



NEAT.

ISSUE 5: Summer 2014

NEAT.

Issue 5
Summer 2014

Edited By
Elizabeth Jenike
&
TM Keesling



StuckInTheMiddlePress

Published and edited by

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

Desire. That was the theme of this summer's issue. Honestly, we didn't know what kind of submissions we were going to get. We've been around for a whole year now, and we have had everything from stories about pioneer murderers to Twitter poetry.

As we went through this round of submissions, we started to notice a few themes emerging. We read about your anger, your loss, your nostalgia and hope. There is sadness here, but also happiness—fear, bitterness, joy. Desire is a complicated emotion, and in order to describe it right we have to encompass all other emotions it stems from and births. We believe that the work in this issue accomplishes that task, and we think you'll enjoy what lurks in these depths.

As always, our highlighted writers for Liz's Pick and TMI are up on the website, which is now: neatmag.net.

We also have a tumblr now – we don't have photography in this issue because we are going to start asking for photo submissions there. Check it out when you get a chance!

Keep it classy. Keep it NEAT.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Jenike
TM Keesling
NEAT. Editors

Finish this Story

Rebecca McElfish

Write about the dream where we met on the coast road,
he and I.
How the crocuses laughed, their deep throats
murmuring sentences
the words unstuck in my head and floating
away.
Remind me how you didn't like the ocean man either,
with his theatre paste smile,
stringing together *snap* words.
Try to incorporate sensory details;
the precise color of perplexity that comes with the clock
striking 11:52, the touch of damp salt in the blood,
the taste of never getting used to this.
Tell me how I might be an unreliable narrator.
Make it believable.

You Smell Like Candle Smoke

Myles Buchanan

For Christina Rossetti

“The sparrow, flying in one door and immediately out the other, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry tempest; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, passing from winter into winter again.”

-Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People

By seventh grade it was clear
that some lawns glow with
their own light—a different light.
That some clover clusters are little galaxies,
some honeybees cosmic messengers,
carriers of astral dust.
This is what I thought—that
bedrooms are haunted places,
with their desks of old cursive,
the lonely toys closeted
in darkness, the caged pets
unplayed with.
Something outside understood,
I knew, and brushed the wind chimes
with frosty fingers, writing
me love songs.

—

But take winter, spring. Take summer.
Each year their tingly missives slip past me:
the note written in sleepy haste
that falls from the bedside table, the idea,
itching between recollections, behind nostalgia, gone by morning,
the person who brings the special light,
who holds it under her eyelashes.
The dream she brings, where even the
coldest things are edged in flame.
Icicles, hoarfrost, the car that
medicates through
a stop sign at the wrong moment—
all edged in flame, but
I wake up again. I wake up.

Then the fraying of the trees, the grinning of pumpkins,
the did-we-set-the-clock-back?
I stir, stretch my legs, gather and weave what I can.
Each year, it's as if I've moved north—the leaves
hardly orange before red,
hardly red before silver.
It gets so cold it hurts to breathe.
My ill-formed wings beat the thin air.
The sky is made of ash, and whatever is above the ash.

My imagination is predictable:
any image an excuse to love,
any love an excuse for constructions:
not a castle but an inn,
warm enough even for you,

even for me. Outside, there's
thick sleet, there's rain like bullets,
oaks designed to crumple under snow,
to bow under wind. *I'll melt the icicles
on your heart* I swear *I'll light
candles, chop firewood,
do "whatever it takes"* –
I wake up to these generalities.
I wake up again and again.

Blasted trees, fall leaves hanging on
like charred Christmas ornaments.
Cinders falling, trailing invisible smoke,
oak trees racking up shelves of white...
Again and again, we're foiled in our
attempts to love:
by clothing, by skin.
By the things that grow in us
that we don't know about.

No wonder we cling to each other,
grow melodramatic at the sight of
a single yellow leaf.
No wonder we're always buttoning up,
piling firewood, melting wax,
cutting wicks, getting shy.
No wonder we want so badly
for *silent* to mean *secret*,

we who are without
each other, who
crave snowflakes on

eyelashes, who wanted
to be in love.

If Kerouac Had Just Stayed Home

Shannon McLeod

Like many adolescent males with a counter-cultural bent, Dennis felt a deep connection with Kerouac's *On the Road*. In his final paper for 12th grade English, he wrote a stream of consciousness response to Sal Paradise's journey in the book, comparing it to his own life. The actual assignment called for a persuasive argument on the role of early 20th century jazz on the Beat writers using evidence from the novel. When he turned it in, Dennis put a sticky note on top of the printed pages explaining his unique approach to his teacher. He worked harder on that paper than anything he'd ever written for school. He got a D minus.

His girlfriend, Becky, was in the AP English class, so she was reading *Invisible Man*. She wouldn't have really gotten *On the Road* anyway, Dennis thought. But he still couldn't help relaying Sal and Dean's adventures to her on their walk from school to Becky's. It was a late May afternoon and the heat swirled in hairdryer eddies in the cul-de-sac where Becky lived. Dennis couldn't stand his parents, lawyers, so they spent most of their time at Becky's. Before they reached her butter-hued ranch, Dennis stopped and gazed beyond the cul-de-sac, into another dimension, almost.

"I need to go hitchhiking," he said.

"What do you mean?" Becky knew what he meant, but she didn't want to sound like her mother.

"This is what I need to do after graduation." He had a familiar sense of grandeur in his voice—the tone Dennis shifted into when they were alone, never around his friends.

Becky had a full ride to Oberlin next year, while Dennis would "figure things out" at home.

“This is what I’m *meant to do*.” He turned to her with a big grin. “This is where it all begins.” His eyebrows slid up his forehead.

Becky kissed him to hide her expression, then grabbed his hand and led him into the house.

As promised, after graduation, Dennis bought an aluminum-enforced backpack at REI and left for his adventure. Becky begged him to wait until she’d left for college. She wanted to spend the summer together. Dennis said he had to go.

She checked her email at least once an hour. He told her it was unlikely that he’d have Internet access, but he’d try. She checked the mailbox each morning, much earlier than the mail carrier had ever arrived. Becky sat on her front porch and read *On the Road*, picturing Dennis as Sal. Her stomach buzzed and sank. She read *Dharma Bums* after that, then *Big Sur*, and then moved on to the other Beats, like Burroughs and Ginsberg. In between, she read the notes Dennis had written her over the school year. She wrote him an email every day, speculating what was happening on his adventure, telling him to be safe and to contact her as soon as possible. Dennis had dropped his cell phone in the lake before his trip. He said he didn’t need one anyways.

—

To: bmxbro22@yahoo.com

From: beckysings@gmail.com

Subject: Missing You

Dennis,

I hope you’re having a great day. If you never make it to a library or somewhere with Internet access, you’re going to return to a hell

of a lot of emails from me. Haha. I can't help it, though. I miss you so much, and writing to you makes me feel like we're a bit closer.

I've been reading On the Road. I can see why you love the book so much. I'll admit, it took me a while to get past Kerouac's rambling style, but now that I'm used to it, I love the story and the way the writing feels like a friend telling you his wild hitchhiking tales. I understand now why you had to go. I think you'll come back with a lot of great material for your writing. Have you thought any more about that novel you've been wanting to write? Maybe it could be a modern-day On the Road. I have one confession about the book, though: I don't like how these guys treat women. It's like every girl they come across is just part of the scenery. I know that probably makes me sound like a crazy feminist, but I hope that the characters' attitudes about women are more of an effect of that time in culture, rather than that just being the way guys really are without women around. I suspect it's a little of both.

My job at Fitness World isn't as bad as I thought at the beginning of the summer. Sure, it's boring. I'm mostly just wiping other people's sweat off of bike seats and elliptical machines, but I like the people I work with. The best part, I've discovered, is that they'll let me hang out by the pool after my shifts. It's peaceful in there. It's where I've been doing most of my reading.

*Thinking of you,
Becky*

—

Finally, five days after he left, Dennis called. He said he was in Las Vegas and had found a ride to LA tomorrow. He hadn't

gotten a chance to check his email. Before he hung up, he said “I love you.” It shook Becky’s chest. She wondered if it had been a mistake out of habit from calls to his parents.

Six days and four books after that, Becky received a post card. She immediately recognized Dennis’s handwriting peeking out from under a fall outerwear catalogue in the stack of mail. On the front of the postcard was a photo of sand dunes looming over the Pacific Ocean. The top read “Monterey” in bright red, with cartoon fish on either side of the lettering. On the back, Dennis had written the following:

Dearest Becky,

Can you believe I've made it to California!? I've met so many kind and interesting people so far. Life is really inspiring when you have to rely on strangers so much. My faith in humankind is restored when the people pull through. Monterey is so beautiful. I want to return with you someday. The picture doesn't do it justice. The silkiest sand and the bluest water I've ever seen. Really blows Lake Huron outta the water! (Pun intended.) Monterey is also home to one of the world's best aquariums and the BEST clam chowder I've ever tasted! Not sure when I'll be home.

*Thinking of you all the time,
Dennis*

Becky read it three times, then cried.

What Dennis didn’t mention in his postcard was the following: He’d met more assholes than kind people. He’d spent more time on the side of the road and in bus stations than he had riding in cars or trucks with interesting strangers. He read the

descriptive plaque outside of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, but he didn't go inside. The tickets were \$35 a piece, he only had \$97 left to make it back to Michigan, and he didn't know how much more hitchhiking he could take. He had slept on the beach the night before and he woke up frozen to the core, even though he had been wearing the wool sweater he'd bought for Becky in Minnesota. The only thing he'd eaten for dinner that day were clam chowder samples from six different seaside bistros. His shoulders had what felt like permanent knots from carrying his backpack. He missed his parents, he missed his friends, he missed his bed, and he missed Becky much more than he'd thought he would. He didn't know what the hell he was doing in California, and he didn't know what he was going to do when he got home.

Becky kept the books she'd read that summer, the notes from Dennis, and the postcard he sent from Monterey in a decorative box she'd gotten from the craft store, which was covered with tiny dancing cats. This reminded her of the eighth grade, when she'd been pen pals with a boy, Ben, that she met at camp the summer before. She and Ben were shy with one another for most of camp, but he asked her to dance at the end-of-week celebration. For months after they parted ways to return to their home states Ben wrote letters that Becky would keep in a shoebox under her bed. Her parents would *ooh* and *aah* when his letters showed up in the mail. And with each letter, Ben got mushier. Then he started telling her about her body. Then he told her he loved her. She stopped writing.

Becky put the lid on the Box of Dennis, then opened it again, and read his notes one more time before going to bed. She brought his postcard to bed with her, hoping she'd dream of being on the beach with him. Next year, Dennis could come to Ohio with her, Becky thought. He could enroll at the community college in January

if he didn't return in time for the fall. She would help him ace his classes. She would help him transfer to Oberlin. She hugged her pillow tight, imagining it was his body against hers.

A week later, Dennis showed up at Becky's house unannounced. She shrieked in pleasure upon opening the front door. His blonde hair looked much longer, even though it had only been a few days past a month since she'd seen him. His face looked tired and tanned. His parents had booked him an overnight flight from San Francisco International to Detroit Metro Airport. He had arrived that morning. Dennis came inside, backpack still on. They went into her room and sat on her bed.

"I got you a present. Close your eyes."

She closed her eyes, with hands in her lap, and a smile stretching her cheeks. From his backpack, Dennis pulled the sweater. Finally, he was relieving himself of the thick double-ply woven weight that he'd been carrying for over three weeks. It had taken up half of the space in his backpack.

"Open your eyes," he said, and held it up.

"Oh, wow!" She grabbed it from his hands, held it to her face. It smelled like him.

"It was made by this awesome Native American woman I met in Minnesota. Amazing, right?"

Becky draped the sweater across her knees. She examined the pinkish purple color, then stroked the multicolored tulips that were stitched along the lower half. She hated it.

The next week, Becky's last week before she would move into her dorm, they planned to meet for the midnight movie. Becky waited outside of the theater in the sweater that looked nothing like her. The wind picked up, and stinging gusts pierced through the yarn and prickled her skin. She looked at her watch. She'd arrived

early, almost twenty minutes ago. Now, he was going to be late. She hugged the sweater closer to her skin, hunched and shivering. She looked down at the cheery tulips that she loathed. She spotted Dennis crossing the street at the end of the block—that bouncy walk, that careless smirk. She wondered if she'd ever meet a man who would know her.

The Desiccated

Meredith Hope

I am going back
to the love of my life,
who is hovering over
many waters,
and I am
up to my neck,
and at times,
over my head,
flooded,
completely
submerged,
soaked
through,
and yet,
and yet,
I have yearned,
and I have been
so thirsty.

Cygnnet Lake

Doug McBride

“There’s a family of swans that come by in summer,” Ally says.

I nod and look out across the lake; the wind whips the cold black water into ripples. There’s a slight whistle of a sound that blows barely detectable through the dark green conifers behind us, out onto the churning surface of water down below. Off in the distance, a kayak approaches the far shore with a man and child aboard. The pines rise up above them like sentinels, guarding entry into the mountains where the sun vibrates and sinks into the tree line.

I look over to my right at Ally. She sits cross-legged on a huge rock and faces me, inhaling. The orange glow of the joint lights up her hazel eyes and delicate face for a few seconds. The underside of her purple hooded sweatshirt turns red in the light. The light dies down, her features darken, and the soft wetness of her eyes becomes noticeable. She holds the hit in her lungs and manages a slight smirk. A powerful gust whips a few stray locks of hair back and forth across her face. She pulls down her hood, lets her long brown hair fly, exhaling into that full-blown, joyful smile of hers, and there’s this crushing, melting feeling in my chest. “What?” she says.

I try to manage a normal, friendly-friend smile. When I reach my hand out to her it’s all too clumsy though. I touch her fingers more than I need to as she passes me the joint. “I don’t know. You just look happy,” I say.

Seafloor Expansion II

KD Williams

"There sure as hell
is an awful lot
of sea, but
you can't see
much of it at all,"
the oceanographer
relays to his reflection
in the glass orb
keeping the air in
and the water
out. He hovers,
the watercraft creeping
along the seafloor,
which appears in
dimly-lit half-circles.
The light reveals
the lowliest creatures,
the downdirtiest
bottomfeeders to ever
suck at the feet
of the Lord — all eyeless,
clawed, cloistered
in dark pockets of muck.
He expects
the mimic octopus
to extend a tentacle, the perfect
counterpart to his cold hand,
when they meet — at last.

"How strange to be
searching for myself
all along." The oceanographer
licks his thumb to rub a smudge
from the looking-glass,
but the smudge
grows.
Even in the ocean,
he feels dry.

Seafloor Expansion IV

KD Williams

The mimic octopus
has taken to
going away on long weekends.

The oceanographer lowers
himself,

with the glass encasing
his face, into the sea.

Letting go is easy.

The mimic octopus
disappears into a cloud
of shimmering ink.

Leaving is hard.

He considers which way
is up and relearns to float.

His counterpart
always finds the way back
sometime

on Sunday afternoons.

All the oceanographer
has to do is turn

on the faucet

and lower himself, with
the glass encasing his face,
into the tub. Breathing
out is easy.

The mimic octopus

appears within a cloud
of dark bubbles.
Breathing in is hard.
He considers which way
is up and sinks down,
settling.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Feeling

Coral Lee

I

I learned to braid our legs together
Yours, knotted,
Mine, a black strand.

II

Your back is prickled with fever, driving
my masa harina knees into spicular skyscrapers

III

The waxing and waning bokeh
sends another's terribly romantic heartbreak into my third sternum

IV

touch my lips enharmonically
removing (forgetting) accidentals
you: flat four
me: major third

V

Would you give me your key signature? Or am I to plunk it out of a
sticky key, muddled into velvet?
You stand a half step above.

VI

When you come down, I watch your
sixth and seventh settle a little deeper

into deep velvet.

VII

You have ripped my abdominal fibers

VIII

Your corners pressed into red triangles
strike me as something so narrow and chromatic.

IX

The way you bleed from one yellow to another
is like snow in April

X

Snow in April
cools our braided bodies, darkened
by the moon and,
black outside,
I pull your neck to mine

XI

Your keys—wholly trembling beneath
my chipped fingers

XII

I have learned to speak to shadows
I have forgotten to feel the sun on my shoulders
I have learned to forget

XIII

Under your stars, silk is a verb

**MITCHELL KROCKMALNIK
GRABOIS**

Ant Code

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

1.

I don't report dreams. A poet who reports dreams is in trouble. A poet who begins a poem by identifying himself as a poet is in trouble. But I've had the same dream three times now, and you and I are in it together. We are on a journey in the desert, on camels. Your camel has the face of a famous comic actor. I don't know what my camel's face looks like. We enter an oasis and are offered a milk shake, but the Bedouins' blender is broken. We wait a long time for the situation to change, but the blender remains broken. We are disappointed. We sit on our camels and wait.

Then we're in your school. I've failed at everything I've ever tried, and now I'm a teacher in your school. I know that sounds demeaning, but I feel free to say it because I know how much you hate being a teacher in that school. You once enjoyed teaching, but then you gave a student a Tylenol, and the principal treated you as if you had been unveiled as a heroin dealer. You were cast out, onto Skid Road, like casting you into the desert, where you would sit on an uncomfortable camel and wait for a milk shake that would never come.

In your school I lay on a cot, but could not get to sleep. You were beside me, sleeping heavily. I knew I would not get any sleep that night, and when morning came I would be a teacher in your school. I would know I couldn't do it. It would be something else I would fail at. I left the building and walked home, wondering why I had

never pursued my childhood dream of becoming a mail carrier, why I had not spent a fulfilled life walking the hot, windy sidewalks of L.A.

2.

The third time I had this dream, I thought it meant that one of us would die and, if it were me, you would not attend my funeral, but would spend the rest of your days with the vague feeling that you had misplaced something, like a handkerchief or a small screwdriver, and you would never tell my spirit that you miss me, you would never tell any of my children that you miss me, and that I was a worthwhile person to have known, even though I have more than fifty children, and they reside in every state (at least one in every state, even Texas and Oklahoma, where you were born and raised). But if it was you that died, I would go to your funeral. Your children would be there and your ex-husband, sitting on a plate like a big, stinky meatball, and your sister, her hair long and glowing white like a Mexican curandera, capable of good or evil.

There would be phantasmas swooping around, rattling doorknobs, slamming doors. I would ask your sister if she was strong, physically strong, like you, and in reply she would pick me up and put me under her arm like an old alligator suitcase and take me to the train station and drop me on the platform.

3.

In the morning, when I awoke here in Mexico, where we obey the Virgin of Guadalupe, I went to record the dream, but found that my

laptop was crawling with little Mexican ants, who were contemptuous of me and my feelings, and my fate. When I tried to put all this down in words, I found that the ants had subverted the computer. Every keystroke read something different than what I'd typed, and the whole effort was gobbledygook.

I woke up to a world in which I could no longer express myself, and knew it was me who would die, and you who would be unknowing and uncaring.

The Hollow Center

Kayla Krut

An infidel, I'm not sorry to ransack a kingdom while under its king.
His mouth was the entry point, I put my fingers on it,
smoothing the furrows out. His lips were red.
My fingers went into his mouth, his tongue was hot.
I slid in almost to the knuckles, he licked at my ring.
Morning came and he breathed through his mouth, dew
and rain moistening our feet. I put my hands away.

My Fetid Lover

Jennifer Davis

A disease at the dinner table,
grease smudge on a white napkin,
breach in the hull,
festering, bubbling boil
that overflows with malignant
juices.

For you, my Valentine.
For you.

Valeria in Hollywood

James Croal Jackson

Unease hangs on fame trees
bespeckled by drooped prop
lights as I leave Valeria in a bus
to act

like she belongs, as if anyone belongs
anywhere, who's to say what's right
underneath a moon who lies
to us

every night, concealing
lighted portions of herself, hiding
dusty cratered skin
as dark places in
the midst

of empty spaces
while mannequins remain
tucked behind glass,
wearing gold; exquisite, fit,
staring, wanting, vacant, stuck, cold
in their grim, posed smiles just beyond
our reach

Your mouth is the bitterness

Coral Lee

Your mouth is the bitterness of earl gray
earl gray
is better with cream and sugar,
like those sun-bleached footprints you left

earl gray
is floral, like the song of that
time you almost suggested we
take a picnic, just to enjoy
the softness of each other's hair.

(you are) earl gray
a chopped up, dried up blend of what
is sweet in life, what is searing

you are (earl gray)
when you offer me your teeth when
I want your knuckles, your cheeks when
I want your lips. you, my dear, you're
earl gray

your eyes
are the forgiveness of summer
you are the custard coating the
wooden spoon, the greedy fingers
that keep the ice cream from freezing.

your eye(lashe)s
are the slow jam, power ballad
of rain-slicked dreams, your irises
are the bright blue ring-pop lips that
ask if I'd like a glass of one-
hundredth of a hot wheels racecar.

your nose
is that terrible dream i had
of filling a home with you. a

home that can hide the hours of
christmas and minutes of new year's

your nose
pressed against a ripe peach that walks
in on our toes dancing beneath
my grandmother's dinner table.
a home that doesn't even need
walls or windows or floors because
you swore all you needed was me,
because all I want—all I need—
every morning it is stormy,
your nose

A Study for Salesmen

Matthew Vasiliauskas

Block lent us his car, overcoat, and a hand in a formaldehyde jar.

The owner of the hand had long been forgotten, but it had a way of making things seem lucky.

Your eye would seep into greenness, and fragmented lashes would puncture through flaking flesh.

There had been a real surge in Otwan production, and we wanted to capitalize on it.

Otwan was . . . well . . . I'd say indescribable but important. It possessed a scent that made life bearable.

A smell of washed fabric that traverses rising chests and bubbles in the shifting amber of memory.

We took the stuff door to door in the more influential neighborhoods. Ones Block had picked.

The other face I was with let me do the talking, with most of the conversations going the same.

"Are you aware of the many benefits of Otwan?"

"I really don't have time right now."

"I notice you have a twitch. It has all the signs of being life threatening."

“I have to attend to a baby.”

“This will cure that. It cures everything.”

It was the age of heads, doorways containing the rattling echo of exhausted truth.

Decades had passed since a proper summer, but I didn't really mind.

Block's car was perfect for winter, housing the hypnotic swirl of captured breath.

As time went on we received leads sending us from areas of influence to areas of confusion.

We began dodging flaming garbage, and the occasional urine-filled aquarium.

I was constantly being reassigned to different faces. Something about a yawn that depressed.

Eras meshed, and I saw my adolescent self in the street-light gleam of silhouettes marching through snow.

Sales picked up, and I remember everyone for weeks seeming to be named Brown.

“I'm going to send it to the boys who are still over there.”

“You're doing a real service, and you won't regret it.”

“What did you say it's called again? Ottawa?”

I looked back through the frost on Block's car, and watched as the
hand turned upside down.

Magritte Explains Ornithology

Elizabeth Kerper

After the paintings “Young Girl Eating a Bird (Pleasure)” and “The Healer”

The man with the birdcage body and the girl who eats birds were childhood friends. They grew up together, they remember when she could still be satisfied gnawing on gristle and molted tail feathers, remember the games of tag when his iron-barred torso left broken stripes of rust on her palms. They remember the night when two doves first made his chest an aviary, how she took one fast step toward him. Now they are older, she stands very still among the trees, the birds flock to her, green-black crests and useless claws, there is blood on her fingertips and her white lace collar. The man will not go in the woods anymore, but still, he leaves the door to his ribcage open.

In the Supermarket

Kalyn Gensic

Placing Mrs. Baird's bread in the cart
I recognize a brief stunned expression
cross my husband's brown eyes
before he can tame the emotion.

Following his gaze down the aisle,
there stands a woman in a red turtleneck sweater.
I've never met her, but from an old Polaroid
I know that this is the one
he was rebounding from when he met me.

After six months of premarital counseling
I declared myself healed of insecurities
over whether or not he still loved her.

But now I begin to read the nutrition facts for olives,
striving to iron the wrinkle in my brow,
steady the twitch at the corner of my mouth.

Hunger

Lynn Knapp

He never missed a meal at home,
but she was a convenience to him,
the 7-Eleven of sex,
the fast food of infatuation,
a midnight snack,
never a main course.
He was free to indulge,
free to forget,
the minute his hunger
had passed.

Memorandum

Meredith Hope

When you are not the beloved,
Everything is easy and never too much:
All the time contains all the meaning.
Your glass is always, always
being refilled.
The soup in the bowl is always
the right amount of just hot enough.
Storms prove necessary;
look at the seeds you planted,
in rows and rows on the acres of acres,
perhaps, perhaps, one day, you will know
the extent of the harvest.
When you are not the beloved,
you wait.

JENNIFER FINSTROM

Mushrooms in the Basement

Jennifer Finstrom

In 1986,
I took a card table,
a single
folding chair,
and my electric
typewriter
down
the steep
steps
to the damp
unfinished
basement,
partly to escape
the humid
summer air
and partly
to be
alone with
the sound
of the typewriter keys
and the occasional
thump
of laundry
dropping
down the chute.
Behind
the stairs, a soft

bag of loam
sat quietly,
the mushroom-growing
kit my parents
had ordered.
Out of its darkness,
many pale legions
exploded. Hordes
of mushrooms.
Words reaching
for air.

This is the poem that happens when a boy from your poetry workshop twenty-five years ago appears on Facebook

Jennifer Finstrom

For (and after a line by) Clare Stuber

You had a crush on him because he wrote short angry poems, was in a Ramones cover band, and wore his hair in a long blond bob. He would come over and drink beer at your apartment in downtown Green Bay but always had a friend with him, so nothing ever happened.

This is the poem that happens when you realize that he was quiet not just because he was angry but also because he didn't know what to say. He speaks to you now in opera, posts YouTube clips of *La Boheme* and *Tannhauser* and *Tosca*. He talks about going to Rome and either throwing himself off of the parapet of the Castel Sant'Angelo or not, and you have to look up the plot of *Tosca* on Wikipedia to know what he is talking about.

This is the poem that happens when you say good-night and go to bed at two, after revising your bedtime from twelve to twelve-thirty to one, and wake up in the morning to find sixteen more messages and a poem in German. He has asked "Was ist los?" on your wall, and you have to use Google translate during your office hours to find out what it means.

This is the poem that happens when he writes, "_____ is typing" in the comment bubble. Followed by, "I love you so much. So there

it is.” And you want to answer that what he says isn’t possibly true, that you are a construct created by unholy alchemy, the dark conjuration of alcohol, social media, and memory. But you say nothing.

This is the poem where he summons you again and again from the ether. This is the poem where you begin to question your own reality. This is the poem where you go online, and of course, there you are.

**Almost Sonnet Written While Thinking about
The Winter's Tale and Remembering a Poem I
Wrote Twenty-Five Years Ago in Northern
Wisconsin Where It Snowed a Great Deal**

Jennifer Finstrom

The poem was called "Siberia," and I might have written it for this winter. But now, again, it is February of 1989, my sophomore year, and this night is the last I will spend in your dorm. I sit in the living room while you sleep and write "in mornings I wait to ride the long train to town." Later, you will wake and ask for the note that I wrote for you. I will say that there was no note, that it was a poem, and anyway, it isn't yours. Now, in Chicago, I take the train to the city every day. "Good my lords, I am not prone to weeping." This poem is in my blood; I could write it again.

Humid

Kayla Krut

It's not too soon to plan for the end
of the feeling of Buenos Aires
which you will be leaving for dead

I chose to take advantage
of rain's silences
to focus on how owls fought

and reconciled throughout
summer, a few drams
in a row, which were damp

from the heat in the air.
Ultimately night
had been weeping all the time

and was ready for me
to relinquish
your side and return

to a wide stance alone
a horned owl in a palm tree
balancing while I prepare to move

Kansas City International

Tess Wilson

When you leave
if you leave
you will wade
the margarine
pools of Topeka
night lights.

When you leave
if you leave
you will breathe
the Kansas breeze
and you will bird
every summer.

When you leave
if you leave
you will blink
the flicker of fields
whipping by on
Wyandotte Road.

When you leave
if you leave
you will bleed
the City of Fountains
and quench your
autumn thirst.

When you leave
if you leave
you will sleep
the blue cold
of limestone.

Three stories: when people leave

Greg Overman

The man was on his hands and knees crawling home on the Black Street sidewalk after a good afternoon drunk. Concerned, I offered a hand:

“Nah, man. Just taking a breather. This is a beautiful day.” He was correct in this,
so I crawled aside him, absorbing the sun warmth sidewalk through my palms,

Closing my eyes until all was the pink of a womb. Opening my eyes again
the drunk man was gone and a police cruiser was parked aside me.

Driving through dark in the Absaroka Mountains, I swerved to avoid
a right lane bicycle on its side. Concerned, stopping to find a woman laying,

A night sky asphalt bed. To my belief in her impending death:
“Nah, I’m just enjoying the stars. They’re beautiful.” So I lay

Aside her, counting gods on this mountain road until I slept still.
Waking in the newday light amongst a herd of free range cattle,

She was gone. When a cocaine miscalculation took the life
of a friend at twenty-three, I stood aside her casket and placed

A lily. A child in white aside me tapped my thigh: “I know that we decompose, but how long do our bones stay whole?”

I thought to answer: as long as the stars, as long as the warmth of the sun, as long as the stories we leave behind. But of course

When I opened my eyes to tell,
the child was gone.

Pot-au-feu

Daniel Camponovo

“You haven’t been eating much.

“What?”

“I said, you haven’t been eating much.”

“I don’t have much of an appetite. It’s okay.”

“Mm. You feeling alright?”

“Fine.”

“Well, eat a little more. You need to keep your strength up.

Are you?”

“Am I?”

“Keeping your strength up.”

“I think so. I feel okay.”

“Just okay?”

“Yeah, okay. Just not hungry.”

“And without an appetite.”

“Yes.”

“For weeks now.”

“Yeah.”

“And that doesn’t bother you?”

“No. That never happens to you?”

“We shouldn’t have done it.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It was stupid. That was a stupid thing to do.”

“You’re being an asshole.”

“Did you tell anyone?”

“What would I tell them? That I don’t have an appetite?
There’s nothing to tell.”

“But did you tell anyone? Your parents? Or what’s-her-name, Rhonda?”

“I don’t have friends named Rhonda. And no.”

“Good. Don’t.”

“There’s nothing to tell anyone.”

“You don’t know that yet. How could you know that?”

“Because I know my body.”

“Well, I know your body pretty well too.”

“What was that thing you said earlier? About it being stupid?”

“It was. It was stupid of us.”

I suddenly felt very stupid for letting him do that to me.

“It wasn’t safe.”

“I felt safe at the time. Now I don’t feel very safe.”

I brushed the frizzy strands of hair out of my face and tried to keep my hands from shaking above the table. Below, they could shake. Out of sight, they could shake like they had never shaken before, but brushing my hair away, I focused on keeping those hands steadier than they had ever been. Like a surgeon’s. For some reason it seemed important to me that they not shake.

That night it had seemed important that my hands not shake as they explored his body, tracing the peaks and the valleys with the tips of my fingers like braille. I felt his body before I saw it. We were kissing, with my eyes shut, and while I was afraid of losing my way, I was more afraid still of opening my eyes and seeing how pale and raw he must have looked, our bodies on top of each other like keys on a piano. While my hands were tracing up his thighs his were tracing down mine, reaching under me, and when I tried to cross my legs and prolong the exploration a bit longer he pried them open with his fingers like a duck’s beak. His fingers were cold, and when he brushed them against me he exploded a part of my brain I didn’t even know I had.

His Big Romantic Gesture had been cooking us dinner, a pot roast he had had simmering all day, and the entire house smelled like meat. The door handle had grubby kid's fingerprints on it and the refrigerator had a magnetized shopping list in a woman's handwriting, reminders of his family gone for the long weekend. The smell of cooked meat blasted me as soon as I walked in, and it didn't smell good or bad, necessarily, just strong. Inescapable. He topped the meat with a red wine reduction so that it looked like a pulsating animal dying on my plate, and when I cut in with the tongs of my fork the strips of the roast tore away from each other like tissue paper, pulling apart and opening up the space in between where the red dripped down and pooled like a lagoon. He was spearing the meat with his fork and sopping up the juices, tugging the torn threads of flesh around the plate like a marionette before bringing it to his mouth and allowing the juice to drip down. I had been starving when I arrived, but my appetite began dissipating the moment I entered the house to the smell of the pot roast. He had a hunger about him that unnerved me. At the time I wrote it off to his being a gourmand, taking appreciation in his cooking and his food, but now I wonder.

"My African queen," he breathed as he kissed my neck, with such a want that against my better judgment I took the words as the compliment he believed he was giving me and not the barbs they stung like. I had never been to Africa. I had never known anyone who had been to Africa. I had never even been outside New Jersey before moving to Chicago for school. But before I could say anything, before I could stop and gather the hundreds of thoughts running through my mind, the whats and the waits and the stops, I felt his cold white fingers on me again, lighting my brain up like a Christmas tree before sliding themselves inside of me.

I don't remember much of what happened next. Not because it was traumatizing or because I blocked it out, but because it wasn't

anything special. I wanted it to be special; I wanted it to be mind-blowing, the very first time, so that I could take it as a cosmic sign that this was right, this was what we were meant to be doing to each other's bodies, instead of how confused and anxious and unsure of everything I actually felt. It was slippery (he sweated a lot), and at one point he grabbed a fistful of my hair and got his ring tangled in the frizz, but on the whole it was pretty unremarkable.

What I do remember is the smell of the pot roast reaching up even into the bedroom. I remember the way the tender strips of meat pulled apart and tore open, the way the red pooled into the cavity. I remember the way he lapped up the juices dribbling down his chin. And I remember the faint red light on the bookshelf across the room. Small, like a laser pointer, and not difficult to miss, wedged back between dusty hardbound copies of *Rabbit, Run* and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*. I remember seeing it from the lip of the mattress, hovering over his left shoulder as it rose and fell over me, and I wish I had taken a break from digging my nails into his back to tap out for a quick second and point and ask him point blank what that light was.

I stared at that light for the rest of the time he was on top of me, which was not long. His body started to squirm around more than thrust, quivering and pulsating all over until, just as soon as he had started, he finished. I think by then I had convinced myself that the light was a VCR player or something, even though nobody has owned one of those for ten years, and when he climbed off of me suddenly I had to snap back to the bedroom and hide any trace of doubt or fear on my face. Hide any sign that I had seen the light, and that I was now running through all the possible things it could be and what it could mean. I don't know why I didn't confront him about it right then and there, when he was naked and raw on the edge of the bed, and vulnerable, and unable to run, regret already building up inside the two of us. I guess I felt even more vulnerable

and powerless to run. What are the defining moments of our lives? How do we know when they begin, or end, when one moment runs into the next and into the next?

“What the hell does that mean? ‘Now it doesn’t feel safe’? You don’t think—”

“No.”

“Good, because I didn’t.”

“I know.”

“You wanted to too.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Look, if you’re—”

“I’m not.”

“But if you end up—”

“I won’t.”

“But how do you *know* that? Do you know what could happen to me?”

And there it was. He had reached his hands out across the table as if to grab mine but thankfully thought better of it, leaving them hovering above the stack of sugar packets like strange blimps. His eyes were panicked, but he was restraining himself here in the middle of the cafe, flicking back and forth like a drinking bird toy between the fear of how quickly I could undo the life he had built for himself and the power of how completely he could ruin mine before it even started. I wondered then where that video was. If he had panicked and erased it as soon as I had left or if he had locked it away somewhere buried deep on his computer, maybe tucked away in a folder with an unknown and unknowable number of others.

“I don’t really care what happens to you now. I thought I would. I thought maybe it could involve me, too. Just us. But now I don’t.”

“So what are you going to do?”

"I'm going to leave this cafe. Then I'm going to go to the library. Then to class. Because I'm still a student here. What are you going to do?"

"But what about—"

"No. Shut up. I said what are you going to do?"

"Well, I'm going to pay for us."

"No," I said, fishing a couple of bucks out of my jeans and throwing them by my cup. "Then what."

"Then I'm going to go to the library."

"No. You're not following me there. Then what."

"Then I have to teach my class."

"Don't look at me. Don't look at me even once when you're up there. Then what."

"Then I'm going to go home."

"Who are you going to take with you this time?"

He stared at me with a look of shame and anger and pride I had never seen before.

"Who's going to be there?"

"You know that."

"Rachel. And Caleb. He'll be asleep when you get home."

"Yes. He will." He didn't like me using their names.

"And Rachel will pour you a glass of wine to relax."

"She might. She has before."

"And she'll ask how your day went and you'll tell her it was fine and you won't mention this conversation."

"Rachel will never know you exist. She will never even know your name."

"What is my name? Say it. Say my name."

"You're crazy. You're a crazy person. I'm trying to reason with a crazy person."

"Imani. My name is Imani."

“I know what your name is,” he said, grabbing his bag off the floor and standing up from the table and throwing a twenty-dollar bill by his oozing, half-eaten quiche. I ripped it in half.

“Then say it.”

He looked at me for a long second, trying to think of something to say, before exhaling and walking past the table and down the length of the hallway and out the door, slowing but not looking back before exiting.

“My name is Imani,” I called after him. I stayed in my seat with my hands perched on the edge of the table. People’s heads started to turn and stare at me, but I didn’t care. They looked like statues in a garden, still and unmoving and unprepared to say or do anything to help the crazy person they believed me to be, but I had never felt clearer.

“Say it,” I yelled now, with my eyes closed, hands folded in my lap. I reminded myself to breathe. Someone with a low voice said “Imani” from a table behind me followed by a snigger of laughter from somebody else, but I didn’t care. I kept my eyes closed because it felt almost like I could see better that way. Like I could see the whole world laid out end-to-end in front of me, as I imagined it to be, mountains and valleys and glaciers and an entire world of possibilities opening up wide on the insides of my eyelids instead of the brushed chrome interior of the coffee shop, so long as I just kept my eyes closed a little while longer.

appraisals

Jeffrey P. Beck

you know these appraisers: they're your great-grandmother's tight-jawed, wind-bracing people, in West Branch or Keystone, in Hoover's chicken-in-every-pot Depression Iowa: you know this woman's frayed green-cloth coat, closed with a clothes pin from a windy line, you smell the rag weed, corn, and dirt on it, and you know her grimy stocking cap, scenting of clinkers or a wood-burning stove that soots, but never really warms, the clapboard house: you've banged that green screen door yourself a thousand times, and you know the double-jowled city woman too, her fur coat and pearl earrings ordered from Chicago, so you know they're talking chicken dinner, but more than that: the farm girl giving blear-eyed jowlie a sly right finger from out the feathers, but richie is engrossed with her, her furry eyes giving you the feeling she would kiss farm girl and more, and then there's the hen caught up in the death swirl of class, sex, and chicken dinner: a five-pound roaster, fat and healthy, but near the end of her laying, drying up, so this the clever farm girl will deliver: fresh fowl, exhausted fertility, decapitated and cleaned, feather-free, as she kneels under her skirt with wide jaw and searching

tongue in the sweet suck of imagination
at the moist mat at her front door.

Lament for a Catholic Daughter

Katie Kalisz

Running, she circles the kitchen island, her father's yesterday
white t-shirt framing her face like a nun's habit. Stained

armpits, a smudge of devoted dirt on the left shoulder, ribbed
and sagging collar, the cotton covers her body.

I say she looks like a nun and she happily practices the word
in her young mouth. *Nun,*

nun, nun, nun, nun! Praying it aloud in the living room.
I pray against her one word invocation: *Please*

do not become a nun. I will have to go to confession
to admit that, and then do penance before I think it

again. Ten rosaries in the patterned garden. An act
of contrition, my consecrated prejudice. A daughter cloistered

in a convent! More curious than an ordained son. I see
no child priests, no child nuns, but they all must have been children

once, playing catechism and squirreling away patience from their
parents'
hurried practice. *What if I go in her place, knitting my hands in
worry*

and silence? Solitude. I have already unfastened my body. I will
practice
attending mass in halves, without the whole of me.

I would have made a good nun. But not my daughter. She is too
pure,
does not even know what to lament yet. How to regret.

Three Letters from Barbara Two Weeks After the Miscarriage

Katie Kalisz

I.

Barbara proclaims the birth:

Four kittens to my unnamed barn cat!

The precious squinting of eyes,
tongues in constant search of milk -
predictable as pendulums. Giddy with motherhood,
she beds them in the screen porch, offers
gentle stomach rubs, cleans
the mother's dried blood.

II.

Barbara's new news (agony is) a
feral male
breaks all their necks overnight
while the tired mother finally sleeps
Barbara
attempts rescue
Inevitable
as pouring water up
I nod silent goodbyes to both of our losses
as the last of the blood lets
go
of me

III.

How the kittens' mother copes. Rages and hunts.
When I read of Barbara as accomplice, locking
the male in the barn, leading the mother there,
triumphant, I cry out for the same
 guided set-up of my own body, a traitor
 guilty
 of self-sabotage.

Lot 29

Brian Furman

It snowed.

A heavy down comforter, typical of Cleveland in December, a pristine blanket that will resemble an oil spill on an old factory floor come February. The car found its way to the drive and pulled in automatically. We weaved around the labyrinth of land with the same intensity with which we exhausted affection. The silent tension brooding over the vehicle was shattered by my wife's crisp, angled words:

"Lot twenty-nine . . ."

She pointed to a piece of untouched earth that fought to stay virgin. Her mouth crooked, her eyes tired. I could see fragments of spirit leaking, separating from her as if a dormant scar opened and spilled shards of stained glass. Her ripening olive skin glared an unnatural blush and transparency that pulsed with colorless energy. I stared at the wheel as we came to a stop in front of a sign declaring our place on Earth. I dare not stare at her for fear of subtext. I force myself to a place where restraint becomes emotion.

My wife lets her breath out in a long deep trench and gets out of the car on shaky legs. I stare out over the expanse of the field. Crosses and holiday decorations are drizzled along the horizon like bleached coral; stone tomb markers make pits in the white mimicking miniature open graves. I have yet to see any footprints human or otherwise.

In my mind the focus of the holidays is birth. The birth of Christ, or the birth of a new year, a certain renewal that is plucked from the brain stem and placed like a newspaper clipping in a new scrapbook. When her grandma passed those days before

Thanksgiving with her family gathered around her in an ironic and surreal Baptism, wanting to take away pain if it meant consuming bite-size morsels, likening her to Chernobyl and exposure time was crucial and our bodies were made of lead and we lifted her crinkled frame above the fallout parting the air in waves, our arms scaffolds as if giving heaven the Queen of radiation and mutating DNA . . .

That focus in the air was as ever-present as the vertical tubes sticking from her cardboard cut-out shell . . .

Since this year death was the daily holiday card and the repeated mantra in the house was the frantic speech of my wife: "I have to be there before Christmas" each time with helpings of emotion and guilt heaved on top of an already repressed guilt-filled version of the Marianas Trench . . . anxiety became a new chemical that situated itself next to Boron in the Periodic Table.

We stole quick, short breaths in the cold anxiety and I waited

...

. . . And she waited. And her words stole the air:

"There is no gravestone."

And I remembered . . . before the snow, in the freshly tilled dirt, off-center of the plot what resembled a solid soda-pop can with a number driven into the nutrient rich ground. The blanket is now suffocating what little optimism was left.

And I remember my grandma . . . whose expensive, dead, Catholic body lies somewhere in this sanitized land. She has a gravestone. I never visit.

My wife takes off down the road, stopping every five feet or so to kick at a stranger's pit. With every kick her frustration mounts; with every kick the tops of her feet turn a strange bright color as they are exposed to the cold, as if she didn't wear the proper snow shoes on purpose, as if she wanted to go numb. She picks up speed; I hear her grunting at the ground, I feel her weeping in the air. I run the other way, kicking and grunting and guiltting,

wishing I could feel the same way about a loved one's death, feel something in the cutting bite of snow. My feet are covered; my soul is brightly colored, exposed and numb. I try so hard to make my tears freeze.

The dead hear rhythmic footsteps above their underground castles and start the party.

We turn to each other 500 yards away, tethered by a string of emptiness. I give it a little tug, and she pulls back, telling me it's no good, it's too cold, it's too late, it will be dark soon . . .

wake

Jeffrey P. Beck

lies, lies, lies
envelope your tissue

heart: strip, ply
the skin away

and the next skin
appears, more sheer

the gauzy film,
not thick like

sausage sheath,
but lithe as breath

breathing deceit
as easy as air,

one after another
layer and more,

so many, many more,
almost uncountable,

your memory redoubtable
to assemble so many

and insist on every lie
as if it were gospel—

you rule the jungle
of lies, tigress princess

with sexual excess—
but we all know your

onion heart will peel
off its living fiction—

your sharp, empty breath
sweet acid nothing,

and soon we'll wake,
and wake your death.

years

Greg Overman

the gravediggers found me waiting upon the bone steps to begin the
year walk

to our river edge. I asked if you had yet to be brought forth;
hard knowing men, they placed palms upon the Madison water

to shimmer show you dancing with child in white. The gravediggers
have gone again following to the birth of the more known other.
again upon the bone steps I placed my payment to know for all our
ghosts.

Ackermann

Josef K. Strosche

When he took Medieval German Lit in graduate school, Ackermann read *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* by Johannes von Tepl. His professor was amused both by his last name and that his grandparents were Germans from Bohemia. Of course, only his grandmother was from Bohemia and didn't acquire the name till she married his grandfather, an East Frisian, as an expellee in the British Zone of Occupation in 1947. Ackermann nevertheless felt nausea that first day, envisioning a future wife he didn't yet know taking ill and leaving him a young widower.

The work, you see, which is also known as *Der Ackermann und der Tod* and dates from the year 1401, concerns a man in the prime of his life whose wife dies suddenly from illness. He reproaches Death for this offense, taking him to task in the odd-numbered chapters, while Death defends himself with ice-cold reason in the even-numbered ones. Ultimately, God himself intervenes as judge, reminding both to whom they owe their very existences.

Ackermann envisioned a faceless stranger when he thought forward to his dead wife, reading chapter after chapter with growing dread, despite the fact that he was in a relationship at the time. The girl was a European and, though he was quite convinced he loved her and she loved him, an improbable choice to be his wife, if for no other reason than neither wanted to live away from family for any prolonged period of time. Weeks after checking *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* off his list and submitting his short essay, Ackermann had expunged all thoughts of the work from his mind. Then he caught a cold. The cold passed in a week, and he developed

a cough. Once the cough was gone, a severe sore throat ensued. He phoned his mother, who told him to see a doctor. He did and was promptly told that he had mono.

He and the girlfriend avoided kissing at first, mindful of the colloquial moniker for the affliction, but the practice soon proved too difficult. Ackermann was warned that he'd become lethargic, sleeping for days at a time, and that he might consider taking the rest of the semester off. Yet nothing of the sort occurred. He even noted that he felt as well as ever most days.

Rather than being good news, the curious fact terrified the young man. His theory was that he'd been misdiagnosed. Surely something worse was to blame. He bounced his guesses, from lupus to lung cancer, off of his girlfriend, who was mostly just annoyed until he posited that it must be HIV, missed by a blood test taken too soon. At this she became irate. She slapped him across the face. Before he could react she punched him in the arm. It took hours for him to convince her that it was categorically impossible for him to have contracted the disease, if not from her.

Despite resumed intimacies, the girlfriend never contracted mono, much less HIV. But they did part ways not long thereafter, the girlfriend returning home and Ackermann intent on finding his calling in the world. He sought it first in Prague with an internship at the *Goethe-Institut*. When it ended he got work teaching English through a private language school. He made friends, mostly with the English but with a sprinkling of Spanish and Greek to keep him on his toes. They began with dinner and drinks around nine, hopped bars till one, and closed clubs at seven. He met the younger clients, who neither minded nor judged, in the mornings with booze yet on his breath. The older ones, the ones who paid better, the business folks, he met after waking in the late afternoon, just before heading out with his tribe to do it all over again.

Not quite a year into Prague he took the time and acknowledged the thoughts that had been waiting patiently in the back of his mind. After granting them their hearing he judged in their favor, opting to head north to investigate the ancestral nest of his deracinated grandmother. The village he found was depressing and lorn, bearing scars of expulsion and communism even some version of capitalism couldn't and wouldn't heal. It soured Prague for Ackermann. He found himself taking lonely strolls through Josefov and peering through the miniscule slits in the walls surrounding the spooky Jewish cemetery. He even took a tour once but had to abort midway through, scared out of his wits.

After another visit north to his grandmother's homeland, he moved to Germany, deeming it the only fitting solution. In Oldenburg, he was an hour east of the patch of soil on which his father had been bred. There too he first taught English for subsistence earnings, but in place of the late nights and strong drink were great aunts who could cook and second cousins with connections. He got a decent job working for an online journal. With the respectable salary he could afford a real apartment. He met a girl.

The girl was nice, a Slovenian in town for the university. The fact didn't seem to pose the problems it had in the past. They didn't even talk about where they'd end up, only that they'd end up somewhere together. For a year it went on. His parents came over and joined them on the train to Ljubljana so that all could meet in one colossal language blur. She moved in. They expected a child but lost it late in the first trimester. It hurt but didn't deter them. Six months went by without another pregnancy. The doctor at first told them it was complicated and then that she was sick. It was an intestinal disease first misdiagnosed as stomach cancer. The treatments were awful and the symptoms even worse. In time she improved. The two close calls, however, were too much for

Ackermann to take, leaving him wondering if his time chasing Death in Bohemia might not have infected him.

He left the Slovenian and soon all of Europe behind. Two years of isolation in the States passed. He buried his grandparents before he met me, the first and last woman he'd marry. I don't know what it was that shook him out of his slumber, as much as I'd cherish saying it was me. I'm twelve years his junior, so I've always wondered if he thought I was immortal. When he'll listen I still tell him how ridiculous it is, how his past has nothing to do with his illness. And yet, with what they keep swearing is eight weeks to live, he insists that I should exact my revenge on a Death I don't even believe in once he's gone. I ask him what I'm supposed to do. Should I take our two small children to the babysitter while I sit at home in a vodka rage, calling out some specter for what he's robbed from me? He drifts in and out nowadays. We decided to keep him at home. Last weekend I heard him praying to God, stuttering and mumbling but begging fiercely for forgiveness for something I could not decipher.

He Sang to the God that Woke Him

Laszlo Slomovits

1.

He sang to the god that woke him —
Make me a fire that will not burn her.

Deny me this heat but not this light.
And the fire cardinal — innocent

bystander to helpless yearning —
continued its cry on the branch.

2.

Every leaf told a different story,
in the same wind, on the same branch.

And he touched her with a stifled song
and she sighed, and the fire
in the song flared from her breath.

3.

And he was young and wild with virility,
and she was ardent as the sun.

And he thickened at the root and she opened
at the base, and they both blazed at the core.

4.

And they swayed in the smoldering,
softening dark, deeper with each swing.

5.

Later, he watched her head bowed over a book
as in prayer — long strands of hair falling
forward — and he loved her shadowed ear

showing through. Here was yet another joy —
listening in silence to words about words,
delight-dripping, uncertain, yet learning to mean.

6.

Desire is our native tongue.
Yet we've been exiled, compelled
to make a home from what've we lost.

7.

*Where is the mast to be tied to, he cried,
sailing through waters filled with your voice?*

*Where the strong rope, the knots? Where
the ear-plugged oarsmen to pull me through?*

8.

A bone must sometimes be broken
again before it can properly heal.

*And the heart, doctor,
what about the heart?*

Everything ached for must be
forgotten, remembered, imagined again.

9.

And when the light is no longer there,
we'll help each other in the dark.

We'll follow the curve into
the pearled shell of memory.

And when words no longer come, may we find
we've said to each other all that was needed.

Artist Biographies

Jeffrey Beck: “wake” & “appraisals” (poetry)

Jeffrey was born and raised in Iowa. He is the recent winner of the Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Award, and honorable mention winner of the Frank O'Hara Poetry Prize. His poetry has been published or will be published in *Miramar*, *Writing Tomorrow*, *Worcester Review*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *I-70 Review*, and other journals. He is Dean of the Nathan Weiss Graduate College at Kean University in Union, N.J.

Myles Buchanan: “You Smell Like Candle Smoke” (poetry)

Myles Buchanan is from Portland, Oregon and has studied English at Kenyon College and Oxford University. His poetry has also appeared in *HIKA*, and his prose has appeared on *Yesteryear Fiction*.

Daniel Camponovo: “Pot-au-feu” (fiction)

Daniel is an East Coast ex-pat writer and linguist living in Chicago, Illinois. He is currently pursuing an MFA in Fiction Writing from Columbia College Chicago. His work has appeared *North by Northwestern* and is forthcoming in *Hair Trigger*, *Blue Lake Review* and *The Acentos Review*.

Jennifer Davis: “My Fetid Lover” (poetry)

Jennifer has a B.A. in theatre with a minor in creative writing from Northern Kentucky University. She works for herself as a freelance writer and editor, and recently published a poem in *NEAT*. Jennifer’s professional website is www.jendaviswriter.com.

Jen Finstrom: “This is the poem that happens when a boy from your poetry workshop twenty-five years ago appears on Facebook,” “Almost Sonnet Written While Thinking about The Winter’s Tale and Remembering a Poem I Wrote Twenty Five Years Ago in Northern Wisconsin Where It Snowed a Great Deal,” & “Mushrooms in the Basement” (poetry)

***highlighted writer**

Jennifer teaches in the First-Year Writing Program, tutors in writing, and facilitates a writing group, Writers Guild, at DePaul University. She has been the poetry editor of *Eclectica Magazine* since October of 2005, and her work appears in *RHINO*, *Cider Press Review*, *NEAT*, and *Midwestern Gothic*, among others.

Brian Furman: “Lot 29” (fiction)

Brian is a writer originally from the mythical portal of Cleveland, Ohio. He currently resides in Tampa, Florida with his two wonderful children and his hotter-than-normal beauty of a wife.

Kalyn Gensic: “In the Supermarket” (poetry)

Kalyn is a mother of three children and works as a visual artist in Ardmore, OK. Formerly, she was the art and poetry editor for *The Shinnery Review*.

Mitchell Grabois: “Ant Code” & “Complexion” (fiction)***highlighted writer (“Complexion” found with interview on site)**

Mitchell’s poems and fictions have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He is a regular contributor to *The Prague Revue*, and has been thrice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His novel, **Two-Headed Dog**, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available for 99 cents from [Kindle](#) and [Nook](#), or as a [print edition](#).

Meredith Hope: “The desiccated” & “Memorandum” (poetry)

It only took Meredith eight years after obtaining a writing degree to begin sharing her creative work publicly. Her poems and essays reside at www.ohmeredith.com.

James Jackson: “Valeria in Hollywood” (poetry)

James originally hails from Clinton, Ohio. He is a film and creative writing graduate of Baldwin Wallace University. He writes music, makes short films, and perpetually longs to play racquetball. You

can find more of his writing in various publications and at jimjakk.com.

Katie Kalisz: “Three Letters from Barbara Two Weeks After the Miscarriage” & “Lament for a Catholic Daughter” (poetry)

Katie has an MFA Queens University of Charlotte. She teaches writing at Grand Rapids Community College, and her poems have appeared in *Plainsongs*, *Dappled Things*, *The Dunes Review*, and *Big Scream*, among others. She lives in Belmont, MI with her husband and their three children.

Elizabeth Kerper: “Magritte Explains Ornithology” (poetry)

Elizabeth lives in Chicago and recently graduated from DePaul University with a BA in English literature. Her work has appeared in *N/A Magazine*, where she is an associate editor, and most recently appeared in *Eclectica*. She can generally be found sitting quietly in the corner with her nose stuck in a book.

Lynn Knapp: “Hunger” (poetry)

Lynn is a poet, memoirist, and teacher. Her poetry has most recently been published in *The Burden of Light*, an anthology edited by Tanya Chernov to benefit the National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance.

Kayla Krut: “Humid” & “The Hollow Center” (poetry)

Kayla is an MFA candidate at the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She earned a BA in Comparative Literature (poetry in English, Latin, and German) at UC Berkeley. Read more of her recent work at www.kaylakrut.blogspot.com.

Coral Lee: “Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Feeling” & “Your mouth is the bitterness of” (poetry)

Coral is currently studying English, Music, and Studio Art at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. Her work can be found in *Teen Ink!*, *scissors and spackle*, and *Hika*. Her haiku, "words", won the 2013 Nicholas A. Virgilio prize.

Doug McBride: “Cygnet Lake” (fiction)

Doug writes in the wee hours, when his lovely wife and two amazing young daughters are fast asleep. His most recent piece of published fiction can be found in the Spring 2014 edition (Volume 1, Issue 2) of Wolf Willow Journal: <http://www.wolfwillowjournal.com/new-years-eve.html>

Rebecca McElfish: “Finish this Story” (poetry)

Rebecca is a recent graduate from Kenyon College. Having been transplanted there from a warmer coast, she has never quite gotten used to the cold.

Shannon McLeod: “If Kerouac Had Just Stayed Home” (fiction)

Shannon is currently completing her debut novel, *How to Steal a Shih Tzu in Fern Park*. Her short essay "Your Call Is Important to Us: Ballad of a Telemarketer" was published in Hobart. A 2011 graduate of the University of Michigan, she teaches English at a Southeast Michigan high school, where she also coaches the slam poetry team. Shannon has led creative writing workshops in venues as diverse as a children's summer camp and a women's correctional facility.

Greg Overman: “years” & “Three stories: when people leave” (poetry)

Greg was raised in rural northwest Ohio and now lives and writes in rural Montana. He spends his time driving and walking through the mountains of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Washington. His work can be found previously in *Neat*, as well as *English Journal* and *Ozone Park Journal*.

Laszlo Slomovits: “He Sang to the God that Woke Him” (poetry)

Laszlo is one of the twin brothers in Ann Arbor's nationally-known children's folk music duo, Gemini (GeminiChildrensMusic.com). In addition to his music for children, Laszlo has set to music a great range of poetry — from Rumi and Hafiz, 12th and 13th Century Sufi Mystics, to the American greats, Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost, to contemporary poets such as Naomi Shihab Nye and Michigan poet Linda Nemec Foster. Besides his work in music, Laszlo has had haiku and other forms of poetry published in a number of journals.

Josef K. Strosche: “Ackermann” (fiction)

Josef earned an M.A. in German from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and studied in Vienna and Regensburg. Following the completion of a Fulbright scholarship he interned at the German Literature Archive in Marbach, where he analyzed and archived W.G. Sebald’s papers. His fiction has appeared in the *Santa Fe Writers Project*, *fwriktion : review*, *Gravel*, *Revolution John*, and *Connections* and is forthcoming in *Five Quarterly* and the *Wisconsin Review*.

Matthew Vasiliasukas: “A Study for Salesmen” (fiction)

Matthew is a graduate of Columbia College Chicago. In 2009, he was awarded the Silver Dome Prize by the Illinois Broadcast Association for best public affairs program as producer of the Dean Richards Show at WGN Radio. His work has appeared in publications such as *Stumble Magazine*, *The University Of Wyoming’s Owen Wister Review* and *The Pennsylvania Review*.

KD Williams: “Seafloor Expansion II” & “Seafloor Expansion IV” (poetry)

KD was born and raised in Southeast Michigan. In 2013, she graduated with honors from the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, where she received a 2011 Undergraduate Short Fiction Hopwood Award and several other scholarships for writing and academics. She received the 2013 Stony Brook Short Fiction Prize, and she is now attending Stony Brook Southampton to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing.

Tess Wilson: “Kansas City International” (poetry)

Tess is a Kansan who has transplanted herself into the hills of Pittsburgh while she pursues her MFA in Creative Writing. She is a big believer in dirt, sterling silver jewelry, dogs, and breakfast foods.

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