



# fugue<sup>52</sup>





# f u g u e

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# f u g u e

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MARIAH PERKINS

## PEOPLE NEVER DIE IN DEEP WATER

One. When I was ten years old, I stole tadpoles from a puddle/I put them in a small fish tank/none of them became frogs/They never even sprouted legs.

Two. My high school classmate surrendered to the undertow/twenty feet from shore/reaching for her sister/who survived.

Three. Twelve ounces of beer/twelve ounces of beer/twelve more and more/My friend tells me she wants to wrap her car around a tree/Only 48 ounces can remind someone that it takes no time to get from/now to nothing.

Four. A friend was running last summer at dusk/a thin layer of sweat around his whole body/when the driver made contact.

Five. The doctor said grandpa had fluid build-up/something like water in the wrong places/the doctor drained it even though they could no longer do anything for the cancer.

Six. I've been told not to panic in water/but what do we do/when we are made of it?

## COOS BAY, OREGON

I was five years old, asleep, my first night in a new sleeping bag purchased to replace my family's repossessed bunkbeds, and I was awakened by something cold and wet. Before I opened my eyes I already knew I'd pissed all over the sleeping bag and that the urine had soaked through into the carpet. Earlier that afternoon while buying the bag, my father had asked me if I could, for once, act like a goddamn adult and not piss in my sleep. I had said that I wouldn't. I'd promised. And I lay there in my mess thinking about that moment in the store and felt immense shame. What kept me awake, though, were thoughts of my father, a short, hairy man with thick forearms and scary teeth, doing what I later learned adult words for: Belittling me until I was so small that even my mother couldn't scoop me up.

So I waited, shivering and wide-eyed, until morning. He came in. And it played out as I saw it earlier that night. It always did. I knew he loved me, which made it hard to understand why he couldn't hear it when I said it was beyond my control. Eventually I gave up because I couldn't penetrate his anger. It seemed nothing could.

I am 33 now. I've quit my job and am travelling with my two sons, Dominic and Finn, 8 and 5, across the American West for the summer. We travel, cook, wash dishes, get dressed, brush our teeth, and sleep in VW Vanagon.

We are in Coos Bay, Oregon and the wind has been cutting hard all day so we hide in a coffee shop and eat giant chocolate chip cookies. I have a cup of coffee. Dominic and Finn have some juice. We are the only customers and we finish up. There is an arcade down

the street and we play pinball and arcade games like Donkey Kong and Joust.

We leave the arcade, chilled by the wind, and head to the van. I fire it up and we drive a little south of town to a campground on the beach. We find a spot and park.

I say, "Let's go down to the beach."

"Can I look for crab parts?" Finn says as he unbuckles. His hair is cropped but the copper color still glows even with the cloud cover.

"Yes," I say.

"Can I wear my sandals?" He says, waving them around.

"Yes."

"Can I walk out into the water?"

"Man, you can do whatever you want. Let's just get going."

"Yesss."

They both pile out of the van wearing their jackets and hats, but they are both wearing shorts. The wind is even chillier here with the nearby sea, but I let them make their own decisions.

We walk the paved road to the camp entrance where I hear the crash of the ocean below the cliff to the west. The wind is a constant force, tugging at our clothes. It's blowing through chimes on an ocean buoy that we can't yet see, making two distinct notes. One low, and then one high. It sounds like a church organ playing the theme from *Jaws*.

There is a steep trail leading down the cliff. I go first. The trail cuts straight through vines that drape down around us. I mash down a couple of banana slugs as I slide over them and cut left, stopping at a flat spot.

"Okay guys, one at a time," I say. I turn and see Dominic attack the trail. He slides it like he is playing baseball and this is the game-winning run into home plate. His face is covered with dirt and his pants are now stained. He pops up, filthy, and jogs the last few steps, using my legs as a backstop. I catch him around the back and give him a hug.

"Did you see the slugs?" I point to where I smashed them.

He turns and says, “No. Where were they?”

“I think I ground them into the dirt. You probably have slug guts all over your pants. Gross, dude.”

He laughs and smears some of the dirt on his pants and says, “No I don’t.”

Finn descends now and he has opted for a more careful backward-stinkbug style.

Dominic whispers to me, “He’s sticking his hands in the slug guts, huh?”

“Yes,” I say. “Let’s not tell him.”

We both smile.

Finn stops and says, “I think somebody smashed a slug up here.” He holds up a mangled, gelatinous hunk.

Dominic laughs and so do I. I say, “Come on, buddy. Put that down. Let’s get to the beach.”

The steepness of the trail levels off and we emerge from the vines into a swampy basin with grass taller than Finn’s head. There are giant deciduous trees blocking out sun and their leaves sound like a jet engine in this wind but down here the air is stale. Small bugs take flight as I move through the grass and they buzz around us. I am in the lead with Dominic close behind. We step from tuft to tuft, avoiding bogs on either side of us. Finn is walking behind us, with his hands in front of his face, pushing the grass away.

“You got it, big guy,” I say.

“This is big grass, Dad,” he says. Then he says, “I stepped in some mud. Sorry.”

“It’s okay, buddy,” I say.

I watch him plod on, sometimes jumping, and he nearly falls more times than I can count but he keeps motoring forward while Dominic stays at my side, still talking about the video games he played at the arcade.

At the edge of the swamp there are low shrubs and cobwebs and the boys laugh as I bend low and snag everything. They scoot through with ease. We emerge on the beach.

The chimes from the buoy are louder here, and it's visible now, lolling back and forth and up and down in the surging waves. The beach is long and flat and the shorebreak travels thin like glass; the gulls overhead are soundless. Clouds feather the horizon and the sun is two fists high, giving us a few hours to play. There is a crowd of people on the right and smoke from their cookout wafts our direction. I see a parking lot there too and a road extends from it, slicing into the trees. This is probably where we should have walked.

I point down the beach to my left. The people are scant and tiny as pebbles. A jagged rock slices the sand in the distance. I say, "Let's check out that rock."

Dominic has been running in wide ovals making motorcycle sounds, but spins out of them and heads that direction. Finn stays with me, picks up a stick, and drags it in the sand while he walks.

He zigzags back and forth between the water's edge and me. Dominic runs too far ahead, away from the water, jumping and rolling in the loose dry sand, and then he waits for us to catch up before he takes off again. And I walk between them watching the water connect and disconnect with the land. The rock grows as we move forward and the sun droops in the sky.

We approach the rock and Dominic says, "That looks like the back of a stegosaurus. Look, Dad, can you see the plates?"

He points and I can. The beach ends in a steep cliff and the rock juts out from it. It's a rugged wedge, two different colors of brown, the darker of the two making the plate shapes along the top. It's long, and narrows to a point that stabs into the water. We cross a small sand bridge at the tip of the rock. On the other side of the jut is a horseshoe alcove, steep cliffs all the way around. There is a line of driftwood and seaweed on the beach marking high tide. Two buzzards hop around, picking at something I can't see, and a bald eagle swoops in and scares them away. There is no one here and I unzip my pants, back to the boys, and piss on the beach.

"Dad, can I go in the water?" Finn is looking at me when I turn back. He throws his sandals near me and then hikes his shorts up. I

don't mean he pulls up on the waist. He grabs the short-legs at the bottoms and hitches them up so that his hands rest near his crotch, making his shorts a pseudo-Speedo. In the past I have asked him why he does this; he usually laughs, head thrown back, and runs around kicking his pale legs high. This is enough for me.

I take my sandals off and throw them with his.

"Sure, buddy. Don't get wet, though. You'll freeze in this wind." He laughs again and then runs into the water. I quick-check Dominic who is climbing over the rock-face and I look back at Finn. He waits until the water recedes and sprints to touch it. As it rushes back, he giggles and retreats trying to outrun it. Back and forth like this, he could do it forever.

I smile. This is that rare kind of day. Crisp and glossy, like a photo.

I climb the rock beside Dominic and he is playing a game where he is some kind of scientist. I ask if I can play and he says I have to be the hunter. I am unclear on the rules so I sit and listen to him play. He climbs again, going higher than he should. But I don't stop him and soon Finn is climbing with us too. Finn is given a character, maybe the hunter, I don't really know. They scramble back and forth over the rock. Then they dive from a point on the rock and fly like Superman and I catch them. Dominic tries to outjump my arms and I tell him how stupid this is but secretly I am glad he is doing it. Finn has to be talked into jumping, and when I catch him he seizes my arms in his.

We finish jumping and I gather our sandals and go around the other side of the rock, to the long beach. Dominic follows me. Finn stays behind, in the alcove. He is running around in circles and laughing. Dominic reverts to the scientist routine and climbs up the rock-face to the top and looks into the alcove. He is saying something about finding a T-Rex fossil so he can make a new dinosaur.

Then he says, "Dad, Finn peed his pants."

I drop the sandals, go back around the rock, and Finn is standing there with a dark stripe down the front of his plaid shorts. He is frozen and staring at me.

My mind reels back. I am five years old again, throat tight with shame and fear, no words coming out. It's slow motion now as my father is bent down, nose to nose with me, and picking me apart at the seams. Sometimes little pieces of spit fly out of his mouth and stick to my face. His hairy arms swim through the air his eyes are all the way open. I don't attempt to tell him that I couldn't help it, but I beg him with my eyes to understand that. He's not listening anyway, and I can't figure out why.

In this moment I am both a child, with the memory of father bearing down on me, and a father, with a volcano inside about to erupt. And even though I know all the rules now, the words, the sentences for both sides of the conversation; even though I know that Finn could not help it, as this isn't the first time, and that my father also could not prevent his reaction, I still cannot stop what happens next.

"What the fuck?" I say. "Why'd you do that?"

"I don't know, Dad."

"Look around, dude. You could have fucking peed anywhere." I wave my arms around showing him the entire alcove. Showing him the world.

"I didn't know I had to go, Dad."

"How do you not know?" I snatch his hand and start leading him back. He stumbles behind me.

"I don't know," he says. And then he says, "I don't know," again, but I don't think he meant to.

"I know you don't know. That's all you can seem to say." Then I say, "Were you having fun? Playing here at the beach?"

"Yes."



“Well guess what, the sun is setting, the wind is cold and blowing a million miles an hour, and we’re far from camp. You’re going to freeze on the walk back. Fun’s over, buddy. You fucked up.”

He starts crying and we round the rock. I grab our sandals and thrust his at him.

“Put them on,” I say. “We aren’t going to have a fun walk back. We need to move.”

Dominic starts to say something, but I tell him to shut up and run ahead of us.

We move down the beach and I keep looking back at Finn. I wet my finger and hold it into the wind to check the temperature. It’s a frigid combination, the wet and the wind. We would have been okay if his pants weren’t soaked. But as it is, I’m scared.

I turn and say, “Walk faster, Finn.”

Dominic plays his motorcycle game out front. Avoiding.

I go back and forth between silence and berating Finn.

I know this is all wrong, the way I’m handling it. But I can’t reconcile the right way and the wrong way and verbal abuse is frothing at the edges of my mouth and flying out at a kid. My fucking kid. Who is absolutely devastated as he trots along behind me. But I can’t seem to stop.

As we approach the parking area, a large stream cuts down from the marsh and out to the ocean. It’s wide, but shallow. Six inches at most. We could walk a hundred yards upstream where a log is being used as a bridge. We could take off our sandals and ford. We could, at this point, do anything.

Instead, blinded by frustration and anger, I walk towards the narrowest part of the stream, about four feet wide. I know Finn cannot jump it. I ask Dominic to jump and he does, clearing it. Then I tell Finn I am going to throw him across. We have done this before, the throw, over shorter jumps. I think this will be fine. But, if I’m honest, I just want to get back to the van, clean him, make dinner, eat, and then go to bed. I want his piss-pants and my anger to end, even though I know shame will grow in its place. I want to

leave those things behind, in this day, and move into the next where I will get another chance to be a better dad than this. Where I can be the dad he wants me to be.

So he grabs my right arm with both hands. He pulls hard. I swing him through the air and let go of his hand. As he lands I see his ankle twist to the outside in a way that makes my stomach flip and he is wailing before he comes to a complete stop.

The first thing that comes out of my mouth is, “Why did you do that?”

And as these words pass I know it’s not his fault. I know exactly whose fault it is.

I jump the stream and inspect his ankle. It’s not broken but he is crying hard enough to attract the attention of some of the people at the cookout. They are wearing matching blue shirts that say their last name and I think this is a family reunion.

“He’s fine,” I shout. And then I say with less gusto, “Just a little fall,” and wave them off.

They give me concerned looks but I think they can see the shame coming off me like heatwaves so they turn and leave. I help Finn up.

“Can you walk?”

He limps. This is a real limp, full slouch and whimper.

Then I hold his hand and say in a low voice, just to him, “We have a long walk in front of us, buddy. You’re gonna have to man up.” But right now I don’t even know what a man is.

He is awash in tears, wincing as he hobbles, and between high wails he sucks up his snot, his chin vibrating with emotion, and says, “I love you, Dad. I’m sorry I fell.”

And my heart breaks the fuck in two.

So I hold his hand and say, “I love you, too, buddy.”

I hold his goddamn hand so tight that I feel every shift of his body weight like a knife-stab in the heart. I hold him like this because that’s the only right thing I’m doing. Maybe the only right thing I’ve ever done.

I hold his hand so tight that he says, “Dad, you’re hurting my hand.”

But I can’t help that either. I try to explain why, but the words are falling out all wrong. So I stop trying.

For now, we walk uphill into the night. Dominic in the lead. Finn limping at my side. With a low and high whistle from the buoy rocking at sea.

Back and forth. Up and down. **f**

AMY ROA

## RADIOACTIVE WOLVES

All my dreams take place in a house I've never been to.  
A place west of the rubber trees where workmen plant fluorescent  
orange flags  
on spots known to be flush with radioactive wolves.  
My mother, inside, adjusts her wig, counts all her children,  
and says, "the wolf pack spends all its life cycle circling the cord  
grass like someone in love."  
Then she leaves to huddle in a nearby culvert, and smoke  
cigarette after cigarette.  
I have seven sisters, all named Wendy, each of them have their own  
separate dreams where  
they're cuddling a sleek black pony. They write to several government  
officials offering their  
services to charge into battle, ready to fight communism.  
Our house has no roof. The sunlight breathes down, settles in among  
the furniture like a guest.  
Though they chew chunks of hair off our scalps,  
we often keep juvenile wolves strapped to our backs for warmth.  
One of the Wendys says, "Things aren't so bad are they? Creatures  
like this usually kill on fifty-  
three percent of their attacks. And we can still pray with our hands."  
The truth is, I've never met a wolf I didn't like,  
I've hated every job I've ever had I once held a cricket,  
its abdomen close to my ear, and walked through a vein in its heart.

OWEN MCLEOD

## CLICK HERE TO GET RIPPED

Play the lottery. Pray all you like.  
Odds are, tomorrow you'll be stuck  
in some basement washing socks.

Remember when we let Jesus  
into our hearts? That lasted, what,  
three months? Now we're on eBay.

selling industrial corn starch  
in jars labeled Muscle Builder Max.  
Between shipments we smoke hash

with Randall the one-armed janitor.  
When stoned, he can't shut up  
about making America great again.

What Randall doesn't understand  
is that America is Jesus, that Jesus  
isn't coming back, that when Jesus

leaves your heart he leaves it worse  
than he found it—punched-in walls,  
rooms crammed with fast food bags,

plumbing & electric shot to shit.  
Meanwhile, millions of adolescent boys,  
keenly sensing where the future's at,

set their sights on getting ripped.  
Don't forget the heart's a muscle, kids.  
We're here to help with that.

## THE LEPIDOPTERIST'S COLLECTION

1.

**Y**ou help me use a net, adding them to the killing jar with cotton balls soaked in acetone. The fumes stop moths from panicking and damaging their wings. The flying ants don't die right away, so I freeze them. An ant's stinger twists to stop me from pinning her abdomen as she thaws. The grasshoppers are far worse. The ones I think about. The acetone makes them vomit yellow and brown onto white cotton. I sit next to our mother while she pins the bodies. I can't do it. I lose points for biodiversity and neatness. My Boxelder Bug looks damaged, the blood orange wing crinkled, folded, ill.

2.

In second grade, we sing about the muscle groups, the nervous system, the skeleton structure. I cover my ears. I want to unzip my purple boots, to take my thumping arteries out. I am too aware of the shoe pressing against the tip of each toe, grounding the pulse against me. The same is true of my fingers, my wrists. I shake my legs in order to distribute the pulse into a motion I can stand.

3.

I'm in middle school when you become ill. This is the first time I know you want to die. The next morning, you wake, drowsy, sick, but not dead. Disappointment and the hardest morning. How long do you wait before telling mom? I have a memory of you, so drowsy, still drugged, laying on the floor in the basement family room. You are on a pile of moveable couch cushions. They are large flattened

squares of maroon and 80's charcoal pattern. You are loose and detached, watching me play Nintendo64. After one of these attempts, the police are called to commit you. At the station, the officer shows you to a cell. I wonder about these moment. If the cell is cinderblock and mint. Whether there are bars like in old westerns or if there is a metal door with a slot for meals. I wonder if you sat in a plastic chair or a bench and whether a medical officer looks at your wounds while the paperwork is processed.

4.

I wake to a police radio multiple times in the coming years. Once, I hear it from the bedroom Stephany and I share. We lay still in the dark. The static pull follows a voice or sharp beep. All of this punctuates the officer trying to reassure our mother.

5.

The other patients teach you the merits of slitting wrists vertically to increase blood flow. There was St. Elizabeth Hospital, Bellin Hospital, Brown County Hospital, and Winnebago Mental Health Institute. You moved from the short-term inpatient programs to long-term county hospitals. Only beginners and TV characters slit their wrists horizontally. You trace the veins in your arm when you tell me. Patients give you lessons in burning your skin with friction and flame. You model methods after each outpatient release. Your arms scar and scab in long burnt and sliced patches.

6.

You weren't always "ill." One of my earliest memories is your curiosity. You and your plastic jar with the red lid. The lid has holes punctured around the edges. You catch irregular combinations of insects and arachnids. You want to see what a bee does to a spider. Does an ant make a good friend for a lady bug? Could a caterpillar marry a centipede? When it is time to release the bees, you open the



jar and we run, shrieking, imagining a wild chase of angry bees for two laps around the house.

7.

I'm trying to be David Copperfield. The hero of my story. I'm afraid to make your memories present if you want them behind. I should not make you live and relive, what you rejected. But, in my memory, you are always there.

8.

I fail to erase bunkbeds and matching porcelain dolls. They have green velvet dresses, curled hair and matching bows. My doll is blonde like me. Your doll is brunette like you. I fail to erase your flapping arms when warming up for a swim meet, the way you yank the laces of your soccer cleats, and your love for *Beauty and the Beast* on VHS. You refuse to watch the movie now. You want to see it through the eyes of a child for the rest of your life. I fail to erase the way you eat the same meal for weeks at a time before switching to white rice to coffee cake to spaghetti to dehydrated mashed potatoes. The way you see freedom in paper Dalmatian kites. You plan our Halloween trick-or-treating path and eat spicy candy like a hero. Our dad teases you for eating too many hamburgers. I fail to erase you buying two used pink refrigerator magnets in the shape of Styrofoam Beta fish. You see art in pipe cleaners and sequins. I look for ways to protect you when you don't need me to, even from Styrofoam fish. As your younger sister, I see how fragile and pure you are. I pity your lost 50 cents. Ashamed, you throw the fish away.

9.

You're my older sister, but it hasn't been like that, has it? I'm supposed to be your guard against you. In middle school, I sleep next to your bed. I'm to wake if you get up to kill yourself. You resent me, making me sleep on the floor rather than next to you in your queen-sized

bed. In my sleeping bag, I write in a mint diary with a gray kitten on the cover. I write about cutting as if I'm you. I write about cutting my legs with a broken shard of wood, with the one family *Schick* razor, with any sharp object mom hasn't locked away. These are expressions of sadness I don't know whether I actually experience. I enact you to understand or maybe just to own my own sadness, separate from you. I use purple and pink gel pens and store the diary beneath your bed. You sleep above the book each night.

10.

When you're in elementary school, mom shaves your head. Your hair is chlorine damaged from competitive swimming. You run from the room, from the house, and into the garage. I ask for the same haircut. This is the way hurt and empathy work, I think. I can have the same haircut. You will be less sad if I lose my hair too.

11.

Most of my memories are like this. I'm not sure what is mine, and what is me empathizing with your neurological imbalance, a drive toward death. The same illness that makes our mother cry with the *winter blues* and that I face with each change of the season.

12.

In the diary, I write about piercing my ears with a needle. The way the needle presses but does not puncture the final layer of skin for several hours. I pierce my ears four times. I write about sniffing glitter nail polish and wanting to die too. But hurt and empathy can't be redistributed to decrease volume upon entering the body. I had the flu during the night once, and you didn't wake up.

13.

You skip school each Monday. Mom gives in to your begging, buys you Hard Lemonade each Sunday night. You come into my room, lay on the floor, will your television to me. I am in bed reading about dragons and trying to survive the seventh grade. My carpet is pink but not by choice. My dressers are painted with kitten scenes. I have a collaged tribute to *The Lord of the Rings* on my closet. I have a Samurai sword, but the blade is missing inside the scabbard. We are not allowed to have sharp objects. I have hand-me-downs, all of Nicole's clothes that are passed to you and then to me. I pass what is left to Stephany. If you die, I don't want your television set.

14.

I wear pajamas to gym for a year. I get my first Adidas sweatpants and shirt, and girls rip the clothes through the vents of my locker. Cut and glue the fabric before pressing shirt and pants back into the locker. This is when I know: Middle school is possibly the worst idea of all. Hundreds of sweaty hormonal bodies without high school students as a point of reference for what comes next. Who thinks it is a good idea to put pubescent adolescents in an isolation chamber? I struggle to come through the other side. You did too. By high school, the lack of fieldtrip money, heat, or food make high school nearly impossible for you. The instability of eating onions, ranch, and bread sandwiches. You skip school each Monday.

15.

What is the point of making a list of memories other than to say in the least number of words what happened? Is it to attribute mental illness to moments rather than neurology and purge it back out of our bodies? An incomplete list:

16.

Fighting over who must pay for each item a child requires. Shelter, food, clothing, love.

17.

And the man who touches our dolls and grooms me for his next. He assaults our mother and gives our dad a reason to leave. I don't know how to say that assault is not infidelity, but it doesn't matter now. A stranger leaves a painting of the Virgin Mary in this man's white pick-up truck. He moves it to his darkened basement where I am when I see him standing at the top of the stairs, outlined in light.

18.

And the pedophile that follows. Another one. Dad spits the word "co-dependent" at mom like a curse. At the risk of gaslighting: our mom needs to be needed. He spends eight years in our home, standing in my bedroom doorway, watching me sleep. He smokes outside the bathroom window and asks for hugs.

19.

And then, Nicole runs away. During the divorce, she gets the winter blues in summer.

20.

And the time I overhear mom say, "I wish I could walk out. Start over." I listen from the stairwell, hang the Christmas stockings to make her remember the time of year when we bake and make garlands of popcorn for birds. She cries, knowing she can't wrap anything to place inside.

21.

When these things happen, you learn from a website that ranks method by pain and effectiveness. I remember the toaster's ranking being high in pain and effectiveness. Did the website tell you about the others? The roof and the *Draino* that could eat your insides? The roof may not work. You may live. The chemicals can hurt. There is no escaping. This will hurt.

22.

The bad time, when you take the pills, were you looking for the capsules mom hide under the bed? Or do you find them by accident? They are under the bed, a shoebox beneath the boxspring. Mom sleeps above them while I sleep next to you. You take the pills for mom's degenerating spine, depression, and seasonal disorder. I think about you pouring them into your palm. You discover them in the length of time it takes to pick me and Stephany up from school. You begin seeing people, but it is never clear whether this happens because of the medications, the overdoses, or the imbalance in you. You will find the pills again. You will find the key to the safe when mom starts locking away the pills and steak knives. She keeps the key in her pocket. There is the time you found the safe key. Miles from home, you collapse in a farmer's field.

23.

Each attempt builds inside you. There are no cotton balls soaked in acetone, only activated charcoal and the EMT pumping your stomach.

## THE ANGIOLOGY OF THE VESSELS

1.

You filter five senses into the body. The world eats you from the inside. It moves through your veins, makes you destructive, ill.

2.

I say *the world* like it is a quantifiable entity which can be held and ingested.

3.

I say *the world* like bodies are different than what is the world, what is *other*. But what if we don't differentiate? What if your body is *the other* as it enters? You are the air as you breath. You are molecules the same as the chair you sit in, the same as me. I am you.

4.

But then, you already know this. You told me, *This is your story to tell*.

5.

As if it really is that easy to appropriate you.

## NORTHERN HOSPITAL FOR THE INSANE\*

### 1.

I'm in the seventh grade, visiting Winnabago Mental Health Institute. The building is imposing brick, border walls, and visiting rooms. We visit you. Mom, her pedophile boyfriend, his creepy son, Stephany, and me. The creepy son offers a white pill in the darkened backseat of the car on the way home. He keeps them in his wallet. He asks to meet in his room later. He wants to show me how you got on the roof. When we get home, he takes my homemade sorcerers' wand. I can have it back if I close my eyes. I break my toe purple kicking him after he prods me in the cunt.

### 2.

At the hospital, we go through security. The hospital was founded in the 1800's. There is a building for the criminally insane on the grounds. This hospital is one of two considered for Jeffrey Dahmer during his psychiatric evaluation. The man who attempted to assassinate Theodore Roosevelt stayed here for a time before dying in another hospital. I say this as a method of description. I say this to set the mood. Maybe I say this to show you what I know and that I am afraid. Maybe I am trying to shock someone. I hope I'm not trying to shock anyone.

### 3.

The trees are gnarled, mature oaks over the hospital's Asylum Point Cemetery. Each numbered cement rectangle is for a body, the bodies of family members never picked up. People considered dead when they are committed: *inpatient*. The gravestones are level with the ground, a number on each one to commemorate the body below the earth.

#### 4.\*\*

Pre 1908: Frank Bryant (40), Anna Strealka (34), Mrs. F. B. Halford (Removed), Franz Sankart (41), Charles Sodarassen (19), James Rolling (42), John Oldenburg (38), Almaratt? M. Dunn (35), Henry Beglinger (87), Chas Bealka (39), John Sosenski (100), C.C. Norman (101), John Pomand (103), Andrew Sohllissing (104), Martha Finch (106), Sopha Sodarassan (34), Martin Fattlina (105), Michael Sanen (113), Frank Graham (107), Andrew Snodty (110), Wm. Hyde (111), Julius Bathan (114), Fred W. Schroeder (114), John Schinnal (109), Julius Kogher (115), Lovina Hubbard/Hulbert (108), Pat Doyle (116), Ola Halvorson (120), Conrad Kellin (117), Maretta Handrich (119), Fred R. Thompson (121), John Geotsch (118), Otto Kraman (122), J.B. Hammond (123), Gustav Kreben (124), P.C. Angivina (125), Andrew Summitch (126), John Hiegel (127), Wm. Baxter (128), Emil Schroeder (129), Gabe? Jackson (130), Sam Rapp (131), John Engles (133), Mary Gram/Grans (132), Susan Keil (134), May DeGrace (135), Mary Slariutski? (136), John Finder (137), Wm. Bowman (138), Augusta Machholtz (139), Roger Sullivan (140), Richard S?adman (141) Joel Johnson (142), Chris Saul (143), Frank Miller (144), Baby Jurgersen (145), John Cavanaugh (146), Carl Haney (147), Otto Shultz (148), Jas Smith (149), Gustav Goetz (150), Carrie Kempke (151), Ernst Silen (152), Christian Raetz (153), Catherina Zwilike (154), Christopher Voss (155), Hans Johnson (156), Earnest Sautar (157), Mary Schllissing (158), Fred Rehbine (159), Jo Willis (160), Phillip Teal (161), Sophia Johnson (162), Joseph Schindlhotz (163), Pat Garvey (Buried Neenah), John Hoffert (164), John McCool (165), James Peckman (166), John Driscol (167), John Bergen (168), Baby Wandle/Mandle? (169), Charles Stanley (170), Howard Fraser (171), Ida Weisenhomer (172), Owen Loyd (173), Nick Feber (174), Emily Darling (175), August Hening (176), Patrick Moriarity (177), Willie Cox (178), Frank Reich (179), John Stranch (180), Mary Madagaski (181), Charles Sherman (182), Amy Avery (183), Mary Anderson (184), Paul Steinel (185), Henry Elmer (186), Ernestina Krueger



(187), Mrs. Marion Pinney (188), Maggie Keating (189), Pat McHugh (190), Miss S.E. Prink (191), Elizah Rounds (192). 1908: Rose Zwickey (193), Chas Anderson (194), Geo Johnson (195), Susan Hefty (196), Tracy Hammer (197), Lena Baker (198), Carrie Ogle (199), Mary Church (200), Hans Monk (201), Chas Moore (202). 1909: Elmer Keggett (203), Chas Shupano (204), Fred Nitzel (205), Wm. Sherry (206). 1910: John Schultz (207), Arthur W. Matthews (208), Geo Allermann (209), M. Teske (210). 1911: W.H. Simond (211), Gustav Benneke (212), Pat Smith (213), John Redmond (214), Evelyn Reed (215), Eva Lennon (216), Mary Madson (217), Joseph Merkle (218), Wm. Enos (219), Jose Zemlock (220), Harry Bouck (221). 1912: Ernestine Henrich (222), Godfried Kiehl (223), Emelia Huiritz (224), Walter Bassett (225). 1913: Edw. Reschal (226), Albt. Rauun (227), Andrew Bohman (228), Simon Hoben (229), Joseph Jones (230), Fred Runkay (231), Peter Bavelt (232), Chas Hathaway (233), Henry Deobold (234), Amelia Abraham (235), Mahitable Kaine/Kaive (236), Wm. Walker (237), A.H. Miller (238). 1914: C.C. Pinney (239), Nick Ackerman (240), Irene Nuller (241), A.S. Wieworth (242), Emma Nelson (244), Albert Davies (245), Martin Jensen (246). 1915: Sarah Farry (247), Henry Lillman (248), Julius Freeman (249), John Shields (250), Augusta Stelter (Moved), August Yaeger (251), Chas M??shhausen (243), Frank Gross (252). 1916: Richard Quilty (253), Augusta Stage-mann (254), Elizabeth Jones (255), Gusta Machollac (256), Hans Peterson (257), Nickolas Fritz (258), Henry Pistohl (259), Martin Machollac (260), Joe Nichels (261). 1917: Michael Nuller (262), Henry Kusch (263), John Weaver (264), Joseph Walters (265), Libbie Miller (266). 1918: John Helback (267), T. Wistrull (268), Wm. Beasley (269), Albert Beilke (270), Elizabeth Steinholt (271), Joseph Conley (272), Nickolena Ingrbretson (274), Herman Zibell (274), Harold Hanson (274). 1919: Gusta King (276), Roderick Sanies (277), Emma Meyers (278), Alden Crosby (279), Ellen Anderson (280), Anna Ward (281), Napoleon Thiebault (282). 1920: Mary Foster (283), Wm. Pistohls (284), Wm. Sampson (285), Herman Pair/Parr (286), Maggie Lake (287), Nels Peterson (288). 1921: Joseph Folzer (249), Eva Daggett

(289). 1922: Catherine Fritz (290), Robert Roberts (291). 1923: Geo Liphite (292), Jacob Schwartz (293), August Madler (294), Henry Haskins (295). 1925: Wm. Diamond (296). 1926: John Abraham (297), Eva Zimmerman (298). 1927: Joseph Bondrovich (299), Joseph Johnson (300), Fred Busch (301). 1928: R.F. Johnson or Tom Ashton (302), Mary Hoffman (303), Thos. Pauliski (304), Wm. Wolff or Wm. Knaack (305), Elizabeth Dougherty (306), John Jones (307), Belle Horton (308), Ed Dougherty (309). 1929: Mrs. Herman Krueger (310), Leonard Skufe (311). 1930: Fred Brullow/Bruelow? (312), Israel Rawear (313), C.A. Jones (314), Carl Giersback (315), Ethel Norton (316), Peter Torigian (317). 1931: Chas Seger (318), Geo Modale/Wodole (319), Anna McCool (320), Tillie Hickey (321). 1932: Albert Amnunon? (322), Fred Paap (323). 1933: Susan Johnson (324), Ella Merry (325), Wm. Leach (326), Hattie Clark (327), Barney Nichols (328), Wm. Buhrow/Bubrow (329), Herbert Wilson (330), Hallie Blanchard (331). 1934: Christ Brauski/Branski (332), Henry Hiw?sar (334), Grace Rose (335), Mike Quinn (336), Thos. Clutcher (333), Horace Wm. Crane (337), Martin Wise (338), David B. Crow (339), Iram French (340), Wm. Clune? (341), Evaline Harvey (342), Emil Seling (343), Johanna Peterson (344). 1935: Albert Kleinschwidt (345), Andrew Walch/Malch (346), John Wagner (347), Emil Krueger (348), Paul Froehlich (349), John Potter (350), Martin Makowski (351), Joseph Erickson (353), Robert Delaney (352), Wm. Kryzaniak (354). 1936: Charles Bouck (355), Carl Korth (356), Eugene Reives/Rewes (357), Clarence Hull (358), Russell Marsh (359), J.H. Van Orden (360), Tilda Kreglow (361), Susan K. Peterson (362), Eli Chartrand (363), Albert Hanson (364), Wilhelmina Beilke (365), Arthur Dobr/Dohr (366). 1937: Melvin Hawley (354), Winifred Knapp (367), Edward Johus/Jabus (368), Florence Murphy (369), Mary Finney (370), Alex Price (his leg) (371), Fred Mason (372). 1938: Peter Lichtenberger (373), Wm. Sofranko (374), Herman Krisel (375), Arthur Nicholson (376), John E. Weeton/Waton (377), Elizabeth Remmuiger? (378), George Hardy (379), Alice Johnson (380). 1939: Minnie Springborn (381), Phillip Stieren (382), Jacob Koznia

(383), Alfred Gallup (384), Henry Kaiser (385), Jas. Dilmore (386), Andrew Tolseth (his leg) (part way down 385). 1940: Amanda Kruse (387), Mrs. Gus Gruevwald (388), Maggie Kupp (389), Albert Hass (390), Wm. Leonhardt (391), Alex Price (371), Lillian Dodge (392), Louis Bruining/Brniung (393), Margaret McPhail (394), Chas. Springborn (395), Andrew Tolseth (396), Geo. Tuttle (397). 1941: Ole Henderson (398), Otto Hoferbecker (399), Carl Doerflinger (killed on hwy 45) (400), Peter Arenz? (401), Jens Therkildsen (402), John Anderson (403), Fred Schiller (404), Chris Peterson (405), Sarah Anna Vale (406), Francis Springer (407). 1942: Geo. Abbott (408), Revnand Spanbauer (409), Irving Ligvess (410), Joe Cotanche (411), Fred Vanderberg (412), Chas. Walts (413), Fred Burgett/Birgett (414), Jacob Roland (415), Michael Rutha (416), Mary Berg (417), Emerson Turney (418), Pat? Berrigan (?), Geo. Yagers (?), Mrs. Phippies (?), Ena? Burrows (?), Wm. Furney (?). 1943: Jos. Androshka (419), John Wallace (420), Wm. Morgan (421), Pitt Robinson (422), Chas. Silk (423), Wm. Smith (424), Wm. Cook (425), Alf Landwehr (426). 1944: Joseph Miller (427), Millie Thorn (428), Wm. Bartels (429), Chas. Gorschels (430), Fred Geise (431), Mary Johnson (432), Herbert H. Krueger (433), John Doe (434), John Mitchell (435), Kitty Hanson (436), Geo. B. Crowe (437), Sylvester Lewis (438), Joe Juenzman (439). 1945: Wm. Fraunt (440), Richard Thoundel (441), Wm. Basing (442), Wm. Carley (443), Harry Wheeler (444). 1947: Blaz. Davich (445), Ernest Hills (446), John Novak (447). 1948: Carrie Cutler (448), Allan Folsom (449), John Eisner (450), Wm. Abbey (451), Gustav Baasch (452), Elizabeth Mielke (453). 1949: Frank Peterson (454), Aug. Maleisske (455), John Green (456), Silas Brown (457), Robert Smith (458), Wm. H. Vail (459), Herman Waspi (460). 1950: Lucius Wood (461), Nic Nammers (462). 1951: Maih Fitzpatrick (463), Michael Polus (464), Constance Manpole (465), Mary Polier (466), James Jungwirth (467). 1952: Chas. Ross (468), Tom Chapman (469), Hulda Cronquist (470), Irving Kaufman (471), Ernest Ripple (472). 1953: Conrad Rivens (473), Mattie Clemens (474), Cyril Van Sent (475). 1954: Wm. Golze/Dolze (476). 1956: Frank

Loss (477), Lawrence Winkler (478), Margaret Fisher (479), James Thomas (480). 1957: Norma Anderson (481), Albert Brahmmer (482), Samuel Gouch (483), Margaret Smith (484). 1958: Jessie Swantz (485).

5.

Yellow florescent light washes the halls. This isn't your first hospital stay. The last time we visit you here, you are too drugged to have a conversation. There are cots in the halls of your unit. Not enough rooms for the number of patients. You are being *stabilized*, they say. This time, we wait for the nurse to buzz us in. We listen to the child screaming. See the girl who stares. *She was gang raped on a home visit*, you say. Her body torn apart by the bodies of multiple men. We shouldn't know this about her. You shouldn't tell us. You need to tell us. I don't think I've ever heard those words. I let those words into me. *Draino* in my stomach. I'm twelve. I'm starting to see empathy can't be passed, distributed this way. The girl still feels her own private trauma in a way I can never understand. I avoid looking at anyone else, but I don't know if my avoidance is out of respect for their dignity or my refusal to feel any more.

6.

Years after Winnebago Mental Health Institute, you become stable. We met in a hospital again, but this time it is different. Your brain is well. It is the rest of your body that is ill. Your pancreas is swollen from a gallstone. I sit next to the guardrails while they break your veins and tap your knees. They medicate through a tube and wait for the right moment to cut out your gallbladder. It is *only* your gallbladder, as if this part of you is less you than your brain. They will cut it out. When this happens, I wonder if the rest of your body will know a piece of you is dead in a medical landfill. Will your liver miss your gallbladder? Will you have a version of phantom limb syndrome in your gut? A nagging pull? Or, is it only vital organs that are really

alive in the way we know? I imagine a body composed of only the brain, heart, kidneys, lungs, and liver. This body hugs with the left pulmonary artery, tucks the common carotid artery in the crook of opposing superior vena cava. This body has no need of legs or feet which aren't really alive anyway.

7.

The named patients in the Asylum Point Cemetery are sometimes misspelled or unsure. There are unnamed bodies in the Asylum Point Cemetery too. They have only a number. Both named and unnamed graves are accompanied by patients' Alex Price's and Andrew Tolseth's legs. They are buried separate from their body. Inexplicably detached. Unlike your gallbladder, the legs are buried with their own grave number. The pre-Socratic philosophers viewed matter, such as detached legs, as a living, although not sentient, being. Matter is alive, but it has no tendency toward striving, so is therefore not conscious. Their legs, your gallbladder, my feet, are not sentient. We can cut them out. Greek philosophers called this living without striving: Hylozoism. I listen to dictionary.com pronounce this word over and over. I tell my refrigerator magnets that they are hylozoic. This does not increase or diminish them.

8.

Plants may have consciousness. An African Violet may understand her place in the yard. She may sense running footsteps and the growth of an adjacent dandelion. If an African Violet loses a petal, does it understand the death of a limb? Does the Violet differentiate between 88% alive and 89%? Is there celebration or mourning?

\*Northern Hospital for the Insane is the official name of the hospital before it became Winnebago Mental Health Institute.

\*\*Wisconsin State Genealogical Society. "Winnebago County Asylum Cemetery." *Wisconsin State Genealogical Society Newsletter*, Vol. 27. Number 2. September 1980, Copied for Newsletter by the Asylum Office by Wayne and Alta Guyant in 1974. "Section 25, Oshkosh Township on County Trunk Y. This cemetery has no markers. There are no records of earlier burials. Grave number is given. f

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

## BECAUSE WE DON'T BURN WITCHES ANYMORE

It's not shotgunning these lines of  
empty bottles into sharp little stars

but how quickly we drank them  
that awakens the courage. The doubt.

Upwind from the politics of home  
and that wet-dog stench of rain

baking into clay, the sky is ours now  
to shatter. To forget. And remake.

And I'm no longer terrified  
of what I'll grow up into.

Not the faith but the gods in things, missing.  
Not the blackbird sharpening its beak

on stone but what we call the sparks  
when they don't come. Sometimes

you can be too careful. Sometimes  
you must try to spark all your own.

Not far from here they used to burn  
women that failed to confess their guilt

or drown in their innocence. Nowadays  
we marry them, and our parents sigh.

We have all been here before, lying  
drunk in the bed of a pickup surrounded

by warm shells, briefly empowered, waiting  
for the earth to change us for the better.



BRAD RICHARD

## NEW ORLEANS LULLABY

Hush, everybody, stop all your crying,  
you'll wake the bullet that wants my baby.  
Go to sleep, everybody, and when you wake  
you'll have a circus with swans for horses.

In a vacant lot in New Orleans East  
lies a bullet-ridden girl, still breathing.  
Gnats and dragonflies veiling her eyes,  
she whispers to the weeds for her sweetheart.

Her sweetheart's body is cooling in the morgue,  
a bullet in his head instead of dreams.  
When that bullet grows up, it wants to fly  
like the heart of a horse in the circus.

Hush, people, I'm tired of all your crying,  
you'll wake the bullet that wants my city.  
Go to sleep, people, and when you wake  
you'll have a circus of murdered swans.

## THE UNIT

We sat around a table, each of us with a tray that had our name on it, but first names only, for privacy. Privacy from whom, we didn't ask. Certainly not from the therapists, psychiatrists, nutritionists, nurses, social workers-in-training who made up, in their words, our "team." Our trays were filled with individually wrapped everything: slices of bread, slices of deli meat, slices of cheese, graham crackers that came two to a pack, granola bars, miniature boxes of cereal, miniature cartons of milk, Dannon yogurts in coffee or blueberry or vanilla. Nutritional supplements called Boost in strawberry, vanilla, chocolate and, occasionally, butter pecan. We had thirty minutes. We hid the food we could—cream cheese spread under the table, an energy bar strategically stuck to the bottom of a chair. If we got caught, we lost privileges like smoking or standing up. They called it Unit Restriction and Bed Rest. We called it fucking bullshit. At the end of the meal, a nurse checked each of our trays. She made us scrape yogurt containers until there was nothing left, not even a skid-mark of blueberry, and turn over our milk containers to prove they, too, were empty. We had to gather any crumbs.

They had access to our files. They held daily meetings about each of us, and in those meetings they discussed our daily vital signs, what we ate and when, the time it took us to finish our food, how many ounces of fluid we drank, the medications we were taking, the dosages, side effects, our compliance (or lack thereof) in matters of food, drink and meds. They knew our weights, down to the ounce. We wondered if they were ever jealous; if they ever compared their heights and weights to ours. Especially the social workers, the Jessicas and Kimberlys, with their bouncing ponytails and crisp button-downs tucked into skirts that stopped just shy of the knee. We saw how they

crossed their legs when they led us in group therapy—carefully, so as to provide the illusion of orderly, containable thighs. We saw how they looked at themselves when they passed mirrors, windows, doors made of glass.

Most of them didn't stick around very long. Our unit was where they went while waiting for something better. So we saw them off to getting fellowships, having babies, changing career directions entirely. Who wanted to work with us? The therapists, we imagined, would have preferred the straight-up depressives; the nurses and dieticians had surely hoped for diabetics. Instead, they got us. Occasionally, a guy would join our unit; but mostly we were girls—even if we were women in our fifties, we were girls—who were not to be trusted with, among other seemingly-innocent offenders, pockets, batteries, nail polish remover. Because we would hide our food, falsely elevate our weights, try to kill ourselves. We were exhausting, incorrigible, entitled, wastes of everyone's time.

While we were there, they tried their darndest to keep us alive, but only because it was their job.

Sometimes we fell into bragging: Could we wrap our fingers around our biceps? Our ankles? Had we grown any lanugo? How big and how numerous were the clumps of hair we found in the shower? Did we have edema? Were we orthostatic? How low was our body temperature? Heart rate? Did we have osteoporosis, or just osteopenia? Did we need an IV, a feeding tube? Had we ever? How many times had we been hospitalized? For how long? How many calories did we eat at home, how much did we exercise, how often did we weigh ourselves? And, shyly, because this was a question we really weren't supposed to ask: *what was your lowest weight?*

They liked to speak to us in catchphrases, platitudes itching to be embroidered onto pillows. Variety is the spice of life, they'd tell us. Food is fuel. We learned that fat was good for satiation and taste, that our bones needed milk and periods, that food is more appeal-

ing when it isn't all the same color. So, turkey on white bread with a banana and vanilla wafers and milk was out. It should be turkey on whole wheat bread with a red apple and chocolate chip cookies and orange juice. That was better, wasn't it? Did we see?

We saw. We weren't idiots. But we wanted to ask them what world, exactly, they thought we lived in. Because the one in which we would show up at school or work with a brown paper bag filled with this earnest lunch seemed appropriated from a fifties sitcom. Especially when we took into account the lunches we saw our nutritionists themselves eat—a rubbery bagel from the hospital cafeteria, salad with ranch dressing clearly asked for *on the side*, a paper carton of soup with mushroom-barley sloshed over the edge.

Cigarettes. Phone calls. Coffee. Walks around the block. These were our privileges. If we were close to discharge, we got day passes. My father called it “being on leave,” as though we were in the army. We would go out into the world for a few hours, slipping off our hospital bracelets, attempting to pass for sane. We would go out into the world with a specific task: eat a sandwich in a restaurant. Maybe we really would go into the restaurant, order the sandwich off the menu in a too-soft voice, spread a napkin over our laps and eat it. Or half the sandwich. Or the whole thing, plus chips—but then we'd throw it up. Or we wouldn't go into the restaurant at all, and instead we'd buy a cup of black coffee and feel our hearts skitter up against our ribcages. It was always a relief to come back. To come home, we said, by mistake.

In psychotherapy group, we rated our feelings on a chart of one to ten. We were never a ten. We were twos and threes and crying and shaking our legs to burn calories, sitting up straight as rods to burn calories, counting the calories we'd eaten so far, knowing we couldn't burn them all, couldn't get even close—but as soon as we were discharged, then we would. We talked about our fear of the unknown, which was really just our fear of how many calories were in the piece

of pie with its mandatory whipped cream we were going to eat during one of our three snacks as a “challenge” food.

There was something they were trying to get out of us. They wanted us to talk about something *real*. But it was hard to think about the lives we’d left behind. It was too much to ask of us. We could give them only this: we were there. That’s where we lived, in the moment of our being there, locked up, shoelace-less, peeing into plastic hats with little lines that measured our urine in cc’s, shitting into commodes. We could talk about that—our shitting—but the therapists didn’t want to hear it. We were constipated, they got it. Enough already. But it was never enough for us. We could talk about shitting all day, if they’d let us.

The attending physician prescribed Metamucil and Colace.

A good anorexic is a dead anorexic, our therapists liked to tell us, meaningful eyebrows raised. We widened our eyes and tried to look chastened, but really, we always took it the wrong way. They meant to scare us, but we saw it as a criticism, proof of our failure to be true anorexics. We weren’t thin enough. Our heartbeats were too steady, our nail beds too pink, our bones not imminently apt to crumble.

Still, anorexic was the best thing to be. Bulimic was the worst. We felt sorry for the bulimics, with their ruined teeth, swollen cheeks and average bodies. “It’s much harder to be an anorectic than it is to be a bulimic,” my always-on-a-diet mother said one evening during visiting hours. “Yeah,” my brother said. “We’re so proud of you.” My brother and I laughed, but our mother, her voice thinning to a whistle, said, “That’s not really what I meant!” Her use of the word “anorectic” showed she’d been studying up. Regular people might call us “anorexics” but she knew “anorexic” to be an adjective. “Anorectic” was the true and rightful noun. We were embarrassed for her.

Heather had a dual diagnosis. She was bulimic and also an alcoholic. One day, her boyfriend came to visit her and she went down on him in the day room. Liz’s children, ages four and seven, walked

in on them. The fact of the children was what made the story so wonderful. Without them, the story was a different one. Take out the children, and it was hard to tell why we all felt so surely, so smugly, that what Heather had done was wrong. Heather got transferred to the substance abuse unit, and sometimes she'd wave to us from her new window when we were out on smoke breaks. We waited in a line for the Kimberly or Jessica to light us up.

We were woken at 6AM by nurses aids, who were the nicest—most likely because they only spent this early morning time with us, when we were too groggy to rage or cry. We would put on paper gowns that gaped open in the back. We held the paper tightly to ourselves, a last-ditch effort at dignity. In the weight room, we had to let go of the back of the gown so the nurse could check us for objects we might have taped to ourselves in an effort to trick their scales. Here's what the nurses didn't understand: we were never tricking *them*. It was never personal, though they always acted as though it were. Our thinness was like a piece of art, or a newborn child: that precious, that hard-won and spectacular.

Of course we tried to protect it.

During our intake interviews, there were forms for us to fill out. One of the forms asked that we finish the sentence "I am..." Most of us couldn't think of an answer, and we left that one blank. Our minds moved slowly, as if underwater, thoughts rippling to the surface and then sinking back into the murk. And our mothers—because it was most often our mothers who brought us there—seeing us fail to answer that question, would lean over and hiss, "I can't believe how sick you are." But a few of us came up with good answers: *I am blond; I am female; I am fucking pissed off.*

Our thinness was the true rest of that sentence. To take that away from us was outrageous. No. It was cruel. And so we cried and raged and they called us manipulative, non-compliant. They weighed us backward, and if we cut ourselves, they also checked our bodies for fresh wounds, running their hands over our old scars like scanners at

the airport. Efficient, disinterested.

If this hospitalization was our first, we might get visitors every night, and those visitors might include our parents, our siblings, our grandparents, our friends (because, if this was our first, we probably still had friends). They'd bring gifts like flowers, but in plastic vases so we couldn't kill ourselves. They weren't allowed to bring us food. But greeting cards, yes. We'd line our rooms with all the cards we received, each cheering us on, in various fonts, to *Get Well Soon!!*

If this hospitalization was not the first, but rather the third or fifth or eighth, we definitely wouldn't get flowers, but we might still get cards. Only those cards would have a different tone. Those *Get Well Soon!!s* would start to sound more like commands. If we didn't have visitors—if we were lost causes—we would watch *Jeopardy!* “Alex Trebek is my visitor tonight,” we'd say. We'd watch and we'd knit and call out answers in the form of questions. “Hey, you're pretty good at that,” someone's father was bound to say.

When we said we felt fat, they said, “Fat is not a feeling.” They gave us worksheets. What did we really mean, they asked us, when we said “fat”? They gave us options: lonely, scared, angry, and also a few sophisticated suggestions, like *maudlin* and *melancholy*. We were to check a feeling off, circle the space around a feeling, fill in a blank. “There,” the Jessica or Kimberly would say. “Very good. So just remember, when you say you're feeling fat, it's actually, okay, in this case...maudlin!”

Maudlin!

Yippee!

They couldn't help the way they spoke. They'd been trained, and we were crazy. Because how could we—really, how?—look in the mirror and see anything but our grotesquerie? Our Halloween-skeleton bodies? Our sallow skin, our bulging eyes and sharp, sunken faces, making us look angrier than we really were. Or maybe (we would think,

years later, looking at old pictures, remembering this time), exactly as angry as we really were.

But fat was a feeling in the most elemental sense. We felt it with our reptilian brains, in the dumb, animal tongue of the body, sharp as hunger or thirst. They pointed to our bones and if that didn't work, our BMIs, and even if we saw the bones, understood their charts, we also still felt the fat, the phantom limb of fat, pale and softly quivering, a mound of risen dough just before it's punched.

Dr. Katz was our favorite psychiatrist. He told us all we were fat. I'm fat, we'd tell him, and he'd say, "Yeah, you're quite the cow." "Then don't make us keep gaining weight," we'd say, victorious, but also ducking our heads to hide our smiles. "I gotta," he'd say. "Gotta get that BMI closer to normal." We scowled, crossed our arms. "Then why'd you say we were fat?" It almost felt like we were flirting with him. Like we were, or could be, eyelash-batting coquettes who knew how to have fun. Phat with a ph, he'd say. He had two daughters, and he told us he had beds on reserve for them both. He'd written a book for parents called *You Are Not to Blame*.

When we'd gained enough weight or our insurance ran out, we were discharged. We made each other goodbye cards with glitter during art therapy. We said we were glad to be leaving, thank goodness we were done with all that. We said we were counting down the minutes, and never that we were afraid. We promised to keep in touch, but most of us didn't. Outside of the hospital, we stopped making sense in each other's lives.

We did call each other when there was a death. There was no one in our lives outside who understood what we had lost. "What a waste," the people we lived with—our parents, roommates, spouses—might say. "She was only thirty." And they would go on with their day, but we kept remembering: how she used to crochet everyone slippers with animal faces, how wonderful she was at braiding our



hair, the way we used to line up for her. “Which one of you lugnuts is next?” she used to say. We remembered her sitting hunched over in the day room after meals, knees pulled up to her chin, hairy stringy around her shoulders. She was not to be touched. We remembered her name.

Sometimes we’d have a dream about our dead, and we’d wake up sweating. The dead person would say, “I didn’t die! I don’t know why you thought I did.”

And we’d say, “Oh, good. But please be careful. Please take care of yourself.”

We tried, some of us, to meet up for coffee. We missed each other. “Do you remember ‘Variety is the spice of life?’” we said, when we got together. And, “‘Fat is not a feeling!’”

We stirred and drank our coffee and said wasn’t it great that we could use as much Splenda as we wanted now. How the particular joy of unlimited Splenda was one no regular person could ever understand.

And then we didn’t have anything else to say.

f

unusually : generally : more : otherwise :  
various : many : your : other



JESSICA LANAY

## BLACK GIRL NOTES TO/ON SÁNDOR FERENCZI

JULY 2014. WEST PALM BEACH

You would have appreciated the mock documentary. My mother and I sat on the couch, our bodies like nautilus chambers. Me curved smaller against her curving. The CGI enlivened the slick black bodies of merpeople. The thesis was that people did not plop from a tree—like some burden of fruit. But that they writhed onto land, and after many sufferings, learned to take in air. No wonder we have such a hard time, why we linger at water's edge. The backlash was total. The mock documentary was considered misleading, too real, inaccurate. My mother was in it for the merpeople. But the idea rested in me like bread on water, the tiny minnows of my thought picking away. If this is at all plausible—the whole white kernel of the world becomes wrong—even you.

FEBRUARY 2015. BRONX, NYC

Let's be clear. You and your teacher, Freud, were rampant racists. I don't even exist in your catalog of human specimens. I think I am at a point now that I can talk to you because if you were reincarnated in my kitchen; some purple jelly slopped from my sandwich that takes your form like a scene from *Hellraiser*, I know at least five mothers who live on my floor that can re-educate you. I would make you read Helen Oyeyemi—she writes and lives in your country of birth. I suspect that your apprenticeship to Freud was fraught. That he was sure of my inferiority, but that you were in it for the funding. Your notions of water origin and vagina centered worlds got you laughed out of the academy. Still, that's a start.

MAY 2015. MACON, GA

I am at a bar where the wood is sticky like my tongue. I am stomping my feet and the lyrics to the bluegrass come from my mouth like bolts of yellow silk evaporating. I sway like a plum coral fan planted on a reef. And I can't help but recall what you say about sex. That it is fueled by needing to cool off, return to water. That we push and grunt our way into each other, grapple with our skins, trying to go home. *Etútú*. Sandór, that means "to cool" in Yoruba. It is what my auntie's tongues click out when they call our godfolk from the water.

JANUARY 2016. SAVANNAH, GA

I love cities where the living know their place. All my folks come from cities like that. Entire places rimmed by sea line, choked with salt that provides the air on which the dead drink. I am explaining you to my auntie who draws people's blood for a living. Her scrubs are decorated in little spots of coral. Suddenly my everything below my belly button is like a ruffled yellow bird, chirping and popping up and down like a hot seed in an oily pan. I stop and drink a glass of water, say to my aunt that I want to go swimming. She replies, "But baby, you know it is jellyfish season."

SEPTEMBER 2016. PITTSBURGH, PA

Your letters to Freud can be boiled down to you shouting, “Please believe me!” But with all the attention he was getting, you were hardly worth the trouble. So much for friendship and scholarly attachments. My professor and I talk during break about taking your theories in essence and reviving them through a black feminist queer lens. In short—someone needs to tell you about your sorry ass, about what you really meant to say all that time. f

## IN THE END

**W**e have finally realized nothing matters. It has taken our whole lives up until now. Since nothing matters, nothing must be said or done when something unfortunate happens between us, like when one of us doesn't tell the other they have stained their shirt, or eats the other's after-meal sweet without asking. All the little hurts and lies evaporate somewhere off into space. So we don't hug or say sorry, and only if it's something particularly grievous, like if one of us were to stab the other in the meat of her thigh after taking the wrong medication, would we maybe share a brief meaningful gaze with one another.

We are very old and nothing is so important that we should spend what little energy we have on it. We have some lipstick on our teeth and are happy not knowing it; we are happy in our loose lovely skin with our sagging breasts we've grown so fond of; we are happy with the shapes our faces have folded into. We have impressed ourselves all our lives and now we just sit back and admire our impressiveness. It is something to see, all of us so old and happy. We are resting, like ancient trees.

The unknown no longer bothers us because it has all turned out okay until now.

And we're prepared for the end whenever it comes.

Millie's husband Ronald died in his sleep two days ago. She went into his room in the morning and said, Good morning, Ronald. And his silence said, Ronald has moved on. Then she called us to his room and together we looked at Ronald's partly open mouth and thought of how lovely his dancing was.

So long, Ronald, we said.

Nelda in room 103 died last week from Pneumonia and just a



month ago emphysema finally suffocated our long-suffering next-door neighbor, Martin.

Here, death is like getting the mail.

Here, take it with your eggs and toast.

Here, the beds are not that comfortable, the rooms aren't the cleanest and the food isn't that well prepared. Life takes its course.

We gathered Ronald's veneers and toothbrush, his wallet and bowtie collection, his shoebox of valuables—wedding ring, paper notes, his father's comb, his mother's gold tooth—and packed Ronald into plastic bins beneath our beds. In place of Ronald went Francis; in place of Ronald's veneer's went Francis's; instead of his photo albums, her romance novels; instead of his cane, her oxygen tank, and so on.

Millie is always dreaming of flying. She says, Last night, I soared over Chicago.

Francis asks, Did you see my family's old house?

Millie says, I only saw the fingertips of skyscrapers through the clouds.

Oh, Francis sighs, How nice.

Francis cannot remember her dreams but her unconscious frequently drifts to one of the young nurses aids. It has nothing to do with sponge baths.

There's a lot of love undercover here, hiding in the fake plants and gray meal trays; the smell of disinfectant and bodies that are regularly losing something—a sliver of curled toenail, a flock of white wispy hairs; a bubble of spit, a full bladder. A young man visits Mr. Lewis every Wednesday to give him his "foot rub"; the therapist and the a.m.receptionist make love in the spare units; Mr. and Mrs. Tiegle, almost never leave their room. Now there's Millie and Francis and together they aren't alone. It's rare for there to be a spark between a person who is ninety-six and one who's eighty-three. But it's there.

At night we sneak to the rooftop in our white cotton gowns and soft blue slippers.

Mille says, Ronald was a good husband.

She says, Sometimes he was hard to talk to—but his hearing aid was old.

What? Francis asks.

And they smile, despite the ache.

We name a star somewhere Ronald. Maybe Ronald's Ronaldness is drifting somewhere nearby.

Francis and Millie go back to their room and comb each others' hair. It would be romantic to say that they turn out the light and find the parts of each other that never get old. Tongues. Throats. The backs of their eyelids. Touch, touch. But they don't. Their love is something else.

Everyone believes that the year before you die is lonely, but it's the best time anyone's ever had. We see and hear everything people think we cannot see and hear. Mr. Habib sneaks away with two to three extra ice cream cups every night and when he gets caught, he just stares at the aids quiet and lost-looking until they kindly lead him back to his room.

Mr. Habib, one says, You have diabetes.

He forgets, whispers the other, It's his dementia.

We know it takes a special kind of person to work in a place like this, where things move so slowly, and people sometimes mumble so cryptically, and there is always a mess to clean. Where crocheting and Girl Scout choirs and bingo games rove on in an endless cycle, like Vegas, but at one one-thousandth the speed. Most of the people involved in these activities are not as involved in reality. Crocheting is the best of one because we can float far away while we do it; we can leave and visit our grandchildren while our hands twiddle away.

Francis crochets every Tuesday while her unconscious plays. Afterwards, she finds us and says, I think I am ready to go home now.

You are home, we say.

She looks around considering this, then agrees.

Did I ever tell you, she says, That I have not seen my children in

six years. And everyone used to love me.

We know it has been at least eight years since anyone has visited, but we know it is not for lack of loving; we know that here, time means nothing.

All of us detach from reality and have to be brought back from time to time—it's usually what got us here in the first place. The rivers running through our brains are flooding into oceans. There is no stopping it.

Once someone starts detaching, the aids sign them up to engage their softening minds in synapse-preserving activities. Francis does all the activities. She doesn't have much of a choice as she thinks she's somewhere else most of the time. When someone separates from reality, we hide it from the aids the best we can. One of us has to supervise.

Francis almost twenty-four seven; we work her in shifts; jab her in the ribs when the aids march by so she looks alive. But now that Millie is always holding her hand, Francis looks less lost.

After Francis comes back from crocheting we have our weekly Remembrance Meetings. It's a special activity; our secret. This week's theme is *The Worst You Ever Saw*.

I saw my cousin break her arm, Francis says.

I saw someone jump off a building to their death, Millie says.

Agnes has lived through two wars.

Last week we played *That Was A Crazy Night* and Agnes told us about the time she robbed a restaurant with an empty gun (just once) (and got away with it) and Francis talked about the night her brother drowned.

Every Sunday night, we play *Who Has The Most Dead Friends*, except this time we don't share memories unless it's truly special; this time we take turns making tally marks by our names on a white board in the lounge, above a vase of plastic calla lilies on a pink stand. We don't mind the flowers' inauthenticity; they look real enough to us.

We know that the part of death that hurts so badly is the absence

of the tiny things that make up a person, like that they never lasted through a whole film; that they said thank you at inappropriate times and yelled when anyone was late and always prayed before eating. A million little holes to fall through.

Millie helps keep Francis brain-strong. Their friendship is the deepest and shortest they've ever had because life changes rapidly here. A bad aid gets hired and some of us shit our pants over delays in bathroom schedules—it happens. Last year we ate hamburger casserole every night for two months because of budget problems. Most of our tastes have faded anyway; so we pretended the casserole was something different like we do with everything else.

People come and go. Everywhere they're getting older every day. Our rooms are in steady demand—high demand if you consider the rate at which we move out of them and into the beyond. Fortunately there's rarely any violence, but there are a lot of attacks—gall bladder, heart, ulcer. We never know what's going to happen and a good deal of the time we do not know what's going on in the first place so we're completely blindsided when Millie slips in the shower.

She breaks her hip; sprains both wrists; hits her soft veiny skull on the cracked yellow tile.

Gravity erodes. Our bones waste to porous shells of their milk-strong younger years faster everyday. Once we get to a certain age, they'll be so hollow a strong wind could sweep us up—this is what we tell Francis on her ninety-fifth. We celebrate while Millie is away at the hospital getting her hip fixed. We wheel Francis to the rooftop, tie ribbons around our wrists, and wait for the wind.

No one says it, but everyone knows a fall or the death of a spouse is the middle of the end—phase two, after coming here. Phase three is dying. But Millie has survived worse.

Francis has trouble remembering it's her birthday, which is okay because we know by now that age doesn't mean much.

The sun shines; it's not too hot, not too cold, and not windy. Francis stands at the edge of the rooftop and looks out over everything

she can see from there. She spots green shapes in the courtyard and says, We must have pleasant trees out front. She looks up into the blue sky; the clouds, she assumes, are remarkable shapes—we all take turns guessing them.

No one floats off.

After awhile we amble back inside.

Maybe next year, Francis says, The wind will finally take me away.

Having lived so much has its difficulties when you're far enough detached. Your mind could crack open at any moment and who knows who will emerge. Some of us can't help that bad people have lived inside us; sometimes they appear when our heads wander away; we are not even looking when they come out. So we have to take care of the ones who have wandered off for good—we know it's not really them who has to be tranquilized in the hallway.

It's impossible to know everyone inside someone. Millie and Francis have been a hundred different lovers; they've had lives in different states and states of mind, and have been different mothers to different children, plus whoever else they've been to anyone who ever met them or might have watched them from far away thinking they were beautiful.

We are all we've got, plus Millie, who we leave an empty chair for at our Remembrance Meeting where we play, *That Was the Last Time I Saw Them* and share our surprising final memories of people we've lost.

Some of us have seen spirits leave peoples' bodies and float off into the atmosphere; some of us have watched people predict their death or walk willingly towards it; or turn their lives around just to have it sneak up suddenly on their short-lived happiness.

All of us are glad we made it here. We wake up here each morning as expected, eat the same breakfast, socialize in the lounge; send another letter because we forgot we sent one last week; cut different shapes out of colored paper; watch our shows, and so on.

Any upset in our routine baffles the few blinking neurons still shuffling around up there and when that happens, the aids find us staring off in a corner of a room with one shoe half-tied. So when Millie gets back from the hospital, she is scheduled for every activity available in between her physical therapy. Before that she only did craft hour on Thursdays and sometimes went with Francis to bingo.

Since Millie broke her hip, she's crocheted three blankets and a scarf. When we visit, she shows them to us, dazed with joy.

It's normal for people to be a little off for the first few days after getting back from the hospital. We're used to this. We smile at her with the same enthusiasm as usual when she asks, for the third time, Did I show you the blankets I crocheted in the hospital?

Francis cries a little. Millie's hands are perfect for holding. She holds them. She has realized not much else matters. It has taken her whole life up until now. f

SHRODE HARGIS

## POSEIDON

I wish like hell  
I could surface again  
in a river and find my father,  
sunburnt, with a foam  
koozie in his hand.  
The day is shirtless  
with sunblock and cut-off  
denims, and he's wearing  
the mustache he'll soon  
banish to a photo album  
along with his fat glasses.  
I wrap my race-car  
towel around my body  
and sit on his lap  
so I can press my thumb  
into the blue  
snakes that are his forearm veins.  
He draws the outlines  
of states on the brown side  
of a Budweiser box Indiana  
Kentucky and explains  
which way the river goes,  
how the water sheds  
its name at the sharp end  
of Illinois and stays that way  
until it gets big and round  
with salt. I try to imagine how long

and tough and dirty  
his toenails would be were we  
to follow the path  
of his pencil, drifting day and night  
with no pajamas. Just belts  
made of stars, boloney & crackers,  
and the river slopping  
against the hull.  
The sound of a giant  
wetting his lips.



MEG REYNOLDS

## RITE OF PASSAGE

Between spine-stubborn roots, pine needles are dry hair  
crackling indigo and slate. Around the rim of the lake  
sloshes alcohol and starlight. Even if I hold  
the night-black bark in my fists like a skirt  
in the wind, we won't stop. In the trail, my grandmother  
carves two long tracks in the curve of a girl.

My hair is braided to my grandmother's.  
Lock over lock, she's knotted and holds  
as close as a sunfish holds lake  
water. There were times when I was a girl  
that the essence of pleasure was to have my hair  
brushed and braided at the hem of her skirt.

But what do I know of pleasure? The house lifts its skirts  
as a boy wrests me toward it. My grandmother  
stumbles and thuds behind me, her hair  
snapping like frozen power lines against the hold  
of messy tangles and his engine legs. *I'm your girl!*  
*Don't leave me!* I scream at the lake.

The moon noses my underwear on the lake,  
oil-black and mirrored. I ask, *Who shucked off my skirt?*  
*What kind of person wants to get inside a girl*  
*with a grandmother tied to her head?* My grandmother  
says she would rather be thawing steak tips, asks to hold  
a blanket over me or at least wrap a towel around my hair.

Inside, he forces his hand, his tongue, my girl-  
tongue flares back with love. I taste wet hair  
and lake water and my grandmother.  
As I slide, naked and drunk, into a lake  
of fire, he runs a cold shower. She cries, *Your skirt!*  
*Where is it? Be a lady. Don't you let him take hold.*

But he has me now. He stands to hold  
my head down. I am no longer a girl  
but a mouth. My grandmother crouches like a skirt  
at my waist. He can't feel her through my hair.  
I'm the wet catch, silver he got out of the lake.  
He'll soften if he hears the voice of my grandmother.

And though he can't see her, my grandmother  
sees him and goes quiet for a second and ink-heavy as the lake.  
Then she says, *Look what he's done. Look what he's done to your hair.*

## INTIMATE OSSUARIES

The evening storm writes this city's young men. The brown limp of winter in every crack of the city's cobblestones teaches them how to etch the silhouette of the birds in flight: the feathers glued together to form the wings, the open beak, cartilages. A thin film of dust on every leaf – the city began as a roundabout history of forms set in motion elsewhere. A city manufactured inside the redundant alphabets, fragile dust, brittle pages. A skinny girl: boycropped hair, quill-thin arms. Trying to forge this city's ribcage from its insistent coughs. She is gathering between her palmlines what this city harvests: used bookshacks, coffee-houses, lonely neighborhood parks, tramlines, tobacco-stained lips. No one taught her how to write herself as the chronicler of an unborn night. How to document this collapse of the present within her veins. The city rarely teaches its young women to etch the bones of the unchronicled poets. Rarely teaches them to hammer in a storm on the mirror. No one will buy this portrait of a city's detritus: no museum will light her way home. She barns her collectibles inside the marrow of her bones, illustrates them with tomato-crimson petals. When she will prance around the terrace at dawn, the storm will be raging: elsewhere.

## INCLEMENT WEATHER

Ms. Lee stood on the patio in front of her condo in a long wool coat, while her small dog yipped and tried to climb her leg. She must have been waiting a long time; the snow accumulated on her shoulders. Colton made eye contact with her as he pulled into the parking lot, and she waved him over. He had no choice but to comply. His grandmother had trained him too well. He pulled his pickup up to her garage door and grabbed his stocking hat off the passenger seat. Five inches of snow lay on the ground already, and the meteorologists had promised another nine. At 11:00 AM, Colton had already put in seven hours, and the storm wasn't supposed to let up until late. He was going to have a very long day. He got out of the truck.

"Yeah?" he said as he dodged the big plow blade on the front of the Chevy.

"I don't understand." She planted her hands on her hips, which shook some of the flakes from her shoulders.

"Oh," said Colton.

She waited, but Colton said nothing. "I don't understand how we can hire you to plow the lot, and then we never see you. If you don't want our business, just say so. If... if you can't take this seriously, then just forget the whole deal."

The responses raced through Colton's head. *I'm real sorry, but I'm here now.* Or, *we agreed that I'd stop over every three to four inches, but when it's coming down like this, it's tough.* Even something like, *I could alter my route, but we'd have to take another look at what I'm charging you.* But nothing reached his lips. He just stood there.

“Say something,” Mrs. Lee demanded.

People ordered Colton to “say something” a lot. Back in school, some of his teachers made that demand with gentle sweetness, while others barked it like drill sergeants. His grandma told him to “say something” all the time, like when she asked him what he wanted for breakfast, or when she made him sit on the couch to chat. Sometimes Colton was able to talk, but never after someone told him to “say something.” No words ever came after that.

“Unbelievable,” said Mrs. Lee. “I can assure you, this is the last time you’ll have this job. I don’t care who you know.” She shook her head and turned to go inside. “And we’re not paying you for this time, either.” She bent over to grab the dog’s rope off the ground, and clipped it to the animal’s collar. “Go potty, Tika. Hurry up.”

Colton stood still and nodded. No responses blew through his head this time. He didn’t even know what to think. He turned, got in his truck, and started to work.

The repetition of the job calmed him down. His snowplow was like an artist’s paintbrush. He knew exactly where the corner of the blade was. He knew exactly where to turn and how to push the piles of snow into uniform banks. He could plow within a few inches of a building and never nick the siding. The Evergreen Court Condominiums’ lot was a big one, six buildings with four units each, surrounding a broad expanse of blacktop. Colton started at the far side, as far away from Mrs. Lee as he could get.

By the time he returned to Mrs. Lee’s end, the first part he plowed had collected a layer of snow. But that didn’t make any difference. The old people who lived in Evergreen Court would never leave on a day like today, no matter what appointments they might have or how much they needed to grocery shop. But they were still obsessed with keeping the lot plowed. Maybe they wanted it clear in case a kid or grandkid stopped over for a surprise visit. Maybe they just didn’t have enough to worry about anymore.

Colton came around the front of Mrs. Lee’s building and pushed

away the snow that had drifted up next to her garage door. He angled the plow at the last minute so the resulting snow bank didn't extend onto her patio. He backed up to plow another row, when he saw it.

On the first plow of the year, the heavy steel blade picked up all sorts of stuff. Sticks, frisbees, plastic pop bottles, rocks, everything buried under the snow ended up sticking out of those first snow banks. But after that, the lots stayed pretty empty. He'd mangled a few sleds that kids had forgotten in their driveways, but he'd never hit anything too significant, too tragic.

Until now. The dark spot in the snow bank grew as he watched it, a small blob ringed with red. At first he denied it, even though he could see the dog's severed rope laying right there in the lot. He denied it as his hands started to shake and his throat closed and all of a sudden he couldn't breathe. He was going to die too, right there in the truck, because he choked and couldn't get any air. He gasped and almost threw up and felt the urge to run. He wanted to put the truck in gear and drive away, but he stopped himself.

Instead he climbed out of the cab to inspect, because maybe there was a chance Mrs. Lee let her dog in and he just hit the rope and what looked like a mangled dog bleeding in the snow bank was an illusion, an old mitten reflecting the Chevy's headlights in some weird way. But as he approached the mound, he saw the remains, like so many rabbits dead in the road. He looked away quick. Maybe if he didn't acknowledge it, it wouldn't be true.

He wasn't proud of his plan, but it was the only one he had, and he had to act fast. He got back in the truck, plowed the next swipe, and angled the truck to deposit the snow on top of the dog's carcass. No evidence remained, at least not until spring. His grandma would be so disappointed. She would tell him to take responsibility and talk to Mrs. Lee, but he couldn't do that, no matter how much he wanted to, no matter how hard he tried. He plowed the rest of the lot like he would have anyway, like nothing ever happened. He glanced at Mrs. Lee's door with every pass, convinced she would emerge with the

wrath of Jesus in her eyes, but she remained inside, clueless about the murder of her little dog.

When he finished, he turned down the driveway, and out onto the road. He had a ton more work to do, and he was almost out of gas.

Focus on the work and the rest will take care of itself. That's what his grandma always said.

But while he waited for his tank to fill, Colton couldn't help but stare at the businessman on the other side of the pumps. The guy's trench coat was covered with ice. He took off his glasses and tried to wipe away the condensation with his damp lapel, which streaked the lenses worse than before. He stepped in a puddle, then lifted his soaked foot. "Give me a break," he said. After the guy swiped his credit card and settled to watch the numbers on the screen tick upward, he leaned to make eye contact with Colton between the pump and the column with the windshield-washing buckets. "You must love this," the businessman said, pointing at the plow on the front of Colton's truck.

Colton looked up and shrugged. "Sure." His hands wouldn't stop shaking.

"Yeah, well..." The guy wiped a handful of snow off the roof of his car and let it slop onto to the ground. "I hate this shit."

The shelter of the gas station roof created a small pocket of clarity in a landscape of angry, relentless white. The snow fell heavy and fast, flakes the size of marbles, sometimes straight down, sometimes horizontal. The lights of the cars out on the highway barely permeated the blizzard, but the shelter's fluorescent lights reflected back into the protected bubble, twice as bright as normal.

"I always wanted your job," said the guy. "Drive around all day, crank the radio. Make some big snow banks. It's like playing in a sandbox, right?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I've got god-damned depositions all day. You're the lucky

one, for sure.”

“Yeah.”

A fresh panic squeezed Colton’s chest. The guy leaned against his fancy car with his eyebrows raised. Colton’s customers gave him that face after they asked small-talk questions. “How’s business?” they always asked. “Fine,” Colton always said, because that’s what it was. It either snowed a lot, or it didn’t. If it did, there’d be a dry spell soon. If it didn’t, some was certainly on the way. It was always fine. But they stood there and waited for him to say something else, and he never knew what else to say. Fine. Everything was fine.

Colton copied the guy and leaned back against his truck, careful to avoid the rust spot above the rear wheel. He stared at the ground and nodded and realized how tightly he had clenched his jaw. He tried to think of something to ask. Depositions meant this guy was a lawyer, probably. Maybe an insurance guy. He could ask which. He could ask about the guy’s Lexus. He could comment about school. They didn’t cancel school, even though the storm was supposed to dump upwards of fourteen inches. Everyone had an opinion on that, either, “How could they not cancel school, those poor kids,” or “Good choice, they never cancelled school when we were young.” All Colton would have to say was, “Can you believe they didn’t cancel school?” Then they would talk, like people are supposed to.

A minute later, the guy stood up straight and removed the gas nozzle from his car. “Alright then,” he said. “Good luck out there.”

“Yep,” said Colton. The businessman got in his car while Colton’s truck guzzled more fuel. At least gas was cheaper than last year, cheaper than the last seven years. Colton could have talked about that. “Gas sure is cheap, isn’t it?” Then the guy would have said something like, “Sure is. Let’s hope it stays that way.” Then Colton could have said, “You bet. Anything under two bucks, I’m happy.” That would have worked.

Colton replaced the nozzle in the pump and climbed in his truck. It had been running since a little after four in the morning, so the heater blasting on the floor mats made them smell like hot rubber and



the cigarette burn holes in the bench seat released the mildew smell of damp foam and the fast food wrappers added a tinge of grease, of meat. Suddenly Colton was sweating, even as shivers raced across his shoulders. He cracked the window and pulled out of the protected cube into the winter stew.

His route had been planned since the first snow in November. On a map, it looked like Pac-Man, a big circuit of his grandma's friends from church, and a handful of apartment buildings and condo developments that his cousin handled maintenance for, and a few houses of people who got his number off the side of the Chevy. The plan needed tweaking every time it snowed. If the weather arrived before dawn, Colton had to start on the east side of the city, because when Mr. Halvorsen's driveway wasn't clear before he left for work, Colton got a phone call. If any more than three inches accumulated in the Evergreen Court Condominium's parking lot, he got a phone call from Mrs. Lee, so on a day like today he had to stop over there four or five times. He could save the south side for last, because the big city plows didn't get to that part of town until it stopped snowing. But when he took too long, when Mrs. Gross or Mr. Frank or Mr. Galloway had to sit in their cars in the street because their driveways were blocked, then Colton got calls.

That phone. That god phone. A hundred times a day, Colton's stomach twisted when a stray vibration from the truck or a stray noise from the radio reminded him of the ringing phone. And when it rang for real, the little electronic melody tortured him more than his teachers or his grandma ever could.

Two minutes and two stoplights outside the gas station, the phone rang.

"Yeah," said Colton.

"Is this Severson Plowing?"

"Yeah."

"I can't hear you. Is this Severson plowing?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, well, this is Tammy. My customers can't get into the park-

ing lot. Are you on your way over?"

"Right."

"Are you sure?"

Colton's right arm started shaking again, and his throat started to close. He breathed, slow. "Coming," he said, after a moment.

"So you'll be over soon."

"Okay."

"See you soon." Colton held the phone out in front of him for a moment, like a pot that needed to cool before he could set it on the counter. As soon as he placed it back in the cup holder, it rang again.

"Yeah," said Colton.

"Hey, Mike, from over on Summer Street."

"Hey."

"What the hell is going on?"

*What the hell is going on is this is the biggest blizzard I've ever seen, and nothing about our agreement could possibly cover what's happening out here today. Mike, I am doing my absolute best, and I promise I will be there ASAP.* "Nothing," said Colton.

"So you're not coming over? I'm just fucked then?"

"Nope."

"Nope what? What's that mean? Do I need to grab a shovel?"

"No."

"So when are you coming?"

*I am going to do my absolute best to get over there as soon as I can. And, hey, because this is such a crazy day, let me discount your bill ten percent. Consider that my apology, and my promise that I am doing everything humanly possible to meet your expectations.* "Soon," said Colton.

"Don't fuck with me. If you say soon, you better mean it."

Colton paused again, to wait for this throat to unclench. The windshield wipers had trouble keeping up with the snow. It took two swipes before he could force the words out.

"Okay."

"Okay," said Mike.

Colton took a left into a strip-mall parking lot to turn around. He tried to calm down, because he needed to think. Mike's place was almost straight west, four stops away, according to the original route, and Tammy's scrapbook shop was north of Mike's. A quick jog down the highway to Mike's, then up to Tammy's, then take the bypass back to where he left off, and Colton could salvage the day. That might work. It had to work.

He pulled out onto the highway, and at least he had the road almost to himself. A few other guys with their plows were out, and a few big four-wheel-drive SUVs, but that was it. When Colton squinted and tried to look past the flakes, he could see the outlines of the landmarks along the highway. The old barn with the painting of Jesus on it. The house with the big RV in the driveway. The brick supper club on the corner. As he drove, the snow fell even harder, harder than Colton had ever seen, harder than he thought possible. Three miles down the highway, he couldn't see any of the other cars on the road. He couldn't see anything at all. Almost a half-inch of snow collected on the driver's door armrest from the open window. Colton cranked it closed.

No matter how mad Mike would be, driving in a full whiteout was too dangerous. And there's no way Tammy's customers were angry about not being able to get into her lot, because she wouldn't get any customers on a day like today. Colton pulled off to the side of the highway, where the pickup's wheels skidded, which meant he found the gravel shoulder. He turned off the truck, clicked the button for his hazard lights, and sat back. The patter of the flakes on the windshield was so quiet, so gentle, that it made him nervous. The edges of his vision shimmered, like he had stared too long at a bright light. He had to keep working. He should close his eyes for a few minutes, for the only moments of sleep he would get for the next sixteen hours. But he wouldn't. There was too much to do.

The phone rang. Except this time, Colton ignored it.

Instead, he used his sleeve to wipe the condensation off the inside of the windshield, and he stared out into the thick swirl of white.

If he were buried in a snow bank, like Mrs. Lee's dog, that was exactly how it would look. All white, like a big blanket. Maybe it was nice, being covered like that.

If it snowed like that all the time, Colton could buy a new truck and move out of his grandma's trailer. He'd have to hire somebody. Maybe two or three guys. He had considered bringing on an employee a few different times, someone who could talk to customers and drum up more business, someone who could go door to door and hand out fliers with neighbor discounts to the houses and parking lots surrounding his existing customers. "Hi, I'm with Severson plowing. Are you sick of shoveling all the time? Would you rather enjoy the snowfall with a cup of cocoa instead of killing yourself with all that work? Well, since we're in the neighborhood already, we can take care of your snow for cheaper than you think."

He could print off business cards. He thought of what logo he could use, maybe a snow shovel or a snowflake. He could leave stacks all over town, at the churches, and the gas stations. He could send one of his guys with a bunch of cards to all the condo developments and old folks homes and apartment buildings. He could buy a new truck. Three new trucks.

The phone kept ringing. Maybe voicemail had yet to snag the first call, or maybe a second customer was on the line, or a third. All of a sudden Colton couldn't tell how long he'd been sitting there.

He had to get out of the truck. He had to see what it felt like, what it sounded like, to be buried in all that snow.

He exited through the passenger door and took a few steps into the ditch on the side of the highway. The snow came above his boots, and it stung his ankles as it packed in around his socks. Colton looked out over the field, then to his left and right, up and down the highway. He saw nothing. He turned around, and his truck, fifteen feet away, looked hazy and white in the blizzard. Only the dome light through the open door stood out, a single point of warmth in the impossibly deep nothing that enveloped him. Most people would flee back towards the light, but instead he turned to the field again, to

the immense quiet. The snow absorbed the sound of the phone. If anyone tried talking to him out here, Colton wouldn't be able to hear them, and it wouldn't matter what he said in return. The snow filled in his collar, and settled behind his ears.

And then the white wasn't all white anymore. Instead it flashed red and blue, and the blizzard stopped trapping all the sound, because Colton heard someone yelling.

"Hey," shouted the sheriff's deputy. "Are you all right? Everything okay?"

Colton shivered, and turned. He could barely see the woman standing up on the shoulder. He didn't say anything, only nodded.

"You sure? Your truck's not stalled out or anything?"

He shook his head.

"Okay. Waiting out this squall is a good idea, if that's what you're doing." She wiped the snow off the brim of her hat. "And thanks for using your flashers. That's what you're supposed to do." She leaned backward to see down the highway, past Colton's truck. "You sure you don't have anything to say?"

Colton just stared at her.

"That's fine if you don't," she said. "Take your time, but I need to keep moving."

*Thank you very much, but I'm okay. I just need a few minutes out here, and then I'll get right back to work.* Colton pictured the dog buried under all that snow. It probably wasn't even cold anymore. It didn't need to worry about awful Mrs. Lee anymore, or Mike or Tammy or anyone else. Colton wanted to feel what the dog felt. He decided to try.

"Thanks," he said to the officer. "I... I'm good."

"Okay." The officer turned back to her cruiser, but stopped. "If you've got time today, I could sure use someone to plow my driveway. You got a card I could have?"

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Mike and Tammy would have to wait. Colton wove back into town, past the gas station and the car dealership, back to the Evergreen Court condos, with all their mature trees, where one of the office ladies from his grandma's church lived. It looked like he had never been there. There had to be another two inches on the ground, and Mrs. Lee probably had her ruler at the ready, and as soon as she measured three she would dial Colton's number and sigh and tell him that he was terrible at his job and if it were up to her, she would have fired him three months ago. He pulled up to her garage door, and turned off the truck.

Colton didn't bother to grab his hat or his gloves, because it didn't matter. The chill no longer bothered him. He crossed in front of his truck and over Mrs. Lee's patio. The overhang above her door didn't make any difference. It snowed just as hard under it, flakes blowing up and down and sideways. He rang the doorbell.

The door opened half a minute later.

Mrs. Lee gathered her sweater in front of her chest with one hand. "What on earth do you want?"

It took Colton a long time, but he breathed and opened and closed his jaw and nodded and blinked, and finally he was ready.

"You... You need to be nice to me." He made himself look up at Mrs. Lee. "I'm doing... the best I can."

"I doubt that," she said. "If that's the case, your best is pathetic."

The dry furnace air poured out of Mrs. Lee's front door, melting the ice on Colton's clothes and warming his face. He preferred the cold.

"By... By the way," he said. "Your dog's dead."

Mrs. Lee glared at him. "I'm certain I let him in."

"I don't think so," said Colton. He turned and walked away as Mrs. Lee scanned the ground, each turn of her head more frantic as her breath came quicker and she started to moan, looking for what she had assumed was there. **f**

JESSICA LEE

## CHAIN REACTION

How many daughters use weather talk  
as metaphor, meaning

*Mom, it's raining hard, and cold*  
translates to

*I woke up, cold, with a hard*  
*man inside of me*

*I didn't want there.*  
*Wells dry, I stayed*

*quiet, more like snow*  
*than rain, really.*

How many daughters keep such stories  
just below

the surface like fish, restless  
beneath thin ice.

How many mothers wish their daughters  
hadn't learned to stop demanding what they want

and don't want.  
No matter. The fish, more like

shame—impossible to count  
those slippery shadow darts, hiding  
in the heat of tangled reeds  
impossible to account for love  
the way it tangles self and origin,  
broken daughter trying to protect  
the one who split for her.



DEREK GROMADZKI

## ECHOLALIA

All day long day at the water's end and halloos  
after saltgrass anthems to while away the lovely  
nothings where nothing lovely returns on wind  
in absentia from a witch's kite unspun and lentor  
ashake amid marram all day long day at the water's  
end where nothing lovely leaves on wind rewind  
around a witch's kite to while away the lovely  
nothings where nothing lovely returns all day long  
day at the water's end and halloos after saltgrass  
anthems.

## YOU, SOLDIER, AND OTHERS

I was on the phone, in the middle of booking a ten-day tour for a couple's thirtieth when I got an email from an old friend with your name in the subject. At first, I couldn't help but laugh at the odds. But I guess they were pretty high, ever since Vietnam was voted one of Travel and Leisure's "Top Ten Most Beautiful Places To Visit" a few years back. Now, the age of the internet has reduced my clients to the pseudo rich and the elderly and I run the whole thing out of my garage in Tarzana.

"Have you ever been?" the woman on the phone asks. "Not really."

When I tell her about the tunnels I can almost hear her eager fingers flipping through the index of her Rick Steve's, scanning the page till she finds it under Things To Do in Ho Chi Minh City (but to me it will always be Saigon).

They always insist on reading their travel guides out loud to me over the phone. This is my job, I want to say, but I let her get excited.

"The Chu Chi tunnels were dug with simple tools and bare hands," she reads slow and methodical and in her pauses I can almost see her eyes squinting as she leans towards the page, careful not to skip a line as she follows with her finger, "The tunnels provided the Viet Cong with refuge and defense against the American and South Vietnamese forces. American soldiers used the term 'Black Echo' to describe the Viet Cong who would emerge from the tunnels at night, all muddy, to scavenge for supplies or engage in battle. Air, food, and water were scarce in the vermin infested tunnels, and during periods of heavy bombing or American troop movement, they would be forced to remain underground for many days at a time."

A long pause and I imagine her looking up from the book,

smiling.

“Sounds wonderful,” I say.

I tell her the walking tour includes the headquarters where the VC brainstormed the Tet Offensive and the last attacks towards victory and the overthrow of Saigon and she counters by reminding me Saigon was also once Prey Nokor, a small fishing village, before the French colonized it in 1859. If you stare at something long enough, I guess it’s bound to become something else. She tells me the book also says they let you fire live ammunition from an vintage MK at the end of the tour.

“Yes, that too,” I say, “Very exciting.”

The email was from an old friend we used to know when I still worked for American and it said you crashed off the coast in a little two-seater flying back from Mexico a few weeks ago. A few weeks ago. You had been there on your annual trip with a few others from your congregation laying the foundation and building the framework of multiple houses outside of Tijuana. That he would have let me know sooner but he had to hunt down my information.

Bower, he wrote, that’s a nice name.

I don’t remember getting the client off the phone. Nor do I remember typing your name in the search bar, but there they were—a bunch of local news articles and a few pictures of a little one engine all lit up with with the flash, its left wing sticking out in the night, and I couldn’t help but think of that flight out of Honolulu where we met half a life ago and then to imagine you there on my screen or I guess somewhere close to Catalina, and if I could only see through all that steel and black water to you in the sea. I clicked around.

The Palisadian Post had a short blurb about you—an alumni of ‘66 three-year-varsity backstroker turned paratrooper turned swim instructor to the Los Angeleno elite and amateur pilot—who died from drowning when he ran out of gas less than a mile out.

They shipped you home on my flight. Back then, soldiers were advised to change into civilian clothes on their last leg home so they

wouldn't be accosted by protesters at the airport. But all we ever had to do was look in your eyes or watch your shoulders when the food cart went down the aisle. None of you fooled us. If it had been up to me I would have taken you all home, but your friend was the one that had the balls to ask. Eventually I knew it would lead to you.

I often wonder if you were so hollow as a kid, or if that was something you brought back. I remember the car crash when we were living in that shitty place off Laurel Canyon, us driving home and that red Shelby ran a red-or maybe you did- and the world broke loose and we came back upside-down and trapped amongst broken glass and bleeding and you were so calm so quiet, even then like it happened everyday. Psychological Inoculation, something some book said once when I still cared. I swear we were pulling shards out of our skin for weeks, cutting each other when we made love or tried to.

The Newport Breeze reported you were traveling alone and that the autopsy results indicated drowning. They said the water where you went down was only a few feet deep and then mud, causing the tiny plane to be sucked under soon after impact.

My fingertips felt prickly like pins and I thought maybe it was time for a glass of wine.

There was an open bottle in the fridge and I used the remote to flip on the set in the living room. Jon had left it on a news station-probably watching before work-and I listened to last night's game scores and put water on to boil. It'd have to be pasta tonight.

At the end of the article was a picture of a man that looked like you, but older and somehow different. Balding now and skinner, true, but I didn't remember your teeth ever showing. So tiny and tilted inward.

The newscaster on the TV wore a windbreaker and his hair flapped back and forth across his forehead-someone I didn't recognize, from

a syndicate or something. Yes the graphic on the bottom said he was outside of Boston. It must be a slow night for news, I thought, outside of you. On the beach where the newscaster stood with his shoes off, the white foam crests broke silently at his bare ankles as he pointed into the dark behind him. It looked as if the sun had been gone only an hour or so and the almost invisible water still clung to the rusty iridescence of a foggy sunset and there was something large on the sand the waves kept crashing into. Out there where he pointed. Large and black like a hole and what was he saying-it was a beast-a sperm whale, he said, washed up outside Rockport this morning, cause of death unknown. What they did know was that biologists called to the scene reported harpoons dating back to Melville still lodged in her flesh and as the camera zoomed in I could see them myself, these thick black slimy scars all over her now opalescent skin and then I felt you-no, Jon touch my shoulder and he was home. And the pot was boiling over and he was holding the empty bottle and asking why I was crying.

If you had died from drowning, then you must have survived the crash. If the water was only a few feet deep, then you must have been sucked under with the plane. You had survived everything else, but maybe that seatbelt was stuck or maybe it all happened too quickly or maybe this was just determinately it. And were you calm like you were with the Shelby when you finally realized what was happening? I can't think of you out there, having nothing left to breath but mud.

Jon made me eat a bowl of the pasta he finished before he poured me another glass of wine. As I lifted it to my mouth I could smell the tannin and he turned the channel to one of those animal ones with voiceover, something neutral in the background. He's good like that. One of the reasons I love him.

I've never told Jon about the last time I saw you, after the Northridge quake and I still had the need to call. Make sure you were okay. At the restaurant you said your whole chimney came down, crashed right through your patio and onto your driveway. I remember

the water on the table rippling and thinking ‘Jesus, here we go again’ and then you held my hand and I realized the shaking was me. Now it seems silly I didn’t tell Jon about it, but maybe I liked tucking it away. We don’t have many secrets. Jon prefers stories like the time you emptied our whole basket of groceries on the ground in the market because the line was too long or the time you got a little too sloppy and locked yourself out on our patio all night, screaming about nothing to the Hollywood Hills until a neighbor called the cops or the time you almost slapped me because I snuck up too quietly behind you in the kitchen one of those almost mornings when you couldn’t sleep.

But I would too if I were him.

As he cleared our plates I emptied the rest of the bottle into my glass and moved to the couch. All I tasted now was metal and I could feel him looking at me and wanting to help, wanting to touch. But I, I wanted to hurt, wanted to feel you drain back into me. As if old lovers ever leave. Not really. I could feel him behind me as he finished the dishes and waited for me to look at him and tell him with my eyes I was ready to talk, to be with him again and do this together but I couldn’t turn around. My glass empty and something in the ocean on TV and he said he was going up to shower. I heard his socked feet squish down on the carpeted stairs and then a door and then water. It could have been the TV or him, then I knew it was him because I could hear it pound against his skin, changing tone as he moved through it and what did the whale die from if not from her own scars and how long did it take for all that bloated blubber to be light enough to float up and be carried by the waves to that beach?

Do you think the break is clean when we die? All that ugly. But then what’s left and would you know it in the mirror? Did you want to? All shiny and white and un-you. You told me once when you were drunk that you shook their hands after, because it was you or them and you were always going to choose you.

We both did. Or maybe just I did. I thought of you on that final table, all cut open with mud oozing out, all the darkness coming with it and if I were there I would have grabbed a needle and sewed you up

and kissed your mouth and maybe I would have tasted mud or wine or you with you not there. You not anywhere.

Everything was heavy and I thought of opening another bottle. I heard the bathroom door creak, but muffled, and then maybe his feet on the stairs, maybe nothing. I don't know, maybe I slept.

But I remember my eyelids lifting and feeling frightened because the room was drowning and I thought you were here next to me and I was holding the harpoon and there you were on the screen, all white and bloated with the sea-not mud- and I didn't want you, empty with glory.

But it wasn't you, just an army of tiny jellyfish like plastic bags floating across the screen. And the voice filling the room and I couldn't find the remote. Whispering *turritopez donherknees turnitooplies donthurtme Turritopsis Dohrnii*, the immortal jellyfish first spotted off the coast of Saigon, who can age in reverse, returning to its fetal state after stress or sickness to begin the cycle clean. And then I knew I wasn't holding the harpoon or you or our old home or anything to come. It was only his hand in the dark.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

LAURA BERGER is an artist living in Chicago. She is interested in and inspired by rituals, symbols, nature, dreams, travel, our quest for self-development and freedom, and how we piece it together to create personal meaning and a sense of belonging to the greater whole.

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MIRIAM COHEN's fiction has appeared in or is forthcoming from The Black Warrior Review, StoryQuarterly, West Branch Wired, Cream City Review, The Florida Review, DIAGRAM, The Collagist, Cimarron Review, Carve Magazine and The Bennington Review. Her story "Naughty" was chosen by Brian Evenson as the winner of The Black Warrior Review 2010 Fiction Contest. Amy Hempel selected my story "Old for Your Age, Tall for Your Height" as second place in StoryQuarterly's 2012 Fiction Contest, and my story "Recess Brides" was a finalist in The Florida Review's Editors' 2015 fiction contest. She was the 2012-13 recipient of the Carol Houck Smith Fiction fellowship at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and received my MFA from Sarah Lawrence College.

ANGELA CORBETT was a Squaw Valley Community of Writers fellow, and my short story, "Grievors" won the 2015 Sonora Review fiction contest judged by Stuart Dybek and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She has an MFA in Fiction from California State University, Fresno where she worked as Online Managing Editor and Associate Fiction Editor for the Normal School.

SHRODE HARGIS has had work in Bat City Review, Cream City Review, Harvard Review and elsewhere. He currently teaches at Delgado Community College in New Orleans.

NANDINI DHAR is the author of the book *Historians of Redundant Moments* (Agape Editions, 2017). Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *New England Review*, *Memorious*, *New South*, *Best New Poets 2016* and elsewhere. Nandini hails from Kolkata, India, and after living in US for 15 years, has recently moved back to India, where she divides her time between her hometown and Sonipat, Haryana, where she works as a teacher of writing and literature at OP Jindal Global University.

NICHOLAS DIGHIERA has a piece published in *Catamaran Literary Magazine* and four pieces published in *F Magazine* as well as winning their annual statewide writing contest. He also has a piece in the book *The Better Bombshell* that was reprinted in *Cirque* magazine. He has an MFA from University of Alaska Anchorage.

DEREK GROMADZKI received an MFA in poetry from the Literary Arts Program at Brown University and another in literary translation from the Translation Workshop at the University of Iowa, where he's currently a PhD candidate in the Comparative Literature Program. His poems have appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *BOAAT*, *Colorado Review*, *Conjunctions*, *Free Verse*, *The PEN Poetry Series*, *Sonora Review*, and *Witness*, among other publications. His most recent translations, collaborations with Sayuri Okamoto, appear in *Alice, Iris, Red Horse: Selected Poems of Yoshimasu Gozo* (New Directions, 2016). And my first book, *Pilgrimage Suites*, is just out from Parlor Press's Free Verse Editions.

TRACY HAACK studied creative nonfiction and pedagogy in Northern Michigan University's MA program. She is currently working toward an MFA at Western Washington University. Her work has been published in *The Flager Review*, *The Wisconsin Review*, *The Pinch*, *Pithead Chapel*, and *Crab Fat Magazine*.

JESSICA LANAY is currently an MFA candidate in the poetry program at the University of Pittsburgh where she also is the Graduate Student Assistant at the Center for African American Poetry and Poetics. Originally from Key West, Florida, she arrived in Pittsburgh by way of New York. She is a *Callaloo* and *Cave Canem* Fellow. Lanay's work has been published in *Acentos Review*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Five Quarterly*, *Sugar House Review*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Black Candies: A Journal of Literary Horror*, and others.

JESSICA LEE is the poetry editor of *Sweet Tree Review*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *American Literary Review*, *BOAAT*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Rufous City Review*.

EMILY MOECK Emily Moeck lives in Boston and runs the food program for a local coffeehouse chain. Her work has appeared in *Madhat Annual* and has been produced by *Rareworks Theatre*. She is working on her MFA at UMass Boston where she is the Editor-In-Chief of *The Breakwater Review*.

OWEN MCLEOD's poems recently appear or are forthcoming in *Field*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Missouri Review*, *New England Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Yale Review*, and elsewhere. He is a potter, a professor of philosophy at Lafayette College, and he lives in eastern Pennsylvania.

MARIAH PERKINS

ERIC RASMUSSEN teaches high school English in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He is pursuing an MFA from Augsburg College, and his work is featured or upcoming in Sundog Lit, Pithead Chapel, Black Fox Literary, Mulberry Fork Review, Forge Journal, Chariton Review, and Volume One Magazine, among others. He serves as assistant fiction editor at The Indianola Review, and founded the regional literary journal Barstow & Grand.

MEG REYNOLDS is a poet, artist, and teacher living in Vermont. She holds her MFA from Stonecoast at the University of Southern Maine. Her work has been published in The Missing Slate, Prelude, Mid-American Review, Southern Quarterly, and the anthology *Monster Verse: Poems Human and Inhuman*. She is the co-director of writinginsideVT, a program that offers supportive writing instruction at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility. She hosts and organizes the Lit Club Poetry Series at Light Club Lamp Shop in Burlington, VT.

BRAD RICHARD is the author of *Motion Studies* (The Word Works - 2010 Washington Prize Winner) and *Butcher's Sugar* (Sibling Rivalry, 2012). His poems and reviews have appeared in many journals, including American Letters & Commentary, Barrow Street, Gettysburg Review, Guernica, Iowa Review, Massachusetts Review, New Orleans Review, Okey-Panky, Sakura Review, and Xavier Review. He directs the creative writing program at Lusher Charter School in New Orleans and co-curates a LGBTQ reading series, The Waves.

AMY ROA holds an MFA in Fiction from Sarah Lawrence College. She's had poems published in The Adirondack Review, the Moth, and The North American Review. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS is the editor of two Northwest poetry anthologies and the author of nine collections, including *Disinheritance* and *Controlled Hallucinations*. A seven-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Philip Booth Award, American Literary Review Poetry Contest, Nancy D. Hargrove Editors' Prize, Confrontation Poetry Prize, and Vallum Award for Poetry. He serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review* and works as a literary agent. Previous publishing credits include: *The Yale Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Sycamore Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Saranac Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Third Coast*, *Baltimore Review*, *RHINO*, and various anthologies. He lives in Portland, Oregon.





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