

the **SLIGGO**
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 10 Petal Storm, LIVIA ABRAMOFF
- 11 Talking with Deborah (The Space Between), HOLLY TROUT
- 12 What Do I Know? CLAUDIA CASSOMA
- 14 Distante, CHRISTIAN CHAVEZ
- 15 At 5 Weeks, TERI CROSS DAVIS
- 16 Pink & Blues, JULIE DEIBEL
- 17 Redemption, TERI CROSS DAVIS
- 18 One Night Stand, TERI CROSS DAVIS
- 19 Aroma de una Reminiscencia, MELISSA DIAZ
- 21 Faced, BRIANA SMITH
- 22 The Hero, RACHEL DILIMA
- 23 Embodied Soul, TSAITAMI DUCHICELA
- 24 La Mente, ALEX GUERRERO
- 26 Canada Geese Crossing the Road, JOE YANEZ

- 27 A Lone Sparrow—Passero—in Firenze, MERRILL
LEFFLER
- 29 Another Story, MERRILL LEFFLER
- 30 Marine Science Poem, MERRILL LEFFLER
- 32 Homage to Walden, MERRILL LEFFLER
- 33 Orange Trees, MAGGIE KUO
- 34 Olga and Ezra, SAUNDRA ROSE MALEY
- 35 Looking out, Looking in, SAUNDRA ROSE MALEY
- 37 Discovering Blood, MARK MCINTOSH
- 38 Will She Rise Again? KIRSTY LITTLE
- 39 Mountain Lady, Tell it True, MARY ANN
NYAMWEYA
- 40 Eloí, NATALIA SCHOCH
- 44 To Dream, AMBER SMITHERS
- 45 Mama, CHARLES HOPE
- 46 General Electric, GALENE ELIZABETH WONG
- 47 Abstract Dragon, NATALY BERMEJO
- 50 No Longer Relevant, DANIEL BEELS

- 52 Colors in Abstract, SUNNI MORGAN
- 57 Cat and Bird, AMANDA REARDON
- 63 Armstrong, CURTIS R. BERRY
- 64 The Nymph Who Drank Wine, MAYA REID
- 68 Water Lily, SHARON WILLIG
- 74 Blonde Boy, ANNA GALLEANO

Poetry

Petal Storm

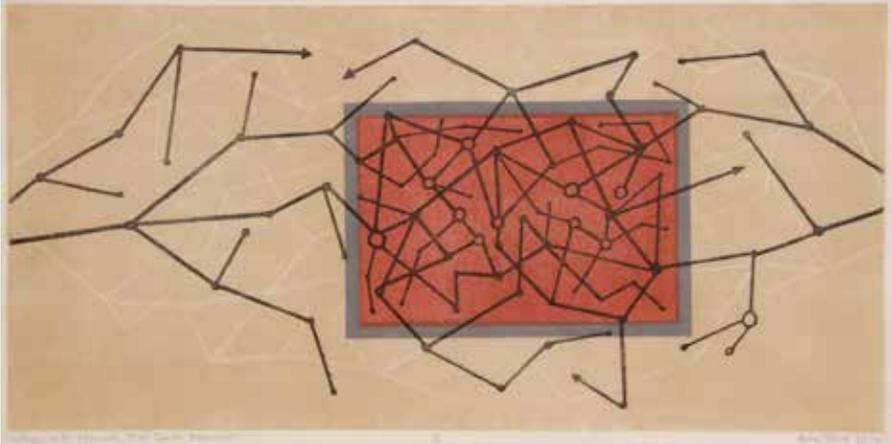
Livia Abramoff

Honorable Mention, 2014 Ventura Valdez English Poetry Award

Flake fluttered wood-nymphs,
Dropped like pink confetti
The ice was shattered glass,
The wind asked, are you ready?
It all turned to blossoms,
It all turned to cherries
A perfect storm to strike the streets,
A ruffled nature's feathers

Talking With Deborah (The Space Between)

Holly Trout



What do i know?

Claudia Cassoma

somebody told me it was 40
first for the flag
and then
for that stupid tag
 (?) but somebody else told him
so, what do I really know?
i don't hear it in the songs,
they smile with their souls,
they dance with their bones,
they even make plans
what do i know then?
of the blood spilled
the shed tears
what about the children
were they able
or they lost their April
what do i know?
was it just the empty schools
or something more than the arms forced in their hands
he told me they fought
 (?) but somebody else told him
so, what do i know now?
Neto wrote
others sang in silence,
but is that enough
for me, for others,
will we understand
the anger hidden in their bright open eyes,
their long smile,
will we see
their ever heavy hands,
when we see the valleys
will we see their bloody tears
or we'll be like slugs,
but until then

what do i know?
if the books are dumb
if they don't hold stamps.
my grandparents?
oh! they say they did overcome,
although they hate the outside
"[they] have it aside."
i do doubt it.
but how would i know?
if my parents don't dare ask them
they're afraid as well
they too fear the past
how'd the future be if they knew.
i do think they have more to say
but, since one of them is still awake
silence is what keeps them safe.
So, i guess i'll never know then
why are the buildings destroyed
why are those children still scared,
and not just in Huambo.
why can't we camp
why can't they read,
i'll never know
what really happened.
no,
not from these flat and empty lines
not from the mouth of somebody else.
how?
if they don't even know what it means,
and i'm not taking skin

How would i know?
how was their summer with snow.

Distante

Christian Chavez

Honorable Mention, 2014 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Award

Tu sublime belleza mi ternura inspira
Eres mi razón de vivir y el aire que respiro
Origen de todas mis tristezas y alegrías
Te miro y sonrío sin ningún motivo

Se estremece el alma al recordarte ausente
Te busco cada día en el perfume de las flores
Más llega la noche y sé que no volveré a verte
Te has marchado en busca de nuevos amores

He naufragado en un mar de lamentos
Ingenuo y delirante aún te sueño mía
Me privas de tu amor y de tus besos esquivos
Sabiendo que sin ellos moriría...

At 5 weeks

Teri Cross Davis

Like a splinter the bleeding didn't last long.
A day, two, at the most when the pain pricked
then pricked again, business-like, curt. A miscarriage

leaves no genetic calling card like a live birth.
No grooves where the pelvic bone popped apart.
No finger-painting the genes to say someone was here.

Memory sharpens the pain, splintering its lightning
through the body. The body, its grieving heart, its hunger,
its questioning: can we, too, not have joy last past a season?

There was no warning this muscular embrace would break.
No warning the bough would fall, the blood would flee
in mutiny, spreading down the thighs, forsaking. I have found

if I turn my head this way and see that perfect tendril of February
sun, the memory of pain comes back. If I listen to the singer's tenor,
breaking sorrow's back, the straining violin too full of beauty

to sustain, I return to the moment when I was but brief the vessel.
And I am the vessel again slowly emptying myself of you.

Pink & Blues

Julie Deibel



Redemption

Teri Cross Davis

“And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor.”

—King James Version, Ruth 3.14

The threshing floor is cold, flat
against my womb. My perfumed
hair entangles his feet. I give
myself to a stranger.

How soft can the hands be
that sift grain all day?

But how warm the heart
to offer advice, vinegar
mixed with sweet wine,
leavened bread
and tell me, “eat,”
until I am full.

One Night Stand

Teri Cross Davis

If this is desire, let consumption's
Pace leave the body spiritless
Let the next morning's tears be expectoration;

Ejecting the ether of guilt, an
Absolution of action, flesh indignant
Of limits imaginary, arbitrary, hear the robin's

glory sear the day, resolute
the deed is done, lust was your donation.

Aroma de una Reminiscencia

Melissa Diaz

Esta noche se acerca a mí la silueta de tus despedidas. Tengo confesiones guardadas para ti en una gaveta de la memoria. Hoy renace el valor de escribirlas, plasmarlas en esta epístola, dibujarlas con la intermitencia de tu sombra, presencias, ternura y orgullo. Debo admitir que tu melancolía se esparce sobre la música de unos versos que siempre se concluyen y renuevan. Arrastras cadenas pesadas de tiempo que vacilan ante la reconciliación. Te sumerges como un pez en un mar de distancia. Mientras tanto, tejo con los segundos alguna elegía. Bordo los contornos de tus promesas con una oración amparada por la fe. Destejo los acuerdos sobre el futuro, es tan incierto, pero tú lo sospechas. Soy ignara de tus senderos, sin embargo, los invento con algún pincel metafórico que llega hasta mí sin vacilar, sin prisa, con movimientos tenues conducidos por alguna fuerza infinita. Estoy allí, encuéntrame en el aliento de los árboles, en la mirada de la orfandad, en las piruetas de las mariposas, en el sonido de tus pasos. Verás también, que estoy sentada sobre los segundos perdidos frente a un lienzo colorido de ambigüedades. Tu recuerdo me rescata de esos laberintos alfombrados de atonía. Quiero escapar de esos epígonos que rondan este extraño mundo. La renuncia a las reticencias ya está firmada. La esfera humana se suaviza con tu presencia, se perfuma, se irradia de espiritualidad profunda. Multiplicas la esencia de la vida, encendiendo las constelaciones desconocidas de mi universo, un territorio que no vislumbra, que no sospechas, pero que tal vez te alcanza: la poesía. Desintegras cada óbice en mis batallas contra el desaliento. Eres como mi áncora, espada y escudo. Fenecen las desgracias. Resucitan los imperativos por la vida. Corren las ilusiones sobre un cielo de papel, son cenizas en tu mundo, arcoíris en el mío. Te agradezco en el transcurso de todos los tiempos que bordean mi existencia. Te digo gracias desde lo más profundo de mi corazón. Te confieso que el eco de tu paz me alcanza. Cruza las fronteras, detrás de ella, tus despedidas. Gélidas noches, las quimeras lloran y yo las acompaño en su duelo. Regresas y se despeja la mirada. Mis confesiones están aquí, las observas en un punto y espacio imprevisto. Hay días donde la acuidad del recuerdo despierta la cascada de mi llanto. Me rescata la escritura a través de las formas de la esencia. Me elevas y sujetas sobre las líneas puras de las asonancias y consonancias. Solo unos segundos de melancolía abren las puertas de las habitaciones que expanden tu sombra. Me refugio allí, en una cueva de papel, cuyas líneas te representan. Escribo lo que tu presencia me muestra. Un abrazo a la pureza de los dones que condu-

cen dignos ideales. Tú estás allí. La piel del cielo absorbe las agonías y exuda sosiego. Luego, llueve calma, sobre las veredas de nuestra distancia. Gravita la iridiscencia de mi lealtad sobre estos renglones. Las ignoras por completo. No sé si lleguen hasta tus córneas. Tu nombre se ondula, en el pabellón de mis alegrías. Ya lo has descifrado. Hay transparencia y también ceguera. Continúa la búsqueda. También me encontrarás en versos y prosa o en alguna historia bizarra de idilios vivos y muertos. Eres una sucesión de puntos infinitos en el camino del olvido. Ya estoy cansada de recorrer esas veredas. Me doy por vendida. Escribo, no para acortar distancias, sino para reemplazar la agonía de esta fuerza que me lleva hasta ti en una ola de mi nombre. Cada noche ha sido una aliteración de reminiscencias robustas. No consigo el reloj que marca el olvido, solo saetas señalándote.

Faced
Briana Smith



The Hero

Rachel DiLima

Winner, 2014 Ventura Valdez English Poetry Award

With her copper pot helmet
and her wooden spoon sword,
she piloted a swing upward
to the moons of Mars.
There she scooped stardust
in between slices of toast
and dined on galactic memories,
leaving only the crust.
On her way to Earth
she played hopscotch with the Sun
leaving her burned but undeterred,
her crooked smile showed she'd won.
And as she searched for gnomes
to demand they grant her wishes,
I knew her heart just forming
for it was green and bold and fearless.
So whilst gazing at the little knight
as she combed through the grass
I whispered to my captured gnome,
Don't let her heart grow old,
let her be a Hero to the last.

Embodied Soul

Tsaitami Duchicela

We ourselves are germs
Though my luck had to be hers
I am a woman of my words
Sometimes like a cat in front of a mirror
But what is down there, under
My eyelids, wrestles.
And it learns what is the real
Fantasy of the world.
Love made untouchable outside a
Warm shell of crystal salt spread
Like the ocean. Valleys of the body.
The placing of the skin is
Via one love.
Now the wondrous tears
And sweat dripping baby hairs
On my face are reaching for the
Air to breeze underneath them
And in the moment
Fate unites me.
All of my tips hang loosely
Unthinking and let to slip
My body is numb before it lets
Go.
Like a fist unclenching
In realization
Of mortality.

La Mente

Alex Guerrero

Las profundidades del alma nunca se podrán interpretar, a los ojos de los hombres.

La obscuridad de los pensamientos es impenetrable, sólo a través de la luz de nuestras acciones son reconocibles, y éstas dan cuenta de nosotros.

Una noche, un día, son la distinción entre la eternidad de nuestros pensamientos. La luz del día sólo nos da un destello de la inmensurable medida de lo que somos capaces de lograr a diario, si nos lo proponemos.

El mundo gira a nuestro alrededor, algunas veces sin dejarnos chance de cambiar nuestros errores o fallas, y nos frustra con nuestros deseos de ser, y vivir sin ser limitados.

¿Qué hoy, qué mañana, nos podrá mostrar el curso? Sólo cuando realmente nos disponemos a lograr el cambio, es cuando verdaderamente entendemos lo difícil que es sobrepasar la mediocridad que nos rodea.

Medirnos con la fuerza de la naturaleza es nuestro consuelo, solo ella nos puede dar la medida y estatura de lo que percibimos o lo que pretendemos que somos. El oír el canto de las aves en sí mismo, nos deja complejos y sin pretensiones algunas, y la simplicidad de sus cantos nos dicen que ellas fueron creadas primero que nosotros; y sin embargo, ellas lucen tan frágiles que no podemos medirnos con ellas, a excepción de sus vuelos, y la altura que ellas alcanzan para desafiarnos y retornos en nuestra búsqueda y encuentro con nosotros mismos.

Aún mirar el vasto universo nos deja perplejos, nos desnuda en nuestra mente e ignorancia. Él nos dice que fuimos creados para Él, para alcanzarlo con nuestros sueños y actitudes, que se inclinan hacia el logro del bienestar de quienes nos rodean, y nos muestra con sus infinitas luces que todavía nos falta mucho camino por recorrer, en la vasta inmensidad de sus inalcanzables constelaciones y planetas. Aún el océano, nuestro vecino, nos reta en lo desconocido de sus profundidades. De Él sabemos mucho y a la misma vez no sabemos nada de él. Nos petrifica la idea de penetrarlo muchas veces, nos infunde

respeto, miedo, y confianza a la vez, por el equilibrio que él nos brinda. Nos provee y a la misma vez nos quita la vida cuando menos pensamos.

Oh la Luz!... esa luz que llena el infinito. Nos pudiera penetrar ella, y llenar nuestro entendimiento con la sabiduría que de ella solo emana. Fuente inagotable de todo lo creado, de todo lo perfecto, de todo de buen nombre y conocimiento; cuanto no daríamos por hallarla y conocerla; nuestras riquezas y posesiones se quedan sin valor delante de ella, y sin embargo siempre nos muestra que está a nuestro lado, acompañándonos en nuestro viaje, en nuestra travesía por la vida. Nuestro ego muchas veces no la deja entrar, la ignora, y la pasa inadvertida.

No la escuchamos, nuestros oídos están tan aturdidos de lo mundanal, de tantas voces en nuestra mente que no le damos chance y cabida para escuchar su música, su sonido único que no distorsiona con lo que a diario nos compromete y nos silencia en nuestro quehacer diario, y nos paraliza en nuestra voluntad de adquirir un cambio nuevo y revolucionario.

La mente, esa masa incógnita en nuestro cuerpo que deja a la ciencia muda y sin interpretación alguna de ella misma. La ramificación capaz en nuestro cuerpo de alcanzar lo infinito y desconocido de nuestro ser; a ella se atribuye mucho y nada a la vez; su poder es un misterio que solo la Luz que la creó y formo puede interpretarla y recrearla a ella misma, en un espacio de tiempo desconocido por el hombre mismo.

¿Quién puede conocer la mente del hombre?, Quién subirá a las Alturas para tener cuenta de ella y dármele a conocer, y así abrazarla en su encuentro y nunca dejarla ir en el vacío del miedo y lo desconocido, e invitarla a ser mi amiga eterna en su entendimiento y acuerdo con su creador.

Canada Geese Crossing the Road

Joe Yanez



A Lone Sparrow – Passero – in Firenze

Merrill Leffler

“If a sparrow come before my window, I take part in its existence.”
—Keats, Letter to Benjamin Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817

“O lonely sparrow, wandering, has gone . . . / Alas, how much my ways
Resemble yours!”
—Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), “The Lonely Sparrow”
“Il passero solitario”

Here at the window’s ledge
High over the Passagietta
a sparrow’s pecking for crumbs.
Ciao, passero, say I in poorly-accented Italian.
There you are on one side of the divide
and here am I on the other. (Addressing you I know
is a trope. So be it.) You are under the high blue –
gray actually (it is overcast today) – and I
in a pensione under a low ceiling.

I am pecking too.

It’s clear what you’re after – but me
after days trekking through the Duomo and
church after church, one gallery and fresco after another,
past the infant Jesuses in their mothers’ laps and the grown
Christs in cruciate pain on the cross.

And now you
and your caraway seed-spotted wings (Marianne Moore)
across from me. O! *Passer domesticus*
I think of how you’ve been maligned by poets
before me – “The meanest of the feathered race,”
wrote William Cowper, and Yeats pejoratively
of “the bawling of a sparrow in the eaves.”
Perhaps I’m here to celebrate you, passero
which I’d do in Italian if I had enough to do so.
Like Leopardi, I might compare your ordinariness
to mine, but your wings are at the ready
and I am lacking them.

But this is a poem after all,
and the poem can sing – può cantare – whatever it pleases.

Perhaps it simply wants to free itself

from the divide and become a passero,
to rise above this ledge and out over the Duomo di Firenze,
the Uffizi, the frescoes, the Marys and baby Jesuses, the crucifixions
to head for the Ponte Vecchio and tipping our wings farewell,
singing – canto – I follow the river, il fiume Arno
flowing west west west, past Empoli, past Cascina,
past all the small shadowy villages on its shores
until we reach Pisa, finally giving ourselves up to the sea. Ligurian.

Another Story

Merrill Leffler

Homage to John Cheever's *Collected Stories*

O city of broken dreams
The pot of gold. The enormous radio.
The golden age. The bus to St. James's.
The seaside houses. The bella lingua.
Goodbye my brother.

Just tell me who it was
The country husband? The duchess?
The Hartleys? The summer farmer?
The superintendent? The music teacher?

Christmas is a sad season for the poor.
The worm in the apple.
The sorrows of gin. The season of divorce.
The death of Justina.
The trouble with Marie Flint.
A woman without a country.

O youth and beauty.
Just one more time.

The world of apples.
Metamorphoses.
A vision of the world
The geometry of love.
The angel of the bridge.

Marine Science Poem

Merrill Leffler

Marine biologists failing to clean their submersible
accidentally introduced Californian molluscs
to the deep seas off Washington, and possibly
introduced copepods who prey on mollusc gonads.
“It’s really embarrassing,” said a team member.
“But it didn’t seem like a clear and present danger.”
Whoops!

*

Researchers turned a snail into a 7-milliwatt battery
that can be recharged by feeding the snail
or by allowing it thirty minutes’ rest.
Excited!

*

Fathead minnows
exposed to low levels of SSRI antidepressants
become somewhat autistic.
Depressing!

*

Dolphins downwind of power plants are more mercurial.
Those of Cardigan Bay had learned to anticipate
discharges of whelk waste from the seafood industry.
Salute them!

*

Young scallops were unusually numerous in the Mid-Atlantic.
What goes?

*

Brittle stars locomote bilaterally. Hundreds of starving
crown-of-thorns starfish killed themselves in Japan.
Nunc ergo surge et comede!

*

The Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary concluded that a koi theft in the village of Heck had been committed by an otter, and archaeologists announced the discovery of Scotland's first cursing stone.

What the heck!

*

Nine turtle couples were found to have been fossilized 57 million years ago while having sex.

Swingers!

*

A dolphin in the Ionian Sea freed its genitals from an octopus.
Bravo!

Homage to *Walden*

Merrill Leffler

1.

Pine groves standing like temples
Or like fleets at sea, fully-rigged
With wavy boughs and rippling with light
So soft and shady that the Druids
Would have forsaken their oaks
To worship in them

The cedar wood

The trees covered with hoar blue berries
Spring higher and higher. And the white spruce
And the swamp-pink and the dogwood
The black birch and its cousin the yellow birch
The beech. The bass. The hornbeam.
The *Celtis occidentalis*, or false elm.
A hemlock standing like a pagoda
In the midst of the woods.

2.

In the midst of the woods
A hemlock standing like a pagoda
The *Celtis occidentalis*, or false elm.
The beech. The bass. The hornbeam.
The black birch and its cousin the yellow birch
And the swamp-pink and the dogwood
Spring higher and higher. And the white spruce
The trees covered with hoar blue berries.
The cedar wood

To worship in them

Would have forsaken their oaks
So soft and shady that the Druids
With wavy boughs and rippling with light
Or like fleets at sea, fully-rigged
Pine groves standing like temples.

Orange Trees

Maggie Kuo



Olga and Ezra

Saundra Rose Maley

Write about Pound,

said Olga Rudge, *not me.*

She had given her all to the violin, Vivaldi
and Ezra Loomis.

Circe to Pound's Ulysses,
she had been pulled into the vortex
of the poet's mind
as she wanted it to be.

She worked her magic, too, and shot her threads
into the center of his being.

With Olga he would murmur
lines from Li Po
into their pillow,

And gaze into her periwinkle eyes.

Looking Out, Looking In

Saundra Rose Maley

light falls through high branches
onto the blue door

in this portrait

that changes with each hour
and closes in

birds build nests
in the crossbeams and rafters

a small blue box keeps blackberries
and apples warm

first study
of this spare season

winnowing
winnowing

how is this art

green eyes peer
above the window ledge

at the edge of memory, wisteria

all opposites appear
in the big room, turning
in the north light

study the room
study the mirror
study the room in the mirror

a cold spell predicted,
the old quilt becomes a comfort

snowed in
on groundhog day

how is this art

Discovering Blood

Mark McIntosh

Never really knew you
But didn't have
To feel you
But still wanting to
Have known you
Tears flood your grave site
From small tears to
Large tears
Memories run through
Their minds
Don't know why
But mine too
Family is important
The message
Without your loss
I would have never
Gained the knowledge
Of the blood around me
So I will not be sad
Forever
But also rejoicing in what
You have
Given unto me
You use art to express
Yourself
Never really knew
But didn't have to
To feel you

Will She Rise Again?

Kirsty Little



Mountain Lady, Tell it True

Mary Ann Nyamweya

for Ventura Valdez

I think that I see Ventura
Up past a misty ring of clouds
Atop a mountain, simply standing
Earthen green-hued robes aflutter

I wonder 'bout her storytelling
Is that her voice I hear?
It seems to tell of child-bearing
For men, for women, for all

The stories are like children,
There are no falsehoods here!
Weaving together, and linking arms
They run with joy abandoned

I imagine resting on thick green grass
Closing eyes to find Ventura
I feel her now, and the weight of her tales
Becomes so light and free

And so I say, Ventura,
Tell me your stories, do,
And I will tell you mine as well
Our souls will mingle, truth will swell
Along this open ocean . . . of poems

Eloí

Natalia Schoch

Winner of the 2014 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Award

Su presencia inunda mi cuerpo,
acelera latidos salados,
y frena amargos pensamientos.

En cada átomo de carbono
graba su esencia líquida.
¿Al azar del infinito?
No creo en tales cosas,
¡que me arroje una mentira!

Hacia él fluyen mis lágrimas,
hacia el eterno retorno.
En su pecho brota una fuente,
tapizada de algas
verdes, pardas, cencidas.

Con precisión integrada,
cada célula de su piel
sugiere una madera noble,
de árticos boreales.

Sumido en el insomnio
recorre rojas mis arterias,
de plutonio-238
y tungsteno radioactivo.

Sus pulmones exhalan vida,
vientos de bonanza
y estíos al sol navegables.
Me estremezco,
mi mente a comprender no alcanza.

Lo marca suavemente,
el tempo, con su mano desnuda
sobre las pecas de mi espalda.

Añoro momentos de tangos y
rítmicos trémolos de la Pampa.

Calla esta vez y escucha,
sólo su vieja guitarra,
de cuerdas magistrales,
desbordando entera mi alma.

Así es, de inocentes sinfonías,
y piruletas infantiles.

Eloi

Natalia Schoch

Winner of the 2014 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Award (in translation)

His presence floods my body,
speeds up salty beats
slows down bitter thoughts.

He carves his liquid essence
in every single carbon atom.
Is that infinitely random?
I do not believe such things.
He'd better hurl a lie!

My tears flow towards Him,
towards the eternal return.
A fountain springs from his chest,
upholstered with green, dun, untrodden moss.

With integrated accuracy,
each cell of his
suggests a noble wood
from the boreal Arctic.

Immersed in his insomnia
He goes all over my veins,
made of plutonium-238
and radioactive tungsten.

His lungs exhale life,
prosperous winds
and navigable sunny summers.
I shiver,
my mind could never understand.

With his nude hand
He softly marks the time
on the freckles of my back.
I miss those moments of Tango,

rhythmical tremolo from the Pampas.

Hush this time and listen,
only his worn out guitar,
made of masterful strings
overflowing my whole soul.

That's it, naïve symphonies
and childlike lollipops.

To Dream

Amber Smithers

I once dreamed of love.
its gentle voice,
its sweetness.
All mine to have,
love was mine for the taking.
But I took love for granted.
Now I have no love.
My foolish folly was
believing that love was easy.
Love is kind but something larger than just mine.

Mama
Charles Hope



General Electric

Galene Elizabeth Wong

My soul retreats to the refrigerator light
To quench my thirst for a stagnant sun
When I lay awake all through the night
I wrestle the anxiety of my daily fight
To confront my fears, yet I always run
My soul retreats to the refrigerator light
My body shivers and my hands turn white
And in the silence I cradle a gun
When I lay awake all through the night
I hold myself back with all my might
But I need hope, and I have none
My soul retreats to the refrigerator light
I clench the handle and brace for the bright
Yellow to break this ghastly black stun
When I lay awake all through the night
Behind the steel door is a pitiful sight
The monsters I battle have already won
My soul retreats to the refrigerator light
When I lay awake all through the night

Abstract Dragon

Nataly Bermejo



Fiction

No Longer Relevant

Daniel Beels

The best pitcher ever was a barman in Iowa City. He played a bit for the University of Iowa before dropping out to take care of his dementia-addled grandmother. No one took notice of his talent. Women didn't preen for his attention and scouts didn't knock at his door for his signature on any dotted lines. He spent his adult life serving drinks to drunks and bussing tables. The bar stayed closed on Mondays, so he'd grab a bucket filled with raggedy old baseballs and head to the forgotten diamond in a corner of the forgotten park a block from his house and pitch to the paint-chipped backstop and the cheers of a crowd full of weeds. He died a barman in Iowa City of cirrhosis at 67.

The best pianist to ever tickle the ivories was a secretary in Chicago. She trained for a while at a conservatory before stopping because her mother told her she'd never find a husband if she didn't get a job in the city. A man never found her and she spent her adult life tapping away at a typewriter and taking messages. On weekends she'd pop open a bottle of red and play symphonies to an audience of two hairless cats and the deaf geriatric who lived above her. She died a secretary in Chicago of a stroke at 72.

John Duffy wasn't a pitcher or a pianist. He wasn't fantastic or interesting. He was a bureaucrat with a big rubber stamp.

His office was on the 42nd floor of the monolithic block of brutalist concrete that enclosed the Department of Standards and Reviews. Like a molar attached to a great subterranean beast, the building jutted mercilessly high into the sky from the puncture wound at its base. It dwarfed all the surrounding buildings and cast a shadow for miles. Looking from the top of the structure, the shadow disappeared into a point of darkness well beyond the edge of the city at the horizon of the flat, farm-flecked landscape beyond, circling over the course of a day like the hour hand of a giant clock.

A red bulb blinked from atop his cream colored plastic desktop monitor indicating his overseer was demanding his presence. He sighed and slumped backwards a few inches on the medicine ball that served as his chair. It made his bowels ache and caused him to sweat and smell like an onion, but his doctor had insisted. He got up and walked towards his overseer's gray

office at the edge of the gray maze of chest-high cubicles, imagining the cushy embrace of faux-leather against his buttocks as he passed coworker after coworker sitting in their comfortable black chairs.

He stopped for a moment before entering the office and adjusted his tie. His clothes were of poor quality and a size too large all-around, but his tie always sat perfectly centered at his collar. He stepped into the office and was greeted by the bulging form of his overseer.

“You blinked, sir?” His voice was deep but timid.

“Yeah,” his overseer barked through his rounded baby face, “upstairs sent one of your reviews back.”

“They did? What was wrong with it?”

“One of the initials is missing on page four,” he said without shifting his gaze from his computer screen.

“That never happens.”

“Well, it did, John, so fix it.”

“Will do, boss.”

John was shaking as he left the office and returned to his cube. He checked the name at the heading of the form. It read “Larry Thutte.”

On Fridays after work, John occupied a stool in the bar at the ground level of his building. His apartment was three floors above. The bar wasn't a dive, a sports bar, or a pub. It was an amalgamation of all of the most prominent elements of the three, failing to meet the expectations of each with an air of prideful defiance. It had the tiled ceiling of a dive and the grizzled old drunk who told uncomfortable stories. It served soggy wings with expired bleu cheese dressing and played football or baseball from a flat screen above the bar. The most popular drinks were Powers whiskey poured from a bottle of Jameson, and Guinness, although the old drunk only ever ordered High Life.

He flipped through the pages of Larry Thutte's review until he got to page four, where the offense had been outlined in bold red ink. The mark was shaped like a scythe and in the dim lighting of the bar it looked like blood. John tapped away at his glass. Distracted, he held it up to his face and squinted. He looked for a reflection, but it was swallowed by the blackness of the pint. He continued to squint, searching for something within the pitch. His eyes grew tired and he drank from the glass, draining it. He held up the empty glass with a finger raised along its rim and the bartender took it and refilled it.

Reviews were everything. Once a month every month, the adult members of each household would fill out a review of their own performance and another review covering the performance of the other adults in the household

Colors in Abstract
Sunni Morgan



and submit it to the Department of Standards and Reviews. The reviews asked a series of questions and were answered by checking yes or no, or always, sometimes, or never. Some questions were mundane, others were serious. There were questions covering vegetable consumption, criminal activity, and everything in between.

Following the review of the reviews, notes written by the reviewing staff of the Department would be doled out. Notes ranged from congratulatory to stern, sometimes both. New parents were wished well. Irresponsibility and gluttony were met with harsh, matter-of-fact words. People who had committed crimes were taken away late at night, never to be heard from or spoken of again, except for in hushed whispers behind locked doors and shuttered windows. The only people exempt from review were the processors like John, the Enforcers, and the reviewers themselves.

John couldn't understand how Mr. Thutte could have forgotten to initial. It was unheard of. There was only one thing to do. He'd go to Mr. Thutte's residence on Monday and get him to sign it. He prepared a sternly worded note about civic responsibility and circled the address on a fold-out map.

Thutte's house was dilapidated. It was a craftsmen style building in one of the more rundown neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. Police didn't venture this far from the city's center often; otherwise they would have taken notice of the overgrown state of his yard and written him a note. The house hadn't seen a fresh coat of paint in years and had worn to a faded brown. It appeared to lean to one side like a dog with a lame leg. Kudzu grew from the eaves, winding its way in and out of the gutters. A great oak shaded the property with its sweeping branches and leaned defensively towards the house.

Trepidatious, John walked over the weed-strewn path to the door and knocked. No one answered after a spell, so he knocked again, louder. He was trying to catch a glimpse through the picture window to his left when the door opened a crack with a loud, prolonged creak.

"What do you want?"

The thin, chalkboard voice came from between a pair of chapped lips pressed like tinned anchovies to the crack in the doorway. No light crept out from within, only the dark outlines of a wrinkled face, a big hazel eye, and the pair of dry, flaky lips.

"I've come from the Department, Mr. Thutte," he quavered. "You forgot to initial on page four."

John reached towards the crack with the sternly worded note he'd penned, holding it as far out as possible from himself. A jaundiced, liver-spot-

ted hand darted out and snatched it from his grasp. After a pause, he heard a low chuckle followed by the release of the door chain. The door swung open presenting a tall, gangly man- Larry Thutte. His hair was long and brown, punctuated by frequent strands of white; and he had a full beard. The skin left exposed from his worn clothes was wrinkled like tissue paper and dotted with liver-spots.

“Come in. I’ll put a kettle on.”

“I really shouldn’t linger.” John stepped inside nervously. “I just need your initials and then I can be on my way.”

“Nonsense, stay for tea, or coffee. The choice is yours.”

“Tea, if it isn’t too much trouble.” They reached the kitchen and John flicked his head around, observing the dingy, claustrophobic surroundings. “Earl Gray if you have it.”

“I don’t. Is Darjeeling fine?”

“Yes, with milk and one sugar, please.”

Mr. Thutte shuffled around the kitchen preparing the tea, while John stepped into the living room and took a seat on the cloth, olive-colored sofa in the center of the room. The room was dark, with the oak out front blocking most of the light and the curtains deflecting errant rays. The room was cluttered with knick-knacks and columns of newspapers stacked and tied into bundles. A musty smell of stale cigarette smoke and mothballs permeated the air. Creeping yellow nicotine stains patterned the walls.

Scraps of paper laid scattered about the coffee table and John leaned forward to read one of them. It read:

*I learned to fly with Icarus’s hand-me-down wings,
Tried to touch the sun with wings melted down to a skeleton frame and waxy black pith,
Fell down and tumbled into churning slate waters,
Sank like a stone and touched sea grass at the bottom,
It grasped and pulled and wouldn’t let go – pulled me down and hugged close,
I kicked and thrashed and broke free,*

*Swam with heavy body towards the surface through viscous water,
Too heavy – I fell and the sea grass embraced me,
Now I am one tendril amongst many,
I wave when they wave and pull when they pull,
Undulation is my expectation*

Mr. Thutte set John’s tea down on a saucer by the paper he was reading and sat in the armchair opposite him. He waited patiently for John to finish, sipping his tea and watching his guest. “What do you think?”

John stirred his tea, mulling over a response. “It was interesting.”

“Just something I wrote for myself, you know,” Mr. Thutte said off-hand.

“Do you write often?”

Mr. Thutte seemed taken aback by the question, as if John had coiled like a snake and struck him. “Yes, it’s my job. It says so in my review. I try to write little things like that for myself, though.”

“What kinds of things do you write?”

“Anything, really,” he set his cup down and shuffled through a stack of old magazines. “If it pays, I’ll do it.”

“Anything I might have read?”

“Do you read *Hustler*?”

John started a little in his seat. “No. I mean, I used to when I was a kid. All the kids did.”

“You might’ve read some of my stuff. I had a poetry column a long time ago called *The Dirty Scotsman*.” He opened a magazine he’d grabbed from a pile and handed it to John. “Here.”

John read the poem Mr. Thutte had pointed out. A rudimentary sketch of a woman spread-eagled and parting her labia stood directly beside it:

*Yer ryal dairy air,
Stickin’ oot sae verra bare,
Blows shite throu-oot ma lair,
An divna ye e’en care*

*Ay, but the milk frae yer nips,
Tastes sae sweet on ma lips,
Makes ma savor the sips,
Frae yer damn sappie hips*

“I remember these. My friends used to laugh at them all the time.”

“Well,” said Mr. Thutte with a flicker of disdain, “you would have been the target audience.”

“Yeah, these were great.” John was excited. “What happened between this and that other poem?”

“Business versus pleasure, I suppose.” He sipped his tea. “I chose pleasure.”

“Ah,” John sighed. “That explains the lackadaisical approach to your signature.”

“What do you mean?”

“These reviews are your civic duty, Mr. Thutte.” He paused to mull over his next thought. “You’ve shirked your duty just like your job as the *Dirty Scotsman*.”

“How dare you!” Mr. Thutte huffed.

“I mean no offense,” John continued, “but a man who chooses pleasure over his responsibilities is no man at all, is he? I can’t think of anything more selfish.”

Mr. Thutte looked stricken. He began to shake. Sweat beaded at his brow. A vein pulsed visibly on his forehead and he stuttered. “Get out.”

John’s smile turned to a bewildered frown. “Did I say something?”

“Yes, now leave.” Mr. Thutte jumped from his chair and pointed at the door.

“I need you to sign your review before I leave, Mr. Thutte.” John fumbled with a stack of papers in his briefcase and set a pen on the coffee table.

“I will do no such thing. You will leave, immediately.”

At the door, John turned and said, “I will just come back with an Enforcer.” He paused for emphasis. “Do you know what will happen then?”

“I know exactly what will happen and I don’t care,” he said with resignation. “Leave.”

From the porch beyond the slammed door, John shouted, “this won’t do, Mr. Thutte!”

Once John’s car was out of sight, Mr. Thutte collapsed into the armchair and took a deep breath of his home’s stale air. He sat for several moments, appearing to sink into his chair, and then jumped from it and began to race around the house, gathering a score of boxes and loading paper after paper into them. He loaded the boxes into his car, grabbed a pack of Marlboros, and drove off towards the countryside past the edge of the city.

There was a lake ten miles away. Mr. Thutte would often go there in search of inspiration or when he needed to clear his head. The lake had deteriorated over the years. In Mr. Thutte’s childhood, it had been a deep blue and a thick pine forest had surrounded it. The fish were plump and plentiful. The water had muddied in the decades since. Trash dotted the shore and many of the trees had been cleared for a townhouse development which had never been completed and now stood abandoned. Fish were a rare find, and what he did catch would often be small and sickly.

He had a dinghy moored at the pier the developers had built before abandoning the project. His was the only boat there. Mr. Thutte parked in the garage of the townhouse closest to the pier and began to load the boxes from his car into a wheelbarrow the construction crew had left behind. There was a thin, grassy peninsula shaped roughly like a boot adjacent to the pier which stretched for fifty yards or so into the lake. He hauled the boxes to the heel and dumped them. There wasn’t a path along the peninsula, so the going was

Cat and Bird

Amanda Reardon



rough, but after three trips back to his car there was a neat pyramid consisting of ten boxes. He arranged small bundles of lighter fluid soaked dead grass in the spaces between the boxes.

The boxes contained his writing, everything he'd ever written over the decades, whether for pleasure or business. They contained his passions, his dreams, and his reality. They took the form of sonnets, ballads, stories, several completed manuscripts, and silly Scottish obscenities.

Mr. Thutte took a cigarette from the pack of Marlboros and lit it with his beat-up old zippo, lingering reverentially at the click of the lighter. His eyes were closed as he inhaled deep and held the smoke in his lungs for a few seconds, and exhaled with a gentle push through his nostrils. He opened his eyes and watched the orange glow of the setting sun flicker behind a wispy layer of clouds. He took another drag from the cigarette and tossed it onto one of the bundles of grass within the pyramid. It caught, and the flame flickered around the base, catching the other bundles on fire. The fire climbed the boxes, twisting around and around until all the boxes were completely ablaze. Cardboard peeled and blackened; the papers within caught and began to crumple into ash.

Mr. Thutte stood close to the fire and watched, staring into its heart at the dancing remains of his work. The boxes and the papers were dry, so they burned fast and hot. Soon, the fire died down into a smoldering pile of ash and he retreated from the peninsula to the pier and his dinghy. He climbed in and untied it from its post. The boat rocked on a bit of chop and inched towards the pier. Mr. Thutte steadied it with the paddles and began to push the boat out towards the center of the lake.

He stopped paddling a few yards from the center and rested while the boat drifted the last stretch. The chain attached to the cinderblock anchor hooked to a loop extruded from the aluminum hull. Mr. Thutte unhooked it and tied the end of the chain around his legs, looping it several times around until he could no longer move his feet and then tied it off and padlocked it firm. He tossed the key as far as he could, picked up the cinderblock, and tumbled sideways into the water, sinking like a stone and disappearing into the muddy-brown soup.

Larry Thutte was a writer. He never had any formal education beyond secondary school, instead choosing to travel. He was never particularly charismatic and was always a bit of a loner, but he wrote well. He saw small professional success as a columnist for Hustler, but that was the peak of his career and it dwindled into nothing with time. In between paid jobs, he wrote for himself; some of it was good, a larger portion was mediocre or bad, but a few pieces were excellent. He died a writer of smut of suicide at 56.

The Enforcers were brutish creatures, barely human, pumped full of amphetamines and growth hormones. All of them were lobotomized, hulking, seven-foot-tall masses of obedient, rippling muscle trained like dogs to chase and pulverize. They wore wire muzzles which half-concealed their ruined, gnashing, spittle-flinging teeth. Powerful shock-collars were fixed around their necks.

John paced back and forth in front of the cage containing the Enforcers, muttering under his breath. The Reviewer General was making him wait. As punishment, he supposed. No one had ever refused to sign before. Mistakes were sometimes made while filling out the reviews, but they were rectified quickly and without complaint.

The door of the chamber opened and John's overseer walked through, followed by the Reviewer General. They advanced at a brisk pace towards the center of the room where John stood. He was stony-still and had taken on a sickly pallor at the sight of the Reviewer General, who was a tall, well-appointed man. His tailored charcoal suit, slicked-back hair, and riding crop gave him the appearance of a praying mantis stalking its next meal. He stopped in front of John and addressed him directly.

"So, this Larry Thutte won't sign his name? Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"He refuses outright?"

"Yes."

"Fascinating," the Reviewer General shook his head, bewildered.

"Well, there's only one thing to be done."

John knew, but he asked anyway. "What must be done, sir?"

"We must force him to sign." He smiled. "Don't look so glib, Duffy. This will be over with soon enough."

They advanced towards the large black personnel carrier and boarded. John signaled for the Enforcers to be loaded on and drove off once they were secured.

The ride from the Department building to the outskirts of the city was long. Loud grunts could be heard coming from the cabin of the carrier, as well as occasional clangs indicating the enforcers were jostling each other or head-butting the walls of their compartment. The Reviewer General made casual conversation over the racket, stopping every now and then to press the shock button on the remote controller for the collars. The Enforcers would quiet for a while, too occupied huddling over in agony from the shock to make any noise. They reached the dilapidated house on the edge of town and exited the vehicle. John's overseer released the Enforcers while the Reviewer General

doled out idle smacks to their thighs with his riding crop to organize them into a line.

John and the Reviewer General took two Enforcers with them to the front door while the overseer and the last Enforcer circled around to cover the back door in case Mr. Thutte decided to bolt. Expecting blood, the Enforcers grew excited and began to pant. They slouched down further and their arms hung past their knees, apelike.

John knocked and waited, but no one answered. He pounded at the door and yelled for Mr. Thutte to come out and surrender. Tired of waiting, the Reviewer General gestured at the Enforcers and then at the door and they began to jump against it and kick at it. The door exploded open and the Enforcers tore their way into the house, knocking over stacks of newspaper and clawing at the furniture. John and the Reviewer General followed, and the overseer stumbled through the kitchen with his Enforcer in tow. They searched for signs of life, anything that could tell them where Mr. Thutte was, but they found nothing. He was gone.

The Reviewer General had a wide, irritated smirk plastered across his face. "Get the drones," he said to the overseer.

The overseer hurried out to the car and returned carrying three small black spheres. He pressed a button on the top of each and they sputtered to life, flickering bright blue beams around the room and unfurling into vaguely bird-like forms. They flapped their mechanical wings and burst into the air and out of the house, breaking into three separate paths and scanning for Mr. Thutte.

Rain started falling a few minutes into the search. John, the overseer, and the Reviewer General stepped outside onto the porch to await the return of the drones. The Enforcers lurched out into the yard and lumbered around as the rain washed over them. The three talked amongst themselves about work and hobbies. John's and the overseer's nervous chatter was punctuated at intervals by raucous, genial laughter from the Reviewer General. Several minutes later the drones returned and chirped, indicating that they had not found anything. The Reviewer General's smile faded.

"This won't do. We need a body to put this to rest."

Anxious, John asked, "What can we do?"

"I'll tell you what you can do," said the Reviewer General.

"What?" John stared at the Reviewer General, rapt.

"You can die."

The Reviewer General snapped his fingers and the Enforcers lunged onto the porch, breaking through the railing and tackling John to the ground, holding him prone. He angled his face towards the tall, well-dressed man he'd been joking with earlier. Rain streamed over his mud-plastered face as he pleaded, "Why me?"

“You were just unlucky, I guess.” He shrugged. “A different day with a different set of circumstances and this could have been me.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” John’s words were garbled. The Enforcers were pushing his face into the ground and his mouth had filled with dirt.

“It’s not sinking in?” The Reviewer General looked over his shoulder at the overseer, who shrugged. “It’s a signature or a body. Mr. Thutte is nowhere to be found, so we’ll go with the next best thing.” He paused and took a drink from a flask in the chest pocket of his jacket. “We need a body and your records were scrubbed when you came to work for the Department, as per policy. You don’t exist.”

“They’ll know it’s not Thutte. I look nothing like him.” The Enforcers ground his face harder into the dirt, causing his front teeth to crack in half. He cried out.

The Reviewer General stepped down the rickety wooden pair of stairs and crouched over John. He reached down and grabbed the shards of John’s teeth. “It’s your soon-to-be nonexistent word against mine.” He enclosed the shards in his palm and shook them, allowing them to fall to the ground with the last flick of his wrist. “I’ll take my chances.”

He retreated back up the stairs to the covered porch, rubbing his hands together under the pouring rain as he went. He wiped his hands dry against his suit and turned away from the Enforcers and John below, nodding at the overseer. “See to it.”

The overseer snapped his fingers and the Enforcers pounced. Their limbs flew wildly as they pummeled John. He cried out, but to no avail. They pounded at him with their bricklike fists, punching and punching him until his cries gave way to a low gurgle as his mouth and windpipe gave in and blood began to pool by his head. He was dead, but his useless limbs twitched; and the Enforcers continued to tear at him like wolves until he was completely unrecognizable.

The Reviewer General sat at his desk in his office on a very high floor of the massive Department of Standards and Reviews building. Larry Thutte’s review was positioned squarely in front of him on the polished wood surface with a pen resting on top. He unscrewed the cap, placing it to the side of the stack of papers, and drew a big X in bold red ink across the top page. Underneath the X, he wrote, “Deceased, no longer relevant.” He screwed the cap back on the pen and placed the review into his outbox, buzzing for an assistant who came and whisked the review off his desk and out of his office.

The assistant carried the review and placed it into a box marked for

the recently deceased, at which point it was handed off to another assistant who took the box and hauled it down the long elevator ride to the basement level. Once in the basement, this assistant handed the box of the deceased to another assistant, who took the box to the incinerator and placed it on the conveyor belt leading to its fiery maw. The box of irrelevant reviews shuffled its way towards the mouth of the incinerator until it reached the threshold and tumbled inside. The reviews disappeared and the incinerator burped a puff of ash.

Armstrong
Curtis L. Berry



The Nymph Who Drank Wine

Maya Reid

A water nymph lived with her mother and sisters in a house by a lake. The youngest of seven, Hazel was forbidden from leaving the property until she came of age.

She busied herself with chores every day. She tended to the garden in the backyard and gave encouragement to the blossoming plants. She was the sole caretaker of the family pets, a trio of cats that followed her around even if her sisters were home. Her mother didn't find her a good listener and so they didn't talk much, but Hazel still liked to listen to her mother's tales of their Goddess Artemis every now and then.

When her sisters returned home for dinner, their mother reminded them: "It's nice to feel free, but you must remember to beware the Gods, the monsters, curses and maenads..." and Hazel would tune her out. She hated listening to her mother's spiels, especially when they weren't relevant to her.

Every night before going to sleep, Hazel and her sisters swam in the lake. The bright moonlight reflected on the water, and the nymphs felt ethereal as they swam through it. Hazel especially enjoyed the sisters' talking about their days without their mother having a chance to lecture anyone.

Hazel backstroked through the water as the other sisters chatted. The oldest was talking about her day working at the local library. She beamed and bragged as the other sisters moved in to listen, leaving only Hazel unimpressed. At 27, the oldest was the only sister the mother believed mature enough to work. The other sisters got their GED's and attended the same local college only 20 minutes away. They spoke of their classes and assignments and most troubling upcoming exams.

Hazel rolled her eyes. "I won't go to school," she said.

Her sisters gasped and one spoke. "What will you do then, Hazel? Stay at home with Mother forever?"

"No," Hazel said. "I'm just done with learning. I've heard enough from Mother and know everything there is to know, except for one thing."

"What's that?" her sister asked.

"What it's like to be free. To do whatever I want." Just saying the idea out loud made Hazel's toes curl. She didn't know what was behind the woods, but she couldn't wait to find out and explore the world even more than her oldest sister had.

"That's it?" a sister said, befuddled. "All you have to do is wait 'til

you're 18."

"Yeah, Mother lets you major in whatever you want."

Hazel groaned and splashed out of her position to face her sisters. "I don't want to major in anything. I want to roam. I want to be an explorer!" "That's dangerous, Hazel. A God could find you at any moment. You could be kidnapped and taken into the underworld."

"You could be turned into an ox or a spider."

"You could drink the wrong wine and be consumed by madness!"

Hazel scrunched her nose. None of that would happen to me, she thought. She questioned how often such moments even occurred.

"It's best to just listen to Mother. She knows what's safe. That's why she guides us."

"I thought that's what Artemis is for," Hazel said bitterly.

The sisters were quiet for a moment. "Well, of course," one finally said, "but Mother is just guiding us while Artemis is away."

Another nodded. "Mmhmm, we have to rely on Mother for the time being. For her protection."

"And knowledge," another sister said.

The sisters began to relax and smile again. "Mother is so smart. You need to listen to her, Hazel. She knows what you need."

Hazel turned away from her sisters and rolled her eyes. She dived down into the depths of the lake, not wanting to hear them anymore.

The next day was the eve of Hazel's 18th, a Saturday. Every Saturday was dedicated to Artemis. Hazel wondered if she would receive the same mid-night birthday celebration that her sisters had, but her mother didn't mention it, so instead her family proceeded with the usual rituals.

In the morning, she and the other younger sisters cooked breakfast for the family. Hazel ate with the cats lying around her jittering feet. She ate quickly, as if it would make time pass faster.

After breakfast, the older sisters went hunting. They returned carrying a wounded deer, which they took into the backyard and placed on the altar. The altar was cleaned regularly, but dried blood stains from previous sacrifices remained. The scenery was still kept beautiful out of respect for their Goddess. A flower bed surrounded the altar on all sides and the mother's garden surrounded the yard.

The nymphs held hands and chanted, and then the mother dragged a knife across the stag's throat. At night, the women entered a room dedicated to Artemis. A shrine stood at the head of the room. Atop the plinth was a statue of her, her bow and arrow poised and her face set in concentration. The

nymphs turned off the lights and lit candles about the shrine. They sat on the floor and prayed silently. Hazel asked her to visit.

When the Saturday rituals were over, the mother announced she was retiring to bed.

Hazel watched her mother's back as she ascended the stairs. "Mother?" she asked.

The mother turned around to face her, her eyelids heavy. "What is it, Hazel?"

"I'm eighteen tomorrow. Aren't you going to stay up for my midnight ceremony?"

Her mother rubbed her temple. "No. You don't want me there."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Because I'm not permitting you to leave."

Hazel gasped. "What do you mean? Why not?"

"You're too immature to be let go. When you understand the path you should take, I'll consider it." Her mother finished ascending the staircase and entered her room, closing the door behind her.

Hazel attempted to follow after her but a sister grabbed her wrist.

"You'll turn eighteen just the same, Hazel," she said. "You'll still get your celebration, you just can't..." She lowered her eyes and twiddled her thumbs.

"Just come with us," another sister said. "We'll have your ceremony."

Hazel followed after her sisters into the woods, strapped into her first pair of hunting boots.

"Your first hunting trip - isn't it so exciting, Hazel?"

"Imagine how much closer you'll be to Artemis when you're the one hunting for the sacrifices."

"Mother will be so proud when you're carrying in a deer."

Her sisters all threw smiles her way and chattered on about how thrilling Hazel's initiation was going to be. Hazel couldn't bring herself to care, though. It didn't matter if she couldn't leave.

The sisters stopped in an area that seemed arbitrary to Hazel. "Now, close your eyes," the oldest sister said.

"Why?"

"Because that's how the initiation goes! We sing to you first and then you hunt. So close 'em."

Hazel closed her eyes and her sisters began to chant something unfamiliar to Hazel. She opened her eyes again and saw that her sisters had closed their eyes along with her. She looked out deeper into the woods; she couldn't

see much, but an idea entered her mind and she couldn't let it go.

She bolted. The excitement and adrenaline made her smile as she tore through the woods. Her sisters were shouting and running after her, but Hazel made a point to not run in a straight line. She'd heard her sisters talk about the short cut to take to the college and library; Hazel wouldn't be going that route.

The woods ended, and Hazel was faced with a neighborhood of apartments and brownstones.

She hesitated behind a black slate apartment complex, taking deep breaths and recouping her energy. She watched humans slide into taxis and walk dogs down the sidewalk. She had never seen a human before, but had heard about them from her mother and sisters. Her mother gave warnings about them. She'd say, "Sometimes, you can't even tell the difference between a human and a God." Her sisters, on the other hand, dubbed the humans mostly friendly, so that's what Hazel kept in mind.

Hazel beamed at the chance to meet the humans on her own. She brushed the dirt off her dress, combed her fingers through her hair, and stepped into view.

She didn't know where she was going; she just aimlessly strutted down a sidewalk smiling at everyone. The humans didn't look that much older than her. Most of them were leaving and entering the apartments in heels and tight dresses or nice shirts. The humans mostly ignored her, and the ones who didn't looked her up and down in confusion. Hazel was wearing one of her plain house dresses, a white loose-fitting knee-length dress with long sleeves. She looked odd, especially with her hunting boots and the twigs she hadn't managed to get out of her hair, but Hazel didn't know that.

She walked down four blocks, her mouth open in a dazed smile. The city life was new to her, and she couldn't get over all the lit-up buildings and clusters of people walking about. She wanted to fit in with them, so by her fifth block, she was ready to enter one of the buildings like they all were. She set her eyes on a group of young people entering a bar and followed after them.

Hazel paused in the entrance to absorb the aura of the darkened space. The lighting reminded her of the shrine room in her home, dimmed and intimate. The music, though, was entirely distinct. The foreign music pumped through the bar and Hazel's body. It was nothing like the songs and chants Hazel was used to. Brown leather booths and a bar waited past the en-

Water Lily

Sharon Willig



trance. Hazel gazed at the framed artwork (pictures of sports teams and locally born icons, not that Hazel would have known that) and the chatting people. She was eager to join them. She tried to walk past the lobby to a seat when the hostess stopped her.

“You can’t come in. We have a dress code,” the hostess said.

Hazel looked down at her dress and boots. “I am dressed,” she said.

“Not in the way that I mean. This bar requires cocktail attire.”

“What does it matter? I just want to go sit down.”

“You can’t come in. There are benches outside.”

Hazel didn’t care what the human had to say. The booths were right in front of her and she was going to sit in one. She side-stepped the hostess and walked further into the bar. The hostess followed after her with polite urgency.

The people inside gaped at Hazel coming in but they didn’t care much. Hazel peered at everyone, eventually making eye contact with a friendly face. A rangy man with long chestnut curls beckoned her to his table with his finger. He was surrounded by women, but there was a spot open for Hazel. She sat down in the booth of him and his friends.

The hostess followed her to the booth, apologized to the group for Hazel’s presence, and again insisted that Hazel needed to leave.

The man spoke: “Let her be. She just wants to have fun!”

The hostess demurely stated that Hazel was improperly dressed for the bar.

“Here, have a drink,” he said, offering the hostess a filled glass.

She accepted the glass and drank. She downed the drink until the glass was empty. Then the hostess reached across the table, grabbed a wine bottle and drank straight from it. Hazel laughed. She’s really thirsty, she thought.

“Would you like a glass?” the man asked her. Hazel took her eyes away from the hostess to focus on him. She found him rather feminine-looking, with a soft face and kind, welcoming eyes.

Feeling comforted and cozy, Hazel said, “Yes.”

The woman next to her, one of the man’s friends, grabbed another bottle on the table and an unused glass. She opened the bottle and poured until the wine overflowed and spilled. She passed the glass to Hazel, the cup filled to the brink with the drink.

Hazel accepted the wet glass politely and sipped. She pulled back. She didn’t like the taste, but she didn’t want to be rude to her new friends. And the man was watching her. He gave her a teeth-baring smile and a wink. She returned the smile and then bit her lip. I might as well get it over with, Hazel thought as she gulped the drink down. Only when she finished did she read the label on the bottle and see that she had drunk wine.

Oh no, she thought, what did I just do? Her mother taught her not to drink wine years ago. She taught her not to drink any alcohol, but especially

not wine. If only she could remember why. Hazel wished she hadn't stopped listening.

When Hazel had finished drinking, another woman grabbed a third bottle and poured more into her glass. "Oh, thank you," Hazel drawled. She knew she shouldn't drink anymore, yet every cell in her body wanted that wine. She lifted the glass to her lips and drank. The wine tasted succulent now, and Hazel drank it blissfully like a nursing baby.

A man approached the table and scolded the hostess. She yelled in response and almost aimlessly swung her hands at him until she managed to grip his shirt. The hostess tugged on it and used it to shake the man back and forth. Hazel watched the man's mouth move. She could tell he was angry, but didn't understand some of his words, like "You're fired" and "Get the hell out." Hazel concluded that he needed to drink some wine.

The friendly man from Hazel's booth stood up and interrupted the scene. He put his arm around the hostess and patted the man on the shoulder, saying something to him with verve. Then he turned back to the table. "Come on, everyone," he said. "We're going out!"

Hazel and her new company left the bar and bustled through the city at the man's whim. He took them through busy streets, where people smiled at him and the women. Hazel had to be supported or else she'd stumble and collapse, so the women would alternate who held her. The hostess had her arm hooked around Hazel now; Hazel's head bobbed on the woman's shoulder.

The man led them into a park. Hazel noticed a sign saying that the park was closed, and she lifted her finger to point at it, but gave up and closed her eyes. The women noticed a stray mama cat and her kittens walking through the park and stalked towards them, Hazel's head still bobbing on the hostess' shoulder. The mama cat was grabbed, and then a kitten. Hazel kept her eyes open enough to see a kitten cradled in her own arms. The women pet the frightened cats and laughed. The cats struggled to get out of their arms, and one woman became annoyed. She grabbed the kitten's paw and tugged. The other women joined in and rived the cats, twisting the animals in all angles wanting to pull them apart. Hazel gazed down at the little kitten in her arms and felt a surge of energy rise in her. Her lips twisted into a smile and she grabbed a limb and followed suit.

Hazel felt beatific, but she still didn't want to look at the kitten's entrails falling out. She liked cats. Instead she focused on the other women, wild and raving. They reminded her of something. Another thing her mother told her about. Maenads, Hazel thought, these women are like maenads!

She giggled, finally recalling something her mother didn't think she could. Oh, what did Mother say? Something about mad women in a pack. Crazy women who would follow the God of wine. Ha! I remembered all of this, Mother! She laughed until her shoulders shook and then she keeled over

onto the grass.

“Enjoying yourself?” The man was standing over her, eyebrow cocked.

“Maenads,” Hazel said. “Those women – “ she pointed at the pack of women, now tearing apart the last kitten, “are maenads!”

“Did you just realize that?” he asked dryly. His face dropped, almost as if he was disappointed.

“It’s a joke,” Hazel said. I couldn’t have possibly encountered maenads on my first night out, she thought.

Perhaps it was just the darkness of the night, but Hazel found the man’s eyes had changed; they had lost all softness, and now glared down at her with severity. She wondered then, how this human man knew what maenads were. He smiled, perhaps sensing her discomfort, but she didn’t find his smile so soothing anymore.

He offered his hand to her and Hazel accepted it. “Just a joke, huh,” he said. He lifted her off the ground and Hazel didn’t sway and stumble as much.

A beam of light flashed, and Hazel turned around to see a uniformed man. “The park’s closed!” he said. “What’s going on over there?” He flashed the light on the group of women.

Hazel’s new acquaintance – at this moment, she realized she didn’t know his name - walked over to the policeman smiling. As he cajoled the cop, Hazel turned her focus back to the women. Her excitement and bliss dispelled, she now wanted to see if she had misremembered the last few minutes, or if she really had –

She had. Mutilated cat corpses were scattered around the women’s feet. Now the women were moving closer to the police officer, passing by Hazel as if she wasn’t there.

Bile rose in Hazel’s throat but she covered her mouth in time. Her hand had an unusually metallic smell and wetness. As she pulled it away, she saw it was blotched with blood.

Her eyes watered and Hazel sniffled, but she knew she needed to escape. She walked away from the scene until she was out of the park. She wanted to run, but her body was hard to move.

Hazel staggered down a street; she didn’t know what time it was, but the roads weren’t as busy anymore. The streetlights lit her path, and as she turned a corner, she saw that a bridge was not too far away. She could see a dark river running underneath it, and it motivated her to start an ungainly run.

Something smacked into Hazel’s shoulder. She looked behind her and saw the pack of corybantic women chasing her. She wondered what they did to the uniformed man and what they would do to her. She looked down and realized they had thrown one of the cats’ legs.

“Leave me alone!” Hazel said.

The women vociferated nonsense. Each of them carried pieces of the cats. The hostess shrieked and launched a tail at Hazel’s cheek.

Hazel swatted the tail away, crying out with disgust and regret. She turned back toward the bridge; her arms wobbled about and her legs were weak, but fear kept her moving. A fusillade of feline body parts landed around Hazel’s moving feet.

Hazel reached the bridge and leaned against the side. She slid over the railing and pulled herself down until her body toppled over into the river, leaving behind the shouts and hollers of the women. The crash didn’t harm her, as the river opened its arms to embrace her. It swallowed the nymph down into its depths and cradled her, sobering her body and mind and washing away the blood. When it was ready to let her go, it pushed her up to the shore.

She lay down on the dirt and took slow, refreshing breaths as she gazed up at the night sky. She accepted her situation - she’d walked right into a scenario her mother had warned her about. I can’t cry about it now, she thought, even though she wanted to. They could still be following me.

She pushed herself up and started walking through the woods behind her. Her boots were soggy and her dress clung to her body, but she didn’t mind it.

Dawn hadn’t come yet, so she couldn’t see much. Still, she found being encompassed in the forest’s darkness better than being exposed in the city.

She traipsed through the woods without a clue of where to go. She mumbled a prayer to Artemis as she walked, hoping that She would guide her way home. Over time, Hazel got used to the dark and relaxed, but then she felt a grip on her arm.

“There you are,” a man said. Hazel knew who he was now, understood what happened when she accepted a drink from the God of wine.

Hazel struggled against his grip, trying to pull her wrist away but he was too strong.

“I haven’t seen a water nymph in a long time,” Dionysus said. “Where were you hiding?” He pushed her against a tree and pressed himself close to her. Her confinement was so tight that Hazel found even squirming futile. “I think I’ve forgotten how you taste,” he said, his eyelids lowering.

Hazel gritted her teeth and tried to turn her head away. She was set to bite his tongue when his head jerked to the left. His hold on her loosened, but Hazel didn’t move. She was in awe of what she saw. An arrow had pierced through his face; his jaw and cheek were bloodlessly detached but rejuvenating. He was no longer looking at her. His gaze was focused on something to the right. “Ohh, Aaerghhiigh,” he said.

“Don’t you ever stop talking?” a woman said. Hazel turned to face her and gasped. Artemis stood there, armed with a bow and arrow just like on her

shrine. “Still preying on the young ones, huh, Dionysus.” She loaded another arrow and shot it into his throat.

Dionysus seemed to laugh: “Arghh harghh harghh.” He pulled the arrows from his face and neck, and smiled nightmarishly. Hazel cringed at the gaping holes. She watched as the last bits of skin healed. “I was just showing her a good time. I think she’d fit in with my women.” He looked back to Hazel. “You had fun with us, right?”

“Leave her alone,” Artemis said. “Get out of here.” She had another arrow trained on him.

Dionysus winked at Hazel. “I’m sure we’ll meet again.” He vanished.

Hazel gasped and reached out in front of her. He was really gone.

Artemis lowered her weapon. She peered at Hazel with a furrowed brow, almost disapprovingly.

“I can’t believe you’re really here,” Hazel said after a pause. She laughed softly and wrapped her arms tightly around her Goddess. Artemis smelled like the forest and leather. Hazel pulled away from Artemis beaming, but her smile fell when she saw Artemis’ disapproval. “What is it?” Hazel asked.

Artemis scowled. “Why are you running around with maenads and Dionysus?”

“I didn’t know – “

“How didn’t you?”

“I didn’t think – “

“No, you didn’t. You walked right into it.”

Hazel was stunned by the brusque words and bowed her head. “I wanted to get out of my house, but I guess I disregarded Mother for too long. My sisters were right.”

“No, your sisters are idiots,” Artemis said. “If you follow after them, I’ll never protect you again.”

“Why not?” Hazel asked. She wondered how her sisters could be considered idiots; they were permitted to be outside almost every day and they hadn’t encountered any Gods or maenads.

“They idolize your mother over me. They care more about obeying her than having independence or even free thought. I couldn’t respect you if you went back to them.”

“But they’re my sisters, and that’s my mother. I can’t just leave them.”

“You already did and you made the right decision. You put me and your independence over your mother, and that’s why I came to you.”

“I’m not so sure I like being on my own, though,” Hazel said. “Even aside from who I ran into, I did things I never thought I’d do.” Hazel thought about the kitten she’d cradled. “Stuff that I never would have done at home.”

Blonde Boy
Anna Galeano



“You don’t have to worry about that. You’ll never harm another animal again.”

“Oh, no, I’d never! I love - ”

“You’ll never touch them again. Cats, dogs, horses, rabbits, pigs will all be repelled by you.”

“All of them?” Hazel whimpered. “But my cats – “

“Oh, so you’re going back home? Your cats there will be waiting for you, I haven’t changed them; they’ll be there, but I won’t.”

Hazel looked down at her boots, penitent.

“If you want to return home, Hazel, to your mother, sisters, and cats,” Artemis said, “just walk the path of the river, maybe even swim it. It flows into the lake by your house. Or you can go anywhere but there and I’ll be with you.”

Hazel didn’t respond, but when she looked back up, Artemis had gone just like Dionysus.

She walked back to the river. She couldn’t remember the exact path but she found it in decent time. The river undulated peacefully and Hazel smiled meekly at its beauty. She had been swimming in that lake for her entire life, and yet she never knew that it led to a river. She never knew that the river flowed under a bridge in the city, or that there even was a city, a city filled with interesting sights and humans and danger. She never knew that Artemis was with her the entire time.

Hazel cried for her mistakes and her sisters’. She cried for her mother and all the lessons she would have to relearn. Then she wiped her tears, said good-bye to her old lake, her cats, and moved on.

Contributors

Livia Abramoff, a student at Montgomery College (MC), recently finished an internship at the Potomac Review and has been accepted into Montgomery College's STEM program. She hopes to one day have an academic career in English, math, or physics.

Daniel Beels is a student at MC-Takoma Park/Silver Spring who recently took a creative writing fiction course.

Nataly Bermejo is studying art at MC-Takoma Park/Silver Spring.

Curtis R. Berry now retired is a Marine Corps veteran and a graduate of Pratt Institute. He was the first African American in the CBS News Design Department. He also worked for U.S. News & World Report and other government agencies.

Claudia Cassoma, originally from Angola, attends the Rockville campus, where she is the president of the Poetry & Slam Club. She is the author of the book *Amores que nunca vivi* (2013) and has been featured at the Red Jacket. Visit: www.claudiacassoma.com

Christian Chavez won an Honorable Mention in the 2014 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Contest.

Teri Cross Davis holds a MFA in Poetry and is a Cave Canem fellow. She has attended Soul Mountain Writer's Retreat and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Her poems have been published in anthologies, online, and in journals. She resides in Silver Spring, MD with her husband and two children.

Julie Deibel is driven to help create a more equitable world. Her background includes community organizing, fundraising, communications, and instructional design. For her Masters in Community Planning, she authored a report on how art can define, connect, and strengthen communities (<http://bit.ly/1tQn-nw3>). She attends MC for continuous learning opportunities.

Melissa Diaz, born in Peru, lived in Venezuela for 20 years, where she studied education at the University of Carabobo. A teacher, she has lived in the USA since May 2012. She loves literature and her favorite writer is Mario Vargas Llosa.

Rachel DiLima is a cosmetologist and self-professed bibliophile working on her degree in psychology. When she isn't climbing rocks, painting, doing homework, reading, or making a general mess, she will take the time to write a poem or short story. "The Hero," her first published work, won the 2014 Ventura Valdez English Poetry Award.

Tsaitami Duchicela has been a dancer, singer, writer, and visual artist since childhood. She is Panamanian and Ecuadorian, yet has lived in several Latin American countries since age 18. She describes her art as intentionally imperfect so as to express life's tendency to surpass expectations by gracefully drawing the path to new destinies.

Anna Galeano is an art student at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus.

Alex Guerrero is a student at MC who is originally from Caracas, Venezuela. He majors in construction management at the MC-Rockville campus. He recently won a scholarship to travel to Cuba with the Study Abroad Program. He was recipient of the 2014 ABC Student Chapter Scholarship (Association of Builder Contractors) and also received the Student Choice of the Year award. He blogs and travels.

Charles Hope, born in New Orleans, is an alumnus of MC and the University of Maryland. His work contains no narrative; rather, it may be about a memory of something that may never have happened, a build-up of tension that may never be resolved.

Maggie Kuo has always been an avid art lover, especially modern, abstract art, which has led to her lifelong dream to paint after her retirement in the accounting and finance field. Her primary medium is acrylic paint, but she has also done work in watercolor, oil, charcoal, and pencil.

Merrill Leffler, currently Poet Laureate of Takoma Park, Maryland, is the author of *Mark the Music*, his most recent book. He has been active in the literary life of the Washington area as a publisher and teacher for more than forty years.

Kirsty Little, who has worked with her body for 20 years in the International Circus scene based in England, with gigs from Buckingham Palace to Tokyo, has a strong desire to use that knowledge of the body in her sculpture. Using the dialogue of her own life experience as a basis for creation, Little turns the impulse for failure into a metaphor for the present treatment of the world's

assets.

Saundra Rose Maley has had poems in a number of small press magazines, including, *Dryad*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Full Moon on K Street: Poems about Washington D. C.*, and *D.C. Perspectives*. Her first book of poems, *Disappearing Act*, will be out from Dryad Press in January 2015. With Anne Wright, she co-edited *A Wild Perfection: The Selected Letters of James Wright*, and the two are currently working on a book about Wright, *Where the Treasure Lies: James Wright and Translation*. She teaches English at MC-Takoma Park/Silver Spring.

Mary Ann Nyamweya has a philosophy degree from VCU, with recent MC courses in health and sociology. Alongside a lengthy copyediting profession, her life has always included poetry, music, herbs, and a passion for color. When creating, this wordsmith uses her intuition and love of nature.

Mark McIntosh has been writing poetry since the age of 9. He grew up in the Silver Spring area after immigrating to this country from Jamaica. Writing means a lot to him and it keeps him stable.

Sunni Morgan is a student at MC majoring in Studio Art and Art History. She is a painter, printmaker and collagist. She had a year-long internship at the Freer/Sackler Art Museums working with the curator of American art. She also had an internship at Pyramid Atlantic Art Center.

Amanda W. Reardon, born in Washington, DC and raised in Silver Spring, currently resides in College Park, Maryland. She is a returning adult student pursuing a bachelor's degree. She loves taking pictures of her family and animals in her spare time.

Maya Reid is a student at MC-Takoma Park/Silver Spring who recently took a creative writing fiction course.

Natalia Schoch, originally from Spain, is a sophomore at the University of Maryland, where she is majoring in chemistry. Besides science, she is interested in literature and poetry, both in English and Spanish. She has been writing poems since the age of 14 and has won two literary contests, including the 2014 Ventura Valdez Spanish Poetry Award.

Briana Smith is an up-and-coming artist who explores the limits of ceramic art and what defines pottery. Her work is influenced by her own spiritual growth and the joy that comes from experiencing the natural and supernatural world.

Amber Smithers is a cinematography student who loves writing poems. “To Dream” was inspired by someone who was unkind yet who taught her that being alone is better than being with someone who doesn’t want you.

Holly Trout is currently studying studio arts, focusing on printmaking. She earned a B.A. cum laude in Art History from Mount Holyoke College. Presently, she works at the Smithsonian American Art Museum/National Portrait Gallery gift shop.

Sharon Willig is a non-credit student who has begun to discover new skills through art classes offered at MC. She retired nearly two years ago, after having practiced as a speech-language pathologist for 50 years.

Galene Wong aspires to be an engineer and studies at MC. She enjoys ballet and classical music, and is inspired by The Five, among other Russian romanticists. In her spare time, she happily refines the musical abilities of promising youths and practices mental math.

Joe Yanez, a retired Army veteran, currently is completing his BA in psychology in order to acquire a degree in occupational therapy.

