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Cover and Book design by Alyssa Mielke

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, 2020

Metonym Literary Journal  
William Jessup University  
2121 University Avenue  
Rocklin, 95765

[www.metonymjournal.com](http://www.metonymjournal.com)

Metonym is published annually and is available to subscribers upon request at [metonymjournal.com](http://metonymjournal.com) or [metonym@jessup.edu](mailto:metonym@jessup.edu)

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METONYM  
Literary Journal

*Spring 2020*  
*Tenth Anniversary Edition*

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# Editor's Note

Ten years is an accomplishment. A gift I'm incredibly proud to take ownership of through my role as Editor in Chief.

Our journal has grown immensely in the last 10 years. It's expanded from being a collection of works written by students at our tiny Northern California school to an amalgamation of authors and artists from all over the world celebrating the ability to share thoughts and passions in print. Through this time, we've seen two generations graduate at William Jessup University, and the third is halfway done.

Graduation is, in some respects, death. It's the end of an era, the end of a season of life. And as I and many of our staff graduate, I am reflecting on the past four years spent at this university. Much of what I am feeling is represented in the works within these pages. Transition is messy and hard and frightening, yet it yields growth and development in ways that were otherwise impossible. Metonym is a sort of swan song for us, and we hope you enjoy it as much as we did while putting it together.

We hope this journal serves you well.

# living alone again

BY ABBY LACEY

I swore I'd never paint a living room beige  
or buy my chairs in bulk  
and now here I am, sinking in monochromatic  
shapes  
and sequence, encircled in the colour story of  
eggshell  
and tan and cream  
that highlights the accents of  
a stock summer photo hung in perfect  
parallel with the hardwood floorboard  
the look is pleasant enough,  
in the woeful way of a woman  
who dulls her spring colours,  
remaining palatable as the pasteurized cheese  
she pairs with whites  
and all the furniture is wicker,  
flimsy and fake and in the way  
I knock my baby toe on the corner  
every time I pass by until it is sanguineous,  
aubergine, clashing with my colour scheme,  
and, like the hedges that must be tended every  
Saturday,  
it is gone with a quick slice,  
to be purged with a baking soda

# Pour Pablo, 2019

BY ANNE CECILE



Carrara Marble  
40 x 32 x 36 cm

# Your Move

BY ROBERT A. KRAMER

German winters are cold, and 1922 was no exception. Reparations from the war weighed heavily on the people as they tried to recover from their defeat. Political trials and upheaval rattled an already fragile public confidence. And in the countryside, ice crystals fought their way into the window frames of a small, simple hospital, its warm inner glow a contrast to the frigid world outside. A pair of boys struggled through the snow as they approached the entrance.

Kurt, a worried teenager wearing a thin coat dusted with desperation, pulled his slight, fragile brother, Ernie, up to the first nurse he could find. Ernie's oily hair fell across his eyes, sealed shut with dried puss and the lack of attention that comes from poverty and poor nutrition.

"Excuse me, Miss?" Kurt said.

Turning around, she looked at the boys. Her quick eyes assessed their circumstances before she addressed them, "Come with me." She took them to a small, bare room with no windows, just a wooden chair that leaned against a cold plaster wall. Kurt gently nudged his brother into the seat.

"I'll be right back," the nurse said as she left. Moments later she returned with a basin of warm water, a rag, and a glass. "What's your name?"

"Ernie."

"How old are you, Ernie?" She dipped the glass in the basin, collecting water.

"Eleven."

"I have a son around your age." She put the glass in his hand. "Take this and hold it over your eye for a few minutes. Then gently wipe it with this rag." She placed the rag in his free hand with a compassionate squeeze. "When that eye is open, do the same to the other one. I'll be back with a doctor in a little bit." She patted his hand and left them there. Ernie followed her instructions and began the process of freeing his

eyelids from their prison.

Tipping his head back, he turned the glass over on his right eye. "Don't worry, we'll get there."

"This just had to happen now," Kurt mumbled.

"I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault. If Dad had sent for us sooner..." He sighed and ran his hand through his hair. "I've got some time left. We'll make it."

"What about the boat?" asked Ernie.

"There'll be more boats."

"We've waited so long."

The nurse returned with a doctor in tow. "Where are your parents?"

Ernie pulled the glass away and wiped his eye with the rag until the lid broke free and light flooded his vision. He smiled and overturned the glass on his other eye.

Kurt answered, "Our father is in America. That's where we were going when this happened." The doctor frowned and examined Ernie's eyes. "What about your mother?"

"She died six years ago."

He looked up and met Kurt's eyes with an intense and searching stare.

"You've been on your own?"

"We've been with the church, sir."

The doctor nodded and returned to looking Ernie over. "It's an infection that has been going around, very contagious for children. We'll have to cauterize his eyelids."

Kurt winced at the thought.

"What's cauterize?" asked Ernie.

"Burn the inside of your eyelids with a hot wire."

Ernie swallowed hard. "Will it hurt?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it will."

Ernie lay on a wooden table; arms and legs strapped down like he was on a medieval torture device. Nurses prepared to hold each limb still should he lurch at the straps and Kurt held his head. The doctor raised a small wand on the end of which was a thin wire that glowed red hot. "Hold him steady."

Kurt tightened his grip as the doctor slowly lowered the wire towards his brother's eyes. He felt him tense in anticipation as the device entered his vision.

"Ready?" the doctor asked.

Ernie gripped the sides of the table until his knuckles turned white. "Not really."

“Look up.”

The smell of burning flesh permeated the room. Every muscle in Ernie’s body tensed and he ground his teeth as smoke rose from his eye. He let out a small whimper and the doctor pulled away.

“You still okay?” he asked.

“Ouch.”

Everyone chuckled at the muted response. The nurse grabbed a rag, rolled it up and put it between his teeth. “Here. Bite this.”

###

Behind a closed door, Ernie sat alone. A simple cot and small table furnished the room. A window in the door allowed people to look in, but he was too short to see through it straight, he had to look up at an angle, which made it hard to connect with anyone on the outside. In the opposite wall, a window gave him a view of the trees and snow outside. Frost on the corners of the glass created patterns of reflected light. Kurt stood in the hallway, watching. After a few moments, he gently knocked and put his hand to the window in the door so his brother could see it. Ernie reached up and placed his hand on the other side of the glass. “The Doctor says it’ll be at least a few months before you can get out,” Kurt said.

“Six. Then another six if they’re not sure it’s gone.”

“Really?”

“I overheard the nurses.”

Kurt slumped, forehead against the door. “That’s too long.”

“You don’t have to stay.”

“I’ll write to Dad and let him know we’re not going to make it yet.”

“You can go if you want to. I’ll come when I get out.”

Kurt took a deep breath before answering his brother, “I’m okay if you’re okay.”

“...Okay,” said Ernie hesitantly. He sank to the floor of his room near the door.

Kurt slid down the door in the hallway and sat too. He pulled two small checkerboards out of his coat; every square was numbered and slid one under the door. “What’s this?”

He pushed the game pieces under as well.

“I have one too, out here. You’re red.”

Ernie set up his board as did Kurt. “Your move.”

“Ten to seventeen,” Ernie said. He moved the piece on square ten to square seventeen. In the hallway, Kurt mirrored it.

###



Spring, 1923. The last remains of the snow melted away, revealing grass that had been dormant for too long. New life felt like new possibility, hope. And inside the hospital, Kurt spoke to Ernie's doctor in a busy hallway. "He's fine. I'm telling you."

"We can't be sure he's no longer contagious."

"It's been six months. He's going crazy in there."

"If we release him while he's still contagious it could lead to an epidemic. I have to think about more than just your brother."

"You don't understand. We're leaving. There won't be an epidemic because we'll be on a boat to America."

"I'm sorry. He stays."

Kurt balled his hands into fists. "I can't wait any longer."

"There's no way."

"I'm taking him."

"As long as he's in here, he's my responsibility. My charge. You'll have to wait until I decide it's safe for him to leave."

"You don't understand." Kurt pushed, "I'm taking him."

"I'm afraid it's you who doesn't understand," the doctor replied. "He's not leaving." He patted his pocket where Kurt could see the outline of a metal key hiding.

He stormed off down the hallway to Ernie's room. He yanked on the door, but it wouldn't budge. He shook it and pulled on it to no avail. Tears of frustration sought to escape from the corners of his eyes. He quickly scrubbed them away as his brother approached the door from the other side.

"I have to stay. Don't I?"

"I'll stay with you."

"You turn eighteen in two months."

"I know."

"Dad's visa is only good if you go over before you're eighteen. And the trip takes weeks."

"I know."

"You have to go."

"I won't leave you."

"I can take care of myself," he gestured at the room around him. "Besides, what's going to happen to me in here? I'll come over as soon as I get out."

"I'll wait with you," Kurt responded.

"You have to go."

"I can't leave you," he struggled through his tightening throat.

"Go." Ernie's frustration was mounting.

Kurt moaned slightly as he felt he was being torn in two. "I promised Mom

I'd look after you," he whispered.

"And you have. Just go." Ernie hissed through clenched teeth. He knew his brother couldn't stay. He wouldn't let him. "If you don't go now, then I'll go when I get out, and you'll be stuck here without me anyway."

"No, you won't." Kurt chuckled to himself.

"I don't want you here anymore," Ernie cried out, choking on the lie, "Leave." He walked away from the door and turned his back, staring out of the opposite window. Kurt opened his mouth to say something, then changed his mind. He stood silently and watched his brother. They'd been through so much together. He was all he had, and he was going to just abandon him?

"Just go," Ernie begged, "Please." He wiped at his eyes with the back of his hand.

"I can't."

"You can't stay. Kurt, please."

He knew his brother was right. They had no future here. And their father was in America waiting for them. His time was nearly up. It was now or never for him. Defeated, Kurt slumped. "If you aren't there in a year, I'm coming back for you."

Ernie turned back towards the door, towards his brother. "You won't have to."

"Here." Kurt slid a photograph of their father under the door. On the back was written an address. "Don't make me come get you."

"I won't."

Kurt looked down at the checkerboard at his feet. The game was already in progress from his last visit. "It's your move."

Ernie pushed a checker to Kurt's back row. "King me."

###

Kurt watched as daylight began to fade into night through the trees. The branches blocked his view of the sunset, but he knew it was there. He could feel the day's warmth dissipating as he started his trek from the hospital to America alone. He carried a small bag and ticket for a boat that was scheduled to leave the next day. He stopped as he caught sight of Ernie standing at his window, arms crossed. Ernie spotted his older brother in the twilight and he slowly raised a hand to the glass. Kurt raised his hand in response. They stood like that for a moment until Kurt slowly walked off into the unknown. Ernie looked at his checkerboard. He placed it in the drawer of his nightstand and slid the drawer closed.

# Penitentiary

BY MICHAEL HOWER



## Cubicle

Taken at Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Philadelphia, PA



# Flossed

Taken at Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, Philadelphia, PA

# A Country Room in Northern Spain

BY ERNESTO L. ABEYTIA

There's a ghost in the playroom,  
Dolls decorating the shelves have decided

Life is no longer worth living,  
Begin hurling themselves off,

One by one, onto the hardwood floor.  
My sister wakes up screaming

But the sound chokes her throat  
So that only muted whimpers escape.

The nightlight darkens, goes black.  
When I tell you about this, you say

It's only a dream, spirits don't exist.  
Nighttime speaks different.

A tree branch scratches at the window.



# Friend

BY MANIT CHAOTRAGOONGIT



# Young Adult, Not Novel: The Gables\*

BY YVONNE CHISM-PEACE

I slept there once near December dawn  
With barely a toothbrush or comb  
On the run from love's eviscerated pit  
Which one dragged me into their fight?  
Usually Mother screeched my name  
Just as Daddy's fist earned the blame.  
That night I spurned their plunge to memorize  
A Yuletide pageant in post-modern guise.  
No questions asked, no reason given,  
To the Grail that night I was a pilgrim.

Four years before, high school diploma in hand,  
I had played a dumb grand slam.  
"What a pretty Catholic art and book shop!  
It's summer. It's empty. Need any help?"  
Latin, French, First Honors, a Scholarship:  
In the real world, I was a blip.  
So, they gave me no cash, but a chance  
To learn the register, get a reference.  
Ergo, I held a Black youth commission  
In their ecumenical mission.

Next June some patchwork teens, carefree,  
Jobless as I had been, hitched their boredom to me,  
Flew off to "Our Town"—not wild, but equal  
In salt and pepper stardust. Yet, no sequel  
Clamored from their elders. Unpaid, I suspect,  
Lust for greasepaint got no roar, no respect.  
So, the Grail settled me down to Christian

Seders and spiritual revolution.

To them, my world was bright, if feckless,

'Til that night I darkened their door, reckless.

\*The Gables, a Victorian masterpiece built in 1889 by the celebrated architect Willis Hale, was the home of Dr. Egan and two generations of his family until 1936. Willed to the Catholic Church, it was used as a residence for a succession of occupants: the elderly, a group of Catholic laywomen known as "The Grail," and finally the Jesuits. Most recently it has been restored as a Chester Avenue bed and breakfast.



# Young Adult, Not Novel: Erased, 1962

BY YVONNE CHISM-PEACE

Page 100. A high school yearbook. All  
Girls. Caps and gowns. A black and white daisy-  
Chain. To a fashion blind eye, a random scroll  
From the whole 20th century.  
But the crushed bouffants, the prim-spun-  
Teased-with-a-fine-tooth-comb-page-boy fluffs  
Telegraph the Fifties—not quite undone.  
No go-go dancer flips. Yet. What disrupts

Sneaks in at the bottom. Two Negroes.  
With no names. Nobody knows?  
Below three rows—each with six fair faces,  
Some coy, some beatific, their traces  
Of tribe bleached in the flash, yet the soul  
—A family name, a church festival—  
Persists. These sly two, a dark afterthought?  
Oops! Somebody forgot.

I was one of the two. On the left. Nameless.  
A colored, four years straight with Distinguished  
Honors. The first? Maybe. Extinguished,  
All unspeakable rights! Whose? Not some shameless,  
Uppity you-know-what! Who's hysterical?  
Whose backseat on the bus? How convenient.  
Side by side, with nary a document—  
Slaves? Wetbacks? At least, alphabetical.

# Requiem for a Habit

BY JOHN TOMPKINS

*I'll feed the sugar glider first*, I thought. Doris was always hungry when I got home. Undoubtedly the dogs would start barking, and they wouldn't quit until I poured food into their bowl. From there it was an onslaught of dinner, baths, washing dishes, and the slow, intermittent march to get my girls to sleep. It would be a long night.

A cacophony of screeching echoed in the living room as I opened the door. Piper was running around the rug, holding strings of plastic beads in her hand as Abby chased her.

Welcome home. I wanted nothing more than to go to the fridge and find a beer, maybe a shot of whiskey. Anything to prime my evening.

"Abby, stop chasing your sister!" I bellowed, trying to eclipse the squeals. "Or I swear I will knock the blue out of your eyes."

Empty threat and they knew it. The blur of Piper's brunette hair and Abby's strawberry-blond mane waved in the air as they ran off. The screams continued as they darted into the hallway. At least the gypsum walls would stifle the noise.

Ages three and five, my girls never ceased to amaze me with the depth of their energy. Their mom was leaving for the evening. A promised girls' night out. I had trepidation about it and thought about protesting, but she was exhausted and deserved the break. I would have to take care of our girls on my own. Get them fed. Get them bathed. Then a snack. Then to bed. I walked to the fridge and opened the door. There was a six pack of the familiar bottles stacked longways in the crisper. The first of many temptations. I eyed the translucent amber bottles and then shut the door. No time. I'd also promised myself not to drink when it was just me and the girls. If something happened, I needed to be able to get behind the wheel. I'd learned that one the wrong way.

Marie came out of the bathroom. She wore the argyle sweater I bought her for Christmas. I don't think she liked it, but she probably wore it to make me happy.

“You got everything?” she asked as she rustled to gather her purse.

“Yeah,” I said, strolling into the kitchen.

“You sure you’re going to be fine with them?” she asked with more concern.

“Marie, I can take care of my daughters,” I replied.

Requisite hug and kiss, and then she left.

I opened the door to our bedroom, and Doris sailed across the room from her perch and hit me in the face. All the sugar gliders in the world and I had to get the blind one. Doris, a guilt gift for Abby, ended up becoming our pet. She clung to my shoulder as I retrieved her daily fruit offering. Gliders are needy like that.

Reheated casserole apportioned appropriately on small plastic plates. Abby and Piper sat at their little table adjacent to the adult table. They mounted their typical resistance to dinner. “We had this last night!” “I don’t like this!” “Daddy, can we just get a pizza?” I responded with a volley of more empty threats. It seemed to be enough. Eventually their tiny hands grasped their respective forks and ate. Relief. At least one thing went down smoothly that evening.

I fixed my own plate, put it in the microwave, and then sealed the casserole dish with its press-and-seal wrap. I opened the fridge to put the dish back and spotted the bottles at the bottom and paused.

“Daddy,” Abby said in a measured tone, “are you getting a beer?”

“No, sugarcakes, I’m just going to put this dish up.”

So tragic. Even my five-year-old knew when I drank.

“And it’s not called a beer, remember? It’s ‘Daddy’s juice.’”

“Right,” she said with a naturally cute grin and giggle.

I wouldn’t say that I had a drinking problem. I would always characterize it as a bad habit. I just needed to get through my evenings. The word game had all the red flags of denial. Even though I didn’t believe it was a problem, it was a situation growing out of hand. I kept the beer and whiskey around because I wanted to find a point of moderation. At my peak, I was drinking a shot of bourbon with three beers or four beers six to seven nights a week. It wasn’t the volume that was an issue, it was the frequency.

The girls finished eating and continued playing as I washed the dishes and scrubbed casserole particles off the wall. After drying their cups, I opened the cabinet to put them away. Then I saw the whiskey bottle at the top shelf. I put the cup down and stroked the smooth glass with the gold-brown liquid. I picked it up and peered into it. I couldn’t even bother to give myself the usual epithets of rationalization. “Just one.” “It’s not like it’s a real problem.” I quickly placed the bottle back and shut the cabinet. It would probably be best to wait until they’re in bed, less chance of having a disaster

that needed an adult.

Bathtime. First came Piper. She was the youngest and easiest. Piper played in the water but didn't splash much. Less to dry up later. Her bath was a quick act of scrubbing, rinsing, and washing her hair. After dressing her and setting her in front of the TV, I put Abby in the tub. Usually I would let her stay in the water longer to play. She could be trusted.

Once she was in the water, I paced around the kitchen, trying to get snacks ready. PJ Masks blared on the TV. I opened the refrigerator and checked on the beer. Still there.

"Dad, I'm ready to bathe!" Abby yelled.

I shut the door and went back to the bathroom. I told myself that if I could drink one beer, then that shouldn't be a problem. I usually drank far more than that. One wasn't really something to be concerned about.

I grabbed the washcloth and scrubbed Abby down thoroughly. I laughed and poked at her skin, which would reveal her veins with the warm temperature of the water. I squirted a liberal amount of shampoo and started washing her hair. Through the strawberry-blond strands on her forehead, I spotted the familiar white scar at the edge of her hairline.

If I had been paying attention, it wouldn't have happened. I didn't like to think about it, but it was still my fault. Kids were not supposed to be cutting snowflakes out of construction paper while sitting on the edge of their beds. I was too busy drinking beer and sitting in the chair, watching a college football game that I wasn't much interested in. Stereotypical dad. When I heard her fall, I knew something was wrong. Really wrong. She gave out a sickly wail, and adrenaline flooded my veins. Marie wasn't home. It was a Saturday and she had taken Piper to go shopping for a flower girl dress. They would be gone for the afternoon.

I ran into her room and all I could see was blood. It was everywhere. Abby was screaming and still clutching the scissors in her hand. I picked her up, and she threw her tiny arms around my neck, hollering in my ear. She was pleading for help.

But I could do nothing. I was afraid to leave the house. I didn't feel drunk, but I wasn't sure. I took her into the bathroom and sat her on the counter. I poured peroxide on the wound. The entire time Abby peered into my eyes, expecting me to fix everything. For a few minutes I wondered if I should call Marie and admit my failure or just wait until I was sure I could drive. I decided to wait. An hour later, I drove her to the emergency room.

The cut was so deep that the ER doctor called in a cosmetic surgeon. Abby screamed at him, and I was forced to hold her down as they injected her with the anes-

thetic. After fighting with her for twenty minutes, they eventually knocked her out.

I traced my fingers along the jagged contours of the white flesh.

“Daddy!” Abby yelped. “That’s my scar.”

“I know, sugarcakes,” I said calmly. “I was just looking at it.”

“It’s fine now.”

“I know.”

Baths finished. Snacks of mini Oreos. Another episode of PJ Masks. The pajama’d trio managed to save the day by ridding the museum of Night Ninja. The girls were calm for the first time all evening. Unfortunately for them, it was time for bed. Piper went down first, of course. Abby refused to go to bed before her kid sister.

I laid Abby down in her bed. She was getting too big for the privilege, but I figured I would endure it as long as my back could stand it. Abby nestled into her satin covered pillow, and as I was about to stand up, I felt the soft flesh of her arms around my neck, pulling me insistently toward her.

“I love you, Daddy,” she said.

The kid was always trying to break my heart.

“I love you, Abby,” I responded. A tear crept to the edge of my eyelid, but I willed it back in.

“Tell Doris goodnight for me?”

“I will. Goodnight, baby,” I said with a subtle crack in my voice.

I walked directly to the kitchen, swung open the fridge, and pulled open the crisper. If it was just one beer, what was the issue? I grabbed a bottle. With my fingers clenched around the cap, I stared intently at the amber, translucent glass and the promise of relief that lay within.

My fingers loosened their grip.

This was too hard for something that wasn’t supposed to be a problem. Maybe it was more than just a habit. Maybe I needed help.

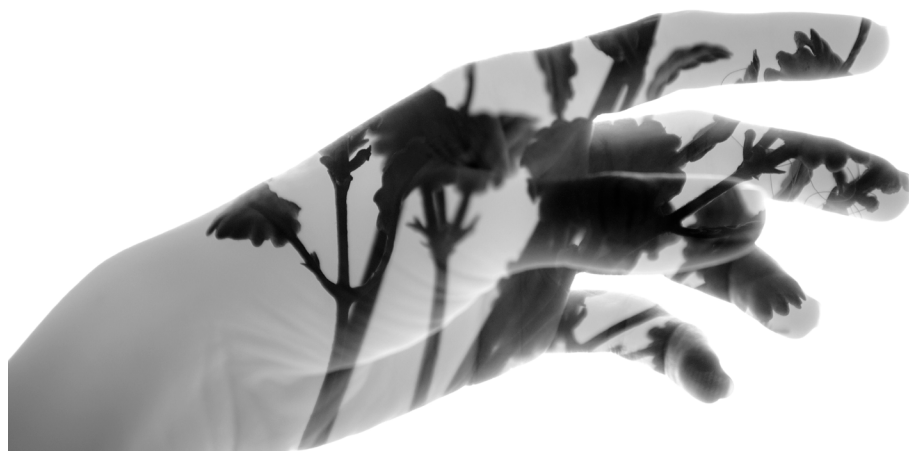
“Daaaadddyyy!” Piper called out. “I want a drink of water.”

I placed the bottle back. I shut the crisper and the fridge. I searched for a sippy cup.

“I’m coming, sweetheart.”

# Overlayed

BY KARYNA ASLANOVA



reach



all grabbing



cliff



# Birdsong

BY HAYDEN MOORE

‘The chorus points to a secret law’ (Wittgenstein on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s,  
Morphology)

Pidgin was a cat of great distinction within the teak walls of the grounded ship. His name possessed a duality in meaning and being. With the graceful gesture of a seven-year-old girl, the cat was named after it had appeared one cold morning without a sound. But the cat, as the girl stroked its matted striped fur, produced a kind of chortle, a bird-like call of satisfaction intertwined with desperation. “He sounds like a pigeon,” the little girl laughed to her father that morning. By late afternoon, after eating copious amounts of fish guts, the cat began to sing. The song of the feline seemed to originate from some primordial place, a realm before language, where the notes meant more than the content. The girl’s father smiled the smile of a man who never laughed anymore and told his daughter the cat was speaking pidgin. After a half-hour debate on the difference between the identical sounding names—the fundamental Truth: Words only had meaning in the stream of action and life—it was determined that the cat would be named ‘Pidgin/Pigeon.’ Of course, the case of whether the cat was Pidgin or Pigeon was solely determined by its mood at the moment: Either it was pleased, or it was singing for something more. Pidgin had a thousand and one dreams and they were all about fish.

The little girl was bound to the land by a washed up ship. Too young to swim beyond the ancient buoys and too old to pretend the ship she lived in with her father was at sea, the girl turned her attention upwards. Most days were spent looking at the various birds as they circled the shallow bay. It smelled of oysters in the morning and the sewer by noon. Fish no longer fascinated her, although they were a suitable

metaphor for the flight of the birds above. The slimy scales of the fish felt like death, while the birds sang with diverse skill in celebration of lofted life. The birds resembled automated toys whenever they walked on land. Imperceptible turns of their heads, preternatural hops, the hidden cogs within that turned their gears. It fascinated the her. To fly was to shake the yoke of inauspicious bindings from their world-weary flesh. Her father told her that Darwin would have agreed. As her father worked on the boat—the smell of gasoline and tobacco betraying his labors—the girl sat with Pigeon and watched the birds. The water was stagnant in the minds of both the girl and the feline, but for far different reasons. Such was the nature of a symbiotic relationship.

On a rainy morning in mid-August, a morning crowned by the absence of her sleeping father, the little girl sat with Pigeon on the poop of the boat. he cat watched the seagulls circle overhead. A family of swans, their spring-born children now tending towards white, drifted along the oyster-waters. A cormorant glided along the surface. Countless ducks were scattered across the water near the shore while nameless birds, ones her father had failed to identify, filled the interstices of avian recreations with names she called them only in her mind. No rain, gravity, or mishap could keep the birds from flying through the morning sky. The ducks and the swans were feathered symbols of potential energy. A few flaps of their wings would carry them away. Unlike the birds, flapping or chortling for the girl or the cat would not liberate them from the poop of the ship. Perhaps that was why the birds sang, the girl thought. They were free. They had choices. But every song of each species was distinct in its own right. Certainly, some birds sang more beautifully than others. The seagulls were hypnotizing on a cloudy morning, but annoying by the afternoon. Crows alarmed, while pigeons—actual birds—seemed like they had fallen on their heads at birth. Red-tailed hawks, as they flew above the pathways of their prey, cried out with regal power, signifying their place on the throne at the top of the food chain.

The little girl petted Pidgin. The cat chortled in agreement. She curled her toes and stood up for no particular reason. Looking down, she saw a nebulous collection of minnows feeding on the rocky shallows. A dark fish, only discernible by its tail, fed on the murky bottom. Only the lapping water and the broken songs of the birds intruded upon the aquatic meditations. The girl leaned over to watch. Pidgin began to sing behind her. The last thing she heard before her head struck a rock below was a rare ‘meow’ of concern from the cat. Then all was black and silent.

When she opened her eyes, her ears could feel the song of the sky. She blinked at the sun that had not yet reached its zenith. The imperceptible hairs within her ears were transmitting to one another at a pace as dizzying as the neurons in her brain. She slowly sat up and felt the weight of the world. But an overwhelming sense

of calm pervaded throughout her body and being. She closed her eyes and listened. Once, when her mother was still alive, the little girl remembered her mother taking her to see Beethoven. Beyond the thrill of watching her mother in her own element, the girl remembered the conductor standing upon a platform with his diminutive stick. With a stroke, the music came to life. He reminded her of what God must have been like before he left. Strings, horns, drums, whistling wind, and tinny sounds were melded into a magical harmony, a singular song from the Chaos of human noise. The hand holding the stick pointed to a secret law.

But now, she was the conductor. The sounds of Nature were melding into singularity. With her eyes closed, she groped around and found a broken piece of a fishing rod. The little girl stood up and steadied herself on the rock that had caught her. She opened her green eyes and lifted the stick into the air. She began to conduct. The wind and the birds followed the thrusts of the wand, the silent fish in the sea watched. From the poop of the broken boat, Pidgin provided the chorus. A ship drifting past sounded its horn in critical acclaim. Her father snored on in a dissonant melody in the bowels of the boat.

The clouds had parted and the magnificence of light pouring through them resembled a Renaissance painting where the gods, in their perfect forms as young Demi-gods, conducted the mortal creatures below. It was a song, telling the story of the world. The orchestra above and below the girl was now subject to an invisible choreographer. A flying and drifting dance accompanied the song, the players possessing the same consciousness as the dancers. Pidgin, the feline prima-donna, sat next to the little conductor, chortling and singing towards the sky. Cirrus clouds bent the light to their will, creating an overarching collection of prisms on the roof of the sky, the apotheosis of Tiffany glass on a temporal window sill.

The girl manipulated the flying things of the earth and the sky with seamless whips of her wand. In such a place as this, Time had come into space. What had been broken was brought together. What had been scattered was gathered. It sounded, smelled, and felt like harmony. Throughout her performance, the girl had to close her eyes to clear them of tears. The beauty was kaleidoscopic through the waters welling from within her. She knew that her mother would love this. Even if her mother was nothing but dust returning to dust, she had left an ineradicable mark. The little girl was herself and her mother and a little bit of her father at once. She was the birds, the silent fish, and her cat. All was one. But everything was distinct. It was a beautiful paradox. Songs and language were the articulation of Chaos. Memory was the record of the moments and the meaning. Time could never take that, even if nobody else was there.

As yet another overture ensued, Pidgin stopped singing and lowered his large yellow eyes. His head followed in kind as his rough tongue lapped up the girl's blood dripping on the rock beside him. The salty puddle nourished the cat as he prepared to rejoin the performance. The girl carried on. A collection of murmurations of intermingled species of birds formed nameless symbols. The secret unity of individuals becoming a single mind was glorified by the soft light of the afternoon. As a red-tailed hawk dove down, the little girl felt like she was floating. If she raised her bare heels from the rock, she would join her orchestra and dancers in the sky. It was not a weariness that was possessing her, but a liberation. Her soul was moved to such a degree it yearned to escape the confines of her body. In the past year, all the times she told her father she was happy had been a lie. Nothing hurt anymore, not even inside. This was what happiness felt like.

There were no bated breaths, no hesitations, nothing but the breath that followed. Maybe her mother felt like that now, the girl thought, as she whipped the rod through the woundless air. Infinity must be the simple passing of life in moments. The endlessness she had tried to imagine after her mother died was nothing but a dark linear labyrinth. The girl felt the sweat trickle down her neck and along her back. She smiled. As the singularity of birds thrust upwards along the invisible thermals of air, the little girl reached her left hand over her shoulder and scratched the tickling channel that ran down her back. Chills ran down her arms. The viscous liquid covered her hand in protest.

A gentle hum resonated throughout her body. The song had found its way within. The little girl froze. She blinked and the sight remained. Suddenly it was a song without sound, silence crying out for what was. The birds continued to fly but none of them sang. Pidgin continued to drink the precious drops on the rocks. The colors on the little girl's hand astounded her. They were reds without names, some tending towards onyx as the mineral appearance was exacerbated by the flesh and bones of her hand. The specks of flies around her looked like dark electrons, excited, as they flew to their iron-clotted deaths. The lightless blood that was previously coursing through her had now found its radiance. Gravity and the rock had incited a violent creation.

Pidgin continued lapping up the blood of his keeper. It was a beautiful indifference, the actualized proof that beauty was neither good nor bad. Beauty was beauty. The blood coursing down the little girl's back no longer tickled. It flowed according to the law of Chaos, a lawlessness justified in itself. She looked back to the sky where the birds were waiting for her directions. As the sun fell behind a swollen cloud, a spotlight fell upon the little girl. With a redefining grace, the art of the natural world reached its apogee. The performance was beyond its reaches: An interstellar song of the

universe confounding Time and space. Darkness intruded as the girl's eyes struggled to remain open. The water-glass of her Time continued to drip onto the stones. She could feel the audience standing up as the song was concluding. They would catch her when she fell.

Stars, stars, and everything else in the sky, was birdsong. She relinquished her hold on the earth, fell backwards, and was caught by the arms of the audience. Pidgin licked her face in joy, his coarse tongue relieving her skin of its exhaustion. The little girl looked into the sky and saw the sun surrounded by countless stars. Her performers murmured once more towards the heavens. The last thing she felt was Pidgin licking her ear canal. The last thing she saw were the birds descending towards her, a feathered shelter for the endless night.

# Neon Lights

BY NICOLE FANG



# Elegy No. 1

BY CLAIRE VERBECK

I used to mourn the tiny tragedies for themselves:  
a lost library card,  
pots of cilantro knocked broken by a storm.

Grief held easy through close inspection,  
a total world teeming with tiny losses.

But piled up  
(finding the body of Boots,  
the neighborhood stray, covered  
in fleas,

seeing Jeremy, who lived behind me,  
relapse again  
and again  
and again

answering to hear  
*Uncle Monte's gone*  
*crushed during a tractor repair*

and days later  
*your father's in a coma*  
*you might consider*

*coming home)*

it gets easy to cry  
over a lost favorite pen  
as if it were true love—

# A Recovering Anorexic's Guide to Grocery Shopping

BY MAIRE MCNAMARA

## **Before You Go:**

1. Make a list, if you don't make a list this is going to be a lot harder.
  - a. Here's part of my list, we will work with this:
    - Grapefruit (2)
    - Oranges
    - Almond Milk (Because I'm sort of vegan but not because of the eating disorder, I think)
    - Tofu
    - Cereal
    - Mini Carrot Cakes (Fear Food of the Week™)
    - Grapefruit Juice
    - Off Brand La Croix (I know they are zero calories, but I like them, so leave me alone.)
    - Pasta and Sauce
    - Fruit Snacks (yes, I'm 20 why do you ask?)
2. Try not to think about how many calories are in all the things on your list.
  - a. Step two is not going to work but you need to pretend that it does, or you will never get better. Recovery is scary but the eating disorder is worse.
3. Keep Going
4. If you can, go to the store with someone else, they will keep you rational.  
If you can't, that's okay you still need to go to the store. Headphones help.
5. Keep Going

## **At the Store:**

6. Be sure you get everything you need, that is not food first, that way you



have extra time to think about how many calories are going to be in the items on your list.

7. Stop thinking about calories.
8. Waste a little more time, maybe go look at the blenders, or maybe the vacuums. Pretty much anything works especially if you don't need it.
9. Keep Going

**Shopping for Food:**

10. When you finally do make it to the food, start with produce, since those are the easiest foods to get. They have the lowest calories, but you know that. Maybe building up to other things will get you ready for the higher calorie foods.
  - a. This step probably won't work.
  - b. This isn't going to be easy.
  - c. Sorry, I don't know what to tell you.
11. Try not to think about the things you got when you were sick, but when you inevitably do, don't think too hard. Remember that was a shitty time, even when your brain says it wasn't, that's a lie. Anorexia is no fun and you know it.
12. After you get the fruits and vegetables, it's time to move on to the rest of the food.
13. Now you're definitely going to need to have a brief (sometimes not so brief) panic in your aisle of choice (my latest one was the cereal aisle) and find a reason to freak out. For example, maybe you've had the same cereal for the last three weeks; we are supposed to be breaking food rules here not making new ones but the other cereals have too many calories, too much sugar, too much fat. Too little control. You can get creative with this step.
  - a. And you will.
  - b. I'm Sorry.
14. Keep Going.
15. Once you pick a cereal, or whatever food you freak out over this week, we can move on. That was the hardest part and it should all be up from here.
16. Continue shopping, even though there is a chance of another anxiety/panic attack, hopefully that won't happen. But usually it does.
17. At some point, probably when you have a lot of lower calorie things in your cart, you're going to start wondering if it looks like you have an eating disorder.

- a. This is weird because when you were starving that's all you wanted but now, you're terrified of people thinking that.
  - b. Is that progress or are you just overthinking it?
  - c. You're definitely overthinking it.
19. No one is going to look at your cart of fruit, almond milk, tofu and off-brand La Croix and think "Oh, she is definitely anorexic." And they definitely are not going to think "Wow, that's a lot of food, no wonder she/he/ they're so huge." They aren't going to notice. Your brain is just being mean.
20. *Keep Going*
21. Grabbing the Fear Food of the Week™ is going to be hard some (most) weeks. Other weeks just grabbing it will feel like a win, it just depends on the mood you are in. Grab it no matter what mood you are in. It is a win. Those mini Carrot Cakes are the key to getting better! God, I sound like one of those inspirational Pinterest quotes about how beautiful recovery is.
- a. Recovery isn't beautiful. It's hard and awful and shitty.
  - b. But eating disorders are worse. Eating disorders will kill you. Recovery just feels like it will.
  - c. Someday it will be worth it, but most days it won't feel like it.
  - d. Eventually, it will be worth it more often than it isn't.
  - e. Will it ever feel totally worth it?

**Checking Out:**

- 22. Walking to the cash register is going to be both relieving and scary all at once. No one cares what you have in your cart, I promise.
- 23. Go to self-checkout. It is much less stressful trust me. Self-checkout is the way to go.
- 24. Bagging the items will feel awesome; no one will see what you are going to eat.
  - a. What you need to eat.

**Going Home:**

- 25. Get to your car quickly and load your groceries. Scream in the car for a while before driving home. That's what I do and it seems to help.
- 26. Drive home, unpack your groceries, and try not to think about them until mealtime.

**Until it Gets Easier:**

- 27. Mealtime, when you actually have to eat what you've just bought and it is

always the hardest step of all. You already know that.

a. So keep going.

28. I promise, it will get easier. Just go again next week and the week after that. Just keep going.

# A Girl from Kitale

BY THOMAS MAMPALAM

She was born in Kitale,  
in the northern rift valley.  
After school, she ran carefree  
along red clay roads and maize fields.

I met her on a cancer ward  
during a summer rotation.  
For minutes, I was muted by her beauty.  
I glanced at her as I read a medical chart.

Then, I blurted: "Where are you from?"  
She smiled knowingly and told me  
that she was born in Kitale.  
Her eyes sparkled like volcanic glass.

If she had been born in a northern country  
her face would cover fashion magazines.  
She was a solitary paradise flower  
growing straight above the weeds.

This beautiful girl, born in Kitale,  
placed intravenous lines in sclerosed veins  
of dying patients on chemotherapy  
then cleaned up their blood and vomit.

I wanted to shelter her far away,  
to dress her in silks and pearls,  
to ensconce her in a mansion with  
flower gardens and a view of a great city.

Forty years later, our son has her length,  
our daughters, her sloe eyes and raven tresses.

The large house echoes like a chamber  
until the grandchildren visit.

I hear my wife's light steps in the kitchen.  
She has gathered herbs from the garden.  
Last autumn, we bought two plots  
on a hill of the local cemetery.

There is a view of the bay and the city.  
We will lie side by side forever where  
on the marble stones, the children can  
place flowers that the deer may eat.

The children may gather in memory  
of their mother, who was born in Kitale,  
and their father, who loved her since  
that first glance in the cancer ward.

# [one foot free, one foot caught]

BY JOHN SWEET

a blind man painting  
the face of god

a fist

flesh and bone and  
bottomless blue sky, and  
what exactly are we getting at here?

sex and depression,  
probably,  
and sometimes together

sometimes the wrong pills  
a song on the radio carrying  
too much weight

we are always fucking  
the wrong ghosts

i am never sorry enough  
for the pain i cause

it always arrives with  
the promise of more

# The Game You Lose Just by Playing

BY BRANDON MARLON

You're prompted to write of it for the first time, perhaps, at least subconsciously, when a commercial for Bell Media's *Let's Talk Day* airs on television. Good for them, you think to yourself, publicly addressing mental health issues and combating the stigma on behalf of all those who struggle privately, leading quiet lives of despair.

Naturally, you comfort (read: protect) yourself by telling yourself your own case is "mild," restricted to excessive hand washing and sanitizing. But even the most pronounced neurosis falls short of psychosis; the neurotic remain sane, alas, their self-delusions translucent.

On reflection, you readily identify the tenacious tendrils and tentacles of this condition, the grip of an authoritarian regime. Its specious dictates determine what clothes you wear (quodidian and dispensable, unlike those carefully preserved in the closet); how you get dressed (pant legs on the bed, lest the legs touch the floor); how often you do laundry (when enough articles become "contaminated," though not yet dirty); when you shower, and how you go about it (methodically, best believe); what you touch, and especially what you avoid touching; and the sequence in which you do things (dealing with "pure" things first, then "contaminated," never the reverse).

In the light of hindsight, maybe your own case is not in fact mild but moderate. But this self-diagnosis does not withstand scrutiny: Contemplating the litany of your routine, you notice that it hardly seems moderate at all. What's so moderate about functioning on a daily, hourly, basis according to illusive premises? What's moderate about making obeisance before the altar of inanity seen as such? In a moment of epiphany, you realize that you have been downplaying the severity of your obsessive-compulsive disorder for a very understandable reason—you've become an expert at winning the game, to the extent that you hardly realize how immersed in it you remain. But you are honest and know better. You recognize that, in this instance,

winning is losing. You know in your heart of hearts that OCD is the game you lose just by playing.

Ironically, *real* grime or slime or dirt does not unnerve you at all. You take out the garbage without hesitation. Bodily secretions and emissions pose no problem. You like getting your hands filthy in garden soil or in the kitchen when baking. It's only imaginary "contamination" that afflicts your otherwise healthy and active psyche, paralyzing you—literally, for what seems like lengthy periods—where you stand as you retrace through your memory the precise history of what you or the physical object in question came into contact with, categorizing the "contamination" according to degrees. If you are compromised, so to speak, you cleanse your hands or body; if something you privilege has been compromised, responses range from using a (preferably lemon-scented) Lysol anti-bacterial wipe (not that *actual* bacteria or germs or viruses disturb you more than the average person) to throwing the object out, no matter how valuable it might be to you in terms of personal connection or cost.

Something like a dozen times a day, every day, you ritually purify your hands (sacred sauce of choice: the big boy, PC Hand Sanitizer with Aloe Vera; 970 mL; medicinal ingredient Ethyl Alcohol, 62%) not because they are at all dirty, but because this allows you to then touch something you consider "pure" and warranting your own purification, at least as far as hands go. The fact that, owing to your exertions, your hands appear red and rough and raw disheartens you, though not enough to refrain and go easier on yourself. (When once a cognitive-behavioral therapist required you to throw out a large sanitizer bottle, and she later asked, "And...?", you replied, "And... you owe me five dollars." She laughed; you did not laugh, and continue to await long overdue compensation.)

To be perfectly clear, it isn't that a few certain things are "contaminated" and it's just a matter of successfully evading them. Oh no, on the contrary: Virtually everything is "contaminated" save the precious few things you deem "pure" and take special care to preserve discretely, squirreled away in most cases in a bag or box inside your bedroom closet. You yourself are normally "impure," so you feel it necessary to prepare yourself with due diligence before coming into direct contact with your prized possessions.

As far as you know, the anxiety disorder stems from a chemical imbalance in the brain, specifically involving serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. If their levels are out of whack, to use the technical-scientific term, too high or too low, whatever, then your moods go haywire and strange behaviors ensue as a result, possibly in an attempt to compensate. Maybe when you can't control important things, you try to make up for it by hyper-controlling unimportant things.



From what you understand, a person has to have a genetic predisposition to OCD, perhaps something that runs in the family (quite so, in your case), as well as a particular trigger to set it off. Your own trigger was when you were 12, and the notorious termagant in synagogue grabbed you by the sweater and shook you against the pointed bulbs of solemn memorial lights protruding from a wall in the upstairs lobby. She didn't hurt you, but shocked you, and the trauma of abrupt assault by an adult (who claimed as she rushed out of the cloakroom that she had heard you mutter something disrespectful, though you denied it then and still don't remember if you or one of your lobby-loitering chums ever said anything) became, in a sensitive boy, a lasting burden.

Oddly enough, when you were 16 you acknowledged the power of forgiveness and unilaterally pardoned the harridan. You decided that four years of hyper-OCD had taken its toll and enough was enough. You quit cold turkey, and it worked. And how did you do it? You asked yourself what was the most "pure" thing you owned (at the time, your new Rollerblades), and what you considered the most "contaminated" (anything that had come into contact with the perpetrator, whether by first or second degrees). Then you forced yourself to touch these things in the "wrong" order, and you rode out the anxiety spike until it dissipated. You did this deliberately again and again and again until the anxiety diminished in intensity and duration and the fictive distinction between "pure" and "impure" had collapsed beneath the unbearable heft of truth. Employing what you later learned cognitive-behavioral therapists called "exposure-response therapy," you freed yourself.

Twelve full years passed, during which time you were whole. And you sincerely suspect that *wholeness* is the real value of psychological freedom and the real cost of the OCD regime. Even if you function highly under its tyranny, you only ever have access to what feels like 75 percent of your true mental powers, whether recollection, concentration, cerebration, imagination, or introspection. OCD obstructs or redirects your synapses, depriving you of cognitive regions you could otherwise readily access. You are not fully you. You are not fully in control. Something else is at work behind the scenes, invisible to most, as insidious as parasite to host.

And strident as well. When the OCD recurred all those years later, it returned with a vengeance, as if it resented your blatant apathy to what you touched and avoided, what you allowed to intermingle freely without restriction or repercussion. According to OCD dictates, you're either diligent or negligent. Your *laissez-faire* life was an affront to its rigorous distinctions and differentiations, which you abjured with abandon.

It begrudged your wholeness.

Others might wonder how you could still suffer from a condition you had once overthrown decisively, a charlatan disorder that ironically made you more orderly than others by several orders of magnitude. (When it comes to cleaning or organizing, OCD is a <sup>\*</sup>^%#@\$@! superpower so step aside, civilian bystanders!) Having ousted the despot, a mountebank hawking bogus wares, you may well marvel at its resurgence. How was it able to overcome your defenses and whelm you anew? OCD is clever; it waited patiently on the sidelines then used a bout of depression as its re-entry ticket to usurp your headspace and reclaim the helm. And you've allowed its grip to resume its former tautness, even though you see plainly that this emperor has no clothes, because you dread the intense spike in anxiety that threatens your every move.

Just get it over with, you rationalize, as if rationality is genuinely a factor in such calculus.

Actually, one of the things that makes OCD so potent is that it definitely possesses its own internal logic, which makes perfect sense within the confines of the game it forces you to play. OCD's rules are few and clear. You master the rules, you begin to win, and the more you win the more the game self-perpetuates because, sad to say, this may be the only thing you win at at any given point in your life (recall the note on depression previously mentioned). We all crave success in life, and we take it wherever we get it. For the obsessive-compulsive, apparently, fictional success trumps no success at all.

Which point brings me back to the concept of losing-by-playing, and of prolonging your losing streak by prolonging your participation in the game. It is not quite true to protest that you play involuntarily; you intentionally and voluntarily—voluntarily at least to a degree, in the big picture—choose what feels like the lesser of evils. You agree to reorient your entire routine, recalibrate your daily regimen, and even play the gawky fool to escape anxiety's sharp pangs. In those moments that last surprisingly briefly, minutes at most, sometimes seconds, moments that nonetheless feel like elongated hours of panic and doom, hope is bound and gagged and the imp of the mind, sinister impostor, misleads you into believing all is lost.

But you are fundamentally reasonable and logical (and hopeful), knowing better. Hope may be hostage for a season to depression and anxiety (dastardly duo) but hope is the notional equivalent of breath. It cannot be held in forever.

So from time to time you muster the willpower to fight back against your own semi-pirated mind, resisting or flouting your own pseudo-thoughts, sheepishly making excuses about being too fatigued to succumb to the requisite stringencies. You pretend you're more "pure" than you seem and feel just at the moment, that one thing did not actually touch the other (close call, though! Phew!), that you're dispassionately

indifferent to supposed “contamination” (oh dear, did I unthinkingly condone a breach in purity’s sacrosanct realm? Damn shame...), that what the hell difference does any of it make anyway. You remember the resolve you showed once before and trust that the very same resolve, even if dormant, is yet latent, and may be manifested even now, decades later.

You would say to other sufferers, if you could, what you regularly remind yourself of:

You’re not a helpless victim, your strength abides within;

Overcompensation only postpones redemption;

OCD may have its say, but you alone have final say (and it bloody well knows it);

Ignore the imp of the mind. Instead, trust the testimony of your senses;

Neuroplasticity is real, so believe in your ability to organically rewire your brain;

When the anxiety peaks, breathe deeply and calm your mind with the mantra “false alarm;”

Above all: Thoughts are not facts, so don’t believe everything you think.

# Grandma Said Wash Your Hands

BY ZOLTAN KEGYES



# Tired

BY SOPHIE LAING

ask me what it feels like,  
and I'll show you the dance of my body  
as it clicks, clicks, clicks into place.  
like a wind-up doll,  
there isn't any way I can move, unless I've been pushed there.

I feel like this:

every muscle frozen all of a sudden,  
a domino effect up my spine as my mind itself curls into the fetal position  
and blinders snap around my eyes.

I try to drink water, but it evaporates once it hits my tongue.

I feel everything I touch either crumble,

or

I feel unable to grasp the concrete world around me.

I'm not calm enough to go on a run to calm me down.

you can't move like that when your knees are hugging into your chest.

all I can think about during these times is,

how many hours are left before I can sleep?

# Fear of Missing Out (3)

BY J. V. DAVIS

In high school, she was bookish and demure  
a wardrobe of muted colors, a sparse vanity  
just a dusty mirror and some dark eye makeup  
Gentle, compulsive tugs at her shirt sleeves  
she brought them just past her palms, to hide  
scars on her wrists  
muffled screams we all heard but talked over

Then, dispatches from a seedy basement  
scattered glassware and thrift store couches  
Her slender frame blankets some burnout's lap  
hoodie sleeves slid up past her fingertips  
now hiding track marks, fresh scabs, and new skin

In her profile, she stared into the lens  
an expressionless gaze  
now she lingers forever in monochrome

[I remember that bonfire party  
just after our sophomore year  
when my car's transmission went out  
you lent me your phone  
when no one else could be bothered  
to look up from their cups.

I could have done the same for you.

We were all willing bystanders  
to the evolution of an addict  
and yet nothing moved us.

I first saw the news  
on your relative's wall  
a link to a carefully redacted online memorial  
a public procession of cheap regret  
born of private voyeuristic unconcern.]

# Care Packages

BY CHARLES DUFFIE

*Ecstatic faces, tilted hallway, backyard paved with beer cans, founder's statue, crescent moon, keys jangling, digital scale, voices rhyming "-itch" words: ditch, switch...*

Julia woke on her side, staring at a dark PO box. The keyhole widened like a crack in the world, and she fell through.

*"This has your name on it," Sam said.*

*Julia took the plastic cup and sipped. Ginger ale.*

*The living room throbbed with music and bodies. Larry's hands clamped her hips, pulling back, grinding. She smiled over her shoulder ("defuse aggressive behavior") pushed his hands off ("set clear boundaries"), and danced into the crowd. Strangers scanned her body as if she wore barcodes...*

Julia woke again, curled on the cold tile. Bright windows threw salt in her eyes. She sat up and stared at the wall of PO Boxes. She was in the campus post office where her parents sent their budget care packages: thrift store sweaters, leftover Starbucks cards, mom's taffy twisted in wax paper, dad's origami animals with notes inside she no longer read because they were variations on a theme (love), and when she unfolded and refolded the cranes and rabbits they were never the same: Fine edges blurred, perfect corners bent.

The wall clock read 6:24 A.M. She choked on a rush of bile. Holding her stomach, she faced the empty post office. She couldn't remember how she got here.

*"Dance?" Bobby. Those glasses, like Clark Kent's anemic little brother.*

*Julia handed her cup to Ting and danced.*

*Larry cut in. She kept dancing for a few seconds then casually rolled out of reach. From the stairs, she surveyed the snake pit. Music thrumming, arms punching, eyes rolling, bodies laid out like corpses on sofas. A pug puppy crouched under a corner table, watching like a scared alien. In the kitchen, Julia dodged kegs and punch bowls, found an open can of ginger ale, danced back toward the*



*dog. Someone flecked the word “bitch” at her back. She danced harder. Jostled. Pressed. Felt nauseous. Faces bobbed. Hallways tilted...*

Julia leaned back against the PO boxes. She remembered falling. Hands under her arms. Around her back. On her hips. Steering her outside.

Oh God. She felt under her dress. She would know if—she’d feel it. Nothing had happened. It was just a medieval hazing ritual. Spike a freshman’s drink and leave her in a public place. She was sure nothing else had happened. Please God. She had to go to campus security. But she couldn’t prove it was Larry. Couldn’t prove anything. No, go to the hospital first. Get a blood test. Identify the chemical he, they, someone, anyone—

*Ditch, switch, glitch...*

She pulled her hands through her hair, a calming habit since junior high—her fingers froze on her bare neck.

Her long red hair was gone, shorn away in crooked lines.

Terror shoved her to her feet. She spun expecting hands with scissors, but the room was empty. PO Boxes and mail slots and do-it-yourself stations. Clutching her neck, she stepped trembling to a digital postage meter on the counter. This was where she weighed her own care packages: 5 ounces for a yard sale scarf, 8 ounces for a stone painted for mom’s garden, 3 pounds 2 ounces for a ream of discarded dot matrix paper dad cut into perfect squares and sent back as swans and dragons.

Her red hair lay in piles on the silver tray. The digital scale read 11 ounces.

Julia stared at the spirals. Something turned inside her. She looked around the empty post office, walked to the stucco wall, and pulled the fire alarm.

# Anais

BY DOMINIQUE DÈVE



# Housekeeping

BY STACIA O'CONNELL

We'll put dishes in the cupboard  
to the left of the sink and then move them again,  
closer to the stove, after first breakfast fumbles,  
reach overs and stepping across the dog as she  
inspects microscopic flecks of meds  
in her morning bowl; scribble parallel work schedules  
on the calendar, arranging our days like furniture.  
The walk-in closet appears huge until it's not, a glut  
of bags, boxes, and empty hangers. We'll find  
a spot on the wall for the clock and my attempts  
at artwork, mingled with a few fortuitous acquisitions.  
At night, I'll soak in the bathtub, cataloging bruises  
and scrapes accrued from door jamb miscalculations  
and coffee table kisses. Bananas will ripen  
on the counter, the dog will nap on the rag rug  
in the entry way, and our mail will be forwarded  
from our old lives. Photos will appear, yours and mine,  
and after a while they will merge  
as if our whole lives have been this,  
as we are now.

# The Gift

BY DAVID ROGERS

I'd been told the place was only three-quarters of an acre, but when I got there, it felt a lot bigger. Weeds and tall grass grew around abandoned cars, a couple of rusty trucks, and arcane, old-fashioned farming equipment. A small barn, its door partly unhinged, held several ancient bicycles and lawnmowers, the kind you pushed. A wire fence in disrepair surrounded what I could see.

No telling how long I might have stood there gazing around, but Fred said, "Let's get moving. We haven't got forever, you know."

I was momentarily overcome by a powerful sense of *deja vu*. It passed. "You may be right," I said.

I knocked at the door of the house. Twigs and old leaves covered the crooked steps and porch. My knuckles came away crusted with chalky white paint flakes.

The door opened a crack. Surprised, I realized I'd expected no one to be home.

"You must have nowhere else to go, or you wouldn't be here," she croaked.

I wanted to disagree, but what the old woman said was too close to the truth for comfort. I don't like to lie. Call my tendency to tell the truth a character flaw. One of many.

"I suppose you may as well come in." She opened the door wider and stepped back at a glacial pace, leaning heavily on her cane. It looked like it might have been cut from one of the many trees around the house.

"Thank you, Aunt Ellen," I said, stepping inside. The house was dark. Thick curtains hung over windows. Given the smell, I was glad it was dark. Seeing would not make anything better.

"Just 'Ellen' will do," she said. Okay by me. She was some sort of second cousin on my late father's side by marriage. We were not blood relatives.

Outside, the afternoon heat was oppressive. Here in the dark, it was cooler.

She brought water from the kitchen, a glass for me and one for herself. The glasses had probably seen things I didn't want to think about, but the water was cold. No chlorine taste. Well water, I guessed.

She pushed a stack of ancient newspapers off the couch and said, "Sit." I sat. She eased herself into the only other chair in the room, a recliner half-buried in pillows and blankets. I wondered if she slept there.

"I know what you're looking for," Ellen said. "You won't find it. Will sold it years ago. Or gave it away." She took a drink. "At least, I hope he gave it away. I told him it's bad luck to sell a thing like that."

I thought of the barn, the rusting cars and trucks and farm machines, the many hiding places the tall grass must conceal. We would see what could be found. Oh, yes, we would see if Uncle Will had sold it or given it away or hidden it for someone to find. Someone determined, like me. But I kept my thoughts to myself.

When I did not speak, Aunt Ellen said, "You don't remember, do you? Very well, then. You're like your father, too stubborn to learn from your mistakes."

I took another drink. The water was really good.

###

I slept in the barn that night. A few bales of hay in the modest-sized loft made a decent bed. Any animals the hay had been intended to feed were as gone as Uncle Will.

Ellen had offered to let me sleep on the couch, but the thought of what else might be sleeping under it or in it made the barn far more attractive. And I could get started early on the search without Ellen's noticing, I hoped.

The next morning, I took Fred out of my bag.

"Well, Freddie, where should we start?" I asked. Fred is a plastic skull I've had since my first (and only) year of medical school. He usually just grins as if he knows a secret and says nothing, but this time he spoke.

"Just stay quiet and as far away from the house as you can," he said. "Ellen sees more than she lets on, despite those thick glasses. Maybe because of them."

Fred is usually right about these things, so I started in the obvious places. Toolboxes in the barn, shelves covered with tractor parts, stacks of old tires. I dismantled bales of hay and looked under loose floorboards, found nothing but spiders and a disgruntled pair of snakes, and moved on to the old cars and trucks. I got a crowbar from the barn and pried open doors that were either locked or rusted shut. All to no avail.

I was dusty and sweaty. Despite the season, oppressive heat radiated from the sky. Leaves and twigs and hay stuck to my arms and face. My shirt dripped with sweat.

The smell of mold and decaying wood drifted from the trees.

Finally, Fred said, “You realize you’re overlooking the obvious, don’t you?” He twitched one eyebrow. I had drawn the eyebrows on myself. I thought it made his face more expressive. He was looking up at the giant, ancient oak that spread its shadow over the house. “You may be afraid of heights, but we’re still going to have to climb that tree. You don’t want to come all this way for nothing, do you?”

It was easily the biggest tree I had ever seen, a live oak that must have been hundreds of years old. It made the other trees around the house and in the woods look like saplings. Long, massive branches, thicker than my waist, spread from the trunk and drooped near the ground. I sighed. Fred was right, as usual. I stepped up onto one of the branches and made my way toward the trunk.

At least it was easy to climb. The branches were spaced closely in places, some rising at shallow enough angles that I could easily move along them to the next step upward. I tried not to look down, but soon I was high enough that the ground was no longer visible.

One of the branches near what must have been the center of the tree had an odd, knotty growth. I scooted toward it and saw it was not a growth at all, but an iron doorknob. At least, it felt like iron, cold and worn smooth, as if opened by many hands. I turned it. The door in the trunk opened with a click. You would not have noticed a door unless you first came upon the knob and turned it, so seamlessly was the edge of the door woven into the grain of the rough bark.

I stepped through. It was mostly like what you would expect the inside of a tree to be like. Dark. Stuffy. That old wood smell. While I looked around, seeing nothing as my eyes tried to adjust to the darkness, the door clicked shut behind me.

Fred is a glow-in-the-dark skull. Otherwise, the darkness was complete. “That was unexpected,” he said. “I hope we’re not locked in.”

“You’ve got nothing to worry about,” I said. “You’re already dead. Or more precisely, you were never alive.”

“Doesn’t mean I want to spend eternity locked in a tree.”

“Relax. The door wasn’t locked.” I held Fred up to light as much of the space as possible. The little round room was about six feet wide. A wooden box sat on a small table in front of me. I sat Fred beside the box and opened it. Unlike the door, which opened silently, the hinges on the box creaked.

Inside was the thing I had been looking for. The clock. And a letter, a single page, handwritten, front and back. I turned it over. It was signed, *Uncle Will*. Beneath the signature, underlined, was a PS, a single sentence: *Whatever you do, don’t turn the key!*

I put the letter back in the box with the clock, closed the lid, put Fred on top

of it, and turned to the door. It opened easily, of course.

Back on the ground, I opened the box again and read the whole letter:

“Dear Ferdinand,

“I know you will not stop looking for this until you find it. If I were a stronger person, I would destroy it. Few can resist such temptations. But you must know what choice you face. Once you have turned the key and the clock begins to tick, you have only the time until it winds down to give it away. You cannot sell it. If you try, it will be yours forever. But it will grow vengeful if you try to exchange it for money or gain. It will wreak its vengeance as long as it chooses. You may try to keep it forever, and it will resent that most of all.

“The clock is a time machine. When the machine is wound, each click of the key opens a door to the past. You will think you can carry your knowledge of the future into the past, win the lottery, make millions in the stock market, or bet on the World Series and Super Bowl.

“Trust me, things will never work out as you imagine. Time is an intricate web, far too complex for the human mind to comprehend or manipulate. Time is a river, not a rocky cliff that remains the same when you climb up and down. You can row upstream a little way, but you cannot change the flow of the river. You cannot calculate the path of the million molecules of water you displace with each stroke of the oar.

“I implore you to be stronger than me. Destroy the machine before it is too late. Whatever you do, do not wind the clock. You will wish you had never seen the machine. You will curse my memory, but before you do, remember that you were warned.”

Under the signature was the ominous postscript I had noted earlier.

I smiled. Uncle Will had always been superstitious. The clock was only a valuable old artifact. But it would be worth more if it were in working order. I turned the key.

The hands began to move. I had an overwhelming sense of *deja vu*. It washed over me in a flood. I had done this all before. A dozen times. No, it seemed like more. A hundred, a thousand times? Then the memory was gone. It left only a vague sense of something forgotten, something lost, a sight or sound just out of reach of the senses. A bird calling from so deep in the woods you wonder if you imagined it.

*Tick-tock*, said the clock.

###

I'd been told the place was only three-quarters of an acre, but when I got there, it felt a lot bigger. Weeds and tall grass grew around abandoned cars, a couple of rusty trucks, and arcane, old-fashioned farming equipment. A small barn, its door

partly unhinged, held several ancient bicycles and lawnmowers, the kind you pushed, that never had an engine. A wire fence in disrepair surrounded what I could see.

No telling how long I might have stood there gazing around, but Fred said, “Let’s get moving. We haven’t got forever, you know.”

I was momentarily overcome by a powerful sense of *deja vu*. It passed. “You may be right,” I said.

I knocked at the door of the house.



# Waiting Room, Revisited

BY NICK PECUCCI

*don't let the spotlight get to you  
or get through you...*

—banter heard between songs

-----

as i walk through the room's  
transparent doors the receptionist tells me:  
*please wait*  
and so i wait  
i sit in a soft chair like the statue of lincoln  
just as still &  
just as numb  
the ice cubes are shaped like doorknobs  
they melt like dreams in the water  
i wait for something to happen  
behind me two voices  
discuss a cavalcade of police cars  
on the streets below  
and then as if conjured  
two policemen appear in the waiting room  
one of them looks at me  
i see nothing in his eyes &  
i see nothing in his bulletproof  
vest  
soon they exit through a door  
and i no longer hear voices  
behind me  
but an airplane passes  
above me  
silent through the soundproof  
windows

and still i wait for something to happen  
finally a figure  
appears in the door  
outlined in the thick glass  
and at first i tense  
because the figure seems to be  
coming towards me  
but it is not  
it merely moves from side to side to side to side  
its outline inflating and deflating  
and then my therapist enters the waiting room  
from the wrong door  
or at least not the one i was expecting  
and says:  
*sorry about the wait*  
and i pretend not to recognize them.

# build castles in the air

BY JADA FABRIZIO



as long as i have you



## the commuter



chicken and egg





golden hour

# A Holy Encounter at St. Anthony's

BY KATHLEEN MCGUIRE

I thought I could smell the blue of the sky outside the hospital. It's clean out here, different from tropical blues. Those smell like denim left out in the afternoon sun and geraniums sweating and humid. This crystal blue smells almost like nothing. The white of St. Anthony's smells clean too, but antiseptic and thinly covering the smell of pain and humanity.

Hospitals make these feeble attempts to dress up the whiteness. There are always plastic house plants and fake flowers resting on the side tables that soldier the waiting room. If they were real, pulsating with chloroform, it might make us patients feel closer to life than to death. Our scales need all the life they can get to balance back the weight of mortality.

The waiting room. A room for waiting on news, on fate. We sit in pastel chairs before the great white unknown, where x-ray machines and doctors roll their heavy dice. Sometimes there are "inspirational" photographs of the moon in the forest or framed quotes by Lord Byron hanging on the walls. They don't inspire me as I look down the blank hall into the fluorescent face of *what if?*

The nurses wear red scrubs. They look like drops of blood running around the office. "Kathleen?" somebody asks. That's me, but it sounds so removed from the little me in my chest that I take my time to answer. "Yes, right here." I kind of wave to one of the blood droplets. Her face takes on detail as I walk closer. She is middle-aged and scrappy like a terrier.

"Hi sweetheart!" She scans my face for the answer to the question I can feel she must be thinking. *Why is she here? She's too young. She can't have it yet.* I don't have *it*, for goodness sake. I just have this mass of tissue like a tiny island in the deep blue of my right breast. "Follow me this way please." All nurses use the same language, the sugar-coated tongue of delivering bad news with a smile. "What's your date of birth?"

She seats me in another holding cell with two chairs and a big computer. I tell her. She writes something down on the clipboard in her arms. The flower of needing to fill the silence grows in me. “You know, I’m just doing what the doctor says, better safe than sorry, right?” (My tone is like a standup comedian trying to validate a bad joke.) I always use this line. It’s my defense, my cheerful mantra, like this whole thing’s a hilarious inside joke between me and my breast. The first nurse leaves the room and I’m passed like a baton into the ready grip of a new nurse.

“Hi hunny. I’m just gonna go over some paperwork with you and get your John Hancock on some goodies. Gee isn’t it early?”

“Yes, I need more coffee,” I joke.

Coffee jokes are always a good idea with people in the medical profession. I like her. She’s kind of like a wise mountain with rivulets of experience running all over her face. She hands me a stack of pages to read and sign. She confirms my birthday, asks about my medical history and my religious orientation. I didn’t know they asked about religion. I tell her I’m Christian. The word feels funny coming out of my mouth, like I used to know it but I’m out of practice saying it. She only nods, expressionless. This room also has inspirational art on the walls. Two young girls smile from the frame on her big desk. These must be her girls.

There are Bible verses and spiritual poems taped to her desk like reminders of the other world. In a sense, this clinic is a portal between worlds where futures are determined and next life considered. I shiver. The white feels cold against my body. It feels like I crawled into a white tomb and won’t come out. That’s just my death anxiety speaking. She’s been inside me a long time. It’s a shouting match between the little Kathleen in my chest that has the truth and the anxiety that has the lie. They’ve fought for twenty-three years, they might fight for twenty-three more. . .if I make it that long. *Oh shut up, death anxiety.*

“Everything okay, sweetie? I thought I felt something.” How could she feel something. That sounds so psychic. Can she hear the fight inside me? The white walls close in on me, chasing me further up in this tomb. I’m silent for a few minutes as she finishes the paperwork. She turns to me. We are almost knee to knee. I’m touched by the blood.

“I’d like to offer you a prayer. It’s just something I do,” she says.

“Sure. Why not?”

My insides melt. Nobody has ever interceded for me in the vacuous tube of the hospital. She grabs my hand and presses it. I don’t even know what she prayed. There were sounds, angelic gasps and tumults. I went out of my head, my body, even myself for a moment. She is finished.



“Thanks. It means a lot,” I say and I feel the familiar tug of tears at the corners of my eyes.

“Oh, sweetheart.” She drops my hand and pulls me into her chest. “May I anoint you?” The question lingers and I’m pelted with catatonic mental imagery. Snake charmers in a Pentecostal church, someone slain in the spirit writhing like a worm, the pop of being struck on the forehead, the purging of darkness, the bloodletting of light.

“Go for it. I’ll take all I can get,” I laugh. The fight inside me falters as if what is about to come upon me is far beyond the well-drawn lines of fear and trust, life and death.

My knees prickle against my jeans. I didn’t shave today and the hairs grow up like weeds in goose-bumped anticipation. She turns to a filing cabinet behind her desk and takes out a vial full of honey-colored oil. “It’s frankincense.” And this all seems fake, like a fable. “Let me drop some on your wrist.” It’s warm and smells like the fire-burning stars of Bethlehem. She anoints my forehead and I’m drawn back into time. A baby wails in the night, a voice moans in the garden, an angel falls. I close my eyes. She speaks a blessing over me.

She puts the oil back in the cabinet. She makes a cross over my head and says, “God be with you. My name is Katherine.” I feel like there is a change in me, some gained ground in war. She takes my hand and leads me into the hallway that smells of whiteness. I fall in line behind other women heading to the machines that reveal our fates.

*God be with us.*

# Exit Visa

BY ALFRED SEARLS

“I’m sorry, Mr. Sinnerland, but your death certificate cannot be approved at this time,” purrs the voice.

Newt Sinnerland runs a bony hand through his thin grey hair, sighing heavily when the feeding tube snags on his liver spotted earlobe.

“Check again, will you? I failed my medical examination only this morning. It might not have uploaded yet.”

“Please, have no fears in that respect, Mr. Sinnerland; your hospital records are completely up to date and absolutely one hundred percent in order,” says the distinctly female voice, gushing with admiration for an administrative task well done.

“Well, what the hell’s the problem, then?”

“I’m afraid you simply don’t have sufficient funds to pay for an Exit Visa. And without an Exit Visa, your death simply cannot be approved at this time.”

“That’s just nonsense; I’m fully insured. Goddammit, I’ve been paying in for years!”

The eerily faultless face, hovering in his eye line above the foot of his bed, smiles its silken, synthetic smile.

“And so you are sir, and on behalf of State Insurance, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your years of loyal patronage.”

“Loyal patronage? You bastards deducted it from my salary whether I liked it or not!”

“That’s the law, sir,” says the insurance sprite, its expression suddenly prim and its tone smug.

“Look, forget that,” says Sinnerland hastily. “I’m not questioning collective policy, I’m really not, but I’ve paid in full every month... I have.”

“Indeed you have sir, and on behalf of State Insurance, I’d like to take this...”

“Stop that!”

Sinnerland instantly regrets the outburst, as he collapses back onto the bed and gasps for air.

“Are you alright, Mr. Sinnerland? Would you like me to call a member of the medical staff?” The voice speaks in an exaggerated tone of concern.

“No...no, I’m alright...don’t call anyone.”

He pulls the oxygen mask hanging around his neck up to his mouth.

“Just...tell me why...you won’t let me...die” he gasps between deep, laboured breaths.

“Unfortunately your insurance policy doesn’t cover death by natural causes; just major trauma and those diseases for which treatment would be prohibitively expensive. The Crosland Act now specifically forbids the granting of a free Exit Visa to any citizen who is deemed economically productive.”

It takes a few seconds for Sinnerland to process this news. Slowly, in a distant part of his mind, vague memories of half watched news reports mist into view.

“The Crosland Act?” he croaks feebly.

The image at the foot of the bed flutters for a fraction of a second as the pretty female icon is joined by a suited middle aged man, standing at a podium and gazing out at an unseen audience. She turns to gaze admiringly at the Commissioner for Mass Extension.

“The world today faces an unprecedented set of economic and social challenges. As we all know, science has steadily eliminated most of the diseases that blighted our ancestors, and for the first time in human history, most of us can now look forward to living well into our second century.”

However, we have not yet cured the frailties of old age and so now we are faced with the problem of how we are to cope with this unprecedented event of mass extension.”

“Ah shit,” Newt whispers weakly.

“...Thus, if we are to meet our ongoing financial commitments, from midnight tonight on, any citizen wishing to apply for a death certificate will be required to purchase an Exit Visa from the Ministry of Life, the cost of which will depend on the individual’s insurance payments and their potential ongoing economic productivity, as judged by...”

“Stop!” he gasps.

“Mr. Sinnerland?” says the icon, freezing the projection.

“I don’t have any potential for economic productivity, ongoing or otherwise. The doctor said so and you can check that, it’s all in my medical report.”

The projection springs back into life.

“...And, thanks to the pioneering work of Vortal Incorporated, the human race has now taken a giant leap towards freeing itself from the shackles of the human body.”

“Stop. Look...” Newt says between hits from the oxygen mask, “...I’m just a tired, broken-down old man... Virtual Reality won’t help. I couldn’t work again... not even from my bed. I just don’t have the energy anymore... surely you can see that?”

“Oh, this isn’t Virtual Reality, Mr. Sinnerland; this is Enhanced Reality!” says the sprite, its phantom face flushing with genuine excitement. “Vortal isn’t some run of the mill VR system, oh no, Vortal is so much more than that. You see, Vortal is a direct projection of the mind into a completely convincing artificial reality, allowing the individual to function without having to worry about the frailties of the human body. Just think of it, Mr. Sinnerland: No more aches and pains, no more feeling tired and weary. No more worries!”

For a moment, Newt’s rheumy old eyes widen and gleam with a wonder he’d thought long since lost.

“Why... that’s...that’s wonderful...I’d be young again. I could touch and feel...and do all the things I...”

“I’m afraid not, Mr. Sinnerland,” snaps the icon. “You see, your presence in Vortal is a simulation and whilst your mind is present, your body isn’t, so there’s no real physical sensation of any kind, good or bad. Hence, there’s none of the emotion that physical sensation generates.”

“That’s...appalling!”

“In fact the implications of that lack of physical sensation, in terms of its gaming potential, almost rendered Vortal an economic failure. But happily the lack of emotional stimuli has proven a real boon in terms of its applications for the customer service industry.”

“What?”

“Think of it Mr Sinnerland, when a customer reaches out to a contact centre they want to speak to a real person not a virtual simulation, no matter how sophisticated the programme, and now they can.”

And not only will they be talking to a real person they’ll be talking to a senior citizen who, as we all know, will have years of real living behind them, living that’s helped equip them with the just the kind empathy and skills that go to make for really good customer service.”

Newt clutches the oxygen mask, eyes wide, inhaling hard.

“And because you won’t have any bodily needs, there’s no need for breaks, time off, or even sleep. You can work round the clock, Mr. Sinnerland, and you’ll be able to pay for your Exit Visa all the faster. Isn’t that wonderful?”

“You mean...you want me to work in a call center? Twenty-four-seven? I won’t do it!”

“Of course that’s a choice you’re entirely free to make, Mr. Sinnerland.”

“Damn right it is.”

“However, it would be remiss of me not to point out that while we are legally bound to continue to provide ongoing treatment for all life-threatening conditions, your policy provides for only a limited quality of life package.”

“Are you threatening me?”

“Oh, not at all, Mr. Sinnerland. We’re merely seeking to expand your care options, now that all citizens are legally obligated to purchase an Exit Visa.”

Newt pulls the mask over his face and closes his eyes. For several minutes, he inhales deeply. Then, still with his eyes closed, he slips the mask from his mouth.

“How long?”

“At current rates, we anticipate you’ll be in a position to purchase your Exit Visa in a little under 29 years.”

“Twenty-nine years! I can’t live like this for 29 more years. I won’t...I mean it’s...” But his outrage is curtailed by a violent bout of coughing, and he pulls the mask back over his mouth.

“Oh, Mr. Sinnerland, we’d never ask you continue for that length of time in your present condition. No, you’ll be in Low Sleep for the whole period.”

“Low Sleep?”

“Yes sir, Low Sleep is what they put the astronauts into on long missions. It keeps the mind in a state of deep unconsciousness while maintaining the body in...”

“I know what it is,” he snaps. “Look...surely it can’t take that long to pay for a Visa?”

“You have to remember, Mr. Sinnerland, that we’ve gone to a great deal of expense to provide you with this opportunity. The cost alone of transporting you safely into orbit works out at...”

“Transport me where?”

“We’ll be storing people in orbital platforms, Mr. Sinnerland. You see, in Low Sleep, zero gravity greatly enhances our ability to maintain the human body and...”

“So I’ll be paying you for the privilege...the privilege of...”

His words trail off, and his tone of weary resignation triggers an algorithm

that silences the icon. He lies still, eyes closed, breathing deeply. Long minutes pass before he speaks again.

“Where do I sign?” he says quietly.

“I’ll draw up the papers right away, Mr. Sinnerland. Oh, and while we’re here, I did just want to mention our enhanced insurance packages for the new arrangements...”

# Looking through Vocabulary Flash Cards with My Toddler Daughter

BY BRIAN MCCARTY

Syllables assembled like the trembly mini-towers  
she stacks from wooden blocks embossed with letters,  
dulled corners damp with her saliva,  
into worlds too consequential to adorn a globe.

I struggle to define each word.

No cards for people, just hair, a few strawberry blond bangs  
like incomplete question marks,  
metonymic, like shirts and spectacles and fingerprints.

Fish: fish grow scales instead of hair.

Trees: trees grow bark instead of hair.

Clouds: clouds grow rain instead of hair.

Lions: lions roar instead of yawning in mirrors.

Water: drips down glass, fills with oil and dead seahorses, bloats with each new sinking.

Teddy bear: teddy bears are dapper fellows in bowties.

Empty: blank white square cutout. She blows raspberries.

Keys: keys are integral;

They decide who gets in and who's left out.

How can I explain that the image is erasure?

That the cloud is time manifested  
in undulant aerosols, shadows peeled from the land?

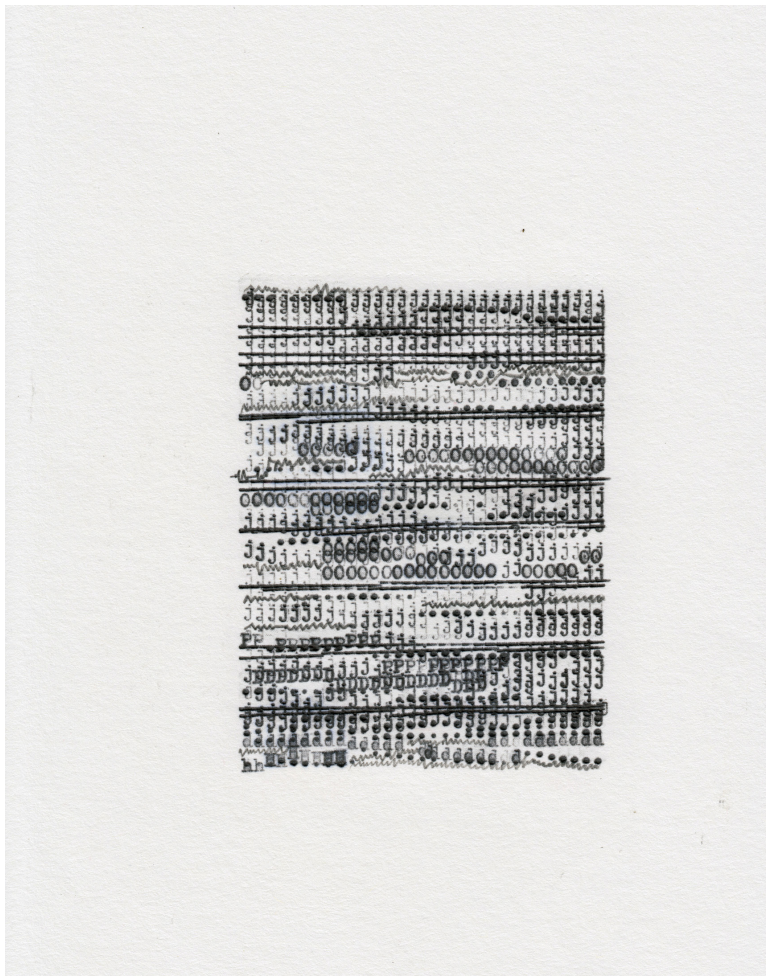
The tree's leaves rattle in the wind,  
but when an inchworm nudges a crevice in bark  
cracked like old frescoes  
the shadows never acknowledge it.

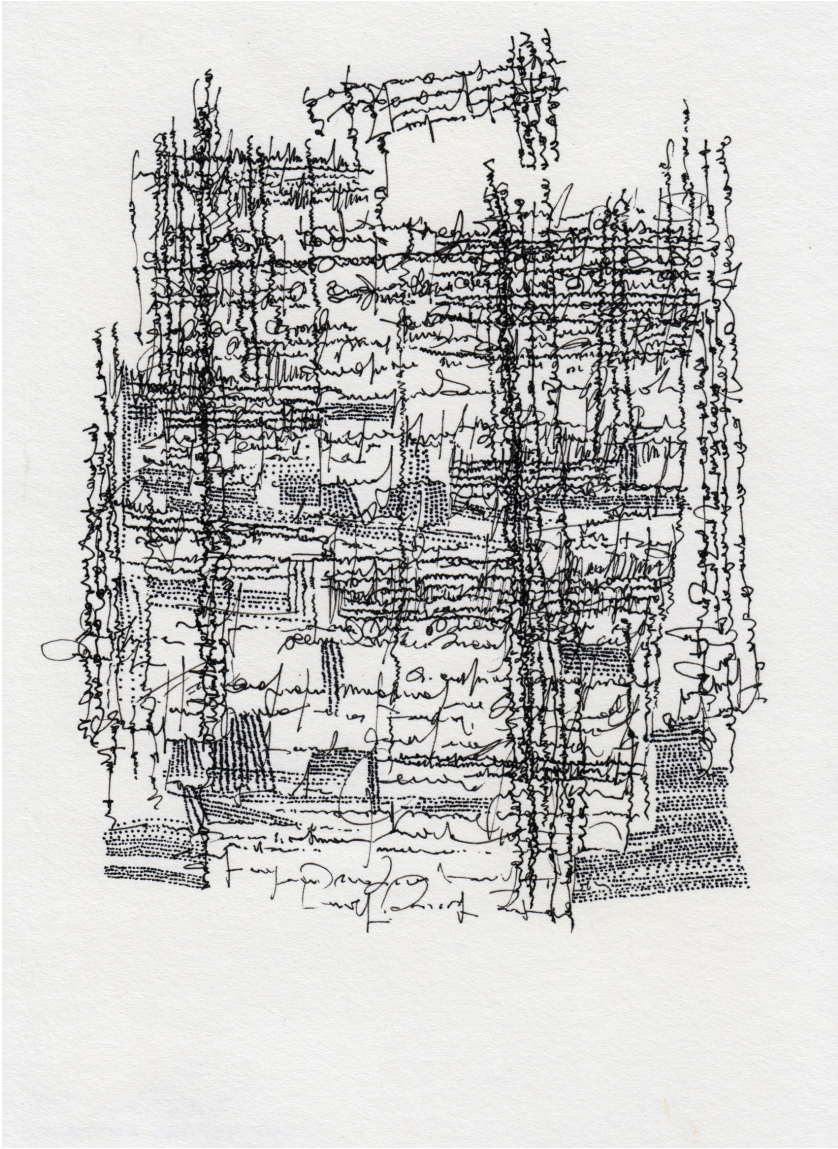
I warn her: don't put the dog and cat cards together.  
Sun and moon side-by-side would be apocalypse.  
She rises slowly to her feet, wobbles through successive  
giant steps for mankind, while I slip  
on the card with the banana peel.



# Studies on ascemic interferences on and within concrete structures

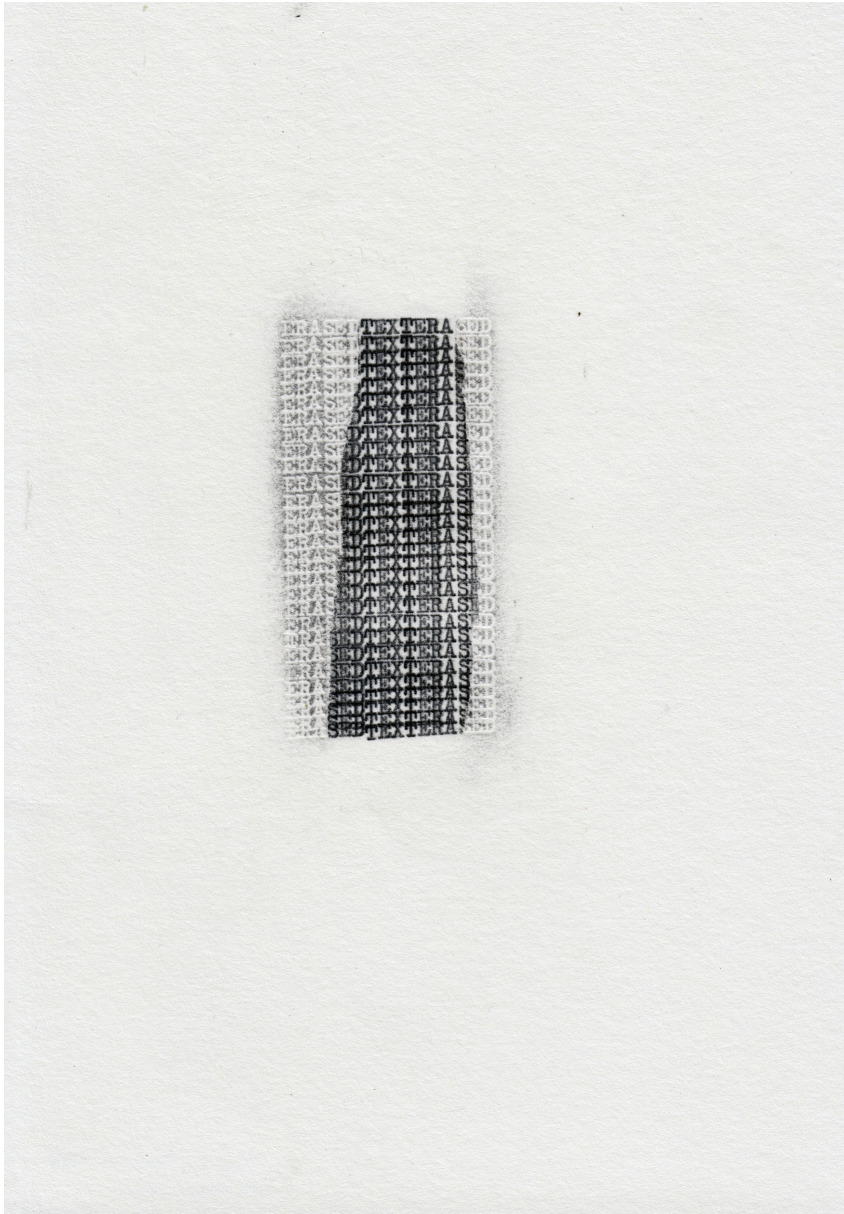
BY FEDERICO FEDERICI





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## the kinetics of text

# A brief list of overdue thank-you notes

BY CLAIRE VERBECK

- to my mom, for always telling me about a new antidepressant she saw advertised on TV
- to my sister, for listening to me cry about my loneliness through the phone in a Lisbon sidestreet
- to the technology that makes these calls possible
- to the airplanes and inherited opportunity that brought me to and away from this country
- to the friends who never left, even when I took months to acknowledge their messages
- to the publishers who held up my work
- to the roommates who always offered relaxed and easy company, and cigarettes and hash
- to the apartment where I lived alone, without heat in a Kansas City winter, building blanket forts and wearing quilts in candlelight, precariously
- to my baby Nala, the sweet bean who licked up so many of my tears, even as I was packing up to leave her
- to the last partner I truly deeply purely loved, for loving me back and loving me still
- to QuikTrip, always, for the RollerGrill and discounted afternoon donuts
- to every library that's given me books, and every one that hasn't
- to my 2004 Honda Civic, whose two doors flapped like wings to carry me through the Midwest
- to my ex's sister, for letting us borrow her tent that one time and for teaching me to paint
- to all the family at my dad's AA hall, for breakfast and for being
- to the crew at Chez Charlie, for always having a story and a cold PBR
- to the platonic lovers who taught me once again how to be comfortable with cuddling
- to every job that helped me learn about the world, pay my rent, and keep my stomach full
- to the therapist who continued to see me after my insurance stopped covering her and who still messages me, half a world away

- to every mentor who read my work and called me a poet or writer
- to every artist who made work that felt like falling in love
- to you, for occupying space
- to remembering, and to forgetting
- to the leather box where I used to keep my razor blades and my grandpa's old coins
- to the doctor at health services who told me, once, that I hadn't permanently harmed my body
- to public transit and hospitality workers, everywhere
- to everyone who loved me despite my bad behavior
- and to everyone who stopped loving me for the same reasons

# Biographies

**Ernesto L. Abeytia** is a Spanish-American poet and teacher. He holds an MFA from Arizona State University and MAs from Saint Louis University and the Autonomous University of Madrid. His poems are present or forthcoming in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Fugue*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and others. He has been anthologized in *The Brillantina Project* and in *Of Color: Poets' Ways of Making*.

**Karyna Aslanova** is a Kyiv-born Ukrainian multimedia artist, director, and photographer. She studied Theatre Directing at The National Academy of Government Managerial Staff of Culture and Arts, Kyiv, Ukraine and although photography is her principal medium, Karyna also uses video, painting and illustration, and poetry to further her exploration of a multitude of subjects.

**Loreena Cain** is a senior undergraduate at the University of New Mexico, currently pursuing a degree in Philosophy and English.

Born in 1987 in France, **Anne Cecile** currently lives and works in Ariege, in the Pyrenean Mountain. She learnt to sculpt with several sculpture materials in night classes, and was introduced to marble in 2014. Marble was a revelation to her, and she dedicated her practice to it since then.

**Manit Chaotragoongit** was born September 30, 1983, in Bangkok, Thailand. He got photography awards from Globalhunt Foundation, India, and Burggrun Institute, USA. Photography has been a passion for him. Streets and alleys are the place where he journeys and takes photos. He presents artwork from his inspiration.

First poetry editor of two pioneer feminist magazines, *Aphra* and *Ms.*, **Yvonne Chism-Peace** has received several awards including NEAs for poetry and a Leeway for fiction. Recent print publications include: *Home: An Anthology (Flexible)*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Pinyon*, and others. Verse memoir excerpts are online at *American Journal of Poetry*, *AMP*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, and others.

**J.V. Davis** teaches philosophy in New York. His work appeared most recently with *High Shelf Press*. His writing, both scholarly and otherwise, is preoc-

cupied with death for some reason.

**Dominique Dève** is a french painter born in 1959. He specializes in portraits. His expressionist figurative style allows him to take part in exhibitions in Paris, London, Los Angeles, New Delhi, Sheffield and many more. Contributor for several *Art et Literary* reviews.

**Charles Duffie** is a writer working in the Los Angeles area. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *So It Goes (The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library)*, *Anastamos*, and others.

Photographer and passionate storyteller **Jada Fabrizio** is an enthusiastic watcher of light and its effect on form. When she is not building sets or sculpting creatures, she plays classical guitar and does freelance photography. Born in Queens, New York, she studied creative writing and photography at SUNY New Paltz.

**Nicole Fang** is a sophomore in the International Baccalaureate program at Richard Montgomery High School. As part of her school newspaper and county newspaper, she loves to write and design. Her works have been previously honored by the New York Times.

**Siyun Fang** is a poet and translator. A graduate of Centre College and New York University, she will attend The New School MFA Program this coming fall. Her research interests include modern and contemporary poetry, poetic theories, theories of narrative, American fiction, and dramatic arts.

**Federico Federici** is a physicist, translator, and writer. His works have appeared in *3:AM Magazine*, *Jahrbuch Der Lyrik 2019*, *Poet Lore*, and others. He has two books: "Requiem auf einer Stele," "Liner notes for a Pithecanthropus Erectus sketchbook." In 2019, he was awarded the Nassau Review Writer Awards for poetry.

**Michael Hower** is an artist and photographer from Central Pennsylvania. His work focuses on human objects and structures in modified environments now devoid of human activity. His artwork has been displayed in galleries, museums, and publications around the country.

**Zoltan Kegyes** is an amateur designer and photographer originally from rural Hungary. He has been creating visual artworks for 5 years. He also aims to establish himself as a writer in the English speaking part of the world, creating poetry, prose, and screenplays.

**Robert A. Kramer** is a husband and father whose writing has been published in Carnegie Mellon's *The Oakland Review*, *Abstract Magazine*, *Clocktower Literary Journal*, and others. His feature script *Hidden Rage* was produced by the God of Moses Films and his short script *Land of the Free* was produced by Synergy Media and Biola University. He is completing an MFA at Lindenwood University.

**Abby Lacey** is an 18-year-old poet currently studying English at the University of Prince Edward Island. She has previously been published in *Snapdragon* magazine. She hopes to inspire with what she creates.

**Sophie Laing** is an upstate New Yorker who has been writing poetry for several years now. She is currently a law student and hopes to make the law a more just and interdisciplinary field.

**Thomas Mampalam** is a neurosurgeon in private practice in Northern California. He writes poetry informed by his medical, immigration, and family experiences. He has poems published or forthcoming in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Neurology*, *The Healing Muse*, and others.

**Brandon Marlon** is a writer from Ottawa, Canada. He received his B.A. in Drama & English from the University of Toronto and his M.A. in English from the University of Victoria. His poetry was awarded the Harry Hoyt Lacey Prize in Poetry, and his writing has been published in 300+ publications in 30 countries.

**Brian McCarty's** slightly surreal, pleasantly ironic (OK, that's a judgment call) poems have been published in *Lunch Ticket*, *Palaver*, and others. He is pursuing his PhD in American Literature at Southern Illinois University. When not hitting the books, he enjoys hitting the trails in the local national forest with his wife and toddler daughter.

**Kathleen McGuire** resides in Denver with her husband and son. In addition to writing about her impressions of real, raw human experience, she is a songwriter and fronts an indie rock band. She has been published in *Open*:



*Journal of Arts and Letters, Torrid Literature Journal, and Thread Magazine.*

**Hayden Moore** was born and raised in Georgia and has lived in New York City for the past twelve years. He performs with a number of classical theatre companies in the city. He lives with his wife and cat on the waters of Jamaica Bay in Far Rockaway.

**Stacia O'Connell** is a recently transplanted Midwesterner to Florida and a poet-mixed media artist and former chef working at the local Publix, hoping to return to the pursuit of a Bachelors in Creative Writing.

**Nick Pecucci** is a part-time bookstore clerk and a full-time nervous wreck living in Chicago. He received a BA in English from Northeastern Illinois University. His work has appeared in *Former People, Mochila Review, TL;DR Magazine,* and others. His work seeks to elevate the mundane, celebrate the obscure, and amplify the minor-key horrors of contemporary life.

**David Rogers'** work has appeared in publications including *The Comstock Review, Atlanta Review, Sky and Telescope,* and others. He is the author of *D.B. Cooper is Dead: A Solomon Starr Adventure, Thor's Hammer,* and *Return of the Exile.* His latest works are *Roots of the Dark Tower: The Long Quest* and *Many Lives of Roland.*

**Alfred Searls** has spent the last decade building up a grimly successful career in PR and Marketing, during which he developed a keen sense that he was becoming a character in a Kafka novel. He's enacted a plan to escape the corporate cage by writing his way out, which is still a work in progress.

**john sweet,** born 1968, still numbered among the living. A believer in writing as catharsis. Opposed to all organized religion and political parties. His latest collections include *Heathen Tongue, A Bastard Child in the Kingdom of Nil,* and *A Flag on Fire Is a Song of Hope.*

**John Tompkins** is a writer living in Texas. He has published fiction and non-fiction in print and online with a variety of outlets including **Levee Magazine, Glass Mountain,** and the **American Philosophy Association.**

**Claire Verbeck** grew up in the rural Midwest poking anthills, collecting tick bites, and abandoning countless library books. She graduated from

Wellesley College with an honors degree in English and Creative Writing. Her work has appeared in *Linden Avenue*, *Kansas City Voices*, *Rookie Magazine*, and various friends' mailboxes.

**Sarah Yun** was born in January of 2003. She is currently attending an international high school in South Korea. Her hobbies are sewing, collecting small glass sculptures, and studying design. Her future aspiration is to become an industrial or product designer.