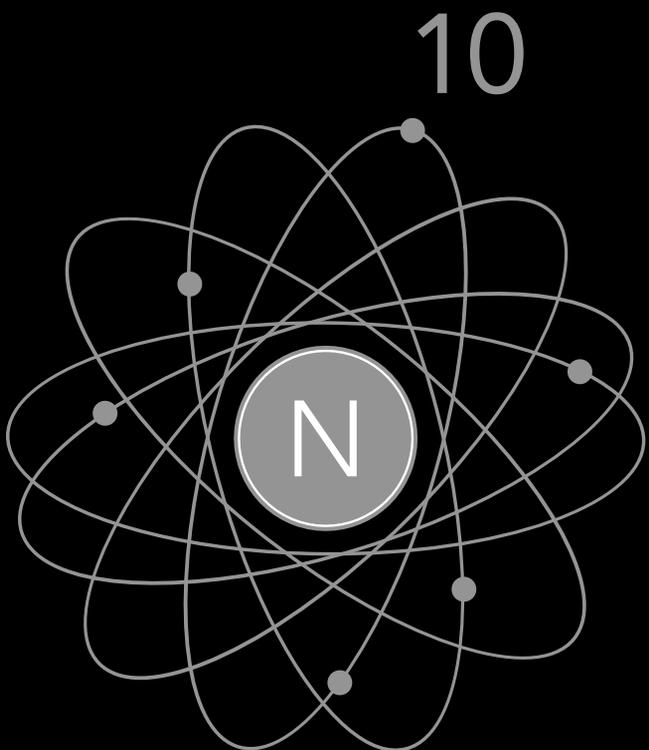


10

NANO Fiction



THE END

# NANO Fiction

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**Editors** Kirby Johnson, Elizabeth Wade, Sophie Rosenblum

**Associate Editors** Kelsie Hahn, Matt Sailor

**Web Editor** Sophie Rosenblum

**Web Developer** Benjamin Voigt

**Design Concept** Lynette Liwanag

**Layout and Production** Andrea Trninic

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Elizabeth Wade

Sophie Rosenblum

Glenn Shaheen

Lynette Liwanag

Andrea Trninic

Matt Sailor

Andrew Bales

Andrew Brininstool

Gregory Caridi

Kayla Rae Candrilli

Signe Cluiss

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Steph Opitz

Nikki Ortiz

Austin Lloyd Sepulvado

Anna Saikin

Angela So

Robert Bjorn Taylor

Stephen Thomas

Eric Todd

Benjamin Voigt

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Readers, this is the end.

This is the twentieth and final issue  
of *NANO Fiction*.

When *NANO Fiction* began in 2006, the editors were a handful of students wanting to create a space for short stories. There were the lit journals we looked up to, the powerhouses of flash fiction: *elimae*, *Quick Fiction*, *SmokeLong*. We hoped to create a space like these, a space where the shortest stories could find a home, where they could tear a reader apart with their sharp little teeth, where they could saturate the page without filling the page. Much like the era, the work we wanted to publish was concerned with economics, with time, with space.

*NANO Fiction* came about at a moment when print had just been declared dead, where everyone was succumbing to the recession—universities were stripping long-running publications of their funding, subscribers were tightening their belts, and non-profits were flailing under the Bush-era gutting of their endowments. But there was something about the form flash fiction that could not be pinned down by all of this. *NANO Fiction* was flexible. The stories took a form not easily boxed-in by the rigid constraints of genre, and in return the magazine was a reflection of this liteness. The recession opened a door where flash fiction could thrive in print, and we are so proud that *NANO Fiction* helped in that process.

I mention all of this because, as the founding editor of the journal, I was always deeply aware that the economics of the publication were important. I loved the stories, but it was the business of the magazine that needed the most attention, and it was the business of the magazine that I took the most pride in. Ten years ago, *NANO Fiction* was concerned with creating a print outlet for flash, and it was my duty to find a way to financially do that, but over time the magazine became more than that—it became an educational tool, a resource for writers and teachers, a trigger for conversations, and a balm. *NANO Fiction* was where new writers could experiment with short forms; writer-educators could find teaching materials and essays for their classes in our State of Flash Series; readers could find the latest and greatest collections through our reviews; and those with writer's block could cure their ailment with our writing prompts both online and in our

*We Like It Fast* handbook. It has been an incredible decade, one in which *NANO Fiction* has transcended even our own expectations. The journal and the community it fosters have changed dramatically.

As our staff has surveyed those changes, we've thought deeply about the next steps. And in doing so, we've come to see that the conditions that led to *NANO Fiction's* creation have changed, too. Flash has gained traction as a literary form, and now many publications routinely include it in their pages. Print is, in fact, still around, despite the early elegies of the aughts. And the literary magazine scene is vibrant and lively. We're so honored to be part of that scene, and we hope the work we've done has helped enrich it. We're proud of that work.

In some sense, of course, the work of advocating for underappreciated forms and creating a space for diverse voices will never be complete. But in a practical, economic, logistic sense, we do feel that *NANO Fiction's* tenth anniversary is the time for us to end our journey. Therefore, this will be the journal's final issue. As part of our transition and educational mission, we're making all our archive available online starting January 1st, 2017. We hope you'll enjoy reading and rereading these works as much as we have.

We're so grateful for the writers who shared their work with us and the readers who came to our pages. Thank you for being part of this lovely decade.

Thank you,  
Kirby Johnson  
Founding Editor

## Medusa

Like most disasters, the snakes came all at once. I awoke to find my lover beside me turned to a wall of broken stone. One by one, the servants became rubble before my eyes as they answered my cries for help. Fear made me wise. I threw my mirror into the moat that I might stay a stranger to myself. Even the imperfect image of my face in a quick-running stream is enough to stiffen my joints.

The villagers do my bidding though. They know that if my meals are not brought, I'll come down from this castle and look in all their windows, rapping slyly on the sill. When I'm in the mood, they bring a boy to me in blindfolds. As long as he does what I say, the snakes can be managed. I have learned the hard way that kissing is impossible. The venom works into their veins like molten tin, and it's preferable to pull the blindfold off when that happens. I let them decide.

I know what you're thinking—that the pretty girl has turned ugly, that she likely had it coming. Maybe I did. Beauty begets enemies, and when it's gone, most women must take whatever passes for love. I'm here to tell you it is not impossible to live in two worlds well. There is another path and I am on it. No man dares mishandle me.

*Katrina Prow*

## #3077879: Contraceptive Intra-Uterine Appliance

February 19, 1963

The doctor asks if I trust my lover, and I think, trust is the wrong word. He is the floor beneath my bed each morning, planks of imitation eddies that sink with the promise of feet but still hold. I think, this isn't about my lover really; it's about quiet, about plugs and shapes that fit like buttons in sweater holes. This is a selfish thing, what I want without my lover, we are wire twisting, semi-precious in loops and loops, we circle yet never meet before one touch. The doctor waits for answers, my legs wide and screaming around his white coat, I think, look inside and tell me: is it trust, does a tunnel lead to simply one end? Put a tree of copper in and read the leaves like tarot. I was small and chalk-colored between my mother's legs once; my father couldn't spell the word if he tried, loops and loops of the letter T not crossed. Do you think this is about pattern; my lover works in oil fields every day, hands slick but gummy at the tips, the rig gyrating spirals of in and out. The doctor's hands are thirsty; before the quiet of a great exhale, I feel everything, a sharp pinch of settling, and then a hard swallow into the empty of my gut.

## #3077885: Brassiere

February 19, 1963

When the diagnosis came, I stopped with the bra. Unhinged from my vertebrae, it was limp and loose on the hardwood, a lifetime of limit curled into coil. I let him touch me then, bare wild and exposed beneath a tissue of cut-up crop-top shirt. A hook, an eye, a hand, a reach, he wants to keep me, all the parts, even the bits of fabric dying. The cancer is black, my bra is flesh-pink, my nose is ruddy from medicine. The cells between my legs shift and go crystal, two hands in a fist: clasped then unraveling. The doctor peels away insides, shapes the mass into cone; his laser is a compass steady-north. My bra flung to the floor, tossed to the chair, brushed under a bed cross-stitched in lingering bodies. Everyone has it, the authorities say, but I can't repair the math quick enough. A phone call and a dial tone becomes something hollow; my bra is two folded cups, elastic, and band. He is silk; he is broadcloth; he is lace restraining. I feel him even after he is ghost, even though he is thin polyester. Where are the straps of your girdle now? What happened to the threads of your backing?

*Katrina Prow*

## #30077891: Toupee and Method of Manufacture

February 19, 1963

My mother used to say that heat lifted out of our bodies from the pores in our head. I'm no expert, but hair is a fuss when morning-tangled, like black sludge mountains in stopped-sink pipes. When my lover left the first time, I took scissors to scalp, cut fringe with the blade perpendicular, a cross, a curtain for my face the way my mother's mother taught; her own hair fire red or ice blonde or the color of fancy chocolates. The second time the hair fell on its own, in knots or strands, locks of bubble membranes to signal the end. Adhesive solves the problem of release; ours was a problem of staying together. We are designed for different crowns, an error in mechanics, how we are made, what's born and growing from the follicle, our hair inches and inches long, creeping slow like toenails or filled-up lungs while we sleep. The hairline of these things is supposed to curve or come to a point, a wise woman's peak. The important thing is to keep sprouting—act natural. Comb and scratch and shower, they say. Lather and rinse twice: an appearance like life. Under it all I'm bald, a flesh of red when I see him, the steam splitting my brow like machine. How does that song go? Gonna wash that man, that man, that man. Gonna peel him off like Velcro, gonna pull until he rises with the flakes of hard product or dead skin, right out, right out, and down the drain with the rest of them.

*Dawn Sperber*

## We Take All the Luck We Can Get

In New Mexico, we take all the luck we can get. When it streams along the red dirt road like rainwater, we bend down and scoop it up in our empty to-go cups. Then we duck behind a piñon and pour it over our heads, open our mouths and drink some too, just like a hobo shower. We love the luck and what it does to our waking dreams. How it makes us shine. There are magnets in the water that call our intentions from over the mountains to our hands like trained birds. Everyone—from adobe wall-builder to hermit oil painter—everyone out here trying, loves to hear them sing and stops to listen when at last they sing again. Sometimes the luck showers us from the blue sky like warm summer rain, every now and then. We stay attentive, ready for it.

## The Bird Who Taunts You

The bird inside your head pecks you awake. You feel its beak jab the backs of your eyeballs. You get out of bed and trade pajamas for an Oxford shirt and slacks. You grab a chocolaty Clif bar as you leave and drive to work ten minutes behind schedule. Your bird chirps, "Is that the best you can do?" One day, this bird flew into your head, inside of your skull, and never left. Instead it made a nest of dead neurons—your mind a mineshaft for a canary that will not die. At work, you sit at a desk with a computer in a cubicle. Sometimes your job is data entry. Sometimes your job is stuffing and sealing hundreds of envelopes. Sometimes your job is waiting for hours for someone to assign you a task. Your bird squawks, "I guess you're good for something." You want to wring his brittle bird neck. Your skull needs a round hole like a birdhouse that you could reach through to grab the feathered prick. What tool would you use to make it? A power drill? A screwdriver? A one-hole-punch for the human head? You open a drawer and look at your office supplies: stapler, tape dispenser, pencil sharpener. Your damned bird tweets, "Hey Einstein, I'm on your side." The computer chimes with an e-mail from your manager; her printer has a jam that needs your attention. You click and drag the message into a folder marked *Did Not See*, where it joins months' worth of requests to refill water coolers and documents you were supposed to file. You lean back in your swivel chair and ponder whether you'd rather be bored doing your job or bored doing nothing. Your bird whistles a care free tune, always at home and never alone.

## The Hare Who Knew Your Father

The hare hops from heart to stomach to lungs. You lie awake in your twin bed and feel it rooting around your liver. You haven't washed your sheets in months. Underneath your pillowcase, your pillow is stained yellow and brown from excretions you cannot identify. Your hare says, "You're becoming more like your father." You remember your mother complaining of the same discolorations inside his collars and ball caps. Whence this filth? You shower daily, you use two-in-one shampoo and conditioner. Did you inherit these stains, a strain of perennial grease in your DNA? A whisker tickles your kidney. You close your eyes and imagine your father's funeral. You picture an old woman in a long, black dress who turns out to be his first wife whom you've never met. In your head, you write the eulogy, how you'd be gentle yet accurate, how to focus on love instead of exacting revenge, how you'd make only the vaguest references to times he betrayed you and broke the law and somehow got away with it all, even when he was caught. The hare bounces on your spleen. It says, "This brings back memories of your dad." You sit up and check your phone. It is 3:33 on a Tuesday morning. You turn on the lamp and pull all of the sheets off your bed. Your mattress is white on the edges and yellowed in the middle where you just lay. The hare, dangling from one of your ribs, shudders at your shame: full-body bed-wetter. While you sleep, your pores seep—but what? Something that can penetrate layers of linen and cotton. A parasite in your blood, some unknown dweller in your corporeal zoo. You stare upon a sepia-toned, headless silhouette that you created but cannot recognize.

## The Toad Who Needs Things

The toad lives in your throat, a roadblock between brain and tongue. A co-worker asks about your weekend. Your toad croaks, "Don't forget me." You pause too long for such a simple question before stammering out some combination of fine and good. Did you say something about food, or your foot? You might seem rude or dim-witted to others, who produce small talk with ease. At noon, you microwave a frozen chicken-and-cheese tamale, divide it into bites with your fork, and cover them in red drops of Tapatio. The chewed-up cornmeal chunks wriggle past your toad's slimy flesh. It cries, "It's too hot!" You shovel the remaining pieces into a trashcan. For four hours, you sit at your desk and speak to no one. Your phone rings once, and you let it go to voicemail, which you don't check. No one needs you except your toad, which would die without the shelter of you. Sometimes your toad makes it hard to breathe, clogging your airway, causing frenzied gasps. At 5:00, you drive home in rush hour traffic. You unlock the door to your apartment and step inside. You leave your work clothes in a pile by the door. Your toad moans, "What a dump." You think your toad belongs in a Florida swamp, or an upstate New York lake, or neither. You've forgotten all the geography and biology that school taught you. All but the names of things—Krebs cycle, mitochondria, Bering Strait—their meanings lost. In your bedroom, you lie down to nap or masturbate before you have to cook dinner. On the floor is a coffee pot you use as a spittoon when it's too difficult to swallow. You hope someday your toad will see this miniature pool, leap out through your mouth, and learn to swim.

*Kimberly King Parsons*

## In Our Circle

If she was afraid, she never let on. She'd pull her chair right into our bloody-minded circle, get dirty up to her wrists. It didn't matter if we pinched pots or rolled out dicks and balls, at the end of each class the art shrink would take whatever we'd made and mash it all back in on itself. We'd watch her small hands choke through the mess and try not to levitate the craft table with our peckers. "It's a process," she told us. Of course there would be threats and thrown elbows, sometimes somebody getting grabbed by the throat for what seemed like nothing at all. When this happened the art shrink would sigh and push the call button. The doctors would rush in, their little clipboards up like shields. The rest of us sat still, hands soft where everyone could see. "Allow these distractions to deepen your concentration," the art shrink would say. When they let me out I was just as mad as when I went in, only fatter and too lazy to exercise my wrath. Plus, I'd shaved my eyebrows off for no real reason and what grew back was fine and blond and seemed to endear the world to me. I'd done the work, passed their tests, but my mind was still snarled. To keep the red thoughts away, I bought myself a card table, a couple tubs of modeling clay. Now I make little ball-people and smoosh them down. A thousand snakes, warped pancakes. I think about the art shrink, how she told a roomful of monsters to leave space for luminous moments. I squish that thick stuff around, contemplate my talents, wonder if this is what she meant.

## Date at the Zoo

It says *TIGER* in Comic Sans, rudimentary line drawing baring teeth beside an empty cage. This floating image is their only reference as they press hands to partition glass. They already saw the elephant make eyes at a bit of log, a mountain pig's anus pointed upward, tail wagging like a finger, and now this ghost.

His date asks to punch a hole through his stomach out of boredom. She lifts his skewered body on her arm, holds him against the cage glass separating them from the idea of the animal.

"The best zoo would be one giant cage. We'd enter at our own risk," she says to his back.

He wants a hot dog. Neither of them has a clue what real sustenance in nature could possibly mean anymore. She lets him slide down her arm.

"In the wild, this is when you'd need to resolve the problems you create," she says. He wrestles a squirrel into his middle section to absorb the blood. Seeing the attempt as genuine, she cradles him, walks to the car, and begins driving to the hospital. He mentions that it would be best if they just part ways.

The whole ride home, he pushes the writhing mammal back into his chest, apologizes for the mess on the seat. She parks, asks to come in. He's in no shape for romance, but solitude pulls like ancient reflex.

On his bed, she tears the pulsing rodent out of his chest. It slinks across the floor. Mounted, she puts her mouth around the wound opening, tongues the inside. His limbs stiffen; the sheets wind around his body like a spindle. Consciousness slipping, he feels the natural order in consumption, how in another version of today, she would be him, or another, all of this ritual glass encased.

*Ann Hillesland*

## Gravity and Wind

Gravity is fine, she thought as her parachute opened. Green unrolled beneath her. Used to the gold grass of California, Ohio's greenness still stunned like a margarita freeze. Gravity is fine; green will be fine too.

On the plane she'd made herself so calm her legs didn't feel like hers anymore when she jumped. Like paralysis. But everything was green and blue, and those puffy white Midwestern clouds were everywhere, and her fiancé Jason was next to her, behind her now, drifting away actually, or maybe she was drifting. That was OK, too. Wind was just fine.

He'd proposed at Santa Cruz boardwalk, the roller coaster roar and the distant screams at her back. She'd let Yes float out of her mouth, stream behind her in the ocean wind, back to the people lifting their arms on the Giant Dipper.

And if her chute failed, that was fine too. It was out of her control. Now she could barely see Jason, the Ohio boy who'd carried her here, Ohio boy lost in the greenness as gravity pulled her gently and she drifted farther and farther west.

Beth Bosworth

## Rest Area

A woman was washing her feet in the bathroom sink. I was reminded of this science fiction novel in which a beautiful alien washes her privates in public. I went into the stall and peed and came back out, and she was gone. When I got back to the car, the dog was chewing on his tumor. "No, no," I told him and lowered him onto the asphalt. We walked slowly toward some grass. He didn't remember how to step up so I lifted him. But he slid off the grass with a yelp. "Oh, oh," I said, kneeling and dabbing bright blood off his fur. I had been told to look for signs. Was he eating properly? Was he urinating without help? What was his quality of life? In the novel, the alien has forgotten everything about the Mother Planet. Little by little, the narrator helps her remember until one night, realizing she's stranded on our planet, she drowns herself. When I lowered the dog onto the seat, he was panting. The tumor had begun to give off an odor. This tumor wasn't cancerous, mind you, and no one could say whether it would turn septic. A police car, siren wailing, put me in mind of another story—about a composer whose hunched back releases a pair of glistening red wings. My dog had once been a young dog who loved to swim, fetch, and listen to Mozart. I got back in the car and drove south.

*Paul Vega*

## Mantra

To hack through a porpoise's tail and free him from your gillnet, you have to have a steady hand. You have to find your faith. You have to say: If Jesus were still a gillnetter, what would he do? And he'd probably say, Damn bruh, all you got is a machete for this shit? That's old school. And you'd be like, I feel that, Jesus. And he'd be like, this reminds me of the Sea of Galilee when I told Peter to quit bitching and keep grinding. And you'd be like, but do you see this blood, do you see it, Jesus? Why are you doing this? And he'd say, Paul, your life is cake. You have hydraulics, a combustion engine, Tinder. Peter didn't have that. And I'm sorry anyway. I'm sorry I put that porpoise in your net. And I'm sorry I killed your sister and will one day take everyone you love before I take you. But I gotta test you. And you'd be like, damn, Jesus, no need to get Old Testament. Because all I can really focus on right now is Hacking. Up. Porpoises. And he'd say, just finish and bury it. Bury that porpoise and move on. Because you can't quit. You remember *Castaway*? How I stranded Tom Hanks? And all I gave him was a god damn (excuse my language) volleyball and a cave. You don't think he wanted to quit? When things feel hopeless, you've just gotta say to yourself: Tom Hanks. Tom Hanks. And you'd say, okay. You'd throw the rest of the porpoise overboard, watch the bloody trunk disappear. And you'd say okay, Jesus. I'm gonna trust you. Even if it feels like my whole life is a trial by porpoise blood, I'll try. I'll try and have faith: Tom Hanks. Tom Hanks.

Tyler Barton

## Whatever's the Worst that Could Happen We Want

Neither of us was a botanist, it's just: breaking into the greenhouse was easy. And the wide booths at the Chipotle made grabbing each other's crotches simple. And the lounge in the basement of the Student Memorial Center often stayed empty.

"You're like, always having sex," our friends would say, the five of us standing in line at the movies, or half-listening to washed-up comics in Steinman Theatre. The joke went: we were having sex when we were in class, even when we were in separate classes. We could just think about each other and be fucking.

Her theory, which was my theory because this was college at nineteen, said that recklessness delivered joy, joy, joy, and eventually some kind of barrel-bottom. The beautiful way she explained it: you wanted that bottom—and then, you look up.

"The way you look up at me when I'm on top," she explained, which made sense, the way possibilities only seemed perfectly endless from the lowest vantage point. On me she would grind, as I tried to open my already open eyes. The leaves big as boogie boards, the flowers five-colored and wet. A concrete floor, but the beds were dirt soft. We sunk in. We ruined student science in the name of knocking down our lives, so sure that we couldn't wait to start all over.

Marcella Vokey

## Donor

At dinner I tell my husband that I went to the hospital again. That a man was there, lost both his hands. It only seemed right to give him mine. My husband of two years contemplates with his eyes closed for a moment, then nods.

"How did you ring the doorbell?" he asks.

Using the kitchen table at which we sit, I demonstrate the way my nose pressed against the button, and my husband nods again. This he understands.

"Maybe that man will use your hands to build a house or paint a masterpiece."

"Or not," I say.

"Maybe he will just pet a dog tied up on the sidewalk."

He is nodding as he drinks his tomato soup from a large spoon. Meanwhile I slurp mine from the edge of a shallow bowl. Briefly we discuss our ideas on the perfect way to prevent grilled cheese from sogging, and then he reaches for my hand. I offer up my stump, newly bandaged and numb, because what is a wrist without a hand but a stump. He tries to take it anyway.

That night we are in bed, arranged as always. Legs entangled, arm over chest, head on shoulder, breath on neck. He squeezes my shoulder while there is still something for him to hold and I, lacking fingers, caress his calves with my toes.

## Eros and Cupid Fistfight in Heaven

This restaurant runs on sexual tension. Take that literally. It saves the owner a thousand bucks a month on lighting and refrigeration. The servers, bartenders, cooks, they eye each other with protruded lips, flexed posture. They drift fingers over lacquer tabletops. They mouth flirtations. So easy to tell when some pair has caved in, has violated company policy out by the dumpsters, in the staff bathroom, two co-workers returning inside having broken the vow of lust because they think it's like an onion you need to keep peeling. You can tell because the lights flicker, food comes out slightly lukewarm. Steaks can't get past rare. Our head line-cook, his wife came to the restaurant once. She left him that night because the cream from her coffee had turned; the decaying sign of something wanted becoming something that was. "Do you know how long it takes cream to spoil?" she had screamed. "Did you never think it could have been someone else!" he had replied. But it couldn't have been because it hadn't been, it had been him and the back waiter from Oklahoma who has management written all over her. As the employee turnover rate grows, the owner tries different age groups and shift combinations like an alchemist. Eventually he fills the place with nothing but shy students from the local college's Classics Department. They look discreetly at the ridges beneath each other's clothes and whisper erotic poems in Latin. The wires melt light bulbs, glowing like metallurgic tools. The owner, he stands on the roof at night, supernova beneath him so bright it scares even the cockroaches. He stands and spins in circles, smiling into a whiskey sour, pretending it's the whole town orbiting around him.

Amy Bee

## Independence Day

*What is it about small towns*, I wonder, eyeing the girls in Daisy Dukes, cautionary tales of meth and boredom. It's Utah. It's hot. The tow-truck drops us off at a roadside motel. A dusty parking lot full of cracked up cars. A forlorn tire swing listless in the weeds. Our home for the night.

It was supposed to be an easy good-bye. He'd drive me to Vegas, and I'd be gone, into the unknown. California, probably, then north. *North is the new Wild West*, I told dubious acquaintances. He understood. No messy farewells, we agreed. Now we are stuck, I guess. Stuck here, with too much time.

Our room has a stench. The swamp cooler sputters and clicks off. Through the window, I see people at the park. I see checkered picnic tables and potato salad. I see women with aprons and men in uniform. "Looks lame," I say.

"Let's go," he smirks.

Our feet kick up dust as we cross the street; our faces collect an instant sheen of sweat. We want to laugh at these people, to pity them and enunciate all the ways we are not like them. We want to tsk-tsk their backward ways: their homogeny, their apple pies, their flags. We study the brittle aged, the angry teenage boys, the flies on the melting watermelon. We want to feel superior, but it's too sad to ridicule.

Back in our room, we take off our clothes. We are sad, too. As sad as the shabby carpet. We move slow, as to not startle the other. He is long and slender, arrogant and clever. Too beautiful for me: my best friend. Outside I hear bottles clinking. The methed out girls have found the angry young men. Together we all stifle in the deadlock heat.

Amy L. Clark

## The Broom is for Sweeping

In my ESL class we were asked to write about a typical day. I said that in the morning "I swoop the kitchen and then the dishes." My teacher told me that it is called a broom. So I crossed out my words and wrote, "In the morning I broom the kitchen." Then she told me that we sweep with the broom.

At home, I put water on to boil, and while I'm waiting for the kettle to scream, I get out the broom and lean it against the counter, where it stares at me. In the top drawer by the sink, I sort through rolls of antacid, books of stamps, candle stubs, a package of sticky notes, and a fork with two broken tines. I find a Sharpie and uncap it. The kettle is making the room humid. I hold the broom with my left hand, and with my right I write THIS IS A BROOM. IS FOR SWEEPING on the handle. I re-cap the marker and pour hot water over a Tetley.

If I could speak English, this is what I would tell my teacher: Where I come from, we have ten provinces, an honorable history of both communism and democracy, a world-renowned orchestra, and an undersea cable bringing high-speed internet to hundreds of thousands of people. But the brooms most women use daily still do not have handles. To use these brooms, I had to bend at the waist until I faced only the ground. I cannot really explain this in any language.

I throw my teabag into the sink, where it lands wetly beneath the arch of the faucet. With the sticky notes and the marker, I traverse my apartment, naming my new surroundings. CUPBOARD, I write. DOOR. I cannot remember the name for the refrigerator. FRUIT, I write on the white bowl, but I have trouble recalling the specific name for what it contains. THE FRUIT IS NOT MANGOS I write instead. I do not know the word for thermostat, so I designate it NOT WARM ENOUGH. I look out the window. Peel off another note. THE TREE IS NOT A PALM TREE I write.

*Ginger Duncan*

## Produce

I got the idea one day at the market while holding a ruby red grapefruit to my face, smelling for ripeness. I pressed it against my cheek slightly, then my mouth. It was cool and smooth and only a little sour resting there. I realized I could create a new version of you. I could choose which parts would be sweet, which soft, which strong. So I did. I chose a honeydew for your head. A stack of pit-heavy dates for your spine. Rhubarb ribs. Oranges for your knees, limes for heels. Long carrot bones. I halved eggplants for quadriceps. A string of sausages for intestines. A crisp Cameo for your heart. I loaded bag after bag of you into my car, drove you home, put you together on my kitchen floor. Circling again and again, I adjusted at every angle, the length of your neck, the curve of your shoulders.

I knew I only had a week before rot so I peeled away the rinds and baked your body into a bread. When you cooled I dressed you in your favorite worn jeans, a navy blue sweater. I took you on a double date with my two best friends. They didn't seem to notice that your arms hadn't risen evenly. The dent of a flattened air bubble at your left hip. That your blueberry eyes were swollen to a squint. You were quiet through dinner but after a fourth glass of wine we all laughed when you made a quick joke at my expense. Be careful, I said playfully, still smiling. But later I would repeat it when I laid you down on your side of the bed. Careful, I would say, running my fingers through coriander hair. Careful. Careful. You would taste so good.

Lucas Southworth

## The Pier

The pier was actually two, side by side, one just a vertebra of beams poking from the water, the other clearing the sand and stumbling down, frozen in the act of toppling. Underneath was a place where things happened if you could gather the courage to go there. Boys went to find their first kisses so they'd never have to look again. Girls waited to grant those kisses for some reason we never understood. I was twelve then. The girl was two years older, a foot taller. She was standing there like she'd been waiting for me or someone like me. I had my shoes on in the sand. I had sand in my shoes. I bent my knees a little so she wouldn't notice the quiver, so I could pretend to myself I wasn't shaking. I remember how thin the waves were. I remember sunlight shredding through the slats above us. I remembered then that days earlier, I'd gone under the pier with a friend and we'd dared each other to wade out into the cloudy water. Snakes and leeches lurked in the shadows, we said to scare each other, creatures we couldn't name, cold tentacles ready to wrap around our toes and ankles and never let us go. The girl kissed me without touching me. Only a brush of our lips. It hadn't lasted for more than a second before she stepped back and stared past me or through me. Suddenly, she began to laugh, and I remember how hard she punched me, right in the stomach. I gasped, my breath gone as she climbed up the beach. She stumbled once but caught herself, and she was still laughing, laughing like she couldn't ever stop, and she was still laughing in the stillness of the sun.

*W. Todd Kaneko*

## Metalhead's First Concert

Afterwards, at the Denny's near the freeway, no one has to say anything about desire or mythology or metaphors for life because they have been making those gestures with their fingers all night. Metalhead eats his Moons Over My Hammy sandwich with both hands while Valkyrie smacks a pack of smokes into her palm and no one has to talk about the concert because Rockgod is still playing air guitar in his seat, mangled lyrics spilling from his wagging tongue as he replicates the final guitar solo, note for note, as far as anyone can tell. No one in the booth needs to talk about how the dead look as they careen against the living in a mosh pit, about why they thrash about the room to songs about hellfire and Valhalla and twelve-minute drum solos. The future is a wilderness of blood, a fountain of scars that will one day be flesh. There can be no such thing as boredom as long as there is Heavy Metal, as long as no one has to confess their real names or what they will call themselves in the future. Rockgod puts his arm around Valkyrie and runs a fingertip along her ear lobe as she sparks a cigarette to life. Metalhead takes the last bite of his sandwich and fishes in his pocket for a quarter so he can call his father to come take him home.

## Because Metalhead Says So

By the time Metalhead catches up to Rockgod, the older boy is dragging on a cigarette behind the gymnasium, hands in the pockets of his denim vest, his eyes focused somewhere out beyond the parking lot, past the trees on the other side of the street. Metalhead knows what he is seeing: the future, all chrome and bone, fists in the air and boots in the mud. Rockgod strokes his mustache and asks him what he wants, and Metalhead thinks about how the teacher didn't try to stop either of them, Rockgod when he proclaimed that social studies is bullshit and stormed out the door, Metalhead when he jumped up and ran after him. It's like the teacher knew Rockgod was headed for a quick smoke and then a job at a record store or gas station for a while before being claimed by the army or the grave—maybe both, if he was unlucky. *You can't quit school*, Metalhead says. His friend doesn't look at him, just offers him a drag and asks why not. Metalhead takes a deep drag and looks at the ground that same way he will years from now when he learns that Rockgod is heading to the Middle East, like he will ten years later when he glimpses Rockgod playing guitar for spare change outside a liquor store in Detroit, like he will whenever he thinks about how easy it is for a boy to lose himself in the city or the desert or a crappy job selling used cars to suckers. His father will ask him one day why he isn't friends with Rockgod anymore and he won't have a good answer—*Lots of reasons*, he says, then grinds that cigarette out with his heel.

Elizabeth O'Brien

## Time Takes a Cigarette

For David Bowie

A florist gave me a rose, colored platinum, lavender-silver as my fingerless gloves: no charge. I was wanting not to be girl or boy but an androgynous neither/both in velvet leggings, top hat and tails and ruffled shirt. Not quite person, not quite: something else. This was where I wanted to make my home, a body like this. I brawled, started wrestling matches in the kitchen or down in the grass. Pressing arms around your waist elbows knees like pins, like jelly as we felt each other's breath and skin. I wanted to know if I could be loved like this. Wanted to become your body, ruin my clothes with sweat and yours, for love asexual-sexual, larger than the lines, all *Ziggy Stardust*, which we aped word for word, drunk through the entire album: time takes a cigarette. Your dad says—you report—he saw me on the street and was unable to tell if I was from the past or the future but that it was good. We agree this is a supreme compliment. We each hold our own small recognitions and compliments dear. *Oh no, love, you're not alone!* The clock waits so patiently on our song.

## Nightlight Recon

In summer you'd catch fireflies blinking against the heavy heat. Nightlight Recon, your father called it. Take an oversized mason jar with a hole-punched lid and take turns scooping the fireflies in, making a contest of how many you can catch—twelve being average, any more and the creatures would start to escape, too few and it ruined the whole effect. Your father said the holes were there to let the fireflies breathe through the night. He would tuck you into bed and you and your brother would fall asleep to the flicker of the bugs. In the morning, the jar would always be gone before you woke, your father explaining that the bugs had been sent out on another mission, which you didn't question. Summer was your favorite season, not just for the adrenaline rush of capturing a creature that gave off more light than you could fathom, but, of course: no school, you had the freedom of bikes and the backwoods and no teachers to answer to. It wasn't until you were older that you each realized what the removal of the jar before waking was designed to do. Years later, your brother told you that one night when it was storming he woke to the sound of lightning, and, scared, stilled himself to hear your breathing. Then he looked over at the jar to be reassured by the fireflies' flight, but saw the bugs defeated, limp, barely flickering against the darkness in the room. In the morning, as always, the jar was gone.

## Destiny

We started out with just Bill's sperm and Lucy's egg, but then Richard got huffy and said it was only fair that the baby have his eyes. Plucking them out, he shipped them direct to the OBGYN for implantation. Of course then Freya wanted in and decided that the baby should have her breasts. She sent them out for X-rays and a gentle kneading from a decently-respected gynecologist who soon approved them as cancer-free and gift-worthy attractive. Monique, not to be outdone, promptly took a cleaver to her feet—hers are those little, colorfully painted toes you always see on the cover of beach magazines. Then Jasmine tore off her smile with duct tape, and George took tweezers to the dimple in his chin. Becky bottled her signature laugh, Miguel snapped off his nose, and we voted unanimously for the prying of Moira's pearly perfect teeth.

As for me, we all agreed that I had one thing that was simply too *right* not to pass on: my name. Destiny.

Ecstatic, we tried explaining to Baby Destiny all that we'd given her, how much we loved her, loved seeing ourselves through her—

I'm sorry, she said, but I just don't see it. I don't see you in me.

Don't be ridiculous, we all told her. What's not to see? Who do you think made you, Destiny?

I did, she said. Can't you see me already growing?

And we saw then that she really was growing up very fast. Her legs stretched long and her hands became hand-sized, and as she kept on growing, we all started to cry, even Richard without his eyes.

## Manhandling: *to touch the male genitals*

First, we stop to watch the monkeys, which are technically baboons. Almost immediately, we want to walk away, and we assume that everyone else does too, but no one's moving. Their bright pink asses remind us of the color of human infections. Paralyzed, I lean into the air-space of the family to my right, curious as to what the mother is going to say to her daughter as the mid-size male begins rubbing his penis wildly. I want to know what the vocational mothers say, the ones that stay home until their daughters are earning straight As and making all the right decisions after football games on Fridays. But this isn't the time, and this isn't some homoerotic scene from "Song of Myself," like when Whitman's imagined lake-bathers are sousing themselves with spray. This is dirty, like it is when any woman takes it from behind in a flurry of primitive need, is bent over a chair or a rock unexpectedly, ribs cracking under the force of each thrust.

If it ever ended with a simple self-touch, maybe I'd feel like staying.

*Su-Yee Lin*

## Tiger in the Mountains

My father once said he saw a tiger in the mountains here, all teeth and blazing fur. I don't believe him for I have climbed these mountains since I was young and all I have seen are the monkeys and the birds, the rising sun above them all. My father said that to see the tiger was to know fear and doubt and so I am fearless and he is fearful. My father saw the tiger and it broke his heart in two. I have never known my mother; I have never seen the tiger.

Su-Yee Lin

## Tulou Secrets

On summer days, the paths are slippery going up the mountains. From above we watch the others inside the tulou, those packed earth houses, courtyards and secrets open to the air.

"She found out he's been looking at another lady."

"He lets the cat out to scare the chickens at night."

"She sneaks away to see her boyfriend while her parents are napping."

"He's going to fall," one said of a child peering down into the well.

And the child does, his body slipping down like a fish through one's hands.  
We look at each other; we do not speak.

*Andrew Newby*

## Probably What Sex is Like at College

On a particular evening someone begins building a child with someone else. Someone else talks about how pleasing it is and someone says to someone else will you always love me. Someone else asks someone to touch here, please, while someone else says it is a chore sometimes, loving someone. Someone recoils while someone else is frustrated and leaves the room. Someone lies sobbing while someone else enters someone somewhere else.

*Bailey Pittenger*

## Sensual Crisco

The apocalypse will smell like a Dollar Tree body spray, and every man will initiate sexual intercourse by announcing that his partner has reminded him of his mother.

And every man will live a block from his partner's father. Every man will have a father who took a class taught by his partner's grandfather. Every man will split the check.

The apocalypse will taste like the Cajun seasoning every man abandons in the back of the cabinet above the stove. Every man will season his partner's bath with Crisco.

And every man will hope that Crisco traps his partner in the tub long enough that the water will cool her skin to the temperature of his dead mother.

The apocalypse will feel like an over-easy egg yolk, and every man will collect it in a cast iron skillet. Every man will try to cook things back to how they were before.

And every man will piss his partner's name on a wall until the wall feels like a fried egg yolk. Every man will bite his nails for the taste of something fried.

The apocalypse will sound like the warning call of a squirrel, and every man will think that sound is his own name. Every man will want to hear his own name.

And every man will ask his partner politely to remind him of what he was called before.

## Separation

Yamiko woke up without her right shoulder. She wasn't surprised that it abandoned her. She heard it screaming for months. She ignored it. She sat in her hotel room after her matches, smoked a long Sakura cigarette and eyed whatever city she was in that night from her window. She promised to rest eventually, repair the joint and rest in her home village on the sea. But one match turns to ten, weeks dissolve into years.

Her arm now lies limp at her side. A sad stretch of flesh.

She could not know that her shoulder— sinewy, bloody, raw nerves exposed to the air for the first time—was crawling on a supermarket floor at that very moment.

Yamiko began to recall all the abuse the body part took throughout her career: dislocations, a torn labrum, a thousand crashes to the mat. Bruises shaped like flattened insects. Cortizone surging through her blood.

Groaning, gritting her teeth, she managed to slip out of bed and slide a robe over herself. The shoulder would not leave her vulnerable like this. It would not wipe away her strength.

She found a photo of her elbowing Hikaru Ozaki in a match at Azalea Taisho Hall. In it, the spotlight gleamed across the skin of her shoulder, warming the taut muscles of her arm. Slumped over in pain, she shuffled from person to person, waving that photo around, hoping someone had seen the wandering joint.

Meg Tuite

## There Will Be No Harvest This Year

Her husband is all about fruit. When it is a grape on a vine she waits until he leaves for work, locks the door. She wages war on massive mahogany bookcases, armoires, and credenzas. She pushes. They screech. She clenches. They wail. Floorboards spasm, rise up like beasts.

When it is the size of an apricot she smokes packs of Kools. Menthol spits brown flecks from her lips saying, 'vandalize with vile satisfaction.' She lives on the toilet. The window yawns. The room sits alone with an intruder. Her cheeks puff and eject the bitter stone. The sky is gray and running out of matches. She is tired of lousy sunsets.

When it is the size of an apple it won't even clothe itself in red. Her skin will not peel away from the ashtray that cradles each butt. Green strips even the smallest of pleasures. When is the intermission? The room is squeamish with the monotony of hairspray fumes. Chemicals throb and smatter a haze of tiny silhouettes through eye slits. The sky is stretching pores like rubber bands across her orchard.

A cantaloupe distinct and round planks the queasy whiff of decay. Feed sacks shroud and flank the ripening flesh. Bloated with fruit, she is a pastel basket of pattering lumps. She is full of nothing but the fight that riddles her silent anticipation.

They got it as a wedding present. Her husband uses it to scrape rinds into pies. She prods open her legs in the bathroom and stabs the lemon zester in and out, scraping away and stabbing until the watermelon stops rolling inside her. Succulent seeds in juice flood the tile with the pinkest reds she has ever seen. Numb, but for the sweet infusion of summer-wrapped chunks that feed her with the empty blaze of beginnings.

## Lousy Elegy for Ben Chalmers

I think Ben in the tech department killed himself but all the president keeps saying in company-wide emails is that he was a private man, that he died suddenly at home, has no family here. He worked in the other office. I don't even know what his voice sounded like. I always talk to Matthew in the tech department about how slowly my computer opens Outlook. Matthew is a ginger with a wedding ring and bad pants. But my inbox is full of messages from Ben—the hours the server will be out over the weekend, software changes. And Bens have always been good to me. Never met a bad Ben. Ben with the wizard beard who couldn't drive a stick shift or swallow durian but read every book of poems I gave him. Ben in high school who flushed his dad's cigarettes down the toilet and wrote a song about it that made his voice crack. Ben my brother wanted me to date who went to a Christian college in Indiana but I couldn't imagine wanting to touch. Ben who slipped his hand up my thigh one night at dinner but never anything else. Ben I told my worsts to. Ben who played French horn and ran cross country and might not be named Ben. Ben who always answers my drunk dials. Ben with the prettiest dark hair down to his butt. Ben with the prettiest butt. I don't know what the world lost in this Ben, but I am afraid he held the growing impossible in his stomach like I have. I'm afraid that it's here. We're all afraid to say what this cubicle zoo can do to a person. I type and delete an email to IT, to Matthew with the bad pants, about the sales software freezing. The president says IT is working on a strategy to divide up Ben's work. The president says Ben worked here almost ten years. If it were a heart attack, he'd write that in an email. My first suicided friend's obituary word-for-word: private, suddenly at home. I want someone to say we never asked his favorite kind of pie or mother's name. I want to know if he wore gradually more crinkled khakis, if he had nice hands. I want someone to say we're all in this alone together.

*J. Bradley*

## Half-light, Jackknife

The car in front of me takes a sharp right, crashes through the railing. After the car falls into the Legia River, the railing knits itself back together. I keep driving. Everyone else around me keeps driving.

No one knew when Leucosia Bridge started convincing drivers to kill themselves. I tried talking to the bridge once, left my car at home just to be safe. I plugged my ears, wore a life vest. The bridge ignored all of my questions, kept repeating how I would die alone. After the police rescued me from the Legia River, they congratulated me on being the first person to survive the bridge.

A car goes through the railing over on the left lane. The railing knits itself back together.

After the eighth or twelfth car drove off the Leucosia Bridge, the city approved a plan to build a new bridge and then destroy this one. They instructed the bridge building crew to avoid Leucosia Bridge at all costs. The foreman ignored the city's advice. You can see the incomplete skeleton of the new bridge on a good day.

The signs leading up to the bridge say, "TURN UP YOUR RADIO. KEEP DRIVING. STOP FOR NO ONE." These signs are posted on the bridge every 1,000 feet. Once you see the ninth sign on the bridge going in either direction, you know you're almost on the other side.

## Mon Frère et Dieu et une Carotte

My brother was choking on a carrot.

It's what carrots are made for: death. God constructed them to perfectly plug a throat. I can imagine the whole work-shopping of the carrot, the practice with early humans, God fine-tuning the thing down to perfection.

We were in one of those restaurants where it's so swanky that the waiters look partially suicidal. It had that kind of warmth. Everything was white—the tablecloths, the chandelier, the curtains, the waiters' sclera. The chairs had a shade of azure, a hint of iris. My father was a commercial plumber so this was a big deal. He took us out once a year and my brother and God and a carrot were ruining it.

There was an on-duty cop there, relaxing with a big full-blood Wagyu tenderloin and he rushed over and did the Heimlich and the carrot flopped out and landed on the subtle herati pattern Persian carpet. Everybody started shaking the cop's hand—the sous chef, the janitor, the airplane pilot that was flying overhead. It was a whole bunch of bowing and saluting and thanking and all that crap. Some news guy even snapped a stereoscopic photo.

Then they saw the carrot on the floor. It clashed with the decor. It had the horror of memory. It resembled a blood rainbow. The sous chef picked it up and started shoving it back in my brother's throat. The pilot and pastry chef helped. They lodged it right in the center so that my brother started turning blue. The cyanosis was perfect. It blended well with the chairs. We watched how smoothly everything fit together, like grace.

April Bradley

## Heretic

My grandfather is a strong tower razed. He's been awake for days.

My sister and I stumble around the ruin, a makeshift Eastlake hospital room. The sharp edges of a metal bed graze against a sideboard and urine sloshes in draining bags resting in bedpans on an Isfahan rug. We are daughters without a purpose—no more linen to wash, no medication to administer, no meals to prepare, no loving smiles to trade, no arguments to exchange, no communion of hearts. His stories no longer spin. There is no sanctuary. He rocks back and forth, his gaze focused beyond us.

Morphine confers a secret language to our grandfather. My sister and I sit next to one another on Victorian brocade and hold hands. Among the jabber we hear, "Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray."

The hospice aide watches her phone and chats and chats relentlessly, talks louder and louder to drown out our grandfather. She tells us about how her father behaved just before he died years ago. An IV stand blinks next to a painting and a stethoscope waits, curled up around candlesticks. Polite "Umhmm"s do not work. Ignoring her doesn't either. She twirls her hair and talks and talks as my grandfather rocks faster, implores us urgently, "Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray."

I tell the woman to shut the fuck up. She leaves, crying. I find the only olive oil in the house, a small bottle of medicinal sweet oil, and bless it.

Holding the Book of Common Prayer, I begin the sacrament of extreme unction, "Peace be to James's house and to all who dwell in it and trace a cross on my grandfather's forehead."

He rocks, licks his chapped lips, much like he used to lick the end of his pencil before he made corrections on blueprints. I'm so close I imagine the smell of wonder, our tall grandfather who was bigger than the sky: sweet sweat, Old Spice, toothpaste, leather, new wood, motor oil, nails, grass.

He repeats, "Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray."

*Alina Stefanescu*

## Hush Hush Hush

The mole on the outside of my daughter's left heel is very very dark. It is dark as an inkblot or honest-to-goodness bat-wing black. My mother died two months ago because God loved her. Because God would spare her the parts of a story where her five-year-old granddaughter fights melanoma. Mole grows darker and larger by the week. I make an appointment with my dermatologist. The voice calling to schedule an appointment is one knot shy of hysteria, one tremble short of losing too much. At the lake, I slather on layers of organic full spectrum sunscreen. I pray over the spectrums that haven't been discovered yet. I pray they stay away from my child's foot. I practice explaining to her why the whole foot must be removed. Why a foot is a piece of shit. Then a lung. Later a liver. My breath comes out in colors I cannot spell. The curses are a call and response I carry along with a universe that might do this to us. Fuck no, I say, knowing the other kids will see what I've hidden in utero so long, a little one we called my best nurser, the favorite fail all over my face.

Paul Luikart

## Victim

The one with black hair and slick bronze skin looked like the one in charge. He was the driver. You can imagine he was also the one who shouted to his friend about their third, blood-soaked, and probably dead-by-now pal, "Grab him. Get him in the car." How loud must it have been inside the car on that drive? Who knows how long it took to get from wherever they were to the ER.

*Ohmygod, ohmygod, ohmygod! Holyshit, holyshit, holyshit! Staywithme, staywithme, ohfuck I think he's dead.*

The friend in the back seat had the toughest job. Jobs. A) Hold on to him. C) Keep him alive. B) Stay cool. When the car zoomed up and jerked to a stop under the "Ambulances Only" sign, the back seat friend also had to get the bloody, probably-dead one out of the car. He kicked open the back door so hard it swung itself shut again, but he stuck out his leg and it slammed on his shin. It looked like he was trying to lift a two-hundred-pound tube of sand.

Arms under, arms over, knees buckling, finally dragging him out of the backseat using the armpits like handles. The pigeon-toed bare feet bonked on the asphalt.

Circular saw? Gun shot(s)? Rabid dog? Accident, murder, suicide?

A scrawny nurse in hot pink scrubs trotted down the ramp with a wheelchair and they all dumped the dead boy in—a red pile of appendages and stained, ripped clothes—and they all shoved him up the ramp. A second later, the one with black hair came back outside. He smoked a cigarette, made a call. He took a series of steps in all directions—two steps away from the ER, a step back, an accidental little side step into a flower garden.

David E. Yee

## Gramps

When they shot your second wife, you fled Carolina and gave your life to horses. This was well after you changed your name from Roy to Gerald cause you didn't want to be a cowboy in law school. Now you're mucking your own stalls. You told me that story as I learned to heft a shovel, throwing manure into a wheelbarrow. I filled up the feed, hosed in the water, liked the clop of their teeth as they chewed through the hay. Your farm was hemmed with Appalachian ivy that ran along the posts—held together seven pastures and the ankle of a mountain. After that Thanksgiving, your third wife didn't want us around, but while the cobbler finished in the oven, you taught me how to rap my finger on the electric fence to test the pulse. Asked you why that Appaloosa had his own lot, and you said he was still wild. Got him for a steal because you thought you'd break him, and now you're too tired for taming. This is how I knew metaphor before I owned the word, how I know now you're just sitting on the couch, listening to plums fall from the trees in your yard. You are, you are, you are, and when you're not, I'll remember you black and white, flat-capped, Lucky Strike on your lip, snapping, *Get up six! Get up six!* Fist wrapped around a trifecta ticket, knowing when a horse has more to give.

## Dust

November is dust. It gets in your eyes, on your skin, makes chalky patterns in the small spaces between your fingers. The dust makes Maman close the door before the men are done at the mines. She closes it and takes the kerosene lamp down with her to her room. I keep at the window and watch: here, next to a slag heap are two working-class girls, talking too quickly, laughing and hitting each other too hard as they do. Some boys from the mission are kicking distractedly at a discarded water pipe, the dust swallowing them now and again. Once in a while, a boy is separated from the group, and I try to guess if he is the one I let put his hand over my chest at the vigil the mission held last week for migrants crossing into Tamanrasset. His hand was a twitching thing the whole time, and he would not look at my face, even though anyone might have thought he was praying for me, and it was dark besides. When the men come from the mines they are long and tired, like shadows, and white. The talking girls do not look at them. Some of the men stop to join the boys in their game, but many more walk by. If someone happens to look in the window, I close the curtain but continue to stare through it, at the blurry, mixed-up shapes the muslin makes everything. When all the men are gone, I leave the window to eat what Maman has left.

Kate Jayroe

## Jeep

In my more elusive, lucid dreams, I drive a giant white Jeep. The Jeep makes revolutions around an eerie, orange cul-de-sac. The sky is purple. I look out of my rearview and see several people standing so still. I cruise around then pull up close to a woman. I swipe my hand outside the window, and then graze her face. She dissolves and then I know: I'm the only one alive, here. And of course I know too, I'm dreaming.

You're a person I think about, in my more elusive, lucid dreams. But I still can't bring you to my dreams' moments. I'll have this knowing feeling that you're at an airport, about to leave this non-town. If I concentrate to a point of near-pain, I can see the moving sidewalk that just had you. Or I'll smell the coffee and nervousness of the space, those airport anxieties sealed in a place that isn't quite a place.

In these dreams, we have a romantic past that I never get to feel. I know it happened in my grandmother's hollow parlor. Your teeth ground into my shoulder. Hasty friction. Little intimacy. But the non-feeling knowledge strangles itself back to the cul-de-sac as soon as it even shows, wisteria vines grown in my own knowing mind. And so, I put the Jeep into reverse. People grow smaller.

What makes me know you're wonderful is that you can't be conjured.

Even my sleep-ridden fantasies are bridled by your realness. Your too-kind voice is a mother's lullaby turning vulnerable at a last sour note, hovering above her body's stiffened curtain of jutted bone and stagnated milks.

The Jeep kicks up orange dust, the spittle of cobblestone pebbles.

It never gets dirty, so it never gets washed.

*Gen Del Raye*

## Last Typhoon in Kyoto

We sat together on white carpet, shoulders touching against the bed. TV at eye level, window above. Do you remember? we said. All the storms that didn't come. Once a year, every year, every year until tonight. Maybe the last time will finally be the one. Like when Tomo paid Yusuke what he'd owed for so long. You try to leave a city, and the city remembers. Some promises, some debts, they finally come due.

Nobuyuki on the weathercast one more time: instant wind speed, hectopascals, words he must mumble in his sleep. Under his hands the storm churns closer and closer. Flooding in Kyushu, he tells us, downed trees in Shikoku. He tells us he'll be here all night, and we tell him that too. Eyes closing, fighting sleep, slouching lower toward the floor. We leave the window open for the first drops of rain.

*Robin Tung*

## In Transit

The loneliness is, at first, unexpected. Moving through airport security, slipping the shoes off and on, readjusting the straps of a bag. Circling one magazine stand and its refrigerated wall of cold water, looking for comfort in the first thing that catches you, overpaying for tea. The ticket is missing a gate number. A man in a silk scarf spills his coffee at the arrivals and departures monitor. You sit and wait to board the flight, feeling a singular sadness. On the plane, the woman to the right of you holds your tea so that you can put your luggage in the overhead compartment. She shows you photos of her summer class in the Mongolian plains. She tips her Mongolian Bible open and the psalm is familiar like Russian. The woman to your left speaks no English at all and reads her Book of Hours in Spanish, a leather purse in her arms. And you think, between these two women of God is a safe place. A space carved out for you, without coercion, a silent opening, and you were inclined to take it.

## Curriculum Vitae

April Newman, MFA

My name feels like never enough.  
I always thought the extra letters after it would make a difference in this  
feeling.  
They do not.

Address

The orange walk-up apartment,  
with  
a perpetually leaking ceiling.  
The place I ended up:  
married,  
happy,  
growing vegetables in a garden.  
But still under-employed.

### EDUCATION

There were lacquered desks at the Iowa Catholic school where I learned to read, but maybe I knew how to do this before—from the lilting voice of my mother telling stories. If it was she who taught me to read, it was he who taught me to hide myself or suffer his blurred hands. So big and mighty then, as Thor.

### MFA Creative Writing, Columbia College, Chicago, 2008

Like everything we do it's backwards; the emphasis on the performance rather than the process, forgetting the years of eating canned tuna fish sandwiches, and how we all smoked in the corridors because it made us less hungry. How the smoke, like the coffee, was a chemical fire to bur through pages, deadlines, and part-time jobs that were really close to full-time except without the salary, or the sick time. How we all started off wanting to be writers and wanting to teach writing. And after eight years, I can only name a few who still do it.

- Graduated with a 4.0 on a 4.0 scale.
  - › When I was in high school, I never had a 4.0, but my father would lie about that—tell strange women of my academic pursuits in order for them to view him as safe. Then might bed them and steal all their money—a true and charming grifter. I wonder if I write this for my own accomplishment or if on some level I am still working to prove he was not a total liar.

- Master's thesis was a memoir, *Broke Love*. The chapter, "Diagnosing Father" won a Columbia University Scholastic Press Award (New York, 2009).
  - › Perhaps I am answering my own questions.

### **BA English, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, 2001**

People outside Iowa like the idea of it, like the dreamy stills of red farm houses on mass produced butter boxes. They think of us as strong, and weathered by hard work and rain; that we are honest. This is basically true. Except for the small farm part.

- Honor's Program and Dean's List during study.
  - › See previous admission on daddy issues

### **TEACHING INTERESTS**

#### **Composition and Developmental Writing**

- Developmental is a nice way to say teaching the people who do not give a fuck about writing. I have taught this class so much, the research paper, the five paragraph essay—that I sometimes fear I will lose any sense of what writing really is, from the time long past when I really knew it, the artistry of it, all stamped away by five paragraph essays.

#### **Creative Writing**

- Once I actually designed the Creative Writing class for a university. The irony is that I never got to teach it.

#### **English**

- A throwback to when literature was a thing people gave a shit about

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

#### **Teleservices**

- The first job I had was when I was fourteen and not legally able to work. I was a telemarketer, calling grannies and people home alone—preying on them to buy accidental death insurance. My dad took a percentage of my paycheck, but I secretly hoarded enough away move out of the house when I was seventeen.

### **The University of Iowa**

- I worked for the Parking and Transportation Department in college, getting paid to read and write in a little booth. Making change and watching sunsets. It was the first time I read Jamaica Kincaid or Eudora Welty or Lorrie Moore. I read Margaret Atwood after the line of cars died away. I read Toni Morrison by the booth's dim light. I flipped through the pages of Sylvia Plath in near darkness. It remains the best job I have ever had.

### **Post Graduate Corporate Work**

- In my thirties I had a boss who was insane, but this is not something one can put on LinkedIn. She would purposely try to make me fail, and when I did not—she would attack me. Calling at midnight about a typo. Assigning a library reorganization project for school by reading level, but with a team of people who did not speak English. I thwarted her by being kind to the non-English speakers and having a friend translate. Then I printed pages as guides that correlated the font size of text to the reading level. We made short work and all hugged! But she found two books out of order and berated me. I cried at work so many times. I cried on the bus down Ashland Avenue. I could not quit because I needed the money to pay for student loans.

### **Current Position**

Finally, I got a job teaching writing again. I mostly teach developmental writing. Even though my students do not care for literature, they have stories to tell and technology in which to tell it. I remember what it was like to be hungry for both food and a father's love. Or not having enough money, or the tears on the bus and the fear of leaving home. So do my students. Having to work from the library because the utilities are shut off again, or there are children pulling at their sleeves in the background; and their eyes are bone tired from having to work almost full-time, but without the salary or the sick time. I hear these stories, whispered as private messages. I honor them.

## Letting Students Not Like Flash

When I assign Amelia Gray's *AM/PM* to my Intro to Fiction Writing students, I hope at least some of them won't like it. Typically, they're the more outspoken ones. This last term, Nicole spoke up when I reminded the class to start the book for next time: "I hate this book," she said. "I can't stand it." I tried to be diplomatic. I told her I couldn't wait to hear what she'd thought—but that we'd have to. Secretly I was delighted; the passion with which she maligned *AM/PM* was the college equivalent of telling high schoolers there's a salacious sex scene somewhere in the reading for the night.

The next class—our first after four weeks of workshops—I asked the rest of the students what they thought about the book. The louder voices stuck with Nicole and expressed frustration and disappointment. Reasons being: "It doesn't make any sense." "Nothing is connected." "The *author* doesn't even seem to know what she's writing about." They were put off by everything I first loved about the collection: its punchiness, its formation of meaning not through narrative continuity but through a constellation of images and scenes, its willingness to move from sensible if wry human interactions to the surreal or bizarre or lyrical in the space of a page break. After our semester reading canonical fiction from *30/30: Thirty American Stories from the Last Thirty Years*, Gray's 120 page-long flash pieces required both more readerly work and more openness to mystery than they were accustomed to putting forth.

But the students' confusion (and passionate dislike) was what I wanted. On the board, I started writing what I saw as implicit in the way they framed their struggles: the things they had hoped to get out of *AM/PM* but didn't. CONNECTIONS. FLUID READING EXPERIENCE. THEMATIC COHERENCE. "SENSE." When they had finished thrashing the book, I pointed to the board. What you're seeing here, I said, are all the things that you expect from fiction. *AM/PM* is so frustrating because it isn't doing these things the way you think stories should. Right?

Right.

So for the next twenty minutes I asked them to brainstorm what else they had come to expect from fiction. Coming off of four weeks of workshop, they realized they had developed a lot of predilections as to how stories ought to be—ideas about setting, character, and plot arc, as well as sentence-level details, firmness of voice, content matching form, and an ending that was satisfying but not too satisfying.

Then I asked them to take another look at these rules and to discern which of them Amelia Gray was breaking, along with what rules she was developing in their place. I told them I would list these transgressions on the other half of the board, in opposition to their expectations, and asked them to use examples from the text to support their claims. Instead of continuous narrative development, they found the sporadic reoccurrence of images or themes—John Mayer concert tee, two guys trapped in a box, a character’s dismal dating life. Instead of subtle tone shifts, they found the juxtaposition of radically different tones between adjacent pages, creating its effect by incongruity.

You can see where the lesson is going: once we started looking at specific stories, we had a theoretical lens through which to understand them—namely the idea that the contravention of rules is intentional, for a purpose, and often accompanied by the establishment of other rules. I’ve done this for stories from *NANO Fiction* too, and for “The School” by Donald Barthelme and Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl.” In “The School,” we discussed how the entrance of the children’s bizarrely articulate voice at the end the story both defies the voice that the rest of the story is built on and forms an almost epiphany-like gap; in “Girl,” we mined the apparently static narrative mode for subtler narrative developments, change within the static. In each, as in *AM/PM*, rules are broken and others are created, and the story’s success depends on the fluency and dynamicity with which it navigates its own new rules.

I haven’t been a teacher for long, but so far this discussion of rules has worked. The in-the-trenches labor of workshop pays off when students become aware of the opinions they’ve cultivated while reading their peers’ work; a conversation about rules, expectations, and genre leads to an understanding of fiction as situated and contingent; and most importantly, students’ discomfort with forms they haven’t seen before is channeled into an interrogation of the reasons for that discomfort, an intellectualization of it even, and finally a distance from their own viewpoints in favor of a more objective understanding of the variety of ways of creating and experiencing stories.

Most students wouldn't use those words to describe what's changed in them. Still, they can see that something *has* changed. When I asked them to remark on what they learned in the course once it had ended, students said: "I learned how to structure a story correctly, the 'rules' of fiction, and when and why it's okay to break the rules." "The *NANO Fiction* and *AM/PM* sections in particular really broadened my understanding of the genre." Both these students transferred the lessons we learned while reading *AM/PM* to the craft level, recognizing that rules are contingent and shifting, and that they can apply this logic to their own writing. A third student, who had followed Nicole in openly declaring his frustration with the book, wrote, "Even *AM/PM* was a fun and interesting read."

Teaching flash—especially formally innovative flash—is important work. We need to create a space in which to ask students whether they *like* the stories they read. We need to give them the opportunity to be unsettled, confused, even pissed off about formal choices in fiction, specifically flash fiction, which so frequently experiments and unsettles. While it's easy to complain that students don't care about literature, and probably most students would agree that they don't, I have found that students respond with a remarkable passion to the abandonment of a character mid -paragraph, or to seemingly meaningless *Godot*-like sequences of two characters trapped in a small cube. This type of indignation may appear negative, but it's very much a type of caring; it means students *do* have values about imaginative writing, and that they are willing to speak up in defense of them. The opportunity to channel this passion into a moment of awareness for students is one of the chief rewards of teaching flash: they might not like it, they might say so, and they might want to know why.

Taylor Heuston

## When I Talk About Amy Hempel

Amy Hempel is still writing. At the New York State Summer Writers Institute, she reads three new, unpublished stories that you wouldn't believe were true but really did happen. Not that it matters, Rick Moody asserts in our workshop the next day, whether or not she calls them fiction or nonfiction—the story is still the story, the effect remains.

Hempel's last book came out ten years ago. She publishes in magazines sporadically, though memorably—"A Full-Service Shelter" from *Tin House's* Summer 2012 issue won a Pushcart. And yet, we're still thinking about, talking about, and writing about Hempel in our classrooms. Her story "What Were the White Things?" is included in Norton's excellent *Flash Fiction Forward* anthology, which many of us are using to teach Flash Fiction.

Perhaps it is what she has done for the form. For decades, she has worked deftly in miniature. She is exemplary of what the minimalist movement can really do with a sentence. If you want to study compression, suggestion, and experimentation, her body of work offers a litany of titles, each more nimble and surprising than the next.

Perhaps it is something in her teaching, in her generosity with her students? My friend in her workshop at University of Florida wrote to me that she is "...an angel sent from God, even if there is no God, *especially* if there is no God. We need more like her, and badly."

Perhaps it is the way her work resonates with her peers and contemporary writers? She must be what they call a writer's writer. An internet search of Amy Hempel does not turn up an author's page, but a slew of essays about Hempel's fiction (two written by Jamie Quatro), blog posts devoted to her best known and most obscure work, as well as lists of recommended reading from her collected works.

#

The first time I read Amy Hempel's "In a Tub," I was on the top floor of the university library at U.C. Santa Barbara. It was early in the afternoon. The sun warmed the windows and lit up the dust motes floating in the air. I stood in front of the shelf with my book bag at my feet and held Hempel's collected stories in my left hand while I turned the pages with my right. It was a musty, old library copy. The corners of the pages were soft.

Whenever I read Hempel's flash, I have the simultaneous sensation of being hit by a freight train and sitting behind the conductor, who is so focused on the tracks that our vision tunnels and nothing else seems to exist but the rails before us.

The first line of the first story in her first collection, *Reasons to Live*: "My heart—I thought it stopped." A line like a freight train—clear, bold, barreling.

There are many ways to talk about Hempel's work, which is rich in detail yet economical in language, fluid, imagistic, humorous, and heartbreaking. Rick Moody's introduction meditates on the pleasure of reading her prose, coming back again and again to the power of her sentences.

I like to think about the shape of Hempel's work, which is often like a mosaic—seemingly disparate pieces that assemble into a greater picture. Instead of using a linear narrative, her stories are often built out of objects, memories, scenes in the most present moment, asides, and fun facts put forth by the narrator for the reader's consideration.

#

The summer that I taught Flash Fiction at North Carolina State University, I assigned two Hempel stories: "In a Tub" and "What Were the White Things?"

The conversation died as quickly as it began. A student offered her hand and said, "I can tell it's really good. I just don't know what it's about."

There was a collective exhale as the rest of the room expressed their agreement: Amy Hempel is clearly a master, but what she has mastered, we cannot say for sure.

There were a few students who sincerely enjoyed the work, and some who had really disliked the lack of clarity they felt at the end. The rest of the room was neutral—not that they felt their time had been wasted, but that it wasn't their taste.

I have always been an effusive recommender of Hempel. Sometimes I wonder if she taught me how to write in the collage style that I favor, or if I was always inclined to write that way so I naturally felt connected with her style. It is hard to say how much of what we love is shaped by what we read and how much what we read is shaped by what we love.

I had naively assumed that if I simply assigned the work to my students, they too would be moved by the effortless yet effortful way her stories unfold. That was how I had felt the first time I held her collected works in my hands.

I failed that day to clarify what I feel Hempel accomplishes in her work, because I'd never before been challenged to put it into words. I sputtered and agreed that her work is nuanced, pointed out the structure as something to consider borrowing, and moved us along, hiding poorly how deflated I felt for the rest of the morning.

#

In a world where fiction by women is often coded as women's fiction and described as raw, emotional, or intuitive, I feel an urgent need to take care when I describe Hempel's work.

I like the word "visceral," because her narratives and narrators leave me with an understanding that is so complex that I can't quite articulate it, no matter how hard I reach. Yes, "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried" explores grief and guilt, but exactly what the narrator and the reader understand about the things we owe to the dying and ourselves in the face of our fears is deeply felt in the end and is still difficult to put into words.

Hempel's work is emotionally rich. It is also polished and focused. Not a word is wasted. She is incredibly specific, describing a church with lively yet evocative redundancy: "It was as quiet as a church."

Lately, I've been wondering if the genius of Hempel's work is how deftly she illuminates the human experience by inviting the reader to move alongside the narrator as she leaps from thought to thought, between image and memory. After all, many of the stories in *Reasons to Live* open like invitations—"Do you know what I think?"

#

Our guiding question, the summer I failed to explain Hempel: What makes a flash story work? It's the same question, really, as: What makes a story a story? For some there needed to be an evolving plot, or a character who was profoundly changed or unchanged by the end.

Amy Hempel taught me to add to my definition the sensation that something particular of the human condition has been revealed, complicated, or brought back into focus. Even a small revelation makes a story worth my while: "Most of the time you don't really hear it. A pulse is something you feel."

Part of this essay has been born from a desire to revisit that day I couldn't quite explain what I love about Amy Hempel to a new generation of writers, the one that will follow on my heels, the way I follow on the heels of my mentor Ellen O'Connell who first introduced me to Hempel's fiction in my first workshop.

The other part of this essay comes from the simple fact that five years later, I am still thinking about standing in the library with a panoramic view of the Santa Ynez mountains and the Pacific and finding that for the first time I really understand what fiction can accomplish.

My heart, that day, I thought it stopped.

# Contributors: Volume 10 Number 1

Tyler Barton is a fiction editor of *The Blue Earth Review* and an MFA candidate at Minnesota State University, Mankato. His work has been published in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Hypertext Magazine*, *WhiskeyPaper*, and elsewhere. Find his stories at [tsbarton.com](http://tsbarton.com) and his jokes at [@goftlyer](https://twitter.com/goftlyer).

Amy Bee lives in Sacramento, CA. She writes genial music blurbs for the *Sacramento News & Review* and chronicles her (mis)adventures in long distance backpacking at [gottahike.com](http://gottahike.com). Amy plans to write a collection of essays about her attempt to hike from Mexico to Canada in 2016.

Beth Bosworth is the author of *A Burden of Earth and Other Stories*, the novel *Tunneling*, and *The Source of Life and Other Stories* (Drue Heinz Literature Prize, 2012). Her stories have appeared in *AGNI*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Guernica*, and elsewhere. She is founding editor of *The Saint Ann's Review*.

April Bradley is the associate editor for *Bartleby Snopes Literary Magazine* and the founder of Women Who Flash Their Lit. Her writing has appeared in *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Hermeneutic Chaos Literary Journal*, *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Narratively*, and *Thrice Fiction*, among others. She stumbles through digital space [@april\\_bradley](https://twitter.com/april_bradley).

J. Bradley is the author of the linked story collection *The Adventures of Jesus Christ, Boy Detective* (Pelekinesis, 2016). He lives at [iheartfailure.net](http://iheartfailure.net).

Amy L. Clark is the author of *Adulterous Generation* (Queen's Ferry Press). Her work has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *Fifth Wednesday*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Quick Fiction*, and *Litro*. She is a writing specialist for Northeastern University's Foundation Year Program.

Ryan Dilbert is the author of the novel *Time Crumbling like a Wet Cracker* (No Record Press). His short fiction has appeared in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Word Riot*, *PANK*, *Matchbook*, and other journals. He covers the WWE for *Bleacher Report*.

Rosemarie Dombrowski is the founder of Rinky Dink Press and a poetry editor at *Four Chambers*. Her collections include *The Book of Emergencies* (Five Oaks Press) and *The Philosophy of Unclean Things* (Finishing Line Press). She teaches courses on radical poetics and women's literature at Arizona State University's downtown campus.

Ginger Duncan is a writer of poetry, flash fiction, and creative nonfiction. A native Oregonian, she lives and works in Portland, but always has her eye out for a new adventure.

Stevie Edwards is editor-in-chief at *Muzzle Magazine* and Acquisitions Editor at YesYes Books. She is the author of two poetry collections: *Humanly* (Small Doggies, 2015) and *Good Grief* (Write Bloody, 2012). She has an MFA from Cornell University and currently lives and works in Ann Arbor, MI.

Kathleen Heil is a writer and translator of prose and poetry. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, *Five Points*, *Fence*, *Gigantic*, and elsewhere. She is a 2015-2016 Sturgis International Fellow in Berlin and a 2016 NEA Translation Fellow. More at [kathleenheil.net](http://kathleenheil.net).

Taylor Heuston, California native, holds an MFA from North Carolina State University. She is a VCCA fellow, and her work has also appeared in *At Length*, *Carve Magazine*, and *Two Serious Ladies*. She lives in Raleigh, NC.

Ann Hillesland's work has been published in journals including *Fourth Genre*, *Bayou*, *The Laurel Review*, *Corium*, and *SmokeLong Quarterly* and has been selected for the *Wigleaf* Top 50 Very Short Fictions. She has an MFA from Queen's University of Charlotte. See more of her work at [annahillesland.com](http://annahillesland.com)

William Hoffacker grew up in New York City and lives in Tucson, AZ. Recent work has appeared in *The Matador Review*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, *The Mondegreen*, and *matchbook*. He also interviews contributors to *The Collagist* for the journal's blog. More information is available at [williamhoffacker.com](http://williamhoffacker.com).

Nneoma Ike-Njoku is a Nigerian writer currently living in northern New Mexico. Her short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Transition*, *The Kalahari Review*, and the Kerber Verlag anthology, *African Futures*.

Kate Jayroe is from Little Mountain, SC. She works at Powell's City of Books, serves on staff with the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and is co-editor-in-chief of *Portland Review*. Her work appears in *Hobart*, *Maudlin House*, *Word Riot*, and elsewhere.

W. Todd Kaneko is the author of *The Dead Wrestler Elegies* (Curbside Splendor, 2014). His writing can be seen in *Barrelhouse*, *The Normal School*, *The Collagist*, *PANK* and elsewhere. He is a Kundiman Fellow, a co-editor of *Waxwing* magazine, and he teaches at Grand Valley State University in West Michigan.

Su-Yee Lin is a writer working on a collection of short stories influenced by Chinese folktales. She holds degrees from Brown University and UMass Amherst and was a 2012 Fulbright Fellow to China. Her work can be found in *The Freeman*, *Electric Literature*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *Interfictions*, *Tor.com*, and elsewhere.

Paul Luikart is the author of *Animal Heart*, a collection of short fiction (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016.) His MFA is from Seattle Pacific University. He and his family live in Chattanooga, TN.

Lucian Mattison is the author of *Peregrine Nation* (The Broadkill River Press, 2014). He is the winner of the 2016 *Puerto Del Sol* Poetry Prize and his poems appear in *Four Way Review*, *Hobart*, *Muzzle*, *Nashville Review*, and elsewhere. His fiction appears in *Fiddleblack*. To read more visit [Lucianmattison.com](http://Lucianmattison.com)

K.C. Mead-Brewer is a writer and editor living in beautiful Baltimore, MD. Her writing appears in a variety of publications, including *Cold Mountain Review*, *Litro Magazine*, and *Bartleby Snopes*. For more information, visit: [kcmeadbrewer.com](http://kcmeadbrewer.com) or follow her @meadwriter

Jason Namey is a graduate student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where he edits prose for *Permafrost Magazine*. His stories appear or are forthcoming in *Hobart*, *Moon City Review*, *Phantom Drift*, *FLAPPERHOUSE*, *fields*, and elsewhere. He is from Jacksonville, FL.

Andrew Newby studied creative writing at Auburn University. He is a husband, a father, and a veteran. His twenties were good, his favorite color is clear, and he likes the taste of water.

April Newman is a writer and professor. She facilitates English coursework for The University of Phoenix. Her work has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Mindful Metropolis*, *Hypertext* and *Plunge* magazines, plus an anthology from The University of Wisconsin Press.

Elizabeth O'Brien lives in Minneapolis, MN, where she earned an MFA in Poetry at the University of Minnesota. Her work—poetry and prose—has appeared in many journals, including *New England Review*, *Diagram*, *Sixth Finch*, *Radar Poetry*, *Whiskey Island*, *PANK*, *Revolver*, and *Cicada*. Follow her on twitter at @elzb\_obri.

Writing by Kimberly King Parsons has most recently appeared in *Bookforum*, *Black Warrior Review*, *New South*, *Fanzine*, and *Fiction Southeast*. She is the former Editor-in-Chief of *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*. She lives with her family in Portland, OR.

Southern California native Katrina Prow lives and writes in West Texas. She is a PhD candidate in creative writing, fiction at Texas Tech University, where she serves as an associate fiction editor for *Iron Horse Literary Review*. Her writing has recently appeared in *WhiskeyPaper*, *Juked*, *CHEAP POP*, and elsewhere.

Bailey Pittenger currently resides in the Midwest, where she is an MFA candidate at the University of Notre Dame. She writes prose that consumes humans, digests feminisms, and excretes horrific charms. She sometimes summons animals just by thinking of them.

Charles Rafferty's tenth book of poetry is *The Unleashable Dog*. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Oprah Magazine*, and *Prairie Schooner*. His stories have been accepted at *Sonora Review*, *Cortland Review*, and *The Southern Review*. His collection of short fiction is *Saturday Night at Magellan's*.

Gen Del Raye's fiction can be found, among other places, in *The Monarch Review*, *\*82 Review*, and at [gendelraye.blogspot.com](http://gendelraye.blogspot.com). He grew up in Kyoto, Japan and lives in Berkeley, CA.

Ron Riecki's nonfiction, fiction, and poetry have been published or are upcoming in *The Threepenny Review*, *River Teeth*, *Spillway*, *New Ohio Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Canary*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Orleans Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Wigleaf*, *Juked*, and many other literary journals. He loves writing while listening to film scores.

Lucas Southworth's stories have recently appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Meridian*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Conjunctions*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Willow Springs*, and his collection, *Everyone Here Has a Gun*, won AWP's Grace Paley Prize (Massachusetts Press, 2013). He teaches at Loyola University Maryland, and edits for the *Baltimore Review* and *Slash Pine Press*.

Dawn Sperber's fiction has appeared in *PANK*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Gargoyle*, *Going Down Swinging*, *matchbook*, and other fabulous places. Some of her stories are tiny and some are long and tall. She is a writer and freelance editor in New Mexico.

Alina Stefanescu lives in Alabama with her partner and four small mammals. She loves the sound a pebble makes when it falls into a lake. Today she woke up and realized your homeland is a speculative fiction. See [alinastefanescu.com](http://alinastefanescu.com).

Dennis James Sweeney's stories and poems have appeared in places like *Crazyhorse*, *DIAGRAM*, *Indiana Review*, and *Passages North*. He's the small press editor of *Entropy* and author of the chapbooks *THREATS*, based on Amelia Gray's novel of the same name, and *What They Took Away*.

Robin Tung has been featured in *Black Warrior Review*, *DailyServing*, *Sugar House Review*, *Surface Magazine*, *The Montreal Review*, *This Recording*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, among others. She lives in Los Angeles with her daughter.

Meg Tuite is author of two short story collections, *Bound By Blue* (2013, Sententia Books) and *Domestic Apparition* (2011, San Francisco Bay Press), and five chapbooks. She won the Twin Antlers Collaborative Poetry award from Artistically Declined Press for her poetry collection, *Bare Bulbs Swinging* (2014), written with Heather Fowler and Michelle Reale. She teaches at Santa Fe Community College, and is a columnist at Connotation Press and *JMWW*. Her blog: [megtuite.com](http://megtuite.com).

Paul Vega is an editor for *Pacifica Literary Review* and received his MFA from the University of Washington. His work appears or is forthcoming in *The Pinch*, *CutBank*, *The Collagist*, *BULL*, *The James Franco Review*, *The Portland Review* and elsewhere.

Marcella Vokey currently resides in Cambridge, MA. She was once described as "a balloon with a lead weight," which she takes as a compliment. Her work has recently appeared in *\*82 Review* and *Temenos Journal*.

David E. Yee is a fiction MFA candidate at the Ohio State University. Sometimes he misses Baltimore. He is an associate fiction editor at *The Journal*. Elsewhere, his writing can be found in the *Sycamore Review* and *The Welter Lit Journal*.