

Issue 9



Gambling the Aisle

Masthead

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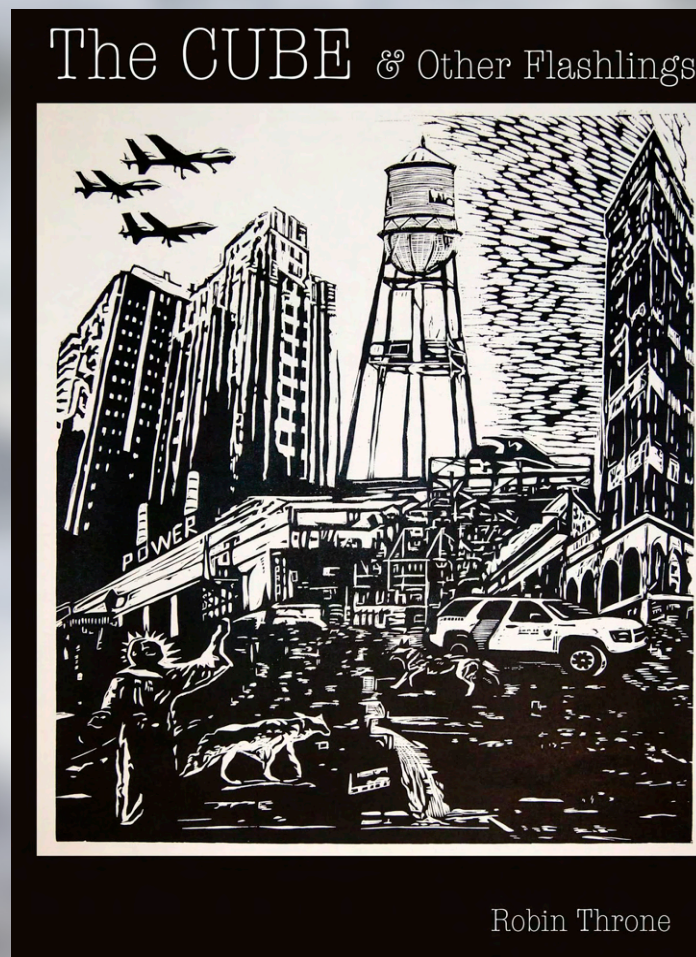
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Gambling the Aisle 2015 Chapbook Contest Winner

The Cube & other flashlings

Robin Throne

Robin Throne is an Iowa writer and educator whose work has appeared in *Split Lip Magazine*, *The New Poet Journal*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Gypsy Cab*, *Mankato Poetry Review* and *North Coast Review* among others. She was the recipient of the fourth David R. Collins Literary Achievement award from the Midwest Writing Center.



Chapbook Runners up:

Forms of Obligation by Alexander Luft

Interior Designs by Lori Gravley

Field Guide for a Human by Judith Roney

The Sheep Woman of New Zealand by Kirby Wright



Untitled by Kathleen Deep

Home

Matthew Neely

*Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.*

-Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Two days after Lieutenant Maynard is crushed to death by a 5-ton truck, we land at Boston-Logan, so that those of us on the military hop can go on our two-week leave. Two days after coming home from tan and beige, I begin to dream of blood and blue. On this rainy January morning, the kind of morning that exists in the space between Christmas and Real Life, we step off of the plane. We get our duffel bags. Someone in army green, obviously not from Iraq, stamps our leave papers as we exit customs. That's it. Everyone in the desert version of army camouflage just starts disappearing.

When I walk from the international side of the airport to the domestic side, it is just after five in the morning. The airport smells like bleach and hand sanitizer, and a man on a floor-waxing Zamboni hugs the wall with his machine. Men and women in their uniforms ease out of the cracks in the walls of the airport until it is just me walking down this hallway—me and the Zamboni man. And then I turn a corner, and old women whose t-shirts read things like *VFW Ladies Aux.* and *Army Nurse Corps* begin walking towards me. They give me cellophane-wrapped cookies and Rice Krispie Treats. Old men in VFW t-shirts and ball caps that say *Vietnam Veteran and damn proud of it!* greet me with handshakes and signs. These old people shake my hand...sometimes they grab both of my hands and hold them in their hands. I don't know where everyone else went, so they come for me with their handshakes and cookies and wrinkly old-man flesh, like Russel Brown's scalp in the back of that Hum-vee. These old men and older women, they say that they are proud of me. They say that they fought in 'Nam or they worked the factories while their husbands fought on the beaches of Normandy and Omaha. They remind me of their own stories before I can tell them mine. One man takes my hand and pulls me to the wall across from the Zamboni man.

Everyone one else has disappeared, except that I can see Baker, gurgling breaths of laughter escaping the dark redness of his flushed cheeks. When he see me shoot him a glance, he disappears himself.

"Never got a proper homecoming," the old man says. "I came home on that freedom bird from Da Nang and those shit-bags in San Diego, all they gave me was some chow and a pat on the ass." He stops and chuckles. "I never got a proper homecoming, so I'm giving one to you." He wraps me in flabby arms and tells me his son was there. "In Fallujah," he says. I think I cry a little, but not for his son. I'm tired and people are dying. I tell him I have friends in Fallujah too.

"Some," I tell him, "will be coming home, like me."

The old man lets me go, and Baker comes back, walking me out to the end of the terminal. We say our goodbyes, and he goes his way, and I go his way too. We both make our way to the bathroom. We are on the same pee schedule, Baker and I.

He tells me to buck up, that he'll see me in two weeks, and that I get to visit Daley, and that I should be glad about that. I tell him I want to hang out with him, and he tells me to quit being a fag. This offends me, but I don't know if I am supposed to be offended. Baker tells me that it's okay to be offended by this, and that he is too. He tells me not to shake it too much. He washes his hands. He leaves the bathroom. By the time I exit, he is nowhere. Always in me, though. I laugh at that, how Baker would be in me. I am not even his type. He'd never be in me.

It is very like a dream, with colors and signs in English and not a speck of dirt on anything. So many people stop me and thank me for my service, but when I ask them how to just get the fuck back to Baker, they don't know. They disappear suddenly. After months of men with Patton-sized egos telling

us that we are a “brotherhood-in-arms,” I am told nothing in this early-morning airport. We are left to rot or die or shit or piss in a hallway near Fenway Park. It is lonely and it is wonderful, all at the same time.

After the old people, I walk towards a sign that reads *Smoking Area Outside*. Our medic, Melendez, who was on the plane, walks towards me already dressed in denim and wool. Her graying hair is flattened in the back, and her lips are pink and puffy, not at all like the Neptune blue of Maynard’s. She asks me what I am still doing in my uniform.

“I had heard you can get people to buy you drinks on the plane,” I say. “Where are you headed?” She tells me she is from Boston and that she had changed in the bathroom. She sees me look up at the sign.

“You goin’ for a smoke?” she asks. I tell her I have time before my flight to Oregon leaves. We walk through the double doors. I feel along my desert fatigues for my cigarettes, but Melendez is quicker. She hands me one from her pack.

“Thanks,” I say. “Long flight.”

She puts a cigarette in her mouth, lights it, and motions for me to come near her to light mine.

“Shame about Maynard,” she says.

I hold my cigarette up to the flame and then bring my hand down, cupping the lit end in my hand.

“Yes,” I say. “A real shame.”

“He was your platoon leader, right?” she asks.

I take another drag. “Yes. He was a good man.” She laughs.

“A good man,” she says. “Right. That’s what we are supposed to say.”

“What else do you say?” She looks at me and raises an arm to flag down a cab.

“About a lieutenant like Maynard?” she asks. “You say he was a real soldier. A man who never got to come home cause pirates cut him down in his prime.” I squint my eyes when she says this, and I am about to ask her what she means. She continues. “Google Maynard, Sergeant Neely. He comes from a long line of booty-chasers.” I force a laugh and try to talk. She interrupts me.

“Real sorry about the lieutenant.” Melendez steps to the cab, and a brown man pops the trunk. “Don’t think about it too much,” she says. “You’ll get nightmares.”

I turn and walk back inside to find my flight home.

I fly to Portland and then take a Greyhound bus to Coos Bay and finally to Atheria. For two weeks in January, I do nothing except taste rocky road ice cream and watch sunsets in the mountains with girls younger than I am. I take them through the green and wet of the Coastal Mountains and sometimes, we stop at a turnout and they show me lots of things. Sometimes, in the rain and the green of the coastal mountains, we fog up the windows and then have to wipe them off with our shirts and pants and coats. Sometimes, we just sit and talk, but still the windows fog. In these moments, I cry, sometimes. And sometimes I don’t cry. Regardless, we always end up talking about Iraq. It got me free beers on the plane, and it gets me free fucking on the road. But when we talk, and we always do, these girls, they ask me stupid questions—always the same one first. I hate it when they ask me, and I don’t tell them. Instead, I tell them that I don’t know. I tell them that I never checked. They laugh and they think they get it. But they don’t get it. They wouldn’t want to talk about some poor motherfucker who got killed at their hands either.

After a few days, I call Daley. On the phone is much different than in person, so after I get some practice in, I call her. I get to know Daley in this mountain fog and drizzle sort of way, except she doesn’t ask me if I killed anyone. When Daley and I sit together at the pullouts along the coastal mountain highways, we don’t fight and we don’t fuck. She just says that it was a damn shame that I had to be there. A real damn shame, she says. And then we talk about Baker, about his sexuality and about her desire for him. We talk about how she felt when he left for basic training, and she rolls her eyes at the memories. She tells me how silly she was, and I tell her to stop, that if I liked boys, I would like Baker too.

We talk about all these things, how they happened and how they happen, but we never talk about what *will* happen. We never talk about how, in a few short weeks, Baker will run through the cracks and whistles of the market street with a boy under one arm and that boy’s arm under the other. We talk about how he is a fucking hero, but not because of the forthcoming rescue, though that will probably earn him something shiny to go on his uniform. In the car on the way to Coos Bay, we

discuss Baker's sexuality.

"He'd love shiny," she says, and tries to laugh at the obviously unfunny joke.

"He'd love to be left the fuck alone about the whole thing," I say. Daley looks at me and her eyes drop.

"I didn't mean to say..." she begins, but I just stare at her eyes, the color of the forest outside. For a moment, I wonder how she is making them wet, like the trees outside in the rain, and then I get it.

"Stop," I say, trying to match the color and wetness in her eyes. "Stop it and look at me." She does. "No one gives a shit who that man loves. And anyway, a lot of guys like to suck dick in that unit. You know, metaphorically speaking." She laughs, and snot comes from her nose and lands on my shirt. She notices.

"Oh lord," she says. "I blow snot on the first guy I like since Baker." Her voice trails off when she realizes what she says. She squints her eyes and her nose crinkles the way it always does when she gets like this. I retrieve a tissue from the glove compartment.

"Glove department," she says, and she smiles. *It's a nice smile*, I think, with no fear on her part and no tears on my part. We sit like that for a long time, for millions of moments. Magical moments, I call them. And then she speaks.

"I'm glad you came home, even if it is just for two weeks." I look back towards the road.

"Me too," I say.

•

For three days, we make our way from Kuwait City to eastern Kansas. For three days, like being in the belly of the fish or in a God-forsaken tomb, we shift from talking about what got fucked up to who will get fucked up. A year and a day after we leave for Ar Ramadi, Iraq, we land on an empty airfield in eastern Kansas, and we load a bus to go back to Fort Riley. On this Bluebird bus, my face is hot. Hotter, maybe, than Iraq was. In minutes, maybe just moments, I will see Daley, and I am fucking *hot*. Baker and Diaz and Russell Brown and Lieutenant Maynard won't be seen—and maybe that's why I am hot. A year before, on the way to the airport, every seat was taken on a blue Bluebird bus. Now, a year later, without Baker and Diaz and Brown and Maynard, every seat is still taken, and I don't know how they did that.

On the bus, no one talks about Baker or Diaz or

the eclipse. No one talks about how only *days* ago, we mopped up the barracks and the guard towers that still had little pieces of brain and blood strewn around like chicken feed. No one talks about how we pecked until we bled, holding it in along with our vomit and our embarrassment. Instead, everyone just talks about how they are going to go home to fuck girls and fuck wives and fucking fuck up this fucking town. I just want to go home.

Melendez turns around from where she is sitting. She catches my eye and nods. She switches seats with Smitty, who has been sitting beside me for the whole ride, all the way from Camp Doha. She sits down and takes her beret out of her pocket. She slicks her graying hair back with her hands and throws her hat on backwards. She does this so I will laugh—like we did on guard duty with our helmets.

"I'm glad you have that girl," she says.

"I don't even know what I am going to say to her, Maria."

"Start with the best," she says. "Tell her how you saved those boys."

"Sure," I say, but I don't mean it. I just don't know what to say, so I sit with one hand in my pocket and she sees me doing this, holding on to the shiny star in my pocket.

"Do you still have it?" she asks.

"Yes," I say, "but I'll give it to him when I get to see him." She smiles.

"Give it to her, you mean? Give it to Daley?"

"No," I say. "To him. To Baker. When I get to Oregon, I'm going to Eagle Point." She sees my face and she gets it.

"Right," she says, and she nods her head. "Is that where Daley lives?"

"No," I say. "That's where he lives."

"Who?" she asks.

•

Two months later, I walk out of the education building on Fort Riley, Kansas to a late October rainstorm. On a radio, somewhere far off, I hear Lakshmi Singh talk about troop movements in Russia and Crimea. I take a breath, because I am going home, and I don't have to care about that. In this October rain, I smell the air mix with the dirt, and though it doesn't quite feel like home in Atheria, it is rain. It is rain, and I am going home in two weeks, so I get my beret from my pocket and I stand in the rain, letting

the wetness roll off the wool in my beret and onto my shoulders. *This is what it feels like to be home*, I think. They are gone, Baker and Diaz, but I am still here, and I want to stand and shut my eyes and ears and nose and just stand in the rain. So I do. I don't move down the steps, and the first thing I feel is the rain from the awning—one of those big, swimming pool drips falls down the back of my neck. I breathe. Again and again these drips tumble down my back and make me breathe. There are no booms and no clicks and no dusty war-sky. This sky is green, the color of Atheria and of the mountains, and it swirls, like I have never seen before. I stand there for millions of moments and let the wind freeze my nose and my cheeks and my fear and I hear nothing until a voice shouts.

The voice screams at me to get inside, but I don't care. I just want the breeze and the rain and the clouds that swirl. And then it happens. I hear the explosion, and I am on the ground and the man is near me, covering me with his own

body, the way that Baker did, and the way I tried to cover Lieutenant Maynard when I did the breathing part of CPR for a dead man. I hear the explosion, and the man is covering my body, and then he is trying to pull me up. I just want to sit and sit and sit. So he sits down next to me.

"Neely," he says, and I look up. Baker's face looks into mine. "Get up."

I wrap my arms around my friend, ignoring the

volleys around us. This man, whose lips crack like Baker's, and whose eyebrows thicken his forehead like Baker's, speaks.

"That's some kind of storm," he says as he pulls away from me and stands. "You okay, sergeant?"

"Get the fuck down, Baker!" I tell him. And then I try to tell him that this is not a goddamn joke, that the phone center and the PX and all of his bullshit can wait till the mortars stop. I tell him to get down, and he does. In the fall evening air with a coming storm and rain and wind and the lightning and thunder, he does. He gets the fuck down. And when he sees my face, he gets it. He knows. He takes off his beret, and I see his face, and then I understand.

I sit and my body shakes and my face is wet, not from the rain. We sit there, on the rain-soaked earth and concrete, this man and I. My hand comes to my face because I don't know what else to do. My mouth is open and my eyes are wet, not from the rain, but no sound will come out. He sees this

wreckage in front of him, and he pulls me towards his own body and wraps his arms around me.

"It's okay," he says. "It's really okay. You are here. You're home." He holds me closer and I cry into his shoulder. He lets me do this for a long time. When I pull away from his rain and snot-soaked uniform, I look at him, moving my eyes to each of his.

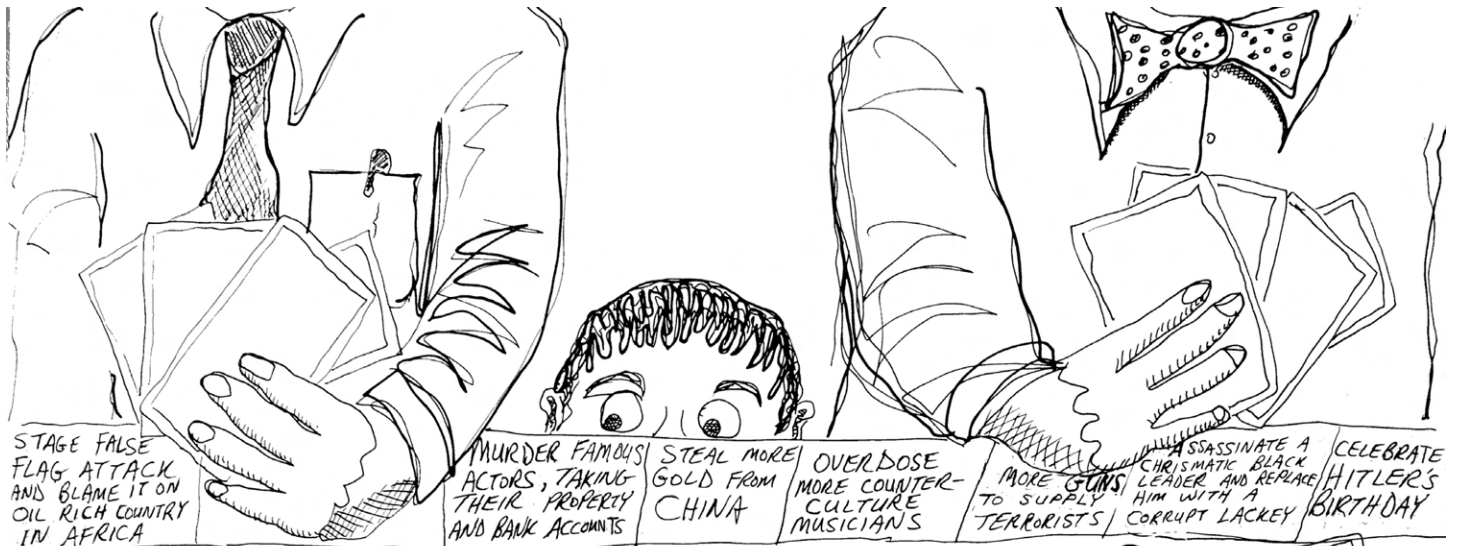
He is not Baker, and I am never coming home.



Stranded Between Destinations by Bill Wolak



where its all headed by Allen Forrest



NEW WORLD ORDER THE BOARD GAME



Forrest



nwo the boardgame by Allen Forrest

Nancy Devine

This is how I say I love you

Who knew that the stick that would draw the line
would be both itself
and what lay beyond it?
That I could hold it in my teeth
and yours at the same time
as if kiss?

We devoured the sand yet it seemed as though
the sand devoured us,
grains we had become,
wheat and oat and chaff,
ocean-scrubbed glass
flung into the desert
like a bucket of dead minnows
pitched into a moon-streaked river.

When I dream maps of us----
sucked into sleep like the émigré that I am---
countries look as though they have borders,
but really, they have skin,
flimsy as envelope flaps,
licked to be sealed
never entirely closed
if the right finger comes to rip them open.



double mint double fun by Alexandre Nodopaka



Untitled by Kathleen Deep

Impression, Sunrise

Ashley Williams

This is where it always ends.

I'm sitting on this musty motel mattress and I can't take my eyes off of you. A beautiful boy dressed up in boxers with a gun pressed to his head in a game of blow your brains out. Breathtaking.

Pop!

You don't even flinch.

I take the pistol from your hand and play with it, making it dance on the table.

You reach over, grab my neck, kiss me hard.

I push you down, kiss your neck, the gun falling between us.

"Your turn," you whisper, and I sit up, straddling you.

Cool metal kisses my temple. I look you right in the eyes and smile.

"Tell me how lovely I am," I beg, and you shove your fingers in my mouth.

"Baby." You suck in on your lower lip. I contemplate doing it for you instead. "You're a fucking Monet. You're a god damn princess." You move your hand to rest on the back of my head, your index finger falls on mine, threatening to press the trigger. "You're gold and purple and royal blue."

Pop!

I'm so in love.

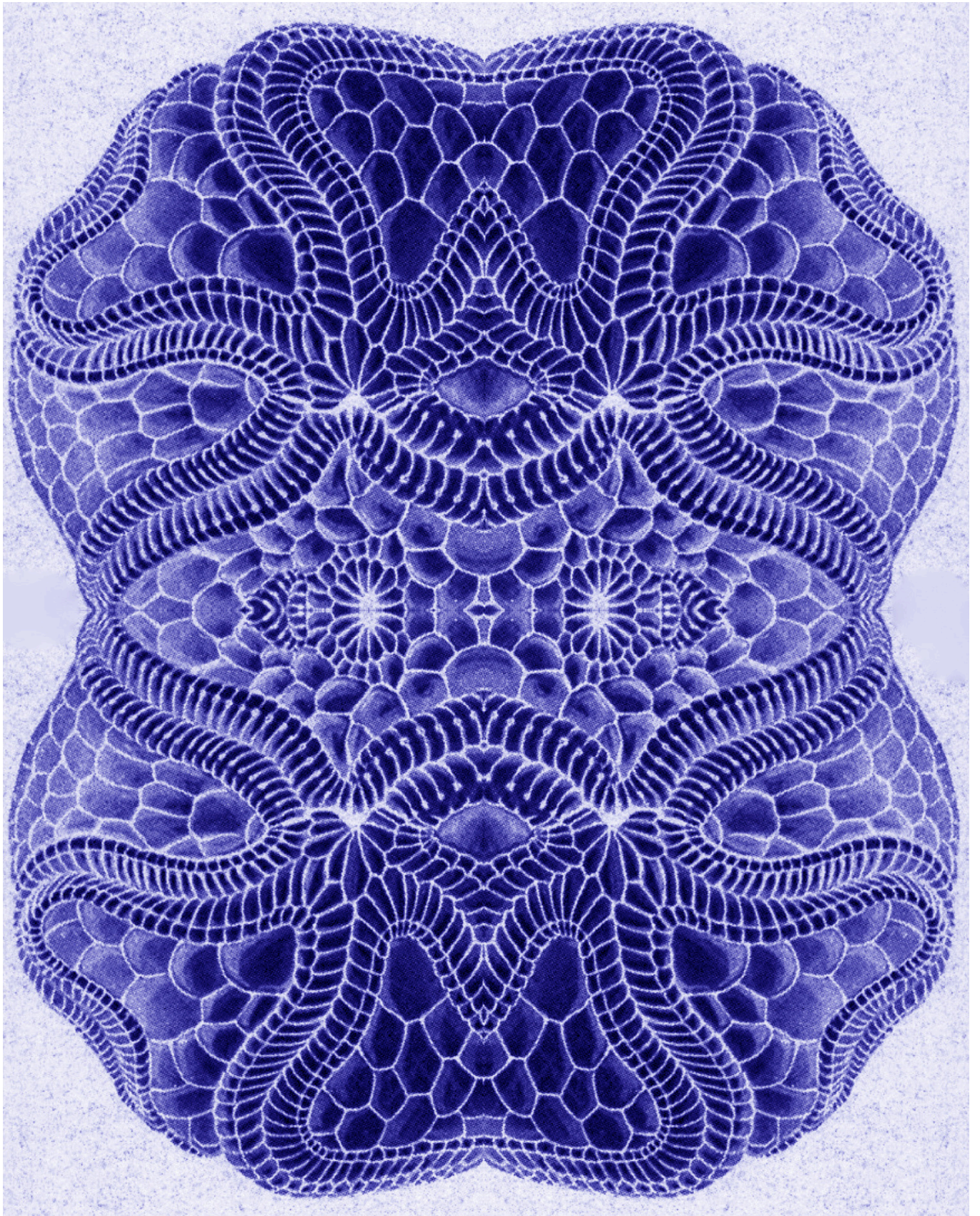
I crawl over you to the nightstand. Pixie dust is waiting for me. I lean down and take a big whiff. Every single sense I have is tingling. When I turn around, your eyes are red with desire. You push me down and start digging yourself into me. I press the gun to your chest as my teeth tug on your jaw, a blue and purple trail making a map on your skin. You don't even open your eyes when you reach over and grab the other gun. You pull me up by my hair and slide it right into my mouth. It's cold and dangerous and insane, but then again, so are we.

Pop!

Pop!

All the windows are open, letting the entire world watch as two bodies fall into each other. The red fireworks are what really make the show. Look at us, baby, filling up the room. Red paint on white walls. We've made art. We're even prettier than a Monet.

This is where it always ends.



As Deep As Time Swallows by Bill Wolak

John Sweet

missionary

jesus christ this need to
breathe in pure shards of sunlight

this need to offer apologies where
none will be accepted

frozen fields and splintered glass, the
smell of fear the fear of death the
death of the past

you are here in this house of
half-truths with your father's ghost and
your broken hands

you have answers that are lies to
questions no one asks

no different than when you were 17,
than when you were 26, except that now
you can feel the blood turn to
sludge in your veins

now you can see the drugs for
the gifts they were

can finally start to lick the
salt from your lover's wounds

Painter

Brad Garber

When I went to the island where you lived it was to invite you to lunch and the beauty of the inlet flanked by high trees and the smooth water was dreamlike and peaceful the rugged home at the end of a thin fjord smoke curling into a rising day and you were there in the studio the one transported from the high school where you taught me to notice things and the artwork dripped and shimmered off the walls of your home your thick right hand injured when I reached out to shake it your broad shoulders like yokes on oxen driving you from one place to another thrusting a tall can of beer into my unworthy hands as you walked by talking about something as light and smoke filled a thick cabin air a small child (perhaps mine) sitting on a bench while you welded piles of foam rubber in the living room and your wife watched in the kitchen and a generator in an adjoining room burst into flames and me alerting you by throwing my beer into the flames and you rushing into the room to douse the electric flames by grabbing sparks with rubber gloves which you just seemed to be wearing and then it was time to go and we kissed our cheeks your broad arms around me never looking me in the eye and your wife directed to take me off the island as you stormed off to the next creation your wife unsure as to how to operate the boat which was a white mare in heat strapped to a boat trailer waiting to be freed so I took my daughter (perhaps the small child) to a far shore and swam back to leave the boat for the artist.



Children at Play by Madison Creech

Exploring Encumbrance: An Interview with Katherine Fields

John Cross

Before we begin let me just state that I am not well. I am sick. The malady that ails me is more mental than physical. I think you would call it stress, but that is not the right word. You could call it anxiety, but that doesn't quite fit. I will call it "being human" in hoping this banner helps defray some of the blame to you, the whole of humanity, because if I am enfeebled well then so are all of you. It is under this duress that I sat down with Katherine Rhodes Fields, our featured artist, to attempt a meaningful conversation about her work. Katherine, whose work enjoys international acclaim, was wonderful and understanding. I, on the other hand, conducted myself like a bumbling idiot. The following transcript will shed some light both on the brilliance of the mind of KRF and slip-slidey slope I currently find my mental faculties on.

John Cross: Tell me a bit about Encumbrance, where did this series of prints begin for you?

Katherine Fields: My use of the image of the plague doctor started in 2005. My first time to use it was in a painting--a diptych that references the song "Ring Around the Rosies," which is about the plague. After Katrina hit my home state and after 2 weeks of not hearing anything from my family (I had just moved to St. Louis), I made some monotype prints that featured a solitary figure wearing the mask and an x... The x was being used to mark the dead in houses on the gulf coast, as they did for homes with the plague. I was watching the news and saw people wearing bandanas as masks and garbage bags for shoes/waders...it reminded me of how the plague doctor costume was a lot like that...protecting but not protecting...so much unknown...so the mask became a metaphor for ignorance in my work.

JC: Had you known the plague doctor image before that?

KF: Yes--I was a European history and fine art double major in undergrad...so I was familiar with the costume as well as its use in comedia del arte theatre. It's a character from that type of theatre trope. Let's hear it for a Liberal Arts education! Ha!

JC: I saw a photo of a man wading through a flood up to his chest in a downpour, he was carrying an open umbrella. Talk about futility!

KF: Exactly... It become parallel with our efforts of survival against odds we cannot even comprehend so we just put on costumes and pretend...

JC: What is the history behind the plague mask? Where did it originate and why do you consider it futile?

KF: The pose of the figures is also in tribute to art history...the tronie. The plague was thought to be mi-

asmic, or airborne, so the mask was shaped to look like a bird to trick the disease since the birds weren't dying. The beak performed like a gas mask...it was stuffed with fragrant flowers...posies..."pocket full of posies" and sawdust to kill the smell of the dying bodies and filter the bad air. The eye pieces were red to throw off the disease as well. The hat, gloves, and full body cloak protected the doctor from having to touch the dying and hid the body from appearing human.

JC: So it was a mask worn to disguise the human beneath from the threat of the plague because the plague didn't affect birds. That is such an interesting way to combat something that we didn't understand at the time.

KF: Hiding as something else...yes...just as we do to live in contemporary times...hide in fashion, profiles, altered pictures, etc. Or we just use what we have based on our current knowledge to handle problems beyond our understanding.

JC: I see what you mean, we seem to live in a culture of almost truths/altered truths, as if the reality of life is malleable to suit our personal needs.

KF: Exactly....the tronie is a type of portrait that was made popular by Rembrandt. It's a portrait of no one of significance but they are adorned in a way that is counter to the actual sitter... [Vermeer's] The Girl with a Pearl Earring is considered a tronie.

So my doctors are no one in particular...actually Everymans. They wear a mask of ignorance despite the hats, clothing, or jewelry.

JC: In your artist statement you talk about how the concept drives the materials. So what is it about the subject and concept here that makes you want to make them as etchings?

KF: There are 2 sets. One set is from old plates, the other set are new. The old plates were used as background information and I imposed the masked figure on top of it.

They are also etchings, but they are made using non-toxic processes. The relationship to Rembrandt and the origination of the tronie... they were etchings.

JC: Is it a connection to the historical aspect of etching (which became popular with artists like Rembrandt), but the non-toxic is a reflection of contemporary concerns?

KF: Yep--you got it. Etching is one of the most toxic processes in printmaking.

Every mark, every choice I made was intentional. I tried to make them "perfect," too, as prints, so as to trick the viewer into seeing them as being made the old way. Inked, printed, placed, etc. but I tried to keep free, too with my mark-making. Etchings were also considered sketches, not "high art," so I wanted to embrace that tradition too. Even though it took a very, very long time to make them all... labor intensive for sketches.

JC: You've worked in painting, drawing, multiple print-making media, installation, and photography. You even used the grease from fried chicken as a medium once. So when you say you choose etching with non-toxic materials you are really saying that you are trying to reference the past, especially artists like Rembrandt who used etching to make his images while relating it to modern society's obsession with safety?

KF: In a way yes... there are many ways to skin a cat. The etchant I used is what's used in the computer industry to make microchips. It's a saline sulfate etch... electromagnetic, as opposed to acid. Another level...ha!

JC: If that is the case tell me more about how the reference to ancient images relates to us, here, now. I mean how do you see this "masking" occurring today?

KF: Material goods, perhaps. Going into massive debt to appear wealthy; appearances to make oneself feel wanted or secure. Depending on technology, as opposed to common sense. We take on characteristics of a larger belief system in order to survive, while dismissing our true selves.

JC: "I am what I buy" or "I am what I post" as a veneer to who we really are?

KF: Rembrandt would put caps on himself and give himself curls--long hair in his portraits that were outside his class rank... "selfie culture." The tronies are early "selfies" but in mine it's more or less an opportunity to see oneself in a predicament...self-preservation. It's not condemnation, it's more or less a parallel I saw.

JC: I think so, we find ourselves in a time in which we are the most exposed, the least anonymous, but at the same time we have the capability to recreate our virtual self to fit

the image we want the world to know, rather than the truth of ourselves. The plague doctors were fighting a disease that they didn't understand. We know that we do this and have not yet, in my opinion, realized we are sick.

KF: Exactly. We are sick... spiritually, emotionally, and socially. From a technical standpoint I've accomplished the feel of the old process but I've used new knowledge to accomplish the images without relying on the old ways. A lot of printmakers are reticent to use non-toxic processes because they fear change or it not looking "right"... with this series I prove otherwise.

JC: That brings up another point, your process is new, but the image is quite old. When a viewer looks at your work will they get the historical reference? Will they compare that to the contemporary process? Or will they just look and say "That looks old"? You say that the object is not as important as the concept but as a visual artist how do you rectify the possible disjointed communication with your viewer? Does someone need to know all of this historical data to "get" your work? Or does that matter to you?

KF: From what I can tell--my audience response varies. It matters to a certain extent but in the end, people put what they think onto an art object and that's just what happens. I have a bad habit of being esoteric with my work and I struggle with that from time to time and have been criticized for it as well. Admittedly, in Europe, everyone got it. In America we didn't have the plague, so I guess I'm lucky that it showed first in Belgrade.

JC: Why did you choose to call this series Encumbrance?

KF: Ignorance is an impediment to healing, growing, and expression... the mask of ignorance that we all wear is the encumbrance.

KF: "Ignorance is an impediment to healing." I couldn't agree more. For me, at least, I need the instantly readable icon of the plague doctor's mask to shake me out of my stupor, if only just long enough to realize I have been asleep. I truly feel the highest role of art is to act as the plague doctor of our time, shaking us, scaring, and healing us from the encumbrance of "being human" today. The commonplace, the ordinary, the constant buzzing in our ears telling us what to do, where to go, who we should try to be, this is the pandemic of our lives. Creativity may not be the only cure, but it certainly can alleviate the symptoms. Personally, I am in debt to Katherine, and every other artist out there who shakes the tree even just a little bit.

To learn more about Katherine Rhodes Fields: <http://www.katherine-rhodes-fields.com/>



Medicodela Peste Negra by Katherine Fields



Skateboard by Katherine Fields



medico della peste by Katherine Fields



castpr bean toxin by Katherine Fields



dancers by Katherine Fields



Pope by Katherine Fields



il Furbo- the clever by Katherine Fields

*Bene Kusendila***To you**

The season of wine is over
before its taste could silence our tongues forever into now
Hungry vines feel their arms again,

bare like our stomping feet
when our laughter used to wake up the sun.
Do you hear the women singing our song?

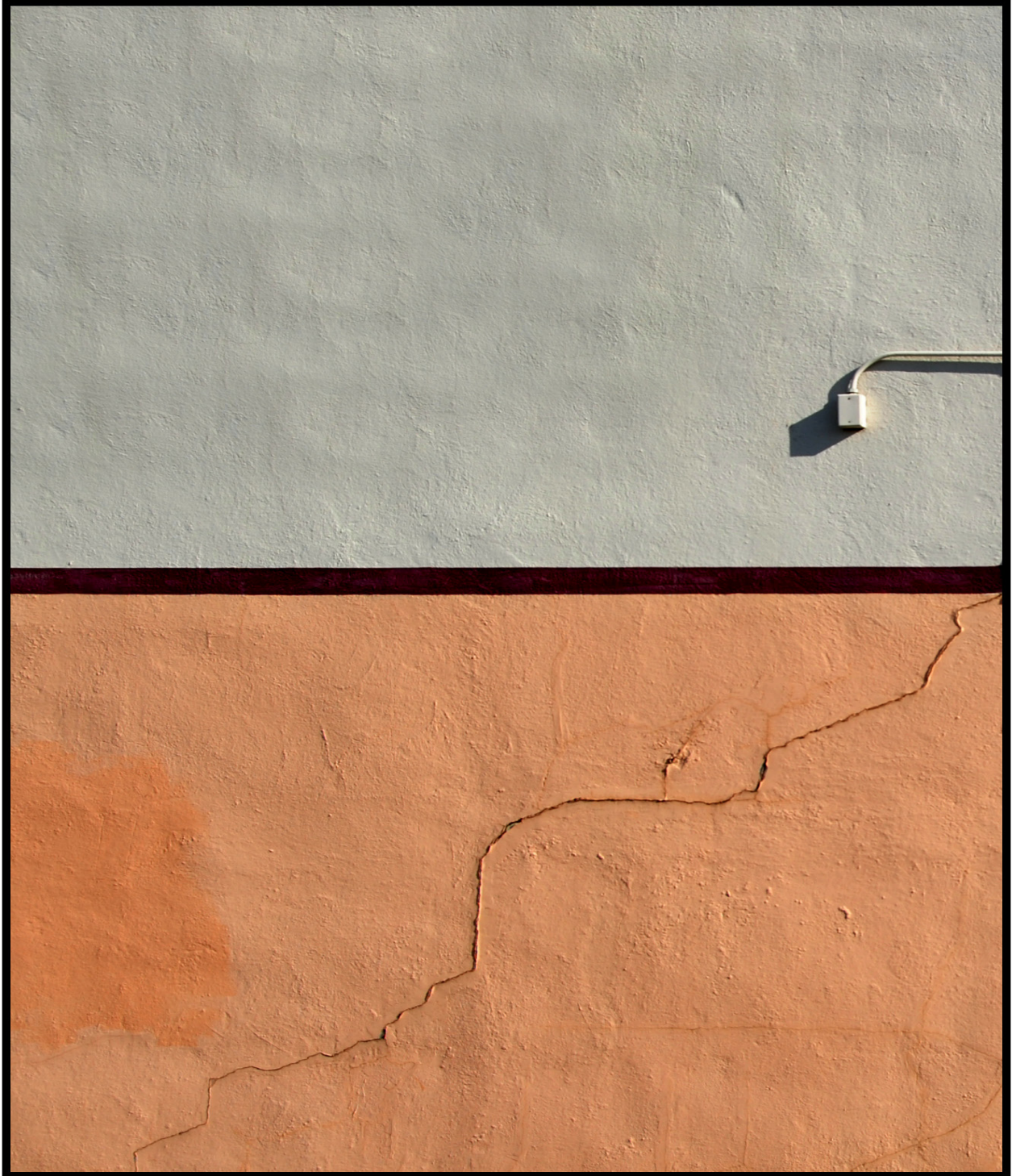
Watching those thirsty home grains
glide through your red-hued toes,
do you miss the women singing our song?

Can you still hear them and how I wish
they had crushed the grapes instead of us?
Do you see me still raising my glass

Joseph Reich

Everything Tastes Better on a Triscuit

Imagine losing it with your loved one
and the one you love and your snow
globe collection shattered in shards
scattered all over the floor; you just
lying there spread eagle in a pool
of blood, staring up at the ceiling
thoughtful reflecting with ballerina
and groom and whole extended
family of twisted torn tchtckes
your sentimental and
bittersweet memories
wondering if this is what
it means to hit rock-bottom
and maybe psychosomatic
maybe not, begin to feel better
and start to naturally pick yourself
up off the floor, as expecting the
dishwasher repair guy somewhere
between 9-12, pulling pieces
of glass out of your skin
she loves me, she loves
me not be the symptoms
be the erratic swing of
emotions be the hymns
and the hers somewhere
between virtue and sin
which all kind of feels
on the exact same
continuum and
doesn't make
much of
difference



Untitled by Thomas Gillaspay



Untitled by Thomas Gillaspay

Rebecca Teich

What Is Produced

<p>Plant a metal Water it with blood curl around. Now Is a sack There is only so get before they are artificiality is a delight. Suck my finger- er than anything grow. In this age whole. In this age of landscapes. They other with jet fuel Everyone carries and point and Out in emojis and increasingly Tug the metal it down all cauldron-like. in its juice. I beg you they often misbehave hopes of their</p>	<p>rod in a chest. and let roots of vein this is a heart, and body littered with tumorous growth-- close that bodies can one. Stick it to me Like candy. tips and tell me I'm sweet- the earth could we are becoming there is vastness bleed into each and virus and PDF downloads. a load-- shoot. Spurt spit. What do we share but more. out and melt Roll in it, coat trouble my borders, in sugar-coated authority.</p>
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On a Scale of One to Ten

Gregory Koop

Eight

I was afraid to fucking step out of the truck. My wrists and hands tingled. I looked at the emergency room doors, then the ground outside my open door. If ever a man needed running boards, this was the moment. I'm so cheap sometimes. I thought maybe if I was quick, I could dump myself out of the truck. I shimmed inch by inch. I looked at the dash clock, wiped the sweat off my face. It took a minute to teeter to the edge of my seat. I turned off the ignition and tipped my shoulder out the door, spilling into the parking lot. I'd like to thank my goddamn knees for buckling and the pavement for tearing the shit out of my hands.

I rolled to my back and puked in my mouth. My left hand slipped to my beltline. There was a bubble under my skin. I've never had a hernia before, but this must be one. I pressed my middle finger against the lump. The muscle over my belly gave way, and my finger sunk inside my body, the skin stretching over it like bubble gum over your tongue. Fuck. The pain and pressure pulled up my nutsack. I coughed and my left side blew a bubble of guts again. I stuffed that back inside, too. My eyes burned with salt. Fuck. I crawled to my feet with a yell. Fuck.

I hated this world sometimes. One minute I'm trying to pry up on a trailer hitch with a two-by. The next minute a cartoon cat and mouse played inside my head, a goddamn cartoon right behind my eyes. Reefing up on that rusty goddamn ball hitch, it played out like it always did Saturday morning: That cat pointing a garden hose at the bulldog, and that fucking mouse kinking the hose. And in between blinks of my eyes I watched that hose swelling into a large green bubble until it burst. This was a lot less funny.

An old man smoking on the curb bench looked up at me. I stared back, but don't ask what he looked like, because all I saw were his balls hanging over the edge of the bench outside his wide open hospital gown. How the hell did he not feel his nuts dangling in the open air? It was only like twelve fucking de-

grees. He gave me a smirk, a blue ribbon of tobacco smoke curled up to his lip and rose over his winking eye.

Five

A woman taller than me barged passed through the mechanical doors. She had long greasy, mousy hair. She ambled like a grocery bag caught in a dirt devil. In fact her complete ignorance of my presence felt like grit in my eyes. She was a real diesel burner. Her jeans rode up over her hips. She wore a denim button up shirt, tucked into her high pants. Her untethered tits drooped, jostled, and collided pushing her old jean jacket open. It was tattered at the cuffs, and the White Snake iron-on was peeling at the corners. She went right up to the nurse's station and told them she had fallen and needed something for the pain.

"I took three codeines already and it hurts, dude." She was over 30 going on 50 and calling a nurse dude.

"Miss you'll have to check in at the admittance desk. It's just over across the way." The nurse pointed the woman towards me.

"It's a ten. The pain is a ten."

"Walk over right across there. It's only twenty steps."

The woman moved towards me and got distracted by the payphone. She picked up the receiver and dragged her knuckles over too many numbers.

"It's me," she said. Then she paused before she said it again, "It's me. They won't help me." She started talking louder, looking around. "I fell two, three stories, man, and nobody wants to help me. They think I'm some junkie." Her sobs fell into the waiting room. Nobody would look at that mess. "I feel light headed," she looked over her shoulder back at the nurse. Then she went and leaned backwards like the phone cord was some repelling line. Then that crazy bitch opened her fucking hand. Her head bounced off the floor like a brick. She moaned and

cried. The nurse rushed to her, slipping on a puddle flowing under Jeans Lady. I didn't understand where the puddle came from until the nurse got her into a wheel chair, and I saw the dark blue stain. She pissed herself. She threw herself down, probably concussing herself and pushed a puddle of piss out her body.

Within seconds the woman was rolled back behind a cloth curtain. Another nurse went in with white prepackaged bags. Morphine. I had gotten one of those packages before. Then guess what? Within three minutes Jeans Lady strolled right out the fucking front doors.

Four

"Can I help you?" It seemed the wrong question to ask a hospital patient, customer service at Walmart, not a hospital.

"I think I have a hernia."

"Healthcare Card." She tapped her gnawed fingernails into the aluminium tray dug under the Plexiglass window.

The process was fast and I found myself in the waiting room holding a stack of labels with my information, and another nurse taking my pulse and temperature.

"What level of pain do you feel?" She was older than me, maybe forty. But sexy as shit, Sexy Nurse. Her sneakers were clean and squeaked on the tiles when she folded her feet under her chair.

Geez, I swear women are perfect between 35 and 40. It was hockey's fault. I was fucking good, but let's say drinking, caffeine pills, and Camaros didn't play well with my knee—that's when a person needs that little white package. Nothing serious, but with the rehab and surgeries these kids get now, maybe I could have done something more than some forgotten stats and a book full of puck bunnies and Polaroids. Ah, but page sixteen. Mrs. McGuffey. Big Mac. The Big Mac Attack. She was my Susan Sarandon. She had red hair and freckles between her titties. I must have counted those freckles every time she gave me a ride. I never did get the same number twice.

I spotted a couple of freckles on Sexy Nurse's arm.

"Sir, your pain level, on a scale of one to ten..."

"Maybe a four. If I move too fast a six. There's no

pain right now while I'm sitting."

"I'll mark it down as a nine. Always tell them higher. You'll get in faster."

"Will I? Will I get in faster with an exaggerated number?"

"And if you behave."

Oh, what a fucking smile: sideways and with a toss of her eyes over her shoulder.

Three

As my eyes followed her tight pants, I thought about her advice. If I exaggerated my pain then isn't this room full of people exaggerating their pain? I looked up. A wreck of a man sat across from me. How much fucking pain was this guy in? His eye was swollen shut, his forehead ripped open from his hair zigzagging down between his eyebrows, and the bridge of his nose, which was red, swelling, and dripping blood, was crookeder than shit. I'd seen breaks the same from hockey. Mine broke while I played Junior B. It was on the Makwa Reserve. And those Cree, they could play, boy. I took a slap shot right on the beak.

That man looked rough. Why wasn't he back there? Where was his little white baggy of treats? A woman sat beside him tracing her finger tips along the insides of his fingers, pinching and wagging his thumb. There was a bright red boomer under her seat.

"What the fuck," his words slipped through the corner of his mouth over his handlebar mustache into his wife's lap. She clenched her ankles around the boomer. One of the hooks twisted and fell over. She patted his back. "We've been here four fucking hours."

"Shshsh."

"This is fucked up."

The emergency doors slid open letting in the fall cold. A kid maybe seventeen, maybe twenty-one, strutted in holding a pretty girl's hand. They both had sunglasses and farmer caps, the old-timer kind you see stapled to fence posts lining gravel roads. The chick had her ponytail pulled through the hole at the back. The nurse who wheeled Jeans Lady in came and gave him a kiss.

"Mom, I feel kind of sick." He rubbed his tummy. The nurse touched her forearm to his forehead.

"Of course, dear, head around back to station

18.”

I looked at the trucker, at the boomer between his wife’s legs. He stood up and took the boomer in two pieces to the nurses’ station.

“Listen I’ve been here four hours. My face is split open and my nose is bust. You’ve let some junkie and a kid with a tummy ache jump line. I don’t know about the rest of these people, but I’m bleeding like a stuffed pig.”

The nurse frowned but gave him a smile. Then she handed him some more medical pads, trading him for his broken boomer. “We’re waiting on the surgeon for you. He’s coming in from up north.”

“Jesus Christ, I could get being ignored if I was some drunk here after a scrap, but a boomer exploded into my fucking skull while I was chaining my loader.”

“Please, sir, if you find your seat the doctor will be here soon.”

Two

I looked for a magazine. They were spilled on a side table beside a rack of pamphlets on Chlamydia, AIDS, teen pregnancy, flu shots, elderly abuse, and all the addictions associated with a rig-pig town: gambling, smoking, drugs and alcohol. A college kid rifled through the magazines too. He wore a camo military jacket too big for his shoulders and on the seat beside him was a green canvas duffle bag. Black dirt stained his cuticles and the cracks and creases of his hands. He was a tree planter. His hand swirled a magazine around and around. I stopped following it. That’s when it fucking happened. The little hippie chucked. Piss yellow bile spewed right out his mouth painting the wall, and spilling over the magazines.

A nurse ran to him as another gush of puke sprayed the floor. I fucking hate the smell of puke. His smelled like coffee breath and cheese. The nurse dropped a waste basket onto the magazines. The little shit wiped his mouth and smiled. Yellow ooze glazed the top of his steel toes. The green CSA patch was Jiffyed black to match his boots.

He whispered, “Sorry.” And the nurse took him around back.

One

A dark African man came upon the vomit and magazines with a janitor station on wheels and had the mess cleaned in ninety seconds. He carried a frown away with the mess, his feet too tired not to drag on the floor.

Watching his feet pulled down at my eyelids. Maybe if I slept. I haven’t in days, four o’clock mornings, waiting for the Prairie sun and following it until dusk, when the sun’s so low in the horizon that the gravel on the back roads spill shadows. I slowed my breath. Fuckin’, fuckin’, fuckin’, fuckin’ Rigpig towns, man. I found a position, crossed my arms and tried to think about beer, that first one at the end of a day. If it’s cold, boy, it could pull sunburns off your neck. I’d set a bottle right inside my guts—my own personal cup holder.

Six

“Holy Shit.” My head snapped up. I grabbed my guts. Another bubble swelled up under my skin. I left it this time. I wiped the drool off my chin. I looked at the clock over the nurses’ station. “No fucking way.” I checked my watch. Two fucking hours. Seriously? How the fuck do you sleep for two straight hours. I looked around. Nobody noticed me? Fuck this. If a busted up trucker had to bleed for fucking who knows how long, what chance do I have? I took the arms of my chair. I counted the pulse beating through the knot of guts bulging under my skin. On three I pulled myself up and limped out the front doors. I should have just gone back to the city. I knew what butt-fuck rigpig town hospitals were: Cigarette breaks and a supplier for junkies and upper-middleclass rich kids. They’d probably just dope me up with Demerol or morphine and ship me on my way. Two fucking hours. I could have been halfway home by now.

Outside Jeans Lady wandered the parking lot, lifting car door handles. She was looking better. She had ditched her pissy pants and her shoes. Somebody should have cued the porno guitar, because we had us some 70s bush. It was thick, Demi Moore-thick. Her thong made her crotch look like a raccoon eating a mouthful of spiders.

Her jean jacket and shirt were splayed open. Her nipples pointed down. “I need a ride.” She whispered

at me.

“What?” I shook my head and unlocked my truck doors.

“They’re after me.”

I tried to lift my leg into my truck. It fell. “Fuck me. I can’t fucking help you.”

I finally got my leg in. I grabbed the wheel. Looking through the passenger window, I spotted a short, narrow Filipino in jogging pants, flip flops, and an oversized *Bud* shirt.

He yelled, “Get the fuck away from my lady.” He whipped his shirt off and held up his fists.

I laughed.

The little fucker kicked my door. A sharp rod of pain pierced my ass. I hopped back. He kicked my door again.

“You think this is funny?”

“Fuck off,” I said.

He cocked his fists again. His thumbs pointed out, like he’s holding up a wet towel ready to shake the shit out of it. He punched my window. “Let’s go.” His violence seemed like it came from a little boy pretending to be a ninja.

“Enough with the Saturday morning cartoons shit and fuck off.”

He stepped into me real close as close to the point of violence and said, “Let’s go.”

Another shirtless man in flip flops and board shorts wrapped his arms around Jeans Lady. He bent at his knees to lower his eyes to hers but chose to glare at me.

The little man flexed his chest and smiled. His teeth were crooked. Some molars were missing. His knuckles, cracked and popped as he reset his fists. He stared down at my hip. I looked at my left arm. It had slid down, nursing my side. He shoved me back and buried his foot into my side.

My groan seeped out every pore. My body was a colander holding only pain. Everything below my hips felt wet. And as much as my brain was telling me to plant that little fucker, my goddamn arms quit. They folded over the hole torn through my guts. My knees were no fucking better. They buckled and I dropped.

Nine

His buddy kneeled beside me. “Yeah, man, you shouldn’t fuck with his lady.” My head rattled following the fucker’s cheap shot.

“Yeah, don’t fuck with my old lady.” The man went to Jeans Lady and reached into her top pocket. He slid his other inside her open shirt and cupped her tit. He turned his head over his shoulder and looked at me. She leaned into his mouth with her lips. His lips twitched into several loud sucking kisses. He tried to pull his hand out of her pocket, but she grabbed his wrist.

“No, don’t do it.” She said.

He held a finger over her lips and slid his hand from her pocket. She cupped her hands over her eyes and turned away.

That little fella strutted. He unfolded a pocket knife in front of my face. I reached for his hands. He pinned one of my hands against my face and kneeled on it. My feet kicked against the pavement, trying to catch some traction. It only rolled my pants up over my calf. The struggle squeezed more guts outside my body.

“Fuck you,” I said.

He punched me in my side. More guts pushed out. I was turning into a goddamn Play-doh factory.

“Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you.” I said.

He bore down with all his weight, his knee on my hand, my jaw. A piece of gravel dug into my temple. My breath picked up. But my eyes wouldn’t close. I looked at the white slippers of cracked skin covering his heels, hiding his brown skin.

“No, no, no. I say fuck you,” he said.

The knife slid into me without any feeling. He wiped the blade on my shoulder. Then pain everywhere inside exploded from my stomach in all directions. My toenails, kidneys, teeth, and finally my hair quivered with hurt. And for some weird reason I fucking sneezed. The pain doubled, tripled—diesel on a fire, man.

The little shit got off me. I wouldn’t look at him. I wished he had stabbed me in the ear, so that I didn’t have to listen to his laugh.

“You laugh like a little girl,” I said.

I held my head off the ground. I thought I had pissed my pants like his whore. I closed my eyes. I heard the mechanical doors slide open and pound shut. Sneakers slapped the ground all around me. And squeaky wheels spat in my ears. The Sexy Nurse kneeled taking my head on either side, her thumbs wrapping around my ears, her chilly fingers spilling down my neck.

“I would give this pain a nine. But do you think I should say it’s a ten?”

End.



American Bison and Fleet by Emily White



Untitled by Thomas Gillaspie

Golden Bird

Mary F. Whiteside

After “The Pine Tree” by Joy Weitzel

Description

Chestnut brown raptor with golden highlights on head and neck. Beak and talons gunmetal gray. Muscular and hardy, adult females weigh about twelve pounds. Males just over ten.

February, 1833. John James Audubon painted an adult, female golden eagle using watercolor, pastel, graphite, black ink and black chalk with touches of gouache and selective glazing.

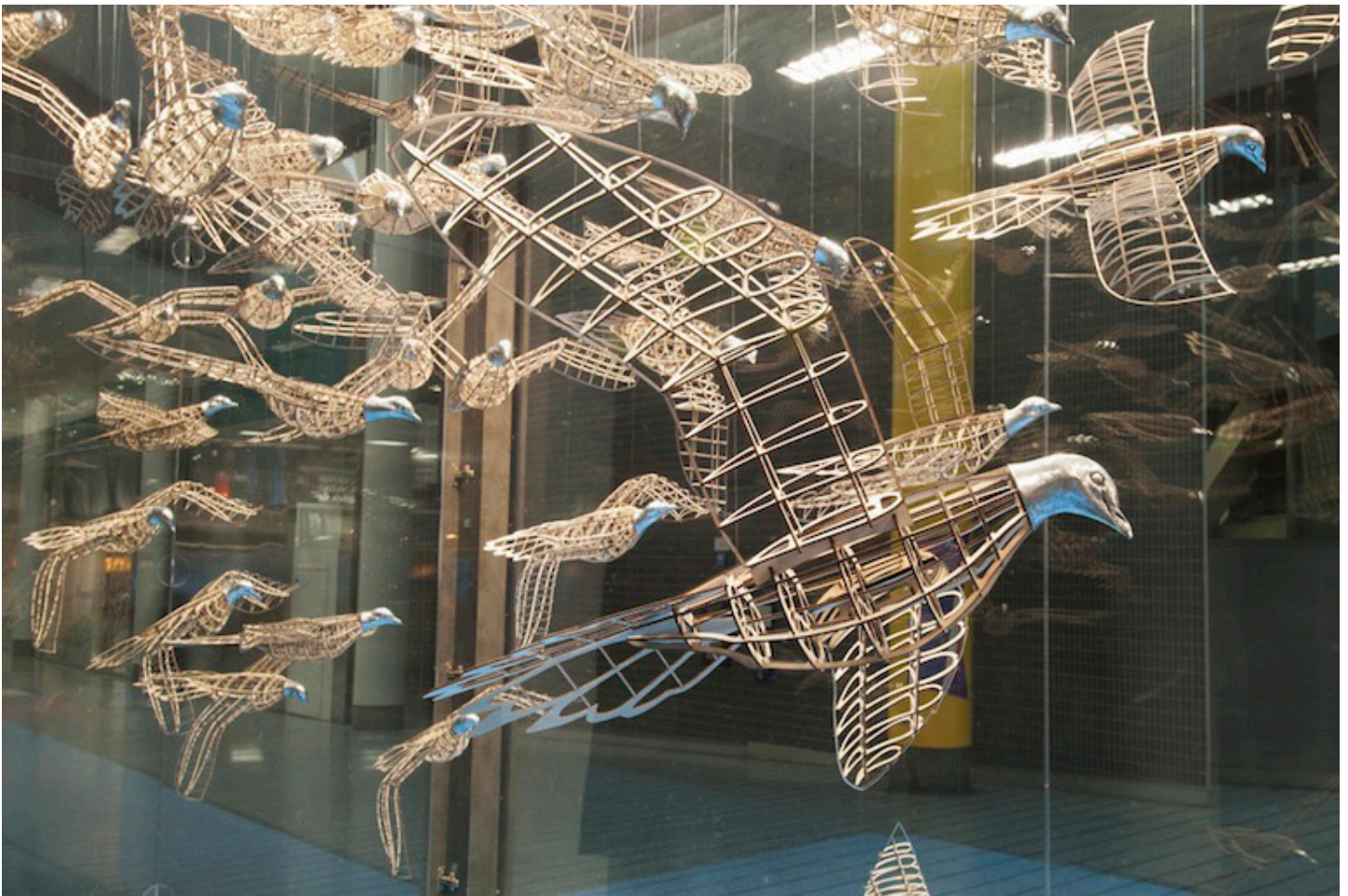
Tall and slender with smoky eyes, her mantle of beauty flawed by a too-long nose and narrow lips. Encouraged toward education, she read widely—Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden* and *Bartram’s Travels*. An accomplished musician and better swimmer and horseback rider than any boy.

Habitat

A golden eagle prefers open or semi-open country near mountains, canyon lands, cliffs and bluffs, and avoids unbroken tracts of forest and populated areas.

John Audubon acquired the fine eagle, caught in a spring-trap set for foxes in the *White Mountains*. Buying the bird for fourteen dollars from Boston’s *Columbian Museum*, Audubon carried it home in a blanketed cage.

She thought him impetuous, the tall Frenchman who came to live at neighboring *Mill Grove*. Ruffled shirts and those thees and thous learned from Quakers. His passion, hunting and drawing birds; her passion, him.



Fleet by Emily White

Behavior

Golden eagles perch on cliff edges or in high trees. Then flying in slow circles they scour for rabbits, squirrels, prairie dogs, ground hogs, and marmots. Often observed hunting in pairs, these birds usually mate for life.

Audubon scrutinized the caged bird's every movement. Its death would need to be simple and pain-free: suffocation by smoke. He shut the eagle in a sealed closet with burning charcoal, but the bird remained unflinching on its perch. Then sulfur, to no avail. Finally, he thrust a long needle through the bird's heart. Not a feather was disturbed.

Along wooded lanes, wild tracks, and shady creeks, she trailed him. Read as he sketched, taught him English. Like the pewees he marked, Lucy an innocent caught by a silver thread.

Nesting

Golden eagles construct their nests on isolated cliff ledges. Lined with soft moss and leaves, aeries are large, bulky pallets of sticks, bones, antlers, and human objects.

Audubon wired the eagle to a wooden grid, its majestic wings straining upward. In his painting, Audubon bloodied the eye of the northern hare in the bird's grasp. A background of rocky, snow-covered

mountains, wild blue sky and wind-tossed clouds.

Amid strangers in a Louisville tavern, the newly-weds' meager roost. Second-floor room, strewn with clothing, watercolors, crayons, paper, bird skins, nests, and feathers. Lured outdoors, he became a moccasined woodsman. Pinned like a specimen, she awaited their first.

Longevity

The adult golden eagle is generally long-lived with a lifespan in the wild of approximately 28 years.

The Golden Eagle was plate 181 in John Audubon's *Birds of America*, published between 1827 and 1838 on handmade, double-elephant-size paper. Engraved prints issued in sets of five in tin cases; four hundred and thirty-five plates (eighty-seven sets of five) composed the original work. Only two hundred complete sets compiled, one hundred and ten extant.

They settled into a home of glass windows and servants. Yet too soon prosperity took wing. His portfolio, their only resource, they determined could become a book—life-size and depicting every American bird. He chased the dream—New Orleans, Natchez, Bayou Sara, Philadelphia—while she endured harsh seasons of privation and loss alone. A final shared migration to England—publisher engaged, destination reached. An abiding refuge in *Birds of America*.



American Bison by Emily White



Untitled by Kathleen Deep



Untitled by Kathleen Deep

Leave of Absence (escalation)

Stephanie Cleary

Asking For Money

Nicky calls me from the parking lot to ask me if I can “let her hold” twenty bucks for gas, just until she gets this thing with her apartment straightened out. It’s a familiar question and she knows I will say yes, even though she is a couple weeks late on the “emergency” money I lent her last month. I walk outside to her regular parking spot, the hashmarks next to the handicap parking, where she knows she shouldn’t park but does anyway. The window of her white Cadillac is cracked an inch. Smoke wafts out the window. She hasn’t noticed me, and I watch her as she texts. She is talking to the phone as her slender fingers fly over the digital keypad, but I know there isn’t anyone on the line. When she is upset, or nervous, or “in a state,” as she says, she always brings her thoughts to the front of her mouth.

Her other hand is holding her perpetual cigarette, a Marlboro Menthol that somebody else probably paid for. She turns to the window to flick the ash and sees me. She takes a drag, drops the phone into her lap, next to the Coca-Cola Classic tucked between her knees, and hits the button to roll the window down a little further. “You got that twenty? You know I’ll get you back, Im’ma hit the plasma place tomorrow.” I hand her the money and she takes it without meeting my eyes. “Thanks,” she says as she rolls the window up and slides the big car into reverse.

Not Keeping Up Appearances

I walk into the bathroom in our building and Nicky is at the sink. She’s splashing cold water on her face. “Do my eyes look puffy? I don’t know why I haven’t been sleeping.” They do look puffy, but I don’t tell her that. I just reassure her that she looks fine, pretty. There’s no use in saying we both know it’s the bottle of wine she drank while she watched basic cable last night that made her eyes so bloodshot.

It’s worth mentioning that this is the second

day in a row that she’s worn that blouse. I try to be nonchalant about asking her, but her eyes narrow. She stands with her hand on her hip, and her lips are thin when she asks, “What, you the fashion po-lice now? I need to run my wardrobe by you? I just forgot I wore it already this week. You wanna make sure I’m wearing fresh panties, too?”

Poor Communication

I need to ask Nicky about the cryptic email she sent me, so I head outside, to the smoking area on the end of the building. She’s pacing back and forth, cigarette in one hand, phone in the other. She is making wide gestures with the phone, punctuating her rant. “I don’t know why people can’t just mind they own business. Why this dude gotta send me messages like I don’t know what’s really going on?” I tell her I don’t know.

She sits down at the picnic table backwards and grabs the pop bottle on the seat next to her. She takes a long drink and pats the bench for me to join her. “What’s up?” I ask her about the email and she tells me to forget about it, she already handled it. She just needed some information, but she got it from my email yesterday, she “just didn’t know where her mind had been lately” but it’s all figured out now. It’s all one big run-on and I still don’t know what her rambling email was about to begin with. She twists toward me, drops her cigarette, grinds it out with the toe of her black Coach shoes.

“You know I gotta get out of here so I can handle an errand. Can you do my timecard for me tonight?” I tell her I hate when she asks me that because I’m afraid I’ll forget, so she leans on close. “Just this once. Please?” I can smell the Jack Daniels she spiked her soda with, and I tell her to do it herself, just do it early.

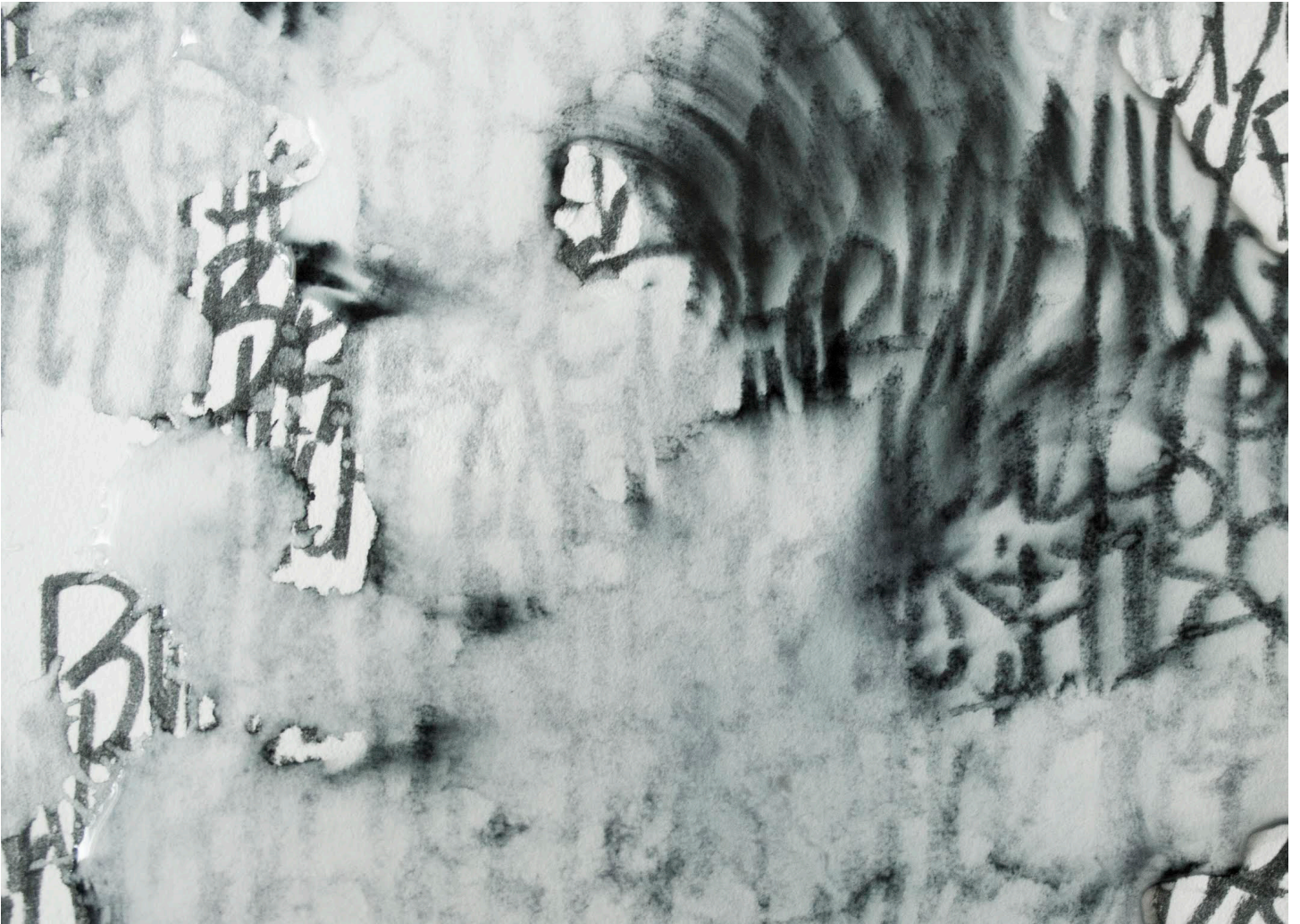
She stands, grabs her pop and her smokes, and walks through the door without looking at me. “Whatever.”

Bad Office Manners

Nicky is standing behind me so she can grab the Kleenex on the other side of my desk. She makes sniffing noises, and I can hear her wiping the corners of her nose with her index finger. In the reflection from the computer screen, I see her inspect her fingertip, then rub it along her gums. She does it again. “Hey, look at me. Do I got dry skin on my face?” I turn and look at her, and tell her maybe just a little, above her lip. She thinks I don’t know the difference between dry skin and the cocaine that rims her nose, but she isn’t sure.

What comes next is tricky.

I mention that there’s a rumor one of the employees on the late shift has been coming to work stoned. She asks me who, and I pull a name out of the air. “Yeah, I could see that. You gonna talk to him?” I say I will, and ask her where to find the info on the employee substance abuse program. She tells me it’s available online, then she looks at me for a long minute. I can hear the seconds ticking away on the clock on the wall.



Wash 3 by Adam Christensen

Contributor Bios

Michelle Askin's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Oranges & Sardines*, *2River View*, *Pleiades*, *PANK*, *Beecher's Magazine*, and elsewhere.

Adam Christensen is a young artist and father of four working out of Orem, Utah. His work delves into human frailties and the desire to change the past. He uses unintelligible text to explore thoughts never shared. He received a BFA from Utah Valley University and an MFA from the University of Utah where he currently teaches foundations classes. www.aecpaintings.com

Morgan Christie's work has appeared in *Hippocampus*, *Aethlon*, *Blackberry*, *Germ Magazine*, *Moko*, and elsewhere. She will begin her candidacy at the University of Oxford for the Masters in Creative Writing this fall.

Stephanie J. Cleary is a Writer's Workshop student at the University of Nebraska in Omaha. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The 13th Floor*, *The Metropolitan*, *Nature's Companion*, *NEBRASKA-land Magazine*, *Gravel*, *Crab Fat*, and *These Fragile Lilacs*. She's a great wife and an awful housekeeper, a two-tour veteran, a girl who sings to her naughty dogs, and an unapologetic book addict.

Madison Creech grew up in a military family and was always moving, stationed frequently in rural areas like North Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska. In contrast to an urban lifestyle, her family embraced the unexpected creatures that graced their backyards - rabbits, antelopes, or badgers. Her favorite games usually involved bird watching. She is inspired by bird wings and flight, and amazed by their instincts for migration and nest building. In her art practice, she is constantly searching for tools and symbols to illustrate and challenge the fragmented and confusing relationship between bird and human.

Kathleen Deep is an artist and photographer currently residing in Connecticut. Her processes of image making include merging analog, digital, alternative processes, mix media and hybrid workflows. Deep's images have exhibited in Oregon, Texas, Connecticut, upstate New York and NYC, including web magazines and gallery publications. Samples of Deep's ongoing creative writing prose "To Slow the Sinking" have been included in various web and book publications.

Nancy Devine teaches high school English in Grand Forks, North Dakota where she lives. Her poetry, short fiction and essays have appeared in online

and print journals.

Born in Canada and bred in the U.S., **Allen Forrest** has worked in many mediums: computer graphics, theater, digital music, film, video, drawing and painting. Allen studied acting in the Columbia Pictures Talent Program in Los Angeles and digital media in art and design at Bellevue College (receiving degrees in Web Multimedia Authoring and Digital Video Production.) He currently works in the Vancouver, Canada, as a graphic artist and painter. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's Reed Magazine and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

Brad Garber has degrees in biology, chemistry and law. He writes, paints, draws, photographs, hunts for mushrooms and snakes, and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. Since 1991, he has published poetry, essays and weird stuff in such publications as *Embodied Effigies*, *Clementine Poetry Journal*, *Sugar Mule*, *Barrow Street*, *Aji Magazine* and other quality publications. 2013 Pushcart Prize nominee.

Thomas Gillaspy is a northern California photographer with an interest in urban minimalism. His photography has been featured in numerous magazines including the literary journals: *Compose*, *DMQ Review* and *Citron Review*. Further information about his work is available at <http://www.thomasgillaspy.com>

Gregory Koop grew up on the border of central Alberta and Saskatchewan. Living the life of Garp, Gregory cares for his daughter, practices Muay Thai, and writes. A past finalist for an Alberta Literary Award, Gregory has also been a resident of The Banff Centre's Writing Studio. His work has been featured in *Carte Blanche*, *Compose*, *Dali's Lovechild*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *ink&coda*, *The Nashwaak Review*, *paperplates*, and *Red Savina Review*. He is currently polishing a novel thanks to the support of a WGA Mentorship Grant.

In a former life, **Bénédicte Kusendila** was a member of the South-African Afrikaans Writers Guild ("Afrikaanse Skrywersvereniging"). She received an M.A. in Germanic Languages, English and Applied Linguistics, from the Catholic University of Louvain and holds an M.Phil-degree in Education and Applied Language

Studies from the University of Cape Town. Recently, a couple of her poems have been published in *Extract(s)* and *Gravel Magazine*: a literary journal. Another one is forthcoming in *Aji Magazine*.

Alex Nodopaka originated in Ukraine-Russia in 1940. Studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Casablanca, Morocco. Full time author, artist in the USA. His interests in the visual arts and literature are widely multicultural. However, he considers his past irrelevant as he seeks new reincarnations in independent films if only for the duration of a wink... ok, ok maybe two!

Joseph Reich has been published in a wide variety of eclectic literary journals both here and abroad, been nominated five times for The Pushcart Prize, and his books in poetry and cultural studies include, "A Different Sort Of Distance" (Skive Magazine Press), "If I Told You To Jump Off The Brooklyn Bridge" (Flutter Press), "Pain Diary: Working Methadone & The Life & Times Of The Man Sawed In Half" (Brick Road Poetry Press), "Drugstore Sushi" (Thunderclap Press), "The Derivation Of Cowboys & Indians" (Fomite Press), "The Housing Market: a comfortable place to jump off the end of the world" (Fomite Press), "The Hole That Runs Through Utopia" (Fomite Press), "Taking The Fifth And Running With It: a psychological guide for the hard of hearing and blind" (Broadstone Books), "The Defense Mechanisms: your survival guide to the fragile mind" (Fomite Press).

Doug Steele grew up a "Wisconnie River Rat", whose creative inspiration often drew him to the area's plentiful shorelines. Being a true homer, he bleeds Green and Gold, and wears shorts in January. He is a member of the Academy of American Poets, published in *Literary Nest Magazine*, as well as founder and sole contributor to the Poetic Blog *Sunset In Cheeseland* <http://sunsetincheeseland2.blogspot.com>

Matthew Sterner-Neely is a profoundly progressive Catholic Christian, a writer, a disabled Veteran, and a current English and tap and ballet teacher in Pueblo, Colorado. His work includes the systematic deconstruction of the patriarchal hegemony and joining his children for tea in the middle of the living room floor. He takes seriously the commission to love one's enemies, and rarely remains anything but friends with those he comes into contact with.

John Sweet, b. 1986, keeps getting angrier with age. No time for zealots, ideologies or any sort of dogma. A big believer in sunlight and in the application of surrealism to everyday life. Most recent collections are "The Century of Dreaming Monsters" (2014 Lummo Press)

and "A Nation of Assholes w/Guns" (echap, 2015 Scars Publications).

Rebecca Teich is a student at Columbia University. Her writing, both creative and expository, has been featured in *BigThink*, *Crab Fat Literary Magazine*, and the *Advocate*. She currently works as an editor for the *Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism* and as an assistant teacher for writing workshops and the head editorial intern for two literary magazines at *Writopia Lab*, a creative writing youth organization.

Emily White was born in 1987 in Brockton, MA. White received her BFA from Massachusetts College of Art and Design (Boston, MA) with a focus in sculpture. White has received awards including the Wind Challenge, Fleisher Art Memorial; the Helen Blair Crosbie Sculpture Award, Massachusetts College of Art and Design; and she was nominated for an Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award, International Sculpture Center for two consecutive years. White has had solo exhibitions the Philadelphia International Airport and Penn State Altoona (Altoona, PA). Her 2D and 3D work has been in group exhibitions in the US and abroad including shows at The Royal Castle (Warsaw, Poland); City Hall (Philadelphia, PA); Pterodactyl (Philadelphia, PA); Annmarie Sculpture Garden & Arts Center (Solomons, MD); Gallery 263 (Cambridge, MA). White currently has a sculpture on display at the Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, MA) and will have two large-scale sculptures on display at the Philadelphia Flower Show this coming winter. Emily White now lives and works in Philadelphia.

Mary Whiteside grew up in the Ohio foothills of the Appalachians, but now calls Texas home. Her writing focuses on short fiction, vignettes, fragments, and haibun, most often with an element of history. She is currently working on short fiction about a famous bird artist's indispensable wife. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including: *Lifting the Sky: Southwest Haiga and Haiku*, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *Haibun Today*, *200 New Mexico Poems*, *Forces Literary Journal*, *Star 82 Review*, *Spry Literary Journal*, and *Postcard Poems and Prose*.

Ashley Williams is a high school student who is currently studying creative writing at Harrison School for the Arts. Her work has been published in magazines such as *The Voices Project* and *Deltona Howl*. When she's not writing, she spends her time playing the violin, obsessing over Disney, and sleeping with her dogs.

