

# Bloodroot Literary Magazine

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*Bloodroot Literary Magazine*

*Bloodroot* is a nonprofit literary magazine dedicated to publishing diverse voices through the adventure of poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction. Our aim is to provide a platform for the free-spirited emerging and established writer.

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## Note on Type

This book is set in 12 point ET Bembo, a modern face designed for the web and print by Edward Tufte and based on the Bembo family of typeface. ET Bembo is a freely available open-source font. The text was typeset using xelatex, an updated  $\text{\LaTeX}$  typesetting package, along with several other free packages, including poemscol.

## Introductory Remarks

My co-editor for this issue, Hannah Howard, has been going around the world and is currently on her book tour promoting her memoir *Feast: True Love in and Out of the Kitchen*. Getting this issue ready means she's sent me pages from India, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Vermont and New York City. Howard is a strong voice in the culture, no matter where she's writing from or what she's got on her plate. She didn't need to take this on in addition to all of her other commitments—finishing graduate school and planning her upcoming wedding, just to name a few—but she did take it on, and I'm very grateful.

Much of the work in this issue was written right here in the Upper Valley, which is to say, the region of the upper Connecticut River Valley that is the natural border between New Hampshire and Vermont. Hannah Howard does not live here, and doesn't know the local scene. She came to these pieces with fresh eyes and made selections that resonated with her. We hope they resonate with you, too.

Notably, Howard did all this for free, or rather, for the love of this craft we call writing. Let's be clear: *Bloodroot Literary Magazine* is a labor of love. The editors don't get paid, the writers don't get paid, the unpaid typesetter is my excellent husband and the web hosting fees come out of my pocket. We can't afford to print this magazine, but we've crafted the best online offering it is possible for us to make at this time.

*Bloodroot* is committed to sustaining the highest ideals of independent literary publication. Our hope is to introduce you to new writers whose voices you've never heard before, and to curate a platform that includes rather than excludes, and actively resists censorship and political influence. You will never see ads on these pages and we won't sell data about your reading habits to a third party.

When *Bloodroot* founder "Do" Roberts died, there was a gap left in our literary community, and many were worried that *Bloodroot* would die with her. Let's keep *Bloodroot* alive and strong. Let's keep the Upper Valley writing scene blooming. Two significant online publications that also serve this purpose are *Literary North* (<https://literarynorth.com/>) and *Junction Magazine* (<https://junctionmagazine.com/>) both run more or less the way *Bloodroot* is run, for the love of the literary. Thank you Hannah Howard, for working on this issue with me, thank you writers, for continuing to send us your best stuff, and thank you readers, for giving our words life.

RENA J. MOSTEIRIN



## Introductory Remarks

I didn't fall in love with writing and reading in order to make friends. Both are such solitary endeavors. Sure, a gorgeous poem, an incisive essay, or a haunting story has the power to transport me into a world with characters that may become *almost* as real to me as friends. But I'm talking about real live people to laugh, cry, gossip, hustle, adventure, and commiserate with...and, of course, to love. I had friends; I had books. They existed in what may as well have been separate universes.

I am deeply grateful to the Bennington Writing Seminars for bringing Rena (*Bloodroot's* brilliant editor) and me together. I came to graduate school because I've always been compelled to write. I wanted to shift the location of writing from the periphery to the very center of my life. Two years later, it's worked. My book *Feast* is out in the world and I write (nearly) every day. But the greatest gift of the program, hands down, has been writer friends who have become true friends—the best of friends.

I've been introduced to the term “literary citizenship.” As writers, we hope people will read our work. Our words exist in order to communicate, and *we* exist in literary community. We try our best to buy each other's chapbooks, books and journals, champion each other's work, and break out the pompoms and the champagne to celebrate each other's successes.

*Bloodroot* is literary community at its best. These beautiful, powerful words come from writers young and old, from the Upper Valley and beyond, with all sorts of different perspectives and stories to tell. I hope they resonate with you. When writers and readers come together, all sorts of amazing things can happen. *Bloodroot* is one.

HANNAH HOWARD



## And Then She Replied

She takes herself to the sea  
to read its verse,  
to see the reliable line  
of the horizon,  
the earth's curve,  
the birds' whirl,  
the stanza of the day,  
and finds instead  
the thick paragraph of storm, rain, whipped waves, clotted clouds.

She takes herself to the field,  
freshly hayed,  
following the dog who is  
following a scent.  
Stalking their way  
across the stubble.  
She sees the branching birch, the standing conifers, the powdery sky  
and misses  
everything the dog sees.

When he opens the hive  
he tells you the way to see  
the Queen.  
The same way you see  
the Pleiades and the Perseids,  
your future,  
the one path, and the one that diverges:  
by not looking.

This morning  
the cottontail in the grass  
and I look each other  
straight in the eye,  
and see the same thing.

## Annotations for a Girl

Modern kitchens,  
formal fireplaces,  
hearth and home.  
Glowing beauties  
in silence.

Gilded estuary,  
shimmering. Mighty  
green arches  
roofed by  
June.

Everything here  
points to the  
same thing:

Your soft hair,  
the fragrant pine  
wood, the bangle  
and pearl,  
their own fire.

Light, the  
visible reminder.  
This boy with  
bright blues,  
glimmering.

### Cento

As late as yesterday, ice  
preoccupied over the orchard.  
A truly black cloud wearing  
only her nightdress.

A postcard comes from  
a friend. Bad news arrives  
in her distinctive hand:  
“Like primitives we buried the cat.”

Three crows fly across  
a gun-metal twilight. A few  
bats loop out of the barn. Wind  
plays the spy.

The new snow fell — or should I say  
so little snow that the grass in the field—  
the grasses in the field — have toppled.

Let the light of late afternoon  
through the screen door.

REBECCA SIEGEL

---

This cento is drawn from the first lines of several poems in Jane Keynon's *Let Evening Come*.

## One Sunday in March

When she considers the rut  
where she is stuck the  
only clear choice is to  
become a whale. She begins

to sleep with her toes  
pointed towards the  
deepest blue, even before  
her body lengthens into

a tail, her blunt head  
buoyant below the sun-  
washed swells, half  
her brain remembering

to breathe. Her dreaming  
half recalls another life,  
land-locked, counted,  
currentless, dirt under her

nails. Now her fingered  
flippers extend and  
pulse against the foamy,  
resisting water, something

to lean into. Her plush  
blubbed body holds  
its own smooth space,  
a swaddle. Later she

overhears her voice  
as if from a long way  
off, telescoping from another  
sea, carving arcs of song

in the brine. When did she  
start becoming and  
misbecoming? When did  
she learn to heed the

clockwork needle pointing  
south. When did her heart  
grow so large that she could  
love even her whole self?

REBECCA SIEGEL

## The Hinges

in the midst of the traffic  
how calm  
stillier than thought  
the smoke winding  
off the leaden circles  
like the flap  
of a wave

an indescribable pause

doors swinging

that particular hush  
and the uproar  
before

the jay singing  
of some irrevocable  
hour

his eyes  
and blue-green light  
vivacious  
burst overhead

a lark! a plunge!  
his smile the kiss  
and the jingle making it  
their hinges

and the strange high  
of that open air  
that open air  
how fresh

girl of eighteen  
a first  
a warning



rising falling  
standing wave  
chill and sharp  
chill and sharp.

REBECCA SIEGEL

---

To write this poem, I mixed the first five paragraphs of *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf, with the Text Mixing Desk (<http://www.lazaruscorporation.co.uk/cutup/text-mixing-desk>), then extracted the parts I liked and arranged them.

## Wilmington, Delaware

In the dirty room,  
she wishes.

Sure, he said,  
at the sunlight  
not to her.

She wishes  
the plaid silk dress  
the crepe hem  
the eastern shore  
the man beside  
her summer side  
will make her.

All the steaming  
disinfectant  
compulsive  
papers and  
sauerkraut  
the premature  
adult life.

Life ranges from  
those few  
days' events  
presents itself to  
the point of lies  
a shared minute  
a movie.

Then day broke  
where she was  
so insistently.

Later I saw her  
in New York with  
a mink coat.

REBECCA SIEGEL

## ENUMERATION AT THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE

13 floors and 1 satellite tower. 3 Colonial-era chandeliers.  
 Hour in, hour out. Green, digital time. 10:27.  
*Where do you come from and where are you going?*  
 12 glass stalls: information, processes. 1 list of your rights  
 as a refugee, 1 as a visitor. 1 bright poster  
 for the kids being moved. Keep smiling.  
 1 form letter that says I love and honor.  
 1 form letter that says I tell the truth.  
 25 minutes of 2 copies of everything and 3 weeks for 1 decision  
 on you. 1 you. Is that right?  
 2 payments. 2 lost receipts equals 6,700 pesos which is  
 335 dollars, which was 670 dollars once upon a time:  
 when Mexico had 50 billion more barrels of petroleum,  
 1 less widespread panic about walls,  
 1 more rat in the race.  
*How did we get from there to here?*  
 2 photos of my face (front and profile) in 1 of my 2 palms.  
*They won't need your photos until they're sure they want you.*  
 2 skinny lawyers on their feet all day.  
 My 2 expedientes on the 2nd floor labeled  
 'número único de trámite' (a unique processing number!):  
 1 file from a former life and 1 from the 1 I live now,  
 with 6 pictures of my marriage in 6 different locations:  
 kitchen, ocean, with mother, flash storm, living room, undisclosed.  
 1 proof of conviviality; 2 fines; 3 ex-visas; 4 white lies. Just like that!  
 1 more year until permanence. 3 more years until citizenship given  
 0 detectable errors in my conduct. The official with heavy red  
 lips has found 3 errors in my solicitude: 1. no apartment number  
 2. no land line 3. the way I classify my existence is all wrong.  
*Phantom!* no, *¡Ausencia!* yes. 1 computer at which to fix errors.  
 1 code of 18 characters for my being, 13 for my fiscal obligations to society.  
 Alphanumerics. Type fast, girl. Type.

Reader:  
     tell me.  
         What did I set out to tell you?

KIMBERLY KRUGE

CANTO FOR TWO WOMEN WHO  
COMMISSIONED A LOVE POEM

Do not do the death march.  
Come the government for you.  
Come a mutation in your genes.  
But do not do the death march.

Do not do the death march.  
Do not do the death march  
When shaving vanity from your head,  
Or hearing, throughout the day,  
Your personal call to prayer,

Do not do the death march.  
That unresolved interrogation  
Of pain that scours the body  
And stops, swells, wants.  
Your gods cannot be interrogated.

Do not do the death march  
When displaced from Jalisco's wilds  
To the America of rect sunflowers  
And bright machines. Nor should you

Do the death march when in their machines  
They mark your blood with contrast  
And go illuminating the apexes of events  
That are a supposed, projected death.

Do not do the death march when  
On the monitor the shape of your lungs  
Glow like a body of water irradiated  
By the meticulous sight of the full moon.

Nature cannot be interrogated.  
There in your lung bodies,  
The tubers grow, anamnesis of  
The milk of your childhood farm.

Always the idyllic spoils. But never  
Do the death march. Come diagnoses,  
Come the law, come the rule of the land.  
You wouldn't know how to do the death march.

You never have. Nor the good woman beside you.  
Neither have ever been ones to march.  
Not against the institution nor its cumbersome  
hate that suffocates the flame

Of any love that isn't its version:  
The candescent love of two women  
Hidden so long it starts to burn the chest  
That hides it and then metastasizes.

Unhide. Love cannot be interrogated.  
Your good woman knows all of your gods,  
Calls them by name, invokes the healing  
Of all of their hands, and for you. Life, death, even

Their polemics—it's all beautiful—say you.  
Beauty cannot be interrogated.  
Flash a light into the Styx.  
But do not do the death march.

KIMBERLY KRUGE

## To the Reader

Tertullian wrote, *We don't need athletes,*  
*we have Martyrs,* and I conceived

of suicide as extreme sport. I trained:  
 late 80's, 180-odd miles of I-84, driving east

along the Columbia, for a T-Bone.  
 Or was it a Ribeye? Bargain, marbled meat.

So what if the baked potato was finished  
 in the microwave? They cooked the steaks

to order and no one knew where I was  
 and, except my mother, no one cared.

Dead, my blood-kin would be obligated  
 to attend my funeral, my thick blood I'd thin

in the Columbia, which flows so close to I-84  
 I rolled down my window to dabble

my fingers in the river I might walk out on.

I never played cricket, but pictured  
 the run-up to death like running up to bowl.

No one watches this practice  
 in the immense silence of man-made places,

empty stadiums, plazas, piazzas:  
 just obelisks on stained plinths, pigeons,

a cartwheeling wrapper, and a determined soul  
 running up to an edge only he can see.

In public I stole, made scenes, cadged drinks,  
 held grudges, borrowed money and lied,

lied without remorse. In short, I disappointed.  
 Disappointing is an art, and during those drives

along the river, hung over, I consolidated  
my losses. I penciled lists on napkins

I took from the rectangular stainless  
steel dispenser next to the pastel phone,

one per table; the place seedy, but not gone  
to seed. On the walls and ceiling

of the john cocks-and-balls like putti  
spurting empty tear-drop thought bubbles—

But I can't leave here. I can't.  
Everyone I want to let down is here.

MICHAEL AUTREY

## The Second Life of Ice

It was the fate of the fragile to suffer  
 when I was around. The green  
 glass fish faced each other, hollow  
 to hollow, a centerpiece,  
 the hollows lost when I broke them.

What I put down countless times  
 on intake forms won't explain  
 why once, when drunk, I lifted,  
 with a friend's help, a beam

from an old icehouse. Groaning,  
 we hauled it a block, dropped  
 it behind a dumpster, cursed the downpour,  
 never returned with a pickup.

In my mind it grows back  
 into the old-growth  
 Douglas Fir it was cut from.  
 It is the log I saw when I sleep well.

Better to have been all liver  
 from the neck down, a torso  
 for metabolizing alcohol,  
 crisscrossed with bile ducts.

If only I had known why I was so  
 angry—everyone knew but me—  
 why, when no one was looking,  
 I'd look with my hands instead of my eyes.

When I dried out, my insides  
 loosened, and I was reduced  
 to Styrofoam peanuts  
 where friends shoved their secrets.

All across the north the tarns  
 are freezing, and a century ago



good, ambitious men, at the sight  
of the first snow, sharpened their saws,

preparing to cut next summer's ice.  
Late winter now, and, finally,  
it snows the famous snow  
of this neutral Scandinavia:

a blizzard of punctuation,  
the air become an enormous  
dot-to-dot—sky lowering,  
air clotted with ellipses ...

MICHAEL AUTREY

## A Morandi (Fiori)

Pink at the edges,  
the center magenta—a likeness

of transience,  
this rose           wound.

Of course it does not, cannot  
change, and you cannot

see it for anything other  
than what it might be,

yet its effects are always  
in excess of their cause.

The hands' decisions final,  
not necessarily decisive;

and the pleasure,  
if there is  
pleasure in it,  
is in knowing  
when to stop.

MICHAEL AUTREY

Excerpted from the novella *The Great Divide*:

Mary heard the nervous anger in her mother's voice but she chose to disregard it. It served the woman right given how gullible she'd been last night with whoever had called and how arrogant she was being now with her, the one person left who might truly protect her.

"I have to take out the trash." Ella's voice began to rise with the kind of desperation that Mary remembered from when she and Frankie were children and some circumstance beyond their mother's control had rolled up to their doorstep. "And then at 11 o'clock the mail comes and you know I'll have to be down there at the mail boxes for an hour listening to all those busybodies who have nothing better to do but stick their faces into my business..."

Jesus Christ, couldn't Frankie run a little interference here to calm down their mother while she broke into this junk heap of a laptop? If her mother wasn't going to quiet down on her own to let Mary do what needed to be done, the least her brother could do was step in to help.

"If you two are going to be here all day from now on I'm going to need some notice..."

Mary took a deep breath and tapped in the password that she had created from her father's birthday, watching the characters appear for an instant before the password field turned each of them into a covert black dot. She knew enough about passwords to know that this was the computer's way of trying to convince her that it was keeping her safe by hiding her personal credentials from the prying eyes of hackers and cyber-thieves. But all she could see hiding behind those black dots was her father's birth date chiseled into his gravestone.

A flush of longing had surfaced for Mary and those black dots were doing nothing to cover how much she wanted to have her father alive again, to be the one to take care of her mother. It rose up in her like a flame how she wished she could be her father's little girl again, to push her burdens onto him so he might shoulder them as he had when he was alive.

"I told you that I didn't want you just popping over here any time you felt like it." Her mother was squirming on the couch as if she wanted to escape somewhere but had no idea where that might be. "I get up early for work and when I come home I'm tired, God knows I'm tired..."

Hearing her mother, Mary knew that she had once again started to turn the corner into a place far in the past. She couldn't help but wonder what her father would have made of all this: this woman he loved having a now-you-see-it-now-you-don't relationship with reality; this computer with his birthday being used as the secret code she needed to enter the virtual life her mother had created for herself now that he had been dead and she alone for so many years.

Mary punched the Enter key and the laptop began to spin. A few seconds later, having recognized the password, the computer unlocked itself exposing the face of the desktop.

“Are you in?” mumbled Frankie hearing the thwack of the Enter key and looking up from the phone he had once again slid out of his pocket.

“How much longer will you be, Mary?” asked Ella. “I really have to get home. I left a load of laundry in the dryer and your brother and father are getting back soon from the movies.”

Mary looked up from the keyboard at her mother and then at the pained and dumbfounded expression on her brother’s face. Why did it still bother Frankie so much when their mother slid off her cogs to see pictures of bygone days projected onto the walls of her mind? By now you would have thought Frankie would have gotten used to this. Why did men turn into such helpless babies in the presence of their aging and dying mothers?

“Mom,” called Frankie in a piteous tone. “I’m right here.”

Ella turned her head, looked at her son and pinched her glasses tighter into her nose.

“Of course you are,” she said with an expression that told Mary she had only hazy recognition that it was Frankie.

Mary had had a hunch that digging into her mother’s laptop in front of her would cause her the kind of anxiety that would send her burrowing deeper into her dementia. That was what she was trying to get across to Frankie when she told him that she’d wanted to hide this from their mother. But there was nothing she could do about this now. After last night – and whatever it was that had gotten her mother to start wandering the streets with five-thousand dollars in her purse – Mary knew she couldn’t waste any more time trying to find out the extent of what was going on. If her mother had to be here while she did, sliding off her rails because of it, well that was just going to have to be how it would be.

“You want a little drink to calm you down, Mom?” asked Frankie, gesturing to the cabinet under the Microwave that held the sludgy remnants of their parents’ liquor supply.

Dear Jesus, thought Mary. Who needs the drink, Frankie, you or her?

“It’s eleven o’clock in the morning,” said Mary. “She doesn’t need a drink. She’s fine, aren’t you, Mom?”

“Of course I’m fine, I just want to go home.”

“You are home, Mom,” said Frankie, pleading with her.

“Look,” said Mary. “Why don’t you both just watch a little TV?”

Ella was about to say something, but Frankie cut her off, speaking sharply to his sister. “I really do have to get back to work soon. I can’t stay here all day.”

Mary could feel her blood beginning to boil. Her eyes darted at Frankie and then at Ella and then back at Frankie again.

“You know what would be nice, Frankie?” Mary was talking now in a voice that was louder and more pointed than she would have liked to admit. “It would be nice if once and for all you could make up your mind how much you did or didn’t care about what’s going on here.”

“I care,” said Frankie, shouting. “You know I care.”

“Don’t yell,” said Ella. “I don’t like it when people yell.”

Frankie shuffled his feet like a small boy caught doing a bad thing, sulking and then dropping onto the couch next to his mother.

“It’s okay, Mom,” said Mary. “Nobody’s yelling. We’re all okay.”

Yeah, Mom,“ whimpered Frankie. ”Why don’t you and I just sit and talk.“

Mary had her doubts about how far a dialogue between Frankie and their mother could actually go—it would have been much better if her brother had listened to her and picked up the remote to sedate their mother with a mindless segment of cable programming. Though at least now, Frankie was *trying* to keep their mother calm.

”So, Mom,“ said Frankie in a hollow voice. ”I don’t know if I told you, but Jill and I are planning a trip to Italy.“

Mary shook her head to clear out Frankie’s self-centered babble and began logging onto her mother’s online credit card statement. She knew this would be as good a place to start as any to find out what kind of monetary damage might have been done last night or at any other point in the past as her mother freewheeled her way through the on-line jungle of electronic shysters and rigged social media. This time, however, Mary didn’t have to think long to remember the password because she had chosen a very personal password that would be hard to forget after she took control of her mother’s credit cards a couple of weeks ago (though she was kicking herself now for not having looked at this statement long before this).

She opened the browser, navigated to the Discover card site and typed in the word:

*BADMARY58*

She was mildly embarrassed but secretly proud of this online password she had been using in different variations across a range of Web properties for a couple of years now: VERY-BADMARY; MARYWASVERYBAD; MARYDIRTYMARY, etcetera, etcetera—these strings always followed by the last two digits of the year she was born. In real life Mary had always been everybody’s good girl except that she liked to pretend sometimes that it wouldn’t take much to push her to become some kind of deviant that slept with whomever and smoked and drank whatever and wandered into all kinds of bad places whenever and wherever she wanted to. It seemed to her that the Internet had been tailor-made for this kind of in-the-closet identity swap and though she’d never gone much beyond doing anything on line but using these slutty-sounding passwords to get into her Amazon or Google accounts, she’d fantasized that she could have if she wanted to. Which was just like her, wasn’t it? She was such a good girl that she couldn’t even pretend online that she was a bad girl. The most she could do was to pretend in her head that she might someday go on line in the guise of a naughty, out-of-control slut.

”Did you hear me, Mom?“ Frank was still trying to jailbreak their mother out of the past. ”I said that Jill and I were going to go to Italy.“

”Well, that’s fine, dear,“ said Ella, ”Does your father know?“

Mary sighed audibly and made herself focus on the virtual credit card statement that was taking its time loading line-by-line down the screen of the laptop. At first, she wasn’t sure she was seeing what she thought she was seeing. She figured that it was just because she had forgotten to put on her reading glasses that the numbers appearing, those amounts that had been charged over the last couple of months, seemed to be distended. Her eyes had to be playing tricks on her. There were too many digits here among these charges, more like the strings of numbers you’d find if someone had charged hundreds and thousands of dollars instead of the tens or occasional hundreds she was expecting to see. She reached over to her purse to find her glasses.

Whenever she put on these glasses Mary got lost for a second in the memory of how satisfied she’d felt the first time she saw herself in them at her optometrist’s office: how hip they made her look. Any satisfaction she felt this time, however, quickly dissipated. Holy mother of God, here were rows and rows of charges with barely any of them less than three or four hundred dollars and many of them running into the range of five or six thousand dollars. And when she looked at the businesses that these charges had come from her eyes widened even more.

Other than a couple of charges for the Cable Company and the CVS, none of the businesses listed here were any that Mary had ever heard of nor could she even figure out what most of them sold. They had names like ”ALT, Inc.“ and ”Ukraine Holdings Corp., LLC“ and ”SamIam Distributors.“ One or two of these business did call themselves something that pointed to the kind of goods or services they might be dealing in, but with names like ”The Dollars for Jesus Institute“ and ”GamblersFun.com“ Mary didn’t feel a whole lot better after having digested these names. And then there was the bottom line of the statement highlighting what her mother owed, a current outstanding balance of \$32,457. What the hell had been going on over here when nobody was watching her mother ...when she had not been watching her mother?

”I can take you over to the cemetery if you want, Mom,“ said Frankie. To show you.”

And here—as if to compound Mary’s angst—was Frankie again, still going at it, still trying to slap their mother back into the harsh reality of their father’s bones lying in a graveyard between Route 34 and the I95. Mary had to fight the urge to scream at him. Maybe if she screamed out what she’d found at the bottom of their mother’s credit card statement he might finally get it through his thick head that this woman was all but lost to them, that she was crossing a great divide over which they’d never be able to pull her back again.

”Nobody’s going to the cemetery, young man,“ said Ella. ”What a thing to say to me.”

As much as Mary wanted to turn around and drag Frankie over to the computer to shove his face into what she was seeing, as much as she wanted to pull out the Xanax in her purse and shove two or three of them into her mother’s mouth, as much as she wanted to do these things to shut off the blathering inanity behind her, Mary knew she couldn’t waste a single second on any of that right now. Right now, on top of everything else she’d had to

be for this family, she had to become the O'Toole family's own crime scene investigator. Somewhere hidden in this laptop there had to be a clue that pointed at how this avalanche of charges had gotten rolling, and Mary had to find it in spite of her misguided brother and their poor demented bobble-head of a mother, the targeted victim if not the unwitting accomplice in all of this. "Mary, what are you doing there?"

Fuck. She should have figured that her mother would pick up on her agitation and that this would bring her back to the present faster than any cajoling Frankie could do. The woman had an instinctual ability to see the stress waves rising off her daughter's shoulders like heat bending the air on a desert road. How was it that parents, no matter how sick or crazy they were, could always tell when something was bothering one of their kids?

"Mary Elizabeth ..." Ella was getting panicky again. "I'm talking to you."

"Mom," said Frankie. "She's just ...ah ...checking her email."

Mary could hardly believe it, but it seemed as if Frankie was finally clicking into gear.

"Well hurry up," said Ella like a jealous child. "I need to check my email too."

At first Mary was still so hyper-focused on digging into the mayhem of her mother's credit card statement, she didn't even realize that her mother had just pointed her toward a clue as to where and how that mayhem began.

Scrambling now, Mary clicked on the postage stamp email icon at the bottom of the screen. No need for a password here. The email engine had helpfully cached the password so that anyone could have an unfettered look at any of her mother's emails across the last five or six years. But Mary wasn't going to have to go back five or six years to get to what she had been looking for because, there, right at the top of the inbox, was an email from a man named "Peter" who had a shockingly poor command of the English language, even as he had a better than excellent command of what it took to be an Internet con artist.

*"Your gift to our child was in receipt very well but the priest of your holy father now request you help to pay for our poor child's school books ...many hundreds of child's ...you help so much before ...donate three thousand dollars this week ..."*

Mary's head was swelling as she skimmed down the length of the email. And when she got to the bottom and started to read through her mother's replies to the other emails that this Peter had sent, her head nearly exploded. There, in her mother's first reply, was her Discover credit card number, expiration date and three digit security code, all of which Peter had specifically (or as specifically as his crappy English would allow) asked for after he hoodwinked her mother into this email correspondence from a supposed orphanage in Yugoslavia.

This couldn't have been who had called her mother last night—this *Peter*—he wouldn't have needed to as he already had her goddam credit card number. And if that were so ...well Mary didn't even want to fathom the possibilities of how many different ways her mother might be getting scammed through the dark undernet of this laptop.

"Everything okay over there?"

Even Frankie was now picking up the panicky vibrations rippling off Mary's shoulders.

“I’m almost done.”

Mary closed the email from the orphanage and let her eyes scan down the page through the twenty or thirty other emails that she could see. Over the past few days there had been the usual scattered missives from the grandkids and her mother’s few remaining friends. But there were more emails from people Mary had never heard of, and she did not have to open but two or three of this alien species of correspondence to realize that her mother was indeed entangling herself with a good-sized clutch of Internet swindlers—questionable individuals and specious organization all independent of each other and all pretending that they had her mother’s spiritual, financial or medical best interests in mind. This started to explain all those Discover card charges. The question was how were all these people able to target her mother in the first place?

“I also need to look at my Facebook when you’re done,” blurted Ella at Mary. “I have a lot of friends who I need to see today.”

Mary froze. *Fucking Facebook*. Of course—that had to be where this trail of fraud began. Over the past few years, ever since they made her mother a present of this laptop, one of her mother’s primary activities was to plunk herself in front of her Facebook page to keep refreshing it in the hopes of finding new friend request, postings or messages she might reply to.

Though Mary could only surmise what her mother had been doing on Facebook these past few years. Because even though her mother had relentlessly “friended” her, Mary had never accepted any of those requests. She just didn’t want her mother to be privy to her own Facebook exploits as she tried to keep up with her *approved* Facebook friends, all of them, including Mary, seeing it as a duty to broadcast every minuscule fragment of their day across the infinitely meshed cyber-society in which they were all being groomed to live. Though now, as her mother’s Facebook page unfolded before her, Mary knew it had been a big mistake not to accept her mother’s friend requests a long, long time ago. A huge, irrevocable mistake.

“Mary,” Ella said. “Is that my Facebook you’re looking at over there?”

With Ella trying to rise off the couch to get to Mary, and Frankie trying to get her to sit down again, Mary leaned into the laptop, dumbfounded by what she was seeing. It wasn’t the inane postings on her mother’s timeline that clawed at Mary’s face to hold it on the screen. It wasn’t even the ads for shady loan companies and questionable pharmaceuticals that were popping up along the page’s rims like broadsides at a carnival. No. What it was that had so flabbergasted Mary was the small rectangular box at the center top of the screen where the number of her mother’s “Friends” was listed, a number that Mary knew was just shy of the theoretical limit for the number of Facebook friends anyone was allowed to have, a number so large in Mary’s mind that it curved around space and time into something nearly satirical.

*4,899 Friends.*

Nearly five thousand people had convinced her mother to become “friends” with them.



Mary couldn't imagine that her mother had given it a second thought when she merrily, one-by-one, allowed this multitude to join her on Facebook. In fact, she could almost picture her mother being grateful that all these people were so interested in her postings and replies. And why shouldn't they be, here were her mother's innermost longings, her likes and dislikes, her weak points and triggers, all hung out there for all of them to take advantage of at will.

Clicking on the Friends box, Mary found that her mother had let nearly every imaginable type of individual, group and organization into her Facebook life. There were born again Christians and Neo-Nazis. There were orders of monks and motorcycle gangs. There were leagues of foot-fetishists and clubs with members who thought they descended from fairies, all of whom had gotten her mother to take in their group Facebook pages en-mass. And there were corporations as well—the Kmart and Johnson & Johnsons—these companies that had targeted Mary too, none of them willing to rest until they had imprinted their brand on every Facebook page on the planet. But there were also other even more shadowy figures for which her mother had opened wide her arms: supposed Ethiopian princes and troublingly handsome entrepreneurs with fortunes that they were just waiting to cash in on with the help of a select few “friends;” cannily, moon-eyed young men with profiles that boasted of their love for their mothers and grandmothers; Internet sharpshooters who promised on line help for a fee; and even ministers and deacons trolling for donations to help spread the word of their pop-up Internet religions.

TONY TADDEI

## Do Cats Contemplate Suicide

So far I've lived some lives  
Lives that I rinse and repeat  
Again I'm born as a cat  
And cats always land on their feet

I've known hunger several times  
Been cold out on the street  
I'm feral but still fear heights  
And I always land on my feet  
Some say that life makes you wise  
Myself, I feel dead beat  
I've been around long enough  
To know that I'll land on my feet

For all those who envy me  
The story is incomplete  
I land on them just fine  
But then I just drag my feet

VASSIKI CHAUHAN

## Why I Am Hyperventilating

The cruelty of children.  
Bodies hewn in two for sport.  
The damn dog always dead in the end.  
Our most intimate selves.  
Every time I walk to the mailbox.  
Bones so cold they break.  
Not looking back.  
Looking back but with nothing in your eyes.  
Slate where his head split.  
These keys. Their snap snap snap.  
Too little air and a heartbeat  
fast and hard as his fist.  
Or it was just words.  
The silence after you say it.  
No more gas, just bodies.  
Little piles of fingers.  
Dust.  
Every time I never think it could be this bad again.

GIAVANNA MUNAFO

## HORIZON

The dogs sleep all day.  
At the edge of the woods  
weeds bend in wind heavy  
with rain headed this way.  
What's impending blows  
through me: one rape  
story after another, my boy  
driving off to the prom.

GIAVANNA MUNAFO

## CHECK PANTY-LINE

Check panty-line. Check lipstick. Check wallet for plastic. Check back seat. Check street-lamp. Check beat cop for pistol. Check ID. Check bar scene. Check nut-mix for garlic. Check barkeep. Check cocktail. Check footstep for stalker. Check pony-tail. Check DJ. Check pocket for taser. Check day-dream. Check blind date. Check pulse rate for tremor. Check panty-line. Check lipstick. Check. Check. Check diving for cover.

GIAVANNA MUNAFO

### A Bad End

First, we watched the video  
about the woman who didn't make it.  
Then we watched the one about  
the woman who did.  
From safe house to distant  
cousin's cabin, from one coastline  
to another, one found bloody scrawls,  
high tech spyware, cereal  
and knick-knacks she didn't buy.  
The other hid, erased herself,  
left everyone behind.

GIAVANNA MUNAFO

(#metoo) THE STRAWBERRY PICKER

On the radio  
they say she's  
bravest, the

woman with  
nothing but berries  
to lose.

GIAVANNA MUNAFO

## Be That as It May

An elegy for Ted Greenwald

“He knows how things get done  
Because he’s been to a school  
More esteemed than Queens”  
A surprise coming from you  
On the corner at 3am  
Wednesday in a truck  
In your plaid flannel shirt  
Cup of java in your mitt  
En route to search for a semi  
Parked on a street  
Near Sheridan Square  
And filled with Voices  
For an entire village  
From the Italian grocer on Bleecker  
Up to Herald Square  
Down three flights of stairs  
To the lower level subway kiosk  
To make change for the Arab  
From hundreds in bills stuffed  
In bulging frayed jeans  
Hot dogs with the works  
Bundle returns in strings



Then up to Danny's  
Where we count-out  
And schmooze about babes  
Redheads his soft spot  
And vintage wheels  
Rented for shoots  
On blocked-off streets  
Where you have to keep  
Ten balls in the air  
Because you don't know  
What, if anything  
Will turn into something

GARY LENHART

## Myopia

There's the urge to live,  
Taking sustenance from a feeding tube  
Tucked into your shirt

And there's the desire to die,  
Attacked suddenly while lecturing to  
An audience of cardiologists

Between the two  
Everything's unsure, squirrel  
Gets mistaken for fox

GARY LENHART

### Five Senses of Winter

Acrid smoke hangs along the road.  
 My neighbors burning green wood again.  
 Crunch of salt and sand under snow-caked boots,  
 Grit I will sweep up come spring.  
 Windchill cutting through down and fleece.  
 Incipient frostbite in my ungloved hands,  
 Loosening days old ice from a windshield.  
 Plump, peaked cardinal at the feeder  
 I keep filled as my daily penance. Flame red  
 Against the blanked out sky.  
 Craving something rich and feral, a +fleshy  
 Treat that will +glut my tongue.

+ steamy  
 + scorch

IVY SCHWEITZER

### Seven Banned Words of the CDC

If only the sun were vulnerable,  
 And birds shared their entitlement  
 Through vast diversities of love,  
 Where no one was without transgender  
 Of the swish and fin of the fetus,  
 Before any boundaries of the evidence-based.

Before many boundaries of the evidence-based,  
 Only the sun is vulnerable  
 To the swish and fin of the fetus,  
 Like birds sharing their entitlement  
 In air, no one is without transgender  
 Through vast diversities of love.

Through vast diversities of love,  
 Before all boundaries of the evidence-based,  
 No one is without transgender.  
 If only the sun were vulnerable,  
 And birds shared their entitlement  
 With the swish and fin of the fetus,

Then, in the wish and swim of the fetus,  
 Through vast diversities of love  
 Where birds share our entitlement  
 Before all boundaries of the evidence-based,  
 Only the sun would be vulnerable,  
 And no one is without transgender.

When everyone is about transgender  
 In the win and fish of the fetus,  
 Only the sun is vulnerable  
 To vast diversities of love,  
 Before any boundaries of the evidence-based,  
 Where birds share their entitlement.

Yes, birds share all entitlement  
 When no one is without transgender,  
 Before any boundaries of the evidence-based,

And the swish and fin of the fetus  
Through last diversities of love,  
Then, only the sun will be vulnerable

In the way a vulnerable sun is entitled  
To the vast diversities of transgender  
in every fetus, every evidence that we are based in love.

IVY SCHWEITZER

## Adoption Q &amp; A

Whoa, whose baby is <i>that</i> ?	Yes
What's his story?	No
Is he yours?	Yes
Is he yours?	No
Yours?	Yes
Where'd you get him?	A dream
Where's he from?	A city
Where's he from?	A macaw, scarlet
Where's he from?	Seed and river
Where was he born?	Room with a window
Was it expensive?	The summer was hot followed by wind
How much?	Then I knew it was asking too much
Did it take long?	Up all night making sure he could breathe
Is he adopted?	Yes
Is he adopted?	No
Is he adopted?	Yes
Is he adopted?	No
Is he adopted?	No
Is his father tall?	Tall/short
Is his father dark?	Jesus Christ on a bicycle
Is his hair like his father's?	Will this heat ever end?
Is his father big?	I'm not feeding him anything
Do you know who his father is?	Stork
Does he speak English?	I don't know yet
Are you breastfeeding him?	I'm feeding him coffee and hard candies
Do you know about the breast milk bank?	He's got the candy
Do you want me to feed him for you?	No
Is he mixed?	Feathers and black sand
Black?	Yes/no
Is he black?	Slate
Is he black?	Yes/no
Is he black?	He comes from kings and queens
Is he black?	He is vanilla-pod

What is he?	Charcoal preaching
What are you doing with his hair?	Black bean black
Is his mother dark?	Also gleaming
Do you see his mother?	I don't know
Was she on drugs?	The heat
Do you have contact with her?	Was killing me
Do you know his family?	Shifting integers
Do you know her?	If I do know I would never tell
Have you met her?	Do you know?
What's her problem?	Space and time
Is he yours?	Continuum
Is he yours?	Could be mine
<i>Is he yours?</i>	Yes no yes no yes

KATE MARTIN ROWE

## Foster Parents, or The Most Famous of the Ancient Myths of Feral Children

### I

The fostress fosters.

Growth is fostered.

One could say, couldn't one, that the fig tree fosters its fruits and the seeds  
inside them.

Yet to care for your own is not to foster.

The fostress, foster mother, an animal that is willing to that can fall.

To be able to not get up from a fall, is willing to not.

If it becomes necessary to fall and not get up.

To foster and maybe fail.

To encourage the fosterling is the job.

To harbor to safe to faster to foster.

A fosterage can be dangerous to mother or child.

To foster, suggesting limits.

The eggs are dyed and hidden on Easter, but the kids are not hiding.

The check is in the mail.

To faster to foster.

The fostress and her fosterling.

Fosterage, an action promoting a thing.

Sometimes action brings trouble to the fosterer.

So just cash the check.

Yes, people will look.

Sometimes animals foster others of different species,

An act we believe humorous and kind.

### II

Romulus and Remus fought over where to locate their great city.

I understand that a she-wolf did the fostering.

Had to be her.

Because to foster is to not shatter.

The teeth would be necessary and the growl.

To possess a tearing instinct also.

Thick fur and an exacting sense of smell.

Her gold eyes watched over the early fights.

Later, the boys fought more.

Then one killed the other.



(Poor Remus! Poor Romulus!)

The abandoned baby heads  
smelled like some other female.  
How soft their fine hair felt when she gripped the necks in her teeth  
And carried them away.  
To foster was faster.  
To carry, to shelter, to foster.  
To foster was faster to nurture to nurse  
to harbor to cherish.  
Without considering what was right.  
Her claws were thick but sharp.  
To warm and to keep she wrapped her light body around their heads.  
The she-wolf, the mother-king  
the city's founders fostered in her den.  
To foster is faster to pray the baby  
is to know, to foster is  
to know it faster.

KATE MARTIN ROWE

## White

white fire, a pearl, fog, the cold color of bone, the whiteness of the whale and Ahab's face, a multi-hued skin tone when sunburned, embarrassed or bruised, roadways of blue on the backs of white hands, the sclera, full crescent or gibbous moon, the insides of things for instance almonds, *my color is not my son's*, the grubs squirming in the compost, sea salt, white sand desert, the moon's surface, albinism, sometimes dangerous—for instance the sun's white light in an eclipse of hate, white people in the tanning salon trying not to be, *there is a difference between us*, the plum tree's blossoms, dead things such as lawn at summer's end blonde and burnt up, European-American, Caucasian, Anglo, we don't know what to call it or don't call it anything, a kind of facade of wholesomeness, egg shells, milk, white bread and frosting, in skin a deficiency, *my deficiency not his*, weathered things too, such as bleached out swim suits and jeans, the color of the rabbit, of fairytales, of ghosts, the sheep's fleece, blisters, nail beds, *my color not his*, though a president is half-white we call him black, how do we become white and when, the color of surrender, the color that lightens, *my color is not his, his not mine*, the color of weddings but not of love, many blacks in America partly white and all of us come from Africa, the color of death in some places, the color of some religions, age a kind of whitening too, *someday he will have questions, such as did I buy or steal him, how to understand mine not his, the not too similar the whiteness of the heartwood*

KATE MARTIN ROWE

## Hug Therapy

I don't like hugs. I don't like them from my nephews (aged 9, 7, and 4) or my little niece (also age 7). I don't like hugs from men who want to celebrate a Ravens touchdown or from girls who come into my bar and want all men to find them cute. I don't like hugs from family members at Christmas or my birthday or from platonic female friends that think a hug might lift my spirits. I don't even like hugs at the end of first dates even the really good first dates when I want a second date and a kiss and everything else that comes with dating. I don't like hugs in the form of shoulder squeezes from "frat boys" who need to express friendliness when walking by, or hugs of thanks that mark occasions when I do something nice. I hated when my best friend hugged me before he deployed to Iraq and never understood why my brother's girlfriend (now wife) gave me a hug every time we saw each other.

But how do you avoid hugs? Can you tell your seven-year-old niece not to hug you? If you bump into an old friend's mom at the grocery store, one you haven't seen in years, can you really dodge her embrace with a handshake? Is it worth the time and effort of explaining to every woman that enters your bar who wants a hug (and if you work at a bar a lot of women will want hugs) that it's not her but rather you yourself that makes the hug awkward and unwanted? What can you really do in polite society when someone wants to hug you? If the hug isn't drunken or malicious or somehow sexual in nature, if it's given in friendliness with no ulterior motives, can it really be denied? What can you do when a situation or relationship merits, according to most, a hug?

I don't remember this being an issue in high school. I don't remember anyone trying to hug me. Not the girls at school or my family at home. Perhaps that's why they bother me so much—it's so different from how I was raised. Then I went to college and things changed. People in the dorm hugged all the time. Sometimes as a means of flirting, but mostly just to be friendly, just because it felt natural.

One of the girls on my floor even gave me hug therapy. She was beautiful and sweet and I really wanted to date her. She had a boyfriend, so I knew we couldn't date, but I always thought about it when we watched TV or talked.

The therapy consisted of short hugs every time we saw each other. They only lasted a second or two and were never particularly strong. But the frequency was supposed to make them feel natural, sort of the way a child gets used to swimming in a pool just by being exposed to the water. It didn't really work. I never enjoyed the hugs, though she gave me one whenever we said hello or goodnight. It was always awkward, always forced. Her breasts would press against my chest and her arms would circle my waist. Part of me wanted to kiss her and part of me knew that was inappropriate, so I kind of just did nothing

and waited for the second to pass. I loved her, in a youthful-crush sort of way, but even that didn't make the hugs comfortable. It might have even made the hugs worse. It was simultaneously less than I wanted and more than I deserved.

Her hugs were consistent. They lasted the same amount of time and had the same force. She gave the same hugs to the other guys on the dorm floor, even the ones she didn't particularly like, and for the most part everyone seemed to agree she was a good hugger. The only difference was I didn't crave the hugs. I didn't enjoy them.

The therapy lasted most of the fall semester. It was sort of a game. She would see me and smile and open her arms as if I was a little kid. "Mr. Mike," she'd said with a lilt in her voice, "I know you love hugs." Sometimes I'd shrug her away but most times I'd let her hug me. I wanted to like the simple embrace as much as the other guys on the floor did, and I wanted her to feel special that I'd go through the motions. I mean, I wouldn't have done hug therapy with any of the other girls on the floor. With the other girls I was quite content to say, "No, thanks" or "I'm good" when they offered a hug.

But I liked my hug therapist and even if hug therapy didn't really work, I didn't want her to feel bad. I wanted her to think I was at least willing to try. So most nights we'd hug when we finished hanging out, and I hoped that was enough to make me the next-in-line to be her boyfriend. In my head I knew that wasn't quite the way things worked. She didn't hug me because she liked me, not in a romantic way; she hugged me because that was what she did. That was who she was.

Even if her hugs carried some secret intention would it matter? I was always self-conscious during the embrace, wondering where my hands should go, how tight to hold, and for how long. The motion was labored and we both knew my lack of joy was real.

I think the therapy stopped after the fall semester. The joke had run its course and my therapist couldn't believe I didn't hug my mother over Christmas break. "We just don't do that," I said, trying to explain a hug-less life. She shook her head in disappointment, the way a teacher scolds a mildly disobedient student. "That's sad," she said, "your poor mother."

That spring she broke up with her high school boyfriend and a couple of the guys thought I should date her. But I was young and couldn't find the right words. Asking her out felt as awkward as a hug so I gave up without really trying. It's for the best. I'd never understand what she found so magical about hugs and she'd never understand how empty they were for me. She wasn't single long. In fact, she married her next boyfriend who I'm guessing both gave and received hugs really well.

I still think about her. Not with any what-if dreams but with a thankful knowledge that I know myself a little better. I am not a hugger. I don't say that to be cool or unemotional or somehow different from the group. I say it because I tried to like them. I've been through therapy with a girl I wanted to hug more than anyone else on Earth. She was a good hugger and made me want to be a good hugger too. But it wasn't enough to create a true desire. And if she couldn't create it, as sweet and wonderful as she was, no one can.

MIKE KOENIG

### Besotted Pirouette

It continues, unabated,  
this strumming of thoughts

latest nights of pastel gyre rolling through  
to earliest susurrant scenes of day.

Togetherness is the self-correction of imperfection  
building toward a reflection of smoke and intricate violets.

Could I ever proclaim the crimson of my obelisk  
without invoking the moon in her besotted pirouette?

No matter when your hands move  
I feel the curving movement which guides them.

You're the fullest fraction of every fantasy  
and the slippery intersection of your own circumference

and If I've missed a moment of circumspect naughtiness  
I've only got myself to blame.

RICHARD KING PERKINS II

## Wreath of White

Last night

after the fall of rain  
we laughed

rippling  
into the deepest blue.

We brushed branches  
and boles

disencumbered numbness

skimming the dampness  
of leaves.

In the pretense of sky

I made planets  
and moons,

a chill of eastern wind.

You brought daylight,  
a sun

a hemisphere  
of crystalline stars

igniting a wreath  
of white fire.

RICHARD KING PERKINS II

## Flute

They sat beside each other  
on a bed that was his  
and a sheet that was hers  
inside a silence they had made together  
It's always so difficult to be the first to  
break something

She thought of a piece that was built like  
a hawk  
and it dove from the sky to  
kill something small and shrieking  
At the part where it dove  
the flute seemed to split open  
into a sound like a cry  
as though the sky had cracked  
and the world was suddenly lit

She thought that maybe she should start like that

KATE FRIDKIS BERRING



## Gone again

You are gone again  
Such a simple thing  
The train  
A clean gray  
Blurred line  
Flicks across the bridge  
Licks the brief distance  
And vanishes

Such purpose in that motion  
So linear the track  
The wire  
The way straight back  
To all your work  
That you neglected  
For one moment  
So that we could collide  
Rush and try not to touch eyes  
Fight and cry  
And crush ourselves together in my bed

What sacred structure  
What logical order  
You deviated from  
For the tangled wild and red  
Jungle  
That I am

KATE FRIDKIS BERRING

## Storm

You came down the keys like a storm  
 flinging sound—uprooted trees and houses  
 The whirling shards and earth  
 Every color  
 Spun into ferocious, glittering patterns that undid themselves  
 Instants after forming

Your hair swept the pages.  
 I caught the book  
 Just as it fell  
 And set it to rest on the lid  
 Where it lay neat and self-contained  
 With its clean font that said “Chopin” like  
 It might have said “Museum Entrance” or  
 “Diagram 1a”

I will probably never understand  
 How you can disappear so immediately  
 Under the surface of this music  
 As though it is a deep pool without a ladder  
 And you never sit on the edge and put your legs in  
 You just jump every time

You came down the keys like a storm  
 Hurling sound and passion and fear before you  
 So that they were smashed into inseparability  
 And your whole body was wrapped in it  
 Physical reality getting lost in the vacuum of art  
 Which seemed to represent tangibly in the rush of your hands  
 The arched lines  
 The shape of your desire

I brushed a film of dust from the  
 Piano’s sleek flank  
 Awkward in my new invisibility  
 I kept looking in the mirror  
 To make sure I was still standing there  
 Decorative— a sculpture of myself

The one thing  
Though directly in its path  
Your storm would not touch

KATE FRIDKIS BERRING

## True Love, Green and Plushy

There would be other loves, of course, and other losses too, but none would compare to that first love. Michelle Hollingworth had a habit of stealing things that belonged to me. Before it was my heart, it was my stuffed dinosaur. I didn't ask for either of those to happen, although I suppose I could have been partially responsible for the dinosaur part; after all, I had brought him into the Second Grade because I didn't care for him in the first place. I had received him as an unsought for, last-minute sympathy gift from a relative during my latest stayover at the local hospital—an incident involving a slippery puddle on the bathroom floor and a porcelain toilet seat that broke my fall as well as my arm. Unfortunately for me, that particular accident was not out of the ordinary. At seven-years-old, I was blessed with the physical condition of a wet noodle. It was why every recess period had found me the last picked for every team, and why I had received nicknames from the other boys at school like Earth-to-Face Jake or Jell-O Bones Jacob. Because names were one of those few things in life easily earned with only a little experience and even less effort.

No, sports weren't my thing. Books were. Also dinosaurs. Because really, who didn't like dinosaurs? So one of my relatives had decided that a plush dinosaur holding an open book forever stitched into his hands would be the perfect buck-up present. And that's how I met Danny, as I called him, after the book *Danny and the Dinosaur* of course, because I was so well-read and also clever like that.

Danny and I should have been great friends—he was green (my favorite color), a dinosaur, and apparently loved books too—but as soon as I saw him, I instantly disliked him. I couldn't decide if it was his beady, dopey eyes that stared back at me stupidly or the forced black-threaded smile, or maybe it was the red-and-white striped tie under his chin that made him look like a tame, white-collar meal for a hungry T. Rex on the go. Or it could have been the fact that he lacked any attempt at archeological accuracy, being a generic, fat dinosaur-like shape, with a green and bottom-heavy body of a pear, and no legs to speak of. And then there was the nauseatingly bright yellow cap made of hard plastic that sat on top of his head, making him instantly uncomfortable to sleep with in an already-uncomfortable hospital bed. Evolution would have to be blind to favor him.

So when it came time to offer up one of my stuffed animals to the altar of literacy, Danny was my natural selection. My teacher, Ms. Loudon, had announced to our class that we would be allowed to bring in one stuffed animal to share as a “reading buddy” for DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time. All of the animals would sit untouched on the bookshelf by the window until every student was allowed to select a plush companion and a book to read. Sharing anything of mine with the class seemed like a horrible idea, especially imagining it being in the hands of someone like Mattie Stuckenschneider, who always wore

a layer of dirt, could never seem to get over a wet, soupy cough, and who picked his nose and scratched his butt and put his fingers into his mouth following either of those activities. So Danny was my throwaway, chalking up his fate to survival of the fittest and all that.

When that first reading buddy DEAR time came around, Ms. Loudon nodded and gave us the okay, and it was like a shot had been fired off, signaling the start of an Olympic race. Every student exploded out of his or her seat and made a mad dash for the bookshelves towards the stuffed animals, who endured the violent stampede and grabbing and pulling with stitched smiles. And I-on account of being me-had tripped over the leg of my desk chair, making me the last one to the shelf to get the one remaining animal that no one wanted-a re-sewn and faded-brown bear that smelled faintly of burnt chocolate and cigarettes. Being the last-picked for everything, I couldn't resent the situation we found ourselves in, so I tucked him underneath my arm and brought him back to my desk along with a book on dinosaur eating habits. I looked around the classroom to see who had gotten Danny, because I thought it would make me feel better knowing that someone had gotten stuck with a choice worse than mine.

That's when I saw Michelle, the petite girl with long, gently-curved golden hair tied into a side-ponytail, held into place by a large pink bow that seemed to be all the rage with seven-year-old girls. She sat two rows over on my left and one desk back. And Danny was wrapped tightly in her slender arms; his smile seeming to be wider than I remembered it. Michelle didn't look unhappy at all, unfortunately. Even as her pouty, pink lips moved silently at reading the book that was open flat on her desk, I could see that there was a smile there. And every now and then, she'd pause and whisper something into his non-existent ear or press Danny snugly to her smooth cheek; even the hard plastic yellow cap didn't seem to bother her at all.

In that moment I felt something that I had never felt before, although I couldn't say what it was exactly. It was like a sudden jolt of static electricity had sparked in my chest, traveled up my spine, and warmed my brain before traveling back down. It all lasted for a second. I told myself it was nothing. I liked Michelle, sure, but I liked her the same way that I liked every other girl: kept at a safe distance. Because I might not have been the most athletic or most popular boy, but I was still wise in the ways of boyhood. And that wisdom had taught me that every girl was a primary carrier of the Cooties disease.

I know because I had seen it happen. Gregory Pierson was an unfortunate victim of Cooties, having contracted it from Freckle-faced Janey-Kay. Every recess would find the two of them sitting in the swings, side by side, holding hands, smiling at each other. They would never say a word, never even swing, they'd just sit there, day after day, with their skin touching, with their doughy smiles, lost in some other world where no one and nothing else existed. And whenever Freckle-faced Janey-Kay didn't show up for school-when she was out for days with Chicken Pox-Gregory Pierson would sit in the same swing, his eyes cast down, his face like a stone, never speaking, never looking up to see what was going on around him; he just sat there, silent, softly swaying to a sad melody only he could hear.

Gregory Pierson was a monument—a warning sign—to every boy of the dangers associating with girlkind. One girl was all it took to tear a boy’s life down, to make him an unwitting slave, with even the slightest drop of fun sucked dry from his bones. It was thanks to Gregory Pierson that I was not the lowest boy on the social totem pole at school. Because the only thing worse than a boy who played poorly was a boy who didn’t play at all.

So, I watched Michelle, curiously, but always from a distance, convincing myself that I was too smart to fall into a Cooties-ambush.

As the weeks went by and DEAR times came and went, we all cycled through different books and different reading buddies. Everyone except for Michelle and Danny. They stuck to one another like glue. I watched Michelle, watched her glance over at Danny during the day or occasionally flash a quick smile at his grin-threaded face whenever it got close to DEAR time. She probably didn’t think anyone else noticed, but I did. I noticed how she would rush up to him and embrace him in a tight, full-bodied hug, as if they had finally been reunited after months apart. I noticed how she would place him gently back on the shelf, whispering something tenderly to him as their noses touched. And I couldn’t stand it. Just seeing them together made my teeth clench and my face feel hot, although I didn’t know why. I rode the bus back home every afternoon with a sore jaw and a deflated feeling in my chest.

After a while, I tried hard to be get to Danny first, to beat Michelle there and take him for myself. But day after day, I failed. My lack of coordination didn’t help for sure, but simply put, Michelle was closer. And she knew exactly what she wanted. Everyone else could see it too, which is why no one else had laid claim to Danny.

“...We’ll have such a great time again tomorrow, I promise,” Michelle whispered to Danny after one particular DEAR time had ended, her voice sweet and honeyed like I had never heard her use with anyone before. I had gotten close enough to eavesdrop as I pretended to take a long time putting back the limp, orange snake I had gotten stuck with. She patted Danny’s snout tenderly before turning to go back to her seat. Catching Danny’s eye, I shook my head at him and rolled my eyes.

Playing by the rules had gotten me nowhere. So at the end of the day, with everyone funneling out of the classroom, I nonchalantly strolled over to the shelf full of animals, grabbed Danny, and stuffed him down into my backpack, perhaps a little too violently. Even if I got caught, I couldn’t get in trouble, I reasoned, since Danny was mine to begin with. Still, the entire ride back on the bus, I was sure Danny would undo the zipper and come tumbling out, and everyone aboard the bus would know exactly what I had done.

When I had safely gotten inside my house, I went up to my room, snatched Danny out of my bag and threw him in the corner of my bed. “Girls are nothing but trouble,” I mumbled, though I wasn’t sure if I was trying to convince Danny or myself.

Guilt was not a new feeling, of course. I remembered it with stolen cookies from the jar on top of the fridge or from the time I hid my little brother’s favorite plastic blue car underneath his pillow so that he couldn’t find it and cried away the entire afternoon. But

the guilt I felt over the next couple of days with Michelle was different, somehow more agonizing and lasting. I could barely stand watching Michelle anymore; her eyes, dark and puffy would always be cast down at her desk, her blonde hair scraggly and drawn around her face; no smile would visit those big, soft lips of hers. DEAR time would find her sitting alone, not even bothering to find herself a replacement reading buddy. She'd sit at her desk with a book open, her head in her hands, and her lips never moving. I knew she wasn't reading. But then, neither was I. I pretended to read from a book while I snuck in furtive glances at Michelle. I was alone for DEAR time too. Because I figured if she wouldn't have another reading buddy, and it was because of me, then I shouldn't either. So we both sat there, together in our misery, together in our loneliness, yet separated by oceans and mountains and planets.

She knew I was the one to blame. How could she have not known? I was sure she hated me. After all, I hated myself for what I had done to her.

So I tried hard to make her smile. It became the only thing I thought of, the only thing I wanted. I even went so far as to fall on my face on purpose while walking up to the front of the classroom. The entire class roared with laughter at my misfortune. Except for Michelle. My pain didn't register with her in the least. I looked up from the floor to see her sitting at her desk, her face in the palm of her hand, staring sadly toward the empty spot on the bookshelf where Danny used to sit waiting for her.

That night, I tossed and turned in my bed. One hundred and ninety-nine sheep later, and I was no closer to sleep. All I could see on the back of my eyelids was Michelle's sad face. Sad but beautiful, I sighed. Those kinds of thoughts were dangerous, I knew—wade in just a little bit and I could drown. But was sinking so awful?

I held Danny more firmly in my arms, allowing the hard plastic cap to dig into my nose. The pain was deserved, and I could endure it. Being with Danny was another reminder of what I had done to Michelle. I hated him for that, and at the same time, I had grown so fond of him. I remembered how closely she had held him, how she had tucked him under her chin and spoke softly to him, and it made me hug Danny tighter. I imagined I could feel her own hug through him; those same milky white arms that had wrapped themselves around Danny encircling me too. And maybe, just maybe, she would feel my embrace being returned as well—it would make its way out the window and through the night sky and into her room, to hold her and comfort her, to tell her that I would do anything to see her smile again, and I would never, ever want to see her sad.

I had gotten Cooties. It didn't even matter anymore. No, that wasn't right either. I couldn't cling to the childish myths of seven-year-old boys any longer. I was growing up. These feelings I was having had nothing to do with bugs or viruses or bacteria. I was falling in love with Michelle. There, I admitted it. And with the admission came a strange sense of relief, like winter making way for spring. Suddenly, I understood why Gregory Pierson subjected himself to being a social outcast among the other boys, why he could be content to spend recess sitting on a swing holding the hand of Freckle-faced Janey-Kay, and why he

was filled with such longing and loneliness when she was absent. It all made perfect sense to me now. Because I had felt that way for Michelle.

“Do you miss her too?” I whispered to Danny.

He didn’t answer, but even in the dark I could see his beady eyes looking back at me sadly.

“You’re right,” I said. And I knew what I had to do. “Tomorrow, you’re going back to Michelle.”

Danny pretended not to care, though I could make out the threading of his smile begin to stretch.

Yes, I thought, lying back on my pillow and grinning into the dark. Tomorrow I’ll give Danny back to Michelle. I’ll be her hero. And she’ll smile again. And everything will be right.

I fell into a deep sleep, dreaming colorful, musical dreams of Michelle, happy and bubbling with laughter, of the two of us sitting in swings, holding hands, while Danny gave us a light push from behind.

The warmth of that feeling nestled at the back of my brain and carried me into the next morning as I sat quietly at the back of the bus with Danny firmly in my lap. I held onto him so tightly that my fingers began digging divots into his green fur. I wouldn’t let anything stop me from getting him to Michelle. My heart thumped against the back of Danny’s capped head. What would Michelle say to me? What would I even say to her? Dread mixed with exhilaration in my chest. I wanted to run, so I’d never have to say anything, so she’d never have to know. It would be easier that way. But I also knew I would explode if I kept it cramped up inside me. I would tell Michelle how I felt about her. I had to. There was no going back.

The school bus finally came to a stop in front of the school and we began filing out into a rainy, gray-sky morning. But even as I stepped off the bus and felt the wet touch of a few drops on my cheek, I knew it would be a day that would change my life forever.

Across the way, I spotted Michelle getting off of her bus, and with her golden hair and matching bright pink rain boots and backpack and the rosiness of her fair cheeks, she seemed to be the only thing in color against the backdrop of a dreary, grayed-out world. Upon seeing her, that same jolt of electricity that I had felt so long ago shot up from my chest, propelling words up into my brain and out of my mouth.

“Michelle!” I called, beginning to jog over to her. “Michelle, wait up!”

She stopped and turned towards me. And when she saw me, her face lit up in a smile—a smile so big and bright that her eyes squinted and brought out the dimples in her cheeks I never knew she had. I had never seen anything more beautiful, and my heart pounded in response and my vision blurred.

And I didn’t know if it was her smile that dazed me or the puddle that I hadn’t seen lying in wait in front of me, but I slipped in mid-stride and went sprawling on the pavement-face-first-while Danny flew from my grip, splashing into a soggy patch of mud and silt.



“Oh no, Jack!” she screamed, running towards me. “Jack, are you alright?”

“It’s Jake, actually,” I said with an embarrassed laugh, quickly trying to pick myself up and wipe away the blood and grit from my nose. “But you can call me Jacob if you like.”

But Michelle hadn’t noticed me at all. She was on her knees in the gravel and mud, clutching Danny’s grimy body tightly to her chest.

“Jack,” she sobbed, her tears streaming down her muddied cheeks, mixing with the rain, soaking into his soiled fur. “Oh Jack!”

KURT R. WEST

## Suspected of Purple Longings

Pink-eyed, albino, the night  
drags and dredges to expose  
the fatal crash of the one man  
suspected of purple longings.  
You could have testified

that his trousers fit so badly,  
so baggy in their extremities,  
that he couldn't have committed  
the thought or daydream of which  
he could have been convicted.

I also could swear that the mid  
summer hail that packed his eye  
sockets never melted, leaving him  
too innocent to express himself  
except in the most general terms.

He crashed because he learned to drive  
by watching movies from the Fifties  
in which rear projection replaces  
the fits and tremors endemic  
to the actual landscapes we love.

You want to publicly mourn,  
but the police have affixed us  
with expensive German optics,  
so we should smile like a pair  
of oysters arranged on a plate.

Maybe those purple longings  
linger in narrow streets lacking  
those powerful orange streetlamps  
that erase the faintest bloodstains,  
Maybe we can duck in doorways.

We'll cuddle like plush upholstery  
in memory of the man who crashed  
in a shatter of primary colors  
too fragile to bear witness  
to the text his momentum scrawled.

WILLIAM DORESKI

### Lost Cattle in The Forest

Some take to travelling. Leaving gates open. You might  
     forget to close the barn door. You might open the gate  
 when the horse runs for it. You might have seen the heifer  
     that escaped from the barnyard. You were a child then.  
 You knew nothing about going missing yet. Maybe something.  
     You knew the barn. The bank of lights in the field that looked  
 like an airplane. The cows at the windows strapped  
     In their stanchions, tails swinging. Your father heave-hoe-ing  
 udder to udder. The mythic "first-calf" heifer. It wasn't a  
     disaster, her calf born in the forest. Seen now and then  
 with the mother. The calf suckling for as long as the cow  
     would let her. All that milk in her mouth. Those farms they  
 skirted. On the lam. Disappeared. Living off the land.  
     Some saw the cow and the nearly grown calf outside the fence.  
 Some saw my brother. The forest. A flock of birds. You can  
     print it on you. Leaf mold. Twigs. A time. A place.  
 Since then, I've lost one horse. Two parents. A woman  
     I loved badly; a child that was never born. This is the call  
 cow and calf answered to when they reappeared bucked up  
     with burrs and under-weight. This is the stream they drank from.  
 What they did in the winter I have no idea.

CAROL POTTER

## Iris and Pedro

Iris and Pedro live in Manhattan,  
renting a floor of a dark, sleepy brownstone.  
Pedro works with his hands. He is charming.  
Iris fits clothing to rich, famous bodies.  
Before she can smile, you think of Brazil.  
Past a tall iron gate, she is walking her dog,  
brown with a black snout, named for a beach.  
Pedro will surprise you with whispered affection,  
a compliment about your skin, or your words  
that he took to heart, and Iris will confirm.

On Sunday afternoons they lounge in a courtyard,  
muscular tension will shut Pedro's mouth.  
He is jealous, but he loves her,  
jealous, but he understands  
the call of green-blue light on hot nights,  
the rush of some dance you can't name  
but Pedro has memorized, from his steady feet  
to the aura of his fanning fingertips.  
Iris smiles about coffee, her sadness  
long ago took residence. She pays it no mind.

DONALD ZIRILLI

## Echo

The day, tired, blinks  
pink into the spreading clouds  
while a common bat, searching,  
circles like a clock,

the whole sky hers,  
a multitude of dots  
she connects, her only tool  
perfection. A sketch,

exact replica of hunger  
sated, is written  
in her distinctive hand,  
generous with swoop, flourish

and impossible caesura,  
where one imagines  
the bat the bat imagines,  
blackly digging the air,

all gesture and chew, no dance,  
no fine malaise, no flight.

DONALD ZIRILLI

## Hurricane on the Rocks

First to rattle is the glass.

We pour ourselves any port  
that in the cupboard meditates  
or merely waits.

Dinner's gone to a darkness  
not unlike the pouch of storm  
digesting house and home.

Shall we be stubborn as corn,  
ride and seed disaster,  
heedlessly thrive on horrors,  
rise up through tomorrow  
as its fine dissecting pins?

Tell that to the force majeure skin  
our vinyl siding now excites.

DONALD ZIRILLI

## Hurricane on the Rocks

These our teeth  
 without rumination  
 grind fast as eyes can  
 see/think/smell to hunger for.

These, the doctor's hands—  
 both too large to fit—  
 use jewelers' tools  
 on molars (each a separate mountain range)  
 and cuspids (each a shark, a shank, a sharpness).

Chair time is a teacup  
 transparent as scorpions—  
 scorpion tails like handles—  
 handles like serpents—  
 fanging like cotton boles—  
 cotton white as teeth—verseline teeth like porcelain—  
 white as time with novocaine.

They bid us open wide—  
 trucks, whole flamingo flocks,  
 hot-air balloons insist  
 it isn't wide enough.

They bid us speak  
 even as they hold our tongues.

What doesn't destroy, heals.  
 We spit the residue of crud  
 and blood and bitty  
 bits of tooth and death,  
 wash out our garages/factories/black holes  
 with alcohol and mint  
 and close.

Somewhere, the whole time  
 music swore we'd calm,  
 sit still, compliant as



chewing gum  
beneath the glare  
of drills and freezing sprays.

We exit flossy-headed,  
bourgeois and virtuous  
cleaned-out root canals.

DEVON MILLER-DUGGAN

## PET Scans Tell Us that Fingers' Small Repetitive Movements Settle the Brain

What happens to the stuff—things I made and made to send the demons out through busied fingers—scarves my whole acquaintance couldn't need, hats for babies I would never meet or comfort? Made like endless scales on a piano, never adding up to fugue. Tiny movements, near precise, but made a door, a drain, dog-shaking-water-from-its-hair, spells for settling.

Use old knives for measure. Know some other family's madwoman's finger-music managed density enough—made stuff beyond stuff, became feeling or truth or scream or manifest of something none can throw away—her thickly crocheted spirit dolls the size of babies or adult torsos pass down hand to hand to museum. Not mine. The madwoman crocheted out her life. I'll leave my children or my children's children nothing so across-the-void-between what's good to keep and what needs to be thrown. But I'll leave threads. They'll pick apart my makings, or pick up my threads.

Darknesses make us. My fingers don't make them. And making them won't make them go. Their fingers—even my darknesses have hands—practice past and present, pulling each in and out, black threads twisting air behind them until they're golems made of threads and stolen air. Museums of spirit, art of looping and catching, knotting and winding.

DEVON MILLER-DUGGAN