

Stonethrow Review
a journal of creative writing

2017

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The Journal of the Creative Writing Program at
The State University of New York, New Paltz

Editor

Pauline Uchmanowicz, Director, Creative Writing

Associate Editors

Laurence Carr
Dennis Doherty
James Schiffer
Sarah Wyman

Design & Layout

Heinz Insu Fenkl

Cover Photograph

Miriam Camloh

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Laura Barrett, Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Andrew Higgins, Chair, Department of English
Ethel Wesdorp, Administrative Assistant, Department of English

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Contributors to *Stonethrow Review 2017* investigate timeless and timely subject matter. Complex attitudes arise about family life and loss, social justice, gender identity, marriage, pregnancy, and romance. Meditations likewise unfold regarding nature and ecology, art and technology, religion and the cosmos. Showcasing experimentations in form, style, and genre, this issue includes playwriting, social realism and detective fiction, workplace writing, memoir, and poetry in traditional and contemporary forms—sestina, villanelle, free verse, and prose poem. Featuring urban and pastoral settings as well as characters and narrators distinct in background and age, taken together, the selections that follow weigh and negotiate our collective actions against possibilities for compassion and redemption.

—Pauline Uchmanowicz

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Daniel Affsprung

Juggling

Just thinking about you takes two hands

Writing a poem each:

Teeth of a kiss

Taken too eager

Still hot from the coffee

And —

Under the bridge

Bits of coal shine patient and piano black

On the creek-bed

After the tracks have all been pulled up.

Tiff Scott

Underwater

a piano
asks for
a friend

sobbing
under
porcelain

bashful
caesura

uncertain
wave

interrupts
the final note

Katrina Scarimbolo

Drowning

One push too far
and you are grazing
waters of defiance,
pushing through, for
a shred of light to
cut the harsh whitecaps.

Little footsteps
of your past self
try to beckon you
away from the reckless
waves that lured you
to a seabed of despair.

Mother's Day

A man twisted the stem of an Easter lily in his fingers and watched the petals swirl like the pleats of a floor-length gown. He stood alone on a bowed wooden bridge, curled forward on the railing. Human traffic in the early morning was sparse. Most were routine walkers and joggers. A group of chattering old women had power-walked by a few minutes ago, discussing the types of frivolous things that upper-middle class retirees could afford to prioritize. He heard the footfalls of a jogger on a strict exercise regimen. Her brief, close proximity swept through him the ghost of her inner disciplinarian. Seven minutes, thirty-five seconds. Watch your heels. Don't lean in; keep your back straight. Slow, steady breaths. Breathe in. Breathe out. Pick it up; let's go. He watched her take off into the woods, blond ponytail swishing back and forth, certain that this was penance for the previous day's gluttony. A mother pushed a stroller and spoke to her prancing young daughter about twenty yards away. A lone cyclist swished by behind him but he didn't glance. Just watched the lily twirl in his fingers.

Behind him, beneath him, and before him, Breakneck Creek rushed.

The atmosphere wasn't very scenic. All around him were scratches of lichened, bare trees just starting the annual struggle to squeeze out new leaves. The sky was gloomy and the ground was soggy from recent rainfall. Beneath the soil, tangles of roots wrestled for dominance. Some of those struggles surfaced in knots that waited to catch unsuspecting ankles. The creek was a rocky trough of a width no greater than fifteen feet and no deeper than three. It was swollen with murky brown water that tumbled and churned. The embankments were unpleasantly muddy. He didn't know it, but a sneaker was buried in the sediment nearby; an unfortunate step plunged a child's foot deep into the muck and it had sucked the shoe right off of its foot. In the summertime, when

the foliage flushed brightly, the area was a cozy, verdant haven. Right now it was wanting.

There were times when the man was glad that he'd never known his own mother. Those times were heavily outweighed by the times when he wished that he had. All that he knew about her was secondhand information, passed on to him from his father. He was not once able to conceive an animate image in her likeness. He dreamed of her, imagined her, envisioned her with a mother's love and pieced in the chips that his father shared with him, but her mosaic portraiture always lacked particular depth. He suspected early on that there were plenty of things about his mother that his father withheld from him, but in his youth, he presumed (correctly) that the privacy his surviving parent maintained was constructed from the pain associated with her memory. They didn't broach the subject of wife and mother very often over the years. For the longest time, the man was at peace with the reality that there was a dimensionality to her that he would never be able to fully perceive. He knew she loved lilies, though. "Lilies were her favorite," his father once said, "the ones that were bell-shaped." He hadn't known they were called calla lilies, but he said she liked them because they were weird. Different. Special. A whole cluster of them was bunched in the man's other hand, resting on the lip of the wooden rail. He chose pink ones from the florist because, in his mind, she liked pink ones. He tucked the Easter lily in his breast pocket after bringing it to his nose and inhaling.

A firm hand grasped his shoulder.

There beside him stood his father. Old, but not old enough. Grayed, but not grayed enough. A dim smile graced his features, then dissipated. His hand slid down off of the peak of his shoulder, fingers gently splaying over the blade of his back as he drew closer and turned to stand abreast with his son. He was the same: a few inches shorter, had the same oak eyes, and the familiar—but not missed—scent of his aftershave misted the immediate space around them.

The man watched his father reach for a calla lily. Drop it into the creek. He followed suit. Together they expressed their thoughts silently, depositing the beautiful flowers into the ugly water. One by one, the

pink blossoms fell a graceful ten feet, and they watched them sweep away under the bridge and out of sight. Father and son lifted somber, commemorative smiles together. The man clung to the warmth and comfort his father's presence implied, but those wishful thoughts slipped through the mind's fingers, and an ominous fog seeped into the vacant spaces they left behind. His eyes fell from the phantom. Watched the torrential creek gurgle and hiss. His father was long gone from this world, but from beyond the grave, he carried with him a message that had gone unspoken for the entirety of their lives together. The man's gifts rang sure and true; while he could keep vivid company with others in their absence, he couldn't always will the figments of his imagination to adhere to him. He saw people for who and what they were. These apparitions didn't always immediately present themselves authentically, but when the pieces of their puzzles clicked together —

“Calder.”

Hearing his name startled him. He looked up.

What he saw was something unfamiliar, unlike anything he had ever seen portrayed on his father's face. The contortion of his features was uncharacteristic, a distortion of the man he always knew. He was pallid. A madness that didn't belong permeated his skin, polluted the air with frightful potency. An alien presence emerged from somewhere unknown, somewhere within the array of plotted points mapped over years of personal experience. Dots connected within the intricate web of his father's profile and it was all too striking for him to see at once. Facts collided with cacophonous sound and in the tumult it was impossible to know how he knew but he knew and a new face peered out from the dimensionless plane and it leered not unlovingly —

She was disquieting, like the breath drawn before a scream.

◇

Meghan O'Brien

Inheritance

I wonder how he extinguished his flame,
erratic and desperate in some lonely Catskills place.
But where to start without mentioning his name?

For the final catastrophe his sister took blame,
and it haunts me now that I share that space,
but where to start without mentioning his name?

He was the youngest of four, perhaps the most tame,
ten years her junior, full of artful sensitivity and grace.
I wonder how he extinguished his flame?

It was his Vietnam stint that he scarcely overcame,
though I heard he maintained his gentle face,
but where to start without mentioning his name?

Still, his sexuality bore the most condemning shame,
and one's life, I suppose, is one's own to erase.
I wonder how he extinguished his flame?

My grandmother told me things are never quite the same
when my dear friend departed by the same awful fate.
I wonder how he extinguished his flame,
but where to start without mentioning his name?

Paul Seigniny

My Brother the Zookeeper

I always wondered why you came home smelling like
 fresh excrement,
Which never bothered you,
And why you borrowed my boots until they were destroyed
Because, you said, yours were too distracting.
I only found out after you ruined the third pair,
Thoroughly caked in tropical guanos,
That you refused to wear the boots mom bought you as a gift
When you first got the job at the zoo
Because they had an even number of eyelets.

I am beginning to see why you chose the zoo:
The warm routine of scrubbing fish tanks,
The bobcat that is a better listener than any therapist,
And the easy topics for conversation —
The emu that jumped the fence of its enclosure
Or the wallaby that gave birth to twins.

Every morning you put thirty-one dead chicks on a log
Inside the aviary with the Barn Owl,
The Cooper's Hawk,
And the Bald Eagle.
You assure me they are dead before they even arrive at the zoo.
The white mice for the snake terrarium are not so lucky.

In the afternoon, you stir smoothies for lemurs and marmosets,
Carefully mixing fresh mangoes and guava,
A little vanilla yogurt,
To the tune of the recipe
As you hum along with the soothing static of the walkie-talkie
 on your hip.

Recently, you've become friends with the parrots.
They squawk your name and whistle sarcastic catcalls
When your "fine legs" walk into their coop.
The alpacas still spritz you with spit
If you get too close.

It all makes me think back to when I would visit you in the hospital,
Trying to make small talk about baseball
Or cars
Or the weather,
Or anything at all
As you reclined on the bed in your oversized johnny gown,
The first time you tried to end your life
Because you had no control of a single thought
Inside the beautiful menagerie of your mind,
And the world was a lonely cage.

Julianna Reynolds

Stilts

You slip on your boots,
the ones with the chunky wooden heels.
The ones your mother never
let you wear out in public,
they're the first thing you put on that give you
an overwhelming sense of confidence.
You make your way down to the kitchen,
careful not to fall down the stairs.
Can't give her any reason to admit
she thinks you're not ready.
You can feel yourself shrinking
even with 3 ½ extra inches.
She isn't telling you "no"
but she still hasn't said a word.
And you can just taste the judgment
she sprinkled on your pancakes.

Lauren Sirna

Millbrook

This was the first time in my seventeen years of life that I was going out past eleven at night, and it was strangely thrilling. James was speeding down Elm Street as I anxiously watched the clock hit 11:39. I had moved to Millbrook a few months earlier, but this was the first time I had taken up my cousin's request to hang out with him so late. His girlfriend, Carissa, sat in the front, screaming along to some pop song I'd never heard, and beside me, dressed in dark jeans and a deep purple zip up, was Casey Hemlock. James was yelling over the music to her, telling some bullshit story about the teacher he'd told off at school that day as she nodded along to him in the rearview mirror. The window was cracked just enough for her to ash a cigarette, leaving clouds of smoke lingering in the backseat. It was freezing, but I didn't dare ask her to close the window. Instead I pulled my faded black Hurley sweater closer to my frame.

"I mean man it was sick!" James finished, laughing to himself.

"Seems like it," she replied as we pulled into the QuikMart parking lot. Millbrook, I had discovered, was such a small town that the one gas station had become a sort of hang out for the kids our age. There were no late night lounges or 24-hour coffee shops, only a small convenience store on Elm, wedged just on the edge of a forest.

James insisted that we get here thirty-five minutes early for a rendezvous. He said on the way over that he just had to pick something up, and when I pushed further, I was instructed to "grow a set and shut the hell up." I hoped it was only weed, but even that I'd never seen in person. After all, I had only agreed to go after an hour-long rant from my mother about my lack of a social life; if only she knew what she had dragged me into.

James killed the engine and we all reluctantly stepped out his pickup into the cold night. Behind me, James was handing Casey a fresh cigarette and Carissa was still squawking out the Selena Gomez song she

had been blasting in the car, her brown curls bouncing as she danced to herself.

"Okay Carissa," Casey said, obviously annoyed. "You can stop any time."

"God Casey, are you ever happy?" James asked, holding the lighter up to the cigarette between her lips.

"I've been happy before," she replied.

James smirked and turned the pack to me. Reluctantly, I plucked out a faded yellow butt and let him light it, the flame seeming unnatural against the cold, dark parking lot. I rolled the cigarette between my fingers but didn't bring it up to my mouth—I was not a smoker. My nerves began to settle as we fell into a soft silence. The anxiety I was feeling in the car now felt more like adrenaline. Most of the town was asleep, we were on stolen time.

"Tell me about it," I prompted her, my heart pounding. "The last time you were truly happy." Casey paused and looked at me from under a coat of heavy eye makeup. She was probably surprised that I had spoken at all—I was too. I held my breath as she watched me, cigarette poised at her lips.

"Okay, new guy." She exhaled a cloud of smoke. Casey always held herself like a fortress, but whatever she had been sipping on the ride over must have begun to kick in as she talked. "I lived with my grandmother for a while when I was younger." I could not believe she was actually talking about it. I hid my shock and leaned in to hear her better. "Well, not my actual grandma—she died before I was born—this woman was actually our neighbor but we called her Grandma Joan. Anyways, I'm getting off topic." She pulled the silver flask from her coat pocket and took a long swig. "This old lady was a fucking saint. Every morning she'd come into the guest room and creep open the blinds just enough for the sun to peek through before I woke up; said the sun wouldn't shine if it didn't see my face." She chuckled to herself. "Which is bull but it made me feel important. I lived there for like four months before I turned thirteen and Jan—my mother—showed up." She looked down and took a drag from her cigarette, digging a hole into the dry

November earth with the toe of her boot. "I guess you could say I was happy then."

Without looking towards her, James replied, "Deep shit," and put an arm around Carissa. She got on her tiptoes and whispered something to him as a smirk ran across his face. "We're gonna go for a walk."

Casey nodded and we watched after them in silence for a while.

"So," I said, hoping Casey hadn't notice me stub my cigarette on the wall behind us and toss it into the bushes. I was already shaking with the nerves of her confession and timidly trying to get more information from her. My heart was pounding but I told myself not to back down, not just yet. "Uh, what happened to your mom?"

"Jan," she corrected me. "She's not my real mother; I was adopted."

"Oh." We fell silent again. I pointed to the flask in her hand, "Do you mind?" She shrugged and passed it over to me. Thick liquid burned as it slid down my throat, something that tasted like cinnamon and fire. Fighting to hide the goosebumps that exploded on my skin, I passed it back to her. I didn't drink much but the warmth was welcomed on such a cold night.

"Do they often let deadbeat single women adopt kids?" I asked.

A short laugh. "She wasn't always like that."

"Really?"

"And she wasn't always single."

I exhaled into my hands and rubbed them viciously in the frigid air, but didn't speak yet. In the entire two months that I had known Casey I had never heard her speak this much at once, not to me at least. I could tell that the conversation was as fragile as the burning cigarette between her fingers. Too many questions and I could scare her off, but I was too intrigued to stop now. I watched her blow smoke up into the starry night, the swirling cloud almost as beautiful as she was. I willed her to keep going. She did.

"She had a husband. A real businessman, very logical and like—calculated. He kinda kept her tethered to earth, you know?" I could tell that the alcohol had begun to hit her because she started speaking even more freely. I eagerly nodded along. "They got me from some teen

pregnancy. I'm told it was good for a while. He died when I was eleven. Drunk driver."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. When he wasn't working, him and Jan would be off on some booze cruise or another and I'd be at Joan's. I hardly knew the guy."

"So that's when you lived with your neighbor? After he, um, died?"

"Yeah, Jan freaked. Locked herself in their room for two weeks after the funeral. Then one morning she came out. I remember it was one of those rare sunny days in February that tricks you into thinking it's finally spring. She made me chocolate chip pancakes. Same ones her and David would make on the one Sunday a month he wasn't working. I was so shocked—like amazed—that we barely spoke the whole time. After that she dropped me at Joan's and left."

"For a while?"

"Yeah." I could tell the heaviness of our conversation was weighing on her, so I didn't push any further. "So, um," she started.

"You don't have to."

"No it's, uh." She took out the flask and tilted it up to her mouth. "Never leave a story unfinished, huh?" She was quoting me from earlier.

"Your choice."

She took a breath, unfazed by the liquor she just poured into her throat. "She didn't come back. The next morning I woke up and heard Joan yelling—she never yelled. Being the ten-year-old that I was I picked up the phone next to the bed. There was just a lot of sobbing; it was Jan. Joan was telling her to come back, but she wouldn't. She was fucking hysterical, but I could make out her saying 'can't, not alone' and 'she's not even mine. Didn't want this.'" Casey zipped up her sweater against the wind. "She was a bitch."

"Oh man, Case—"

"No." She cut me off. "No 'Casey I'm sorry' no spiel about things working out for the better, because they haven't." She leaned against the ledge behind us. "Damn, I'm kinda drunk." I opened my mouth to speak but she kept on regardless. "I didn't tell you for pity. I told you because

you're James's cousin and apparently you'll be sticking around. And I'm sure that douche would've told you in the twenty minutes a day he isn't between Carissa's legs."

All I could manage to do was choke out an "OK" before she turned abruptly and walked back towards the car. I didn't realize I was holding my breath until then, and quickly stumbled for the car keys in my hoodie's pocket to unlock the door for her. I followed after, thinking that if Casey were a storm she'd be a hurricane, and I would be endlessly running through it in search of the eye.

◇

Aidan O'Callaghan

Talking

There had been a horrible accident. That was it. A horrible accident. I turned it over in my mouth, trying out its many verbal costumes, all of them bloodless, boneless—starched white and vacuum packed, something meaningless like a word, like “chair,” except there is a chair, there are many. In fact, I’m sitting in a chair right now. When I see a chair, I think chair, and all is well.

However, when I imagine my father, a powerful man, a workhorse whose labors seemed to outpace the earth itself, lying motionless beneath a four-thousand pound Oldsmobile, some run-of-the-mill, tar-stained sack of Detroit pig-iron, I do not think to myself “horrible accident.” Words such as “why” and “Jesus” come to mind. Phrases such as “Are you fucking serious?” and “God in heaven, he wasn’t a bad guy” do.

You know, losing a parent as a child isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. It’s not all fun in the sun. It’s more like stepping off your back porch into a Viet Cong spike pit, but you’re not dead, just grievously wounded. A solitary lance of shit-covered bamboo curious about what the inside of a human throat looks like prevents the possibility of calling out to your buddies, who can’t find you and grow increasingly worried as night crawls backward from the east into the howling canopy.

“That’s some heavy stuff, man.”

“Heavy indeed,” I reply, grateful for the verbal stop sign that was his lone interjection. Noting, also, that I should look to curb my use of the word “indeed”; what was once a pleasant conversational idiosyncrasy acquired from an erudite friend had grown into an ugly verbal crutch. I’ve got so many crutches now that I’ve got crutches for my crutches, I thought to myself in an *I think I’m so goddamn clever, but not really* kind of way. Crutches is an ugly word. Why do I tell people about my dad when I get nervous or drunk? I did it at a party recently, and I hated myself for the absorbed pseudo-investment that I, no doubt, was

responsible for fostering in the crowd. You want to know how to get people to stop dancing? Tell them about how your dad was crushed by a falling car when a single rusty bolt on a ramshackle car lift gave up the ghost about .1 milliseconds before the man that taught you to shoot a free-throw did the same. Exhausting stuff to lay on already exhausted bar-goers. They're just trying to relax, man. Why don't you let them relax?

I excuse myself.

◇

Ashley Cummins

OAK

as the sun
starts to move
closer
to the horizon
a boat floats in

the wooden force
reminds him of his father
strong
unwavering

a raw material
his father
could leave
scars
on his flesh

and like tattoos
the pain was
temporary
but would never
leave

but he held
no grudges
only reverence
for this man
son père

and he knew that
he'd never leave
and if he did
he'd come back
as an old oak tree

Kelsea Cassone

Deerfield River, Massachusetts

Waters rushing faster than my thoughts,
than the blood pumping in my ears,
all I can do to focus on the river
underneath the thin wood of our canoe.

The roaring pierces through the pines surrounding us.
My muscles scream in pain
but my father commands behind me,
"Push harder, go faster."

I am the oarsman but he my stern paddler.
In complete control of my direction he leads me forward
towards the finish line,
towards dry land.

Now I paddle alone, the strength of the river
pulling me through dangerous white water.
With no one in the rear
I have no sense of direction.

I never find the finish line.
The river drowns in its own laughter.

Michelle Minarik

At Home

When people think of New York, they almost always think about New York City. While the Big Apple is a major attraction to my state, it doesn't even come close to being my favorite part. When I tell people that I am from Rockland County, they look at me puzzled and most ask, "Is that upstate New York?" to which I can't help but frown. Have they never heard of Binghamton? How about Buffalo? I don't know who educated these people but everybody seems to forget that there's more to New York than some dirty, crowded city.

Rockland County is about thirty minutes outside of NYC. Personally, I find it has everything. Every town has every kind of shop you could imagine; string lights and flags dance along the main streets of Nanuet at night, it's really quite adorable. Nanuet is a hamlet in which I reside, cozy and small, its community constantly bonded. From there, if you were to get onto the Palisades Interstate Parkway North and get off at exit 13, you'd find yourself in a town named Pomona. Pomona was founded in 1967 and named after the goddess in Roman Mythology, meaning goddess of fruit trees, gardens, and orchards. Once off of the Parkway you'll be at a stoplight; to your left will be Gilligans, a thematic seafood restaurant, and to your right past the underpass, will be a diner. Parallel with that diner is Quaker Road, a quiet road with an SPCA shelter and animal hospital on it. After a slight hill, you'll find, to your right, a trailer park. Looking dank, quiet, and small, this trailer park was one of my homes.

Arriving at the trailer park, where I spent every other weekend when my father had visitation, I would wait in the truck as my dad got the mail. I'd watch him put the key in his designated spot and pull out the mail that was put there just for him. Sometimes it would rain, and the envelopes would get soggy; he would put them on the truck bench and drive on.

The park had three rows, two of which we walked every night, the third, not so much. Rough teenagers riding their bicycles late at night in

groups, people gathered smoking and hanging out on a specific trailer's front porch, music blaring from crappy cars that would pass through, even a silent movie would portray this place as a shit hole. It was hard not to see a trailer with bicycles, furniture, broken hardware, or tires cluttering up the front stoop. But not my dad's.

His trailer was clean, tucked away behind a screened-in porch adjacent to the front of the home. My dad, being an arborist, had his fair share of talent with wood, so you could imagine how well he applied himself when renovating his space. The hallway wall and closets were lined with grade-1 pine tongue-and-groove wood, a light color of wood, so light that it brightened up the whole space. The first door in the hall led to the room my older half-sister Jaclyn and I shared; she took the couch on the weekends that I was over, I never really noticed that. Our room was painted a friendly lavender purple and the door was a dark brown wood; everything didn't match but it felt just as comforting as ever. Continuing down the short, slightly rough, carpeted hallway you'd find two more doors leading to the bathroom and my father's room. Personally, my favorite part about the bathroom was that the window in the shower opened with the clockwise turn of a handle, instead of just pushing up the glass.

Returning back to the front door, looking straight ahead, you'd find yourself looking at the dark brown kitchen cabinets. One of which held a homemade post-it note holder with sky blue notepaper, and a picture of me from when I was in girl scouts. Continuing on into the last room, furthest right from the front door, was the living room. The couch was constantly being shifted in different arrangements to entertain the small space around the 70-inch TV that took up almost the whole wall of the mobile home. A gateway computer sat tucked away in the corner, on top of a soft and smooth wood table made by (who other than) my father. Then there was the small but tall brown center table where drinks and snacks floated in the middle of the room, but mostly serving as a play-pretend kingdom for my Barbie dolls.

My dad's place was a hidden gem among Quaker Road trailer park; I wish I could own it today. I feel sad that I used to cry to my mom before he picked me up on visitation weekends; why wouldn't I want to

go to such a cozy place? So diverse, full of different people to observe and chances to explore the scenery of some place other than my home with mom. The friendships I made there, old and young, shaped me for the rest of my life. The trailer park opened me up to experiences, with people I would have never met at “home,” and I am forever grateful for that.

◇

Al Rigby

Would You Like to Save

My mom wasn't a great mom. She'd leave my brother and me alone for hours while she partied with men of suspect character. Even when she was home, she was too strung out or hungover to pay us any mind. And then she died when I was a freshman in high school, OD'd at her boyfriend's place. Needless to say, I didn't know my mother very well.

What I do remember of her is watching as she played video games on our little Dell computer. She would sit for hours, lost in these fantasies on this little monitor, and I desperately wanted to be part of that. The instances where she actually told me I could play with her have stuck with me my entire life. Three games I distinctly remember; their visuals, their background music, the characters, the puzzles—everything about them I could recall in precise detail. Unfortunately, I never bothered to learn any of their names. So, after my mom passed, it made it very hard to track down any of these games again, and I needed to find them; I never forgot those days playing with her, and it felt like a fundamental part of me as a person was missing without those electronic collaborations.

Over the years, by doing searches through old-PC catalogs and Google that, in retrospect, were rather incoherent (why was I surprised "90s PC game about jars and poorly rendered dragon" didn't return anything?), I eventually found two of the games. They're both considered classics, far ahead of their time: *Shivers*, a puzzle game in a decrepit mansion with neon-colored ghosts and badly acted dialogue, and *Sanitarium*, a psycho-thriller about a mental asylum and pumpkin-headed children. As soon as I found either game, I immediately downloaded and replayed it. I fell back in love, looking at these games and seeing the nuances for the first time, solving puzzles while overwhelmed with nostalgia, as well as a new appreciation. I smugly decided that, in retrospect, my mom had pretty good taste. No matter

how hard I looked, however, I couldn't find the third game. For twenty years, this one computer game haunted me. Last month, I found it.

A website called "Abandonware" is one of my usual haunts, and as I scrolled through pages of long-forgotten software, I saw a picture of a game box, and knew that I had found what I had been craving after for the better part of two decades. I savored the title as I read it, *Lighthouse: The Dark Being*. I went through the screen shots, waves upon waves of nostalgia hitting me with every click. I downloaded it, and began playing.

It wasn't good. Mediocre at best, really. Underwhelming. Here was the game I had spent my entire adult life looking for, playing on the screen right in front of me, and I couldn't bring myself to enjoy it. I don't know what I was expecting: some insight into who my mother was as a person, or a connection to a woman dead and buried, something, *anything*, but all I got was a lukewarm experience. Now that the search is over, and the results are less than satisfying, I'm at a total loss of what to do. I thought there would be some marvelous revelation at the end, something I could hold up and say, "It was worth it for this." There's no one left to talk to about the games with, to solve puzzles together with, or to make fun of the outdated music and graphics. All I have are the memories that are better than the game itself, and a conclusion that I don't want to accept. That, unlike in these games I hold so dear to my heart, there is no groundbreaking reward at the end of the quest, no last puzzle to solve that would forever change my perceptions about my mother, just a bitter taste in my mouth and less space on my hard drive.

◇

Robert Wieland

Software Development

I threw my keyboard against the frozen tree

I was done with programming and it was done with me

Emily Zogbi

On Following the Pope on Instagram

My deepest darkest secret
is that I follow the Pope on Instagram.
I wonder if it's a sin
to be one of 3.2 million, but have never found a home
in the church, never bowed my head to pray
or held the Eucharist in my hands.

I scroll past pictures of people stretching their hands
to him. Pope Francis doesn't know my secret,
he doesn't know how I pray,
he doesn't follow *me* on Instagram.
He's always known his way home.
@fransiscus: Is this a mortal sin?

Is following you a sin
if I don't know what to do with my hands
around a pretty girl? That I've always found home
in the pages of a book that isn't Holy? This secret
I've always kept. @fransiscus: Your Instagram
isn't great, too many pictures of you in prayer.

How about instead of praying
you do something fun? You should try sinning.
You'd be good at it. Go out one night and use your Instagram
the right way. Raise your hands
to the roof of a nightclub and let go, secrete
your holy light on all the party goers and go home

drunk on all your divine right. Go home
to the Vatican, the new party house. Pray
like the rest of us for no hangover tomorrow. Post these secrets,

these deadly sins,
these writhing human bodies with their open hands,
to your Instagram.

@franciscus: Are you the first pope to have an Instagram?
Do you ever follow yourself home?
Have you ever held your hands
over the door of a church and fallen prey
to doubt? Will you absolve me of my sins?
Will you keep my secret?

Instagram isn't a good place to keep secrets.
You should know that sin and prayer often sleep in the same bed.
@fransiscus: What do you call a carpenter who builds a home with two nails in
his hands?

A shitty carpenter.
A house covered in blood.

Gam LaFrance

Bloody Mary

Lady in red sits on a highball poised regally on the zinc
after burning Protestants at the stake to spice the English
earth with their entrails. In those Worcestershire gardens

she dreamt of heirloom tomatoes and kissing the Prince of
Moscow. Now she's Queen regnant of Sunday afternoon
with the ladies downtown in that new coat made from the hair
of the dog that bit you. She's the lemonade life told you to make.

La Doña de Tabasco, North Star of us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

Anthony Mitchell

Faith

A salacious wafer
minty in flavor—

Swallowed with wine
an eerie strychnine

A hopeful ritual
albeit ineffectual

In chase of—
missionary communion.

Beth Wynne

Hagia Sophia

Evidence of shared religion, coexistence.
A basilica turned mosque.
The Christian-Constantinian symbolism
Transformed and overlaid
By abstract mosaic and Arabic pendants.

Istanbul, Turkey
Muslim, Christian
Multi-cultured, historical
Creation-forming destiny.

Jerusalem, Oh Holy Land
Holy sharing
Holy communion.

(Take wisdom,
Use it for goodness and kindness
For good Samaritanism.)

Cole Solis

Paper Cranes

You are alone,
in the midst of a thousand paper cranes.
In the bay,
remnants of black orbs and deadly juices
Eves and Adams and apples of

Poison!

It fills the hourglass with the dust of time.
The last speckle seeps through the crevice,
'twas the death of all humanity.
The mountains are where my soul
prowls to.

Sanctuary.

The safe haven
liberation from the land of paper cranes.
A box where I keep the ashes
that corrode plains of—
Ashes.

When I die, use my ashes to create.

Nicole Bressi

Wake Up

93.5% of humans are dead; today, my ninety-year-old uncle joined them. Tomorrow, he will be put into the ground, and for the next hundred years he will be decomposing in what is essentially an enlarged jewelry box. Tonight is his wake where my parents and I will see him for the last time.

We walk into the funeral parlor where I am immediately woozy from the overwhelming smell of Chanel No. 5. I am surrounded by twenty or thirty strangers, practically half-dead themselves, when I spot my aunt, looking as old as ever; not because she's old—even though she is—but because I've suddenly realized it. Since this is my first wake, and I am not dressed in wake etiquette, I start to do what any eighteen-year-old would: latch on to my parents and hide. I could go over to my aunt and tell her how sorry I am for her loss, how much he meant to me, how much we'll all miss him, but instead I decide to take a break and go to the bathroom. After a quick social media check in, I flush, wash my hands, leave, and get back just in time for the good stuff: the mass.

I see my uncle—propped up on a stage—for the first/last time. My eyes are glued to him because I know the second I turn away or blink, he'll crack a smile. I'm not aware of my facial expression, but I'm sure it is one of confusion/discomfort/ minimal disgust. My first thought is: whoever is in that box is not my uncle. He's thinner and shorter than I remember, has an ungodly amount of makeup on, and I'm eighty-five percent sure they gave him a spray tan. I push the image of a dead man lying in a tanning bed out of my head and reluctantly sit down. The priest enters to announce the curtain call.

"We are gathered here today to celebrate the life of a loved one. Tonight, we say farewell to Ralph Mondella as he returns to his home with Our God, The Father. Ralph was a very kind man. He was loved and cared for by many, most of who are here with us. Although it is hard to see such a good man go, he's not really gone. You may not be able to see him —"

“—right there. . .” my Dad whispers into my ear. We look at each other and laugh. My eyes immediately shift back to Uncle Ralph—did he just laugh with us?

“—but he’s always with you. At this moment, you may all begin to approach Ralph to say your final goodbyes,” Father Matthew says. I start to picture him sitting up to shake our hands. I get on line, like I’m waiting for my checkout at the supermarket, and start shivering. Not because I’m sad or upset, but because I’m scared of what will happen when I approach him. I prepare myself as much as I can in the moment. I imagine all the possibilities: his eyes open and he gasps back to life, his hand grabs me and pulls me closer, or he’s motionless and actually dead. I can’t decide which one’s the scariest.

I approach the body. I can vaguely see the previous griever’s spittle, tears, and snot lingering in the air. I can see his overly freckled hands piled one on top of the other, the caked on layer of make-up that covers his crow’s feet and smile lines, and his parted salt-and-pepper hair resting on a small white pillow. What I can’t see are his golden brown eyes or cheeky smile, but I guess it would be weirder if I did. All the time I spent thinking of what would happen when I got here, I didn’t think of what I was going to say, so I didn’t say anything. After a moment, I turned around and sat back down. I watch my parents say their goodbyes, his son and wife cry over his casket, and many little old ladies permeate his mahogany wooden coffin with perfume. I watch him take his final bow.

More people arrive with extravagant arrangements of flowers to add to the others. The room fills up with more and more perfume and I’m secretly hoping it inflicts an asthma attack on me so we can leave. Everything in this room is tainted by death. The flowers lack luster, the lights are soft, the conversations are dry and low, and the people are pale— except for, thanks to the spray tan, Uncle Ralph. I feel like someone’s sucked the life out of everyone in the room and judging by the looks of it, some of these people might not recover. I’d be shocked if there weren’t more funerals soon to come.

I’ll bet more than half of these people already have their coffins picked out! There’s a woman in the corner who’s been going in and out

of consciousness for the past half hour and, while others might think it's past her bedtime, I think it's a cry for help. I'd give her another half an hour and call it a day. They can throw her in with Uncle Ralph; it's not like either of them would know! Although, I'm not sure how much Aunt Connie would like that. . . .

The man behind me just got back from his trip to the bathroom that took him a whole twenty minutes. Aside from his loss of movement, he has the permanent facial expression of someone who's constantly internally bleeding. If I bumped into him, he'd crumble.

I guess my discomfort has become too evident because my parents decide it's time for us to leave, but not without saying goodbye first. We make our rounds to every griever. By the end, I've got nine different shades of lipstick smeared on my cheeks and another coat of perfume on me. I keep groaning that it's not over yet, and my mom keeps telling me to think of what a nice thing I'm doing by letting all of these old people see someone in their prime.

Before we leave I take one last look at Uncle Ralph. He'll never bring me rice balls again or take care of me when I'm sick. I'll never hear him call me Grace Kelly while I'm dancing in his living room. We'll never bet on the horse races or drive to church again. I close my eyes and picture him sitting on his porch, wearing his cherry red windbreaker, and waving goodbye to me. My throat starts to close as I wave back.

We're on our way out when I hear someone fall.

93.6% of humans are dead; wherever Uncle Ralph is, he sure has lots of company.

◇

Austin Frayler

UV

You are the blinding sunshine
that strikes me after hiding
in the dark for what feels
like an eternity.

Always caught off guard
I say things I don't mean
and dig my own grave
until you manage to
shine your light through that too

Hayley Nusbaum

Aubade

I counted the ceiling tiles waiting
For someone to wake up.
Thirteen long and nine wide, but suddenly
Multiplication did not seem trustworthy
So I counted again, block by block,
And when the numbers matched
A doleful hue settled in the static
As I recognized the peculiar order of the world.

Cassandra Goldman

Face of a Mountain

and he leaves again—lifting himself from my bed.

I watch him dress and when he is done

grab his hand.

He holds mine with strong fingers,

lets go, and with a glance

slips out.

Tomorrow morning I will observe
that even in sleep his face is hurting.

Grazing it with my hands,

tracing aged peaks and ledges,

hiking my fingers upward

until reaching his dark hairline,

and stopping to survey my path.

I imagine my fingers as him

climbing up,

away from me

and here.

I will lay there exploring him

and almost understand,

almost feeling the sadness seep

through his pores—

puddles at my fingertips as they tread on.

I will watch him rest and know

that next time

when he tries to leave,

to swing on a raised cliff,

I will not grasp his hand

to stop him.

Meagan Towler

The Boogeyman Likes My Sweets

He found my stash:
the candy under my pillow,
the soda beneath my bed,
the panties in my drawer.

Addicted,
he ripped the chocolate from its wrapper
and my breasts from theirs.

Soon enough he cleaned up the empty casings
and re-buttoned my blouse.

He fell asleep with the socks under my bed.

Mary Shannon McHugh

The Wedding

(MARGO and EMILY are both lying in bed together. It is silent and uncomfortable. EMILY picks up a book from her nightstand and begins to read. MARGO, fidgeting with her hands, looks desperately at EMILY, letting out heavy sighs to grab her attention. It isn't working. After a moment, MARGO finally sits up and starts putting on her clothes.)

MARGO

What are you reading?

EMILY

Nothing that you would like.

MARGO

You don't know that. Just tell me.

EMILY

You don't even like to read.

(Beat)

Do you want me to call you a cab?

MARGO

Oh no, I'm fine. I can walk home.

EMILY

(Sounding uninterested.)

Are you sure? It's getting late.

MARGO

No, I think I need some fresh air.

EMILY

Well, fine, just text me when you get home then. Be quick, though, I don't really trust the new people who moved in down the block.

MARGO

Okay.

EMILY

Okay.

(MARGO slips on the rest of her clothes and quickly puts on her heels. She is about to leave, but can't quite take her eyes off of EMILY. She lingers, slumping herself against the door frame.)

MARGO

Do you hate me?

EMILY

(Putting her book down.)

Surprisingly, no I don't.

MARGO

Good. Good. So, this means I will see you at the wedding, then?

EMILY

Margo, are you being serious?

MARGO

Well, you didn't exactly RSVP by June third.

EMILY

What do you honestly think I did with that invitation when I got it in the mail? Best guess.

(MARGO shrugs her shoulders unwilling to answer the question.)

EMILY

Use your words.

MARGO

I just want you to be there, Em.

EMILY

Does that even make sense to you? Come on Margo, you are a smart girl.

MARGO

Well, I don't know. It's just that— look, I get it. I know it's super fucked, but, Em, you are the only person who has remained constant in my life these past five years. I want you to be there.

EMILY

Alright, let's fix that statement. I am the only person who has let you use them as an emotional punching bag these past five years.

MARGO

I do not *use* you.

EMILY

(In a mocking tone.)

Emily, I'm really lonely, and I miss you. Can I see you tonight? I promise this will be the last time. I mean it. Do you miss me, Emily? I just want you to hold me, Emily. No, I am not that drunk. Just one last time, Emily. Please.

(EMILY continues to mock MARGO. MARGO clenches her fists as tears well up in her eyes.)

EMILY

Now you know how I feel.

(MARGO begins to sob. EMILY watches her silently, her anger slowly dissipating.)

Come here.

(MARGO sheepishly walks towards the bed and takes a seat at the end of it.)

MARGO

You wanna hear something funny?
You are the only person who has ever
told me that they love me.

EMILY

What do you mean?

MARGO

Well obviously, beside my mom and
dad, but that is only out of obligation.
Jonathan hasn't said it once and we
are getting married in two months. A

little Snapple fun fact to top it off, he didn't even ask me to marry him. One day I came home from work, and his mom was there with a wedding planner. Next thing you know, my wedding colors are blush and off-white. I will also be wearing a tight satin number designed by Ms. Vera Wang, herself. All of it was very jarring, and I don't even like pink, mind you.

EMILY

(Sighs.)

Margo.

MARGO

After his mother leaves, he just acts like none of it happened and he hands me his grandmother's wedding ring. Just hands it to me. Hands it to me like it weighed nothing. He then just goes right upstairs to work in his office. And that was it. I sealed my fate as the soon-to-be-loving Mrs. Jonathan Rochester, and who ate dinner by herself that night.

EMILY

You got to be—

MARGO

Then, proceeded to slam a bottle of red wine to her face and passed out on the couch.

EMILY

—kidding me.

MARGO

My life is just one long punchline at this point.

(MARGO flashes her engagement ring.)

EMILY

Why, Margo? You are certainly someone who isn't afraid to say no as I have learned multiple times.

MARGO

Because he is a safe choice.

EMILY

And I'm not.

MARGO

That's the reality of it. My mother drilled it into my head at an early age that you marry for stability, not for love.

EMILY

Ah, so you do love me.

MARGO

I guess. I mean, must have at some point or else it never would have gone this far.

EMILY

Harsh.

MARGO

It's just anytime we attempted some
piss poor semblance of a relationship,
it burns out so fast. One day we are
hand in hand on Washington Ave,
next thing you know we are
screaming the nastiest things at one
and other.

EMILY

What if it is different this time? We are
older now, smarter now.

MARGO

Because we have had conversations
like this before and yet, we keep
ending up in the same spot. You
naked and me crying at the end of
your bed. Don't play dumb.

EMILY

I wouldn't call it dumb, just hopeful.

MARGO

Those words are one in the same at
this point.

EMILY

Do you just want to stay here tonight?

MARGO

That would be ideal, since I'm pretty
sure it just started raining out.

(MARGO and EMILY both turn their heads to look out the
window. The sound of light thunder can be heard.)

◇

Operation Come Clean

It's eight o'clock at night and I'm already an hour late to dinner. I stare out the window of the cab that's going way too slow for someone in a rush like me and think about how I'm going to tell her. Watching as her red-stained smile falters and the gleam in her eyes dims will be enough to make me choke on the lump I already feel forming in my throat. She can't be that mad, though, can she? She's aware that I can't really talk about my old undercover (UC) days, what the cases were about, and who was involved. She knows. That's why I never told her. Plus, we didn't even know each other then. My wife should understand and forgive me—wasn't that in our vows?

Huh, vows. What was also in our vows was never to lie to each other, something I've already broken. What's even worse is she gave me the opportunity to come clean about anything else, a freebie, and I didn't take it. I let my pride get in the way. If I had told her about the woman involved in the drug ring that I was in a relationship with when I was UC, before I even met Emma, maybe this news would be a little easier. Now, Emma has to find out about Sandra the hard way. I hope she knows this situation is just as hard on me as well.

Finally, after what seems like hours of sitting in the cramped-up and sweaty smelling taxi, I arrive at Del Posto. My shirt smells of the worn-out leather and perspiration that lingered in the car, so I pull my cologne out of my work bag and practically douse myself in it, hoping it will mask not only the taxi scent but my fear and uneasiness as well. I spot her wearing her favorite red dress right away despite the restaurant being as dimly lit as one of those Hollister stores I used to take my little sister shopping in when we were younger. She spots me walking towards our table and rises to greet me; I take it all in, for I do not know if the sight of the eagerness in her eyes will ever be something I witness again. Once we sit I order us a few drinks, knowing I won't be able to make it through this confession without a little bit of liquid courage.

The smell of fresh Italian food briefly calms my nerves, but I know it won't last for long. I try to put my confession off for as long as possible, and we make it about halfway through our meal when she asks, "So, what did you want to talk about tonight?"

My shoulders visibly tense and the smile on my face vanishes. She has no idea what's coming. "Uh, I actually wanted to talk to you about something regarding my UC days," I say as I watch her tense up as well. "I haven't been completely honest with you, Emma."

Her tone is cold and stern. "Go on."

"First, I want you to know this doesn't change anything, you know, with us. You're still my wife and the one I love. But, uh, remember the drug-ring job I worked a few years before I met you? I never really said much about it, mostly because I'm not really allowed to, but this is different . . . there was this woman, Sandra, the sister of the leader I was trying to get to. To make a long story short, I worked that job for about a year and a half, almost two years . . . and the only way to get more information on him was to pursue a relationship with her, so, uh, I did." I see her flinch at my last statement; she's slumping a bit, and I know this next part will kill her.

"Well, a few weeks ago we got a domestic abuse call over at the precinct, and that same woman was involved. She never found out I was previously an undercover cop, and I was ordered to flee before the drug raid, so she probably just thought I got caught beforehand or something, since she never saw me after it. . . . In either case, that call we received ended up being at her house and I was one of the responding officers. When she opened the door to see me on the other side she couldn't hide her shock. It was awkward to say the least. She looked more than surprised to see me, but once she saw my partner beside me she acted like she never knew me at all. My partner and I formally took a statement, and it was weird going through the motions of my current job with someone from my past job, especially when she didn't even know police work was my job. Afterwards I noticed a bunch of toys and shit lying around, right? And I couldn't help but look at all of it, and then I notice a backpack, and some Sketchers, even a drawing hanging on the fridge. I was about to shake it off and leave, but right before we made it

to the door a little boy comes out. He can't be older than seven, and, I don't know, he just kinda looked at me and uh —

"He's yours, isn't he?"

"Yeah . . . yeah he is. I told my partner I'd meet him in the car so I could confront her about it and requested a DNA test. It came back yesterday."

I don't like this; Emma's eyes are empty and her posture is stiff as a board. I want to reach for her hand that's lying on the table but I know better so I give her space. I search her face for a tear, a tremor, anything to indicate that she still has feeling and hasn't shut herself out. I don't find anything. She glances at her half-full glass of wine and downs the rest like she's chugging water after a marathon. I clear my throat a bit before asking, "Where does this leave us?"

"Who, us as in me and you, or us as in you, your baby mama, and your son?"

I deserved that, I think to myself. "You and me. Where does this leave us?"

Immediately after the question escapes my lips we are greeted with a prolonged silence. The anxiety crawls up my back like a spider as I await the inevitable. Her hesitance tells me what her words cannot.

She looks up at me and says, "Well, this leaves you, sitting here alone with a dinner bill" right before she gets up, shrugs her coat on and leaves.

I stay where I am for a long time after that. I knew as soon as she left that she was on her way to pack a few nights things and sleep at her sister's house for the night, and I'm just not ready to go back to an empty apartment yet. I better get used to it, since that's how my future nights will look.

After a few hours the host comes over to me with a look of pity in his eyes, as if that's what I need right now. "Look, buddy," he starts to say to me, "you don't have to go home but you can't stay here."

Walking out of the restaurant I realize I have no idea where to go. I'm definitely not ready to go home, but it is half past eleven in New York City. Certainly there's some place I can go to try to have a good time, right? I decide to just walk around until I come across something

remotely interesting, but became genuinely confused when I look up from the ground and find myself outside Sandra's house. Why the hell did I come here? She made it clear when I asked for the DNA test she wants nothing to do with me. She doesn't even want our son to know I exist within the same city as him. Damn, our son. Whenever I picture myself saying those words, it is Emma's face I imagine with the baby, not Sandra.

I take a deep breath and turn away from the house. There's nothing there for me, not now or ever. Then I walk to the bar.

Two days after I came clean to Emma she barges back into the apartment. I expected her to be back today, since I noticed the day before only a few items from our closet were missing. What I didn't expect was the positive pregnancy test she drops in my lap.

◇

Michael Timpert

Argument

The steps in front of me are impossible.
A vignette clouds my vision red,
and hope slips between my fingers
like ashes in rain.
He's talking to me but too far away,
so all I can hear is the gentle
brush of grass in the yard.
A ceramic mug paints my right palm
with cool reassurance, while my
veins divert boiling blood away,
far away
from where it should go.
I left the mug on the wooden railing
of the back porch to wait for
rain to fill its empty chest, but
it never came.

Kayla Marie Gleeson

Horoscope

after Ted Kooser's "Telescope"

These are the revelations that hold
our spirit and echo in the solar system—

the half-hearted attempt
to identify ourselves in the stars

and invoke the dust of creation
which exists inside us all.

The ink of the Milky Way drips
into newspaper text—only 99¢

and the dull blinking screen
of the Virtual Psychic Site

mirrors satellite signals
assumedly sent from the constellations.

Amber Mason

Happy Birthday

the stars
floating
like dust mites
dancing
in the moonbeams,

your breath on my ear
as I—
 click
fumble with—
 click
a lighter,
and candles burst to life.

startled delight
and brownie crumbles
frame the scene
while sounds of
Carl Sagan
talking about
the stars
the universe
and beyond.

but my beyond is you,
the places where your fingertips
brush against
with unsure intentions
and all the gentleness of a first-time lover.

Noelle Hansley

Active Daddy Casanova

You're my active daddy Casanova
Dark stars shine
Taking the light
Spilling out of your sides
It was a coffee-cup massacre
That we couldn't survive
Oh how I wish
The universe
Came into supernova
So that I
Would not have to wait
To be yours

Taylor Hartell

Twenty-One

The black snake
curls around the birthday cake,
slit yellow eyes eyeing
a young girl who is smiling.

Among tumultuous cries
celebrating the girl's goodbye
to playful youth,
the serpent whispers its truth:

*Go on my dear, blow out the candles to your cake,
and see how different the world will be when you wake.*

Ryene Fenner

Happy Birthday

Covered in red velvet
soft as rose petals
happiness comes
in the smallest forms.

You came from me
but were never mine
darkness hovering over me
lined with their parental smiles.

Signed on the dotted line
and away you went,
the tsunami in my eyes
reflecting the waves in my heart.

Three days later
you're adopted, I'm in hell
blowing out sixteen candles.

Juliana Sebben

Fruit Salad

I remember when Mia first learned she was pregnant. She had been dragging her feet for weeks, waking up every morning nauseous and complaining that her breasts felt almost too tender to put on her bra. In retrospect, there was no reason for her to have been surprised. Still, the day she found out, her gasp was so huge that it sucked all the air from the house.

"Lucia!"

I ran to her in the bathroom, startled by her cry. She had sunk to her knees on the tile, one hand cupping her mouth, the other clutching the white stick which read her fate. When she raised her big eyes to me they were swampy; tears trickled between her fingers.

"*Embarazada.*" She heaved a great breath through her mouth, her lips stretching into a smile that showed nearly all of her teeth. She scrambled up off the floor and threw her thin arms around me. "*Lucia, estoy embarazada!*"

Papi's eyes filled with tears when he heard the news, Abuela nearly fainted with joy. Even I couldn't stop the swelling of my heart when I imagined a mini-Mia growing up to call me Tía. Everyone had been so happy. At twenty-six, it was prime time for my big sister to have a baby. She and Carlos had been together for so long that her engagement ring had practically been tattooed onto her finger by the sun. The wedding was four months away. Mami complained that Mia's dress would need to be altered now to fit over the bump but I could tell she wasn't really mad. Every morning I'd walk in on her in the kitchen, scrolling through baby clothes online while she waited for the tea to brew.

Three weeks later, when I missed my period, I knew that things would be different. It had only been two days late when the panic set in. I didn't wait until my feet dragged or my stomach roiled or my breasts ached. I whispered to Janelle in the hallway before Algebra and we ditched immediately to a pharmacy. I gave her the money, too ashamed

to go in and buy the test myself. I could only imagine the look the cashier would give me, eyes flickering over my brace-face and flat chest. A baby having a baby. No, I waited outside, tapping a dent into the concrete with the toe of my foot.

We walked to her house together, Janelle swinging the bag carelessly on her wrist. "You're going to be fine," she kept saying, popping the gum in her mouth. "Seriously, relax. I've been through this a hundred times. It's probably just a fluke."

I nodded, pasting a smile onto my face. Janelle noticed the fraud and bumped me with her hip. "Really, Lucia, *relájate*," she said. "You've got nothing to fear. You never fuck without a rubber anyway, right?"

Maybe, I told myself, if enough people believe it to be true, it will be. So I agreed, nodding my head again. "*Nunca*."

I wonder now, as I perch on the toilet in Janelle's bathroom, how Mia had felt three weeks earlier. Nervous? Excited? Like her entire life was on the brink of collapse? On the cusp of a miracle? I cling to the test in my hand, staring for what feels like a lifetime at the tiny grey screen. I don't move, I don't breathe, I don't make a sound. Only later, when two little pink lines float into sight, do I drop my eyelids in an attempt to blink away the double-vision, an attempt to blink away the truth. The roar of blood in my ears is so loud that I don't hear Janelle come into the room, my tears so thick I can't even see her until she is right in front of me, her face looming over my own like the moon. I feel her fingers brushing the hair from my forehead, I feel her lips on my cheek, I hear the underwater sound of words that my brain can't give meaning to, I wrap my arms around her neck, and I cry.

Two hours later, we sit in her bedroom, a mixed bowl of papaya and pineapple between us. I eat the pieces mindlessly, staring blankly out the window. My eyes are so swollen from crying that they're hard to see through. Janelle had suggested icing them but her room is too warm; the cubes had just melted in my hands.

"Hmm." Janelle looks up at me from her laptop. "It says here that if you do one hundred burpees it's enough to kill the baby. Bounces

around so much inside you that the umbilical cord just snaps." I raise an eyebrow and she shrugs. "Worth a shot."

"I don't think so."

"Maybe you should tell Daniel. He might know how to help."

The mention of his name draws his face to my mind. I can see the soft curve of his grin, hear his gentle voice asking, *Don't you trust me?* A bitter taste rises in my mouth and I grimace. "I don't want to talk to him."

"You should tell him," Janelle says. "I think he deserves to know."

"Yeah, well you also think eating this fucking fruit salad will actually abort my baby," I snap back, tossing my hand towards the bowl of orange and yellow lumps.

"It used to work for Jen all the time!" She frowns at me. "I'm just trying to help, okay?"

I know that. There's no reason for me to feel any anger towards her at all, but it flares up suddenly, cresting over me like a red wave. I see her, sitting there in a tank top so low-cut the tops of her nipples are visible when she leans forward. I think of all the stories she's told me of boys she's blown in the woods behind school and of all the times she's gushed about how good it feels to scrap a condom. The injustice of it all glares like a neon sign; I can't keep the words inside. "It should've been you."

My accusation rings out like a gunshot; it hangs in the air like smoke curling from the barrel.

"What?"

I'm overcome by these feelings of hatred and fear. All at once I want to explode, to be held, to scream, to be silent, to go back to a time before this baby was or rush forward to the day when it is no longer. Everything feels wrong and I tell her so. "I don't deserve this shit." My head shakes back and forth. "It should've been you!"

The set of her mouth makes Janelle look ages older than her fifteen years. She slams her laptop shut and points to the door so aggressively that all the bracelets on her wrist crash together with a jangle. "Get out."

The shock of her intensity freezes me. I stare at her with wide eyes and she glares back, jaw clenched. All of my fury flattens just as suddenly as it had risen. "No," I say.

"I mean it." It's clear in her voice that she does.

"I can't go home."

"Well, I don't want you here."

"I'm sorry, Janelle." I search her face for any signs of forgiveness; I need her forgiveness. I can't go home yet. "I didn't mean it."

"Yes, you did." Her lip snarls, her nostrils flaring. I recognize the look as the same one she'd given Yazmin S. last week before throwing the first punch and brace myself. "You think you're so high and mighty because you've only been with one guy. You think you're so fucking pure--"

"No, I—"

"But you're not." Janelle plows through my interruptions, unfazed by the tears that have begun to well again in my eyes. "You're a skank, Lucia, just like me." I wince and she continues, "In fact, you're even worse than me because now you're fucking pregnant!"

She cackles and I stand abruptly, knocking over the bowl and sending cubes of fruit skidding across the floor. "Hey!" she protests, the smile disappearing from her face.

"Fuck you." I blow past her and out of the room, keeping my head low so she can't see how much her words have hurt me. Her response chases me down the hallway.

"Pregnant bitches aren't really my type!"

I slam her front door behind me and crash onto the street, my heart racing. Outside the sky is colored orange by the last dregs of daylight. I can hear the sound of kids playing down the block; I can see the Hernandez's dog napping on the porch across the road. Janelle's street is as familiar to me as my own name but now I'm baffled by it, so disoriented I may as well have stepped out of a movie theatre and into bright sun. How can the world look the same as it did when I woke up this morning when everything is so different?

My feet make the decision to move before my mind does. The rest of my body follows them down the block, one slow step at a time. My

head holds a brain that can't make sense of its life; my stomach holds a baby, which has just ruined it all. I try to think, as I walk, of the best ways to confess to my parents that their fourteen-year-old angel is not so innocent after all. Perhaps they'll believe me if I pretend that my pregnancy is the second coming of Christ, but more than likely they will not. Defeated, I decide instead to stop at the market where I buy all the pineapple and papaya I can afford with the change in my pocket.

◇

Christine Donat

Someone Else's Heart

I wasn't certain about feeling a heartbeat that wasn't my own. And, of course, that uncertainty led me to be certain that I had. It came in pairs, thumping in systematic rhythm as it coat-tailed the pulsation of my own heartbeat. Our two hearts, symphonizing in delicate matrimony, crafted a united bond that could only be shared between it and me. I wanted so badly to be an adult, and in what felt like an abrupt instant, I went from matching my own socks to contemplating matching someone else's. I was more than ill-prepared to reap what I had sown during my exploit with childish conduct.

I think the scariest facet was the carelessness of consequence. Our generation, that is, my generation, is so capable of taking a beautiful entity and making it ugly. I often ponder how much I enhanced its ugliness. Kids presume life to be thoughtless. They ignore the penalties of their selfish decisions and live as if they possess complete invincibility. And I learned this in its entirety due to the beating heart that depended on me to provide for it. This was the lesson I would lug around publicly for nine months, proving to the other careless kids that life is all *but* what they presume it to be.

There is a particular ringing in your ears when someone important talks at you about something important. It comes in times of sorrow, in phases of agony, and in moments of denial. The kind of ringing that mutes the speaker's voice, only to enrich the ringing itself. And in that excruciating pain, the ringing does not silence.

I sat patiently in a tight room, analyzing the thin, white sheet draping over the end of the bed. I brushed my hands impatiently across the layer covering the mattress, each movement recording crinkles on the surface. My legs dangled, and I stared down at them in disgust as if they were the dirty clothes hurled around my bedroom. What seemed to be a decade later, the doctor strolled soundlessly into the box I'd been lingering in for hours. She looked up. She looked down. She looked in every direction but mine.

Finally, we made eye contact and just like that, I was crying—my cheeks flooding with waves of regret. They became a tsunami of careless decisions that I had blamed on being a kid. She stared at me, and I saw her mouth begin to quiver as if she wanted to say something, but the word “pregnant” was being avoided by her assumptions of how I was feeling. Yet, I didn’t need her to say the word, because at that moment, I could feel both hearts beating in unison. I could sense the discomfort between us, and I wondered if she too could hear the ringing. I started to concentrate on my unmatched socks. My chipped nail polish. The pen stain spattered onto the left leg of my pants. The constant ringing in my ears. I concentrated on everything that was wrong but the thing that was most wrong: the beating of someone else’s heart inside me.

There is a particular sensation that transpires with bad news. It comes in times of regret, in phases of perplexity, and in moments of loneliness. The kind of sensation that allows a fleeting plunge in your stomach, only to emphasize the plunge itself. And in that agonizing hopelessness of desolation, the plunge does not cease.

I cried desperately in the arms of a stranger, imagining a solution that did not exist. The doctor cradled my vulnerability while utterly ignoring the presence of my tears on her shirt. I was thinking about not thinking. I was thinking about having to think, but not being able to. My brain developed a numbing distress, so the ringing conquered and the plunge in my gut waved its flag in triumph. I wanted so badly to disappear. I could tell the doctor did, too. But I could not evaporate like I begged to because I was no longer the only variable in the equation. My heart beat for another. And I was alone again. That is, it and I were alone. There was an elephant in the room, but I was more than aware of its company. I wished I could ask it to leave, but company always over-stays its welcome, and I had no choice but to remain hospitable.

I was given the opportunity to make a few phone calls; the doctor knew I was not going to drive myself home after this mess. The only person I could think to call was my best friend, Lacy, who answered the phone after just two rings. I was expecting it to go right to voicemail because it was early in the morning, too early, yet fate stepped in and her groggy voice reacted. “Hey what’s up?” I hadn’t prepared what to say

because I assumed she wouldn't answer, so instead I wept and told her the address of my gynecologist. She thought I had an STD. I wish I had an STD. We hung the phone up once she was able to understand my location and for a brief moment, life didn't seem real. I felt like I was watching a movie—an *ABC Family Special* with one out of five stars on viewer rating.

I loitered in the doctor's office until I heard the sound of Lacy's voice echoing in the hallway speaking with the receptionist. "Hi, where is Christine Donat? She's my best friend and she had an appointment. I need to get into the ro—" The receptionist cut her off and asked her to be seated. She hadn't taken a seat, or if she did it wasn't for long because the doctor ushered her into my little cove about fifteen seconds after her arrival. She gazed at me, my eyes glassy and smudged, and without asking what was wrong, she hugged me. I never corrected her about thinking it was an STD, because the moment she looked at me, she knew. The same way that I knew when the doctor looked at me. Lacy knew when I looked at her.

She drove me to my psychiatrist appointment that I had mindlessly scheduled when cramming in all doctor's visits before college started in a week. After I filled out a misery of paperwork at the gynecologist's office, we said our thank-yous and went on our way. The drive was about thirty-minutes long, so we got to talking about the third person in the car. "What now? Are you going to keep it? How will you tell Steve? Did you already tell Steve? I thought you were on birth control." My silence illustrated that I knew none of the answers and that I didn't care to know. She drove me back to my car later that afternoon, and when I sat down, the musty odor of a 2001 Chevy violated my nose. I thought, *Why haven't I ever noticed this smell before?* I'm sure it was because I was focusing on everything else: except for my baby. How "parent-like" of me. I sat in the parking lot for a while and organized my thoughts. *How will I tell Steve?*

He asked me what I wanted, as if I really had an option. I began to blame my childish mistake on his mastery of persuasion. What I really wanted was to be dead. Looking back in reflection, I should have known one of us would run away. Looking back with envy, I wish it could have

been me. Being alone in that room foreshadowed whom I'd be sitting with on the porch at 2 a.m. that night. I drove myself to Seven Eleven, the only place that I felt suitably accepted at. I bought a pack of cigarettes; I used to think they were disgusting. And every drag was more nourishing than the previous one. Each time I pursed the cigarette between my lips, I would close my eyes and appreciate knowing how much I contributed to a generation of arrogant idiots.

There is a particular awareness of isolation that becomes evident when you realize you are living for someone else. It comes in times of seclusion, in phases of depression, and moments of selfishness. The kind of awareness that slaps you across the face, only to accentuate the awareness itself. And in that alarming recognition of confinement, the awareness does not surrender.

I could not fathom the future. I could not rescind the past. I was alone on that porch. That is, it and I. As the clock ticked forward and the sun persisted to rise and fall, my company grew exponentially louder. I survived misfortunate news, but treasured the loyalty from the heart that was not my own when I needed support. In every throbbing ache that wallowed abysmally within my soul, I learned to cultivate being solitary into being comfortable. And I began not minding to be alone on that porch.

◇

Jessica Sommerfeldt

Lyme

Green is by far
the cruelest color —
the underbelly shade
of a fish turned over,
the pigment of a river
thick with bacteria,
the color of herbs
concealing poison
thrown into the frying pan.
But that only came to me later on
after I learned my lesson.

(2016)

two-thousand sixteen is the deathly epigraph, the preface to the disenfranchised poem that some of us read, but others, who, too tired, too apprehensive to keep reading, leave be because we are, sick of the dying Black bodies, seeing ourselves die as They are mere reflections of ourselves, we grow weary when the mirrors keep shattering. some of us are too sheltered to know how to even mold the cracks to once more fix them. some of us are too scared to die fighting for freedom, while our willful ignorance continues to divide us. Keith Lamont Scott, shot in his car while holding a book perceived to be a firearm; we held dearly a sixty-six-year-old Deborah Danner in need of help, yet the police responded to her “emotional disturbance” with gunshots: dead by a bullet like Officer Shelby to Terence Crutcher. Coexistence cannot exist on Earth when we have to convince one another why we don’t deserve to die. for a human to convince another human of their humanness, is exhausting—it denies existential anxiety looming under our weighty breaths, brutally panting with no time to breathe, while we continue to sound our unarguable declarations toward Black Liberation. dismissive, victim-blaming American culture is our truest murderous method. to only believe that the only time we suffer is when our Black human flesh bleeds, is like an added bullet to our open flesh wounds and survival scars.

◇

Michael Starace

Nightskating

The trick is to crunch over
yellow slants of truncated domes
and sidewalk cracks.
To carve and sometimes drag your foot.
To race, as the red hand
replaces the white walker
blinking madly like vengeance
like some inversion of conquering man.

No real match for his SUV
so far removed from nature.
What nature? You wonder,
in this asphalt town
on the cold street
on a winter night.

Sequoia Stone

A Song for Winter

white flesh packed like sawdust in damp shipping crates
fish bones in the snow swelling, rising
spreading apart, desperate for
the slim fingers of the sun
decay, decay
i crouch down in the gutter and raise you to my lips

Benan Saracoglu

Milk & Cookies

White winter winds wail wildly while we wither away.
Obsession over every minute detail creates craters in our faces,
but craters make good bowls to share broth from —
broth because Mother says we're saving the sugar for when Santa
finally comes
down to whisper sweet nothings to our shambling corpses,
and then we will thank him, because Mother taught us to be polite.
When he leaves, we, like kids, will climb up on the mantle to suck
marrow from mounted antlers
to sustain our shine like spit on a man's boots,
the stag who once roamed freely, our stalwart protector.

Ari Bayvertyan

Nocturnal Arts and Crafts

Up all night,
Venom consumes me.
My veins burn as my blood takes all colors
Flooding the canvas I see when I close my eyes.

I've learned to let it change me,
And let myself go—
As I let myself grow, I see a child in panic
Trying to sew the man I someday want to be.

He makes mistakes, sure,
But I love him so.
And love him more I will,
As fate's threads come together to bind my skin to my soul
Once and for all, enchanted embroidery.

Darren Lyons

Painted Pictures in My Mind

Love is entering this walled-off brain palace
apart from my worn everyday.

Love is the ultimate cliché, but mine is there,
lit galleries in my white-boxed mind,

painted as de Kooning's stabbing brushstrokes,
streaked door to a blue river beyond.

Kline's black tracks flatten, shine on my white
flurry, fury of what is not waking life.

Head-space is filled with reds by Rothko,
from London, Chicago, and my soulmate,

New York, city of pure-colored dust specks;
love, immersed in viscous oil, fast plastic.

Hand-picked Pollocks drip rainbow blood-skeins
in my rooms where no other humans reside.

These curated works, culled from among the hum-drum
billion pictures, are hung and solely displayed.

Tommy Falcone

Please consider you are dealing with the human form

"I historically belong to the enormous bliss of American death."

—Frank O'Hara

Somebody throw the earth through my heart to counter the bruised-blue striations of a stormed sky as we step forward into our urban selves faithless like waxy, bloated mortuary smiles—that body full of erasure conceding to all that is perishable when humans become massive, ill-fed inconveniences walking the earth in a self-governing bureaucracy of mutually dependent parasites all searching for their own consommé of desires in which to drown before they die immediately and join the overwhelming efficiency of inert space: never to think that the self is content in which to step lovingly until, drawing exhaustively, we join the infectious breeze, which is our true inheritance, to stave off tone bleeds that drip into the periphery of our lives and settle into a patina that can never be altered.

It has been a struggle to get here; constantly inserting meaning into abandonment; lost in fricatives ululating in rapids over the pebbles of a streambed, which, to you, must seem like just defective lachrymal. I require cigarette breaks and ample amounts of spooning to coax me into a face. But nobody has held me like I wanted: the exact measure of my length. If only there were something to fall back on:

An intricate lace of affection to correspond when desires fail, signifying love's indifferently bent axis, like the soft rub of dusk on the contoured hills. What would it take for me to embrace these porous creatures? Can they survive the crossing over to their shattered receiver; can they begin to unfold the pain in my eyes, the inimically slow girth of long nights? I will follow all of your instructions. I promise.

However absurd or lowbrow, until you have found in me something indistinguishable from your own self. Sure, you can wear me on your mouth awhile. I actually think that would look pretty hot; that adorable crease deepening every time I compliment your eyes. But you must look at me now. I'm entirely serious. I need to be something other than eternally deferential or I swear I'll swallow a bottle of pills. I must be able to find the words to say: look, we're here.

◇

Austin Carpentieri

Settle

Specks of dust
Flutter and settle through
The warm light from the
Propped window,

And though I see them
Land on my arm, and
Settle here and there
Amongst empty desks and
Forgotten boot polish cans,

Some particular particles
Remain, swinging this way and that
With the . . . is it breath? Energy?
Electricity? Which keeps them floating.

Today, the bones feel
A glow.
A bold, gold, old
Glow. Resonating from within
The emery white and red-muddied marrow.

It is rising, for feel it
In the wastes which we wander
With ease like blue birds singing
To ourselves.

A long, blue streak along
This gray and brown scape,
And my soul is cast.

I am the pale emerald leaves
Before a storm, through the window
Where behind you the sun burned brightly—

And lit up the static strands of your flannel-rubbed hair like
Fire electric.

And the warm specks of glow settled.

Julia Morini

our lives in three parts

I.

we were always pushing light bulbs
into the sand
waiting on the rain
to show the world what we did
but we always forget
it doesn't rain here anymore
nothing comes back once it leaves
there is so much more than sand
and empty glass in this world
i am not sorry i left

II.

yesterday lightning struck the sand
but there were no bulbs left to light
you screwed them into the kitchen lamp
after i left them to break
and i promise i'm not mad
they are getting their use
somewhere in a kitchen long ago
we dance to the sound of home
the promise we would come back to each other
space has never really been far between us

III.

call it your worst fear
an empty house filled with birds
yet we will come home to you
even if it is breaking beneath our fingertips
this love isn't giving up our light bulbs in the desert
it is always pouring the sand out of our shoes
before we come back inside
telling you about the day lightning struck

Emily Cerrone

Joy

Waterfalls flow past memories
of fish doing gymnastics
over my favorite childhood
songs. Smells of burning
wood and snickerdoodles run
wild, twirling around a
happy version of myself.

The color green follows me
as I fall asleep on a
towel in the sand. Sun
beating down on my back,
music playing in my ears.

Ten years ago, I dance and roll
and skip into the same forest
I've been in a thousand times.

Now I hear the absence in the absence.

Hayley Naphen

A True Horticulturist

Debby B. drives an old silver Toyota pick-up; its inspection sticker is going on four years expired. Old towels, coolers, and other miscellaneous items are strewn both in the cab and the bed of the truck, and every time she opens the passenger door for you because the handle is broken, there is always a dog lying in the passenger seat. She'll tell you to just push her over.

Debby was the first friend I made working at Martha's Gardens. She is in her late sixties, and had long silver hair that was recently cut to shoulder length. She is what I consider to be a true Islander; she rarely steps off of Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts. She tells me about her half-senile, entitled, wealthy elderly friends who seem to be even more eccentric than she is. Many people I know think she's a bit nuts. She did too much acid in her youth or she's escaping reality. I believe she has more freedom than any other person I know.

We met in March of 2013. I had recently graduated from high school a semester early, and a semi-distant family friend, Kristen, asked if I wanted to live with her family on Martha's Vineyard and work at their landscape and nursery company. After initial hesitation, I decided to accept the offer. When I got there, Kristen took me on a tour of the business, including their retail location with seven greenhouses, as well as their growing facility known as M.G. 2, located just a few blocks away. Debby works at M.G. 2 during that time in the season and is the main plant cultivator. She's been working for Kristen for over twenty years.

For the first couple of days Kristen had me filling flats of soil for Debby so she could sow seeds and transplant as quickly as possible. I enjoyed the repetition and rhythm that went into filling those flats: I would get into the mechanical swing of it and quickly filled the flats faster than Debby could seed sow. So she taught me how to sow seeds, too. She explained to lightly press the tip of my index finger into each cell of soil, so that when you watered the seeds in, a little bit of soil

would cover them. I sowed a variety of early cool weather crops: kale, romaine, arugula, mesclun mix, and more. I loved checking on the seedlings every morning, and seeing which of them had sprouted. I took care of them like they were my own and I loved watching them grow up.

Debby and I immediately got along well. I loved her constant singing or whistling; she was always making some kind of noise. We worked side by side and she showed me how to stack trays up on the bench while I transplanted, so that my back was not constantly bent over. She would tell me about her childhood in Connecticut and how she and her siblings used to sneak out and skip school. She mused over never getting caught.

Debby would also tell me about her daughter, Eliza, and how much she missed her because at the time she was in the Peace Corps. We would drive to a nearby pond most days to take our lunch breaks so that her old yellow lab, Lila, could stretch her legs and swim. Though it can be easy to grow tired of the long days at Martha's Gardens, we pretty much always enjoyed ourselves when we worked together.

A few days after I had first started working there, I was seed sowing and Debby asked, "Have you met Ethan yet?"

"Uhhh, no? I don't think so," I replied.

"Oh, well."

"Well what?"

"Well, you'll find out when you meet him. I don't trust him. He was accused of murdering his wife in Boston."

"Really?" I asked. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, he was. He was found not guilty, but they never arrested anyone for her murder."

Her story gave me creepy vibes, but I couldn't really tell if she was serious or not.

A few days later, I was working at M.G. 1 with a few Brazilian women, Angela, Isabelle, and Andora. They were transplanting hollies that never sold the year before into bigger pots, and I was pricing them with stickers and moving the trees into rows. A friendly gentleman around Debby's age approached us, and he introduced himself to me as Ethan. He had a calming voice and genuine laugh, and he began teasing

Isabelle to work faster. This was amusing not only because Isabelle was clearly the fastest one transplanting, but she also gave him shit right back. We always mused that Isabelle and Ethan would have made a great couple.

I learned quickly that Ethan had a great sense of humor and was often pranking other employees. He and I also got along well right off the bat, and he often teased me for being the dirtiest employee at Vineyard Gardens; more often than not, soil would accumulate all over me, for some reason more so than anybody else.

I asked him one day, "How come you and Debby don't get along?"
"Because she's out of her mind."

I decided to leave it at that. Every time I'd see the two of them interact, Debby seemed to be straining politeness; she was usually asking him to do something for her. Ethan always replied curtly, with no trace of humor in his voice. I understand why he doesn't like Debby; she can be confrontational and irrational, especially in the heat. But to this day their feud seems pointless and immature; can't they just tolerate each other?

About a month after I had been working there, Debby B. told me, "I was intimidated before you got here. Kristen told me what a genius you were because you graduated early, and I was expecting that you would walk in here being a true horticulturist. I thought you were going to kick me out of my own greenhouse! Then I met you and realized how wrong I was."

I remember laughing heartily at this comment. Though I managed to graduate early, I was by no means a genius and knew absolutely nothing about plants when I started working there.

Debby, on the other hand, amazes me with her knowledge. She'll be able to identify the most obscure clipping by at least its Latin name: *Ilex opaca*. She knows the name of even the smallest of the various sprouts that volunteer along the creases of the greenhouse. People can say whatever they want about her, but they have to admit that she knows her plants.

This past summer I still worked with Debby from time to time; it was my fourth summer at Martha's Gardens. I still lived with the

owners, Jim and Kristen, though it probably had something to do with the fact that I also started dating their son, Alex, back when I first got there in 2013.

Debby and I were working in the greenhouse one humid July day. It was 95 degrees outside, meaning that it was 103 degrees in the greenhouse. She and I were losing it. We were pouring sweat, and I knew it was getting bad because Debby was starting to tell me about the wet dream she had the night before. She only confides in me her sexual desires when the heat is getting to her.

"Let's go to Menemsha for a swim and some lunch!" She suddenly shrilled. I wasn't going to object. Though it was about a twenty-minute drive to the small fishing village, we decided to take the risk for our half-hour lunch break. Debby opened the passenger door to her truck and I gently nudged her new, incredibly sweet Pit Bull over so I could sit down. Lulu Bell looked at me with frustration for being moved with her sad, timid eyes.

We rumbled along the windy, salty, hilly roads to Menemsha. When we got there Debby changed into one of the suits she kept in her truck and took Lulu Bell for a swim. I bought a fish sandwich for us to share. I met them at the beach and watched as she swam along the shore; Lulu Bell was trailing behind. I was mad at myself for not keeping a suit in my workbag; why didn't I just have these things on me at all times like Debby, so that I could go for a swim at any time I wanted? That's the thing though. I would have to plan ahead in order to have the freedom and flexibility that Debby has, whereas hers comes naturally.

Debby is a controversial person; I know a few people more than just Ethan who refuse to work with her directly. Zach, Alex's best friend who also works for the landscaping side of M.G., does not like her because she once yelled at him for not immediately dropping what he was doing to carry heavy bags of soil into her greenhouse for her. She sometimes has crummy moods and takes it out on those around her. She complains about Kristen and various politics and employee drama that's a daily accompaniment of working at Martha's Gardens. This aspect of her does not diminish my love for her.

This past May we were joking and catching up because I had just returned to the Vineyard for the season. She said after a particularly loud outburst of laughter, "You know why we get along so well?"

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I have to be nice to you; you're going to be my boss one day!" Her response took me off guard. She was referring to the fact that my boyfriend, Alex, is gearing up to take over the business one day, and she assumed that I would just run it with him.

"Debby!" I exclaimed. "I thought we were friends! Now I know our whole friendship is a lie. . . ." Though I responded with some form of sarcasm, I was hurt by her words. I had always thought of Debby as a close friend, even before Alex and I officially started dating. I told Alex that night what she had said, and he sort of laughed it off by saying, "That's Debby for you. Don't take it personally."

But I knew her better. I knew that she didn't really mean what she had said, but I was confused as to why she would feel obliged to say it. I was surprised that she, who pretty much raised her daughter single-handedly, would assume I would drop all of my personal goals in order to support my current partner. I was also offended because she implied that we did not have a genuine friendship. Though I love all of the plants and employees at Martha's Gardens, I don't really have an intention of running the business someday.

The truth is that I have no idea what I actually want to do. I'll be graduating in a few months, and as a liberal-arts-college student I feel enormous pressure that I should have some idea of what I want to do by now. Though I am the only person who really puts this weight on myself, it nonetheless makes me anxious about what I will do post graduation. I want to utilize my college degree, but for what I have no idea. My biggest priority, like Debby, is to be happy in whatever I am doing.

Alex has already expressed to me that he wants me to live with him on the Vineyard. He's now twenty-seven and was given land on which he can build a house, and he wants me to help him build it. I cannot comprehend beginning to settle down to that degree immediately after I graduate. I want the option to travel. I don't want to be tied to a

mortgage in my early twenties. Though I love him and Martha's Vineyard so freaking much, building a house is a serious step that I'm not quite ready for, either emotionally or especially financially.

At the same time, I recognize how privileged I am to have the option of saying no to an offer like that. It wouldn't be a bad gig to take over a successful company one day where I could work outside amongst the flowers on a beautiful island with the person I love. It may still happen one day. I want something of my own, though.

Whatever it is, I want it to be mine. I don't want to be handed something because then I would have no real sense of ownership over it. I will take pride in whatever I end up doing, for sure, but I take better care of and more pride in the plants that I've grown from seed than the ones that have been wintered over from the previous year. I think it might be the feminist in me that makes me want to prove that I can create something substantial on my own and claim it for myself. I understand how lucky I am to have this choice.

Debby lives in a building that can only be described as one step above a shack. It is tiny and cluttered with stuff everywhere. She does not pay her taxes, lives life paycheck to paycheck, and is often telling me about the latest concoction she made with anything in her fridge, or about getting drunk off of fermented blueberries. She often skips out on work, and does not put up with anybody's shit. Though she has no savings or extra money (she warned me never to bury money in the ground even if it's in a jar because it will get moldy), she is the happiest person when she is alone with her dog in nature.

Wherever I end up and whatever I end up doing, I simply want to be happy. I want to be free like Debby.

◇

Kira Hall

Old Lady Willow

Woman with seedy eyes
And white hair rolling
Over rooted wrinkles
Pinched with aging soil,

And crouching in her barren silt
Returns to earth by graceful wilt.

Conor Tuohy

Stumped

I was looking out the window and a small blue bird just grabbed, what I presume to have been a stinkbug, off the screen and looked straight into my eyes as it completed this task. It took off quickly, bug in beak, and landed swiftly upon a tree branch. The bird gazed at me again, communicating through eye contact. Yes, I love you too. Then, the bird was gone.

What a difference time makes. For instance, last spring I was looking out onto a parking lot. This year, I'm looking out into the woods. There is life, plenty of it, a mixture of fascinating movement and genuine stillness, all in the same time and place. That's what makes the Earth so astonishing, right? The creatures are exuberant, flying, prancing, squirming, crawling, and those motionless, still breathing. Everybody seems to forget that plants are living things too. Quite understandable it is, since indeed we exist in a world where there are plastic plants sold exclusively at Walmart. If it's painted green, they won't know the difference. Green is the distinguishable color of life, which explains why people think aliens would be green as well. But scientists aren't searching for aliens—I bet they're looking for trees. Picture this: seeing a tree, in space! They seem to be unique to Earth though, at least for now. Any connection to why life exists here? There are those who would argue not. Wouldn't it make sense for all people, young or old, in charge or on the sidelines, to be on the same page when it comes to the liquidation of the trees? Forests are getting bulldozed by bullies of the planet, a staged atrocity left out of the minds of many who wouldn't think twice about it. The issues that surround the future and protection of our environment are most contentious. If one side argues about conservation, which is positive, how could another side with destruction? This is the moment we realize that money may not grow on trees, but trees are simply a part of the human consumption process. The trees, and everything else under the sun have a price tag attached. We buy, and we buy, and we consume and repeat, as if supply has no end. The world cries out and calls for

help, but this man hangs up the phone. When he says it's not important, his supporters won't think it's important, neither will his army.

Then came the squirrel out of nowhere. This particular squirrel had a distinguishable reddish tail, unlike any other squirrels I've seen around here. It was digging at the ground for less than a second, before gnawing at what appeared to be a small nut. The scruffy critter paused mid chomp, and turned his head toward my window. Everything, completely still, except for his rapid chewing, which caused his small cheeks to bulge simultaneously. *You give me peace of mind.* Then, the squirrel scurried off before another would find its hiding place.

In terms of extremely rich humans, selfishness leaks all over the floor. The rest should rise and face the facts of our future, because it's not merely the trees that are disappearing, but the ozone layer depleting, the ocean filling with toxic waste. Imagine if the fish were polluting the land like we pollute the ocean, dumping all types of seaweed shit, clogging up our streets. I bet a good portion of these rich rapacious men would be looking to sue the hell out of the creatures of the sea. I'm quite surprised *this man* hasn't tried to sue fish already. If there's anybody who could really sue a fish, I would have absolute confidence that this man would do it better than anyone else. I can see him getting support for his lawsuit. How about people whom we may applaud for stepping up for the cause? If Leonardo DiCaprio doesn't spike interest in supporting action against a global environmental crisis, I don't know what the fuck would do it. I put my trust in the courts. The executive branch may be lost momentarily. *This man* and his *executive coordinators* are used to getting away with bogus. Unfortunately for himself, fortunately for everyone else, he had more power over the law, when he wasn't a part of the law. Federal judges, they aren't radical, even if they favor a political platform. One must have to assume they have the best judgment in the nation. It is the legislative branch of government that citizens must remain critical of. It is the closest thing we have to a government focused on needs of the people whose voices ring high and low. Personally, we need somebody who isn't a part of the legislature to shape business. How many people out there are in favor of a Congressional Mother? Strong paying job. Extremely transparent. The designated mom will

keep these outlandish senators in line, and slap ‘em when they step out of bounds. This mother will guide state representatives, that in *this* house, everyone must share and make healthy, reliable decisions that will advance all our hopes and dreams. When accomplishments are finally achieved, we can bring in a Congressional Grandma to bake cookies every once in a while.

Sipping my second cup of green tea, I spotted one deer, two deer, five! Three were resting beside tree trunks while two stood, eating berries off a bush. Then I noticed that they noticed me. They weren’t afraid and I was soothed by their serenity in the matter. I sipped my tea, listening to Joni Mitchell’s “Big Yellow Taxi,” as they shut their eyes and ate berries. *Thanks for being here.* Then, I closed the curtains and opened the page.



CONTRIBUTORS

Daniel Affsprung, a writer from Pennsylvania, is in his last semester at SUNY New Paltz. His poems have appeared in *American Literary Magazine* and *Omphalos*.

Ari Bayvertyan is an international student, aspiring musician, and English and Philosophy major. His poetry has appeared in *Chronogram*.

Nicole Bressi is an aspiring Tina Fey, but will settle for herself if need be.

Miriam Camloh is a Photography major who spends her days running around looking for good lighting and bad puns. She loves her family, her fiancé, and reading about what Jesus *really* said.

Austin Carpentieri is a junior English major. He enjoys reading, writing, and arithmetic (just kidding, he hates that last one), and looks up at the sky a lot.

Kelsea Cassone, a junior who majors in English and minors in Creative Writing and Psychology, loves to watch horror movies, drink coffee, and find old books in antique shops.

Emily Cerrone is a nineteen-year-old sophomore, who majors in English with a Creative Writing concentration. An aspiring author, she writes mostly pastoral poems.

Ashley Cummins, a twenty-two-year-old fiction writer and poet, describes herself as being nascent.

Patrick Derilus, an undergraduate majoring in English with a Creative Writing concentration and minoring in Black Studies, is also an independent writer of poetry, essays, and short stories, with a self-published anthology, *Thriving Fire: Musings of A Poet's Odyssey* (2016). His poetry has appeared previously in *Stonethrow Review*.

Christine Donat, from Stony Brook, New York, enjoys writing, drawing, the ocean, and being active. She writes: "My inspiration comes from my

loving family, which I am so blessed to have. My ultimate goal is to be happy with wherever my professional interests lead.”

Tommy Falcone, a senior Creative Writing major, who has an obsessive relationship with books and coincidentally works at a bookstore in downtown New Paltz, grew up in Northeastern New Jersey but has lived in the Hudson Valley for the past three years. His hobbies include book collecting and trying to get his cat to stop peeing all over the house.

Alida Falkena, a junior majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing, is fond of strange plants and blood-dipped fish swimming in a glass cube. If she were to describe life in terms of texture, she would say it feels like plastic.

Ryene Fenner is a twenty-one-year-old senior who lives in Lagrange, New York. She graduates in May of 2017 with a degree in English and a minor in Creative Writing. Ryene finds writing therapeutic, and is honored that her poem, “Happy Birthday,” is a part of *Stonethrow Review*.

Austin Frayler is in his sophomore year studying Adolescent Education in English, with a minor in Creative Writing. He enjoys writing poetry and plans to become a well-established author and English teacher.

Kayla Marie Gleeson is a mythic-pastoral poet whose inspiration is drawn from nature and historical figures—fictional and nonfictional. Third-place winner (for poetry) in the 2015 National Suffolk County Community College Writing Festival, she aspires to continue writing poetry for as long as she lives.

Cassandra Goldman, a senior, is studying biology and creative writing. She aspires to one day be a physician assistant but will be volunteering with Americorps in the meantime. Cassandra is currently working on a nonfiction novel as well as continuing to write poetry.

Noelle Grassel, a Creative Writing major in her sophomore year, has enjoyed writing ever since she was a child but truly became passionate about it after taking a creative writing course in high school.

Kira Hall, born in King, North Carolina, is currently a junior Creative Writing major and Philosophy minor. She reads, writes, and watches anything and everything.

Noelle Hansley, a graduating senior, is an International Relations major who minors in Anthropology. Constantly inspired by the works of Emily Dickinson, Joy Harjo, and Pablo Neruda, in the future she will continue her journey reading, writing, and drinking coffee.

Taylor Hartell, a graduate of SUNY New Paltz (December 2016), studied English with a Creative Writing concentration. She enjoys writing stories and poems, and someday hopes to become a published author with works everyone could enjoy.

Gam LaFrance: English major from Brooklyn, New York forever wooed by language. Poet. Storyteller. Friend.

Darren Lyons will earn a BA in English in May 2017, and in the fall, will attend graduate school for Creative Writing. In 2015, Darren received first prize in the Troy-Hayner Cultural Center's Poetry Competition. His short fiction has appeared in *Stonethrow Review*.

Amber Mason, a junior in the Creative Writing Program, has been writing all her life. She is currently putting the finishing touches on a novel she started her freshman year.

Mary Shannon McHugh is currently a junior obtaining a degree in Creative Writing and a minor in Theatre Arts.

Michelle Minarik, a commuter student born and raised in Rockland County, New York, majors in Early Childhood Education with an English concentration. She is a lover of literature and hater of naps. She happily pays tribute to her father and late mother in her entry to *Stonethrow Review*.

Anthony Mitchell writes: "I am a Manhattan poet fascinated with rhyme, rhythm, and syllabic patterns employed in song—a product of

early Sunday school hymns. I generally employ lyricism as literary vehicle—a means to convey a subtle undercurrent of romance, physical intimacy, and insecurity in my works, emblematic of my personality.”

Julia Morini, a History major from Brewster, New York, has been a member of the New Paltz Slam Poetry Team for two years.

Hayley Napphen, a senior, enjoys exploring the local area by bike, being immersed in nature, and planting seeds.

Hayley Nusbaum, a senior Creative Writing major, is appearing in *Stonethrow Review* for the third time. She has a shrine in the dark crevice of her pantry where she worships Bruce Springsteen and Percy Faith.

Meghan O’Brien, a fourth-year Italian major, loves to be outside, writes as a defense mechanism, is devoted to foreign language studies, and always wants dessert. She’s just trying to live her best life.

Aidan O’Callaghan is a twenty-two-year-old English major from Red Hook, New York.

Julianna Reynolds is a third-year undergraduate majoring in Public Relations and minoring in Creative Writing.

Al Rigby is an Asian Studies major, who hopes to graduate in 2018. Born in Memphis, Tennessee, she moved to New Paltz to attend SUNY. She has enjoyed her time here, even if still trying to comprehend “snow.”

Benan Saracoglu, who double majors in Creative Writing and Theatre Arts, enjoys: “spending time with their friends, writing, reading, and art, with interests in poetry, dramatic writing, and painting.” Benan’s poetry has appeared previously in *Chronogram* and *Stonethrow Review*.

Katrina Scarimbolo is a Psychology major with minors in Creative Writing and Disaster Studies. She enjoys hall government activities, undergraduate Psychology Club, warm summer sand, and the view of the mountains from her dorm window. Her work has appeared previously in *Stonethrow Review*.

Tiff Scott is still procrastinating declaring a minor in Creative Writing, never mind seeking publication, but has been published in *Stonethrow* twice. She primarily writes about alcohol and food—but this Administration has prompted her to seek solace in amateur political commentary and a lack of punctuation.

Juliana Sebben, an undecided first-year student, grew up in Yonkers, New York and graduated from Yonkers Montessori Academy. In addition to writing, she enjoys playing sports, watching movies, and backpacking.

Paul Sevigny is a woodworker, writer, and literarian whose work has appeared in *Stonethrow Review*. On a sunny day you might see him driving around New Paltz in his Miata with the top down.

Lauren Sirna, a Creative Writing major from Middletown, New York, writes: “‘Millbrook’ is a first-fiction piece that I wrote, which will kick off into a larger story. I’ve been writing since the 7th grade and am so grateful to have achieved my first publication.”

Cole Solis was born in Cuenca, Ecuador then resided in Queens for twelve years, bouncing around school districts from Corona to Flushing to Farmingdale and finally settling in New Paltz. She aspires to be an independent self-illustrator—creating a unique oeuvre while experiencing vastness.

Jessica Sommerfeldt, born and bred in Poughkeepsie, New York, is currently a junior majoring in History and Creative Writing.

Michael Starace is a Digital Media Production major with minors in Creative Writing and Film & Video Studies. This is his second publication in *Stonethrow Review*.

Sequoia Stone is preparing for graduation, applying to graduate school, and watching too much Netflix. Her poetry has appeared previously in *Stonethrow Review*.

Michael Timpert is a senior Creative Writing and Journalism student, who writes poetry to forget about what he'll do after graduation, other than work for minimum wage. His poetry has appeared previously in *Stonethrow Review*.

Meagan Towler is a twenty-year-old Creative Writing major from the Hudson Valley. She has been writing since she was ten and is working on becoming an editor for a publishing company.

Conor Tuohy is a Digital Media Production major and Creative Writing minor. He enjoys experimenting with videography and writing short scenes, essays, and more.

Robert Wieland, a Computer Science graduate from SUNY New Paltz (December 2016), took Creative Writing and loved the class. He enjoys writing, programming, martial arts, and traveling.

Beth Wynne, an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Art, enjoys outlets for creativity.

Emily Zogbi, a senior English major graduating in May, is founder and president of the New Paltz Writers Society, captain of the New Paltz Slam Poetry Team, and 2017 Codhill Press editorial intern. Published twice previously in *Stonethrow Review*, her poetry has appeared in *Chronogram* and *Gandy Dancer*. Emily wishes very much that she had been a dancer.

