THE COST OF PAPER
VOLUME FOUR

Edited by William M. Brandon III

The Cost of Paper is an annual publication dedicated to short fiction. It is a unique anthology of international narrative prose sold only for the cost of the paper in your hand—or, completely free at 1888.center.

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Stories by Brett Arnold, Arianna Basco, Daniel Chameides, Alex Clark-McGlenn, Douglas Cowie, Rodrigo Ribera d'Ebre, Jacob B. Garber, Susie Griffith, Jian Huang, Faisal Khan, Brian May, Dean Moses, Jenny Raj, Jordan A. Rothacker, Warren Stoddard, Chelsea Sutton, Lisa Torem, Aaron Weddle, Sean Woodard

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19. J.T. Robertson, *The Memory Thieves*
20. Scott Alumbaugh, *Will Kill for Food*
21. Shaunn Grulkowski, *Retcontinuum*
22. Kate St. Clair, *Cursed*
23. B. Tanner Fogle, *A Little Evil*
24. Nate Ragolia, *There You Feel Free*
25. Cazzey Louis Cereghino, *116* Days with Dad*
26. Nate Pensky, *Skinny Blue*
27. Jason L. Pyrz, *Renaissance Spook*
28. Scott Amstadt, *Foster*
29. Jon-Barrett Ingels, *How to Succeed by Failing*
30. Jordan A. Rothacker, *The Pit, and No Other Stories*
31. Chanda J. Grubbs, *Albedo*
32. Khristian Mecom, *Love & Black Holes*
33. Eric Z. Weintraub, *Dreams of an American Exile*
34. Dean Moses, *A Stalled Ox*
35. Shannon Barnsley, *Beneath Blair Mountain*
36. Allison A. Spector, *Let's Stalk Rex Jupiter!*
37. Danielle M. Walters, *Cut The Thread*
38. Ryan Dunlap, *The Goldfish*

The Cost of Paper

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Dime Novels

Before comics, pulp magazines, and television shows, 19th-century working-class America relied on dime novels to break the monotony of daily life. Spurred by accelerated printing processes, efficient rail and canal shipping, and ever-growing rates of literacy, dime novels catering to fans of urban outlaws, detectives, working-girl heroines and romantic heroes were sold at newsstands and dry goods stores across the country.

Relive the late 1800's with our classic Dime Novels. Each book, designed to fit in your back pocket as you ride from town to town, will include essays from authors and historians with contemporary cover illustrations inspired by the wood engraved wrappers of the 19th-century.

1. Edward L. Wheeler, *Denver Doll*
2. W. B. Lawson, *Jesse James*
3. Ann S. Stephens, *Malaeska*

Table of Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the fourth volume of *The Cost of Paper*.

- William M. Brandon III, *Editor and Curator*

Eleven

by

Jenny Fan Raj

Jamie cut her hair today. It used to be long and blonde and heavy, hanging down almost to her butt. She used to twirl around really fast to make her hair fly up around her like a satin cape.

Whenever I'd sleep over at her house, which was a lot, I used to spend almost the whole night braiding Jamie's hair. She had a special horsehair brush on her nightstand and I would brush and brush her hair until it was super shiny and glossy, then carefully separate the hair into three parts before tucking the strands around and around each other, always going under like her mom had taught me. I loved watching the yellow braid emerge from my fingers like some magic snake. Jamie's hair was all these different shades of yellow and white and gold and I would sort through her hair and twist the strands and let it fall over and over again in different patterns.

The last time I slept over at Jamie's house was maybe at the end of May, before school got out for the summer. Jamie acted really weird that night – she didn't want to take a bubble bath together like we usually did – and she spent most of the night in the bathroom while I read in her room. When it was time to sleep, her mom made my bed in the trundle in-

stead of just letting us flop together on Jamie's bed the way we used to.

"Honey, I think the bed is getting a bit small for the two of you," she'd patted the trundle with the white guest sheets all tucked in like a hotel bed, "you'll both be much more comfortable this way." I laughed and dove into Jamie's bed, which smelled like her hair, musky and warm, but Jamie just said "Seriously, Gabby, get off of me," and turned away, and her mom had laughed weirdly again and turned off the light and said good night. It took me hours to fall asleep on the trundle, from which I could only stare at the dusty space below Jamie's bed. Jamie didn't say anything else to me the whole entire night. I felt really lonely that night at Jamie's, and I never told anyone about it.

Jamie's been acting even weirder since school started this year. She wasn't around all summer, so I had to hang out with Emma a lot, which wasn't great even though she's really good at hula hooping and she taught me how to do it. We spent almost every afternoon practicing how to hula. I missed Jamie all the time. My mom let me text Jamie on her phone by texting her mom, but she only texted me back twice. I think the last thing she texted me was a thumbs up emoji even though I had written like three paragraphs about learning how to hula from Emma and how weird and awkward and bored I was.

So my summer sort of sucked, but my mom just said maybe it's a good thing because I got to make a new best friend. (Emma is not my new best friend, even though I think my mom wants her and not Jamie to be my best friend.) I was pretty excited when I heard Jamie was also in Mr. Green's class for fifth-grade. I'd planned on tackling her and giving her a big hug on the first day of school like we always used

to, but when I actually saw her in the classroom I didn't end up hugging her. I kind of looked away instead. I think it was because she had gotten fat and no one had told me, so I was kind of surprised and embarrassed. I don't know that many fat people, and I didn't know what to say.

Jamie didn't say hi to me either. She wore a baggy T-shirt and her hair looked dirty. It was pulled back with a green scrunchy. She had gotten a double chin. Her nose was red and bumpy and greasy, and she looked sweaty. She seemed embarrassed even though no one was talking to her. I couldn't see well from across the room but it looked like she had grown a shadowy mustache above her upper lip.

Jamie was hanging around Jack and Griffin, trying to talk to them. I could tell that they didn't want to talk to her. Jack kept giving me this look like "she's *your* friend, come over here," but I just went over to Emma and Sophie and kept my distance. After a while Jamie sat down at a random table with her back to me. I spent the rest of the week avoiding her at recess and lunch, even though each day I would think of all sorts of things I wanted to tell her after I got home from school. Jamie wasn't ever actually busy or doing anything important. At recess, she mainly bounced a basketball by herself in the ball alley, even though she looked bored and tired.

After she cut her hair, Jamie looked even weirder. The haircut made her look like she was halfway between a girl and a boy. She was wearing boys' sneakers with black ankle socks and gym shorts , which made the dark hair on her legs stand out. I was standing with Emma's group listening to everyone talk about what they wanted to be for Halloween

when Sophie pointed at Jamie and said, "Jamie's already got her costume – a boy!"

Emma smiled at me. "Wait, Gabby, you didn't tell us yet – are you going to be a boy like your bestie?"

Sophie giggled. "Yeah, are you going to use the boy's bathrooms because you're 'all-gender' like Jamie?"

My heart pounded and skipped violently. My mom didn't tell me Jamie was changing her gender. No one did. We'd made rainbow-colored signs that said "all-gender" and taped them over the first-floor bathrooms this fall because the teachers said that was the nice thing to do, because sometimes people didn't have to be what they were born as but could choose for themselves, and that was a good thing. It was supposed to be cool to do that. But no one actually knew someone who was like that. No one told me that was why Jamie had become so weird. It actually wasn't cool at all.

I ran over to Jamie.

"Hi."

"Hey."

"So what are you, a boy now?"

Jamie let the ball bounce away and looked at me. It felt like it was the first time she'd looked at me since May. She sneered.

"Yeah, so what?"

A soccer ball flew by our heads and bounced off the wall behind Jamie.

"Dykes!"

"Yeah, fags! Look they're going to make out!"

"Eew, gross! Gay!"

A group of six graders started pelting balls at us. Red and green rubber balls flew towards me and I instinctively

grabbed Jamie's hand and ran. We ran around the building, zigzagging and ducking, until we reached the shadow of the doorway that led into the school. I knew the boys wouldn't aim the balls at us there because they didn't want to hit the windows.

We leaned against the door to catch our breath. Jamie suddenly grabbed me around the waist and pushed her head into my chest. I leaned down and breathed in the familiar smell of her hair, soft and spiky now that it was short. She smelled the same – warm and musky, mixed with something new and unfamiliar, pungent and mysterious. I drew it in as my tears slid onto Jamie's scalp.

○

Jenny Fan Raj lives in San Francisco, where she teaches at the California College of the Arts and is working on a novel and a collection of short stories. She has a B.A. in East Asian Studies from Columbia University and a M.Des from the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology. She's taught English in Japan, consulted in Europe, and mothered in Northern California, and has a patent, and is convinced that all of these experience will make their way into her work somehow. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Obra/Artifact*, *The Columbia East Asian Review*, and *The New Engagement*, among others.

Crossroads

by

Sean Woodard

Cassie stood on the top of the overpass scanning the desolation before her. Yellowed grass and dust and cracked asphalt—the same in every direction. The wind picked up, rustled her short-cropped hair. Dust blew in her face, making her clear blue eyes water. She squinted to see in the failing light. The intersection of highway and overpass created a crossroads, but from what she could see, there was nothing in either direction.

She heard her name called and looked back down at the highway to see her father. He stood in the car doorway with one foot out, beckoning her. She nodded and walked down the on-ramp, kicking at loose pebbles.

"C'mon!" her father said. "Git goin'!"

Cassie quickened her pace and climbed into the beat up Chevy Nova. Her father started the engine, then manually cranked down the window to let air in. He pulled onto the empty two-lane highway and headed west, past a sign that read "El Paso 212 miles."

#

Her father tuned the radio to the news and pulled his hat brim lower. She turned her face to the window.

"I hate the news," Cassie said.

Her father spat out a wad of tobacco out the driver side window.

"Not your car, not your say."

"But this ain't even our c—"

"I don't wanna hear it. I'm the one drivin' so I git to choose what we listen to."

He spat again.

"But that ain't fair. I don't got a license."

"Well, tough. Life ain't fair. About time you learned it to deal with it."

Cassie stared at the dead grass and passing gray clouds. She slumped in her seat.

"Where we goin' now, anyway?"

Her father pointed down the road. "That-a way. Forward."

"That's not a place."

"No," he said. "But it's a direction."

Up ahead in the other lane and police cruiser came toward them.

"Put your seatbelt on," he said, tapping her arm. "Don't want no trouble."

She clicked her belt in the buckle and then turned back the window. The police car passed. As he watched it disappear in the rearview mirror. Sighing, he loosened his grip on the steering wheel.

After a while Cassie asked, "How much farther we got?"

"I don't know."

#

The dashboard clock was broken, but Cassie's father estimated it was near midnight when they reached the town of Merkel and pulled into a motel parking lot. Cassie got out of the car and stretched her arms.

"I bin in that car for too long. Feels like my joints done welded together," she said.

Her father killed the engine and climbed out.

"Wait here," he said, and walked to the motel office.

Inside an overweight clerk leaned over the counter.

"Evenin', ma'am. Room for the night, please."

"One bed or two?"

"Jus' one. How much?"

"Twelve-fifty," she said.

He handed over a crumpled twenty. As she made change, she looked up and past him. The door opened and shut. He turned around to find Cassie standing there.

"Di'n't I tell you to wait outside?"

"I was cold."

The clerk smiled. "What's your name, darlin'?"

"Maddie," she replied.

"What a nice name. How old are you?"

"Twelve, ma'am." She smiled politely back.

"Ain't you sweet?"

Her father grunted. "The key, please?"

The woman lifted a key from a hook hanging on a board behind her.

"Room six," she said, passing him the key. "Down toward the end."

"Thank you," he said.

He turned to leave.

The woman touched his shoulder. "Sir, you forgot to sign the register."

"I'm sorry." He passed the key to his daughter. "Go on ahead," he said.

Cassie exited the office.

The woman handed him a pen and pointed to a blank line. She glanced down as he signed his name.

"Ben Walker," she said.

"Not that special of a name," he said. "Goodnight."

"Night," she said, and he walked out.

He entered room six. His daughter was brushing her teeth in the bathroom. She had already laid their suitcases at the foot of the bed. He sat down in a chair and proceeded to remove his boots.

"Dad?" she asked. She rinsed her mouth out and then lay down on the bed.

"Yes?"

"I don't feel good about not using my real name."

"I told you, Cassie. It's not safe right now to do so."

"But that's lyin'."

"It's not lyin'. It's protectin' yourself. And me." He finished removing his boots and reached over to pull the window curtains shut. "Git some sleep, you hear? We got to wake up early."

"Yes, sir," she said.

Cassie closed her eyes and soon her breathing grew shallow. He watched her as he sat. He removed a pistol from the back of his jeans, weighed it in his hand, and then laid it on his lap. He tilted his head forward, staring at the silvery glint the gun metal made in the dim light.

#

"Up and at 'em," he said, nudging Cassie's arm. She moaned and opened her eyes.

"You can sleep in the car," he continued.

She sat up and put on her shoes and walked outside. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes as she sunk into the front seat. Her father soon returned and climbed in. He slipped a wad of bills into his wallet.

"Where'd you git that?"

"The woman returned it. Said I overpaid."

She nodded solemnly and left it at that. She knew what had really happened but she didn't want to think about it. She closed her eyes and leaned against the headrest.

Her father turned the key in the ignition and the engine revved to life. He drove out of the parking lot.

They soon left the motel behind them. The morning passed by uneventfully. Cassie awoke a few hours later, confused to see they were traveling on a four-lane highway.

"About out time you woke up," her father said. "We're on the interstate now."

"Thought we was supposed to be headin' south by now?"

"Change of plans," he said. "Gotta see about somethin' in the city. Won't take long."

"Won't people be lookin' for us there?"

Her father spat out the window and wiped his mouth on his shirt sleeve.

"Probably."

They fell silent and remained that way for most of the afternoon. Around sundown, steam started spewing up from under the hood and he pulled over to the side of the road.

He got out and propped the hood up. "Damn."

"What's the matter?" Cassie yelled out the window.

"Car's overheated."

"What we gonna do now?"

"Can't do nothin' for it now." He glanced at her. "Reckon we jus' have to wait until someone drives by. Don't know why there's not much traffic today. Must be nothin' goin' on, I guess."

After a while a car appeared. Cassie's father shaded his eyes with his arm.

"Looks like one of those new '74 Fords," her father said. "Saw it in one of those auto magazines." His voice grew stern. "Stay in the car."

He waved his arm and the Ford slowed down. Cassie's father approached the car. An old couple was inside, the man driving.

"Howdy," he said. "Name's Ben." He motioned to his car. "Car's done overheated."

"Name's Herb. Lemme take a look," the old man said. Cassie's father took a step back and the man got out of the Ford.

"Herb used to be a mechanic," his wife said.

"Well then, reckon we got lucky," Cassie's father said.

"I'll be right back," Herb told his wife.

They walked over to the car and Herb examined the engine.

"Herb, how's it lookin'?"

"Ben, looks like you're gonna need to git this here car towed. Good news is there's a town a few miles up the road." He lowered the hood.

"Thank you, sir. But I think we'll be jus' fine." He smiled and let out a short chuckle.

"I beg your pardon?"

But he had already pulled the gun. Cassie ducked her head down. A shot rang out. She glanced up briefly. Blood spread on the old man's shirt around Herb's stomach. Herb's wife screamed. Cassie's father buffaloed Herb's temple with the gun. He collapsed.

Cassie's head snapped back down between her knees. Her body shook violently. Her eyes pressed shut. The door of the other car opened, followed by a scuffle and another shot. Then silence.

The back door of their car shot open and Cassie yelped in fright. The old man's body was being shoved into the back seat.

Her father yelled, "Into the other car now. Move!"

Cassie fumbled with the door latch. Once the door was open, she ran toward the Ford. Her father pushed the other body into their old car then shut the door. Cassie reached the Ford and climbed in the front seat, cradling her legs in her arms and continued to sob.

Her father slammed the back door of the car and pushed the car into a ditch. Then he hopped into the Ford and gunned the engine.

#

Night came. Her father starred attentively at the road in front of him.

"Looks blacker than midnight under a skillet," he commented.

Cassie remained silent.

"Somethin' botherin' you?" he asked.

"You know what's botherin' me."

"Cassie—"

"Why'd you kill 'em, Dad?"

"We needed the car, Cassie."

"We could have ridden to town with them and then you could of stolen another car."

"Too dangerous."

"*You think that wasn't dangerous enough*?"

"Calm down. I had control of the situation."

Cassie shook her head. Tears formed at her eyes.

"Dad, you di'n't just shoot them. You beat him like a rented mule."

"Well," he said after a long pause. "Can't do nothin' about it now. What's done is done."

He turned on the radio and flipped to a country station. Cassie wept harder.

"Shit," he muttered, spitting tobacco out the window.

Cassie's next question surprised him. "Why don't you talk about mama?"

His grip tightened on the steering wheel.

"Sorry, Cassie. That just couldn't be helped."

Cassie sighed and closed her eyes.

He drove for another hour listening to the sad sounds from the country station, then pulled off the road and rested his eyes. It was early morning but still dark when he awoke and continued driving. Cassie woke up later sore and stiff from sleeping in the car seat just as the sun was beginning to rise behind them.

"Mornin', Cassie."

"Mornin'," she replied. "Can we eat soon? I'm starvin'."

"A sign said twenty miles to El Paso."

"Okay."

As they drove along a beat up pickup truck came roaring up the road behind them. It crossed the double yellow line. Cassie and her father watched the truck as it passed. Hoots and hollers from beer-swigging teens emitted from the cab. The truck sped up and merged back into the lane and left them behind.

Cassie's father said, "You ever encounter anyone as stupid?"

"No, sir," Cassie replied.

He turned the radio to a comedy station. Soon he was laughing at everything the comic said. He looked over at Cassie and was surprised to see that she was laughing too.

Her face was beet red and her body was doubled over from laughing so hard. He continued to laugh to hide his astonishment. It was the first time he had seen his daughter laugh since before they hightailed it out of Gainesville two days ago.

When he turned his attention back to the road, he noticed black clouds ahead and heard a faint boom of thunder.

"Looks like it's gonna rain."

He cringed. "Yep."

"Dad, who we seein' in El Paso?"

"Uncle Frank. Maybe he can help us."

"But . . . he's Momma's brother. What if he knows?"

Her father bit his lower lip.

"That's a chance we'll have to take."

He reached over and tousled her hair, but she pulled away from him.

○

Sean Woodard is a graduate of Point Loma Nazarene University and Chapman University. A writer with Catholic guilt, he spends his day either analyzing Westerns and Horror films or listening to Ennio Morricone's film scores. He aspires to be a college professor, but instead gets off the couch to devour another jumbo bag of cheese puffs. Focusing on a wide variety of interests, Sean's fiction, film criticism, and other writing have been featured in *Found Polaroids*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Los Angeles* Magazine, among other publications. A native of Visalia, CA, he now resides in Orange County. You may follow him on Twitter @SeanWoodard7326 and Instagram @swoodard7326.

The Worm
by
Jordan A. Rothacker

The Worm turns... It is expected...
See the Worm… Arriving like it has never been gone...
See it arise and see it turn, the Conquering Worm...
It is here… It sees by knowing… It has no eyes... No eyes, but a mouth at both ends...
An ass at both ends... Both ends the same... The Worm might not begin, but the Worm never ends... It is here for you, for us, for me...
To eat, then shit... To eat, then vomit... It is all the same with the Worm... All without turning…
And still the Worm turns... It turns and it rears... Its body is thick rings of muscle... It is just a long lower torso on all sides... Thick rings like abdominal muscles... And covered in sharp wire hairs like nails... That is how it sees, how it feels, how it knows... With each turn and ripple the nail-hairs dig and trigger... Antennae... Divining rods…
Here it comes now... The Worm is turning...

§

Peter closed the notebook. He tried to write the Worm away but still it followed. Notebook shut. Eyes open. Still the worm. Sometimes it worked. This was not one of those times. The Worm went beyond the page. The Worm was a page-eater.

Something sightless. Something with no discernment between eating, vomiting, or shitting. A rolling mass of muscles sharp to the touch, and with every move sightlessly knowing. It was the perfect horror for Peter.

There is no way the other students in Study Hall could feel like he felt. They read or wrote silently in their notebooks, being normal students doing homework. Now as he rubbed his eyes, tried to rub the Worm from his eyes, and looked around, he felt so alone. But Peter was never alone; there was always the Worm.

§

Peter's mother meant well. She meant well all seventeen years of his life. She meant well when she wasn't around because it meant that she was working hard to support her child and self. She meant well when she was around even when she was telling Peter what to do because it meant she cared enough to take an interest in his life. And she especially meant well when he was a small child and she read great literature to him every night in bed. It so happened that one of the books of classic literature she read to Peter was a collection by Edgar Allan Poe. This book was among the likes of Edith Hamilton's Mythology and Aesop's Fables and assorted fairy tales. What she loved about the Poe was that his poems rhymed and flowed so well they were perfect for a child. Sometimes she would move on to the short stories. Some had poems in them. "Ligeia" was one of these. The subject matter was pretty dark, but he was so young when she read it to him she assumed he didn't understand, maybe he just enjoyed the rhythms and rhymes from the poem it contained. The poem was called, "The Conqueror Worm." She only read him "Ligeia" three times between the ages of two to five. That was all it took.

§

It grew from the pages of Poe, grew and changed with Peter over the years. As if it expanded with his conscious-

ness, it constantly bent and realigned its grasp upon him. The Worm became the dark part of him, where all fears and anxieties went. But that is just the psychology. To compare the Worm to the imaginary friends of other children would not be fair to Peter.

For Peter, the Worm was very real in its presence and potentiality. When he slept the Worm was there behind every image. He would see a friend, or his mother, or even Superman, and the Worm would turn and that would be the new dream. No more friend, no more mother, no more Superman, just the Worm, turning and eating and vomiting and shitting, all at once, every end, every movement.

Daydreaming was no different. Each thought needed no more than three steps to connect back to the Worm.

§

By age ten he saw the Worm everywhere, in every blink, in either end of the blink, open or closed. School was tough, but nothing was really easy. He saw the Worm in his teachers' eyes, turning around in the irises and threading through the pupils. He tried to sing it away. He fought his fears with art from an early age. It was not consciously calculated, only a reflex, deep in his humanity. No one had ever told him that "Ring Around the Rosie" fought the plague. Not as didactic, his song, but nevertheless at ten he began to sing:

Fingers or toes
Or even a long nose
Anything can be
The Worm

Fingers or toes
Or even a long nose

Anything can be
The Worm

Over and over to a crazy but soothing rhythm like:

Bum ba da da
Bum ba da da da
Bum ba da da…
Da Da!

But that is what it was like. The Worm was everywhere and to the rhythm of:

Bum ba da da
Bum ba da da da
Bum ba da da…
Da Da!

He sang and sang under his breath and when he was lucky the rhythm took the Worm away from every finger or toe or even long nose.

§

Now, at seventeen, as he tried to write it away, he went through many notebooks. The Worm was a page-eater and ate oh, so many pages. Peter wrote everywhere all the time. It seemed to be his only control, his only power, no matter how ineffectual, against the Worm. When he was younger, scratch paper would do, but as this attempt gained seriousness he needed better equipment. He thought the school bag and the constant homework given a high school student were good cover for the ever-present notebooks. Cheap was okay, but the more plentiful the pages the better.

Peter's mother bought *Writer's Market* books for her son and any literary magazine she saw that contained short stories. She left them all over the house. One day he would be a great writer, she believed. She was so proud of how hard he worked, writing all the time. And she applauded herself for all the great literature she read to him when he was a child. She had no idea what she really put inside him.

Peter was the love of her life, her raison d'être, and his success would be her success. This writing must come to something, he worked so hard all the time. He must be a budding novelist, she thought, to fill so many notebooks. She fought so hard peeking into just one, just one of those marble composition books stacked all over his bedroom. Soon he would graduate and every college she suggested had a good English Literature program with Creative Writing. He had such a solid foundation already, the love of literature she provided from a very early age and all this writing practice he has been doing.

§

This final semester of his senior year Peter had a pretty easy schedule. After Study Hall his seventh and final period was Gym. This was the highlight of the day. He could run a little track and then load up his backpack and run home from school still in his gym clothes. Running was good, there were moments when his mind cleared and there was nothing, not even the Worm. And then the endorphins came and there was a slight high and another moment of Worm respite.

Today after Study Hall, then Gym, followed that same pattern of the semester. Peter ran home with his backpack on. As it was Friday, his mother would be home from work early and they could maybe go shopping together before dinner. Since it would be summer soon, and then college, he

actually wanted to spend as much time with his mother, when she wasn't nagging him.

Peter walked into the house and called out a general greeting to his mother, wherever she was, as he headed towards his bedroom. When he opened the door he found her there, sitting on his bed. Every surface of his room, floor, desk, dresser, and bed were covered with open notebooks. His mother had one on her lap and staring down at it she was crying and blinking rapidly.

Oh, what joy and elation Peter now felt! Maybe he was no longer alone with the Worm? Maybe it could even go back to from whence it came? Maybe the Worm won't win?

○

Jordan A Rothacker is an essayist, poet, and novelist based in Athens, GA where he received his MA in Religion and PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia. He is the author of the novella, *The Pit, and No Other Stories* (BHP/1888, 2015), the novel, *And Wind Will Wash Away* (Deeds, 2016), and the forthcoming work, *My Shadow Book by Maawaam* (Spaceboy Books, 2017).

A Brotherhood of Rabbits

by

Jacob B. Garber

The earthquake arrived on the camp's final day as the bus full of Rabbits wove through the Saratoga hills. They were ages ten through twelve, roughly, older than Otters but not yet Youth Leaders. A transitional group, as Pastor Abe called them. He stood next to the driver at the front of the bus, smiling and scanning over the children, the chatting pairs that swayed and bumped in unison. His hands were placed on the back of two seats, the fabric vibrating up his arms and throughout the bus. A community, Pastor Abe thought, looking from face to face. Some girls added color around their eyes. They were beginning to carry themselves as young women do, a light shimmer on their lips, sitting with boys whose calves and shoulders grew against their green Camp Calvary tees. Though there were others who still wore butterfly hair clips and sweaters buttoned all the way to the neck, faces soft like little angels. *May our sons in their youth be like plants, full grown. Our daughters like pillars, cut for a palace.* Warm, grateful happiness rose in Pastor Abe's chest. Redwood branches ticked against the windows, the crooning summer heat reddening faces, jostling some to sleep in the sunbeam that shown through the trees.

A few of the older children shared headphones, nodding in sync.

Two girls tittered over a deck of cards.

A group of boys in the back huddled together, recounting the morning's adventures. It had been the day of the ropes course, a tradition to close out the camp. Most climbed

the rock wall, but the bravest kids tried the more difficult option, a walk across a perpendicular log suspended some thirty feet above the ground while the kids below yelled things like Don't fall! or Don't look down! All in good fun, of course, all in the supportive jest of children, as Pastor Abe and the other councilors held onto the support rope, knowing all the while that there was no real danger, and that even if the child fell the others would have a new kind of respect for him once he was lowered to the ground.

An eleven-year-old named Jude had walked across the log as a ten-year-old the year before but feared the others had forgotten. When Pastor Abe asked who would like to go, Jude was the only one to call out. The others cheered. They strapped him into the harness and led him to the ladder, a redwood tree with iron pegs mashed into its bark. Don't be scared! they called. Sweat made Jude's hands slippery as he climbed. He wasn't scared. He heard another camper below yell out, Jude! Be careful on the Wooden Bridge of Horror! Jude had made the mistake of calling it the Wooden Bridge of Hell earlier that day. He was threading a lanyard with two of the younger boys during lunch hour, telling them what it felt like to run across that Bridge of Hell last year, and how he'd go even faster this time. Pastor Abe had tapped him on the shoulder and asked him, in his soft voice, to take a walk. He could bring his lanyard if he wanted. They sat down on a bench overlooking the archery range, a field of dry, yellow grass, empty targets set up in a line. Pastor Abe opened a bag of sunflower seeds and held it over to Jude. He was sorry that he had to take him aside like this, he said. He knows how scary and embarrassing talks like this one can be, but it's important that he knows what's okay and what isn't. He's an eleven-year-old, and he's a leader, and the other kids look up

to him, and he's counting on Jude to help out the other boys, to be an example. And maybe next summer when Jude is older he can graduate from Rabbit to Junior Leader. *Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will exalt you.* James. Have you read James? Jude shook his head. The Pastor put a rubber band around the bag of seeds and handed it to him. You have such wonderful potential, Jude. Such wonderful potential.

Jude thought about yelling back down to the kids, telling them to shut up, that he needed to concentrate, but Jude remembered the conversation and then looked down and saw Pastor Abe smiling up at him as he held onto the support rope. He kept climbing. Up on the platform, he felt dizzy, not like he remembered feeling the year before. The other kids looked up with their mouths open, some of them yelling encouraging words that they'd practiced, as encouragement begets community, brotherhood and sisterhood – *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love*, as Pastor Abe said – and that is what they are. Brothers.

Jude fell after his fourth step; his legs went soft and his body slumped to the side, teetering over the log's edge only slightly, enough that the others below knew he was falling and made a collective gasp. And at that moment, Jude thought about seeing his life flash before his eyes, but it did not. Wind rushed against his face. He found his hands lifted at his sides. Something had stolen his breath, and he thought of nothing because nothing came to mind. Before his ankles dropped below the bottom of the log, Pastor Abe and the other counselors hoisted him until he was floating midair, swaying gently from side to side as the harness tightened around his waist. Once they lowered him to the ground the other campers surrounded him, asking what it felt like to fall.

Did his stomach float to the center of his body? Did he pee himself? Did he fall on purpose because he'd already made it across last year? On the bus, one asked Jude what it felt like to go into the light, what it was like to see the Devil and fight him off. The girls in front of him turned in their chairs. Jude raised an eyebrow and said that the Devil was bigger and more evil and dark that you could ever imagine. That when he fell off the log the Devil appeared in front of him and said, Jude. It's time for you to go. But Jude said No, Devil. It's not. And they fought for what felt like days in what was only really a fraction of a second, until Jude won and was lowered back down to the real world. As he told this story, Jude could see Pastor Abe looking at him from his place at the front, still smiling but with a face that seemed wearier. It was in his tired eyes, those blue eyes that looked right into Jude, sending a wave of heat that clenched Jude's teeth and curled his toes. He wanted to jump from his seat and throw his hands around Pastor Abe's throat. He wanted to hit him, to yell at him: What have I done wrong?

The earthquake arrived only seconds after the driver announced that the bus would soon be driving over the San Andreas Fault, one of the biggest in the state, and that they'd feel a bump. The driver announced it every time they drove home from camp, and all the kids put their hands up in the air as though they were riding a roller coaster. They did the same this time, and the driver said, Remember to keep your arms and legs inside the ride at all times! He looked over his shoulder and chuckled.

Today, the earth teetered more on one side and tottered more on the other, only enough that the asphalt sealant that glued the land together came apart. The earth opened up just slightly, imperceptibly in the scheme of things. Far down the

road, the quake shook houses and offices. It knocked cereal off grocery shelves, woke parents and infants in their midday naps. On the bus, it put a little more lift underneath the children as they hovered in the air. Upon landing, it pulled them forward into the backs of warm cushioned seats and promptly returned them to their own, each child safe, searching for their lives before their eyes.

Jude was watching Pastor Abe as the bus went over the fault. The pastor's hands had been resting on the seats that split the aisle, and he was smiling as he always was. His face did not seem to change when they went over the bump and his hands slipped away. His eyes kept their blueness and his smile remained as the two front wheels touched down and his body was pulled, quiet, into the dashboard, and calm, calm, against the windshield.

Jude believed it was something divine striking down, a punishment for his vanity and mistruths, though everyone told him it was just years of pent up tension in the earth's plates, finally being released.

○

Jacob B. Garber is from Los Gatos, CA, and began studying English and writing at The George Washington University. He has an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of California, Davis, and writes about all things Silicon Valley: earthquakes, anxiety, technology, and dreams.

He is the 2014 recipient of the Hassan Hussein Prize for the beginning of his novel, now titled *Under the Valley*. He has published stories – "A Suburban Earthquake" and "The Explain Game" – with Harvard Book Store, and presented numerous others at UC Davis and UC Berkeley. Outside of narrative fiction, his research on gender and race in Hollywood appeared in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* in 2016, and he is a 2013 Luther Rice Fellowship recipient for his research on David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*. He currently lives in Washington, DC, where he works as a media strategist for Democratic nonprofit and political organizations.

She Left

by

Lisa Torem

Hard-as-a-rock chicken fingers embalmed in Tupperware, a linen blouse still swimming in Woolite and an almost expired train pass tucked discretely under the toaster oven — those were the first clues that it had all changed—overnight. It had all come to a harrowing halt even before the Subaru got gassed up for the Monday run, before the teen-applied midnight-blue liner and eggshell gloss on a sleep-deprived, dehydrated face and even before she stashed her Vegemite sandwich and air-popped side inside a bulging backpack.

And the Venetian blinds had gone half-mast even before the kittens shifted their weight, before they bounced down the oak stairway for an on-the-house, mackerel-scented meal.

"Where's mom?" Lucinda asked, as her father filled the cat bowls with clear water. Standing dangerously close to the burner, he shoveled scrambled eggs onto paper plates.

"Did she already go to Zumba?"

"Zumba? What's that?"

"Seriously, dad. Do you and mom ever talk?" Lucinda scraped a spoonful of egg onto a rice cake, took a small bite and threw the rest away in the trash.

"Is that all you're eating?"

"Yes, father, that's all I'm eating," she laughed. "I told you we're going on a field trip. We'll have snacks on the bus."

"Lu, I'll chaperone."

"I don't know if you can. They had mom's name on the list—"

"Lu, it will work out. Let's go."

Bruce Bozeman had always been an emotional driver and today was no different. Lucinda air punched his shoulder when he ran the first red light.

"When I get my license, I'm going to be super careful. Hint hint."

"Sorry, Lu."

"Mom said we could shop for my dress. Will you remind her?"

"What dress? You have enough clothes to sink a battleship."

"Homecoming, duh. Hey, can you stop speeding?"

Bruce abruptly pulled over to the curb and checked for messages on his phone.

"We're not going to be late, Lu. Just want to check—"

"You can't wait until I'm at school? Do you care if I get a detention?" Lucinda leafed through her folders and pulled out a form. "You'd better sign the permission slip."

After ten minutes of gridlock, they entered the school zone. Lucinda poked her head out of the window when she saw her friend's mother by the school entrance.

"Mrs. Grazek? Are you going on the field trip?"

"Yes, but it turns out we have more than enough chaperones. Didn't your mom get the text last night?"

"Well, dad. Looks like you're off the hook," Lucinda said. She grabbed the signed form and ran up the steps, pausing to do a quick selfie.

Already worlds away, Bruce dumped the contents of his entire wallet out on the Formica counter, plucked out a few

bills and hailed the hefty server, whose cheap, paper hat dipped over one bloodshot eye.

"Over easy, buttered rye and coffee. Hot," Bruce commanded without benefit of the menu. When he saw another walking, three-piece suit, he flashed Cliff Moss a disingenuous smile.

"Good of you to come, Cliff."

"I love this place," Cliff replied, gaping at the signed photographs of local hockey stars. "So this is 'The Palace'"? Doesn't look much like a palace, does it now, Bruce?"

"Not my game, Cliff, but they have the best corned beef hash in Chicago."

"Good, I'll try some of yours."

"I didn't order any," Bruce laughed. "Just like to know I can have it if I want. That's the joy of living in a big city. So how are things?"

"How are things?" Cliff responded, looking serious. "Bruce, it's not like you to call me for such an early outing? How are things with you? We haven't talked since you and Alise got back from Maui."

Bruce gazed intently at the autographed, king-sized trophy on the pine ledge.

"Bruce? Earth to Bruce," Cliff muttered, pointing eagerly to a photo of the Stanley Cup Skillet, a pan dripping with bacon fat, jalapenos, baby reds and Chihuahua, when the server grunted a reluctant greeting.

"We went to the Goat Surfing Dairy, where they sell that herbed cheese and never did get to the winery."

"I heard Willie Nelson owns a club there. Did Alise get to meet him?"

The gleaming trophy suddenly looked antiquated and tarnished. "Look, I shouldn't have bothered you. Let's wrap it up. We'll get together soon."

"Are you nuts? We just ordered," Cliff said, staring at the pile of abandoned business cards and receipts crowding his friend's plate. Bruce tore a twenty out of his vest pocket and slid it under the empty mug.

Bruce drove to the dry cleaners and handed the cashier a receipt. "Your wife picks up your shirts, Mr. Bozeman," she said, arching her eyebrows and coaxing a lock of dishwater blonde hair across her left cheek, "but it's nice to finally meet you."

Bruce checked his messages before glancing at the desk calendar, which featured glossies of the Greek Islands. Although his throat burned, he flipped the pages back so he could see the familiar, whitewashed houses of Mykonos, where he and his young fiancé had eloped despite their parents' disapproval.

"Mr. Bozeman?" The cashier had already whipped her index finger through a series of neatly pressed garments that were smothered in plastic and hanging on a metal hook. She handed him a stapled, cardboard box.

"Oh," he said, grabbing the box. With the tight string tugging at his fingers, he headed towards the door.

"Mr. Bozeman," she said, sounding fatigued. "That will be—"

"Oh, God, sorry," he said, pulling his credit card out of his wallet.

"Your wife pays cash," she said curtly. "The sign says we need singles."

"Look, I'm sorry again. I'm sorry. Sorry. Sorry. So just hold my shirts hostage a little longer and I will get you cash. Okay?"

Bruce saw that he had a text message. It was his mother-in-law hogging the screen. She always communicated in complete sentences, ending the message with her full name, as though he wouldn't have recognized the paranoid woman, who had formed a gulch between her daughter and son-in-law for the last seventeen years.

"Serena, is Alise there? I haven't heard from her all day."

"It's not the first time. Don't you lock the doors at night?" Bruce could imagine Serena's thin lips sealed as tightly as a childproof bottle of aspirin.

"It would really help if you wouldn't jump on me like this. Have you heard anything?"

"I don't know what's going on with Alise, but you're some prize, Bruce," she stammered. "Some prize. I was obligated to contact you because of my poor granddaughter—"

"Since you don't have the slightest bit of faith in me, Serena, why even call?"

As Bruce disconnected the phone, he felt waves of heat rising up to his temples, but before he could slow his pulse, there was another call.

"Cramps? Yes, she gets them. Can't she just lie down in the nurse's office? Or can't they give her some applesauce or something?"

Bruce's hazard lights were still on. He had parked in front of a hydrant temporarily so that he could get his dry cleaning, but even when he saw a police car drive by, he couldn't muster the strength to re-park his vehicle in a legal spot.

So he opened the car door, let himself in and collapsed in the front seat. After drifting off into a heavenly slumber for what seemed like an entire afternoon, he was awakened by Cliff's staccato horn.

"Bruce, there's a space at the end of the street. Park the car. How about we talk?"

Ignoring the request, Bruce walked outside to the crumbling curb and fixed his eyes on a small crew of construction workers. He found their sooty, orange belts strangely appealing against the cloudless, colorless sky.

"Bruce, please."

He maneuvered the car as cautiously as a student driver, but when he pulled down on the gearshift to parallel park, he realized that his nerves were like firing pistons every time he shifted gears; it felt like barbed wire was digging into his palm. He walked over to Cliff's car, smiling weakly and somewhat apologetically.

"Lu's ill. I might have to pick her up."

"What a shame. Gail said they had a field trip. Something about The Inca Trail."

"I don't know. Maybe they came back early?"

"Alise called my wife today. Why didn't you say anything, Bruce?"

Bruce stared at the Pekingese peeing on the fire hydrant. "What do you want me to say, Cliff? I mean, it's not the first time."

"What will you tell Lu?" Cliff asked.

"Damn it, Cliff. Nothing's final. She's not a little girl."

"Have you called her, Bruce? Have you asked her to come home?"

"Damn it, Cliff. She left me a pile of dirty dishes, a kid with PMS—"

"Have you called her, Bruce?" Cliff repeated.

Bruce shrugged and checked his messages:

"Daddy, dying. bad food. Pick me up. Do you remember me? Lu."

"It's Lu," Bruce growled. "Got to go. Thanks for being a friend."

Bruce has always been an emotional driver and today was no different. He was only aware of it now because Lucinda was calling him out.

"Dad," Lucinda groaned. "Slow down."

"What did the nurse say? Will you be okay?" asked the half-dad, half-prosecutor.

"Yeah, I guess."

"How can you stomach that vegetarian stuff, Lu? Will you ever get off that kick?'

"I never even ate the sandwich, dad. We ate at the food court. So is mom taking me?"

Bruce swung the car over to the curb. A Jerry Lee Lewis hit was blaring from the outdoor speakers; a couple of lighthearted teens were jitterbugging in front of a car wash, which was adorned with synthetic sugar palms strung with tiny, neon lights.

"Your mom and I used to dance like that."

"Right," she said, rolling her eyes as she browsed a glamour magazine. "I'm thinking peach chiffon with spaghetti straps."

"You know, Lucinda. She left."

"Mom's gone?" Lucinda blew hard against the window.

"Just promise me, no sequins," Bruce said. "You're way too elegant for that."

"It's not the first time," Lucinda replied, squeezing her eyes shut, surprisingly oblivious to the soaring glissandos and curbside flirting.

"So downtown or to the mall?" Bruce asked, trying desperately to siphon up the awkward spaces between them, sadly realizing that he hadn't taken Lucinda shopping since he'd purchased for her that first baby doll.

"They need a few dads," she said. "I mean, not to spy or anything but to check the coats and—"

"Or maybe to Zumba?" Bruce asked, fishing his pocket comb from his vest pocket and fixing his hair.

"Dad, dad," Lucinda giggled. "Don't." But Bruce was off, dancing spontaneously in front of the car wash, energized by hoots and applause from the other teens and a look of absolute dread and disdain from his only daughter.

○

Lisa Torem first discovered the resilience of the written word by reading cornflake boxes and comic books. Since then, and for the past decade, she has conducted music-related interviews with international rock and indie artists for Pennyblackmusic, where she also launched *Rock Salt Row*, a monthly column on which two writers expressed opposing views, and now runs *Raging Pages*, where she reviews or features a music book.

Lisa has also contributed to *The Chicago Reader*, *Grateful Web*, *New City*, *Popmatters*, *Tomorrow's Verse*, and *Windy City Times* and co-wrote "Through The Eye of The Tiger."

More recently, she was thrilled to see her poem, "Packrats" in the Literature Emitting Diode Anthology (Partial Press, 2015-2016). Last year, two separate essays were also published in 1888 Center's "Routineology" (April 4, 2016) and "Why We Write" (February 2, 2016) columns. In addition, her nostalgic essay, "Winnemac Park" ("Place Where You Live", March 4, 2016) graced the green-friendly pages of *Orion Magazine*.

The native Chicagoan was ecstatic to find an acceptance letter from 1888 Center for "She Left," inspired by an old-school diner where servers still shove pencils behind their ears.

Initiation Rites

by

Warren Stoddard

He made his way down the dimming streets of Dublin, walking fast, looking over his shoulder, trying not to look suspicious. It's just two, he told himself repeatedly. Even if he got caught it would be no big deal, just some young teenager trying to steal a little alcohol. His wrist would sting for a bit, but it would be no big deal.

He opened the door to the corner store, the shopkeeper leaned back in a chair and stared at a newspaper, paying him no attention. But the boy darted his eyes to the reflections of the lights on the tile floor and lengthened his gait to the back corner of the shop. There they were, row after row of amber bottles lined up like a parade, boasting their labels written in gibberish he did not understand. Mickeys, Olde English, Guinness; how was one supposed to make sense of it all? What had they asked for again? God, he hoped he didn't screw this up; this was his shot.

He pretended to look at the selection of soft drinks, occasionally snapping his eyes between the alcohol and the disinterested shopkeeper, still reading his newspaper and leaning back in his chair. Fuck, he knows doesn't he? The boy hopped in front of the door to the refrigerator and hurled it open. He was torn between the Mickey's and the Olde English. Fuck the English, he thought; and his decision was made. He grabbed two green-labeled bottles of Mickey's and cradled them in his arms. How was he going to get this past the shopkeeper? He walked slowly past the man, as if he was a slumbering dragon who would be woken only by the sound

of his gold clinking under unfamiliar footsteps. He turned his back to him to shield the bottles from his view. He pushed the door open with his foot and dashed outside. The shopkeeper flipped to the next page of the news with a yawn.

The boy streaked and stumbled through the streets and around corners until he reached the river and turned left and followed it until the town became shadowy, dark, foreboding even. He slowed his pace to a springy sauntering step. He turned down the alley with a cheerful and prideful grin on his face as he was greeted with familiar devilish smiles and open arms by a tall, imposing, and unwelcoming audience. And then the flashing of brass.

○

I grew up in Dripping Springs, Texas and moved to San Marcos when I was eighteen. I am currently an undergraduate at Texas State University in San Marcos where I study English. I am an avid motorcycle enthusiast and rider. I am also an apprentice for a Harley-Davidson mechanic. In my free time I enjoy traveling, camping, hunting, hiking with my dog, construction projects, and wrenching on my 1968 Shovelhead..

Not In Service
by
Dean Moses

Martin tugged at the corner of his mouth with his index finger. Leaning into the mirror, he examined each and every tooth appearing in the foggy glass. His eyebrows creased, the left incisor seemed to exhibit a slight buttery coating. Martin snarled at his reflection, finger still in his mouth.

What the fuck? I only whitened them last week.

His eyes wandered upwards, to the bathroom light. *Maybe it's the fluorescence. I will check again after work tomorrow,* he told himself, finger finally dropping. He continued his nightly routine, taking the brush from atop the sink and running it through gray hair exactly 42 times. He carefully removed and then neatly folded a luminous MTA jacket, next came the meticulous boot shining.

"Time for bed," he addressed the mirror.

The door creaked open, the bedroom lay in utter darkness, and only slight silhouettes—rudimentary outlines—of modest furnishings could be made out in the gloom. Martin did not need to see, in fact, he preferred not to. He entered—taking large strides towards the bedstead, hands reaching for the sheets with expectant glee—hardly waiting to sleep with them. With perspiring palms he took hold of the comforter. A deep breath preceded a hard tug. Running hands along the mattress he felt them—both physically and spiritually—

fingering the deep groves, fondling the jagged points, and caressing the smooth edges. The excitement was overwhelming—the majority of which stemmed from his crotch.

"My darlings!"

Standing before a bed obscured by hundreds of bones, he let out a high-pitched moan. The bulk of the hollowed frames were once attached to chickens, rats, and other small animals, but some were human. Martin had found a human skull fragment on the tracks of Grand Central after a pretty young girl had been pushed in front of the 7 train—the investigators must have overlooked it. A hefty femur protruded from under one of the pillows—a trace of his childhood dog. Through blue eyes he scanned the mattress until they fell on his prized possession: a fully formed human finger recovered at the Vernon Boulevard-Jackson Avenue station. He loved his job; it allowed him to save these bones from powdering on the city's tracks, or from becoming a ceremonial object at a funeral service. Martin climbed into bed and embraced the bones. Within mere moments sleep had taken him.

He awoke with a start. Sweat poured down his forehead—something was not right. He crawled out of bed, feeling the mattress cling to damp skin.

"One, two, three, four…" He counted the bones. They were all there. "No, no, no." Something was definitely not right; he could feel it burning in his core, hear their voices rattling around his head, begging him to understand their pleas. Sitting on the edge of the bed he glared at a blank wall, lost in a swirling whirlpool of voices and confusion.

"Give it to us."

"That's it!" a sudden stir after an empty hour. "My *bones* are lonely, they need a skull… a complete human skull."

§

Martin arrived at the 34 St-Hudson Yards station at one A.M., hauling a black garbage bag over his shoulder. This newly constructed train station lengthened the 7 lines. It was his workplace, castle, and favorite location in all New York—a dome of white that sang to his soul. If he were an architect, he would have constructed it in the same exact way: glass oval greeting pedestrians, extensive escalators plunging riders far underground, concave walls studded with hundreds of lights, and, most importantly of all, it remained spotless—unlike the rest of the city's subway system.

"Morin', Marty."

Phillip, a stocky, red-haired man decked out in an MTA uniform stood at the bottom of the stairs, dipping his head in a pronounced nod.

Martin despised social interactions—his mouth grows dry, his voice adopts a rasp, and his upper lip sweats—their eyes always judge him, especially Phillip's. Upon reaching the platform, Martin bowed in return, before scurrying away from his colleague.

"What's in the bag, Marty?" Philip's voice chased him, but Martin kept moving. "Damn, weirdo," Phillip said, purposefully loud.

The platform led Martin to his pride and joy, a train used to pickup garbage littering the tracks. Connected to five carriages with the purpose of luging the waste to the borough's depot, and prominently labeled with the words Not In Ser-

vice, this metallic, subterranean snake served as the portal to his precious bones.

"Let's go clean up NYC, Marty," Philip said, stepping onboard and taking a seat.

Martin followed his contemporary into the snake's belly. The carriage dated back 30 years. No longer employed commercially, the passenger car had started to yellow, akin to the pages of a timeworn book. The remnants of an 80's teen could still be felt thanks to a line of faded graffiti that had survived numerous acid washes. Striding up to the controls and dropping his bag, Martin started the powerful engine, feeling the machine tremble beneath his fingers, hearing the rumble echo down the long tunnels far ahead. Fighting the lump forming in his throat, he asked: "Wh-where are the rest of the guys?"

"They're in the back carriage, playing cards, I think," Phillip called back, resting his boots on a rusting pole.

"Go-good," Martin replied, pulling back on a lever, inciting the doors to slide shut and the train to move.

The wheels let out a whine as they began to carry the substantial vehicle under the island of Manhattan. With one hand on the controls and the other slipping into his jacket pocket, he pulled out a crumbled photograph. His childhood self stands with arms around his mother's waist, eyes beaming with youthful innocence, an excited dog sitting beside him.

"I miss you both—Mom, Wolf."

He wilted from the unwanted thoughts, concentrating his mind on the shadowy passageways whizzing by at high speeds. He thumbed the photograph back into his pocket before slamming on the breaks. The train wailed, almost as if it were in pain. Sparks propelled upwards, covering the

windshield in blinding light. Martin clung steadfast to the controls. Phillip was not so lucky. The redhead fell from his seat and slid along the grimy floor, hitting his crown on the steel-plated wall. The train lights flickered, a voice, heavy with static, emitted from the control panel after the train had come to a halt: "Martin, what's happened, everybody okay?"

Martin stood motionless for a moment, glaring at Phillip, a steady stream of blood descending from the downed man's forehead. Reaching for the communicator, the driver finally replied.

"We had a-a slight st-stall. No need to wo-w-worry. I will have it working again in a jiffy."

Martin smiled again. He needed a complete skull, and he needed to kill for it. It could be a little cracked and beaten up, as long as it was complete. With shaking hands he reached into his bag, pulling out a bone the size and width of a baseball bat. He kissed the femur, whispering, "Let's go, Wolf."

Lunging, large bone lifted overhead, arms bulging under the tight jacket. The femur changed course, now heading downwards… for Phillip. Martin closed his eyes and waited for the crack, thud, or bang to occupy the air, for he did not know what death sounded like.

"I always knew ya were a crazy *fuck,"* Phillip said, clasping the bone with both hands, mere inches above his head. That was not the sound of death. Their gaze met, each one waiting for the other to make the next move.

"Let go of Wolf."

They struggled for control of the bone—yanking it back and forth like two small children fighting over their favorite toy. Phillip glared at his newfound adversary, questioning if he should continue his vie for the bone or release it and bum

rush his workmate. He dove forward with an attempted football tackle. Martin jumped backwards and swiftly swung the makeshift weapon, clobbering Phillip with a golfer's swing, shedding a small portion of flesh. Phillip immediately collapsed, his body twitched violently for a few seconds before coming to rest.

"Ha," Martin spat. *I did it*. "F-f-fuck." He experienced a concerning revelation: *How do I get my skull home?* Something he never considered. He visualized the desired separation. Within that mental picture heavy wheels divorced the valuable skull from the undesirable frame. He knew what to do. It would just be a nasty accident… all just an accident.

§

He had to be quick about it; the boys in the back carriage would surely be growing suspicious. With heavy, guttural groans he dragged Phillip's rotund physique alongside the tracks, listening to the exasperated rasps reverberating around the passage. He draped the man's neck over the silver rail, blood dripped onto the shimmering metal. It seemed to glow in the dim light. Martin shuddered with anticipation. He leaned over the body and rested his head on Philip's, "You belong t-t-to me now," he hissed.

Philip's eyelids rolled up, his pupils focused.

Martin screamed. The shrill howl carried itself along the track.

"What's going on out there?" a voice from the back carriage asked. "Martin is that you?" Another voice.

"Help!" Philip cried. "Help me, I can't move."

Martin panicked. He ran, abandoning Wolf for the opaque tunnels, gentle darkness blanketing him. He was back at home now—in his bedroom—a step away from the bed of bones. Heavy footfalls echoed in the gloom, the faint

warmth of flashlights on his back, dim voices dancing on dust. He reached for the bed; it crumbled, along with the reassuring fantasy he had made for himself. At the next station he climbed onto the platform.

The platform was almost empty thanks to the early hour, only a drunk sat slumped on a bench. The lights appeared harsh to Martin's eyes after his time in the dark. He took a seat alongside the slumbering commuter, to catch his breath. The sound of the snoring drunk was somewhat appeasing. A soft gasp, a nasally wheeze.

"Over there."

Radiant MTA jackets emerged from the tunnel, Martin could not waste anymore time. The voices felt like they had arms, arms with clawing hands that tried to pull him back, but he broke free, jumping down, into the adjacent track.

Soft, snickering laughter. Martin could not help it, believing he was now home free. *They can't catch me in my tun—*

A snap echoed. He fell, head striking a rail, a tooth exploding from his mouth. Martin looked back, through a flurry of white dots. A bloody bone protruded from his leg, skin frayed, foot tangled beneath the opposing rail. An almost orgasmic joy swelled within him, he had never considered his own bones. As fast as it arrived, the exhilaration faded, for the tooth lay inches away. As he reached for the incisor it lit up in a pool of brilliance. The vibrations, the clattering, it could mean only one thing: the 7 train was coming. Martin did not attempt to move, he lay mesmerized by the tooth and its yellowish hue.

How the fuck is it yellow? I only just whitened my—

The tooth sailed out of sight on a gust of hot air. The 7 train came to a controlled stop at the station. The drunk

awoke and hurried onboard, never knowing that he had sat next to Martin, or that he now stood above him.

○

Dean Moses is an author, freelance writer, and photographer. He authored *A Stalled Ox* from 1888 in 2015 and has composed a host of short stories for various outlets. His writing and photography has appeared in numerous newspapers, including the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Spring Creek Sun*, and *Queens Courier*. He began his career by transcribing for the *New York Times' Lens Blog*. Dean was born in England in February of 1991. At the age of nineteen he moved to New York City, where he hoped to fulfill two of his longtime dreams: marry the love of his life and become an author. Dean currently resides in Manhattan with his wife and four cats.

Horror Show

by

Rodrigo Ribera d'Ebre

I can't remember what she looked like. When I think of her face, an image of "Rocky" from The Mask appears. I remember light curly hair and fair skin, but apparently she was ugly. She was ugly because my mother said she was. She had slanted eyes, a flat nasal bridge, and abnormal teeth. Perhaps she had other irregular physical characteristics but I didn't notice. I didn't know what Down syndrome was then. Her name was Shiloh and she wore a uniform to school every day. My parents took care of her a few hours a week. She did unusual things like lift her skirt up in public, or talk in unusual phrases. People with Down syndrome have a mild to moderate IQ, and in some cases they have a severe intellectual disability. I never knew about Shiloh's, and I never had a conversation with her. I wasn't allowed.

My brothers and I used to make fun of her footwear. They were black and white saddle shoes, popularized in the 40s. In those days, we simply referred to them as "Shiloh shoes." At the time, we wore sneakers with fat laces and windbreaker outfits. Anything else was out of fashion. I don't know why she came to exist in our household. I asked one of my brothers recently and he said that my parents did it for extra income.

One afternoon, we picked her up from school, and she rode in the station wagon with my siblings and me. We didn't like to sit near her so we let her sit as close to the window as she wanted. She stuck her head out like a dog and let the wind crash through her curly hair. We weren't driving

that fast, maybe about thirty five miles per hour on a residential street. I noticed that Shiloh reached for the door and pulled on the handle. My sister and I screamed when the door opened. My father slammed the breaks and Shiloh smashed up against the door, and managed to stay inside the vehicle.

My father screamed at her in Spanish, "Que chingados estas haciendo?" she didn't understand. She laughed and shook her head, and attempted to climb out through the window. I don't remember the ride home, but it must have been uncomfortable and comical.

I asked my sister the other day, "Remember that time Shiloh tried to jump out of the station wagon?"

"Yuck, no. I don't remember."

"You don't remember what my dad did to her?"

"That girl was just crazy."

In the driveway, my father dragged Shiloh out of the vehicle by her curly hair and hauled her into the house. "Ahora vas a aprender cabrona." Shiloh laughed and seemed to enjoy it.

Perhaps my father thought she challenged his manhood. My siblings, mother, and I went into the house and retreated to our normal routine. I decided to check up on Shiloh and I walked to my parents' bedroom. Shiloh had her skirt down to her ankles and my father was whipping her with a metal baseball bat on the ass. He glanced in my direction and kept hitting her. I wasn't exactly sure what I was looking at, but I knew I had walked into a real horror show. Shiloh cried and roared like I had never heard. For the first time, I felt sympathy for her. My father was physically abusive to my siblings and I, but this seemed highly inappropriate.

I told my sister, "You don't remember my dad whipped her with a bat?"

"Shut up."

A few days ago, my brother and father came over to watch a game. I asked my brother, "Do you remember Shiloh, that one girl?"

"Yeah of course. What about her?"

"I was wondering about that time she tried to jump out of the station wagon. I was thinking about her punishment."

"Ask my dad."

My dad said, "I don't know what you're talking about. You guys are inventing things." He took a drink from his tequila and went back to watching the game.

○

Rodrigo Ribera d'Ebre is an essayist, novelist, scholar, director and curator. He was born and raised on the seedy streets of the Los Angeles Westside, near the LAX Airport, where he participated in many subcultures during his youth. After his two closest friends were convicted of the homicide of a federal informant, d'Ebre distanced himself from the streets and graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science. He is a regular contributor to the *Huffington Post* and his writing has appeared in *Dual Coast Magazine* and *the Los Angeles Review of Books*. He is the author of *Urban Politics: The Political Culture of Sur 13 Gangs*, a political treatise on Mexican American street gang organizations in Los Angeles. His nonfiction has been highlighted by NPR and he is an award-wining filmmaker for his narrative and direction in the documentary film, *Dark Progressivism*. He is currently a graduate student in the MFA program at Mount Saint Mary's University.

Strange Fish
by
Brett Arnold

A week passed before Jack and his motorcycle were found on the rocks below the cliffs of Pacific Coast Highway in Santa Barbara. That was July.

In early June, I picked him up from LAX. His grandmother, the last of his family and the only one of them he'd ever really loved, had passed away in Berlin. He traveled to her there when he heard from her nursing home that she wasn't doing well, that hospice was near, and that she had some things that needed attending to. Her will. A funeral. A chance to be with someone she recognized. He'd only meant to stay a few days, but that turned into almost all of winter. She'd survived a world war and a wall, only to be taken by slow, deafening cancer. "She can't hear anything," Jack wrote to me when he first arrived there, "not a damn thing. It's for the best."

When I saw him exit the terminal, his face was puffed up and pink. I almost didn't recognize him in the crowd. All he had on him was a small leather handbag and a crumpled newspaper. He looked at his feet as he walked towards me. I got out of the car and hugged him. His arms were tense, then relaxed.

"It was a long flight," Jack said.

I nodded. "It's good to see you. Did you sleep?" I studied him. "You've got black stuff on your face."

He rubbed his cheeks with his thumb, smearing the words *abandonnierung, scham, liebe,* into his thin facial hair.

"Ink," he said. "And no, no sleep." He threw his bag in the trunk, though it would have fit between his feet just fine. "They charge for pillows now, did you know that? So I used a newspaper."

§

We were roommates during our last semester of college and then again after graduation. My older roommates had moved away for jobs in other, more interesting cities with other young people, rising and always rising. But we had found work locally, and he was the first to respond to my ad on campus in search of someone to fill the spare room in my apartment.

When he moved in he brought: a pillow, a tattered copy of *The Essentials of Joyce*, and a plastic storage bin filled with assorted bottles of liquor. He set his stuff in his room and then went into the kitchen to cut his hair. "You don't mind if I do this here, do you?" It was long then, reaching his shoulders and curling up at the ends.

"Don't you think the porch would be better?"

"But then people would see me." He smirked. "I'm joking," he said. "I'm not crazy."

"Right."

"Wouldn't want to freak you out on the first day." He took out a bottle of Yukon Jack and unscrewed the lid. "To long health," he said. "And haircuts." It was 9:45 in the morning. So much for not being crazy. We both took a long pull—I'd never drank directly from a bottle before. Later that night I found clumps of his hair in the garbage disposal.

§

On the car ride home from the airport I asked him what was next. "You can stay with me a while, if you want."

He stared out the window, over the bridge at the traffic below. "Only for a night or two. I've got to get to Oakland soon."

Before everything with his grandmother started, he had been accepted into a fellowship program just outside of Berkeley. He was going to finish working on his novel. It had ballooned to over eleven-hundred pages, but the fellowship saw potential. He wouldn't tell me what it was about. They were providing housing, money for food, and a small allowance for everything else so he and the other admitted artists could focus on their craft without needed an outside job.

"I only need to grab my motorcycle," he said. "You kept it safe, right?"

"It'll kill you," I said.

"Everything will kill me."

He retrieved a cigarette and match from his coat pocket. He lit it without rolling the window down. The car slowly filled with a gray haze and I fought the urge to cough.

§

I came home exhausted one day when we were still roommates, and there he was sitting alone in the living room with his shirt off, a portion of his chest covered in petroleum jelly and Saran wrap. The radio was blasting the noise of in-between two stations. He'd gotten a tattoo of a whale.

"Funny fish," he said between swigs of his bottle of Yukon.

I walked around him, on my way to my room, when he stood and tripped himself and fell back to the floor with a crash. He was drunker than I thought, and his face was now cut above his left cheekbone. "My grandmother has cancer,

by the way," he said. "The one in Berlin. The only one, I guess."

When he was young his parents divorced and so he split the weeks between them. This lasted for three years until they both died within weeks of each other. At the age of seven he deduced that surely this was a sign that they had still loved each other. He lived with his grandma in Germany for eleven years before returning to America for college.

"That's terrible," I said. What else was there to say? I sat next to him on the floor. His skin resembled wax and smelled like alcohol. "Is it, um, far along?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything. I'm going there in two days. Can I get a ride to the airport?"

§

Back at the apartment, he thanked me for the ride, and we went and sat at the kitchen table. Half of the space was bare and awkward; his things had only been removed not so long ago.

I'd collected Jack's mail for him on the table. A few political magazines, some coupon books I wouldn't have dared to throw away, and a couple letters. He flipped through the pile silently, eventually shuffling the whole pile into the trashcan. He saved only a small, red envelope.

"How was the service?" I asked. "Do they do them the same there?"

"I always imagined funerals with more people, you know? Not this time. Just a bunch of old ladies."

"You didn't know them?"

He was studying the handwriting on the envelope. "No, they're all—well, the rest are dead I guess, or somewhere else. Probably somewhere else."

He ripped it open, and read the contents.

"Strange that I don't remember what my grandma's friends looked like," he said, and sat for a moment staring at the letter. He stood and walked towards the front door. "I need a cigarette."

"What'd the letter say?" But the door had closed.

It was getting dark then, and I started making dinner with the only thing I had in the fridge: a pre-packaged salad. It was exactly the kind of thing Jack would've hated. After plating it and sitting at the table for a while waiting, I turned on the radio. A woman on NPR was responding to a reporter's question. "It's true, yes, amputees often feel pain in phantom limbs. It's treated with mirrors, with varying degrees, arranged just so…"

I opened the front door, and knew that he'd gone.

§

At three o'clock in the morning the door to my room quietly opened.

"Are you awake?" Jack whispered. A perfume of whiskey and decay filled the room.

I pretended to be asleep. I focused on breathing, the purplish shapes behind eyelids in the dark.

"Yes," I said.

He leaned against the frame of my door, and slid to a sitting position on the floor. "My fellowship was cancelled."

My back was towards him, and my eyes were closed with weight. "That's awful," I said, "What happened?"

"I don't know, something bureaucratic. Probably decided they hated my book after all."

I felt guilty, like somehow I was part of a larger human consciousness that had decided this. But I was also very tired.

"Bureaucracy," I scoffed. "They couldn't defer your acceptance?"

"I'm just letting you know I'm leaving in the morning. I guess I'll still go up north and do whatever there. Something."

He stayed there, just sitting, neither of us speaking, until he fell asleep. In the morning he was gone.

It was two in the afternoon, the police figured, when his motorcycle broke through the highway barriers and dove down the cliff face. Another fifteen yards and he would've hit the Pacific, they said. There was no traffic at that time. No tire skids, signs of foul play. I remembered him sitting on the wood floor of the living room the day he'd gotten his whale tattoo. Drink in hand, he grinned and said," Everything will go back to the ocean someday, won't it?"

○

BIO FOR BRETT ARNOLD.

The Sad Tree

by

Alex Clark-McGlenn

I was sleeping on the couch—drifted off while watching M*A*S*H—when somebody pulled my shoulder and I sorta jerked awake. I'd done that since Ma died. I always hoped she'd wake me.

"Neill," said Nate, my big brother.

It'd been me and Nate against Pa for a couple months.

"Yeah, alright," I said, and leaned up.

"They're cutting the tree down tomorrow," Nate said.

"How'd you know?"

"Heard Pa say. Want to see it?"

"It's a tree," I said. The light in the room came from the television and made Nate's face pale, like he'd seen a ghost. His dark hair was shaggy--Ma used to cut it. Nate handed me a flashlight.

"Pa said not to," I said.

"Pa don't know shit," said Nate.

"Ma ain't home to stop him," I added.

"I know," said Nate.

"You're right," I said.

Nate stood up straighter. He was two years older and I was 11.

"So you coming or a chicken shit?" he asked.

"Okay," I said and pushed myself up. I wanted to see the tree, even though I didn't.

I followed him passed Pa's armchair. The built-in cup holder was filled with butts.

"Sure Pa's asleep?" I asked

"Yeah."

If Pa catched us I didn't want to think about it, but losing the tree felt like losing Ma all over again. That tree, out by the pond, was the most beautiful we'd seen. Ma loved trees. She said trees owned themselves. She said poetic stuff because she loved Robert Frost. When we lived in Georgia she went on walks and found new trees. Yellowwoods, Red Maples, Beech, and White Ash.

I don't know what kind of tree this one is. When we moved here, Ma lost her love of walks and Robert Frost, and all the trees but one.

I followed Nate to the door and put on my shoes. Everything's louder when the world is quiet. The front door creaked as Nate opened it. It could have been an alarm. I was sure Pa would wake and know and come down the stairs in that stiff fashion and ask, The hell you boys doing? And he'd get his belt. I didn't know what Nate would do because he was maybe as strong as Pa and wouldn't let him hurt me without a say so.

Then I stepped through the door after Nate and shut it with care.

The moon overhead was a sliver and didn't cast much light.

We walked toward the Front 20. It was a large field, owned by our neighbors but they lived more than a mile away. We jumped the fence. The grass was long and wet and I felt cold-damp where the grass pressed my jeans.

We didn't speak. I think we both worried about Pa.

Once we were halfway across the Front 20, Nate spoke. "Know what Bobby says about Ma?"

"Everyone knows what Bobby says about everything," I said.

“You think he’s right?”

“Don’t know. Maybe.”

“I don’t think so,” said Nate.

“Me neither.”

“You said you thought he was,” said Nate.

“I said maybe, but maybe not.”

Silence.

"Why'd we move?" I asked.

"Pa's work," he said.

"That ain’t what I meant."

"I don't know what you meant, then."

On the other side of the field we jumped the fence out of the Front 20, where it met the forest. A woody smell. Cedar. The dark below the branches was much worse. We flicked on our flashlights.

"Ma was never the same, you notice?" I asked

"Sure I noticed."

"She say something?"

"Naw," said Nate.

"She told me Washington’s got no soul like Georgia," I said.

"So you do think Bobby's right," Nate accused me.

"She changed, but crazy? no," I said.

"Crazy. . ." Nate hawked and spat on the ground. "Bobby's a pissant," he said.

The light of the thin moon hung up on branches overhead.

"Yeah," I said. "He is.”

"You listen to him.”

"I ain't," I said. "Pa might’ve drove her to it, though."

"Pa drives people to all sorts of things," said Nate. His words were as sharp as his pocket knife. I knew he was thinking about the next time Pa got on the drink.

The branches above blocked out the light. The underbrush my flashlight beam fell on was old and brown and fallen from the cedars themselves.

After about a hundred yards I heard the sound of Quade Creek. The trees thinned and the starlight sprinkled down. The path followed the creek for a while. We came to the fork. One path cut away from the creek, the other followed it. This was the way Ma went, and so did we.

"You miss Ma?" I asked.

"Naw," said Nate. "I know I'm supposed to, but I can't feel that for her."

A stinging nettle brushed the place where my pants cuff rose above my sock and I felt the tingling itch that it left there.

"Damn," I said. "Nettle sting."

"Yeah. That's what it feels like to me," said Nate. "I sting inside but it's not like my mom has died, it's like she's gone away."

"I miss her," I said.

Nate turned around. His face was dark. He was a good big brother, but if he left me with Pa I didn't know what I'd do with just Pa. But Nate was here now, so I tried not to think about it.

"Parents die," said Nate. "It's the natural order, is all."

I didn't know how he knew this, but once he said it, I agreed.

"Yeah," I said, but didn't feel the words were just. Good parents didn't choose to die.

I remembered when Ma first took me to the tree. It was at the edge of the pond and the branches hung low with some unknowable weight.

Ma was gone for three days before. . .

I didn't hate the tree. The Sad Tree--that's what I called it in my head. It was the only thing Ma loved at the end.

I felt the temperature drop and the pond came into view.

In movies and books the saddest trees are Weeping Willows, but this tree wasn't one of those. It had thick bark and needles.

I wanted Ma to be there waiting for me. I wanted Nate to tell me he wouldn't leave. I even wanted Pa mean again because for the last while he'd just been quiet. I knew what he was thinking when he was mean.

I walked forward, ahead of Nate. The tree was a quarter of the way around the pond. I imagined Ma walking in the exact place I walked.

When I placed my hand on the trunk I felt the life there, almost. The bark was grooved like a deep scab.

"Easy to climb," said Nate.

"Yeah," I said. "Which branch, d'you think?"

Nate regarded the tree. I could see his face now. His gaze darted from branch to branch until it settled.

He pointed. "Two up and three right."

I saw which he pointed to. I fit my hands into the deep grooves of the bark and climbed. After the first scramble, I was among the branches.

"Ma could have done that," said Nate.

"Yeah," I said.

"Yeah."

I sniffed and looked out across the pond. The starlight and moonlight glinted off the dark water like flung paint. I

imagined Ma looking at the same view. A breeze blew back her dark hair. Her eyes lingered on the depths of the pond, the swirling light reached out from the other side, the other bank. A quiet, peaceful land. Welcoming.

I tore my gaze away and looked down. A body hung from the branch I sat on. A thick noose was around the woman's neck. Ma swung back and forth and my breath caught. I couldn't get another. My flashlight fell from my grip. My hands worked by themselves. I pulled and scratched at the knot in front of me. Nate yelled, but I didn't know what. Fireflies burst in my eyes. The beautiful pond fled in the distance and that peaceful land was long gone. Ma's body fell to the ground as light brighter than the sun and whiter than the moon hit me in the face. Boom!

My fingertips throbbed. I sat up and my vision blurred. My legs were wet. I wiped my eyes with my palms and looked around for Ma's body. I'd fallen from the branch just like Ma and landed with my legs in the pond.

Nate was standing over me, looking up.

"Where's Ma?" I asked.

I think Nate shook his head, just a little, but I couldn't be sure.

My eyes flared and burned and my nose was like a leaky faucet.

"But she was right there," I said, pointing up. "Right there. And she fell and—" A hurt ran from my temples down to the heels of my feet like a pressure inside me. "—I just thought maybe she'd still be alive if I untied her," I said through my gushy nose.

Seeing that branch like that—from above and then below—I knew that tree, that branch, that inch of bark where Ma tied her rope, was in another world altogether. An un-

natural world. It was in a place I couldn't touch and a place I didn't want to go, even if I could. It might be peaceful, but it wasn't for me. Not yet, anyway.

I climbed to my feet. My shoes were wet and squashy. My right ankle hurt, but not as much as my fingers. I picked up my flashlight and went up to Nate. He hadn't said a word and hadn't moved, except to maybe shake his head.

With snot in my nose and tears on my cheeks, I said, "I never wanted her to leave."

Again, Nate was silent and didn't move.

I nudged him with a hand. Nothing. So I nudged him harder, but no. I flicked on my flashlight and held it up to his face. I expected him to go all mean on me. Call me a turd and accuse me of blinding him. I even wished he would.

His eyes were glassy and stared up at the branch—at that same inch I knew didn't exist in this world and I thought, maybe, he was there too. And I thought about what he'd said when that nettle stung me—how he knew he was supposed to be sad Ma was gone but he couldn't, and I understood that he was sad she'd abandoned us, and he'd just not known it.

I waved my hand in front of Nate's face, but it stayed smooth and calm. At peace. I imagined that was what Ma was like now. I figured it wasn't a bad way, as long as you were away from Pa, and that was Nate's final escape.

All this time I'd thought Nate stuck around to take care of me, but it had always been me stuck around for him. I took a step along the bank as if I'd meant to do it all along. I turned away from The Sad Tree. Turned away from Pa, and even Ma. But most of all, I turned away from Nate.

I walked on along the edge of the pond. I came to the outlet and the little deer path beside it. I looked down the overgrown way and knew, just as Ma had known, the bend in

the trail led to light. As I took my first step upon that path I left a whole world behind, and I could have been anybody, and that's who I was. Anybody. And Pa couldn't stop me no more.

○

Alex is a graduate of the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts. His fiction has appeared in *eFiction Magazine*, *Smokebox Literary Magazine*, the *Best New Writing 2016* anthology. This is his second time appearing in *The Cost of Paper*. His piece "The Story of Grandma Snow" was included in volume three. He lives in Olympia, Washington and is currently seeking representation for his debut novel, a blend of magical realism and horror. Follow him on Twitter @alexclarkmcg or at alexclarkmcg.com..

And She Kept Walking

by

Chelsea Sutton

Her smile was falling off all day, but she didn't seem to notice, and everyone else was too embarrassed to say anything. At first, it just looked a bit off-kilter, a little crooked like a crayon drawing or a cloud or a one-way street. But then it got worse. It moved up to her cheek for a while, remaining there while she mailed some bills at the post office. Then it slipped down to her chin, where it dangled and jiggled as she shopped for bread, milk, and instant Jello at the supermarket. From there, the smile slid down her neck and under her blouse, reemerging once again on her left bicep. It looked a bit like a tattoo in that position, and people who saw her during this time, and didn't know any better, thought of her as a real bad ass. But still, nobody said a word. Her hair was pulled up tightly into a bun so everyone who was looking could see the smile when it moved again to the back of her neck. And there it began to grow. It grew and grew and grew like a wart or a cyst or a tomato plant or a ten-year old child. And then it fell off. It fell off as she was walking down the sidewalk toward her home in the middle of a housing tract. It fell off and she kept walking. It made a terrible shattering sound, like a dropped mirror or a jet plane or gunfire. She didn't hear it, but her neighbors did. They stopped mowing their lawns and trimming their hedges and drinking their lemonade and smoking their cigarettes in order to look at the smile's scattered shards on the ground.

○

Chelsea Sutton is a fiction writer, playwright, and a 2016 PEN Center USA Emerging Voices Fellow. Her fiction has appeared in *The Rattling Wall*, *Spectrum*, *Bourbon Penn*, *The Texas Observer*, and others. She was the winner of NYC Midnight's Flash Fiction Contest and a Finalist for the *Indiana Review* Short Fiction Prize. Her plays have been finalists for the O'Neill Playwrights, PlayPenn, and Seven Devils Conferences, the Ingram New Works Lab, and the Stanley Drama, Woodward/Newman Drama, and Reva Shiner Comedy awards. She was nominated for a Stage Raw Award for her play *Wood Boy Dog Fish*, an adaptation of The Adventures of *Pinocchio* written for Rogue Artists Ensemble. She is currently working on a short story collection entitled *Curious Monsters* and developing new plays with Skylight Theatre's Playlab and Humanitas PlayLA. She is a graduate of the College of Creative Studies at UC Santa Barbara.

A Bitter Reunion

by

Aaron Weddle

Bernard left the therapist's office and turned onto the main street. The wind whipped through the buildings and Bernard had to bundle up against the cold February chill. The sky was overcast and the streets were painted in whites and greys. Bernard walked a few blocks until he found a familiar bar. The bar brought up unwelcome memories of his and Clara's relationship, but he knew this area better so he made the sacrifice. Bernard hoped his old friends would walk through the door. They all used to frequent this bar on Fridays. Bernard was a little bit early so he sat down and ordered a light beer. The barkeep recognized his face. "Hiya Bernard, how're you doing'?" she asked. "I'm fine," he murmured. "How's Clara?" she asked. Bernard froze; had it really been that long? "We're not together anymore," he said. She grew flustered and clearly didn't know what to say. "It's okay Frieda; you don't have to say anything. I've had enough sympathy for the day." Frieda walked away with her eyes down and busied herself with a couple in the corner. Bernard sighed and turned back to his drink. He wondered how so much had changed in such a short amount of time. Frieda was still at the bar, so that was a constant in his mind. He still smoked, so that was constant. Bernard wondered when he had seen his friends last. They used to come to the bar every weekend and play pool. He couldn't remember the last time he had played a game of pool.

Tired of waiting to see if they would come through the door, he pulled out his phone and called them. The first call

went through, but it wasn't James who answered. Apparently he had changed his number or moved. Bernard called Isaac and Roy next. Both of them answered and agreed to come to the bar, but Isaac said he couldn't stay for very long. Bernard ordered another beer for the wait and sipped it coolly. He considered what his therapist had said; had he really been making Clara and object of blame? He didn't think so. They clearly just didn't belong with one another. He became upset thinking about Clara so he tried to just focus on his beer. He found it hard to focus. Every time he looked at it he remembered the dates he had with Clara here. He would drink this same beer but she would be sitting next to him, laughing and admiring his resolve to study philosophy. Bernard sighed and took a new seat in the corner of the bar to allow his friends a space to sit.

Bernard didn't immediately recognize Isaac and Roy when they entered the bar. Isaac's familiar clean-shaven appearance was gone under a thick, curly beard. He wore a pair of wire-rim glasses and his body was more filled out. The last time Bernard had seen Isaac he was lanky and had a mop of hair. Now his hair was neatly parted and he wore a smart button-down shirt. Roy looked mostly the same, but his hair was thinning and his former dominating appearance seemed to have vanished. In the past Roy seemed to fill a room, but now he just filled the doorway. Bernard motioned to his friends and they came over to the table in the corner of the bar. Frieda recognized them immediately. Bernard wasn't sure if they were regulars or if she just recognized them in conjunction with Bernard; either way, their appearance didn't throw her off so he figured it must be one of the two.

Isaac and Roy both followed Bernard's example and ordered light beers. Silence pervaded the group for a few minutes before Bernard spoke up. "Well, it's been a while hasn't it? How are you guys?" Roy was the first to speak. "I haven't been here in a while Bernard. It sure brings back some old memories." So now he knew that at least Roy hadn't been here in a while, maybe things had changed more than he thought. Isaac spoke up. "I haven't seen this place in ages either; do you still come here regularly Bernard?" Bernard shook his head. "For some reason I thought about the old times at the bar and I figured you guys may still come here. Do you guys want to play a game of pool?" Isaac coughed and shook his head; Roy considered it for a minute before declining. Isaac seemed to be mulling something over in his head and Roy looked around nervously. "You know Bernard," Isaac began, "You abandoned us when Clara came into your life." Bernard was shocked. How could he say such a thing? "Well you didn't like her," Bernard stammered. "No, we did," Isaac said. "You were just more concerned with spending time with her than you were with spending any time with us." Bernard looked at his friends. This wasn't his fault, it was their fault for not understanding how busy he was; he was sure of it. "Well you'll be happy to know Clara and I have separated." Isaac and Roy were taken aback. "Why the hell would that make us happy? We liked Clara." Roy said. "We were only upset that you didn't have time for us anymore."

"Well now I have all the time in the world." Bernard said. "I'm sure you two are still free to hang out; you were always so carefree and spontaneous." Isaac coughed nervously. "I'm married now Bernard," he said. "I have a daughter now too. That's why I can't stay very long; I have responsi-

bilities and business I have to take care of." Bernard was shocked, but he turned to Roy. Roy was always free to do something. He was the bachelor of the group. The only responsibilities he had were always at work and apart from that he lived wild and free. Roy must have known what he was thinking because he shook his head. "Bernard I'm engaged to be married," he said. "I don't know what you were expecting calling us up, but things have changed." Bernard was speechless. What had happened to the fun they all used to have playing pool and drinking? Isaac excused himself. "I need to go home to my wife and daughter," he said. "I'm already running late. He paid his tab and left. Bernard looked hopefully towards Roy. "Will you play a game of pool with me? Please?" Roy shook his head. "I'm sorry Bernard but I promised Deandra I would have dinner with her parents tonight. I really need to go so I won't be late." Roy paid his tab and slipped out of the bar. They were gone just like that. Bernard grew angry and ordered another beer. How could they just leave like that after all of the good times they used to have? Why couldn't they entertain one night of nostalgia?

Bernard called out for his tab and sat brooding. Frieda glanced at him with pity and hurried off before he noticed. Bernard left the bar and walked back out onto the main street. The air had become considerably colder and he had to double up under his thin jacket. His hands and face grew red as he walked the blocks back to his apartment. He didn't want to be in his apartment. His thoughts were a whirlwind of self-hatred and blame, and he didn't want to sit alone in his apartment to think about them. He walked the streets aimlessly to pass the time, hoping that he would tire himself out and let exhaustion overwhelm him so he could avoid his own mind. The streets were mostly empty. Every now and then

he would pass someone rushing by to escape the cold; he seemed to be the only one that wanted to be in the cold. Bernard walked a few more blocks until he found an unfamiliar bar where people wouldn't know his name. He ordered a gin and tonic and warmed up at the bar. He finished the gin in a matter of minutes and ordered another one. The bartender eyed him warily. "Somethin' the matter son?" he asked. Bernard glanced up and said "Divorce." That was true. Bernard was divorced from his wife and he felt divorced from his friends. The constants in his life were diminishing and he was beginning to feel divorced from himself. He wondered why constants were so important to him. He asked the bartender if he could smoke. The bartender said it was fine and pulled out an ashtray. Bernard lit a cigarette with tenured skill and inhaled deeply. Tendrils of smoke rose from the tip of the cigarette and dissipated in the rafters. The bar was mostly empty so no one really seemed to mind. Bernard started thinking about the constants in his life again. Okay I have cigarettes, writing, booze, therapy, books, and family; none of those have changed. Don't I have more than that? When did the list grow so small? I used to have school, Clara, and friends at least, but now all of that is gone or all of it has changed. What's so important about constants anyway? Regardless of whether or not they're there I'm still Bernard Everett. Is the shifting environment uncomfortable? I suppose I may find comfort in constants. Can I reasonably expect things to stay constant while I change as a person?

The thoughts sped through Bernard's mind. His cigarette had burned down to the butt and a long piece of ash fell off into the ashtray. Bernard called for his tab and pushed the ashtray back towards the bartender. The bartender wished Bernard a good night and Bernard responded with a forced

smile. Back on the street, Bernard turned for home. The alcohol and chilly air made his cheeks look like two bright red spheres in the night. His thoughts were muddled; he had achieved his goal. The longer he could avoid thinking through the present issue the longer he wouldn't have to be stressed out by its existence. He made it back to his apartment and sighed. It was a mess, but it was something he would have to deal with later. He didn't want any more reminders of his current position in life. He made it to the back room and laid down on a futon he had bought after the divorce. It wasn't particularly comfortable but he figured it was better than sleeping on the floor. A pile of half read books lay stacked next to the futon. He picked up the one on top. It was *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. He really enjoyed the writing style but he couldn't seem to finish it. He couldn't remember the last time he had finished a book; it seemed that every time he started reading something came up or there was another book he needed to read. He forced himself to read more of the book by a dim lamp. He made it through one page before he fell asleep.

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Aaron Weddle is 23 years old and holds a B.A. in Philosophy from the University of West Georgia. He will be attending school for his M.A. in Philosophy this fall and is ultimately aiming for his PhD. Aaron seeks to couple philosophy and fiction, to blur the lines of academia enough to present new and original ideas.

In his free time he likes to write short stories and novellas, and he is currently working on his first novel. The short story included here is an excerpt from an unpublished novella, which catalogs a man's journey with anxiety and depression and explores the fragility of the bonds of friendship and how they are affected by time.

Tobacco and Dead Things

by

Daniel Chameides

In his dream, Greg was stuck in transit. First, he was coming from work, smoking a cigarette and sliding the edge of his last paycheck over the tips of his fingers, staining the paper pink, then crouching by the creek, counting the seconds and hours and years as the tired brown flow forever pushed and pulled at mud and bank, then in the dark below the MARTA station, listening to the busy stomps and whispers buzz and echo above his head, then cold and huddled beneath a covered bus stop, watching the rain pelt the ground and hugging himself deeper into his poncho, then crouched on the open windowsill of an abandoned house, squinting through blackness and scratching his fingernails on the rotten wood walls and straining his ears against the bumps and creaks of human absence. The days and stations whirled around him like drops of black in the static between television channels. A few people shambled here and there, coughing and staring at their feet as they walked, fumbling with newspapers and wristwatches and bus schedules. Greg couldn't remember where he was supposed to go anymore; the lines and routes on the maps crossed and blurred as he stared at them. His train hummed to a stop and he thought, time to change lines—always changing lines. When the doors slid open he found himself in the basement of his father's house.

Dim shards of moonlight cut through the dark, stale room, leaving patterns of dust in the air and white lines on the wooden walls. There was a creaking on the steps and he

looked to the stairs to see the glare of a flashlight followed by the outline of an old woman, maybe his mother. She swung the beam over the room, over old chairs missing legs and cracked mirrors and discarded toys and clothing. She sighed. "Take whatever you need; we're throwing all this old, broken shit out pretty soon anyway."

Greg squinted desperately through the blackness, scanning the floor for the train tracks he knew must be there. He didn't want to be caught in its path when it rushed through the room, didn't want to be trapped between its lights and crushed and flung lifeless aside from its screaming, impatient way. He could already hear the beeping and grinding as it stopped to trade passengers somewhere up the line, behind the walls.

The old woman sneezed and wiped her nose on her shirt. "Remember your fare, Greg, 'cause nobody rides this line for free. Even if you have nowhere to go."

Greg could feel the rumbling now, and he knew the train was coming right at him, would roll right over him and he would disappear forever. He grabbed desperately in the air for a cord to stop the train, to give him time to get out of the way, to get home.

His hand disappeared and he realized he had been sleeping with his eyes open, staring at the ceiling. He was in his father's house, in his bedroom upstairs. Two lines of moonlight ran down its length; the rest was shadow. He lifted his head and pivoted his feet to the floor. The room dipped and swam and with it his stomach and he knew he was hungover. He could smell the sharp, almost fecal odor of vomit, and behind it, tobacco and dead things. The smell was acutely familiar, though he could not place it.

He stumbled downstairs to the kitchen, careful not to wake his parents. Everything seemed wrong here, out of place, and he realized that this wasn't his father's house—it was *his* house. His fingers shook as he scooped coffee grounds into a filter. He wondered idly if he was still dreaming, if he would wake up and be a kid again, but the dream was already fading away beneath a growing headache.

"You promised me you'd quit." Faith's voice startled him, and he jerked, spilling coffee grounds over the counter. He looked around, trying to locate her, but the room seemed to tilt away everywhere he looked.

"I guess you have me figured out: pick up a white chip and I come running back to you. Then you get wasted and I'm the one who has to take care of you." She walked into the room. She was wearing a white nightgown. Her eyes were puffy, like she had been crying.

Greg stammered and tried to say how the seconds had become hours and the hours had become years and, in an instant of distraction, the road ahead had become the road below and the road behind, with only the cracking of old bones beneath the tires to make the passage and, above all, all his crimes were crimes of love, be he stuttered and lost his thought and instead he told Faith he loved her and they went back upstairs and fell asleep together and Greg dreamed about being young again, again.

○

Daniel Chameides (1976-2016) was a computer programmer, mad genius, and prophet to all who knew him. He wrote poetry, short stories, aphorisms, and along with Jordan A. Rothacker he conceived the *Art/Art Manifesto*. He will be missed but his writing lives on.

Weaver's Sundries

by

Douglas Cowie

Weaver's had been empty for a long time, ever since old man Weaver went to Attica. The sign still hung above the door and window, however, as though everybody was too afraid to take it down, as though somehow Weaver would find out about it, and get them. Or maybe he still technically owned the place, and nobody could do anything about it. It was a bright blue sign back then, with bold white lettering that said WEAVER'S, and underneath that in smaller letters, SUNDRIES. Now, though, it was faded and peeling from years of inattention and cold, snowy winters followed by hot, dry summers. Back then, Weaver would get up on the ladder every spring and repaint it himself, even when he started getting on in years. It was the local joke: forget about robins or the groundhog, when you see Weaver up on that ladder, it means winter is over.

Weaver must have made decent money out of that place. He used to go down to Florida for a month every winter, closing the shop for all of January before returning to organize the mid-winter, pre-inventory sale, when all the on-hand merchandise, "everything without an expiration date," as his ad in the *Examiner* always announced, packs of playing cards, stationary, even typewriters, went for half price. The old calendars would go down to twenty-five percent, and Weaver would endure the inevitable taunts from the twelve and thirteen year-olds who uncleverly pointed out that the calendars had dates on them as they slunk around the shop, buying a pencil or pack of gum while trying to steal pornography.

Nobody was afraid of Weaver. Nobody had reason to be. He was the nicest guy in town, and everyone knew it. He always went to Little League games, and told the players how well they'd done the previous week when they came into the store. He remembered everyone's names, and always asked about their wives or husbands or kids or parents. He'd give free lollipops to kids whose moms stopped by every week to buy *Good Housekeeping* and *Redbook* and pay the bill for newspaper delivery.

The delivery job itself was a coveted position among the boys in town. Weaver employed two boys, one for each half of town, which is split into equal parts by Highway 12, the main road running north-south from the I-81/88 junction to the Thruway, and it was well known that Weaver rewarded his delivery boys for a good year's service with ten bucks and stack of comic books at Christmas. One year he employed a Jewish kid, and dispensed the bonus across Hanukkah, a couple of comics a day until the eighth day, when the kid got the ten bucks and some old packs of baseball cards Weaver had found in the storage room. Every February, dozens of kids put on their Sunday dress shirts and asked their dads to help them tie their ties so they could interview for the delivery job; the employment only lasted a year, and nobody could hold the position twice. He'd interview each kid for five minutes, asking him about what he wanted to be when he grew up, who his favorite ball players were, that kind of thing. He hired a girl one year after she told him her career plan was to play second base for the Yankees.

The storefront had a large bay window in which Weaver displayed the newest and nicest merchandise. To the right of the display window was the maroon door and stuck to its glass window were stickers for the chamber of commerce,

and stickers shaped like firemen's helmets that showed Weaver's support of the volunteer fire brigade. The police inspectors spent two hours in Weaver's that day, and carried three cardboard boxes out the door when they left. Three boxes. Nobody knew for sure what was in them then.

The door was boarded up when, three weeks after he was convicted, some kids smashed a rock through it and looted everything they could carry: porn, comics, cigarettes, dip and condoms. The window display had a typewriter, some copies of the 1989 edition of *The Farmer's Almanac* and the sign, which always stood in the corner of the window, advertising the newspaper delivery service. Visible from the sidewalk, sitting on the counter next to the register, was a jar of pickled eggs. Like Weaver's annual sign painting, those eggs, too, were a source of local legend. Some claimed that the same eggs had been sitting in that brine-filled jar for as long as Weaver had owned the shop, that nobody ever bought them. Others maintained that Weaver himself ate them, and always had a reserve jar ready to go. Still others claimed to have bought eggs from Weaver, but couldn't agree among themselves how much he charged for them. The jar still sat there, the yellowish eggs at the bottom like oversized stones in an aquarium. There weren't many, but it was impossible to discern the exact number. There wasn't enough light to see deeper into the store, to see if it all looked the same, preserved as though it were still in business, and Weaver was just down in Florida, like he always was this time of year. Only the boarded up door and the peeling sign hinted at the truth.

Everybody said they were shocked that day. Weaver was arrested right there in his store, led into the state troopers' car with a coat over his head, like you see on television,

even though there weren't any television cameras, just a few people on the sidewalk and the neighboring shopkeepers to hide him from, and they knew what he looked like anyway. The *Examiner* didn't hardly have any other news in it, except the sports reports, and it had interviews with people who lived on his street and even a couple of the boys who'd delivered papers for him in the past few years, everybody trotting out the cliches you always hear when these things happen: he was nice, kept to himself mostly, never had a problem with him; only some of which were true of Weaver. A lot of people assumed he was guilty right away, but most of the town maintained his innocence. The owner of The Mill started a legal defense collection in the form of a jar, similar to the pickled egg jar, that he put on the bar and into which he encouraged people to unload their spare change. Lots of people did, especially on the weekends, when, towards the end of the night, drunken discussions would turn into inspired proclamations about Weaver and his merits as a generally upstanding citizen and businessman, and dollar bills would be stuffed into the jar. It didn't matter, though, and when he was convicted, the people who had said he was guilty from the beginning gloated, and those who had supported him shook their heads and repeated the same cliches, which the *Examiner* dutifully printed. It didn't make the news any further away than Syracuse, just another small town sensation.

That was all so long ago now, and nobody talks about it anymore. The kids who'd be delivering his papers now weren't even born when it happened, and their parents have better things to worry about than some incident that caused a few weeks of excitement more than a decade ago, and in their minds has long since been resolved. Weaver has faded from the town's collective memory. The only reminder is Weaver's

itself, and even that is fading now, nothing more than a boarded up door, a peeling sign, a pile of outdated *Farmer's Almanacs* and a jar of pickled eggs, the place where the old man had earned his living and the town's respect for longer than anyone except a few of the older people can now remember. But somewhere underneath the accumulation of all those years, the people who were around then must still remember, it must still creep into their minds once in a while, when they're thinking about something else. Who he was and who he became are too much a part of the town to be completely erased forever. Yesterday, returning to town and standing outside that store for the first time since I left so many years ago, I remembered, all these things came pushing back into my memory, and that's why I'm heading out of town now, driving up Route 12, driving towards Attica.

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Douglas Cowie was born in Elmhurst, Illinois and has lived in England and Berlin since 1999. He is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is the author of *Owen Noone and the Marauder* and two linked novellas, *Sing for Life: Tin Pan Alley* and *Sing for Life: Away, You Rolling River*. His most recent novel, *Noon in Paris, Eight in Chicago* is a fictional account of the 18-year relationship between Simone de Beauvoir and Nelson Algren.

Commuter Train

by

Susie Griffith

She couldn't contain herself. The train had been sitting outside her kitchen window for 45 minutes. Her friend, who lived on the other side of the tracks, texted her and said somebody had been hit by that train on its way into the city. She watched it for a while, being sure to look out the one window without a screen so she could see it better. She and her friend exchanged more texts, containing little solid information and much speculation. She cleaned up the breakfast dishes, fed the dog, changed the laundry. Then she just had to go see.

She didn't even take the time to grab gloves or to stuff her unruly curly hair under a hat. Simply tossing on a winter coat over her yoga pants, hands jammed in pockets, she walked out of the house, down the street, around the block. She crossed under the viaduct to the other side of the tracks. A woman walking towards her said, "Don't go down there."

"Why not?" she asked.

"There's a body on the tracks." And the woman passed on.

She paused. Well, of course, I'm going down there, she thought. That's what I came to see.

She continued down the block. She saw cops, an ambulance, a man finishing his morning run. She looked over to her left and there was the body, under a white sheet, sort of strewn off to the side, half on the tracks, half on the embankment, as if the force of the train had gently nudged the body aside after trampling it. There were cops around the body.

One of them obligingly lifted the sheet so they could take a picture of the body and she saw it. Black clothes, shirt hunched up around the midriff, the un-humanly white skin of a porcelain doll. She couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman.

She stood for a moment, knowing that the cops would see her, knowing that they would tell her to move along. She paused another minute, for as long as she dared, then she walked around the block as if she had been on an errand of little importance, an ordinary neighbor. She got back to her obsessively tidy house and resolved to get on with her busy day, but the hovering train outside her kitchen window was an insistent houseguest that she could not dismiss.

There was no doubt that trains had always captivated her. That's why they bought the house with the train tracks behind it. That's why she laughed when the realtor considered the commuter line running through the yard a buyer's detraction. When the trains would zip by, she would often pause whatever she was doing to watch them go. If they were sitting on their deck, her husband grilling dinner and she sipping wine, they would raise their arms gleefully and cry "Train!" as the heavy engine rattled the house on its journey past. Before owning the house, she would sometimes go out of her way on dog walks to see the trains rumble by, making her dog sit to watch them with her. One of her earliest memories was of her grandmother excitedly pulling an ottoman over to the bedroom window, just the right height for a small child to stand on and see the train pass on the other side of the lake, her grandmother's arm loosely draped around her waist to keep her safe from falling. She remembered the family game of counting freight cars rolling slowly past the crossing gate, her mother turned around in her car

seat to entertain the children while her father tapped the steering wheel impatiently, trapped.

So, she had to see. She had to know.

She went back to her kitchen to bake some pumpkin bread for the weekend, listening to the thrum of the engine outside her window, as steady as a heartbeat. When she saw men on the tracks in their neon orange jackets, she opened the sliding glass door to the deck, hoping to catch their conversation but the engine was too loud. Were they looking for evidence, a note, perhaps, that had been pinned to the black shirt? Were they cleaning up personal affects that had been strewn as casually and as violently as the body? Her friend texted her that the Internet reported it was a woman. Had this woman been in despair of her life, or had she been taking a short cut that proved beyond foolish? Had she looked up to face the demon of her choice? Would her eyes haunt the engineer until the end of his days? Or was her back turned, rendering her last act faceless?

Throughout the morning she watched. The engine sat idle for two hours. She washed up the dishes from her baking, aware that she couldn't stop glancing up at the train, confirming it was still there. When it finally pulled out, it slipped away from her so quietly she was startled to see it gone. Which way did it go? It must have continued on its path southbound, for surely she would have heard it going the other way. It was as if it had evaporated. One minute, it was there and the next, it was the quiet that had made her look up. She felt a sense of betrayal, as if a lover had left town without saying goodbye, or a bad habit had faded away without the struggle of making it go. She felt very alone.

With accustomed efficiency, she went about her day, ticking off household tasks, walking the dog, running into

friends. "Did you hear? Happened right behind our house, I saw the body." She knew enough not to call her husband with the news. He would consider her fascination ghoulish. But the rumble of the engine stayed with her all day nonetheless.

Her husband was out of town on business so she was alone that night. She was still caught by the concept of someone standing on the tracks and letting the engine approach, feeling the vibrations in the rails, hearing the frantic wail of the train as the engineer tried to stop. What does that impact feel like? Does it knock your breath away? Do you feel yourself floating? Or are you just suddenly lifted, thrown, gone?

And why, with all the magical promise of mobility that a train offers, all the romantic imaginings of an undefined life, of fantastical places and people, why would that woman choose to stop its progress?

She was enthralled.

She walked the dog late that night, last walk of the night. She had to go by. The dog was confused. Why are we taking this different path, he seemed to proclaim with every hesitant step. She walked past the spot where she had seen the body, and she couldn't resist. She scrambled up the embankment, the dog pulling at the leash, afraid. She stood at the edge, her foot on a rail, looking both ways down the dark tracks. There was no train coming. She could not feel vibrations in the rails. The only sound in the crisp, urban night was a distant police siren. She stood, looked down the long, uninterrupted distance, and she wondered. What would it feel like?

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Susie Griffith is an actor and writer who has pursued the non-linear career path of an artist, working jobs that span the gamut from paralegal support to hand modeling, box office retail to fitness professional. She holds a Bachelor of Science from the School of Speech at Northwestern University, where she studied theater, playwriting and screenwriting. She began her career working in theater management, and was a member of and served as the Managing Director and Grant Writer for Terrapin Theatre in Chicago for nine years. She also served as a grant writer for various not-for-profit organizations for several years, most saliently for Steppenwolf Theatre Company. As an adjunct career to theater and writing, she taught Pilates for 15 years.

Originally from Ohio, she now lives in Chicago with her wonderful husband, a timid border collie, and a mostly blind cat. In addition to short story and novella creative writing, she continues to perform in the vital Chicago theater scene, and uses her writing passion to create elaborate back-stories for her characters.

Third Bird's Laments

by

Faisal Khan

The dining room's windows are open with sashes up and outside beyond the mesh screens on trees' limbs unseen to Lil Frankie Blake are birds of various species. Among the various chirps and warbles there are two that are specially prominent, both of which Lil Frankie regards in his periphery: one's song forlorn and worried, a stretched quality to each syllable, as if exhortative and petitioning; issuing from the other are calls that are monosyllabic, abrupt, and imperious, sounding as if in response to the importunate pleas of the first bird, exasperated by some exaggerated urgency on the part of the latter and making a very sharp request in the final throes of its patience for the first bird to please shut up and discontinue whining. Lil Frankie Blake is at the kitchen's sink, 10 odd feet from the dining room windows, up on his tippy-toes with his arms stretched forth, barely broaching the sink's rim. Through time and trial and error, he's arrived at the perfect calibration of sugar content that accords with his particular taste: a rounded tablespoon per 8 ounces. His post-breakfast coffee-drinking episodes have been daily (and understandably surreptitious, as Lil Frankie is barely 7) ever since discovering dark and milkless joe several weeks ago thanks to one of Mama Blake's friends' half-unfinished and forsaken cup left lying on the corner of the kitchen's counter. He pours 8 ounces of the coffee when it's ready into a 10-ounce cup, the extra coffee-less space at the top to forestall any spillage when stirring the sugar or any general movement of the cup here and there, as spillage would require clean-up and clean-up

would require extra time and an unwelcome disruption in a timed-to-the-second routine in which stealth and expediency are of paramount importance. Hard on the heels of Mama's departure from the kitchen, in which she returns upstairs to her bedroom for the remainder of her morning routine consisting of make-up and general feminine preening, he adds extra water in the reservoir and ground coffee into the filter, the measurement of the added coffee not exact but erring on the side of too much to provide maybe an extra, if slight, caffeine-umph. He adds sugar, once the coffee is poured into cup, very meticulously, taking care not to allow any sugar granules to stray and fall onto the surface of the counter immediately surrounding the cup. He stirs, slow enough to be careful, fast enough to be heedful of the time and dispenses cursory glances towards the living room's clock above the fireplace. He then throws back the coffee in 3 or 4 large gulps, the final one of which is followed by a deeply satisfied exhalatory aaah, washes the cup and spoon with dishwashing liquid, ensuring the removal of all vestigial soap froth, before drying both with the small hand towel hanging on the oven door's handle, before replacing both cup and spoon to their respective places in the clean dish rack, with all evidence of his morning coffee imbibition very fastidiously cleared, somewhat like a professional criminal. His little heart now beats much faster and harder, seeming to convulse and thrust itself in various directions within a cavity inside his tiny chest, as if a bird was beating itself violently against the inside of its cage, its thrashing a mute plea for an exit. His eyes pushing forth wildly at their rims, sickened by containment. Lil Frankie now stands poised by the front door, a little soldier beyond about ready to begin his day. For a moment only his eyes move, the remainder of him utterly still, feeling as if

he had just been within the eye of some sort of storm, unmolested by the storm, but that now the storm was subsumed within him, tamed, his to control. He clenches and unclenches a tiny fist with his right hand and counts the wrinkles and creases produced in the webbing between his thumb and forefinger, most of which are too insubstantial to account for. He commences to contemplate counting the dust specks floating in the rays of sun intruding and pouring forth from the recessed window high up on the ancillary living room's eastern wall. He bends to adjust one side of the bow of the tied shoelace of his right shoe so that both halves of the bow are equal in size. One usually feels no inborn need for vigilance. He counts Mama's steps as she descends the stairs, dons her shoes at the base, pours coffee into her thermos, voids the coffee-maker's filter basket of the now limp and soggy filter, places the empty carafe in the sink filling it with water to leave it thus, and walks towards him keys jingling in her hand. He shifts slightly as she nears and pivots so that he now faces the door. The bird, bruised crippled maimed mangled and resolutely holding back screams, violently flaps still restricted wings which are now drawn and as taut as the top of a drum. As she opens the door, Lil Frankie Blake is down on one knee, his backpack's straps tightened conclusively with zero laxity, the fingertips of both his little hands flush on the surface of the hardwood floor, his head up, his eyes through and beyond the open door, at the ready. Here Lil Frankie feels loaded and cocked. He hears the year old echo of the single gunshot from the basement, the sound muffled then but resounding now. Daddy Blake, sober and lucid and hoping that the taste of the metal of the barrel is the taste of utter resolve, with eyes and left fist clenched, drawing from his entire body's strength the force of one finger's pull. The

door now fully open with Mama standing far back from the entrance giving Lil Frankie wide berth, he springs forth and sprints across the front porch, bounds over the front brick steps, produces a screeching sound to signify a hard brake as he stops abruptly by the car's rear passenger door in the driveway. He can hear from far off the laments of a third bird, its calls much like the squeaking of unoiled hinges on a patio door.

○

Writer and artist, residing somewhere quiet not too far from Atlanta, among imperious pines, and the sounds of perennial birdsong and summer cicadas.

Dream House

by

Jian Huang

I come from a family of thieves.

"In the United States, if it's left out on the street, then it's free," my father said to me that first week we had arrived from China while we settled into our new home in South LA.

At least this was the rationale he used to acquire my first bicycle. We got it one rainy afternoon outside a Chinese supermarket in the San Gabriel Valley. A kid-sized Schwinn. Red shiny paint. Real classy chrome handles. And a basket too.

"I'll wait here in the car," my dad said to me.

We drove up to the bicycle, which was parked outside the front door of the market. No chains. No locks. Not exactly left on the side of the streets, but it was in a parking lot, so that was close enough. I darted across the lot, pushed the bike like it belonged to me, opened the backdoor of the car, and popped that sucker in.

"They won't arrest an eight year-old. Just act natural."

My dad worked at a motel on 3rd and Alexandria in MacArthur Park, so most of our bed sheets and towels were stolen too. Never great quality: real thin, bad thread count, polyester, and sometimes a little stained. He brings them back home whether we wanted it or not.

"Just use some bleach and it'll be fine," he said. Our factory-direct flame retardant curtains had cigarette holes in them. "Keeps you safe. Won't burn."

We stole ashtrays and used them for plates, we stole large cardboard boxes and used them as my ghetto Barbie

Dream House, and we smooshed little soaps together to make a normal-sized bar.

My dad knew that I preferred Hot Wheels to Barbies in my McDonald's Happy Meals, so he helped me build a car ramp that connected to the second floor of my dream house with toilet paper rolls.

"See!" he said proudly. "Aren't you glad I used to be an engineer?"

Every so often at the motel, our neighborhood junky/stolen-goods salesman Kenny would come by around 2 a.m. selling VCRs, CDs and boom boxes. Once we even got a machete from him for $5.

"Yo man, you wan watches for yah daughtah?" Kenny said. "I gots Rolex, Carteerrr, Mickey Mouse."

"You see him?" my dad said to me. "He's a drug user. Don't be like him" "What's a drug user?" My mom worked at a sweatshop. I spent my summers cutting threads for her in a

stuffy warehouse with no AC and a big industrial fan. I wasn't allowed to cut white clothes because I'd poke my fingers too often on the scissors and get red spots on the fabric.

Other women brought their kids to help too. Bring your kid to work season was two months in the summer and two months in the winter. If LA Unified School District was super crowded, then that'd get extended to three months. I stole plastic buttons and pretended it was money. I stole waistbands and clothes tags and operated a makeshift popup store. Sometimes I'd even play with the other kids on the factory floor. Every so often one of us would slip and fall and get splinters.

"Don't play near the machines," mom's dragon-lady boss warned us.

My mom stole dolphin-printed fabrics that smelled like feet. "I can make shirts out of these," she said. Thank god I wore uniforms at school.

On television I had seen that in America every family had two cars, a house, and a wooden fence. I could probably incrementally steal a fence from Home Depot if I went back often enough. For a car, I'd have to enlist the neighborhood boys Omar and Alvaro for help. A house would be harder.

Theft at the 99 cents store on Washington and Maple was the easiest because there were no anti-theft detectors. The Food for Less on Adams and Hoover was a little harder. Don't even think about Thrifty's.

The school lunchrooms were good for stealing an extra carton of milk. Four cartons equaled to a pint. Mom liked milk. Dad liked apple juice.

Kleptomania is defined by health care professionals as an uncontrollable urge to shoplift. If I could have stolen some health care and sought some help, I would have guessed they'd categorize me as that too.

When I was 18 I got a job at the Starbucks on Hoover and Jefferson by USC. Three years later I would talk my way into admissions, but back then I was just one of the poor kids from the neighborhood making coffee for the rich kids at the school. I had gotten admissions to a university up north with a scholarship, but then my dad up and lost his vision. Mom was already deaf, so she was no help.

"Your father had a seizure in his sleep," the eye doctor said. "Do your parents speak any English? Do you have a sibling to help you?"

No and no.

Pastries were easy to steal and dad loved them. Fresh coffee was easy too. Sandwiches were harder.

"What are you studying?" my co-worker Michael asked me as we made lattes. "I'm going to the Architecture school."

"Oh, you know, school's so boring," I deflected.

In the United States, if it's left out on the streets it's free. Once I found someone threw away an admissions brochure outside of Starbucks. I was sweeping and I found it was holding up a wobbly leg on a patio table.

Apply. Perspective First-Year. Transfer Options.

When I was eight we tried to steal an electrical box cuz we thought it'd make a good wardrobe, but it turned out to be tethered to the ground. This brochure wasn't tethered to the ground.

○

Jian Huang's parents brought her to the United States from Shanghai, China, when she was six years old. She grew up in South Los Angeles through the LA Riots and eventually earned her degree in Art History from the University of Southern California. She has worked for several social service organizations, including LA Conservation Corps, Homeboy Industries and LA County Arts Commission. Her work has appeared in *Dirty Laundry Lit*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *ALOUD*, *Entropy*, *Angel City Review*, and *Tongue & Groove* among others. She is the recipient of a 2016 PEN Emerging Voices fellowship and a 2017 Harriet Williams Emerging Writer award. Jian is currently working on her first memoir about the humorous and lonely journey to the American Dream.

The Red Glove

by

Brian May

"And you can't look back.
'Cause you don't know history."
-Mamet

1

The young man awoke at two o'clock in the morning. He had heard a noise outside his window, a kind of snap. He got up and pushed aside the curtains so that he could look out upon Lake Ellyn, the lovely reach of which spread beneath his hillside window.

There was summer mist on the warm water of the lake, but he could see something in the clouds, the mist, or radiance, moving towards him through the dark bright night, as if a silver cloud wrapping a Blue Ridge mountain in its moist warmth. And he could hear something… a kind of echo.

It was… what was it, what was it moving in the mist, scraping, swishing, skating…

It was a skater.

It was a woman, a young one.

It was a beautiful young woman.

She was skating towards him out of the mist, a silver dress shimmering in the darkness, diamonds on a black felt cloth.

2

Barry didn't believe him.

Harry didn't believe him.

Kay, the sensible one, to whom he just hinted about the whole thing, didn't seem interested.

Jerry at least seemed interested.

"When was it?"

I don't know—it was the middle of the night.

"Not water-skiing?"

Skating.

"Not swimming?"

No, skating.

"Not treading, like, walking, pushing herself along in the water?"

Not treading, not walking, not walking in the water, not walking ON the water—SKATING!!!!

"OK, OK," said Jerry. "Sheesh."

3

Months passed. The young man forgot about it all. Yet one early morning, about two o'clock in the morning, he heard a noise outside his window. He got up and pushed aside the curtains so that he could look out upon Lake Ellyn, the lovely reach of which spread beneath his hillside window.

There was autumn mist on the cool water of the lake, but he could see something in the clouds, the mists, rising off the lake.

The skater was there, skating away, scraping little showers of ice, shaving ice with sharp blades, echoing as if from walls of a canyon. She swerved in a broad sweep smoothly leftward and started coming back towards him, and, yeah, he

could tell, though he couldn't quite see her face, her features, so brilliant was the shining silver dress, like platinum on fire, that she was looking right at him.

4

She was on the walk outside… She was skating on the sidewalk, the grass, roof, sky.

It was all noise now, not loud, just everywhere… a kind of silence into which you can see.

All light now, she was in his room, near the closet. She was near the bed, the room flooding with light. He felt wrapped up in it, almost blind, starting to float.

Redgloved, red silver gold radiant, resplendent, slowly a hand, diamond-spangled, rosy-fingered, redgloved, raised up, reached out, slowly, touching his lips...

His head filled with light, the air shimmered, the world shook...

5

"Are you out of your mind," asked Jerry.

"Are you crazy," asked Jerry.

"Have you lost touch with reality," asked Jerry.

Yes, he said.

There was a pause.

"Well," said Jerry, "O, Kay, I guess…. And now what?"

Huh?

"What are you going to do with yourself, now that this has happened?"

Well, nothing, I guess. It's no big deal.

"O, Kay," said Jerry.

I have done one thing, but it doesn't matter.

"What?"
Oh, it's nothing much.
"WHAT?"
Well… I've… I've taken up skating.

6

3 am, skating, and the lights go out. Nothing, no light, anywhere, other than in the sky with stars. A rush of wind, a bang, and the school is now altogether lost in a black cloud of smoke that rolls in a flood down the hill and spreads over the ice, coming towards him… the house is on fire… no, the hotel, the hotel on the hill, which rises up sprawling majestically where once the school stood, and he hears screams, and a girl comes out of the cloud on skates, coming towards him, fast, riding on a scream…

7

"He's working at the Econo Lodge on 38, last I heard," said Kay.
"What?" said Jerry.
"Yeah," said Kay, "night shift."
There was a pause.
"O my god…"
"Yeah," Kay burst out, "Yeah, he leaves his million-plus dollar house every night to go work night shift at the Econo Lodge!" Laughing…
There was a pause.
"Are his parents OK with it? His father…ever since he dropped out…"

"Yeah," said Kay, "I don't know about that, but it's hard to think he'd be in favor of this, that buttoned-down corporate guy…"

"Yeah," said Jerry. "Did you know his father actually called me up the other night? My mother told me. Thank god I was gone."

"I heard that Caitlin was called."

"Really!" said Jerry.

There was a pause.

"Not that that would matter. Not that she would care or do anything…"

"Yeah," said Kay. "That's over, that's for sure. She's gone churchy with that new guy… But it doesn't matter—his father never listens anyway, like he's got poop in his ears."

"Yeah, " said Jerry. "Anyway, I was out on the Prairie Path with Harry…"

Laughing…

"Taking a walk, huh?"

"Yeah, Harry and I… a constitutional!"

"Yeah, your evening constitutional!"

There was a pause.

"The Econo Lodge?" said Jerry.

8

Here, he thought, it is the people who are ghosts, not the ghosts who are people.

3am, sitting, the MUZAK turned down as low as possible, he was now and then checking in the rootless riff raff of low-end travelling salesmen and women who…well, they were hard to place. They would never have been allowed in THAT hotel, unless they had been female, young, and professional…from Chicago's south side, probably, Irish, hard as

nails, lost in space, looking westward from the highest window in the Hotel, on starry nights where the late nineteenth-century prairie stretched away as if endless…

It was a relief, after all that.

It all started with the history lessons, first from that friend of his father's who told them about poor young Stoney Hatley, who did it for Suzie, he said, on the rocks below the reservoir sluice-gate, and then all that reading in History about Glen Ellyn, which he had never thought HAD a history. He kept reading, sort of on his own, gathering up what hard historical facts he could, peeling away the history of his town, each layer of which, yes, like an onion, seemed translucent, seemed partially to conceal, partially reveal, local myths, received stories, inconvenient truths… grotesque scenes, frightening visions, appalling little cul de sacs of what might have been.

9

"The ECONO LODGE!!!!!???"

10

She was probably a pro, he said.

He had come up with a name: Laura Dowden.

It was one of those blessed nights, blessed because so few, that the green light was shining in the night. Skating was allowed and, even, encouraged—at least, earlier in the evening. The Ice Guards had been out, that safety patrol on ice. Which was rare, these days: what with the chemical run-off from the riotous "new development of existing homes" and other "home improvements" that had occurred in the watershed, events known to others as home removals and

tear-downs, and due as well to the consequent in-fills, the lake had grown chemically resistant to the cold. Once, the lake had frozen regularly for weeks and months on end, and the Illinois High School Speed Skating Championships had been held on Lake Ellyn in the 1960's. Never again…

It was his night off, and it was late, very, very late; the orange cones were gone. He had the ice to himself.

Yeah, she was probably a pro, he said, aloud, to himself.

A pro…a pro…apro…

There was an echo—from the brick walls of the school on the hill, maybe, or the houses on the other little rises ringing the lake.

She was Irish, like me, not that I'm Irish, really—but neither was she, he thought, not really.

He had been reading in the history of Glen Ellyn and of Illinois, generally, which had taken him to the larger question of the Irish in America and, by way of Ellis Island, back to Ireland, to the question of the Irish in Ireland—to the question of the Irish, period.

A pretty big question…great hatreds, he had read, little room.

But he had a big room.

"As big a room," his father had told him, "as any in Glen Ellyn." His father was very proud of having gotten him such a big bedroom.

The lake, howsomever, was a bigger one.

"Howsomever" was the way some Irish used to say "however," he imagined.

There was a big wind that night, and suddenly a loud noise, a "bang," according to reports, and then one could see smoke and people running out of the hotel, most of whom

were wearing very little—this happened in the middle of the night—and some of whom were on fire.

They interviewed one very young woman from Chicago who was there by herself, or with friends, co-workers, but not with her parents. She made it out just fine but she was grieving the apparent loss of her pal, another young woman, named Laura Dowden.

Laura Dowden had not been located as of press time but seemed, to her friend, to have disappeared, as if she had just kept running. She had last been seen running northwestward across the frozen lake…he could see her disappearing into a sepia-toned cloud. And all they ever found was a glove. A red glove.

11

"He doesn't sleep in his room anymore, not at night. He said it was too big—he couldn't sleep there anymore. His mom told mine. He sleeps in his father's study on the couch. They are worried about him, obviously."

"He needs to snap out of it."

"But what is it? What is 'it'? As Mulvaney would say, 'what is it out of which he needs to snap'?"

"Ahhhh… there's the rub."

There was a pause.

"You know something," said Jerry.

"What?"

"I'm a little worried about him, too."

12

Laura Dowden was born of Irish American immigrant parents in South Holland, Illinois, in 1884, in black and white.

She had been a good student in parochial school.

Her father died when she was sixteen.

Her mother was an alcoholic. She got a job while young in a Southside diner where she became locally famous for the sharpness of her tongue and the redness of her hands.

She was attractive, and pure, wearing gloves of white.

She was possessed of an unusually brilliant brain that could broach bunches of difficult subjects and master them quickly.

Gifted with an unusually powerful imagination, she had written lyric poems while an adolescent and had them published in a fledgling poetry magazine, based in Chicago, called Poetry.

She had a tough upbringing but had persevered into young adulthood—until the crash.

Laura Dowden fell into the ways of ill repute while still a young woman and soon distinguished herself, amongst the Irish pimps of South Side Chicago, as a profitable piece of chattel, indeed.

Laura Dowden had a heart of gold.

13

There was no Laura Dowden.

14

It is two o'clock in the morning.

The young man awakes, rises, glances about his empty room, which stretches away miles in every direction, and goes to the window.

A red light is shining in the night.

Skating, silence, and then, finally, the wind rises, the bang, the smoke rolls out over the ice, fire, screams, and riding on the scream, the beautiful girl. Jesus, there she is… and she is one fire. She skates right by him at a million miles per hour… throws her head back, a smile, dazzling, but featureless, there is no face… He wheels, starts skating in pursuit… it is broad daylight in his brain, the crowd collectively sighs, applause, rah rah sis koom bah, cymbals, he's in the lead and gaining on her, the glove flies off and away, the red glove, and he reaches out for it, sprawling, practically airborne… and, yeah…yeah. That's what happens.

15

"I don't think he suffered," said Kay.

"No, the cold makes it quick," said Harry. "The cops said it's faster than when the water's warm…"

"Thank god for global warming," said Kay.

There was a pause.

"Bummer," said Harry.

"No, it was his father," said Kay.

"No," said Harry, "It was this place…I'm getting out of here. I'm leaving on a jet plane…the Metra, anyway… Chicago, LA, New York…"

"No," said Kate.

There was a pause.

"Jerry."

"Jerry?"

"Yeah…" said Jerry. "What?"

"Jerry, what was it?"

There was a pause.

"Jerry?"

"Huh," said Jerry.

"Yeah, " said Harry. "What exactly was the question?"

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Married with three children, Brian May is a Virginia native who taught in Texas for six years before moving to the Chicago suburbs in 1997. Now a professor of English at Northern Illinois University, he is the author of two academic books—*Extravagant Postcolonialism: Modernism and Modernity in Anglophone Fiction, 1958-1988* (2014) and *The Modernist as Pragmatist: E. M. Forster and the Fate of Liberalism* (1997)—as well as a number of literary-critical discussions of such authors as Ford Madox Ford, W. B. Yeats, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, and J. M. Coetzee. His most recent work of fiction is a prequel to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* that is entitled "Nineteen Forty-Eight – From the Archives of Oceania."

the torch
by
Arianna Basco

Who do i think i am
What was i thinking
What kind of person
What kind of heartless lemming
Brings a child into this world

Was it not enough
That history wrote over our story
with a privileged white hand
Was it not enough
The day the towers fell
Was it not enough
Our voices being silenced
By way of fear,
By way of bullet,
By way of thrusting by a dumpster,
By way of consumer distractions,
By way of being born different.

Did i not see the red flags
When reality tv stars became presidential candidates
When sex tapes became the currency for fame
Our farms were replaced by processed food
When it became more convenient for us to waste
Than to give
Did i not see the red flags
When they were trying to sell us an abundance problem

'A lack of' problem
'There's just not enough' problem
When the problem all along was
distribution
Did i not see the red flags
When it became more profitable for them to keep us sick
Then it was to actually cure us
More profitable to give us pills to sedate us
Then providing the tools to heal us
When it's easier to attain a gun
Than a driver's license
Did i not see the red flags
As cruelty swept humankind with genocide and slavery.
Did i not see the red flags
When we enslaved ourselves by the computers in our hands.

Who do i think i am
Bringing children into this pitiful hate-filled power-hungry
narcissistic greedy world.
I wonder if we had the chance to do it all over again
Start over from the first atom
If civilization would be different

Like what if the filipinos had the dominant voice
Would it be different?
Would they show more compassion, more dignity
You know, heal the world with karaoke songs,
feed the people with rice dried on the side of the road
Adobo grown in their own backyard
Lumpia hand made

...We'd probably still find a way to fuck it up

Is that human nature though?
Are we just a series of bad decisions?
A victim to our trauma?
A result of everything that sets us apart?
Ran by the injustices of just existing?

I hope not.

I delivered two little humans into this life.
What kind of mother would put her children in harm's way?
They say becoming a parent is one of the most selfless things you can do.
I think it might be one of the most selfish.
They didn't ask to be here.
And yet i am asking them to inherit the burden of this troubled world.
I am asking them to take the baton.
I am asking them to rise toward the glare.
Asking them to carry the flame,
Be the light,
Bear the torch
that was given to me.

○

Arianna is the author of *Palms Up* (Black Hill Press) and the host of Speakeasy at The Last Bookstore in Downtown Los Angeles. Most recently she collaborated with Beau Sia, The Great Company, and #WeOwnThe8th cultivating creativity and nurturing artists in Southern California communities.

She is a relentless supporter of the performing and literary arts and loyal crusader of many charities and organizations reaching as far as the Philippines. Arianna Basco was recognized by the City of Los Angeles for her contribution to the arts and her family was named The First Filipino Entertainment Family.

Konstantin Datz
Cover Design

Konstantin Datz is a freelance interface, icon, and visual designer based in Berlin. Since his early childhood he has designed and created. Konstantin is currently a student at Fachhochschule Potsdam.

In 2010 he designed a cocktail poster and an iOS application called the cocktail app. His love for applications and sushi led him to he SOOSHI – another high-end application featured in the Apple store. His long-term project braillecube—a Rubiks cube for the blind—was produced in early 2015 and exhibited in the MoMa in New York City. Since August 2015, he splits his time between Berlin and New York City.

William M. Brandon III
Editor

William is a voracious reader and an unrepentant scribe. The co-mingling of these pleasures forged a path that lead to editing and design for numerous publications and journals. In 2015 he became the Managing Editor for Black Hill Press. He is a father, a husband, and his work has been published by *The Rumpus*, *Rain Crow Magazine*, in a special anthology supporting the non-profit Mines Advisory Group, and many others.


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