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Poetry

The Limited*

Joseph Baldi Acosta

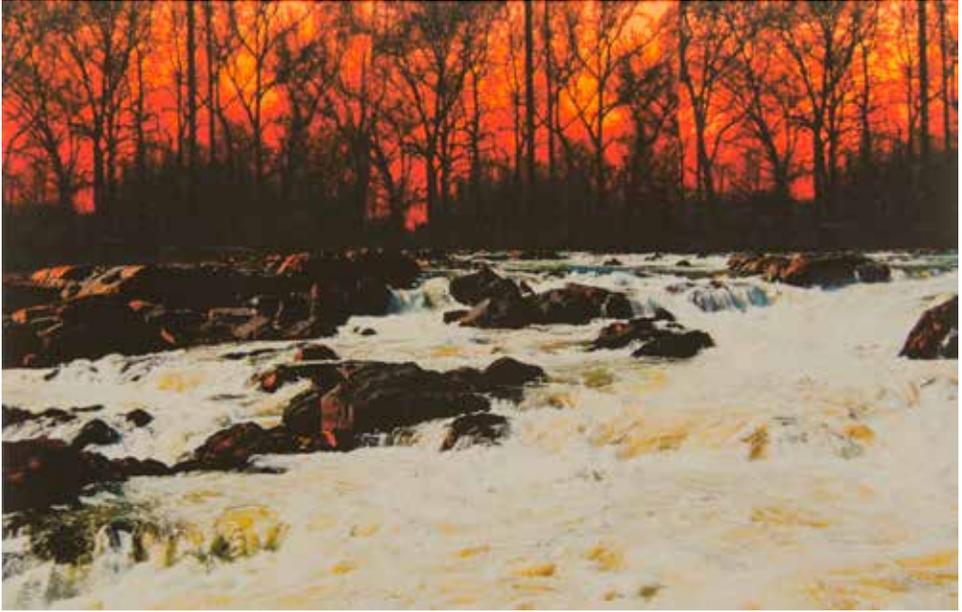
Winner of the 2013 Ventura Valdez Poetry Award

We boarded the shiny car under la Guera's careful watch. The Limited lurched from the station, passed hills that border East L.A., accelerating, slicing the Mojave, blurred outlines of yuccas and tumbleweeds near the tracks, home and the overcast sky far behind. Tranquilized by constant heartbeat of iron upon iron, the Limited rocked us to sleep. The train caught its breath on short stops—Yuma, Phoenix, Tucson, as it ran with the night to encounter the sun. Guera awakened us before red and orange mountains swallowed the train. It strained, climbed, emerged from the cliffs like a serpent—the last cars visible on tenuous tracks winding high above Ysleta and the Rio Grande. My sister and I walked into a warm sun consoled and wrapped in the love of our Mexican family. For 30 days we escaped the painful, permanent void that awaited.

*The Southern Pacific Sunset Limited

Red Woods

Hana Bekele



Domestic

Miguel Aldaco

There's today and tomorrow,
and the last time
you cooked stuffing and a little extra
in a casserole dish beside the bird.
We never bought the dog,
so I finish the food at midnight,
for breakfast, mumble something at your morning pantsuits
that are billowing clipper ships
up elevators to your job.

It's too much sometimes,
guts of the oven bubbling in its warm compartment
beside our drawer of shared blue and red Tupperware,
while the lights are out,
while I'm spinning the lock behind me.
Your snore,
a shivering ring of keys.

Myself swollen in the moonlight,
the yellow daylight, peeling lost pet posters
from telephone poles.

I'm at the airport, at the neighbor's, when
you're not at home. On the roof with ghosts
of grandmothers and grandfathers,
on the roof with cat claws
kicking rocks.

At 12 o'clock I walk the
pavement, the promenade, lock the door behind me
while you sleep
and leave the oven on.

Tourist

Miguel Aldaco

It's her first time in Beirut
so Maria wants an authentic dish, homespun
as a bowl of Aunt Chuca's albondigas on a San Diego
orange hangover morning.
She who will not stomach menudo
squatting in the kitchen beside rounded corners of a manila fridge.

You see, she is la raza, the race of the cosmos,
those effervescent feathered serpents:
Her brown people
who tore from their pyramids laying waste
to her brown people,
until those who gave her a name
cast their horrible armor upon her shore.
Together they forged Mexican Highway 15, erecting a million steeples,
billions served.

Hers is a people
found and found again,
who pitch for the genuine article
and hunger
only for what the Sultan's sons dine on,
what the monkey suited narguile boys take in
beneath Phoenician tapestries, and
she expects Lebanon's beverage of choice.

Her mouth moist,
she bites into the Burger King,
the french fries and on her hotel veranda
Maria makes a promise to share a Pepsi with her abuela
the next time she visits.

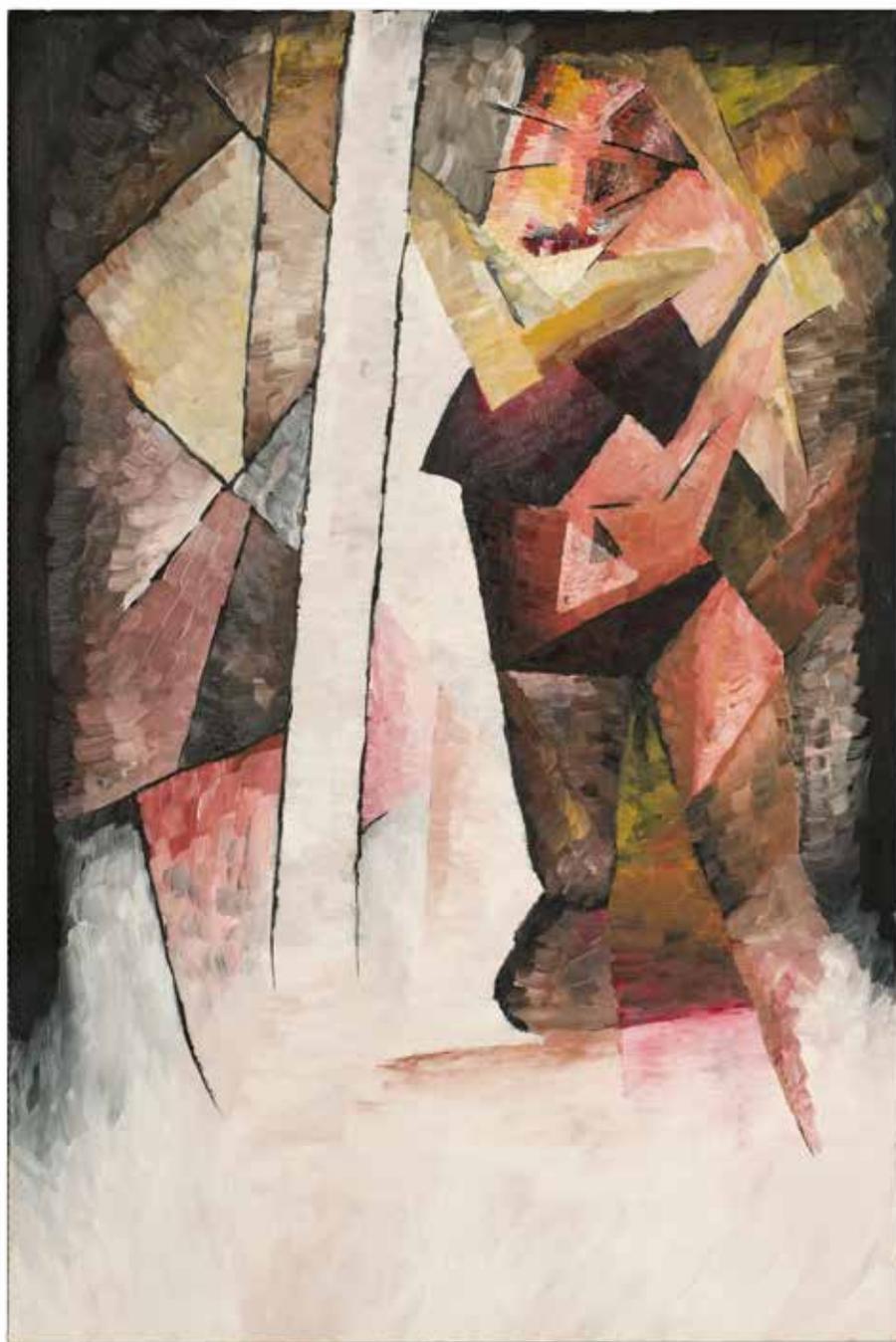
Homage to the Globular Body

from “Femme se Coiffant,” by Edgar Degas (c. 1881)

Anne Becker

Three folds of flesh, belly pressed
between breast and thigh, float within the frame,
rich like those flowers of wood, leaves and scrolls,
gilt chains, golden fruit—could be pomegranates,
pears or apples—in each corner, that holds
a woman, her three folds of flesh, belly pressed
between thigh and breast, from tumbling backward
in slow motion, heels over head, off balance
as she is, into the curved arms of the viewer.
Captured by the artist’s heightened eye—did he lurk
behind her on a ladder?—and sure hand and steady
wrist, pressed as the globular body has been
into the top left corner of the room, tethered
it rests, belly, thigh, breast, those delicious folds of
flesh, tucked into itself, soft rosy skin disguised in blue,
in green, in gray shadow, brush strokes feathered
on the underlying fabric, face hidden by
hair, arm folded into succulent wing,
hand holding a comb to the red, dark
strands that flow forward toward the
knees, nowhere to be seen, in shadow
stream of hair, even the shins rounded,
scoop of lower leg and foot, no blade of
bone to hinder the controlled flow of the
body into the air outside the canvas, oh,
if only the holding muscle at the core
where back and belly cleave, would let go,
we could take this body for our own.

Painting of Cubes
Bruno Emilio Marcenaro



Just Before . . .

Anne Becker

I hear the singing (of words)
I get the bit between my teeth
I want to write:
keyed up, a horse
prancing on the track
neck arched, dark and sweating
fooling with the snaffle
rolling the bar with my muscular
tongue, tasting the metal
bouncing with each step
as I feel the bounce
of each word as it takes its
place in the starting gate
ears that were flicking now back
suspended between silence and
the snap second, the bell
and the door bursts open.

In Southern Horizons

Nancy Naomi Carlson

Color, same odors, and heat
We all hold them in our hearts
Except for furrows of certitude
All of us, in southern horizons

Independence, cadence and dance
Let's not regress to infancy
Let's not see distress in In-France
In the Third Island: Ile-de-France
Except for shadows of servitude
Islanders isolated
Men alone
Women alone
All of us, in southern horizons

Our mists are of sand, our signs
Of heat, Equatorial or Tropic
Children of the sea
Girls of sand
With black skin
Of Arab descent

Beyond savanna and mangrove swamp
Shackled to
Metropolis
Bewitched by
Megalopolis
Windswept by slave trade and traffic
Arrived from southern horizons

Spirits possessed by all their police
Their black magic with white skin
Voodoo on us!
In stampede, ire or erratic ways
Alienated by those with smoother skin
And straight hair fixed right
In the land of the Rights of Man

Quimbois, voodoo!
Take this, drink, my dear!

Alienated by hair like silk
White masks without
This rescued skin
Frizzy hair
Our blood mixed
With those who escaped
Banania, bamboula, macaque
Black Diaspora
We have pasts that leave a mark
And also a present that clacks
A past of marks
People of mark
Thumbing their nose
At nasal neo-nazis and barbaric beards

To open, the future eludes its marker
Take our marks
On your marks
Get set
Go
We run fast, a long time and far
Jamaicans or Ethiopians
Straight ahead
Without flag, in the wind
Of Windward Islands
Without hymns, in the wind of Leeward Islands
Lifting
High our swarthy brows
People of mixed descent
Illegal immigrants, sans masters or gods
Sans shirt
Sans pants
Sans documents
Illegal immigrants
Sans master
Sans trust
Nor law
Condemned for the wrong color of skin
Fodder for blunders by barbaric Babylones
All of us, in southern rainbow hills

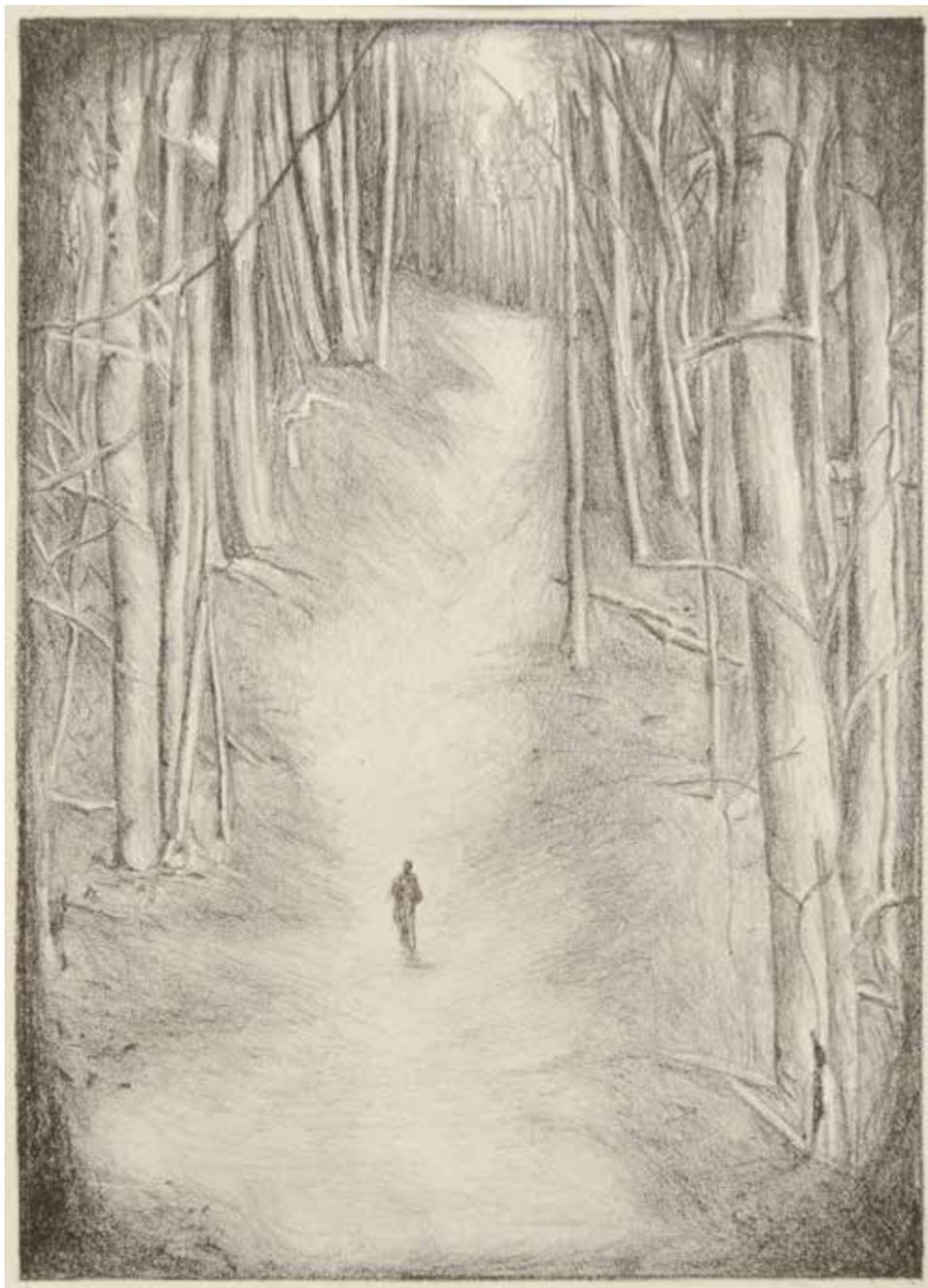
Griffe, sacatra, cascós, sambo, mango
Mustifee, mustifino
Octoroon, congo, quadroon, meamelou, marabon, metif...
Maroon men, Maroon women!

Snow White, bronzed, metic
Bougnoule— “Black” in Wolof, “Arab” in savage slang—
Words that wound us
Wrongs that will give us strength
To stand tall in our skin
All of us, in southern rainbows
Snowball, mixed blood, negro
Words that make us zeroes
Wrongs that make us heroes
Tanned, dirty, dark
Negro, Negress with Mursi plate lips
Badly whitened, café au lait
Negrita rum, swarthy and flashy foreigner
Bique, bicot, crouille, melon, beur
Dirty rat, *keubla*, colored
And if we had in our head
To feel good in our skin
All of us, in southern horizons?

Pointe-des-Nègres—quarter in Fort-de-France where slaves, deported from Africa
during the slave trade era, came ashore, 2003

Translator’s note: *Quimbois* is an Afro-Caribbean, Creolized form of witchcraft and healing practices, often involving herbal potions. The name comes from the Creole word *Tjenbwa* and is built on the injunction to “Tiens bois” which means “Take this and drink.” Banania, a French cocoa-flavored breakfast powder, originated in 1912, using ingredients imported from France’s tropical colonies. *Bique, bicot, crouille, and melon* are offensive words used to describe North African Arabs living in France. *Beur* (Arab) and *Keubla* (black) are pejorative French slang words constructed by reversing syllables.

Man in Woods
Eric Meile



Bereft

Tranetta Franklin

She huddles,
Crouched precariously on the battered wood
Of a mahogany chair, the bleached bark
Groaning as it sliced through the air.

On the desolate floor of her psyche,
Laid the shattered remnants of her mind
The dull, cracked pieces glittering,

Specks of dim glowing gold, dwindling.
In the chilled cerulean of the night.
Like the milk of her marrow,
The yellow of her bones,

Light was fading.

She panted, searching
Tears fell freely,
Sheathing her eyes in the surreal.
Through the shiny obsidian film,
She shoved and pushed,
Trying to gain a hold of herself,
But the braid of wheat encircled her wrist.

Its honey hue blending,
Colliding with her skin—she toppled over

Having spun too hard,
Realizing she was a Stranger,
The only inhabitant of her mind.
Not even a whisper,
An echo of thought did she have—

They all had left.

Daybreak

Tranetta Franklin

A silky orange, a blooming mango
Mixed with yellow gold.

This morning,

Tasting citrus on the tip of my salivating tongue as it bubbled,
And sizzled
I watched the sun rise from his deep slumber.
I watched, as he tossed the dark sapphire sheets,
Collecting specks of sparkling silver
Glistening grays.

I saw him, the most captivating star,

Open one heavy-lidded amber eye
Then the other.
Breathing in the sweetness of his ginger,
I bathed my cinnamon in his light.

And when he

Climbed

The

Steps of his celestial home and rose,

I arrived.

Colored coral,

Lit ablaze,

I washed the filth of my hands in his cloudless teal,

As Day shook off his shackles and broke f r e e,

From Night.

Hambre

Arturo García

Winner of the 2013 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Award

Hambre.....

Hoy pienso.....

Hubo días en que pasé hambre
e intenté engañar al hambre durmiendo,
pensándote, soñándote. Tengo hambre de ti.

Hambre de tu boca, de tu voz,
de tu cabello, de tus ojos risueños,
de tu piel, de tu cuerpo.

¡Quiero comer el aura de tu hermosura!
tomarme el cóctel de tus labios,
la nariz soberana del arrogante rostro más tierno del mundo.
Quiero comer la sombra fugaz de tus pestañas. Tu mirada.

Hambriento estoy, vengo y voy olfateando
tu aroma, como un perro, siguiéndote el rastro.
Buscando tu corazón, anheloso,
como un puma acechando a su presa.
Aún no consigo un bocado de ti,
haciendo de mi vida un ayuno.

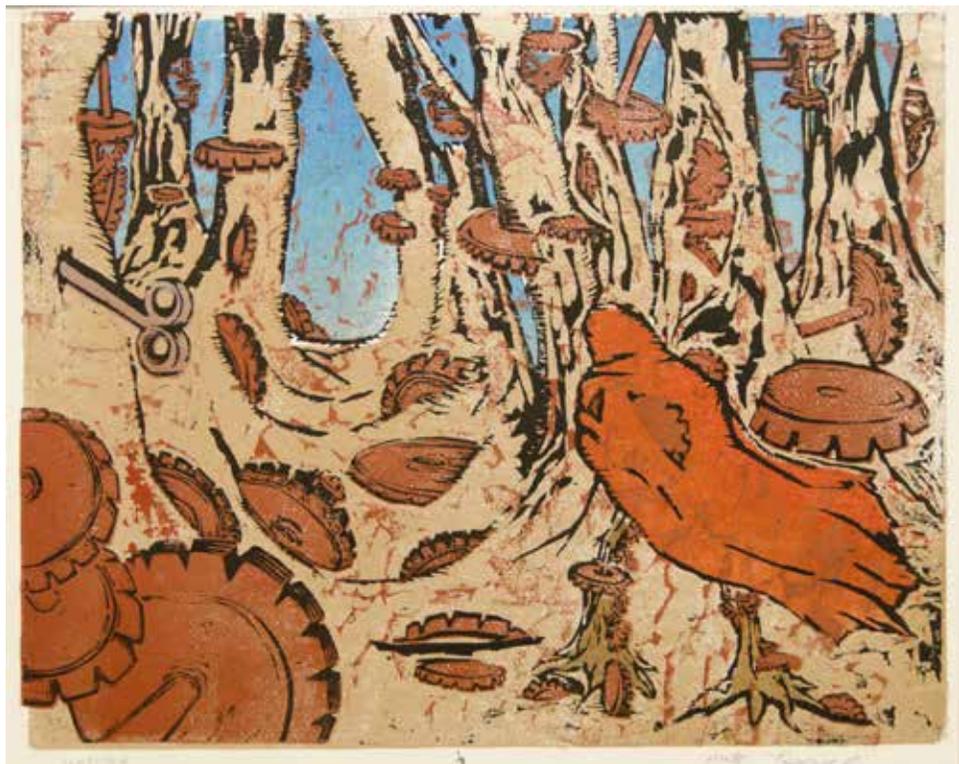
Patillas

Brenda Lopez

In the dark without a headlamp, second night in, confused, tired and nervous. I walked from the little island (formed by a river that once was taller than me-a long-time ago) to the mainland, where our tent was. I heard the conch shell's sound, the drum's sound, the wind's sound. They called all the people that intentionally came to this gathering, while her plus I magically made it. Roisa hydrated, Alfonso played, Sofia sprayed herself from bugs. And I am getting her, my girl, my pacemaker, and my companion from our 6x6ft home. I led the way back to the little island. This time I noticed the path was lined with candles inside plastic milk containers cut transversely. I felt graceful. I step closer to the 6-foot crossing, running water, slippery rocks, and a wooden railing to the left that is below the knees. Moving forward placing one foot down at a time brought my smile inches closer to my ears. Reached the island with a final jump. Wait for her then walk towards the noise. Crunch, the leaves say. The light of the fire allows us to see naturally. People circled him, some sung to him, some played to him, others like I gazed at him. Alfonso begun to chant and all stood. We collaboratively greeted, thanked, and loved all the directions. "Aho," we yelled. We followed the leader and asked the element to enter the temple. He answers by turning our offering of tobacco into ashes. One by one we wait to get covered in sage fumes to enter the wooden structure roofed with cloth. My turn is up. "Con todas mis relaciones" (with all my relations).

Red and Blue

Matt Bessel



Little Gray Thing

after "Lullaby for the Cat" by E. Bishop

Brenda Lopez

Come out of me
I have carried you for over three weeks
It's getting uncomfortable walking around
I have been preparing to care for you
I have been thinking about the things
I did to your siblings
They all fell from my standing positions
You will too
But I will kick you around
twist my trunk around yours
lift your head and drop it
smack you
and when the slightest breath is seen
I will make you stand
walk around
on the ground covered with the fluid you lived in
Yet that is not to worry
it is all to make sure
You're okay

I am here
Expecting you

Daylights Saving

Brenda Lopez

Looking through the double layered
invisible mixture of various elements

A barrier that protects objects
from the beauty of nature

On the other side
there are trees

I think of climbing them
jumping tree to tree

Yes

Like the squirrels

There is a nail clipping rising
that I once bit off my big toe

There is an orange setting
that was never peeled

The trees extend their limbs to the sky
some tips have dried up organisms
that once
made green shadows

Now they are empty
without color

My right hemisphere interprets
an equal sign
bottom left

Produced by the beams of the setting orange

It's sad
that the bear had to miss out on this

The Moon as The Sun

Brenda Lopez

The moon as the sun
Where the sea made a bed
of rocks, broken shells, washed up debris
and sand as the under-layer.
Some January night, where the air was cool
and getting colder
I have Caroline to my right
Alex, Leigh, and Allen to my left.
We lay with our heads towards the rocky mountain and our feet towards the silent
sea.
We each slowly doze, knowing the morning begins at 4 AM.
I am within my mummy sack, making the temperature just right,
allowing my eyelids to drop
..time passes..
Suddenly I feel this tap
over the top of my sleeping bag.
It's Caroline.
She says "look"
points to the "end of the sea."
I lift my head and see the moon in flames.
She's right under my feet.
Illuminating the entire sea with an autumn nightlight.
We drool
over the pureness she shares.
As she sets, we lay our heads
and all fade into the mysterious nocturnal world.

After the News

Spain, March 11, 2004

Judith McCombs

In the first hours after the news reached Seville,
the air became clearer, *limpio, azul*:
we remembered the 60s riots in Detroit's inner city,
when all traffic ceased, and ash flakes the size of my hand
fell on our yard, out of the suddenly blue sky.

No, said the bus driver, *No Plaza Nueva*.
But a lively *Señora* in tweed pulled us aboard,
made me repeat—*Entiende?*—in my patchy Spanish
where we should exit, which way to walk
in the streets now sealed to all traffic. *Explosiones*,
she said, *en los trenes, Madrid, muertos*
estudiantes, trabajadores, niños, por qué?
I tried to say more than *Comprendo, lo siento*,
qué terrible. But who comprehends such killings?

At the Cathedral we exited, joined a river of people
hurrying, intent, released from their midday labors
to shoulder the griefs that had spared us.
In the busless Plaza people eddied, waited, dispersed.
We saw the three flags of *España, Andalucía, Sevilla*
slowly hauled down to half mast. In their shadow
the protests began: students, five and then seven,
sat cross-legged on marble, chanting *No No No*.
Beside them a newsman knelt with his video,
filming from banners to faces, rooftops to crowd.

In the narrow stone lane of Calle Zaragoza
a white motor scooter came toward us, silent,
wheeled like a bike, its rider on foot,
bareheaded, holding his helmet like an empty bowl.
Such silence, a city holding its breath!
Then, near the taberna, from some balcony above
came the deep grieving howl of a hound,
reverberant in stone, baying and baying.

In the almost empty Taberna del Alabardero,
we found Beth and Patrice, friends from our tour.
It's like the 70s and 60s, those students, Beth said—
remember our protests and marches, the changes we fought for?
We raised our glasses to justice, to youth.

Three days our nation is mourning, the headwaiter told us;
All will be closed, government, museums, schools.
Patrice, born French, conveyed our respect and deep sorrow.

A light rain began as we walked back to our Plaza hotel.
Lágrimas del cielo, bad for the protests, I said;
but Patrice, smiling gently, opened his hands to the sky:
See, raindrops are washing the streets for the march.

Kiwi Locomotion

Pablo Callejo



Sketches

for Zoë, nearing six

Judith McCombs

The waiters rush, the Cuban music blares;
you turn your placemat to its blank white side
and ask us all for shapes to color there.
Aunt gives you crescent moon and star-flocked sky;
Mom and Grandpa, intent on Mid-East wars,
say they never could draw right—but for you they'll try—
and make you starts-and-stops of doodler's stars,
strung out like options left for changing course.

Across from you, I sketch the straying strands
of light brown hair (your mother's, memory-framed),
the shadow-shapes beneath your nose, half-slant
beneath your smile—the forms that have no names
flow through my eyes, impel my seeing hand.
You're drawing me!—your sharing, teasing gaze—
You have to say you're drawing me, it's true!—
I can't while lines flow on, becoming you.

Now you take the paper, ornament your eyes
with lion reds; then make your yellow-gold
sweep over and beyond my half-hatched lines
like tongues of molten sun, a gleaming flood
that claims the space with swoops of yellow light.
Moon and stars go under purple shoals—
our shrimps arrive. You lift your head, surprised,
the color flow still in your hand, your eyes.

Draw Me

Larry Moffi

This one goes out to my new found
friend who is dying and wants
to draw me. She will love this

watercolor greeting, *L'esprit du Neige*:
a bobolink on a post, on a dollop
of snow on a post, and milk cows

gather because the first yellow
tufts of rye grass here are tender
always. It's what I think I see,

she says she paints, pen and ink
colored not to resemble but be.

Draw me, the cameo Lola

on the matchbook begged, *and win*
drawing lessons for life.

Every time she lit a smoke, Draw me.

Original Chintz

Larry Moffi

The plastic eyes of the Indian maiden
clock on the wall glow and click
the minutes away, a cold indelible blue.
She has been sneering generations
of revenge down on me for hours,
her pendulum's quiver of arrows
tipped with steel her people forged
in the fires of my dream. I remember

trying to count cubes of lamb
in a stew, the tender carrots,
chestnut meats, sprigs of fresh
mint. It felt like New Zealand,
cradle of a dell—the green
declivities and the gangly young
girls dyeing wool for smocks
along the river's lips. Rose
was the woman beside me whose beauty
those girls, in bodies they would
never grow out of, could not bear.
What was it she was asking that
brought me to laughter? Surely

I am going to die before I dream
New Zealand again. And here, God
save me from the useless hours,
beneath a puff-ball, pastel coverlet
in a motel room of original chintz.
Still, the clock wants to tell a naïve
American time. The magic
fingers that vibrate the bed have not
yet walked off, and the box, with
its clean slot for my quarters, calls.

Breaking it Down

Yvette Neisser Moreno

First drama,
then sentences spoken in the dark
by disconnected voices,
then silence.

A mind coming to stillness.

A sky full of clouds
that dissipate,
leaving a pure blue.

The page clears itself of words.

Everything in reverse: the goal now
to distill the essence,
break down the compound
to its original elements,
unstir the batter
until the flour separates from the eggs.

Bleed the colors from the fabric.

Remove the buildings from the landscape.
Open the sky to an unobstructed view—
just mauve darkening to indigo
as the sun sets,

dropping off the edge.

The Back of the Sunset

Table Bay, South Africa

Yvette Neisser Moreno

As the sun drops on the water,
a fiery disc that turns to flame,

the pale undersides of pastels
blush the eastern sky.

Always the quiet changes in color
that make all the difference

while in the foreground
something burns and shimmers.

Grasses
Deborah Gay



Descomponer

por Yvette Neisser Moreno

traducción: María Teresa Ogliastri

Primero el drama,
luego frases dichas en la oscuridad
por voces inconexas,
luego el silencio.

La mente viene a la quietud.

Un cielo lleno de nubes
desvanece,
dejando el azul puro.

La página libera las palabras.

Todo en reverso: la meta ahora
es destilar la esencia,
descomponer la mezcla
a elementos originarios,
deshacer la masa
que la harina se separe de los huevos.

Desangrar los colores de la tela.

Borrar los edificios del paisaje.
Abrir el cielo a una visión sin obstáculos,
solo malva oscuro a índigo
durante la puesta de sol,

cayendo por el borde.

Ground, stand

Katy Richey

The murder, the murderer
the victim, the bloody fingers
the heavy-throated mourners
the long years before dignity
the dying flowers
and the next body
and the next.

Nude Back of Blue Man
Jevon Brooks



Full Moon before Class

Joseph Ross

I stand still
in the mirror-clear night

outside this college building,
staring at the fullest moon.

Luminous, it silvers
the blackness around it.

Soon, I will go inside
to discuss poems and grammar.

But for a moment first,
I try to read this moon.

Are these grey lines of worry,
carved while watching the earth?

Are these canyons of tears
orbits of observed sorrow?

Are they unnamed continents,
land masses that moved

with the speed of centuries,
colliding unaware?

I stare, trying to identify,
a face or a geography,

that would help me understand
what it means

to watch a world.

On “The Downtown Artist at Large”

A Mural by Manone, Los Angeles, 2012

Joseph Ross

for Lamont

If only America’s roof
could keep out the cold

the way colors sometimes
can, the artist’s brush

might tower over
the world like God or

God’s mother, awaiting
not worship or gold

but use. The brush gripped
to splash the color of light

in the shape of a broken
life. Good and evil,

the saliva of God, wait
impatiently to mix with

the hue of open eyes,
the color of coffee,

the shade of an impatient
country where some are never

at home. The artist finally
arrives at the color

of a wall’s destiny:
every rich man’s wall re-born

with a poor man’s face.

One Love Poem Too Many

Terence Winch

You are all milk and lips.
You are like that invisible particle
that glues the universe together.
Your dishes pile up in the sink.
You swim in the Caribbean
with the tour guides. You hide
your pictures in the freezer.
You worship nude models with
perfect asses. You won't ever pick
up the phone. You do not have
time for me. You will not meet
me in the Mexican restaurant
for the saltilla platter and iced
margaritas. You will not stand
on line with me in Starbucks
for a tall cappuccino and a
black-and-white. But there
is so little time. You know that.
You know we can hum a tune
today that is flawless and forget
how it goes tomorrow.

My Wife

Terence Winch

My wife rides her horse
in the fiery forest while
I eat an éclair and suffer
dramatic thoughts about
tigers, who are supposed
to dwell in that very forest.

My wife attempts to make
me drink champagne. She
offers me ice cream, and
bread and jam. She says
I remind her of an incredible
infant with fiery eyes.

My wife has a smoke with
our Chinese visitors while
I cook up a fiery feast of
cabbage and crubeens.
The Chinese regard me
as insignificant, but they love
my wife for her innocence.

My wife says it is necessary
to sing of the blessings
of the fiery night and the sea.
She believes that time can
stop and start. In between,
she says, we swim in the
black water of eternity.

Fiction

Roses for Clara

Josybett Claros-Nava

Rays of light shone directly onto Clara's sun kissed arms. She stood at the edge of the park, brown eyes darting over the jungle gym and slide before walking over to the swing set. She sat down, small hands clasping the metal chains tightly as she pushed off and began to swing. She saw her sister, Quinn, walk away from her, black hair tumbling over her straight shoulders, bouncing with every deliberate step, farther and farther away. Clara felt herself swinging higher, watching her sister's retreating form. They went to the park a few times a week after Quinn picked Clara up from her afterschool activities. They went "together," but not really together. Quinn had a tendency to leave Clara behind at the swing set while- ah, yes. Clara's eyes flashed as she saw the shadow of her sister melt into a familiar silhouette. That Thierry boy had all but bewitched her older sister. She was graduating from High School in a few months and he was in his third year of college, an age gap that their parents thought was inappropriate. It felt like those outings to the park were the only times Clara got to see her sister. Even if they were just excuses to see that Thierry boy in secret. They didn't go anywhere together. Not really.

Quinn unlocked the front door to her house, letting Clara walk in before she did. They saw their mom lying on the couch, Mexican soap opera on at full volume, the weeping sounds of another wronged woman reverberating through the house. They could always count on finding her there on the weeks she was off, waiting for her husband to walk through those doors. She didn't have an ideal schedule, what with being a flight attendant, and her absence had been something the girls were accustomed to. They tried their hardest not to see the disappointment in her face when her head snapped in their direction as they walked in.

"Hey, mum."

"Hi, mommy," The sisters mumbled simultaneously before slipping past their mother.

Quinn barely heard her faint "hello" as she went into her room. She threw herself on her bed and pulled out her phone, replying to the various texts from Sebastian Thierry, oh, she just loved the sound of his name, and her girlfriends making plans for the following day. It wasn't long before she heard the front door slam open and shut. A muffled greeting in the small voice of her mother and the booming, slurred response from her dad. She sat up in her bed, leaning towards the door before her curiosity got the best of her. Quinn opened her door just a crack and braced herself for whatever she would hear. Regardless, she was sure her mother would vent to her in depth the next day, but even those accounts were skewed from time to time.

Almost every night that her mother was home, was a night that Quinn

desperately wished to be elsewhere. They always fought. Whether it was about her father's problem, or mother's next flight, it always escalated faster than plausible. This time it would be worse, she was sure. Even from upstairs Quinn could hear her father storm into the kitchen and yell about the dishes still being dirty and how her mother was all too happy serving to complete strangers but couldn't even properly take care of her own home. She heard her mother's infuriated, nonsensical reply that consisted more of swear words than anything else as footsteps started to come closer and Quinn quickly closed the door to her room and took out a book, pretending to read.

She held her breath as the reeling pattern of footsteps came to a stop at her door and let it out when the shadow under the crack of her door moved away. Her father opened Clara's door and barged inside. The slurred "I love you" and Clara's reluctant "I love you too, daddy" was enough to make Quinn gag.

She couldn't find it anywhere. Quinn stormed out of her room the next morning, fully dressed, but her hair still a mess. She heard the beep, beep of a new text message from her phone. She groaned and checked the bathroom and her parent's room before walking over to Clara's door and knocking twice. She hated when people took her things without asking.

"Clara, have you seen my hairbrush?" She asked, tapping her foot impatiently. She suddenly realized that there was no way Clara should be home at this hour. Her spring break and Clara's didn't start at the same time. She always forgot that the middle school kids wouldn't be out for another two weeks. With that in mind she simply slipped inside and turned on the lights; her eyes were immediately bombarded by walls of pink. How could someone have so much pink in her room? Not just the wall, but the rug near the bed, the pillow case and a good 3/4ths of Clara's belongings strewn all over the floor and desk were some shade of pink. There was no doubt that Clara was a girly girl. Quinn checked her sister's dresser, making a mess of all the hair bands, bracelets and necklaces as she rummaged through it. "Aha!" She said, picking up her brush from off the top of a little black Moleskine journal. She always knew her sister had a journal. She'd find her writing in it from time to time but had never seen it unless it was in her sister's firm grip. "Curiouser..." She knew she shouldn't... but did it anyway.

Quinn looked around the room cautiously and picked the journal up, sliding off the elastic band and opened it to the middle.

January 1st

Dad's drunk again and mom's crying. She actually made it home for the Holidays this year and I wish she hadn't. We can deal with him on his own... But with mom home, it's worse.

She remembered that day after New Year's Eve. That was one of the first times their dad had started to drink during the day. Curiosity peaked; Quinn started to sift through a few of the other entries. It appeared to be the same thing, memories of fights, grades, a mention of a boy in school and as she got closer to the pres-

ent day, her sister's once enviable handwriting became sloppier, the words appeared to have been scratched deep into the pages, words like 'disappear' and 'enough' popped out in red ink among the black and finally, blank pages.

The most recent entry read, "*I'm done.*"

Quinn's heart almost popped out of her chest when she heard her phone ring from her room. She dropped the journal on the dresser without a second thought, running the hair brush through her hair a few times before going to her room. She quickly pulled on a grey cardigan and grabbed her phone, answering it as she flew down the stairs. "I know, I know! I'll meet you guys there!"

Quinn laughed at the joke Sebastian's friend, Nick, had made and set down her coffee. Since she had started to see Sebastian, she'd been doing a lot of things she normally wouldn't have been doing. Her high school friends were planning a laser tag outing that weekend and she had politely declined. Sebastian had planned a get away with a few close friends at his cabin a few hours away and had invited her to go along. And there she was; drinking coffee, which she hadn't even really liked until she met Sebastian and his friends. She liked to think that she had matured, and tended to scoff and ignore the people that tried to point out how much she had changed over the past few months.

"Hey, weren't you supposed to go pick up your sister?" Sebastian asked, leaning over the cafe table and gave Quinn a nudge. "It's almost 5, doll." Quinn's eyes widened. She wasn't the most punctual creature in the world but this time around, she'd REALLY lost track of time. "Ugh, I hate when my parents can't pick her up! Sorry, guys I have to go!" she said and gathered her things, taking the last swig of her now lukewarm coffee. She swooped down and planted a kiss on Sebastian's lips and waved goodbye to his friends as she walked back to her car, throwing her jacket into the back seat before getting in and setting off in the direction of Clara's school.

She was already two hours and a half late and had tried calling Clara at least ten times on her way there. She pulled up to the school and was not surprised at the lack of students milling about or the busses parked outside the small middle school. Quinn cursed, slamming down on the pedal to race home, hoping to catch her sister walking there.

She arrived to the door of her house not 15 minutes later, not a sign of Clara anywhere on the way home and parked the car hastily, phone to her ear as she listened to the persistent ringing. "Clara, you better answer this phone. I swear if I get in trouble, I will end you." She huffed into the phone, hanging up after leaving the 3rd voicemail in the past 7 minutes. She unlocked the front door and stepped inside, almost stumbling over Clara's little pink backpack which was carelessly discarded at the entrance. That in and of itself was odd enough. Clara was considered the clean sister; Quinn's room usually bared a resemblance to the aftermath of an F5 tornado.

"Clara!" She called out as she kicked the backpack to the side and stopped dead in her tracks. All along the length of the stairs she saw articles of clothing. Shoes discarded at the bottom, then socks. Jeans as she walked further up and a tee

shirt with a yellow cardigan. A chill ran down Quinn's back.

"...Clara?" She repeated at the top of the stairs, heart thumping in her chest as she felt her body go cold. The bathroom door was slightly open and she ran towards it.

"Oh, god..."

Her little sister was on the floor, her light brown hair strewn around her face, empty bottles of prescription pills at her feet and pools of dark, red... Quinn dropped to the floor, her mind racing, hands covering the gaping wounds on her sister's wrists, her hands quickly becoming enveloped in the viscous red liquid, eyes darting away from the vomit on the floor. A million questions raced through Quinn's mind all at once. How long had she been here like this? But the most urgent one: Why? Why? Why?

She held Clara's hand on the car ride to the hospital, not caring that those stains would probably never come out of the white upholstery in the passenger's seat. She held her hand in the emergency room, yelling into the phone at her parents. She held her hand in the hospital room, careful not to touch the fresh bandages as the doctor's explained everything to the three of them. She held her hand until their parents started to yell, placing the blame on the drinking, on the absences, on Clara's friends.

Her hands were shaking and her face was flushed. But she knew whose fault it really was. It was her fault. She'd seen those entries and she'd done nothing. She let her sister try to kill herself. Quinn looked at Clara lying on the bed, face so pale and lips so pink, and she cried.

Quinn peered into the tiny rectangular window on the door. It was the fifth day in a row she'd been there that week alone. The place wasn't as eerie to her anymore. The other kids there had even started to remember her name. She hesitated before opening the door; the only sign that Clara was aware of the entrance was the slight drop in her posture at the sound of the door sliding open.

Clara sat atop her favorite pink blanket, in stark contrast to the white walls that surrounded her. It was one of the few belongings they said was okay for her to keep there. It brought out the color in her cheeks... or so Quinn liked to think. Rays of sunlight bathed Clara from a high window out of her reach. She let the door close behind her before she spoke.

"Hey, you." She said with a bright smile on her face, shifting her weight before Clara turned to look at her. Quinn held out the bouquet of roses for her sister to see; the stems smooth, Quinn fingers ripe with little red pin pricks from the effort of removing the thorns herself.

"They're yellow today." Clara said. Quinn smiled as she placed them on top of the night stand, her fingers lingering on the long stems she had painstakingly de-thorned herself as she sat in the car outside of the institution.

"How are you?"

The clock on the wall ticked away. Quinn turned to look at her sister who was doing anything she could to avoid eye contact.

The Weight off My Shoulders

Danielle Smith



“Shouldn’t you be with your friends?” She said, shoving her hands and bandaged forearms under the blanket.

“I have better things to do.” Quinn replied with a smile as she reached into her bag and pulled out a new pink Moleskine journal. She handed it over to Clara and saw the fleeting lip twitch that she had convinced herself was a smile being fought back.

“Did you know that yellow roses can mean the promise of a new beginning?”

Quinn glanced up at her younger sister, always so full of tidbits of information.

“I think they’re perfect.” Clara said.

Quinn replied with a smile, “I guess they are.”

As Seen on TV

Andrew Mayn

I am pointing to a pack of cigarettes when I see my mom staring at me from the cover of a magazine. Her arms are crossed and she is gazing defiantly at the camera. Beneath her bleached smile the headline read in bold letters, “Where is Madeline now?” I nod at the cashier and fumble through my wallet for a ten. Outside, in the cool night air, I am shaking so hard I drop my lighter on the pavement.

My mom had been out of the hospital for nearly three months when the film crew first arrived. Over dinner she told us that she had met a producer at a champagne brunch. He was looking to film a pilot for a new TV series and my mom, with her tanned and taut face set against the backdrop of the posh suburb where we lived, was just what he was looking for. Upon hearing this news my dad shook his head slightly, but quickly refocused on his peas and said nothing. A week later I watched her from the landing as she paced back and forth, heels echoing against the hardwood of the foyer. She was fingering the diamond studs in her ears and nervously toying with the clasp of her necklace when the doorbell rang. She shrieked, pressed her blond hair down, smoothed her red cocktail dress, took a deep breath and opened the double doors wide to greet them. I retreated to my room, locked the door and fell on my bed.

The first time my mother left I was eleven years old. It was during summer vacation and I was jerked out of sleep after hearing the front door slam. I followed my dad’s muttering down the hallway to the landing and peaked through the rails of the banister only to see the door crash shut. The chandelier chimed as the sound reverberated throughout the house. I stood in the silence for a minute. Part of me wanted to go back to my room; turn around it said, but I watched my feet creeping down the stairs and by the time I had plopped down in front of the window and parted the heavy drapes the voice of protest was quiet.

My mom was pacing in the middle of the lawn. Bits of grass clung to her bare feet and ankles as she tromped back and forth through the morning dew. Even from the window I could see that her brown eyes were bright, burning, despite being set in heavy circles the color of ash. Although the sun rising behind her had just started to shine through the LA summer haze, she looked as if she had been out all night. Her rose lipstick was smeared and purplish lines of mascara ran down the length of her face. In one white-knuckled fist a small purse dangled limply from a strap, spilling its contents, tissues, makeup, pens across the yard. When my father, dressed in his suit and tie, stepped forward her face contorted and she shook her head violently. She moved back until she was up against the Buick, the same one that she would pick me up in at the bus stop each afternoon. When my dad inched closer she brandished the car keys in front of her. He had an expression I had never seen

before, but one that I would become familiar with: pleading, confused and scared, as if she was waving a gun in his face. He took another small step forward and I saw him mouth her name, “Maddy.” If she heard him she didn’t show it, and she threw herself into the driver’s seat and pulled the door shut, narrowly missing my dad’s wrist as he lunged forward. My dad stood there, shoulders slumped and mouth agape. All he could do was watch as the car rolled back down the driveway where it crushed the daisies that she had planted months ago, before clipping the mailbox and turning it askew. We didn't hear from her for a week.

My dad brought her home some time later. Coming up the walkway she looked much smaller than I remembered. Her steps were uneven, timid and my dad struggled to adjust his pace to stay at her side. Inside the door she touched my shoulder and smiled weakly before pausing in the foyer. The fury and the fire that had been in her eyes that morning had vanished leaving hardly an ember in its place, as if whatever had burned inside her had consumed everything. Standing there in the foyer she looked the way a guest does upon first entering someone else's home—self conscious and uncertain. I wanted to hug her and test the frailness of her appearance, but my dad had told me that morning while searching for his keys, “Mom is sick. Tell her you love her but let her rest, OK?”

In the weeks following she rarely stirred and when she did it was as if even the smallest effort was like trying to push a boulder up a hill. Playing Nintendo I would hear the vacuum roar only to stop and clatter to the floor a minute later. Her sigh, huge, carried through the house and hung in the air over me and Mario. One night the smoke alarm announced dinner and as I rushed into the kitchen I found my mom with her head in her hands, sobbing over a blackened and unidentifiable lump as smoke churned around her. She took up residence beneath a quilt on the living room couch, dozing through soap operas and daytime television. Some days I would step in between her and the TV and relay the events of my day.

“I got an A on my history quiz...Mrs. McKenzie said I should join the track team...”

“That's good,” she'd say, not moving. It seemed important to tell her about the world outside, still moving.

It was a while before she began to recover her stateliness, and even as she resumed her routine of soirees and country club meetings there was a hesitance in her step. Her calls to friends often went unanswered or were met with a nervous giggle and a polite, brief excuse. News had spread of her scene on the lawn. She had become radioactive, absolute poison to the normalcy that other wives had carefully cultivated, and so she was left to drift on her own through the various functions and events that she previously dominated.

Now, five years later, she was to become a reality TV star. Over the next few days our house became studio and stomping ground for an aggressive film crew. My mom had signed the release allowing for my image to be used but, like my dad, I kept my distance and ducked the cameras when I could. Our noncompliance didn't faze my mom, now dubbed “Madeline” by the studio, one bit. She relished the at-

tention of the camera and blushed when the producer called her a natural. "You've got style," he said. "Pomp. Attitude. They are going to love you." The network agreed with his assessment and ordered an entire season.

As much as I hated the show I couldn't deny the producer was right. The addition of the camera crew was a shot in my mom's arm that brought her back to life more than any of the numerous colorful pills she had been prescribed over the years. As Madeline she glowed, both literally from the tanning beds and figuratively. There was straightness in her spine, a strut and air of assurance that I only recognized from fuzzy memories of her lording over other mothers at t-ball games. In the eye of the camera she sipped mimosas coolly on the patio, gossiped with friends, dropped in and out of salons and aerobics classes and chatted up tailors in tiny boutiques. She was all smiles and charm unless, of course, the producer called for drama. On some episodes this was as easy as acting indignant and tossing a drink in a co-star's face, or confiding in the camera some pretend secret concerning another person's fidelity. In one instance a flat tire was edited into an earth-shaking event: in a wide shot encompassing the orange sky Madeline stood on the side of the road, staring dejectedly at the shredded remains of the SUV's tire amidst the chaos and exhaust of rush hour. There were other times when the producer requested her softer side make an appearance, such as at a charity dinner for foster children where she teared up while giving a short toast. Witnessing tender moments like that I couldn't help but wonder what Madeline was thinking of to make herself cry.

The second time my mom left I was fourteen. I had just set my backpack on the kitchen table when she stormed into the room and began tearing through the cabinets. Pots, pans, spatulas, fork and knives crashed to the floor as she gutted one cabinet after another.

"Mom, what are you?" She looked over at me with a start but then smiled and turned back to the cupboards. "We are remodeling. I am just re-organizing things." she said breathlessly before reaching deep into the back of a cabinet and yanking. A heavy cast iron pot bumped against the wooden frame. She grunted and pulled again but the pot didn't come loose. All she had to do was turn it to the side. Couldn't she see that? She looked down at the floor and sighed, before squaring her shoulders and taking hold of the pot again. The small muscles in her arms jumped as she pulled and grunted.

"Do you want me?" I was cut off as her grunt became a full blown scream. Her grip on the pot slipped and she fell backwards onto the tile. For a second she looked like a toddler who couldn't make up her mind as to whether or not she should laugh or cry. She chose neither and by the time I reached her side she was getting to her feet. "Are you okay?" I knew the answer by now. Her eyes were focused on me, but it felt as if she was looking somewhere else, perhaps chasing a vision inside her head. As she turned away she swiped her keys off the counter. Heading out the door she called to me, "I am going to grab some things for dinner. Do you want anything?" The door slammed shut before I could respond, leaving me standing alone amidst the wreckage of the kitchen.

Season two was a great success, largely due to the producer's urgings behind the scenes. "Viewers love it when you get mad. Give us some more of that," he said. "You know, get crazy." She took his advice. On one episode she screamed tearfully into a cell phone while jogging on a treadmill at the gym. She nearly leaped over tables at restaurants, coming just short of actual cat-fights. She exited many scenes red-faced and muttering under her breath just loud enough for the mic. Madeline and the camera entered places like a destructive whirlwind, fueled by the wary gazes of onlookers.

Sometimes I would be asked, "Is your mom really like that?" I would shrug my shoulders in response. I wasn't sure myself, and if I had been asked to pick her out of a line-up of reality stars I don't think I would have been able to.

Half-way through the season it was deemed necessary to highlight Madeline's maternal side, a necessary balance to her wildness. I was unwilling, not to mention too old, to play the part. Auditions were held, a kid was found. On screen he was Madeline's sandy-haired and be-freckled nephew from the mid-west. Together they puzzled over long-division, goggled at monkeys at the zoo and split ice-cream sundaes on the boardwalk. Viewers and critics alike responded well. They especially enjoyed the moments when the persona of Madeline seemed to fall away and her eyes became misty, soft, wistful as she watched her co-star's small hands fumble with his shoelaces.

Off-camera she thrived and the distinction between my mom and Madeline became more blurred as the show progressed. The doubt in herself had disappeared; there was simply no room for it given the massiveness of Madeline's personality. Whatever she had lost with each hospital visit prior to the show, she gained back with the success of each episode. The scene on the lawn had broken her loose, set her adrift in suburbia, and the show promised her a way back, an identity. I can see that now.

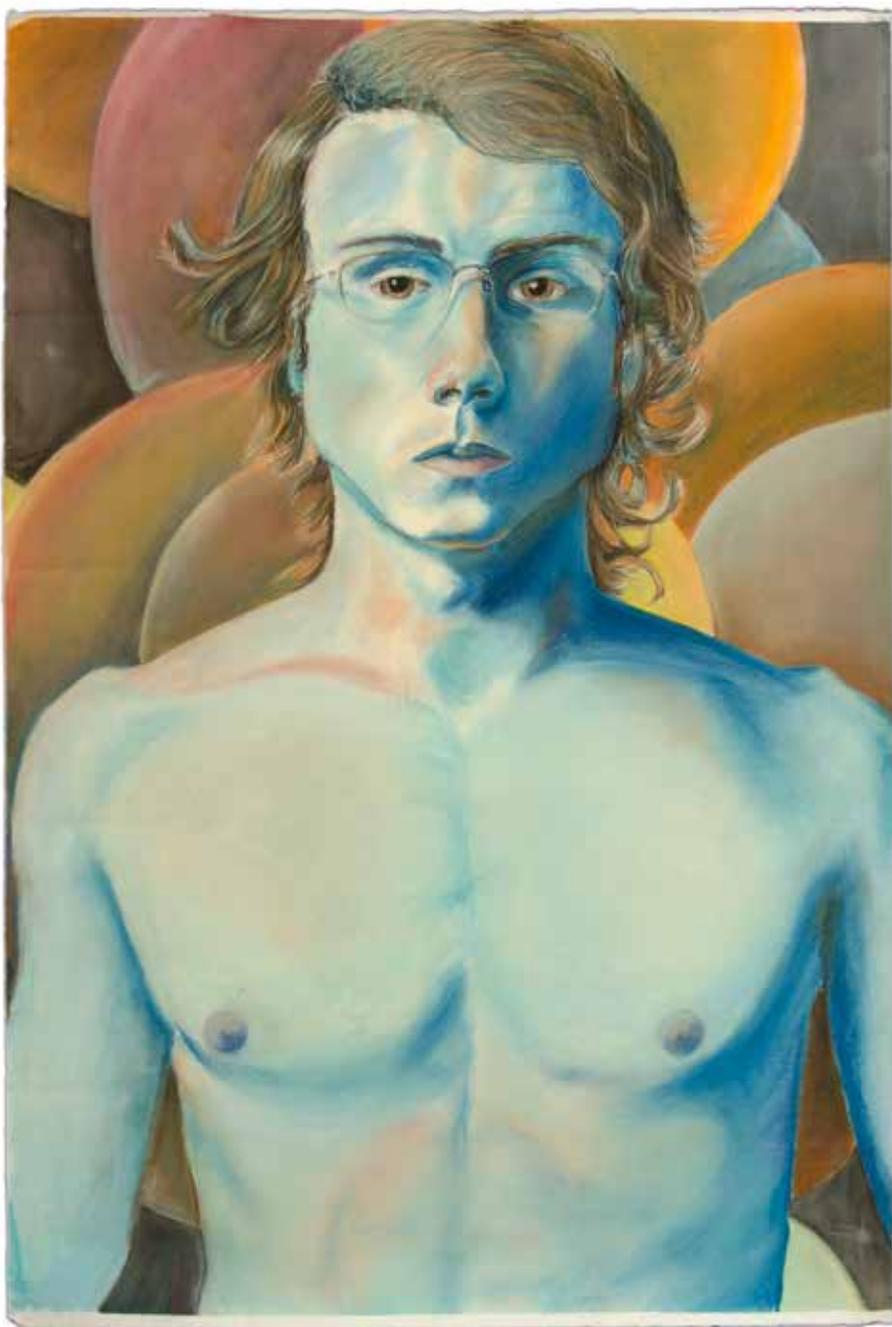
The third time my mom left she left in an ambulance. It was a Friday night and I was picking at carry-out across the table from my dad. A faint voice from the hallway cut the silence between us and when I turned I saw her slumped against the door frame in a flannel night gown. Her face was pale and her eye lids kept drooping, before fluttering open again. This was the first time either of us had seen her that day.

"I think..." she swayed forward before catching herself. My father got up from his seat. "I took too many..."

I dropped my fork back on my plate and stared as he slid her arm over his shoulder and grabbed her around the waist. He shouted for me to call 911, but my brain was sluggish. I couldn't remember how to stand. The floral patterns on the wall looked alien and ridiculous. The ceramic napkin holder, the crystal salt and pepper shakers and chandelier all seemed trivial, hypocritical and utterly unnecessary. A surge of undiluted anger struck me out of my daze. It was disturbing, out of place, but it propelled me from my chair and towards the phone. I was fifteen at the time.

They canceled the series midway through season three when viewership began to wane and the reality TV fad went into full swing. I don't know how the scene

Pastel of Blue Man
Eric Meile



played out, but I imagined the producer throwing up his hands and hopping into a convertible while my mom stood frozen on the side walk. When she told us that night at dinner she deflated as the words left her mouth. “Canceled” settled over all of us and we sat in silence. My dad gently took her hand in his and caught my gaze. I thought to myself, don't let her go.

But it is hard to hold onto another person's life. The last time my mother left she didn't come back. At the hospital a kind woman sat us down in a small office and gingerly placed a box of tissues in front of us. I didn't need them; I could hardly hear her as she spoke. All I could do was think, over and over, “I lost my mother a long time ago. I lost her a long time ago.”

“...like a burning building. You want to go in and see if there is still someone inside, but if you get too close you can get burned...”

My father nodded slowly, very slowly. Did he hear her? The woman was looking at me patiently, expectantly. “I don't know,” I mumbled. She nodded sympathetically.

My mom is illuminating my tiny dorm room. The box set is open on my bed. I have been watching the show a lot lately. This particular shot, hidden away in the bonus features, is my favorite. The day it was filmed I had followed her and the crew to the beach as a favor, but spent it instead lying in the surf. In the shot my mom is standing on a pier with her back to the ocean, staring out across the sand. Against the clear blue sky she is tall, confident, infallible and she is looking at me.

Taking a Personal Day

Rachel Williamson

The problem with open concept houses, Theodore supposed, was that there was no way to hide anything. Something you could see from the dining room, you could see from the kitchen and living room too. If his parents or older brother were downstairs, they could see everything he was doing, and they always saw when he was doing something he wasn't supposed to. There were things he could do in the living room: play his cello, watch TV, read a book. But there were so many things he couldn't do, like paint, or play with his toys, or run around, which was why the living room was his least favorite place.

The thing was, he'd been missing Mom lately, and the living room was her favorite place. She had even decorated it herself. The carpet was white, but Mom insisted it was some made-up color called 'crème'. The big couch she'd picked out was plain and tan, like the chairs off to the side of the room, but it was comfortable, and served as a barrier between the living room and kitchen. A dark coffee table sat in front of the couch, with weird little trinkets sitting on top: a square bowl filled with smooth rocks, a vase without any flowers, and a basket with clumps of...something. It smelled nice, whatever it was. A large, black bookcase took up the wall opposite the couch, and, for some reason, the middle of the bookcase had an area for their TV. He'd never seen a bookcase like that before Mom bought it, and he didn't get it; what was the point of books if there was a TV right there? Why his mother was so proud of this room, Theodore had no idea, since it looked boring. But he had been spending lots of time there anyway. Two months was a long time for Mom to be away...

"Theodore," Adin called from the kitchen area, "dinner will be ready soon, so go wash—"

Not waiting for his brother to finish speaking, Theodore raced upstairs, all thoughts about the living room forgotten. He grabbed a handful of sleeping pills and pocketed them before rushing to the bathroom, holding his hands under the cold tap water for a few seconds, and beating a path back downstairs.

Theodore watched as his older brother drank his tea and did everything he could to keep from grinning. It had taken him a while, but he'd finally come up with a way to get the older boy to relax. These past few weeks, Adin had been doing all of the housework, on top of all of his other duties, so he wasn't sleeping very much. From cooking to cleaning to grocery shopping to laundry, Adin was always busy. When he wasn't doing that, he was helping Theodore with schoolwork or teaching him how to play the cello. More than once, Theodore had woken up late at night to see the light shining from underneath the door of his older brother's room,

as he stayed up working on assignments for his college classes.

If Mom and Dad were home, Theodore knew Adin would feel much better. But they weren't home, and hadn't been for a while; Dad was a soldier, serving in some far away country. He wrote letters all the time, but he couldn't come home, he said, not yet. Mom was a foreign ambassador, which meant she went to far away countries too, but she didn't stay as long as Dad. She had gone somewhere two months ago but hadn't come back, even though she'd said she'd be gone for "two weeks, tops." He didn't know what was keeping her away from home, but Adin knew, and he said Mom would be back as soon as she could. Sometimes ambassadors got held up in other countries because of politics, but Mom would be fine. He missed her, but Theodore wasn't worried, because Adin said it was okay.

In the meantime, though, Adin had to take care of Theodore, which was more work than usual. Theodore tried to stay out of trouble, but he was eight; trouble found him. He knew that the extra work was troubling his brother, but he hadn't realized that Adin couldn't live his normal life anymore until he'd overheard a hushed phone conversation his older brother had held with his girlfriend.

"I can't do anything for the foreseeable future, Jetta. You know that," Adin had whispered into the phone.

"Yeah, I know, but can't you get someone to help you out every-"

"No. It's fine. I can handle it," Adin had snapped.

"It isn't fine. You're 20 years old! You shouldn't have to worry about taking care of a child..."

Jetta's words hadn't hurt his feelings, but they had made him feel a little guilty; he knew he could help out. He could do things on his own! But his older brother never let him, even though he had so much work that he was too busy to sleep. He'd complained to his friend Patrick about it, and Patrick had told him about sleeping pills. He knew all about them, because his mom used them, and he said he would give Theodore some. They tasted bad, so his mom took them with decaf coffee. Adin didn't drink coffee often, but he did like black tea; when they'd gone grocery shopping earlier in the week, Theodore had replaced the regular black tea with decaf. He thought black tea tasted awful, so he hoped his older brother wouldn't notice whatever weird taste the sleeping pills had.

He wasn't sure how many pills he should use, but they were tiny, and he figured his brother was really sleepy if he was nodding off into his baked potato, so he'd put a handful into the teapot just to be sure. And an hour later, when his older brother shuffled upstairs, tumbled into bed, and fell asleep instantly, he smiled to himself.

Five o'clock the next day found Theodore curled up on the living room sofa, taking a quick break from chores. After Mom had left on her "diplomatic mission," Adin had told him that it was really important to make sure the house was orderly and neat when she got back. Usually, he only had to do small stuff, like wipe the table off after dinner and put his things back when he was done with them. Adin did the cooking and laundry, things like that. But it couldn't be that hard to

do, and Theodore had been determined to take care of himself and keep the house clean for the day. Now he was starting to think his older brother was just better at it. He'd tried to make breakfast for himself, and everything would have turned out great, if he hadn't accidentally left a dishcloth on the stove. The cotton cloth caught fire quickly, and he'd grabbed the fire extinguisher, pulled the pin, and sprayed white, chalky powder all over the stainless steel stovetop, along with the countertop and floor. In his rush to clean up before Patrick's father came to take him to school, he had tried to use wet hand towels to wipe up the mess, but the sopping wet towels instead created a thick paste that stuck fast to the floor tiles, and which he'd had no time to clean. Thankfully, he hadn't messed up the living room; it was going to stay perfect until Mom came back.

Other than the fiasco in the kitchen, though, everything else had gone off nicely. After coming home from school, he'd done some homework, a load of laundry on his own, and cleaned the upstairs bathroom, though he had lost a bit of time looking for a face mask to wear. Bathroom cleaner made him feel strange if he had to breathe it for too long. All that was left to do was mop up the mess in the kitchen, which had dried onto the floor tiles. He had known that doing household tasks was a lot of work, but hadn't realized just how exhausting it would be, and he hadn't even done half of what Adin did. He was very tired, and honestly, he was lonely.

It was kind of strange with nobody moving about the house. He had never noticed just how quiet it was. Adin wasn't very talkative, but he usually struck up conversation, and it was never completely silent. The vacuum would be running, or the dishes would be clinking in the sink, something. Now, there was nothing. No noise could be heard, from upstairs or downstairs. It was deathly quiet. Theodore felt uncomfortable. As he filled a bucket with soap and water and proceeded to mop up the mess on the kitchen floor, he felt distinctly alone in a way he never had before. He wanted his brother to wake up. He wanted his father to walk through the front door. He wanted his mother to hug him. He had no control over that. But there were plenty of things he did have control of. He was the one in charge for the day. Abandoning the mop and bucket of water against the island in the middle of the kitchen, he pulled a pan from a cabinet and a frozen pasta dish from the freezer. The hiss of the stove as the gas turned on was reassuring, in some strange way. He could at least make dinner. When Adin finally woke up, he'd probably appreciate it; he'd be hungry after sleeping the entire day. And though it probably wouldn't happen, he wanted his parents to come home too, and they could all have family dinner together. They didn't get to do that often enough.

Content that the food was heating on the stove, Theodore trudged into the living room and curled up on the couch again. It was still too quiet. He felt tears stinging at the back of his eyes, but he blinked fiercely, resisting the urge to cry. He was too old for that. His friends would all make fun of him if they knew he was a giant crybaby. Still, he scrunched up into a ball and hugged his knees. He stared at the bowl of decorative rocks and remembered how Mom had told him how to throw a rock just right that it skipped across water, and suddenly he was floating in dream, and Mom was sitting on the floor painting her vase while Adin beat Dad at

chess for the sixth time in a row, and Theodore just sat back and watched it all.

Theodore was startled awake by the loud beeping of the smoke detector, and panicked, thinking his brother would wake up and see the mess in the kitchen. He rushed into the kitchen, which was slowly filling up with thick, gray smoke. Coughing, he turned off the stovetop quickly, and grabbed the handle of the pan, yanking it off of the stove so it wouldn't start a fire. Belatedly, he realized that he hadn't put on any oven mitts, and he registered searing hot pain in his hands a split-second later. With a cry, he dropped the pan and stumbled back blindly. He knocked something over behind him, which was accompanied by a loud splash; to his horror, he had knocked over the bucket of mop water that he'd forgotten to empty earlier, and dirty water had spilled onto the floor.

As if in a trance, he watched the liquid quickly spread across the tiles. The smoke-filled air and the throbbing in his hands were barely noticeable, so entranced was he by the layer of dirty water covering the floor. It wasn't clear, not with the combination of fire extinguisher residue and soap that had been mixed in; it was pale white, nearly see through, like the coconut milk he had tried at the grocery store once, a long time ago. The smoke detector rang loud and long. He didn't really notice anything other than the water, and his own rapid heartbeat.

It only took a few seconds for the water to travel, but to Theodore it seemed like hours. The water was moving in slow motion, creeping around the island towards the living room. It moved like a snake, slithering across the floor. His eyes were latched to the movement of the water snake as it slithered closer and closer to the living room. The beeping of the smoke detector barely registered in the back of his mind. The water reached the border between the kitchen and the living room and his heart stopped; it lingered a second before finally slipping across. Time sped up, and water rushed into the living room, soaking the carpet, dampening the base of his mother's couch. Theodore's heart dropped into his stomach.

He sat on the floor, limp and unfeeling, for what felt like an eternity. Even when the men from the fire department burst through the front door, heavy boots pounding through every corner of the house, tracking dirt and spraying water. Even when one of the firefighters shook him on the shoulder and tried to speak to him, urgency written across his face. Theodore remained silent through it all, hands aching, unable to see anything but the ruined living room floor.

The firemen thudded around the house, joined by two police officers speaking loudly into walkie-talkies. To Theodore, they were background noise. Paramedics came by to check him for injuries. They went unnoticed. More and more people seemed to be running upstairs. It didn't matter to Theodore. Nothing mattered, except for the look that would be on Mom's face when she got home to see what he had done to her room. She would be so sad when she saw it. She would cry. She would cry for days, and she would never forgive him. And Adin was never going to speak to him again. His older brother would hate him, because he broke all of the rules and ruined everything. That was why he hadn't come down to yell at him yet;

How Did Symbols Change Throughout History

Edelweiss Calcagno



Adin didn't even want to look at him.

Outside, an ambulance siren began to blare. A group of men ran into the house with a stretcher and launched themselves up the stairs, but Theodore didn't see that. He saw dejected eyes, angry faces, and a ruined white carpet. The arms of a paramedic wrapped around his waist and picked him up. As the paramedic walked them both towards the front door, Theodore's eyes locked onto the shattered remains of his mother's vase next to a black boot print, left on the carpet recently by one of the many firemen who had trampled through his home, and he felt the familiar burning sensation behind his eyes. His vision distorted as his eyes filled with tears, and as the group of men rushed out of the front door with their heavy stretcher in tow, Theodore started to cry.

Fifteen Days

Joel Collins Sati

In fifteen days, it will be ten years since that day in Detroit. This day is important enough that I will most likely take the hour-and-a-half bus trip down to the Burger King on Veirs Mill and Randolph in Rockville, Maryland. I will order a Whopper with Coke; whether I can afford it, well that's another issue. As a philosopher is wont to do, I will think about the past ten years, the life I thought I would have, the lies I have told and loves I have experienced and lost up until now. Maybe I'll plan the next week out; the old adage does say that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. I'll tell myself to calm down, and then take a bite of the Whopper; and all of a sudden I'll be in what could have been my last supper in the only good part of Detroit.

It was Wednesday, October 24, 2002, when my four-foot-six nine-year-old seventy-two-pound person walked into the Detroit Metro Airport; I was in a land of giants to say the least. I didn't remember much before it, and quite frankly, I didn't have to; all I cared about was that we had a Northwest Flight 123 to Atlanta in a few hours. On the other side of this flight would be my mother who I hadn't seen since May, when she made her journey to the United States. Past the cacophony of busy businessmen, tourists, and waiting families, I could sense the apprehension that underlies their behavior, a year after 9/11.

I had arrived with a family friend, Mama Joseph and her two sons, David and Joseph. The boys were a few years younger, yet perfectly situated atop my very last nerve. Their mother was a pastor's wife who had just taken her American-born sons to Kenya for vacation; she had received a call asking her to do a favor for one of her husband's parishioners—I happened to be that favor. Her steadfast resolve kept us in line and kept us moving quickly; she had to put up with various requests for sweets and toys to achieve her aim. With that in mind, I figured this would be just like our first stops in Nairobi and Amsterdam; arrive, clear the security check, take a bathroom break, get food, board the next plane and leave Detroit in less than two hours. In retrospect, I was naïve; I mean 9/11 didn't happen in The Netherlands. It happened in America. Naïve is something I think we all were—well except Joseph—he was three and whatever was in his nose was too damn good.

We arrived at the security check line, when something caught our eye. A few officers approached Mama Joseph and asked that she take the children with her. One of the officers paid a disconcerting amount of attention to me, not the least bit because I was much darker than the other boys. He wanted us to walk with him to a more private place, "to ask a few questions." I felt heavier and heavier as we walked, and my mind, with all the excitement within, slowly left my body from the sides of my ears.

I sauntered into a cold and damp interrogation room, and almost instantly I was left alone. I cried, with the whirr of a fan in the background. A portly gentleman, in his early forties—irritated about something, came to interrogate me with the intent to start an inquisition.

“Who are you?”

“Joel Sati,” I said.

“Where are you from?”

“Kenya,” I retorted, in what is probably the only time I was ashamed of my origins.

He fired off those questions in a manner that very well indicated he didn’t care about the answer. “We know the lady you came with isn’t your mother—you’re most likely going to be sent back.”

I interjected, “But she’s taking me to see my—”

A figure appeared on the glass that surrounded the room. It moved toward the door, waving up and down the glass walls, stopping before it reached the door. There was a solitary knock. The interrogator stopped, acknowledged the figure, and was compelled to move toward that figure. He left the door ajar, and he and the figure had a conversation.

“London? Two hours? Alone?”

I don’t know who said what, but it didn’t matter; the death knell was sure to have been struck. My American dream was to wilt before my watery eyes and before I knew it, I was bawling – hard. The tears stopped in time to overhear Mama Joseph pleading her case. I was more than some kid being smuggled into the States; I was a boy who missed his mother. All this ‘thinking about my mother’ business had me sleepy and quite hungry. I fell asleep, head firmly on that metal table, mind certain of deportation. I then felt a touch, which turned into a bump, which matured into a raspy and industrious female voice whispering “Hey, bud, wake up!” I sneered at her, then at the clock- two hours had passed. “Ya feelin’ nervous?” she asked. I nodded, my mind having left the country by now. “It’s gonna be okay; you missed your other flight because we had questions to ask your friend. We’re just calling your mom in Atlanta and we’re gonna make sure everything is accounted for—we just can’t be that lax anymore, ya know?” she continued. I was going to ask why not; then it hit me—still does. To defuse the awkwardness, I looked for something and saw her gun, which looked cool. “Can I shoot—uh—touch it?” I hesitated, infantile impulse having been arrested by my better angels. “Fat chance of that happening,” she shot back, the reply hitting me with bewilderment before I understood that it meant I was neither going to shoot nor touch the gun any time soon.

After a long pause, she got up and motioned to me as if I was to walk with her, and I reluctantly followed. We walked for what felt like two minutes, past a sign which screamed ALIENS, and into a room with a few chairs, a television and a solitary vending machine. I stared at the machine, and then I remembered that I hadn’t eaten since Amsterdam. “I sure as heck am hungry—how about you?” she said, having noticed my gaze at the machine. I nodded again, this time more vigorous than last; maybe my mind was returning to my body. “Have a seat, I’ll be

back,” she said before wandering off, with the television in the far end of the room booming “GIANTS BEAT THE ANGELS AND WIN GAME FIVE OF THE WORLD SERIES!!” in the background. Knowing nothing about baseball, all I saw these normal-sized ‘giants’ do was run around a diamond-shaped piece of ground. They somehow won, making an officer at the far end of the room curse his luck—so much the worse for his better angels.

The lady came back, this time with a sack and a bottle, a golden logo emblazoned on the sack with red text that read ‘Burger King.’ The ‘have it your way’ I quickly dismissed. She sat down next to me and dove into the bag. “Since this is your first time in the States, I got you the most American thing I could find—a hamburger!” I slowly divested the burger from its wrapper, careful as if I was holding the pride of a culture, all the while knowing that hamburgers come from Germany. I took a bite, and as my palate assimilated to this new taste, I became American in no uncertain terms; this was made no less so by my ear-to-ear grin. “I know,” she said, recognizing the grin, “that’s the good part!” She then gave me a bottle of Coca Cola to wash all that assimilation into my gut, which has proven to have a staying power longer than chewing gum. Satisfied, I had thought that was the end of it—again I was naïve. Her phone rang.

“Hello?”

The voice on the other end I could not make out, yet it sounded dark—something a young child associates with obscure figures.

“Yeah it’s me.” She acknowledged the voice

She reached in her pocket for a pen, then frantically looked for something to write on, tore off a piece of the bag, taking the logo with it. She hastily scribbled a few notes.

“Are you sure? He can go?” the frenzy continued.

“What time?”

“Oh wow! We don’t have much time—that’s in an hour and a half—Ten four!”

She hung up, thrust the phone into her jean pocket and motioned me to finish the rest of my burger.

The burger promptly disappeared, and then we rushed to the room where Mama Joseph and her sons were; she was barely awake and her children asleep—finally. We left, past the ALIENS sign; I thought to myself as to what that referred to, then I left it alone. In the hallway that separated us from the security checkpoint, I saw the interrogator, to whom I proceeded to give the middle finger. I then ran toward the lady I had my first American meal with; I hugged her, and then left for the plane—I never knew her name, she never knew mine. We ran to our gate, where another Northwest flight was boarding; we caught the flight, minutes away from departure. The plane then took off, the Detroit skyline being the last thing I saw before sleep. I was truly on my way to being an American.

Two-and-a-half hours later, we arrived in Atlanta. It was midnight, and the walk to baggage claim was silent, bar the hum of the escalator which separated us from baggage claim. Going up the escalator, I asked myself questions which were

left unanswered: Why am I disappointed about the prospect of going back? Is this as bad as it is going to get?" I thought, before "Hey, Joel!"

I knew that voice. It knew me. There she was—straight ahead, arms wide open.

"Mum!"

Well, I'll probably finish the burger and then I'll think about my buddy Ray's birthday. Whether or not I can afford a card, that's another issue.

Contributors

Miguel Aldaco, a former winner of the Ventura Valdez Poetry Award, is currently at Penn State University where he is studying literature and creative writing.

Ann Becker, poet laureate emerita of Takoma Park, is poet in residence at Pyramid Atlantic, a print-making and book arts studio and gallery in downtown Silver Spring, MD, where she is developing projects to promote collaborations between poets, visual artists, dancers and musicians. Her books include *The Transmutation Notebooks: Poems in the Voices of Charles and Emma Darwin* and *The Good Body* (chapbook). Since 2001 she has led a special poetry workshop, Writing the Body, for those who have experienced life-threatening or chronic illness as patient, caregiver or family member.

Jevon Brooks is an art student at MC-TP/SS.

Hana Bekele, who is originally from Ethiopia, is currently an undergraduate student at University of Maryland College Park, majoring in accounting and finance. The art piece in this collection is one of her favorites; she loves taking pictures of landscapes.

Matt Bessel, an arts student at Takoma Park/Silver Spring majoring in graphic design, hopes to pursue a career as a concept artist/ graphic designer.

Edelweiss Calcagno (Picasso) is a painter, engraver, sculptor and art restorer. Her dynamic, award-winning works are cubist, expressionist and abstract in style and her art has appeared in dictionaries. She has created art pieces for the Astronomy Department at MC and others for the European Union and for Reed Construction Data. Visit her website: <http://edelweisscalcagno.weebly.com/>

Pablo Callejo, born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is currently pursuing a double major in art and nursing at Montgomery College. Art is his passion and he does painting, printmaking, and sculpture. He recently won the Gloria Monteiro Humanities Award.

Nancy Naomi Carlson has received grants from the NEA, MD Arts Council, and Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County. Author of the critically acclaimed *Stone Lyre: Poems of René Char*, she is an associate editor for Tupelo Press.

Josybett Claros-Nava, a student at Montgomery College, is studying business. She wrote her first short story at the age of 10 about the adventures of a little field mouse and his friends. She lives in Hyattsville, Maryland, with her two beagles,

Dusty and Sassy, and likes to knit and eat Sushi during her free time.

Suzanne Dracius, author and playwright from Martinique, won the Prize of the Society of French Poets for the body of her work, as well as the Prix Fetkann for her poetry collection. Dracius's work emphasizes Martinique's complex cultural history, and its shaping by Asian, European, and African cultures.

Tranetta Franklin is a poet and fiction writer and has been writing since the age of eight. She is currently on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus Council and a volunteer with Habitat for Humanity and the American Red Cross, hoping to transfer to George Mason University to obtain a BFA in creative writing and a BA in English Literature.

Arturo Garcia is a recent winner of the Ventura Valdez Poetry Award and is studying at MC-TP/SS.

Deborah Gay is an art student at MC-TP/SS.

Brenda M. Lopez is currently a student at Virginia Commonwealth University studying to become a social worker. She truly enjoys the natural world and its offerings and lives her life in every breath.

Bruno Emilio Marcenaro, who was born in Lima, Peru, is thriving through the early stages of being an art major at Montgomery College and enjoys life itself and the opportunities that come with it.

Andrew Mayn is currently a student studying social work and psychology at The University of Maryland-Baltimore County. He was born and raised in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Eric Meile, who attends MC, plans to graduate in 2014 with an AA in Studio Art. He wants to transfer to a four year school and major in sculpture and physics.

Judith McCombs' poems appear in *Calyx*, *Measure*, *Nimrod* (Neruda Award), *Poetry*, *Potomac Review* (Poetry Prize), *Prairie Schooner*; *Shenandoah* (Graybeal-Gowen Award); on line in *Innisfree Poetry Journal* and *Levure littéraire*; and in her fifth book, *The Habit of Fire: Poems Selected & New*. She has held NEH and Canadian Senior Fellowships, and in 2009 won Maryland State Arts Council's highest Individual Artist Award for Poetry. She arranges a poetry series at Kensington Row Bookshop in Kensington, MD.

Larry Moffi is the author of three collections of poems, most recently *A Citizen's Handbook*, and three non-fiction books on baseball. He is co-founder and senior editor of Settlement House, an independent publisher specializing in poetry.

Yvette Neisser Moreno is the author of *Grip*, winner of the 2011 Gival Press Poetry Award. Her poetry translations from Spanish include *South Pole/Polo Sur* by María Teresa Ogliastris and *Difficult Beauty* by Luis Alberto Ambroggio. She is the coordinator of the DC-Area Literary Translators Network (DC-ALT), an organizer with Split This Rock Poetry Festival, and an instructor at The Writer's Center.

María Teresa Ogliastris is a Venezuelan poet and writer. She is the author of several books of poems: *Cola de Plata*, *Nosotros los inmortales*, *Brotos de Alfalfa*, and *Polo Sur*. She has written a novel *Adentro de Marilyn* (Inside Marilyn) soon to be published. She resides in Caracas, Venezuela.

Joel Collins Sati is an alumnus of Montgomery College, having graduated in May of 2013. His short story "Fifteen Days" won the 2013 Danielle C. Ezrin Creative Writing Scholarship. He currently resides in New York City, where he's studying philosophy at the City College of New York.

Danielle L. Smith is a full time student at Montgomery College and wants to transfer to MICA in the spring to obtain a MFA in general fine arts. She lived in Germany for 8 years before moving to Maryland in 2000. Her paintings consists of a variety of textures including paper, stones and glass and vibrant colors.

Katy Richey's work has appeared in *Rattle*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, and *Full Moon on K Street: Poems about Washington D.C.* She co-edited the February 2011 issue of *Beltway Poetry Quarterly: A Tribute to Langston Hughes* and hosts the Sunday Kind of Love reading series open mic at Busboys and Poets on 14th and V in Washington D.C.

Joseph Ross is the author of two poetry collections: *Meeting Bone Man* (2012) and *Gospel of Dust* (2013). His poems appear in many anthologies and literary journals including *Poet Lore*, *Tidal Basin Review* and *Drumvoices Revue*. He has received three Pushcart Prize nominations and is the winner of the 2012 Pratt Library / Little Patuxent Review Poetry Prize. He teaches English at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C. and writes regularly at www.JosephRoss.net.

Rachel Williamson, a student at MC-TP/SS, recently took the creative writing course in fiction.

Terence Winch's most recent books are *Lit from Below* (2013) and *Falling out of Bed in a Room with No Floor* (2011). Poems of his have appeared in four *Best American Poetry* collections and in many other anthologies and journals. He is the winner of an American Book Award, an NEA poetry fellowship, and other honors. Also a musician and songwriter, he released a CD in 2007 called *When New York Was Irish: Songs & Tunes by Terence Winch*. See www.terencewinch.com.

