

Cover Art: KAREN BOISSONNEAULT-GAUTHIER

VINE LEAVES
Literary Journal

ISSUE #13

Featuring

TOM SHEEHAN ~ CHRISTOPHER DEWAN ~ KATIE LADEW
J.I. KLEINBERG ~ ALLEN FORREST ~ LIS ANNA-LANGSTON

Vine Leaves rings in 2015 with fresh perspective, fresh opportunities, and fresh talent.

The New Year is always a special time for the Vine Leaves staff. Not only the birth month of our Journal three years ago, but also an annual opportunity to start fresh.

Fresh perspective. Fresh opportunity. Fresh talent.

As we kick off 2015, our team is busy looking at ways to make Vine Leaves Literary Journal bigger, fresher, and more strategic, while continuing its mandate to foster a love of the arts — for all ages.

It starts here, with Issue 13.

In addition to the usual buffet of outstanding literary submissions from across the globe, we're thrilled to feature the work of budding new artists. Inspired by a novel study, a Grade 9 class from a U.S. school submitted their vignettes to us. We loved them all. So much so, we've published them here in the first of what will be a regular section of the Journal, *Blooming Vine Leaves*.

As you settle in to enjoy the incredible talent tucked between the beautifully-designed pages of Issue 13, we encourage you to raise a toast to those artists—both young and old—who have taken a leap and shared their talent with you.

Wishing you all the best in 2015!

Cover Photograph by Karen Boissonneault-Gauthier

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THE MOUNTAIN *by J. J. Kleinberg*

the mountain

bled

BURGUNDY

PARASOLS

LIPSTICK

AND LAVENDER

cerise
evening

every stone

crease

neon-blue
shadow

FEEL *by J. I. Kleinberg*

feel

the clouds

Fully
dark

And
deep,

the shadowy
flood

OF HEAVY

quiet

STRAWBERRY DAUGHTER

by Zvezdana Rashkovich

“Sweet strawberry, just like your name. Your father named you well.” Mama’s face could hold two opposing emotions simultaneously. It was a talent, Jagoda realized a long time ago. There it was now. Intense sorrow. Childlike glee. In those days everything was simple.

Safe like a caterpillar in its cocoon, Jagoda’s entire self glowed with inner light, lit by her mother’s unconditional love. She basked like those sun worshippers on the beaches, greedily absorbing all of it. Sometimes, Jagoda worried she might have caused her mother’s sunken cheeks and sagging face, and over the years that slight dimming of aquamarine in mama’s eyes. Perhaps she had drained all the life out of her mother with the incessant, pulsating raw need for love.

Jagoda passed her pink tongue over her lips and tasted salt. Her body contracted and she moaned. Mama.

Gone now. A sniper found her on her way to the piazza one morning. She was going to make a spinach pie and needed, wanted, to go.

“I am not afraid sweet Jagoda, do not worry dearest.” A tired smile showed her dimples. “We have to eat.” She pulled on her green coat, ten years old, a gift from another era. Worn out and thin now. On her head, a headscarf. A profusion of faded wildflowers framed her gaunt face. Sewn by her expert hands, like a garden she had tended once but now was no more.

“To ward off the brain inflammation, Jagoda.” She tucked the scarf inside the coat collar and shook a finger at her worried daughter. She left their flat on the third floor of a socialist conceived monstrosity with a firm tread in her dead husband’s black boots.

They found her later, on the street, the pretty scarf stiff with blood, a bullet hole in the back of her head. Green coat spread around her and her body curled inwards tight like a child’s, like a wilted chestnut leaf in autumn, like a baby suckling on a swollen breast.

Spinach and apples, some fresh baked bread she had found, what a victory. Mama must have been so proud

thinking what a nice lunch she would make. Flaccid spinach leaves scattered around her body, apples rolled off into the gutter, mayhem on the streets. Many dead that day and the city wailed long into the night.

After she buried her mother in damp soil crawling with earthworms, after weeping relatives had gone home in their black scarves and three-piece suits scented with mothballs and fear, Jagoda sat down by her mother’s small mound. In the distance, the rumble of war drifted over her and through her and disappeared into the Balkan Mountains where nymphs and dark things roamed.

She has a package. Wildflowers tinted with her mother’s dried blood tied into a bundle like rabbit ears. Jagoda unfolds the knot carefully then touches each item with the tip of a broken fingernail. An apple, brown and pungent now after many days—bruised and pungent but she bites into it and closes her eyes. With mud-coated hands she tears pieces of stale bread into big chunks and stuffs them into her mouth. It is raining now and soon her long hair is wet and dark against her coat. She leans against her mother’s grave and eats all the bread and the apples, chews and chews on the hard crust and swallows hastily.

She can’t taste anything at all and the rain is thick and cold now and the screams of the dead and dying linger in the wet sky.

BEN AILING

by Dave Barrett

Ben Ailing sat hunched over the wheel of his Chrysler Gran Fury, inching his way down a long gravel alley in a rundown section of the Republic South Hills—past boarded-up brick houses and junked washers and dryers—looking for a sign of something familiar—wondering how in the hell he’d wound up here of all places. He’d thought it had something to do with his boys. But then he’d remembered that all three had left town for the winter: Will finishing his senior year of college across state, Ben Jr. trading futures on the Nikkei market in far-off Singapore, and, Jerry, his youngest, playing guitar with a rock n’ roll band somewhere in Texas.

It was the second time in as many months he'd "gotten lost" driving around Republic like this, and he felt a little wave of panic welling up with the realization he might be experiencing the same early onset of dementia that had plagued his own mother near the end of her life.

Ben hit the brakes midway down the alley and backed up the Chrysler. Something had caught his eye through a gate hanging wide-open at the back of one of the houses. Leaving the engine idling, he stubbed his cigarette and stepped out of the car to investigate.

"I'll be damned," Ben muttered.

In the waning light of a December afternoon, Ben identified the strange scurrying blotches of movement on the inch of fresh snow that blanketed the little backyard lawn and had first caught his attention.

"Pups!"

A half-dozen or more newborn puppies, littered across the yard, blindly nosing through the snow like survivors of a plane wreck.

Ben stepped up to the open gate, looking for the bitch, when a frail old woman wearing an oversized man's parka appeared from behind a wooden shed and called out to him.

"Can you help me, mister? The mother dog refuses these puppies . . . she bares her teeth and snaps at me . . . she's right here in the shed. . ."

The old woman's eyes were glassy with tears.

Ben entered the yard, and told her he would help.

He asked her where she wanted the dog to be with the pups.

"Right here in the shed," the old woman answered. "There isn't any room in the house. . ."

The bitch was lying on her side on a tattered sleeping bag just inside the open door of the shed. Ben thought she was a cross between a Lab and a Doberman. She

bared her teeth and growled at him.

Ben spotted an old San Francisco 49ers sweatshirt atop a stack of boxes and asked if he could borrow it.

"Yes," the old woman said. "Use anything you like. . ."

Ben wrapped the thick sweatshirt around his left hand. Scooping the nearest pup out of the snow, he allowed the bitch to clamp down on his wrapped hand while he forced the first pup onto its mother's teat. He waited patiently until the dog slackened her bite on his hand, and then repeated the process until all seven pups were reunited with their mother.

"That'll keep you busy," Ben said.

When he stroked the top of the dog's head with his unwrapped hand, she no longer growled back.

The old woman had left the yard, and returned now with a small change purse in her hands. She offered to pay Ben for his services—her gnarled fingers fumbling to unfurl a ten dollar bill. Ben refused. She asked him if he would like any food or drink, and he refused that as well.

"I'd best be going," he said. "Forecast is for a good three inches of the white stuff tonight."

Ben returned to the idling Chrysler. The first swirling flakes of the forecasted storm were already drifting out of the darkening sky. He'd intended on asking the old woman for directions, but his own sense of direction had returned while working with the pups.

As he drove toward the downtown and the work awaiting him there—the restaurant accounts to balance, employees and customers to placate, deadlines to meet—Ben's mind wandered back to those pups worming through the snow in search of their mother.

And he thought that while this world was indeed one struggle after another, it is not without its joys.

SHE CENTRES THE URN ON THE MANTLE

by Kate LaDew

she centers the urn on the mantle
and watches its reflection in the mirror,
some people take up more space dead than alive



PHOTOGRAPHY *by Lis Anna-Langston*

*Kate La Deru***SO YOU READ IN A BOOK,**

someone smarter than us, asking,
if you cut a limb from a tree
planted it in the ground
and grew a perfect replica,
when the old tree dies
would the new one be the same?
and all I can think of
is this brand new baby tree
in an old body
looking down at a replica of itself
decomposing in the dirt—no—
this new tree would have problems

THE DISTANCE

we got the contract Thursday night,
Friday morning
the two of us put on our surveying hats
over our thinking caps
and measured the distance between right and wrong,
it's a lot longer than you'd think

BEST BUDDIES

by

Allen Forrest





LONDON NOIR *by Allen Forrest*

FIRST WRINKLE *by Lydia Padellec*

1

In front of the camera
your stomach pulled
You cut
your breath
a fly
shorn of its wings
Your smile quivers
under the weight of sky

2

The lines tell
the story of your grandmother
woman in fields
factory worker
Your face wears
many faces
that you try to erase
with creams

3

Mouth half-open
barely a smile
by the tip of the index
I slide on the red
and in a flash, out of nowhere
on the right side
a wrinkle, the first letter
of my own story

THE 100TH FLOOR

by Christopher De Wan

In all his days as a window-washer, he had never once seen a door on the outside of the hundredth floor, until that day.

They'd started at the roof, as always, plunging their small platform over the edge and then riding it down, little by little. They enjoyed each other's company, but even more, they enjoyed the silence, the silence and the squeaking sounds as they worked over the glass. They enjoyed their own never-ending rhythm, fanning in graceful arcs, fanning and dunking and drying, complementing one other, filling in the limits of each other's reach.

They almost never looked inside the windows. The people inside were murky shadows, like ghosts or underpaintings or characters in an old, washed-out silent film. Their shapes distorted when the windows were doused, then wiped dry, doused, then wiped dry, and the men on the scaffold noticed the people inside only sometimes, the way one notices shells on the ocean floor, revealed after a passing wave, then hidden, then forgotten.

They loosened the ties on the pulleys and lowered themselves, and started again, window after window, floor after floor.

The sun was an arm's reach away.

The wind was cruel.

They brought with them their own weather. On cloudy days, their scaffolding would sometimes seem to ascend above the clouds into a sunshine that no one on the ground could see. On sunny days, such as this day, the window-washers would sometimes disappear into a small cloud that

hovered over their platform, perhaps fashioned from the water they carried and from the heat of their own breath.

It was from such a cloud, and dangling from a heaven-high roof, in an otherwise unremarkable moment, that he saw it—the door, high above him, high and to the right: a glossy red door with a brass knob that reflected the sunlight into his eyes, a heavy wooden door set into the vertical plane of steel and glass, an impossible door.

The other men were already unfurling the platform down the building, working their way down and bringing the door farther out of reach, and he knew then that if he didn't reach for it, didn't at least try, then he'd never have a chance again, and he'd never know what was on its other side; and without a word to his colleagues (for they preferred to work in silence), he stepped off the platform, and they never did understand why.

AQUARIUM

by Cathy S. Ulrich

The girl thinks she came out of the sea, like Aphrodite or a Japanese movie monster. Her parents have shown her pictures of her mother in the hospital holding a wrinkle-faced infant that they claim is her, but she knows better. She is a changeling child, a foundling.

She has fish lips: large and puckering.

The other children laugh at her because of her lips, and because of the braces on her legs, the bobbing of her stride.

She knows. Her legs were never meant for land.

The aquarium by the docks is her favorite place, filled with multi-colored fishes. She goes there after school and the fish greet her.

Fish-girl, fish-girl, fish-girl, swarming to the glass to see her. She admires their bounding movements and their delicate fins.

She nears the glass unevenly, her eyes leaking tears that moisten her lips. The saltwater taste reminds her of the sea. She presses her mouth to the glass, leaving an imprint in the shape of a fish.

TO INFINITY

by Sarah Mack

There is a moment as your beloved dog, your one true always-friend and anchor through the shallow horrors of high school—there is a moment as he lies on the exam room floor in which the breath is punched from your chest. He could have stayed if you had disguised the vitamins a little better, mashed them up into peanut butter, mixed the concoction with the soft food you switched him over to when dry no longer enticed. He loves you. He would have stayed. Couldn't you have strengthened him for just a few more months?

His eyes, soft and rheumy, find you. He loves you even now, but you cannot breathe around the truth as it drags its shining claws down the skin of your chest. You're bleeding all over your shirt. You want, you need, him to live.

The vet places an old green towel, ragged at the ends, between your always-friend and the linoleum, and then leaves you to say your goodbyes in peace. When you step away from the wall and call him back, everything will move forward.

In this moment, you are the only thing standing between your beloved and the end. That's what it feels like, even as you bleed all over truth's ivory claws. You feel one scrape against a rib and almost inhale against the pain.

Beneath your bones, however, in the deepest, warmest part of you: your beloved always-friend leaves a pearl where he knew it would be safest. (He was always safe with you, until now.) His pearl is hair to a rhino's horn—smooth, shining, everything truth's claws are not. And even as his muzzle turned white, as his muscles weakened, as his hips failed, the pearl grew until it reached the size of his heart.

(Infinite.)

He sees you. His lips curl back and his tongue lolls out; he grins from his place on the linoleum. His tail thumps once, twice, to say he's happy to be in this odd little room with you. He has always seen you, always known you. Your throat closes, but you step away from the wall. You inhale around his pearl of truth, around the love that gives until his quiet dying breath.

To the end, until forever, you will take care of him.

BUT MEMORY

by Alex Sebel

I called myself a fact, in that room, ceiling lined with slivered light. And she told me, repeated it, but not in those words. So I did, my tongue a latch, words as spit, my brain clenching toward my eyes, I could see it, I know I could. And she said, but memory? Mine or theirs? I thought it was a valid question. But I knew that it wasn't mine, because I couldn't possibly know my self, forced to give to mouths, disgusting openings, to do with what they would. But I just want them to know me, I said. She looked at me, over her glasses, the ceiling's lights striping the lens. And you don't care how? After awhile, I said yes. But I was lying. I could only know so much about myself.

CROSSTOWN *by Clinton Van Inman*



VAN INMAN

I HOPE THIS IS YOU

by Jesiah Spence

“Yeah, hey—Is this the voicemail of Tom Crowley? The Tom Crowley who went to Seymore High School in Fernridge? I already called this number and left a couple of voicemails, so it may not be you, but I just wanted to leave another message in case it is you and you just missed my other messages.

“Anyway, this is Michael Harris. Remember little Mikey Harris? I sat behind you in geometry. Remember Mrs. Tennyson’s geometry, fourth period? Sure, you remember me, probably. We used to talk about The Simpsons. Fun times.

“So, yeah, I just thought I’d call and see what you’re up to these days, see how life is treating you. I heard you went to med school and became a cardiologist or something. Good for you. And didn’t you marry Mary Swinson? She was always a real looker. And so nice to everyone, even me.

“It sounds like life’s been treating you real well. That’s great. Really great. Couldn’t have happened to a better guy.

“I got married too, right out of high school, but it didn’t last very long. We probably shouldn’t have ever gotten married in the first place, but she was pregnant, so it seemed like the right thing to do. I never did have time to go to school, what with being a dad and all. The kid must be eight or nine now, but Lyla won’t let me see him.

“Anyway, that’s enough about me. What I really want to hear about is what it’s like to live out in Shoreline. From what I’ve heard, you’ve got yourself a really sweet place out there. Swimming pool and everything.

“I’ve just been moving around between different apartments. Never could scrape the money for a

house, but I do alright. A lot of times, I just stay with friends or with my brother. He’s a real good guy, but I haven’t been able to get a hold of him lately...

“So, yeah, that’s me. Living the life. Working when I can. You know how hard it is to get a job sometimes. Well, maybe you don’t... Anyway, I do odd jobs mostly. But hey, that’s how I like it really. No suit and tie for me. A rolling stone gathers no dirt and whatnot.

“Okay, this message is probably getting too long. I know you’re probably a busy guy. I’ve got to get going myself. I’ve gotta meet up with a guy about a loan. Nothing big. I’ve just been a bit short lately.

“Really what I wanted to say is you and me should get together sometime. Maybe grab a drink, talk about old times. I’m free pretty much any time, day or night. You just let me know when.

“So, okay, yeah. I hope this is the right Tom Crowley I’m talking to. Give me a call back whenever. I’ll probably give you a ring again if I don’t hear from you in a couple of days.

“Great talking to you.”

COULD HAVE BEEN US

by T. L. Sherwood

At a different conference, we would have kissed. The way you stared at me while I read my poetry! Salacious as fingertips, I felt your need gripping my neck and caressing my thigh. During a break, your desire would have urged me towards your lips. I could have glimpsed your tender side while you snickered at mine.

Six months later, I would go to your AWP panel and sit in the back. You’d attend my off-site reading where I would avoid your eyes. After-

wards, you'd commandeer the barstool beside me and ask why my hands shook.

"Us," I'd admit.

The post-applause rounds of beer chasing shots you'd buy for the house would lend me courage and I'd suppress my common limitations and normal sense to kiss you again. You'd chuckle like the imp you're not and tell me you know better than to get involved with a fellow writer. I would agree it was nuts.

In your hotel room overlooking the harbour, we would make love that night. The next morning, still tipsy from wine and lust, we'd stand naked on a freezing cold balcony. We'd declare ourselves legends, imagining our voices being heard by the whales to the east but not by our spouses.

We are not a likely couple, aesthetically or artistically. In our work, we'd hint; then later in interviews, we'd sheepishly concede our affair had begun that weekend—something for our close friends and biographers to puzzle over for years.

And once there had been one thousand and eleven skirmishes, pleas, and tears, we'd have our final fight. It would occur a decade from now in London. We'd be there for a seminar and in our shared room at the B&B, you'd want me to leave my husband or I would demand you divorce your wife. The pain of us not being together would be too much. We'd agree we have to end the misery, but remain split on how to do that. Stubborn and hurt, we'd storm, rage, and grind against each other under musty sheets as our lust rewound and at dawn, well before my requested wakeup call, I'd depart.

In an alternative universe, we could meet at a college mixer and not feel a thing. You'd see me as a pack of vessels and connective tissue, all harboring the alcoholic disease. I, an archi-

tect-to-be, would not think you worthy of a shack, let alone being the inspiration for the next Taj Mahal. If we ended up living close to each other, our children would become friends, but not us. We would be people who slip past each other at block party barbecues and never speak during cocktail hours. When we attended PTA meetings or charity fundraisers, we wouldn't linger, let alone entertain silly "what if" thoughts.

No, it's only at this conference, in this small lakeside town that our eyes lock and I consider that first kiss. I shrug, smile, and to the list of "could have been," I add "us."

THE NEW CURRENCY

by Alex Sobel

I fumbled the new currency that was shoveled over our faceless neighbors, spilt colour and poorly guarded opinions. I shivered, you shivered, the Chicago wind was what they say. I shook my head, or what I thought was my head, each step like I was walking up a flight of stairs, the lining of my nose corroded, stripped from the skin to the other skin to whatever rests beneath that. You reached for something in your coat and I could see your thumb, a wart resting against your nail, blood on the joint, the color revealing definition, the beautiful valleys of your skin, highlighting the rarity as if it needed the blood to be real. I smiled, but you weren't looking. I was strong, I kept my lips turned. It was then. It was enough.

CLEAN MOUTHS

by Brooke Di Gia

You succumbed to the drink again;
I put the washing machine on
rinse.



PHOTOGRAPHY *by Lis Anna-Langston*

1500-APP

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13

PHOTOGRAPHY *by Lis Anna-Langston*

LIFE ACCORDING TO EUCLID

by Alan Meyrowitz

Were I to make of life a square,
one corner mine to cower in
curled if need be, fetal there
I may dream of hexagons
for places more to hide within
but dare not hope for octagons—
extravagance, a sin.

WHATEVER ELSE IT'S STILL THE BLUES

by Vladimir Swirynsky

The future is here, clearly
marked so we know it's industrial
strength rat poison. It's also
noodles & day old coffee reheated,
an expired gift certificate,
the second Tuesday of last week
waving its arms to get our attention—

The future is plotting,
making sure that we miss
the bus by ten seconds,
while reaching in our pockets
in the dark for our car keys
a twenty falls out,
a picture of Hugh Hefner.

What scares us,
what we fear is that the future
is a wicked child dropped
off on our doorstep.

This is our lost son,
the heart wanting
a tour-de-force of misery,
a reason to sing
the prison yard blues.

BEG, BORROW, OR STEAL

by P. C. Vandall

She smells of Paris while I permeate
Pine sol and orange peels. She wears pouty
pink lips, opera gloves and matching heels.
She wants to borrow my husband again
but I've lent her eggs, milk and honey, watched

her take the paper and slips of bleeding
hearts from the front walk. She's in a low-cut
blouse, an even shorter skirt and her breasts
play peek-a-boo in the thin-taut creases
that gather at the pearly open gates

of buttons. I can hear his feet padding
down the white spiral staircase so I slam
the door. I turn and unbutton my brown
flannel shirt, pop open my full support
bra and shimmy out of my high-waisted

jeans down to my tummy-tucking, slightly
yellowed granny underwear. The doorbell
chimes and I fling panties to the dog pile.

I saunter to him slopping side dishes
of cellulite, jiggling scars, and trailing

veins of purple iris. I am moving
like coppery ferns sashaying in wind,
whispering moon-blanching words to a blushing
sun. I spare him the pounding of my heart
and let it beat in—the knotty French door.

ASH

by Francine Marie Telf

what fire tastes like,
once its heart has chilled.

It rides November
like a pack of windy crows,
scattering wider and wider . . .

Where does it settle?
Street corners. Rooms.

Unastonished,
we walk on dead stallions,
wipe hair that held sun
from dusty shelves.

TICKET SELLER AT ZACULEU

by Maraya Lora Koxahn



POSTCARDS WRITTEN WITH THE OTHER HAND

by Daniel Roy Connelly

dear Ma

This morning I saw an amazing set-to at the Colosseum between a woman in gladiator get-up and the old-timer punching tickets on the way in. The way they were going at it made me think back to Uncle Joe's door-to-door acting classes in the 1970s. It's all theatre here Ma, and there are worse ways to spend your time, Your son,

dear Ma

The sun set over the Forum tonight and the sky was red like blood, it reminded me of the time when granddad shot my poodle clean off the winners' podium at the annual show, best thing that ever happened to me and likely to the poodle too, yes that was an amazing sunset, I'm off for pizza, Your son,

dear Ma

Don't be shocked but there was a traffic accident today and no, it was not me. She must have been a hundred, she got hit by a taxi crossing a crazy piazza and she fell over, I've no doubt she was in pain because she screamed and screamed until her mouth was all messed up and her face shone like a dinner bell from the old days, it's a crazy town, Ma, Your son,

dear Ma

The ex-mayor who is even shorter than he looks and is a fascist and who may or may not have a swastika tattoo on his person, he never takes his shirt off, says say Hi! Your son,

dear Ma

Hello from the Palatine, ancient Rome's Beverley Hills! I'm standing in the ruins of a villa that

used to be THE hot ticket, there's a plane flying directly overhead as I write this and it's covered in tattoos and I'm thinking of you as its nose pierces the clouds, Your son,

dear Ma

There's a lot of talk of food out here—and you know me and food—on every corner I hear about the size of artichokes or the right cream for the right eggs, or how a horse steak takes a couple of minutes longer in the pan and that's without even going to the supermarket where hundreds gather to fondle food and exchange recipes they have copied from the many cookery shows, it's not all tomato sauce and tiramisu, Ma, but I hope nonetheless you're enjoying yours, Your son,

dear Ma

From the floor of the Sistene Chapel I hope all is well with you. It's everything they say it is, religion and art on a ceiling, I keep looking up and down from ceiling to postcard and every 20 seconds they let go a taped shushing sound that fills the chapel and everyone pipes down for 10 seconds before starting up again with the usual Sistene Chapel chit-chat. Say Hi to Dandelion Jo, tell him he'd like it out here, smoke is cheap, girls are pretty, no one speaks English, Your son,

dear Ma

The police are lined up on one side of the piazza looking very serious in their rubber boots, tight ultramarine uniforms, Ray Bans and stubble with their hands twitching against their truncheons, they fit right in here at Gay Pride and I reckon you would too, Your son,

ADRIFT

by Simon Kewin

Gibson had been adrift in the ocean for fifteen days when he started to see the flowers.

On most of the days since the Ocean Flyer went down, his little orange life-raft had stood becalmed, the eye of a hush filling the whole world. On some days the winds whipped the sea into sudden mountain ranges. Peaks he ascended and crashed down and ascended for hours on end. Long, grueling hours when each moment looked to be his last.

He'd clung on, survived both calm and storm. In all that time one thing remained unchanged. He had no idea where in the wide ocean he was.

The life-raft carried the essentials to keep him alive. A solar water purification unit, dried food, a fishing line, flares. But no radio, no GPS. All that had gone with the Ocean Flyer. The exact events were a blur. The perils of single-handed sailing. Some fever had overcome him two weeks into his voyage and for maybe another week he'd drifted, barely conscious, course unknown. Then a bad storm had come up and broken the back of his brave yacht. He'd barely made it to the life-raft. A time later—hours or days—the light had roused him and he found, to his surprise, that he was weak and parched and sunburned, but alive.

Still, he knew his chances of survival were slim. He'd always known the risks of being out here. That was part of the point. The sea was callous, indifferent, yet it made him feel alive. But it owed him nothing, no consideration, no grace. His life or death meant nothing to it. He'd put to sea accepting that, welcoming that.

Since the Flyer went down he'd seen no one else. No ship, no plane to fire his flares for. He could row, but in which direction? The sun and stars

told him where north was but they didn't tell him where the nearest land lay. It might be over the horizon or a hundred miles distant. Or a thousand.

Then he'd seen the distant bloom of red on the green-blue of the ocean. Unable to make out what it was he'd rowed that way. Within an hour he was floating amid a field of bobbing flowers. Red, plastic flowers. He plucked one from the water, smiling at its bright colours, its moulded simplicity. He'd heard of similar things. Cargos of plastic ducks lost over board, set free to flotilla the seas, going where they would on the world's currents.

He made up his mind. The red flowers stretched in a snaking drift to the western horizon. They were a line. A pathway to take.

Perhaps something lay at the other end of that road. And perhaps it didn't. But he would find out. Picking up his oar, Gibson began to paddle his way along the road of bobbing flowers.

DEAR JANE ...

by L. L. Hill

In the ice of a tear rigid on her cheek, amber flames flicked sparks of derision. Rising with the smoke was the mocking pity of everyone that had already known. Flames wrapped their scorn around wilted petals and rust fringed leaves. On their altar lay the paper, inked words writhing with their dismissal.

MY ELIOT

by Nick D'Annunzio Jones

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Lies the couch

BUBBLE
DAY

*by Margo
Lemieux*



Tom Sheehan

CAMP COFFEE

When we fished the Pine River, Ed LeBlanc, Walter Ruszkowski, and I, for thirty-some years, coffee was the glue; the morning glue, the late evening glue, even though we'd often unearth our beer from a natural cooler in early evening, a foot down in damp earth. Coffee, camp coffee for your information, has a ritual. It is thick, it is dark, it is pot-boiled over a squaw-pine fire, it is strong, it is enough to wake the demon in you, to stoke the cheese and late-night pepperoni. First man up makes the fire, second man the coffee; but into that pot has to go fresh eggshells to hold the grounds down, give coffee a taste of history, a sense of place. That means at least one egg be cracked open for its shells, usually in the shadows and glimmers of false dawn. I suspect that's where scrambled eggs originated, from some camp like ours, settlers rushing westerly, lumberjacks hungry, hoboes lobbying for breakfast. So, coffee has made its way into poems, gatherings, memories, a time and thing not letting go, like old stories where the temporal voices have gone downhill and out of range, yet hang on for the mere asking.

DOUBT AND SHADOWS

We are judges first, even as we wait for death, disaster, calamity, to enact a rule, a new kind of judgment—when the end comes, wears out at the last stop. We enact laws to fit death, crime of any sort, make a rule a law. Doubt is like a shadow; shadows give way to new grayness escaping light, a threat from the east of dawn, doubt too, sitting there in shadows, akin, sharing a dark brotherhood.

THE TRUST OF CIVILIZED MEN

by Robin Wyatt Dunne

The word *sex* comes from a root to cut, as in
sec tion.

Sec tor

Sax on (for their knives)

Sex cuts, to the quick:

Quicker than anything, but slow, multiform
perusal of this aspect of now, illuminated in
awareness through the senses, but more impor-
tantly through the imagination, the same thing
that gave Einstein his $E=MC^2$ gave us sex, the
riotous music of civilization, the pink delight
murdering the self in its quest for surrender:

Nothing like it, right folks?

Separate it out and fill it in, color it in with your
crayon, the shape of sex like the shape of the
paper doll, diaphanous and cool, intersecting leg
on leg, and arm on arm, protecting one another
with their counterspiral toward a destiny within
the bin, after the play hour's out.

Oh why must I never shout, why must I never
clout the rube the lout upon the head, my sweet

For it is already here, the end

My end

Not French but closer than all African heritage
grassier than her cunt, fire alive underneath the
religion of music is this stampede of life:

Terra terrae hurrah hurray and so we'll say it's
pushed right to the edge:

Right to the edge Silverstein, look you into the
bliss, and kiss this fist we lift now to your mouth:
my sidewalk never ends.

My sidewalk never ends, it shouts. Trap the
spout and clasp her doubt within you, lest the
fervor or the whimper be expanded to a deeper
pull and mull, you mule; lift us now out of this
path, baby, lift us out:

Bullfight slow. This undertow of civilization
walks alone so walk with me; we'll swim. And
through the din of the city I'll whisper to you all
the things I never were, no never were a fireman
or cat, nor band leader or spat-wearing salesman
but this drifter, only your professor, and I profess,
as you've guessed, my burnt sienna song, it's low
but may it be long for you:

RESPIRE

by Cristina Juliana Burlacu

She listens to Billy Idol
While driving
And Billy Idol screams in the car
Stories about how speed can fulfill desires.
She doesn't know a midway.
It's either that or the silence.
She drives and he screams
She drives and he screams
Until he'd be driving and she'd be screaming.
She forgets about the coffee stain on her jeans
About the wind too sharp
The rain pouring down her open window
About the brown teddy-bear in the car seat
behind her
And the infinity of red brake lights in front.
She drives
Screaming
Screaming
Screaming
Until it all goes silent.

THURSDAY ON THE HILLS

by Michael Skirw



WITHOUT YOU

by Nick D'Annunzio Jones

Without you, we wouldn't be us.

SUBCUTANEOUS

by Mary Anna Evans

There is a spot at the corner of my mouth where the skin stretches with every word. It is creased by a hundred thousand smiles. Science tells me that the part of me that you kissed, at this very spot, is gone. The dead cells were shed and new ones have grown in their place.

Forget science. My own eyes tell me that this is true. My face sheds its skin with the slightest sunburn. There are cosmetics in my medicine cabinet that promise to speed up the process, washing away yesterday's skin and uncovering tomorrow's. When I was forty, I stopped believing that the new cells would be prettier than the old cells. Why, then, do I believe that I can still feel your lips on this spot at the corner of my mouth? All of your lips—mother, father, friends, lovers, husbands, children, grandchildren?

It is as if all my loves slid down the looping chute of my DNA and buried themselves in my skin. You are all subcutaneous, lodged in my epidermis, wrapped in collagen, hiding in follicles—aren't the words of scientists lovely?—and you're waiting for something. I'm sure it is my death.

But what then? Will I see you again, or will we go to dust together, nothing but uncurled double-helices waiting for entropy to finish its work?

TEA COOKIES

by Michael K. Brantley

Granny made things unlikely to be found in stores: caramel cake, coconut meringue pie, sea foam candy and chocolate “candy” icing. But nothing came close to her tea cookies.

Tea cookies were a simple concoction. They weren't

anything like what TV food celebrities crow about in overdone Southern accents as they make what amounts to mini-biscuits. Flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, eggs, buttermilk, butter, a pinch of salt and a little vanilla extract went into the bowl—never measured, just eyeballed. Granny would beat up the dough, throw it out on a flour-dusted cloth and run her roller back and forth until the batter looked as though it might disappear. I wondered how much of that thinness was out of a lifelong habit of stretching ingredients, and how much actually mattered to the construction of the cookie. The dough was cut into circles with a vegetable chopper, and placed on a baking pan.

It would seem that putting such thin pieces of dough into an oven would result in either a burned, brittle shingle or a cookie so hard it would be inedible. Granny knew just how long was long enough. She yanked the pan out of the oven, and scooped the cookies onto a cloth baking sheet, admonishing my cousins and I not to touch the treats until they had cooled, or we would get horribly disfiguring burn wounds. No doubt that anticipation made the tea cookies sweeter, and just one opening of the oven door would envelope the whole house in a fog of “freshly baked.” As far as I know, the recipe has never been written down, and Mama is the only person in the entire family who knows how to make the cookies. She hardly ever makes them, even though they rival Granny's finest. Mama says hers just aren't as good.

My cousins all preferred their cookies to be lathered in chocolate candy icing that Granny would make in small batches on the stove, using condensed milk, Hershey's cocoa, powdered sugar, and butter.

I preferred my cookies plain. They were perfect as far as I was concerned—crispy, sweet and buttery—and it seemed wrong to mess with that. I always thought they were the best things anyone could ever eat, and nothing was as warm as getting the kitchen chair closest to the living room heater and digging into a plate of warm tea cookies.

BEYOND THE SKY
by Nory Marc Steiger



Steiger

THE URN *by Nory Marc Steiger*



TOXIC

by Shushanik Karapetyan

He's nervous. I can feel it from the way he moves and makes the walls of my cage vibrate. He needs me. He'll come for me. And it doesn't take long until he does.

He flips the top open. I shiver from the gust of wind in the darkness. He runs his cold lustful fingers across my lips, shivers rushing down my spine. He pulls me out, plays with me—rolling me back and forth between his thumb and index middle fingers, then places me in between his warm wet lips.

Light me.
Love me.
Burn me.

The flame of the match ignites my body, his breath running through my veins. His fingers hold me in place, his lips tightening and relaxing as he takes his first breath, ssssssssslowly. Burning me.

Killing me.

I ache in pain and pleasure. His lips free me.

Temporarily.

Take me back, I release a lubricious moan of smoke.

His lips seize me again. And again. And again. He sucks slow inhalations, my smoke, my life invading his insides, his tender membranes. He sucks me tenderly, quietly to quench his appetite. He drains me then drops my shriveled leftovers to the ground.

Satisfied?

And all you'll have left from me will be my souvenirs, my particles of tar clinging to the walls of your lungs.

SHOVELING WATER

by Née Varin

We're outside of Nikko. South of it, precisely. Trees cover the land and inhabit the sight left to right, up and down. Sporadic peaks tower above them in the distance, but only the tallest ones. The wind brushes the branches and pinches them in an agile, bewitching tune. It's cold out there but for some reason it doesn't affect me as much as in the city. I came to terms with it, and the fresh breeze eventually clothes me in its sheltering cape.

I'm sitting on the log by the wooden cabin, looking at the river slowly flowing downhill, away from me, skillfully unlacing itself in millions of threads around rocks, twigs and sprigs; an occasional limb. Untamed blues of the wild evading the grays and the greens. Someone starts whistling at the table, the thwack of an axe cuts logs in halves, but mine's safe. He shovels water from the river, his legs deep within. The click of the photograph, a bottle opens, glasses clink and it's already night. A bath in the dark, a bucket is thrown, the kitchen is smoking, the smell charms my mouth.

I'm back on my log and laughter follows, the river still flows. An echo of silver glitters in the stream, the moon hides in the trees and someone sings a piece. Red dots in the bushes, a fox out of sight, a deer looks at me in the eyes. He's still shoveling water. A smile you can't hide.

IN THE SNOW

by Tamara Hollins

(First published in Linden Avenue Literary Journal, Issue #31)

the last time i saw you
was when you fell to your knees in the woods
almost indiscernible except for the blood that,
like your lost cape,
coloured part of the landscape red

LONELY MAILBOX

by Rhonda Parrish



THE BUS STOP

by Sam Butler

I hope she won't be there. She is. That ratty beehive towers over her moony face. I pray she won't speak to me as I fall in next to her under the bus stop awning. When she doesn't, I relax. Best not to get involved. If I get involved I might make things awkward. If I that happens I might have to find another bus stop. This bus stop is just outside my apartment. The next-nearest stop is five blocks east. I checked last night, when the fighting upstairs went bad.

I see her daily at the bus stop. Nothing unusual, usually. We wear work clothes. Sometimes she wears bruises on her arms; we never speak of these. Instead we say "good morning." Once we talked about the weather. Once we talked about her mother who lives in the country.

Today sees no small talk. She's dressed differently. She carries a tattered carpetbag. The bag sits by her feet, by black kitten heels that don't match her belt or her wool slacks. It's too hot for wool. I'm wearing a cotton skirt and sandals. How can she stand those leather shoes? She's wearing too much makeup, brown mascara and peach gloss abandoned for smoky eye shadow and red lipstick.

If I'm staring (I am) she doesn't notice. Her hands twist a garrote in the fabric of her shirt. When the bus pulls up to the curb I let her board first—and then I see it. There are only two seats left, one next to the other like best friends huddled in the schoolyard.

She sits next to the window. I sit on the aisle and look straight ahead. Face forward. No other choice. Don't stare. Don't attract attention. Don't choke on her purple-smelling hairspray.

Too bad. I cough, jolting. The bag on her lap digs

into my thigh and she doesn't seem to notice so I shift, and she sees this shift and she moves, and it's too late for me to look away and pretend not to notice. She speaks. Her voice scratches.

"I'm going to my mother's," she says. "In the country."

"Oh," I say.

"She needs help around the house."

"That's... nice."

Familiar buildings rush past. My stop draws near. The bus's brakes scream. I stand.

"Have a good day," she says, smile closed. I start to turn away—

—but.

I look at her, instead. I feel I have to look at her (maybe I owe her that, just one kind glance, one spare smile), and so I give it—

I glimpse the lipstick, the eyeshadow. That ratty beehive.

No. Never mind. My gaze drops.

"Good luck," I mumble.

I leave.

I spit the taste of her hairspray on the sidewalk. I try not to think her eye shadow looked like a bruise. I try not to think as the bus pulls away from the curb, taking her to comfort I wouldn't give, a warm place surrounded by fields of cotton and corn.

SAN FRANCISCO

by Mark J. Mitchell

Complicated lovers feel their breath leave
like missing letters on a red tide.
This is the last city you will ever need.



THIS MOTHER *by Kevin Lichty*

The tag on the Persian rug in our living room said Made in Pakistan, because Persian rugs made by Persians were dangerous things. But our Persian rug was a safe Persian rug of red and blue and gold, of diamonds and flowers and long winding curls that made labyrinths on the floor. I traced those labyrinths with my eyes or with the tips of my fingers and felt the soft, soft wool that was hand spun by the fingers of a mother that was not here, who would weave her motherhood into this rug and send it to me so that I could exist in the universe of her motherness.

And in that wool, I could smell the whispers of the spices embedded still in the fibers from the fingers of that mother who was not here. And I wondered what food this mother made with these spices with her fingers when they were not spinning wool and weaving colours and making labyrinths. And in those colours I could hear the ghost of the voice of the mother as she sang and weaved her diamonds of blue and red and gold, but only if I squinted and pressed my ear hard against the floor so that I could hear the sound traveling from there to here. Did she sing to her children at night with this same voice, full of half-notes and half-prayers and half-wishes, until their eyes closed and their bedrooms liquefied?

The rug's space, its eight by six foot space on our living room floor, became my space, and the mother contained

within the fabric of my rug became my mother. And we clung to each other every day. And I existed only within this eight by six foot universe of blue and red and gold; of labyrinths and diamonds; of half-notes and spice.

And I would lie on her and watch the leaking pipes paint pictures on the ceiling. And my brother would loom over me as I gazed at the gallery on our ceiling and he would wrap me in her like a burrito and he would sit on me and have my sister and other brother sit on me, and she would wrap me in her arms and tell me everything was okay, and tell me that I was beautiful because I didn't get scared, and brave because I laughed even though my body was panicking beneath their weight, my arms and legs crushed beneath them.

And she would tell me stories, hidden in the dark places between the lines, revealed in the patterns of red and gold and blue, of her homeland, of her children and how they drank milk and drizzled honey on their bread in the morning, and how they would play in the mountains outside their home and pick lavender and bring it home to her in the evening. And she would sing me to sleep at night, after I wrapped myself in a powder blue electric blanket and made a coffin of the sofa cushions. And I would braid her tassels, wet the strands with my tongue and smooth them out on the floor and she would tell me how many girls would love me because of how gently I separated the tangles.

Bauke Kamstra

ARRIVAL

I arrived
with no memory
of passing
the pine branch
still bowing
grass gripping
my feet.

THREES

Three nights
three knocks
three angels
there on the floor
by the hearth
three feathers
white & warm.

ABANDONED

Bare
kneeling
desiccated
trees
down to the bone
in the mountain wind
betrayed
& praying
for the fall.

HORSE DREAMS

by Amy Elizabeth Robinson

Every time I see a horse lying down
I feel nervous,
as if my death is somehow wrapped up
in its fatigue.

ALGEBRA

by Sarah Brown Weitzman

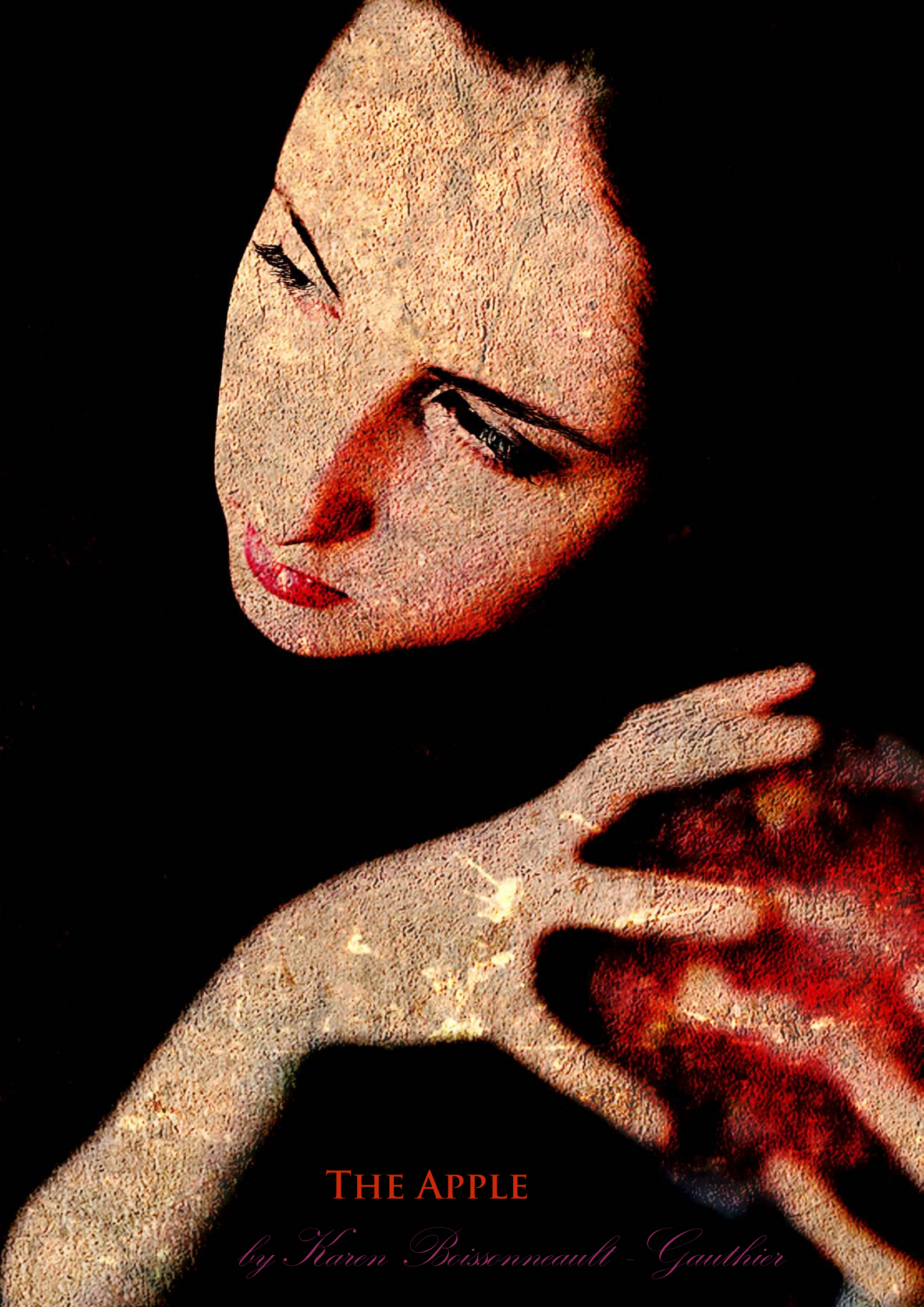
(First published in Rattle #19, 2003, Vol. 9 #1)

Whenever I hear a train whistle
I think of someone leaving, always
leaving, never arriving. This
melancholy bent of mind can be
traced to high school algebra
where we studied problems of time
and space: "Two trains leave
from depots 107 miles apart.
One train travels at a rate of 29 mph
while the other at 77 mph.
At what point will they meet?"
For all I ever understood of algebra
the question might have been:
"Name the engineer." So I would drift
into a different time and space
where real imagined dangers increased:
What if these two trains were traveling
on the same track and what if the signalman
forgot to switch the tracks and what if ...
Oh, Lord, I'd pray carried away, please don't
let them collide! This was when the teacher
seeing how wide-eyed I'd become
would call on me.

KINNERET

by Brandon Marlon

Wheeling eaglets overfly the rim of hills
in swooshing gusts across the lakescape;
below, reapers harvest melons and gourds
in ripened fields while lowing heifers
shoo snooping pullets from their mudhole.
Banana groves occupy labouring hands
whose brawny arms flaunt russet tans,
daylight's testimony and keepsake;
the picking ends with night's advent,
leaving time to regard fiery ribbons above.
Cooled by the gentle lacustrine draft,
warm bodies rest against each other,
alive to the truthful undercurrent of
hope and joy and love, singing thanks
for tokens of favour and seasons of life.

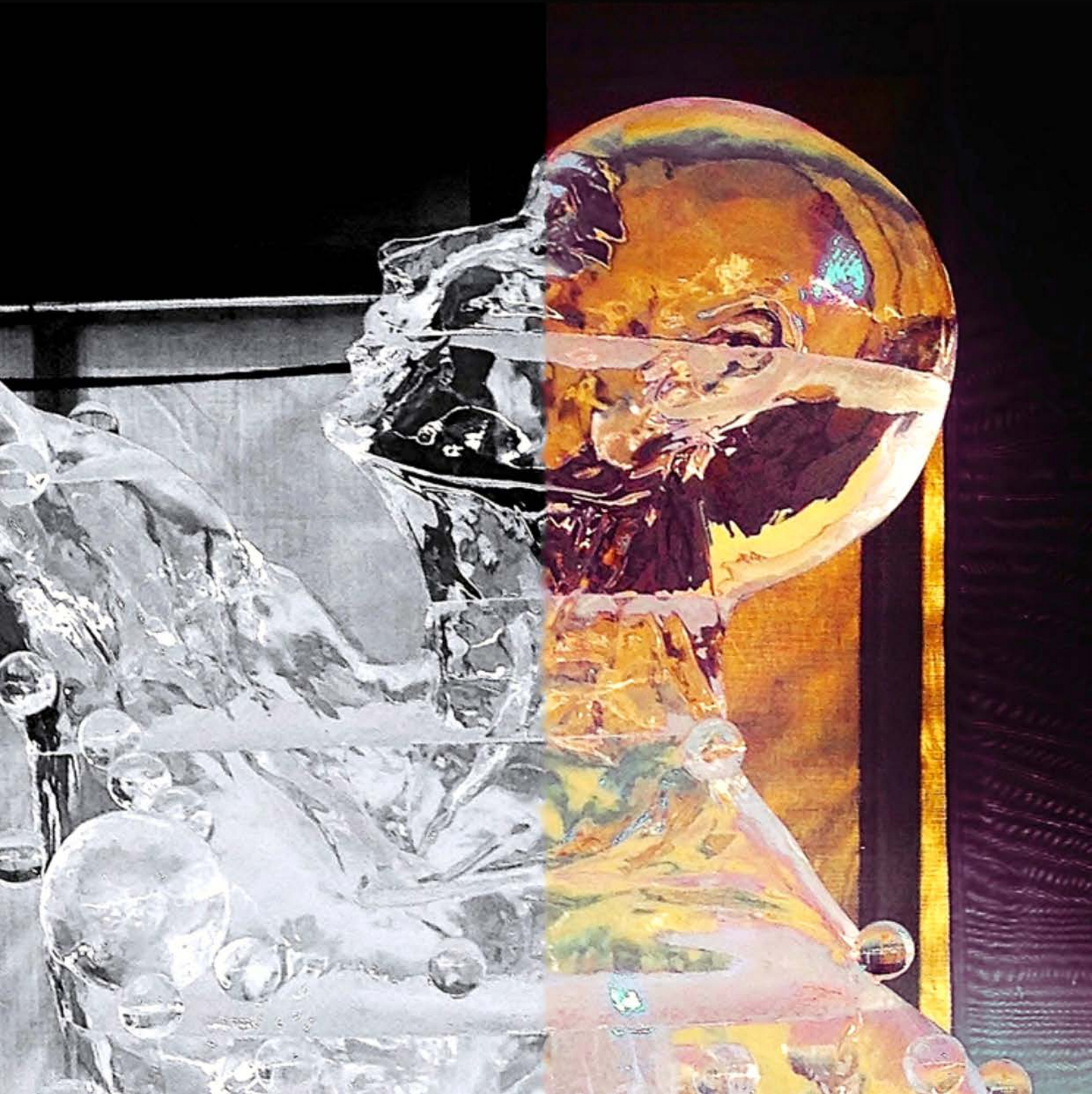


THE APPLE

by Karen Boissonneault - Gauthier

THE HEAD

by Karen Boissonneault - Gauthier



COLLAPSE

by Susana H. Case



BLUESMAN

by
Allen Forrest



2001 CARTOON WATCHING

by Meg Eden

Mom says I was born in the wrong decade.
In 6th grade I listened to Heart and Fleetwood Mac
while other girls listened to Good Charlotte,
and on Saturdays, I woke up at 6 a.m. to watch
Boomerang that aired all the shows that were
cancelled before I was born. I lived off of their
forgotten names: *The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan*,
Cattanooga Cats, *Goober and the Ghost Chasers*—
I drew Penelope Pitstop in my notebooks, and youth
leaders smiled, but said they couldn't remember
her name. That was OK though. I was the one remembering.
But there was one episode, it was Hanna-Barbera's
Moby Dick, and the voice casting listed the whale
as: *unknown*. I cried then, knowing that if even the source
of a recorded voice was forgotten and unnamed,
then who am I, and how will I ever be remembered?

COUNTING

by Kayla Pengrac

I'm losing sleep by counting sheep and
now I'm thinking about how a hearse has
always looked like a limo to me. I don't know
where my heart went wrong. Playgrounds
during wintertime haunt me. Her unborn children
already adore me. I just want to sleep. I just want to sleep.
I just want to keep your secret, while I sleep.

DROPLETS *by Anna Catarina Gragert*



THE FIBONACCI FOREST *by Christopher De Wan*

When she was one year old, to celebrate, her mother the botanist planted her a tree, and when she turned two, they planted another, and then, when she turned three, her father the mathematician switched them into another tradition—a Fibonacci sequence of trees: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, and so on—so by age thirteen, they were planting 233 trees, and the year she turned eighteen, when her father was already gone, she and her mother planted 2,584 trees.

She dreamt of living to a hundred, in a forest so thick that no one could walk through it, because by then trees they'd planted would have begotten more trees. This act, which had started as an act of will—an effort to share her birthday with nature, but also to control nature—would be subsumed by nature itself: the forest growing more forest until she could no longer distinguish which parts of nature were hers and which belonged to nature itself. The woods existed only because of her, yet she knew the woods would continue long after she herself was gone and forgotten; and this made her happy and it made her sad.

“This is my tree. This is my first tree.” All the subsequent trees were planted in a widening circle around that first one, so the youngest trees were at the outside, and the forest grew taller and older toward its center. When she turned twenty, and her oldest tree turned nineteen, she built herself a house in its canopy, and the house grew higher and farther from the ground each year; and when she turned twenty-five and was already surrounded by thousands of trees, she fell in love and married; and when she turned thirty she had her first child, and she and her husband started a new circle of trees at the edge of her forest, so her daughter's forest grew to mingle with her own, the same way her daughter grew—adjacent and intermingled, but distinct, and pushing out in her own direction. Later, they started a new forest for her son, at the opposite corner of the woods, and finally, four children in all, each with a forest growing higher and wider, canopies intertwined, and houses on the highest points of all of them: the family grew higher, and farther apart, too, until they forgot the look of the ground and each other, and remembered only the trees.

BRANCHES *by J. I. Kleinberg*

branches
of charcoal

writing
the
tree

in
a wide
wood

INSPIRED *by J. J. Kleinberg*

inspired by
marbles,

pebbles
wonder

how
the bedrock

created
the
stream

PR-315



PHOTOGRAPHY *by Lis Anna-Langston*



PHOTOGRAPHY *by Lis Anna Langston*

ROADKILL SCARF *by Hermine Robinson*

It lies on the road, flattened and forlorn, a squished and ruined thing, devoid of life and form. The original shape, barely apparent in this new state, is mute testimony to a former life of vibrant colour, now sullied. It is damp and smelly, ground down to a scrap of ragged edges by tire tracks and road grit, with fringes soaked in melt water brine. Lifeless, it lingers at the side of the road, a sad little heap, unwanted, but mostly just ignored and dismissed by those who recognize a dead and awful thing.

I blame myself for not taking better care, for the moment of inattention when it was allowed to slip away as I hurried across the road, oblivious to its plight. Trailing perhaps, or just falling away, unnoticed and defenceless.

It will not be mourned by anyone other than me. I remember when it was lively and lovely and warm. I pick up the rag gingerly, with a glimmer of hope, but the damage is done, the threads of life crushed. I brush away the leaves and dirt and dream of resurrection. I wonder if it is possible to breathe new life into a shapeless mangled carcass and think, it cannot hurt to give it a wash and a fluff, to see if that is enough to restore it somehow. I know in my heart it is too late.

The matching gloves clutched in my hand tremble like orphans as I stand at the side of the road and mourn the death of my favourite scarf.



FORM & TEXTURE
by Nory Marc Steiger



LIFE ON EARTH *by Bruce Louis Dodson*

SEVENTEEN

by Kelsey Dean

Two bodies sprawled across the hot tub cover with a spider web of branches above, stars glimmering like dewdrops between the leaves. Eyes wide, freckles like constellations. A wildly ringing heartbeat pounds against a steaming chest. A touch, a breath, a whispered crescendo: *your smile tastes like June.*

PROTEST

by Michael Mark

I pick the cigarette butt
up from the sidewalk
and put it in my mouth
in front of my kids and my in-laws
and ask the guy outside the restaurant with
a cigar and big watch for a match.
It was the \$17 hamburger
and the \$31 salad that had just four shrimp
and the valet kid's look
like my Lexus wasn't as important as the Maserati
and the sun that is always set at 72 degrees
in December
and how fucking far I've come from Queens.
So I take a puff, a drag, a hit, knowing
their eyes are on me,
knowing this is a lesson, a memory,
a tragedy from our holiday meal together
that was, will be, forever the time Dad, he, Michael,
picked up a disgusting, used, homeless person's cigarette
from the street, gutter, garbage, and smoked it after we ate our
forgettable \$400 meal at what's-the-name-of-that-place?
Oh my God I, we, all of us will never
forget, live down, get over, forgive him for that.

FORM *by J. J. Kleinberg*

form
the Moon

shimmering and
round

ample

shadows,

CHIAROSCURO

STAIN

fine

fine

bird

TO MAKE *by J. J. Kleinberg*

*to make a
cave*

form

the sea,

create

stone

consume

time—

abandoning the

rock

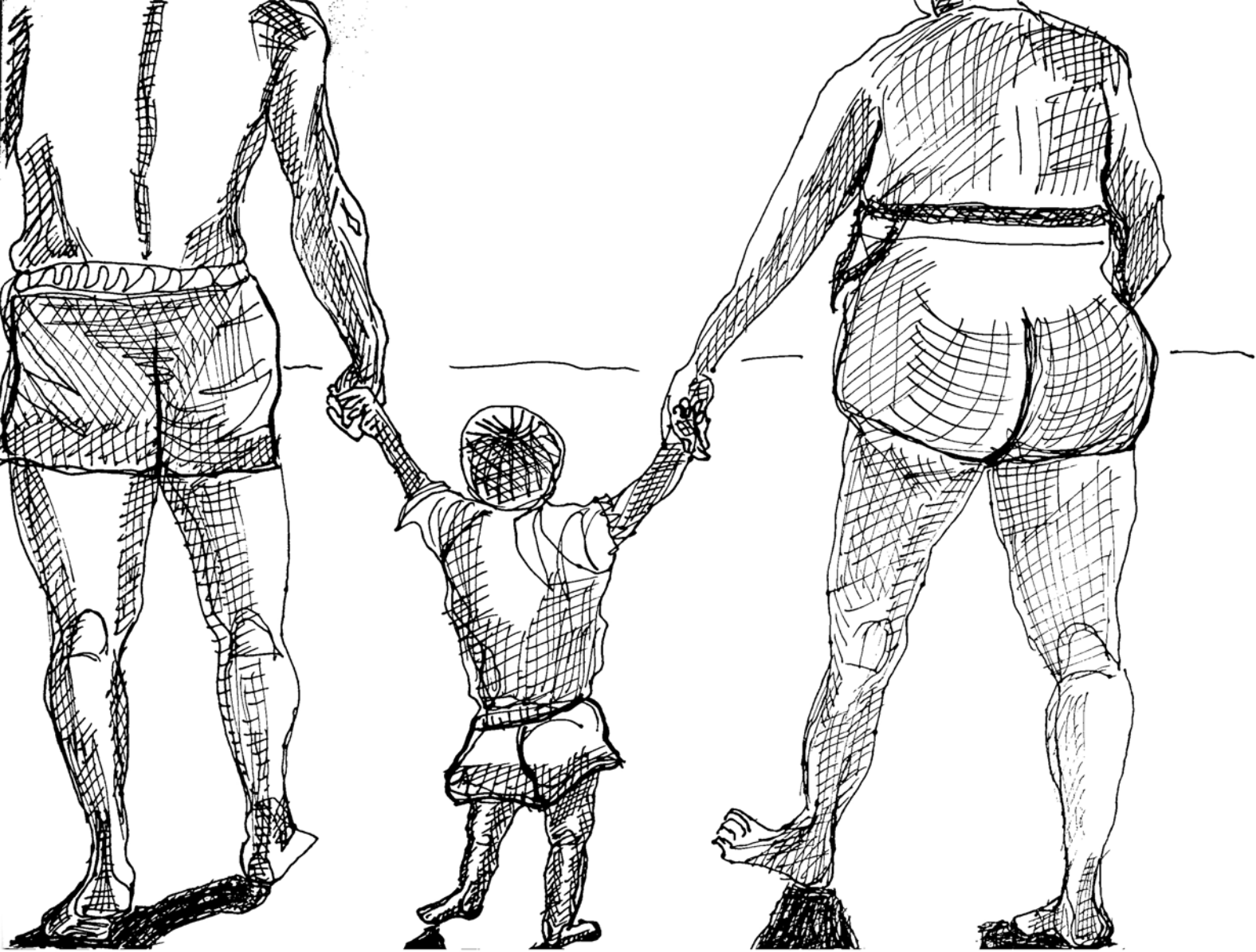
weave

the sea

and rain



PHOTOGRAPHY *by Lis Anna-Langston*



CITY LIFE, MAN, CHILD
AND WOMAN

by Allen Forrest



PHOTOGRAPHY *by Lis Anna-Langston*

THE EDGE *by J. J. Kleinberg*

the edge of
the ocean

licking
granite

driving
water

and the
sea
called

foam
from the
edge

And now,
silence

*Please take a moment's pause before
continuing on to our special feature ...*

BLOOMING VINE LEAVES

Twenty-two students who are in the 9th grade at Notre Dame Cathedral Latin High School in Ohio, were inspired to write vignettes after reading Sandra Cisneros's novel, *The House on Mango Street*. They submitted them to us. In awe and with immense pleasure, we decided to publish them all in our very first special feature dedicated to the young writers of our world.

MY HOUSE

by Antonia Mysyk

My hands are laced around thickets of grass as I lay back soaking in the sun. A busy wind whistles past my ears like a train on its tracks. For once I felt at peace. I sit back and I look up at the towering structure that is my house. Bricks line the side of it while white wood fills in the rest of the space. It's just one of the many well-structured houses on Locus Grove Drive.

If you step into my house you're hit with a wave of lemon-scented air freshener. When my grandparents came to visit from California, they brought cases of this overwhelming fragrance.

The beep, beep of the door can be heard at almost all times of the day. We hustle in and out of the house in a constant motion, too busy to ever slow down. Time is like a Ferris wheel that never stops spinning. All we can do as passengers is keep up with the ongoing ride.

The house lies on just the outskirts of what could be known as the country. The yard is an unending rolling pasture of grass. In the center of the back yard lies a pool. It is untouched basically all summer because we are so booked that we barely have time to use it anymore.

When we were younger we used to use it all the time. Once when I was probably seven, I spent the whole duration of the summer teaching myself how to do a front flip into the pool. I was so proud of myself when I thought I had mastered it that I just had to show all my friends. With a little bit of an over-confident attitude, I attempted the flip. To my embarrassment I ended up crashing my head onto the concrete so hard I thought I had broken it open. Now the pool is used every blue moon, and the memories of it have started to fade. The pool lays there, a bitter-

sweet reminder of the fun it used to contain.

Behind the pool is a fire pit. Who knows the last time it was actually used. Thinking back to the days when we were smaller, it used to be lit almost every weekend. We would camp out there with a tent and roast marshmallows. Fun. Fire. Happiness. Camping. The pit just lies there now. Cold, and abandoned. It's now like a time capsule of memories, waiting to be reopened.

The house used to have this safe feeling. It was like stepping into a warm hug every time you entered the house. Now it has an emptier feel. The house never changed, it was always the same beautiful house we had moved into when I was three. Just the people changed.

A couple years ago the house would change with the seasons. White ghosts would swarm the house at Halloween. Plastic turkeys in all places during Thanksgiving. One day in that time period, a neighbour that lived right across the street from us came to our house while my mom, sister, brother, and I were playing in the snow. The neighbour walked to my mom and stated almost laughing, "It's incredible."

My mom, confused, had replied, "What's incredible?" The neighbors shook her head and spread out her hands, saying, "Your house is the most decorated house in Christmas lights on the whole street. I mean your house it so amazing lit, that it inspires the other neighbours to put up their own lights. My kids are now excited to go to bed because they want to look at the lights at your house before they go to sleep. I kind of use that as a reward to them. I tell them that if they are good, they can see the lights on the Mysyk house. We all go to the window and pick out our favourite light of the night as if it were a hobby."

My mom smiled at the neighbour and said her thanks. I had been proud of the house at that time, how it was admired.

I don't think we would win the best light contest on our street at Christmas anymore. I wonder if the kids are disappointed that the lights aren't as good. I bet they don't even realize the difference because as they grew up, they were too busy to notice. Everything is busy.

Busy, like a crowded Subway.

Busy, like a highway at rush hour.

Busy.

ROLLER COASTER

by Aubrey Kahuranco

"Grandpa is gone. Isn't he?"

My heart beat out of my chest. It was like the first rollercoaster with my dad.

I was stuck screaming, almost in tears. I felt shaken up, my heart racing at the speed of light. We got on, and I couldn't get off. The height we traveled had me clutching at my stomach. I'm stuck going up the hill on the frightening roller coaster, never catching the thrill but experiencing the fear, the worry, and the nervousness.

I saw my dad break like he saw me break. The tears rolled down his face. I held onto him like I held onto the bar keeping me inside the cart, when really I felt trapped. Click, clack, click the bar creaked as I tried to get out. The bar jiggled, but I couldn't escape the reality and the fear. We held onto each other with the hope it wasn't real, while everyone else enjoyed the thrill.

We were stuck going up the frightening hill, and we can't escape. We can't come back down.

The hill never ends.

MY WORST NIGHTMARE

by Charles Forbes

While walking through the park with my mom, I saw two young children getting destroyed by their mother's words. I watched the kids as their eyes grew big like marbles. I felt terrible for them because I once went through this same thing. Each word that was spat out of their mother's mouth made me think back to the time my mother did the same thing. It brought shock to me to realize that's what my reaction was to my mom. It made it seem as if I was a mouse who had turned a corner and saw a big mean cat.

I could remember the moment perfectly. I was messing around with my brother, fighting like normal siblings do, until things started to get a bit out of control. He hit me too hard in the face so I started to cry and walked away. Three minutes later I ran into the room and kicked him right in the leg with all the force I possibly had. It was all slow motion for about two seconds, but then he started to scream. I didn't know what I had done, but I knew it was certainly bad when my mom started screaming, "What is going on?"

She ran in and noticed my brother on the floor screaming and crying and then just looked at me. I started to put on my most innocent face, but this time it wouldn't count for anything. She just started to rip words out at me at the top of her lungs. For the first five seconds I was a zombie. It was like my world had just frozen. Finally I came back to reality and crumbled where I stood. I was bawling my eyes out as if my eyes were Niagara Falls.

CATFISH CAMPOUT

by Charles Joyce

When most people think of great holidays, they think of Christmas, Easter, Halloween, 4th of July, and other more popular celebrations. I love all of those too, but a holiday that comes to my mind is Memorial Day.

In the woods, on the river's side with the campfires to our backs, and the water to our front, we sit patiently, my cousins and I, waiting for the catfish to start biting. The cold nips at our noses, but that only makes the fire all the more comforting. As darkness comes and the silvery moon is barely visible through the thick, tangled tree branches, the catfish come out of their cavernous homes on the river bottom.

The catfish aren't the only ones who are hungry at this time of night.

Uncle Dave makes a quick run to his tent to grab some hot dogs, so as we keep one eye on our rods, we can keep another on our dinner, roasting over the flames. An hour into the new day, it's time to pack up the gear and get to our tents. When the morning sun rises over the tree-line, giving it a golden outline, it's time to get up and light the grills. We get together and tell stories of our biggest catches, or just how things are going, as we cook the catfish. When it's all over, we pack up the tent and head for home with new stories to tell and new memories to share.

NAPTIME

by Christian Baker

The heavy dark presses in like a beast surrounding the room. Sprouting in the corner, a warm light fluctuates like a beacon of hope that counters the beast. Blocks of fluff caress my head in a

warm hug. The soft sheets that flow with the calm scents of home, the ones that grace you with sleep, come in two. Light, like the air of the world, swishing to and fro, but heavy, the winter coat your mom bundles you up in to keep warm.

Squeezed between my tiny arms hangs my little doll of comfort and softness. This doll has been with me since before I can remember, and he's always by my side. He keeps me safe from the terrible darkness when I lay down to rest, and he's still there when I awake. Along with my doll, nestled under my head, is my mini blue pillow that feels like grains of sand. It bends beneath me as I move in my bed.

The "scary dark" has left me as I aged, along with my doll and pillow. Still, waiting in my closet, lay my old friends, willing to protect me from the darkness. I've seen them very few times in the past years, but they always hold a special place in my childhood that can't be replaced.

MY "NEIGHBOURHOOD"

by Elizabeth Walsh

I can't really call where I live a neighbourhood. It's more of a community. When I think of a neighbourhood, I think of something from the movies: a perfect development with all the same houses, expertly-trimmed shrubs, and people watering their lawns. Let me tell you, we don't have shrubs in our "neighbourhood"—we have bushes. All of our houses are different, and nobody waters their lawn.

All of the houses are shades of white or grey or tan—nothing that really sticks out. Some have fancy little doorsteps, some have steps that are rotting off. All of us have trees in our yards, and with trees, come leaves. Our yards are littered with leaves, and nobody sees any reason to get rid of them, because more will just blow into their yard the next day.

There are no fences in our “neighbourhood.” I like to think of it as if we all share a yard. Nobody gives a sideways glance if the neighbour’s dog from four houses down is in their yard—it will eventually wander back.

We all share a lifestyle of simplicity in our community. In our special neighbourhood.

MY FIRST PET

by Erin Eppich

He was gone.

My pet fish gone, all because of one simple accident. It wasn’t her fault, it wasn’t anyone’s fault. No one could have seen it coming. The way her hand hit the bowl, the way the water splashed onto the carpet like a waterfall. And my fish squirming, gasping for air.

We rushed to the bathroom, putting him in a cup of water, but it just wasn’t enough. We were just too late I guess. I thought he would make it through the night, maybe his lungs just weren’t strong enough.

There’s nothing to do now except flush him, I suppose. My poor little fish, dead because of one simple accident. My fish, gone because his lungs weren’t strong enough.

THE DANCE

by Hailey Oppenlander

Anticipation bubbled up inside of me, my heart-beat pounding and thumping to the beat of my deep breaths. I sucked in all of the oxygen around—I would need it for the five-minute performance that would ensue. The rush of being onstage traveled throughout my body, the boost of energy coursing through my veins and spreading to my limbs. A raging winter storm

swirled in my stomach, burying my preparation beneath layers of snow yet arousing and flinging my anxiety in the strong gales.

The velvety red drapes hung in front of me, the only barrier between me and the audience. The slight gusts of air caused the deep crimson fabric to ripple like the returning tides on the sandy beach, engulfing the miniscule grains of sand. I was a tiny grain, the majesty of the grand stage and curtains consuming me whole. But dance filled the emptiness, pervaded the resounding silence with raw emotion and power, with both struggles and successes.

I glanced around at the other dancers, thinking about the hours we’d spent rehearsing together, throwing our entire being into the dance. My pink tights clung to my legs, the lace arms of my costume stretched against my skin. I held my vibrant pink fan in front of my face, concealing all but my eyes.

In my mind I saw a vision of my younger self, the hours spent in the dance studio which became my haven and second home. Though the studio was like our household, we all knew the stage was our true home, that special place where the rush we craved was satisfied.

I received my first taste of performing when I participated in our studio’s annual rendition of the Nutcracker. I used to sit beneath the wooden barre or wait by the threshold, dying for a glimpse of the older girls. I could still clearly see the experienced dancers rehearsing the Waltz of the Snowflakes. I was mesmerized by the beauty and synchronicity of the girls moving together. My eyes were seemingly glued on the dancers as I listened to the hypnotic soft sounds their pointe shoes made, and when they did smack against the floor, the echoing yell of the instructor. These dancers embodied the music perfectly, like elegant swans gliding across the stage. The soft plink of their pointe shoes came down like the patter of rain, soothing. I couldn’t wait to be on

pointe too, to flutter around the stage as they did.

I longed to wear the pretty pink satin shoes, to tie the silky ribbons around my ankles and rise up on my toes. I watched intently as the older girls moved swiftly around the stage on their toes, and I was oblivious to the pain and struggles they had gone through to achieve such a feat.

They looked like the dancers from the story-books I once read—the ones with the pointed toes, the perfect arabesques, and the leaps that seemed to fly right out of the paper. I used to flip the pristine pages over hundreds of time, gazing adoringly at the pictures that crafted and retold the magical story of a dancer. The cover read *To Dance* in fancy pink script, the inside containing a graphic novel chronicling a dancer's journey. The words wove around the page effortlessly with the fluidity of a seasoned dancer. The explosion of pink—pink shoes, pink leotards—splashed up from the pages and into the realm of my imagination. My eyes were locked on the images depicting getting fitted for a first pair of pointe shoes. I stared endlessly at the images, my heart soaking up the dancer's experiences and feelings. I wanted to be the one holding the scarlet Capezio box, staring in the mirror as the image reflected back a taller me.

And that's how I came to be standing on the stage as the curtains whooshed apart, revealing all of the dancers to the audience. The melody danced throughout the stage, embedding itself in our hearts as we poured our souls out through movements. Like the tide, we flowed gracefully back and forth, a sea of dancers lost in the music. The audience members watched on from far away, grains of sand lost in the dim lights of the theatre.

MY NAME

by Haley Otto

"What is your name?" they ask.

I have answered this many times, but I have never considered what my name meant. I never thought it was important. The meaning has never defined me, so why bother knowing it?

I create my own definition for my name many times. To me, it is a rare name. With its unusual spelling, it is unique. Almost as if I have my own secret—one not shared with anyone but myself. My name is unknowing of pain and suffering. It knows only happiness and joy.

My name does not easily roll off the tongue, but that's what is fun about it. It challenges people to think, to understand, that it is exclusive to me. Others may pronounce it wrong, but each time they do, I laugh to myself. I think it is amusing when they assume they know everything about the name I proudly dawn. I wear it with confidence, placed upon me like a badge.

"What is your name?" they ask me.

"My name is Haley," I respond.

And I am proud of that.

POTHoles

by Jackie Clinger

In Chardon, there are too many potholes. Our freezing winters wreck our roads, leaving a weathered scar that our rough tires will inevitably spin over. We make a point to avoid them after we have fallen into them. The splits in the asphalt are present in even the wealthiest of the communities, where the houses are bigger than stars.

As we drive along, we feel it—the imperfection of the road. It tilts the SUV for a second, lodging the tire in the hole, and spilling our bags' contents. My mother cusses under her breath and remarks: "All these taxes for nothing." Even though her car is out of the pothole almost as quickly as we fell into it, she has not quite left it for the rest

of the drive. She sings the same song over and over on our trip until I know the words by heart.

My sister is different. We fall into many water-filled crevices during our routine drive to school and she barely blinks. Her school bag falls to the floor and she shrugs because she does not pay any taxes. She can sing a new song that she does not know the lyrics to and will not repeat it for the rest of our trip. The blue little Subaru speeds on and does not stop to look back, its bright lights set on the future.

CHRISTMAS

by Jenna Landgraf

The ground is white, the trees are bare. A fire burns bright and warm inside, while the wind mercilessly pounds through the winter air. This eve is always spent with family—for it's the night before the twenty fifth of December.

Tonight everyone arrives with bright red noses and the smell of food steaming through container lids. Soft music plays as we gather around the tree with its beautiful lights aglow. Sweaters adorn our skin and smiles never leave our faces. This time of year is truly delightful. As we go around the circle opening thoughtful gifts, my mind drifts to the past.

Going back to my younger days, the only thing that mattered was that Santa Claus came; the presents underneath the Christmas tree when we woke up was the main event. Building snowmen in the cold, listening to themed music and watching holiday specials such as *The Grinch* was how we prepared. This specific season brought joy and love, and especially magic. Kids fantasize of just this one day all year long. The thought that a good old man dressed in red went around the world shedding gifts from his sleigh somehow left children fascinated and gave off an aura of

excitement. The adrenaline that pumped through your veins the night this man came was undeniable; everyone experienced this awaited feeling. Santa was purely magical and to me, hope that any magic still existed in the world.

After opening gifts from cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, the ride delivering my siblings and me home could not take long enough. We were balls of energy, the mere thought of sleep foreign to our innocent minds. Our parents somehow always got us to bed saying Santa Claus would come sooner the faster we fell into our dream filled sleep.

Growing up, every year was different and soon Santa was no longer factual, he was just a fairy-tale. Christmas is never the same again and you feel like the magic is lost. You wonder if oblivion would have preserved the wonderful, fictional thoughts of the North Pole, elves, and reindeer.

Soon enough though, you find that abandoned glow of magic in small, simple things: Christmas lights on each house, a white Christmas, if you're lucky, and the specials on TV, hot chocolate, families coming together, decorating your home, and even finding a tree. These things become the new magic that will bring joy to everyone's hearts.

Eventually, that's what Christmas is all about. A time of love, hope, maybe even sadness or grief. This holiday somehow smiles upon all people of the world no matter what you believe. It does not judge; but is a time of bliss and contentment for anyone who chooses to accept her glee and jubilation.

As I sit here in the present, with my family, and it's my turn for a gift, I slowly tear open the sleek wrapping paper, my eyes filled with happiness and my lips turned up with a grin, and I think about how every year is something unexpected and new. And how that's exactly like a gift. The

day is now night and the air freezes while the snow falls, and Christmas yet again brings a new found aura of magic to my heart.

THE BIG GAME

by Lillian Martin

Right now, as I'm practicing and anticipating future games, in this small, dreary gym that smells like a locker stuffed with dirty gym socks, as I'm releasing the leather ball out of my hands, I realize that I did the same thing in The Big Game.

In the gym covered in green, bleachers as tall as the ceiling pulled out for spectators whose voices were buzzing, all I listened to was the authoritative voice of my coach.

The serve soared over the net faster than a speeding car on a freeway. The people in the stands held their breath.

A perfect pass came off the passer's forearms, leaving a slight red mark behind. The ball ended up in my hands. I held the next play of the game up above my head. The excitement grew as everyone wondered where the ball would go next; where I would send it. Hearts beat a million times a minute as this rivalry between lions and cougars played out. My knees fueled my next move, and my elbows straightened out and pushed forward.

The ball that was cradled by all ten of my fingers would soon leave. It flew through the air like a bird. A loud smack echoed as it was sent over the white tape at the top of the net by the hitter's sweaty hand. As fans jumped up out of their seats in unison cheering, I realized why I love this game.

MY DOLL

by Madelyn Lesko

With a pink shirt, purple backpack, and yellow map, my new Dora doll stood on the top shelf. I used to love watching her show, and learning about new languages—I could recite all of the colours in Spanish and I loved it.

I used to beg my mother to bring me to the library, just so that I could take out new DVD's about learning Spanish. I found the fact that everyone saw and thought of different things in different ways and languages fascinating. Now, as I take a Spanish class, I find myself getting bored and annoyed with learning a new language, and it seems as if I learn more quickly when I want to, instead of when I'm forced.

I thought of learning Spanish as I took my first step onto the large, blue shelf to retrieve my doll. The shelf was almost twice my size—there was no way that I could just reach the doll with my hands. I needed to climb higher. I remember when I reached the second step and screamed as I fell backwards. I heard a loud bang and noticed that the shelf had fallen on top of me. I was too shocked to cry, but I still managed to yell for help, which came as soon as the loud sounds of every item on the shelf hitting the ground had been heard.

My love for the doll didn't last very long after the fall, I became more interested in electronic toys and playing sports. Now, whenever I think of Spanish, I also think of the pain that I felt when I fell, and how learning Spanish and my doll are similar. Because when I was forced to get my doll from the shelf in order to be able to play with it, or forced to learn Spanish for a grade, my interest in them decreased.

DIRT ROAD LIFE

by Madison Mitchell

I look out the window of my living room and see the old woman walking her dog. She walks on nothing but dirt and rocks. My mom thought that they would have paved this road eleven years ago. She was wrong. The old woman has been walking her dog on the same road for as long as I can remember.

My road.

The road that is as quiet as a church mouse.

My little brother and I used to always see her walking when we waited for the bus in the morning. I don't take the bus anymore. I only see the woman through the window now. My neighbours don't come outside much. I don't even have that many neighbours. I wouldn't even call where I live a neighbourhood. The woods on my street hide most of the homes. I like it that way. It's always been this way.

Peaceful and quiet.

HELLO, I SAY

by Megan Ha

The creaking of a garage door is what brings me out of my thoughts. I look up to see my neighbour through the scraggly grasses that serve as my lawn. She doesn't like me, I know that. But she tentatively waves back.

It's almost as if I didn't have my glasses; my vision sharpens like a hawk's when searching for its prey. I can see every detail of that day, and the days before that, and the days after.

I was friends with her—once. My next door neighbour, who I have looked at jealously too

many times to count, the one that attracted other pretty people like moths to a flame. She'd moved in two weeks before me. The pale blue house, where the sun reflected off the brand-new windows and the white paneling that made it resemble a sky of sorts, was one of the first things I had been jealous of. It was much prettier than mine.

It wasn't something that would deter us—our friendship dated back to the first day of the first grade. I'd finally seen who lived in that house—a girl of perfectly-straight brown hair, brown eyes, and dimples that would make everyone smile back. This was the type of girl many would consider pretty, and there I was, the little Asian girl whose default expression was deemed a frown.

We'd met at the corner, where the bus stop was. Our parents watching us anxiously, the kind of parents who'd moved in and don't want their kids growing up socially awkward.

Hello, I say.

Hello, she says.

I asked her to sit with me on the bus, and just like that, we were friends.

By the end of third grade, we'd regressed to mere passing hellos when we saw each other in the hallway. She'd made her own friends, the kind I didn't really like. They talked about the other kids, the more unfortunate when it came to looks. I had my own friends, who'd I like to say were better.

That had passed, too. Now we were more likely to go dancing in frigid rain than go shopping together.

But I still say hello.

MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

by Mary Mahaffee

Green leaves and brown trunks lined the neatly paved road on both the right and left sides of my neighbourhood. The archway of trees was always a welcoming sight when driving down Case Avenue. It was home, even when the leaves changed to yellow, red, and brown.

Then they fell, only to be reborn.

The houses never changed, though. There were the green apartment complexes on the very end, near the busy road. A little farther down was the house that belonged to the lady with a big and friendly German Shepard. I saw her walking the dog every day, even during the heavy snow.

Next came the three houses in which three families resided. Between them, there were eight children and they all got along. You could see them running around with Nerf guns, shooting the foam bullets. Laughing faces full of joy and freedom could clearly be seen whenever you drove by.

Then there are the two big families. Both of them seemed to colour-coordinate their cars. One family had all red, and the other silver. You could always tell when they were having family over.

Two houses down was the big, brick house I called home. Green shrubs lined the freshly paved driveway as a makeshift fence. A curved sidewalk led up to an old door that was almost impossible to open, especially with its rusty locks and handles. Once past the door was a cozy house that had a family of four. So many memories had been made in that house over the past thirteen years we'd been living in it.

Whenever my friends asked where I lived I would point and say, "The big, brick house on Case Avenue."

PUPPY'S FIRST CHRISTMAS

by Mary Malone

A big red bow flashed across the room, running from one side to another in seconds. The excitement of Christmas morning ran through my skin. My siblings and I entered the living room, which was decorated with bright lights and a Christmas tree filled with glistening ornaments. There was a puppy as big as a basketball. My mom informed us that she was a three-month-old female black Labrador retriever. Her eyes are as big as golf balls, and her paws are so large that she stumbled as she trotted around. She was barely able to walk on the tile floor. I was so excited I could barely speak. She ran over to me and greeted me. I sat down to play with her and she kissed my face. As I petted her, I noticed her fur is soft like a stuffed animal's. After she made her way around the room greeting her new family members she started playing with the wrapping paper. She was chewing on everything in sight, just as puppies do. I could see an expression of happiness on my family members' faces. We were all smiling uncontrollably, filled with joy as we watch our new puppy run around. This new puppy meant the world to us. As I look back on that moment I can picture my dog with her big red bow and I remember that Christmas day being one of the happiest of my life.

DON'T DO, CHOOSE

by Michael Benjamin Louard

Advice is like beauty, it comes from the eye of the beholder. My eye isn't another's eye, so the advice I receive will never hit anyone the way it hits me. I was once told, "Good choices don't make good people, but bad choices make good people. Bad people don't make choices—they just do. Choose."

To be honest, that's the best advice I've ever

received. Every moment that saying dances into my head, the weight on my shoulders disappears. One piece of advice can alter the path to success.

People shouldn't be so worried about the choices they make. There's a line that we have to stay on. Tilt to the left and make radical and impulsive decisions. There's a reason wildcards aren't popular. On the other hand, tilt to the right and overthink the choices you have, to the point where you can't even decide on things for yourself. Those people need just as much help.

But if I can follow this advice, and keep my toes on the line that leads me to happiness, maybe I can begin to live for myself. Finding independence isn't all about being young, wild, and free, but it isn't about routines and plans either. Independence is beauty—it comes from the eye of the beholder.

QUIET, BUT FRIENDLY

by Dan Besworth

Burlington Ridge is a quiet little street. Nothing important or extraordinary, just a small little road, a quarter-mile from the local fire station. Don't get me wrong, it's not like there's one person living to a home. I'm so lucky to live here, in fact.

Some of the neighbours are okay, a little strange, but we all have that one (or a couple) odd neighbour. One person I am so grateful to have on my street is my neighbor, Bernadette. She is a second grade teacher at Newbury Elementary School. She is the most amazing human being I have met. She wakes up very early to go to school, then comes home and works late to tutor kids who need extra help. Finally, she stays up to the late hours of the night to grade papers so she can make sure her students are happy and understand what is going on. She has always been there for me.

When my Grandpa died, Bernadette took care

of me while my parents and sisters were at the funeral wake, because I can't handle funerals. Thank the Lord for the friendly neighbour in a quiet neighborhood.

GEORGE, THE FLIGHTLESS BIRD

by Olivia DeJohn

A scrawny bird fluttering in front of the chilled window tries too hard to fly. Some things just aren't meant to fly.

He was a young lad trapped inside the body of 80-year-old George. All alone in his small, tucked away, nest of a house with the hideous red shutters. The white picket fence that separated our houses was slowly deteriorating from the long years of rain and snow in northern Ohio. His house so out of control with overgrown weeds and shrubs, you would almost forget there was a human being living next door. At the sight of this, my parents would simultaneously put their face in the palms of their hands. I, however, gazed on in amazement at his backyard jungle. I wanted his house more than anything, except for the red shutters. I was never allowed to explore the wilderness of George's backyard because I was tied down by my ever-so-strict parents.

George liked to play with my little black Pomeranian when he stopped over. He ruffled Vinnie's short ears so hard, you'd think they would snap right off.

Though I was young, I found old George to be quite entertaining. His shaky voice, always trying to get the stories of the times when he was a boy out of his dry and tight mouth. He rambled, motioning his hands, which were even shakier than his voice that was much too loud. Blah, blah, blah. My parents thought nothing of his nonsense, but then there was me. I saw so much more in George's scattered words. I was so interested in George's stories, they were fairytales of

another land I longed to travel to.

George was a strong man, and I respected him for this reason. Every morning, rain or shine, I peeked around the blinds to watch George pedal with his bird legs up the steep, never-ending slope of Elmwood Street. His bike was one of the old fashioned, giant, wheel in the front kind of contraptions that creaked every time weight was put on it. With every forced effort, the bike was lucky to advance more than a few inches.

Even though George didn't weigh much more than the flightless bird he was, I could tell he struggled to get up the hill on his rickety bike. I remember the time it would take for George to reach his destination at the top of the street. Years would go by. He had an interesting way of doing this however. After forever passed on the way up, the once earthbound George finally grew wings on the steep descent, hollering the whole way down. It was hilarious to a child like me, yet another embarrassment to my parents, and a trip back in time for George, the flightless bird, who learned to soar to new heights.

A CHRISTMAS PRESENT

by Ryan Thomas Thomas

It was Christmas and a baby was on the way. That baby was my little sister. My other sister and I were staying with my grandparents. I did not really know what was going on because my grandparents were on the phone and I was confused. Also, I was very nervous.

On Christmas morning I woke up and my parents weren't there. They were at the hospital. I was upset and being selfish. I did not realize how important this was or the great blessing that I received that Christmas.

That Christmas night was nerve-wracking. I was going to meet my new sister for the first time. I

was allowed to hold her. It was like holding a doll because she was so small. This was my first time holding a baby so it was very exciting.

When I held her she was wrapped in a red Christmas stocking. She was tucked into it so you could only see her head. It was very cute because it looked like she had been delivered by Santa Claus.

I am reminded of this Christmas every year. It comes to me on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. I think back to this day and how special it was to me and my family.

THE FRIENDLY CAT

by Timothy Cermak

I sit on the steps to my house. The autumn breeze shuffles the leaves around. My friendly and loving cat sits on my lap purring. She stares down the leaves like a lion getting ready to pounce on her prey. I think back to the cold day when we found her.

Her mother was named Midnight. Midnight gave birth to the kittens in our barn. Midnight was a beautiful, all black cat. She loved to run across the road to our neighbour's house. One horrible night she danced with fate.

The headlights rushed towards her. The screech of brakes and honk of a horn scared her, froze her in fear.

Knowing that she had a litter of kittens a few days earlier, we set out to find them. We looked all through the barn then I heard the meow of a scared kitten. There were eight of them in a little pile of hay. We brought them into our garage to warm them up.

Oh, how my little kitten has grown up. She is bigger, but still the friendly cat, daughter of Midnight, we found in our barn.

OUR GOOD DAY

by Briana Cowman

It was a kind of a spur of the moment thing. We all had a few hours to spare.

Want to join us? Kaia had asked.

Sure, why not? I'd replied, anxious to come.

Running down the narrow, rickety, pine green paint-chipping stairs, we greeted our parents in the nearly empty lobby.

Can I go? I said..

Go where?

So I explained. Out. With them. I pointed to Kaia, Daniel, and Nicholas.

My dad was hesitant, I could tell.

But it was a spur of the moment kind of thing.

Although, I didn't care, they were my friends. My friends I knew I would never forget. Merrily walking over to them, I heard Nicholas. Frolicking. We are going frolicking, he said happily.

Is that even a word? I said.

Yes. He was so positive. I looked it up.

Are you coming?

Yes.

We cheered, excited to begin our adventure.

Kailiegh! Joel! Come with us! Join the frolicking party!

It was a spur of the moment kind of thing.

Chris! Join the frolicking party!

Frolicking?

It's a word. I know it is, Nicholas informed us.

Linking arms, we looked so juvenile. But we didn't care.

Skipping, singing, laughing like little kids, you never would have guessed we were in high school. But it didn't matter. We loved it. We embraced it.

We go together, like rama-lama-lama, ka-dinkity-dink-a-donk!

Remember forever as shoe-bop shoe-wadda-wadda-yippity-boom-da-boom!

We are a gaggle! Nicholas exclaimed. My eyebrows raised in question, mouth a tight smile indicating that it was obvious I was holding back a laugh, and dark chocolate like eyes emanating a comical, yet questioning look. I stared at him like he was crazy, but in a way, I guess we all kind of were.

So off our gaggle went, frolicking throughout the streets of Chardon Square in our own little world. We passed the playground, the Dairy Queen, and other shops and restaurants along the way until we reached the park. I knew there were others around us; other things we had to be conscious of, but it didn't feel like there were. It was just us.

And we were invincible.