

# THE NASSAU LITERARY REVIEW

ESTABLISHED 1842



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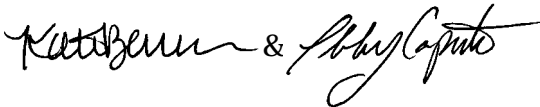
## EDITORS' NOTE

The *Nassau Literary Review* has played an integral part in Princeton's literary tradition by publishing some of America's greatest writers, including Galway Kinnell, John McPhee, Edmund Wilson, Booth Tarkington, W.S. Merwin, Woodrow Wilson and F. Scott Fitzgerald. After 161 years, it remains the primary creative forum for writers, poets and artists at Princeton University. We celebrate our legacy this year by looking to the past for inspiration while moving toward a future of new, talented writers and a revitalized *Review*.

In this issue, you will find four of F. Scott Fitzgerald's early poems, originally published in the *Nassau Literary Review* over eight decades ago. Surrounding these echoes of the past are some of the finest prose, poetry and art being created at Princeton today, selected from over 400 submissions received this year. We are happy to introduce to you the expressions of a new generation.

We would like to thank our editors and selection staffs, who in the midst of classes, independent work, and other extracurricular activities worked to make this year's *Review* the best in recent history. We especially appreciate the efforts of our seniors and wish them luck in their future endeavors. Further thanks to all supporters of the *Review* listed in the back of the magazine. Without your generous contribution, this publication would not be possible.

We hope you enjoy reading,



Kate Benson & Ibby Caputo  
Editors-in-Chief  
*Nassau Literary Review*

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*Angela Buckingham*  
Black and white photograph

NIGHTSONG

*Rosanna Da Costa*

and the star fell in an arc  
and your body held the curve  
a hand reaching down through the rails  
fingers stretched for the petal drifting  
there on the sea

the smell of sea-smoke  
and in the car your face kept  
pulling the waves up to the road  
so I steered around them  
holding tight to the twists  
in the sea-road

otherwise we might spin  
off into the cliff winds  
and that would be the end of me  
but perhaps not you because I heard  
what you said when we slid across the ice  
unmoored

and there is a twist to the road  
that warns me we are close  
the dune grass lies in Celtic tangles  
already light is refracted by incoming mist  
and your hand rests lightly on the door  
an arch of promise

## THE ELEGY

*Margaret Johnson*

AUNT JEAN'S FUNERAL WAS MY FIRST. MY EYES SLID FROM BLACK shoe to black shoe, velvet, satin, patent leather. Men's dress shoes chafing their defenseless ankles, which showed skinny and effeminate in thin dress socks. Women's shoes, vain, buttoned, bowed, heeled to hoist them several safe inches above the earth, in case the death spilled from its container and oozed down the aisle, lethal and contagious beneath the organ's moans. Above the shoes the faces opened and closed: a priest's face, a husband's face punctured with oxygen tubes, sons' faces, my mother's face, Bobby's mother's face, unknown faces. They kept a tight, nervous rhythm, as though before an audience.

*So this is dying.*

With other men my cousin Bobby carried in the massive mahogany shoe box someone purchased for the disposal. I knew her little, the woman inside, but I knew she was too small for this shiny chest born on men's shoulders, the shrine, the signifier, the box where they locked up the death for the safety of those in attendance. Someone had tried to make it look innocuous, carved and finished it as though it were an oversized coffee table. I pictured her curled like a fetus within it on the expensive cushion that she could not feel, that would return to the earth never being felt. I had met her only three times, yet I sat later that afternoon in her front room, a soggy paper plate balanced on my knees, and ate potato salad that matched the yellow-green curtains. I



tasted the funeral in the food. I swallowed, and it crawled through my arteries and capillaries to my brain where it settled.

*She could have been anyone.*

Then Bobby's boots came to me, brown with dirt beneath the cuffs of a seldom-worn suit. His funeral suit. I replayed the boots walking beneath his burdened shoulder hours earlier, his hand on the coffin handle someone would save as though she had cherished it. I hope that he felt her in there, her small weight cached inside the massive wooden chest.

After mass, he lamented that they had left off the fifth verse of "Amazing Grace."

*How can you not sing the last verse of 'Amazing Grace?'*

The omission pained him.

My mother said *Bobby, You should have finished it.*

I know he would have, my cousin who whispers to his flowers, who built a chapel and wrote to God on its walls, who has no priest. Who plays guitar with a man missing an arm because arms don't make you whole. He would have, if not for the suit, all the shoes, and everyone afraid of touching the floor.

Over the potato salad I decided that he sang the fifth verse. He walked up the aisle, and Father Someone cowered aside, grateful for the interruption. In my memory, Bobby pushed away the heavy white cloth, opened the box, held her fragile puttied face in his hands, and sang. Unstarved her passing with his voice, dropped the mouths behind him so mourning entered them, finally. I will remember that because of him they realized she was gone. And they, they were alive.

## AFTER THE ARGUMENT

*Melissa Galvez*

In the stiff yellow light of morning, it began:  
half-drunk coffee mug, copy of the *New Yorker*, pile of pens.  
It was reasonable to do this;  
though the hour was strange and the clocks ticked loudly  
in the silence seeping

like cold water  
through the room—  
it was reasonable to rearrange, reasonable to remove:  
cried-on tissues, dated circulars, dead leaves.  
normal, even, to transpose the vase of dried roses  
align a chair  
draw back a curtain.

But by the time he found her the  
light had loosened  
and she was shuffling end  
tables  
like a  
deck of cards.

—too tiny too square too squat too tall  
too glassy too glossy too worn too new—  
a four footed beast was exiled to the corner  
for being a bit short in the leg  
and the pillows kept migrating from beneath his back  
when he tried to relax  
for a cup of tea.

But she was right about something:  
something riding on feng shui, good taste, the tides of the moon.  
All through the morning as ashen clouds wisped past their windows,  
armchairs and straight back chairs, a love seat, an ottoman  
danced grudgingly round the room  
hoisted by four rubber arms, accompanied by thuds  
as squares, triangles, pentagons  
rose into being  
and misted away.

When the sun poked through the ashen clouds  
it became reasonable:

oak table,

walls of book shelf, pull out couch

piano, armoire,

grandfather clock

they groaned across the floor

scraped, protested

lay bare spaces

they didn't know were there

exposed corners where the dust had gathered

and spiders made homes at the junctures of things

the ache in the arms

let them ignore

the memories of discordance loitering in the

metronome, mirrors

and the disorder was familiar:

a bookshelf reclining on a couch

a table up ended like a dead animal

the grandfather clock which stood poised

pinch-faced

over the piano ready to play.

They collapsed in the rubble

and remained

until orange light filled the room.

And when it was all over:

languorous, they reset

A silent day

except for the scraping of wood on wood

and the clud-thunk of things falling

A silent day

finishing in orange light

much has been moved

but all that's changed

is a pillow, or an armchair.

## MAJESTIC

*Megan Brown*

he fumbled with the shell  
for fear that it might bite him  
until he realized  
that its gentle grooves  
captured the distant  
melody of the ocean

his younger brother, whose simple life  
revolved around the changing of dirty diapers  
was not yet old enough  
to enjoy the tickle of sand funneling  
through the cracks between toes

his attention was held  
by the plastic, oversized necklace  
that dangled from his neck  
its colored beads resting  
in the fold of his bellybutton

or his mother's delicate fingers  
that struggled to control  
his squirming curiosity

and the boy wondered if they knew  
that each grain of sand  
winked like a sparkling diamond  
that life under the water  
spoke only in song  
and that each wave rolled in  
slowly delivering the mystery of the sea

he let his eyes go cross-eyed  
losing focus of the dark glossy shell  
and let his mind whirl away  
in the salty, summer breeze  
but he didn't care  
because the wind had slipped  
into the sleeves of his white terry cloth robe  
and as it ballooned out triumphantly  
he realized what it was like  
to be a king

## BELLA'S WINDOW

### *Clare Beams*

THE FIRST TIME IT HAPPENED WAS BY ACCIDENT. BELLA WAS eating her breakfast, watching Al chew across the table from her, when a light suddenly went on over his left shoulder. The next-door neighbors had turned on their living room lights.

Al opened the pages of the paper he was reading, rechecked it, and set it back down beside his cereal bowl. "Might snow later on today," he said, looking down at the weather section.

"Mmmm," Bella answered. She had noticed before that the houses in this development were close together. When she and Al had moved in two weeks ago she'd been struck by how many the builders had managed to cram in, how the narrow strips of grass separated one from another in their neat, identical line. She'd even noticed how their kitchen faced right into their neighbors' living room, bay window to bay window, like eyes in a staring contest. But this was the first time they'd eaten in this breakfast nook – they'd just picked out a table for it yesterday at Sears, nice light oak to match the cabinets – and she hadn't realized quite how visible her neighbors' room would be to her before now. It was lit up in the dark winter morning like a storefront display.

As she watched, a woman entered the living room and moved across it, turning on floor lamps.

"I'll have to be careful driving home. I haven't put the snow-tires on the car yet," Al said, fishing the last pieces of his Total Branflakes out of the discolored milk at the bottom of his bowl.

"Make sure you take your time, if the roads are bad. Drive slow," Bella said. The woman across the way had disappeared again.

"I will." Al stood up and pushed his chair in, scraping it across the new linoleum. He carried his bowl to the counter and came back to kiss Bella on the forehead. "All right, I'm off, hon. Have a good day. Hope the school gets back to you."

"I'll let you know," Bella said, and watched as he picked up

his briefcase and walked out the door. She'd put in a call to the Montville Public Elementary School as soon as they'd moved, letting them know that she had taught third grade for twenty years back in Clairview, Pennsylvania and she'd be happy to come in for an interview, if they were interested. She hadn't heard back yet, but she knew how busy things always got in schools around the holidays. They'd call eventually. She had, after all, been one of Clairview's longest-serving and most active teachers. One of its best.

And in the meantime, Al's new job seemed to be going well. His face had started to lose that funny crumpled look it'd had in the weeks after his old one had ended. She still couldn't believe a company would lay off a man so close to retirement age who had given it more than two decades of his working life.

The woman across the way appeared again, bearing two cups of coffee that she set down on coasters on the coffee table, and a newspaper that she put down in front of one of them. She sat down on the couch and brushed the front of her dress pants flat. She was about thirty, thin, dyed-blonde and perfectly pressed, even at this hour of the morning. She probably *slept* perfectly pressed. Bella knew her type. They always had limp handshakes and overused laughs and names like Samantha or Rhonda. Yes, that could almost certainly be her name – Rhonda.

Bella stood up and carried her own cereal bowl over to the sink, rinsed it and Al's out, and put them in the dishwasher. When she turned around, Rhonda had flipped on the television and was sipping her coffee in front of it, with the other cup waiting untouched next to her. Bella couldn't see the screen – the angle was wrong – but it was probably turned to something like the CNN Wall Street report. Women like Rhonda watch talk shows, but never when their husbands are about to come into the room. Bella's own coffee was still sitting on the breakfast table, only half finished. She supposed maybe she'd sit there, just for a few more minutes, and drink some more of it.

She wanted to see what Rhonda's husband looked like.

Bella was down to her last few sips of coffee by the time he appeared. He strode across the room, still knotting his tie, and picked up the other cup of coffee once he'd finished. He took

a big swig. He looked just like Bella had known he would. Tall, neatly dressed, broad-shouldered, with big muscles just beginning to turn to fat – the kind of man who does a gradually decreasing number of pushups every morning before his shower. His name was probably something like Patrick. Yes, Patrick sounded about right.

Bella watched as Patrick perched himself on the arm of the couch (the way people do to signal they're not staying long) and picked up the newspaper. Rhonda said something to him and he smiled absently. She sat and watched the television while Patrick finished his coffee, which only took another minute or two. Then he put the empty cup back down on the coaster and rose, giving Rhonda a brief peck on the cheek before he headed out the door.

Rhonda sat on the couch for a few more minutes after Patrick left. Bella noticed how tastefully chosen the color of the couch was – the red of it picking up the red in the wallpaper, setting off the green of the carpet. Everything was so clean. It was the kind of order, Bella thought, that came only with childlessness. At last, Rhonda reached for the remote beside her, flipped the TV off, and left the room. Bella waited for a few minutes to see if she'd come back into it. She didn't.

Bella's coffee had long since gone cold.

She spent the rest of the day unpacking boxes alone in the house, just like she'd done every day for the past two weeks. Over twenty years things had crept into every corner of their old house on Front Street, and it had surprised her how much there was when she'd taken it all out again. She wasn't sure that this house, with its new gleaming surfaces and ninety-degree angles, would ever hold everything.

But it was probably just as well that she kept unpacking boxes only to find that their contents didn't fit into the places she had designated for them and she had to start over again. It kept her busy, so that she didn't think too much about how odd it was to be home in the middle of the day. The only time she'd ever been at their house on Front Street on weekday late-mornings and early-afternoons had been when she was sick, and



even then it had never been this quiet. Once the other teachers at Clairview had gotten wind that she had a substitute for the day, they'd be calling to see how she was. Bella felt like here she could disappear and nobody would notice.

Here there was only the muted ticking of the wall clock she'd hung up yesterday and the bright unfamiliar smell of a clean house that was not her own.

That night, lying in bed beside Al while he slept, Bella got to thinking about Rhonda and Patrick again. It was strange, she thought, shivering under the thin blankets – their thick comforter was still hidden at the bottom of some box they hadn't found yet – that they didn't have any children. Women like Rhonda always had children. They were always terrible mothers, but they always had children. They seemed to think it was expected of them. She thought back to her years and years of sitting at PTA meetings in Clairview, meetings that were always full of mothers like Rhonda – listless, uninterested mothers who were there because their friends were and who never spoke. They were the kind that always came into parent-teacher conferences with no questions to ask and who always had trouble reading their children's handwriting on the papers she'd shown them.

Al rolled over, gave a brief choking snore, and resettled himself on his side. Bella patted him absently. Maybe, she thought, Rhonda wanted children and Patrick didn't. Maybe he had realized his mistake in marrying a woman who'd be such a horrible mother. A mother who'd be upset if her kid spit up or spilled on her dress pants. Maybe he didn't want any child of his to be subjected to that.

Yes, she thought, pulling the blankets up under her chin and tucking them there. She was sure that was exactly what was going on.

The next morning after Al left, Bella went hunting for a certain box. The light across the way had flipped on just as Al was walking out the door, and Bella had wanted to just sit there and watch. But she'd decided to take a certain precautionary step first.

She found the box she was looking for pushed into the

downstairs front hall closet. She ripped it open, and there, on the top – a little wrinkled, but not awful – was what she was looking for.

A set of bright yellow curtains, the color of sunshine. And beneath them, a disassembled curtain rod.

They'd hung in the kitchen back on Front Street, but the kitchen here was painted a sort of cream color, and she and Al had agreed they wouldn't look right. Bella was sure he wouldn't complain, though, if she put them up.

But once she had – standing on a chair and taking poorly-aimed swings with Al's hammer, which she'd managed to find in a box under the stairs – she realized that the curtain rod was much too short for a window this wide. The curtain by her side of the table was all right, but the other one fell considerably short of the other side – it hung right down through the middle of the pane. And she'd hung the whole thing crooked, too. She'd have to fix that. But as she reached for her hammer, she caught a glimpse of Patrick coming into the living room across the way, where Rhonda was waiting for him.

She stopped, abandoned the hammer, and stole into her seat, positioning herself so that she was mostly obscured behind a swath of bright yellow. Patrick came into the room just like he had yesterday, except that this time his tie was already knotted. Bella watched as he picked up his coffee and perched himself again on the couch's arm, saying something to Rhonda, who gave him a little smile in response.

The tension, Bella thought, was much more palpable today. The tension from the baby.

She watched them as they drank side-by-side in silence for a few moments. Then Rhonda said something. She's asking him! Bella thought. She's asking him again. Why, Patrick? Why don't you want me to have your child? Don't you love me? Don't you think I'd be a good mother? Haven't you *ever* loved me?

Bella watched Patrick's face, gauging his response. No, no, and no, he's thinking – she thought – but of course he won't say that. Patrick put down his coffee cup and patted his wife's knee.

He said something. He's reassuring her, Bella thought. Don't be ridiculous, darling. You know I love you. It has nothing to do with that. It's just a question of whether this is the right time, that's all. But we can talk about that later.

Patrick stood up. Now I have to go, he was saying – Bella thought. He kissed Rhonda on the cheek.

You're always going, Bella imagined her saying.

Patrick was pretending he hadn't heard, gathering his briefcase and suit jacket as if everything were normal.

Rhonda again sat on the couch for a few minutes after Patrick had left. She wasn't crying. Women like Rhonda never cry, Bella thought, unless there's someone there to see it. Finally Rhonda stood and left the room, turning out the lights as she left.

Maybe, Bella thought, I'll just sit here in the kitchen and read for a while today. It's really a very nice little corner. She went to the bedroom to get a book, came back, positioned herself behind the curtain again. She opened it and realized she'd read it twice before – she had grabbed it off the shelf without really looking at it. As she flipped the pages, her eyes kept jerking up to the window across the way. It stayed dark, like the screen of a television that hadn't been turned on.

That night in bed Bella lay awake, imagining Rhonda lying awake in her bed next door. She imagined her thinking about Patrick, who would be next to her, already asleep, tossing and turning. Patrick would be a restless sleeper. Rhonda would be lying there hating him for depriving her of what all her friends had – baby showers, baby nurseries, pretty little babies to take pretty pictures of.

Maybe, Bella thought, Rhonda would take matters into her own hands.

She imagined Rhonda getting up across the way, careful not to wake Patrick, and creeping into the bathroom. She'd shut the door very softly and make sure it was shut completely before she turned on the light. She'd go over to the cabinet behind the mirror and take out a sewing kit, open it and take out a needle.

Then she'd open one of the drawers next to the sink and

take out her diaphragm.

Yes, Bella thought, that was almost certainly what was happening. Possibly at this very moment.

“SO YOU DECIDED TO HANG THOSE UP AFTER ALL,” AL SAID, pointing to the curtains with his full spoon at breakfast. A moist Total Branflake fell off, onto the tablecloth. He picked it up and put it back into his bowl.

“Uh-huh,” Bella said. The light next door hadn’t come on yet.

“They don’t quite work like that, do they?” Al said, eyeing the yellow sheet that hung down in the middle of the window, the slant of the curtain rod.

“Guess not,” Bella answered. Where was Rhonda? She should be up by now.

“Well, maybe I’ll try fixing them when I get home.” Al got up and brought his bowl to the counter. “Have a good day, hon.”

Bella sat there after the door closed behind him, waiting for Rhonda to come downstairs. A half hour, an hour after Al had left she still hadn’t come. Where could she possibly be? What could have happened? Bella decided to sit there and wait. She was sure something momentous had happened, and she didn’t want to miss anything. Maybe there had been a terrible fight in the middle of the night, and Patrick had left, and now Rhonda was gone trying to find him. That might be it. Maybe Rhonda was *already* pregnant! Maybe she told Patrick and he’d stormed off!

Yes, she’d have to stay there in the corner today. Just to see what happened.

Hours went by and the window stayed dark.

Al got home at five. He opened the door and walked into the kitchen, whistling. “Hi hon!” he said. “Guess what?”

“What?” Bella said. She wasn’t listening. After a day of waiting, the light had just gone on in Rhonda and Patrick’s living room.

“I just ran into our next-door neighbors! They live right

over there.” Al gestured toward Rhonda and Patrick’s house. “They were pulling up just as I was, so I stopped to introduce myself.”

“Oh?” Bella said. Rhonda was making her way into the living room.

“Their names are Carol and Tom. They have two little boys—they’ve just picked them up from their grandmother’s in New Hampshire. They sent them up there for their winter break and spent the day going to get them.”

“Huh,” Bella said. Two boys ran into the living room, followed by Patrick. Whose boys could those be? Maybe they were visiting nephews. Bella winced as they plopped themselves on the couch, curling their shoed feet under them. Rhonda would probably have to get the upholstery cleaned after they left. Maybe this would convince her that kids weren’t such a great idea after all.

“Yeah. They seem like really nice people. So did you hear back from the school yet, hon? Hon? Hey,” Al said, really looking at his wife for the first time when she didn’t answer. She was still in her faded pink bathrobe, her gray hair still tousled, her breakfast dishes still on the table in front of her. “Bella, have you been sitting here since I left?” She was staring at some point over his shoulder. She didn’t seem to hear him. “Bella?”

“What?” she said, still staring past him. “I’m sorry, what’d you say?” She finally turned her head to look at him.

“Bella, what have you been doing here all day?”

“Just sitting. That’s all.”

“Sitting? All day? Just *sitting*?” he asked, incredulous.

“Well, I don’t have much else to do at the moment, do I?” Bella answered.

The smile she gave him was as crooked as the curtains.

## OVERNIGHT SPOONS

*Corinne Schneider*

Noshing a cold apple,  
it is only natural that you offer a bite—  
and you do. I continue your path  
around the core. Then you press lips  
over my teeth marks, think nothing  
of the spit I left on waxed skin.

We guess at animal crackers  
with disproportionate limbs.  
*Elephant or turtle?*  
I spout sympathy over their deformities,  
mention that an oven had baked their lumps.  
You munch, say they're still  
good for their taste.

It grows early through talk,  
and outside becomes a little less than dark.  
Somewhere far from our window,  
the sun had flipped out from the moon.

I sip water. We agree to turn off the lamp,  
and then our eyes adjust  
to see the other nod off.

We plan to wake for breakfast,  
but sleep too late—with my head resting  
under your chin, our ankles touching.

FOR MY GRANDFATHER, BEN SCHIMER

*Jay Katsir*

You always kiss me  
twice on the forehead and  
say, “my *boyeleh*,” bristles

scraping my skin in  
the barrage. You showed me  
how you groomed those bristles to

an even, white stripe  
above your lip, standing  
bare-chested in the bathroom

of your apartment  
in Queens. I got to mix  
the lather with a soft brush,

and asked you how come  
Grandma hid the extra  
toilet paper under a

knitted purple hat.  
That night, kids were laughing  
in the courtyard but it was

too dark to see out  
the window. You brought me  
the book we read every time,

and before I fell  
asleep, I listened to  
the fan whisper in your room.

## VIEWMASTER

### *Nate Sellyn*

JULIUS WONDER WAS BORN IN BROOKLYN, A BEAUTIFUL SON TO two ordinary parents. His father worked in the garment district, stitching ready-to-wear dresses for Fifth Avenue beauty queens. His mother sold newspapers on the street corner outside their apartment. Julius shared a bed with his parents until the day he moved away, and then he never saw them again, but they thought about him everyday.

*click*

Julius went west, over the mountains and into the sunshine. The year was nineteen-sixty, and he was eighteen. He rode railcars all the way, and saw America slip by before his eyes like sand in a great pastoral hourglass.

*click*

Julius acted in Los Angeles, mostly because he could. His face was all smooth ebony angles, and there will always be work for the beautiful wanderers. He played a cowboy for patrons of the movie house, the first black hero of the silver screen. He would sign autographs with a 'J' so exaggerated you could cut yourself on its curve. He thought himself in Eden.

*click*

Julius married a petite woman named Frances, mesmerized by the many faces of her eccentricity. She wrote only with crayons. He fell in love with her the way you fall in love with a child, all at once and for no reason. She killed herself a year later, jumping from the top of a Florida hotel in a ketchup red sundress.

*click*

Julius died himself thirty years later, when old age arrived to reinforce his broken heart. He went quietly, on a rainy Sunday morning, curled up in a blue velvet armchair by the window. He had faded, like the ink on a Golden Age comic, left to gather dust in a forgotten corner of gallantry's crawlspace.

*click*

Julius and Frances had one son, Harold. Julius raised him on



dairy and dreams, and read him bedtime tales about true love. Sometimes, when Harold would creep into his father's room because the darkness scared him, he would catch Julius crying, and know how unique a woman his mother had been.

*click*

Harold left Julius when he was eighteen to go to school, where he learned to become a carpenter. Julius stopped talking to him after that, telling Harold carpenters could only ever lead lives that left them wishing. Harold knew his father was wrong, because Jesus never wanted, and who could ask for more than that?

*click*

Harold married Bernadette in the fall of that year, under a canopy of gold and crimson leaves, beside a church that smelled of lavender. He kept a leaf from that day in his wallet, and even when it crumbled he liked to imagine he still had it. Bernadette still had all her baby teeth, and made everyone she met feel like they could stay up all night with her, just talking with the lights off and holding hands.

*click*

Harold took to collecting stamps, pasting them slowly into the pages of his favorite book, making sure they lined up as squarely as fascists on parade. Bernadette warned him that soon he wouldn't be able to read the book anymore, but Harold said he loved it so much he wanted to send the whole world the words.

*click*

Harold and Bernadette had a girl, Marianne, probably a few years sooner than they should have. Her eyes were so bright Harold would sometimes turn off all the lights in the room to make sure they didn't glow. *My Marianne*, he would tell people, *she's a miracle*. He kept her away from heights, and away from heartache, and sung her to sleep until she grew too old.

## CENACOLO (THE LAST SUPPER)

*Matt Nguyen*

I would sleep better tonight  
Had they been seated on both sides of the table  
Had da Vinci not made the tablecloth short enough  
To expose their crazy feet  
Had they not had a look in their eyes  
As though you just walked in on them in the shower  
And they liked it.

Bread and wine.  
Not much of a last supper.  
But maybe, the look on Peter's face  
Does not pertain to any prophecy of the Resurrection.  
No, I recognize that look.  
The real supper, the osso buco, the risotto,  
The tuscan beef, the roasted pheasant  
Are all behind da Vinci  
Peter can smell the delicate spices  
And he knows that this angel with a palette  
This demigod holding a paintbrush  
Is all that stands between him and  
The true feast.

Da Vinci can't smell anything.  
His moustache is soaked with oil paint.  
Buttery color covers his fingers.  
He yells at his subjects to stay  
On their side of the table.  
He makes them cut the tablecloth  
To show him their crazy feet.

Jesus complains he has a crucifixion to attend,  
And he cannot be a second late  
For his ascension into Heaven....  
Now as I walk through the refectory  
The apostles' faces are starting to fade  
And soon the original paint will vanish completely  
Evaporating particle by particle into the air of Milan  
Or making a fine dust on the dark floor

And once there is no more paint on the wall  
It will be time for these shameless exhibitionists to take their seats  
On both sides of the table

## PROXIMITY

*Lauren McCollum*

In the moment just before the bolt pulsed into the tree  
near where I stood, I was struck  
by the surprise of my eligibility, the roll of energy  
that made my backbone buck

and the shy hairs of my neck stand on end. Chalk  
after-images from guides  
about survival flashed on my eyelids as the ions flocked,  
prepared for flight

into the arrested vessel of the sky-committee's choosing.  
As I threw myself prone  
onto the ground, a suppliant to the flash and its diffusing,  
I felt in my bones

the electric possibilities certain ancients must have known  
when they awoke one day  
and realized that God Himself was whispering in muted tones  
*I've chosen you to relay*

*my secrets.* How the prophets' skin must have prickled  
when He cradled their old,  
bent bodies, soothing their sleep as sublime truths trickled  
in their ears, waiting to be told.

IN THIS SEQUESTERED VALE OF STAR AND SPIRE  
F. SCOTT. FITZGERALD'S PRINCETON

*Introduced by Lizzie Bailey*

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH PRINCETON WAS ROCKY at times. Immortalized in *This Side of Paradise*, the University provided Fitzgerald with a bank of experience, which he drew upon for the rest of his career. Many of Fitzgerald's short stories and poems, published originally in the *Nassau Literary Review*—four of which are reprinted here—would be expanded or incorporated in later works. For instance, Fitzgerald ultimately posited “Princeton—The Last Day” in prose in *This Side of Paradise*. Though his first novel, now practically required reading for matriculating Princetonians, cemented Princeton's position as Fitzgerald's overt, early muse, his relationship with Old Nassau was often one of unrequited affection. The University never fully embraced him while he lived, suspending him for poor academic performance during his junior year. Since Fitzgerald's death and the rise in national and global popularity of his novels, the University has struggled with the legacy of Fitzgerald's Princeton.

The institution Fitzgerald attended, as well as the spirit of his time here that pervades his early works, are vestiges of an era that, seen from the vantage point of ninety interceding years, can appear either glamorous or archaic, attractive or anachronistic. At a time when Princeton was at best an insular, elitist university and at worst a glorified country club, Fitzgerald inhabited a position at the intersection of exclusivity and inclusion. While he was neither of the old moneyed, New England stock from whence many of his classmates came, and felt the sting of constant consciousness of his social status, he did experience the exaltation and the agony of bicker as part of a select few accepted to an exclusive club that rejected many others, including some of his close friends. Yet, the mature voice Fitzgerald believed he developed at Princeton, which would later

become a cornerstone in the canon of American literature, managed to neither idealize nor damn the school and the age, though for many readers it may succeed in inspiring a certain nostalgia.

Today Fitzgerald's personal and literary legacy is at once transcendent of and anchored to a distinct time in both Princetonian and American histories. Not only do his years and experiences here represent a heyday of an older, more traditional Princeton spirit, but Fitzgerald's education and his coming of age also coincide with the coming of age of the nation at large. The Great War marked a loss of innocence for America and for the Western World, and Fitzgerald would go on to repeatedly explore and lament the fall from romantic adolescence that the war heralded. Present already in these four, early poems, particularly "Princeton—The Last Day," is a bittersweet preoccupation with "the splendor and the sadness of the world" that he would carry with him, and which would carry him throughout his career. The indomitable wit that, though often eclipsed by his romanticism and wistfulness, was characteristic of his writing and personality is rampant in his parody of Keats' famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "To My Unused Greek Book" is an insouciant caricature of a poet whom Fitzgerald deeply respected and whose influence on Fitzgerald extended far beyond this spoof. In this poem, Fitzgerald hilariously captures the power of academic energies, harnessed effectively, to manipulate any subject—be it one's own feats of procrastination or a legendary piece of poetic discourse—into entertaining comic fodder. In contrast, the more mature poems included here, "City Dusk" and "My First Love," are more familiar renderings of that distinctive wistfulness, that romance at once naïve and knowing, vulnerable and poised, which permeates Fitzgerald's later writing.

By reading these early offerings as precursors to an American icon's later works, as trials and exercises in the development of Fitzgerald's voice, and also simply as the products of a Princeton student's time spent not on his studies but on his passion for writing, we can gain some insight into the

aspiring writer he was before he became the voice of a generation and the young man he was before he became a Princeton legend. We can also catch a glimpse of Fitzgerald's undergraduate life at a Princeton that in some ways no longer exists. Seen through the telescoping lens of the University's curious ability to collapse the distance between past and present, student and alumni, and institution and individual, these poems offer something not only unique to F. Scott Fitzgerald '17, but in some ways universal to a multitude of modern day Princetonians.

Here is every student who finds himself with an unopened book and without the compunction to open it—every student compelled to devote more time to extracurriculars than distribution requirements. Here too is every senior who finds herself looking at the familiar sights of four years spent on a magical campus and wishes she could distill some intangible quintessence of this place to keep present and alive in her mind for the years to come, far away from its sequestered vale of towers and spires. Here is every student who comes away from college not with academic fundamentals imparted by textbooks, lectures and examinations, but with a growing knowledge and sense of himself gleaned simply from coming of age. Here, then, is F. Scott Fitzgerald: comic, romantic, adolescent, American, Princetonian.

FOUR POEMS BY F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

TO MY UNUSED GREEK BOOK

*(Acknowledgements to Keats)*

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,  
Thou joyless harbinger of future fear,  
Garrulous alien, what thou mightst express  
Will never fall, please God, upon my ear.  
What rhyme or reason can invest thy shape  
That is not found in countless syllibi?  
What trots and cribs there are, what ponies rich,  
With all thou sign'st and in a clearer key.  
Expose thee to a classroom's savage rape?  
Nay! better far remain within thy niche.

Tasks all complete are sweet, but those untried  
Are sweeter, therefore little book, with page  
Uncut, stay pure, and live thy life inside,  
And wait for some appreciative age.  
Oh, Author, most admired and left alone,  
Thou cans't not ever see the garish day.  
Editor, never, never wilt thou speak,  
But yellow grow and petrify to stone  
Where I shall throw thee after tests next week;  
Yet grieve not—ever thou'lt have much to say.

Oh happy, happy, leaves that cannot shed  
Their ink, or ever bid the print adieu;  
Oh happy, happy, bard who never bled  
At verse of his droned out with meaning new.  
No words are penciled in a barbarous tongue  
Above thy dactyls oft misunderstood;  
Caesuras are not marked to shame thy taste;  
Thy song is as you sing it, though unsung.  
If not of use at least thou'rt noble waste;  
Let stand thy native accent as it should.

*(1916)*



## PRINCETON - THE LAST DAY

The last light wanes and drifts across the land,  
The low, long land, the sunny land of spires.  
The ghosts of evening tune again their lyres  
And wander singing, in a plaintive band  
Down the long corridors of trees. Pale fires  
Echo the night from tower top to tower.  
Oh sleep that dreams and dream that never tires,  
Press from the petals of the lotus-flower  
Something of this to keep, the essence of an hour!

No more to wait the twilight of the moon  
In this sequestered vale of star and spire;  
For one, eternal morning of desire  
Passes to time and earthy afternoon.  
Here, Heraclitus, did you build of fire  
And changing stuffs your prophecy far hurled  
Down the dead years; this midnight I aspire  
To see, mirrored among the embers, curled  
In flame, the splendor and the sadness of the world.

*(1917)*

## CITY DUSK

Come out. . . . out  
To this inevitable night of mine  
Oh you drinker of new wine,  
Here's pageantry. . . . Here's carnival,  
Rich dusk, dim streets and all  
The whisperings of city night. . . .

I have closed my book of fading harmonies,  
(The shadows fell across me in the park)  
And my soul was sad with violins and trees,  
And I was sick for dark,  
When suddenly it hastened by me, bringing  
Thousands of lights, a haunting breeze,  
And a night of streets and singing. . . .

I shall know you by your eager feet  
And by your pale, pale hair;  
I'll whisper happy incoherent things  
While I'm waiting for you there. . . .

All the faces unforgettable in dusk  
Will blend to yours,  
And the footsteps like a thousand overtures  
Will blend to yours,  
And there will be more drunkenness than wine  
In the softness of your eyes on mine. . . .

Faint violins where lovely ladies dine,  
The brushing of skirts, the voices of the night  
And all the lure of friendly eyes. . . . Ah there  
We'll drift like summer sounds upon the summer air. . . .

*(1918)*

## MY FIRST LOVE

All my ways she wove of light  
Wove them half alive,  
Made them warm and beauty-bright . . .  
So the shining, ambient air  
Clothes the golden waters where  
The pearl fishers dive.

When she wept and begged a kiss  
Very close I'd hold her,  
Oh I know so well in this  
Fine, fierce joy of memory  
She was very young like me  
Tho half an aeon older.

Once she kissed me very long,  
Tip-toed out the door,  
Left me, took her light along,  
Faded as a music fades. . . . .  
Then I saw the changing shades,  
Color-blind no more.

*(1919)*

## MUNG

*Annie Lee*

A bag of dried beans  
rattles like bones.  
I bury you

beneath the mung bean tree  
at the edge of the woods  
where we slept

curled like veins.  
Turning up the hem of your changpao  
you gathered them.

Dried them. Stuffed them  
into a pillow cool as dried saliva  
on the neck. Your saliva dried

like embroidery  
across the face of the pillow.  
I trace the pattern.

A bag of bones  
rattles like beans.  
Roots are hard to sleep on.

## LOVE (LETTERS)

*Kate Benson*

### I. Love Letter to a Blind Man

ALL THE WAY UP, THE WHOLE DRIVE NORTH, YOU SAT BESIDE ME and didn't say a word except to ask me to describe the scenery. "Be a writer out *loud*," you put it — do you remember any of this? — "a private reading just for me. Come on, please? Don't worry about how it sounds, just tell me how it looks up here."

Even the sun seemed sad that day. Faded and tired-orange as a dying street lamp, it hovered on the horizon and slowly flickered into night, like a birthday candle, like a last wish, and I wanted to tell you all of that. God, I wanted to tell you everything, *show* you everything, make your eyes be my voice, make my voice suffice. Have time move backward into last month and stop you from getting in that car, from looking for the last time at the truck flying toward you, the glass flying toward you, and then this blackness — but all that was impossible. It seemed as possible, rather, as being able to describe the whole world to you because we both know I'm not that good, could never be as perfect a pair of eyes as you deserve, a realization I tried not to dwell on for too long. *Just go, go, go*, the push of it like a voice in my head, *don't stop, don't think. Keep driving, keep going*, and I did: kept moving us closer to what seemed, somehow, like a sort of end, an impending change between us, as inevitable as seasons.

Later, at my cabin, we went out to the end of the dock to look out over the dark lake and listen to the fireworks. Maybe you remember this: your arms tangled up in mine, the fading heat, the slow surge of waves under our feet, how you held me tight and whispered tickling into my ear, "Tell me the most beautiful thing you see." Nighttime was exploding all around me into sudden light and more than anything, I wanted to tell you everything. Only how could I pick the most beautiful thing, pick which of these fireworks you would call the best? Pick just one when they seemed, each one, to be something right out

of myself, when it seemed you couldn't separate them, that you had to see them all together as something whole — but you wanted the most beautiful, so I tried. Quiet, gold fireworks wilted down like willow trees — maybe you'd like those, or maybe you preferred the crazy looping kind all lost and frantic. Racing, streaking across the sky, the ones with white tails like rockets shot sure and straight up towards the clouds and made me think of flying.

Slowly, your arms were tightening around me, warding off the advancing cold as night grew darker, and still I couldn't choose, and they just kept getting better. There was the kind that exploded sudden and red with the center gold and glittery, like how falling in love should be — and then the ones that grew and grew and sunk a quiet silver before they faded into seamless black, the ones that made me think of how it was to fall in love with you.

Underneath this blooming, this springtime of night that seemed like it would never end, I could feel you waiting at my back, waiting to see what I'd say, to see some kind of beauty through me — so how could I choose just one? Vast, empty black, the whole blank expanse of sky, was making light out of darkness like something magical, something beyond description, and you wanted me to put that into words, and I knew it was hopeless. Words, right then, seemed as blank and empty as anything, so I said, "This is how it looks," and I kissed you and pulled you so tight to me I could feel your heart beating fast and steady against mine, and even though it wasn't the same, it was close. eXploding into a different kind of light between us. You remember now — how I held you there for a long time, the sudden quiet filling up our ears, how when I finally let you go, you touched my face that way you do and told me the fireworks felt beautiful. Zipped up my sweatshirt, took my hand and let me lead you home through the wet grass and the nighttime chill, home to bed where, all night long, you kept me warm.

## II. Love Letter to a Cowboy

ZONED OUT, TRIPPED OUT, DRUNK OUT OF YOUR MIND — YOU

were the type of man I usually found in clubs. You're a *type*, you know: that short, unshaven cowboy-type who can't dance alone, longish hair tickling the back of your neck, the type of man I'd take home like a lost puppy, the type who needs taking in. eXcept for the skanky divorcees, you were older than most of them — I pretended not to notice the gray clouding your whiskers, and you pretended not to notice me noticing and pretending not to. We got along like that from the beginning.

"Very good," you shouted when you started to dance with me, "you're very good," the words rolling clumsily off your tongue like children down a hill, and I smiled. Understand, I used to like my men drunk, on the knife-blade edge of control. Then the world swirled into our dancing, your cowboy hips opening up to me and seeking, almost desperate, a steady and familiar beat — my eyes were closed, but I know how it goes. Swaying hard and smooth, your breath close, your body closer, I could feel the heat radiating where we pressed up together: chests, hips. Right then, I knew — when your arms came quivering around me, that look in your eyes like a kind of mad thirst — that's when I knew I'd gotten you.

Quietly, secretly, I reminded myself who you were, or who I thought you were: the type of man I'd once decided was easiest to love, the type I could love or not love however the hell I wanted to because we both knew it was up to me. Pressed against you right then, I was pressed against any man, the next man who needed me, *someone*, and truth be told, that's the real reason I took you home. Only I didn't realize until later that you were playing the same game.

Not that you let on right away. "Maybe we should go," you said finally, hesitantly, as if afraid of making your move too soon and scaring me away. Like a careful hunter, a crafty child, you nuzzled my neck in just the right way, held my hips lightly, and waited for permission. Knitting my fingers into yours, I gave it with a kiss, and you led me outside into the familiar damp of another autumn night.

"Just hang onto me," you said when we reached your motorcycle, a big chrome rush of black Harley Davidson. In a buried part of me I didn't show you for a long time, a spin of

fear twitched and twisted up tight; I'd never ridden a motorcycle before, and I wasn't sure what to do, where to put my feet or where to hold on. How not to fall — but before I knew it, you were revving the engine like we were in a biker movie, and it was all over. "Get ready for the ride of your life, baby," you said before we took off, and secretly, despite myself, I liked that you called me baby.

Flying down the highway and into the bright black hole of the city, clinging close to your jacket that smelled like old laundry, I started to think you might be different — who knows what it was about you at that point, but you were different enough to get under my skin. Enough to make me *want* you under my skin. Dirty sock smell, bad hair and all, you made me want to hold on tight, forget about all the other nights and pretend life could be this simple. Cowboy rescues cowgirl; that kind of story. Because the way you touched me, I could pretend there was something beneath your tough crust, a hollow ache like mine — broken hearts lined up on your shelves like old novels, or the sharp-edged memories of a broken home, something that wore you down and made you softer than the others. **A** quiet kind of hero.

**A**nd we picked up speed. Before I could stop myself, I was on a roll. Closing my eyes against the pricking wind, I imagined where you lived: dishes piled in the sink, a fridge full of Hungry Man and Cold Springs. Dust on the countertops and crumbs in the sheets — I felt like I knew you, needed to know you, and I could feel myself getting lost inside this unreality. Each detail of your life, however imagined, made it closer to mine, and maybe it was the bright night air lit with white moon and neon city, or maybe the Coronas I'd had while dancing, or too many cigarettes, or something else, but I felt suddenly electric, unstable, like I'd lost my grip somewhere. Felt it eating me up, this feeling of free: the bike beneath me, the heat between my legs, you. Going faster and faster, cutting down the highway, cutting right through my fantasy, and then —

Head-on into reality — and until you stopped in front of my house and the night in my ears stopped screaming and the tears in my eyes pulled back in, until I got off and my feet were



on the ground and I forgot the fleeting feeling of your back pressed against me, I almost forgot why I took you home.

Inside, the dance club scent of sweaty cigarettes oozed off our skin and pooled around us, and I went through the motions. Jeans first, then damp flannel shirt: I undressed you slowly, one sleeve at a time, like a mother undressing a sleepy child. Kept peeling off layers, dodging your own seeking hands, until you were naked and stretched out limp before me like a dead body. Like something I could bring to life — I crushed your chest with mine and covered you with violent kisses.

Most of the time, in the midst of all this, they don't talk; but you did. Not all that poetically, but maybe that's what did it. Oh, trust me, it was other things too: your blurry eyes like star-spangled pools, your wide hands that smoothed the tangles from my hair, but mostly it was what you couldn't say. Poetry is subjective, and what you told me that night — that there weren't words for it, for me, that you had no words — meant more than the babble of any poet I'd ever slept with, and I thought maybe that's what love is: not having words for something so real.

Quick and hard and fast, that's how I fell for you that night. Ready or not, it hit me as I moved over you, over the parts of you I love most, these delicate parts that are not a man's: the downy curve of your ear; the dips and slopes of your chest and the pouch beneath the black well of navel; your long eyelashes. Smiling, in turn, you did the same to me, and then we crashed into each other like accidents until morning started seeping into night.

"That was nice," I told you afterwards, and I meant your words, the way you unbuttoned me slowly, how you stopped once and just looked and looked and I could feel your heart pounding hard into my chest. Underneath me, you shifted, rolled me over to beneath, and I figured you'd think *that was nice* meant sex. Vagueness, I've found, is often mistaken for emptiness.

When you cupped my cheek, though, and tucked the blanket up around me, when you gave me one small kiss where my hair parts and said, "Yeah, it was," I thought maybe you could see inside me enough to know what I meant. X-ray vision, like a kind of superhero — like that kind of story right here in my

bed. You fell asleep beside me then, and after a while, I let myself fall asleep too. Zoomed in and out of dreams with you between my legs and a happy ending at my back, and when I woke up, you were still there.

### III. Love Letter to My Father

1. Zany stories from your childhood, or about the Army, or how you and Mom met, and your eyes when you told them to me: I thought they must be real.
2. You used to kiss me on the lips when I was little. You were never afraid of that.
3. X-men, Spidermen, He-Man and She-Ra in the park — I was the Princess of Power, and you always let me save you.
4. When you left, you left a hole. Wide and hot as a wound, an angry cut-out in a photograph. What's worse is that other men are still trying to fill it.
5. Vague memories of Grandma's funeral: it was the first time I saw you cry, and after that, things were never quite the same, but not in a bad way.
6. Underneath the father part, you were my best friend, you were me turned inside out.
7. The time just before you left when I came home drunk and tried to sneak in the back. There you were, waiting for me like a hard pillow: not as soft as I would have liked, but quietly comforting and all that I really wanted right then. That night, you gave me water and bread and I vomited on your bare feet. Then we both cried, and you never told Mom.
8. Sometimes I pretend you're coming home. So I brush my hair and sit there and think of all the things I have to tell you, like how I'm not a virgin anymore, or how sometimes I hate you but I'm trying not to. Sometimes I pretend you're there already and I tell you everything and all of it is true.
9. Remembering our best times makes me think I didn't make it all up.
10. Question one: Where did you get your stories? Question two: Which ones were real? Question three: Were any of them real?

11. Perhaps love only gets a happy ending in stories.
12. Our walks together up at the cabin. Once the sun set, we couldn't see each other's faces, and we followed one another by our voices and the knowledge of where the other person was standing.
13. No one makes grilled cheese sandwiches as good as yours. No one else likes the outsides burnt and the insides gooey.
14. Maybe *love* is the wrong word. Maybe I mean *missing*, *mystery*, *memory*. Maybe love is all these things.
15. Love, I think, is the scraps of all these things. Leftovers, the late realization of an echo after it has passed.
16. Kind of like a shadow, or a scar.
17. Just tell me why you left — that's all I want to know. Just the truth and nothing else.
18. If it's something I did, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for not realizing what I had until I didn't have it. I'm sorry for not knowing all the reasons that I'm sorry.
19. "He was half a man," I hear her tell her boyfriends. "He was the icing without the cake."
20. *Going away* meant something with an end when I was little — the *coming back* was implied, a simple and stable balance. *Going away* did not mean trailing off like a lost thought, like something that may or may not come back, that may or may not be lost for good in the indefinite black abyss of the mind.
21. Fiction can be a kind of love.
22. Each time I think of you, I think of you as a photograph. Every memory is like a still frame, filed neatly away as evidence.
23. Don't think that you don't belong here anymore, or that I've forgotten any of it. Don't think there's no longer a place for you; there is, it's right here, like an empty chair I've been saving next to me.
24. Come fill it. Come home and be my other half again. Call.
25. Because I don't know where to send this — because it is the imprint, the blueprint, the fingerprint of something real, but without the guarantee of reality.
26. And I wonder if it was all just a story.

## INTRODUCTION

*James McGavran*

Our guest tonight  
Is the author of ten  
Thousand and twenty books of poetry,  
Three million novels  
And more critical essays  
Than there are stars in the evening sky.

When he speaks the trees  
Incline and listen, leaves rattle reverence,  
Every living thing shakes in resonance,  
And small children and domestic animals  
Drop stone dead, incapable, so powerful  
Is his voice.

And when he lifts his pen to write,  
I dare not say what trembles  
Shake the earth and sky,  
Expectant and hanging,  
Or hanged from the crook of the *g*  
That glows in his brain's song.

In short, verse scrawled in blood  
Pricked from the very finger  
Of the Very Risen Lord,  
Verse carved from house-sized blocks of gold,  
Set burning on the tops of icy mountains  
For all the ragged world to adore,

Rivals not one single thought  
Scribbled light and hot  
By our godly guest of thunder  
On one wonder-wounded napkin.  
Please join me in fainting  
To welcome our poet tonight.

## SYLLABLES

### *Josephine Decker*

The homeless are washing their clothes like words in this water.  
Questions splash up, fall like elbows, one man puts on a  
wet *if*, I think to impress *on* who never takes risks.

The sun is turning forty and throws arrows like some Cupid  
through the holes in *when*.

*Or* and *yet* laid out on the near grass like sacrifices:  
men sit around them and contemplate the sentence.

*For* is still dirty even though she washed it three times.  
A close moving train spells the past with blue smoke.

The equator could be right here.  
One step, and all the *whys* would be in another hemisphere.

## THE VALLEY

*Emily Woodman-Maynard*

THE SCENT OF PAPAYA IS DECEPTIVE; IT SMELLS OF HONEY AND sweetness and deep fruitiness, but the fruit itself is tart and burns the sides of the lips when it is eaten alone. The only problem with the papaya, Marcos reflected, was that one could eat it in so many ways but never raw. Some people try it, washing their lips afterwards, but to truly savor a papaya it must be adulterated. Syrup of papaya, candied papaya, papaya marmalade, jarred papaya, papaya juice — it is not as if he could not reach one of the jars of papayas sitting on the shelf in the fruit cellar, but without the summer heat he was just eating bottled sunshine, never as good as the real thing. He remembered the summer's harvest, the mounds of fruit to be peeled and boiled and cooled. He remembered afternoons when he would eat papayas in the shade of the willows on the banks, devour an entire jar with its juice.

His family had a small store, really a *negocio*, but those who knew its reputation made secret pilgrimages to taste the papayas. There, the customers could sample the product before they bought, as everything was sold in large quantities. Children went home clutching candied papayas in their sticky palms while their mothers licked their lips anticipating the bananas lathered with papaya syrup that they would eat all year. Those who came before Christmas bought enough syrup to give to their neighbors when they went for tea, or bought an extra *pan de pascua* made with dried papaya and touched with the pisco liquor of the valley. That was summer; all yellow sweetness, and gold, and rides on the back of his uncle's pick-up truck from the groves to the store.

Now it was winter in the valley. Marcos thought of the papayas he would eat, thick with their own warm juice, when he walked to school through the thin layer of July snow. The snow covered the valley and its *papayos*, the papaya trees; it withered the grape vines and called the herd in from the high mountains.

He had helped his grandfather with them, taking a mule up into the highlands for a week to gather the sheep and bring them down to a winter corral. They had killed many fine males for mutton in the spring, killed them when the lambs were born and hung the shanks in the barn where the smell escaped and attracted the dogs. Then the herd had panicked, for these dogs weren't the commanding herd pups they were accustomed to obeying, but hungry, lawless dogs frenzied by the scent of new blood. Unable to enter the barn, they attacked the herd, killing a few lambs before Marcos' grandfather came with his gun and shot them down. Then the ewes whimpered and the sheep ran together, they ran without direction, round and round the pasture. Marcos watched and felt that he preferred the work in the papaya grove to seeing the herd that he had taken so much trouble to watch and care for, frightened and witless.

The next day, they had set about repairing the fence. Before they began, his grandfather cracked a nut between two of his yellow, scarce teeth. He chewed it noisily and reached into his pocket for another to hand to Marcos. Marcos watched his grandfather's breath leave his nose.

In the woodshed, they cut branches of thorns to lay on top of the stone wall, to plug the hole where the dogs had pushed their way through. The thorns were sharp and Marcos had to watch his fingers. Others used barbed wire but his grandfather preferred crown-of-thorns, a plant that grew freely in the no-man's-land of the highlands.

"Next time repair the fence sooner, when the branches are still green and pliable. You should have done it as soon as we returned," he told Marcos. "These branches were sitting cold in the barn for weeks. Now they hardly bend."

"I was at school," Marcos said. That was in the spring.

THE SCHOOL WAS ON THE ROAD BETWEEN PISCO ELQUI AND Alcohuaz. He liked it, with its cement football field, its walls painted by a visiting artist, a mural showing off the fruits of the province. The verses of the Poet were included in the mural; they were everywhere, from the walls of the post offices to the

blackboards of the school. So it ended that any schoolchild could recite some of her lines, rarely the entire poem. Even Marcos knew a few, knew them well because when he was lulled by the rocking of his mule, he sang to himself those rhythmic, sing-song, childlike verses.

*Danzamos en tierra chilena,  
más suave que rosas y piel  
la tierra que amasa a los hombres  
de labios y pechos sin hiel.*

THE WINTER WAS A COLD ONE WHICH TOOK MORE SHEEP, SO that Marcos had begun to take his lunch at school. When the luckier children went home, he stayed behind to see how the state would feed his belly. Not badly, it turned out — he ate much better than those at home.

One day, after lunch, he watched the teacher from the capital organize lessons. Her hair was the color of a peeled papaya, pale yellow, a hue almost unknown in the Valley. Valley hair was black, dark to match dark eyes. The teacher had colored eyes, not exactly the blue of the Valley skies, more a deep green. She shivered a little in the cold of the room, pulled her brown sweater tighter around her neck as she read a biology book, trying to make a lesson that the children could copy easily. Marcos wondered what it would feel like to touch her hair. He imagined himself fingering her hair, stroking her head, smelling her. She would smell of papaya.

He had never been able to watch her like this before, searching and planning, ignoring the students. He was used to seeing her pace in front of the classroom, turning on low heels from wall to wall, looking every student in the eye, trying to convince them of the beauty of the Poet's work, or the marvels that God had given them in the seasons, the sky, the highlands. Now she looked smaller, huddled, shrunken, cold and alone, but busy in her isolation. He thought the room should be warmer, that if there was any money someone should bring a stove to put by her desk.



Profesora Buschmann was the granddaughter of German immigrants, but she spoke a proper capitaline Spanish. That other, brusquer tongue was reserved for family occasions — a leftover from her childhood, when she would go to her grandparent's house and eat *küchen* with hot chocolate. The school post in the Valley was a whim; she was more than qualified for the job and the region snapped her up as part of their rural improvement program. A young, progressive woman like Buschmann, educated in the city schools, was welcome most anywhere. They dared not suggest that she was wasting her talents. She was not married and showed no signs of liking the Valley men.

TWILIGHT SET IN AFTER THEY FINISHED REPAIRING THE FENCE. Hungry, his hands already scabbed from the thorns, Marcos could not wait until summer to eat papayas. The fruit was alluringly stacked in the cellar, in glass jars covered with dust. After a meager manzanilla tea with old bread, Marcos excused himself to feed the herd.

The fruit cellar was a long, low adobe building built halfway into the ground where the fruit was kept cool all winter. There wasn't much left because the summer harvest had given scarce fruit and the vacationers, for once, obliged them by buying eagerly. Marcos had not been inside the cellar since the afternoon he helped his mother stack the final jars on the shelves. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he tried to remember where they were. He had forgotten to bring a lamp and the door did not let in much of the dusky, winter light. He pushed past the threshold and entered.

He saw the jars on the eastern wall. Dirty and old, they did not shine until he took one down and rubbed it against his jacket. The lid of the jar took some time to screw off, and when it did a little of the juice spilled on Marcos' sleeve. He swore, "*¡Caracoles!*" Then he dipped his fingers into the jar and pulled out a slippery-wet papaya, dripping with juice. The hulled interior of the pregnant fruit was also filled with liquid, which he lapped up as from a bowl. The juice was cold and very sweet — he remembered the handfuls of sugar they had stirred into the vats of water and

fruit, those mounds of white crystals to combat the acid papayas.

The juice ran down his chin in his messy pleasure. Marcos imagined the Profesora's blue lips. He bit the papaya and let loose another rush of juice over his fingers. She was small like the papaya, delicate and cold. That day when he had told her he would be eating at school she had quietly filled another plate. They ate a steak with rice and a glass of whole milk. The dessert that the school provided was a few tea cookies for each child. He pocketed them to bring home and eat later, but they were crushed in his jacket and he settled with eating the crumbs surreptitiously during class. But those crumbs were long gone, and the manzanilla tea had hardly filled him.

He knew hunger that winter, knew the dizzy fatigue that never brought sleep but instead kept him awake half the night slapping at bedbugs. His hands trembled; he could not remember if he had studied his mathematics, but his mind wandered when he tried. The Profesora would correct him gently when he turned in a page of incorrect answers. He was ashamed that he could not learn the multiplication table.

The Profesora had insisted that Marcos stay for lunch. His face had been growing thinner, hollow, and his school pants hung loosely from his waist, supported by a belt drawn tighter by the month. The steak smelled so nice, fried in hot oil and garnished with onions. He ate all on his plate and regretted there was not more. He could stand hunger but he could not support food. The meal had whet his appetite and reminded him of what meat tasted like. It was harder to go home to a poor pantry after he had so enjoyed his lunch. For the first time in weeks he had felt well enough to notice little things, like the white cloak of snow that covered the pastures in perfection, or the tremor of Profesora Buschmann's knees when she stood up to write at the blackboard.

Marcos had thought to eat just one papaya and then put the jar back on the shelf, but he realized his error when he closed the jar and saw how much juice was gone. Besides, he had broken the seal. With guilty relief he fished out another papaya.

The Profesora liked fruit. In the fall María Teresa had brought her a basket of pears. She told María Teresa that she had beautiful eyes, for which she spent a week admiring them in her mother's compact. The second papaya went down with a gulp of juice.

He dedicated the third papaya to the Profesora's green eyes – the color of papaya leaves. While not hungry anymore, hunger had given way to appetite. He gobbled down the third papaya.

With the next he paused long enough to recite the fours. Four times one is four, four times two is eight, four times three is twelve... When he finished "Four times twelve is forty-eight", he ate the papaya.

There was one papaya left, swimming alone at the bottom of the jar. He reached his sticky hand in and fished it out. This papaya was the end, he reflected. He would have to clean his hands at the pump, rearrange the jars on the shelf to hide the empty space, bury the jar in the snow, and go to feed the animals. Only this papaya stood between him and his duties, his hunger, his teacher.

The last papaya looked like the others: round, swollen. It was what he imagined his teacher's stomach to look like under all of the wraps and woollens she affected. Her womb was full like the papaya, like the papaya it would open, it would let the juice run out as he was letting the juice run out. Then she would leave the valley and return to her parents. She would leave the school. The valley hid her as well as it hid the papaya groves.

Marcos ate the empty papaya bite by slow bite.

## THE NARWHAL

*Ari Samsky*

DECEMBER, 1940. GREENLAND. A BLOND MAN, SJURK Sigmundsson, is drinking in the Heilige Blutfische with six of his fellow sailors. The air is thick with blue smoke and Danish curses. New wool has just come in from Flanders and every able man in Nuuk works at unloading it from the ice-hung ships. The men begin boasting, making wild claims of strength and endurance. Sjurk claims to be able to lift a bale of sodden Flemish wool in one hand; Dirk Eddirsson calls his bluff. The men go down to the docks, their liquor-soaked breath condensing in the bitter air. There is no moon that night. Sjurk and Dirk both prove that they can lift the bales, barely straining their hawser muscles. Sjurk tells the gathered sailors that he is bold enough to strangle a Narwhal in the icy waters. Dirk, who hates Sjurk in the same cold way he hates the sea, once again calls the other man's bluff. Sjurk removes his pea coat and canvas shirt, hard muscles painted softly in the light of the shuttered lanterns. His torso crawls with long scars.

Nils Rolandsson tries to calm the pair. The wind is hard and very cold. Sjurk and Dirk shove one another. Sjurk spits, the saliva cracking in the freezing air, and dives into the sea. Miraculously, he finds a Narwhal almost instantly. He grapples with it, easily avoiding its waxy, yard-long horn. The beast's skin is rubbery and very slippery. He hooks his right hand around its horn, his left slipping into the Narwhal's mouth. The shock of its teeth causes Sjurk to scream, cold salty water invading his mouth and nostrils.

In the morning a Walloon longshoreman finds him delirious and bloody, brandishing the Narwhal's horn. He turns out his pockets, showing the Walloon the three lonely fingers the beast took from him the previous night. The Walloon gives him a blanket and some brandy. He tells his wife Sjurk's story over dinner but she does not believe him.

13 ON LEAVES

*Peter Landwehr*

VIII.

The room was pleasant  
until the leaf entered the door  
and landed on the rug  
in its wake the guests  
became frigid

FROM "DIVINING THE PERIL"

*Heather Lichy*

IV.

He chants, swaying like an unhinged leaf,  
throws spices into the fire.  
Body sent to the sky, like a name whispered out of a window  
searching, like a nervous suitor  
    pushed further by  
feathers and bone on rattling wrists.

## HIDE N' SEEK (A THESIS EXCERPT)

*Adam Nemett*

I'M IN TOYS R US, WONDERING WHEN IT WAS THAT I STOPPED enjoying toy stores. Men of my age could conceivably still take pleasure in something like this: the happy giraffe veering me off the parkway; a detour from swiftly approaching fogginess. I could sniff Play-doh and smell youth.

Inside, the monotone aisle floors mix with fluorescent reflection, forming a hazy neon. Everything is electric now. Television screens mark each aisle and children run from one to another, expecting something new and expensive and necessary. A dusty-haired toddler rolls by on a small, motorized Huffy with training wheels, commandeered from the towering bike section in the back. His mother gives a slow, embarrassed chase, taking huffing breaths drawn out like breeze between brusque, closed-jaw bursts of "Marcus! Mrr-kss!" Marcus is gone, hooking a left around aisle six, towards *Action Figures*. Marcus' mother looks at me as she passes and loosens her neck, her head wobbling in the desperation that only parents know, she thinks, before continuing her staccato "Marcuss near the board games. It sounds like she's barking.

Big stores make me uncomfortable. I have the constant, apologetic feeling of being in someone else's way. Especially low-priced superstores full of children, Mah-Mah-ing and twisting their bodies down to the washed-out tile, kneeling unnaturally on warped knees. The courage of children lies in their fearlessness of the floor. They are unaffected by the prospect of germs or social appropriateness.

I want to hide in the Cabbage Patch.

A boy in a blue vest asks to help me.

"I said, Can I help you?" he says. His job is to spot disorientation.

"I need a gift for my daughter."

"Okay. Well, what did you have in mind?" I only now realize that I had nothing in mind. I had hoped the giant store would

shake a gift out of me like a bully holding my ankles above his head, jangling the lunch money from my pockets.

“I’m not sure,” I admit. “She’s a girl.”

“Most daughters are,” he says. “Is it her birthday?”

“Yes.” And I don’t want him to ask anything else. I may not be able to answer.

“Maybe try the pink aisle. What birthday is this?”

“Where is the pink aisle?” The bubbly word had never been so intimidating.

“Next to the blue aisle. How old is she?”

I want to say either six or nine. Both seem like a good toy store age.

“Courtney’s eight,” I say. “Eight years old.” Repeating it, convincing myself. I generally think of her as either younger or exceptionally older than an eight-year-old.

“She might be too old for the pink aisle, then.”

“Yeah. Maybe.”

“Is she a reader?”

“For her age, yeah, she’s a terrific reader for her age,” I say, getting into it.



AFTER DINNER, I USED TO READ IN THE LIVING ROOM. I’D PUSH into the right-angled back corner of the burgundy couch, which was balding from use and didn’t match the other furniture in the room. Cameron, my wife, has since replaced it. Times when I felt comfortable, I’d let my feet air on the ottoman, like two smelly kings.

Courtney would sit with me. That made the cushions sink down on the left side, not because she was heavy, but because the cushions were old. I’d switch my wallet from my back right to back left pocket to even out the height difference in my butt cheeks. Sprawling my arm across the back of the couch and patting it a rhythmically like it’s a good dog, I’d feel Courtney plop her head back against my elbow pit, thinking hard about her book. She never liked me to read with her—only next to her. When I tried to curl myself overtop her pages, covering over parts of words the way my mother used to, helping sound

out “silent” or “fishing,” she’d tear the book away from my flattened palm, insisting she could do it herself. And I always conceded, loving her for her fire.

Cameron sat in the lounge by the magazines, scolding us both in one breath:

“Artie, let her alone she can do it herself, Honey, Daddy’s just trying to help.” Then, tilting her head and secretly saying to me: “It’s so cute how she reads with you.”

She’d stare from her bundled post in the chair, adorned in the short curly hair and earth tone slacks of a young, content mom. She mouthed the words.



“What?”

“If she’s a good reader, there’s some interactive talking books in aisle nine.”

I want to tell the young salesman that a talking book would be the worst possible gift for my daughter; as it is, the lines between real and imaginary are fuzzy, and the last thing she needs is to open up a dialogue with a didactic two-dimensional Pooh bear. But I don’t tell him this. The apologies of strangers are unsatisfying for everyone involved.

“Aisle nine?”

“Aisle nine.”

“I’ll give it a try.”

I walk slowly through the store, out of place amidst all the swift activity of commerce. Near the educational toys, three children fly around my feet like fast and drunken marionettes, their short attention spans tinkering for a bit, then standing still below a display with the upward-focused eyes of disciples. After a moment of quiet observation, one of the trio torques his body in the sudden, spastic dance of impatience that only a child can muster, and like that, the spell is broken, giving way to the next colorful piece of cardboard. I decide to follow them.

*Air Hogs, Air Snares, Vapor Flames, Hot Wheels.* The products overrun me as I walk.

All three children are about four years old, I estimate. The child I think of as The First Child is meticulously dressed and



hair-cutted — a tucked-in flannel shirt, dark corduroy pants, and miniature versions of shoes made for basketball players, overtly beautiful black skin, underneath a perfectly cropped crew cut. He is painfully cute, made so by the careful composition efforts of his mother. Although I have trouble with his words, he is undisputedly the loudest, and therefore, the leader.

My cell phone rings, a recent addition to my daily routine.

“Artie, it’s me again.” Cameron is in the earpiece. The connection is muddy.

“Hi.”

The Little Girl of the trio is disheveled, enjoying her last few years of carefree naiveté before the world will force her to primp like a woman. Before slacks.

“I just wanted to tell you to try and find something educational.”

The Little Girl looks nothing like my Courtney, but she is a girl, and she is close enough.

“You told me already. I m trying,” I answer, preoccupied.

She wears a chocolate-stained blue long-sleeve shirt and denim pants probably meant for little boys. Her hair is puffy and she insists on grabbing her crotch throughout her occasional pose of awe when in front of display items. The boys don’t notice.

“Vocabulary. More vocabulary is key. That way she can communicate what she wants with them. Right now she’s getting overrun, and frankly, so am I, especially when it’s teeming, really really teeming in there, and maybe that’s why she’s not talking and I think vocabulary would help her say what she wants to say in response, not so much so she can argue with them, but right now its like the screaming is all she has and I’d like her to expand her...palette. Her palette of possibilities, that’s good. That way —”

“Slow down.”

“That way conversations equals negotiations, not other stuff. And we really need it, Artie, cause I can’t always hold it all. She probably doesn’t even know the word, ‘teeming,’ but that’s exactly what’s going on. I can teach her that word, but not everything. So something educational.”

“Cameron, she doesn’t even respond to schoolwork anymore. It’s like pulling—”

“Oooh. When I was younger they had, what was it called, what was it called, whatwasitcalled... aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah *FLASHCARDS!* Flash cards! Thank you! On the front: a word; on the back: its meaning, its synonym; it’s simple and to the point and we can make it work, just flipping, flipping, flipping. And we get her something to hold them in—a barrel or a flip-top box—and start tomorrow. Magellan’s birthday.”

I breathe into the phone.

“Arthur.”

I breathe again.

“Hello?”

“Cameron, this is cra-“

“Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Something educational.” She hangs up. I wait for the new cell dial tone, then hang up too.

The Last Child never speaks, and is possibly younger than the other two. They are all of the age where one or two years makes an astronomical difference. His Brunette skin depicts an agreeable racial mix: Hawaiian and Taiwanese; Indian and the other kind of Indian. His clothes are non-descript, which is to say, they fit.

In their naked simplicity, they are gorgeous. Goal-oriented and full of something undeniably good and fleeting.

I hope they will lead me to the aisle nine, or to the pink aisle, and ducking behind skateboard displays, I shadow them like a pulp novel sleuth not wanting to blow my cover. I hide my eyes from other parents, afraid they will think me a pervert lusting after young toddler flesh and innocence, instead of merely shopping, and I myself wonder which of the two I am actually making my current enterprise.

The store curves around to the left.

Marcus flies past me again, slaloming through stacks of board games. I don’t see his mother. He pedals past *Pokemon*, *MegaMon*, *GearBotics*, and boxes bragging “Extreme!” Expertly

shifting his weight to the left, he nearly clips a rack of *Tiger Tanks*, and then hits a nice straightaway, the ends of aisles boasting *Knex, Glo-Bonz, Moto Maniax*, vibrant neon green on black font substituting cool Xs and Zs for obsolete and unsexy letter constructs. His path is so smooth.

As he rounds another corner, Marcus disappears, leaving me without a visual translator. Boxes housing alien militias with equally alien names: *Galvatron, Nui-Jaga, Tarakava*, some assembly required. Children deploy army guys and storm troopers from their windowed barracks, bound to the box at waist and neck with metallic grocery bag twisties. Young sons convince fathers of the inherent value of a *3D Snowboarding Blitz* headset, and fathers pretend to weigh options other than their wallet and need to please.

Zoids, Bionicles, Epic Duels, Nemesis Factor.

Plastic crashes against more plastic, then falls on formica.

*Super Soakers. Simulators.*

Up front is screaming and I am drawn to it out of social habit, not care. I turn to see the fuss and find a toddler being parentally bounced from the store, like a drunken dud from a club. The toddler hits its mother on the hair with both wrists, expressing and inflicting emotional pain. Its mother moves increasingly quicker to the exit, shamed by the necessary evacuation. *I want something to hit. A Bobo doll. As I turn from the screaming scene I see a young salesgirl wearing blue, and a ponytail. I fix my hair, again, out of habit.*

“Were you looking for something?”

*Radica Pinball, UNO Blitzo, Pox Spino.*

“Where is the Cabbage Patch?”

“You mean the dolls? Oh, we don’t carry them anymore.”

“Why not?” Am I that old?

“It was a fad and people just lost interest. Coleco tried to stimulate the market with dolls that did things.”

“Did things?”

“Talk, cry, urinate. Gimmicks. People weren’t interested. Or if they *were* interested in the gimmicks, they wanted a name other than Cabbage Patch, which was already kinda uncool by

the mid to late 80s.”

I was stunned at the store’s personnel training regimen. I stared at her.

“Anyway, are you sure that’s what your daughter is looking for? If you’re looking for a doll, you should try one of the new ones that burps or brushes their teeth. The new gimmicks. *Zip n’ Zoom Shannen* comes with a real motorized scooter. “

“So does Marcus.”

“Who?”

“Nothing.”

“My little sister got a doll called *My Real Life Baby* from Santa last year and she seems to love it. I remember her playing with it for about an hour and it kept crying and needing to be fed and wetting itself and eventually my sister looks up at me with this helpless, tired look and says, ‘I really need a husband.’”

“Adorable.”

“So cute!”

I spot my three children in the back of the store and make the nondescript nodding motions that signal the end of a conversation.

“Have you tried the pink aisle?”

“I’m trying.” I say.

“Hey, how old is she?” She asks as I am walking away.

My trio of giddy friends has taken to chasing each other in an indefinite circle, for indefinite reasons. As I gratuitously check the price of something *Crayola*, green and orange, hanging from a silver skewer, I become aware of my own sweat. Large stores are usually cold. The situation is surprising. It’s hidden beneath my clothes, on my back, oozing. I raise my head and look for the *Musical Instruments* section, as if its an incoming friend lost on a train station platform.



FOUR YEARS AGO, WHEN THINGS WERE FINE, I BOUGHT MY daughter a doll. Three years ago, I bought Courtney a drum set. It wasn’t her birthday, I just bought it for her because I thought it was the best gift a kid could possibly get. Not a mini-set that kids usually get as gifts. A full 8-piece kit. Courtney

loved it, the size and scale of it. She loved the prospect of being so little and so loud. Cameron hated but tolerated the noise. I would tell her: “In my opinion, there’s nothing more empowering for a woman than the ability to play drums,” and Cameron would smile at me, knowing she’d been beaten. I would tell her: when I was five years old, I begged by parents for a set of drums, like every other kid. They refused until I was sixteen, until it seemed I wasn’t ever going to forget about it. I always wished I had started earlier, when I was younger and spongier, and I didn’t want to make the same mistake with Courtney. “But Courtney never *asked* for drums,” shed say. It didn’t matter. She would remember that Daddy bought her drums.

I taught her to play. Something else taught her to play at another level.



*TONKA. ELECTRONIC TALKING EVERYTHING.*

Under a tall wall stacked high with Tickle-Me Elmos stand three teenagers — two boys and one girl. In my daze, it’s as if my three toy-store children have grown up, become mischievous, stoned and chuckling. Their backs are towards me, their hands jutting out at the stomachs of the throng of Elmos, seated and staring like a homogenous red Reich. A large yellow arrow says Try Me. As each Elmo is poked it begins to throb, then shake, then dance its container across a space of thin beige metal shelving, banging into its left- then right-hand brother. The sound of box banging against shelf roils like a drumroll, builds in power like slow applause. Six arms chop at their stomachs, unrelenting, reaching up for ones on higher shelves, using feet for those close to the ground. Plush tongues flap from chaos. Elmos upon agitated Elmos. Even the still ones appear part of the motion.

The once individual dolls on shelves melt into a singular herd, arrhythmically marching towards nothing. As one stops, another starts, and the stopped one is started again. It rains Elmo, and I lose the sight of each drop in favor of the full storm. Their orchestra, their army, their vibrating clones are animated, unblinking, giggling at me with a canon of a thousand manufac-

tured voices. The wall is about to pop, a thousand red insects bustling beneath stretched-out skin.

Salesmen rush to halt the hands, to stop the chorus of “That Tickle,” in hopes that smaller children have not been influenced with mischievous ideas. I run to find the children, to make sure they have not seen the spectacle. On the way the bombardment continues. It flits past my eyes like a wide, colorful stock ticker: *Rev Raptor, Spinosnapper, Trackmaster, Shoot n Score, Grip n Go, See n Say slammer stunt pump station street luge rail shakin super quake hyper sonic monsoon force 4000*, and in the back right, the book section.

I turn a right corner and am face to face with what is undoubtedly the pink aisle. Two sidewalls and a back plane, covered in small female products. Pink stars, pink fur, pink pillows hang from poles spread across the aisle, obscuring the ceiling. Within, a cave of babies and Barbies sits, stacked three or four deep, beneath suffocating plastic panes. I pick *My Real Life Baby* off the shelf.

She stares at me, unblinking, blue window eyes in a slightly smushed baby face, just like Courtney. The box promises she will cry, giggle, and sneeze. She comes with accessories. I can name her whatever I want.

The phone rings.

“Hi. I’m calling from outside cause it was getting too intense in the kitchen, so tell me if it’s too staticky.”

“You let her play the drums again today, didn’t you.”

“No, I promise no.”

“Cameron, I know we haven’t figured this out yet, and I know it’s all she has, but I just think it’s too dangerous for her to play the drums with you around. It puts you both into this state and then you’re both agitated for the rest of the night. I swear to god, I’ll throw them out.”

“No, she didn’t play, we’re just feeling it very loud today. I can’t explain. There’s voices back and forth, especially in the kitchen. It’s just a very loud day.”

“Can I help?”

“No.”

“Well, what have they been saying?”

“No screaming, just lots of talking. Nothing violent at all. I’m hearing a lot of lists, like someone is listing items, nothing consistent, just listing, coming from right around *here*...”

I could tell she was gesturing to *here*. Maybe towards the area above her right eye. Both Cameron and Courtney have started to recognize *where* each string of voices, each pictureless hallucination, is coming from. Vivid visual descriptions come from the back of the head. Long, nonsensical barrages, rambling from in front of their foreheads, several inches away. Violent screaming on the side. My wife and daughter walk around the house with their heads cocked sideways, like listening to an invisible phone wedged between the ear and shoulder.

We started noticing changes in Courtney around her sixth birthday, after a case of viral encephalitis. Doctors called it *child-onset schizophrenia*. Cameron started hearing the same voices about a year later, only when Courtney would practice her drums. Doctors called it *induced psychosis*. More pompous doctors called it *folie a deux*. I was not privy to the disease they shared, and had to decode their world based on the present source of their voices. I could only hide while Courtney played her drums in our fancy room, and watch my wife be inexplicably ravaged by inner conversations, inaudible to me. I experienced my schizophrenia vicariously. Doctors had no name for it.

“I’m just checking to see what you found,” she said.

“I’m not sure what I’m looking for, anymore, Cameron.”

“So that’s about fifty, fifty-five minutes from now that you’ll be home?”

“You’re not listening!”

She breathes into the phone.

“I cant buy a gift that’s going to cause more problems. The fucking drums were a gift and they’re what started all this.”

She hangs up. I take the baby, and start to run and I don’t know why.

The exoskeleton of this store now has nothing more to offer me, besides an overwhelming heat and fear. I must hide within, underneath, or below. The store rushes past me, aisles full of

Vipers®.

Aisle seven, named *Playhouses, Climbers, & Slides*, is empty of people.

I strafe sideways between the soaring stacks, as if I've just been spotted, looking up like an Egyptian amidst a parted Red Sea about to lose its magic. The bottom shelf is taller, more spacious than most. It holds big items, sparsely shelved. Small castles in big boxes. Slide sets and jungle gyms. Little worlds. I move a *Hide & Slide Climber* to the side and step onto the shelf, testing its weight with my pressing shoe, and decide that it can hold me. Ducking my head, I enter the cramped and raised stage where toys sit and present themselves, and swivel to look out at the empty aisle, where the audience might sometimes be. I envision the children who will walk past me, little people who don't have to worry about winter automobile maintenance, or couples therapy, wondering if I'm live or stuffed, their parents, only visible from the thigh down.

It's a strange thing for a man to sit on a toystore shelf.

I'm cradling *My Real Life Baby* as the phone rings:

"If you're done soon, pick up some cold cuts on the way home. Bologna or salami. She'll eat that. She doesn't like the hard crust on the outside though so ask the deli man to peel it first, or whatever they do." Her voice has not changed its pitch or volume from our last conversation. It stays static like that of a badly drawn movie character.

"Cameron, I'm scared of tomorrow. I'm scared it's going to be exactly like today and the day after is going to be like tomorrow and it's always going to be like this and I don't think I can do it."

"Well pass *me* the camera, how do you think *I* feel, when you work in status and Gladys?"

"I don't *know* how you feel! You won't let me. Either of you. You're both locked into this twisted little bubble and I'm outside of it, pounding on the glass."

"How that's what you want for me to be behind glass. Just take me away in the straightjackets and let the morning come. Do you know what's it's like to have so much stuff, with so



much information that you can't even process it in time and it mounts up in stacks and layers? To be constantly bombarded, till forever now?"

BuilderPro, ProVirtual, Virtual Reality Kawasaki Ninjas, All-Terrain ClimbaTron Vertibug.

"Sometimes," I answer.

"Where are you right now?"

"I'm sitting on a shelf in the toystore, hiding behind two large boxes."

"Well, come home. And bring coldcuts."

She hangs up.

I hang up and begin to cry. My knees instinctively fold to my chest and I bring my coat around them, pulling my arms through the coat sleeves and towards my chest. Muscle memory tells me I've done this before, at pre-bike-riding age. I would stretch a T-shirt over my balled up form, my arms and head pulling themselves inside to join the rest of their body. Perhaps I always liked tents. The box on my right is perfectly positioned to shield me with its shadow and block me from the aisle, but still allow a slit of sight for me to view the outside. *My Real Life Babysits* in front of me, quietly. I slink an arm back out of its sleeve and pull the box on my left closer to me, like it's a middle school movie date named Stephanie. The box says, *ImagiSound Playhouse*. The words along the box attract my attention. I read them with interest, like the sides of cereal boxes during quiet breakfast:

*In this high-tech electronic playhouse from Little Tikes, children's movements are detected by a motion sensor, and the house itself responds with sound. Doorbells, telephone rings, and even voices are heard in a variety of combinations. Features include a working door and friendly oversize windows. The playhouse automatically shuts off when not in use and requires two C alkaline batteries (not included).*

I breathe, and am satisfied.

"Mar-cus," says a voice from outside. "Now!"

“But this one has a kick-stand *and* a web-blaster.”

“Wait till the summer, when you’re taller.”

The sound trails off.

I ball myself tighter, breathe easier. I wish I were smaller. Microscopic, even.

In the center of two aisles, this fluorescent-lit back alley, pin-pricks of light enter through holes in the shelf metal. The holes are perfectly spaced, like candy buttons, and I wink one eye to see through them to the outside. The light enters in streaks. It is made visible by the untouched dust trapped behind the shelving, and the diagonal beams echo rays from Gothic church windows—images from textbooks and movies. It occurs to me that my life was fairly wonderful, and always had been. But in my new home I suddenly realize that I have outgrown the outer world of this store; I have outgrown my life. This pain: a remainder at the end of an equation, unable to be rounded-off. I have lost interest in trying. You seek refuge in bubblegum pop songs about love piercing through the bad times. People will tell you, At least you still have each other. But we don’t have each other. *They* have each other. I don’t know what I have. Without love, there’s only pain and mutual pity.

I’ve always felt I owed life something in return for its gifts. Inside these stacks, the moment bears the unmistakable inescapability of life coming to collect. I let it come.

To my right, I hear rustling. Boxes are moving at the hands of someone or something unseen. Perhaps it is a clerk, the ponytailed salesgirl about to ask, very nicely, if I could stop crying, making an ass of myself. She will coax me out of hiding, promising me an unabridged history of the Slip n’ Slide. My fingernail are nervous, picking at a rivet through two pieces of overlapping metal. I see little hands.

The box at the end of the aisle is nudged just enough to allow a tiny form inside. It is the beautiful black child, the loudest voice, who has entered my sanctuary. Strangely, I am not upset to have him find me. He stands on my bottom shelf, many boxes distant from my perch. He is able to stand up tall without brushing his hair on the bottom of our new ceiling. We look at

each other.

He whispers something to the outside. From the answering sounds, I understand his friends are waiting just on the other side of the tilted box, that he has volunteered as a shelf-spelunker, or that they have sent their fearless flannel leader inside the stacks and now demand a full report. He welcomes them to our hiding place and they enter, ladies first, and gain their footing. We look at each other. In good faith, I wave first. The leader waves back, not breaking his gaze. He says, "C'mon."

Though I can sense the tiniest amounts of their fear, as they can sense mine, six feet rhythmically pace towards me, all in a line, as on the all-pervasive invisible tightrope that only children can see. I wonder what we will say to each other.

The leader sits down next to me, Indian-style.

Finally, he whispers: "What are you doing?"

"Hiding," I whisper back. He looks around, out towards the aisles on either side.

"This is a good spot," he assures me, like a colleague showing approval.

"Thanks."

"Are you playing too?" he asks.

"I was," I say. "I'm not anymore."

"Then, you wanna play something else?"

I pause to consider the tacit implications of his question, and the nature of the game.

"Sure," I say.

"What d'you wanna play?"

I think hard, making sure I'm serious about my answer.

"I want to play the drums."

## KITCHEN CONVERSATION

*Kate Schirmer*

By late morning  
hours of *The Price is Right* and shop TV  
have bored her.  
Her voice drop into silence  
like an egg on a skillet.

*You would not believe, Ern, how expensive  
this fruit is at the new Giant. Four dollars for  
strawberries.*

*But you know, I only need bananas . . . and the  
broccoli,*

*I love the broccoli.*

There is never much to say.  
She informs him of the mail he still receives,  
though he's been dead since August:  
what bills are due, who sent thank yous  
for the Christmas stollen and who did not.

Her mind can slip like a gearshift.  
The linoleum table swells  
around her hips, over her head,  
chrome legs circling her veined ones,  
a pod encasing its pea.  
Through the grimed window she can see weeds  
overtaking the tiny cube of backyard  
where her boys used to dig holes with sticks.  
The youngest, alone, searching for bug specimens  
like a good Boy Scout.

*Don't dirty your pants, Bruce!*  
*I told you . . . now, wash your hands*  
*or you'll get them in your eye,*  
*catch your death, those germs!*

Her tongue tisks bounce  
off the refrigerator and fill the hollow room  
with an angry bee noise.  
It startles her, hands clenching the coffee mug  
as her eyes focus only on empty grass,  
green, growing.

FALLEN TREE LAKE

*Cory Landerfelt*

A mouth,  
stretched and bloated  
with Sierra blueness,  
chokes on dark swollen timbers in  
the shade.

FROM "CONSIDERING A SNAIL"

*Christine Malvasi*

Curved on concrete,  
a glimmering necklace  
which must have slid  
off your neck.

# GEORGIA

## *Tammy Brown*

### I.

I roll my mother's name  
On my tongue:  
"Georgia"

Every time I cry  
Her name  
I wonder  
How a savage taking could birth  
Such a giving  
Woman

Descendant of a hairy  
Peach-skinned man  
Poking in the shadows  
Outside the slave-quarters  
Who chose my grandmother  
A plum-black girl  
With cheek bones  
That slanted eyes  
And half moon lips that curved  
Into a dimpled smile—  
When not terrified

### II.

That night,  
The breaking of smooth  
Shiny black skin  
Tearing of flesh  
And descent into the pit  
Left her

Barely fourteen  
Throwing up  
An acrid aftertaste

Grandma carried and birthed  
A girl-child, a stolen seed,  
Whom they called "Red"  
Because she looked  
As if the master had stepped  
Out his big house  
And smeared her face  
In clay

Now I—  
The son of this scarlet woman  
Wish I had been born  
Generations earlier  
I would have been Nana's  
Little warrior  
Not caring if the abortion  
Of that breaking and entering  
Destroyed myself...

### III.

Years later—  
In a town more north than south  
My schoolmates  
With the brownest eyes  
Would peer into my blue—  
And as if possessed by twisted envy,  
From lunch pales, they hurled  
Sardine sandwiches, sugar cookies, and  
Nectarines by the dozens

But in the midst of this cross-fire  
I thought of Mama



How she used to skin and pare peaches  
Into small cubes to sprinkle  
Over hot cereal  
While crushing blossoms underfoot

How Mama  
Cradled my moist cheeks  
In her palms  
And taught me how to say her name, slowly,  
And to swallow bits of fruit  
Without choking  
And I grew  
To love them...

I was too young to understand:  
After Mama passed  
My Aunty found me  
Perched in the shadows  
Of a willow  
Nibbling nectarines—  
A hybrid fruit  
Cross between peach and plum,  
An infant  
Nestled against my mother's breast

*(Summer 1996)*

## EZEKIEL'S SLINGSHOT

*Jay Katsir*

YOUTHFUL ACCOMPLISHMENTS HAUNTED EZEKIEL. KEATS HAD been just twenty-two when he composed his odes, Edison twenty-one when he achieved his first patent, and Hunter had been only five when he discovered how to unhook the zookeeper's bra with his beak. And here was Ezekiel, at age fifty-seven, unable to construct a functioning slingshot. He cocked his grayish-green head, kicked away the worn, rainbow blanket at the back of his cage, and took inventory of the materials he had collected and hidden over his time here among the deranged.

One band-aid-colored rubber band, thick, discovered lodged under the gate of the petting area. One rubber band-colored band-aid, small, found dangling by a single adhesive wing from a crack in the ferrets' daytime viewing box. One mongrel ball of tape, precious, formed after delicate pickings off the faux wooden desk in the keeper's office. One package of eight multi-colored hair elastics, unopened, dropped by a mother too occupied with yanking her chubby daughter's ear to notice a hole in her plastic shopping bag. One diaphragm, questionable, dropped by the same mother.

Eleven months here, and this was all he had.

But from these items he would construct the device that was to be the culmination of his productive life, the invention to redeem all of the aborted projects of his years back in the communal macaw habitat. He just didn't know how to fit them together to make a slingshot.

Like the wings of all the parrots at the zoo, Ezekiel's were clipped, and he could not fly farther than a few yards at a time. But with the slingshot, he hoped to propel himself with enough velocity to glide over the high wooden fence and the heads of the mindless inhabitants of the Children's Zoo.

He clamped the band-aid in his jaw, lifted the diaphragm in his fist, and for a few minutes attempted to unite them in a novel way. Then he dropped the band-aid and climbed beak-first out of his cage and onto the freshly mown grass.

◆   ◆   ◆

WHEN HUNTER'S WOUND HAD REOPENED AND THEY CAME TO take him away, he beat at their faces with his wings and tore at their skin. He screamed all the words he knew at them—which were not very many because he was originally a wild parrot and had spent his entire captive life in the habitat with other birds—and he even defecated onto their clothing.

Six months later, when they came for Ezekiel, he had extended his leg and stepped onto their arms.

The first place they took him was to the infirmary for a medical exam, and while he was standing on a table having his left wing lifted for a vaccination, he peered through a grimy window into an enclosure that he had never seen before. Behind a fence was a high lattice of metal beams. Sidling along this structure, ruffled heads bobbing arrhythmically, were parrots far more unsightly than those that Ezekiel had encountered during his years at the zoo. They had discolored patches on their breasts and heads, tufts of uneven feathers, cracked beaks, muddled gray eye-sockets, and signs of illness in their drowsy gait. He recognized a few. Dunehopper, a bellicose old bird who had arrived after surviving a local family's house fire and had lived in the main habitat for just a month before losing her toe in a scrum. Count Snackula, who had been ostracized for his habit of ejaculating in the water dispensers and was eventually plucked virtually bald in a gang attack. And in the back corner, climbing beak-to-claw along the fence with futile desperation, straining to jam his healing skull through holes in the iron grid work, was Hunter.

"Thank you, Catarina, that will be all!" Ezekiel screamed with fright. It was one of the few phrases he had mastered during his youth as a domestic parrot. He had lived in the household of an affluent heiress to a national denture-polish fortune and spent most of his time with the maids. They had fed him a lot of chicken fat that he later suspected had stunted his intellectual growth. Liberated as an adolescent when he was donated to the zoo, he had led a quiet and industrious life in the communal habitat up until now. Was he about to join Hunter in this ref-

uge of the mangled and abandoned?

A tattered wing slapped against the window, and Ezekiel fainted due to a tranquilizer he had been fed in a chunk of honeydew.



STILL CLUTCHING THE DIAPHRAGM, EZEKIEL SHUFFLED AWAY FROM his cage and across the pruned grass. He thought back to his first moments here at the Children's Zoo. He supposed they had delivered him unconscious directly from the infirmary. When he had awoken, he was lying on a blanket with a grubby finger poking at his belly and two huge blue child's eyes within pecking distance.

This rough treatment turned out to be a trend, and he soon discovered that the keepers would allow children to handle him because they expected his passivity. Over his months of confinement in this mad-house, Ezekiel settled for the exchange of docile behavior for the freedom to leave his cage and walk around during the day.

Not that there was anyone worth visiting here.

He crossed a gravel path and stopped before a tall wire cage. Inside lived an enormous, brain-damaged porcupine. Despite the mammals slow-wittedness, his antics amused Ezekiel, who had once even devised an ineffectual lock-pick to liberate him.

The porcupine was named Gregory. Today he was lifting his morning potato in his forepaws and repeatedly banging it into the underside of his hairy neck.

"Si, Señorita Den-ti-fresh," Ezekiel whistled congenially.

Gregory looked up from his potato, stirred his massive hind-quarters into a clatter of quills, and then resumed banging with vigor. It was pointless.

Ezekiel peered around the side of the cage in search of materials for his slingshot. There were none, but as he turned to move on, he heard a muffled thump and rattle against the inside of the bars. The porcupine had thrust something through the wall of the cage, and it lay in a brown clump on the grass. Ezekiel twisted his head to examine the object. He was delighted to find that it was a leather eye patch with an elastic strap, potentially very useful. Transferring the grass-stained diaphragm to his

mouth, he dipped his forehead through the strap and hoisted the eye patch. He began to nod his gratitude, but Gregory was already preoccupied, violently assaulting a plastic water bottle at the back of the cage.



THE FIRST TIME EZEKIEL HAD A DIRECT ENCOUNTER WITH Hunter, he had already been intimidated by the younger bird for a long time. Hunter was almost five decades his junior, but carried himself with a brashness that Ezekiel could only imagine personally attaining if he ever lived up to his potential as an inventor.

That day, the keepers had not scattered a sufficient amount of food for the twenty-eight macaws that occupied the shady communal habitat. As usual, the dominant birds scrambled to lift their portions to perches on the tangled network of elm branches that reached up to the high, grated ceiling. Ezekiel was not among them.

When he descended to the dirt floor, Ezekiel found only sunflower husks, a barren corncob, and a few cantaloupe rinds, all coated in fresh guano. He was accustomed to eating last, but there was usually enough left over for him to scrape together a meal. There was no way he would be able to induce the others to share. “You must fold the laundry properly, Catarina,” he squawked anxiously.

He heard a throaty staccato complaint behind him and swiveled to see Hunter. The sleek gray bird swayed tenaciously from leg to leg. He hadn’t reached the food quickly enough either, probably slowed by the grimy wound over his right eye. Hunter stepped forward and waved his black tongue at Ezekiel, and then flapped up into the branches. Flustered, Ezekiel scampered to a vantage point from which he could observe what the younger parrot was doing.

He looked up in time to see Hunter pulling down on an unbalanced tree limb. The branch was lodged directly above McGroodle, a small but aggressive red macaw renowned for his ability to smash pistachios with his skull. This was ingenious. The branch landed on McGroodle’s back, and the vegetables he had been hoarding beneath his body cascaded to the ground.

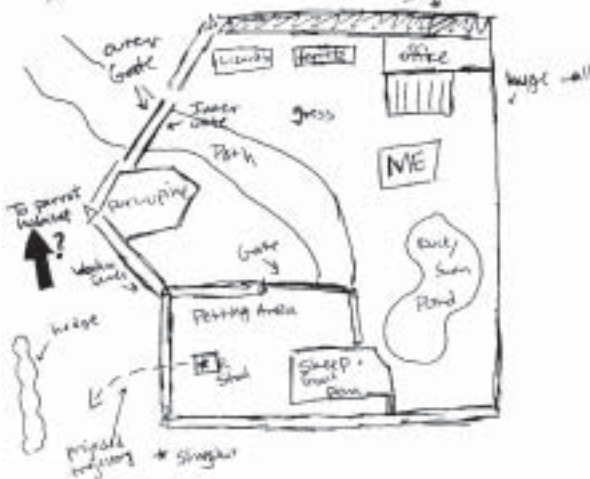
Hunter hopped floorwards to retrieve his spoils. In the course of his swaggering, he kicked a gnawed zucchini skin in Ezekiel's direction.

Ezekiel forgot his awe in a spurt of inspiration. The skin was just what he needed for a back-mounted parasol he was considering developing.



TURNING FROM THE PORCUPINE'S CAGE, EZEKIEL DECIDED TO visit the petting area and inspect the launch site for his slingshot. On the way he had to recheck some of the details of his plans. With the eye patch still dangling from his neck and the diaphragm secure in his beak, he bobbed surreptitiously to an ivy-covered section of the wooden fence that separated the Children's Zoo from the main zoo facilities.

He nudged the ivy leaves aside with his forehead. There, scratched into the plank, was a complicated map he had scrawled in his own private hieroglyph. It outlined the strategic landmarks of the Children's Zoo and contained a vague rendering of the terrain outside the fence as far as he could determine. He had marked the preferred location for the completed slingshot, as well as his projected trajectory over the fence and onto the path to the rest of the zoo. Translated into English, it would



have looked like this:

Ezekiel clamped down on the rubber disk and sighed. The map was the most fully realized part of the entire operation.

Just as his life had been during his years back in the communal habitat, he could see where he was going but could not figure out how to get there.



THE DAY THAT HUNTER WAS FIRST BROUGHT IN, EZEKIEL WAS struggling to weave pliable twigs into a hammock he could suspend between low branches. He was fifty-four years old then, exactly six times as old as Mozart had been when he quilled his first symphonies.

Hunter was dragged into the spacious, bustling enclosure behaving the same way he would when removed two years later, belligerently. His flailing fury sent the entire population into a melee of screeching and warm breezes, and in the confusion, he managed to pierce the keepers thumb and was dropped on his head. He hopped darkly to a branch-sheltered corner, where he crouched and rubbed his wings over his face.

Ezekiel had been too engrossed to notice the cause of the uproar, but when he glanced down from his low perch, Hunter was staring directly at him.

“Señorita Den-ti-fresh es enorme una puta!” he yelled, and fluttered backwards, knocking the sticks he had been manipulating down to the dirt. Hunter beat his way quickly from the corner and dragged Ezekiel’s creation back with him.

The next day, Ezekiel was so frustrated that he couldn’t eat. He swung upside down from a bough for hours in order to facilitate thought. It had taken him months to acquire enough viable material for the hammock, and it was the closest he had come in years to putting one of his innovative ideas into action.

That evening he discovered it completed behind the water dispenser.



EZEKIEL BACKED AWAY FROM HIS MAP AND DUCKED UNDER A wooden post into the petting area. The four ferrets had been let loose today, and they ricocheted between small mounds of wet hay with their usual ignorant glee. They were Ezekiel’s most appropriate inmates at the Children’s Zoo; like the majority of the visitors, they were hyperactive and had an unpleasant odor. The albino one, who was named Fizzbert, was galloping

straight towards him in mindless greeting. Fizzbert careened on a lump of sheep feces and skidded into Ezekiel's breast, soiling his green feathers and throwing the diaphragm and eye patch across the enclosure.

When Ezekiel glared up, the ferret was licking its pale genitals.

He preened himself and sought out his lost materials. The diaphragm was wedged under a lamb's hoof, and he removed it with some difficulty. Luckily, the contraceptive had retained its flexibility. He found the eye patch swinging from a mushroom-shaped wooden stool, the launch site from his map. He bit firmly onto the springy strap and pulled down with his right claw, but it remained affixed. He jerked his head to the ground in an attempt to dislodge it. He paused.

At fifty-seven years old, he had finally reached his moment.

He carefully laid the convex side of the diaphragm against the inside of the leather eye patch. He turned his body, and then strained his back into the rubbery surface. Taking a few steps backwards against the tension of the strap, he pressed against the asphalt with the pads of his toes, and prepared to extend his crippled wings. This was his time of achievement, the redemption for his years of perseverance, and it had happened by chance. He supposed that was all right as long as he got out of here.

Ezekiel breathed, then released.



HE LAY FLAT ON THE INFIRMARY TABLE WITH A CLOTH BANDAGE around his jaw and an intravenous needle under his wing. Beneath the dressing, his beak was cracked down the center. He was bruised across his entire torso. Ezekiel had taken no time to calculate the angle of trajectory in his haste to escape. He had launched himself directly into the base of the stool.

From now on he would be considered too unattractive to return to the either the Children's Zoo or the communal macaw habitat.

He struggled to his feet and looked through the grimy window. Hunter was peering in, waving his black tongue.

"Catarina, have dinner ready promptly tonight," he chirped with satisfaction.



# THREE DIALOGUES BETWEEN HERACLITUS AND DEMOCRITUS

*Matt Nguyen*

I.

And they came and separated and came and came and separated,  
the fire judged itself sharply against the parts of its motion  
spit them bitterly into the sky as they cackled and popped,  
split into effects,  
swirling up empty expanse. There their extension gropes  
with shaking little hands.

II.

Bouncing knuckle bone in the temple courtyard like politics,  
he quipped and children became stars.  
Skipping by, another looked and looked and stared  
and strained until he turned the temple and all its  
games into dots so small he couldn't imagine anything smaller.  
These he folded inside olive leaves and placed in a sac.

III.

This Cosmos was not made by gods or men, but always was,  
and is, and ever shall be ever-living fire, cried the one.  
Yes, and the sun is a foot I tickle with mirrors, replied  
the other. He gahawed until his atoms shook.  
Of the first,  
he wept until the heat hissed into mist,  
grew and grew and traveled far, far away.

## FISH MARKET

*Michael J. Grabell*

And down go the fish heads  
To swirl in the sewers—  
Down too the lobster claws  
And scallop shells.  
Down goes the refuse. Down goes the sea.  
And the fish heads talk  
Of yesterday's rain  
And mourn the shrimp.  
A catfish head drags behind,  
Its eyes ignorant to sorrow.  
It doesn't understand the sharpness  
Of cleavers or the momentum of hands.  
And the squid slouch in the icebox.  
Their tentacles dangle like beards.  
Down goes their wisdom in prayers  
And eulogies. Down goes faith. Down goes fear.  
And down go the nets in the predawn haze.  
The fishermen's fingers tie rope in knots.  
Their hands ache. Their flesh is raw.  
Each weather-struck wrinkle has a history.  
The palms hold the annals of men's lives.  
Down go their memories in epitaphs and wills.  
There's dirt under their nails  
From casting sand in graves.  
And down go the coffins six feet deep.

## LOSS (A THESIS EXCERPT)

*Jessica Kirkland*

EVEN THE NIGHT THAT THREE FIFTH GRADE BOYS WERE SHOT, Ellensdale was quiet and smelled like pine. Just over the tree line, the virgin sky struggled to stay light, holding on to the last few streaks of orange and pink before succumbing to unconsciousness. From above, the center of town may have looked like a very dim star, surrounded by space that knew true darkness, broken only by sparks of streetlights set at mile intervals. This coming of night was an affirmation of rightness, of safety, and was always marked by the citizens of the small town. At 9 pm, that was the only sign that something had gone wrong. No one noted the deepening darkness, looked out a window to say *ahhh look at that sky* or *better turn on the lamp*, *honey* or *time to brush your teeth* or *it's already coming earlier, you can almost feel the chill in the air*.

Parents had already come home from the morgue, but it was too early to cope. Lucky mothers and fathers ran shaking hands over young, frightened heads. Squeezed small hands as if even now, they might slip away. Comforting embraces ended awkwardly, without discussion. It was difficult to think. As families closed inward, silently, like flowers, the true dark that people in Ellensdale were proud of and comforted by came without warning. Blackness without warning, like an invasion or a betrayal.

“We made the national news,” Matt LaCosse spoke with unintended, instinctive excitement of a small town boy, and winced at the sound of his own voice. His wife Anna put a palm to her nose and mouth, sucked in her breath, ran from the dinner table, chair scraping in the silence of the absence of television. Matt started to get up to follow her, sighed, sat, switched on the television.

Across town, Darlene Mathers exhaled a mouthful of cigarette smoke, shaking her head sadly as she flipped through fourteen channels, each replaying footage from earlier in the

day. If she looked out of her window, behind the TV, she could see the school in the distance, every light on.

Eight-year-old Sam Johnson had stayed home sick that day. His parents first refused to tell him, but he pleaded, and they didn't have the strength to make an argument. They wanted to know too. At 10 pm, the couple sunk into their nubby plaid couch. Sam watched from the floor at their feet.

As the night went on, each house came to hold the same dancing reflections in its windows. Mr. and Mrs. McCann were the last ones to tune in. They didn't believe in television anymore, but the TV came out of the closet just for the night, and they wrapped new foil on the rabbit ears.

*Three boys at the elementary school shot.* A reporter from CNN and repetition of what everyone knew. *One boy missing.* Repetition, using different words, as if somehow, with different words...

*Why?* On the porch rolling a beer bottle between a palm and wooden rail. *This is terrible.* In bed, sitting in arms against the headboard and not feeling safe. *Well, what.* Still in uniform, staring at a badge in hand. *I can't believe.* Over a cup of too-late coffee with red eyes. *Do something.* In flannel. *Mommy, what does it feel like to die?* In the kitchen, the water runs. It overflows a glass with Tom and Jerry running around it as a little girl waits, as the answer does not come.

*Let the call be overturned, let the blow to be against another town, let this be a nightmare.* With the news on all night, unceasingly beating down denial. In that confusion, the night felt colder than it was. Cold as a killer that hadn't been caught. *But he was one of our own. Our neighbor, our friend.* Thoughts freely roamed the maze the day had laid. *He was only 11 years old.*

The police found the gun, dropped carelessly onto the dirt of the playground, ten feet from the back door. Four teachers, and too many students had witnessed parts of the crime to doubt that Neal—small, unassuming, with no reason to do this—had shot the three boys in his fifth grade class. But after that, there was nothing. He couldn't drive. He hadn't run. But he had vanished.

*He descended like the angel of death, and returned.*

*We were right there! I was nearby! If only I would have run after him! But I was afraid. He was a boy, but covered in blood...you wouldn't understand.*

The night was empty. The police cars barely moved, shining spotlights behind every dumpster, watching every fence for signs of movement they might have missed. Circled the school again. One officer felt a rush of maddening possibility, stopped his car, and went back into the school. The killer was just a kid, maybe he'd run back in, hid. But there was no one. The smell of industrial carpeting, chalk dust and pencil shavings hung heavy. The officer faced a row of lockers, smeared with blood. The scent of the place choked him, made him dizzy. Back outside he coughed hard with his hands on his knees. Later, it would be that odor that bothered him most. That smell of children in a place covered with blood.

Ellensdale's people were left without comfort. *What did we do? What could we have done?* Late into the night, reporters speculated that Neal had an accomplice. Made references to the highly planned nature of past school shootings, gave examples of child terrorists and child guerilla warlords. But what adult would assist the murder plot of a child? Stern reporters in trench coats, with hair skewed by the wind, made pleas. *Ask your children if they know where this boy is. He is dangerous. Even if he is a friend. Search your house. This boy is most probably hiding somewhere in town.*

He could have been forced. Instructed. Held in bondage as we lay in our beds crying for the ones already lost. At our windows, eyes red, mouth foaming, as we lay in our beds already lost.

*Or maybe he just never existed at all.*

And that's how it would seem, for a very long time. It would have been too much to guess the strange crossing of paths—a driver, speeding, a boy running, covered in blood. In a town of working moms and working dads, there were no people left behind the windows of Crescent Street that Friday morning. No one looking out when the boy flew from between two parked

cars and the man in the Chevy didn't have time to stop. The man named Murray, a businessman on an upward swing, who had certain reasons for not wanting attention from the authorities. Who, panicked at the amount of blood, convinced that he had killed the boy, shoved the unconscious body into his vehicle, and drove home.

A man who believed, if he didn't hurry, if he had one more interruption in his life, it might just be like he had *never existed at all*.

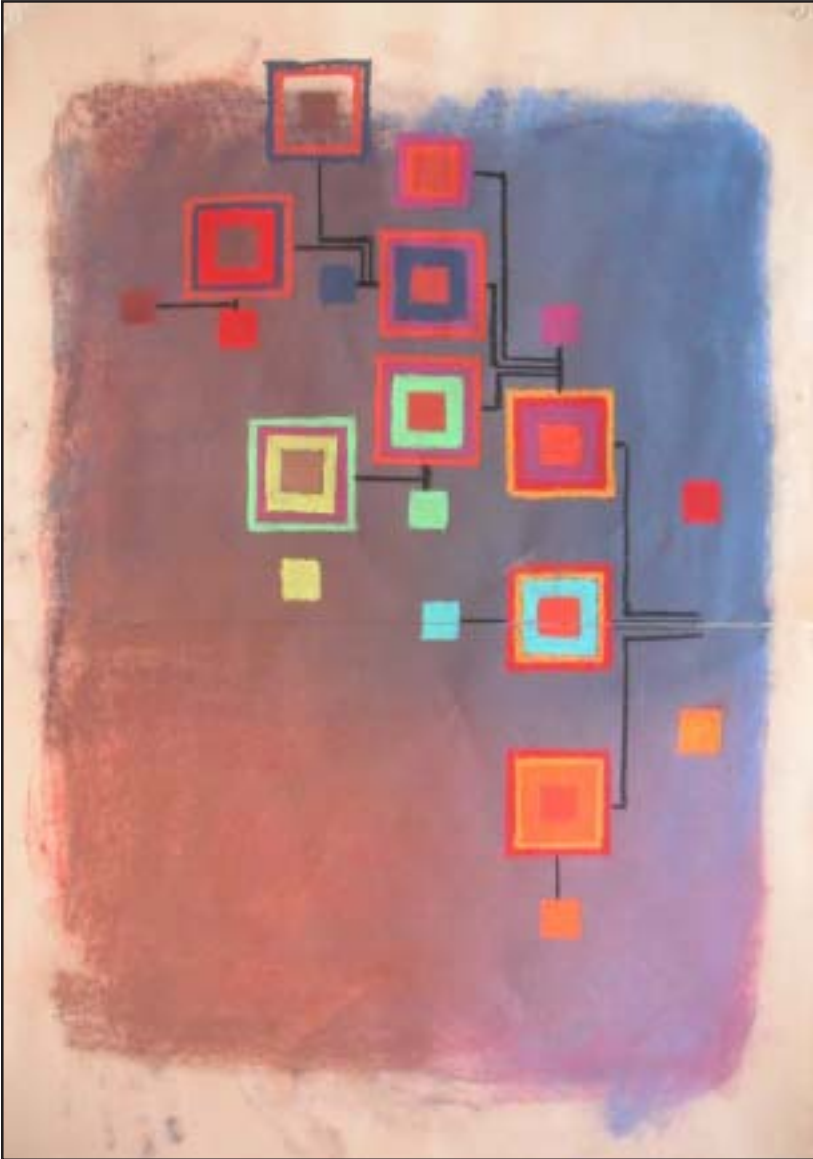
## CATTAILS OVERRULED

*Jennifer L. Schanbacher*

Cattails overruled;  
The footstep always has the final word.



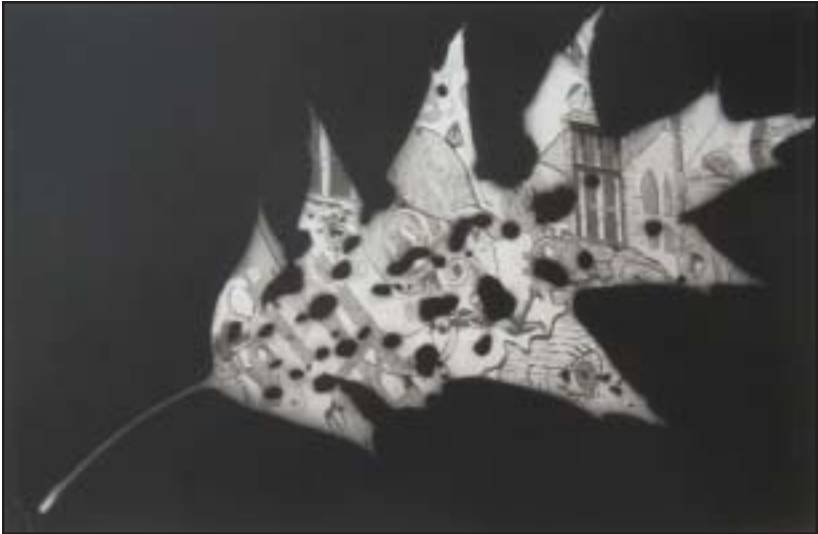
*Emily Schlesinger*  
Acrylic on canvas



*Jason Houck*

Colored charcoal drawing on beige paper





*Allen Taylor*

Black and white photograph



*Andrew Jordan*  
Color photograph



*Jessica Inocencio*  
Oil paint on canvas



*Kalle Thompson*



*Ibby Caputo*

Color and black and white photographs



*Lauren Teichner*  
Color Photo



*Krista Brune*  
Mixed Media

## CONTRIBUTORS

*Clare Beams* is a junior English major. She's spent a lot of time over at 185 Nassau, but this is her first time contributing to the *Nassau Literary Review*. She is from Connecticut.

*Kate Benson* is a senior English major who hopes to become a professor of American literature or creative writing. She spends most of her time deciding between these careers, working on the *Nassau Literary Review*, and trying to finish her fiction thesis.

*Megan Brown* is a freshman who enjoys playing volleyball, working with animals, and of course, writing poetry. She began writing poetry as a freshman at her high school in central Jersey.

*Tammy L. Brown* is a third-year Ph.D. student in the History Department with a focus on twentieth-century American history, American religious history, and the African Diaspora. Brown's dissertation topic is "West Indian Immigrants to NYC and Racial Identity, 1930-1960." She enjoys using history to inform her creative writing; her next project will be a series of poems documenting an around-the-world trip that she completed in summer 2000.

*Krista Brune* is a freshman this year, who hasn't decided her major yet. For fun, she likes to create different types of art, especially mixed media.

*Angela Buckingham* is visiting from Australia. She is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts where she studied film directing. Using her year as a creative sabbatical, Angela is focusing on photography and theatre design.

*Alex Bueno*: well, then, three sentences about myself. bueno! bueno? bueno. :-)  
I'm a freshman looking at an Art History major (from afar, though—whatever that means). I photograph ... things. Must it be? It must be. I made this picture on a powermac g3 in august of 2001, scanned on a nikon coolscan iii. I shot it on a concrete slab, the remains of some sort of dock at fort jefferson, I suppose about a hundred kilometers west of key west (florida).

*Ibby Caputo* is an Art History major in the Creative Writing program. Along with serving as Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Nassau Literary Review* and writing a novel for her senior thesis, Ibby is a published photographer and a Yoga enthusiast. She plans to teach and travel for two years before enrolling in a Masters in Fine Arts program for creative writing.

*Brian Cochran* is an undergrad of class '06 planning on majoring in Sociology with a certificate in Creative Writing. He hails from Hudson, Ohio and is a member of the wrestling team.

*Rosanna Da Costa* is a freshman from Maryland. She is still undecided about her major; it will either be Creative Writing, Psychology, or Interpretive Dance.

*Josephine Decker* is a senior in the Comparative Literature Department, with minors in Creative Writing and Latin-American Studies. She plays the drums and the piano, and she hopes to be a screenwriter some day. Cookie.

*Melissa Galvez* is a Forbes sophomore from Staten Island, NY. In high school she won the Scholastic Writing Awards for poetry, fiction, a play and personal essay. Many thanks to Prof. Richardson and CWR 201, as well as Marty Skoble, who can even teach a six year old to love and write poetry.

*Michael J. Grabbell*'03 is an English major from Montville, N.J. He is working on a poetry thesis in the creative writing track. His work has also been published in the *Tulane Review*.

*Jason Houck* is a senior Civil Engineering and Architecture major from Colorado. He formally began his art studies at Princeton and vows to continue making art after graduation.

*Jessica Inocencio* is a sophomore from Lytle, Texas planning to major in Art History (Visual Arts) with a certificate in Creative Writing. She embraces fondly thrown-away objects, but likes to occasionally begin anew.

*Margaret Johnson*'05 is an English major from New Orleans, Louisiana. She has studied creative writing in several workshops at Princeton and elsewhere during her summers. She is working towards applying for a creative thesis and being brave enough to submit her work to other publications.

*Andrew Jordan* is a sophomore from Middlebury, Vermont, planning to major in the Art History and Visual Arts Program. He is actively involved in several student theater and film groups on campus and is also on the track team.

*Jay Katsir* is a junior majoring in English and hopefully Creative Writing. He grew up in Philadelphia and went to high school in Vancouver, which on several occasions has led him to be labeled a Canadian sympathizer. This anxiety may or may not be visible in his writing.

*Jessica Kirkland* is a senior Psychology major who is writing two theses. She is looking for a job. Desperately.

*Cory Landerfelt* grew up in Sacramento, California and is currently a freshman in Rocky. He plans on concentrating his studies on humanities, and hopefully he can continue to work on the creative arts.



*Peter Landwehr* is a member of the class of '06 in Forbes College; he intends to major in Computer Science, English, or History. He has attended Interlochen Arts Academy to study writing twice, taken a course in poetry at 185 Nassau under James Richardson, and is pleased that some people like to read his words.

*Annie Lee* is a senior in Comparative Literature. When not writing, she can be found belly dancing with Raks Odalisque or cooking up feasts in her kitchen.

*Heather D. Lichty*, class of 2004, majoring in English, from Ontario, Canada, still believes that the dog with a thousand heads drinks from one bowl.

*Chrissy Malvasi* is a sophomore from Ventnor, NJ (near Atlantic City), majoring in Psychology with a possible certificate in Spanish Language & Culture. She also participates in the Creative Writing Program.

*Lauren McCollum* is a senior in the English Department. "Proximity" is excerpted from her creative thesis and arises from an actual close call during a powerful electrical storm. She thanks The Womb and is forever indebted to her sage thesis advisor, Professor Paul Muldoon.

*James McGavran* is a first-year graduate student in the department of Slavic literatures, where his main areas of interest are poetic translation and Russian poetry of the 20th and 21st centuries. He received a BA in modern languages and literatures from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio.

*Adam Nemett* is a naughty naughty boy who enjoys firing Super Soakers filled with mayonnaise and Dutch people. He also has hair and wears T-shirts, sometimes. He would like to thank all of the wonderful humans who have made his last four years a ridiculous spanktrified debacle.

*Matt Nguyen* is a freshman from Morristown, NJ. He attended Delbarton School and is undecided as to his major.

*Ari Samsky* is a senior Anthropology major from Connecticut. He's vice president of the Princeton Dueling Society, and ex-editor in chief of the *Nassau Weekly*. At home he has a horse from Ireland and some fish.

*Jennifer L. Schanbacher* is a junior in the English department and the Program in Theater and Dance.

*Kate Lynn Schirmer* is a senior English major, receiving certificates in Creative Writing and Women's Studies. She is writing a creative thesis in poetry, and hails from Charlottesville, Virginia.

*Emily Schlesinger* is a senior in the department of English. After graduating she plans to study art & architecture.

*Corinne Schneider* is a sophomore from Manhattan, NY, who has never been in the driver's seat of a car and enjoys listening to world music, watching cooking shows on public television, learning Mandarin Chinese, and temperate weather. She plans to be a Politics or Woodrow Wilson School major, with a certificate in creative writing. This summer, she hopes to mentor children in an underdeveloped area of Hunan or work for the International Rescue Committee aiding refugees.

*Nate Sellyn '04* is an English major from Montreal. He very recently won the Grammy for Best Spoken Word Album.

*Owen Tanzer* is a sophomore from Florida, probably majoring in Comparative Literature. The best fortune cookie fortune he's ever gotten said, 'Harsh words break no bones; tender words butter no parsnips.'

*Allen Taylor '03*. German Department major with a certificate in Latin American studies. California native who is nuts about photography and all things photographic. Writing his thesis on the Revolution in Photographic Seeing in 3 Post-Revolutionary Societies: 1920s Mexico, Germany, and Russia.

*Lauren Teichner*. I am a senior in the Religion department, with a certificate in Women's Studies. I only started doing photography in my sophomore year, but since then I have become obsessed. I carry my camera with me everywhere. I love seeing the world as if through the lens of a camera, finding natural compositions all around me.

*Emily Woodman-Maynard*, class of 2005, is a Spanish major. She has lived and traveled in Latin America, and is spending spring semester of 2003 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



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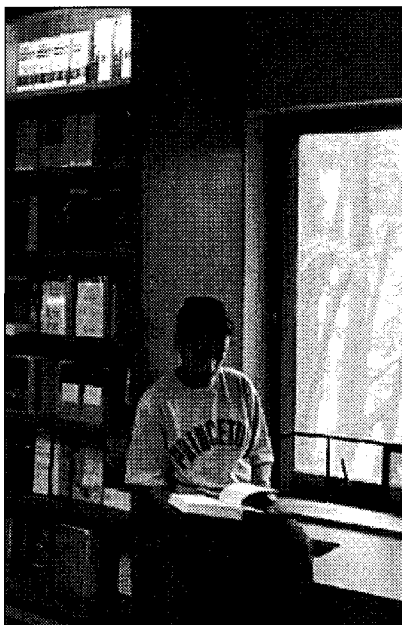
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The *Nassau Literary Review* would like to thank the following for their support this year:

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