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Artwork courtesy of [Rachael Warecki](#).

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Joshua Wetjen

My assistant Erin plies the hideous reptilian skin of my loathsome wings with a special mix of lanolin, Vaseline and coconut oil—the homeopath’s latest concoction mixed with some eczema treatment recommendations from a famous dermatologist—and the woman in the black turtle neck does my face make-up for this latest talk-show appearance. I forget which talk-show—there have been so many in this year of discovery and wealth and revulsion. Then I spot the mug—hot lemon water, no dehydrating coffee for me, please—on the desk. The CBS logo. I keep hours with no regard to circadian rhythm, daylight, conventional clocks, so I flick my phone on to see the appointment. *The Morning Show*. Pleasantry. Contentment. Mild bawdiness. They’ll light me for glory and surprise, hiding the way the wings look in close-up, that crusty shameful skin that I stopped examining months ago.

“Susan, they look magnificent. Magnificent. They have the lighting perfect for you and when you unfurl, well...” Erin says.

“Ratings through the roof,” I say.

“No. Come on. Just you wait,” Erin says again, reaching back into the jar of goop and scooping another dollop onto her fingers. Erin and this kind woman doing the make-up—they would have avoided the choice. Each would have told the figure in the green room to leave that night from a year ago. But who knows? Every culture has the stories. Ovid’s horrible punishments, the Pixiu of China, the Aida Kandicha of North Africa, all myths and legends, stories of creatures and transformations no one has seen, only recounted as with a dream that gets retold until it becomes a shared memory and, in my case, unfortunately, one that I market.

“Yes. Sell, sell, sell,” I say as the make-up woman folds up the bib and sets it on the counter. We plan to write a book. All these appearances will cultivate an audience. And before that my agent said we could find a movie deal. Meantime, I make paid inspirational appearances—I am the poster woman for “Anything is possible.” Endorsements and a short gig with a reality show with tie-ins on advertising: Macbook, Hanes, Farmers Insurance and a bunch of others.

Erin hums to deflect my sarcasm and draws her fingers across the skin of my wings. I can't feel it, or I rather I think I can't, but then when she does this, it reminds me of my mother brushing out my hair at night, a methodical, comforting ritual I only felt in the emotional not tactile sense of feel, except when that gentle tug would work against my follicles and my scalp got that sensation a little on this side of pain. Endorphins. That was the last touch I remember from her before my father left us and she became brittle like the skins on my wings. I had dry hair.

I have dry hair. That is nothing compared to the wings. Last night I crawled to my fire escape on the Upper West Side so I could see the lake at Central Park, the subtle movement on its surface, the way the streetlights and buildings get reflected there. I did not turn my apartment light on. Then I unfurled. I could hear the crackly skin. It's not like it once was. Not at all. I will say nothing about this on the show.

On camera they have me on a stool as we have requested, not the usual couch chairs for guests, and they will zoom in on my face and torso, my turquoise Givenchy blouse, exhibiting glamorous chicness. When they pan out I will get the cue. Erin has carefully stitched open the seams in the back, the horned tips of the wing bones poke out and they will slide through and open like sails and the audience will swoon. I will bow or dance in a circle—this part at least I can improvise. Then questions from the audience, the host will tease about the book, and cut to the next segment. The camera will not linger or focus on the wings because they are hideous. This routine with slight variance—how many times have I done it? But I worry about the seams. And this is a new blouse. It looks gorgeous with my eyes and skin, distracts from the thinness of my hair, but if the wings do not open the right way—there's one chance for it to happen.

And now she's smiling, her lustrous hair and open face turning to me.

"Do you want me to?" I ask.

The audience stands up, cheers, roars.

"Don't you get tired of this?" she asks, then turns back to them.

"Oh, never, I never tire of it," I say. I bow. The wings spread. The audience roars in approval.

I am awake, sitting again on the fire escape in my bathrobe, my wings furled, the lake in the park aglow with the lights of buildings. Its surface is a broken mirror once the breeze picks up. Buildings lose their shape. The shards and circles of light almost look alive. I hear the ping of my phone through the open window and see that it is Erin. Tomorrow I have a plane ride, ironically, to Hollywood and there I will talk business about the documentary, the possible movie deals, the one where I could be played by Charlize Theron and CGI and a green screen. We have not decided how we—how I—will talk about the wings, and the choice—the world behind the curtain, that night the shadow entered the green room where I was left alone—how I lacked the precise ear for irony so many other burgeoning comedians had. The shadow hissed the joke even I, as a comedian, misunderstood. “Don’t you want fame? The power to fly more than swim? To soar more than to hide? To escape this life that is like breathing with gills?”

Irony is different on stage from what it is in life, different in conversation and friendship and family and romance from how it forms for an audience. And I chose the wings. I swore at the time it was a dream, and I did what they say to do, pinch myself. I pinched hard, bruising my forearm. And then, with the yoga flexibility, that late-in-life youth-regaining decision I was so proud for having made, I felt it with my fingertips—the first protuberance of the bones straining my skin. Yet I had to go on stage and do my set. Ignoring the change is a performer’s trick—ignoring anything that happens before and after you hit the stage. But I was not meant for comedy or even acting, what I hoped to come of it all someday. Besides, the wings took over. All the scriptwriters and producers since the choice. I’m famous, despite the inspirational speeches, for my freakishness. Without it, no inspiration to anyone.

I go from crouching to kneeling and then relax back on my haunches, the best way to balance if I decide to let the wings stretch a little, which might be good, though a lot of attention if anyone sees in this city where anyone could see anything anywhere, where there is a strangely attentive anonymity. I curl my toes into the spaces between the iron bars of the fire escape landing. Down on the sidewalk near the lake, now and then through the trees, I see a woman jogging with a light fastened to her green ballcap, the ray of it bouncing in rhythm to her stride. She is confident and free in this iteration of New York, safe and protected, lower crime, greater exposure. I’m jealous of her, though who knows what else she faces? She has no visible hideousness, but there is any possible kind of hideousness in the rest of her life. Still, she jogs like she is happy, at least in that moment, like she is light, free.

I feel the breeze of night. I will catch a chill if I stay out on my solemn perch, this Spartan fire escape, a New York stamp of urban character, much longer. I long for that moment when the wings started growing, the sting of it, like shin splints or the spikey growth pains I had in my knees in high school. After the time on stage I was confused, then exhausted. The wings grew that night as I slept, a night that felt like any other. They grew without pain. I never saw it happen, and for some reason I feel like if I could have seen them take shape, I would have answers I do not have, instead of that memory of the shadow offering me the choice back stage before I had to yuck up another pathetic audience. It's why I do not sleep well. It's not just the judgment of my mother who told me I would not amount to much at the rate I was going, who would criticize my body and then if I lost weight, my outfit, her teetering voice in my mind like grating music. Becoming famous would be my revenge. Only that night after the choice I woke face down, the wings flapping on their own, the hideousness visible in the reflection on the dark face of my alarm clock.

I shiver and pull my arms in, the way people do when they are chilled, some endocrine reaction that does little. Then I do something that makes me blush, though I've done it many times since the choice. I loosen the robe and pull the wings around me to stay warm, trying to ignore the dry, scaly, flaking feeling, disgust welling in me. I could go inside but staying out in the night breeze helps me breathe, not because of the wings, but because of the openness of the sky, the hiddenness of dark, and the night around me like a blanket.

But the wings get sore, the muscles in my back pulling in a way I can't hold. Because the wings want more than this. They want to stretch and flap and send me into the night air. I flapped them once and took to the sky and they rattled with excitement. I felt the currents underneath, the air billowing in heat waves that only the wings sensed when the rest of the day they had been numb. When I flew I was terrified, and separate from the wings and their pleasure, the world shrinking into a thing distant, unrecognizable, itself frightening. I panicked and landed on the sill of my bathroom and pulled a fingernail out yanking the window down to let myself in. And I weighed myself on the scale because for once in my life I felt lighter than I had been. I feared hollow bones, many chambered hearts, the frenetic life of a bird, or the ugliness of a bat. And so, the wings became only a prop. And an excuse to not talk to my mother.

I pull down my robe to let my wings spread. I reach into the open window and shut off the light, turn over the phone. I can feel the air again—the waves. Currents. A

language only I understand. I am no longer cold. The skin on the wings seems to shine, to gain flesh. I feel them daring me.

Then I see real movement on the face of the lake. A body rising, a swimmer taking shape. The outline of her body is familiar, a silhouette that echoes my own. The strokes that bring her from the depths are like the waltzing stride I have practiced since I was young to feign confidence. I know her. She is another night creature, but one who has kept all her secrets.

Joshua Wetjen is a high school English teacher living in Minneapolis and working in St. Paul. When not working or chasing his two children, he likes to practice jazz guitar and sample new restaurants with his wife. His work has appeared in *Right Hand Pointing*, *Newfound* and *The Cleaver and Opossum*.

RED SHOE TWITCH

Dustin M. Hoffman

Barry buried me in the Escape Cube, six feet down. Though it's not a cube. It's a plexiglass casket, more of a rectangle. I built it, Barry named it, and he convinced me to test it, but it's been too long since I stopped hearing dirt shush against the plexiglass top. Maybe he's still pissed about the time I misplaced the key and after a half-hour of writhing we had to knife him out of the straight jacket in front of the San Bernardino Lion's club and all their booing grandkids. I said I was sorry. I didn't complain when he docked the jacket's price from my pay. Now I'm thinking bygones aren't all gone.

My phone reports its twenty-percent battery life left, and maybe I should turn the light off. But everything inside the Escape Cube seems louder in the dark—my breath, my skin squeaking against the plexiglass, the whispering dirt grains piling at my ankle. I'll probably keep the light on until it dies.

Staring into a plexiglass wall of dirt, I confront the fact that I'm in my forties, earning an income subsisting of whatever scraps Barry feels like paying me. I can't even get the under-the-table construction jobs anymore, and they sure as shit won't let me build anymore stunt props on the studios since the accident. You know the one. Video went viral—the kid's shiny red shoe twitching for too many seconds under all those sheets of collapsed OSB. Barry embraces death. Mortal inevitability—he told me when he hired me two years ago—infuses the show with a necessary pulse.

Should I have crammed myself inside this box even though I'm terribly claustrophobic, which Barry is certainly aware of? Jokes on him. After thirty-three minutes down here, I'm feeling much better about small spaces. I'm sold on exposure therapy. I glance down at my bare toes, my twitching feet. I think of the trapped kid's shiny red shoe and rehearse the regret of how I should've used twice as many deck screws, that goddamn director rushing me. Next comes pondering plexiglass joint strength, that acrylic cement clear as water against however many tons of earth, against so much weight stacked over my face. I'm aching to stretch my limbs. So maybe traces of my claustrophobia linger.

Probably I deserve this. I told him an escape-from-the-grave act didn't seem best

for an elementary school. What about rabbits in hats and bright bouquets erupting from thin air, I'd said. I could hack together a flashy trap-door box for a disappearing act, I'd offered. He clapped a hand against my cheek, pulled my forehead against his, and said so slowly I thought I'd melt: We are not magicians. We are escapists.

Yeah, Barry. Of course, Barry. My bad, Barry. But I would like to point out that I am not an escapist. I'm strictly props. I'm the hammer and nails, the measuring tape and drill bit behind the curtain. I'm the saw.

But this all might be about Kate. Miserable Kate who I didn't even fuck. It never got anywhere near that far, and it's not like they're married anyway. A ring, a promise, stretched over five years, until we get a Las Vegas deal, does not a commitment make. Yet still I refrained. Kate snotted all over my car about how Barry doesn't trust her, still hasn't introduced her to his dying grandmother Poleski, about how Barry only goes down on her for thirty seconds, exactly thirty, every time, and then makes a joke about how Houdini could hold his breath for four minutes but he was the master. Worst of all, she uttered through tears, is that Barry won't even tell her the secret to how he escapes from the grave.

Me too, Kate. Me too.

I've already kicked and punched my hands raw, but, what the hell, I'll take up another round of flailing. I've also already screamed my throat raw as gravel, coppery with blood, so this time I just howl, high pitched, as long as I can hold the note, which is much less than Houdini could hold his breath and probably about as long as Barry's cunnilingus.

The trickling dirt has completely buried my feet now, and that's on me. Bad seal somewhere. I'll probably die in here, suffocate or be crushed like the kid and their twitching red shoe. I thumb a few texts to my mom, my favorite English teacher, my sisters, all about the same: *Thanks for the good times. Guess you were right about Barry. I never thought I'd hurt anyone. If you find my body, please don't bury me again. Set it all on fire.*

My ears ring from all the howling, or maybe they're not ringing. Maybe it's some kind of subterranean echo. Maybe the worms have taken up my hymn. Maybe that kid is siren-singing me to join them. I clamp my lips and hold my breath to test the sound's reality. It rings. It sings. It begs me. It rises and falls. Metallic. Beautiful as a shovel exhuming earth, as my salvation. The kid and their shoe won't stop

twitching if you just keep replaying the video and never let it end.

[Dustin M. Hoffman](#) is the author of the story collection *One-Hundred-Knuckled Fist*, winner of the 2015 Prairie Schooner Book Prize. He painted houses for ten years in Michigan and now is an associate professor of creative writing at Winthrop University in South Carolina. His stories have recently appeared in *The Masters Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Washington Square Review*, *The Journal*, and *The Threepenny Review*.

INHERITANCE

Jennifer Marie Donahue

For as long as Emmaline Kingsley could remember, her mother believed in the ability of objects to harbor evil spirits or bad omens. She never questioned this fact, nor wondered if there had been a time when her mother had believed in other things. Until one morning, that is, as she waited by the front door to leave for school and considered the clocks. At eight, the tiny gears of two Black Forest cookoo clocks cranked forward the time, the doors swung open and miniature fairy tales, rendered as German wood carved figures, marched out of their dark cave to perform their predictable dance to the familiar song.

“Ready to go, peanut?” Emmaline’s father asked as he picked up her backpack and met her at the door.

“How come Mommy lets you keep your clocks here?” Emmaline asked. In her world, her father’s collection of yard sale treasures and antique furniture were deposited straight into the garage where they belonged. Because objects could be dangerous elsewhere.

“Those aren’t my clocks. Those were your grandmother’s clocks,” he replied, then frowned. “They are the only thing from before....”

Before? Emmaline, like most children, could hardly imagine a time before in her parent’s lives. She studied the clocks and tried to discern the power they possessed, power enough to break her mother’s rule. She reached up and ran her hand along the side to see if she could feel any difference, but it felt entirely ordinary to her.

In the garage Emmaline’s father built row upon row of shelves made out of 2x4s where he placed the objects and possessions collected with a museum curator’s precision and labeling. Pottery: bowls, candlesticks, figurines, vases and ashtrays. He had first edition books, wrist and pocket watches, and framed movie posters. There were six antique boat compasses, fish hooks of various sizes stored in glass mason jars. In one of Emmaline’s favorite corners were the boxes full of slogan buttons, some political: “We like Ike” or protests: “Execute Justice, Not People” or commercial endorsements: “Thin Mints are the Best!” By sheer number, the

largest group of items was the photographs – black and whites, sepia colored, Polaroids, out of focus and fuzzy prints, wedding and graduation portraits, track meets and football games, baptisms, family portraits and even a few of the recently departed lying in their caskets. The people were all strangers, a series of unknown faces Emmaline’s father had adopted as his own. Together, Emmaline and her father would examine the pictures and make up elaborate stories: *This man was born in Kansas and sold every single thing he owned and bought a boat even though he had never seen the ocean. This girl dreams of running away and joining the circus. This woman came from the French Alps and that far away look in her eyes is the memory of the mountains that she can still see hovering in the distance. This boy grew up to be the most famous bank robber in the Mid-Atlantic.*

Emmaline loved her father’s nest of things, the way he held each item so gingerly, as if he could erase the lack of care the object had endured from lying on a folding table, a makeshift display sheet in someone’s front yard, or molding away in a basement. Summer was her father’s hunting time and by the age of five she had become accustomed to driving with him on a Saturday afternoon to the store or the pool where she took swimming lessons and being inevitably diverted in their quest by the sight of light fixtures, bicycles, hampers overflowing with clothes and stuffed animals, or a collection of furniture dragged out on someone’s yard. Her father would hook a dangerous u-turn in order to peruse the offerings. It was easy to get caught up in his enthusiasm: “You never know what you might find!” he would remark, every time, and rub his hands together in anticipation of a new discovery.

Soon after Emmaline turned six in November, she deduced her mother’s pregnancy. Neither parent had told her about it directly, but her mother complained every morning of feeling sick and she’d overheard a hushed phone call proclaiming the good news to Aunt Helen. She surmised the change that would unfold, based on the snippets of things her mother replied. “I don’t know. We may have to get rid of some things. Make space.” It reminded Emmaline of the stories her father told describing her mother’s industry when she was pregnant with Emmaline. Back then, she’d labored for months preparing The O’Neill House: installing air conditioning in the 1860 colonial, steaming and scraping wallpaper from the powder room, stripping paint from the carved wood molding of the built in shelves in the dining room, scrubbing the yellowed grout with a toothbrush and solvent in the kitchen, and finally removing the potentially dangerous objects to the garage.

Over the next two months, the bulge of her mother’s stomach grew, and with it

her desire for more room in their home. A clean slate. Her mother packed up boxes of items in the guest room. This industry was not limited simply to the spare room, no, Emmaline's mother began packing boxes elsewhere. In Emmaline's room, she inquired: "Do you really need all these stuffed animals?" Emmaline stared at the dozens of shiny eyes on the shelf in the closet, feeling attached to their unflinching gaze. Her mother wondered aloud if Emmaline needed so many necklaces that hung on the silver jewelry tree or if her vast assortment of sea shells were truly necessary. "But they are my collection," Emmaline answered, running her finger along the smooth insides of a white shell, and invoking the word that had come to represent a reprieve from the trash, a way of communicating the deep, strong desires attached to certain objects.

Once the guest room had been emptied her mother painted the walls. Emmaline sat on the floor, on the tarps covering the refurbished hardwood floorboards. Her mother described how she had spent the last month of her pregnancy painting the walls in Emmaline's room a robin's egg blue and then created the mural in the corner near the window that looked over the yard. "How did you decide what to paint?" Emmaline inquired, thinking of the flowers that were so fanciful, a hybrid combination of a rose mixed with a tulip, a zinnia mixed with a sunflower, all in pretty shades of pink, orange and yellow. The butterflies were similarly imagined, unnatural swirls and whorls of colors no two the same. A giant, asymmetrical beanstalk with heart-shaped leaves snaked up the wall and disappeared into a bank of puffy clouds. Her mother paused, turned to her and said, "I don't know, I started sketching one day and it took its own shape. I liked how everything was in bloom." As Denise sketched the boat, water, and the lighthouse on the wall of the new baby's room, she explained how Emmaline would help her paint the clouds. "It will be like how I did them in your room, I pressed a dimpled sponge full of white paint to the wall to create the effect."

*

Emmaline walked to the Havre-de-Grace Elementary school everyday with one of her parents, but never both at the same time. Emmaline loved first grade, thrived within the construct of measured achievement and competition. School pulled out in her specific inclinations toward perfectionism. She sought to be the first one done with her work, 100% wasn't good enough and she craved opportunities for extra credit questions to her boost her score higher. Every single month she claimed the title "Student of the Month" for which she received a laminated star with ribbon attached until February when Mrs. Pfister pulled her aside and explained that despite her star performance, she would be passed over. It was

only fair to give other children a chance.

Emmaline watched Ava Hunter advance to the front of the room to claim the star, Emmaline's rightful star. Everyone clapped and Ava even bowed. Fueled by the injustice of it all, Emmaline finished her subtraction quiz in record time. She flipped the paper over to the blank side to pronounce her victory. She looked around and spied Ava on the opposite side of the classroom not even working on her test, but admiring the laminated star, and running her fingers along the ribbon. Emmaline drew a row of stars on the backside of her paper, pressed down so hard the point broke off her pencil. She looked up and caught a new glimpse of Ava, leaned back in her plastic chair, balancing all of her weight onto the rear two metal legs. Emmaline frowned, unhappy to observe such disregard for rules by the star stealer. She wished for Ava to fall.

Ava lost her balance. The fall, the entire moment of tipping, caught Ava so off guard that her arms simply pinwheeled ineffectively and the first thing to strike the ground was the back of her head. Her foot kicked up the desk and knocked it over. Everyone turned as she rolled off her chair and quickly set about putting her chair and desk upright. Mrs. Pfister walked over to investigate, a stern look of disapproval on her face. Ava's face glowed with shame and her eyes brimmed with tears. Mrs. Pfister asked if she was okay, and Ava nodded vigorously, wiping at her eyes.

"Everyone, return to work, please," Mrs. Pfister called out, clapping her hands to quiet the children. Emmaline watched Ava settle down, her pencil scratching across the mimeographed paper. There at the back of Ava's head a spot of red began to bloom in her blond hair. Soon, the spot the size of a quarter grew to the size of a clementine and then... Emmaline felt the world lose its shape, the edges grew too bright, like a midday sun reflecting off metal. Ava reached up to scratch the crown of her head, pulled away her hand dripping with her own blood and screamed. Emmaline felt herself start to fall, but then everything went black.

When Emmaline came to, Mrs. Pfister hovered over her body, too close, with her sour coffee breath clouding the space. Emmaline could hear the sirens outside. She turned her head and saw Ava on the ground, the nurse holding pressure. All that blood, seeping through the towel, on the floor, running down Ava's arms. Everything went black again for Emmaline. She felt as though someone had closed a set of heavy red velvet stage curtains in her mind.

When Emmaline regained consciousness a paramedic hovered over her. The

stretcher with Ava wheeled by them. A cold compress gave a tingle of pressure on Emmaline's head. "Your mother is on the way," the woman said and gave her a kind, face crinkling smile.

On the way home, her mother drove by the old Concord Point lighthouse, recently refurbished and repainted white. It stood at the inlet where the Susquehanna River met the Chesapeake Bay. There were 207 steps to the top, Emmaline knew, she had counted them all. Her great-great-grandfather had worked inside, as a keeper, lighting the whale oil lamps that illuminated the Fresnel lens, only giving it up when the entire process was automated in 1920.

"Are you okay?" her mother asked.

"Yes," Emmaline replied, but it was a lie. Something had happened in her brain, and she kept seeing that spot of blood appear and then grow bigger. She saw it in her mother's eye in the rear view mirror, a speck that spread all over her face. Emmaline closed her eyes, and the speck was there too, blooming bigger and brighter than the darkness inside. What if she had caused Ava to fall?

"My mother was like that too, about blood. I tripped on the front steps once and when she came outside to answer my calls for help, she fell off the porch." The words themselves could have been arranged with some humor, a lightness that would have lifted the mood in the car, but the tone her mother used to tell the story was morose and sad. Maybe it was catching a glimpse of the river water, gray and unsettled with a coming storm.

Ava Hunter returned to school the next week with a line of stitches perched on the crown of her head like a giant, fuzzy caterpillar. She went up to the front of the classroom, held up the x-ray of her head, and talked about riding in an ambulance and going to the emergency room. She was a rule breaker turned super star.

*

On President's Day, Emmaline went with her father to an estate sale north of town. This was the type of house sale, a clean-out, that marked a person's demise. There were closets full of clothes, linens and towels, half-full bottles of alcohol, silverware and dishes, all the furnishings inside for sale. Cheap. Emmaline wandered through the rooms with her father, observing how so many people pressed inside to paw through the items. This group would clear out this old woman's house in an afternoon. People carried things under their arms, piece by

piece like a line of ants out the front door.

Emmaline found a prism hanging by the window in a bedroom, and admired the rainbow of light it cast around the room. She appreciated the way the tiny object could transform the light. She liked the weight of it in her hand, but worried that it had captured other things, bad things. Her father plucked it from her fingers and put it in his pile of other items he'd found and planned to buy: another antique boat compass, an old black and white etching of the Baltimore port, and a glass Santa Claus ornament he claimed was made in Germany. In the basement, her father found a child's sized gorilla costume, the thick, black fur smelled musty, like a wet towel left on the floor. When Emmaline slid on the head it felt claustrophobic and hot, the sound of her voice inside became a muffle, but she liked it because she could be anybody in that suit, anybody at all. When they got home, it was explained away to her mother as "perfect for Halloween." A flutter of fear passed over her mother's face. Maybe it was how real it looked, how menacing, or perhaps it was how taken in her daughter was with her husband's obsession. Emmaline stood in front of the full length mirror on the bathroom door and admired herself, how she couldn't even tell if she was a girl inside that suit.

She took the prism and put it in her closet. When the new baby came, she would hang it up in the window of baby's room to catch all the light.

*

In March, there was a trip to the doctor but her mother didn't come home. The neighbor, a retired baker who always smelled sweetly like yeasty dough, watched Emmaline and stayed through the evening. Her father came home briefly and packed an overnight bag full of her mother's clothes, toothbrush, a comb, and her face cream that smelled like cucumbers. "Everything is fine, your mother will be home tomorrow," her father assured her, but Emmaline knew something was wrong. She could tell in the nervous way he spoke, the way his body pinched up, like a body bracing for a physical blow. She could tell it in the teary way that the neighbor wished her good-bye the next morning and told her to be a good girl.

Her mother came home and went straight to her room. She lay in bed for three days, the static hum of the radio her only real companion. Emmaline went in occasionally to check on her, to offer her a glass of water or cookies. These offerings were always accepted, but then left untouched on the night table. Emmaline held her mother's hand which was bruised purple and green. She looked in her mother's eyes, the familiar brown orbs that sometimes looked green when

she wore the right colored shirt, but Emmaline felt unanchored in them as though a giant swell had consumed her mother.

Emmaline had blue eyes, a shade of blue that nearly matched the color her mother had painted her bedroom all those years before. Her father's eyes were ordinary blue. Emmaline wondered, would the baby's eyes have been brown like her mother's or blue like hers and her father's? She'd read that all babies have blue eyes when they were born. She doubted this could be true. She wanted to ask her mother if she had seen the eyes. Were they able to observe the baby before it was sent to the place wherever dead babies go?

Her mother got out of bed on the fourth day, showered and washed her hair that had grown slick with oil and sweat. She pulled up the sheets on the bed, took the ball into the laundry room and set about soaking it in hot water. Her mother went into the spare room, the one she had been making ready for the baby. She opened the curtains, sunlight shone on the wall with the half completed mural of the Concord Point lighthouse with a sailboat in the distance riding on unfinished waves.

She announced to Emmaline that they were going to the park. They walked down Concord, under the naked sycamore and maple trees that lined the street. They sat on a bench near the pier and watched the gulls glide in and out of their sight line. Her mother watched the water as if waiting for something to surface. Emmaline felt so cold that her nose went numb.

*

In April, Emmaline was sent home from school with a fever. She had the swine flu, her father told her – it was springing up everywhere this year. Emmaline's body felt heavy as if she wore the lead vest the dentist draped over her body during her tooth x-rays. Her fever climbed higher and higher. Her mother brought towels she had soaked in water and put in the freezer to lay on her skin. Emmaline stared at the flowers painted on the wall, their petals began to sway in the breeze. A green troll with a nose made entirely out of warts scurried down the bean stalk. His eyes were blue. A butterfly peeled itself from the wall and landed on her big toe sticking out from the sheets. Emmaline commented, offhandedly to her mother, "Look how the spots on the butterfly seem like eyes when it opens and closes its wings."

A crow cawed at the window. Emmaline's mother screamed. She remembered the

sound of her mother's frantic voice as she called the doctor. Then, like the time at school, the world lost its substance and it wavered around her until it felt like someone had blown out the flame of the only candle lighting her mind.

Emmaline spent three days in the hospital. Her teacher, Mrs. Pfister, sent her flowers. The class had used a piece of poster board to make a "Get Well" card. Someone had drawn a picture of a pig on it. Ava Hunter wrote with flourish, "See you soon, Emma!" Emmaline hated it when people abbreviated her name without permission. Her father brought her a watch he had found at Goodwill, it was purple, her favorite color.

When Emmaline got home, she climbed the stairs to her bedroom and lay on her clean bed inhaling the scent of laundry. It smelled like her mother. It felt so much better than all the white, stiff industrial sheets at the hospital. She woke that night as the half-full moon peered into her window. Emmaline's body stiffened with fear. The troll's eyes were there, glowing blue under the mural clouds where the wall met the ceiling. In the morning, she tried to work up the courage to tell her mother she wanted to repaint the room. But Emmaline couldn't bring forth the words, her mind kept flashing to the penciled in sketches of the waves, of the unfinished space in the other room.

*

By the beginning of summer, the cookoo clocks were gone from the wall by the front door and her parents had stopped sleeping in the same bed. They thought she didn't know, but the couch started to take on the impression of her father's slumbering body. She witnessed him tucking the sheet and pillow into the closet one morning before he went to shower. At night, when they thought she was asleep, they would fight in angry whispers. Her mother blamed her father for the baby's death, it was the evil lurking in the objects, this evil had been made manifest. Emmaline worried it had been the prism, she worried that she had made the baby die like she had made Ava Hunter fall off the chair. Watching her parents together was like watching that blood spot grow, bigger and bigger and yet unseen by them. Emmaline's mother went into the spare room and took down the crib. She sat in the rocking chair and cried in choking sobs she thought Emmaline couldn't hear.

On the fourth of July, Emmaline went with her parents first to the cemetery at church where her grandmother was buried. They laid roses on her grave. Later, they went to the park where it was oppressively hot and her clothes stuck to her

body. They stayed until the sky went dark and the boom of firecrackers streaked across the sky. Emmaline watched the spray of colors, but only in the reflection on the surface of the Harbor water. When no one was looking, she tossed the prism into the black water.

In August, her Aunt and the twins came to visit for a week. They went to the zoo, to the beach, and took a trip to the museum in D.C. On the train ride home, as her cousins played video games, Emmaline overheard her mother confess – *I don't think I can do this anymore*. In her mother's voice was a tugging, like she had been transformed into a balloon that was about to float away.

*

Emmaline started second grade in September. By the beginning of October, her parents had been called into school for a special conference. When the teacher passed out the timed addition and subtraction quizzes, the spelling tests, Emmaline refused to do the work. She flipped the paper over and drew stars on the backside. Only stars. The school was worried. Emmaline wouldn't read aloud in class, she did no homework, in art she refused to paint anything except picture after picture of a red flower. Her parents didn't know what to do. They took her to the doctor. They took her to a therapist, where she sat quietly and never answered the question, "How are you feeling today?"

On Halloween, Emmaline donned the gorilla costume despite her mother's entreaties to be a dancer, a princess, a tiger, anything else. At school, Ava Hunter quivered in fear as Emmaline went and stood too close to her. The head was hot and her vision obstructed, but she didn't want to take it off. That night her father took her trick or treating. The wind blew cold, there was an unsettled feeling in the air that something prepared to bear down on them. People along Main Street a block from the water stacked sandbags in futile hills. The hurricane turned tropical storm swirling up the coast would bring a surge at high tide.

In the dark, the invisible water could be heard churning and crashing against the break wall. People who opened the door to toss candy into Emmaline's fluorescent green pumpkin joked about battening down the hatches, about the ghost storm. They all appeared eager to usher the gorilla that looked a bit too real off their stoops and porches. When it started to rain and the wind picked up, leaves scuttled across the pavement like bugs, and Emmaline and her father headed home early.

Emmaline stopped in front of the house, removed her gorilla head, and stood looking at the way the front of the house appeared alive, the windows resembled eyes and the door yawned like a mouth. Her father grabbed her hand, but she pulled away.

“Do you think it was evil spirits or the prism?” she asked, in a whisper.

“What?” her father replied, his face scrunched in confusion before a flash of grim understanding passed over him. “Are you talking about the baby? No, Emmaline, it wasn’t the prism. These things just happen. Sometimes there is no reason.” He knelt down and lifted the brim of his worn baseball cap to meet her eyes.

“Superstition is a way to explain the unexplainable, a way to believe in something. Do you understand?”

Emmaline nodded. Like a troll in your painted clouds or a blood spot grown bigger. The unearned star. They went inside and watched the news report, the satellite image of the storm swirling up the east coast, with an all-knowing eye. The wind howled outside, grew in intensity, like a beast from the netherworld come alive. Emmaline imagined it with a body of rain, wind for hair, and a voice of waves. When the lights went out, her mother lit their hurricane lamp that made the air smell of kerosene. Her parents pulled the couch out into a bed. They would sleep there, huddled together, the three of them. Inside the house it was too quiet, the absence of noise from the refrigerator, the furnace, the hum of electricity that had become a comforting background sound to their lives. Outside, the wind grew stronger, sought every available crevice and moaned through the house.

Emmaline tried to sleep, but a part of her felt anchored and attuned to the storm, listening to what it would say. A thunderous crack sounded above them, everyone startled awake as the walls and floor shook. Her father went to the window. Maybe a tree, he said. He grabbed the flashlight and clicked it on, went up the stairs. Trolls aren’t real, Emmaline reminded herself. Emmaline and her mother listened for his footsteps that made the floorboards creak. When he returned he brought the news: the Elm in the backyard had fallen, and one of the branches had come through Emmaline’s window, the rest of the tree had fallen on the garage.

“Your things!” Emmaline’s mother cried.

Emmaline’s father sat down on the sofa bed and soothed his wife, rubbed her shoulders and assured her. “We are safe. The house is standing. Those are only things in the garage, nothing more. Don’t worry. Sometimes things just happen.”

Emmaline could feel the hole in the house, in the corner of her bedroom. She could feel the broken glass of the window and the rain leaking inside, running down the wall, taking the cloud and the troll with it. She could feel all of this as if the breach were a spot on her own skin, a bloom of blood growing bigger and brighter.

[Jennifer Marie Donahue's](#) work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Catapult*, *Grist: A Journal of the Literary Arts*, *The Rumpus*, *JMWW*, *So to Speak!*, *Necessary Fiction*, and other fine places. A native of Virginia, she currently resides in Massachusetts where she has received scholarship support from Grub Street and the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing.

THE SITTER

Charlotte McCall Pattison

The sitter is thorough with the litter box; it is almost artistic, the way she tills the absorbent crystals like her own private Zen garden. She is skilled at making the old cat take all six of his heart medications. She eats a handful of salted peanuts every time she walks in the door; sometimes she also eats the dark chocolate chips stored in the cabinet. She has an eye on the level of each, the peanuts and the chocolate chips. If it gets obvious, she'll buy a replacement and dump the contents into the original container until the level is restored. Elizabeth said she should make herself at home.

The apartment is perfect for the sitter's needs. The cable TV is a luxury, the couch is comfortable for lounging, the bed is always freshly made when she arrives, and the claw-foot tub is a gift. She could pretend this is her apartment, and that *she* is the corporate executive for Macy's if it weren't for all the troubling personal touches, which she finds every time she opens a drawer or scrutinizes a fridge magnet.

Even though the apartment is small, she finds its silence eerie. Perhaps it is the cat who follows her from room to room with a forbidding countenance, waiting for her to settle in a location so he can fold himself primly in her lap like a longhaired paperweight. She has always had a hard time disturbing a sleeping animal. There is something precious about his sleep. The stolen hours here and there, one ear always cocked for predators, the slight twitch of the paws that might prove dreaming. It feels like a measure of trust to have an animal installed in your lap. You'd rather have your legs go numb than wake him. But her boyfriend sneers and says, "You are just like a space heater to them, they are drawn to warm places."

The longer the visits last—three weekends in a row, one or two weeks—the more snooping she feels is authorized. First, she just wants to know where Elizabeth goes when she leaves. Many of the trips are for work, but the two weeks in March are for ICELAND!!! scrawled in all-caps on the wall calendar. The sitter looks ahead for vacations to get an idea of how much money she can expect to earn. Several business trips in April, Sarah's Wedding! and *Thailand???* in mid-June. It is one of those personalized album calendars studded with photos of a blonde family of four with two cute kids hovering around the age of ten. Everyone's birthdays

and anniversaries come pre-marked. The woman in the pictures appears to be Elizabeth's sister. Munching on the stoneground wheat crackers she has been slowly depleting all week (she'll get more), the sitter wonders what it would be like to be close to the family who produced this calendar. Who else did they send it to? How many people were expected to filter the next year of their lives through the main events of someone else's?

At least Elizabeth's bedside reading is indicative of simmering psychological distress: *YOU ARE A BADASS: How To Stop Doubting Your Greatness And Start Living An Awesome Life; Daring Greatly*; and confusingly, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving A Fuck*. The sitter thumbs through them while the cat purrs in her lap. Some pages are dog-eared for reference. In *YOU ARE A BADASS*, the reader is invited to list their best qualities. Here Elizabeth has written in pencil: *caring, family-oriented, adventurous, animal lover, active, ambitious*. The whole page is smudged with eraser dust and false starts. The sitter pets the cat too hard. He snaps and moves to give his tail a tongue-combing in the corner. Her boyfriend texts her to invite himself over, he wants to *try out that bathtub* ;), but she doesn't reply.

Other things: The bedside drawer with the two packs of unopened condoms, a half-burnt candle, a bottle of lube barely squeezed, but no sex toy. A note-to-self taped to the fridge door reminding Elizabeth to *call the gym and ask about personal training sessions (remember: not Stefan!)*. What did Stefan do or say? The butterfly collection pinned behind glass in a shadow box on the wall. The case is antique, a relic from prior age of animal cruelty. Maybe it also descends from the grandmother who handwrote dessert recipes on little cards that have also been glass-cased and memorialized next to dried purple flowers. The straightforward recipe for cobbler with the postscript to future generations: *This is a quick recipe when you are in a hurry and very good!*

Next to the Ziploc bags she finds a list of attributes that Elizabeth is seeking in a partner written on an index card. They are the same ones she wrote in *YOU ARE A BADASS*, with a few additions which may be qualities she feels she lacks: *calm, spiritual, good sense of humor*. Or perhaps direct correctives for a previous love: *patient, serious, kind*. The sitter takes a picture of the list to text her boyfriend but deletes it immediately once she sees how the photo looks. Her phone has framed the list as bright and insignificant, the same as the recipe. Taking the photograph makes the sitter feel sick; for days she sees it whenever she closes her eyes. The next weekend she opens the same drawer and the list has vanished but the feeling remains.

Elizabeth is in Iceland and the sitter is on her couch, the cat pinned in her lap and yowling while she administers his second heart medication. Elizabeth left a big tip this time. Her note said *THANK YOU! You're the best.* A text appears on the sitter's phone screen. Her boyfriend invites himself over to the "cat condo," he says he wants to *take a bath together* ;). But if he gets in the bath, he'll see the little rubber duck that Elizabeth placed next to the faucet. He'll see her hair removal cream with its label turned shyly towards the wall. He might eat her gummy vitamins and sneer at the copy of *Women's Health* wrinkled with bath-reading. He's exactly the kind of man who would put on Elizabeth's polka dot shower cap and do a stupid dance.

She takes the cat's water dish, with its surface wisps of floating hair. She drops in three salted peanuts and a spoonful of chocolate chips for sweetness. From the bathroom cabinet she takes a pump of anti-aging cream and an aspirin for unexpected pain. A dash of lube from the bedside drawer. On Elizabeth's fire escape she looks for something natural and sees with a guilty pang the scraggly basil plant she has forgotten to care for. A few withered leaves will have to do. Behind her the cat is testing an exit, he has one paw out the door before she softly closes the screen. The sitter knows that when she pours this charmed stew into the alley, she should say something that matters, but it isn't easy to think. She looks at the mess she's made and thinks "Dump," the cat in the doorway sees his dish and purrs: "*Drink.*"

Charlotte McCall Pattison is a student in the MFA program at Cornell University. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Passages North* and *Smokelong Quarterly*.

OUR SUMMER

Andrew Cothren

Jess bets she can land a front flip off the Rite-Aid roof. She shimmies up a gutter and stands tall at the edge. We all stop whatever we're doing and watch. She takes a running start, manages half a spin in the air before hitting the parking lot asphalt face-first. Her body crumples, folds, legs bending like a scorpion tail towards the back of her head. She bounces slightly as her limbs spring into place and she lands on her back near the cluster of us, looking up at the dusk sky. We laugh. She sits, brushes small rocks from her elbows. There's a new hole in the side of her shirt, and she sticks a thumb through it. "Shit," she says. "My mom just bought this." She hops to her feet, unharmed, and climbs back up.

As Jess keeps trying, landing horribly, and rising unscathed, the rest of us carry on. Marnie lights M-80s with a Zippo and lets them go off in her hand, wiping black powder onto her jean shorts. We take turns playing the knife game, the blade bouncing off our skin whenever we miss. We'd play Russian roulette if we could get our hands on a gun.

The group of us realized it was our summer when Tanisha got hit by a semi on Route 9. Not even a week after finishing eighth grade and already we were restless, irritable, sweating strangely. We rode our bikes to the quarry every day, lying around on large smooth rocks in last summer's swimsuits, shocked at how quickly our bodies change. On the way back one evening, Tanisha took the last turn into town too sharply and skidded under a downshifting truck. Its tires turned her bike into a twisted knot of pipe, but Tanisha crawled out from beneath and stood looking herself over, smiling. We scattered and rode away, Tanisha sitting triumphant on Jess' handlebars, laughing her ass off.

That night we started small. Shoved needles then knives into each others arms and guts, watched them bend against our skin. We ran face-first into brick walls, filled bathtubs and held each other under. Threw ourselves down staircases. Not a scratch.

August, now, and boredom has set in again. Each day we loiter around the main intersection uptown. Traffic slows as it passes, the drivers eyeing us nervously, knowing we're prone to running out in front of moving cars when we get antsy.

Michelle's mom works at the insurance agency on Main Street and says our group is a menace, the worst in years. The men who work at the auto body shop appreciate the work we've made for them, whistle as we bike past, smiling and staring.

Our followers keep their distance. Young boys, gathered on the other side of the parking lot, watching us. They show up the same time we do, whispering amongst themselves. Once in a while one of them shouts something at us or makes his way over to our group, the others making encouraging, animal sounds. We pick up handfuls of rocks and rain down fury, laughing, chasing them off. We're proud of the bruises we've bloomed on their skin. If they know our names, they've never used them. We've heard you don't know when your summer's ended until you try something one day and it hurts again. You bite the inside of your cheek and taste blood, or scrape a knee, or dive into the dark quarry water and don't come back up.

Across the street, in the Burger King parking lot, the high school girls sit on the hoods of cars, shaking their heads at us. Cigarettes pinched between the fingers they've still got left. Limping in and out the door with refills of soda. Boyfriends run fingers along places on the girls' bodies where things didn't heal right.

Jess still can't land on her feet. Marnie lights an M-80, but it's a dud. She throws it in the direction of the boys, who scatter, afraid of an explosion. The air cools; streetlights hum alive. The clock in front of the bank says the sun's setting a few minutes earlier today. Soon we'll each pedal home for dinner. We'll sit at tables with our mothers and feel the thick air between us. Looking at their scars, we'll eat in silence.

Andrew Cothren's work has appeared in *Drunken Boat*, *Redivider*, *The Atlas Review*, and *fields* magazine. He received his MFA from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and currently lives in Brooklyn, New York

HALF-CROWN

Emily Brown

Robyn Schiff selected "Half-crown" for the 2019 Yellowwood Poetry Prize. She writes, "Descending backward into girlhood via etymology and memory, 'Half-crown' is a forceful, understated poem about the violence of keeping secrets and the relief of their release."

the artists are absent
 instead here is a file
 of all i remember
 there was a painting of a boy
 with penguins in the background
 and reflected in his eyes
 the etymology of pupil
 as in the pupil
 of an eye
 is from pupa
 meaning not fully formed or
 girl, the same as pupil
 as in student
 as in a forming bug
 the victorians sometimes called
 locking eyes
 looking babies
 the small reflections of self
 seen in the eyes of another
 your baby self and mine
 engage in a shootout
 like playing a game of chicken
 who blinks loses
 the idea is that stoicism is good
 and hot and honorable
 i never shot first but

i look to fill
and will never take what i want
i remember on the playground
cupping my hand
around the ears of other children
pretending to tell a secret
and spitting instead
is that cruelty?
i think i just wanted
to know what would happen
the kind of thing
you only get away with once
the thing that disturbs me
is i can never remember what happened
after, i mean, meaning trouble or
a hard hit to the sternum
other stories i told
were truer secrets
in the slumber party schedule
this was the last thing before bed
i recounted the worst thing
that had happened to me
in every detail
which maybe explains
how it all comes back
just like that
i liked how all the girls
would lean forward
to better hear me
with their bodies
the sad thing is
i was just early
i am never surprised
to hear of anyone else's
it is assumed like all banalities
you grow older
you hold your rape
under your shirt
like library books when
an unexpected rain comes

i don't tell the details much
there are no more slumber parties
and it would take a long time
for us all to have a turn
in the coffee shop
the barista and a regular
discuss the woman singing
and how fame ruined her lyrics
and voice
and how they liked her so much
when she was new
and young
she is on her eighth album
it is too bad
they both say
that anyone else had touched her
we all have our collectibles
everyone is an archivist

EMILY BROWN's writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly*, *Bennington Review*, *Prelude*, *Sonora Review*, *glitterMOB*, and *Lambda Literary's Poetry Spotlight*, among others. She is currently an Editorial Assistant at *Poetry Northwest* and *The Iowa Review* and received her MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She lives in Boulder.

WHEN THE SITUATION DOES NOT DECOMPOSE YOU ARE MAKING ME KNOW

Kirsten Ihns

the heat sees no thing, just knows
how to rise
supremely a filling action
and
...it is steep to be young

give me just the instant! i will make it out of view:

there are things i am glad
that nobody counts
the number of times
i do

if the good you are circumspect
if the flawless in it circummortal

though i go out like a flash
i go out like a flash flash
i go out like a flash flash & diamond
i go out like a ice

if the animus moves to venture its disposal
you should listen
with your good ear. you should
crack cap polypore. you should cling
to the tree
like you might
fall off
you should get real

convinced about something

allow me to reprise the preliminary causes:

i'm a bad hat

in my real clothes

i am one of those things i do for free

a woman watches a slideshow of her own life

in the big gym

on the recliner bike

if life gets treadless as a lollipop

then i'm bouncing on its slow machine

these are only the rules

but to follow them is a real

likelihood:

the world is a thin case and dimly, the what

you can see through it, hot

not doubt

bound up in the verity of its great clear walls

the fabulate act of their rising

they do no such thing but the fact of it

in a style so tender and suitable

o the heat is totally upwards. the heat is arriving balloon

ok

dear god i am making a true act

very corner

i am turning bleakly around it

is this

a verifiable practice

am i being the right way to ask this

am i

delirious: to have jumped the furrow, joyed
i'm a wayward

annunciating

instrument

(the furrow instrument-joyed!)

passing to another density

whose ancestor occupies the floor

grooved like terrestrial paradise

goal:

i want to be so real

so complete you can know

all my predicates

i want you

to know all my predicates

through the completed trajectory of their arriving

o you see it is comprising

/doing it constantly

let's be pleased by the scent of the yoke

coming on:

i *swear* it is so good it will delight you

someone needs to be brave enough

to go up and comfort the miracle

say soothing things like

that the nation unit observe this day

that the fountain water taste like a strawberry

that there is no flaw in your particular *lightness*

habit:

i want to be changed just by being

how not

are you laughing at my synonym

are you a ~~habit~~ *take me out of the things i am*

you can't

tell the value of a thing

in terms of itself

example: the day passes by
recording its numerals

example: is there a thought
you could put in your mind
that would make it two
habit
you have to trust your body
to know what to do

big animal down in its history rut
scoring it out
coming to settle
my flesh on its sharp angles

love it

bitter wires as a tricked winter mooring
saying what it means like a lazy orbit
pouring up the rainstorm like an hour
lays its waste on the ground enormous sounds
and what remains

i love myself most a moment ago

i love myself in the shapes i know
how to use:

habit, garment, vestment, clothes
woodchip super fortress
paradise

& full of veins
take it nude and shoeless
in the spruces
bare as species
bear as silty clay that means
tested to the depth
of *what do you accept*

/teach me how to be a person
the moment i say

you see, you do what i want

to want

to make me that shape

what is it

made you instrument

what is it made you

start to use them

habit,

tell me *i don't usually do this*

it isn't my house

traversing its zenith

the creature feeling traversed my south

o i know so much at the edge of my reach

it barks at me over the fence

KIRSTEN IHNS is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and is currently a Ph.D. student and Neubauer Presidential Fellow at the University of Chicago, where she co-curates the emerging writer/artist interdisciplinary series Plexiglas, and reads poetry for *Chicago Review*. Her first book, *sundaey*, is forthcoming from Propeller Books in 2020, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Hyperallergic*, *Black Warrior Review*, *DREGINALD*, *Bennington Review*, *Yalobusha Review*, *TAGVVERK*, *The Iowa Review*, *New Delta Review*, *Prelude*, and elsewhere. She is from Atlanta, GA.

CORAL

Rachel Mindell

Once a year on full moon find them: glowing
their way like bubbles rising

a champagne flute for the roof
do these marine invertebrates impel their spawning

upwards, after soft polyps have swelled in release
and propelled towards the ocean surface hundreds,

hermaphroditic bundles that shine in the night
filled with egg and seed as they ascend or cling inside their

together-shape or float for capture by scientists,
I am a scientist, waiting in labs under red light

to collect them, guarding containers
filled with harvested coral and saltwater

and the packages begin to
break apart, falling like a silk robe to the ankles

of each white bucket, releasing ova and sperm,
as lab specialists suck the gamete cells

quickly up through pipettes in their gloves
which are so much rigor, savior, captor, keeper

so as to bank the cells for cryo-freezing, such for shipping,
stacked for storage, that one day reefs like the Great Dead Barrier

mother gone grey and fetid, might live yet again, another
night

another benevolent cork future popping its blue or
purple, orange and branching
swaying skeletal magnum across the sea.

RACHEL MINDELL is the author of two chapbooks: *Like a Teardrop and a Bullet* (Dancing Girl Press) and *rib and instep: honey* (above/ground). Individual poems have appeared (or will) in *Black Warrior Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *DIAGRAM*, *Foglifter*, *Forklift*, *Ohio*, *The Journal*, and elsewhere. She works for the University of Arizona Poetry Center and Submittable.

FIVE POEMS AFTER ART

Jack Christian

After "The Dam, Loing Canal at Saint Mammes," by Alfred Sisley 1884

Held out from River Seine,
I stole into morning

hoping boredom might accrete
into worship if I could be

uncalculated as any breeze.
This aim muttered irreverently

until true, and no urge did guide
the brush, making me mesmerized

by any thing, by boaters
on their errand near the lock,

beneath clouds we dreamed ourselves,
water mirroring less than obliged,

village grave pastel
common to the cutbank

grown of glyphs, my life,
my spirit, uncertain stipple

of unseen, homes swaybacked
and rotting like who gives a shit.

Not me, fled from the parlor
into the plain air, bleating

through midday until

the canal was sky, too.

After “Spring at Bougival” by Alfred Sisley, 1873

Maybe I’ve missed it again, been beleaguered
by bugs, by weather, with no direction

to approach my lostness, so crawl
and call it back. Box easel, field easel,

new whoop of the trivial. On the path,
my father holds his arms wide, walking

with one leg surer than the other,
inviting and cancelling oblivion

for which neither of us can account,
much less stop and hug. In a tyranny

of flowers he’s telling me life is like
a ribbon someone ties and then removes

the finger. That’s him, he’s saying. That’s me
in turn, a bow wrapped to nothing.

For a moment we’re blameless in the blooming,
content to let the trail meander,

our day darkened by petals beneath
clouds that are also blooms, beneath a sky

we don’t know. The two of us, the flimsy trees.

After “Nocturne in Black and Gold” by James Abbott McNeill Whistler, 1875

If I'm longing I'm painting.

I'm 200 miniature suns

against the stinginess of evening.

Cinder plume in the neighborhood

that stank of salt. Great difficulty
of happening into, and sure ecstasy

of joining. I tried to hold all these selves,
our tide, great jab of palaver, smoke

figured in sand, another night
arriving in blue. This one. That one.

The suckiness of leisure, making me
complicit, and beside myself,

and afraid of getting older. Each step
a shore, spark of the instance

I tried to paint into permanence, what dark
exploding, what dark I couldn't see.

**After "Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville" by James Abbott McNeil Whistler
1865**

Earth ends here,
not with a scream

but with a tourist
lost against an ocean,

making the beach
a scene to see.

He's not real.

He's just this dude

stuck happily
in a microwave:

Measured yelp
and evocative poster-print,

see-through wish
for pretty death

as if from a catalog.
Or else no death,

sailor coat and woven hat
sold separately,

the superstition
death won't come

while we watch
a pretend flaneur,

as if salvation
were in accounting,

and in keeping-track
an error-code into heaven.

Keep looking
it's all terrible:

Translucent fucker
locked down in the gloss.

For my next trick
I will monetize

this hopelessness.

After “Peaceable Kingdom of the Branch” by Edward Hicks, 1822-1825

Come see the white kid
doing miracles roadside

with his fat face
while beneath his arm

the brown lion naps.
See the white kid making magic

where the creek is white.
The white kid honored first

with jungle animals
and of-late with laser-lights.

The white kid scribbling plans
for a precious gems, dinosaur bones,

old cars, dead soldier
wax museum, all to commemorate

his being so white the lion
doesn't shred him — His being so white

Dixie sycophants buy tickets,
not so much for the miracle

of the bridge the creek made
as for the Confederate-sympathizing

laser-lights. The creek babbling
for all time. The creek thinking:

of course laser-lights

are what this roly poly

holy toddler has been on about.

The creek thinking, but then again

it's in the presence of this brat

I become a thinking creek.

While the lion naps.

The lion yanked from Africa

so the kid could halt

its first communion with the sheep.

JACK CHRISTIAN is the author of the poetry collections *Family System*, which was selected by Elizabeth Willis for the 2012 Colorado Prize, and *Domestic Yoga* (2016, Groundhog Poetry Press). His poetry has appeared recently in *The New York Times Magazine* and *jubilat*.

AN UPDATE ON BEING ILL

Gabriel Coffman

After two years the head made of felt entirely.
On the edge of town something great moving
inroads. I thought to stop at the edges and I was
right. But they crept inside from faraway. Where
this vision of clockwork and stairs stretched
vertically that this superstructure became my
color of exaggeration denoting the book in the
hands my order forgotten. I did not taint the evil
when I took a pit stop out summoning. The
polygrass quivered in one ear.

“We can’t remember you that well. It’s been
something like awhile,” they said.
“Give me a minute,” I responded.

I looked at what I fed bones for dinner. A maypole
and a gown. Crisp edges fettered. Old friends
walked away to get them a table. I guess I was
scars indirectly. It felt longer than that in months.
Figured our food court was waiting. I drove the
line like timid freakia. I went to know the stone
and the edge where there were no features on
the friends or their fathers. But the foods were
clear gemstones. Syrup opened up the hall. I took
that for meaning the event’s evasion worked with
webbed fingering handshakes over turpitude and
blood. Tutorialized blood. It resists I don’t know
for sure it was covered in softener.

“Straight timbre moves the who,” said their
fathers.
“Your hold and I fold and I hold in firewood and
laughter,” said someone I can’t remember.

I don't bother. I do different things down where they were intended. One key ingredient came out of over. A face delivered intended terror. I imagined its speech. It said no. It said I've got that kind of face.

"Tender and remote," it said.

In that scene when he smiled his face blinked off. In that scheme purple surfaces moved underneath all expression. In this stand the intestines under his smile traveled like trapped snakes. In this tendency I could hear a name in the same pyramid.

"I," they all said, "can wait for a second child if they don't happen anymore. Little child engraving. Give it back."

Sweets vaporized the table sketch. Melded puddles tore away the school book story. I cried out two vibrato notes at once when the sheer loops of the art book cut through the hands. Floating in and outstretched. Further and further the stillness in everyone bent their caverns to repair from home and home. My clothing blooms. I swallow them whole pants shirt everything floating up the throat. It tickles recedes and I rise creamy to my throat

GABRIEL COFFMAN is currently an MFA student at the University of Colorado Boulder and a reader for the *TIMBER Journal*.

THE CROSSES IN YOUR DIAMOND LEGS

Katherine Gibbel

grow overcast this morning germane
to my love your quiet noises
of and in the water
what I can't quit I bring with me
corrugated rock and orange daylilies
like the skirt on Flaming June
and thank god for neither of us
remember seeing her at the Frick
so we can go together
and compare the sun to you
James resplendent in mesh
neon orange daylight
crowding out the clouds
each temporary tattoo of the bird
crossing the sky printed on our arms
filmy and obscure—riverlike in gesture

stained with one streaky red

the train completing this railroad apartment

somehow “in the country” which is to say

its newness is all you

the sand now turning as you say:

the cloud approaches the moon like a spaceship

KATHERINE GIBBEL’s poems have been published in *Bat City Review*, *The Bennington Review*, *Gulf Coast Online*, *Underblong* and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. She has taught creative writing at the University of Iowa and Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand.

FIVE POEMS

Peter Giebel

Tower, the Effect of Pit

sensor of the sun

wheat fields, curved scales
by mouth of any throng

what always was
no worth but yield

I can hear a dog barking

I can see a bird buried
in the earth you have forgot

Risk

den, blossom, fossils

within fossils, what-

ever brings flesh what

like water, blind

having no shelter

the mouth
is no door yet

ransomed

Gest

hirsute and combed

a viper's nest

I cannot write
while running

negligé, jejune

the pyres cower

continuing intact

so few, a solipsism

Adagio

you meet

and fly off, adjacent

a series of walls
nothing inscribed

a locust's shell

an eagle took

rapt to a sprig
afame eagerly

Satellite

I follow
a wall, burden
of a garden
with derelicts over-
head, I come
to recognize a stranger
desiring vital
repeat

PETER GIEBEL is a writer and educator based in Denver, CO. His work has appeared in *Diagram*, *Lana Turner*, *Prelude*, *Pulpmouth*, *Sonora Review*, and elsewhere. Recently, he was a finalist for the Tomaž Šalamun Prize.

MERMAIDS

Lori Propheter

Mermaids

One

We keep our
legs under

blankets the
bones gleaming

in jelly like
concrete left in

a wheelbarrow
in the rain

the next day
leaves hang

under the surface
like beetles

under glass

Two

We dress in
fiberglass our

spun sugar
tongues our

foreheads messy
with welts we

film in secret

from knots in

plywood the
tops of milk

cartons the screen
door lets the

cool air seep
in we passenger

pigeon the night

Three

We drip dry
in the waiting

room our hair
shiny with fossils

moats circle the
automatic doors

our lockets leak
static the aisles

full of ashes
the tollbooths
come in waves

Four

We secretary
the morning

the intersections
full of bells

we slide right
through like

swords through
stomachs empty

yawn of space
the snakes

swallow everything

LORI PROPHESTER lives and works in DeKalb, Illinois. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poor Claudia*, *Storm Cellar*, *Sugared Water*, and elsewhere. She is a poetry reader for *GASHER Journal*.

TWO POEMS

Justin Runge

Day of Rest

The building, imploded, became
a cloud that moved toward those
gathered there to watch. A shrine

on a website collected memories
of the building's many residents.
Even the coworker who'd never

called it home cried on collapse.
We admire the sky so much but
nothing lives an entire life there;

the ground gathers every ending.
In a cloud of clay, cloud of skin,
many people thought of illness.

No one knew that the implosion
would be rhythmic. We thought
about our families, about the rain

brittling into ice on the highway.
Going home in the coming days.
Leaving houses behind to droop

and darken like jack-o'-lanterns.
Plans with our fathers. Plumes
following us down slick roads.

February

Like ruination, weather-
men read the week's last
bleak line as my wife
packs my lunch at night—
it's the act of an optimist.
What she calls memories,
I call documents: cards
from my parents emptied
of the checks. Today, two
pairs of socks, and a child
at the bus stop. Too many
dogs to adopt. I am sad
enough to miss the grass.
The cough I fought off
crawls back into my bed,
my throat; there's room
in both. In my lunch bag,
a note: I'm going to sleep.
This year, our homeland
isn't winning, so the news
is full of failed athletes.

JUSTIN RUNGE is the author of *Plainsight* (New Michigan Press, 2012) and *Hum Decode* (Greying Ghost Press, 2014). His criticism has been featured by *Black Warrior Review* and *Pleiades*, and his poetry has been published in *Cincinnati Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *DIAGRAM*, and other journals.

3 POEMS

Abraham Smith

The Insomniac Sentinel

that's my buddy brother-in-law eddy
on nights at the paper mill
last night fell he says

asleep standing up je-
sus the machine
could've eaten you

nah he says honest worst
would have happened
the paper would have broke

right square where i fell
or it was the facer we
were making

and that's a pretty
easy mess it's a leap in
the hay see

whether facer or no
all to a man jump
in and down and

shoulder that
snake of steaming slop shit
back up out over to

another it's a vat where
it's time to cut the broke up
and cook back to usable

cook it back to usable
there are guys there guys there
can tell it just looking at it

when it's ready to be facer again
changed is what any body says
given time and activities

smeddy's face ilk ug
icked round y
inters f rinks

say we no man left behind ever
and puff a chest and suck a
gut in but of course we do

lose ourselves
and others connections
concessions rusting

carts of sparks
pistolwhipped
arc to ground

in the popeyed veterans'
bitter flags popping loyal
laurel royal alloy say

to a fault shined knights
in peaty books through the so much
rain blasts their underclothes

to rusts hued for good
call it mettle's happy heart attack
let by sunset atmosphere

digging at his arm eddy is
where fiberglass little
glass mouth biter cotton

candy flea facer
rashed him up good
into battle now goodly noble

knights came to expect to endure
how a herald's heft burned the shoulder
blade to flame cranes grey graven there

stands one among many there
she alone the steady eddy one up
on one 'rina foot while silent round shining

in the other weathervane birdpaw basically
it's a manna snowcone minimoon held up
crystal ball style and

the legend goes should she drop that
upraised stone of light into her shadow's shallow into
water's lax glass lap then sleep felled she so

waked better be by some footstone spats with waters
dimpler cymbaler wrinkler surprise her
flat out needs be brought around

to home fires vigilant ligament villagant stay
tuned to any twig's neck hex say because not in this
alone because next bird up just won't do

because spoiled milk twice boiled
slips down the storm gutter pant of the son
of the father hey eddy

hey maybe
that's a wad of paper
facer i mean

steaming and staring and stirring up
through upraised heraldic crane
say she footballed the broke

balled your face maybe even
so yr lips race your eyes to yr nose so
yr brows like fire starter sticks say

rubbed together patch the parachute say
with little snails of smoke say
little ferns unfolding say

on cicada's swale-you-whole-womb-tomb say
on cricket's bandy-knee-shriek say
in every 3rd bird's skipping 7inch say say

say sleep truth escapes no
one she does drift
does drop you

coinwise falling
then into the slipping
stream glass yr second name released into above's below

ah tell how time's a river impulsive to the sea then
or what's time's scuttle when yr under with no
real bellow gill to plum yr blossomless bosom straining

say seconds? days say? before grapes
before melons fireseyes bigging
she sudden sight sees you

as maybe no one
ever has quite
see-seed you

bottomed backed trembled you
solo sexing it you
getting born or first trying to

sign your name while the current's scrawl
does nothing much with you and you're watching
her peace sign peace sign foot falling for you

pedigree hers drawling in inevitability of a machine
closing and clasping and raising you up out
you gasping you sputtering you coughing drool dew you

bap tisk lee east new you new
saved the day she did and you
you saved yr life's chandelier bandito sound for

her sing after won't you it's yr throat so
memorable to those hundred thousands gathered
as around a brown tomb upset

every eye fish
fat with gold
made to measure you

man that wriggler
can't span when yr huger
than a shouting gun chorus

when every mouth swells
to glitz yr simple name
precious metal

fork to spade to tnt to plodding
dozer how much then
after under might remain

gonna dig into the sidehill's
subsidence gonna cove an ear to
badger heart or bear thump thump

not the rain's choice
no the roof's arrhythmia after
o doe o doling drops

like god does
god does
teeth to babies

your birth breath caught a little
catches sound's breast this
rolling out of you in green headwaters

if the river whiskey and i one rat dove
well i'd skitch to the bottom be
that wooden spoon forgotten in

stew stews down darling
the dimple lick tensile
ladle delicacy call it

dearer than marrow in a doll
that's ether's zero only
in the well met helmet of the ortolan bunting

that's the pike the drool town raven is
rowing when above this
river's varicose roll

that's the river keeping everything going
that's the paper the facer rolls deafening on
that's the equator heat belting off the driers

takes the edges
off the porno
mags up in to a sneary little curl

o worthy o consider your glowing
stone on nights like these at the mill
your weight in gold now what would that be

would it your weight or
you and your children
or you your children and your wife

or you your children your wife
and your truck needs a new alternator
or would it you your children

your wife your truck needs a new bearing
and yr bent cussing the pigweed the johnson
grass wound so tight around the tines

the batters of the rototiller as to be
tumor woodstone workerback
o broken clock of weeds

or do you do you wait weigh
goldwise what the minnows in
the mountain streams weigh

tipped and slipped and
running wounds
dogs of debt dogs

may grow cleaner
the keener the closeness
to the sources

may that's after
april before june and all
3 render we rectangular

better call 'em what they are
slippy timothy onion lard
union internal flame dirt

bucketed down upon
our negligible heads
time has a way now

of singing
the high end at the end
like a bottle-

rocket aimed more or less away o
lizard in a blue jay tonight
o boom baboomboom tonight

surprise now come to find now
has a price pray eagle river of coffee
keep me in seeing eye stones tonight

in the other shoe dropsy stall
in sandstorms of sound stones tonight
in lichens shot out shotguns

until they get up
run greeny mouths
into the stars' why white

never once not eggshell
tremble paper-knuckle
into the bonechill blues

into the red
ran vermilion
halfway down

bug on a crown
soresooth flag
who next who now

schoolyard pole
and will you risk it
yr tongue to touch it

awakenin then
sand and facer face
snapped crayon teeth

Double Vision

ah when new baby rises
rises up all black out drunk
from a curbstone seafoamed

in false crests of

newspaper and trashed
xmas wrapping paper

rises up in a coast
or crust of bread
coat trench

something so all leg
so old and new rises
rocks along

this land here
times ago
that ocean

this new thing
proofs it
that muddle throttle

murk at sound
of yr own voice
applaud when

they applaud
to plod upon
applause's plaudits

for lauded yourself
saliva string
a rope tow between

the moth from the mouth
of the nameless goner
and day's first rooster

shovin a frozen flame catkin
up under
the saggin tent

of dawn what is it

to throw yr blood
up into the cask air ask rooster

why baby decides
megadeath for the song
plunks the button

with one oafish thumb
or plain random rain down hums along
the bird the windseam

capable culpable or
cups of fate
spluttering are we

when the train
wags east old hitchyard
whited with styrofoam

lends the chainlink some teeth
wide man stooped to squatting there
blows a coffee in near

car wreck tires
talking and writing
shriek and black

from his ass
sailing out now
in vague parade

baby the second towers
nearer second first
needle for a nerve

behind deadline seamstress mowing
stitches like airplane smoke
in something kin to kitsch sackcloth

and with the mercilessness mind

of one acid's say
baby 2 rainin blowholes

in face scapes of baby 1 til
like an ages old dipper whose
dip spit wears a hole in chin lip

ah habit's holes
try and muddy over
with egg crates

snake bite hammer time oil well
snake bite hammer time oil well
snake bite hammer time oil well

from dear dear beak
from almost a drink
the spine so liqui-new

babe breath got prized
mincin and particular real anger
chipdust pinched by a fatso leerer

unborn again number 1 is
ancillary rooms darkening
clicked it and the life

cord sags again against
shilled earth
dill plant no match

for the ceo
done with his
cigar sun and

i have heard the mighty
misty professors
to pull at their salt beards

at their usual sugar bangs

crazy bard
hard over

this fam kill astonishment but with
no real reasonable or
okay words to peal

their beards their bangs silent
earth under stacked wood
and i have read plenteous loud

psych books piled unto the kingdom
about how you are
how you are because

the pissed and percussed upon
middle child your
firstborn wavin a flamin

signature's vowels
bulging distended
corrals the younger's

kitten blood
in a bedbug
tadpoles

in a cistern
turn the waters
clearer only

child tether fizzing
down the dynamite
tricked up plenty

by the last born
all surveillance gone
i slip to the podium

in this tide tweed shined by

rain and time rot am i not
before yr very first memory

every hill every river
every drumlin every shale
every edge to vanish every stone over

every talus slipper
every plains whose windsong
mitts to copping fire

river run beat teeth deep
acclivity sharp crushed glass
escarpment's echo descrying

rib rill rises flats fats ridges
there where the sib plot thicked thicker
than mule saliva after a day

stuff was glue you could hand it down to a kid
take the pleasure of a hollow hour filled
chase it out cross the yard

mule drool throw it up uhoh stuck it in a tree
nobody tall enough home
all the ladders down the road

as all were pitching in at painting
the barn so this poem leaves you kid
jump jumping but there is no way

that's a war between
that's a battle of
just us kids

of epochs of cities
of natures of nations
for every one there is one

must give shove to

my grace walk
try and heaven my face

heavens my clubfoot
cranesang lordly byron wreaths
of quick and painless spiders

spreading like sex rash
along the toyish
kayaks of his clavicles

our best hair beat
in the dust chaw
our eyeballs jostled

like bedsprings
on the first nights
we must bite if we have to

loose a tooth too
money moon going
ga ga in the ska sky

hummer
thumb in the
blood eye

shiner one
dysplasia loaf
worthy grass

pissing contest
course the creek
serious about river

shoulder dislocate about
who the hell
older is this

little hill arisen then

go grow lonely
behind after

lonely and thoughtful
am i to be no father
my solitary shadow

just the penciled in crime
my tomb
upset by lover

or twobit thief
only the half eaten
acorns under the dramatic oaks

cracked little deeper
into smear know
knowledge sole

o love
whisper a fig
finger in

twin kin in thin down
to a line on a ledger
screw yr poor over

screws or nails
the two kinds of people
will you bang be

earth slurped up or
twist in the clay yard
play thing of wind's

square hands
tantalus stooping
tantalus reaching

am i blasted this black hearth or

the rosy engineblock heartpine
burp burn til queendom

or am come to the king jack
water from shit moat drawn
best bird made i can

my shaking hand
koi carp claim shark
dusk and after

in there not knowin it
or shall i steer
or sleptwalked be

into the cut ground one fine
day my name pulled over
me xray apron heavy

and then
the worked to worth-
less dirt

Brake 4 Cranes

for their size
is ours
or close

anything you love
blow it all
your size or close

i love maudlin turquoise
buttons okay one
your size or close

i love cape cod beech leaves
in early oct toothache bright

okay one your size or close

i love tea on my teeth in the cool pm
and to be near a dim lit bathroom okay
one your size or close

i love wearing a hat in a house
and running hot water over ever redder hands
for winter's sacre sake okay one your size or close

i love it when i check email
and there are none no not one
okay one your size or close

i love sticking my neck out
for unjust people with green eyes
okay one your size or close

calls theirs cull sack
debt natal stay-cation
culdesacfor a trachea call their

unison dandy leek call their
pond jump when kid jump call their
wastey corn teeth laughed free lichen icon their

unicycle bard call their
union pant sauce call their
fascia skeet trashcan lick call their

acne cream squeegee dream call their
blown knee brace ace rage call their
hand pump the well honk geek call their

dirtin curtain dinosaur call their
heartpine stage planks repurposed as
dolls for wet herdsman call their

only way to get that wet
is don't wait on the river call

culdesac neck unspill

one good place is
to raise a family my good friend's kids
bored wd rubwheels to

curbs upon giving skateboard's
unmistakable trenchant
construction patter the cranes

so lovelylovely in their til death ardor
in the land of tammy
wynette well met why not red hurt yr

hands a little for their ardor arbor
already a stout copse just and standing
thick lush beside the sparer coppice

gaptooth haha eye-crept
thru spindles over air
apple green shoulders

into the pissin internet where
rapt injectable plastics enhance mints
in the fleshy mouths of scorchin deportees

die for you die for you
die for you die for you
die for you die for you

died in willy
shakespeare
times ago

tho these midwestern thespians strut
and rail this rehearsal hall still
sound about if

enunciation
were a runrail judge's

florid bile

and pedantics
a kit you try and trace force
with drunk thumbs

after midnight on
what once was
christmas eve sir

about like if an oxfordian's oar's
suspended richmond drip got pinched by
some soil cap scholar layin by

erased blunder for eyes
hangover incurable matter
salted or egging

so rubs old ink river
into his gored tomato gums
sees didn't i tell you heracliteanly

pees pees a fail to
arrive at sea
sit me down this forest dim

as tho low
in hull the water
my mouth tightening

between the pine
and the woodpecker
crosshatched in flight

that i might listen to
heart's time is its own
horse swallowing

is a man moanin
through the leaves

doubletime and there

s/he is

lean against a tree

the tree too big

for its britches for that's

a sycamore one of those

what they call born nudists

and the sick leaves

in their taperings

sort of like ready

to fuck you up

but bout the size of

an ancient shame

give him away sheepish

pelt in a creek eyes

take that taint away

sweat to a future smear

child ups to reachable window

passing man with both eyes seen

wretched in lampshades

powered by his dog whose coloring

conjures a country yam calm

where the bombs

sweaters slipped over the shiverers

where the thoughts steady

in heads rung

rung and bestowed

a not uncertain warmth

where the human

humaning again

pliable domino turns

purblind pures
this where patience is
and angry ain't and

if coins colors
of breath breathed
by cloth buried

no more sweet lingerer
flower freely climbs herself
so there

ABRAHAM SMITH is the author of five poetry collections—most recently, *Destruction of Man* (Third Man Books, 2018). In 2015, he released *Hick Poetics* (Lost Roads Press), a co-edited anthology of contemporary rural American poetry and related essays. He lives in Ogden, Utah, where he is Assistant Professor of English at Weber State University.

SOFT CHAPARRAL

Tasia Trevino

Several sphinxes,

dragged to the dunes by DeMille.
Buried in spite. Then buried in indifference.
They wait, chthonic. At the Occidental center.
Excavation not allowed. Eviction notice
served to the clam suckers. Unable to conjure
Lemuria. This is now a refuge. Pre-Portolan
restoration. Sea bird tracks dainty in the sand
shelves. Snowy little plovers. Ice plant
invasion. I dream the stabilizers get extinct. I
step over the low-slung stake fence to find the
city. The dune hills remove context. No
speech here but a torn black balloon. Its
stretch over the sky. Punctuation of residual
Perseids. The dunes open to me. My mantic
mothers. 21 sphinxes, 12 feet tall. I lay all
night on the oil puddled at their 33-pound-
paws. They see me a world without water.
Could carpet be a desert? If it's long enough in
your mouth.

Hoarse barks,

slap the street. Ring the harbor. The
sea lions pace the length of their concrete
tank. Sun stars dull behind the glass. At the
shell shop, glossy cowries strung on fishing
line. Piled angel wings. Cockles caught
elsewhere by spurts of cyanide. Shipped in
sacks. Dumped into bins. Dive my fingers into
the shifting mounds. You pack my mouth with
salt water taffy. Tame my hair with surf wax.
On the catamaran, we scatter. Respectful

memorials at sea. Remains just beyond the break. Views of the tied island. Its contested face. Views of the triple cigarette smokestacks that loom above the bay. Their blinking red tips. Abandoned in their tasks. End the avenue. I seasick walk its length. Trail clatter of sand dollars. Bits of blown glass. A flock of tethered cormorants. And who should climb this rock? How could the records show?

Condos get,

built on the bluffs. By the Kristin Smart Memorial. Her unfound body may be sealed in concrete in a nearby backyard. Or bones picked clean and scattered beneath the Poly 'P.' Or else. At the seaside resort, I ask to be moved to the table with the ocean-view. I ask to be buried under a manzanita. Lick someone else's waxy lipstick off my wine glass' rim. Pull mussels from their black shells with my teeth. Spit them onto the sand. Contort my tongue. Swoon into the lap of tide. Sift the sand for another way to say. I know how heavy my rain is. Enough to erode. Enough to expose. No fossils here, but a headless Apatosaurus cast in plaster. Enter to the caves down a staircase in its tail. An advertisement for the defunct lapidary shop. What gets built without permit? What occludes the view?

When I come,

tonight I think of Hearst Ranch. No rooms nor pools. Just the land, from the crest to the coast. Little herds of zebra and elephant seals. Monterey Cypress braced against the westerlies. I think of the pre-fall lighting and the expansive land. I think of

being that big. I think of El Camino Real. 555 curved green poles with bells on the ends. Of being that long. Of mercury mines. I arch my head back onto your shoulder. I think of holding a nopal bulb in my right hand. I squeeze it. Then I try to flick it free. I flap my hand, try to unstick it. This turns me crazy. I prefer to be the direct object. I prefer Spanish construction. But what happens without choice. What belongs in my mouth. Which houses grow on my molars. What presses more space between my teeth. What raises my tongue, what depresses it.

A double-domed nuclear,

power plant springs from the curve of cove. Named in defiance. Cooled by seawater sucking through intake tunnels. Spat back 20 degrees warmer. It's built by a fault. It doesn't discern. Spits the Abalone Alliance back down the rocks. Has hot flushes. Uproots. Gets jellyfish sticking in its lungs. I scrape the crusted pleurae of mollusks in the dark. Nails drag the hissing concrete. Anemones grow on my gums. In my lacks. In the cove, you take me transitive. Bend my breastbone to a bow. Pin my elbows to my back. Stretch the skin of my torso. Giant kelp caress my hull. I implant myself with copper anchor. Then angle me in repose. Sleep me in the crease of sky and warmed waters. Stunt my benthic breathing. The cove turns in its sleep. Gulls bob in its wake. Serene behind the breakwater.

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