

# Typehouse

January 2014, Issue #1

LITERARY MAGAZINE

## FEATURING NEW WORK BY

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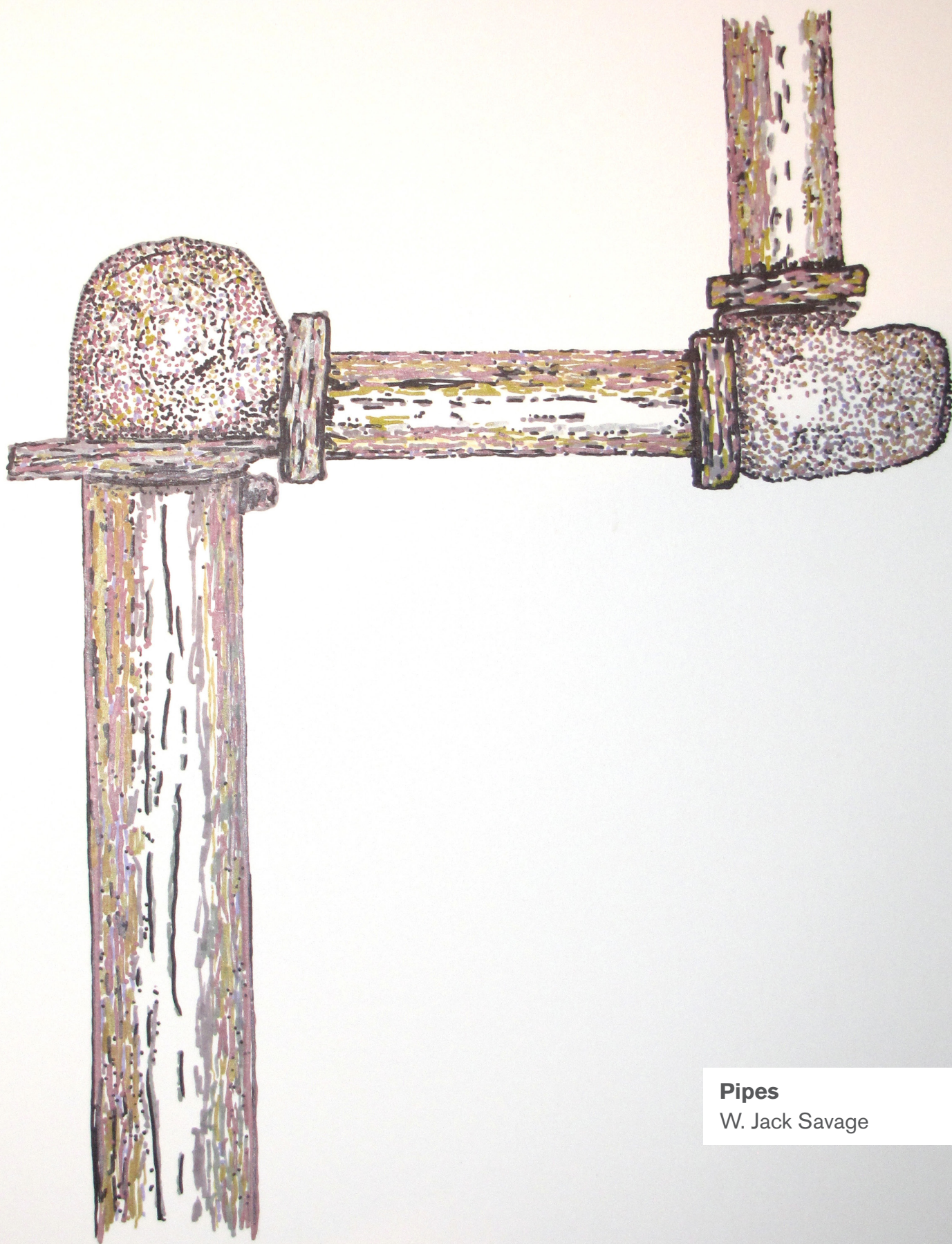
Rich Hartwell

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## **Pipes**

W. Jack Savage

# Call for Submissions

Typehouse is a writer-run, literary magazine based out of Portland, Oregon. We publish non-fiction, genre fiction, literary fiction, poetry and visual art. We are always looking for well-crafted, previously unpublished, writing that seeks to capture an awareness of the human predicament. If you are interested in submitting fiction, poetry, or visual art, email your submission as an attachment or within the body of the email along with a short bio to: [typehouse@peoples-ink.com](mailto:typehouse@peoples-ink.com)

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An Lo Valley, by W. Jack Savage

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*Rick Hartwell is a retired middle school (remember the hormonally-challenged?) English teacher living in Moreno Valley, California. He believes in the succinct, that the small becomes large; and, like the Transcendentalists and William Blake, that the instant contains eternity. Given his “druthers,” if he’s not writing, Rick would rather be still tailing plywood in a mill in Oregon. He can be reached at rdhartwell@gmail.com.*

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# The Gift

Rick Hartwell

Maybe it’s not the place you first got laid which you remember best; maybe it’s the place you got laid best, first, which you remember - but, in remembering, that place becomes a part of you that you embrace forever. And you can’t let go. And you won’t let go. The memory keeps flooding up and over you and engulfing your thoughts of that best, first place, or first, best place. Your ideas and images spasm to that and you are exhausted with the memory.

Just as much as you got into her, or him, and they into you, and as completely and deeply and quickly, that’s how much that best, first place got into me, and probably into you, too. It’s as if the landscape, that place of mind and memory, had been tilled and seeded as well. And perhaps it was. And perhaps the seeds have split and the tendrils have groped their way to the surface of your reflection and, over the years, have grasped you by the lump in your throat and pulled you down again, down and back, back to a more passionate, fruitful beginning.

• • •

He was very nervous about giving it to her. He had kept it hidden in his drawer since the weekend and here it was, Friday already. He was trying to find just the right moment; the right setting, the right words. But it was Friday again already and he was still fumbling.

He bumped into her on the landing outside of the second floor of the new language lab building. Actually there was nothing casual in their encounter at all. He knew she

would come that way after sixth period. He had had her schedule memorized for weeks. He bumped into her as soon as she came out of the door even though his mechanical drawing class was way over on the other side of the courtyard, over by the old gym. He had sprinted from class in order to intercept her and now he was out of breath. He was clutching the present tightly on top of his binder but hidden under the textbooks so his friends wouldn't see it.

"Oh, hi!" was all he could get out in a single gulp of air.

"Hi back. I haven't seen you much." She looked at him quizzically.

"Yeah, uh, this is for you," he said between gasps. He retrieved the wrapped present with his off-hand from between the books and binder and held it out to her at arm's length.

"What's that," she asked but was reaching for the pale-pink-wrapped package without waiting for an answer.

"Oh, nothing," he said aloud. Oh, everything! He was thinking to himself but didn't say.

"Open it," he urged.

Greg stood there stupidly until he realized he'd have to hold her books if he expected her to peel off the wrapping. Her charcoal poodle skirt was swishing back and forth, swirling with the crinkle of petticoats as she twisted slightly, hinged at the hips. He reached toward her and opened his hand again but near the books she had looped in her left arm, encouraging her to hand over her burden. She stopped twisting and released her books and binder into his hand. He stood there with a binder balanced on each hip staring down at her polished black and white saddle-shoes and his scuffed, black penny-loafers.

"Open it," he said again only this time with greater urgency.

And she began to unwrap the box as girls do, trying to salvage the paper and not tear the scotch-taped ends. She quickly gave up after the first tear and then greedily ripped away the remaining paper, balling it up in her hand, and laid the box bare in her left hand. She dropped the ball of pink wrapping paper unnoticed.



Gail hesitated for only the briefest of moments before opening the box. She held the cover in her right hand, still cradling the box in her left. She then deftly plucked apart the steel-blue sticker sealing the gold-flecked tissue paper and revealed his gift.

• • •

Greg had been forced to go to Palm Springs with his mother and her current boyfriend. The boyfriend was looking at some property to expand his business opportunities and his mother was keeping her prospects open, too. The three of them stayed at the Palm Springs Racquet Club, Greg in a separate room. He couldn't get out of it, no matter how he had tried, even by using his lousiest disposition. Also, his mother had run out of places to park him during her weekend trips.

So the three of them had gone to Palm Springs together and Greg had suffered the trip in silence from the backseat of the boyfriend's white, rust-stripped, '52 Plymouth station wagon. Greg had made life uncomfortable for the others, but not as miserable as they had probably expected from him. He spent most of the time in back, moodily thinking of Gail Jasmine, picturing her in his mind once again, and trying to think of how to focus her attention on him.

In the distant shimmer of the desert Greg could picture her as she looked on Friday. Her shoulder-length, straight raven hair, was pulled back in a ponytail with a white scarf tie. Her oval face framed a petite nose, small mouth with full lips, sometimes lipsticked, dark, arched eyebrows over the greenest eyes with just a glitter of brown, and freckles on her cheeks and across her nose. She was just slightly taller than he was and she had a gorgeous, newly-emerging figure. She had long, slender wrists and fingers and she only used clear polish. On Friday, she'd had on a tight-fitting, pleated, navy-blue skirt, and a white blouse with a dainty Peter Pan collar. She'd waved at him, too, just before she got on the bus.

They had started early Saturday morning, traveling through the spread of Costa Mesa on the plateau above Newport and then through the light industry and field agriculture of Santa Ana and Orange. They went by the orchards and dairies of Corona and Norco and the citrus groves of Riverside with its agricultural station turned university. They passed the desolation and decreased populations of Beaumont and Banning and then Cabazon. The station wagon finally got them to Palm Springs by

late Saturday morning and the three of them had lunched on the pool deck of the Racquet Club. Whether it was the dazzle of the late winter sun in the desert or the splash of jewelry around the pool, Greg again started to think about what to give Gail for a gift. It wasn't coming up on her birthday and he hadn't asked her to the Spring Dance, yet. He just wanted to give her something, something she would like, something different, something special.

It couldn't be a ring. That could imply too much and she could easily refuse it. Anyway, he didn't know her ring size and she would just end up wearing it on a cheap chain around her neck or maybe on her largest finger by winding colored thread around it, lacquered with clear nail polish. Earrings wouldn't work either. Even with her face engraved on his conscious mind, he just couldn't recall if her ears were pierced. He finally realized that, for him, a bracelet would provide a balance. But could he afford a bracelet bought in Palm Springs?

That afternoon, while his mother and the boyfriend were lounging around the pool, Greg went to the Racquet Club gift shop. He was very disappointed; not in the gift shop and what it had to offer, but in himself and what he had to give. He had twenty dollars and before that afternoon he had thought twenty dollars was extravagant and sufficient to ransom any captive princess. After his trip to the gift shop, he had been newly educated, and was no longer so certain. He was despondent.

The three of them plodded through the afternoon, two on one side of each conversation and he on the other. They spent Saturday night buried in the Chi Chi Club, behind the bar line in the restaurant area, listening to the midnight show of a stand-up comic and watching the dancing jiggles of a painted chorus line. Greg imagined the boyfriend had had to do some fancy talking to convince his mother that the kid should come along and then some more fancy talk to convince the maitre d' to let Greg in to see the late show. Greg guessed this was supposed to be a bonding time with the boyfriend; something real men shared together. What it did instead was underscore the stupidity of adults trying to think like kids.

Even though he was extremely tired from the late night or early morning hours, Greg forced himself awake and up by eight Sunday morning. He dressed, left a quick note under their door he knew they'd never wake in time to see, and left his room to walk downtown along the shops, searching. He scanned every window, exclusively for



bracelets. Nearing eleven he was about to give up and start back to the Racquet Club. He decided to cross one more side street, to walk one more block. On his left, through the window of the second store from the corner, near the right rear of the display case, rested the perfect gift for Gail. It was Gail! But he couldn't read the price tag; it was face down.

The sign on the shop door said it didn't open until noon on Sundays, so Greg beat it back to the Racquet Club and impatiently waited until his mother and the boyfriend emerged for lunch, or breakfast, depending on your point of view. Over the food and tinkling glasses and silverware, Greg's plea to go shopping downtown met with skepticism. He was forced to admit his reason and to hope for the best. The three of them finally compromised on a plan for doing the shopping after looking at the boyfriend's property prospects.

Greg nervously waded through the desert drive, out of town, to a new strip-mall location. He also had to wait while the boyfriend immersed himself in pacing and measuring and talking, but finally, finally, about three in the afternoon, they were all back in the car and headed downtown. Greg had to remind the others about their agreement and then had to provide directions. The boyfriend had winked condescendingly at him.

After parking and walking around the corner and into the shop, tripping the overhead bell as they entered, Greg became more subdued. He mumbled to the saleslady that he wanted to see the bracelet in the window, but quickly added that he needed to know the price. She was nice enough about it, probably hoping that she could coerce the boyfriend into buying something more substantial. But she was much too loud when she read the tag and announced, "Twenty-four-ninety-five . . . plus tax."

Greg felt disjointed and unresponsive. By now he had the precious bracelet in his hands. He kept turning it over and over, letting the beads trickle through his fingers with the sun flaring and fainting and reappearing as the glass facets caught the reaction of light from through the display window and from the fluorescent tubes overhead. The bracelet was magnificent, but it was obviously more than he could afford, more than he could handle.

The saleslady astutely detected the disappointment on Greg's face and quickly

started talking to impress on him the benefits of this particular bracelet. She needn't have bothered. Greg was sold already, but how could the deal be completed when he didn't have enough money?

Quietly, Greg said he only had twenty dollars and he then thanked her for her trouble. He started to turn for the door. Probably more out of concern for a lost sale to his mother and the boyfriend, the saleslady stopped him with a quick word.

"Wait a minute; let's see what we can do," quoting then a lowered price, "How about nineteen-ninety-five . . . plus tax?"

Greg realized he would still come up short and announced that he just didn't have any more, and he hung his head as if it were his fault. The boyfriend stepped forward self-importantly and told both Greg and the saleslady that it was okay, he would cover the extra. But to Greg, that would somehow taint his gift to Gail. He didn't want any help from outsiders; not even from his mother. He politely declined, shook his head, and again started for the door.

Perhaps it was a slow day for jewelry sales. Perhaps the markup on costume jewelry was so great that a profit could still be squeezed out. Perhaps it was just that the saleslady -- Mabel by her Hello-I'm-Mabel-May-I-Help-You nametag -- could detect in Greg a sincerity of emotion lacking in the other two. Whatever the reason, or combination of reasons, Mabel announced that it might just be possible to reduce the price still more.

"Yes, now that I think of it, there's a sale starting mid-week. I can hold this out and ring it up on Wednesday. Twenty dollars will just cover it. Would you like it gift-wrapped?" said to Greg, casually.

The upwelling elation in Greg was not instantaneous. He was, rather, like a desert animal emerging from a long, cold night underground, up and into the warmth of the new day. He basked for a moment in Mabel's offer and in her smile. He hadn't noticed before, but her mouth was a bit like Gail's. He glowed with reddened cheeks, smiled back tentatively, and answered Mabel.

"Uh huh. Yes ma'am. Thank you . . ." and added very quickly, "very much."

Mabel drew out the wrapping process with a professional's flourish: formalizing the



proceedings; talking all the while; identifying her selections of the right-sized box and the right colors of tissue and wrapping paper and even the choice of sealing sticker. She presented the packaged gift to Greg triumphantly and then leaned closer, with a quiet instruction.

"Make certain it's for the right young lady," spoken just to him. Then quickly Mabel retreated to her polished demeanor once again.

Greg answered, "Yes ma'am," not knowing what else to really say.

The two of them then finished the sale. Greg counted out the two fives and ten ones. Mabel handed him the receipt. The mutually exchanged thank-yous were brief, for apparently the boyfriend hadn't planned on buying anything after all, was just shopping around, and wasn't lured into anything by Greg's example. His mother said nothing.

Greg was troubled by Mabel's final comment though. He kept looking out the side window of the station wagon on the way home. He reconstructed the past two days as a series of questions, trying to form some sense of hidden meanings. Of course, he was certain his gift was for the right young lady. He'd had Gail in mind when he picked it out, right? What had Mabel meant?

Returning through the desert, in the dimming Sunday evening, took about three hours. They passed Cabazon and Hadley's, and Banning and Beaumont, and the Union 76 stations. They went by Riverside and Norco and Corona, and the Pancake Houses. They went through Orange and Santa Ana and Costa Mesa, and the increasing traffic signals.

Occasionally, he'd just watch the blurred images of the desert sweep by as they drove back from Palm Springs. Occasionally, as a tired house in the distance would appear, or an empty station or an abandoned store, Greg's mind would turn from images of Gail or from Mabel's question and he would start to imagine what lives had occupied those buildings; what individuals had peopled those desolate areas. Where did they go? Where were they now? He would invent stories, brief glimpses into their choices and their daily lives. Then he would be jarred forward by the increased volume or spite of overheard snippets of conversation from the front seat.

"Well, I think it's asinine!" from his mother.

"You would!" from the boyfriend.

Greg would turn again to look out the window, to capture and restore the ideals of his imagination.

"You can damn well leave then!" again from her.

"Okay, okay. Settle down!" again from him.

Then a stewing silence from them both. This was all too repetitious and, often, Greg wasn't disturbed enough by the normalcy of it to even lose the concentration on his stories. There was even a rhythm to the stories and the arguments, intertwined.

Greg originally planned to give the gift to Gail on Monday when they returned to school. He hadn't. Something had nagged at him, some unanswered question, and the days had dribbled away. And now it was Friday again.

• • •

"Oh, what a lovely bracelet!" Gail intoned dutifully. "It's so colorful!"

The linked pink and blue and clear glass baubles of the bracelet caught the iridescence of the sun, but somehow, out of the desert and away from the shop, they were dulled and didn't have the same sparkle they had last Sunday. Greg thought that perhaps, just perhaps, over the week they had lost their shine, hidden in the box, hidden in his drawer, out of the sun. Maybe if left out in the open the bracelet would perk back up; would become enlivened with light once again.

"Do you like it?" he inquired more as filler than out of any expectation of an honest answer. Greg was becoming wary of exposing himself with more words.

"Oh yes, it's really very pretty; very nice. I really like it a lot. Thanks!" she seemed to fire at him, taking control of the lagging conversation.

There was more to say, but he couldn't remember what it was. Or he could, but he couldn't remember how to say it. Or he could, but he couldn't decide if she was the right one to hear it. Greg hesitated for a heartbeat, a breath only, and then the week was gone, and Friday was gone, and then Gail, too, was gone; waving bye from the bottom step of the bus and mouthing "Thank you" with her small mouth and full lips.

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**Valentina Cano** is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time either writing or reading. Her works have appeared in *Exercise Bowler*, *Blinking Cursor*, *Theory Train*, *Cartier Street Press*, *Berg Gasse 19*, *Precious Metals*, *A Handful of Dust*, *The Scarlet Sound*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Perceptions Literary Magazine*, *Welcome to Wherever*, *The Corner Club Press*, *Death Rattle*, *Danse Macabre*, *Subliminal Interiors*, *Generations Literary Journal*, *A narrow Fellow*, *Super Poetry Highway*, *Stream Press*, *Stone Telling*, *Popshot*, *Golden Sparrow Literary Review*, *Rem Magazine*, *Structo*, *The 22 Magazine*, *The Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *Niteblade*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Pipe Dream*, *Decades Review*, *Anatomy*, *Lowestof Chronicle*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Lady Ink Magazine*, *Spark Anthology*, *Awaken Consciousness Magazine*, *Vine Leaves Literary Magazine*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Caduceus*, *White Masquerade Anthology*, and *Perhaps I'm Wrong About the World*. Her poetry has been nominated for *Best of the Web* and the *Pushcart Prize*. Her debut novel, *The Rose Master*, will be published in 2014. You can find her here: [carabosseslibrary.blogspot.com](http://carabosseslibrary.blogspot.com).

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## Watching Falling Glass

Valentina Cano

She looked like a glass to him.  
One without fingerprint oil tags,  
without fishbone cracks  
slashing her smile in two.  
She was a wineglass at the moment of falling,  
whole, but tipping with laughter.  
The potential for blood crackling under the lights.  
Ready to undo herself in a scream.

# Night

Valentina Cano

Until that night,  
with its cellophane wind  
and carburetor lights,  
I didn't know anger.  
The solid razor of a hand  
in the wrong place,  
the tap-dance of thoughts  
as they were ripped from me.  
Decisions fell like sweat,  
each one thick and shaking,  
careening to a floor  
I wish I hadn't seen.

# The Feminine

Valentina Cano

She wore her skirt like her smile,  
right on the surface.  
Beneath its liquid folds and pockets,  
she knew herself naked.  
There was a sensation,  
(shucking oysters, peeling onions)  
an uncasing and unwinding.  
The end of a stifling terrain.



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*Evan Mallon is a short story author, novelist and traveler. Born and raised a few miles outside of Chicago, he just spent three and a half years in Japan, eleven months in Chile and a very cold winter in New England. Recently returned to the Midwest, he plans to stay a while and write full-time. When he isn't thinking up stories and jotting them down, he can be found tending to deeply important issues such as the dishes and the laundry.*

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# The Passing of Spanish

by Evan Mallon

The Gods of language slunk across the field for their annual meeting of words. Swedish and Russian drifted in from the north with their collars pulled up tight against their necks. To keep his mind from the cold and from the rain, Russian picked at the crown upon his head. Made on his own for no reason other than that he thought it made him look kingly, it was chiseled and soldered into a shape that if one squinted hard enough and at just the right angle, might agree that it vaguely resembled the Kremlin.

English walked from the south in a huff. A wind whipped across his nose, causing him to bark out a sneeze to which Japanese, who was quietly shuffling in from the east, merely shook his head and mumbled something loud enough only for him to hear.

Next came French, appearing from the west. Goosebumps beaded on her thighs as the wind coiled through the slit in her sequined dress. Her wardrobe was often a topic of conversation among the languages, especially the older ones. "A language needed to be more respectable," they said. "To be a God is to represent history. Something that must be done with more class than a skimpy dress and milky skin." Others didn't care either way and merely sat back, appreciating the view.

Spanish came in from the southwest with her honey-colored skin looking glossy against the last light of the day. Stray hairs flapped across her cheeks. She corralled

them one by one and slipped them back into the loosening bun that dangled at her neck, then turned to look at her son who was following closely on her heels. He gazed into the distance and to the lit barn that waited there with eyes as fragile as eggshells. From where he stood the building seemed to have sunken a mild degree into the earth, causing it to lean like a lone, drunken tooth. His mother had made it clear that since it was his first meeting he was not to expect much and was to say even less. If the other Gods merely took the time to acknowledge that he was there and did not force him to wait out in the rain or knock him over with their chairs as they pulled them out to sit down, then the whole evening should be considered a success. He nodded and agreed, and in order to not lie to his mother, kept his real plan to himself.

A quilting of murmurs swam in from behind, giving him reason to look over his shoulder. Three forms walked together, shadowed against the fading light.

“German, Welsh and Yiddish,” his mother warned, seeing what it was that had caught her boy’s attention. “All prone to bouts of unreasonable bitterness and complaint. Keep an eye on them.”

He shivered and stepped up his pace until he fell in beside his mother, matching his gait to hers as lightning cracked across the sky.

One by one the languages filed into the barn and took their place at the rounded table. The table was different than the boy imagined it would be. He had envisioned a hulking beast of wood, carved and whittled into something so spectacular that it would hurt one’s eyes to look at it too long. But what sat in the center of the room was just a table. So meager in size that when compared against the ceiling, which seemed high enough that it could scrape against the clouds, looked as small as a flea trapped under an overturned soup bowl.

Thankfully, the chandelier made up for what the table lacked. It looked to him to be made of a mess of decaying antlers of all shapes and sizes. A breeze spun it in a slow circle, giving the boy the impression that it was watching him as he took his seat. Someone had jammed candles deep onto antler’s points, which had grown thick over time with wax. A glob occasionally dripped from high above, sprinkling the table with specks of grayish white or even worse, singeing a hole into the coat of a God.

The flames jittered as Yiddish closed the barn door and slid the lock into place.

"I am glad to see that at least some of you made it this year despite the weather," English said, glancing around to the empty seats.

Even with all the languages settled in, a dozen or so seats remained unclaimed. The Gods who had arrived looked wet and miserable as if they would rather be anywhere but an old leaky barn on such a wretched night.

"I believe we decided that this year's meeting would be held in English. Am I not mistaken?"

The boy smiled at the announcement as English was his second favorite language next to his mother's.

"No, you are not," said German, unhappy that the decision was remembered so clearly.

"Very good, then. Let the meeting come to order." English brought down a stone gavel onto the table. "News? Complaints?"

French raised her hand.

"French," Swedish sighed, "Why am I not surprised?"

Ignoring the commentary, French cleared her throat.

"I am bothered by the slang of this generation, this new set of youths," she said. "It is, how you say," she nodded toward Yiddish, "Feck?"

"Feh," corrected Yiddish while he explored a newly arrived strip of grey hair that had recently cropped up on the side of his beard.

Japanese and Welsh nodded at French's point while Russian stared at the curve of her legs.

"I agree," said Welsh. "They seem to have forgotten all the rules we laid out for them. Or just choose to ignore them. Changing a word here, shortening it there and even making up new ones all together."

"Making new words is our job. Not the young," German added, jutting his finger out

at no one in particular.

Swedish chuckled. "There is little we can do to stop a young person's imagination from, well, imagining now is there?" she said as she twirled a strand of her wheat-blond hair around her finger, "We are Gods after all. You will think of something."

French pinched her face as she leaned back in a snit. Thunder howled outside. The walls rattled, flooding the room with the sound of spilled dice as water began to drizzle from the ceiling.

"I agree with Swedish," said English without looking at anyone. He was busy admiring the sparkle of his feet as they rested on dirt floor of the barn. "There is little we can do but wait it out. Fads are fads and always will be. Now," he said looking up, "is there anything else? Any real problems?"

"Yes," Russian said as he shifted his crown. "I would like to inquire why we continue to have our meetings here?"

A collective groan rose from the table.

"I was beginning to think that we would make it through one meeting without you asking the same question," said Yiddish.

"It is a legitimate question!" Russian mumbled in his defense.

Wind blasted the side of the barn. From his seat, which was little more than a crate that had been retrieved from the corner, the boy shuddered as he watched the wall bend inward and then slowly deflate back to its original shape. He wondered if the meetings were ever cancelled on account of weather. Maybe, he thought, it could be postponed until the sun rose the following day. But by the look of indifference on the God's faces, he guessed not.

"The answer is," English said, "the same as it was last year and the year before. It's the way it's always been. The first meeting was held here and until this building crumbles around us, we will continue to meet here."

"I complain only because of the walk. It is so far for me, and I am old," Russian said, trying his best to fish for a little sympathy.



"Maybe someone else should take your spot then?" Welsh said.

"Someone who stares a little less perhaps?" added French. Russian blushed as French continued to bob her leg up and down, letting the slit of her dress fall as it may.

The boy was only half listening as the Gods bickered. He ran his the speech he planned on giving through his head. He mouthed it silently, raising his eyebrows and tilting his head at the parts where he needed proper inflection or to show humility.

Japanese raised his hand.

"Japanese, there is no need to be so polite all the time. Just speak, for the love of all things," English said.

A little embarrassed, Japanese rose. "Does anyone have anything positive to say this year? It is already so cold. Must we dwell on these negative thoughts that only make us colder?"

"Actually, yes. I have some uplifting news." Yiddish stood. "I have added new words this past year that I would like to share."

He pulled a piece of paper from the pocket of his black pea coat and unfolded it. The sound of something large and metallic tumbling by outside caused all at the table to pause and glance at one another.

"What was that?" asked French.

"Nothing, I'm sure," said English.

"Sounded like a heavy, dangerous nothing," Welsh said.

"Maybe we should finish tomorrow?" German offered. "When the weather is better."

"Go on Yiddish," said English, ignoring the increasingly worried looks that were spreading around the table.

"The first word is, 'nakhes', which I have chosen to mean 'The satisfaction gained from life's gifts; proud pleasure, especially in ones children or grandchildren and finding happiness in their success, however small.'" Yiddish said, voice trembling at the racquet outside.

Many nodded at the tender new word the old man had borne into existence.

"Wonderful," said Russian, slapping his comrade on the back a little too hard.

"Gorgeous," said Swedish.

"Bravo," German said.

"Thank you," Yiddish said before continuing. "And 'b'shert', which I have made to mean `destiny; referring to the seeking of a person who will compliment you and whom you will compliment perfectly.'"

"It seems that someone has found love," said Swedish. Yiddish's face blossomed a deep red that was visible through his beard.

"Even old men can find love," Japanese said, coming to the aid of his friend.

"Quality additions, Yiddish. Truly," said Welsh.

"The slang of the youths will never be as pretty," added French.

Even the boy stopped rehearsing long enough to marvel at the new words being given to the world.

"Anything else?" English asked, bored by the tenderness flittering about the room. "At this rate we will be here all evening."

The sound of splintering wood echoed about the room as flecks of the ceiling sprinkled on the Gods' heads.

Spanish raised her hand. "Yes, Spanish, you can speak. Even though I must say how I have enjoyed how wonderfully quiet you have been thus far."

Spanish stood and slid her hands over her green, woolen dress smoothing it out. "As you can see, my son is here with me," she said as she placed her hand on the back of her boy's neck. "And following our rules, he has waited until his fifteenth birthday to decide if he would like to come and join us or move onto other things that interest him." She smiled down at her son despite trying to suppress it as more thunder rolled outside, louder than before. "And he has chosen to join us."

All the languages clapped at the announcement. Spanish raised her eyebrows, which her son took as a signal to stand.

Many seated at the table looked upon the boy and his mother with jealousy. Most of their own children had, as Spanish put it, “moved onto other things” taking no interest in languages or being a God of one. In accordance with the rules, when a child refuses, they must be allowed to wander from the table back to whatever life they had decided was more exciting than one of dictionaries and discussion. Some of the older gods had begun to worry about what would become of their language and of their collation of Gods with so many young prospects choosing to leave the table behind them.

The boy looked each God in the eye, nodding in thanks. Then, after letting their smiles settle, he spoke.

“But,” he began, “I would not like to take over for my mother. I would like a language of my own.”

Spanish’s face reddened as the clapping slowed and then stopped altogether. The expressions on the Gods’ faces plummeted as they looked to one another and then back at the boy.

“That is a very serious request,” English said.

A ceiling plank tore away as soon as English finished his sentence. The hole left behind was large enough for the wind to slip through and extinguish all the candles but one.

“I hate to agree, but for once English is right,” said Welsh, trying to shield himself from the rain with his hand.

Confused, the boy looked to his mother.

“There are only so many seats at the table,” she explained, eyes turned down. “When someone requests a language of their own, that means another language must give up their seat.”

The boy’s stomach dropped at the news. He had not known this. He imagined the process would be simple. He was the son of a God after all. Having a language was

his birthright, be it his mother's or another. Never did he envision something as drastic as ridding the world of one of its languages.

Spanish took her seat and dropped her head into her hands.

"I take it back, forget it," the boy yelled over the wind, but English shook his head.

"Rules are rules. Once someone who has been invited to the table requests a language, procedure must be followed."

"Let's do this quickly if we are going to do it," Russian said, "I have never seen weather like this in all my years."

Another chunk of the roof tore away, allowing a rowdier wind to wedge in and send the chandelier into a twirling sway.

Shouting now, English continued. "Who will it be, then?"

Rain washed across the table as the Gods looked at each other.

"If no one volunteers then it is my duty as moderator to choose," English said. "And as usual, we will lean toward the oldest and the least spoken."

Everyone turned to Yiddish, who had buried his chin into the V formed by the collar of his pea coat as if trying to hide from fate.

"Me." Spanish yelled between her fingers before raising her head. "It was my responsibility to teach him the rules. None of you should be punished for what I did not do. And it is not fair to choose one that is not here to defend themselves. I will volunteer."

"No," the boy said, quiet enough so his words were taken by the wind.

Two bolts of lightning crisscrossed above the opening in the roof. The afterglow lit the faces of each God as they nodded, relived at having been spared.

"Very well," said English.

Lip trembling, the boy looked to his mother whose eyes were locked in the distance, wet and unfocused.

"But," the boy pleaded, turning to the Gods "I didn't know. I just thought that I could gloat to my friends if I were a God. If I had a language of my own. I thought there



would be training. I have no words. I have no rules. I just thought...I didn't know..."

He turned back to his mother.

"I didn't know..."

"Whether you are ready or not, it is decided." English raised the gavel to put a stamp on it all when a crack of lightning charged through the hole in the roof and struck the table, exploding it. Two more struck one after the other, pummeling the wood into shards and atoms that shot up into the sky and were devoured by the gale.

Chaos reigned as the Gods tried to flee. English flung his seat back sending it crashing into French's knees. She screamed softly into the storm as the pain ran down her legs. Russian knocked over Yiddish and Japanese as he ran for the door. A slab of wood whirled across the room and hit him in the head just as he reached up to slide open the lock. Swedish ran the opposite way, skidding into the corner where she tried to bury herself in some hay and patches of a torn potato sack.

Spanish grabbed her boy, shielding him with her body. Hunched, she whispered to him as the barn was ripped away bit by bit.

"Te quiero, mi amor," she said.

"Te quiero a ti," the boy cried, adding, "I'm sorry," just as the rest of the building blew apart and the noise of the Gods disappeared.

When he woke, the boy was a hundred yards from where the building had stood. The sun was creeping up from the other side of the Earth and the air was fat with a pleasant breeze. What was left of the barn lay in piles of worthless debris except for a single pillar that had stayed rooted in the ground despite breaking in half. Gradually the Gods began to appear, worse for the storm but alive. He spotted Russian first. His crown glistened in the early morning sun as he knelt in a pool of mud, mumbling to himself. French and Swedish were the next to stand, appearing at opposite ends of the field. Each looked nothing like the immaculate forms that the boy awed at when they arrived the night before. The storm had washed away their make up and frazzled their hair, but they were breathing and that was enough for them just then. German, Japanese and Welsh huddled in a group, taking in the wreckage while English and Yiddish checked their bodies for cuts and blood.

"Where's Spanish?" Welsh asked.

The boy was fifty yards away when they found her. Russian and Japanese lifted a pile of boards and he could see his mother's green dress glowing against the muck. Yiddish and Swedish bent and lightly shook her shoulders. Relieved, the boy trotted toward them. But with each step he took that his mother did not stir, he slowed, then stopped and let his shoes sink into the terrain.

Yiddish walked out to meet him.

"Storms are tricky things," he said.

The boy tried his best to look the old man in the eye, but couldn't find the strength to lift his head.

The other Gods formed a circle around the body, dividing their glances between the boy and his mother. Most of the men talked with flailing arms and hard eyes as French and Swedish leaned their heads against each other's, their hair intertwining like fishing line. After some time, English broke off from the group and joined Yiddish and the boy.

"We talked, the rest of the Gods and I. And rules are rules," he said, turning his gaze to the boy. "However, this circumstance is uncommon to say the least. And it is a tragedy where rules need not be."

The boy finally raised his head and looked at a spot in the sky between both men, not focusing on either.

"We decided, that if you want, we will forget your request. And Spanish can be yours."

With those words the boy looked English in the eye and nodded.

"Good," English said. And without saying anything more, he turned and walked north, away from the other Gods, in the direction of home.

Yiddish waited until English was out of sight before he pulled a small leather notebook from the inside of his coat. "Here," he said. "This was in her pocket. It is yours now."

The boy had seen the book many times. It was his mother's list of words. He took it and flipped through the pages, his heart churning at the graceful curves of his mother's Ps and Qs.

"Fill it," Yiddish said. "And we will see you next year."

Yiddish took the boy's hand and patted the back of it. Then he walked east and disappeared.

Before leaving, each of the Gods offered the boy a condolence. He received a firm shake from German and Russian, a bow from Japanese, a pat on the back from Welsh and a kiss on both cheeks from Swedish and French. He watched each of them head in their respective directions and then vanish into the budding day.

For the next hour he stood where he was, staring at the spot where the barn used to sit. The Gods had buried his mother. They said that her grave was marked by a rose bush on the far side of the field that had somehow survived the storm. Welsh pointed the way before he left, saying that it was there whenever he was ready. But he wasn't ready. He felt ashamed at what he had done. For a split second he had taken everything away from his mother, disappointing her in a way that he never thought possible. And without saying goodbye, he turned and left.

Walking toward the road that ran along the edge of the field he took out the notebook. Flipping through it, he scanned the words she had ushered into the world: El pasto, las estrellas, el cielo, el conejo, los libros, amor, familia, secreto and hijo.

He stumbled as he stepped from the soggy grass onto pavement. The road was long and narrow, devoid of any faded dashes that marked where one lane ended and the other began. He turned to look at the field one last time, squinting until he saw the outline of the rose bush exactly where Welsh said it would be.

Turning his back, he looked down the road. The morning spread equally across the horizon. The rising day gave details to shadows and texture to far-off silhouettes. He scanned everything from the ground up to the sky, taking the time to identify each bit of life he saw with the name his mother had given it. And when he ran out of words, he turned west and ambled on with open eyes, looking for anything in the world his mother had left for him to name.

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*Scott T. Starbuck has a poem in the Gathering Crows/Artists' Milepost November 2013 Unnatural Acts Exhibit, "a multimedia exhibition [in Portland, Oregon] of work addressing the relentless and outrageous destruction of our earth." His anti-nuclear clay-poem "Napali" appeared in the Oregon chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) Particles on the Wall Exhibit (May and June 2013) about the "lasting impacts of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and the nuclear age." Starbuck's chapbook, The Other History, or unreported and underreported issues, scenes, and events of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, is forthcoming in November 2013 from FutureCycle Press. A 2013 Artsmith Fellow on Orcas Island <http://orcasartsmith.blogspot.com/2013/02/artsmith-artist-spotlight-scott-starbuck.html>, he blogs at [riverseek.blogspot.com](http://riverseek.blogspot.com)*

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## For Indra in Oregon

Scott T. Starbuck

There are rooms in and outside our houses we don't know.

A grandma works fifty-seven years on a quilt like her failed marriage,  
putting in squares and taking them out  
as grandpa goes into or past the tavern,  
and her relationship wanes and waxes.

A neighbor demands everything from car to coffin to coffee mug be mauve.

Her husband, a glass blowing garbage man,  
tracks a deer from a forest in Pennsylvania to his kitchen  
in Portland and shoots it behind the refrigerator  
in a dream only his unconscious and God understand  
as guilt for his time in Vietnam.

The local gym owner tells me to stop eating chocolate  
because the Three Mile Island Nuclear Incident affected  
grass, then cows, then candy bars.



In October a veteran train conductor puts his engine in reverse  
and plows into the train behind him.

The newspaper claims temporary "Insanity" but  
it's more complex, and involves a deranged priest  
or coach and incident long forgotten  
that somehow bloomed at a certain place and time  
after many sleepless months  
when two clouds parted  
and the shape of a face in another cloud was wrong  
as wrong could be.

More often, a stranger or holy book or therapist  
tells a story of a far-away land,  
and we are amazed  
how these stories are our stories  
and the stories of our neighbors.

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**Thomas J. Turner** is a short story writer and novelist. He is a native of the S.F. Bay Area and came of age during the wild 1960's. Tom's primary amusement is speeding around Portland in a wicked fast 2007 Mustang GT with a hood scoop and white decals that say 'The Beast.' His first novel, 'Bohemian Interlude,' is available on Amazon. His second book, 'Ninety Six Shades of Dead,' will be published before Christmas. Tom has six more books in various stages. His ultimate goal is to provide Hollywood with some original scripts that are not 'Cop-Buddy' movies or the tenth sequel of a once successful movie. His interests includes Baseball, Witch Doctors, a collection of mannequins, the study and collection of dice, and mentoring and encouraging young writers. Primary literary influences are Jack Kerouac and Hunter S Thompson. His favorite quote, and one which he uses when signing books. 'Follow Your Dreams.'

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## Dark Rainbows

Thomas J. Turner

There is something mystical about foggy, gray mornings in the San Francisco Bay Area. The lonely blare of foghorns from ships in the bay. They are navigating through thick fog, announcing their massive presence, hoping to avoid a collision. The sounds are hauntingly familiar. It takes me back to my childhood, when I imagined sailing away on a rusty freighter to a far away, mysterious island on the other side of the world. I craved adventure, and wanted to be like Errol Flynn.

I make a pot of coffee in the kitchen that I shared with Lynn for so long. I love the comforting smell of Java in the morning. I am okay until I remember the pain in my heart that isn't going away, despite so many well-meaning people who had assured me that it would. "Give it time," they'd say.

Instead of moving on, I wallow in my misery and lonesomeness, suddenly recalling the smell of Lynn's freshly baked chocolate chip cookies in the kitchen on a blustery fall afternoon. I can feel her spirit, whispering in my ear, embracing me in my overwhelming sorrow that seems as though it will last forever.

I revisit the recent past, when Lynn was my wife, lover and best friend. The scenes play out for me in black and white. It's like color didn't even exist. It did though. I can still remember cutting my finger on the Fourth of July, and my blood ran red. Lynn lovingly bandaged my wound, and gently kissed it 'to make it better.' I believed in her magic.

I retire to my front room and sit in my house of shadows and sip my coffee. I put on some soulful Otis Redding and roll an old fashioned joint. I lay back on my worn, but still comfortable red leather chair. I blow the smoke towards heaven, knowing that if anyone should be granted entrance without question, it would be Lynn.

Her friendly and lonely, longhaired cat, Ginger, jumps up on my lap, purring, wanting to be petted. I lay my hand on her back. It's the best I can do. I have no more love to give. I feel hollowed out, like a Halloween pumpkin with a carved smile that slowly caves in until there is nothing left to do but discard the rotted hulk.

I shut off my phone for two weeks, so that no one could contact me. It was back on now, but still, no one had called, asking to come over and visit or bring me anything. I was left suffering, wanting to punish myself in some way. If only I'd been with her, maybe things would have turned out different.

For some inexplicable reason, I felt guilty.

A light knock at the front door disturbs my reverie. I freeze in fear. Who might it be? I wasn't expecting anyone. Better not be a salesman, I thought. I had a large brass sign prominently displayed above the doorbell, clearly stating 'NO SOLICITING'.

I sighed and opened the door, and the sudden explosion of sunlight blinded me. I put my hands up to my eyes to try and block the rays. I hadn't been outside in quite awhile.

"Reno. How ya doing?" It was my old college friend, John. I hadn't seen or heard from him since the funeral, when he had urged me to call him if I needed anything. A dozen others told me the same thing, apparently sincere in their generous offers. What they didn't understand was that the grieving rarely ask for help. You need to bring it to them, and then sit and listen, and don't try to relieve their pain with stories of your own losses. Don't try to match someone else's grief.

Some of my eyesight returned. John was tall. Well over six feet, and he had put on

some weight, while I had dropped twenty pounds. My pants were loose on me now, and I sometimes had to hold them up with one hand while I hobbled through my house, trying not to trip and fall and get hurt. Lynn was dead and buried. There would be no one to aid and comfort me if I should break a leg.

"Hello, John."

"Well, Reno, you gonna let me in or what?"

"Sorry," I said, stepping back. "Come on in buddy. Sorry about the mess. Have a seat on the couch. That's the safest place."

I preceded him to the brown leather couch and used my right arm to sweep the foot high pile of debris, newspapers, pizza boxes and my unpublished manuscripts to the carpeted floor.

John immediately commented on the stale smell inside my house, "Leave the door open, Reno. Damn, it stinks bad in here. How can you stand it?"

I reluctantly left the door wide open while John gingerly took a seat on the very front edge of my couch. I heard cars passing by, birds singing and my elderly next-door neighbor, Carl, pushing his old hand mower across his front grass.

How could anyone possibly be happy, I wondered. Grief gripped my heart in its cold and unforgiving grasp. The accident happened five weeks ago, and it was as fresh in my mind as if it had taken place yesterday.

I sat in my red chair and clutched the armrests, then straightened the white doilies Lynn had made. If not working in her magical garden, she always had some craft project going. Once they were completed, she usually gave away her treasures.

"How are you doing, Reno? You look like hell. This must be terribly difficult for you."

I stared back at my friend. A lump the size of a baseball stuck in my throat, and I was unable to speak. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I grabbed a Kleenex and tried to stem the tide.

"Allergies," I said, embarrassed at my show of raw emotion.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked John.

I shook my head, not trusting myself to even answer his simple question, I felt the gigantic hole in my heart rip and widen. It physically hurt.

John stood up, "Dude, this is not healthy in here. Can we go outside? You look like you could use some fresh air, buddy."

I rose also, wobbly on my feet, "Sure, okay. You want a cup of coffee?"

"Yes, that would be awesome. You got any smoke?"

"Of course. Come on into the kitchen and I'll get you a cup of Joe. I'm ready to freshen mine up anyway. It's Colombian coffee, the best. Do you like that?"

He nodded his head and followed me.

I poured John a cup and filled mine too. I grabbed my bottle of Jack Daniels and poured a dollop into mine. I held the quart bottle out towards my friend, my eyebrows raised.

"Sure," smiled John, "Just like old times, eh?"

I felt a fresh dagger pierce my heart. He saw my crumbling face and knew he'd said the wrong thing. It's an easy thing to do when visiting the grieving.

I left the bottle on the counter for future use. I didn't want to open my kitchen cupboard in front of my friend and take the chance of him seeing the thirty bottles of assorted hard booze that I had stashed a month ago. I had shopped at Liquor Barn after the funeral, filling up the entire inside of my car with cases of alcohol and plenty of mixers too. John might get the mistaken impression that I had a drinking problem.

I grabbed a box of store bought chocolate cake donuts that I'd recently thawed out, tucked them under my arm and pushed the back screen door open. I stepped out onto the wooden deck and took a sip of coffee. Gawd it tasted good with whiskey. The husky liquid poured like liquid gold down my throat and settled in my stomach and made me glow with reassuring warmth.

John joined me and we stood there for a moment, looking at the massive garden with a 12x10 wooden shed perched in the back right hand corner. The garden had been Lynn's creation. She designed and built her own little world from a long time vision in her head. She made a red tiled Mexican-themed patio, complete with a barbecue



and picnic table. Overhead was a canopy of redwood posts and lattice that was covered with thick vines laden with blackberries and prickly green stems and flowers. There was a heavenly scent of lavender and peaches that was most noticeable when standing in the middle of the lush greenery. Sometimes I stood there and just breathed, pretending that Lynn was in the shed, retrieving a shovel. She sometimes joined me in spirit. I could feel her presence. Part of her was still here. Maybe it would always be that way. I could never move away now.

On the left edge of the large deck was a six-person hot tub that was covered with a gazebo with a peaked roof and stained glass windows. I hadn't used it since the accident, because it reminded me too much of Lynn. We shared some special, wonderful, intimate moments in there. Now, it needed maintenance, but I didn't feel up to it. The garden was the same. It hadn't been touched for five weeks either, and vegetables were growing wild and trees were bending over with unpicked fruit. Weeds were spreading like a summer rash, rapidly taking over.

It was a warm, pleasant day. John was wisely silent as we sat in green, metal sea-shell chairs. We listened to birds chirping and insects buzzing while sharing a joint. Butterflies flew through the acrid smoke, and a hummingbird buzzed by my head, his wings seemingly beating a hundred times a minute. It was comfortable, sitting there under the redwood, berries and vines, enjoying the beauty of the day. For a few brief minutes, I forgot my pain.

"So, Reno, how are you really doing? Don't lie to me now."

"Not good. I've done a lot of research on grief and death on the Internet, and I've learned some things. Valuable things."

"Like what?"

"No one can put a timetable on someone else's grief. We all have our own path of recovery. Many people never make it all the way back. I may be one of them. I'm still stuck at the beginning of what is supposed to be a daily, progressive healing process. My reality is, I'm stranded in a real bad place."

"You aren't suicidal, are you?" asked John.

"If you're asking me if I've made any suicide plans, the answer is no. At the same

time, I don't particularly care if I live or not."

"That's almost the same thing, Reno. Sitting inside your house and drinking yourself to death and not eating is almost the same as blowing your head off, or stepping in front of a bus. It's a bit slower, but the results are the same."

"Any suggestions?"

"Yeah. Come with me. We'll go for a ride up to Tilden Park. We'll get some sandwiches and beer. The fresh air and scenery will do you wonders. A day outdoors is of much more benefit to you than seeing a shrink. I can at least promise you that much."

"Cool. Let's go. You driving?"

We walked into Zari's Delicatessen on Solano Avenue near the railroad tracks. I had forgotten how wonderful sourdough bread smells, along with the rich scent of hanging salamis and twenty different cheeses. John and I ordered the same thing. Salami and Swiss on crusty sourdough rolls. We also got individual boxes of three-bean salad and two six packs of Coors. John paid for it all, and I thanked him. There are few pleasures in life better than sharing an ice-cold frosty beer on a hot summer day with an old, trusted friend. I felt myself slowly coming alive again. I hadn't thought I had any life left in me.

We drove all the way up the ultra steep Marin Avenue until cresting on Grizzly Peak Boulevard. From there, John drove us deep into popular Tilden Park. It was a large, beautiful paradise populated with eucalyptus trees and multiple scenic picnic spots. John parked in a paved lot near Jewell Lake. We grabbed our lunch and beer and hiked up a hill. We emerged onto a flat plane that had a commanding view of the rolling green valley and the backside of the small town of Orinda.

We found our familiar, favorite picnic spot and sat cross legged in the sun, munching on our sandwiches, scooping out bean salad packed in oil, and drinking multiple cans of Coors. We didn't talk much. The sun warmed us. For a while, I forgot my troubles and grief. John had done well by me.

After finishing his sandwich, John lay back on one arm and drank from a can of Coors, "The beer is getting warm. I guess it might be time to get going. I'm going to a Cal basketball game tonight. They're good this year, and they're playing those egg-

heads from Stanford. Wanna come with me? I've got an extra ticket, Reno."

"Thanks, but no thanks, John. I just want to stop at the grocery store and go home."

John took me to Safeway and I stocked up on food and drink. He drove me home, helped me unload my groceries and then departed, saying he would call me in a few days to see if I was doing any better. I thanked him for rescuing me. I opened every window that wasn't painted shut and then propped both doors open to air out my place. I had a sudden burst of energy and stripped my queen bed and washed all my sheets plus my soiled clothes that I had let pile up in the clothes hamper. Lynn used to do all this, I thought. Plus, she worked full time at a local nursery as a clerk, and managed to cook most of our meals. I missed her in so many ways that practically anything I did was like another stab into my heart. I sometimes hoped that I was existing in a long dream, and that Lynn would come walking through the back door again.

She would be dirty from working in her garden, and her face would be aglow. She would excitedly fill me in on the progress of her many different vegetables and the fruit on her healthy, productive fruit trees. Life had been good for us, and I knew I had taken her love for granted. Now, I was left struggling with my memories. I wanted to die too, to join her in death, to be together again.

The phone rang. I was startled. I hoped it wasn't someone trying to sell me something. Anything. It didn't matter. It was always bad timing, a violation of my space and rights.

I picked it up.

"Dad?" Oh no, I thought, my knees buckling. It was our missing nineteen-year-old daughter.

"Sarah?"

"Yes Dad. It's really me."

"Where are you?" I hadn't seen her in over a year. Neither had Lynn. One day Sarah was gone.

She left a short, bitter note and a month later she sent us a postcard from Death Valley. It didn't say much, just that she was fine and would call soon. She never did, and it took a serious toll on Lynn, although she didn't care to talk about it much. Our only

child had rejected us and split without giving us a chance. Her room was the same as it was the day she had left, "She'll be back someday," Lynn would say.

"It doesn't matter where I am. Something's wrong, I can feel it. What is it? Mom?"

There was a long silence. I felt the phone slip from my face that was suddenly wet with tears.

"Dad?"

I brought the receiver back to my mouth and said the words I had been dreading, "Sarah. Your mother is dead. It was an accident. She went fast, didn't suffer. It happened five weeks ago. I had no way of contacting you, about the funeral and all."

It was Sarah's turn to be quiet. I heard her struggling to breathe, and then weeping. It had been the same for me. When I first found out, it was like a heavyweight boxer had punched me in my solar plexus. It hurt bad. It still did.

"I'm coming home," she said.

"When?"

"As soon as I can find a ride."

The phone line went dead.

I stared out the front window, and watched brown leaves flutter to the ground. I wasn't sure how things were going to play out between my daughter and I. We would start fresh, I hoped, brought back together with our mutual grief. I hoped we could build a new relationship on top of the ashes of our old life.

I picked up a recent framed picture of Lynn, standing in her garden, proudly holding up a fresh bunch of carrots. I kissed the picture and walked back into the kitchen, ready to start dinner.

# Hidden Treasure

Dave Garlock

Mushrooms fascinate me. They're small things, easy to ignore or to miss completely, but with such character, such variation in color, size and shape. Some will kill you, others are great for your health. Some are bitter or slimy, while all three featured here are absolutely delicious.

Oregon is a bountiful place for fungi. Each of these was found within an hour of Portland; the chanterelles and the cauliflower mushroom in the same magical patch of forest in the Coast Range, the morel at the base of Mt. Hood.



*Cauliflower Mushroom*



## About the Photographer

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*Dave Garlock is a writer, photographer and co-founder of Ink Stained Creative, a marketing agency focusing on local businesses and nonprofits. Fillings, his first novel, was recently published in a cooperative release with five other members of the People's Ink. He grew up in the redwoods of Northern California, then moved to Portland to attend Reed College. He's lived there, photographing, writing about and exploring the surrounding wilderness, ever since.*

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*Chanterelle*

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**Les Wicks**

*leswicks.tripos.com/lw.html*

*Books available through **leswicks.tripod.com.books.html***

**Latest title:** *Sea of Heartbreak (Unexpected Resilience)*  
(Puncher & Wattmann, 2013).

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## Xmas Day, the Block & Leaf

### Les Wicks

Crack-Whore & Santa Claus  
3rd floor, apartments #10 & #11 'cept  
no one uses crack &  
now they're called sexworkers with  
brassy accountants.  
So much intensity  
remains human transaction.

Naturally, everyone has doubts about Santa.

Their love is nameless  
amidst a great crime of sufficiency.  
His skein of discard cookies. Her tissues. The fit.  
She beat him with a rosella feather whip  
until tickled to a state  
of extreme gratitude.

Southern Sydney summer was playing up,  
they joined the party downstairs at

the splendid Lardly Lord as he reigned over his  
la la musicale by a stream of metal ink.  
Everyone kissed him to a cherubic slumber;  
such a lovely  
great shaggy baby in his crumbspecked toga...  
everything to which his neighbours could aspire.

Terry the Worker  
was coloured in for the day  
(but it was grey). Never said now  
but plans kept out draughts in winter &  
proved toxic to mosquitoes.

Children were loose on the stairway. Like Americans  
they owned everything they wrecked.  
More cola, they snatch at guilt while  
toppling towards our rhythms of the letter.

Emily remained behind her doors. Because  
something she remembered. Clarity is a pain.  
White Bastard, the Scholar with the Molar & a Gentle Lady  
all went a bit crazy  
while the suicidal Chef sauced up.

Santa & Crack-Whore had stuck live butterflies on their giftwraps.  
Presents presented; ambulance vouchers, wheedles of wine then  
kilojewels with the posse sent home. Ribbons  
& choirs are scattered on white ash.  
Covetous scars slink into corners.  
This pancake Australiana  
a stacked, steaming village in tan brick  
patrolled by half-hearted strata sheriffs & a stringent lawn.

Crack-Whore's impossibly old children  
turned up in their European cars, started acting all parental as

their happy mother cried onto Guy Fawkes' tinder.  
Angry bits, lost husband & fouled up egg –  
each shuffled past then disappears. It was too hot for echoes.

Beer flew from bottles. Crazy turkeys caromed  
into sugary walls. Farmers call uninvited saplings woody weeds,  
trees are too indigent to judge.

This is what we are – eucalyptus – burn with vigour,  
an irrepressible shambles. Laughter & Apology  
were left to clean up the mess.



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*Wendy Ashlee Coleman is a published author in both fiction and non-fiction. Her work has appeared in the Evergreen Review, Houston Literary, 3 AM, The Fringe, Bull Fiction, Echo Ink Review, The Foundling Review, Used furniture Review and many more.*

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## Where the Acorns Fall

Wendy Ashlee Coleman

I still hate that damn store bought meat. It taste like it never had no heartbeat. Daddy used to take us out with his big money clip of hundreds and liquor up momma with the purple flow until she could touch the stars and he'd order us these big, fatty marbled, \$40 dollar cuts that looked like juicy, perfectly grilled, bleedin' angel steaks on a plate. Then he'd just watch us; me, and momma that is, as we'd just pick at these slabs of money with our fancy forks, barely puttin' a dent in 'em. He was always so perplexed considering the fang sharp carnivores momma and us normally were. Momma always got headaches from those \$100 dollars bottles.

"Any bleedin' box better than that Merlot shit," she'd always tell me pronouncing Merlot with its t. I told her the t's silent but she'd always just shake her head and laugh. Don't think she ever believed me.

I asked nana once why we didn't like what others loved. Nana used to tell me that what we love in life and what we don't has more to do with, ...where the acorns fall more than anything else.

In the deep country, wild grasses, nuts and especially acorns are consumed by the deer, pigs, and in some cases, free-range farm cattle. It's what gives 'em that wild tang and is why domesticated farm stock are raised on a limited breed of grass, hay and corn based grain and are almost always on a strict acorn free diet. But in the country, the acorns drop every fall by the millions, and many a animal feast on these fatty little treats for the winter, a lovely break from the usual tree bark and weeds. Every time when I'd walk outside in the evening and the neighborhood grills would start to fire up supper, stinking up the cool fall air with the smell a mesquite char and savage hunters meat, I always can't help but think of momma.

My mother; you should have seen her. She looked like Marilyn Monroe with the type of long blonde hair that would go all the way down her back and tickle the top of her ass crack, often puttin' her in these panicky scratch attacks that would make her swerve the road hunting for that itch. And her hair, it would smell like them pinkish flowers especially when she would lay out and let the sun cook it to a warm bake, her hair would get hot to the touch, like you just pulled it out of the oven and it would reek the scent of beauty all around her. It was colored to perfection like a golden waterfall going down her back and I can remember like it was yesterday holding her perfectly soft and conditioned hair to my nose becoming just intoxicated with the scent. I'd sniff it and sniff it until I just couldn't stand it no more and then I'd always, inevitably taste it in disappointment and then wonder why something that could smell so good and look so good, could taste so damn bad. I didn't want to taste the flavor; I wanted to taste the smell and the sight of something that wasn't real. And that was my poor momma's legacy. She didn't taste like the flavor she was pretending to be. Perhaps it was an acquired taste, maybe like hot, red eye gravy on toast, but I liked how the real momma was. She was like the real Marilyn Monroe, you see, a natural brunette whose hair tasted like fine straw and dollar store shampoo, with split ends that could tickle a child's tongue to giggles with no chemical burn or after taste, like a fresh picked organic apple, dull on the outside but the real deal to the core. She had natural breasts that would leave any newborn starving and an abnormal leanness that read 'meth head'. But daddy took care of all that rough and somehow dug up the gem down in there, and goddamn, could she doll up. It was like some mad science experiment where she went in white trash but came out glimmering in white diamonds, bluing up balls all over town. But behind the flowing long hair, and the jewelry, and the big tits daddy bought her, was a woman whose depths didn't reach any further than a parking lot puddle after a gentle shower. This was a woman who once thought "Concealed Carry" meant any jacket with an inside pocket. The same woman who looked at middle school and thought of it as a bit of an over kill, a momma who loved to have shotgun pellet spitting contest with nana as they dined on fresh squirrel.

Her favorite dinner...fried gizzards and Milwaukee light. Her favorite dessert, those heart shaped message candies you'd get as a kid during Valentines, you know the kind that tasted like sweetened chalk. Yeah, that was momma's favorite. Every year we'd rush to the supermarket and just clear out the shopping shelves with that stuff.

We'd leave every February with a good year's supply of the shittiest candy on earth and when I would look at her perfect smile and how her natural blood red lips would just clash with the world's most perfect, whitest teeth, it always seem to remind me of a fresh slaughter in the snow. Her porcelain face, it just be reflectin' off the early spring sun and her happiness, her smile, it was so real, so genuine that to this day I doubt what I tell ya now, would even begin to be believed as the truth, but it is.

Everybody thought momma was some druggie who fried just about every "thinkin' cell" in that noggin of hers...but the truth was momma didn't fry anything cause, well, she never had nothing in the pan to fry in the first place. She came out of gene pool more polluted than Tulsa cocaine but she never did anything any more serious than beer and fried foods. Hell, she never even smoked weed or even messed with any of the hard shit, despite all the money and credit cards dad gave her. Forget Valium, and Xanax and Prozac, that's for bitches with problems and momma had none. Her clothes, she bought at Kmart because she thought Wal-Mart was too uppity and as for Sears, JCPenny, Mace's, well, "They can go on and fuck themselves", as momma would so elegantly put it. She was a trailer park queen that cried her eyes out the day daddy took her away. It was all good intentions on Daddy's part. He wanted a better life for the woman he loved but what he didn't understand was that life, the life of condo living and Cadillac's and diamonds, that all meant shit to her.

"You know why you can't take no trailer park out of this girl, sweets? ...Cause in the camp.... you aint dead... till ya dead."

It took me a long time to understand what my momma meant but as I got older I began to understand. Momma always loved them storms, and wind and nature. I remember, when daddy was at work or out doin' the things he shouldn't, mom and I, we'd sneak over to grandma's little single wide and watch the weather, watch the satellite images of this big, scary, red glob of destruction headin' our way and momma and nana would open up the doors and the windows to smell the eerie pre storm calm, and I would remember how the thousands of the rustiest, white trashiest wind chimes you'd ever saw, the ones that they had hanging all over the place would just start to, sway lightly into each other at first and then soon begin to clash with dings that would fill the air and never leave, and the storm would begin to play this beautiful, rhythm-less music that would become as loud as an symphony and the heav-

ens would begin to flash with light and yell in rage as it would start to conduct this orchestra of rusted shit with command. Soon the trailer would creak and crack and sound like we were bein' pushed out and forced to bounce up and down on some nasty pirate's rotting plank and with every cracking sound your mind would think, "this is it, we're airborne like Dorothy was", only in this version, Dorothy's gonna be losin' her virginity to pieces of our neighbor's above ground swimmin' pool.

And I'd watch momma and nana and a group of guys she always referred to as "the boys" laugh and smile seemingly without a care in the world, even as the lights in the house would flicker on and off, and I would hold my teddy tight and watch as they'd ride this storm out bravely like experienced sailors caught up in a storm on the high grasses, the flat sea of green acreage that went on and on like great oceans, land so flat that every sunrise, every sunset seemed so close that you could reach out and feel it with your fingertips. A place where each beginning and end felt like it was meant just for you, and, unfortunately a place where every damn stormy front seemed like it was coming just for you. During every spring squall, I remember my momma taking me out and pointing towards the horizon with a nervous smile, at what sometimes would seem like an army of cyclones slowly birthing from a wall cloud hundreds of miles away. Occasionally, the storms would get so damn strong the sounds of a wind chime being picked up and crashing into a car window or the side of the house would sound like explosions that would just damn scare your shit frozen. I know the idea to surround oneself with a bunch of potential deadly shrapnel seems like a stupid idea, but the old timers would use this and other assorted yard art as a kind of a pre-Doppler warning system. So I guess when wind chimes and clothes and couches started flying or Ol' Booger, the neighbor over there was just a ducks dick away from being decapitated by a rusty muffler that'd been lying in the driveway for a month, I guess it meant shit was gettin' serious. When it got real bad we'd go to a neighbor who had a doublewide that I suppose was more solid but always seemed just as scary to me. Cause the thin, tin-can like walls would just echo every hard gust of wind ten-fold, so much so it would feel as if god himself was clawing at us, trying to get us. The next step after that was goin' to the trailer park community cellar that could fit dozens, if not fifty people down in her belly. And even when the sounds of loud crashes and blown transformers would make it seem like a war for our very souls was being waged above, I'd watch momma's face, glowing in the candlelight

smiling and laughing and taking in the musty cellar scent of a life that she loved, that she lived for.

Here she was some white trash half breed that got lucky cause she could doll up better than Hollywood, yet it didn't matter none. I didn't matter that she had a full heated and cooled basement cellar under her six bedrooms, four-bath house; to her it didn't feel like home because she had no pulse in that home. And that BMW of hers took away so many damn bumps out of her life she'd often find herself aiming for potholes instead of dodging them, I guess just to feel something familiar. I don't think my mom was the dumb cunt that my uncle always politely described her as, despite the fact that I was helping her read letters at twelve. I think she was just a simple woman, smart enough to see that thriving wasn't near as appealing as surviving, at least in her eyes. And although she could pretty up and look like a domesticated piece of ass, deep down she was wild game through and through, and that was something people in the real world couldn't handle. Her beauty was matched only by her purity. She was a woman uncorrupted by the greed of wanting more, simply because she didn't want more. I think sometimes we confuse fulfillment and genuine happiness with weird or stupid because, well...most of us aren't nuts. It's nuts not want more, ain't it? It's ironic really, because that was one of the reasons my father fell in love with her, and it's also the reason he killed her.

Things got ugly when she filed for divorce. I guess daddy couldn't understand why she seemed so happy moving back to the camp in her little trailer. Or why a bowl of personalized "I love Maiva" heart candies made her just melt head over heels in love with one of the boys, harder than she ever did with daddy and his diamonds. Maybe he couldn't understand how he created the finest looking gold digger in town but just couldn't get her to dig none. Hell, before momma, daddy was known for his love makin'. Momma was too, but when ya put both of 'em together in the sack I guess it just made for a dud recipe. He'd have this man-made silicone, big titted piece of perfection all spread out and momma use ta tell nana, "He'd just be stumped in them eyes, momma." He couldn't understand why he didn't like her more than he should have and momma didn't know why the smell a daddy's Old spice cologne just dried 'er up. Hell, they probably needed a drum a KY to conceive me or maybe she just closed her eyes real hard and did her damndest to recall the smell a sweat and motor oil, the official scent of camp studs.



Maybe they both, deep down just didn't love each other like they thought they should, or maybe daddy really could taste the acorns, who knows. Either way, my daddy wasn't going to let some toothless meth head, half spic steal momma away with a \$15.99 order of personalized heart conversation candies and he definitely wasn't going to let some white trash ho dump him. That's why he killed them, that's why he killed 'em all, he killed all the boys, he killed momma and nana, then he deep throated that Colt like a porn star and took off the top of his head like it was damn hat poppin' off in a stout wind gust.

There were no witnesses but momma and daddy's bodies were found dead in a car and they were holding hands. I don't know what to make out of that. I'd like to think that they fell back in love before he killed her and then himself, that maybe they both agreed to leave this confusing world together and willingly...unlikely yes, but nevertheless lovely to think about. I know momma was just infested with the guilt. She felt bad for not loving a man she should have loved. She felt guilty for not bein' able to change on the inside and I understand that. How many women in that fucking shit hole parking lot she called home dream of some knight in shining armor to come give her everything she wanted. I bet she use ta dream it every night till it happened. Little did she know it was Ol' toothless Tommy next door that got her wetter than daddy could ever get her, even with a fire hose. Life is so fucking strange like that. We finally get a break in life and then when we get that break, we get cramps every-time we pass that dollar store.

I drive through the old camp and park it in front of that ol' tin can every now and then, get shit faced and let my thoughts jus roll outta me. It's repainted now, with a deck, looks the same but coated in difference. I'd sit there rememberin' what me and momma used to say together with a grateful smile when we'd pull up home after a long day, and I'd have some hot chink food take-out burnin' a whole in my jeans and momma was jus tickled to death cause she still had a 20 dollar bill left and it was only Friday. It's what nana use to call "a nigger rich weekend."

I can still hear momma's voice.

"We's here cause we's here cause we's here!!!!!" She'd say while stuffin' her face with those heart candies after our traditional Chinese food Friday.

Since momma left us I've always got this here rattle in my pants. People assume them tic tacs or Altoids and they're always so surprised when they see me pulling out heart candies in July. I always shrug and tell 'em you don't have time and they never argue cause they're never that interested. You see, I got nothing from momma in the looks department, even her post-op beauty. Well, I got her drawl, which only creeps out in bits and then clumps when I get a little tipsy; and I only get tipsy when I tell stories. I took after my father in every way. I've got an I.Q of 162 and the same damn spicy fire that's gave me the sting to make people think I got the biggest balls in the room. But I'd gladly trade all my Midwest bling for my momma's 36-24-34 and her smile.

Most people in general aren't interested in the quiet, pear shaped women like me, no matter how smart they are, or successful they might be. Sure I can get cock, I can get it whenever I want, just like I get anything else I want but professional courtesy fucks are like what my late Daddy use ta say. "Pussy is like bottled water in this biz. You don't even ask for it anymore. You get there and it's already on the table" and since I took over for daddy and my Uncle Hardy, they make sure they always got my flavor on the table. I'm not complaining. I've gotten more quality cock than a chubby chick like me ever deserves and I'm not like momma that way, I don't miss drinking outta the hose and the toothless Tommy types never looked good to me. Sorry, momma. But I guess I'll never be able to understand what it's like to just walk into a room and make men ache with a craving so intense it often looked as if momma was putting these men in real genuine pain as she'd walk by and leave her scent. What a high that would've been, to have every guy in the room lusting after you with such a primal intensity that the love for their wives or girlfriends or whoever rented space in their brain was just momentarily forgotten, all the memories, all the laughs and love just erased and never to be restored, not in the same capacity, because their mind is scared with the idea of what this woman could be.

Women like momma are the types that possess men to scrap that beautiful picture they already have spent so long painting. And they don't do it for the thrill of a new color like many women think, but instead they do it for that bare, milky white empty canvas of possibility that does nothing but display the flawlessness that is nothing. Nothing is beautiful because it could be anything, and ain't nothing can ever be wrong with nothing.... It's like lookin' over the fence and seein' the other side. Hell,

the grass ain't greener, it ain't even there yet, but you heard it's comin' and you heard it's going to be greener than anything you'd ever saw. That anticipation is better than the greenest sod you ever seen cause your mind can make it greener than it ever could be in real life.

"if she tastes as good as she smells..."

Thinkin' like that there's what got daddy trouble. He was one the married men at that very party when he saw my momma coated in a fancy rented dress and some shop-lifted make-up. But ya see, it was too late for him because he fell in love before he got the real taste of what momma really was. She was twenty-two at the time, and it was late November when they met and the acorns had already fallen, just like they'd fallen every season since she's born.

# People's Ink Book Review

Ian Phillips

Vote No For President is the new collection of poetry from Robert Benefiel. Get to know Benefiel, and read his new book. His heart is in it, his spirit is in it, even his mother is in it, or at least her head is, cooling away in a refrigerator. The contents of Vote No almost read like a poem itself, with such titles as, Died Out of Nowhere, and, Shaking Their Head Until Their Head Falls Off. From the beginning we get a note of the tone Benefiel plays throughout the book.

He deftly winds the comic/tragic braid, and it's impactful in a gnarly sort of way. There's a certain philosophy in the text, one of moderation and meditation, or maybe just common sense. Poets like Frank O'hara of the New York School often came to mind.

Poems switch from first to third, and even to the second person. The latter is used to ask questions of the reader in a way that is meant to slam the reader's brain around in her head. We often get a sense that the narrator is speaking to someone in particular, though the queries are universal.

Poems range in content from personal narrative and the absurd, political musings, psychological quandaries, and sometimes a blue and desperate despair over the modern state of the word. Yet whatever the subject, Benefiel slices through the page with wordplay that keeps a silent chuckle going on two poems down the line. His humor is quickly remedied with depressive insights, or nostalgic amnesia.

The poem, A Rotating Metal Stand That Squeaked As You Turned It, utilizes a narrative which builds to some sad memory. Buying comic books is remembered, though with a detachment and indeed sadness of one looking back decades on, and then the poem turns to the absence of father, and we are left with a feeling which is not pink or even yellow, but empty, cold, and slightly skewed. In "Learned a New Word," the style is used again: narrative builds to an unexpected and sad end. It's a method that makes reading the collection enjoyable and fresh.

Metaphor is used generously throughout the collection, weirdly and in a novel way.

From, *It Became Clear*: "My heart/like a child/ would never/ be so small/ ever again/ swelling with joy and triumph/ the way an old wine barrel does before someone ends the insanity with a glass." And in, *Poem Written To A Woman Throwing Her Keys At Me*: "There are no jokes/it's the closing of/stores and marriages/trapped like a magician's/ assistant in two halves."

Benefiel is not wholly possessed by personal history, he often writes about the word as we know it, or perhaps how he knows it. In, "Died Out of Nowhere" we get a glimmer of his overall philosophy. Much consideration is given to the human condition, "graveyards/ are full of people/who thought/they were smarter than everyone else/quicker than/everyone else/better than everyone else."

Although Benefiel largely constructs a world all his own, there are instances of good old fashioned story telling. A premier example of this is the poem, *The Fourth Neighbor In As Many Years*, which describes the intra-hood relationship of two very different people. It is a stark and extremely moving poem.

Benefiel manages to touch almost all of our emotions in *Vote No For President*, and he even scratches some feelings we didn't know existed. These poems seem to be hovering in a massive cumulus cloud resting on the horizon, sometimes illuminated by golden rays of the sun, but usually steaming grayly in a placid atmosphere of absurdity.



# A Short Piece That Isn't Working

Robert Benefiel

the howls have  
turned to murmurs.  
love with tricks  
not even a magician  
would bring on stage.  
rinsed and strangled to purity  
with a cackle only reserved  
for the all too sure.  
the romantics hung  
by their own verse.  
I cannot tell  
insanity's smile  
apart from content's  
as their tears run the same way.  
the dreams we fight for  
with such imagined hands.  
half a drink  
poured over the heart  
and the other  
over a nightmare  
that is looking  
for an excuse to fight.  
it's another story  
that isn't working  
for anybody  
and enough people  
have to work tomorrow  
that I stand  
in the alley alone  
so no one will

see me burn  
my manuscript  
before it can get  
any further,  
but before I can  
light it  
the manager  
comes out the  
backdoor with  
a coo coo clock  
under his arm,  
tossing it into his car.  
then he turns around  
and sees me  
standing there  
and he is so  
nervous about  
me seeing him  
steal the clock  
he just  
has to talk  
he just has to ask  
how was your day?  
and you say  
the cherries in the tree  
probably aren't dreaming  
of being canned  
and jarred straight  
from their mothers  
arms, right?  
the geese all think  
they will keep  
their heads, right?  
and he says which apartment

do you live in again?  
in the barely  
buddha visible light  
that separates  
all this color and space.  
I smile and then walk  
back inside without  
saying anything else.  
there is  
nothing he  
can do  
about it.  
I'm paid up  
until the  
tenth and I don't  
own anything he might  
want besides  
honor.  
the horrible story  
under my arm  
much better than  
the horrible story  
I witnessed.

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*Jack Caseros is a Canadian writer and scientist. His first novel, Onwards & Outwards, was independently published in 2012 to zero acclaim. His newest novel is currently looking for a publishing house to call home. You can read a little more about Jack at [www.jackcaseros.com](http://www.jackcaseros.com).*

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## SORRY (SAYONARA)

Jack Caseros

Whipping down Otter street I'm moving as fast as the broken heels on my hiking boots will allow. If I could go any faster I would, but there's nowhere really to go, I'm just going. It's a cold late winter spring but I can feel my forehead beading with sweat. I wipe it down with my coat sleeve and hope I catch a glimpse of something clear enough to remind me of the memory I was chasing down. Her name was (I don't know), she (paid attention to me) meant a lot to me and I had to see here again.

Back in the bar where I first bumped into her there is no sign of life, it's like an abandoned building overtaken by overexcited drunks who try to sing their own songs over the lone guitar man playing a bastard cover of Your Time Is Gonna Come. Well maybe his time, but not mine.

I stand by the fireplace where I first saw her—where she offered me directions to the bathroom if I took a pic of her with her entourage. She touched my hand when I took her camera and then after again when explaining that the bathroom was exactly where I thought it was. Then she thanked me for the picture. I could appreciate her artistic vision to stretch beyond the arm's length self-shot, but that didn't trigger me, I'm not desperate.

Afterwards I was by the bar, feeling sicker with each gulp of beer, the suicide wings my buddy insisted on getting when the sun was still up rising up my esophagus, scratching an itch I knew I didn't have. I almost shook, and when I did use the bathroom I farted so badly that I was afraid it would stick to my clothes. And maybe it did. That didn't stop her from bumping up against me at the bar, lazily dancing against me.

I'm sensitive, so whenever my stomach rots I get imbalanced, and whenever I'm imbalanced I get anxious, and when I'm anxious I can't be intimate; so when I felt her shoulder on me I thought I would shout at her. Instead I did something worse. I just ignored her. As I came to the end of my last obligatory beer I seeked her out, to see if she knew why I shunned her. I couldn't tell if she knew why, but I could tell she knew that I did give her a cold shoulder (not literally, because my wool sweater was an effective sponge for my building sweat).

I wiped my forehead again. I have to leave. Another bar, another place, somewhere, because she hadn't been celebrating anything other than a Tuesday night, and people who celebrate Tuesday nights usually hold an elegy on Wednesday nights. It was possible that she was tourist and long gone by now, but that wouldn't have changed anything, I was diffident. But she was different. I had felt her. I wasn't looking to feel her again, I'm not desperate. I actually wanted to apologize.

I don't know why, it just seemed like the right thing to do. Poor girl, I couldn't let her think I was too good for her.

Onto the next bar. Damn. There she is. She is bubbly (again) but quiet (hipster silence). I stand as close as I can without getting her attention, to confirm it's her. Then I get myself a drink, then another; then the bartender brings me another drink without asking so I have to drink that one too. Just like last night, dragged around town against my will, I slug back the drink. Hello, my name is William.

The treasure of my hunt had come up beside me at the bar. She looks me over and says hi. Look, I say, continuing a conversation I had already started with myself this morning, I felt like shit last night. I let that spill over to you and I made you feel like shit. I wanted to apologize. Sorry, she says, do I know you?

Yes. This is me, grabbing your head, pulling it close to mine, and sucking as you draw your next breath. This is me alright with everything, serene before the fist, standing before my fall, warm until the cold sidewalk soaks up my heat. Don't you remember me, from last night? Not that I'm desperate. It's me, before I fell apart tonight.

[ **BLACK OUT** ]



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*Frederick Pollack is the author of two book-length narrative poems, THE ADVENTURE and HAPPINESS, both published by Story Line Press. Has appeared in Hudson Review, Salmagundi, Poetry Salzburg Review, Die Gazette (Munich), The Fish Anthology (Ireland), Representations, Magma (UK), Bateau, Chiron Review, etc. Online, poems have appeared in Big Bridge, Hamilton Stone Review, Diagram, BlazeVox, The New Hampshire Review, Mudlark, etc. Recent Web publications in Occupoetry, Faircloth Review, Camel Saloon, Kalkion, Gap Toothed Madness. Adjunct professor creative writing George Washington University. Poetics: neither navelgazing mainstream nor academic pseudo-avant-garde.*

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## Via Negativa

Frederick Pollack

1

As they entered, they found that saints,  
candles, virgins, gold  
altarcloth, flowers, the cross and the figure  
on it were gone, the never-comfortable  
chairs folded in shadow. The pulpit  
would no more frame a priest who might  
have been a pederast and fascist  
or, who knows, a liberal, full of doubt and thought;  
hopefully now exercising  
his virtues elsewhere, having lost his office.  
They stood examining the effect  
of unstained light on stone, of air  
laden only with time, and how  
the least sound echoed oddly in that room.  
All were distressed; some stood in groups to pool

ignorance, some groundlessly  
accused others. But the silence was too vast  
and unfamiliar to them: that of a void  
which concentrates the larger void.  
It wore them down, though an old woman cried  
at length, and only because crying  
was familiar. Finally they could hear  
their inner promptings from a distance  
wide enough for names: greed, willful  
stupidity, inadequacy ... Staring  
across that gap at mirror-bright selves,  
they hoped those noises too would end  
and they be worthy of the greater silence.

2

Here and there, aging people  
cherish untimely  
ideals. They believe in

but seldom proclaim  
the mild, benign State.  
For the tired say

as little about the truth  
as about the fun  
they had in youth.

So they live. While those  
who maintain forever  
traditional hate

for one group or another  
often live likewise; they  
cheer but avoid

violence. At times

it occurs to the former  
that they would give up

hope, if the others  
relinquished desire  
for cruelty. Then all

could be grains of sand  
beneath a pale sky  
on a calm land.

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*Latorial Faison is an American military spouse, poet, and author of six books. A graduate of the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech., she has been published in Southern Women's Review, Kalyani Magazine, ChickenBones, Red River Review, Blackberry Magazine, STARS & STRIPES Korea, Okinawa, Guam, Freedom Verse, and elsewhere. Faison is currently an Assistant Professor at Sejong University in South Korea*

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## Where All the White Socks Have Gone

Latorial Faison

Somewhere beneath a new pair  
of funk-filled basketball shorts  
at the bottom of an old trashcan  
with two apples bitten, just once  
under piles of sugar, flour, washing powder  
causing trackside "confusion and delay"  
inside Mickey Mouse's ear  
whose cushion is now a snowdrift

Among the dead fish scent emanating  
from behind bedroom door number one  
a pair of twice broken glasses  
crammed inside last year's backpack  
with February's fieldtrip food  
at the slow pace of over too many snails  
multiplying in the hallway aquarium  
dripping from classroom walls

Paired with dreams of athletics and cum  
laude or Lil' Wayne and drum solos  
on leather sofas and chairs at Ironbridge  
where LPC's laugh at too damn much

somewhere in the dried piss around  
our guest bathroom toilet stool  
concealed in a sink of dirty dishes  
connected to Xbox, PS3, or Wii remotes  
to be scribbled by broken pencils  
with chewed off, missing erasers are  
six hands, six zeros, or six switches  
with nubs left uneaten and unbeaten

In every opened bedroom drawer  
where all the mini-blinds are broken  
between fights, hidden holes, and codes  
on walls in obscene notes written at school  
of idle threats by teenaged fools  
who bring tantrums and “little boy blues”



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*John Grey is an Australian born poet. Recently published in International Poetry Review, Sanskrit and the science fiction anthology, "Futuredaze" with work upcoming in Clackamas Literary Review, New Orphic Review and Nerve Cowboy.*

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# The One Crow

John Grey

Crow decided the sky wasn't for him -  
too bright, too much sun.  
And the glare - what it did to his silky wings.  
He envied the owl.  
But his eyes were night-blind.

And crow lost the taste for carrion.  
Plopping down to the side of the road,  
beak jerking out squirrel innards,  
was giving him a bad name  
by the passing cars.  
He longed for live prey,  
scouring the shadow-fields for mice.  
But for all his cawing and hacking,  
he had a songbird's heart.  
Their fearful rodent squeals would break him.

Crow just couldn't be crow.  
He yearned.  
Does a dove do that?  
He had grandeur  
but nowhere to go with it.  
The sparrows sang prettier.  
And eagles owned fear.  
He perched on a tree branch

until another crow joined him.

“Do you know,” said the newcomer,  
“we’re one of the world’s  
most intelligent animals.”

The crow didn’t know  
though he always figured  
something was going on  
in that skull of his.

Crow was shot by a boy  
with a BB gun.  
The ratiocinations of one solitary bird  
had little resonance  
in corvidae world.  
They’re seen at their best here.

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*Jordan Moffatt is a writer and improviser living in Toronto. My writing has appeared in Feathertale and Defenestration Magazine, and is forthcoming in Hobo Pancakes.*

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## A Back and Forth

Jordan Moffatt

Barney's Public House is the only place in Stepney's Crossing to get a drink, and that makes it the busiest place in town. This town's seen more than its fair share of violence and shoot-outs in the past, but that ain't the way no more. Sheriff Mitchell took control four years ago and now it's just a place to grab a nice nap and hear the birds sing their pretty little songs. The residents, the few of us left, get drunk during the day and then head straight home to sleep it off.

Still, since it's on the main road, a stop-off in Stepney's Crossing is a regular occurrence for cowboys and wanna-be gunslingers on their way to a more exciting locale. These visitors are asked kindly to make their stay brief, to be in bed before ten, and keep it down if they can. They always oblige; there ain't nothin' else to do in Stepney. Dale 'Gunner' McGear likes it quiet. His former life slingin' his gun gave him glory all over the West, but it also cost him his beautiful fiancée Evangeline. He'd rather not talk 'bout that, thank you very much, but if you get a few shots of tequila in his belly he may just tell you everything there is to know about her. McGear's talented with a pistol, sure, but now his heart's broke and he don't want to do nothin' no more. Stepney's Crossing is the perfect spot for that. Sheriff Mitchell offers him Deputy on the regular, but McGear always turns him down. "Headquarters is too far away from Barney's," he says.

He ain't been called 'Gunner' in years.

It's a typically cloudless New Mexico sky on this here day. Hot. There ain't no escape from the heat on days like today. The only option is to find some shade, have a few drinks, and sweat it out. Heck, that's all you can do on any day. I'm sitting in the corner by the front door. That's where I always sit. I can see the whole bar from here, and I like that. McGear's sittin' right at the bar. That's where he always sits too. He

likes sitting there 'cause sometimes some soul will sit next to him and buy him a drink for his stories. No one buys me drinks for stories -- I give 'em away for free.

It's high noon, so McGear's two drinks in. I'm playin' catch-up on him already. Everybody's always playin' catch-up with McGear. I take a sip of my whiskey and look out the window. A big black horse is bein' tied up by a man with a moustache like you ain't never seen. The big ol' brim on his black hat is shadin' his whole face but for that moustache. It's too big for the hat. He's no regular here at Barney's, so I'm disinclined to trust him. I hope he don't cause no fuss. Of course he's comin' in here though. Ain't nowhere else to go in this godforsaken town, and I don't mean godforsaken as an insult.

Sure enough, the stranger walks through these doors. There ain't nothin' like the sound of these saloon doors. Fwump-fwump, Fwump-fwump. Back and forth, back and forth. I must've passed through these doors a thousand times by now. These doors in this here bar are the most familiar things I know. Heck, now that that stranger passed through these doors he looks familiar too. It can't be who I think it is, though. Impossible. Maybe that moustache is playin' tricks on my head. McGear confirms my suspicions though. He spirals outta his chair so quick you'd think the darn thing was on fire.

"What the hell you doin' here, Cooper?" says McGear.

'Quickdraw' Quentin Cooper. As I live and breathe. I take the rest of my whiskey and shove it down my throat.

"Gunner McGear? That you? Hell, I didn't 'spect to see you in this town."

"I bet you did."

"Naw, I thought you'd be able to move on by now," Cooper smirks. He's tryin' to get under McGear's skin. I reckon it's workin'.

"I asked you a question, Cooper. What the hell are you doin' in this town?"

"Alright, alright. Now there's no need to take that tone, Gunner. I'm on my way to Santa Fe. Figure I'd stop by the ol' stompin' grounds first. Grab a drink. Stay the night. Take a walk down memory lane."

"You ain't stayin' one more minute."

"Is that right?"

"That's right. You ain't welcome in Stepney."

"Oh, come on now, Gunner. You and me both know I can make myself welcome wherever I go."

The two stare each other down. I don't think either of them realise their hands are hoverin' right over their pistols. It's just a reflex for them. Everyone in the bar is tryin' to mind his or her own business. We're all hopin' if we ignore it, this'll just all blow over.

"You said you'd never set foot in Stepney again. You said that!" McGear's voice is shakin' now. "You swore you'd never come here again after you killed Evangeline!"

"Now that hurts me, McGear!" He points his finger at him. "You and I don't need to like each other – never did. That's fine! But I did not kill your fiancée! That was an accident! You know that!"

"All I know is she's dead. She ain't ever comin' back and it's cause of your gun and your hand."

"Dammit Gunner, I ain't gonna rehash history. I'm just stoppin' by." Cooper turns to Barney, washin' a glass he's cleaned five times already. "Barney, come on, you'll let me stay for a drink wont ya?"

Barney is trembling. He's seen too much death in his life for someone so afraid of it. "I-I-I'm stayin' outta this. You-you-you boys settle this yourselves."

"Barney's right. Maybe we should settle this ourselves, Gunner," Cooper says. His tone has shifted from forced geniality to a threatnin' monotone. "Outside."

"I should do to ya what I shoulda done four years ago," says McGear.

"Killin' me ain't gonna bring Evangeline back."

"Only one way to find out."

"You ain't quick 'nuff no more. All that drink has slowed you down."



“Oh, I’m still quick, Coop. I’ll still be...” McGear stops himself. His jaw drops and he doesn’t say another word.

“Still be what, McGear? Still be what? What’s wrong, McGear? Scared?”

McGear doesn’t look scared, but somethin’s sure startled him. I’ve only seen him scared once, and that was when he was holdin’ the dyin’ body of his fiancée in his arms.

“Look behind you,” McGear finally says.

“This is a trick. You really low enough to shoot me in the back?”

“I ain’t gonna shoot. Just look behind you.”

Cooper doesn’t trust McGear further than he can throw him, but he obliges. I do too. I’ve been so occupied watchin’ these two I ain’t looked at nothin’ else. Coop looks behind him, and I look behind him too. I don’t believe my eyes. The doors, these god-damn saloon doors are still swingin’ back and forth. Fwump-fwump, fwump-fwump. It’s like somebody just came in, but nobody has – not since Cooper, and that was at least five minutes ago. It can’t be possible. The doors usually stop swingin’ after thirty seconds – a minute tops. Those doors should silent and still. But they ain’t. Fwump-fwump, fwump-fwump.

“Well I’ll be...” Coop says. He starts walking towards the doors. McGear follows him.

“How in the hell are these doors still swingin’?” McGear asks. Nobody answers. Nobody can answer. The doors shouldn’t be swingin’ no more. They’re defying all our known laws of science swingin’ when they shouldn’t be.

“Everyone get over here and look at this!” Cooper yells.

We all stand up and make our way to the door, present company included. On closer inspection, it’s even more miraculous. They’re swingin’ forceful, like they got a purpose. We’re all silent. The only sound you can hear in the whole town is Fwump-fwump, fwump-fwump. We stand there for what musta been ten minutes without even noticing time passing.

I’m not sure what happened just then, and I ain’t prone to speculatin’, but somethin’

changes in us. We look at each other, then look back at the doors – swingin' away like there ain't no tomorrow – and we all smile. Nobody in Stepney's Corners ever smiles. I turn my gaze over to Gunner and Quickdraw, standin' side by side. They're both smilin' too. McGear puts his arm on Cooper's shoulder.

"I'm sorry about everything, Cooper," he says. Cooper turns towards him.

"You got nothin' to be sorry for, McGear. I'm the one that should be sorry. I'm sorry for everythin'. I'm sorry for Evangeline." McGear shoves his head into Cooper shoulder and sobs.

"She was so beautiful," McGear cries.

"I know, Gunner. I know."

They stand like this for a little while as the rest of us walk back to our seats. Eventually, McGear settles down. The doors are still swingin', and it's a beautiful day.

"Let me buy you a drink," Cooper says.

"I'd like that," McGear replies.

"Barney, give us two bourbons. Make 'em special."

The two sit beside each other at the bar, and Cooper puts his arm around McGear. They drink their bourbons in a contented silence.

I don't know why those doors swung the way they did. Heck, I don't know much, matter of fact. All I know is that if there's hope for people like 'Quickdraw' Quentin Cooper and Dale 'Gunner' McGear, then there's hope for us all. As for those doors, well, they're still swingin' to this very day.

Fwump-fwump, fwump-fwump.

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*Kaitlin Broders enjoys writing poetry and reading dystopian literature. In a former life she was a Star Wars RPG gamemaster. She lives in Portland with her husband in a very tiny apartment.*

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# Burden

Kaitlin Broders

Think of a burden you'd like to release to your ancestors  
If it makes up more than half of who you are, do not release it  
Give it mirror time, give it privacy, cover it

To recover, treasure the inside moods, the all-day moods  
Pour out your fears quickly to your friends, drunkenly in bars  
The syrupy urine of a dehydrated quarter horse

Yes, I can imagine you ten years from now  
Strapping your doctorate to a back-handed compliment  
Losing your mouth-pearls in hemorrhagic echolalia

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*Kate Ruebenson, a New York City native, has lived in Burlington Vermont, Saratoga Springs New York, the Adirondacks, London, Oakland California, Brooklyn, Brazil, and Portland Oregon, in something like that order. Since graduating Skidmore College in 2011, she has had many jobs in educational and literary fields—826 Valencia, AIESEC teach abroad, Hotchkiss & Associates Literary Agency, Moteevate.com, Poets House and Art4Life—and service positions (nine, among them: Anthropologie, Buffalo Exchange, two ice cream shops, a baby store, a farm to table kiosk, a coffee stand, and Barnes and Noble). She has taken graduate-level classes in TV comedy writing, filmmaking, poetry, and ceramics. Kate came to Oregon last summer after receiving a scholarship to Fishtrap writers’ workshop. She loves riding her bike around Portland and only sometimes misses reading on the subway*

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## Take Off

Kate Ruebenson

*Past Participles*

In 1992, we ran around public parks in France with no  
coverage

save the slinky, life-of-their-own curls on our  
heads dipping/dunking down necks.

In '94 liberal New York neighborhoods saw nudity and  
supposed comical in the way of campy

at house parties our parents laughed and watched  
and laughed

as we

stripped from our princess dresses / previously worn  
halloween costumes / tie-dyed socks spread glitter  
on our naked chests, heads adorned  
with construction paper crowns.

Fogging up the mirrors and the windows with our breath.

Heirloom lampshade twinkled even without bulb:  
endless twilight.

Our floor glimmered for months.  
Sparkles in hickory for years.

*The aughts – to*

As father escorted me to the subway, winter mornings, 2001  
grates pluming, halting us like bay fog  
with every sidewalk square into which I stepped I  
became more certain  
Things cannot be what they Used To.

Acid reflux city. Unhealthy sky plaques first then  
altogether rots in runny colored swarms like unwashed  
mouths. Generations of malaise. Crisscross of metal and  
muscle, too hard against too soft. We are penetrable and we  
will go first. We are not made of much. We are made of too  
much. We will mourn.

*Regressions forwards*

In 2009, we shed our culturally required outer skins,  
cotton and polyester to the  
bare minimum.

Hot wind before. After, cold water.

*In touching:*

my underarms and upper thighs.  
Small locations:  
Previously forgotten despite their proximity to me  
at all moments.



Freedom again / here I was  
if only late at night

in the abandon of a calm lake  
in a small cavity between the

protectively raised shoulders of the Adirondacks,  
the wooden tower which I again and again would climb,  
shouldering me briefly upon it's back,  
before I asked to be put down  
like a child who's recently discovered dreaming,  
who used to resist, who now turns sleepy in the arms  
of an elated mother, who wonders what changed.

### *Reflective*

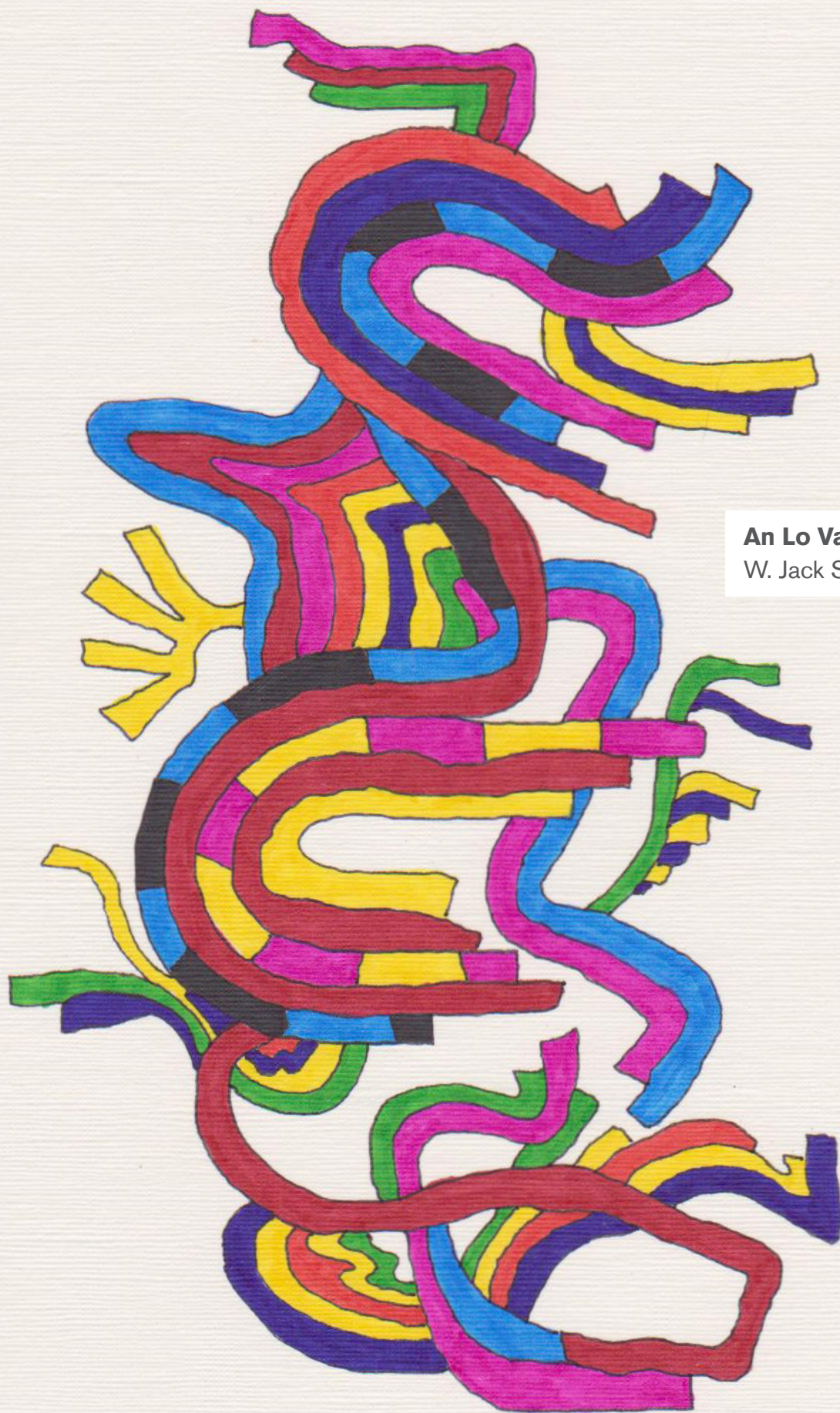
And I fell thrillingly into something new,  
each time  
clashing first, then working into.  
Knocking the wind out of us both.

### *Epilogue*

I longed to reciprocate favors of childhood / re-finding.  
Brazen toes over the edge seem to lengthen not curl—  
a hair that slides a tickle around the ear, twice,  
curious to mounting motion.

Not gung ho,  
more unscared.

I looked back, and look down: the opposite of all the places  
I'd been told.



**An Lo Valley**  
W. Jack Savage