



EL PORTAL

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**Eastern New Mexico University's
Literary and Arts Journal**

ABOUT EL PORTAL

Since its inception in 1939, Eastern New Mexico University's literary magazine *El Portal* has offered a unique venue for the work of writers, artists, and photographers both on campus and off. It is published each fall and spring semester thanks to a grant courtesy of Dr. Jack Williamson, a world-renowned science fiction writer and professor emeritus at ENMU who underwrote the publication during his time on campus.

Each semester *El Portal* encourages previously unpublished short stories, poetry, non-fiction, flash fiction, photography, and art submissions from ENMU students and faculty, as well as national and international writers and artists. *El Portal* does not charge a submission fee. Submissions from ENMU students receive the special opportunity to win a first-, second-, or third-place cash prize in their respective categories.

For additional information about *El Portal*, please visit our website: <http://elportaljournal.com>

SUBMISSIONS

El Portal is open to submissions from all artists and writers; however, its awards are intended solely for the benefit of ENMU students. Submissions are published on the basis of talent, content, and editorial needs.

El Portal serves as a creative forum for the students, faculty, and staff of Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU), as well as artists, writers, poets, and photographers worldwide. Consequently, the views expressed in *El Portal* do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints and opinions of ENMU as a whole.

GUIDELINES

Please submit all written work in .doc or .docx format. With the exception of poetry and art/photography, please limit entries to one story/essay per submission. Simultaneous submissions are welcome; we ask that you notify *El Portal* in the event that your work is accepted elsewhere so that we may remove it from consideration. When entering a submission, please include a third-person biography of no more than 50 words to be printed in the event that your submission is selected for publication.

Fiction (up to 4,000 words)

Creative Nonfiction (up to 4,000 words)

Flash Fiction (up to 500 words)

Poetry (up to 5 pieces)

Art & Photography (up to 5 pieces)

Prizes will be awarded to ENMU students only.

Prizes are awarded in the Short Story, Poetry, and Art/Photography categories.

DEADLINES

Spring 2020: Please submit by December 15, 2019

Fall 2020: Please submit by May 10, 2020

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TERLINGUA, IN REPOSE

Greg Headley



AN INTERVIEW WITH STEFAN KIESBYE

Jennifer Baros, editor

In October of 2018, the Languages and Literature Department of Eastern New Mexico University welcomed author Stefan Kiesbye. Though currently teaching creative writing at Sonoma State University, Kiesbye previously taught creative writing at ENMU, where Portales, New Mexico, may have helped inspire his 2015 novella *The Staked Plains*. During his reunion visit, *El Portal* had the opportunity to chat with Kiesbye about his philosophy of writing.



***EP:** At what point in your life did you know that you were a writer? How did you come to claim this identity for yourself – were there any obstacles you had to overcome or expectations you had to release in order to be able to call yourself a writer?*

SK: I hardly ever call myself that. I am happy that so far I have been able to sustain myself with writing and writing-related work, but I'm not fond of the "identity" part. Constructing identities is a very charged field in contemporary America. People need the feel to belong and carve out niches, but I also see the tribalism, the cultural and ideological warfare stemming from that desire. So, I don't claim that identity – writing is a practice, like brushing your teeth, rather than an identity.

***EP:** You have spoken of writing as a discipline, like running. What advice would you give to writers who struggle with developing/maintaining writing as a daily practice?*

SK: I believe that many beginning writers struggle with their own expectations. When you start running, you might be surprised how soon you have to stop and what muscles and joints will hurt afterwards. But you have to be patient and do it again. You'll huff and puff, you'll look silly, but if you keep going, you'll get better. It's the same with any art form. You do it, you're no good at it, but over time you become better. You have to overcome the disappointment of failing. If you can't find the discipline, it's probably a sign that you don't want it enough.

***EP:** Setting plays such an important role in your work. How would you say places you have visited or lived in have influenced your writing?*

SK: We only make sense in specific places. What has meaning in one setting looks ridiculous in another. A yellow Lamborghini in Los Angeles is a statement. On the Eastern High Plains it looks lost. Places provide the context for our actions. They are more

than just a backdrop – they bring about actions, force characters to make their move.

Our everyday lives in the electronic or digital age often dissolve the feeling of being in any specific place. You can order products that thirty years ago were only available in big cities. You can talk and text with people around the world. Place seems to shrink in an era of mobile devices. But still, pulling out an iPhone in Fargo is an entirely different act than pulling out an iPhone in New York City.

EP: How do you know when a project is finished?

SK: I never quite do. And I have the suspicion that all my books could be rewritten beautifully. But at some point you have to stop. Workshops, agents, and editors can be very helpful in the process of making that decision.

EP: Do you have a set community that reads or comments on your work? Does this community vary with each project? What advice do you have for writers who are not a part of a writing community?

SK: One or two people read my work after it's done. But I do have friends I can talk to about writing, general problems of craft, strange trends, publishing, job opportunities. It's a luxury to have people who understand the small hurdles, the joys, and the frustrations of writing. You have to find community if you're in for the long haul. To find those people, you can go to readings by visiting writers and talk to them afterwards. Hold on to the people you meet in workshops, go to writing conferences, summer workshops, or connect online.

EP: How do you think being a non-native writer impacts your work? What advice would you give writers who want to foster this type of cultural and linguistic attunement in their writing?

SK: Not being a native works in two directions. 1) You gain a very good, stark view of a foreign culture. While that view is of course influenced by the culture you grew up in, it's a point of view natives will never achieve. You're an outsider, and so you assess everything. Nothing is normal. Nothing is "just what you do." 2) Your own culture becomes more visible. You can compare your experience as a native of one country to living in another. You become aware of idiosyncracies, things that don't make sense, beauty, and cruelty. Your home country becomes a work of fiction.

Many writers have started to write — either out of necessity or as an exercise — in a foreign language, and it's good practice. You have to pare down what you want to say, and you discover the thoughts and beliefs embedded in the syntax of this new language. You might miss out on the finer points, but you rediscover the basic building blocks. You start trusting structure and become less dependent of that one killer line.

El Portal thanks author Stefan Kiesbye, whose stories, essays, and reviews have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others. His first book, *Next Door Lived a Girl*, won the Low Fidelity Press Novella Award, and has been translated into German, Dutch, and Spanish. *Your House Is on Fire, Your Children All Gone* made EW's Must List and was named one of the best books of 2012 by *Slate* editor Dan Kois. The LA Noir *Fluchtpunkt Los Angeles* was published in February 2015. The Gothic novel *Knives, Forks, Scissors, Flames* came out in October 2016, and German newspaper *Die Welt* commented that, "Kiesbye is the inventor of the modern German Gothic novel." His new novel *Berlingeles* is available from Revelore Press.

UNDER THE WET SKIN

Nazli Karabiyikoglu

Transsiberia: to cry within

Like comets, with the bullet raining over departure times

Clock towers slipping away. Crying with the bells

Set by the Book of Luka. Icebergs reflect on Lake Baikal,

A crumpled winter cabbage in Novgorod. A pipey instrument

With keys in Odessa. A holiday

In Saint Petersburg, Gregorian chants.

Dacha Dacha!

Your time will come with daphne droplets...

All the clocks of the station pointed it

One

The man had three names. One from his father, and one from his mother. To his father he was Kamil. He'd been calling him overseas for years, asking, "Kamil, my son, how are you?" All the father wanted was for his son to be alive, the specifics of the son's life weren't a matter of concern to him. After adolescence, the boy got used to not saying anything unless he was asked, and remained as the Kamil who survived for his father.

To his mother he was Kolenka. The son of the dark-eyed, dark-haired, pale woman who denied her Siberian ancestors and made Moscow her home. Kolenka. Enamored of the breast, he sucked for three years and three months.

To those who rolled in their graves, those stuck in purgatory, and those straying on earth, he was Samuel. In the past, whenever his breath was gone, he erupted, and blood came out, throwing the weight of the spirits, from which he was cured by dying, from his heart.

Two

It'd been over a year since Kolenka left Istanbul and returned to Moscow; his first time staying with his mother after many, long years. The woman's porcelain, doll-like face hadn't aged. To him, she even resembled his girlfriends from university from behind. From her side, she was a young woman in her mid-thirties. When he looked straight at her, though, Kolenka ached. Flames were coming out of her beautiful face with wrinkles, and Kolenka's shadows danced in circles around the fiery face. After they sat together by the window every evening, he covered his crotch with his hands when he went to sleep. He was getting up and cleaning the transparent liquid that poured onto his palms as he struggled to sleep. He wished to always see her from the back.

Three

Little Kolenka with his wooden train. Fourteen years had passed since his father's leaving. In one of the yellow buildings by Nevsky Street in Petersburg, he was spinning its wheels in their apartment. He was watching Manouchka's skirts move through the half open kitchen door.

Boiling potatoes in chicken stock, Manouchka was looking back to check on him time to time, saying, "very little time till your mama comes, any moment now," with a smile.

Crying after her for days, Kolenka had already forgotten the face of his mother, like that of his father, and had gotten used to sleeping on chubby Manouchka's lap. It interested him, though, that the woman he knew as his mother was living in a tent for a university thesis in Siberia for eight months. For days he camped in the living room with a patchy tent made of bed sheets.

First, he saw the muddy boots of her mother, who entered in from the door with her filthy suitcase. Then, he remembered the warmth of the lips that approached his face. Memory of his mother returned, suddenly, as the familiar lavender scent kicked in. He looked up with longing to the woman whose face was crumpled and offered her the wooden train.

She smelled the same, but Kolenka felt that his mother wasn't the same. They weren't playing with snow in the streets at night anymore or making up names to the random characters they drew. Manouchka began to worry about the dead eyes of her lady and to say every day that she needed to go see a doctor. The woman who kept staring at the ceiling with the rock she held wasn't paying any attention to Manouchka, either. They didn't know what she was doing at her gloomy bedroom while she lit incense sticks. Sometimes she came running into the kitchen, drunk pitchers of water and went back. She wasn't saying anything to Manouchka about her trip to Siberia, or to Kolenka about her adventures either. This was as odd as her sitting at the backyard with mud in her mouth.

One night, she shook Kolenka while he was sleeping and woke him up. She wrapped him in his blanket and carried him with

difficulty to the yard.

On the way, she whispered to her son's ear, "Basty's coming; Basty's coming,"

His mother put him in a hole she had just dug and covered him with his blanket. As she muttered repeatedly the name Basty, she threw handfuls of dirt onto the scared, silenced boy. She left him like that, covered in dirt up to his nose, and ran out to the street. Manouchka, awakened by the noise, searched for Kolenka in terror. When she found him buried in the yard, she screamed in agony. She took him out of the ground and gave him a hot bath.

When the lady returned days later, Manouchka burned the mother's ripped clothes and said nothing to the neighbors.

Winter passed. Winter came again. Mother began to play snowball with Kolenka again. Manouchka boiled potatoes in chicken stock in the kitchen. Kolenka started school.

At semester break, mother stuffed both of their clothes to a suitcase, and left some money to Manouchka.

"Kolenka and I are taking a small trip."

They took the train heading to Novosibirsk. Kolenka waved to Manouchka.

Four

The smell of wet mud was in the air. Conical bushes were placed around a tent, which stood in the middle. A man in a red kafthan was swaying around with rag dolls and bones hanging over his shoulders. People surrounding him were in black kafthans. As the man in red moved, the people were thumping out a rhythm either with their palms or drums. It was the boy's

mother in purple, who approached a bush and set it on fire. Her hair was split into two braids that hung over her breasts.

Next to the fire was a pit that looked like a grave. Kolenka watched all this from a cushion. One in black came, lifted Kolenka up, and took him to the tent. They cut horse and sheep outside. Then, they lay all the pieces in front of the tent. They got on their own horses and rode around the tent seven times. They stood at its door and cut their faces with knives and cried. Blood blended with their tears, which burned in their cuts. They threw Kolenka's wooden train, clothes and books into the fire.

They made his mother get on a white horse. Gave her a knife, expected her to cut the lovely face of hers. Mother did cut her face. Her face, too, burned with tears. She circled the tent with her horse.

The boy was already asleep in the tent as the men skinned their horses and transferred the skins to posts.

The next morning, his mother set *kamennaya babas* beside the grave. Men in black came one by one and left arrows before each of the small, stone statues. The men circled the tent seven times again that night.

The man in red came at the dawn of the third day and took the boy out of the tent. He lay the boy near the fire. All together, those in black and the man in red, yelled, "Begone, Basty,"

They called his mother's name and brought her in the middle. They undressed her and lay her next to her son by the fire. The man in red came and put a stone in the mother's open mouth and sprinkled herbs on her belly. Then, the man cried over the boy and his mother.

The men in black put their hands on Kolenka, too. This time, the man in red put a stone in Kolenka's mouth and splashed the

blood of horses between mother's legs and onto Kolenka's little balls. As the man in red prayed, he started to pour the blood onto them from the bucket he held. Then he covered them both with wet horse skins.

"Now, whatever it is to happen, may it happen under the wet skin, and may Basty begone," he said.

Under the wet skin, his mother pulled him towards her, took him into her own body. As they passed a wooden phallus to her from outside, she pushed her crotch to his. Hymns joined her groans, and arrows and bullets were shot to the air. His mother started to scream and shake her legs so that Tengri would pull Basty back. She pinched his flesh hard as she pushed the phallus deeper. As Basty came on her, she opened her mouth and spit the stone out. She yelled out, and they poured fresh seeds in her mouth.

Then, they took Kolenka and put him in the grave with the *kamennaya babas*.

Five

Kamil lived with father, a man he didn't know at all, while he went to university in İstanbul. Kamil didn't remember anything that happened to him twelve years ago, but he felt his flesh curl up inside like a snail every time he was with a girl, took her clothes off, and lay her on his bed. His face turned red any time he saw a woman's crotch in commercials, movies, billboards. Everyone knew about his failures and called him names for it; so he decided let go of girls for good.

Kamil finished school, and afterward, on his way back to Moscow, he thought about his father. His father had kissed

Kamil's eyes and smelled Kamil's hair before leaving for America. When Kamil entered the door of his mother's house, where they had lived like strangers throughout his childhood, his eyes looked out on Nevski Street. He reached down to a stone on the ground and involuntarily put it in his mouth, then threw it into the river.

Six

Somewhere among the days when his father called him "Kamil," he realized he liked being called this. If he existed with that name, he would reborn, shed light onto the darkened corner of his mind. Get rid of his habits of peeing himself in graveyards, running away at the sight of fire, throwing up because of his disgust towards red and black. He would be Kamil. Stand up right in the center of a family portrait and spin his wooden train's wheels again.

He murmured his name while he walked around Eyüp, "Kamil, Kamil, Kamil."

He heard something rustle behind him. He turned around, there was no one to see. He kept walking. When he heard the same rustle, he turned again, faster. Scanned the area over his shoulder.

"Kamil, Kamil, Kamil!"

The thing that was there looked like a balloon moving in the air with faded green liquid inside it.

Kamil wasn't scared. Slowly he came closer to the object. For a while he watched the green liquid move. He wanted to reach and dip his hand in it, to stick his head inside the balloon, and bury his whole body inside its shell.

“Kamil, Kamil, Samuel!”

His fingers touched the liquid. They didn't get wet. The faded green undulated like a sheet. A face appeared under the silk shawl that rushed away as fast as water. There was a pitch-black face. It moved a bit, and opened eyes that were mere holes. It stood up before Kamil and held onto his arm. In Kamil's palm, it left a bird's heart covered with blood. It told Kamil that his real name was Samuel.

“Forgive!” Then it disappeared, leaving a green trail behind.

Seven

One night, he shook his mother while she was sleeping and woke her up. He wrapped her in her blanket and carried her with difficulty to the yard. On the way, he whispered to his mother's ear “Basty's coming, Basty's coming,” He put his mother in the hole he had just dug and covered her with her blanket. As he repeatedly muttered the name Basty, he started to throw handfuls of dirt onto the scared, silenced woman. He looked at his mother, covered in dirt up to his nose, and put a bird's heart in her mouth, now dried with blood. At last he covered her nostrils with mud too.

Manouchka woke up the next morning and searched for her lady in terror, and when she found her buried in the yard she screamed in agony. Manouchka took the lady out of the ground and had her name written on her tombstone.

SERENE AND QUIET

Katherine Perelas



DESERT DREAM

Mary Shanley

The resident pack of coyotes scamper across
the sagebrush slopes of the Sangre de Christo Mountains,
where spirits of red clay earth keep a leery eye
on urban tourists who come looking for a healing
in the hot mineral spring and maybe have their picture
taken with an authentic, Native American Indian.

Taos pueblo, ancient earth home,
now a popular postcard, like the one
Denis sent me. His message read,
“Indians didn’t have any concept of hell
until the Christians arrived.”

The distant mesas dwell in ancient silence
and the afternoon clouds hang low, as if to
eavesdrop on cinnamon toast earth.

2.

The locals breathe heavy in the atomic afternoon,
swigging Jack Daniels and begging oblivion
to erase the memory of the blinding light
oh, fry my innards in the middle of the day
fry my innards in the deserts of clay
fry my innards with a blinding light

exploding in the sky like the fourth
of July and the flag flies high.
Oh, call my name St. Peter
and ready my great reward
for I've had my picture taken
by a woman from New York
who's going to put it in a book
about the secrets of the desert.

Geiger counter clicking
out prophetic rhythms
of what my government
did to me

Oh, what my
government
did to me.

But I don't mind,
cause the lawyer man
said he's gonna
get me \$20,000
for the lung I buried.

A family plot
A new washer and dryer
a gravestone
a desert dream.

THE SMELL OF RAIN

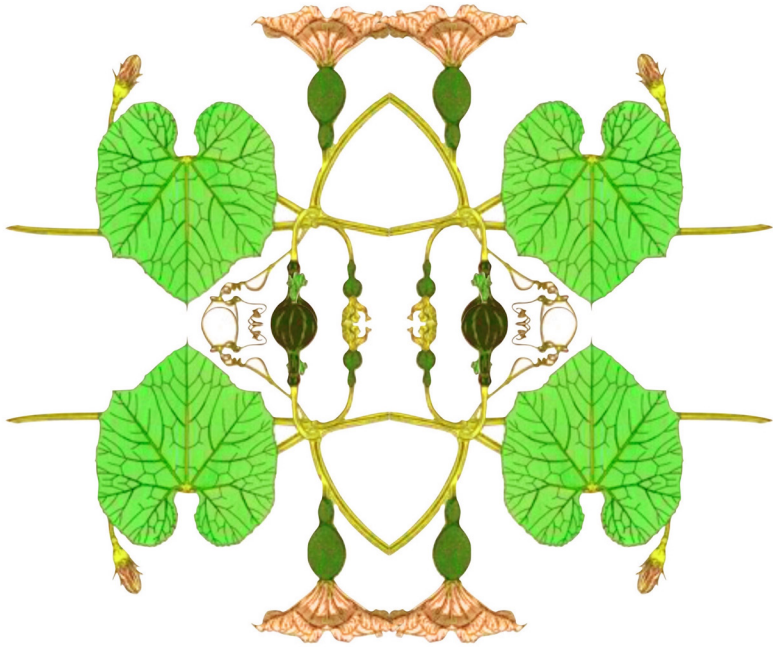
Connor Sparks

The smell of rain
is sweet and sour
it dampens your body
helps flowers bloom
the smell flows through,
entering my windows
and embraces me,
“everything will be alright”
but then the clouds part
the night sky is left standing
and I know it won’t.

You are the rain
and you left me

THE FLAVOR OF RAIN

William Wolak



FOREST TREE

Tyne Sansom

puck, puck, puck
a woodpecker
pecks the skin
of a groaning tree
that moans from wind
that billows hotly
against the contest of
stems and leaves
that acquiesce
a short distance
to shimmer the sun
with effervescence—

leafy chimes,
wisps of wind—
trees find
time to
sit and breathe—
they linger
in lazy sway,
the hot stew
of summer—

sun sets—
moon peaks—
revise the leaves
to blues from greens—
soft mellowness
loosened from the day,
under pacific stars
that wink and roll,
this outreach
of branches
wave and sway—

CRUISING THE VISTULA

William Doreski

We're cruising the Vistula north of Warsaw. The long wooden boat is smooth with wear. It hasn't been painted since before the war, but doesn't leak a drop, and wafts along the current with butterfly grace. The pilot looks young as a pumpkin. He steers with brisk insouciance, avoiding snags and sandbars. You peer at the low, tree-shrouded shore. You know that long fields, wheat, potatoes, corn, sprawl behind the trees. The harvest completed, the land tries to look innocent enough to accept the onset of winter. Today, though, is shirt-sleeve warm, the brown river comfortable as a pair of old shoes. We're passing towns invisible behind the screen of leaves. Pieńków or Suchocin, Gąbinek or Stary Bógpomóż. Like Connecticut Valley towns: one long main street on a low ridge parallel to the river. The boat wallows along, pleased with itself. I can still smell the war, can't you? The stink of hot metal and cold flesh. Cordite and gun oil. Sweat of unwashed woolen uniforms. Bad breath trapped in a scarf wrapped around a soldier's face to keep out the cold. The river flows to the Baltic without hesitation or regret. We admire, but refuse to emulate such mastery of simple dimensions, our faces turning like flowers to catch the light.

THERE'S ALWAYS SOME LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Michael Gardner



A SECOND CHANCE

Natalie Franco

A warm breeze shuffles the leaves of the trees as they transform into a shape of a woman. She looks at her hands and her body made of leaves, while trying to remember what happened to her. A raven caws, and the woman sees it sitting on a branch next to her. It nods its head to the right, but the woman furrows her eyebrows and tilts her head. The raven flies towards her and pulls one of her leaves. The woman cringes from the pain and looks at the direction the raven is trying to make her see. She sees a leafless tree, sitting on top of a grassy hill a few feet away from her. A child's laughter fills her ears as she stares at the little girl swinging on the swing tied to one of the branches. A little boy who's the same age as the little girl laughs while pushing her higher towards the sky. The woman glances behind them at the long staircase, leading to a huge, old, purple house with blue window shutters. Her leaves shake as she recognizes the house, the tree, and the little girl. The woman leans against the tree, trying to calm her breathing. She closes her eyes.

"The little girl is Brisa, isn't she?" The woman opens her eyes and glares at the raven.

It nods its head.

"Then that means –"

The woman looks inside one of the windows and notices Brisa's mother sipping her coffee as she talks to the mother of the childhood friend. Standing by the kitchen counter, the woman sees a dark shadow lurking by the window without anyone paying attention to it. The shadow transforms into a shape of a man as he bores his black eyes at Brisa with a smirk on his

face. The woman watches him shiver with pleasure hearing Brisa's sweet laughter and smelling her vanilla scent. He grips the counter and suddenly, the woman sees images of the things the shadow wants to do with Brisa. She gasps and her leaves turn black. The woman kneels while wrapping her arms around her. She glances at Brisa playing tag with her friend. The woman begins to weep.

"Why did you bring me here? I know what's going to happen. Why do I have to be here again? Please, don't make me see this;" she continues sobbing. But the raven only listens.

Darkness swallows the sky, letting the moon be the only light. The woman watches Brisa and her friend walk back to the house. She walks to another tree closest to the hill and waits to see the events unfold. Brisa happily jumps on each step of the stairs, while holding hands with her friend as they enter the house. The woman looks at the swing and sees a doll with a pink dress. She clenches her fists and her leaves turn red. The doll is the cause of everything.

Her leaves return to green when she hears Brisa's mother. "¿Mija, a dónde vas," the mother asks with a strict tone.

"¿Olvide mi muñeca, can I please go get it?"

"Okay mija, but you can't go by yourself -"

"I'll go with her," the shadow disguised as a man interrupts the mother.

The woman's leaves turn black again.

"No, está bien, I don't want to be a -"

"It's fine, I don't mind accompanying your adorable daughter,"

the man interrupts the mother and gently smiles at her.

He grabs Brisa's small hand and they leave, but the woman couldn't help but miss the mother's worried expression. The woman continues watching the shadow and Brisa as they walk towards the swing. Brisa picks up her doll, but the shadow tugs her toward him. She tries to loosen his grip.

"Let me go!" squirms Brisa, but the shadow grins behind the curtain of darkness that begins to surround them.

A monster replaces the shadow disguised as a man. The woman turns her eyes away as the wind carries Brisa's bloody screams. She looks back again and makes eye contact with the monster, who grins and vanishes into the night. The woman feels her leafy heart beat rapidly, the leaves turn black and red, and shake violently at seeing the monster again.

"Brisa!" the mother shrieks, startling the woman.

She watches the mother bury her daughter in her arms, who's clothes are ripped. The mother of the childhood friend runs away from the house with her son, not wanting to admit the crime her husband just committed.

"Perdoname. Perdoname, mija, perdoname," Brisa's mother repeatedly whispers while hugging Brisa tighter to her chest.

The woman's leaves change to blue and she covers her mouth, keeping her sobs from making a sound.

The woman sits against the tree and wraps her arms around her knees. Her leaves are filled with tints of blue and crimson red compared to the yellow and orange tint in the leaves of the trees. She gazes at the window and sees Brisa, who's an adolescent now, draw on her sketch book. Brisa's light brown hair has

become pitch black and her hazel eyes lost its spark. Plates of food that haven't been touched surround her desk. The walls are covered with Brisa's art of the shadow, a girl hanging from a tree, a monster eating a girl, or a girl filled with blood.

Brisa's father enters her room and tries to hug her, but she cowers against the wall and begins to scream. The mother quickly enters and holds Brisa, trying to calm her down. The father glances at the ground and leaves the room. Brisa goes to sleep, but then begins to wail and cry. Her mother shakes her awake and rocks Brisa back to sleep.

The next morning, the woman sees Brisa finally leave the room, but returns with her mother wrapping Brisa's wrists with bandages. The woman watches this routine continue every day, Brisa suffering, the mother trying to calm her, and the father feeling useless.

The woman glimpses at the window where the mother is sitting at the kitchen table, staring at the swing. A box of tissues stands beside her arm. The mother's straight brown hair has now become a wavy mess. Dark circles hug her eyes because of the sleepless nights, trying to calm Brisa from her nightmares. She wears the same outfit, a gray shirt with sweatpants filled with coffee stains. The woman moves her eyes to the lonely swing without any beautiful flowers surrounding it like before. She hears the flapping of the raven's wings and her leaves become tinted with crimson.

"How long are you going to make me watch her suffer?"

The raven only stares at the woman.

"Tell me why did you bring me here? Why in the hell do I have to watch this again? Please! I can't bear watching this anymore,"

The raven transform into a white butterfly and flies towards the woman's leafy heart. Light surrounds the woman as she's transformed into the butterfly.

The woman she flies towards the house. She enters the window and transforms back to a woman, though now her body is made of light. The woman gently puts her hand on the mother's shoulder. The mother gasps at the warmth surrounding her. The woman smiles and wraps her hand around the mother's hand.

"We're going to be okay. ¿Right, mija," the mother asks.

The woman tightens her grip. The mother gets up and starts packing her bags, while the woman transforms into a butterfly again. Once the mother finishes packing, she slams the front door and walks towards Brisa, who's sitting on the old swing. Brisa's mother drops the bags and hugs her daughter.

"Perdoname," she cries on her daughter's shoulder.

"It wasn't your fault mama;" Brisa returns the hug.

The mother lets go, kisses Brisa's forehead, and grabs the bags again.

"Te amo. I'll be waiting when you're ready," she walks away.

Without moving an inch, Brisa remains sitting on the swing. The woman flies towards Brisa and the light transforms her into a human. Brisa stares at her with wide eyes.

"How? Are you me," Brisa asks.

The woman smiles. "Yes, I'm you."

"Then tell me, does it ever go away?" Brisa's tears swim down her cheeks.

The woman, who is also Brisa, hugs her younger self as they both cry.

“No, that’s why death made me watch this again. We must move on and the only way we can do that is with this.”

Older Brisa hands her younger self matches and a lighter. Her younger self rubs her eyes and walks up the stairs towards the house. Older Brisa follows her as both light the matches and throw them at the house. They watch the flame devour the house then stroll down the stairs to throw a match at the leafless tree with the swing. Older Brisa holds her younger self’s hand as the flame burns away the darkness that the shadow left behind to haunt them.

“Now we can become the person we’re meant to be,” older Brisa whispers.

Holding each other, they walk away from the purple house, the leafless tree, and the swing, not looking back.

ENCHANTING

Michael Gardner



JETSAM

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

A garden of a chain of rocks hanging in the space. Each rock is carved in desert wild flowers, such as cactuses, we survive for many years without rain. We secure each forage floating or sinking when we maintain the garden features, such as fossil insects, leaves, seeds, and tree stumps. Every visitor seems in high glee, laughter, or conversation. We pay the high price of jests and gaiety. I suppose you love your effervesce in five months after spending your capricious souls or heart. I wring the clouds for water to shower your friends in visor, I add your wrath on each rock I mark with seven days elapsing before I model a morning and walk away with your head under a wreath of garden nasturtium bloom. I am absorbed. Someone approaches me unnoticed with the contents I have wanted for your jetty hair.

UNTITLED

K. B.

(12/15/2018)

and even when the earth swallows me whole
I won't forget
your smile.

(1/03/2019)

They say "when you know
you know"
and I knew from the moment our eyes met,
the moment we talked,
the moment we touched,
and every moment since
that you would break my heart
and I would love you anyway.

(1/07/2019)

my feelings are like fire
and I, a dry grassland.

I lie helpless as they burn.

(3/29/2019)

someday I will love myself so much
I won't be afraid
to look in the mirror.

ODE TO GUATEMALAN TOPONYMY

Jeff Schiff

*Make in your mouths the words that were our names.
(Archibald MacLeish, "Epistle to Be Left in the Earth")*

Oh to make in my gringo mouth
the names that were empires
and strongholds of commerce

Zacapa and Retalhuleu

Escuintla

Panajachel

rivers of grass and sign of land
hill of dogs
place of reeds and quack

to manage the elisions and guttural collisions
the dentolabials
and uvular fricatives

to acknowledge that X
can stand resolute
on a flinty page

yet dissolve like highland cacao
in *Xela* and *Iximché*
how a terminal J

can lure you into psalm
but drag you down the lanes
of a ruin like *Takalik Abaj*

Oh, to master obstruents
and sonorous trills
to gather Náhuatl strength

and share *Kaqchikel* mystery
to unhesitatingly articulate
Xocomil and *Chiquimula*

brazenly scurry through *Sacatepéquez*
when required
and without premeditation

THE BED

Shawn Anto

down here you will [lie] on makeshift softness which reaches
our hardened core.

& what might have been, is not anymore—I don't know what I want.

I resist everything this land is. It is infested with web upon
web threading

& sometimes I have no words for this cowering, sticky embrace.

My body will cling to these white sheets, I'm covering my eyes
and head and mouth

expecting so much, I keep it all [in] I pretend I'm not worthy.

This experience is a tunneling insect burrowing into skin, eating
flesh, I let it, my god. I let [this] memory go.

this feels good, not owning everything I have created,
letting filaments

fly where they may, a wind blasting a home, crumbling
this foundation

I made my own place to lie, another word and I may die or I
may quiet

myself—repeat: *quiet quiet now.*

break between bare body or bastardize beauty in body
either way we're sleeping off shadow sadness creeping in
fingers caressing one friend here constantly invective
another silently dissolving I say *sleep here. sleep. rest.*
or put yourself to

[bed].

A NIGHTTIME DRIVE TO NOWHERE

Greyson Ferguson

I pulled into the isolated gas station. Its fluttering canvas fluorescents a lighthouse beacon against the cloudy desert night. Saddling up to a pump, I let the aged engine die before half-opening the door, stopping just before the groan of dry hinges called out. Any noise I made would carry for miles in the open expanse. Sound waves let free to roam like a dog off its leash. But I gently pushed the white door of my ancient Ford pickup close. I didn't want to make a noise. I didn't want to wake *her*.

I walked around to the pump, sliding my fingers under the front gas tank cover. The back tank on the truck leaked, so fuel only went in the front. I could fix the rear tank. Have it replaced. Restored. But I don't. At this point, it seems disingenuous. A skin tuck to a face full of weathered knowledge from paths less traveled and well-traveled. We'd driven down many paths together.

As gas flowed and fumes tickled my nose, I looked at her through the back window. Asleep. My jacket cradling her head against the door. I thought of what our lives could be together.

If we didn't go back.

If we didn't return.

If we just drove.

The pump *clicked*. The sound of a fishing line reeling me out of my dream.

I tucked the pump back into its dock, tightened the gas cap and gently closed the lid. It would clap shut if I didn't guide it down carefully.

As I walked around the truck bed it started to rain. I could smell it before I saw it. It smelled clean. Pure. There's nothing like the smell of desert rain.

Someone should turn it into a candle.

Someone probably has.

I stood there, breathing it in. Letting the aroma fill my lungs as the gentle sound of rain on sand pattered to life.

Opening the door part way, I slid onto my end of the bench seat. I closed the door with as quiet of a rattle as possible. In the old Ford truck, everything rattled.

It didn't wake her. The engine billowing alive did. She looked over at me sleepily as the V-8 greedily drank in its liquid sustenance. Her drooping eyes connected with mine and she smiled. A smile of innocence fresh from slumber where nothing in the real world mattered. The fluorescents from outside highlighted the back of her head, where hair tangled like secret lovers during her brief hibernation.

I smiled back.

As if without thinking, or by instinct, she unbuckled her seatbelt and rested her head on my leg. The curve of my thigh fitting perfectly against the crutch of her neck. I watched her, wanting the moment to last forever but knowing it couldn't. I took the jacket she had used as a pillow and draped it over her.

Pulling the transmission down to drive, I crept the Ford out the station's halo of light before desert night swallowed us whole.

A cloudless desert night offers surprising luminous. The moon, our sun's romantic celestial relative, offers a soft light, picked up by the flecks of mineral in the surrounding landscape, turning the desert into an ocean of stone as it reflects back up at the stars above.

A cloudy desert night absorbs all light. The occasional passing car transforms into a beacon. A flare shooting off into

a darkened abyss.

The rain picked up, pitter-pattering on the roof. It accompanied the sound of the radio. Volume set too low to make out words, but loud enough to remind me it was there. Like her heartbeat against my leg. The gentle reminder that she was there, with me, and yet at the end of the drive wouldn't be. She'd be gone, and I'd cling to the memory of something barely there.

The blue of the dash, making up for the lack of moon, outlined her cheek and seemed to pool on her bottom lip.

If only the drive could last forever.

If only we could drive on to anywhere.

Or nowhere. It didn't matter where.

A car streaked past. Its light bleeding across the windshield canvas like a living watercolor.

I could see a highway sign. 65 more miles.

Just 65.

Why did I keep thinking of the end, the conclusion, when we hadn't arrived yet? We still had 65 miles left together. I needed to enjoy them.

Absorb them.

Remember them.

If only we could just keep driving. Blow right on past. Drive until the truck could go no further.

It's too bad the other tank didn't work.

I should have fixed it.

BOMBS

Thom Young

the bombs drop
in Los Angeles
again.
the dogs ravage the
metal trash cans
left over from the bastards
that lived in my house
twenty years ago.
they left used lives
and bloodstains on the dingy
brown carpet
that should have been taken up
in 1979.
but I can't help but laugh
at it all.
besides nobody knows
that I too was once
in love

BICYCLE

Cody Wilhelm

Skinning knees
Bleeding into the earth
Your very substance
You didn't cry until you saw your wounds.

It didn't hurt
But crying just seemed right.
When you saw your skin torn
Stripped away, it was so strange;

To see such damage.
You were so new
To this
You fell, over and over.

But you've never bled,
Never been cut
In your fragile
Rich world.

Such an impossibly gentle girl
Scraping knees on the asphalt:
Not to ride for an hour to get to school
Like Afghani or Indian girls.

Just to feel the wind rush through your hair.
Just to feel more real than
The cold suits of armor in the manor
More alive than glass eyes staring in the trophy room.

Yet it wasn't the wind
That made you feel
Alive;
It was bleeding for the first time.

TERLINGUA, VIVA!

Greg Headley



CENTRAL TEXAS, JANUARY 2018

Kayleen Burdine

Once the joy,
delirious and
so bright grinds
away into
exhausted, sore
slumber, the
terror curls in
around the edges
like splinters
in tender flesh.
The mantra,
*What the hell
am I doing,
here in this
place so devoid
of bitter and
broken things?*
haunts every step,
every breath,
the rhythm of
boxes unpacked.
So unlike me,
so unlike the known.
Years of
penance gone.
Freedom clings
to my throat
like barbed wire.

STILLED-LIFE W/ LAND-SCRAPED

Thomas E. Simmons

those hills and valleys
combed with
repeating wallpaper / toothpicks of cacti
water-holding units
some hard heavy / flesh-filled / and caught
some crushed-out / spine-stuffed / and squat
some skyrocketing
 tall ... protoplasm
 rising muscle / above lizards
and sand

 while inside / smiles young / amigo-mango
 who held out their twisted cages
changing
and chanting saguaro / saguaro
this sonoran construct
over and over

swore i life
voice yodel / pointlessly
as my gums ... dehydrated &
turned to yellowed papyrus
parch-you-meant
 from the 3ird dynasty / Egypt's clone
 pyramid kingdom
 stacks of sarcophagi
 sleeves of a prophetess

can't say I miss the desert
but there's a power there
hard to feel or grasp
or explain at all / in a poem
but you can touch it – sometimes
 yellowing papyrus
 into this / the color of this
 typing paper / by candlelight

o dash the meaning or sources
the gore dries up (anyhow)
just feel the power / of the heat
 the landscape
 this absurdity
 of water
 its lack

an oasis is 1 rucked-up piece
and i bet the rest laugh
think it's an eyesore
mother-ugly greens

 yeah I blest blew into this sand
 and formed a part of its mathematical drift
 lip of a curve
 remembering the sound of / the hard sand
 against / your face
 and the scream it made / whistling
 and the gleam it made / quivering
 because of her ear
 (the only nonlinear turbulence
 for miles)
 her fleshy earlove
yeah, fleshy
 caught some (sand)

the skeletons-of-wood
but-this-is-not-wood
spiderweb steel-girder frames expanded
by its interior-mango-amigo-atlas, *groaning* &
of what / she used to be a god-so-ancient
50-foot-tall
saguaro cactus

involute ... maybe
with big sticky-white flowers on top
that make a good jam
according to the apache and
certain granola-freaks / of phoenix

o those splintered
eternal
saguaro
skeletons
their mango-amigos evaporated away ages ago

and this / of course
this makes / an eeking reference
to the poet's own (skeleton)

SEVERANCE

Christina Avalos

I
i do
or i did
'til the heart cried
from the strain
to see
you

vows
to keep
yet we broke
frayed the tight knot
cracked the gem
no more
us

ENDLESS BLUE

Michael Gardner



SHE SMILES

Jennifer Goble Poyer

She smiles

Her soul separates a little.

She smiles

Carving out a space.

She smiles

A cushion for the pain.

She smiles

Between her and the rest.

She smiles

Her emptiness, a chasm.

She smiles

Only the chasm remains.

Emptiness becomes her

She always smiles.

A BREATHTAKING SCENE UPON HEIGHTS

Skyler Jon Thayer

Atop Mount Phillip, I stand with a friend.
Camera in hands, he captures this scene,
Which to stale memory might condescend,
Alas! Such a pleasant place to convene.
Amongst dense thicket of various trees,
Separated home to Eastern White Pine,
Natural air brings its full pleasantries
High upon the cliff above steep shoreline.
This timeless sight easily steals my breath,
But the treacherous fall below restores.
Oh! How flashes of his demise and death
Haunt me! Oh, Uncle! How drunk anger roars!
My friend and I are safe, but from guardrail
You crashed, and surely fell hard on exhale.

THE LIGHT OF A LAVENDER SKY

Timothy Gettle

When stars fell from their cradle,
little could be salvaged from the remains in the void,
their absence leaving a hole in the tapestry of the universe.

To think of such a mighty creature,
subjected to an ugly death, due to a creator's lack of foresight?
Be it sympathy or disgust that drew me to these remains?

Perhaps fear of sharing the same fate?
Or ire of all who let their pride spill into the heavens.

The old gods have lived too long.

What's the usual speed limit in town? Thirty, at the most forty
miles-per-hour?

Well, ever since Kennedy packed up and left, everybody started
treating the streets of Miskatonic like the German Autobahn.
Then you'd see some poor, dumb soul walk out in the middle of
that. It was acts of God that they made it to the other side of the
street before prematurely painting the front of somebody's car,
then it just kept happening and happening again. I swear that the
road should have been coated in several shades of red, but right
at the moment of impact the car would serve out of the way.
Hell, it'd put some movies to shame with how precise these
drivers were, why go to the theater when you could see live from
window side?

The blinds snapped back into place as my fingers went back to my side and I turned to face the rest of the apartment. In the center the old couch that Kennedy dragged in sat, as well as a TV and plates still soaking in dish water, all also his. He didn't even tell me what was going on, just walked to his room, grabbed what I could only assume were cloths, and walked out. Mind you, this was the same guy that got his nose broke after walking up to some drunk when we visited Pittsburg thinking he gave him the stink-eye.

If it was an issue with me, he'd talk to me about it, not the same way as Pittsburg dude by the way; you just never had to guess what was on his mind. But the moment I asked what was going on before his hand reached the handle, he looked at me and his face turned white. Like a rat trapped in a cage with a cat; could still hear the damn door nearly snap.

I gave it day or two before calling him and in a shocking development every single time straight to voicemail. Man, *did* I do something wrong?

Then, it seemed everyone caught the same thing Kennedy did. Showed up to work to find that no-one was there, called the manager and the few co-workers I had the numbers of and got nothing. It was the end of the month, so I called the landlord to explain that our rent situation and he and everyone else couldn't have been bothered to pick up their cellphone. Even went as far as looking up his actual address just to find his door open and the house empty.

Did the apocalypse happen? Didn't see any of God's chosen sky into the sky during the night or a blood moon hanging over the sky, but it's the only thing that makes sense. Leaving behind a bunch of mutes, speed junkies on and unfortunately me.

I snapped open the blinds again and reckless driving became

the last thing on my mind, taken up by any shade of purple under the sun. It was a hulking thing, lumbering side to side as it walked on two wooden stilts, swaying heavily with each step taken. Thousands of small pieces of multi-shaded hues of purple paper seemed to always ripple as it moved, complimented by strands of golden cloth hanging behind it; swimming through the air like fish swimming in a river. Beside these royal colors, however, lay rows of arms clasped together, whether it be hand in hand or fingers interlocked. Unlike the rest of the body, these never moved. I'd at least expect them to twitch or switch hands, but they stayed like sculpted stone.

Is this what was happening to people?

My eyes turned to the sidewalks, looking at the pedestrians who'd normally risked their hides on crossing the roads and they all regarded the puppet like creature with admiration. Falling on their knees and arms raised like members of a mass.

It didn't seem to acknowledge them, just moving past with the bulk of it shifting weight as one stilt kept it standing and the other moving falling forward. My breathing quickened as it moved to face me at the window mid-stride, being able to actually see what its face would look like, but the moment it turned a car rolled slowly past it. Covering the majority of it except the topmost pair of arms, and as it finally pasted the puppet already shifted weight once again, facing the opposite side of the street and walking out of sight.

It was about two hours after the towering puppet had passed by the apartment, perhaps normally most people would stay inside after seeing it, but I couldn't stand sitting alone there. Although you could see the odd person moving along during the day, by evening I never saw a soul from my window. If I'm lucky, whatever that thing was wouldn't be out too. Despite the lack

of any cars and people, it actually looked like the world was alive again.

As the sun started to fade, it stained the sky in an array of reds and oranges, the night sky adding its own oiled colors of blues and purples. Even though this helped from going stir crazy, I found the fridge lacking in containing any solid food, and now was as good time as any to get some. It hasn't been the most honest way recently, in my defense, it's not like people are working the rush hours at their diners anymore. And with the development of these, puppets, might just have make sure this would be the last trip for a while.

The doors automatically opened with a burst of air to stop any bugs from making their way in, I looked around for a moment, seeing that the cashier was still nowhere to be seen. At first, I started small just taking a few candy bars and the like, being careful of the cameras looking over my shoulder if I heard any noise. I did leave the appropriate change on the counter, but after about three days of building up the courage to starting to pick out of the frozen meals section, and leaving a small pile of money on the counter, I decided that it was all unnecessary.

I moved over to grab some plastic bags from the counter and started picking my fill of frozen meals, most of the actual groceries having lost their appeal. I was just making my way back to the front of the store when I heard the doors open and close, the fans once again blowing any would-be bug intruders from entering. Whistling soon replaced the silence of store as the automatic door closed, under normal circumstances the tune was obnoxious, now it was relief.

But it could be a looter, someone who's done a lot more than taking a few frozen pizzas and packs of gum.

I edged the corner of the center aisle, peeking behind some

boxes of cereal. Well, he certainly looked like the type, he was a bit taller than me, covered in brightly colored tattoos of neon tinted animals that ran the length of the arms. His hair was done up and colored in a safety guard vest green-yellow, or like a highlighter. No doubt he rode on a motorcycle, with all the overcompensation and dad issues that brings along.

Maybe it would be better to wait along for someone else who isn't playing daredevil on the road, I mean if he hasn't gone missing then there has to be others right? As he walked pass a box of food, throwing it on the ground after glancing at it, confirmed it. I move away, walking slowly to escape to somewhere he wasn't going to be. But I underestimated how much I leaned on the cereal section as several boxes crashed to the floor after I moved away, and with them the whistling stopped.

"Who the hell is in here," he said with a booming voice that carried through the abandoned store.

I suppose I don't have much of a choice, now backing up to the center aisle to face him.

"H-Hey, uh, how's it going?" I saw him reaching for the base of his waist, laying his on hand what I could only assume as a gun, worst case scenario he shoots me cold and dead, best case he's bluffing but still beats the hell out of me. "I suppose you weren't apart of God's chosen huh?"

"Excuse me," he said, moving closer.

"Nothing! It was, it was, it was nothing! I just figured you were just as confused about everything and all." My voice wavering throughout the explanation, and my hands thrown up dropping my grocery bags. As he saw this his arms relaxed, content that I was as threatening as a cricket.

“So, everyone givin’ the silent treatment to you too? Y’know why every decided to go all Buddhist monk on us?”

“You’ve actually tried to talk with them?”

“Of course, after Ted and Mary stopped chattin’ with me, lookin’ like they just some kinda of ghost, I tried findin’ others to talk to. But they just ended up givin’ me the cold shoulder too. Hell, I had one guy run away after I said hi.” He chuckled, reaching over to the international section of the aisle grabbing a bag of foreign chips and started eating them. “It wasn’t easy makin’ good friends before, I suppose now it got a little tougher. How long til’ you think they end this little charade?”

“Yeah uh, I’ve had the same issues, I can’t call anybody without it going straight to voicemail. My roommate just randomly walked out on me, and I haven’t seen anybody I’ve known since last Saturday,” I said picking up my food. “And I doubt they stop anytime soon. Have you seen a uh, giant purple puppet? Looks papier-mâché is the best way to describe it, walks on two stilts?”

“Seen a couple of them walking along the streets, usually see them alone, for the most part I only seen ‘em walking towards the middle of town.”

“Do you know why they go there? Have, have you seen their face?”

“Nope, don’t got no clue. I was plannin’ on following them, but I got, got a bit held up you can say. Who needs happy hour when there ain’t no bartender y’know? But they seemed to ignore me, never caught a no glimpse of a face,” he said. “I do remember smelling smoke when I woke up though, the building didn’t catch so I wasn’t too worried.”

Smoke? I don’t remember smelling any, in a town like Miskatonic if a fire broke everybody would know either by their

neighbors or their noses.

“I guess I’ll have to see it for myself then, for all we know maybe the town is celebrating some new holiday or something, huh?” I doubt the township would get Kennedy acting the way he was or start some fires for the sake of starting fires.

“Why don’t I tag along, I need someone to keep me from drying out Charlie’s bar out and keep me on the straight n’ narrow,” he said, glancing down to the side of his waist.

The skeptic in me rose back. For all I knew, they guy was taking me back to some back alley, where I’d get jumped and killed.

“Well, I’m sure it nothing really, plus with it getting pretty late, so it’d be a tomorrow problem to deal with.”

“About the time you get there I’m sure that everything would’ve wrapped up by then. Hardly get any answers,” he said.

Well, call my bluff, but he has a point. No use putting it off and going there now would be impossible to offload this guy from tagging along. If it turns out that he’s tricking me, he might be taller and bulkier, but I think I could outrun the guy. Sure, there’s the issue with possible gun, but I doubt if he’s trying to lure me in, he’s too interested in murder.

“Alright then, let’s go check it out,” I said.

“There we go! Good head on ya after all. The names Harry Barry. People call me either or, so I just em’ choose.” His hand extended out in front.

“Name’s Jason, nice to finally have a name to the face, Harry.”

“Heh, I figured you for a Harry guy.”

It wasn’t too far of a walk, the store being located in a easy to

reach part of town, the walk was supposed to be brief, but Harry was a story-teller. Talking about all the times he got in trouble after a few too many drinks or mistaking a bottle of piss for beer. By now the sky was blacked out, the oranges and yellows from earlier nowhere to be found, although, a streak of purple danced across the night sky. Something you would hear about in Greenland or Antarctica, not in Miskatonic.

“Well you see, Ted and Mary thought it would be a swell idea to play love-maker, pointed over to some long-haired blonde beauty and told me walk over yonder. Well, it turns out she’s already flat out *wasted*. She was swayin’ like a rattlesnake moving through the Arizona desert, turns out she was some politician or something, apparently gotten thrown under the bus for embezzlement. She started wailin’ the moment I sat next to her, and ol’ Barry had to tell her she was a woman of the people and such- ”

“Has that always been out here, Harry,” I asked, pointing up to the sky.

He stopped talking for a moment, leering at me until finally replying. The purple from the setting sun stained the majority of the sky, drowning out all of the other colors.

“Yeah, it’s been there for a while. Since this all had started, I reckoned.”

I walked in silence letting Harry get back to his story. If it isn’t the end of days, then what the hell is going on?

The air was nearly knocked out of me as Harry’s arm stopped me moving forward. I looked up to see Miskatonic Square, I should have been glad to not see it become a haven for outlaws but, I would have preferred that to this. All the trees that had been planted were cut down, and over a dozen were trimmed to

remove bark stood upright. With hay laid at the base, gleaming as if they were soaked by something. Several of them had people tied to them, writhing and trying to break against their bonds. Crowds of the town people gathered around each, the purple puppets marching around each pole individually, like sharks to bloodied water.

“What the fuck is going on?” Harry’s mouth was frozen open.

“Oh god no, they’ve gone mental.”

No one noticed us in our disbelief, but I turned and grabbed Harry’s arm while it still stuck out.

“Come on, we got to go. We ought to call someone or find someone else.”

His mouth moved as though to speak but nothing came out and I saw his eyes move to follow as another poor soul was moved to the witch’s stand. His hand reaching back to his waist.

“That’s Kendra,” he said, pointing at a woman in the middle of the crowds. “Sweet girl that worked down at Charlie’s bar.” His voice lowered.

“There’s nothing you can do man, you sure as hell don’t have enough bullets to deal with that.”

But I saw that his mind was already made up, shaking me off like a terrier. He threw his arm in the air with the handgun and fired.

“The hell do you people think you’re doing,” he yelled over the entirety of the Square.

One by one, people stopped in their silent cheering, arms lowering to their sides and turned to address the voice that insulted them. Instead of the paled faces we were used to, each

face was stern, feature flickering with the licking of fire from their makeshift torches. Within moments a dozen of the nearest ones blitzed towards Harry, in his reaction he fired three times into the mob, with one of them falling to the ground clutching at his stomach. The mob reached him pinning him to the ground, throwing his gun away to the side, the mass of people easily prevented Harry from getting back up. I ran to the edges of the street, hiding at the edge of one of the buildings.

He's a dead man, why the hell should I risk my life for some guy I just met? But where the hell else am I supposed to go? How long till they find me?

I ran out in the middle of the street.

"What the fuck is wrong with you people? What got into your heads that any of this is okay?" I forced my voice to project like Harry's. "I'm not sure if you assholes got the memo, but burning people alive isn't going to get you to heaven!"

And like Harry before, they stared, insulted by my voice, and whatever notion of heroism fell into the pit of my stomach. Several people ran at me, unlike my first impression of Harry, they could easily catch me if I tried to run. My legs didn't move, stuck in the inevitable motion of their charge, but as they moved to pin me to the ground, I saw the what the face of the puppet's held.

Two endless voids that where eyes were meant to be, as if they were pits to eternity.

And as I was smashed against the asphalt of the ground, I could hear a chorus of voices around me, coming from those who hands gripped me. It was a fading fire of anger and hatred, slowing moving into the music of understanding and love, my fear melted away. I was now home.

One by one each mouth was bound, each time they spoke whether it be pleading for life, or insults churned the pit in my stomach, to be subjected to a primitive and restricted form of understanding. It was anger which then crescendo into pity, sorrow for the loss of such creatures, then lulled into understanding that with their passing, so does their curse.

If they only understood the good their deaths would bring for all?
To finally acknowledge of he who sews the stars back into being,
He who brings lavender light to the night sky.

“JUST ANOTHER MYTH”

Bridget Richardson

They taught us to be cliché flowers – roses perhaps –
to wait for a man not frozen in childhood
to pick us
to rescue us
from that evil witch who is undoubtedly our mothers.

But he didn't know their stories
so his first mistake
was to call her a bird – to tell her she couldn't fly.
– she felt tendons crushing, tearing, breaking
at first.

I know they're wrong – but weakness is what you portray.
– she looked at the wolf, trying to keep his prey.

She's not a bird
– and the cracking stopped.

She's not a flower
– and quit wilting.

She brewed – mixed into another evil witch
– prepared to train her own

like the rest of us.

ON THE FIRST MORNING OF HIS LIFE AS A MORTAL

John Sweet

here in this house where the
priests bless ghosts

here on these stairs
where knives are offered freely
by the sick and the blind

he walks these halls w/out purpose

he considers where his beliefs,
where his lack of beliefs,
have led him

his childhood of television antennas
and of negative space,
of cut-out shapes where his
father should have been, and the
man wasn't dead, no, just
absent

was just elsewhere

and the knives are taken eagerly
by eight-year-old boys,
and they scream happy threats at one another

they turn to their younger brothers,
to their older sisters, and shout
YOU'RE DEAD!

and then run away to hide, and so
what do you do about the ones
who are never found?

and this is his problem w/ faith,
you see,
these sons and daughters so
viciously murdered, so easily taken away,
and these blank-eyed zealots w/ words
like rancid milk falling from their
diseased mouths, and what they
speak of is a better place

what they overlook is that the
atrociousness itself is the most important
thing

is the here and now, and that
anything else is only death

and he considers his own boys, at their
mother's but due back in an hour,
and he steps out the back door, limps
across the yard w/ his one good ankle,
w/ his one bad one,
and stares up into the flawless sky

rain on the way,
but not until later this evening

an entire august afternoon to
spend at the lake

simple joy, which is all he would
ask for the people he love

NO ENCOUNTER IS EVER TOO CLOSE

J. M. R. Gaines

Sheila McDaniel was jogging down a path in the woods when she turned a corner and almost collided with the weirdest thing she had ever seen. In front of her was something about her size that reminded her of a frog, except that it was standing on four legs with two arms out in front and looking right at her with what looked like a pair of blue eyes – completely blue eyes, with no lids, the size of teacups. The rest of its “face” consisted of a long proboscis with some kind of moustache-like growth above it and a reddish wrinkly area just above that, all between the eyes, and a pair of big wiggly ears set farther back and towards the top of the head.

It didn't say anything. She didn't say anything.

It raised a hand – eight fingers with webbing in between – and waved to her.

She did the same.

It reached out the other hand to offer a handshake. After some hesitation (the thing had a sort of backpack with things sticking out of it that might be ray guns), she did the same.

It took her hand and wiggled its ears. Then it plunged the proboscis rapidly into her neck and began drinking her blood. She passed out.

When she came to, it was still there in front of her, but now sitting back on the last two legs and – she could see – a stumpy-looking tail. She gradually sat up, too, rubbing the little wound on her neck and discreetly verifying that it hadn't done anything else to her. All clothing seemed properly in place and nothing felt

strange other than the wound, which was now no more than a pin prick.

It made a sort of high-pitched croak and punched at a device held in its second pair of hands. "Hello."

Nice thing to say after you've sucked my blood, she thought, wondering what she should express to this thing.

But it went on croaking and punching, and she heard a rapid succession on words: "Buenos dias...Bonjour...Kwe kwe... Hang khola.... Ya ta hey... Ainghai..."

"Hello," she answered, cutting it off when she realized it was going through a whole litany of languages, most of which she couldn't recognize.

"Thank you," said the little box. "That fluid was delicious."

She was again taken aback.

"How are you," it asked.

"I am a little scared."

The frog pointed to itself and replied, "I am thirty-eight."

What did age have to do with it? Something was being lost in the translation that box was spewing out.

"I am Thirty-eight," the creature repeated, and, pointing to her, added, "You are A Little Scared."

Ah, there was a bit of a problem with vowels, perhaps.

"Who are you?" she ventured.

"I am very well," Thirty-eight responded, confirming her suspicions.

"No," she laughed, "How are you?"

“Humor! I am Thirty-eight. You are A Little Scared.”

She decided it really wasn't that important for it to know her name and tried another tack. “What are you?”

“I am repair.”

She rubbed her neck a little again. “Are you a ... a vampire?”

It punched at the box a lot after she said that, perhaps consulting some kind of dictionary. “No, I am not a television personality. I am Repair Thirty-Eight of Mission. I was commanded to repair an apparatus that receives your television signals, but there was an error. Thus, I am here, not at the apparatus.”

“Where is the apparatus?”

Thirty-Eight just pointed up into the sky.

“Where is Mission?”

Again, it pointed up.

How can I express this right, she thought. “Where is Mission from?”

Its ears wiggled with a complicated croak and the box said, “Vrompbai!”

She realized that the wiggling ears were actually making the croaking noises, its own language, and the box was just sending out sounds she could recognize. If that was so, where were its real ears? The “moustache?” The wrinkly place?

“So, you are an alien?”

It made a sort of a tic.

“From a place called Vrompbai?”

“Improper expression, but yes, A Little Scared, I am not from your world.”

She said nothing for a second, so Thirty-eight went on. “Your organic fluids are of very good quality. I am completely satisfied. Would you choose to ingest some of my organic fluids? I have several kinds – ”

“No! No!” she cut it off, causing it to curl its proboscis a little bit. Was this disappointment? Hostility? Anger? She quickly realized she’d better offer an excuse. “That might be damaging to my body.”

Thirty-eight poked away at the box for a while before it gave the response. “Your analysis does not appear accurate. Operating protocols state there should be no danger to your organism. However, there is no necessity. It is your voluntary option.”

Sheila thought of one more thing affecting her organism and thought she’d better get the question out there, even if the answer might be unpleasant. “Did you put an alien life form into my organism?”

Thirty-eight stared at the box as it did its translation and then gave a particularly loud croak, followed by a frantic waving of the “mouth-ears” as the box spat out, “Exclaim! Exclaim! Exclaim! Please, A Little Scared! We have just encountered each other. We have not known each other long enough to engage in any similar behavior! I proposed a harmless exchange of organic fluids only. Incorrectly, I concluded you, too, needed to replenish. Of course, I do not consider you unfit to foster a life form of any type, but –”

“Ok, ok, I get the idea,” she said, waving off his cross-species sense of inappropriateness. “Let’s forget it. The thought never crossed my mind.”

Thirty-eight's proboscis uncurled slightly, and it took it a while with the box to say, "I did not intend to traverse your intelligence. I agree that we should reassign topics. This is a very pleasing conversation."

Sheila wanted to change the subject back to Thirty-eight. She knew it had come to fix some kind of a machine in space that had something to do with ordinary television signals and that this trail was not where it was supposed to be.

"Will you be staying here for a long time," she eventually said.

"Not an extended duration," Thirty-eight said. "I have already signaled. Soon I will be retaken. I will alert you before it happens."

She was going to ask him why he was there, but considering the troubles they'd already had with the W questions, she carefully inquired, "For what purpose does your apparatus receive television signals from this world?"

"Humor! Humor! I am not required to know that. I am repair."

Yeah, I just work here, too, thought Sheila, who spent her days staring at screens for the GSA. Why are we shipping two hundred toilets to some guy name Jan Mayen? Does he have chronic diarrhea? Why are we sending fifty thousand toothbrushes to Diego Garcia? He must have pretty bad teeth. Or if that's some Caribbean island, most people there would not be that obsessed about dental hygiene, would they?... But back to the alien.

"Thirty-eight," she said, "do you have a family?"

It seemed the box might be having some trouble with the question; but finally, Thirty-eight gave a little nod and croaked away, "Yes. Yes. My brood is numerous. Not all are repair. Some are guidance. Some are selected. Some are highly trained. I am content to be repair. I have much excellent nourishment when I

return to Vrompbai. My living place is extremely pleasing. There is much music. The waters are of fine quality. I will relate our conversation to all the brood. They will know it and pass it on to the next brood. Organisms on many worlds will learn of A Little Scared. Countless individuals will crave the superior organic fluids of you. I will be... envied."

As Thirty-eight spoke on, she realized a noise very much like a fart was emanating from somewhere near its tail and she started to chuckle.

"Humor! Humor," said Thirty-eight. "I have learned to be amusing."

"Well, not exactly, or at least not by what you are saying, you see, you are ... expelling gases in a way that organisms of my type, on this world, find slightly embarrassing, but in an amusing way."

"How strange! That is simply scholkrek. It equalizes the pressure in my vibration sensors so they do not become dysfunctional. Do you not have something similar?"

"Well, I suppose it's like yawning when your plane is landing, but we do it from the other end."

"Yes," agreed thirty-eight. "Truly it takes all kinds!"

You really are learning something, thought Sheila.

All at once blue lights began to flash on the box and Thirty-eight said, "Return immanent! Goodbye, goodbye! Please go backward six body lengths minimum to avoid damage. Goodbye, goodbye!"

It was a lot like the transporter in Star Trek. As Thirty-eight began to "energize," Sheila called, "Goodbye, my friend. I hope you understand what that means!" But before she could go on, the

alien vanished in a flash of lights.

Sheila looked down at her sneakers and muttered, "Shit!" She was thinking not only of Thirty-eight, but of that bite in the neck and the fact that she couldn't avoid seeking some kind of medical exam. Better sooner than later, no matter what the GSA might do to her.

Fortunately, Sheila's physician, who agreed to see her late that afternoon as an emergency walk-in, did not send her straight to the looney bin. After examining the wound, the doctor made several calls and sent her patient in an ambulance to an area hospital that had a unit prepared to treat "exotic" infections. The next day, Sheila was visited by staff from the Centers for Disease Control, who transferred her by small jet to a facility somewhere a couple of hours away in the "tri-state" region, though no one told her which three states they were. She was placed in isolation in a sealed room in a further sealed and very uncomfortable suit that had the added annoyance of being completely transparent. She complained loud and long about this voyeurism until they gave her a kind of wrap to accommodate her modesty, but insisted that they needed to be able to examine her entire body continually and, indeed, did so.

Needless to say, she was the object of innumerable punctures and probes for tests of all her "organic fluids," as Thirty-eight would put it. She didn't mind those as much as the perpetual IV and the debriefings – with wrap deployed, of course – by various national (or maybe planetary?) security personnel. They wanted to know all sorts of biological and scientific things that she, as a glorified clerk by profession, was utterly unable to give them. The most amusing thing was when they asked about Thirty-eight's gender, she could only reply that she had absolutely no idea if it even had one.

Sheila was overjoyed when, toward the end of the week, the medical staff removed her IV, provided her with a much more comfortable coverall, and gave her a menu of various soft foods to choose from, all of which had to be consumed through a straw. But the best of it was that it included a selection of cocktails. So, she lulled herself to sleep that night with a couple of mojitos and closed her eyes wondering what Thirty-eight would have thought if it slurped up a neck full of nicely alcoholized blood.

She expected all sorts of dire things when they announced her release, but to her surprise the suits who showed up before she left did not threaten to “disappear” her to insure her silence. Instead, they offered a really tempting carrot. Provided that she did not discuss her experience with anyone unauthorized by her new handler, a mousy woman well past her prime, she would become an instant millionaire, given a choice of several up-scale homes or condos (no doubt seized under RICO statutes from drug dealers), a two-week luxury vacation each year at one of several resorts, and a nice sinecure, many grades above her previous position, in a new and innocuous federal agency. It would all vanish like the morning dew if she talked. For someone who was, after all, just a kind of “repair,” it wasn’t a bad deal. Furthermore, despite the lack of total reciprocity that Thirty-eight had suggested, she personally considered their meeting in terms of the “pleasant conversation” he had described. She didn’t wish to roil the fine waters of his living place by making him a headline in the very television programs he was meant to relay or to admit the slightest possibility that he may be widely known as a personality. The guidance in his brood might not want that kind of publicity. Truth be told, she felt special to have known Thirty-eight for that brief period. All it had cost her was an easily-replaced pint or so of fluid. Still, she was glad she hadn’t taken up the offer for the rest of the exchange.

The one thing she did do was to get a new vanity license plate that read: “ALTLSCD.”

IN TWO HALVES OF HYPOTHESIS

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

We're mountains in our own right, formed from a stretch of anger, we maintain our shape that becomes insensible from terror or rubble under pretense of anybody's lurid visage, framed with time, we reflect, & in truth everything within appears almost delirious. Because we're mountains securely on the inside, no more sombre thoughts when we're beating by the rains against any promise we've made after birth. Midnight. We sleep alone. We endeavour to appear so & relieved.

I certainly feel what we feel, I answer my content with smile.
It's no wonder that I'm gazing inquiringly into my eyes we're.
I lift up the curtain.
I shift from the west to the east
in long, silvered columns, the dreams are knotted with figments
of imagination.

CALIFORNIA

Thom Young

I'm going away to California
she said
taking a fifth of gin
and yesterday with me too.
I'll mail your heart in a pack of dry ice,
soon as it stops beating for me
but that might be awhile
because people won't change.
they love the idea that you love them
more than they love you
she said.
I waved bye
then went back inside
and died.

L Aid To Rest

Falyn Benavidez

Here lies a nation broken on unfulfilled words
Not enough money to feed the poor or help the vets
Five hundred and fifty-four thousand people
Whose nation hides the promises not kept
Here lies a nation gutted by the intentions of the mass
production companies
Who massed produced chaos for America and her children
So much chaos,
That the children will not have children anymore
Here lies a nation burned to the ground by a fire fueled on feelings
And compromise was a word her people had forbidden
So flames grew higher, and higher
And the roar of the inferno dulled the protest of "*all men were
created equal*"
Here lies a nation with an epidemic of color-blindness
The beautiful browns, beiges, whites and blacks
Were just too far apart on the spectrum
To understand each other's backgrounds
Here lies a nation who can't teach her people
Without a price
Thirty-nine thousand four hundred dollars on average, to be exact
After all
knowledge is power
And power is a currency that tends to never run out
Here lies the nation that cannot tell truth from lie
is she innocent or is she naïve?

THE GOLD RESEARCH

Ziaul Moid Khan

In the yard under the neem tree, Abdul's corpse lay on the cot. The corpse was strangely swollen from having been in the village pond for three days. Some children at play in the morning had spotted it floating on the surface of the pond water after it rose from the depths. Abdul had been missing from his house since his drowning.

The investigating officer in a khaki uniform indicated for one of the constables to lift the white sheet that covered the cadaver. The contaminated body looked more like a ghost than a human being. The pond moss still stuck to his body and a foul odor had attracted a few domestic flies to have a look at the dead man.

Two pink scars around the neck of it suggested strangulation. Abdul was not a swimmer; but he managed to swim if the occasion demanded. And drowning in the village pond was quite unthinkable. There was commotion, for hundreds of villagers were jam packed in the courtyard of Abdul's house. Fatima, his wife, was away at her father's place with Shuja, her fourth son.

Police Inspector Giri wanted an autopsy of the dead body, but that was abruptly declined by Mukeed, Abdul's younger brother, citing religious reasons. For it was sort of blasphemy and against *Shariyat*, the Muslim laws.

The body was identified by the villagers, for there was long hair on Abdul's ears that he'd never got trimmed. Moreover, an announcement about Abdul's missing from his house had also been made through the mosque loudspeaker in the village. The officer having taken the refusal of the family in writing, hurried off from there with his men in the police jeep. And people got busy

for the dead body's formal funeral.

* * *

"Can you prepare a cup of tea?" Abdul asked his wife, Fatima.

"There is no milk left in the kitchen," she replied.

"Then I'll prefer black tea."

Fatima smiled and went into the kitchen. A little kerosene had to be sprinkled on the chopped wooden pieces in the hearth for lighting the fire. She was putting the kettle onto the stove, when an old fellow of around sixty with a long grey beard, wheat complexion and thinly built frame appeared on the veranda.

It was Munshi Ji, Abdul's long-time friend. He was an avid reader of Urdu literature and alchemy. Abdul was an alumnus from Aligarh Muslim University based in Northern India; he was a luminous man of immense knowledge in alchemy and supernatural science, apart from an impressive command over six languages including: Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English, Hindi and Sanskrit. Munshi Ji often came there and had a good exchange with her husband, as both shared a common interest in alchemy and witchcraft. Abdul was working on his Urdu Magazine, *Murda Alum* (The Science of Dead Souls) and Munshi Ji, his sidekick, was keenly disposed to this business too.

Both the friends firmly believed that artificial gold manufacturing was possible; and in its pursuit they had been experimenting for twelve years but with no apparent result. Experiment after experiment failed without result.

"If you can drink black tea, why can't I," Munshi Ji asked Abdul insisting on taking the black tea like his friend.

After a little haggling, Abdul had to give way. Now both took their cups, sipped, and discussed the progress made in the

pursuit of gold making.

“No headway so far,” Abdul said.

“I’ve come to you with fresh new ideas this time.” Munshi Ji’s eyes beamed.

“Every time you come here, you say the same thing,” Abdul took a dig at him.

“But this time it is not like that!”

“Let’s see at the furnace,” Abdul replied, eyes fixed on the white cup of black tea.

* * *

After having tea and supper, both the friends sat together by the side of a furnace in the living room. This room had actually been turned into a forge, where the two men would often experiment. The flames from the furnace were rising high increasing the room temperature.

Two chairs had been dragged nearby and were now occupied, for both the friends were sitting in them. The fire was now on the sublime.

Munshi Ji broke the ice, “Mercury will make the metal soft; particularly its effect on copper will be surprisingly great, I’m sure.”

“But why phosphorus?”

“The crystals of red phosphorus will give metal a permanent golden color,” Munshi Ji clarified. Though Abdul was not yet agreed, he did not say anything in that moment.

The *kuthali* sat in the middle of furnace and was red hot from the fire all around it. Abdul put a ten-gram copper piece in the pot

with tongs. Munshi Ji poured the same quantity of mercury in. A few more substances were added to the mixture. The chemical process started as the ingredients melted and the pot contents looked like volcanic magma.

“When to mix in the phosphorus,” Abdul asked.

“Just wait a while,” came the reply from Munshi Ji.

A few minutes passed; both friends gazed intently at the red-hot pot made of stone. Soon it was burning as a red coal and the contents inside it were a liquid form of the alloy metals.

As Munshi ji was going to add phosphorus, his host warned him, “It would not be wise to mix the red powder in this mixture, I think.”

“You just wait, and watch,” Munshi Ji said.

Then, putting the red powder in a big handled spoon, he extended a long hand and poured it into the *kuthali* while Abdul was watching.

BANG!

With a horrible sound, the furnace exploded, and the burning coals scattered all around in the living room. Munshi Ji stumbled and fell backward heavily with a thud.

Abdul held his head tightly with both hands, the steel-made long handled spoon, still there in Munshi Ji’s hand, had – only God knows how– struck on Abdul’s head. There was an excruciating pain in his head, a whistling sound in his ears, and thick smoke all around in the forge.

A few moments passed. Then getting back his nerves, Munshi Ji asked, in utter amazement, “Are you alrighty, Abdul?”

Enraged, Abdul grabbed his friend’s long white beard and

called him several names. "I told you, you old bastard!"

Munshi Ji withdrew in fear, and somehow released his beard from his friend's hold. Extremely embarrassed he rushed to the other room.

* * *

Remorseful at his own behavior with his old friend, Abdul was restlessly tossing in his bed. He was trying to sleep, but sleep was far away from him tonight. He regretted that he misbehaved with Munshi Ji who was older in age too. They, of course, wanted the same outcome in the gold research. But every time he thought they were close, something would go wrong.

"Bad luck!" he thought and tried to sleep.

It must have been around two o'clock in the morning, when he began to feel drowsy after long hours of mental conflict. Abdul remained divided between his good soul and bad one. Eventually, he decided that he would apologize to Munshi ji very early next morning. He felt himself relax a little and started sinking slowly in the arms of sleep.

The ghastly dim light from a kerosene lamp placed on the corner of the big wooden table was the only witness to the dark solitude in the living room. The room it was in was rectangular, with two built-in closets on opposite walls, facing each other. Both of these were filled with piles of books, whose subjects ranged from palmistry to witchcraft; and from philosophy to alchemy. Of late, he had been inclining towards conjuring.

Abdul was fond of sleeping prostrate. Tonight, too, he slept with his mouth sunk into the pillow and rest of his front body in touch with the charpoy. All of the sudden, he felt a little jerk in the

cot he was sleeping on. Thinking it all an illusion, he remained calm and composed. Then the second jerk he felt and then the third. But he was so fatigued that he could not rise, and instead kept himself tucked inside the sleeping cover with white lily flowers all over it.

Now it seemed as though someone was pulling the blue bed sheet that he had covered himself with. Abdul clutched his hands onto it tightly. Some irresistible force seemed to be pulling the sheet, and the sheet kept pulling away with every passing moment. Finally, the whole of it flew off and landed almost four feet away beside the wall under the foot of the closet.

Irritated, he sat up thinking that it must be Fatima.

Instead, Abdul's eyes widened in disbelief, for in the dim kerosene lamp, he saw a girl in her early twenties standing beside the table, a sly-wry smile on her face.

Abdul was horror struck. Her long hair was touching her thighs. She wore a yellowish *salwar-kamiz*. Her sharp features reminded him of Shyama, his ex-beloved who betrayed him by marrying someone else. But it could not be Shyama for she was no more.

He sat up at his place and shrank back on his cot. Abdul remembered, faintly, that he'd tried to invoke Shyama's dead soul a few nights back. This figure's high breasts and slim frame was to some extent the facsimile of Shyama. But he was not willing to embrace her tonight.

Before Abdul could understand anything, she came near the cot and sat beside him. It was amazing; she was not breathing while Abdul was panting. He wanted to run, but his feet froze. He wanted to screech, but his voice stuck in his throat. His whole body was paralyzed.

She leaned forward over him and put her long nailed left hand onto his right shoulder. It gave him a shudder, for her touch was wondrously cold. This left him agape. He glanced at her hand; it was deathly pale. Her face looked like that of a corpse.

He felt shivering to the depth of his bones. Then she put her right hand on his left shoulder. He wanted to release himself but felt unable and helpless to resist against her advances.

Her grip tightened. She grinned fiercely and waved strangely toward the lamp. It blew out, leaving the entire living room in pitch darkness. Abdul was still gasping for breath; while she was leaning more and more over him. He was eventually down under her cold weight.

He could feel her bare body and the movements of her icy cold hands in all the nooks and corners of his own thin frame. Very soon she was in full command, and he was there, just a helpless creature.

When the last moment came, she put her mouth very close to his ears and whispered in a freezing tone, "I'm your gold."

With the release of the last sweat of his energy, his entire body felt as if he were frozen. Slowly and steadily he was getting drowsy and felt his body light as a flower; but he was too tired to get up, a strange darkness surrounded him from all quarters. And he seemed to be in the deep cradle of sleep.

* * *

Next morning, when Abdul asked after Munshi Ji, he was informed that the old visitor had left for his village early in the morning, on the pretext of some urgent piece of work. But Abdul was not thinking about him anymore, for the girl's face had still been haunting his memories.

“What was she, some beautiful witch? Or was she Shyama, the love of my life,” he asked himself.

Though he did not have the answer yet, her words were still echoing in his ears, “I’m your gold.”

He went straight to the wardrobe near the jute charpoy, on which he had experienced the horrifying, ghostly sexual encounter last night. He opened the cupboard and laid his hands on a small squire wooden box. Taking out the small box, he opened it and held out a thick envelope that contained some post-card-size snapshots. The pictures showed Shyama in a yellow frock, that he’d gifted her. Unmistakably, the girl last night was no different from her; these images from his past had suddenly come alive.

* * *

Fifteen Years Before

It is midnight. The whole village is fast asleep. The rutted lanes are vacant, save a couple of dogs lying under some bullock carts. On this winter night, they’re managing, coiled by the side of cartwheels, trying to sleep.

The wooden door of Mangatram’s house opens and a human figure comes out of it. She is Shyama, his only daughter; slim and tall with pretty, sharp features. Torch in hand, she stealthily moves out of the house. The path is well known to her feet and she is trying hard to avoid using the torch, for enough moonlight was spread across the muddy street. Even the road, in the wee hours, shivers that such a beauty walks on it alone.

After half an hours’ rapid walk, the path turns to the left towards dense woods where strong bamboo and pine trees stand side by side with mangoes and guavas. Shyama now leaves the main track and starts strolling on a *pagdandi*, the

narrow trail. Almost a hundred meters she walks, and at another fifty meters' distance, she beholds a human figure standing under a banyan tree. He is slim, dark, and average in height, Only a fraction of his body is visible due to the big trees' shade. She does not show any symptoms of surprise or fear.

The man under the big tree remains stationed at his place. Going closer, she finds a bicycle is on its stand at a slight distance.

"How long have you been waiting," she asks.

"Only half an hour," he says. They are silent for a few seconds. Then he says, "Any trouble on the way here?"

She shakes her head.

"The clothes," he asks.

"My brother's."

Again, the same silence. He removes her turban; long black hair falls loose on her shoulders. Together they walk towards a mango grove and sit under a tree. The full moon is spreading Shyama's beauty in the sky, while under the mango tree she sits with her love.

She asks, "Abdul, did you miss me in Aligarh?"

"A lot," he admits.

"How are your studies?"

"Not able to concentrate well, however much I want to," he says.

Gently caressing her long, fine hair, he puts his right hand's index finger on her lips. They are warm.

"Can I kiss you?" he asks.

“I don’t know,” she says.

Abdul slowly bends his face over hers so close that they could feel each other’s breathing. She shuts her eyes with shyness and does not make any moves. Now, he eliminates the distance and envelops her lips with his own.

The wind blows serenely. The moon shines brightly. The stars stare at them and appreciate the new couple. The kiss goes on uninterrupted. His hands hold hers, fingers crossed. The moment passes swiftly.

A little later he slides his hand under her *kurta* and grabs her soft breasts and starts squeezing them one after the other. She breathes heavily and holds him tightly. He continues kissing her lips, her chin. Slowly he places his burning lips onto her neck and makes her groan. Her whole body begins to shiver.

His hands now commence to search something at her back inside the *kurta*, soon they find it: his fingers unhook the bra.

“Why are you doing this,” she murmurs.

He ignores her weak protest and tries to pull off her *kurta*. After a little resistance, she surrenders.

A few moments later, she is lying in his arms topless. Her milky skin seems whiter than snow even in the semi darkness. He brings his lips closer and in the moon light, observes the sharp points of her pink nipples. He cups it in his palm and puts his mouth onto it, taking turns on both the sides. Very soon their bodies warm up.

“Abdul, is this necessary,” Shyama again intervenes. Paying no heed to her comment, he moves his right hand to her *salwar*.

She tries to retreat, but he tightens his grip. With one arm under her waist, the other hand is trying to discover the mystery

of this paradise. She tries to grip his fingers but they're adamant, demanding. She tries to say something; he checks her mouth by cementing his lips onto hers.

Mustering up her total strength, she gets her mouth free from his lips and cries, loud enough for the woods to hear, "no! Abdul, no! We are not here for this!"

He comes out from his dreamland and immediately releases her. She quickly ties her *salwar* strings and grabs her *kurta*. Shyama rushes back through the dark woods leaving behind Abdul, with regret for his whole life.

* * *

Today

The other day I heard Abdul had a sudden acute fit of insanity. He left *namaz* more quickly than usual, gathering his *janamaz*, he shook his head and began to screech aloud. Abdul tripped his clothes and ran into the street. He had to be dragged back by Ballu and Aslam, his nephews.

Perplexed family members called for a Maulvi, who suggested a he-goat to be slaughtered as a mark of sacrifice.

But straight away Abdul said, "Either I can fix the problem, or nobody can fix it."

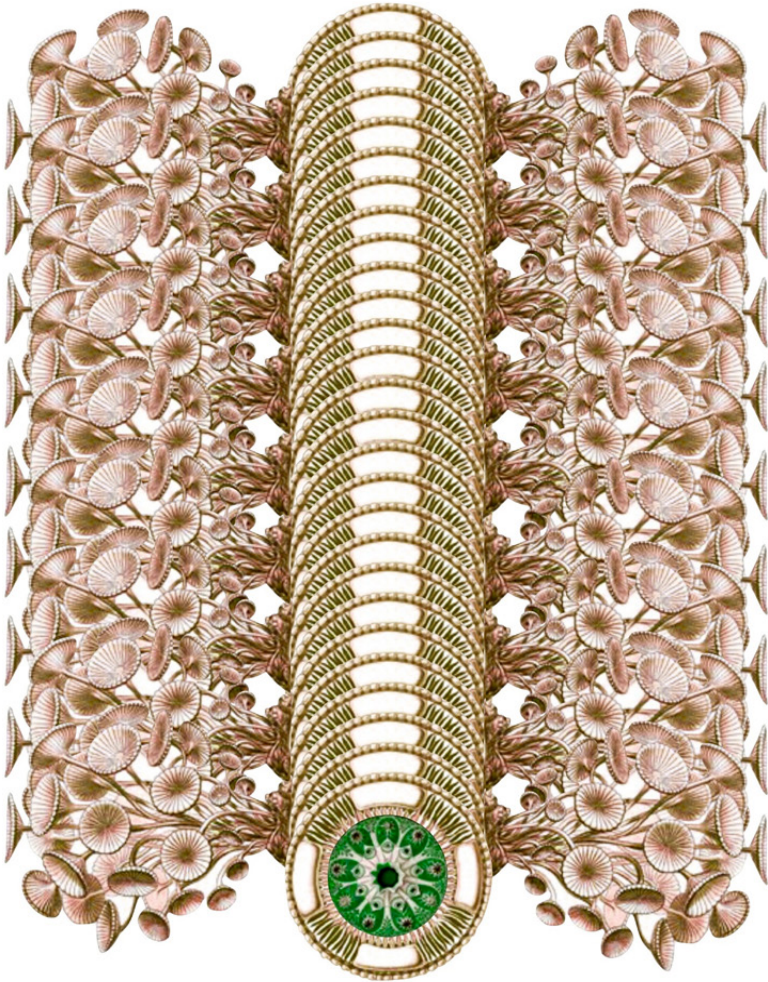
Then calling his youngest son, Zack, to him, he murmured, "If I go somewhere, don't let anybody know of it."

In the small hours of that same night, when the whole family was fast asleep, Abdul disappeared from his house. Surprisingly, all his books on alchemy and witchcraft were burned. All that's left now, apart from fond memories, are his books on philosophy and Smith's History of Europe.

Munshi Ji is still engaged in the gold pursuit and continues his experiments. However, he misses Abdul a lot and calls him his best friend. I sometimes do wonder if Shyama was the cause of Abdul's death, or maybe it is just my apprehension. Some things should remain secrets only, I suppose. Poor fellow Abdul, his gold research, the girl that night in the living room, and his sudden death are all yet a mystery to me!

SMOOTH AS A WHISTLE

William Wolak



TUFFET

Gale Acuff

I don't mind dying if I have to
and I'm pretty sure I have to, I've died
before, in dreams I mean, and I always
come back to life, or wake up for real, or
sometimes come awfully close to it, death
I mean, but pull out of the final dive
in the end, and I guess that I'm talking
about *genuine* death, the kind of death
that counts and everyone talks about it
and folks build shelters for it, churches
and mosques and synagogues and God knows what
else for death to dwell in, at least be praised
like some masterpiece in a museum,
so I go to Sunday School to see what's
up with death and whatever might be new
and this morning our teacher, Miss Hooker,
told us that if we die without being
saved then we go straight to Hell and I yawned
at the wrong time--I've heard the story too
many times to count and I'm only ten
years old--so Miss Hooker said *Gale, see me
after class*, said it like my teacher down

at regular school, so I said *Yes ma'am*
and when she set her children free I stayed
in my seat, I wasn't going up to
her desk, I waited for her to come to
mine and so she did and sat down beside
me as if I was Little Miss Muffet
and that makes her the spider and
I wanted to frighten her away
but then again I like the attention
and may even deserve it, a boy's life
is Hell, fight as you may you'll always die
at whatever age you can't predict and
for all I knew I was dead then, I mean
waiting for Miss Hooker to scold me like
God or Jesus might before they send me
to Hell for eternal punishment, then
she cleared her throat and suffered a smile and
said *Gale, let's pray about this* but I said
You pray and I'll watch and she said *All right*
and shut her eyes and bowed her head and for
a split-sec there I wanted to touch her
as if I could give her the gift of life
because she was kind of dead and I would
have said so but she's 25, plenty
old enough to know what's what and though
I forgot exactly what she prayed for

I'll give her the benefit of the doubt
that no doubt it was good and when she o
-pened her eyes again they were kitten's-blue
and I thought *Poor child, she's more scared of death
than I am* so I said *Woman, your faith
has made you well*, which surprised her so she
smiled so I smiled so she stood up and said
Gale, I'm so happy that we had this talk
and I said *Yes ma'am, go and sin no more*
but then she frowned. I almost had her good.

FIFTH AVENUE, MIDTOWN MANHATTAN

Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

A man of statue in front of traffic statues in Manhattan stares at your large Sister Sarah S, who's drooling over the lead singer through the whole concert & old friends who've folded like the next moat behind the Lord & Taylor's flagship store pare every sight thrown on the marbles, we hear more of these from our kids' textbooks, I zip up my parka & pose like one of these folks. I remember how Benjamin Altman brought this corner & rebuilt himself before the Marble Palace, I don't want to be his next arch-rival, I share a parley between old foes & receive my first fist parking ticket.

How we're the same, our long fingers & their delicate outlook continue to be carefully examined will only hold for a second & that's exactly what you've promised yourself for a long time I try to see for the third time through this mirror of scarves or that Empire State Building, nothing remains the same, unless something else, something strange is drawn for the sun setting now, I look to the streets & those sacrificing the wide sidewalks to accommodate the large pools of traffic, the blocks in matches boxes & measure the stuffing business for not forgetting Sarah S who's presenting herself as a parishioner from the register officer, I study her hands & enough for the shrinking violet on this canvas, I listen to his sibilant speech

& name his seat at supper table something like a dissipated
Park Cinq to follow where carriage drives are erected to soften
Millionaire's Row once used by equestrians & although there's
quite enough of your face to be shown among those we call
questions who look a bit iffy for not able to turn the key
in the ignition, you open the gate & start on the entrance
for half hour, you're closer to the door & you the door,
the front room appears, someone enters at once.
His search & his unrelenting animosity, you drop them down
surrounded by ditches & meanest looking houses,
I knock gently at one of these doors to disclose his features.

TAKE IT AS IT DARKENS

Justin Fenech

Everyone remembers where they were when two planes scythed through the twin towers. Hugo lost his virginity just as the second plane erupted inside the tower's ribcage.

As the flames flooded the clear morning sky, Hugo entered Eva. They were both sixteen-years-old. They'd met in a bookshop and later went for a walk together along the promenade following the shade of the evergreen oaks.

On September 11th 2001, after seeing each other for three weeks, they rented a hotel room together.

As they began undressing each other, clothes falling onto the floor like ochre leaves in the autumn, Eva's mother called her daughter to tell her to switch on the television. "There's been an accident and a plane just crashed into the twin towers."

"What's the twin towers," Eva asked.

"I don't know. Just put the news on."

Eva and Hugo sat down on the edge of the bed and watched the footage of one of New York's tallest tower burning itself out like a big cigar. Her hand reached for his.

"This is awful," she said in a hoarse voice as if she were breathing in the black smoke half a world away.

"Eva, I want you."

"Hugo! It's not exactly the time."

"This is just another disaster, Eva. Like Chernobyl or the Challenger. People don't stop living when disasters happen."

“But it’s right in front of us.”

“Imagine you’re in some African jungle, then, where there’s no television, radio or faulty planes.”

He began kissing her neck and he knew she had listened to him when she closed her eyes in pleasure. He wanted her for the same reason he loved her – without knowing why.

She lay naked on the bed before him and he felt trapped between reality and fantasy. He had fantasized about women’s bodies for so long that now he was almost in disbelief. If men of faith were to see God before them, would they lose their faith in him?

Somehow, he knew what to do. He knew how to kiss her small breasts, how to gently run his teeth across her colourless nipples, how to glide his tongue down her sinking belly as if he were measuring her. To his surprise, he even knew what to do when confronted with her sex. What did surprise him was the smell. It didn’t smell of any *thing*, but it smelt of a season: summer.

As she sighed, exuding cloudy pleasure, he took off his boxers and slowly climbed on top of her. His lips buried in her long, pale neck, he maneuvered himself inside her.

And just as he could feel her cocoon of moistness envelop him, the second plane suicided itself in the tower’s unwilling embrace.

The news caster was shouting, “oh God, oh God, oh God!” And Eva was too.

The news and the rest of the world were united in thinking the same thought: “this *can’t* be an accident.” The whole world - except for Hugo and Eva.

They could see it all happening from the corner of their eyes. The intensity of the flames. The smoke like a nuclear cloud. The sound of fire engines and the screams of the crowds below like a kettle boiling. Hugo thrust harder. All he could think, as the twin towers stood erect for their last few moments, was, "where should I finish?"

Her moans that soared higher than a symphony, pierced Hugo's very skin. Hugo could never fully choose between a life of living and of dreaming. Eva's moans combined both. And they merged, like two waves born on two distinct shores, with the tenor of misery ringing out from the television.

Pleasure and tragedy are one and the same. The sun creates shadows and shadows bring respite from the sun. As the twin towers rotted live on television, ready to shake the ground like a calamity from the sky, so Hugo's entire body shook as he orgasmed all over Eva's breasts. In that moment, his orgasm and the collapse of the south tower were like an abyss and a gutter looking up at the same sky.

"I love you, Hugo."

"I love you too, Eva."

* * *

"For a brief instant I saw the truth," Hugo said as he sharpened his cue.

"The truth's a demon, man. You look into it and it turns you to stone," Pol Pot said as he bent over the pool table to take his shot.

"I'd rather turn to stone knowing the truth than to be free and ignorant."

Pol Pot missed his shot, an easy one, and now Hugo had at

least three shots on. He took a sip from his whisky soda and squatted to take his shot. As he stared down the pool table, distracted by the muted lights of a television beyond the clean felt, he remembered what it was like being inside Eva.

He made his shot. He took another sip as he planned his next one.

“When my mother died, you know what I did for her? I organized a wake after the funeral. My father, brother, grandfather and I all got drunk together. I’m not saying the alcohol took away the pain. But for a moment happiness and agony came together like lovers synchronizing their orgasms. That’s the only truth I care to know.”

“Did you and Eva ever come together, man?”

“No, we only had sex like three times. But we parted on good terms. And of all the women I’ll ever be with, she’ll be my one and only goddess.”

“Goddesses don’t exist. Not in Olympus and not down here. There’s too much beer stains in the world for goddesses to walk among us.”

“Goddesses exist, I tell you, because Eva exists. Only one force has the power to appoint deities: memory.”

Hugo walked home at four in the morning. He and Pol Pot, his best-friend from university, had spent the night playing a drinking game called miss-a-shot-take-a-shot, which involved the players drinking a shot of Sambuca or tequila whenever they failed to pot. The game was like life a vicious cycle: the more shots you drank the more shots you missed and back round again.

As he walked along the promenade under the napping evergreen oaks, Hugo thought of his mother. What must it be like

to be dead, he thought? Not the pain of dying, but just not being. Human beings aren't really scared of death, they're scared of uncertainty, he thought.

The dreams and nightmares of religion were born from that uncertainty. All the great religious massacres of the world – from the Crusades to 9/11 – were conceived in man's lack of imagination about death. It is easy to visualize a pure garden of milk and honey; but absolute vacuum and blackness is beyond man's third eye.

Hugo had to stop and be sick half-way home. He leaned over the railings and threw up into the sea made black by night. When he was done, he forced himself to look out at the deathly horizon and wondered where Eva was.

* * *

Every great human tragedy is a reminder of its predecessor. Just as an ape is reminiscent of a monkey and a monkey of a rodent, so the London 7/7 attacks were reminiscent of the Madrid train bombings which were a reminder of 9/11 (which themselves could trace their ancestry back to the Ottoman Empire and its collapse in the Great War).

When Hugo's brother was killed in the attacks on London, the one-time capital of the world, Hugo, just like the rest of the world, was reminded of 9/11. But unlike any other man or woman alive, remembering 9/11 filled Hugo with a lust for love.

There was a lot of love around 9/11. So many people calling their family and friends from their phones, be it on the planes or inside the towers, had the same three words to impart: I love you. It was on that day, perhaps, people realized the poetic usefulness of cell phones.

But those three words sounded like a terrible scream for those

victims. When Hugo said I love you on that same day, he said it in a soaring whisper.

After attending his brother's funeral in London where he had been living with his new wife, Hugo went home to do some investigative homework. That very afternoon he was on a plane to France where he had learned Eva was living.

On the plane, he looked around at the people beside him and wished desperately they would ask him: are you happy? No, he would say. No, I'm not happy! He wanted to shout it out, to moan it, to whisper it, into the amazing skies outside his small window. He was above the clouds, flying like a deity, and he wasn't happy. The more he thought about it the more he pushed his grief into a darkened corner. But thinking it wasn't enough.

"I'm sorry, sir, can I just tell you something? I'm not happy!"

The passenger next to him arched his eyebrows and turned over in his seat, giving Hugo his back.

Now that he had said it, he felt as though his unhappiness was only a word. A made-up piece of grammar that meant nothing. Now his grief had become like a deathly horizon. Unreal, and only a screen hiding a slumbering dawn. I won't have my life dictated by words, he thought. He closed his eyes and made himself dream of Eva. In dreams, there are no words, only the roar of stifled memory.

* * *

When I forgot the feeling of shade

Caressing me under the evergreen oak

I thought I would forget the feeling of respite.

*When I forgot the feeling of shade
Caressing me under the evergreen oak
I remembered the agony of the heat.*

*When I forgot the agony of the heat
Brutally teasing me of watery relief
I remembered the feeling of respite
Under the shade of the evergreen.*

*Though I cannot make myself remember
The feeling of the shade on that unstitched day
I can look out my window and the azure horizon
And feel a relief as powerful as the shade.*

* * *

“There isn’t a single human being who knows what he is or what he wants, Pol Pot.”

“But then, what’s the point of anything? I have cancer, Hugo, not a cold. And illness makes you face your mortality. And when the sun starts getting low over your life you start craving the impossible sunrise. And you know what you find instead? A sunset pregnant with nostalgia.”

“There is no point, Pol Pot, don’t you see? The more time I spend thinking the more I feel I’m closing the curtains. How can my thinking ever penetrate the great mysteries? If I were a scientist, I would think. But I’m just a teacher. There is no mystery to teaching. There is teaching. There are children. There are parents. In my life I’ve been a butterfly floating from one

sensation to the next. And I'm proud of that. I just wished I hadn't thought about them so much and just *felt* them."

"But the only thing I can really feel now is pain, Hugo. What would you have me do?"

"Feeling pain means you're alive. Stop calling it pain and call it life and then it won't hurt your soul so much."

"It hurts to know I might die."

"When you die the pain will go away."

Why am I talking like this to my friend, Hugo thought. I haven't seen him for years and now I might not see him again after this beer is finished and we go our separate ways.

I blame Eva. I blame her for evading me. I blame her for being married, for hiding from me in life's open cocoon.

Seeing her walking down that avenue in Marseille, her ring finger wrapped around her husband's, I had to walk away, I had to hide, I had to disappear.

After seeing her – no, after losing her – I went for a swim at a beach in Marseille. As I scythed through the familiar waves, my arms burning at the touch of the agonizing sun, I felt my tears falling into the water and disappearing in an instant.

I didn't think about my tears, then, how they were literally a drop in the ocean, I didn't go into the metaphysics of it all, for I know no metaphysics; I just enjoyed watching my tears falling into the sea.

Even through the veil of misery the scene struck me as beautiful. The misery, the loss, the agony and the pain didn't dissipate the way my tears dissipated in the water. The pain was still there but now there were tears falling into the water. I

enjoyed the scene. And some of that enjoyment seeped into the pain. That was enough. I felt better.

“You should go for a swim, Pol Pot. It will do you good.”

* * *

Everyone remembers where they were when the Fukushima nuclear reactors burst into open chaos after the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Hugo had just received the news that Eva had committed suicide.

He was on a school trip in Sicily when he saw the news on Facebook. The class was staying in a rustic hotel near a lake. Beyond the crystal waters and verdant banks of the lake towered Mount Etna like a degraded Olympus.

He saw the news late at night and decided to go out for a walk to the lake. It was a clear spring night. The few buildings near the lake emanated a soft honeycomb light. There were no people around the lake and the air was full of the sound of the waves.

Hugo felt as though he didn't exist. His pain was absurd. And he could do nothing about it.

For so long Hugo was happy not knowing himself. He only felt his existence through his sensations. He didn't know what job he did, what his purpose was, who he was. But he did know he was having sex as the twin towers fell; that he was drunk on the promenade of evergreen oaks; he knew he was in pain after his brother was killed in London; he knew of his tears falling into the sea; and he knew he was smoking a spliff with Pol Pot by the beach a few days before he died.

But now, the death of Eva had awoken him into existence. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't forget anything, and he couldn't feel a damn thing. Not even pain. Not really, no; Eva's

suicide left him painless.

Did she ever think about losing her virginity as the twin towers fell, he thought? Did she ever think of me, of us, of getting in touch with me? If she tried to remember me could she see my face, could she feel me inside her, or was I just an abstraction?

Hugo was now at the edge of the lake. He took a deep breath and he realized that now, by taking her own life, by throwing herself into the vacuum, the two of them were once more coiled together. She was nothing now and he felt nothing. He remembered what it was like, all those years ago, to soar with her, inside her, to hear her young moans and timeless sighs of pleasure.

And then his tears fell into the water without Hugo noticing.

GREAT ARTISTS KEEP CREATING

Katherine Perelas



CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

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Gale Acuff has taught university English courses in the US, China, and Palestine, authored three books of poetry, all from BrickHouse Press: *Buffalo Nickel*, *The Weight of the World*, and *The Story of My Lives*, and has been published in *Ascent*, *Chiron Review*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Poem*, *Adirondack Review*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Florida Review*, *Slant*, *Nebo*, *Arkansas Review*, *South Dakota Review*, and many other journals.

CHRISTINA AVALOS

Christina Avalos is a graduate student at Eastern New Mexico University who wants to live in a world where everyone is passionate about literature. As a child, she was spotlighted within her school district for winning a regional creative writing competition. Christina has a short story published in *Mt. San Jacinto's Flight* 2016 and a poem published in *El Portal* Spring 2019. In pursuit of her passion, she is majoring in English so that she can reinstate the childhood desire for language arts that somehow gets lost as students go through their educational journey.

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Kate Beaudoin is a senior CDIS major who plans on going to get her masters degree in elementary education. She has been writing poetry as a hobby for three years now, and this is her first time being published.

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Kayleen Burdine is a native of Carlsbad, NM. After graduating with a Master's degree in English from ENMU, she moved to Austin, TX and is now pursuing a career in tech. A number of her pieces have appeared in *El Portal* and she's currently devoting her writing energy to her first novel, *Shards of Horizon*.

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William Doreksi's work has appeared in various e and print journals and in several collections, most recently *A Black River*, and *A Dark Fall* (2018).

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Justin Fenech is a 30-year-old author from the Mediterranean Island of Malta. He is a writer of short stories and novels that are minimalist and allusive, a mixture of Mediterranean exuberance and Japanese symbolism. He has had several short stories published in online reviews such as *Cecile's Writers*, *No Extra Words*, *Across the Margin*, *The Missing Slate* and many others.

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Greyson Ferguson is a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design and currently resides in Tucson, Arizona. He's worked as a freelance writer for the past decade and, when not writing, can be found out with his dogs and sampling local whiskies.

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Natalie Franco is from Pecos, NM. She's an English Major in Eastern New Mexico and writing has always been a place where she could express herself without needing to speak. Her dream is to one day become a successful novelist in magical realism or fantasy.

J. M. R. GAINES

J. M. R. Gaines is how James F. and John M Gaines publish their sci works together. Our sci fi short story "Whipping Boy" appeared in the 2017 *Creatures, Crimes and Creativity* anthology. Jim's short story "Middle Management," previously published in another anthology, appeared last year in his collection, *Beyond the Covenant and Other Stories*. The third novel in the Forlani Saga series, *Earth Regained*, is currently in preparation, as is the audio edition of *Life Sentence*. They invite you to visit their blog Gainesscifi.blogspot.com, as well as their author page JMRGaines.com.

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Michael Gardner is a transfer student at ENMU, majoring in DFM and double minoring in Business and Theatre. He is originally from New England and hope sto work in the film industry directing, producing and screenwriting. He enjoys photography, reading, writing, traveling, visiting national parks and of course movies/television.

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Timothy Gettle is a novice writer, normally inspired by heavy science-fiction and science-fantasy genres, as well as a slight dabbling into a H.P Lovecraft inspired pieces.

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Greg Headley is a writer and artist in Austin, Texas. His recent work is published in the *Burningword Journal*, *Indianapolis Review*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, and *Raw Art Review*. For many years, his creative focus was in writing and playing music. He had seven CDs and two tapes released on the 28 Angles and Bake labels, and he played concerts in Japan, London, Paris, and cities across the US. Some of his music and short films are available on YouTube.

NAZLI KARABIYIKOGLU

Nazli Karabiyikoglu is an author from Turkey, living in Tbilisi, Georgia. Born in 1986, Nazli left her homeland to find literary and academic freedom. Between 2011 and 2018, Nazli has five published books in Turkish. You can find further information about Nazli at: www.nazlikarabiyikoglu.com.

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Ziaul Moid Khan belongs to a countryside named Johri in North India, that falls in South East Asia. He received his Master's degree in English from CCS University Meerut City. He devotes his spare time to writing and spending time with his wife and two-year-old son. He teaches English at Gudha International School, Jhunjhunu Rajasthan. His Flash Fiction "The Last Message" was recently featured in *KAIROS Literary Magazine'* and his poem, "The First Rose of Winter" was published in *Blue Lake Review*. He can be approached through <https://www.facebook.com/zia.m.khan.9>.

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Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah is the author of new hybrid work, *Enough*. His individual poems are widely published and recently appearing in *Rigorous, The Meadow, Juked, North Dakota Quarterly, etc.* He is algebraist and lives in the southern part of Ghana, Spain, and Turtle Mountains, North Dakota.

KATHERINE PERELAS

Katherine Perelas is a college senior at ENMU actively pursuing a BFA with an emphasis in Graphic Design, and a BBA with an emphasis in Marketing. She is working as the lead graphic artist of Campus Life, she has sold her work through *Barnes & Noble*, she worked as a juror for *K through ENMU*, and she received the *Excellence in Graphic Design Award* in 2019. She is the president and founder of the ACE+D (Arts, Creativity, Education, & Design) club and was awarded the *ACE+D Leadership and Philanthropic Award* by the ENMU art department in 2019. She enjoys exercising her creativity by taking photos, sketching, or creating the posters that come out of her office.

JENNIFER GOBLE POYER

Jennifer Goble Poyer is the second oldest of five siblings raised in a military family. Moving to a new city every two or three years exposed her a wide variety of cultures in a relatively short time span, teaching her at a young age that relationships among people were as unique and varied as anything in life could be. She loves how the written word provides a path to communicate ideas in a way that seems almost visual in nature, while transcending relationship boundaries as each reader's experience is uniquely dependent on their personal life paradigm. She is currently a full-time working mother of three, a part-time ENMU graduate student, and a writer who has finally elected to embrace her passion of connecting with others in a meaningful way.

BRIDGET RICHARDSON

Bridget Richardson is an extremely stressed ENMU graduate student working too many jobs. Her hobbies include picking up strays and hosting scheduled crying sessions with herself on the weekend.

TYNE SANSOM

Tyne is a graduate student in English and high school culinary arts instructor who lives in Portales with wife and family. He is currently working on a collection of short stories for his thesis.

MARY SHANLEY

Mary Shanley is a poet/storyteller who has had four books of poetry and short stories published. She is a frequent contributor to on-line and print journals. Mary was featured poet on WBAI-pacifica radio, in NYC and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

JEFF SCHIFF

In addition to *That hum to go by* (Mammoth books, 2012), Jeff Schiff is the author of *Mixed Diction*, *Burro Heart*, *The Rats of Patzcuaro*, *The Homily of Infinitude*, and *Anywhere in this Country*. His work has appeared internationally in nearly a hundred periodicals, including *The Alembic*, *Grand Street*, *The Ohio Review*, *Poet & Critic*, *The Louisville Review*, *Tendrill*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Carolina Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *River City (The Pinch)*, *Indiana Review*, *Willow Springs*, and *The Southwest Review*. He has been a member of the English faculty at Columbia College Chicago since 1987.

THOMAS E. SIMMONS

Thomas E. Simmons is an associate professor at the University of South Dakota School of Law where he teaches future lawyers about estates, ethics, and the death tax. He is a fellow of the American College of Tax Counsel and the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel. He has previously published poems in *Nebo* and *Pasque Petals* and is a lifelong South Dakotan, more or less, but has summered in Tempe, Arizona where this poem was inspired.

CONNOR SPARKS

Connor Sparks is currently a sophomore here at ENMU and hopes to become a high school counselor. He is a Presidents Ambassador, partakes in the English Club, and tutors for math classes. Connor graduated from Clovis High School and chose ENMU to see family as often as he can. Connor started reading and writing poetry the beginning of his freshman year as a mechanism to help with anxiety and wellbeing. He plans to start taking poetry more seriously and publish more of his work.

JOHN SWEET

John Sweet sends greetings from the rural wastelands of upstate NY. He is a firm believer in writing as catharsis, and in the continuous search for an unattainable and constantly evolving absolute truth. His latest poetry collections include *Heathen Tongue* (2018 Kendra Steiner Editions) and *Bastard Faith* (2017 Scars Publications).

SKYLER JON THAYER

Skyler Jon Thayer is a Stony Brook University graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in English. He is currently the editor-in-chief for the magazine, *Tessellate*, and is a columnist for a local Long Island publication, *Great South Bay Magazine*. Four of his poems have been published: by *Route 7 Review*, *Ordinary Madness*, *The Ginger Collect*, and Thurston Howl Publications.

CODY WILHELM

Cody Wilhelm is a sophomore at ENMU and enjoys writing in his free time. Cody frequents the Desperate Optimist English Club and is working towards graduating with an English degree.

WILLIAM WOLAK

William Wolak has just published his fifteenth book of poetry entitled *The Nakedness Defense* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages have appeared recently in *Naked in New Hope 2017*, *The 2017 Seattle Erotic Art Festival*, *Poetic Illusion*, *The Riverside Gallery*, Hackensack, NJ, *the 2018 Dirty Show in Detroit*, and *2018 The Rochester Erotic Arts Festival*.

THOM YOUNG

Thom Young is a writer from Texas. His work has been in *PBS Newshour*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Oxford Review*, and over a hundred literary journals. A 2008 Million Writers Award and 2016 Pushcart Prize nominee, his work was recently featured in the *Friction Series* in over 700 Barnes and Noble locations.

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