



HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

Apogee Magazine
Fall 2013: The Vanity Issue

Celebrating our Golden Anniversary

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All submissions should be sent to:
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Include a cover letter
with a 2-3 sentence biography.

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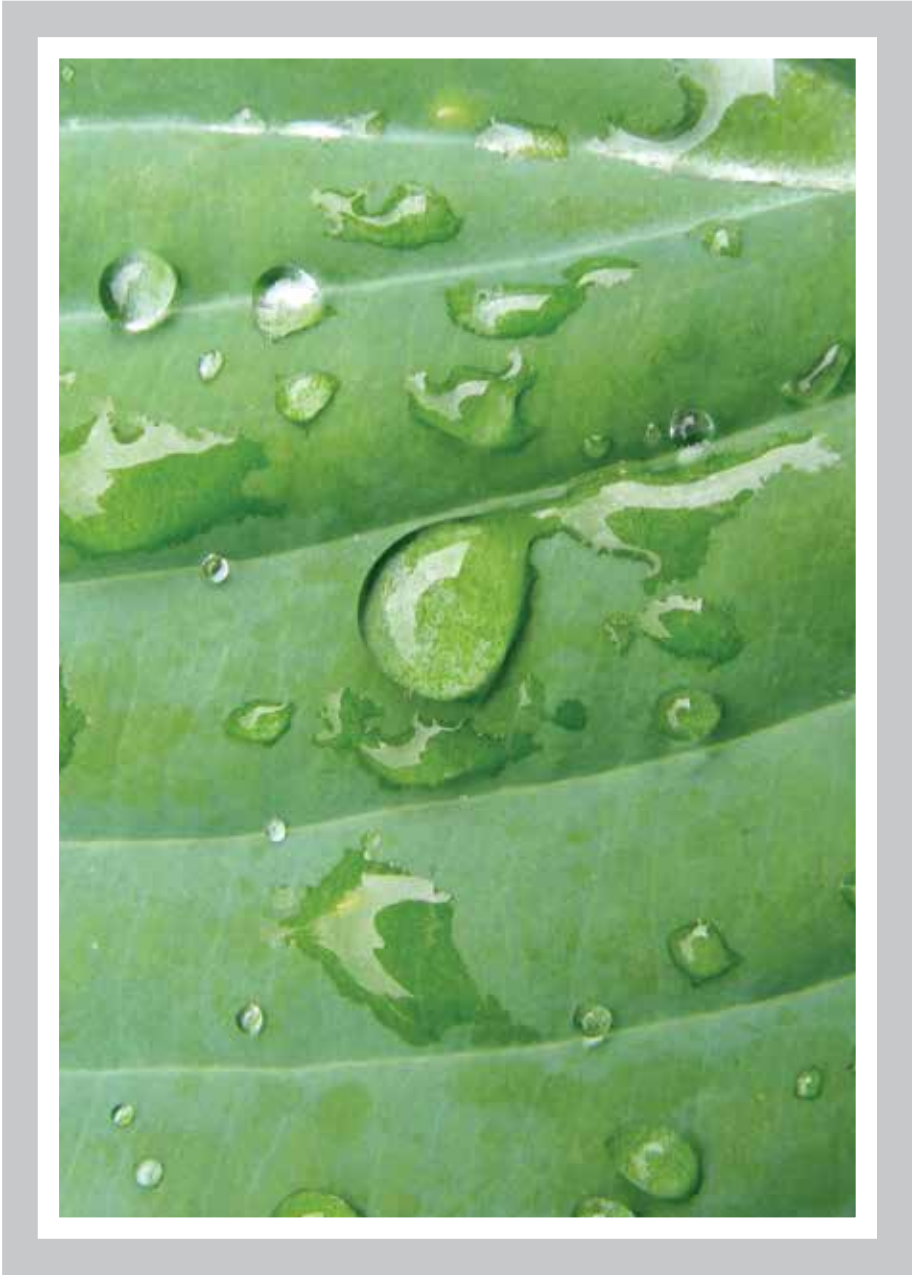
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Cover Art: Roswell 2 (2012. Acrylic on canvas. 48" x 72")

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I was tired and
needed food. I
dug, I heaved, I
moved the
earth. I carried
that earth, I
carried the
fruits it, I laid
the down in
the presence of
God and I was
tired.

My hands were
dirty. I was not
accepted. My
load was heavy.
I was not
accepted.

I sharpened
one stone with
another.

I let his blood
pour over my
hands.

God called to
me. I covered
my face. I lied.

My blood gave
birth to
murderers,

I covered my
face.

I was tired

I blessed the
Lord when the
blood of my
flock was
accepted.

I worked in
faithfulness.

My blood
pooled, it cried.

I was silent.

Cain

l

be

words Sally Evans

They are
received by
truck from a
farm or a
feedlot.

They are
herded into
holding pens
inspected,
preslaughter.

They are
stunned,
unconscious,
and hung by
hind legs on
the line for
processing.

Main artery,
cut, their blood
drains, they
die.

Skins and
plumage are
removed and
the carcass is
inspected for
quality.

The grass is
knee-high,
itchy.

Daffodils
bloom, white
with yellow
centers, yellow
with orange
centers.

I cut them low
on their stems,
hold them
gently.

I place them in
a vase with
water.

I offer them as
a gift, watch
them open,
watch them
wilt.



heLa ex Machina:

*a collection of found poems by Allison S. Walker,
excerpted from The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot.*

HeLa 1: *The Human Petri Dish Experiment* (pp. 183, 211, 226, 263-265)

There they are,
with a sweeping *ta-da* motion,
they're really, really small. That's why
we go to the microscope
so I can show you, zoomed in,
the outline of a cell.
Look, there! See that cell
dividing right before our eyes!
Just as they done in Henrietta.

Oh, I see. The dead have no right
to privacy—even if part of them
is still alive. Now you tell me
after all these years!
It was the closest they'd come
to seeing.

They might make
some interesting color
for the scientific story.
*We would like to have that blood
from you people.*

Even with a microscope
you can't see sometimes.

HeLa 2: *Henrietta's Daughter Speaks* (pp. 237, 161, 80)

...them cells
they just steady growin, steady fightin
off whatever they fightin off.

...them cells
would probably populate
a whole village
of Henriettas.

...them cells
could float through the air
on dust, ride on coats,
shoes; everything

dead about Henrietta,
except them cells.

I bet your mama can't top that.





HeLa 3: *The statue in front of Johns Hopkins* (p. 13, 195, 260)

Looming, arms spread wide, Jesus
stood more than ten feet
holding court over Hopkins
His pupil-less marble eyes
staring in stone robes
body dingy
except for His right big toe
which glowed
from decades of hands
rubbing for luck.
At His feet [lay]
wilted daisies
piles of change
two roses
one with plastic dewdrops
one fresh with thorns.

No one visited Hopkins without visiting Jesus,
but Henrietta went straight in,
the side for Blacks Only,
oh yes, she went straight in.

HeLa 4: *Henrietta's Funeral* (p. 92)

Lacks cousins don't remember
the service—some words,
a song—they remember
what happened next...

sky turned black as strap molasses

rain and rumbling, the long
wings of a silver bird
the metal roof of the barn
flying above her grave
like screams from babies.

Was she tryin to tell us something with that storm?

HeLa 5: *Home House* (p. 77-78)

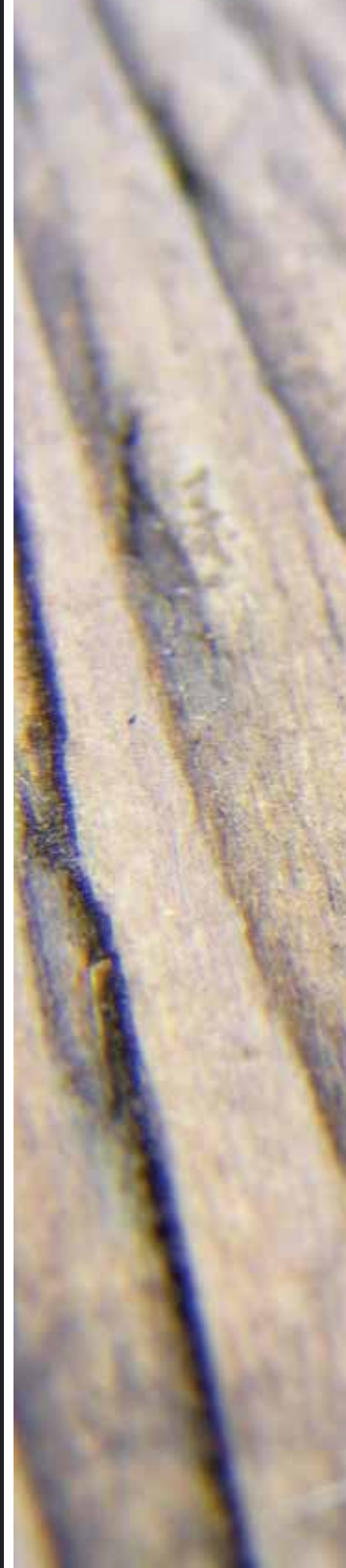
—The place of Henrietta's birth, *home house*, lies just
outside of Clover, Virginia; her body lies buried in an
unmarked grave in the Lacks family plot there.

Clover: a few rolling hills off Route 360,
past Difficult Creek,
on the banks of the River of Death.

Main Street: where you could sit for hours without seeing
a boarded-up gas station,
RIP sprayed across it,
an empty lot that once held the Depot,
where the wall clock hasn't moved
since the eighties.

Lacks Town: across the tracks,
darker than dark, no lights,
a single road where weeds grow,
just a patch of red dirt,
a shack at the end of State Maintenance
where the road turns to gravel.

Across the street: a white picket fence.







Animals by Roberta Gentry

FLIES ATTRACTED TO LIGHT

words Chris Hailey

I wake up and I'm hunched over the bathtub. Not like sitting against it with my back to it, I'm literally hunched over, face lying on the linoleum. Toothpaste is smeared across the walls and the sink is running. The lights are on and the door is shut. Two toothbrushes float in the toilet, Norman's and mine. My body is numb. My arms are squeezed between my torso and the tub's porcelain. I'm lightheaded, so when I make an effort to stand I crash back down. When I open my eyes there are black specks floating around in the air. Is this from medication or a lack of blood? Lightheadedness? Maybe that accounts for the chirping birds, too. Lights are on. I slide off the side and onto the floor, a wet noodle. The sink runs. So does my arm. Somewhere deep under webs of tissue, an artery is being squeezed for all that it's worth.

There's blood staining the floor. There's a deep cut on my arm. People donate plasma for money.

I lock the door so my child thinks things are all right. I tell him that I sleep in the tub. I tell him that I like the sound of the running water, the cold ceramic on my thighs. The truth is I like the sound of running water but only when I'm submerged under it. In theory, it isn't a lie.

Some days I see him taking a nap in here, too. His cheek sticks to the tub and for the rest of the afternoon a side of his face stays blushed. Norman thinks nothing can hurt us in this world. I tell him that outside of here it's not safe and that everyone's like Ben, which isn't a lie, either. It's a dead world and everyone's out to eat one another. Ben's a zombie and we are alive. We are safe and everything is all right. "Mommy is here and nothing can harm you," except Mommy, except for the many women, except for the deities that possess. The sisters of the left arm that say I don't do well enough. My children of escape, who

cover up fear and freedom and truth. Except for the woman who can't protect. I have a control mechanism that dwells inside.

What I can remember is that I've always wanted to die. There's a rush and a release and a feeling of comfort. Later there's satisfaction, which happens at the brink of death, the flirt. My pain is a good mother, and with her I am at ease. I think of my distress as a scale. Some nice woman taught me this once.

"Ok Joni, where are you at now? 1 or 10?," she'd say, and when I told her 7 I'd get strapped down.

Last night, when I split my arm with a spork, I was at a 5. This morning, unable to move, I'm at a 6. I lay on the floor a while longer with my legs still numb. Someday I will buy a harness, or a bed with straps. Until then I imagine laying in the morgue, some sick man stringing my left foot back on and whistling to the Beatles. One stitch, two stitch, three stitch, four—and maybe at the 7th something cool will happen. Fireworks exploding out of my chest? You would need a lot of putty to sculpt that back. I should write this down.

Sometimes I'll use a gag. I keep them stored around the house. There's one in the pillowcase, one in the kitchen cabinet, another here, below the sink. I hope to squelch myself half the time and stop the talk before it begins. Some nights I stick a rag in my mouth just so I can poke harder; make a nice red spray shoot out of my arm. Other nights it's to stop me from chewing down on my own tongue.

So when I die listen to me now: I want to be bound. Strapped down with a sock in my mouth. Hair wrapped around my neck with a stomach full of bleach.

Ben comes on Thursday and this week it was early in the day. He says I have to teach Norman something or he'll put him in a school. We play with flashcards and he learns multiplication. I sit beside him helping him flip, congratulating him on a success. Most of the time I'm not there, though. I'm off, deep in a place where I have already grabbed the flashcards and am now slicing them along my cuticles, so when he flips over a card which says 5x7 and matches it with one that says 45, I can't help but jump out of my dream, say something like,

"Wow! Great job! How'd you know that?" Call him my little champion, and then without even realizing it was wrong, I'm back in a world where I'm frayed and drowning in alcohol.

Sometimes I think he might notice that I'm not paying attention, though. Right now is one of those moments.

"Mommy, can I just go play?" Norman says, eyes lowered to his shoes. His black bangs dangle over his face and all you can see are the contours of his mouth, slanted, pouting. I'm a little disappointed that he doesn't think I care because sometimes I really do.

"Yes, baby, you did a good job, you've earned it!" I say, upbeat. That's the way the mothers in *Parent & Child* magazine say it, so I've adopted this to my arsenal. Shifting around in my chair, I dive in for a hug. He flinches and draws back, shoots up and marches off into the backyard. My fake smile thins. My heart murmurs and I can't tell if I'm relieved or sad. There's an unexpected tear in my eye, which immediately gets blotted away. I'm now thinking about how he wheeled away from me, shot off as though avoiding my touch and immediately, horribly, I'm reminded of my mother. The slimy kisses which smelled of

rotting teeth, the hair curlers, silk nightgown, even saltier kisses of her boyfriend, a hairy tongue.

Pressure builds around my face as I run to the sink. I grab the steel wool and begin scrubbing on the pans. Lashing out on greasy pots and spoons, taking deep breaths and telling myself “Focus, focus, keep focus,” but it’s a useless chant and for the third time in two days I begin to cry unemotionally. Recently this has been happening regularly and I’m wondering if it’s due to the aripiprazole, which I’ve slowly been adding to the drinking water.

Suds are running up my arms and they tingle the hairs. There’s a weight around my temples and my eyes are heavy as cement. I pull out a pan coated in grease and dunk it in the water. I scrub it with the wool but the old eggs just streak, so I scrub harder, fiercer and fiercer until fingernails begin to scratch, picking up grime and grease and wearing out the enamel of the metal, and I look down with runny eyes at the pan, which through layers of tears and soap and old food begins to resemble a man I once slept with—

I drop it; flopping into the mucky water it sends suds and food all over me. I clutch the wool tight until I can feel it cutting skin, and my face is still hard, trying not to give in, but salt-licks still stream down my face and Norman is in the backyard yelling “VrOOOooM,” running around with an elephant-ear in his hand, ripped from the stem, pretending it’s an airplane, and soon his image transforms into Momma’s and then mine and then the man and now my mind runs null and my ears hear white noise and at this point my whole image shatters.

My hands act before I know it and in a second I’m guzzling slimy particles of yesterday’s eggs. Grey water runs down my throat and I can’t see with my face under. A dish or utensil—something in the water—scratches against me and my nose is clogged with mucus and soap

and deteriorating food, the way it does when you vomit from both orifices. When I start to feel faint my hands lose their grip—sliding across counter grease—and I fall, the back of my head bashing against the water faucet as I crumble to the floor. Wheezing, I clasp to my chest, curled up futile-like, and begin to giggle. I’m loaded with adrenaline, which creates a pressure in my lungs, pulsing behind my eyes, and I run down the hallway, soggy bread and soap residue dripping down my back as my hair clings to my shoulders. In my bedroom I fall to my knees, the carpet soaking up running water, and I reach under the bed to pull out a journal.

Inside are dates and names.

June 3rd, 4:03 PM signed *Tina*;

Joni—June 3rd at 4:42 PM;

July 8th, midnight, signed *Tina*;

JULY 8TH PEDER (there’s no time);

Celicia, July 10th 1993.

On and on the journal goes with names and dates and scribbles and doodles and blood and spills and ripped pages and burn marks and lipstick-pucker-stamps and urine and cigarette ashes and ink blots and deep incisions in the binding and stacks and stacks and stacks of journals with names and dates and memos all surround the foot of my bed.

I write my name amongst a page with the tagline “RAUNCHY RAT CUNT,” which is repeated for 6 or 7 pages in big, black, sporadic lettering.

Joni—July 16th at 12:26 PM. *Sad, painful crying, was doing dishes and head throbbed. There’s something in the drinking water.*

As I’m writing this in the journal the ink is being blurred and I’m biting my lip—hard—until finally the rich salt taste arrives and my scribblings begin to lose shape when I look. Two twigs sitting in a bowl of apricots—I don’t see things very clear—except for the fruit flies swarming the foot of my bed. A dead banana is conveniently smashed up to a gunk inside one of my new slippers, which Ben brought last week.

I’m gripping my hair, clutching onto my support system, but the grasp isn’t enough and I dig deeper into the scalp for the heart of my problems. I want to rip it out—all the faces and voices, names and thoughts—rip them out like memories, which has been done before, Ben tells me. At some point he told me this I’m sure, I can’t be certain but I feel the idea looming in the back of my head—or Tina’s head or Peder’s head or Celicia’s head or whomever’s head this is—telling me that I need to accept those memories and move onto tomorrow, but I rarely see tomorrow, it’s always somebody else who watches the sun rise.

All this goes into the journal. I’m calm now and the panic has subsided. I look at the clock that says 12:43 and I add it at the end of the entry. Two deep breaths help to dispel any extra jitters and I get up, deciding it’s about time to clean out the banana from my slipper.

Digging

In the afternoon Norman and I are in the front yard digging up weeds. Dirt rests along my wrists and arms and Norman has a small smear of mud running across his face. When I see it I think of the way blood dries when it’s been stroked across your skin. Instantly I want to gnaw off the piece of fatty tissue, but the gnats are swarming us and my hair is matted. I am way too bothered.

I'm glad to be doing something with Norman, though. I sit within inches of him ripping roots from the ground and he hasn't dodged me once. I feel like I'm in one of those videos where an adult lion decides to nurture a puppy and against all odds the dog doesn't get eaten.

Norman goes behind me, placing his fist in the weed-holes I've just made, pulling out giant pink worms. I throw the weeds in a ceramic pot. He throws the worms in a ceramic pot. Later we'll plant azaleas in the same ceramic pot.

"They're good for plants and planting," Norman says, holding up one of the creatures. It retracts, distorts, and a drop of mucus falls from the worm and onto his knee.

"Yes, baby, they are. Keep finding them for me so our flowers can grow faster," I say, authentically happy.

Norman puts a hand in the weed-pot and pulls out a handful of crabgrass. "Mommy, what will we do next with the flowers?"

"The weeds?" I say, "Well... We'll just throw them away. These aren't the type of flowers we want in our garden." I rip a briar off the house's vinyl and toss it into the pot. Norman nods his head and helps to pull up the remaining roots.

An anthill is agitated. For a brief second I consider putting my pinky down the hole to see how long it would take for them to gnaw it to the bone. I'm deeply considering this until a shadow casts over me and a curious and monotone voice says, "Joni, you want to come inside before your neck blisters? How long have you been out here?"

As I turn around, I feel that my neck is flaming. Norman's is a little red, too, but he doesn't appear to be flaming. I can feel that my skin might soon blister. I don't think this was on purpose.

I look at Ben who has sagging eyes. His cheeks are gaunt and his scruff is scraggly and dry looking. His eyes look withered or evaporated, two grape skins. There's a tuft of hair probing out of his nostrils, which can be seen without being close to him. Ben is 32, 3 years older than I am. Ben is 32, 3 years older than I am and 3 years more depressed.

He rips his hair out in chunks and bites his fingernails to the meat. When we were younger he ripped a hangnail without whimpering, he also ripped out a chunk of his bangs. That did make him whimper.

He reaches down and pulls me up by my arm. My legs kind of respond, only putting in 50% of an effort to hold me up, so it's Ben's gigantic clutch which keeps me elevated. Norman's under the impression that Ben's a zombie. He's on his hands and knees barking out "Zombie! Zombie! Go away Zombie!" He does this in between grunts and nips and snarls, all the while holding a toothy, wicked grin.

Ben looks down at him and shaking his head, squeezes the bridge of his nose. Norman continues howling.

"I think you've made the kid retarded, Jones," Ben says, pushing me towards the house.

"No...he's uh... He's actually very smart... He learns really fast," I say.

"Right. Of course. The boy's going to grow up to be a genius. Just like his mother," Ben says. "You should have given him away to Momma when you had the chance. That boy's emptier than a trash can."

Whenever he comes over Ben tries his hardest to make Norman accept him. I try even harder to make Norman hate him. Ideally, I'd like for my son to run up

and stab him. Give him a skinning knife and have him carve the knee. Ben wants to take my son and place him in foster care. What I do know, and what he thinks I don't know, is that he'd take him home to Momma, let her deal with him just for the right to say that I can't.

We step inside the house, which smells like paint thinner and mildew. A bowl of dusty potpourri sits on a table at the front door. Ben plants me at the dinner table. "What smells like paint thinner?"

"Well it's, uh, paint thinner. The bathroom wall needed a new coat and, well, the paint was... chunky," I say.

Ben walks down the hallway and peers inside. "Well, you did a pretty good job," he calls out. "Don't look like a new coat, though."

My hands have begun to sweat and I ride my fingernails up and down the palm collecting dew. "Just...the paint was old," I say. My mind is still. Kind of numb, and that universal white noise returns to pound deep against my skull.

For a second I consider telling the truth. That, no, in fact I had actually spilled a bottle of painter thinner on the living room carpet 3 days ago when I was attempting to funnel it through my ear. This, of course, was to see if, in fact, things to do go in one ear and out the other.

I consider this. I then consider the reaction and the length of explanation. I then settle on disclosing this information.

Yes, I was renovating.

"What've you been doing to yourself?" Ben asks as he walks back into the kitchen.

I misunderstand him or try to dodge the question, one. Thinking he asked me how I'm doing, I respond:

"Me? Oh yeah. I'm really good. All the time now. Everything... really is good. My son is smart. He's smart and he knows how to multiply. He's seven and knows how to multiply by seven."

"Yeah, that's great," says Ben as he begins digging through the cabinets. He pulls open the silverware drawer and removes the forks and spoons, replacing them with neon sporks that have a rubber tip. He opens up the empty pantry to take out the cellophane and plastic bags. Tears the serrations off a box of aluminum foil. Checks behind the refrigerator for things like a hacksaw or mallet. He opens the freezer and removes a blue icepack, the fluid of which sometimes makes me vomit uncontrollably. I really liked that icepack and my stomach rolls as he tosses it into his bag of contraband.

I look out the window so I don't cry when Ben uplifts the cookie jar and finds a razor blade which I've used on and off for the last 3 years. Even without looking I can imagine the grin on his face. Norman peers in, on his hands and knees, still yipping, and I consider trading him for the blade.

"Get the boy a dog," Ben says. "That way he doesn't have to act like one."

I nod my head and Ben comes over and lifts me up again.

"Water, paper towels, sugar, flour, toilet paper, broccoli, some candy bars, bananas, I didn't know what else to get you but I also brought another notebook," says Ben. "I'll tell Momma that you're doing all right. I'm sure she'd love to know that. Any

requests for next week?"

I look up with my mouth closed. When he says Momma I look at the head of broccoli and remember her cooking broccoli, with cheese. This I do remember and it makes me feel ill. Not like sick but irritated, like, what type of damage can I do with a spork? Like, how does one properly rip aluminum foil without the serrations? Like, when was the last daylight savings time? Or, do the Japanese really hold the standard in blade crafting?

He needs to leave soon. Momma needs to leave soon. I don't breathe now but rather keep looking up; trying not to think while my spine becomes rigid and dense. My face is hot. Will my own radiation cause sun blisters? I consider this while I try to push out thoughts of drinking bleach. Somewhere deep inside something is growing, so without swallowing my tongue I open my mouth and eyes to say:

"Thank you for the groceries." Or, in code, kill me now you ugly fuck.

A clump of Ben's hair falls from the back of his head, onto his shoulder, and onto the floor. When he leaves the house I pull out a book of matches and set the tuft aflame. I then purify the zone with salt. Norman runs around the yard snapping at the wheels and exhaust of his car. I watch this from the living room window, the soft fangs of a spork desperately attempting to draw blood from the hollow which connects the elbow and forearm.

Norman Kills Dog

Today is Friday and yesterday was Thursday. I decide it's about time to pry myself off the bathroom floor and with one good push of my right arm I

manage to feebly stand. When I turn the sink off the drain gurgles and spits up some sort of black, tar looking substance. I reach under the sink for a bottle of cleaner, not to drink, but instead to help soften the caked-on toothpaste that is smeared on the wall.

From the vents in the bathroom I can hear Norman cackling wildly in the basement. A rusty screech billows up afterwards, loud and ancient, so I postpone the cleaning to call him back upstairs.

I flicker the lights to the basement. "UP. NOW." After a few metal clashes he runs up the splintering steps to stare at me with two wide eyes, drooling, a huge grimace on his face.

"Were you playing with the refrigerator?" I ask. He doesn't answer but instead looks down at my arm, which is oozing clot and dribbling blood. A glow appears on his face and before he can ask I tell him "Not today."

Last year I started the ultimate of all projects. Removing the layers of the fridge and sawing out the shelf that separates the freezer from the rest, I realized it was big enough to fit inside. For a good month Norman and I hammered long spikes into the face of the fridge, but the insulation was pretty thick and my attempt at creating an iron maiden was ruined. Sometimes Norman will go downstairs, hammer in some nails. Secretly, everyone likes to destroy things.

I head back to the bathroom where I wrap the arm in gauze. Norman appears in the doorway and looks down at his feet. Again, all you can see are the contours of his mouth.

"What's wrong, are you upset that I yelled at you?"



Places by Roberta Gentry

He shuffles a bit and begins to sniffle. “He came back, Mommy... the thing... the zombie came back when you were away,” Norman says, snot rolling into his mouth. “I’m sorry, Mommy... I tried to scare him, but he came inside and him... he brought something with him... a small zombie I think... I think it’s a small zombie... I put it in the garage... it kept tasting me.”

Usually I’m half-decent at dissecting what he really means, but this time I’m authentically confused. I probe him some more.

“What do you mean a small zombie? When did he come back? Did he see me?” I say, now holding my breath.

He doesn’t answer but sniffles some more.

“DID BEN SEE ME?”

I’m frightened. Ben knows what I do but he’s never seen me do it. I assume if he did he’d have enough reason to take Norman away, put me away, and place me in some claustrophobic, sanitized room. Group housing. Go back home to Momma, even. Place me in a spot where they’re in control and I’m not. A place with people, nice people with happy faces that secretly think of me naked, covered in scars, sprawled out and waiting to be used. The way Momma would look at me during game-show television, fly swatter in her hand. It would mean I’d have to scuffle for something sharp, something elastic, something dull that when pushed hard enough will eventually break skin. My life has become a daily scavenger hunt, searching the bottoms of trashcans, carving blades from the oak in the backyard, digging along the foundations of the house for rusty pipes I could snap and use for...

I ask Norman to show me the zombie. He leads me to the two-car garage on the side of the house that

sits completely vacant despite a few bags of potting soil, a kiddie pool, and a can of gasoline with a little less than a half a gallon inside of it. Silverfish and spiders have become the new tenants and when you turn the lights on it’s as though a live carpet skitters away to reveal the concrete foundation underneath. Outside of the garage I can hear Norman’s zombie crying and moaning and making howls of distress.

“Stand on the side of the building,” I tell him, and he moves to the side of the garage and probes his head out at me.

“Careful, Mommy, it’s fast,” he says, so I nod and scoot the two ceramic planting pots from yesterday out from in front of the door. Then, with my good arm, I bend down to place my hand on the handle, flinging it up like stage curtains, and when the light penetrates the cell, a small, shaggy, Golden Retriever puppy rushes from the back of the room to my feet, clumsily tripping over its front legs to begin lapping away at my ankles with a long, pink, salivating tongue.

“Hey, this might not be so bad,” I think to myself. The only animal Norman’s ever seen was a cat that unfortunately found its way into our yard. The same cat that unfortunately drank from a bowl of antifreeze that was unfortunately placed beside a bowl of milk.

Norman screams harrowingly and when I look over at him his face is broken, like his lower jaw has snapped and is being pried to the ground by some hyper-gravitational force. I laugh a little and bend down to pet the pup and as it begins to nuzzle my fingertips—lap the sweat from in between my fingers—I hear Norman bellow out:

“NO, ZOMBIE, NO!” and from the left of me a 30lb flower pot comes billowing down on top of the pup’s head, shattering on the concrete and flinging shards of clay everywhere—the pup’s tongue

immediately becomes depressed and flaccid, retreating into its throat like an incompetent dick, and my fingers twitch in the air as my knees stiffen and my eyes widen as I look at Norman’s zombie whose eyes are rolled into the back of its head, filth seeping out from beneath its tail, clinging to the fur and dribbling down the driveway as a small bit of blood drizzles out from the mutt’s mouth, the two clumsy front legs twitching sporadically, the same way they must have as it ran circles in an attempt to master the art of running with four legs, while the body still delivers the essence of warmth, which over the next few seconds slowly recedes until the heat of life is gone and the glow of the dog’s fur no longer pulsates the aura of friendliness and loyalty but instead seems copper and dull like an old penny, gritty and worthless, much like the way a person looks when depressed, a figure which simply exists.

When the moment’s over I sit on the ground beside the dog and look at my son. The sun radiates on my neck, and for once I’m empty. For once I no longer feel any pain inside. I open up my arms and he opens up his, crawling into my lap, leaning his chin on my shoulder and sobbing into my ear. I bury my face against his neck.

“I saved you, Mommy... I saved you from being eaten...”

I nuzzle up against his, for once enjoying the warmth of my son, and I catch my breath and begin to speak, wanting to let him know my unconditional love, lifting my gaze from his neck, witnessing the dog as flies begin to land on its sun-baked blue eyes, realizing maggots will soon explode from the eye and I...

I lose the words.

Dinner Time

That night at the dinner table I’ve cleaned out

the cabinets working up a huge spread. Here's a short list of what was presented:

Rack of lamb encrusted with ramen noodles and a chicken flavored packet;

Tomato slices marinated in vinegar;

Peanut butter and banana mash;

Eggs, scrambled;

Slices of cheddar on saltines;

And not to be forgotten...

A lanky, boney, long strip of meat roasted with carrots and thyme.

The meat droops slightly when picked up, sort of like...well...a tail.

It's all steaming, creating some sort of aromatic fog across the kitchen, so before the haze fades I go to the back yard to get Norman who's been digging and burying things for the last hour.

Outback there's an old oak tree that almost all of the bark has been scraped off of. Things that used to be Boxwoods have been trimmed into phallic symbols, a sword here, the neck of a giraffe there... (Mostly, they all just look like shafts). The metal fence is painted white and I've been considering repainting it to something that fits better. It's around the boarder of this fence that a huge sinkhole resides, Norman standing in it head-deep, trying to reach up and grab onto the stiff paw of today's dead dog.

When the mutt plops in I rewind to reimagine this scene. There I am, ankles snapped and neck bent. My spine creates this cool L shape as the blood

hardens around it. My mouth is wide open and my chin rests along the ground. Blades of grass encrust my teeth and a mound of dirt sits on my tongue. I'm a living anthill as they march out, hoisting small bits of flesh 20 times their own body weight. I've saved somebody's picnic, and my skull shifts when pressed. A 50lb flowerpot falls from the sky, cracks me open like an Easter egg.

How would Norman respond when he sees me like this? Would he bury me the way he does now? Drag me into a hole, maybe the one the dog is in, the hole he sometimes pees in when he's scared of the toilet flushing? Would he go inside to eat dinner, with Ben? Go to bed dreaming of new ways to kill small dogs? Go to bed dreaming of new ways to amputate an arm? Or would he go to bed and think of me lying in the backyard, 7 worms lodged deep in my brain, using my ears as their personal canal? Personally, I hope all three. How proud a mother I would be. Later he could plant azaleas in me.

I step up to the hole where Norman's standing on the dog's face, climbing out. I have a good idea ringing in my head, something about creating a sanctuary for stray and unwanted pets.

"Mommy, I'm sooo HOT! Is dinner ready?" Norman says, looking up at me.

I help him out of the hole and he runs inside, covered in mud, to sit at the table.

I sit across from him where I can see his eyes wide, mouth hinged. Easily, this is the first time this year I've actually cooked for him. I give him the whole tail, which he devours. Everything else remains untouched. I don't eat.

When dinner's over I ask if he wants dessert. Rapidly, he shakes his head up and down so I bring

him over one square of Jell-O, and looking down at it he savors his time with it. He breaks it with his spork and manages to turn it into a six-bite-meal. He eats it with proper dining etiquette.

In my mind I'm laughing because nobody expects Jell-O when you say dessert. Jell-O is at the bottom of the food pyramid when it comes to these types of things. It offers no comfort, no relief, no fulfillment, and ultimately no excitement. In short it's a worn out food staple from the 1920's that somehow is still not bankrupt. If there was ever any sort of reason for the existence of Jell-O it's that with the right mindset, one could create a pool full of it. Is this how Jesus walked on water? Even more daring a question, sink or float? You be the judge.

When Norman puts the fork down he looks across at me. Neither of us speaks and now I'm placed in this awkward position where, as the adult, I've got to lead the discussion. There have been ideas brewing in my mind all day since the dog died, so as Norman downs a glass of aripiprazole-laced water I pep up and ask:

"You wanna' stay up late tonight?" There's an undeniable sparkle in my eye, and obviously, as predicted, Norman shouts out,

"Oh yeah! Mommy, I've never stayed up late before! What do we do? What happens when you don't sleep?"

In my head appear a few different things. A nailed bat that sits behind the oven. A blood clot forming along my collarbone. Chemical smells that make you tear up. The way powdered Clorox tastes as it fizzes against your tongue. I think of these things and smile.

"Oh, I'm sure we can come up with something!" I say, spreading my arms wide. Four small divots sit aligned along the hollow that connects the elbow and forearm. The skin there is mucus brown, denim blue, my two favorite colors.

When We Go Out to Eat

words Chris Hailey

Part of you will want to chew the gristle.
Fatty tissue, popping and
rolling across your jaw.

It causes the painful bubble
on your spine.
—the big sip—

Which hurts the head or
The abscess on your
lying tooth.

Sometimes you'll cover things up.

Wrap me in cellophane and
call me your leftovers.
Tomorrow you'll

have me at lunch.
Scarf me down with
a Coke.
Feed the sweet tooth.
Which made you

oh so irresistible and
far too bitter.



Bony Fish by Roberta Gentry

words Jordan Coakley

She was 2.

I was 19.

In the afternoon breeze we would jump.

Jump and jump.

As high as we could. She would tell me I would never be able to pull an apple off that tree. I would double bounce her into the air. And when she would spot one she would squeal and a fit of giggles we would dissolve into, collapsing to the mesh.

Lower. Lower.

Until we were still. Still so we could feel as sunshine kissed our cheeks, left a pink blush like our grandmother's lipstick usually did. The wind would tickle the tall oaks and when she caught her breath she would whisper, "That a big one!"

I'd help her up and we would imagine that I could catapult her to Oz. She would make believe to see the yellow brick road just up ahead, with all the munchkins dancing in time to the singsong of the blue jays. I would tell her how she looked like Glinda, all pretty in pink. When her sparkling eyes would find another one she would shriek!

Then "Wicked Witch!" A gasp for breath. "That Wicked Witch coming! Quick hide!"

Quick.

And she would frantically search for my hand, drag me to hunker down near the edge. She would shove my hand to her chest so I feel the pounding; like a horse's, she'd say. And when she deemed it safe once again, she would scramble onto my back.

"Piggy piggy! Please!"

"Ready?" Three, two, one, BLASTOFF and at the sound I would take off jumping again. With every bounce upward I would catch a glimpse of the house down the hill, I could see the adults. Sweet teas in

hands, steaks on the grill. And the other kids. "Not too tight," I would remind her gently and she would loosen her grip on my neck. "Giddy up, JJ. Giddy up!"

Unsteady now, or more unsteady, arm tangled up behind my back with her. "To *infinty* and beyond!"

"Infinity," I'd gently correct with a turn of my head and a kiss to her cheek. "Do you know what means?"

"No. I is too little!" Her laughter would spill over me as her toes wiggled at my sides. With her little baby finger she would point out to the distance at the cows jumping over the moon and the sheep she said were the same ones that would parade around with the stars as she counted them to sleep. All the while I would jump.

Up.

Down.

Up and then a shout! A shout I had come to know by now. Collapsing again to Earth's atmosphere we would peer up.

"Rocket! That a close one." And then she would roll over into my side, snuggle in close, so close that I could smell her strawberry shampoo mixed with summer on her skin. "JJ, will there be another soon?"

"Yes, baby girl. Every two and a half minutes."

"And those big things flyed?"

"Yes, the airplanes fly. You've been on an airplane before."

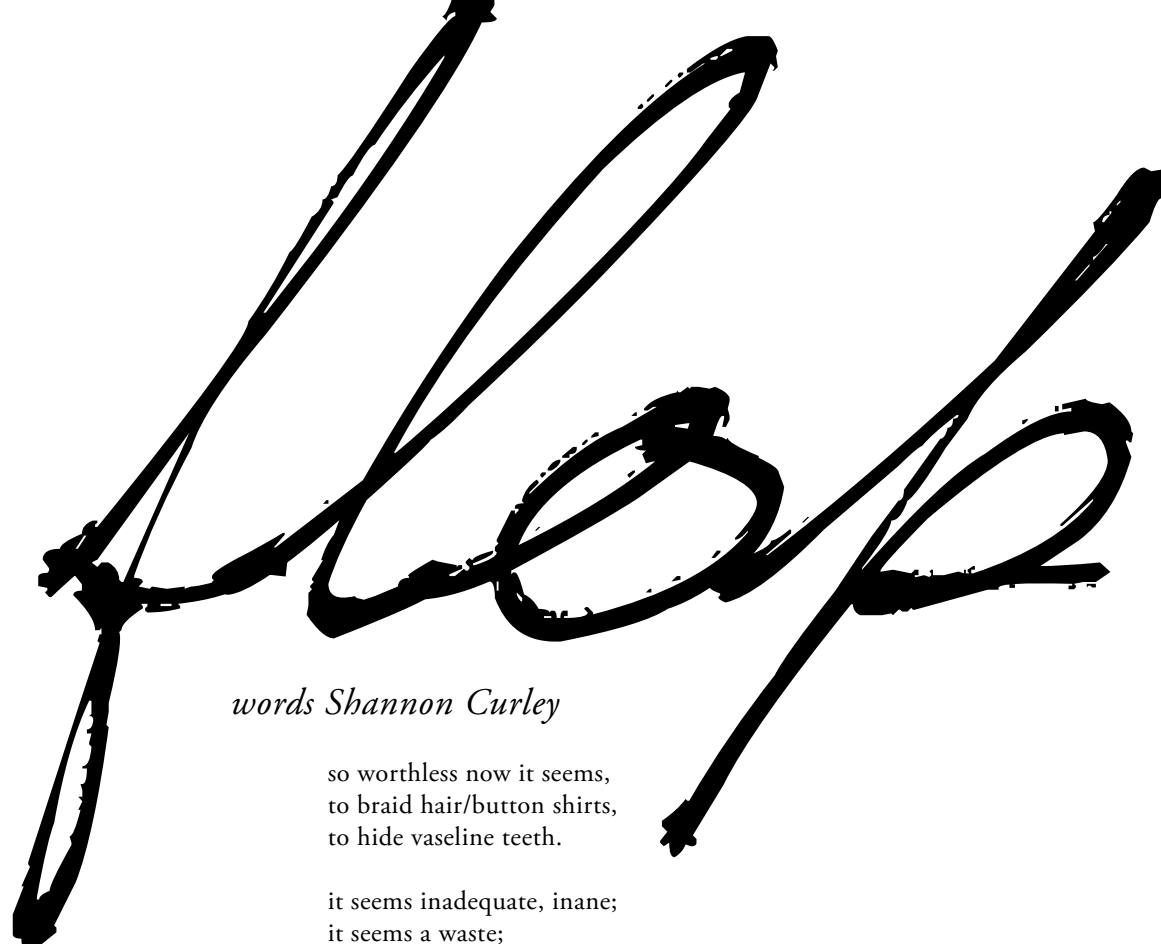
"I did go on an airplane?"

"Yes, you were on an airplane. When we went to Disney World."

"Oh yes! In them clouds. I in them clouds!"

"That's right. When you fly up in an airplane, you are really in the clouds."





words Shannon Curley

so worthless now it seems,
to braid hair/button shirts,
to hide vaseline teeth.

it seems inadequate, inane;
it seems a waste;
foolish, to flounder,
flopping on dry shores,
gills lined in sand and last gasps,
choking to beg another chance to swim.

to swing back up the river bend
(just to be washed up again).

it seems peculiar, torture.
seems, and indeed is,
but it is what it must be
for there is nothing else which i can claim:
to be me.

so silly now it seems;
so silly and dead;
free.



Swing

words Shannon Curley

a syncopated beat
trance
dance
shake it up, shake you off
move

head-bang, mosh
hit, smack, throb
heart attack, pulse
drop

sweat through cold sweats
shifting gears
jump, kick, punch
hands in the air
yell
scream
shout
burst.



BASHFUL COLORS *words Jacob Paul*

The colors were bent and this separated them, divided them. They'd traveled such a long way together, them and those before them, part particle, part wave, together simply light, surrounded by light unbent, singular. And then, eight minutes and twenty seconds after their creation, having traveled 150 million kilometers, having vibrated past Mercury and Venus, past space debris and the moon, they'd begun a painful slowdown through the increasing density of Earth's atmosphere, gradually refracted by the obstruction of their speed, though they remained, still, undivided, barely shifted or tinted, and then, there in the legacy of rain, they'd been dispersed by wavelength, each turned, pointed subtly away, alone. Red, incident at 42 degrees, arced over its long distance peers, felt incredibly distant from Violet, once consort, once in consort with, co-, now four colors away, tucked between Blue and the ultraviolet beyond.

Above, Red sees Other Red at a distance, divided by the invisible spectrum of infrared and shorter frequencies, broadening into infrared again. Red sees Other Red, victim of the same rain droplets, reflected as well as refracted, and high above it, Violet echoed.

In the middle, Yellow thinks that here it will be mistaken for the color of the sun, though the sun, it knows, contains all of light, is all colors combined, is its birthplace. Wavelengths, it marvels in despair: so similar, so apart, for it is separated from Orange and Green only by the fractions of a degree, and yet it is separated, completely separated.

Violet wonders at ultraviolet infinitely tapered away, invisible.

Green feels safe, confined between Blue and Yellow.

Blue cannot believe that Violet is no longer part of it.

Orange, alone, is glad to be apart from Red and Yellow.

Orange is a loner. Hidden in the light, in its second minute after creation, fissile generation, it decided it wanted, wanted for itself, for itself to be a self, alone. Orange wishes it could move somehow from its peers altogether. Still, it holds its peace, wouldn't dare mention its desires to its peers, not yet anyway.

The colors, of course, are internally divided as well. Yellow

is not just yellow, but the full spectrum between Orange and Green, each particular ray graduated by its frequency-wide, discrete gradient. If the separation of the six colors is a cause of public outcry, this less visible, internal division is a source of secret shame.

Shame and outrage, and the colors are not even nine-minutes-old, and yet their frequencies will resonate infinitely, alone or together. The particles of this particular emission, this body of light, will travel infinitely, even if weakened, muted, absorbed, their signature, image, trace, will shine out of this spot in the atmosphere, to the earth and away from the earth again, back through whatever other prismatic and objectular directors and modulators may lay in their path. Even if by brighter beam they are subsumed, made coshine, still their shine will travel.

Eventually they will leave this celestiality. They will leave system and galaxy, course the universe until some portion of them glances the gravity of a black hole, or the universe bends them back around to its beginning, or they discover what lies beyond dimensionality; by then their age will be too great to measure even in billions of years, even in trillions or quadrillions or quintillions, even the very the names of the very largest, named numbers, Octodecillion, Novemdecillion, Vigitillion, Centillion will, eventually, prove inadequate to their duration. Silly names for numbers, bazillion, gazillion, gadzooks, umpteen, with their nimble morality, willing to subordinate definition to truth, are likely better means of measuring the age left these colors, and yet here they are but barely eight minutes and twenty seconds old, already subject to secret shame, given to public outcry.

How shall they be rescued from this?

The colors were bent, if shaped, and below, on the ground, vibrant from the rain, dusty sage now brilliant green, carnelian rock turned scarlet, sand banks of oxidized purple and white and green and yellow, once muted, glossed shining royal velvet, polished opal, sunflower. Below, there was a river, and there were trees, and there were bluffs whose surfaces held waterpockets, staggered Fremont mocchi that shuffled water into teeny slot canyons from which cascaded clear falls over the edges of the carapaces. On one of the bluffs below

stood a group, seven in number, all in worn plastic coats, renewed too by the glistening moisture. They were different sizes. Three males and four females. Some carried bags, some did not. The group stared towards a distance where the next thick weather billowed over bluffs far beyond the river.

The colors were grateful that the party on the bluff wasn't staring at them. Their public outcry was only shared within the divide. Collectively, they would feel caught out to have those below see them as they were, exposed, naked, held up.

The second oldest of the males below wasn't staring above because he was trying to resavor the washed out patchwork of the Southwest-printed quilt in the not quite warm enough hotel room he shared with third oldest of the females, and of the way she pulled cloth up over her goose-bumped paleness as she tucked into him. He was trying to be there and not in the moment before, in which she'd asked how she could follow him if she didn't trust him, and how could she trust him? And he'd asked if this was how she wanted to end their day so as not to acknowledge how he'd pressured her to bring him at all.

Red murmured to Orange to tell Yellow to pass it on down to Violet through Green and Blue: Can you see them? Orange replied, Of course, anyone can see them down there. But ask all of them, insisted Red. No need, said Orange. Gosh! said Red, wondering what it had done to be stuck next to Orange. On the other end, Violet passed a similar question along. When that question reached Orange, Orange, annoyed, shouted, Yes! Yes! We all see the people down there, and eventually, in all likelihood, they'll see us too!

Hush! Said all the colors at once, but it was too late. First one person looked up, the eldest, white-haired and tallest. He held the littlest's shoulders and steered her around to look, pointed up at the colors. When the littlest turned to look up at the eldest, apparently uncertain of his direction, he took her head delicately in his hands and pointed it at the colors. When she saw her head stilled, mesmerized, and he leaned down and kissed the top of her scalp.

I see! She yelled, and pointed and jumped up and down. The others now all turned and looked too. The colors were mortified. Red tried to gesture across the sky above it to Other Red to ask how Other Red was handling this ignominy. Other Red did not respond. Orange, for its part, tried to be just a bit more orange, a little brighter. If Orange had a head to shake it would have shook it at Red's failure to realize the advantages of being on the colors' boundary, hemmed on only one side, hemmed by Orange.

The second oldest male, a young man in a purple coat, had a camera out. He was conferring with the second oldest female, a young woman with yellow hair in a lime-colored coat, as he aimed his camera at the colors. Green quickly warned the others that this device would capture some of them, transform them into energy on a wafer of silicon that would expend them in redirected magnetic polarities resuscitatable as binary data. And if that data is corrupted! By the time Green's warning was out, the little girl, freed of her father's grasp, also had a camera out. Yellow moaned that even more of their essence would be captured. Red complained that worse still the cameras would forever record their exposure, distribute their shame. Orange couldn't take it any longer, said: Small price to pay for immortality! To move in other than rays, not be curved by gravity, not bound by emission and impulse!

It is true, said Violet, that we are resonant, emitted to travel, inconstant, passing through forms. This translation, from colored light to electrical impulse and back again, anywhere, across the earth, to be reconstituted as light and image, as our colors in this moment, brought back, reproduced amplified, not by fate but merit, that image, judged, made multiple, upheld, it, too, destined beyond this universe, is a travel beyond our past imagination. This is our calling! We ought embrace it!

Orange wanted to agree, but refused concert with its peers, even surprising and unfamiliar Violet. Instead, Orange thought about how in reproduction it might be at last freed from the others, how a viewer might separate its hue from the image of it, render its hue in holy saffron robes, in the silk banners of royal hordes, in the ephemeral cast of stage-lit concubinage, it, Orange! Orange in rituals divine and immolative.

If Red had eyes it would have wept tears, oblivious to the irony of creating new refractive droplets, new reds, but Red no more had eyes than it had a head in which to hold them.

The party below had finished eating now, and was heading down one of the bluff's buttresses, passing from a section of carnelian mud to a rippled golden sand spotted with rocks: stones vermilion, chartreuse, lavender, ochre, some small, some large, some polished, some jagged.

At last, said Red, privacy!

The young woman in the lime-colored slicker heard this and turned around. She squinted at the colors. The colors all held their breath. (They all did so out of modesty, hopeful that she'd turn back again. All, that is, but Orange who held its breath in hopes she'd

pay it more attention.) The young man in the purple slicker turned with her, conferred. She gestured for him to go on ahead. He put his head down, remembered that after all of that, she'd told him she wanted him to have sex with her. He caught up with the littlest, said something to her. Hearing him, the littlest laughed and ran as fast she could before skidding, surfer-style, down the sandbank, whose long low angle was only almost not enough to let her move on her still shoes. The young man followed suit and slid past her. They repeated this, leapfrogging each other: the littlest and the young man in the purple slicker.

Meanwhile, the young woman in the lime-colored slicker ducked behind a large boulder that was water-worn, riddled and channeled like coral. She called up to the colors in their own language. The colors could see that the oldest of the party heard her call, understood it even. He tilted his head and smiled a bit, smiled the smile of a proud parent, but continued on, a parent loving enough to not let his protégé, his (unofficially) adopted daughter, know that he too knew the language of the colors.

Why are you so bashful? The young woman asked.

Orange began to protest that it was anything but bashful, but the others had already bewailed their exposure.

But you are beautiful, the young woman said.

We were born together and now we're apart, the colors moaned. We're objectified. On display. You stopped and pointed and stared and photographed. You jeered at our shame.

We pointed at you because you are magical, occasional, rare, the young woman said. You are the sign that God will not destroy us. On the ground your pigments and hues express the Earth, express nature. In the sky you are a reminder of wonder, an inspiration to surprise. You are a reminder of what is hidden in every ray of the ordinary day! You're so seemingly impossible that in fables your ends are buried in gold!

The colors didn't know what to say. Well, Orange did, it would have said that it already knew this, and that it was the most beautiful of the array. But even Orange knew better than to give that sentiment voice in front of the others, in front of this one who could hear color. The colors slightly deepened; unable to shift, they saturated, saturation their embarrassed, happy blush.

The young woman was pleased. Watch this, she said, and took a small triangle of glass out of her pocket. She held it towards the sun, and the colors saw their likenesses appear in a small wedge before her. Now she took a second glass, identical to the first, from

her pocket, held one in each of her stretched apart hands: the colors bound between glass, light to light once more. The colors gasped. She gradually brought her hands together, color contracted between them, until it disappeared, rapidly drew her arms apart, restored color. The colors gasped once more. Far below, the eldest of the group, the gasp of colors audible only to himself and the young woman, chuckled, but the colors didn't notice. Amazing! They whispered. Even Orange watched and wondered, for once not self-aware and self-important.

You see? Said the young woman, you are always everywhere, you're in everything, that you're shy is good, that you're humble is proof of your beauty! (Orange did not thrill to this.) And your beauty! In your travels you will disappear and reappear, take on forms, give form to everything any of us ever see, anything seen anywhere! Whatever you pass through, whatever you bounce off, you embody, you carry with you, you immortalize, memorialize!

The colors were close to convinced. They could see that the young woman could see this. They thanked her, told her she could go. One last thing, she insisted, and she whispered two things in a language of physical images visible to the colors.

What were these things? One was a wild meadow, blooming in the runoff of the peak above it, the meadow tipped towards a desert of vibrant shapes and multihued sands thousands of feet below. The other was a garden before a castle in which every manner of flower grew, and each blossom contributed to an intricate pattern whose sum constituted the sum of human desire to convey what it meant to be human, such sum only visible through a totalizing view as yet unseen by any but the the colors.

You are a rainbow! She whispered to them, and winked.

You are a magician! They whispered back, shining, saturated, as awed as colors can be, awed as only the awesome may be.

If the young woman heard this last, the colors couldn't tell, but she did skip quickly down the spine of the hill towards the young man, who'd been furtively glancing back, looking for her. (Though, as she approached, he hid this.) And when she reached him, she slipped her small cold hand into his square warm one, quietly, so that rest of the group would not notice. And, for once, rather than ask where she'd been, the young man simply squeezed her hand in his, though it took all of his will not to ask, Will you? Will you come with me? All of his will not to declare that she must, she must it was obvious. All of his will though he knew she would not, and in the not he would surely make all of it ugly.



FOR GALEN

words Devan Plyler

The dreamers harvest their deserts and wait
for sweet vermillion in the afternoon
to wash across the sky and decorate
the uninspired lands of sterile June.
High heads tilt'd upwards, they curse lacking wheat—
how it fills their starving stomachs with sand,
glean from the gray trails of passed clouds to eat,
and beg the arid age to cease its hand.
But birds still enjoy their rotten berries
and bees still drink from their fast turning lush;
both wasted on mortals who miscarry
in everlasting after morning's clutch
whose siren song distracts from nature call,
swearing to resurrect the fallen dawn.

Sleeping Beauty

words Devan Plyler



Auna brings the jello shots.

"This one is for the music."

Rose takes the shot, already four
and a mixer deep. She dances on a
tabletop.

Flora brings the mushrooms.

"This one is for beauty."

Rose eats the mushrooms; flashing into the magical forest where all the
lights become colored stars, any color
she liked. She finger paints with
bursting stars.

Merryweather brings the boys.

"This one is prince charming."

Prince Charming grabs Rose by the
waist, and leads her away from her
friends to dance. He presses his pelvis
into hers; it is strong from riding
horses.

"I'm Phillip."

"I'm Rose."

Prince Charming is very handsome;
he is a canvas for her finger paint. His
armor is hard under her fingers. It
shines. Strobe lights and more pulsing
colors bounce off him as he shines.

Other suitors come and ask to
dance. They speak with their forked
tongues.

He defends her against dragons.

Knight in shining armor. She is his.

He says the castle isn't safe, there
are witches and dragons everywhere.

"Want to go somewhere quiet,
princess?" says the prince.

He leads her away from the castle

animals come to play.

"Looks like your glass is empty,
princess."

He takes her cup from her. He pulls
out his noble flask, and brews his
potion: sprinkle tonic, sprinkle gin,
and add a dash of roofalin.

"Drink up princess."

Pricked by the spinning wheel.

She's getting sleepy, very sleepy.

She will sleep for a hundred years.

And only a kiss will wake her.



CHULLMA JAÑACHU, *words Devan Plyler*

I returned from the hospital to find that the L'unta villagers had blown the door off my house using sticks of dynamite. They had salvaged what was left of the door—along with the wood from my desk, some of my chairs, my bed frame and my bureau—to build a new pen for the llamas, who had prior to been roaming around the village freely, which had caused a number of them to run into nasty encounters with the dogs kept by the village people. I walked inside to find my assistant Walter Ambrose—who had also been stripped of the comforts of furniture—sitting under a small bug tent, blocking out the Chagas disease and the assassin bugs.

“Good God, Ambrose, what in the hell happened here?”

Ambrose had stayed behind to observe the L'unta while one of the villagers escorted me to La Paz where I could be treated for a quite painful and expulsive case of dysentery, unfortunately common amongst anthropologists conducting research. The whole way to the hospital, my intestines were acting up, and on multiple instances I had to call out to my escort (who I decided to refer to as Paul since I could not pronounce his given name) to kindly wait for me while I finished behind the bushes off the edge of the sandy road. This proved especially difficult, as we shared no common language, and the young lad did not respond to his Anglican name.

“One of the village priests became ill and died,” Ambrose answered from inside the tent. “Speaking of illness Royston, how’s your dysentery?”

“Cured for now and the least of my worries—They blew up my house because the priest is dead?”

“Yes.”

I ran my fingers through my hair and turned about the room utterly bewildered. “How the hell do they figure that?”

Ambrose unzipped the entry to the tent and crawled out. He held his beige breezer cap over his heart; his dark green socks halfway up his calves.

“The priest’s brother took it for granted that it was you that killed him, and has convinced some of the others of your guilt. I suppose the business with the dynamite is an attempt on their end to run you out of the village.”

“I didn’t kill him. I was over a toilet in La Paz all last week.”

“Unfortunately, that alibi might not hold up. They suspect the involvement of— malevolent magic.”

“Nonsense. What kind of magic?”

“The work of a vampire specifically; you see, he died so suddenly that no one understands what the cause could possibly be.”

“Well of course they don’t understand; death is a befuddling thing.”

“While it might seem to you like nonsense,” Ambrose started, “there is a historical precedent for their allegations. It dates all the way back to the Spanish Conquistadors. In L'unta folklore, vampires feast on body fat rather than blood, and when the Spanish settlers came, they actually did boil down the villagers for their fat so the Spanish could make candles and treat their wounds. In their eyes, you—being the foreign Englishman—are likely capable of the same.”

“How perfectly terrible for us. What should we do?”

“I say we take what we’ve got back to Cambridge as soon as possible so that we don’t upset their affairs any more than we already have.”

“Upset their affairs? They are the ones who are blowing things out of proportion.”

“Yes, but Royston, you must look at it from their perspective.” He defended, rather excitedly, as he is always excited when discussing with me the habits of the natives. Ambrose, while an esteemed researcher, passionate

about his work, and frankly a phenomenal assistant and translator, had a tendency to immerse himself in his adventures and lose sight of his principles. Not long after our arrival to Santa Barbra de Cultra about two months ago, the L'unta people had commenced in a ritual known as Lurya Misa. Ambrose and I followed the procession to the village chapel where they worshiped their Christian Saints. At the front of the cavalcade were two rams led into the chapel by the dead priest; behind him, two men carried incense, and empty bowls to catch the blood. Once inside, the dead priest slit the throats of the rams, and all sorts of red filth stained the dirt floor of their holy place. I found the celebration to be a travesty against our common theology, which is why I was surprised to find Ambrose, knowing him to be a Christian man, partaking in the gross display, praying alongside the L'unta with rams’ blood on his face. Feeling that I could not ethically partake in the ritual, I refused the priest’s request to pray with them, a decision for which Ambrose reproached me and has since not forgiven, calling my rejection of the practice an insult to the people, and an insult to a new world in which I had truly known and experienced nothing.

“I absolutely will not. Ambrose, you seem startlingly quick to accept all this.”

“I am just trying to be respectful, and I think that the most respectful thing is to leave them be.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I came here to learn about these people and I am not going to let my research be interrupted by their foolishness. Surely there is something to be done here.”

“We could seek litigation through the tribal council, but I don’t advise it, and would hate to see you do it; I would not like for the villagers to turn sentences against each other on our account, as they live so harmoniously without us.”

“Ambrose have you forgotten your morals

entirely? You must not subscribe the way you do to your environment. You always lose yourself in the process. These men have wronged me, and it is our duty—with our good sense of justice—to correct this err. Come, grab your things and let us go find the council.”

It took us a quite some time to reach the tribal council, for Ambrose was often distracted while walking through the village by the throngs of young children affectionately tugging at the hem of his jacket and bestowing him with their hugs. On many occasions, he would abandon our research to play and talk and laugh with them; in those instances, when they would approach him with a fútbol, he would join in their game with a complete and joyous disregard for the task at hand, and he would stay with them until he sensed that I—without the Aymara language and uninvented to socialize—was anxious to get back to business.

The tribal council was led by an old chieftain dressed in an embroidered and brightly colored tunic; he listened attentively to Ambrose explain my predicament, and the threat that had been made against me. After Ambrose had finished, the old man sent for two of the younger tribesmen, who, upon hearing the chieftain's orders, left as promptly as they had come.

“The councilmen have sent for the priest's brother.” Ambrose explained. “Then it will proceed much like our court; you are to present your testimony, and he his.”

“I hope he hasn't got a stake with him.”

“I hope the stake is the worst thing he has with him. You aren't the first visitor he has attacked. He means for us to go, and I fear this retaliation might only fuel his fire.”

“Ambrose, I am a man of conviction. I'll be damned if I adhere to the demands of a terrorist. We are going to settle these matters here and by the law and that is the end of it.”

The two tribesmen returned to the council with

the priest's brother and the entire Lunta village in tow. The villagers clamored into the cabin until there was no standing room left, at which point they began to circle around to watch the proceedings from the outside, gathering in clumps around all the windows, except for one which was occupied by a single llama, peeking its head through the opening in an effort to eat the hair off the head of one of the councilmen, who did not seem to mind the llama at all. I observed one boy who—weaving in and around the crowd shouting and collecting money—seemed to be organizing a system of gambling where the spectators could bet on the council's ruling. He made his way over towards Ambrose, who made a wager of two bolivianos, but did not say whom it favored.

The brother was not as old or as intimidating in build as I had expected given his explosive temperament. His boney stature did not come close to filling his tunic, which was comically oversized, and appeared even less flattering bunched under his small leather vest. Aside from the hard lines in his face—those deep wrinkles that revealed more of his severity and dignity than it did of his actual age—he looked like a boy trying on the clothes of his marginally bigger father.

He gave his testimony to the council while moving his hands in grand, enthusiastic gestures. As he spoke, some of the other villagers whom he had rallied to his cause jeered at me. Amidst all the divided voices in the room were the caws of two roosters; they cawed at each other from either side of the same man's underarms. The llama, no longer chewing on the councilman's hair, spit on the ground. It was certainly not a sight fit for a fair and upstanding law office.

“He says ‘the man is a vampire.’” Ambrose translated. “He says that his llamas sickened and died. He says that his brother, who was always a man strong in body, became frail and died like it was a curse. He says that you are a plague to his household.”

Llamas are a staple for the Lunta people for both spiritual and physiological reasons. In the eyes of the Lunta people, the destinies of llamas and humans are entirely intertwined, as they envision the social life of a llama to be comparable to that of a human. As a result of this conception, it is a Lunta rite for a llama to be sacrificed during funeral ceremonies, so that the soul of the llama might accompany the soul of man wherever he may go. In these rituals, it is typical that the llama be dressed like a human for the sacrifice, adorned in multicolour woven cloth, bomber caps, and gold jewelry; it is also typical that the llama be wearing the actual garments of its deceased owner, as they typically try to pair the man with his own animal, particularly his chullma jañachu, or a heart llama, which is given to its owner during their coming-of-age sacrament.

I received my heart llama from a well-meaning young herder who felt that I was lonely in this new village and needed a companion. It was a kind gesture with an ultimately disastrous outcome, as I am not particularly fond of llamas to begin with, and mine was an especially unruly beast that continuously broke into my living quarters where I would find it eating my research journals. I took preventative measures by roping my llama up to a tree about fifty meters away from the house, but one morning, when I went to feed it, I found that it had been mauled by what I can only assume was some sort of wild dog, or big cat. The whole village, including Ambrose, mourned the loss of my chullma jañachu, but I personally never felt a strong kinship to the beast to begin with.

“The chieftain is asking what you have to say about the matter.” Ambrose said.

“Tell him that I bloody well didn't kill the priest or the fellow's llamas.”

Ambrose spoke Aymara to the chieftain to argue my defense. It was at that time that I noticed among the crowd my kind escort who had journeyed with me to the

hospital in La Paz.

“Look it’s Paul.” I shouted to him. “Paul, come forward and tell the chief what you know.”

“Good heaven’s Royston, his name isn’t Paul.”

“Tell him to speak on my behalf. Have him say that I was in La Paz when the priest died.”

The boy was called forward to attest to my alibi, and he told it how it was: how I had been with him for the past week with my dysentery, and could not have possibly killed the priest. The priest’s brother listened attentively until Paul was finished, and he started up again in a stubborn and insisting manner.

“He’s conceding that you did not directly kill the priest, but he still believes that you are a vampire.”

The chieftain, certain that Paul was honest, turned to his fellow councilmen, and they began to discuss if I could rightfully be convicted under suspicion of vampirism. They deliberated for several minutes, and turned back out to face the room. The llama spit on the floor again.

“They have decided that the evidence against you is inconclusive—”

“Fair judge,” I said. “Oh thank you fair judge!”

“—he says that the herder must sign a contract promising that he will not try to kill you again. This contract gives you immunity from the other villagers as well.”

“A judge for his forward thinking!”

“—and this should put the matter to rest.”

“What?”

Ambrose—quite surprised—frowned at me from behind his thin spectacles. “Whatever do you mean, ‘what?’”

“I am down a secured house, and all of the furnishing in it. I should be compensated, should I not?”

“Royston please.”

“Don’t be such a pushover Ambrose. I am entitled to what he owes me.”

Ambrose did as I asked, and told the chieftain that we were still without our accommodations. The chieftain spoke again to the priest’s brother, and told him that he owed us a sum of fifty bolivianos. The herder, upon hearing this new ruling, let out a cry of protest.

“He says he doesn’t have fifty bolivianos to give.”

The chieftain nodded his head, and said that it would be fair enough to pay his dues in llamas.

“He says that all the llamas from his herd have died,” Ambrose said sadly. “And all that is left is his heart llama.”

The chieftain said that the herder was to settle his debt by handing over his heart llama on top of personally reconstructing our house. He said that was to be the end of it, and in his finality, the trail came to an end. The man dropped to his knees upon hearing the verdict and began wailing, and even though Ambrose, having disappeared into the crowd to find the young boy with the wagers, had discontinued his translating, it was clear, even to me, that the knave was mourning the loss of his *chullma jañachu*.

I pushed through the crowd to find Ambrose in the back counting his winnings.

“Come Ambrose, the chieftain is taking us to collect on our llama.”

“I will be out in a moment.” And he returned to the front of the room towards the llama herder. I watched Ambrose bend down to the crying grown man and offer him the four bolivianos he had just won, but the herder, the brother of a dead priest, rose from the ground and proudly refused him with the wave of his hand.

Ambrose and I, along with the chieftain, the council, and most of the crowd, filed out of the cabin. The crowd dispersed, and the herder took us along with the chieftain to his farm to recompense. All that remained in the room was a small group of gamblers, and the man who had carried a rooster under each arm. The young boy again made his rounds about the courtroom; he took wagers for their cockfight.





words Kelsey Paine

I don't like going back, because that means I have to leave again. I'd like to pretend it never changes while I am away. It is the worst kind of lie, the kind that seeps between the cracks and lurks in the back of your mind, growing slowly until it starts to seem like the truth.

There's a traffic light now, a first for Shady Spring, and a 24-hour Sheetz Gas Station where high schoolers hang out. Dad's truck sits alone in the driveway now, and there are bright salmon-colored holes on the living room wall where pictures of mom in her wedding dress kept the color from fading for so many years.

History says that the mountains wear down over time, that the temperatures rise and eventually we have to wait well past Thanksgiving for snow. The cliff face fell, changing the course of the creek and draining the pond so that the water is just below my knees now; or did I just grow taller?

Sometimes I take off my shoes and feel for the still familiar cracks in the smooth bottom of the creek. It's quieter now, without the barking of the dogs, or the chattering of my sister, and the creek seems louder in the silence.

Sometimes I pretend that it's still deep enough to swim.



HOORAY
FOR AGRICULTURE
NORTHUMBERLAND'S #2
INDUSTRY
NORTHUMBERLAND FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

montani semper liberi

words Kelsey Paine

“homemade cherry pie contest starts at two!”

“pie”: one syllable into three

don't forget to try the puddin'

girl in cut-off jeans and muddin' boots

straddles the pig, sponge in hand

lunch:

bbq deep-fried twinkies

Shady Spring High School's

corn stand

“we love our miners!” pinned to

camo jackets

Brad Paisley tailgate:

anyone want a beer?

dessert:

Uncle Bob's cream soda

moonshine cherries

chocolate coal lumps

bait n' tackle sold next to RV park,

tractors, and log rolling contest

sea of navy blue and old gold;

let's gooo “Eers!

blue ribbon cow, proud

West Virginia State Fair Champion

202



words Kelsey Paine

The woman's heels echoed on the tile before she entered the room, a pendulum ticking down their final moments of peace. She shielded her face with a clipboard. "If I call your name, you are to report to the fire department to identify bodies."

Anna ♥ Adam the tree reads
"Marriage," he scoffed. "We have our whole lives to think about that."

shaking so hard the words on the report
blurred: *Autopsy*
she had to be with him in his last moments

*The decedent is identified by recognition of specific coal miner
medallion and tracking number. The decedent is received
wearing heavily soot stained overalls.*

My best friend can't come to my birthday party
because it was his birthday too.

*this is an infinity ring
it means forever*

His father was sorry to know how much his son's heart weighed.

They renamed it
Coal River East,
as if a new name would make us
forget

Town of Montcoal-
population as of 2000: unlisted, but
Whitesville has 520 and an elementary school.

That's where the reporters stayed: finger-painted pictures
covering the walls of their new bedroom, cramming
into too small desks to eat the homemade
barbecue and beans the locals brought to them.

*Helping others is soothing, she explains. It gives us a chance to show the world what we
are really like.*

Massey built the school,
Little League fields and all.
Almost all the children end up
working in the mines.
Massey owns the mines.
They went into the darkness so that we could have light.

Pineview Cemetary on Coal River Road
Massey bought the new headstones

*It's hard, when life's moved on around you,
but has yet to stir within you.*



Jaw by Roberta Gentry

Operator

words Charmaine Cadeau

Doggedly, you've tried to get through and she,
being pure astral body
left you alone with your voice.

Held, as though between rooms.
The body's confusion between falling
and falling asleep. An old nerve.

The distant switchboard, atmosphere
of zeros, clean white
plates. Ghosts on the other end:
dull tones of tires on pavement,
highway speeds.

Dialing the number again, seven
wives for seven brothers. The fist-sized
birds, the stone: it's all in the wrist, flicking
between holding out and letting go.

Unhealthy Relationship

words Lauryn Polo

Waking up entangled in a hug, not from a human.
Nope, this hug is much better than mere arms can muster.
This hug is from my blanket. It engrosses me in itself.
And *whispers* in my ear until I am asleep.
It tells me everything will be okay, that nothing
Is wrong, that no one will harm me.
It soothes me, tells me not to l e a v e.

Tells me there is nothing good out there,
That the best I will ever find is him.
Maybe he is right,
That world is so harsh.
And today is so cold and rainy.
Why should I leave this warm bed
Just to be cold all day?

But some fresh air would be nice.
Is it getting hot in here?
It seems a little close under this blanket.
Weren't these pillows softer earlier?
These sheets feel like wool.
I have things to do today, and I should start now.

Then the pillows cry, "Don't leave us, we need you."
Now what does one say to a couple of fluffy pillows
That want nothing more than my head to be on them?

The mattress is offended that I could ever dream of getting up.
"After all we have been through, after you laid into me every night.
I have you imprinted in me!"
I feel guilty leaving, but I have so much to do.
Cleaning, homework, and errands galore.

"You can do it later." Great, now the sheets are involved.
"It's cold out there, too, you know," the blanket adds.
He is right, it is rainy and wet and cold.
And this bed is dry and comfy and warm.

But I have a paper due tomorrow that I haven't started yet.
And the pharmacy closes at noon, and it is already 10.
I should get up, and get ready, and go.

"You have time; just lay a little longer,"
The blanket's voice is like velvet to my ears.
He is so convincing.
He wraps around my body tighter.
Maybe just a little l o n g e r.

"No, No, No. I have got to get going," I scream.
Not only to convince him, but myself as well.
I kick, I push, and I jump.
I am free, I am out, I am walking a w a y,
And he says nothing.





THE SMELL OF CORDITE

words Matthew Fiander

Dan talked Jill into going to the Memorial Day parade with him and Dylan even though she'd just miscarried three days before. They had been taking Dylan since he was two – he was four now – and he loved walking around the town square to see the fleet of fire trucks, to smell the peanut oil from the fried dough vendors, to see the soldiers dressed up in Union garb to fire their guns.

Dan thought, no knew, it would be good for Jill to go. He said so through the locked bedroom door. What he didn't say was that he didn't expect her to take it this hard. She hadn't been out of the house. Yesterday afternoon, Dan found her asleep on the bed, Dylan's old Fisher-Price stethoscope laid across her chest, like she'd been trying to listen for the lost baby. Dan sat on the bed next to her and picked up the toy, put the buds in his ears and held the chest piece to her stomach. He didn't know why he did it, didn't know why he concentrated so hard when he did. He heard his wife's heartbeat, distant, up in the cage of her chest, but nothing else. He turned his head to hear better what wasn't there and saw his wife's eyes open, looking at him.

"Silly, isn't it?" she said. "I didn't really think I'd hear anything."

"She's not in there," he said. And, since then, he kept wishing he'd said yet. She's not there *yet*. He hadn't known until that moment that his wife wanted a daughter. But the tears in her eyes, the way she curled up her legs and hugged them to her chest, closing off from Dan, told him that.

He took the toy stethoscope with him when he left the room and his wife hadn't spoken since. Not that she'd said much in the three days since Dan woke up to his pregnant wife screaming, to the blood on the sheets, that frantic trip to the emergency room, the flat look on the doctor's face. His use of the word *ectopic*. Surgery. His wife, with a mask over her face, being wheeled down the hall away from him.

When she came out of surgery, after they'd taken the embryo – that's the word they used – out of her fallopian tube and stopped the bleeding, she didn't cry. Not until she got home and laid down to sleep, then she shuddered in the bed. She sobbed and turned away from Dan, clutching the edge of the mattress. All he wanted in that moment was to hold her, to tell her they could try again if she wanted, to say it would be okay. But she stayed on her side and hadn't moved much since. Dan felt like she was on the other side of some uncrossable border. He wanted her back.

"It's not fair to Dylan to miss the parade," he said through the door. "We can't just forget about him." The room stayed silent for a moment until he heard the worn creak of bedsprings, then bare feet padding slowly across the hardwood. He knew she was up, so he went

downstairs and when he got to the kitchen, Dylan was standing there in the doorway, big grin on his face, hand held out for him to shake.

"I'm Dylan, nice to meet you," he said. When Dan went to shake his son's hand, a spark of static electricity shocked him. He knew this was coming. It was Dylan's favorite new game. He'd rub his socked feet like crazy in the living room then run and find you to shake your hand. When Dan pulled his hand back, shaking it in mock pain, Dylan giggled and ran back into the living room to charge up. But when his mother came down a minute later, in one of Dan's old t-shirts and jeans, Dylan ran up to her but didn't hold out his hand. He just smiled at her. "Hi Mommy," he said.

She smiled back and held out her hand. "Come on," she said. "Get it over with."

When Dylan touched her hand, he laughed out loud at the spark, and Dan laughed too, putting a hand on Jill's shoulder. "Let's get your shoes on," she said to Dylan, turning away from Dan.

They only lived two streets from the square, so it was a short walk, and there weren't many other people walking nearby, which meant they were running late. But Dan was glad they didn't have to run into anyone yet, that they had this moment of quiet out in the world.

"We're going to miss it," Dylan said more than once. "We're going to miss them fire the guns."

"We'll make it," Dan said after waiting to see if Jill said anything. She just held on to Dylan's hand and kept moving forward. They walked past Adrian's Jeweler's, owned by Adrian who, when Dylan was a baby, yelled at Dan for running his baby carriage up onto his meticulous storefront lawn, past the children's library with its hard carpet and sweet book smell, past the drug store owned by the MacArthur brothers who had filled the prescription for Jill's pain meds and antibiotics. Reminders, Dan thought, incidental reminders in all directions.

They got to the square and found a spot on the corner outside Bob's bakery. He thought Dylan might ask for a cheese danish, but he was staring down the street to see the parade come around the corner and up Main.

"Is this spot all right?" he asked Jill.

"It's fine," she said. Her arms were wrapped around her stomach.

"You look cold," he said. "You want me to run back and get a sweater?"

She shook her head. "I should have taken another pill, that's all."

Dan was about to tell her that wouldn't fix anything when Joe and Stacy Hutch from down the street walked up to them. Stacy smiled wide

and toothy and asked where they'd been hiding. "You missed our dinner party on Saturday," she said.

"Sorry," Dan said. "Jill was sick."

"Well, are you feeling better?" Joe asked her.

"Sure," she said.

When she didn't say anything else, Dan added, "We'll have her fixed up and back to one-hundred percent in no time." He smiled as big as Stacy did.

"I hope so," Stacy said. "You all need to be there the next time. It's no fun without you."

"You got it," Dan said.

After they left, Jill turned to him and frowned, mouthed the words I'm sick?

"Should I have told them?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You hate those dinner parties. We weren't going anyway. Why'd you make me the excuse?"

"What else was I supposed to say?" he asked.

He wanted to hear her answer, hoped that she had one. That she could tell him what to say to make her feel better, to fix her. When she clung to the bed that first night home, far away from him, she seemed like a piece of his wife, a shard, something that was only a part, that needed to be reattached to some larger whole. He wanted to do that for her, but she wouldn't tell him what was broken. With that oily smell in the air, he suddenly wanted to buy her some fried dough or a frozen lemonade. Something sweet and comforting. But before he could move the din of people milling and talking around them fell away and down the street a truck's horn sounded.

"Here they come," Dylan said.

"I'm sorry," Dan said to his wife, but if she heard over the growing cheers it didn't show on her face.

The small procession always started the same way. A bunch of local women volunteered to dress as Betsy Ross and carry a large American flag down Main Street. They waved and smiled, the crowd applauded. Next came the Shriners in their tasseled conical hats, carrying a banner asking for donations. After that, some of the local firefighters rolled down the street on a couple of their trucks, waving and mugging the whole way.

Dan lifted Dylan up because he knew his son liked to see the fire engine. Dylan nudged his mother's shoulder. "Look, Mom," he shouted, pointing at the ladder truck. "That thing is huge."

She looked up at him and smiled, put a hand on his knee and gave it a squeeze. Her smile was tired, but not pained in that moment, her

eyes almost clearing.

It all weighed on her. He saw it in how her gaze moved from Dylan to the street, the sidewalk, her hands, how the skin under her eyes looked like crepe paper – it told Dan it was all too much. He wanted to take some of it from her, to feel the weight too. The doctors told them it could be harder to conceive after an ectopic pregnancy. It had already taken a couple years to get pregnant this time and Dan thought Jill wanted something to blame, something to explain it, the way he did. The way he got up that night they came home from the hospital and went through the bathroom cabinets, reading the side effects off every label, checking the soap and the shampoo in the shower for chemicals that had hazardous-sounding names. At one point, he woke up in the tub where he'd let the bottles scatter around him and had wrapped himself in Dylan's ducky towel. Dan snuck back to bed and heard Jill grinding her teeth in her sleep. He wondered what her pain felt like, if it settled on her like a film the way his had. Dylan was the only thing that worked on the hurt, that static-electric charge from his son's hand jolting the pain out of him momentarily. Even to hear him cry when he fell and scraped his palm on the driveway – it didn't get rid of the hurt, but it softened it.

"The grand finale!" Dylan shouted, because that is what Dad said to him last year when the Union soldiers came around the corner and up Main. Dylan stared silently as the soldiers came into town in five tight lines.

Dan put his arm around Jill and when she looked at him he nodded up to his son sitting on his shoulders, and he smiled at her to show her what they had. She smiled, but only halfway, her eyes once again flat, staring at Dylan as if trying to figure him out.

One of the soldiers yelled, "Halt!"

"Wow," Dylan whispered to himself, not noticing his mother's stare.

"Aim." The group raised their rifles to their shoulders and pointed them into the sky.

"Here it comes," Dan said.

"Fire!" And the entire squad fired a round. Dylan squealed and covered his ears. Dan thought he felt Jill flinch, until he realized it was his own body that did, jarring her in the process.

"Fire!" Dylan laughed. Dan tightened his arm around Jill.

"Fire!" The crowd erupted in applause. Dylan clapped loudly and the noise rang in Dan's ears.

"Company, march," and the soldiers made their way up Main, away from the crowd, signaling the parade's end.

"Can I try to find some shells, Mom?" Dylan asked.

Jill started to help Dylan down from Dan's shoulders, but she winced so Dan set him down and he ran off with the other kids to find the cartridges the soldiers left behind. Last year, most of the kids found one but Dylan didn't and he cried the whole way home. Jill was watching Dylan search the ground, her eyes sharp, clear all of a sudden. She wanted him to find a cartridge, and Dan realized he did too. That maybe this was the thing this day needed. That their son should find a shell, should run back to them, the shell in his palm, the coppery smell on his hands. Maybe that would be the start of what came next, what came after.

Dan imagined his wide-eyed son finding a shell and bringing it over to him, imagined turning the shell over in his hand to show Dylan the black scoring inside. He would lean in close and inhale that sulfur smell, breathe it deep into his nose. Dan would talk about the residue in the cartridge, how it was called cordite and it was the charge that made the bullet fire. He would use the word propellant. Dan would tuck his son's hand around the shell and tell him to store it in his sock drawer. At night, when Dylan slept, Dan would go into his room and dig out the shell. He'd hold it to his nose, and look over his son, count his limbs and fingers and toes the way he had at the hospital, and he would inhale the cordite smell again and again, until it was gone.

Some children were already returning to their parents, shells in their open palms. Just to their left a boy tugged on his dad's pant leg. Look Dad, a whole bullet!" he said. "It must have fallen out of the chamber or something." A group circled around him to see, patting the young boy on the shoulder.

Dan didn't have to look at Jill to know she'd heard, that she was fighting back tears. He cringed to think something so trivial could upset her, make her mouth go cracking, winter-morning dry. This was how it would be, he thought. Every broken thing the world could truck out, big or small, was unshakably theirs now.

He swallowed hard, all of a sudden wanting a glass of water, then caught Dylan's eye and shot him a smile. "We're going to be okay," he said finally, not looking at Jill but keeping his arm around her. He said this to her whenever he brought her tea or cinnamon toast and climbed into bed next to her. He told her she didn't have to speak if she didn't want, he knew she was upset. It was okay to be angry, he whispered to her, the same way he had driving home from the hospital. Suddenly Jill broke away from him. She was crying openly now.

"Stop saying that," she said, her voice breaking some. "That everything is going to be okay. We're at the Memorial Day parade, Dan.

A stupid, rinky-dink town parade. This thing shouldn't be able to make me cry." She wiped her face.

"We can try again, Jill. We can keep trying."

"I've been trying to tell myself that." She looked away from Dan, hugged herself hard.

"You're upset," Dan said. "We're both upset."

"Upset, Dan? Upset is the best you can come up with? I'm hurting to the bone. Like pain is a part of me for good now. Do you know what that feels like?"

He just stared at her, at parts of her face. Shrunken eyes. Shiny forehead. Limbs faintly quivering. The noise of people passing and shuffling their feet and talking and laughing rose in Dan's ears, his throat caught and his arms went slack. Down the street the soldiers and the Betsy Rosses and the Shriners were sipping coffee from Styrofoam cups and eating donuts and it made anger run like a current across Dan's skin. His hands shook and his eyes stung with tears. Jill looked murky, unrecognizable. This was what she'd become, someone to fill the space next to him. Standing small beside him in the light of day. A heaviness on the other side of the bed. He couldn't hold her. She wouldn't let him, and he wasn't sure he'd know how. "I'm not sure," he finally said, though he wasn't sure anymore what he was answering.

Dan looked in the street for Dylan. All the other kids had been called away by their families, and now that Dylan was alone he scanned the crowd for his parents. Dan met eyes with his son, saw Dylan look from him to Jill and back again. Dylan stood up straight and gave them a soldier's salute. He stayed like that for a second, his hand to his forehead, then nodded at his parents and let it fall.

Dylan stood there with no cartridge. Dan thought his son might cry. But he didn't. He just dropped his head and kept searching while around him men with brooms began to sweep the sidewalks and street gutters. Dan reached for Jill and placed one hand on her stomach, the other on his. She didn't pull away but looked at him, searching for something in his face. He stared off past her, focusing. He was feeling for signs – for a softness in her flesh, a coolness on her skin, maybe a hard, deep-set node. He didn't press, but waited for whatever he was seeking out – the pain, the relief under it, even, miraculously, her – to reveal itself to him. He covered her soft belly with his hand for what seemed like forever, until she finally closed her eyes and shook her head. Dan looked at Jill and then at the crowd around him and then to Dylan still searching in the street. He wanted to get his son and go home.

Gently, Jill lifted his hand from her stomach and, with the same tired care, let it go.

Authors

CHARMAINE CADEAU is an Assistant Professor of English at High Point University. She has published two collections of poetry, most recently *Placeholder* (Brick Books, 2013).

JORDAN COAKLEY is a senior studying English Writing at High Point University. The oldest of three children, she grew up in Leesburg, Virginia but has fallen in love with North Carolina. Jordan is excited to be a part of Apogee Magazine for the first time and hopes to one day fulfill her dream of writing scripts for television shows.

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SALLY EVANS, from Winston-Salem, North Carolina is a recent graduate from High Point University with a degree in English Writing and Studio Arts. Her academic interests have led her to a growing curiosity in writing poetry and the relationship between literature and visual arts. Her writing is often a reflection of this relationship, but it also comments on the human experience both personally and universally, physically and cognitively.

MATTHEW FIANDER was born in Weymouth, Massachusetts, a suburb south of Boston. He received his B.A. in English from Elon University in 2004, and his M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2007. His work has appeared in the *Yalobusha Review*, where he was named runner-up in the Barry Hannah Fiction Prize 2008. He also writes literary and music criticism, serving as an associate editor for the international online magazine, *PopMatters*, and as a fiction editor for the online literary journal, *StorySouth*.

CHRIS HAILEY is a recent graduate of High Point University. Originally from Bedford, Virginia, a small farming town on the Blue Ridge Mountains, most of his work attempts to exploit the nontraditional behavior of some of the towns citizens. "Flies Attracted to Light" breaks from this style, though, exploring the idea of violence versus comfort and how they work in response to the reader.

KELSEY PAINE is a recent graduate of High Point University. Her writing often focuses on West Virginia and ideas about home and belonging.

JACOB PAUL'S first novel, *Sarah/Sara*, was selected by Poets and Writers as one of the five best first fictions of 2010. Excerpts from his second novel, *A Song of Ilan*, won the Utah Writers' Contest in 2008 and the Richard Scowcroft Prize in 2007. His writing has appeared in *Mountain Gazette*, *Western Humanities Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and *USA Today's Weekend Magazine*. He teaches in the Department of English at High Point University.

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Life for **LAURYN POLO** has been one awkward moment after another, all of which have served as inspiration for her poems and other writings. Lauryn is proud to call Toms River, New Jersey her home; the surrounding community has not only shaped her as a person, but has given her inspiration for many of her works, particularly after Hurricane Sandy ravaged the town. She is a senior English writing major and hopes to attain her MFA in creative writing after her journey at High Point is complete. Once her academic endeavors are over, she plans on helping others by pursuing opportunities within the Peace Corps. But, that is quite some time from now, and she is really open to any spontaneous plans in between. All in all, as long as she is actively writing and eagerly traveling, she will consider herself a success.

A graduate of Appalachian State University (BA, English; BA, Psychology) and the University of Alaska Anchorage, **ALLISON S. WALKER** received her M.F. A. in Creative Writing and Literary Arts and gave birth to her daughter, Ada Cassidy, during the insanely dark Alaskan winter of 2004. She is currently at work on an NSF-funded grant project designed to integrate the Arts into undergraduate STEM education. Allison is married to poet and educator J. Scott Walker, and currently teaches in the English Department at High Point University.