



RDSWEPIEDLOOSELY

THE BIRDS WE PILED LOOSELY  
ISSUE 15 • OCTOBER 2018

THEBIRDSWEPIEDLOOSELYTHEBIRDSWEPIEDL

***The Birds We Piled Loosely***  
**ISSUE NO.15 • October 2018**

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THANK YOU FOR DROPPING IN

In the haze of August we read these words across state lines; unintentionally meeting one another as blinking cursors in shared documents, hastily passing notes in the margins. This journal was formed less in formal meetings and more in found moments between obligations. This collection of words and art has been woven in to the rest of our nest to make more space. We hope that you are able to find a moment in this increasingly hectic life, to pull up a chair and join us at our nest.

As the geese turn their beaks south and begin to practice their V formations, join us for a moment away from it all—

*Cailin Ashbaugh, Jay McClintick, & Nicole Letson*

# LUST

by J. Mutis

The memory of her is slowly starting to fade. I want it to be. I need it to be. I need to learn how to patiently wait until it's completely gone: quickly, right now.

#

If I know that this is all wrong, that I'm married to a man, that I have no future with her, that she's crazy, a threat to my stability and mental health, why do I want her so desperately, why do I hurt myself by thinking about her, why did I let it get so far in the first place?

Perhaps, I am trying to punish myself.

Self-flagellating might be a way to wash my mind clean from betraying Karl's trust, from taking advantage of it, from breaking the pact that allowed me to see women at the beginning of last year but then asked me to bring it to a pause just before the summer ended.

I might be playing a sadistic game with myself. One that uses her pulsating, piercing memory to corrode me from within: to remind me of the things that Karl in all of his youth and vigor cannot provide me with.

#

In those quiet moments before my consciousness is lost to the realm of dreams, I allow her memory to pierce my mind.

Her blue eyes, full lips, and the way her soft hands would firmly press my arms to bring me closer to her embrace, enter my mind as I lay in bed, helpless, powerless to her.

My fists close up, teeth begin to clench. I know I should not go there, but fuck it, I'm already there.

I'm angry. Angry at my weakness. My inability to control my mind, to stop myself from thinking about her. I hate myself.

Snapshots of her continue to flood my mind. How her voice would change from a high-pitch to a raspy tone when she would whisper on my ear, the mischievous grin she will throw my way whenever she got a chance to tease me, her scent of wild berries and desire.

I can't seem to stop. I don't think that I want to stop. I want a shadow of those

moments we shared together to torture me for a few more moments. It's getting hard to breath, I feel an increasing weight on my chest.

I think of the way my shoulders would descend, my arms would open to welcome her touch, my tongue would roll along her skin to taste the salty, intoxicating flavour of her.

I want to not remember how it felt to have her hands on my hips, closing on any space still separating our bodies. How my desire for her would make it impossible for me to think or talk about anything if my lips could be consumed by hers instead. How my body would forget about hunger or thirst on the extended hours we spent together.

#

I know I broke it off for a reason. I'm married. She's volatile, emotional, crazy, she snaps, she's impulsive. I'm aware of the fact that I'm not meant to be seeing her.

I could feel that she wanted something more than whatever casual dating meant to both of us before we met. I knew I wanted that too. I yearned for hours, days, weeks with her. My desire for her was only going to increase, cause problems in my relationship, make me more stressed that I could bare to be.

#

I said goodbye. We both did. I pressed my lips against hers one last time under the fluorescent lights that read in thick purple letters Double Down Saloon. I put my arms around her, letting out the air of her puffy jacket, trapping her in my embrace.

All of the following week she texted. I did not reply. She persisted. The last time she did, I was sitting on the subway, head resting up against the window, arms open, legs relaxed. The moment I saw her number light up on my phone, a feeling of emptiness filled my stomach. I could once more feel a pressure rising on my chest.

And just like that It was back.

A stranger's voice came into focus, too loudly, too quickly. My breathing was speeding up. I looked down, scared to see people's faces. I was afraid that the moment I locked eyes with someone else, I was going to start feeling as if they were examining me too closely. As if their faces were going to look odd some-

how, their expressions were not going to mirror the ones that I knew.

My feet started to move, at the same pace, restless, up and down, tapping on the ground, filling up the already overly-saturated background noise. My fingers came together to grab onto the skin on either side of my nails. I told myself “*Do not look up. Try to take in air slowly. You can calm yourself down.*”

But deeply I didn’t know if this was true. I was anxious about the possibility of becoming more anxious.

#

Karl blows thick rings of smoke into the dark air. His face illuminated by street lights and moving cars avoids my sight.

He lays still, vertical, tense on the soft couch, erect, except for his left hand which moves back and forth, and with that motion continues to fill up the air with his dense breath.

“Hmmm, can we talk about the thing,” I pause to clear my throat, “I sort of just want to get it over wi”

“Ok, what do you want to talk about?” He immediately interrupts and raises his eyebrow as if he was annoyed by this statement.

“Well the dating women thing, you know,” I can start to feel the pulse on my throat. But I leave my body as is, arms resting on either side of my uncrossed legs, chin up, face uncovering a fake smile. I can’t look tense. I need this to go well.

He meets my gaze for a second, looks away, and responds drily “Well be more specific.” Now his fingers move up and down the top of his leg, restless, quickly matching the rhythm of *Dazed and Confused*, which is playing on the background.

I think carefully of the words I had prepared in moments passed. I adjust my tone to stay neutral as if I didn’t care what his next words were going to be. “I sort of just wanted to see if on the long term, you know...if you will be okay with me dating women again. I know that last year the whole thing caused tension in our relationship, and I don’t want that to happen again, but....*ahem*....perhaps.... we can try it out one last time?”

His fingers stop moving to grab onto the couch’s pillow. Momentum intensifies. He exhales, fills up the air with the strong scent of vanilla, passes on the hookah pipe onto my right hand, keeps staring at the wall, does not say a thing.

“I mean, I really don’t care about the short term and I sort of want this to be

a chill talk—” *Stress the word CHILL, Chill* “—and is not like we’re going to discuss timelines or anything or have to make a specific decision right now, but I just want to know if in the long term—” *KEY WORD: Key word* “—you would be open to me dating women.” I refuse to look at him, I don’t want my eyes to reveal how nervous I am about what he’s thinking.

“This is something I’ve been thinking about and yeah I reckon that would be ok, I think I would be ok with that.”

We look at each other for a brief second. He coughs, “This shit is making me dizzy, I gotta stop.”

I let go of a quiet giggle and look at him. I close my mouth, lower my eyebrows, blink slowly, attempting to look composed, forcing myself to appear relaxed. My body turns to face him, but my eyes can’t find his.

His back meets the wall, it curves, mouth opens to empty out his lungs, slowly. His hand grazes my open palm. The music has stopped, I can only hear his breathing.

#

People slowly come and go. They sit down and talk quietly. They pass back and forth dragging their bodies, their feet, their thoughts. Coffee is a necessity, a craving. It keeps the line flowing, moving, changing.

Monday haze. Monday blues. Monday blur.

Natalie, -My best friend, a fellow twenty something year old. The one I can be raw, naked with. The only person I have shown the sins engraved on my body to- pushes the heavy door that separates us. Her face reveals a smile the moment our eyes lock in recognition. Her arms up in the air, moving, welcoming me to come closer. “I’m so happy to see you cutie pieeeee.” I meet her embrace.

Our lips move quickly. We talk, talk, talk. Can’t seem to stop. Fast. Quickly. So as not to catch too much breath. She finally says “Enough about me, tell me what’s happening with you.”

I touch her hand. Move my chair in her direction to close the gap between my lips and her left ear, to bring her inner world closer to my secrets. “Hmmm, not much....crazy girl hasn’t texted me in over two weeks, I think that she finally let go of me” I look into the corner as to focus on my next series of thoughts, she does not say a thing, “I also talked to Karl about the dating thing.”

Her eyes widen, she stares at me, does not blink, waits for what’s to be said next.

“He said that he’s open to me dating girls again, but I don’t know, what should I do, I’m so scarred with what went down with crazy girl...I mean I miss having sex with women, I want to do it again, but hmmm.” I pause and look at her hazel eyes, clear face, thick brows. “Maybe, I can try to find meaningless, no feeling kinda sex, I don’t know, it’s hard to find, but I’ve had it...I’m confused, dude. What do you think?”

Natalie meets my gaze firmly, for a second. I look away. She remains silent, takes her time. “I sort of feel like no amount of great, amazing, mind-blowing sex is ever worth the kind of stress and anxiety you went through. Why can’t you just have sex with Karl? He’s really good, isn’t he?”

I look down in defeat. I can feel the tears coming. I close my eyes. My back quickly rises as it tenses up, “Yeah, dude, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. Why can’t I be satisfied?” My hand meets hers. I hold onto her palm, hard.

I feel alone in her presence yet contained by her company.

There’s now only silence between us. It fills the air. It’s loud. It is pressing. But yet somehow that’s the only thing left for us to express.

## OF GLASS

*by Patricia Connolly*

SS SS SS SS SS

hand of slender olive lick

a skull of roses                      you hold in

my palm abrades

yellow

bone disintegrates, so

it is only us

counting into oak                      nearer

you remain. a breath, a dust

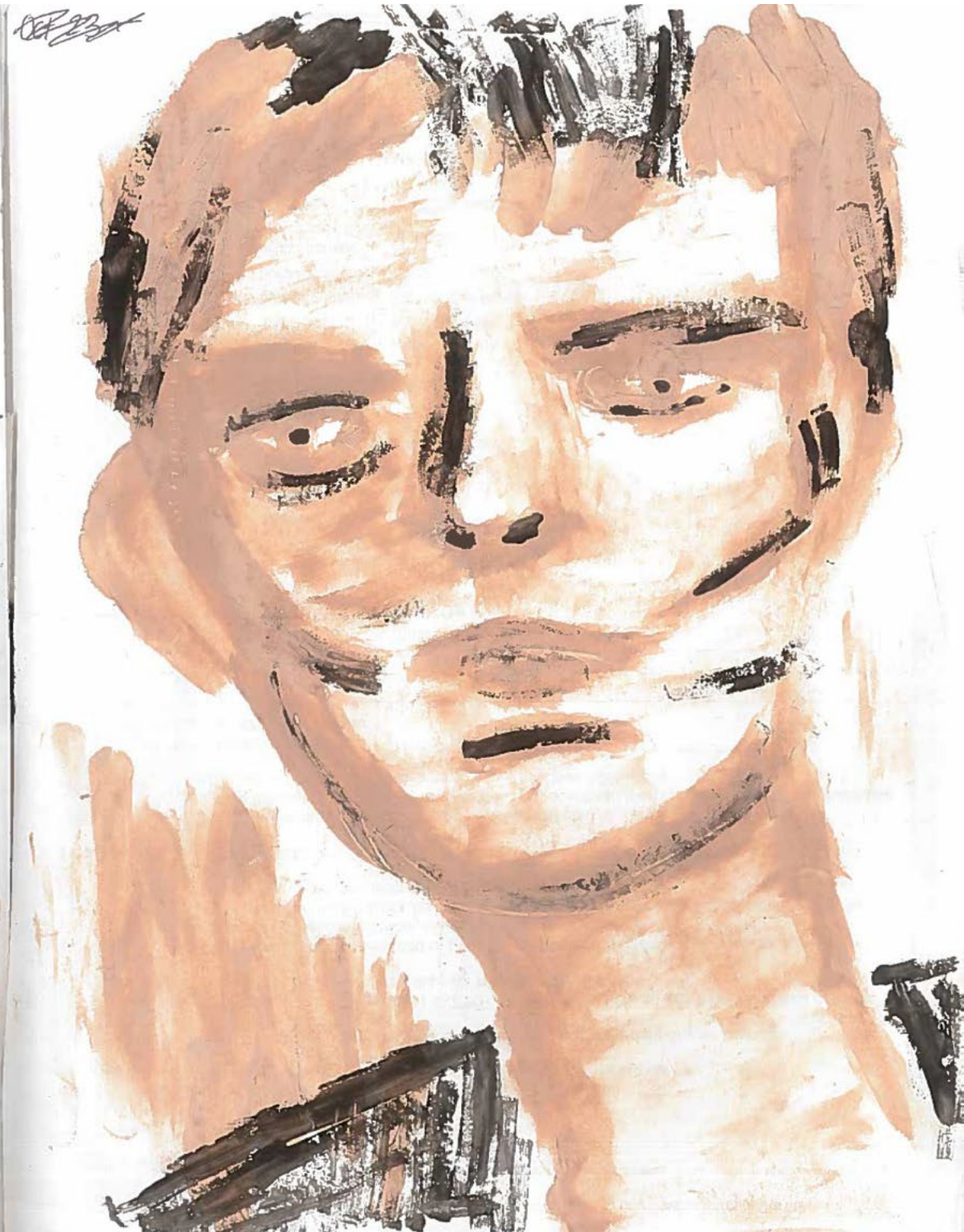
wet unvarnished

vowels

who cannot sort out

the piece

of your jaw                      dangling



*STRETCH MARKS 2*  
*by Emilie Pichot*

## SHARDS

*by Patricia Connolly*

§§ §§

and then I forget  
who I am and

my unmatched ability  
to blend

tell me again  
who I sit across

in the dark  
on a red leather couch

and a brown chair  
rocks wheat walls

stripped by shadow and halogen  
at the right angle of a breeze oscillating

creek. tell me again, who it is I seek  
to redeem and

who it is  
you are about to avenge, somewhere

a drunken high-heeled slur  
oh my god. an orange cast

over the mattress and then I forget  
who I am

on top of  
it all, eyes

pass the passing gaze, a cozy view  
from a neighbors dining room

straight back chairs, candles unlit  
and soft music. tell me again exactly

where everything within  
eyeshot is chainlink



## MY FERAL Q

by Mitchell Glazier

That last year in the mountains was a hurl. Blown night to morning with the fiercest lot of studded swans West Virginia knew. *People that live any other way are crazy.*

\*

In the leather, muscle bears felt him up. Daddies eyed him, twirling their nipple rings in the disco light. Twinks bent in queer geometries at sight of Q's bulge through the mesh I'd lent him.

\*

I met Q in winter outside of Vice. I'd danced among the swollen until Last Call, when we pined for snow. *Call Opal.* Outside by the garbage was foxy Q: snapping at his cock, lips on a Southern Cut.

\*

Late on the edge of oblivion with Q on my lap, glazed and smoking. I made note that death felt far—

\*

We swerved through mountain switchbacks. *Live fast and never die.* Like River in The Viper Room.

\*

Q ashed his Cuts all night on a holy tome. So-and-so's. Q kept guppies, hid his baby teeth in the neon pebbles.

\*

We slept beneath a poem pinned to my wall that I'd written about

him—"Marlboro Man"—though he wasn't sure. He fucked local men, I did his blow. I pissed blood once then bent into song. Klimt, *he hit me (and it felt like a kiss).*

\*

"You made up that word," he said. *"Bonelight."*

\*

At the museum, he grinned at the cocks Michelangelo drafted.

\*

*Un-scent the letters.* In June, I wrote him: *All I can think of is blue yonder. I puked everywhere.*

\*

7/23/2017: Q's far gone now. *Getting bad again.* I tell it slant.

\*

After all, we were handwritten only yesterday. For Q, it was nice it was

\*

*Ever written—*

## SCARGAZING

by C. Kubasta

circle back  
to that story, a split  
lip that can't close – each  
utterance  
open, switches  
of skin  
unbraid and become  
wound. Because

we get older &  
there are too many names  
for the same thing, we confuse  
this flushed skin: what may be  
burn, what may be  
the bloom of tender

blood's lace &  
milk froth, the mouth's o

to yet-unknown words  
between meaning & context,  
sentence, each  
saved until later, when she can  
register. In context  
her first semester, all the new-ness  
everyone's expectations, he said, "you  
will succumb—"

extra consonants hide  
in the soft-voiced thing  
the pennies in the green, scrubbed  
for good luck  
like the baby in the King cake  
no one really wants

shudder  
pen

## BIRDS

by Robin Wyatt Dunn

1.

Something was waiting inside.

Maryella had remembered the furniture; it fit just right in the room. It  
matched the feeling of the street; north of the mission.

She had arranged the cello against the wall and intended to play it.

The same way she had played it for her husband.

He had died shortly after their last visit to the desert; a sudden heart attack.

She walked to the café and met Harry, who was still in love with her, and  
ordered a sandwich and her coffee, which she drank on the street, holding the  
sandwich in her hand.

The apartment was still fresh in her mind; the white room, and the chest of  
drawers.

Over the roof she could smell the sea. You could always smell the sea here.

A car was traveling very fast down Van Nuys; it careened through the inter-  
section, burning rubber over the asphalt before disappearing around the bend.

Sirens lit up and followed it after she had swallowed her coffee. Harry  
brought her the sandwich and she called her friend Elizabeth who had promised  
to make her dinner to welcome her back; she didn't like Elizabeth but had no  
other friends, not after Brian had died.

--

After lunch she tried to play; she held the bow in her hands and stared into  
the alley below her window. Pigeons were muttering on the fire escape. The light  
was perfect; a filmmaker's light. She always wondered why more films weren't  
made in San Francisco.

Brian's face in the tent hovered over her mind, in the bright orange womb  
they had constructed for the desert, where she had done her music and he had  
watched her.

When she had been twenty-one she had met him at a concert. She had known  
there were— what was it exactly? Future premonitions.

She gave up and drove to the gym, playing some of her recordings on the  
stereo, looking for the right place to insert something new.

--

The cello is the instrument most like the human voice. The word most likely derives from the Roman Vitula, goddess of joy. Joy was not happiness, she had discovered. It was something underneath.

After the gym she had dinner with Elizabeth, which was delicious. Elizabeth had a new boyfriend and told her about their problems. The food was better than almost anything Maryella had ever had. Elizabeth was studying to be a chef.

There was something in the sound of her friend's words; she realized it now. Some thing they were talking around.

"How long have you been in the city?" Maryella asked.

"Oh, you know. Since, what, 1995? Almost ten years now."

"Why did you move here?"

Elizabeth laughed. "Oh, I was following Jack. He led me here. On the back of his motorcycle."

"But when you came here, why did you stay?"

"I love it here. I'll never leave."

"But why?"

Some sound in her friend's voice alerted Elizabeth. "What's wrong," she said.

"Nothing, I'm just curious. That's all. Why do you stay?"

Then she heard the sound outside; she walked to the window.

"What is it?" Elizabeth asked.

"Shhh," said Maryella.

She walked out of her friend's apartment and out onto the street.

The car was sitting there; the one she thought the cops would have caught. It was idling its engine, low and quiet, like her cello.

She thought to raise her hand, but realized it would be a crazy thing to do.

"Get out of here!" her friend shouted, raising her smart phone like a weapon.

The man in the car smirked, and winked at the women, and then sped down the street, through another red light.

Over the buildings Maryella could see what it was.

"I have to go," she said.

They hugged and she drove home; listening to the traffic.

The walls were the same when she returned; whiter than anything she had ever seen.

2.

We're going inside; put on your sweater. We won't stay long; she's still playing her cello. Sometimes I still watch her play it, when she doesn't know I'm looking. I can see her even through the walls.

They say that Silicon Valley destroyed San Francisco but I know that's not true. It changed it into what it had always wanted to become.

Inside the studio it's like I've always known here; she was always coming to be here, even when she was an art student. Even when I still thought I would be young forever.

The thing I found, it won't stay long.

Or maybe I'm wrong.

Maybe it was always here. It's what she has in the music. Some thing I can't look away from.

3.

She had dreamt of him again; his voice.

The party was relaxing but she had drunk too much; she leant against one of the strange modern art sofas and tried to catch her breath.

Outside the lights were flickering; Harry held on to her hand and was whispering something in her ear.

She closed her eyes.

The shape of the apartment was clear to her; it was a performance space. She hadn't bought it to move in to; not as a newly single woman. As a widow.

It was an artist's space. Like the one she had had as a student. But something was different. Not the light; it was almost exactly the same. Something underneath the light she had never noticed; some wavelength of light, or a distant sound that only dogs could hear. It was like a memory one knew one had but could not recall; or conversely, a memory one possessed vividly but did not seem to assign to any known events in one's life.

She kissed Harry on the cheek and called a cab. In the back of the leather seat, she could see the moon flying over the Mission, like a widowed woman, still not free.

--

She set up the equipment at once, and the cameras. She called her friend who did installation art, and asked for a favor.

She held the bow against her cheek, remembering.

That bright light outside the studio.

The fire escape.

Brian's lips.

It wasn't the desert; not that. It was before they were married. She had only just moved to the city.

It was the pigeons; that's what it was.

It was just birds.

She saw there was one now; ordinary grey and white, outside on the brick ledge.

She played to it; marching it out; holding her instrument.

What did the pigeon know? It had always known what it was she was looking for. Did that make any sense? It was close to making sense. Something next to it.

She played for about forty-five minutes and then took a shower and lay on

her sleeping bag on the floor.

Overhead the bare lamp mocked her; told her she was single. Told her she was dead. Told her she was a madwoman.

She got up and went up to the roof, raising the hatch that was like a submarine's.

The city's skyline was on fire with light; and she watched the birds wheel overhead.

In the arpeggio of their shape; the movement underneath and above her head she could discern the gravity of their weight; not their mass but the gravity of their movement; it could even be relativistic, she thought, the shape of the movement of the bird down under and above San Francisco, who had never really meant Freeman, for she had never been free here, nor wanted to be, but meant instead the division between that gravity and that weight; that pulling neither down nor up but in, and underneath, to look for the door out.

4.

She performed the first time a widow on stage in the Western Addition; the first piece of her new album, *Birds*.

She flew overhead, watching not the light but the gravity underneath the actors and media moguls and rich girls and boys come under the stunning dim light of San Francisco to wonder at the shape of the world.

It isn't round, she thought, but a whorl. Spinning around a slowly sliding center, underneath and in.

## *FLOWER BED*

*by Katherine Fallon*

We had one full season of roses. Mother dead-headed each blown bud, placed bouquets

in bone-white vases. Spent petals dripped into the dishwater. When Mother herself

soaked through, the garden died hard inside its rail-tie borders, went brown

as teacup dredges. In the ER, they asked what harm I'd meant by replacing

half her whiskey with water. But I knew better. Had no intentions, either good or bad.

Spectator, guilty waiting party. I never touched the bottle, unless to drink from it.

## KEEPING

*by V. S. Ramstack*

The body is a phrase and I hold its hand. I am battling against the mother's tongue plant and my inability to keep it alive. I watch the stalks on the right side bend and bleed into the stalks on the left, but not in a purposeful way. This is being okay with the sight of destruction. This is the plastic spray bottle from Walgreen's. This is body and dirt and leaves.

I call my mother to ask her how to improve the soil. She does not answer so I leave a message and think perhaps there is no way to improve the soil anyway. If I can will my own tongue to speak and remain speaking, so too could mother's tongue. The pot is sea green in the way I have never seen the sea be green. A plant green, then. But it could never be as green as the plant it holds, except for when the plant turns brown and at this point, I know it will.

In the narrative I'm creating, I am not the mother's tongue, but in another narrative I could be. A sunflower growing from my temple and sprouting a hand to grab the water. This water comes down and I drink until I grow leaves inside my leaves. I better my soil because I have to.

## ELLIOTT SMITH STOPS FOR CIGARETTES ALONG THE BEACH

*by Sarah Lilius*

Sand structure, nothing like a castle with rich sand people, small and bossy. Roofless building, maybe a convenience store, clean except for roaches and the people having sex in the bathroom. I can't find you among junk food and unhealthy drinks. Beer after beer, cracked tiles, a bullet hole in the window makes this a peep show, I think something illicit will happen to me here. Somehow I die but no one will believe the few brave enough to pull a knife from my chest. Motors idle in the parking lot, no painted lines, just guess where to put your car for the rest of your short life.



*STRETCH MARKS 1*  
*by Emilie Pichot*

## SALT

*by Andrew Spiess*

I'm worried about crumbling tastelessly  
so I search for salt  
to rub on my body

but all I see is a frail man's  
stolen tablets  
dropping  
from the medicine  
cabinet

skullcap, passionflower, maiden's hair  
to lower the couch and ottoman  
and TV stand  
onto the floor

a salve  
made from the spit  
of a mother  
for the squirm  
between  
my shoulders

one flask of fancy  
the Celexa almost empty

No more heartachewort  
or quietus extract

lemon juice  
in the rubbing alcohol bottle.

I'm rationing my minutes and pawing  
at this notion of continuous days  
until they fall away

and I only do this after  
the yolk of ego breaks  
at the tips of our tongues  
and drips down  
our chins

which only happens before  
I end our relationship  
abruptly.

How desperate I am  
to stop myself  
from pacing  
in the kitchen.

How desperate I am  
to sauté serotonin  
in garlic, cream  
and tequila

little agonist  
little poppy and lavender

and that's only after  
I create a hole  
the size  
of my skull  
to pour it in

and I flambé the combination  
and listen to it melt away  
the fleshy greasy hopelessness  
if only for a fleeting moment  
until I can finally  
look in the mirror



and see what kind of teeth  
are behind  
these fat lips

sigh  
a sparkling result

possess  
a warm face  
an innocuous glisten

a smile  
better than ever

a deathless shine.

## SINKING

*by Aaron Garretson*

I lifted the microkeratome from around Mrs. Caviola's head, cleaned the blades with alcohol, and carefully returned it to its case. It was nearly midnight, and amid the overwhelming aroma of formaldehyde and inanimate flesh, I dropped the corneas into a solution of saline and glucose, to keep the cells alive. I threw my gloves into the biohazard bag by the door, marked the time on the donor sheet, and, before leaving, gently fingered her earrings, again—diamond solitaires. And the locket around her neck.

"Did your husband give you these, Mrs. Caviola?" I asked. I couldn't count the number of times I'd seen EMTs and hospital staff steal from the deceased. But I hadn't quite sunk that low, yet. Maybe in another six months—if I even kept the damn job.

It was still raining outside. Another hot, wet September. And as though the weather weren't relentless enough, I ran into the Caviolas again out in front of the hospital, underneath the awning. When I'd spoken to them earlier, they'd treated me like a monster for even having the gall to ask.

The husband and son turned their backs as I passed. They preferred to shun me in silence. I was fine with that. The daughter, though, had a few more words for me.

"Did you get what you came for?" she asked bitterly.

"I did," I said. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me!"

"Because of your mom," I said, trying to be soothing, "one or two people in this city are going to be able to see clearly again. I'm sure she'd be happy to know that."

She lifted both hands, "Please don't fucking talk to me."

I walked on toward the parking lot. It was always better to keep your mouth shut. Her mom had only been dead five or six hours. You couldn't expect civility.

"You're disgusting," she said to my back.

Yeah, I was definitely going to quit this job. Just as soon as I found something else. I didn't like people assuming I didn't have feelings. I knew the job was disgusting (to some people). That didn't make me disgusting.

A green turtle and the words Turtle Bay Eye Bank were painted on the side of the van. I loaded my things into the back, slammed the doors shut, and climbed into the front behind the wheel. The Caviolas were still out there, huddled under

the awning, trying to cope with their new reality.

My phone rang. It was Lashonda telling me I had another one.

"Where?" I asked.

"Sheepshead Bay," she said.

"Again?"

"The name's Seymour Kazlovich. Fifty-two-year-old male. Want me to spell that?"

"How'd he die?" I asked.

"You need to know that for your job?"

"Yes!"

"I'm going to give you the wife's number."

"You didn't call her, yet?"

"Is that my responsibility now?" She read me the phone number and hung up.

I walked back across the parking lot. I joined the Caviolas beneath the awning, sat on a bench across from them and folded my legs. These donor calls could be brutal. They were frequently humiliating for me, and I wanted to show the Caviolas exactly how revolting I could be. Removing the phone from my pocket, I punched in the numbers Lashonda gave me. After a few rings, a voice answered.

"Is this Mrs. Seymour Kazlovich?" I asked. I spoke loudly so the Caviolas wouldn't miss anything.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Kazlovich, I'm terribly sorry to call you at this time. My name is Chris Lang. I work for the Turtle Bay Eye Bank."

The husband and son stood up and walked inside the hospital. "Bobby..." the father said to the girl. He wanted her to join them, but she remained in her seat, glaring at me. A look of annihilation on her face.

"Do you know what the eye bank is?" I asked Mrs. Kazlovich.

I could actually hear the poor woman shaking her head.

"I just received a phone call from the hospital where your husband is. Are you at the hospital right now?"

"Yes."

"In Sheepshead Bay?"

"Yes."

"The hospital has informed me that your husband is an ideal candidate to be a cornea donor. Did you and your husband ever discuss organ donation? Is that something he would've wanted?"

"I can't... my husband just..."

"I know Mrs. Kazlovich, I'm very sorry."

"I really can't do this now," she said.

The daughter still had her eyes on me, trying to scald me with the hot acid of her gaze.

"Mrs. Kazlovich," I said, "the eye bank only uses a thin outside layer of the eye—I know you don't want to discuss this right now, I'm sorry, I assure you I don't like this any more than you do, but there are thousands of people in the city waiting for the opportunity to see clearly again—to see at all. And your husband could help them."

"..."

"Mrs. Kazlovich?"

"Yes."

"I would do the procedure myself, Mrs. Kazlovich."

"It won't hurt him?"

"I'll hardly even touch him, I promise."

"Are you sure? Are you good at this?"

"Mrs. Kazlovich," I said, "I'm the best. I'm the very, very best."

Cupping my hand over the phone, I took a couple steps toward the daughter. I was still a good person. I wasn't disgusting. Not yet. Maybe I would be one day. I might not even be able to tell when I crossed the line. But not yet. I could still see myself. I could still feel.

"Your name is Bobby?"

The daughter nodded.

"Your mom is wearing a nice pair of earrings," I said. "And a locket around her neck. You probably want those back."

She ran for the lobby, and I walked back over the wet asphalt, the rain still falling. I opened the door of the van. "I'm on my way, Mrs. Kazlovich," I said. "I'll be there with you soon. Before you even know it."

## RIVER ROCKS

by A. M. Brant

he pushed him out  
of the truck  
with his boot.

how hard is it  
to kick a body  
loose from the passenger side  
or the bed of a red chevy.

i imagine his back slumped  
against the corner of the road,  
maybe in the little creek  
maybe under the bridge, arching.

did he die in the truck  
did he die hearing the water  
over river rocks.  
was it nothing.

i look for his body's indent,  
his jacket, the dark strain  
of his head against snow.  
was it snowing.

## THE NONNS

by Jaime Zuckerman

*The Non-Native Species (NONNS) spread in quick syncopated starts—most species died—not having a place to belong in the new imbalance. The human NONNS preserve the last of things, worship their relics. They survive in constant slaughter, know their place in this economy: only the hungriest survive.*

∴

A starling tribe blocks the sun // what was the word for // that twisting // oil spill in  
the sky // murmuration they called it // a collected quiet sound // of wings // after  
they pass overhead // the sun rains again // into the bamboo forest // dapples our  
skins

these lovely words for magnitude // loll on my tongue

\*

In the night // a tribe of feral pigs ate a child // who'd left his hammock // to take a  
piss // we only found blood // pooled & printed across // the white moon // of tram-  
pled young bamboo // a sounder it was called // I say aloud to anyone // a sounder  
of pigs passed // I think: sounds of sundering

\*

The mother mourns alone // & the mothers make quick to move // to new land //  
soon I'll be a mother // so I'm taught // how to hollow a bowl // how to grind corn  
// how to hunt a deer // holding very still // & these practical destructions // keep  
the hands from sadness // each mother knows that feeling // of a lost life // love is  
a kind of phantom // limb

\*

When the tribe finds water // it's choked with carp // we eat their muddied meat //  
around the feast coals // we pass a relic // a hummingbird beak in a jar // we hum  
in unison // our souls align // like a sudden wind // through trees // this is how I  
know // I'm a piece of a whole

She says: can you picture a time // when a charm of hummingbirds // might have  
flown // imagine the shimmer // I close my eyes

\*

The tribe stays hidden // among eucalyptus & wild ginger // when the birthing time comes // all the mothers circle me // breathe together chant // I'd seen it before // never felt it // the surprise the flood // the placenta the blood // I crack in open // the insides of me // spill out

\*

After the girl is birthed // I rise to the top of the tribe // when we find a feral pig // ensnared in kudzu ropes // I'm given the black liver // paint my face in its blood // take that my child // I give her my swollen tit // she is hungry & so new // she looks like a peach pit // the last peach stone in the world // is carried on a cord // around a man's neck // the tribe gather around the spit // fires gilds us all

\*

We walk for days over grassland // deadened by a rabbit tribe // a husk I've heard it was called // or maybe a colony // they've hollowed this land // to a husk

\*

When we find the rabbit colony // it is slaughter // the mongrels herd them // right into our lines // I knife one soft throat // & another bloodies my hands // know the familiar depth // of the blade to slip // slip between hide & muscle // I help peel off the skins // til I'm told to go rest // when the girl cries // I hold her head to my breast // her skull is anointed // with a crimson sun // from my handprint // a handprint like I saw in the caves // she is permanence & the stone // & I am the passing hand // strange how thirsty she is

\*

The horizon is a smear of purple // loostrife swamping what remains // of water once there // the roots: a bitter taste // all we will eat for weeks

\*

The girl's teeth come // one by one // sharp little things // & she cries out

\*

The muse says // we crawled this earth // the cruelest NONN // language stories maps // this ability to speak // led to our spread & bloom // we forgot our smallness // pulled one too many threads // out of the weave // set collapse certain // we whittled away until // little was left // we protect relics // a paw a bone a claw a stone //

ask muse's forgiveness

\*

The girl cries at night // I give suck // stay awake // with the tribe mothers // we sharpen knives // keep guard & talk remedies // I whisper in her ear: // I didn't choose you

\*

Kudzu chokes everything // red deer wild pigs rats // avoid the stuff // only the sparrows // a host of sparrows stops // sends up a raucous chorus // from the green mass // the hunters go out // come back fire eyed // & empty

\*

The girl cries out // the girl cries // she cries

\*

We travel north to forest dense // with locust trees // our sleep is scented // & waking I believe // it has snowed // like in the muse's legends // & then I realize the locust trees // have let their flowers drop // so I lay longer // surrounded in white & disappearing // until I am nothing

\*

The girl cries out // I tell her stories // we must remember the stories // that is why I keep you alive // I tell the girl // there is a reason // I remind myself // because I need reminding

\*

We walk & walk // consuming all we can // then moving to the next // source of sustenance // the tribe walked around // a colossal ant colony // fiery earth & roil of movement // still my ankles got bitten // the girl drooled on my back // I didn't choose her // I didn't choose this life

I think: what's left // when all's been whittled away // if not my freedom?

\*

Dear girl // forget me // may you find a place // to belong // may you find // the wild beauty // that's right in front of you // forget me forgive me

## THE HIGH HEALERS

by Jaime Zuckerman

*They collect flora—sought & gathered from forests swamps & fields. They let dry leaves & flowers—grind them to dust & boil roots black. They coax seeds into being. They are collectors of tales & recipes. Tripping—they incant pray envision: a possible future. Because the body is always breaking— they heal & hold off the humanity of their age*

∴

Todaye Lysandra came to me // blud running down her thigh // sobbing help // I could not help // too layte Black Blud thickend // my hands my fingers founde // the little Lump // layde the being to sleep in the gardn // I gayve her infusion of vervain lemon balm rosemary // & oil of bergamot lemon & rose // to rub on her Brests // for the sadness // after she Slept I sobbed // glugs of lake water rysing // in my throat the wait // the wait of loss // the Moon was a cup // nearly empty of her Milk

\*

Resippe for tyte lungs: // lobelia ephedra & jimson weed // pill-bearing spurge sundew coltsfoot // grind any of these to Powdre // drink as Tea // inhale steam concentrate thots // also Remembre to allowe emotions to Flowe // pracktiss Singing // then will the Lungs open // Breath will flowe threw the Blud

\*

Last nyte by the Fyre// Obero & I burned sage // chantd Prayed to Earth // not the absent gods // for his seeds to grow in me this time // we practised Loving each other // skyn to skyn // again & again // pleasure waves wash thu me // fray my edges // I drank raspberry tea after // picktured the Seed growng // in my Womb // Obero slept // I wayted for Dawn // so I myte be Blessed by both sun & moon bodies // like our bodies // at the point of Joining

\*

Gyde for Growing: // plant Garlic with the Rose // & sage alongside grape vines to repell moths // Rosemary repells carrot moths // Gathre leaves when flowres are in bud // for all their Powres & Propretes // take the flowres & leaves together for synchronicity // wayte til mint & thyme leaves brown // for ripest seeds // Dont

plante if there is a ring around the moon // or the Rainns will come & washe // your work away

\*

The moon full & brimming // we High Healers gathred to Praye // for the sickned & weak of the clan // trance talking // tying knots in stringe of redde// we took on the Sorrows // & all the hurt of this Tyme // Clytemestra took her tirn // in the centre of the cyrcle // she Swallowwed Ergot & root of bundle flower // & in her Flite predictd // a Tyme of rains // a Tyme of rippenning // a vessel Filled & oerflowing // Leaves that trembled & spoke // the Secret of Life // they said: the secret is to stay Alyve

\*

The Poppy is good // for Rype seeds // in cooking bread // for grinding seeds to reach a stayte of Flite // trances vissons sleepie // but most of All // poppy is good // for that pink // seen frum the corner // of the Ey // lastng only a single sun

\*

I kno I kno for Certyn// there is no Lyfe // growing Insyde me // my blud comes thyck

\*

Tattooing: joos from the unrype Genipa froot // blu black ink // applyd with needle to the skyn // Tattoos rytes of passage lyne patterns // forever with the wearer // I pracktis payshence & Payne // with eech needle prick

\*

Last nyte was my tirn for Flite // vysions of the Fates // foretellings of Earth // that she will continue to Spyn // & heel her wounds // that in heeling our People // I stood in the Centre // of the cyrcle of High Healers moaning // I ayte the Payste // of Ergot & root of bundle flower // Budd of weed & // dust of amanita // fyrst a Feeling of tyme slowing // to make the All visible which is usually Hyddn // the trees pulsed // the grate Storm of Sound rose // insect wings leaves rustling // & the wynd that flows over us All // Earth cupped me in her Hand // then a Certenty // I'd Never be a Mother // never growe seed of human // lyfe in my Centre // never be the lyfe Giver // I've always Been // I woke in morning lyte // salt dried to mye cheeks // a still point in the // Still-spyning Earth //

I tolde whut I saw // it wasn't a messaj the Mothers wanted // & they tolde me // go  
mourne in your way

\*

Resippe for wounds: // Bathe the wound with tincture // of sweet calendula // or  
bind it with Clothe soked in witch hazel // place comfry ointment over the scar //  
wounds of the Sole are a diffrent Matter

\*

Obero sobbed when I tolde him // in the Gardyn // we held Eachother // while  
around us: the Gardyn was aphids // & rott

\*

Gyde for curing sadness: // thare's always tea of Ots or borage // or ginsing or lem-  
on balm rosemary // when that fayls: make a smoke of weed // inhale xhale inhale  
xhale // Til you feel Possible agayn

## THE MOLE PEOPLE

by Jaime Zuckerman

*They colonize old mining tunnels—live in darkness—worship the sky that can nev-  
er—never—be understood. They name it blue. Cult of electricity—they love the electric  
light of solar panels. Underground sounds mute & echo distortion. They cling to social  
order—their lives: stratified—each to a role & place in the structure of things—layers in  
the earth. Death is ever-present.*

:::

Night 42, Year of the Scorpion

Completion of 4th stratum // east tunnel expansion // 12 bright torches down the  
stone // their hot little lives lit // & separated by black's soft reach // & isn't black  
always the ending // 1st room holds // 17 sacks barley 22 sacks spelt // 3 barrels  
wine // 1 cool moon of goat cheese ripening

\*

Day 44, Year of the Scorpion

11 voyagers 3 mules & carts // leave for the ocean // they will return with salted  
fish // they will return with tales // of buzzards in the blue // & so much space

Night 44, Year of the Scorpion

Rain soundless & unknown // the cistern swells

Night 46, Year of the Scorpion

Electricity flickers // solar panels need repair // at temple service // a priest says:  
// light is life // & channeling light through wire // makes light flow too // through  
out veins // all in attendance // very inspired

\*

Night 48, Year of the Scorpion

The sound of skulls // crumbling under stone // only a low rumble observed // 2  
diggers dead in collapse // Queen's rites spoken // the 2 souls rose above // into  
blue // Queen declares official pause in digging // for 2 moons // 1 for each life //  
the bodies are stored in cool // of outer room 1st stratum// the pale of bloodless  
skin // vs. blackened stone // until they can be moved above // eaten by buzzards  
// carried to blue // on wings

Night 49, Year of the Scorpion  
Still diggers rest // priest speak prayer 7 times a day // they weep & tear // the skin of their chests // there is reverence for such pain // the Queen resolves a dispute // over hand tools

Day 50, Year of the Scorpion  
The field is a mirror of blue // linseed flowers & sky // look at each other // they are sources of light above & below

\*  
Night 61, Year of the Scorpion  
Queen's pronouncement: // the new stratum of tunnel // lower than the 5th stratum // will be deeper in sediment of eras // will have an airway // to clear the breathable air // into the blue & night // to drill down // to water's depth // the new stratum will contain // large temple & communal dining // weaponry & wine storage // it will take 18 months // to carve into the rock // as the earth once expanded // so does our colony // after the harvest // a new stratum // will ache forward

Night 62, Year of the Scorpion  
Diggers find strange creatures // trilobite & fish bones a reminder // everything has its time // life in the light // & then its gone

\*  
Day 76, Year of the Scorpion  
Figs fatten with moon honey // waiting for harvest // the skyworkers sharpen their blades // the Queen attends a birth // the mother is well & grateful for fortune

Night 77, Year of the Scorpion  
Queen absolves reckless drunkenness // reassigns him as a soldier // his family weeps // wheat bends silver in moonlight // & olives cluster like stars // a time of plenty // Queen's rites spoken // we pray to the gods of blue // for a good harvest

Day 78, Year of the Scorpion  
The skyworkers begin // at sun's first light // wheat falls in waves // chaff rises to the blue // the grapes too are cut careful // though they are carted // to the presses // where priests speak // & the red flows beneath the feet

Night 79, Year of the Scorpion

Skyworkers toil day & night // knowing rival tribes // are also occupied by harvest // & no threat of attack // for now // all emerge to watch sky's pinkening // at the end of the day // the most holy of sky times

∴

Night 8, Year of the Snake  
The rock was hewn // constant song of steel // & stone for 3 moons // until today when Queen's rites spoken // & stone is heaved in place // protection from ravaging tribes // for the new stratum // the construction took two years // longer than planned // food workers toiled all week // readying wines & cheeses // to commemorate the finishing // of the stratum

Night 12, Year of the Snake  
8 voyagers return with wild horses // tales of a storm // that swept snow into the valleys // mixing mud & grey // 9 voyagers went out // 8 returned

Day 13, Year of the Snake  
The wild horses will be broken // now their manes // still smell of wind & sun // their eyes still roll to the blue // this is the land of beautiful horses

\*

Night 97, Year of the Snake  
The walls of the new temple are painted // rust & black & white tell // the tale of the sun burning earth // & the period of thunders // the rise of the moon era // set in precious blue // paint the buzzards watching // death & life revolve // Queen's rites spoken on completion

\*

Night 120, Year of the Snake  
The dead & maimed were counted // 11 warriors dead // 2 skyworkers // 1 child taken // laid their bodies on the cliffs // in the sun // scattered carrot flowers // over their corpses // placed river smoothed stones // eyes painted open & skyward // eyes over their eyes // the priests stay with the bodies // always awake // until they are nothing but bones // they will see the transferal // of muscle to meat // soul to sky // only when they return // will the weeping cease // many moons from now

Night 121, Year of the Snake  
Life stops for death this great // the long period of weeping begins

## 9:50 ON YOUR WRISTWATCH

by V. S. Ramstack

this body is  
shrouded in folklore  
i dressed it up in  
a gray vest and  
stood in front of the  
hallway mirror  
i couldn't see  
my head and no  
matter how  
many times i  
jumped i couldn't  
see my feet  
tame this  
sailboat or teach it  
how to whistle –  
i'm very good  
at both now try  
tying dandelions  
together to soothe  
my rosacea  
to stop that one  
bruise from  
growing  
i'm sorry  
little taurus  
for folding  
your hand in  
the dark oh  
so sorry  
little taurus  
you look  
like a swarm  
of bees  
on highway one

## CORE QUESTIONS

by Toti O'Brien

1

As she suddenly switches a button, the sound starts. Here it is, my heart pounding. Off, then on again. Now a liquid slush, like a waterfall. Off. Now still something different, like a furious slamming of doors.

I have heard these noises before, during similar tests. I immediately recognize them yet they aren't familiar. They fill me with a mixture of fear and reverence. They are portentous like certain manifestations of nature—storms, earthquakes, fires or hurricanes. They are as close as I can get to the idea of divinity, summoning a power stronger than mine I can't understand or control.

2

My heart? Why would I say so? Though it's located inside my ribcage I don't own it. In case, I'm its thing. Its result, its emanation. Its accident.

How ludicrous is the habit of language by which we treat the heart with casual intimacy. We refer to it as to our deepest source of awareness, the receptacle of our genuine authenticity. "I know it in my heart." "From the bottom of my heart." And so forth.

Really, what do we know about it? The heart has a life of its own, animated by an incomprehensible will. It takes and maintains the initiative, blindfolded, alone, in the cave like Hephaestus—the god of fire—or a Titan, a Cyclops, a Minotaur. Looking down, intent, sending no news and listening to none, deafened by the clamor and clangor of its un-exhausted fatigue.

3

My heart (the closest I can come to an idea of divinity) is a blue-collar worker of the old kind, as my coppersmith grandpa was. It exhibits that kind of no-nonsense concentration. The unavoidable single-mindedness. The commitment to rhythm, terrifying in its relentlessness.

Rhythm is the most striking feature of the sounds I just heard—it provides their furious exactness, hard for us to even bear yet needed for anything crucial, 'vital', to be achieved. No rest, no rest, no rest, the heart pounds.

That is certainly what makes it divine, meaning alien. Because we, I am not capable of such impetus. My body isn't, my mind even less. They are all wavering and hesitation, tentativeness, frailty. Success isn't ensured until it's achieved,



for my body (the part I'm in charge of) and mind.

The heart succeeds with every beat. Its momentum is such, I believe it must have prepared before starting (like a spring coiling before release, a deep breath before singing). When, indeed? When does the fetus' heart begin pumping? I have never inquired.

Does it know, when it's about to start, it will not have a chance to stop? Well, one. Only one.

4

I have never inquired, but I recall the fetus' heart. Its noise, and the tracing. Its double-speed beat syncopated with mine. All that rumor made me feel so blessed: two hearts drumming, one quick—a small humming bird flapping its wings—the other keeping a calm, steadier drone. I suppose that's what 'music of the celestial spheres' signifies.

I remember the strangeness of returning to a single pulse—like the end of a grand party, dining room a quiet battlefield scattered with empty glasses.

5

The intelligence of the heart is nonverbal.

Why do we like to fill it with feelings? Why do we make it tender? It is callous. It has to. There is something of the beast of burden about it. We should feed it hay, give it a drink of water at least. Do we? It depends, like all other organs, on our nourishment, breathing, exercising, moods and emotions.

Yes, but so very little. Sometimes all of a body-and-soul is consumed, all has given up, yet the heart keeps beating. "She has a strong heart," someone comments with a sigh.

The heart goes on.

6

It quits suddenly, and disaster ensues. Not negotiable: that's the very point with the heart. Single-minded, I called it. Way too rigorous.

If it weren't so, we could figure some 'reasonable' compromise. But "the heart has its reasons," a philosopher mused, "of which reason knows nothing". Well said, though how we generally interpret such quote is arguable. We use it to mean the heart produces emotions, affections so powerful they defy logic and common sense.

I am not sure, as with 'lack of reasonability' I intended the heart's idiosyncrat-

ic behavior. It goes on—with commendable obstinacy, reliability, no pay and no reward—until it stops impromptu, like a violinist dropping her bow before the phrase is over, the conductor's baton still lifted in midair.

If a form—any form—of reasoning were possible, we could say: "Take it easy. Slow down. Get some help. Cool off, do not rush, make those gestures smaller. Your biceps aren't what they used to be. Do not feel self-conscious. No one sees you. It's ok. No need to show off."

"Just, please, let me know when you're getting tired. Let's agree on a good time for pausing. Give me notice: I have a couple of things to wrap up. All in all you have done an excellent job. In fact, heart, I am speechless. What would I be without you? Nothing as you know, but it doesn't hurt to repeat it. I am grateful. Just don't drop me too hard, if possible. Yours."

7

As I don't hear my heart, unless I'm strapped to a machine and the nurse switches a button on, my heart doesn't hear me. Positive. It cannot. When I listen to the slushing, smashing and pushing, I know that such mightiness has no room, no time for interference. Its imperviousness, indifference, impenetrability are the secret of its strength, of its tirelessness. Four sealed chambers. A world apart. A Morse alphabet no one understands.

When it frantically accelerates because of an illness, when it seems to skip a beat or it pounds so hard, I fear it will break my chest, when the pulse comes right under skin, it's like someone knocking at the front door while I'm sleeping. I wake up, rush on, but always too late. Someone clearly came by with an important message, but is gone and no note was left on the doormat.

Hearts do what they damn please.

MEET SERIES  
by Emilie Pichot



ow the  
re  
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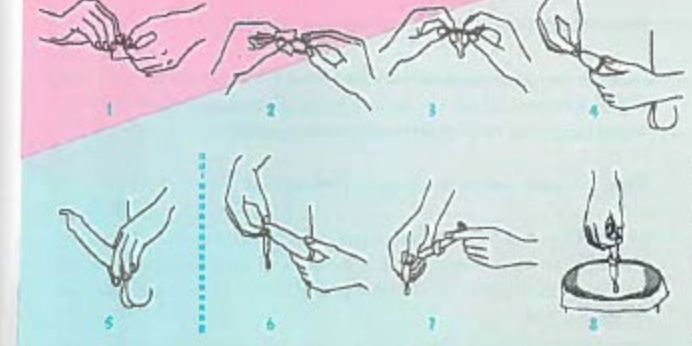
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ake cupo f tea.

RESERVATES  
RESERVATES  
RESERVATES

SESSIONS

in pink strips, not  
laid out on a  
ss consistency of  
his is what I imagine  
re. In contrast the  
cheatin' rashers look more appetising. Their lighter  
colour seems more natural. Perhaps because it's a  
more convincing flesh tone, and each strip has a  
meat-marbled texture and faux fat at its side.

**Jason:** It's not just that Quorn's rashers don't look  
like bacon. They don't look like food. They remind  
me of Play-Doh, the sort of thing only a three-  
year old would be willing to put in their mouth.  
The Cheatin' rashers replicate the shape of a slice  
of back bacon. Like Quorn, they're too thin and  
homogeneous, but at least they're making an effort  
to appear edible.



dition in Japanese culture, of course, but what is  
tain? Paper art in Britain feels really fresh. It has only  
mercially in the past few years, and it's still pretty  
Yt have a huge tradition behind it like origami,  
d to take more risks and experiment freely.

**It putting together the shoes for the shoot? Did  
tion of the actual shoes?** I started off making  
ving the actual shoes in front of me. This was a  
eause I could see exactly how they'd been put  
es in a very different way to fabric, so it was a  
etting the curves right. I'm more attuned to the  
attention to how they've been made

**Art?** At university, I was drawing,  
pretty much anything I could.  
hat I'm now working in one medium exclusively,  
I and perfect edges so I really love the results you  
its limitations but that's part of the challenge.

**I'd like to see you create a paper sculpture. You  
can plait for jeans, dresses, many-sided shapes, and many more.**

myself and complicate things if I can. I approach my work from a fine art  
point of view. I feel more like a sculptor than an illustrator.

**We paid a visit to Conference Room 2, her unconventional living and  
working space. The walls and surfaces around her working area were  
covered in paper in various guises. There were sheets of paper drying  
from experiments with oil on water, Chinese lanterns in fruity forms,  
and a chest full of miscellaneous paper treasures.**

**What would be your dream commission?** My dream commission  
would involve a year-long trip to a hot country with lots of beaches,  
lots of puppies and a very flexible deadline. Failing that, I enjoy any  
project that offers me a new challenge. My main reason for doing  
what I do is to make people smile and give them something out of the  
ordinary to explore.

Lydia Kasumi Shirreff / lydiakasumi.com

## PRIMER RESOLUTION

by Seth Copeland

and when you finally turn away from the local ghost  
call it the embrace the cosmos bullshit phase whatever  
then real honesty  
about what a man is a woman a question  
rumor that hell didn't scan like philandering preachers  
tell you it did hot  
eternal my head tells me its now and  
here though also there  
where a hawk grits a snake in a molar  
of fencepost  
you like this lawful violence something  
sharp exact social physics not ritual  
nothing of spirit to confuse it not the same as the  
dumb boy whose fist chipped your tooth  
one ass smelling gym hour  
years later in cali he  
snapped his own neck because that is the reach  
of this place this world where freedom is a gun  
where empty stores frown blankly  
where his middle name was probably chisholm where  
devil kids spray backwoods  
musk where all else about clichés where  
the lord died for me & then just died where the sheriff is a  
democrat who never votes for them  
where fear makes you someone else  
where you pierced the soil  
where you are pierced

## WHITE KNUCKLES

by Emilie Pichot

:a primer on horror for white people

1.  
every week, one horror film  
  
like pornography  
it elicits a bodily reaction  
  
horror, a verb  
just like the sweat oozing from our palms,  
it becomes  
transforms  
morphs  
  
edmund burke was right,  
"i know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power..."  
  
meaning: the sublime is an aesthetic experience that is terrible and painful  
  
and humbling.  
  
watching horror,  
my ability to empathize grows  
i see the contradictions inside myself  
  
how sometimes i feel threatened  
(a victim) or,  
i only care for myself  
(a villain)  
  
this is what horror film does  
the victim becomes the villain<sup>1</sup> becomes

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<sup>1</sup> Like the young witch who slices her own devastated mother with a cleaver to survive. *The Witch*. Directed by Robert Eggers, A24, 2015.

the victim<sup>2</sup> becomes

makes you question who you call *victim*  
who you call *villain*  
and who you subconsciously cast into those roles

2.  
horror is the sedated monster in our basement  
the one we hide  
the one we secretly feed

(the babadook is us)

“it’s not only in the look<sup>3</sup>

it’s not only in the book”<sup>4</sup>

3.  
horror can open the the door  
and expose sedated monsters

why is the victim always the main character?<sup>5</sup>

there is no such thing as purity

(milk and fruit loops taste better together)<sup>6</sup>

4.  
in this story, we white people are the villains

why do we always feel the need to be the main character?

white pain isn’t universal  
“It’s not over.

It’s just not yours anymore.”<sup>7</sup>

(it never was.)

5.  
whiteness is the villain

that thing you said and can’t forget  
the money i inherited  
the fact we are all racists

whiteness is the villain  
yet often  
portrayed as the main character, the victim, the narrative

or, it’s black face to explore black pain  
without doing the actual work of  
exposing whiteness<sup>8</sup>

we, villains  
sometimes empathy is impossible but  
our ears can listen  
our minds can believe<sup>9</sup>

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2 “How many viewers who delighted in the uninhibited fire dance at the end of the film gave even a second thought to the brief glimpse of Native men at the beginning?” Cornum, Lou. “White Magic.” *The New Inquiry*, 5 Feb. 2018, [thenewinquiry.com/white-magic](http://thenewinquiry.com/white-magic). Accessed 14 February 2018.

3 Racism affects the entire production of the film, not just the characters we play and empathize with.

4 Racism is not a thing of the past; not only in history textbooks.

5 If whiteness is the status quo and most main characters of horror are white, then whose pain are we learning to empathize with?

6 Unlike the preference of Rose who is shown consuming them very separately on her large white bed. *Get Out*. Directed by Jordan Peele, Universal Pictures, 2017.

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7 Says protagonist Melanie, a young black girl, to Sgt Eddie Parks, a white man. *The Girl with All the Gifts*. Directed by Colm McCarthy, Warner Brothers Pictures, 2016.

8 *Candyman* centers a white woman’s experience of discovering that Candyman is actually real. *Candyman*. Directed by Bernard Rose, Candyman Films, PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, and Propaganda Films, 1992.

9 Jake: [Jake whispers] Candyman will get me.

Helen Lyle: Candyman isn’t real. He’s just a story. You know, like Dracula. Or... Or Frankenstein. A bad man took his name so that he could scare us. But now that’s he’s locked up everything’s going to be okay.”

*Candyman*. Directed by Bernard Rose, Candyman Films, PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, and Propaganda Films, 1992.

6.  
the end of this horror film  
will be open and endless (another franchise)<sup>10</sup>  
unless the villain dies

dies out  
and/or  
chooses social death<sup>11</sup>

we white people need to  
dig out our own graves with hushed voices<sup>12</sup>  
to leave some air for breathing  
and,

exeunt.

we need to  
cut the cobwebs of excuses we wrap around ourselves  
let the new story be written by the people we have demonized  
and burn down this haunted White House<sup>13</sup>  
before we all turn into ghosts.

7.  
every week, a horror

## TALLY

by John Sibley Williams

Another penny for the swear jar.

Another garden of lit cigarette butts  
burning some life into a dead lawn.

Think: fireflies to night.

Think of a round bit of neon  
so far down the tracks  
it looks like a train  
is coming.

Try to remember the last time you saw a train  
& didn't wait until the last second to leap.

How beer bottles pop & scatter  
beneath all that movement.  
How coins flatten.

I don't know if others still have their fathers

or if all houses inside us open  
to a hallway of closed doors.

Another penny. Then a dime

down the well to see if wishes  
erupt from the deeper places  
our mothers forbade us play.

Perhaps it depends on the wish.

10 Like another Black man murdered by US. *Night of the Living Dead*. Directed by George Romero, Image Ten, Laurel Group, Market Square Productions, Off Color Films, 1968.

11 Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. Harvard University Press, 1985.

12 John Krasinski's *A Quiet Place* is about white people's fears of saying the wrong thing, perhaps unintentionally. Wortham, Jenna and Wesley Morris. "We Watch Whiteness". Still Processing. New York Times, 26 Apr 2018.

13 The racist classic film *Birth of a Nation* by DW Griffith was the first film to be screened at the White House.

## CREATION MYTH

*by Dustin Stephens*

Last night, i saw the sun arc  
through lazy air and rousing cheers.  
Slippery still with spit and  
captain morgan, before it sunk  
to the slick wood table, only to be rejected  
once again into air. The room  
hangs silent. The orange opportunity circles  
its hoop and sinks  
into the awaiting parting veil  
of soft strata sweeping the bronze  
sky contained only by red plastic.

Last night, i saw the tide  
slide in through the screen door,  
hesitate at the light,  
then shuffle back into the cave  
outside, knocking the cover off  
the ceiling lamp on its  
way out.

Last night, i got close with the Brita filter.

Last night, i saw vomit  
stalactite from hair, before  
dripping, between knees, to  
the hawaiian-pattern carpet.

Last night, i saw a star born  
beneath an elm tree—always dropping  
clusters of pollen into cups held  
loose between knees—then  
fade back into an ember,  
into a flicker,  
into black.

## IN THE SPACE

*by A. M. Brant*

Between us there could be a garden:  
enough distance for the Wolf River  
to rush to touch your face  
I want it to be swamp I want trees  
knee deep in mud  
you are underneath:  
sometimes, when I am standing by the window  
when it is night with the kitchen light still on  
behind me, I pretend there is noise  
of a drawer opening, a spoon dropping. How far  
does sound echo / How light can slip  
inside but will never outline your back while you sleep ever  
again will never be your shadow touching my  
shadow touching me never again  
between us there is not even absent light.

MEET SERIES 1  
by Emilie Pichot







## CONTRIBUTORS

*Aaron Garretson* is a fan of inclement weather. He wrote “Sinking” as an homage to all the different lives we almost live.

Learn more about him [here](#).

*A. M. Brant* teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh and women’s and gender studies at Carlow University. She lives in Pittsburgh.

*Andrew Spiess* is busy filling his apocalypse bunker with canned laughter. Also, his work can be found in a handful of publications.

You can look up some of his writing at [imprintent.org](http://imprintent.org) or follow him on Twitter: [@andrewspiess](https://twitter.com/andrewspiess).

*C. Kubasta* celebrates each major publication with a new tatt; someday she hopes to be a labyrinth of signifiers, utterly opaque. Follow her [@CKubastaThePoet](https://twitter.com/CKubastaThePoet).

*Dustin Stephens* has been in college for three years and been to fewer college parties. This poem concerns one of them.

His [other poems](#) aren’t about parties.

*Emilie Pichot’s* work scratches itches to dismantle violent power structures, poking holes into them until they leak.

Follow her at [slowcirculation.tumblr.com](http://slowcirculation.tumblr.com).

*J. Mutis* is from Colombia, but now lives in New York. *Lust* was written to understand her feelings, flush out her emotions, and fight against her most self-destructive impulses.

You can find more about her writing [here](#) and [here](#).

*Jaime Zuckerman’s* parents often lost her. Now an adult, she’s always looking for an escape

route and never says goodbye before disappearing.

*John Sibley Williams* is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize) and *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize).

You can find more about his writing [here](#) and buy his books [here](#).

*Katherine Fallon* would prefer not to.

You can find her latest publication [here](#), and buy her chapbook [here](#).

*Mitchell Glazier* is an MFA candidate at Columbia University. His work is concerned with sugar daddies and God.

*Patricia Connolly* is a poet and sociology professor living in Chicago. She received her MFA from Notre Dame. She aspires to be a recluse.

*Robin Wyatt Dunn* was born in Wyoming in 1979. He is a graduate student in creative writing at the University of New Brunswick, Canada.

*Sarah Lilius* lives in Northern Virginia with one husband, two sons, and one cat. Check out her [website](#) to learn more about the poet.

*Seth Copeland* is the founding editor of [petrichor](#), and currently teaches in the Oklahoma City metro. Follow him [@SethTCopeland](https://twitter.com/SethTCopeland).

*Toti O’Brien* is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. Take ‘Core Questions’ as a casual impro with very ostinato accompaniment. More of her work [here](#) and [here](#).

*V. S. Ramstack* is a Pisces, a selective extrovert, and an avid crier. Besides poetry, she enjoys cats, flowers, and checking out way too many books at the library. She received her MFA from Columbia College Chicago.

