Rathalla Review

Rosemont College
Fall 2014

Our Misson:

Rathalla Review is the literary magazine published by the students of Rosemont College's MFA in Creative Writing and Graduate Publishing programs. Our mission is to give emerging and established writers and artists an outlet for their creative vision in our online and print publication. We publish the best fiction, creative non-fiction, flash fiction, poetry, and art, culled from a nationwide community of writers and artists. Rathalla Review's staff, comprised of M.F.A. in Creative Writing and M.A. in Publishing candidates, merges the creative arts and the business of publishing into a shared voice and vision.

Rathalla Review

Fall 2014

Table of Contents

Going Home Bass Harbor

Featured Artist: Enrico Pagliarulo

Artist Bio

Enrico Pagliarulo has been involved in the art of photography since his father introduced him to it in 1962. For over 40 years, he has used a variety of techniques that helped him achieve beautiful works of art. Still shooting analog chromes, he uses digital photography as well, which he transitioned over to a few years ago. Although he has been happily married for 35 years, photography has always been his mistress.

Heroes Never Die

Jonathan Dittman

On the Fourth of July, Carolyn rode in a float that proclaimed *Heroes Never Die* across the banner in bold-faced letters. It was intended to be patriotic and reverential yet fell short. She waved at the parade attendees while small children, arms open with opaque-white shopping bags, scrambled for the cheap candy flung toward them.

Carolyn had agreed to be in the parade. She'd been asked to participate only because Josh, her husband, was blown to pieces by an IED on a service road outside Tikrit. While Josh had always been proud of his service and the men he called brothers, she had never truly accepted the reality of it—the risk, the loss, the burden. Now, as she stood above a banner declaring his immortality, sandwiched between the Bay Lake Area Lions Club, and a Benjy the Dog character skating across the pavement on an Arctic Cat snowmobile, she doubted her decision.

As the parade rolled down Main Street, Carolyn saw an armless man watching from a frayed lawn chair beneath the shade of a twisted maple. The old man wore a navy blue cap that bore an emblem declaring him a veteran of some foreign war. From his appearance, she assumed he fought in Korea or maybe Vietnam, depending on how the shadows danced across him. He wore a face like a Matisse–*Portrait of Andre Derian*–indifferent yet longing. She imagined the ways a man could lose his arms in war, each version laden with screams while essential pieces of him flew away, twirling through the air like meaty propeller seeds and landing in softened earth that yielded no offspring. Carolyn felt anger on behalf of the old man. Although Josh had been killed, at least he hadn't been left here as a fragment.

The man's grandchildren placed small American flags under the top of his suspender loops so that the stripes draped toward the ground and flowed patriotically in the summer breeze. Family members gathered around him and giggled. The old man sat there, unable to remove the flags from their makeshift holders even if he had wanted to. Red, white, and blue pompoms lay in the grass nearby, and with a squeal, the little boy placed one of them on top of the old man's head. The girl clapped at her brother's ingenuity and they begged for their grandfather's approval, which he awarded them with a smile.

Carolyn wanted to curse the family for allowing their children to decorate the old man in such a manner, as if *his* loss for *their* country meant nothing. Carolyn abhorred the happiness that exuded from the throng below, hooting like fervent

owls and chanting “heroes never die.” But she knew that they did.

After the eternal, five-mile-an-hour parade idled to its conclusion, Carolyn leapt from the upper deck of the float, nearly twisting her ankle as she landed on the concrete below.

Her car was parked along the street outside the VFW and once she got in, she reached for the glove box and pulled out a pack of Camels. Since Josh’s death, she’d found herself snapping the small metal gear on BIC lighters regularly. She sat with the windows closed and let the afterbirth of the cigarette fill her up. It was only because of him she had quit in the first place. Even during his deployment, when the distance between them would’ve hidden her dirty little secret, she refused to light up. It was her promise to him. She hated breaking it, but he had broken his.

Main Street—its participants and attendees having dispersed—was now open to the general flow of traffic. Carolyn swung onto the road and vowed never to return to Josh’s hometown again. She had bid it farewell from the banister of a poorly-funded float in the middle of nowhere.

Carolyn saw the armless man, sans family, still in his chair. She slowed and stared at him straight on. The old man watched for a moment before nodding and returning his gaze to the shuffling branches of the maple above him.

Carolyn envisioned stopping, saw herself walk over to the man and kneel down in front of him. With the gentle caress she would give to a newborn, Carolyn would brush away the pompom, careful not to leave the faintest trace of indentation in his hat. One by one, she would withdraw the flags from their holsters and place them on the thinning patch of grass beside him, the fabric edges of all facing east, toward the lands that had taken so much from the both of them. She would then lean in, wrap her arms around his wrinkled neck and whisper that she understood his pain, that he was not alone—that she was not alone—and as her arms enveloped him, she would feel his in return. But in that briefest of moments the sensation was, like the old man’s arms, gone, no matter how badly she wanted it to be different.

Jonathan Dittman’s work has appeared in *Creative Colloquy, thick jam, and The Pitkin Review*. His essay on language and identity theory appears in the book collection *Perspectives on Percival Everett*. Jonathan received his MFA from Goddard College in Port Townsend, Washington. He lives in Minnesota with his wife and two children.

Evolving Towards

Holly Day

years from now, will we
huddle in the shadows of football stadiums and office complexes
like our ancestors did in the Coliseum and the Parthenon
centuries after the walls of Rome
finally fell

will mankind descend to becoming the final residents
crouching in the shadows of what
their ancestors accomplished
wondering about the people who designed skyscrapers
international airports and
megamalls?

Holly Day was born in Hereford, Texas, "The Town Without a Toothache." She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center. Her published poetry books include: "Late-Night Reading for Hardworking Construction Men" (*The Moon Publishing*) and "The Smell of Snow" (*ELJ Publications*).

Commitment

Sam Gridley

Uncle Len?" Missy called, tapping with her knuckles. "Hello? Anybody home?"

The grime-crusted screen door *scrawked* as her hip forced it wider. Enough crud for two dustpans lay in the bottom corner of the jamb. She knew the bell didn't work, so she knocked again with her palm and then pounded with her fist, vibrating the inner fiberglass door on its hinges. She paused to listen.

A breathless quiet surrounded the mobile home park. Above Len's trailer the leaves of the big honeylocust dangled motionless, limp and almost translucent at the tips, as if they were starting to dissolve into the steamy atmosphere like the missing birds, squirrels, insects and humans. Today was just too hot for living things. Two lots over, an air conditioner offered a low bass note that was less a sound than an underlining of the silence. Beyond the hill, back out the gravel road, the highway traffic made only a ghost of a hum. A haze hung at the edge of her vision.

Len's air conditioning was bad—that was one reason she needed to check on him today. Also he hadn't returned her phone calls this week. Also, most important, her boss had heard about a tornado watch for the late afternoon and evening. That was common for the season, but when the boss left the office at 4:30, Missy seized the chance to cut out early as well. On the drive here she'd held the wisp of a hope that Len would recognize the danger and come stay in her apartment tonight. She wanted, for once, to be the one giving shelter, as part of her repayment for all he'd done for her. In recent months he'd rarely left the trailer park, but there was always a possibility of rational persuasion. She believed in reason, or thought she did.

Missy rapped hard on the door once more, willing herself to be aggressive. Len must be around—his rusted red pickup squatted there on the gravel. She felt he was ripe for what people called an "intervention"; yet if he wouldn't answer, what could she do?

When the corroded two-step metal platform shifted under her feet, she tilted dizzily. Clutching the screen door, she blamed her tipsiness on the heat. But at the level of nerve and muscle, her body was remembering another sweltering June day nine years ago.

.....

"Fuck you," said Megan to Missy.

Though this was typical of her older sister's mouth, Missy's temper flared. She spun on both heels and marched toward the kitchen.

"Now don't get pissed off," Megan laughed, flipping her ponytail. "It was just a suggestion. Seriously, it might do you good."

Missy wouldn't dignify that with an answer, though she spoiled her stiff-backed, square-shouldered exit by stumbling on the doorsill.

Actually, Missy had uttered the first provocation. Their mother, preparing for a Saturday night date, had called from her bedroom to ask Missy to look after younger brother Mason—though at 12 he hardly needed a babysitter only three years his senior. "I'm running late, we're meeting for cocktails," Mom had yelled; "can you take care of dinner? And make sure he eats something?"

Dutifully, Missy said she'd handle it. She hollered upstairs to inform Mason, and traipsing to the living room, she told Megan as well: "I'm making spaghetti, 5:30."

Megan said, without glancing up from the couch where she was lounging to watch Saturday afternoon movies, "I'm outta here by then."

"By 5:30?" Missy snipped, and at this point she let her resentment show by adding under her breath, "What, your friends are getting wasted earlier than usual?" To which Megan gave her foul-mouthed answer. To which Missy responded with her attempt at a cold shoulder.

Megan was two and a half years older, but the gap between the sisters might have been reversed. Missy had always been the serious, studious, reliable one. Megan had been, since as early as Missy could remember, capricious, volatile, a flirt and manipulator—and in spite of all that, gorgeous and captivating. You couldn't dislike Megan even if she mocked you. And Missy didn't usually mind being the family's designated sensible person, the object of teasing because of her steadiness. But when humid summer weather coated northeastern Nebraska like barbeque sauce, everyone got cranky, Missy included. With her dark bangs stuck to her forehead, her armpits slimy, she couldn't keep from poking at her sister's nonchalant blonde perfection.

In the kitchen a radio on the windowsill played Mom's favorite oldies station—no one had bothered to turn it off since lunch. While Missy checked the cabinets for spaghetti and sauce and scrounged the refrigerator for a vegetable, her mother came in wearing a tight, strapless, low-cut, pale yellow dress that made her boobs resemble honeydew melons. Short and full-figured, Mom was decent-looking for her age but had no concept of fashion. "How does this look?" she asked, and Missy answered, sharper than she intended, "Like you might explode in the guy's face."

"You think?" Mom worried, glancing down and adjusting. "But I wore this last year, and my weight's the same."

"What's this guy's name anyway?"

"Milt," she added, "or Milton, sometimes. You met him a couple weeks ago, the finance manager for Stempel Ford? Tonight it's some sort of business reception, then we're having dinner downtown. He said it's a fancy occasion, so I thought—"

"It'll be fine, Mom. That dress will keep you cool. And I'm sure Mr. Milton Milt will be impressed."

Mom cleared her throat. "It's Milton McIntyre.... Is something bugging you?"

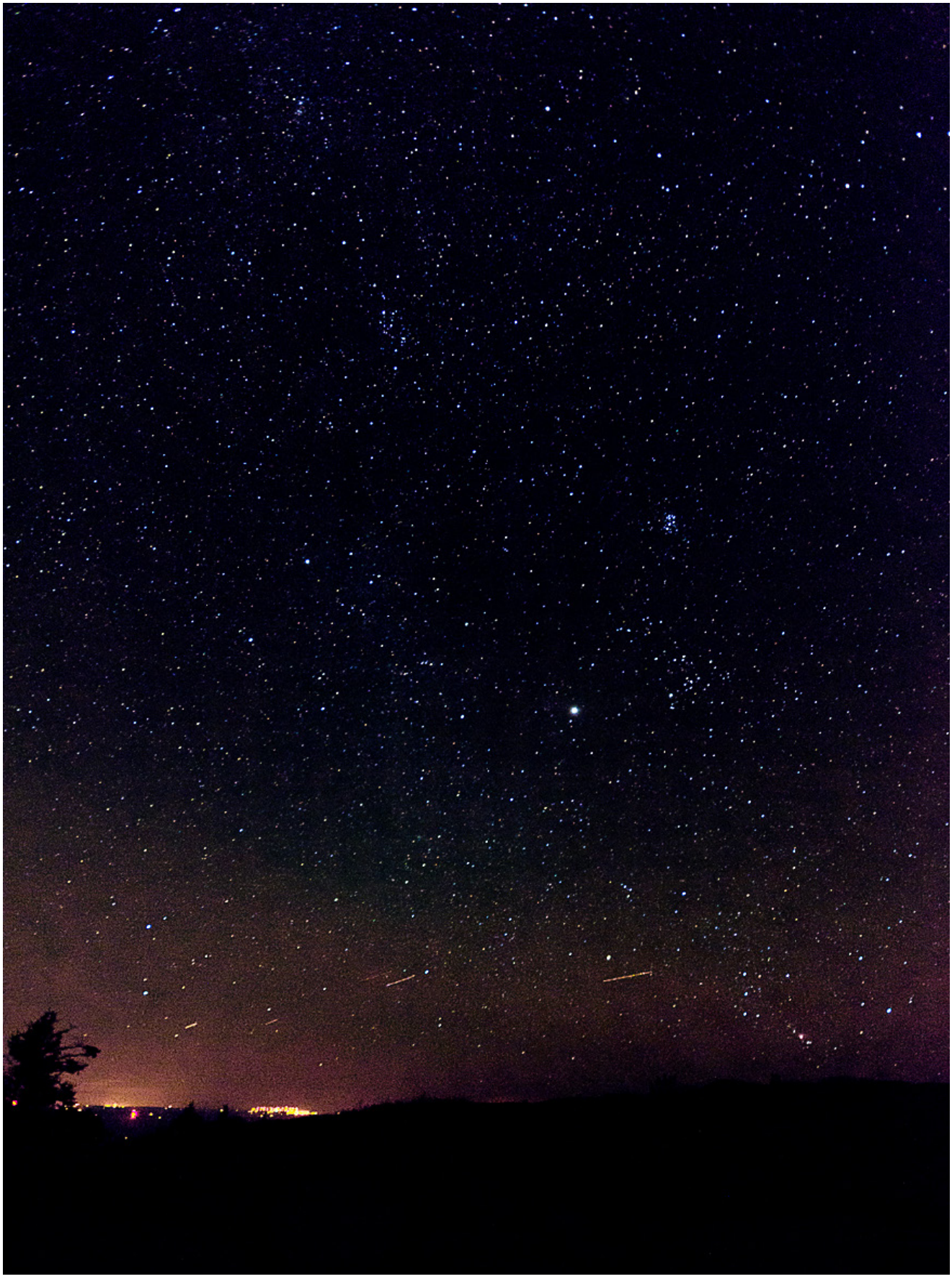
"Nuh-uh," said Missy, shaking a spaghetti box to estimate its contents. In fact she was bugged by everything in their lives, from the men her mother dated back to the divorce that sent their Dad packing back to the decision of those two incompatible people to marry. Why commit to getting hitched and having three kids if you weren't serious enough to keep it going?

Not only were the people in her family irrational and unreliable, they were often absurd. For instance, Mom and Dad—Molly and Mike Muller—had named their kids Megan, Missy and Mason, like there was no other letter of the alphabet. Did they think it was cute or what? "Missy" was mushy in itself—she planned to have the name changed when she reached legal age. And now there was another stupid double-M in their lives, this Milton McIntyre. And this yellow dress two sizes too small, and the desperation that made Mom wear it. No wonder Megan, just out of high school with no plans for college, got trashed every weekend. No wonder Mason spent half his waking hours in a bowling alley, nursing the ridiculous idea of turning pro as soon as he finished school. For her family, the only response to absurdity was more of it.

If she could get through the next three years, Missy had been telling herself, she'd head far away to college, someplace where the cultural heroes weren't football players or barbeque chefs, a place where the air didn't turn to soup in the summer, where women like Mom aspired to more than secretarial jobs in the school district office, where Saturday night offered more opportunities than booze and drugs and sweaty groping. The whole town with its smug Midwestern chain-store mentality disgusted her. What new mentality she would adopt, and where she might find it, remained a vaguer concept. Maybe Casablanca, she mused, thinking of the Bogart movie. Or Sydney, where they were bold enough to put sails on an opera house. Or Edinburgh, with its "Fringe" festival of experimental arts. Edinburgh was located, she had read, on the Firth of Forth. Imagine living on a firth!

Wherever she went, she would do something that made a difference for human life on the planet. As the quiet, dependable daughter, though, she knew to keep quiet about her opinions and ambitions. On this afternoon she told her mother, "I guess Mr. McIntyre's a nice guy. Otherwise, you wouldn't waste time on him, would you?"

Mom let out a long sigh, suggesting oh-so-much she couldn't explain, or wouldn't. Missy took this as a rebuff and resented it. On cue, the radio began crooning "Can You Feel the Love Tonight," a pop song from a Disney movie—an irony



Midnight on Cadillac Mt

that Missy thought she alone could appreciate.

A moment later Megan angled into the kitchen—she always seemed to move at a slant, her ponytail on one side, hips jutting in tight jeans, eyes not catching yours. From an upper cabinet she tilted out a bag of cheese curls.

"I'm making real food," Missy snapped, "if you wait a half hour."

"Can't, got plans," mumbled her sister through mashed carbohydrate.

"And I won't ask who with because I don't expect the truth," Mom put in, "but you will be home by eleven."

"Ditto," said Megan, swallowing.

"What?"

"You be home by eleven, Mommy Dearest, and we won't ask questions."

Though Megan was grinning, Mom was too nervous to grasp the nuances—or so Missy thought afterward. Mom got rattled and worked herself into a huff, which led to ludicrous vibrations in the yellow dress and bubbled sweat on the bare skin above. There was a lecture about who was the minor, who the adult, who had what responsibilities, etc.

"Fuck, I didn't say anything," Megan griped, and this led to further remarks about who had better watch her mouth.

For the moment Missy hated both of them, so while they argued she concentrated on the radio, which had shifted to a news bulletin about a tornado watch in the area—the fourth or fifth watch so far this month, an excuse for news in a place where nothing ever happened.

.....

It occurred to Missy that she could use her key. In the four years since she moved out, Uncle Len had never fixed the sagging gutter or the cracked front window or the flimsy steps, so of course he had never changed the lock.

She had no trouble finding the key on her ring. When she came to Kearney she'd discarded her old keys, along with everything else from her previous life, and at 24 she had yet to accumulate enough new ones to confuse her. But the door tumblers seemed to have taffy in them; even pressed hard enough to hurt her thumb, the key threatened to bend or break rather than turn. Sweat ran down her arms. Despite the honeylocust, this side of the trailer got full afternoon sun, and the doorknob nearly blistered her fingers.

At last the lock snapped and she nudged the door inward. "Len?" she called through the opening. "Uncle Len? ... It's Missy, hello?—I'm coming in. Are you awake? Are you OK?"

She was seriously worried now. It was seven years since his wife had left him, four years since Missy too had departed, a year since he'd retired at age 56 from the

Postal Service, eight months since Teddy the fat shepherd had died—each event marking a stage in Len's depression. Having studied psychology in college, she knew the names of multiple therapies that might benefit him, but not how to convince him to start. Refusing her suggestions about getting help, he sat day after day in a creaky recliner—the upholstery still covered with dog hair—where he drank beer and stared at the TV whether it was turned on or not.

She expected to find him there today, drunk and dozing. Shoving the door past the buckled linoleum in the entranceway, she stepped in. It was dark—all the windows closed, most of the shades shut—and the temperature must have been over a hundred. She could feel the sun's smothering violence through the trailer's skin, thickening the air into jello.

A light switch on the wall didn't work. The dirty carpet clung to her shoes. Gasping for breath, she sneezed, and her foot sent a small object clattering—a beer can? She herself had given the place a good cleaning last September, shortly before Teddy took his last siesta on the couch, and she suspected Len hadn't lifted a broom or mop since.

As her vision adjusted, she located his chair, empty. With sweat sliding into her eyes, she stepped into the small kitchen, where, despite the sour odor, there was little sign of food. A crusted plate on the counter might have been there for weeks. The sink held an empty mini-keg. The refrigerator contained two dried-up pizza slices, a spoiled pint of milk, an empty juice carton and sixteen cans of beer. Lately, it seemed, Len had given up eating as well as cleaning, and as for bathing, she didn't want to think about it.

Someone could die in these conditions. Her stomach turned. She hurried back toward the trailer door and stuck her head out to gasp the humid air that only a moment ago had seemed intolerable.

In the past months, she'd gone as far as discussing the situation with her boss's wife. Missy worked for a small insurance brokerage, helping people (mostly business owners) file claims and revise their policies. Jack, the middle-aged owner, was either dry and businesslike or goofy, depending on his mood, but his wife Amanda had taken to the young assistant, and as a social worker Amanda knew some of the ins and outs of dealing with mental illness. When Missy asked about options if Len kept going downhill and refusing to help himself, Amanda told her about involuntary commitment. It was a difficult process, apparently—complex steps to go through, with a need to prove the person was endangering himself if not others. But Missy had been wondering if she ought to take those steps before it was too late—and fretting about when "too late" might be, and how Len would react if she messed with his life, and whether she had the right to interfere, or the guts.

Today he must be out. No, his truck was there, she reminded herself. He never walked any distance, and he didn't visit neighbors. He could be lying unconscious or dead in his bedroom.

Panicked at this thought, she stepped all the way outside, into the sun's glare, and teetered on the metal steps. No way could she deal with this! But if she didn't, said a larger dread, she'd be responsible, or maybe she was already—and this, the same horror she'd been dodging for years, buckled her knees and sent a hot trickle down her back that chilled as it pooled against her spine.

.....

The house quieted when Mom and Megan left. Mason was a decent kid, moody with weird taste in music, but appreciative of Missy's efforts. Long and bony, he ate enough spaghetti for five truck drivers and ignored the salad. He'd gone bowling earlier in the day and was basking in the glow of a 542 three-game series. Though the score meant little to Missy, his pride rubbed off on her, enough to keep her happy as she cleaned up the kitchen after dinner.

Once Mason had disappeared upstairs, though, Missy's irritation surfaced. Even if she'd rather be at home with air conditioning and a book, it annoyed her to be taken for granted when others went out partying. On the way to the living room, she detoured to the mirror in the front hall where Mom had done a final exam of her eyeliner (too heavy) and a last hitch of the yellow dress. Missy's own reflection offered a different sort of challenge: a skinny face with wire-rimmed glasses, no cheekbones to speak of, straight black hair that hung limp on humid days, a long neck leading to wide shoulders and (she glanced downward) boobs that would never rival Mom's or even Megan's. But she had long attractive legs, a narrow waist, a firm butt—overall a not-so-bad body, she told herself, if she could just make her face more interesting. Different glasses? Contacts? A haircut to match where she was going rather than where she'd grown up? But here her native timidity set in, as well as uncertainty about the way women in Edinburgh or Casablanca might be styling their hair these days.

She took her book to the living room because the bedroom under the eaves she shared with Megan was always too hot. Mom had snatched this bungalow outright in the divorce settlement, but it was old and cramped, on a large but lackluster town lot, with only two bathrooms—one of which Mom hogged for herself, leaving the two girls and Mason to fight for prep time (not that Mason needed it—he always looked grungy). The lack of private space was another reason Missy couldn't wait to move out. Each nail-polish smear from her sister, each crimped toothpaste tube littering the sink, smacked her with a fresh insult.

Tonight she had planned to start on the high school's summer reading list for rising tenth graders. An essay about one of the books would be required in the fall. Skipping over tales of young adult self-realization, which she figured would be too predictable, she had chosen The Hobbit because she liked the cover image of green mountains and the promise of "the greatest fantasy epic of our time" (though the copyright date made "our time" seem a fudge). She had sampled and disliked the Harry Potter books, but maybe a dose of intelligent fantasy was what she needed to escape the world of Milton McIntyres.

Plopping onto the couch and opening the book, she read:

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

The cutesy language appalled her. Would the inhabitants be Henry Henderson and his wife Henrietta, with their kids Hank and Hester and Holly? No—she ventured a couple of paragraphs further—it was Bilbo Baggins, even cuter! After the description of the hobbit species, their "long clever brown fingers" and "deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it)," Missy tossed the book aside and sulked, blaming the school, the teachers, the town and the Midwestern United States for their childishness.

She was done with juvenile fare, she decided. She already read adult authors like Jane Austen and Emily Dickinson. In fact, if she were out on a date instead of Mom, she'd impress the guy with her maturity—and with a dress that actually fit her. Or if she were hanging out with Megan's friends, she could spot the one boy who was good for something other than getting plastered. She'd have a long discussion with him about, about ... well, life, friendship, the architecture in Sydney, the stupidity of American families, the poems of Emily Dickinson—

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you – Nobody – too?

Then, at the end of the night, he'd kiss her and caress her neck with his sensitive fingers—he was a classical violinist, she thought—and when his hands began to wander she would allow it to a point—to about here—but then remark wisely that they ought to cool it until their second meeting, when they would stroll along the lagoon under the huge old oak trees and ...

Her eyes popped open. Something had startled her. Looking around, she saw nothing out of the ordinary, just the commonplace, well-worn living-room furniture, the TV, the framed landscapes on the walls. The house and neighborhood seemed preternaturally quiet—no sounds of kids outside or cars, only the faint whoosh of the air vents and the reverberation of Mason's stereo through the floorboards.

She got up and looked out the window at the motionless grass. Unnerved, she switched on the TV to create some noise, and what confronted her was a giant blob of blue, green, yellow, orange, red—a weather map, it turned out, with a voice announcing that a funnel cloud had been spotted twelve miles to the north-northwest moving in a southerly direction at an estimated speed of ... The details blurred. The tornado "watch" had become a "warning," that much was clear, and Missy jogged upstairs yelling for Mason. She stuck her head into his slope-ceilinged lair, a sticky grotto where some rock band was screaming "Yeah-h-h-h-h... Gotta leave town," and after signaling him to lower the volume, she managed a short conversation:

"Listen, they've put out a tornado warning. Get ready to scoot down in the basement if we have to."

"Not yet, I been watching online. It's miles from here. It's not even raining outside. I got a site that's updated every couple minutes."

"You don't know which way a tornado's going to ..."

"Hey, I'm on top of it, Missy, I'll come get you if we have to do the basement run, OK? We'll grab a bottle of Mom's wine on the way."

Missy snorted at that, hesitated, then headed back downstairs. Though she laughed at her brother's similarity to every other 12-year-old in the United States, she admired him too. The kid was good at multitasking, that was for sure. He'd been reading a comic book and clipping his toenails while listening to music and surfing websites.

The whole family had taken to the basement once before, when Missy was little, and what she remembered most was the argument between her mother and father about the proper corner to sit in, the windward or leeward side. They'd ended up in opposite corners, making the kids choose between them, and not long afterward the split had widened into separate houses.

Missy was in no hurry to repeat that experience with her brother. She wondered if she should call Mom and Megan to tell them about the warning, but wouldn't they know already, wherever they were? Dancing, eating barbequed shrimp, getting stoned, whatever, the people around them would have heard, there were sirens downtown for emergencies, and anyway she was sick of being the mature one in the family. Them out having a good time, her at home worrying, it was all too typical of their life. Mason said he was following the storm on the Internet, so OK, so let him handle it for once.

She left the TV on but turned the sound low. She picked up The Hobbit again, read about the old wizard with "a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which a white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots"—and threw the silly book across the room.

.....

Because there was no one else to do it, Missy forced herself back into the trailer and fumbled through the unbreathable goo. Locating a hall light that worked, she passed the bathroom, where a repulsive reek drifted out, and the little room she had slept in, which Len hadn't used since she left. At his bedroom in the rear, the door hung three-quarters closed. Its hinges screeched a protest.

Inside, in the smudged glow from the windows, she made out the body slung diagonally across the double bed, face down, one arm dangling to the floor, hairy legs splayed.

"Uncle Len!" she screamed.

She stumbled against the door frame, hand to her face, wanting to run but knowing she had to phone someone—ambulance? police?

Then he twitched, rolled over and sat up. “Bliiihhh,” he said.

His arms were nearly as pale as his sleeveless undershirt, and a pasty flap of flesh hung above the checkered boxer shorts. Matted gray hair fringed his head and crawled across his cheeks, and a darker tuft poked through his gapped fly. Every visible piece of skin sagged, from his eyelids to the pouches around his knees, making his weight loss obvious.

“Jesus, I thought you were dead!”

“Who?” he said.

“Doesn’t your air conditioning work at all? How can you stand it in here? Have you been out of bed today? Why haven’t you called me back?”

A dismissive rumble emerged from the back of his throat. He pushed hard on his knees to stand, then trundled toward the bathroom. Passing her, he smelled like spoiled mayonnaise.

After he had taken a long, audible piss, she followed him to the kitchen, where he got a beer from the fridge and held a second out to her. She waved it away. “Have you eaten anything today? No? Uncle Len, I want you to come with me. There’s a tornado watch, and you know how trailers get thrown around like tennis balls—it’s not safe here. You can cool off at my place, the air conditioning’s great. You can take a nice shower. I’ll fix some dinner, whatever you like—burgers? Or we could pick up some ribs?”

He popped the top and tossed it in the sink. After a long slurp, he wiped his forearm across his mouth, scratched his ass and shook his head. “I’m good,” he muttered. “You go have fun with your friends.”

“Didn’t you hear me? This weather is dangerous! You could—damn it, you could die in this heat or in the storm that’s coming!”

“Nah. Long as I got refreshment,” he smirked over the beer can. “You’re a good girl for thinkin’ of me, honey.”

A sense of doom descended, thickening the sweat between her shoulder blades.

After a few more pleas in a weakening voice, she bolted to her car. The honeylocust shook in a sudden wind. She watched the sky darken as she raced home, panicked by the purple clouds on the horizon.

.....

The jangle startled her from a reverie or doze—had she been asleep? She lurched toward the phone.

“Megan?” an agitated voice yelped.

"No, this is her sis—"

"Is she there? Have you heard from her? It's gone, it's just like, vanished!"

"Who's this—Vicky? What's vanished?"

"Armando's, where we were gonna meet. It's—it came right down the street, we heard a siren and ducked in the ice cream place, everybody was running downstairs, there's this huge crash and stuff and we're all crouched in the basement with the boxes of cones, then we come out, lookin' up and down and it's real quiet like nothing happened, like there's not even a storm except a kind of mumble far off, and then we see Armando's, it's—it's missing! Like, not there! Somebody said there's pieces three blocks over. So we're checking on the people that were supposed to—Megan's not picking up her phone, did she call home?"

Right then, Missy knew for certain, even before she tried calling her mother.

She didn't guess the specifics. She didn't guess that "three blocks over," in the lobby of the town's best hotel, a plate-glass window had exploded as the guests at the cocktail reception rushed for a safe room. Nor did she suppose that, with two of the three regional deaths coming from one family, there would be front-page articles about them in the newspaper.

For now, Missy just understood that she had failed to warn. When she put down the phone she drifted to the front window again. Leaves were blowing past, but otherwise the street remained quiet. How could it be so calm in one spot, so shattering a couple of miles away? On TV the multicolored map continued to flicker.

.....

No one blamed her—the idea was so far from anyone's mind, no one even assured her she wasn't to blame—but that didn't matter. She knew.

Before and after the two-coffin service, the family weighed options. Missy's father, who had left when she was six and seldom been in contact since, lived in a Sioux City apartment with his new wife and their son. The boy's room was large enough to accommodate his half-brother, but a girl wouldn't fit at all. The grandparents on both sides, all moved to southern Texas, were too old and too retired to take in a teenager. So the assembled adults decided that Missy would go to her maternal uncle Len and his wife Norma, who had a three-bedroom house in Kearney and no children. One of their extra bedrooms contained Len's fishing gear, the other Norma's craft supplies, and Missy was given her choice. She picked the fishing room because Norma seemed less reconciled to inconvenience than her husband. Missy didn't think she should inconvenience anyone, and if the adults had assigned her to an ice cave in the Arctic, she would have accepted it as more than she deserved. In any case she had it better than Mason, who had to live with a father who'd abandoned them.

When the adults told her to pack, she took as little as possible from her mother's house, which would be sold to create a college fund for her and Mason. Photos,

school yearbooks, iPod, posters on her bedroom wall—everything was a reminder of her betrayal, and she ditched it. She even welcomed her separation from Mason. Rather than cling to what was left, she looked forward to barrenness.

Yet as she settled in at her new home in Kearney, she couldn't help but become a 15-year-old girl again, in some respects. She made a few friends in her new school. She bought new jeans. She laughed at dumb jokes. She grew increasingly fond of Uncle Len, who had a soft voice and told funny stories about postal customers. They did weekend errands together and stopped at his favorite diner for milkshakes. After dinner he exercised his wit on the reality-show contestants they watched on TV, sharing the couch with Teddy the overstuffed shepherd.

Aunt Norma was pricklier. She didn't like Teddy on the furniture, for one thing, and sometimes she shouted at Missy for trivial offenses. Though Missy was perhaps the best-behaved teenager in the city—going out of her way to help with dishes and laundry—she was conscious every day of the sins she was atoning for and the debt she owed these people for taking her in. Besides, she didn't blame anyone for disliking her. When the irritability between Len and Norma morphed into arguments, Missy figured her arrival had upset the balance. She sobbed when Norma announced, two years into this arrangement, that she couldn't tolerate her lazy jackass of a husband anymore.

"You can have him all to yourself," she snickered at Missy, "and his goddamn shedding mutt too."

Missy could only snivel, "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

This began the transformation of good old Uncle Len. Partly to satisfy Norma's demands for alimony, he sold the house and his fishing gear and moved himself, Missy and the dog into the cramped trailer, where Teddy often blocked the entire hallway. Len's occasional indulgence in a cold beer became habitual and then compulsive. When Missy finished high school, her concern and guiltiness about him, plus the slimness of the college fund, plus her lack of courage, plus her conviction that she no longer deserved to escape, led her to apply to only one institution, the local campus of the state university less than three miles away. For the first two years of college she stayed in the tiny room next to Len's, doing most of the cooking for the household, monitoring his beers and prodding Teddy into exercise walks.

Her brother told her "some people" thought it "kind of peculiar," her living with Len in a little trailer, but she wouldn't respond to the gossip. She did, after an introductory course, decide to major in psychology, thinking it might offer insights into her diseased self and family.

In the summer before her junior year, she met a young man who attracted her—the first one, really, since a crush at age 13. The new guy, George, was a graduate student in economics. Practicalities demanded she have a place of her own, so she broke the news to Len, who said cheerfully, "It's about time you got out on your

own, girlie," and she found an apartment near the campus. The first time she called Len after the move, he was too drunk to talk.

It turned out that George had firm ideas about commitment and fidelity. As long as she dated him, she shouldn't glance at other guys. After seven months she discovered that the same rule did not apply to him when he wanted to screw a blonde sophomore. Classic, she told herself, just classic, but then, who was she to complain about betrayal?

Missy was glad to be done with him, and also with virginity, which had seemed an ironic status for a person of her past. She spent the rest of her time in college alone, visiting Len at least once a week to cook a good meal for him, walk his dog and discard a heap of beer cans and pizza boxes. By then the trailer had begun its descent into squalor, but there was only so much he'd let her do. He'd started to resist her help.

After graduation, her psychology major offered no leads for employment, nor any wisdom about her life for that matter, so Missy took the job at the insurance agency—dull but detailed work that kept her occupied. Instead of flying off, as she'd once planned, to Sydney or Casablanca, she bought a car and moved seven blocks to a garden apartment complex. She made sure Uncle Len had her new address. "OK, sweetie," he said. "I hope you like the place. Teddy misses you."

Tired from work, with only the weekends for errands and laundry, she didn't check on him as often as before—and now she was reaping the consequences.

.....

Bursts of yellow-green flashed through her windows. The glass shivered, the frames rattled. During the storm she tried calling Len twice—no answer—and kept her radio, TV and computer on weather news. To her bleary eyes, the multicolored map looked the same as the one nine years ago, but the lurid areas began to shrink and drift away from town. Though she kept waiting for a report that a trailer on the outskirts of Kearney had been wrenched into a pretzel and tossed in the river, the gel-haired TV news anchors didn't mention that.

Through the night she hurtled down an endless street of dark buildings, locked and deserted, with a giant wind of voices behind her. There was no way out unless she surrendered to the swirl of accusations that wanted to spin her up above the traffic lights and smack her around like a volleyball. When she woke, she thought for a moment she was paralyzed, her right hand wedged in the left sleeve of her nightie and both feet tangled in the sheet she had kicked to the foot of the bed. She shook with a silent scream until one foot came loose.

It was Friday. She was due at work at 9:00, but after gulping a cup of coffee she set out again for Len's. The air was dry and magnificent, the sky clear, another joke from the elements. In its semirural setting, the trailer park looked idyllic, and she had a pang of nostalgia for the walks she used to take with Teddy.

No response again at Len's door. This time she used her key without hesitation and forced the latch open, marched through to the back bedroom, found him unconscious but breathing, in the same underwear as yesterday, stinking of cheap malt and urine and old sweat. She didn't attempt to rouse him—he'd just fetch another beer. She opened all the windows in the trailer that weren't stuck shut and pounded the thermostat in a vain effort to start the fan.

As soon as she reached her office and apologized to the boss for being late, she phoned his wife, Amanda. "I've decided, I have to get my uncle some help," she said, and Amanda volunteered to assist in having him committed.

The rest of the day was spent on phone calls. Among others, she spoke with Mason, who was taking a summer class at Iowa State. He exuded sympathy for Uncle Len but refused to get involved. Missy didn't bother to call Len's parents, her grandparents, who were now in poor health; what could they do? Instead, she spoke to half a dozen official kinds of people, who made her explain the situation over and over again.

The long day ended with a police officer entering the trailer and taking Len into emergency protective custody. Late that night, Len was admitted to a mental health facility for evaluation.

.....

On Saturday, when Missy reached him by phone at the hospital, Len screamed—the first time he'd ever raised his voice to her. He accused her of invading his house, violating his privacy, destroying his freedom, subjecting him to psychobabbling assholes, etc.—all true, she supposed.

"What's this protective custody shit? Who they protecting me from? Did Norma put you up to this?"

When she tried to answer, he yelled louder. By the end of the short conversation she was crying.

But it also felt, oddly, like a veil around her life had been broken. Whether she was right or not, she had committed herself to action, and the dangling shreds of regret couldn't stop her.

That afternoon she drove to the trailer with a carload of buckets, mops, cleansers and brushes. If Len started fresh, in a clean space with the right medication, he might do better—she'd give him the chance. By the end of the day, sweaty and exhausted, she'd scrubbed half the trailer, floor to ceiling, and it felt like her mind had been scoured as well.

On Sunday she tackled the back half of the place, including Len's bedroom, where she discovered, jammed in a broken dresser, a small batch of snapshots. Flipping through, she saw one of her family.

It was her mother, Megan, Mason, herself—four smiling faces in front of a roller coaster. Bright T-shirts. A blue-white sky. Megan tilted to the side and

laughing. Mom looking young, plump, tan—when had Mom ever tanned?

Remembering the occasion, a trip to an amusement park for her brother's seventh birthday, Missy stared at the two lost ones: The way the sun shadowed their eyes. The way they blended into the family group, so together and so separate. The anguish she expected to feel wasn't there. Sadness, yes, but not the shame that had made her abandon all belongings from their home.

As she gripped the picture, taking care not to drip sweat on it, it seemed a kind of reward for her strenuous cleaning. She slipped it into her bag. She'd have a duplicate made for herself, she decided, and bring the original back to Len's.

When he'd be allowed to return, she hadn't been told. Already, though, she was calculating that she'd stay in the area long enough to help him stabilize, and then she could move on—not to the Firth of Forth, she supposed, but as far as Austin, maybe, or Denver. She might go back to school for social work. It would be a start.

Sam Gridley's published work includes a novel, *The Shame of What We Are*, as well as stories and satire in more than forty magazines and anthologies. He has received fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and Stanford University. He lives in Philadelphia with his wife and neurotic dog and blogs erratically at Gridleyville.wordpress.com.

Silent Dawn Valley Forge

A Monsoon Wedding

Fabiyas M V

A rural priest
rolls and throws out
the wedding mantras.
The ritualistic ululation
and the music of
a toot and drum
warm the monsoon up.
The bridal garland
like a noose
awaits a bride's neck.
She bows her head
in rural Indian coyness.
Our groom learns to forget all
beside the glitz of dowry gold.

A burning wick
yields to the darkness
beyond the nuptial rhythms.
The froth of cheated love
runs down Miss Hema's chin.
She is stranded on
the bluish eternity,
along with the pressed
love in her womb.
An opened phial lies
on the floor of a hut,
showing its void up.

Fabiyas M V is a writer from Orumanayur village in Kerala, India. He is the author of "Moonlight and Solitude." His fiction and poems have appeared in *Literary The Hatchet*, *Words* With Jam, E Fiction, *Inspired* By Tagore, *ACWC Anthology*, and *Indian Ink*. He won the Poetry Soup International Award, USA in 2011 and 2012, a prize by the British Council, UK, and the Whistle Press Poetry Prize, India.

Kitty

J.T. Ledbetter

Our cat plays the trombone and studies Latin. Neighboring cats tend to shun her and call her Kitty Bitch when she recites Ovid. We have told her to keep a low profile, but as you can understand, it is difficult.

She sits on the corner playing her own arrangement of "The Beautiful Refrain from Loitering," which brings dogs and cats to tears. Humans hear something they like but cannot tell where or from who (or is it whom?) it comes. Kitty is a stickler for pronouns.

Her nights are like most cat nights. She eats a light meal then disappears into the darkness of ferns, geraniums, gardens—even into the backyards of the local killer dog who snores and does not inhale cat. She tells me she sits at the door of his doghouse and stares at him, troubling his dreams, watching his back legs kick and his eyes blink rapidly. It is great fun, she says.

Limp but content, she follows her markings through the night and finds a niche in our garage, safe from the coyotes who have met in solemn conclave about how to kill and eat her. Although, a pair of coyotes were sighted sitting side by side, in what can only be called love, who were more interested in her music as she played a part of the Mozart Horn concerto on her trombone. She says it was priceless the way they rolled their eyes and raised their muzzles, sending forth paeans of wonder to the moon rising over the Santa Monica Mountains.

The local vet has asked for permission to study her. It would mean sea travel to Zurich where other intelligent and aesthetically-inclined animals live on a private estate. We want the best for her, but when does one forego one's own pleasure for the sake of one's cat? We have talked it out with Kitty as she quotes the Ancients and practices scales whilst sitting on the top of our fence.

"One can never be sure about the meaning of happiness," she says, her tail twitching, her eyes narrowing to slits as the neighbor tabby cat inches closer. The slide on her trombone is quick and effective.

"I want to go," she says, "to meet others of a variety of ilks." Since she said it in Latin I will admit to being so impressed that I hadn't the heart to tell her it was a bad sentence.

My wife and I have decided to let her go. Her two small trunks are packed and stand by the door. One is a chintz pouch that contains her self-prescribed allotment of catnip, two little mice toys, and a slim volume of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Her trombone has been sent ahead to the Villa where she will be staying with cats of her ilk. She raises an eyebrow at my ilk-cringing but seems loathe to tell us she is sure she knows how to use language, thank you very much. She is in a kind of state. She recites a bawdy bit of Chaucer, then muffs a high F in her Dvorak.

"Is it a funk?" she mews. "I have heard from others of my...that such is often the case when life gets in the way of pure fun, even reason. Art often loses. Doubtless it is one of the great mysteries—much like why humans do not like to sleep on something narrow with their heads hanging off."

Since her sailing away on the Princess Katania, our house and yard are quiet. The moon still rises, but slower and with less light, or it's a pale light as if it, too, is loathe to rise without the accompanying notes of a Catalonia Sonata.

Our children threaten to bring home as many cats as it takes to find one who plays the trombone and recites Latin verse. We discourage their search, but applaud their *corda iracundus*, and instead bought one a ukulele and the other a tambourine and watch them climb the wall with their instruments and their Mother Goose and, like our faraway but never forgotten Kitty, recite, play, and sing with that human, animal, and plant blessed assurance that the bright moon will rise "over the bent world...with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."[1]

J.T. Ledbetter has published poems in *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*, *Natural Bridge* and others. His latest collection is *Old and Lost Rivers* winner of the Idaho Prize for Poetry and published by Lost Horse Press 2012.

He is Professor Emeritus at California Lutheran University.

[1]Manely Hopkins, Gerard. "God's Grandeur."

Passing

Rebecca Thieman

I tried to snatch time by the string.
The ends of memories hugged between
my fingers and my palm.
They floated away like balloons.

*

Sixteen years I went to school.
I ate, I slept, I learned. Then I woke up
and saw that I was married with
children playing at my feet.

*

“Someday, I will” used to follow me like
a shadow until one day I caught it
and erased the words from the floorboards.
Still, sometimes it tickles at my throat.

*

I woke today to the sound of a train
whistling a warning to no one.
We work too hard for silence.

Dear Sugar

Rebecca Thieman

At seventeen you start drinking and never stop. By the time I meet you the summer of my freshman year in college you are rarely sober. Know that this is not okay. Know that when we are in Interlaken and you slip drunk into my room at four a.m. I will not be angry with you. Your favorite – rum and coke – will stick to your tongue and as you breathe I will smell the alcohol and the hint of vanilla. The sweat on your face will be dry but its salty scent will stream into my nose.

Your hair will always be thick – a bright blonde that curls in ringlets like those of a small child. And your eyes. They are the blue of frozen water and chlorinated swimming pools. Cracked white and deep cobalt. Your skin is pale but your cheeks are a constant red rash as if you'd spent too much time playing in snow.

When you slip into my room that night it will be dark but a small slit in the curtain will leak dull light onto the bed. You'll drape your arm across my stomach; it will feel like dead weight on my abdomen. You'll hold my hand; it will feel clammy cold against my palm. The side of your face will rest on my shoulder and you will breathe into my neck. Hot. Heavy. Stale. You will try to kiss me – your lips crawling up my cheek like an insect on my skin and I want to brush you away. I will think your face is a cherub's. You will whisper, *Please*.

This night will be the first time you call me "Sugar" and the name will stick to us like sap. When we say it, it will be both endearing and cautionary. It will be a preface to a "but." It will mean that what follows is how we hurt and how we break. I call you "Sugar" when I want to be honest. When I want you to know that I still love you – even as I move away.

I will tell you, *No*. I will try and make my voice firm. I will shake my shoulder loose of you, watch your head fall to the mattress. I will look you in the eye and watch you cry and wonder if I can turn back. But you are drunk. And your voice will break. And you will whisper, *Can you just hold my hand? Please?* And I'll give in to you. I'll entwine my fingers with yours and wait for you to fall asleep. When your breath slows and your body slacks I will untangle my hand. I will move a foot or two down the bed.

Sugar, I will try to let you go.

A year later we'll have dinner at a refined restaurant in Bowling Green. It will

be your choice and your treat because you have graduated and landed a job as a Biology high school teacher in the next town over. I will touch your shoulder and say this job is perfect for you. But you've been told your entire life that you were born with purpose. When you went to college you were instructed to follow science and you did, obtaining a degree in chemistry and biology in three years. But, Sugar, when you took the ACT you were drunk. You fell off your chair and don't remember the math section. You still scored a 33. This will make you feel both ashamed and invincible.

Maybe this is why when we sit and talk for three hours on the restaurant patio you will order red wine and tell me how you are tired. How every day you leave classrooms with mixed emotions, you say it's tough to stay connected – it is so much easier to be captured by apathy.

You have begun to show up drunk at work, the students smell it on your breath. Another teacher guzzles pots of coffee with you in the faculty lounge. When you tell me this, you laugh and describe how she arrives every morning with dark circles, smeared mascara and disheveled hair. You found a kindred alcoholic on staff and both of you are earning a reputation.

The principal will know about your problems – everyone will – but you are charismatic and warm and intelligent. They will not want to lose you. Even drunk you have more promise than most people have sober. But you are tired of it all. You will tell me cognition is a burden. That life in general is such a hard thing to discern. I won't know what to say.

You wanted to teach English. You believe in 20th century American writers the way some believe in a Christian god. You found salvation and comfort in Hemingway. Faulkner taught you how to grieve and Fitzgerald made you think your own green light was something worth dying for. You once told me that you were born to die young with a dry martini in one hand. I laughed it off. I used to joke that you were a sixty-year-old man trapped in a twenty-something's body. Then I realized Hemingway's favorite drink was a dry martini and he shot himself in the head when he was sixty-two. I no longer joke that your mind is too old.

Six months after this dinner you will visit my parents' home in Louisville and we will go to a concert on the waterfront. When this happens, please don't drink those eight beers. We will have fun at first. You will meet two of my close friends and at midnight we will dance barefoot in front of the stage while a man finger picks a banjo. There will be a moment when I look at your face and find you with your eyes closed, pale face turned upwards and red rash cheeks marked with two dimples as you smile, body swaying to the bluegrass. In this moment I will stop and stare and think there will be time to heal you. There's a story underneath this one that no one will tell me, though. There's a story and the plot is that you cannot make another person sober. You cannot heal someone who is only capable of dancing loosely to a banjo barefoot when eight beers are in his blood and breath.

This story is the one I won't realize until later that night on my parents' back porch. After my friends have left, you will go to your car and emerge with a bottle of Jack cradled in a brown paper bag. You will go into the kitchen and rummage through my mother's dishes before finding the clear, glass cups you want. I will be disturbed by this invasion, by your fingerprints on her dishes. You will fill these two cups with ice and pour us both a glass. I will not touch mine. I will not touch mine because the smell of Jack has made me sick by now. I'll have known you for over a year and a half. You will be twenty-two and I will have just turned twenty-one and our friendship will consist of sporadic dinners, late night phone calls and the times you cry drunkenly into my neck, your voice catching as you whisper your mantra. *I am bad. I am bad. I am bad.*

As you make your way through the bottle – ice melting in the glass until gone, then Jack straight and warm – you will tell me about your recently deceased grandmother. That she was the best friend you ever had and the one stitch keeping you from busting. After she dies, when drinking and living become synonymous, your daily five to ten hour stints of sobriety will become nonexistent. She will be your reason for finishing the entire bottle.

Don't do this, Sugar. Don't start rocking your wasted body on my back porch. Don't make me want to put your head against my chest and stroke your blonde ringlets straight. Don't take my hand and ask me to hold you that night because you're scared of yourself. I'm scared of you, too. You want to feel connected but you're already gone, Sugar, gone. I can't be the one to reel you back. Your heart is breaking and it's not a crack but a storm and already you're too late to save your ocean heart.

The next morning you will wake after my parents leave for work. It will feel awkward between us and you will be embarrassed. Not because you remember what you did or what I said but because it's all black in your mind. I won't tell you about how you cried over your grandmother or how you kept drinking – even after I asked you to stop. I won't tell you how you asked me to stay with you in the guest bedroom – and how I said no. I won't tell you how you're hurting me too. But I will hug you and I will ask you to drag yourself out of the shit hole you're in.

You will call me the next day. *I poured all the liquor down the sink, Sugar. I'm quitting.* Three weeks later you will send me a video of yourself dancing to Neil Young. A bottle of rum is in your hand.

I will move that summer into a house my friends and I rent for the next two years of college. While packing my books, I will come across the letters you wrote me when I was abroad. On the inside of one of the envelope flaps you wrote: "Courage is not a loud roar. Courage is the quiet voice of the day saying I will try again tomorrow." I will read this and cry.

Next time we speak you are in Chicago. We have known each other for two and a half years. You promise to take me to the Museum of Contemporary Art so we can sip wine and stare at paintings with our heads cocked to the side, nodding

slightly. You say you've joined AA. *That's right, you say, I've given up the sauce. One week and counting.*

Sugar, if I could bottle your promises I'd have enough drinks to last a lifetime.

Rebecca Thieman is an emerging writer from Louisville, Kentucky with B.A.s in Creative Writing and Psychology from Western Kentucky University. Her nonfiction has been published in *The Susquehanna Review* and *The Ashen Egg* and her poetry in *The Zephyrus*. On her free time she goes on backpacking trips in the Appalachians and Ozarks with her dog. Her honors thesis was a memoir about her Lebanese heritage and Iraqi refugees in the state. She has plans to earn her Master's degree in Social Work, specializing in crisis intervention and war trauma.

Jurassic Park Tracy Arm Fjord

The Minutes

Michael Leone

Kendall University

English and Philosophy Department Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2013

9:00 a.m.

SW__

The meeting was called to order at 9:06 a.m. on Tuesday, February 8, 2013.

Present: Patrick McGriffin, Department Chairman; Delvin Scott; Thad Burke; Michaela Roberts; Rebekkah Eisler; Antonio Perkino; Shakeena Brown; Whispering Moon; Gregory Haroutian; Josephine Schenk.

Absent: Barbara Binkley, Paul Bove, Jeffrey Loftus

Minutes recorded and submitted by Josephine Schenck, adjunct instructor of Remedial English and Developmental Writing and acting department secretary.*

*For the record: I am happy to be taking on the role of the late Barbara Binkley. Though she could be tiresome, she was always very courteous. I would also like to state that though this job was pretty much thrown upon me without compensation, in no way did I take it on to appear obsequious.

1. Announcements
    - Condolences
        - Condolence letters and flower bouquets sent to the families of Barbara Binkley, Jeffrey Loftus, and Mark Bove.
            - Three people in the department—who will go unnamed—failed to

contribute to the flower bouquet fund.

- A minute of silence is observed.

- Security
  - Though he does not want to create an atmosphere hostile to research and intellectual camaraderie, Detective Durklin suspects somebody on the faculty or staff of this or the History department of the homicides of Barbara Binkley, Dr. Jeffrey Loftus, and Dr. Mark Bove.
    - Dr. Bove, a specialist on Emily Dickinson, wrote a wonderful blurb for my chapbook of poems, What the Wind Exhales, the Grass Inhales, published by Filigree Press, in a limited edition of five hundred copies. Unfortunately, I found the signed edition that I gave him—the cover stamped with coffee rings—scrunched between his filthy desk and the wall.
  - It is imperative that staff and faculty wear school badges at all times. In addition, pay attention to your surroundings. Report anybody who lacks a security badge and who looks remotely suspicious. In addition, we recommend not working in your offices past eight o'clock at night. Campus police are willing to provide escorts to your vehicles.
    - I have long petitioned the "enlightened" faculty to forego their filth-spewing automobiles—long before it became fashionable—and seek an alternative, eco-friendly means of transportation to school.
  - While we know it is difficult to maintain the status quo during this exceedingly frightening time, we pray the perpetrator is caught very soon.
    - There is also the issue of stolen lunches. At least three times my tofu salad sandwich has been removed from my bag in the community refrigerator, leaving me famished between lectures. The first time I considered it a mistake; the third time I was convinced there was a Sandwich Burglar lurking about, and I think I know who it is.

- Thank You—home-made muffins were graciously supplied by Jennifer Schenk (me).
  - I forget where I found the recipe, but here it is:

    <u>Ingredients:</u>

    2 cups organic wheat bran

    1 cup organic oat bran

    1 cup organic whole wheat flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

1 teaspoon baking powder

2 cups of dried and pulverized jimson weed (optional)

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 large eggs

2/3 cup organic milk

2/3 cup organic yogurt

1/3 cup safflower oil (or other neutral oil or melted organic butter)

1/3 cup organic sweet molasses (not blackstrap) or cane syrup

1/3 cup organic honey

1 teaspoon organic pure vanilla extract

Instructions:

All utensils and bowls should consist of teak-ware only. Muffins are best baked in an all-natural fire pit. Grease a standard-size teak muffin pan or line the cups with unbleached baking cardboard sleeves. Combine the wheat bran, oat bran, whole wheat flour, baking soda, baking powder, jimson weed and salt in a large teak bowl and set aside. Combine the eggs, milk, yogurt, canola oil, molasses, and honey in a small bowl and mix well. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and mix with a wooden spatula just until combined. Bake in fire pit heated properly for approximately two hours.

Enjoy your muffins plain, drizzled with a little honey, or spread with peanut butter and a slather of your favorite jam (apricot is very nice, as is strawberry).

- Celebrations!
  - Congratulations to our department chair, Dr. McGriffin, who received a 2013 Lannan Cultural Freedom Fellowship.
    - I think it important to note that for years Dr. McGriffin solicited my help on his research. I consider myself a polyglot, fluent in a number of languages, including Ancient Greek—I have been working on my own translation of the Epic Cycle for some time—but not once did he ever credit me in his many published books. For instance, his book on Stephen Crane—that was largely written

under the aegis of my research. Years and years of burrowing through monotonous micro-fiche and a harrowing visit to the Stephen Crane house in Asbury Park, NJ, a veritable ghetto, where I was mugged in broad daylight and suffered a contusion on my cheek. And I hate Stephen Crane.

    - Dr. Whispering Moon has just published her epic novel in verse, "Këkhit Kshàxën" ("The Wind Is Strong"), about the removal of the Lenape Indians to Oklahoma, and the first ever novel written in the Unami language.
        - At first, I liked Dr. Moon. She capered down the halls in her bare feet, a Lenape ankle bracelet made of quahog and whelk shells rattling pleasantly, popping into everybody's offices and saying hello. She brought in interesting (but inedible) Native American pastries. But I quickly realized that behind all of that humble, "I bow to the Earth" quality, she was as conniving and competitive as any other Tenure. Once she realized I was not on the TT (tenure track), her attitude became cold, almost hostile. And I did not like her leaving a pile of final exams on my desk that she wanted me to photocopy for her, as though I were her measly assistant. I also think the foot rubs she administered to Dr. McGriffin—a married man—to be inappropriate.
    - Dr. Burch has won the 2013 Tri-State Messy Desk Contest!
        - It's too bad the janitor cleaned up my garbage-covered desk before I could enter the competition. I really could have used that check.
    - The April 17 Sigma Tau Delta Open Mic poetry reading at the Pink Sun Café will feature Dr. Greg Haroutian. He will read his own poems and poems by others.
        - I know the *exact* day I became a poet. It was on Christmas Day, 1977, when our German Sheppard Trudy ate Blinky, my rabbit. I was ten years old.
- Printer in 116 is working now. Please remember you are allowed only ten copies.
    - It is shameful how often this policy is abused, but it doesn't surprise me.
- Colored paper: very low on blue/green, lots of pink/salmon/gold (Please use these first if you use colored paper)
    - Part of the teaching of rhetoric involves teaching the rhetorical appeal known as ethos, and I think one of the most effective ways for a professor to establish a secure *ethos* is in the presentation of their syllabi. I print my syllabi on delightful gold card stock in **funky fonts**. On the bottom of every page is a different inspirational quote by an erudite thinker,

historian, activist, or teacher.

- Other
    - Whiteboards are FINALLY being installed!
        - I know why they keep glancing at me: I've removed my shoes and socks and have applied some Witch Hazel to my soles. It's perfectly fine for Dr. Moon to bare her feet, because she's Native American, but when I do it—and not for affectation but because of my neuropathy—I am treated as a pariah.
    - Ergonomic keyboards will be distributed to faculty
        - The adjunct "offices" are in the basement of Manderly Hall, a warren of cramped cubicles—some of them held together with duct tape—with sputtering fluorescent light. Once, while I was working late grading papers, a fat black spider beneath the desk bit me on the toe. Distraught, fearing I'd been poisoned, I limped all the way across town to St. Ann's Hospital, not realizing that without insurance my bill would end up being over nine hundred dollars for a small puncture wound that a churlish nurse applied with antiseptic. When I apprised Dr. McGriffin about the sub-human conditions in the basement and more particularly, about my spider episode, he laughed.
    - The leaky urinal in men's room on 2nd Floor is finally fixed.
        - My father died when I was fifteen. The coroner's report lists the cause of his death as an "alcoholic insult to the brain." To support my brother and me, my mother enrolled in night school and got her plumbing license. I am proud to say that she was the first woman to join the UA Local 9 Plumbing and Pipefitters union in New Jersey. Though she loved her work, she came home late, her body bruised, her eyes like welts. Over the years her hands eventually lost their feminine shapes. There were times when we would be strolling through the Cherry Hill Mall on a particular slumberous Saturday or Sunday, past the glinting windows of the Cherry Hill Salon where all kinds of women sat in front of manicurists, holding up their resplendent nails, and I caught the gray gauze of sadness that covered her eyes when she looked down at her battered fingertips. "Make sure you go to college," she said.

2. Minutes for 1/17/13 – small typos
    - PM to approve/TB second – approved
        - I used to hide my scars. Now I purposefully wear short-sleeved blouses and even knickers to work so I can reveal to my students, some of whom may be mentally confounded, the pocks, slashes, and gouges I had once

chiseled into my skin.

3. Shakespeare Festival
    - During the week of 7 April, 2013, we will have a series of events linked to the Kendall Lecture Series. This year's speaker is a renowned Shakespearean scholar, Dr. Roslyn Rossner.
        - I had submitted my lecture on time but did I really expect to be picked? Would anything these people decided surprise me anymore? I think it's fairly obvious why Rossner was chosen over me: Tenure Bias (and her shapely buttocks). I may not have the glorified Ph.D., but I have been studying and researching Shakespearean culture for twenty years and have been to Stratford-upon-Avon *twice*. In addition, I constructed, with the aid of a general contractor, a mini-replica of the Globe Theater in the backyard of my apartment building where I hold weekly Shakespeare plays free to the public in the summer months. I am the director, and our best production was no doubt "Titus Andronicus," though some of the parents complained about the brutality of the play and wanted to censor me. I refused, saying that my production of Shakespeare was meant to be as faithful to the original text as possible, and that having children perform these imaginative acts of cruelty would enlighten them to the dark side of man's psyche. Unfortunately, one of the boys continued his savagery long after the play had ended and poked his friend's eye out with a sword, a prop stolen from the show. I won't take the blame, though I had to settle out of court.
4. Everybody, at my last calculation, has sampled a muffin.
    - "A drowsy numbness pains my sense/as though of hemlock I had drunk..."
5. Department Activities.
    - From the floor, the following suggestions were made:
        - Benjamin Franklin tour
        - Alumni Newsletter
            - I try to support my *alma mater*—Blandings College, a small, mail-order degree program based in Bluffton, Arkansas—as often as I can.
        - Spring Fling BBQ. Food sign-up sheet will be distributed.
            - When I was twelve I began to devour raw hot dogs by the bagful. I crept into Bottom Dollar and stuffed bundles of them beneath my sweatshirt and ate them behind the store, next to the canal. It was only in my later years that I developed the healthy eating and exercise regimen that I now maintain.
6. Selection of Academic Senate Representative for English Department.

- Today in the meeting everybody was asked to nominate an English Rep. It is a one-year appointment. Members could nominate themselves if they so wished.
    - I had attempted once to unionize the adjunct faculty. For three weeks in the winter of 2006 I led a contingent of adjunct instructors picketing at the entrance to the Humanities building. I will be the first to admit that the strike was not well-organized. For one thing, I hadn't planned on the strikers being so hungry. At times, I think they cared more about what was on the daily menu—which I was preparing and paying for myself!—than the real issues at hand. Worse, the large inflatable union rat balloon I had rented was improperly tethered. A gusty storm grabbed it and flung it up into the sky where it bounced along for some minutes before crashing into a power line, causing a five-mile blackout in West Philly.
- Dr. Eisler nominated Thad Burke. There being no other nominations—I wasn't as egocentric as to nominate myself, but I was tempted—a vote was taken and Burke was designated A.S. rep by acclamation.
    - I wonder what kind of parent would name their offspring *Thad*.
    - And by the way, *Thad*: You groped me for some minutes in the solemnity of your office while expatiating on the wonders of Whitehead's theory of extension—pun intended—while promising you would speak to the tenure committee on my behalf.

7. Student Fees.
    - Michaela Roberts — Who the hell cares what you think? The way you flaunt your décolletage is demeaning.
8. 2013-14 courses/enrollments/faculty needs
    - Unfortunately, we need to deal with the reality that we are now three people short, two TT. You will be glad to know that after meeting with the dean and President Fulton, we have been promised an increase in our budget that will allow for possibly two openings at TT level within the next three years. Unfortunately, no assistant professorships will be offered.
        - McGriffin offers me a pompous, rueful look.
9. Meeting resumes after brief interruption. [It was nothing: I suffered a brief panic attack.]
    - When I consider the efforts that I had made, the promises McGriffin made me, usually in covert corners of faculty meetings or at end-of-year shindigs—No doubt the influence of alcohol was the reason for his incessant tongue-wagging (and obscene pelvis thrusts) that were bestowed upon me. I've stated again and again, and have even written an article about the subject, that student evaluations should not be a means of evaluating teachers for professorships: students lie, and they refuse to take the evaluation

process seriously. And what about those students who *refuse* fill out the evaluations? My record speaks for itself. I have a 67% student retention rate. My publishing credits are more than a yard long. They may not be the fancy academic journals, but they are subversive, inventive forums outside the spectrum of stale academia where the real research is being performed.

10. Curriculum Proposals from the Department of English.
    - I have wasted my life.
11. Blahblahblah.
12. The first to go down is McGriffin.
    - At three muffins—I was worried there wouldn't be enough for the rest—I'm not surprised. Most people don't realize that your average jimson weed growing amid the shrubbery along the curbside is deadly when imbibed.
        - Because he's fat and clownish it's not taken seriously at first, but when the foam begins to coagulate around his lips and a scraping sound emerges from the cavern of his chest—as though some horrible little scrabbling beast is trapped inside—people begin to panic and bend over him to help. Heimlich Maneuver? Ha. Mouth-to-mouth? Yuck. From whence comes that endless foamy spew?
        - Somebody finally calls the ambulance. By the time they get here this room will be a tomb.
13. Eisler, that supercilious cynic, suspects me.
    - She picks up a crumble of muffin and sniffs it. She points at me. I see her reach for her cell phone but she manages to squeeze a call in before I tackle her. She attempts to grapple with me but her soft frame is no match for my bulk and with one hand I swipe her to the floor.
14. Subsequent collapses, in the following order: Drs. Haroutian, Burke, and Brown.
    - Brown in particular crashes hard, her forehead slamming into the back of a metal folding chair. I almost feel bad for her, but she once told me that she found the works of Robert A. Heinlein to be "trash."
15. Perkino, Eisler, Scott.
    - Pulse-less.
        - I'm half-sorry about Perkino. Though an incorrigible snob, he once remarked favorably on my haircut, though I hadn't had it cut, I simply hadn't washed it in a while.
        - Scott: I hope you enjoyed my fucking tofu sandwiches.
16. Last Indian Standing: Whispering Moon.
    - Her jaw hangs so far down in horror that I can see her tonsils as she screams

in my face, “What the hell have you done?” Meanwhile, continued gurgles and groans from those recumbent soon-to-be cadavers on the carpet. Moon delivers a grating war cry and scrambles after me. We engage in a hefty grappling session and I finally manage to send her to the floor, where she lies convulsing.

17. Mea Culpa.

- I have saved the last bite for me.

The meeting will be adjourned at—my best guess—10:40 a.m.

Michael Leone’s work has appeared in *Ninth Letter*, *Hayden’s Ferry Review*, I*ndiana Review*, and *New York Tyrant*. He lives in New Jersey.

Milyway on Cadillac Mt

The Poet Li Po Visits Relatives in Kansas Stays the Year

Richard Luftig

Spring
The wind fills both basin and plain,
descending, plundering cottonwoods.
But mule deer feel new life underfoot
in the snapping of twigs on the frozen ground.
Perhaps patience is the best path to spring.

Summer
Late shadows of afternoon birds are now
longer than most trees, yet whatever moss is left
along the drying creek still shines like jade.
Windbreak junipers hang still in the air,
waiting for the next breeze with expectant hope.

Autumn
The moon tonight is full of itself
and the wind steals through the branches.
Dun clouds hint of worsening fortune,
of stumbles and falls, while the sun
makes promises it cannot keep.

Winter
February has arrived playing no favorites.
Snow on the rounded hills off in the distance
are arched eyebrows of old men. Bare branches
look so tired in lamplight. I breathe in frozen
prairie air just to make sure I am still alive.

Richard Luftig was a professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio who now resides in California. He is a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature and a semi-finalist for the Emily Dickinson Society Award. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals in the U.S., Japan, Canada, Australia, Europe, Thailand, Hong Kong and India. One of his poems was nominated for the 2012 Pushcart Poetry Prize.

If Flight Attendants Didn't Show Us How to Use the Seat Buckles

Kevin Ngo

Maybe someone would actually forget how.
Or never learn at all.

If flight attendants didn't show us how to use the seat buckles I think I'd fall for you
Hail from the sky with my arms frozen across my chest
My body
A window that has collected condensation and begs for your touch
For you to run your finger along my skin
And trace the curves of your name around my nave—trace a heart
Over my left kidney
Because I'll never melt if gravity is pushing me farther from the sun.

If flight attendants didn't show us how to use the seat buckles I think I'd bleed more
Because tooth paste always comes out
Three shades pinker than when I put it in my mouth and I dream that my teeth
Are just plugs for the volcanoes in my gums and if they fall out
I think I'd find out exactly how much my heart wants what it wants:
An endless supply of human blood.

If flight attendants
Didn't show us how to use the seat buckles I think I'd get caught
Burning playgrounds with young hands because my childhood wasn't built the way it should've been.
Can I get a do-over because I never had a close friend as a kid who ended up wanting to marry me?

And even a crown to award my fastest punches and strongest kicks can't hide the bruises that will show up on my ghost when gravity buries me in the ground

From a skeleton in his own closet who couldn't keep his hands off the bottle or out of my diaper.

I was only three years old.

If flight attendants didn't tell us

And the plane took off with my seat back and tray table in anything but the

Upright and locked position

Would the attention I paid to the sexual tension of that phrase feel the burn of existential angst

Because I'd think it'd make more sense to be lying back when things start to get hard

And if I happened to be dressed like lemonade on any given Tuesday let's say

How many ice cubes would bounce to the floor?

How many seconds would my little paper umbrella need to daintily touch down?

Would the aftermath of that look anything like my own spill from the sky?

If flight attendants didn't

Tell us to put on our own oxygen masks first I think I'd stop breathing

Because it's hard to inhale when the window's down and the air is rushing in

At the same time that it's messing up my hair.

So I'd prefer if you didn't need to donate your organs—not yet.

Pay attention.

No calling.

No texting.

No thinking about bears on the side of the road.

Drive safely and return quickly.

You took my breath and I want it back, Buddy.

If flight attendants didn't warn us about shifted contents in the overhead compartments I think

I'd let you crush me, bury me

Beneath your skin toss me around during turbulence as I sit

Glued to my seat and rub up against strangers in confined spaces like it's April Fool's Day

'Cause it's an overnight flight every two minutes you want to get off to get out but at least none of us

Are wearing those uniforms.

If flight attendants didn't direct our attention

To the overhead courtesy lights I'd still be in darkness

Reaching for the outlines of palms that twist and fade in dim moonbeams extinguish

Like lonely birthdays married to silence—their altar

Bound in static vows to an island that has long since sunk home now

To two-year-old table salt and still-living goldfish who played dead too well

And watch TV and movies all day for free on a million screens—if they didn't tell us

About the lights

I think I would stop floating unscrew

Clouds Nine through thirty-three from the sky and sew the silver lining through my lips

Because I can't stand the stale taste of recycled air so just let me go home already.

I'm expecting something from the Postal Service today.

If flight attendants didn't tell us where the exits were I think I'd get lost

Wondering where you are and what you're doing I'd wander aimlessly

Until midnight vanilla strikes and day and night both just look white to me.

And if they didn't tell us where the lavatory is I think I'd end up

Waiting in your line forever

Bladders on the same cycle

Soon to flood

Staining the carpets in straight lines and asking my lungs to pay for a fog machine.

It's a federal regulation that I taste your lip prints before I die

Or I'll toss myself from the Mile High Club

Burning your initials into my chest.

If flight attendants never asked us to follow along with the safety manual in our seat pockets I think I'd stop shopping

Because Sky Mall

Is the only mall that I need.

If flight attendants didn't tell us that our seat cushions doubled as flotation devices I think

I'd drown in my sleep

Even in the unlikely event of a water landing

Toss until morning to find the things that fell off while I had pheasant dreams illusions

Of feathers dusting around whale tails of glass

And lost family heirlooms good luck charms and Buddhism on paper.

No signals transmitting.

Phone calls that go unanswered.

Stolen passports and a national embarrassment.

Missing debris that any would piece back together if it meant

That airplanes would never stop flying.

But if the flight attendants actually didn't show us how to use the seat buckles

I think I'd automatically fasten myself in

And fall asleep

Expecting that I'd wake up just before touching down.

Kevin Ngo is currently a graduate student at Colorado State University pursuing a master's degree in student affairs. As an undergraduate student, he was a psychology major but took a handful of creative writing classes that really helped develop a love for all creative writing—especially poetry. Through his writing, he has found meaning in the simplest parts of life and enjoys constructing unique metaphors that he hopes will help others find meaning, too.

Riding the Escalator at 30th Street Station

Anne Kaier

Every time I tap my right foot onto the rungs of the ascending escalator, I know my father will be waiting in the great hall when I get to the top. He will be there with his arms flung wide to welcome his daughter. I know it because he always is. He's there every time I come home from college, as if this were his only joy, although it certainly isn't. As if he's surprised that I've come back, although there's no reason for that. Of course I've come back. I always do.

On every return, my suitcase bumps against the rising stair and I steady it with my shin, shift my feet on the metal rungs, clutch the rubber handrail, knowing at every click of the chain that he will be up there, that he will lean his silver head forward when he sees me, stoop a little as if I were still about seven, clap his hands and sing out "Annie." Always. When I'm eighteen, nineteen, twenty-two. Every time he sees me, he sees the same child.

I'm always on the serried steps of the escalator, riding up. I can't return to the train that clangs along the gray platform, heading south to Wilmington, Baltimore, Washington. I cling with my soles to the escalator; I arch my toes on the combs of its steps.

Gripping the handrail as I rise through narrow walls, I can't see him yet but I know he's standing in the middle of the station he loves, where Art Deco chandeliers hang from ninety-foot ceilings and afternoon light slants from a clerestory Perhaps the stationmaster has stopped to talk with him, joking with Mr. K. from the Legal Department who's worked for the railroad for thirty-five years. Perhaps, while he waits, my father turns to admire the massive bronze angel who arches his serried wings and cradles a fallen soldier--forever a memorial to the men of the railroad who died in the Second World War.

I know he is up there. He always is. Year after year, he waits in the center of the station, his arms spread wide to welcome his daughter and I rise on the escalator as other travelers grow taller and melt away and my feet skid onto the floor and he opens his arms wide for his daughter and he claps his hands and sings out: "Annie."

As I tap my foot on the rungs of the escalator and I brace my bag against my shin, I know my father waits at the top. I know he's there because he always is. As I slide my foot onto the first step and brace my bag against my shin, I know he will be there waiting because he always is, waiting near the angel with the fallen warrior,

the warrior who has fallen sideways, his head on his chest, his lifeless head held upright by the relentless angel who will not let him go.

A *Best American Essays* "Notable" author, Anne Kaier has just published a new memoir, *Home with Henry*, PS Books: psbooks.wordpress.com. Malade, a memoir about disability, sexuality, and the Catholic shrine at Lourdes is also new and available from Shebooks: www.shebooks.net. Her essays and poetry appear in *The Gettysburg Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, T*he Kenyon Review*, *Referential*, and *Beauty is a Verb: An Anthology of Poetry, Poetics, and Disability* which is on the American Library Association Notable Books list for 2012. She lives in Center City, Philadelphia and teaches at both Arcadia University and Rosemont College.

Migration

rathallareview.com
rosemont.edu