The Fine Print

dislocate
University of Minnesota
Department of English
1 Lind Hall
207 Church Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

dislocate is a literary magazine operated by the graduate students in the English Department at the University of Minnesota.

Copyright © 2014 by Regents of the University of Minnesota.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the Regents of the University of Minnesota.

Publication of dislocate is made possible by the generous support of the Lerner Foundation; we thank the Foundation for their continued involvement. We are also grateful to the following organizations and individuals for their assistance: the Edelstein-Keller Endowment, the Regents of the University of Minnesota, the Department of English at the University of Minnesota, the Creative Writing Program at the University of Minnesota, Ellen Messer-Davidow, Julie Schumacher, and Peter Campion.

We are informed and inspired by the ghosts of dislocate past and are especially grateful to previous editors Jennifer Fossenbell and Nasir Sakandar. A special thanks also to James Cihlar.

The Edelstein-Keller Endowment

The Creative Writing Program owes the inception of its MFA degree and its stellar roster of visiting writers to the Edelstein-Keller Endowment and the generosity of Ruth Easton (née Edelstein). Ms. Easton was born in North Branch, Minnesota, attended the University of Minnesota for one year, and finished her education at Macalester College and the Cumnock School. She then began a successful career as an actress. She appeared on radio and on Broadway with Walter Huston, Lionel Barrymore, Clark Gable, Eddie Cantor, and Al Jolson.

In 1985, Kenneth H. Keller, then president of the University of Minnesota, discussed with Ms. Easton his plan to launch the University’s first capital gifts campaign—in particular, his hope that the first major endowment specifically benefit the Department of English. As a result of this discussion, Ms. Easton made a significant gift, which President Keller arranged to match with an equal sum from University resources, and the Edelstein-Keller Endowment was born. Ms. Easton named the endowment in honor of her brother, David E. Edelstein, and his closest friend, Thomas A. Keller, Jr. (no relation to President Keller).

The first Edelstein-Keller Endowment visiting writer was Isaac Bashevis Singer, who visited the Twin Cities campus in May 1985. Subsequent visitors have included Grace Paley, Adrienne Rich, Edward P. Jones, Yusef Komunyakaa, J. M. Coetzee, Sam Shepard, Colson Whitehead, Vivian Gornick, Tobias Wolff, and the current writer-in-residence, Charles Baxter. The Edelstein-Keller Endowment made possible the conversion in 1996 of the MA in English and Professional Writing to the MFA in Creative Writing. The result of Ruth Easton’s generosity and President Keller’s vision is a graduate writing program with a national reputation that continues to attract the finest established and emerging writers in the country. Please visit the Creative Writing Program’s website at http://creativewriting.umn.edu.
NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Thank you.

We feel a huge debt of gratitude to the weird, wonderful founders of dislocate, and to everyone else who has come before us and made the first nine issues happen. Thank you to the writers who trusted us with their work. Thank you to Adam Lerner and Nick Jarslburg, and to the University of Minnesota faculty members whose editorial advice and support have been invaluable at critical moments this year.

Over the past nine years, dislocate’s all-volunteer staff has produced ten print issues. Ten! Looking at them all—here, spread out on the table in our office in Lind Hall—is both humbling and invigorating. None of us are paid for our efforts; we read submissions and we meet and assemble the issue in the interstices of the demands of graduate school, teaching and our own writing. But when it all starts to come together, and the work transforms from a mess of computer files and back-and-forth emails into a printed issue, we remember: the work we’re publishing now, here, first, will end up in books. The writers we’re publishing now are in the early stages of brilliant careers. Anyone who wants to know what the future of publishing will hold needs look no further than the work being published in literary journals today. There’s no better reason to continue than that.

Over the years, dislocate has interviewed Eula Biss, Edward P. Jones, T.C. Boyle, Claudia Rankine, Christopher Kennedy, D.A. Powell, and Phillip Levine. We have dug through the University of Minnesota’s archives to print poems by the late, great John Berryman. We have published work by Michael Martone, Jenny Boully, Arielle Greenberg, Stephen Burt, Matt Rasmussen, and Ander Monson. And we have published new writers who excitedly told us we were the first journal to print their work.

Every issue of dislocate is its own beast, featuring a mix of poetry and prose that reflects the aesthetics of its editorial team and the larger zeitgeist of the issue’s moment. In this, our tenth issue, we have compiled a diverse mix of voices representing the Midwest and beyond, through poetry, prose, and visual art. You’ll find writing here about love and grief and suburbia and bears and wrestling, and so much else.

Thank you, reader, for being a part of it.
He then
changes the
birds of
fingers
of lakes
of strangers
of earth
& death
into a deck chair
with a Mountain of thought
endless gravity
to get somewhere

They say
you are inextinguishable
you are a manner
of shirt
an open window
a wing coloration
a glitter in the garbage

where
orthographers
invent
new prying tools
among these old words
the hand
that corrects
milk
or marble
is not
here

something is busy eating the sun
for you

on
the new
shaking
Ivory
Coast

hurriedly you invent new futures

and learn to tango
Chords of flame rosary the throat; you’ve been swallowing arrowheads by the pound. Local historians have warned about misheard secrets whispered to burial grounds carried in Acquino’s bones:

Culassi, where the beach is broken glass and bolos cake with blood.

Your second stain is a native tongue sewn back into your mouth. A makeshift hut bamboos a fear of moonlight. Ferdinand uncaged tigers long enough for their stripes to extend his reach. Under the Jesus midnight, mahogany agony thorns the rose. Rising fast in the November sky, nightmare blankets jungle heat, trapping hearts in a coconut cage. Trucks, boots, soviet rifles.

Brick red mornings bring headless trophies to the spine of Antique—their gore licked clean by Sulu waters. Tigers fatten in the shade.

You sleep with such echoes pulsing across breastbone; as fresh prayers burning sugarcane fields.
“O.K., son,” the ref says. “Get up. You weren't shot here.”
“Only because that big Mexican there doesn't have a gun on him,” Dwarf says.
“És racista,” the sweeper mutters, pointing at Dwarf. “Referee?”
“If you can't speak American, I can't help you out,” the ref says to him.
I get from my knees to my feet, figuring that way everyone will at least stop talking. My shorts are sticky, caked with mud. In any other circumstance this would be embarrassing.

“¡chinga tu madre!”
“Right back at you.”

The rain falling still in black sheets from clouds slung low like great grey brains. I'm soaked to the skin, sodden, and all of them looking now, all waiting. The penalty spot is thick clotted with muck. It's here someplace. They're still looking at me, waiting for me. Time drips so slow. Pick the heavy ball up and wipe it on my jersey. Replace it. Always twice, yes.

Hop all you want. Long arms low dangling like a chimpanzee. Can't be any fun to look like a chimpanzee. Not unless you are a chimpanzee. Smack of padded gloves, check. Crack of moronic grin, check. I see you. Trying to put me off is all. Keep trying.

On paper, we should have won this. Too bad we play the game on grass. Breathe.

Q: You feel differently?
A: Yes.
Q: Remind me how you felt before.
A: Like my thoughts were leaves in a pile on a lawn and the wind would gust and blow them all around. I felt like I'd have to pick up each one and look at it and put it back in place.
Q: And you wished that would stop?
A: Yeah, or that I had this really good rake.
Q: And now?
A: The leaf pile is there, but the wind has calmed some. It's more of a breeze, like what you get on a Lake Michigan beach in June.
Q: You have an interesting way of putting things.
A: Is that good?
Q: It's not bad.
A: Was that a question?

“¿Qué miras?”
“I don't know but it's sure as hell looking back.”
“Boys!” The ref gives us both the stare, which is intimidating, not. “That'll do now. That's enough of the malarkey.”

Malarkey. Where did he find such a word? He's young, this referee, a college boy earning a little beer money on the side. There's an ugly tattoo on his neck, a snake or some such. What kind of person gets a neck tattoo of a snake? Someone who uses a word like malarkey.

**Things You Don't Want to Hear in a Tattoo Parlor**

1. “We're all out of red, so I used pink. You cool with that?”
2. “2 Os in Bob, right?”
3. “God, it sucks bigtime when I get the hiccups.”
4. “Anything else you want to say? I've got plenty room left back here.”
5. “I'll bet you can't tell I ain't never done this before.”

Got to say, that's one massive nose, goalie. Yes, sir, that'd be quite the honker, conk, proboscis, mega-schnozz. Seriously, man, you could pick doughnuts up off the ground with that thing. With that there beak, schnozzle, A1 snotlocker.

Slow. Push the ball off the front of the spot with the cleats and take twelve paces back. Always twelve. Six back. Two to the side. Four forward to strike through. Ah, the PK ritual. Always. Rituals are important.

Q: Doubters?
A: Are afraid that if everything isn't perfect or done right something terrible will happen.
Q: Counters?
A: Are obsessed with order and symmetry. They may have superstitions about numbers.
Q: You are?
A: I am sometimes a doubter and sometimes a counter.
Q: What are the 4 R's?
A: Again?
Q: Again.
A: First, relabel. Go from “I don't think or feel that I need to do this” to “I'm having a compulsive urge to do this.”
Q: Good. Then?
A: Reattribute. Remember that it’s just a chemical imbalance in my brain. “It’s not me, it’s my brain is messing with me.”
Q: Next?
A: Refocus. Say, “I’m experiencing a symptom. I need to do another behavior.”
Q: And last?
A: Revalue. “It’s just my obsession. It has no meaning. There’s no need to pay attention to it.”
Q: Does it help to write all this down?
A: Only if it’s a list and there has to be five things in a list.

#3
Mason, stomping around on the touchline in his weirdass skyblue poncho. Pacing like a caged panther, watching me. It’s all on me now. He’s just a spectator like the rest, can’t do a thing, powerless. It’s in my hands. Actually, it’s in my feet.

You must be the one I’m hearing about.
He took my hand, firm grip, blue eyes intense and frightening.
How’s the place suit you?
Fine.
You transferred I hear?
Yes.
Was there a problem there, son?
My mother felt I needed a change of school.
Was there a problem there, son?
I guess I was struggling a bit academically.
Was there a problem there, son?
Three times the charm, like in a fairy tale.
Yes.
Good man. But you’re feeling better now I take it?
Pretty much.
Was it the drugs?
The drugs, sir?
Was it the drugs?
I stared at my sneakers.
That was sort of a part of it.
That was sort of a part of it, eh? Mason sighed. So what was the other part?
I had personal issues.
Everybody and their dog has personal issues, son. Seeing as how we’re all individuals with a personality.
I have some mental health issues.

You are a young man with mental health issues?
Yes.
But you don’t appear to be a lunatic, son. Which is a start. I don’t think a lunatic is what we need, eh Mr. Boydstun?
The team captain looked up and down, flared his nostrils a bit.
We definitely don’t need a lunatic, sir. We have enough of those already.
I’m better now.
How’s that?
I’m being treated, with medication. It took a while for them to get me the right stuff. Some things needed to get worked out better with my medication.
Mason looked at me sideways.
So you’re telling me the doctors solved your drug problem for you by giving you more drugs?
I guess.
May I inquire what drugs you’re on and how they affect your ability to play the game?
Lexapro. It’s an anti-depressant type deal. Seroquel, which is I believe an anti-psychotic. Adderall. Also something called Wellbutrin. I don’t know what that does.
You, son, are a walking chemistry project. But can you play the game?
Yes.
Yes?
Yes.

And here was your reward, coach. Not one spot kick missed all season, sheer perfection from your golden boy. Boy’s got ice water in his veins you say. I guess, coming from you, it’s a compliment. Mostly, it’s the insults you dish I remember.

Insults
1. You cover every blade of grass, son. You have to. Your ball control is awful.
2. That was only yards away from being an inch-perfect pass, boy.
3. What are we playing here? A five man back four?
4. Without being too harsh on you, son, you just cost us that damn game.
5. I’ve got nothing to say to you lot. Any questions?

#4
How cold the rain! My shirt chilled damp against my skin. This twisted cramping in my gut. I’d imagined it differently. Everything soaked up and me a sponge. Oh, breathe just will you.
Famous Soccer Players With OCD
1. David Beckham
2. Paul Gascoine
3. Tim Howard
4. Steven Gerrard
5. Kolo Toure

Q: It makes you feel what?
A: Lots of things. There’s this thrill of anticipation I get with a clean sheet of paper in front of me. I don’t need a subject for a list. Just the thought of doing one gives me a sense of purpose.
Q: And?
A: I like the calmness that comes when I’m doing it. And I like the satisfaction when it’s finished, when it’s all laid out in front of me. It makes things easier to sort.
Q: Is there pleasure in looking at it afterwards?
A: No.

Symptoms
1. Need to align objects just so
2. Belief certain numbers are lucky or unlucky
3. Behaviors based on such superstitious beliefs
4. Counting compulsions
5. List-making

Q: It makes you feel what?
A: Lots of things. There’s this thrill of anticipation I get with a clean sheet of paper in front of me. I don’t need a subject for a list. Just the thought of doing one gives me a sense of purpose.
Q: And?
A: I like the calmness that comes when I’m doing it. And I like the satisfaction when it’s finished, when it’s all laid out in front of me. It makes things easier to sort.
Q: Is there pleasure in looking at it afterwards?
A: No.

#5
So you’re jogging back out again then, gesticulating. Waving the man back over to us. What’s with you? What a drama queen! Of course there’s a problem. There’s always a problem.
“¿Qué está haciendo?”
Well, yeah, you would want it re-spotted wouldn’t you?
“It goes on the mark,” the ref snarls at me, agreeing. “He’s right. That’s what it’s for.”

What I Cannot Say
1. If you had one more eye you’d be a Cyclops.
2. Helen Keller would have seen that foul in the first half.
3. Get off your knees you’re blowing the game.
4. And there was me thinking only horses slept standing up.
5. Were you that lookout was at Pearl Harbor?

“Bayo y a su izquierda.”

Back on your line bobbing still, but smiling no more. A mouth like a malahide cod on him, my grandmother would say.
“Usted es uno de conversación, amigo.”
“If you can’t speak American,” I say, “I can’t help you out.”
“I said you was a talking asshole.”
“I know what you said. I have a facility with languages.”
“The ref’s had enough, and shows us yellow. The card’s curled at the edges where it’s wet.
“The question should be,” I say to him, “whether that goalkeeper there has a green one.”
“You’re talking your way towards a red here, mister,” the ref says. “So I’d advise you to zip it. You feel me?”

My sponsor said make a list of all the things you don’t understand. Calculus didn’t count, since no one understands Calculus. I didn’t understand my mother or how to spring a good offside trap or religion. Don’t get me wrong. I like Jesus when he’s all about the poor and the lame and raising the dead. But sometimes he’s weird about having his feet washed with expensive perfume, and Prodigal Son just seemed so unfair to the older brother, and the miracles are a bit too David Copperfield for me. I didn’t understand girls, ever, obviously. Anyway, I wrote the list and put my mother under “girls” since she once was one. Keep it simple, you know? My list of things I didn’t understand: Jesus, girls and the offside trap. He wasn’t happy with it.

Blow the damn whistle. Waiting for a shot at redemption. Blow it will you? Drip drip. Boys think about girls once every four minutes statistics indicate. Not me. I can go at least five minutes without thinking about her pretty hair.

I was hoping she’d be the one to ring me up and she was. A cardboard sign behind the register: ‘If you want to complain about my service please take complaint to Helen Waite.’

That really isn’t funny, I said. Did you put that up?
She ignored me. Fifteen dollars, 28 cents.
I remember still what the tab was. 1528. Adds up to sixteen. Our age.
She just punched at the till then tilted her open palm my way. Then since I didn’t move a muscle, a deer in her headlamps, she looked in my eyes. Hers were green, the faint violet circles around them more pronounced because of her paleness. The greenest eyes I have ever seen. The warm night floated in suspension. I could have dived in and taken a dip in those eyes.

She said it again, a little irritated: Fifteen dollars, 28 cents please.
Sorry.
I watched her rummage in the till for change. She was a gorgeous rummager.
What’s your name?
And four seventy two would be your change.
I dropped two pennies in the cup, so the change wouldn’t add up to thirteen.
Do you have a name?
She looked at me curiously. Yes, she said eventually. I do.
So will you tell me it?
She sighed. You’re holding up the line you know.

Make Your Trips To Walmart Entertaining
2. Inquire at Customer Service if John Boy Walton is still in charge of company.
3. Sing “The Union Forever” in a loud and agitated manner in the meat section.
4. Tell cashier you intend to sue for false advertising, them being all out of walls.
5. Put yellow skull and crossbones stickers that say “radioactive” on the cat food.

Q: Why do you think you do it?
A: Why do I make them?
Q: Yes.
A: I am trying to create an illusion of control in an otherwise chaotic life.
Q: You read that someplace didn’t you?
A: Yes. I saw it in one of the little booklets you have in the waiting room.
Q: Do you think it’s useful just to repeat things you hear?
A: Do I think it’s useful just to repeat things I hear?
Q: Yes.
A: I want to say yes so bad right now.
Q: But you’re trying not to be a smart-ass, remember? You were working on that. You were working on not being an ass or blurring out the first thing that comes to your mind.
A: Yes. But seriously, you so need some new magazines. Like, there’s an actual People in the rack all about the death of Princess Diana. I wasn’t even born, hardly. I mean that’s kind of sad.
Q: It’s an issue on the anniversary of her death, I think. It came out last year.
A: My bad.
Q: You’re putting things in a frame. It’s a form of psychic control. Is the desire to control everything in that way good or bad?
A: Bad.
Q: What if you were an architect or a composer?
A: Then it’d be good, I guess. You’re confusing me.
Q: Can you think of other jobs where the desire to control everything might be a good thing?
A: Soccer player.
Q: I don’t know anything about soccer.
A: Most Americans don’t. The only people who like soccer are Europeans, Asians, Africans, South Americans...you know, the whole rest of the world.
Q: You used to play soccer before all this. Did you like playing soccer?
A: Yes and no.

Interesting Things About Lists
1. Lists are finite.
2. Lists make you famous. c.f. Franklin, Benjamin; Gatsby, Great.
3. “List” can be tracked to Shakespeare: “a list of landless resolutes.”
4. List-making as a passion is called glazomania.
5. Lists can keep us from procrastinating.
6. Lists can help us procrastinate.

Mom is by the concession stand. Standing by the stand. Looking away, more nervous than me, for me. A little chubbier than she was, cradling a hot chocolate, hair glistening and wet. She has a calorie counter app on her phone. I’m so sorry. If I could I’d take it all back.

By the time I got to the office she was already inside. I saw her through the glass. She had been crying. She gave me a look, denounce. I was such a disappointment, such a trial. Ms. Montague explained to her how I had been drug tested two weeks before. Before being dropped, I was asked if there was any chance I would test positive. I said yes. My honesty was to be commended. Had I shared this with her? No. My suspension from the team would be for five weeks instead of ten. No further punishment. The Assistant Principal was sympathetic. These things happened. In fact, these things happened last spring to half the baseball team. Frankly, the Ultimate Frisbee team was a disaster. Good thing that wasn’t a varsity sport. Young people do experiment. It happens. It’s part of growing up. I was an exemplary student, a strong athlete. I was well liked. We were talking a minor setback to a promising high school career. I would come back a stronger for it. She asked if I had anything to share with them all, anything to add. She smiled a sympathetic smile. My mother looked at me. I was forgiven. I was understood. I was welcomed back into the fold. I was to say sorry, that I had made a terrible mistake, and that it would never, ever happen again. I was to be a good boy.

So I told them. It felt so good to tell the truth after so long. How I had taken more drugs than I could
remember, uppers and downers, prescription meds, the lot, enough to choke a small goat. How I stole money from my mother, from my aunt, from my friends. How I hadn't slept for three days and was so tired I couldn't think straight. How my thoughts had become so awful that I could never share them with anyone, ever, and I was afraid of cars parked on the street outside my house, and of policemen, and of the things I thought I was capable of doing. I heard voices. I had always heard voices, for years I had been hearing them, and I thought everyone heard voices a little, but now they were there all the time and wouldn't leave me alone, scrabbling at my brain, chewing at every thought. I told them I kept thinking about the same few things, over and over, and couldn't stop. I checked if the front door was locked dozens of times a night. I texted a girl over fifty times in one hour till she told me to quit it already. The drugs I took made me less anxious, is all it was. I was anxious all the time. I thought I needed locking up. I definitely needed rehab. I couldn't do it on my own anymore. I couldn't find normal, but thought it was nearby somewhere and someone had run a soldering iron around my brain and burned through all the important connections. I was nutty as a fruitcake. And right then they didn't want to hear it.

I got out the foil-wrap valium and put it down on Montague's desk. I shouldn't have these. Is that enough to get me suspended at least?

#8

Things My Mother Did for Me
1. Fed me gallons of milk from her breasts
2. Made me thousands of meals
3. Sat up nights with me when I was sick
4. Loved me unconditionally
5. Called the police to pick me up that time

The whistle shrills at last. Thank you. Snap my fingers the six times like I always do.

Incidents Alerted Me to the Fact That Drugs Were Bad
1. The night I had to get a freshman at a party to help me pull my pants up.
2. The night I dropped my burrito on the ground and picked it up and ate it.
3. The night I couldn't remember where I lived.
4. The night I thought I was in bed, but my pillow felt strangely like pizza.
5. The night I started every conversation, "Don't take this the wrong way but..."

Q: How did you feel about rehab?
A: Well, Mom visited on Sundays. I couldn't call her because I lost my privileges.
Q: What did you learn in there that is useful to you now?
A: The steps.
Q: What else?
A: I have trouble with the higher power. I've always had trouble with that.
Q: What is your higher power?
A: God.
Q: How do you see God?
A: I think you make an appointment, like with your shrink.

#9

Pick a spot and hit it. Don't change your mind. Ever. Pick a spot. Hit it.

At halftime Sean apologized to Mason for being at fault for their goal. I should have kept my legs together, he said.

Not at all, Mr. Varsity Keeper, Mason said, booting a Gatorade against the locker room wall. Your goddamn mother was the one should have kept her legs together.

If we played like this every week, Sean said to Dwarf, we wouldn't be so inconsistent.

Tyler had a medallion thing around his neck. Dwarf told me it was his way of figuring out if he was upside down or not.

Mason said to me I needed to get more involved, that I looked like Cinderella out there.

Cinderella, sir?

You're always running away from the ball.

I observed our physio through the prongs of a plastic fork and pretended she was in jail.

#10

Go.

Like, why do you keep on snapping that rubber band like that? she asked. That's really annoying too.

Oh, it's nothing.

You've made your wrist all red with it. Look!

It's just a thing I do, I explained. I have this compulsion thing, and the band helps. It's hard to explain, but it's under control now, the compulsion thing is.

You have a compulsion thing but it's under control now? But you still have to go and snap a rubber band all the time?

Yes. But I don't do much else like that anymore, except for the compulsive list-making.
Her eyes become larger, which I loved. You make lists compulsively?
Yes. Stupid lists. And I also have some weird-ass rituals involving sports. But I'm working through that too.
She shook her head like she was trying to get awake. Rituals? What kind of rituals?

I am exposed to the elements. I am naked before God. I am King Lear on the heath.
Christ, that English course was good for something after all.

Reasons to Go to School Naked:
1. No more concerns about being fashionably dressed before peers.
2. Good way to finally start conversation with cute sophomore in 3rd block Econ.
3. You get to find out if it's just like the dream.
4. Diverts attention from the fact that you also came to school high as a kite.
5. Others stop borrowing your pens after they see where you keep them.

Do you think I'm arrogant? I asked her. When I play?

She kissed me and I loved it.
Dude, seriously, if you were a bar of chocolate you'd have eaten yourself by now.
Serious?
Tell me one thing.
What?
Are these lists of yours supposed to be funny?

#11

It's going low and hard to the left, sucker.

Who's the girl? The one you keep showing off for? Get your head in the game, son.

You have broken my heart. I can feel it where it broke.

How are you going to get your kicks from now on is the more pressing question, son?

Accept that you are powerless, that your life is unmanageable.

Q: Tell me about your father. Do you miss him?
A:
Black as
  A farmer’s
  Fingernails,

Teeth as dull
  As prayers.

I saw them in the blind spots
  Where the light had flaked away:

A pale hand,
  By the swing set, or
  A glint inside the trees.

Footsteps wider
  Than my hand.

I used to dream of them, at night:
  Hunched in darkened playgrounds,

Warmer
  Than slow breath circling
  The hollow in my neck.
There are no organic nails
Only metal
There are organic holes
We were separated when the accident happened. According to the police report, the highway was icy and the visibility low. We had left the in-laws behind schedule so we were likely speeding, and Marie claims it was an unusually foggy night. I don’t remember and it makes no difference. She came out unharmed. Two weeks later, we were home.

Before meeting my wife, I didn’t realize people could sigh with an accent. Hers was a heavy, almost thick, French sigh, like the whine of a small lap dog, only louder. She thought it was nitpicky. I insisted.

– Ezz seellee, Marie said. – You are being so seellee.

– You mean silly, I corrected her.

One aspect of my personality I had not anticipated to hold on to in middle age was my thirst for fights. Like a gag reflex, I couldn’t stop it.

– I’m serious. Sometimes I have no clue what you’re saying.
– I hep you to behd. You look exzausted, she said.

Marie’s accent thickened when she was tired. I couldn’t stand it.

Her friend Susan was in the kitchen, heating up a lasagna she had brought for us. Marie wheeled me into our bedroom. I felt her stabbing hands under my armpits, making a superhuman effort to lift me up. It was still strange to be handled, tossed around. In the hospital, this was done by nurses, people I’d never seen before and against whom I had nothing except the fact that we had met under terrible circumstances. They were detached, professionally cold, and I preferred it.

After five or ten minutes of her heavy breath in my ear and her chin digging into my shoulder she got me onto the bed.

– You haf to eet, she said.

– I don’t want to.

– I’m not hungry.

I don’t think we looked at each other before she left the room.

Chatter came from the kitchen, tentative at first, as if to not disturb a sleeping kid. Back in my childhood room, my ear was always pressed against the wall I shared with my parents’ bedroom. They fought in quiet, long-winded sentences, but I only caught snippets. It didn’t matter that my name was seldom spoken, it was me they fought about. I just knew.

Now Susan asked a question. It was about me. Marie’s silence was charged, a rock meant to break a window. It was an important question, a difficult one. I closed my eyes and remembered the porch of the in-laws after Christmas, the heavy footprints left on the snow. It felt like years had passed. Marie was helping her mother up from the table and her dad watched them as if they were a show on TV and he couldn’t lend a hand even if he wanted. I remembered the sinister feeling that the life we had struggled to build had crumbled to pieces, leaving behind no instructions for its rebuilding. It had, I knew it had, and yet I couldn’t believe that the end of the world wasn’t always the end of the world.

– I’m leaving you, she had said that morning. Or something like that. The details are always obscenely trivial. Would it matter if she were wearing a different skirt, her hair down instead of up; would it matter if her voice had betrayed emotion, if the soundtrack weren’t her parents’ dryer spinning our clean clothes? Would it really change a thing? Did it matter that she threw away the Sunday’s crossword puzzle before leaving a room that wasn’t our own? Did I care that she didn’t cry, that I didn’t cry, that a promise was being broken, that a decade of our lives would be rewritten to fit a new narrative, the story of how we didn’t stay together? Did it matter that my heart sank and I remembered the face she had when we met, the way my name filled her mouth; did it matter that she was unhappy?

– I’m leaving you.

She crawls into bed with a magazine and doesn’t turn off the lights for an hour.

– I’m leaving you.

She takes her make-up off, throws on a parka, walks to her car and comes back with a stack of library books.

– I’m thinking of leaving you.

She washes her face, calls Susan, exchanges a recipe for banana pudding.

Christmas draws to an end; so does our marriage. “Don’t be seellee,” she says, “we can still drive back together.” It will snow. We will figure out the details when we get home.

Did it matter that she used other words, that the exact moment it happened was different from the exact moment it happened?

The thick wallpaper stopped reflecting daylight. Outside, the early winter grayness fell heavy on houses and cars, lowering at once the temperature and moods, and far from my personal tragedy other men threw the race and drove home to their version of a wife, to dinner tables of homemade foods and tantrum-throwing spawns. We were lucky to be childless.

I tried to get out of bed, still half-asleep, and ended face-down on the floor. Out of
nowhere, Marie rushed in, wearing pajamas and a startled face. Thick, impersonal blood gushed out of my forehead and nose, enough to blur my vision and instantly stain the rug under me.

I'd never been a man of great upper body strength, quite the opposite in fact, and forced to rely heavily on my arms I found myself easily tired. Marie put me in the tub. The way I remember it we didn't move for a moment. I began undressing and she turned away, looking for the soap and sponge she knew to be across from me in the shower soap dish, like it always was, and only after I was completely naked she turned back and ran the water.

Her eyes were fixated on the blue tiles behind my head. I had a bloody face and my body disgusted her. I didn't look at my legs either. She grabbed the sponge. I stopped her.

- I'll do it.

I don't know how long I stayed there, anywhere between one and two hours. The water got cold. Once I felt my pores roughing up under my skin I contemplated swinging myself onto the chair. I had never done it before; I called out for her. It was like she was waiting on the other side of the door.

I drained the tub and she handed me a towel. Again she turned her back to me, looking at her own reflection in the mirror and running a hurried hand through her tangled hair.

- It's freezing, she said. – Maybe it’s better if you get dressed here.

With this she left the bathroom. A few moments passed and once more I contemplated the idea of swinging myself onto the chair. She came back with a gray long-sleeve t-shirt, my Ithaca hoodie, and boxers. I threw on the shirt and hoodie, controlling my movements so not to let my sleeves get wet on the sides of the tub. My underwear would definitely be damp, but the idea of having Marie pick me up naked repulsed me. I put on as fast as I could and when I was done she turned and lifted me up.

Back in the room we argued about dinner. She called me out on not eating, pointing at the exact amount of hours that had passed since my last meal. She scoffed when I told her I had no appetite, and stormed out of the room immediately after.

That night, Marie moved to the guest room. From our bedroom she took her pillow, which she later replaced even though I had no use for it, and one by one, in a process that lasted a week, everything from her nightstand's drawer. Each night, at some indistinct hour, the line of light would disappear from under her door. It was never early, but I was always awake.

I had to re-learn how to live, the doctors said; I had no interest. Every night I hoped she would leave me, and every morning I awoke to the distant sound of her movements in the kitchen followed by her entrance in the room with a tray of breakfast she lay down in front of me, a breakfast that would remain untouched until she tossed it away an hour later. One morning I caught her staring at me in an underplayed state of shock and told her to leave the room. That was the end of the breakfast trays.

- We need the money, she said, and went back to work.

Soon, other voices filled the house. Marie was a French interpreter, but those gigs were hard to come by. For the most part, she was stuck doing low-paying translations of online content and teaching English to helpless French children.

- Oui, oui, c’est très bien, Madelaine!

She was always kind to children. Patient. Unassuming.

During the lessons, I stayed in the bedroom, listening to their broken English and French soft vowels, to small voices getting directions to the park, or the library, asking one another for red pencils.

- Une fois de plus, Colette. C'est parfait!

She was fantastic.

When they were gone I watched TV. Marie would call every hour to check in on me, to ask questions and offer encouraging words I knew she didn’t believe. Her pessimism had always been crippling, a pregnant cloud ready to rain misfortunes on her and on everyone around her. She pitied me. I knew she did. Why else would she stay? I didn't have the nerve to ask.

The thing that saved me, strange as it may sound, was drinking. It was the only time I ever left the house. To the corner liquor store and back. I bought four, five bottles at a time, enough for a few days. Drinking clouded my judgment. Whenever I was drunk, time didn't exist. It wasn’t a feeling of things slowing down or speeding up. They weren’t at a standstill either. Time didn't matter, and existence was not unfolding. The bad part of it, at least. I couldn't make important decisions and when I did, they weren't hard. I could be wrong and it wouldn't count. I was drunk. Everything was possible.

She didn't say anything the first time she found me passed out on the wheelchair in front of the television, reeking of cheap scotch. After two weeks of the same behavior Marie decided we needed to talk.

- I don't want to hear your condescending words, I said.

- Don’t yell at me, she said.

- I'm not yelling. This is how I talk.

- I know how you talk. This is not how you talk, she said.

- Do me a favor and just go. Leave me and never come back, I said.

She cried and I wheeled myself into the bedroom and slammed the door.

- We need the money, she said, and went back to work.

- Oui, oui, c’est très bien, Madelaine!

She was always kind to children. Patient. Unassuming.

During the lessons, I stayed in the bedroom, listening to their broken English and French soft vowels, to small voices getting directions to the park, or the library, asking one another for red pencils.

- Une fois de plus, Colette. C'est parfait!
One afternoon, while Marie was at work, I decided to look for my gun. It was the first thing, other than drinking, that I really felt like doing in months. My father had given me the gun before passing away. He said, “I’m proud of you,” then handed it over. It was an old handgun that his own father had given him and he expected me to pass it on to my son, if I ever had one. I didn’t have the heart to tell him we wanted no children, so I thanked him and took it home. I had no idea why my father would say he was proud of me.

My entire life he had been explicit about his disappointment in me, and only when cancer-thanked him and took it home. I had no idea why my father would say he was proud of me.

My brother Michael was dead and with his last breath, my father mumbled his name.

Marie was upset when I brought the gun home. She said it was dangerous to keep a firearm in the house and cited statistics about the odds of death by gunfire now that we were gun owners. It was a present from my father, I argued, so I kept it and we forgot about it. I hadn’t seen the gun in years, but knew exactly where it was.

I was pleased to see that it was accessible to me, hidden in a cardboard box behind my old gym clothes at the bottom of the hallway closet. I took a short swig out of my flask and looked into the chamber already knowing how many bullets were there. My father had kept a bullet for each of his sons and one for each grandson the same strange way his old man had. I knew it was for Michael to keep—a bizarre inheritance of sorts—but he had died too young and here I was. Alive.

I took the gun to the kitchen. I wasn’t nervous. I was holding my father’s gun, and for the first time in a long while, I was in control.

The street lights came on outside, and I wondered if I could ever forgive Marie for wanting to leave, and then for not leaving. My entire life was going.

I never asked if she had stopped seeing that guy and she never told me. Soon, I would hear her heels barely touching the hardwood floors as if not to spoil them. Some nights she went straight to the kitchen to start dinner. Others, she sat in front of the TV for a while. It never seemed to interest her, whatever she watched was white noise. I knew she was soft and present. Her hand held onto the back of my head and I felt the weight of her delicate fingers on my thinning hair. Her breathing was a melodious hiss, quiet, silent, then noisy again, ethereal but almost real. I could see every crease of her lips, every wrinkle around her eyes. She was beautiful.

I loosened the grip on the gun and watched Marie turn on every light she could find. The room got bright and blinding and I heard her undress in our bedroom, hang the stench of dry sweat and faded deodorant. I hadn’t felt her body in months, and her clavicle, peeking out of her blouse, looked like one of those pieces anthropologists dig out of the ground, something ancient and extinct, something that used to be human.

The street lights came on, and I wondered if I could ever forgive Marie for wanting to leave, and then for not leaving. My entire life was going.

I never asked if she had stopped seeing that guy and she never told me. Soon, I would hear her heels barely touching the hardwood floors as if not to spoil them. Some nights she went straight to the kitchen to start dinner. Others, she sat in front of the TV for a while. It never seemed to interest her, whatever she watched was white noise. I knew because of her breathing. It got quieter as she drifted into sleep. The television would go

Sometimes her voice would startle me, four drinks in. She would ask something trivial, a question about gardening, whether sunflowers would bloom if she planted them in the fall, and it would be a shock, as if I had never expected her to address me directly again.

All the lights were off tonight. Marie’s boots clanked on the way to my bedroom, and when she finally called out for me, I let my name linger in the night silence. She called out again. I had been drinking since noon. Seven straight hours. I would have slurred my words.

Quickly, she retraced her steps turning on the overhead lights, aiding her eyes in the task of seeing, maybe starting to imagine things. Her shadow was hard, darkly walking in with no features to make out, just a known silhouette cut against the night. I could almost hear her heart beating when she entered the kitchen where everything was like she had left it that morning. Plates in the sink, folded laundry on the table, a loaf of bread on the counter next to piles of bills and unread magazines.

She stopped at the sight of the gun. Its silver body glimmered, almost with a flash. Through the window, the sharp moonlight did its part, enhancing its beauty. I thought Marie was going to scream. Not until she was directly in front of me I realized how much she had aged. A mouth in parentheses, deep expression lines around her eyes, and a bulgy V between her brows had erased any trace of youth. She looked disheveled, to be fair, and her collar was that off-white shade a day’s work leaves behind. She had gotten a gig as an interpreter for a negotiation seminar. Two weeks of pay. Ten straight hours a day. It sounded dreadful.

She stopped an inch short of me, so close that I could smell the day on her, the stench of dry sweat and faded deodorant. I hadn’t felt her body in months, and her clavicle, peeking out of her blouse, looked like one of those pieces anthropologists dig out of the ground, something ancient and extinct, something that used to be human.

I held her stare. I didn’t know eyes could recede so much and then come back. She stood, motionless, determined. Somewhere in our street a dog barked. It was the end of times. The after to all the befores. A moment outside of history and I thought she would never move again.

Then, as if stepping into uncharted territories, she leaned in and pressed her lips against my forehead. A moist, spring kiss. Her heat touched me, the warmth she emitted was soft and present. Her hand held onto the back of my head and I felt the weight of her delicate fingers on my thinning hair. Her breathing was a melodious hiss, quiet, silent, then noisy again, ethereal but almost real. I could see every crease of her lips, every wrinkle around her eyes. She was beautiful.

I loosened the grip on the gun and watched Marie turn on every light she could find. The room got bright and blinding and I heard her undress in our bedroom, hang the face and manners she had been wearing and change into a domestic outfit, into a face I fully recognized. Then she came back and it was dinnertime.
In the evenings, when they’ve bagged the party—thin plastic tablecloths, paper napkins and plates printed with the birthday kid’s favorite robot or princess or steam locomotive—and they’ve drunk as much leftover soda as they can stomach, that’s Andie’s favorite time. They turn off the fans, so the inflatable play structures begin to droop like teddy bears who’ve lost some stuffing, and they disinfect everything any kid might’ve touched, and then they refill the hand sanitizer.

It’s not Purell. It’s the drugstore brand Hand Sanitizer, and in the store there’s always a tag that says, “Compare with Purell!” And, to be honest, it’s a bit runnier than your bonafide Purell, not as viscous; the smell is a little off. But you can buy it by the gallon, and in the evenings you can funnel it into smaller pump bottles strategically placed around the Oh So High facility.

Andie loves this: standing among the softly collapsing slides and jump houses, the whole place utterly quiet now, and patiently pouring the sanitizer into the pump bottles. It’s a kind of ritual, like back when she was an acolyte, preparing the communion platters—all those small glass cups of wine, each filled precisely, so that no congregant got an ounce more of the covenant than another. It’s like she can feel herself calming down as the sanitizer drips.

She tried to explain it, to her sister Kaylin, and she could tell K. wasn’t getting it at all. “What the shit do you have to be worried about?” K. was probably thinking.

Even though Kaylin has email, Andie can’t write a message without thinking about how far away her sister really is, how bizarre the idea of Oh So High must seem to her. Andie doesn’t even know if they have birthday parties over there; in March she helped her mom pack a birthday box for Kaylin, but they didn’t hear from her until the following week.

The parties at Oh So High last two hours. A new one starts every half hour because of the layout of the facility, a series of windowless playspaces and pizza rooms through which groups of children are expertly paced.

They steer the kids first to the Safety Video, which provides instruction as to jumping and bouncing Oh So High And Also Safely, emphasizing the importance of taking turns on the inflatable slide and in the Jumpy Jousting zone; they then lead them to the wall of cubbies to house their blinking sneakers; they urge them to rub in generous dollops of Hand Sanitizer as they move through the various Fun Rooms. The parents and any tag-along siblings not included in the party headcount follow along, standing in clumps, murmuring annoyance that their cell phones have no signal, and saying things like, “Jeez, they ought to sell beer here, they’d make a grillion dollars,” or “Is there a weight limit on that jousting thing?” or “Makes me want to buy stock in Purell.”

On this point, Andie had learned not to correct them. The first mother she’d informed, “Actually, it’s Hand Sanitizer,” looked deeply confused and threatened to slow her party’s transition into Fun Room 3 by asking for clarification.

This is the most successful Oh So High in metro Omaha; last week Andie did a walkthrough for a group of new franchise owners from Lincoln and Sioux Falls. They took notes on everything, even whether Andie’s shirt was tucked into her shorts (it was). Their uniforms are blue polos with khaki shorts, and white sneakers, with socks, of course, in case you have to climb onto the equipment. Andie, like most of the girls, wears her hair in a ponytail.

Her sister Kaylin wears a ponytail too, but instead of a polo shirt she’s in desert camo. She’s stationed about ten miles outside a town Andie had to look up on the map. On Google Earth it’s grayed out, low-res, like a Xerox of a Xerox of a place. When Kaylin goes into town she usually wears a head scarf. She made Andie promise not to tell their dad about this. It’s just easier, she said. It doesn’t mean anything.

Andie is all for anything that makes anything easier for Kaylin.

Not that Kaylin tells her much. The thing she has mentioned the most, the word that appears most often in her notes home, is sand. Though there must be gunfire, helicopters, snipers; though even walking down the street must be harrowing, Kaylin makes like the worst of it is the sand.

Andie knows Kaylin is withholding the details, to protect her. This used to infuriate her, the idea that Kaylin was keeping secrets from her, secrets about boys and tampons and everything else K. got to experience first. But in the case of the grayed-out sandy horror show Kaylin is living, Andie doesn’t really mind.

The sand, it seems, gets everywhere. Andie’s mother sends bulk packages of baby wipes and new socks to try to help Kaylin with the sand.

Stop-loss, it’s called, when they don’t let you out of the army when you’re supposed to get out. They don’t call it Broken Promise, or Reneging, or Completely Fucked Up. Whose loss it stops, Andie’s not sure. In the small arcade room near the exit of Oh So High there is a video game called Tour of Duty. There is no stop-loss feature. No involuntary extensions of service. Just two quarters per tour. The game is not as
Today the birthday boy’s name is Jonathan. His mother has reminded the Oh So High staff, both in writing and in a series of phone calls, that it is Jonathan, not Jon, and never Jonny. Jonathan is turning four. His party has a Star Wars theme, which kind of blows Andie away because those movies are so old, even older than Kaylin, and if it weren’t for their dad’s well-preserved cardboard box of vintage original action figures and a well-loved Millennium Falcon, Andie and Kaylin wouldn’t have much love for Star Wars themselves. She figures maybe Jonathan’s parents hooked him up with a box of old school X-Wings and Tie Fighters. But Paul, who’s working the party with her, reminds her that they’ve repackaged Star Wars as Legos, turned Yoda into a cuddly action hero, and made those other movies that were so much slicker and more earnest than the first ones. Seriously, Paul says, they’ve warped the whole franchise now. His little cousin actually cried when she saw Darth Vader die, because that was poor sweet Anakin Skywalker. What the fuck, Paul says. I know, says Andie, I know.

They are worldly and jaded; they are fifteen years old and working six Oh So High parties a weekend.

Andie greets each arrival warmly, showing them the ludicrous bin and accepting their liability waivers. She writes each kid’s name on a sticky nametag and attaches it to a well-loved Millennium Falcon, Andie and Kaylin wouldn’t have much love for Star Wars themselves. She figures maybe Jonathan’s parents hooked him up with a box of old school X-Wings and Tie Fighters. But Paul, who’s working the party with her, reminds her that they’ve repackaged Star Wars as Legos, turned Yoda into a cuddly action hero, and made those other movies that were so much slicker and more earnest than the first ones. Seriously, Paul says, they’ve warped the whole franchise now. His little cousin actually cried when she saw Darth Vader die, because that was poor sweet Anakin Skywalker. What the fuck, Paul says. I know, says Andie, I know.

Andie greets each arrival warmly, showing them the ludicrous bin and accepting their liability waivers. She writes each kid’s name on a sticky nametag and attaches it to a well-loved Millennium Falcon, Andie and Kaylin wouldn’t have much love for Star Wars themselves. She figures maybe Jonathan’s parents hooked him up with a box of old school X-Wings and Tie Fighters. But Paul, who’s working the party with her, reminds her that they’ve repackaged Star Wars as Legos, turned Yoda into a cuddly action hero, and made those other movies that were so much slicker and more earnest than the first ones. Seriously, Paul says, they’ve warped the whole franchise now. His little cousin actually cried when she saw Darth Vader die, because that was poor sweet Anakin Skywalker. What the fuck, Paul says. I know, says Andie, I know.

Jonathan is wearing a Yoda t-shirt, and so are two of his friends. All sixteen kids elbow each other throughout the Safety Video, which they have all likely seen before. “All right, young padawans,” Andie claps, “who’s ready to jump and bounce Oh So High with Jonathan today?”

The kids answer with lusty shrieks that make a few of the parents wince. One of the dads checks his watch and appears to be making a mental calculation of his own endurance. Then it’s on to the shoe cubbies, a few preemptive squirts of Hand Sanitizer, and into the first party room. All the equipment is made from primary-colored nylon; a piped-in soundtrack of Kidz Bop covers the whine of the air compressors and fans.

Jonathan heads straight for the bouncy jousting ring, pulling on a padded helmet and waving a friend in after him. A couple of kids consider the tee-ball rig, where an airjet keeps the ball in place until you whack it, and Paul helps them get their stance square. That leaves Andie to police the slide ladder. One of the girls places her clammy hand in Andie’s as she glances up the ladder. “Go get ‘em,” Andie says.

This is the way of life Kaylin is fighting to protect. It does no good to think about this: the mall, burgers at Red Robin, Oh So Fucking High – they’re all unworthy of her.

Their parents used to take them up to Indian Cave, a park along the Missouri. They would go on hikes and sometimes fish the river. Andie’s father urged them to read the markers describing Lewis & Clark’s journey, solemnizing each bench and butterfly with historical significance. Pretty much every third thing in Omaha, including Andie’s junior high school, was named for Lewis & Clark, so it was hard to get too jaded about the plaques at Indian Cave. Also, the Indian part was only semi-accurate: someone, maybe the Sioux or maybe the Nemaha or maybe somebody before any of them, had left traces. Messages carved into the rocks. Petroglyphs, one of their dad’s plaques explained: maybe Indian, maybe not. But there were, indeed, Caves at Indian Cave – entryways draped with vines like the cheesy bead curtain on Paul’s bedroom door. While their dad was re-reading the plaques, Andie and Kaylin were already halfway up the zigzagging wooden stairway to the caves.

The two of them had loved those caves: carved-out places of mystery, hollow beginnings of adventure tales. Inside them, they were heroines, explorers; they imagined their own stories to record in chiseled stone.

Andie feels terrorized now by the less permanent messages of email. Everyone login is potentially tragic. In the past, families like hers lived in fear of telegrams, of uniformed deliverers of horrible news. Now Kaylin has email, and she’s made a pact with her company that any of them would send a message for another. This was supposed to be a kindness. But it meant that Andie was terrified of spam, of names she didn’t recognize and cryptic subject lines. She holds her breath and doesn’t let it out until she’s satisfied herself that the message is really and truly an invitation to save money on Canadian prescriptions, or to enlarge, enhance, and otherwise XXX-ify her love life.

Andie’s love life is not exactly ripe for XXX-ifying. The thing with Paul had initially seemed like something cool, sophisticated, as if she held a sort of power; lately, though, it felt more like she had handed over something, and only now that she’d given it to Paul did she realize its value.

Jonathan’s party has moved into the second room, with the larger slide and the inflatable obstacle course, when the lights go out. All at once their windowless party room is dark and silent: no music, no fans or compressors. The silence lasts only a moment, and then there is screaming and crying.
Andie tries to remember whether a kid is on the slide ladder.

The waiver parents sign before their kids can begin to jump Oh So High was created by lawyers, for lawyers. Andie didn’t read it until she’d worked there for more than a month. One day she was waiting for Paul after work and she stood there staring at the card. I acknowledge and understand that there are risks associated with participation in Oh So High activities, and the use of the inflatable play equipment at Oh So High, including but not limited to: contusions, fractures, scrapes, cuts, bumps, paralysis, and death.

The red letters of the EXIT signs are the only light in the room. Andie peeks out the double doors to see that the power is out throughout the facility. There is light from the front window, behind the front desk, but it’s pouring rain. A thunderstorm. A relief: it’s just weather.

In fifteen minutes Jonathan’s party is scheduled to move into the pizza and cake chamber, another dark, windowless room. But another party is still there, now, and Andie can’t think of a way that doubling the number of panicked children in a smaller space would be an improvement.

So: it’s evacuate the whole crowd into the downpour, or stay put. Andie reaches into the pocket of her shorts for her keychain and the rape whistle Kaylin gave her before basic training. It has a flashlight on the other end; she blows the whistle, asks everyone to remain calm and stay where they are, and then shines the flashlight around her. She sees parents holding onto children, using both hands.

She tells them about the storm, says they’re going to stay in their Fun Room for now, that Paul will tell them a story. It’s too dark for her to see his what-the-fuck look, but she knows he’s staring at her. “Is there anyone who needs assistance?” she calls.

“A whimper comes from the top of the bouncy slide.”

“He whimpers louder when she says his name. “There’s a storm outside,” she says. “The whole building lost power, but we’re fine.” “Is it a tornado?” he says.

“No,” she says. “There would have been a siren.” “Last time,” he says, “we had to hide in the basement with a weird radio.” “Yeah,” she says. “That’s the right thing to do. But this isn’t a tornado.”

Jonathan lets out a shaky breath. “We could go down the slide together,” she says. “All your friends are waiting down there.” “No,” he says, scooting away. When he shifts, she can smell the faintly citrusy scent of urine. He’s four, she reminds herself. “It’s okay to be scared,” she says. “It’s going to be fine.” “I don’t want to go down there,” he says. She nods somberly, then realizes he can’t see her face. “My name’s Andie,” she says. “You said that before,” he says. “Andie and Paul, we’re your Oh So High guides.” “You know, Paul’s actually telling some Star Wars stories down there, if you’d like to come down with me.” She waves the flashlight down the slide. “Your mom’s right there.” Andie calls to her, I got him.

“No way,” Jonathan says. “Okay,” Andie says, “that’s fine. We can hang out here for a while.” She waits a beat, then gasps as if she’s just realized: “Everybody’s going to be talking about your party for a long time. How cool is that?”

He wriggles, and the inflatable slide makes a squeaking sound under him. “Seriously. This is going to be the party of the summer.”

She can imagine the face he’s making now, half skeptical – he’s just begun to realize how often adults lie to him, how casually they exaggerate the coolness of something that turns out to be merely okay – but the other half kind of excited. He can imagine the first day of kindergarten, when the teacher asks them about the summer, and people are still saying, I went to Jonathan’s party and it was at Oh So High and the lights went out. He can picture the kids who weren’t invited, looking at Jonathan with a kind of awe, as if he himself made the lights go out, as if he could control the Force.


“Grudgingly he says, “He’s cool.” “I know,” she says, a Star Wars joke, but Jonathan doesn’t laugh.

He’s not laughing, but he’s not crying anymore, and in time his pants will dry and he’ll be able to coax him back to the party. In the meantime, the two of them will pretend they’re in a cave, a secret place no one can find them.

After ten minutes the double doors swing open and Trisha, the Assistant Manager,
walks in with a headlamp and a bag of neon glowsticks. She bends them into necklaces for the kids, and tells the parents what she’s been able to get from the radio. The power is out all over town. The storm’s let up a little, but it’s getting dark, so she suggests they head home. She hands out coupons for return visits to Oh So High, and says, “Drive safe.” “Hold on,” Andie calls from the top of the slide. “We’ve got to sing.” She holds his hand and they slide down together, his friends bellowing. Jonathan laughs the whole way down. He has chosen to believe her: this party will be remembered, not for his embarrassing accident but for the excitement of darkness, for the glowsticks. Glowsticks are not typically part of the Oh So High package.

After they’ve seen all the guests out, Andie and Paul borrow an umbrella from Trish and head out to Paul’s car. It’s only four-thirty, but it’s gloomily dark. “You were good with him,” Paul says when they’re inside. “Jonathan.” She waves this away. “We’ll need extra sanitizer on that slide tomorrow.” Rain pummels the car, drumming a percussive rhythm on the roof. “You were good too,” she says. “Storytime with Paul, that could be a new thing.” “Andie,” he says. She hates the need in his voice, the yearning. This wasn’t how he used to say her name.

He leans toward her, an open mouth, a searching tongue. She kisses back, her mouth shut tight. “Paul,” she says. “Let’s not, tonight.” “What’s wrong?” “Nothing’s wrong.” “Then why not?” He has moved back to the driver’s seat; his hand curls white around the steering wheel. He’s annoyed that she’s making this difficult. Things between them have only ever been easy.

Water slides down the windshield. In the distance, thunder. She would like to ask Kaylin what to do when a boy is annoyed with her. Besides, that is, the obvious. That is the thing Andie doesn’t want to do, the easy thing. “I’m tired,” she says. “My heart’s not in it.” She realizes too late how Paul will hear this. “Fine,” he says. “You can walk, then.” She is shocked. “Seriously? It’s like pouring out there.” He shrugs. “Take Trish’s umbrella.” It’s eerie, how simply he has made her the enemy. His eyes are deadly gray. It looks profoundly unlovable.

Andie walks a mile under Trish’s umbrella. There are few cars; they slide by on the wet pavement. She wonders whether Paul has gone home, whether he’s rubbing one out with vengeance, possibly by candlelight. She walks with long strides, and she thinks about her dad’s old box of action figures, thinks of sitting legs-crossed (criss cross Applesauce, she chants with the kids at Oh So High), acting out new scenes with her sister, all the what ifs they could imagine. What if Greedo met C-3PO on the Moon of Endor? What if Leia had fallen for Lando instead of Han? What if Hoth Leia was actually Leia’s little sister, and the two of them led the Rebel Alliance as a team? These were the beginnings of the stories they would tell each other later, within the Indian Caves.

Hoth Leia had her braids wrapped into a brunette helmet. She wore white, to match the snowy planet where the Rebels, flying small and nimble fighter jets, tripped up the ungainly long-legged AT-ATs of the Empire. It’s not something you want to think too long about, whether Kaylin is fighting for the Rebels or the Empire.

The further Andie walks, the less effective the borrowed umbrella. Rain pours off the back and into the neck of her polo shirt, and her socks and shoes are soaked. For a few blocks, the rain falls at an angle that allows it to dodge under the umbrella and hit her in the face.

Probably it’s been a while since Kaylin felt rain. Andie tells herself this so she won’t mind the weight of the water, and it works. She decides to send a note to Kaylin, once the power’s back on and the WiFi’s restored, about the way it feels to walk in the dark in the rain. Like standing in the shower for an hour without the bathroom getting steamed up. Like running through sprinklers with your sister. Like crying backward, when the angle’s right. Like the world’s abandoned you.

She will write to Kaylin even though it’s been two weeks since K.’s last message. Andie shakes her head, hard, spraying water outward but failing to clear her thoughts. Two weeks: it’s no time at all, but it’s more than long enough.

As she’s crossing Sixtieth Street, the traffic lights come on. They flash yellow, urging caution in all directions. The buildings around her blink back to life, even as the thunder rumbles in the distance. Someone has worked in the rain to restore service. Someone has left his (her?) family to do a dangerous, unpleasant job. It’s another two miles home.

At the church, the stained-glass windows glow with a bright warmth. She checks her watch: five-twenty. Her mom will be at choir practice inside. It’s as good a place as any to get out of the rain, and if she waits through practice she can get a ride home.

She pulls open the door and follows the sound to the choir room. Tomorrow morning the choir will be robed up, filling the chancel with sober
harmonies. But on Saturdays the choir members come as themselves. Andie’s mom’s plain
dress has two divots where her nametag sat all day; two guys are wearing Huskers shirts.
Andie recognizes the school librarian, with her glasses on that dopey necklace.

She can remember standing next to Kaylin in church, sharing a hymnal, trying to
keep her knees from locking. Her sister’s posture always so straight it made Andie want to
slouch. The games of tic-tac-toe they played on the collection envelopes, during sermons
that sagged in the middle. K.’s grin, toothy and full of mischief that her upright posture
camouflaged. X’s and O’s scratched out in pencil, no match for petroglyphs.

The choir members are tired: they’ve worked all week, they’ve waited through
the blackout, they’ve got to get home and get dinner on the table. They’re lumpy, ordinary
people. But the sound that comes out of them brings tears to Andie’s eyes. The chords build
and change, and the sopranos descanting in sixteenth notes take her breath. It’s too much,
this glorious sound coming from her friends and neighbors, from her mom. It’s something
holy. An offering. She can choose, at this moment, to believe.
First, you cut her hair, that opulent tower of ice-black keratin that holds aloft her corona of galaxies. You let the clippings drop in a bathtub that has never been wet. When the tub is full, you undress, shoes last. You lie down in it and wait for the tub’s clawfeet to spasm, indicating the strychnine has leached into the marble’s veins. They’ll clench and unclench, maybe try to scurry away. Ignore your quickening heartbeat, a noise like newspaper being crumpled in a distant room. Whatever happens, don’t look directly at the green soap, whose upcurled ends resemble a leaf’s. The bald god is testing you. The bald god is testing you. Stare hard at the backs of your eyelids till you feel the vibrations of the soap taking flight like an airplane, and vanishing. It’s time now. Count aloud to seven, allotting a century to each syllable. Then speak the god’s name coquettishly, the way a female owl calls for her chosen mate to bring her a freshly killed rat so they can copulate.
Letters From The Interior

Jenny Wu

Wine on a windowsill, bottled and aging,
Like men under umbrellas in a winter downpour.
Down here no one is speaking. We are deep-inside.
Even the city traffic is wrapped up in its own pantomime
As two silent thunderheads turn the world into a rhythm box.

Quivering, quivering, like rabbits in the ground
We have dark theaters and imagined plays:
The woods in amber,
Like the portrait of a subversive and bizarre duchess,
Captured in haste against the dying day.

We are dervishes in the body of a leaking God.
Cold days coming. The earth will stop plummeting through space,
And all of existence will stare at its barren knees.

As when a child gone night-swimming
Tramps over logs and under boughs back to camp,
I wash my face in the sink,
Stumble blindly toward the towel.
My days will be long.
I will take my communion wine
Like the sea swallowing a stone.
But I remember the primordial beast,
The first driftwood carvings:
All that is swallowed will someday crawl ashore.

After the rain, people start to trickle from their apartments.
There is a sense of relief, a sense of looking-around.
The earth, like a patient coming out of anesthesia,
Watches its dreams hover over the quagmire.
The road out of town has been regurgitated,
And it lies in a mad stench. It holds onto our feet
And then onto our footprints. We have shaped the mud,
Piled it up like shoes for charity.

The night falling back into lavender
Writes to me from my landlocked soul:

Leave civilization,
The interior is learning new languages
And greeting migrants.
The events which led to my curious position at the department of public polling began during election season when the seven-term mayor, in an order to prevent fraud, instituted the new policy of staining the thumbs of voters with phosphoric dye. One man, one vote, he said.

I had very little understanding of politics. I knew nothing of polls. I lacked accounting skills, but was talented with imaginary numbers. I was mostly suited for work that involved raising eyebrows or gesturing puzzled expressions, poorly equipped for professions involving human empathy, such as the time I worked as a florist and suggested to a middle-aged man he would have better luck throwing himself from the bridge and growing begonias. Later, I read his obituary in the newspaper.

My only real talent was in alchemy. Sadly, the market had been depressed for years. As a child I had been enamored with solutions, predominantly at the dinner table on account of my mother's inability to cook. To encourage this curiosity my parents purchased a chemistry set. After creating an indestructible bubble, causing eggshells to disappear, and generating enough static electricity to kill a colony of mice living beneath the floorboards, I considered myself an amateur Faustus. I toyed with transmogrification and came close to discovering the universal solvent. My greatest success came when I combined a certain genus of flower with a honeysuckle and ammonia solution which, when ingested, induced indifference. I tested it with remarkable success on cats.

My experiments alarmed my parents, concerned I might grow up into one of those people written about in history textbooks. I tried for years to create an invisibility ink which would afford me a reprieve from human interaction, but only succeeded in creating an ink which left an irreversible stain. Defeated by the chemical world, I took a position as an apprentice at the local confectionary where I wrapped candies.

On Election Day mayor Bremmer proudly displayed his stained thumb and then gave an impromptu speech, waxing eloquent on the plight of the working man whose labors made him alien to his own body. Later he came to see us at the confectionary shop. The mayor was known to have a sweet tooth.

The mayor shook my hand. I handed him some butterscotches because I knew they were his favorite.

“You might need these,” I said. “To celebrate.”

The crowd of constituents cheered when the mayor emerged from the confectionary, a bit wobbly, displaying his severed thumb. He held it high above his head. It was green with phosphoric dye, remarkably similar to the ink I had invented years before. Apparently, it had been severed while reaching into the machinery that processed the butterscotch candies.

“The people united!” the mayor shouted. It was his campaign slogan.

Later that night I sat in the doorway and watched as many celebrated the mayor’s landslide victory. The confectioner Ernst paraded with the crowds as a guest of honor, waving his whisk like a magician’s wand. In the frenzy of confetti and kissing and idiotic imitation of our political figures, half-a-dozen people lost their thumbs. Applause erupted from the crowds. Two children were hospitalized after mistaking thumbs I had discarded in the gutter for butterscotch candies.

While the medics tended to the children I began to poll the crowd informally on the likelihood the children survived. One of the parents said that if I was asking such questions I must have intimate knowledge of the affair.

“You don’t have an inked thumb,” one of the men said.

This was true.

“He doesn’t believe in voting. Perhaps he prepared the candies,” one of the fathers said.

He informed the police who approached me:

“You poisoned the children with candy?” they said.

They brought me before a judge:

“So, you’re the anarchist?” he said, shuffling through the papers.

As a firm believer in democracy, I remained silent on the charges. I passed a few years in jail reflecting on the situation and determined that politics and alchemy were not distant bedfellows. Perhaps politics was the proper vocation to avoid grief in my employment and find purpose in my aimless existence.

I was released once the children had recovered.

“You were fortunate,” the authorities said. They warned me not to encourage any malfeasance.
A new election cycle was underway. I immediately found a position in the department of public polling. I was given an office cubicle and several bubble grids attached to a clipboard. My supervisor was a husky fellow who harbored a profound affection for data. Follow the polls! he was fond of saying.

I was assigned to the mayor’s reelection campaign. I knocked on doors asking such questions as “Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the water supply?” or “If God exists, do you approve or disapprove of his handling of animals?”

Once finished, I spent the rest of the day at my cubicle looking nervously over the data, pursing my lips and raising eyebrows in notorious fashion. I felt very qualified for the position, having never voted either for or against anything in my life, the epitome of indifference.

The mayor’s opponent was a legless man in a wheelchair named Horst who had made his fortune in manufacturing. Plastics, I believe. At rallies he spoke of budget deficits and the need for bureaucratic layoffs. He spoke of his hatred for government.

“If the eye wanders, pluck it out; if the hand offends, cut it off,” he said. “Government is a body that needed to be disciplined.”

People loved his speeches.

The mayor was nervous because Horst had no legs and all he could display was a measly prosthetic thumb.

“Damn it!” he lamented. “I should have gone to war.”

Not satisfied with the loss of his legs, candidate Horst promised to eliminate his own position if elected. “There is no need for a mayor,” he shouted to the crowds. “We must eliminate the waste!”

To prove his seriousness on the matter he inflicted on himself an aneurysm three months before the election. He remained in a coma. There was a vigil where his campaign aides vowed to keep his name on the ballot.

“Because democracy deserves better than another political pessimist,” they said.

The crowds cheered.

“The day after Horst slipped into a coma mayor Bremmer approached my cubicle. I tried to appear anxious while surveying the recent poll data. He stood there for a good while before musing the courage to look me in the eye. “Horst will win the election,” he said. “People love a man in a coma.”

“Welcome back, Bremmer,” I smiled.

He did not acknowledge me. After scribbling numbers and other data in one page of ledgers he proceeded to the next. I was envious of his skill but also his dexterity with a pen. His hand left long, brilliant brush strokes on the page.

“I think it’s best if I eliminate my position,” he said in a sobering voice.

“That’s brilliant,” I said without hesitating. It was alchemical. It was the solution we had been searching for. I’m not sure why I was so eager to eliminate mayor Bremmer. He had never wronged me. He had sacrificed his thumb for the people. I had always considered him a mentor.

After consulting the polls I advised him on which liquids to mix together that would induce elimination.

The next day mayor Bremmer was not in his office. He missed a luncheon the following afternoon. Then one morning we arrived and the papers from his desk were scattered on the floor and the windows were smashed. There was blood on the carpet. We peered through the shattered window and could see workers from the department of sanitation washing away a dark stain on the asphalt.

We announced the mayor’s elimination. Some received the news with relief, others with surprise. Horst’s campaign scoffed at these dramatic tactics.

“Imitation is a cheap form of flattery,” Horst’s chief of staff turned to the press. “We have the only candidate with a vision for the future. The best the establishment can offer the public is an eliminated man.”

We published an obituary. The burial was a grand affair. Bremmer’s popularity surged in the polls.

Imagine our surprise when less than a week before the election we arrived to find Bremmer in his old office. His hair was disheveled, his pants wrinkled, and he did not wear his signature blue tie. It was Bremmer and it was not Bremmer.

The staff was fascinated. Why was Bremmer so relaxed and pleased with himself? Had he eliminated weight? Had he redistributed his fortune? Or did he eliminate doubt and discover God?

“Have you spoken with Bremmer?” his secretary asked. “He seems like a different man.”

“That’s not Bremmer,” I said, still in disbelief. “Bremmer has been eliminated.”

“Then who is it?” She looked confused.

I shrugged.

I observed Bremmer most of the afternoon. He reviewed the recent poll data. He answered his phone but conversed only briefly. Mostly he scribbled in ledgers. When I decided I could avoid it no longer I went into Bremmer’s office.

“Welcome back, Bremmer,” I smiled.

He did not acknowledge me. After scribbling numbers and other data in one page of ledgers he proceeded to the next. I was envious of his skill but also his dexterity with a pen. His hand left long, brilliant brush strokes on the page.

“Kraus wanted me to deliver these,” I said. “He thinks you’ll approve of your recent
position in the polls.” I offered the stack of papers.
“Thank you,” Bremmer said. “I’ve eliminated my position.”
“We need to formulate a strategy, sir. The election is in less than a week. The press will wish to speak with you. The public demands answers.”
“That won’t be possible,” he said. “I’ve eliminated my position.”
“What about your family, sir?”
“My family understands I’ve eliminated my position.”
“Very well,” I said, trying to maintain my composure. “There is only one problem, sir: If you eliminated your position, why are you still here?”
Bremmer stopped scribbling in the ledger. He let out one of those exhausted breaths from between clenched teeth. Then he stated quite comfortably that he was of the medical opinion that discovering that one is alive after being eliminated is abnormal but not unusual. To eliminate one’s position is to become subject to the logic of ghosts.
“Will you go on record with that statement, sir? We can consult the polls. Your constituents might find that position favorable.”
“That’s unlikely,” he said. “They know as well as I that I have eliminated my position.”
There was no reasoning with him. He was determined to maintain his eliminated condition.
As a parting gift I offered him a butterscotch candy. He kept it on his desk while scribbling in the ledger.
“It must be eliminated, sir,” I said, nodding at the butterscotch.
He unwrapped the candy and placed it in his mouth. Before I had reached the door a curious thing happened. Bremmer choked on his butterscotch. His hands went to his throat. He made some faint whistling noises, then fell out of his chair. He did not twitch.
I had no time to react. One minute Bremmer was with us and the next he had been eliminated. My only regret was that I had offered the butterscotch. I had interfered. Yet I told myself this was the respectable thing. If given a second chance I would have encouraged Bremmer’s elimination once more.
In a few minutes most of the staff was standing in the doorway trying to get a better look at Bremmer. He lay on the floor like a piece of old chewing gum. The mayor’s secretary, a chubby woman named Ketzia, stood at my side. We looked down at Bremmer. Ketzia could not blink.
“We’ve eliminated Bremmer,” she said. She looked very beautiful, in a helpless way.
We later learned when they cut him open for the autopsy they did not find the butterscotch. Apparently, it had dissolved in Bremmer’s last act of elimination.

The following week, as one might expect, Bremmer won the election in a landslide. As the polls clearly indicated, in politics an eliminated man trumps a comatose man any day of the week.
We were hired as Bremmer’s staff in the mayoral offices. Everybody loved Bremmer. His favorability ratings in the polls surged to an all-time high.
About a month later a woman who worked in the division of public accounting made an appointment to speak with me. Apparently people believed I had been close to Bremmer because I was put in charge of handling his calls and given the title special assistant to Bremmer on matters of the public good. The woman felt that, in Bremmer’s absence, I was best suited to consult on her condition.
“What can I do for you?” I said.
“I wish to eliminate my position,” she said.
I did what any rational individual would do: I consulted the polls.
And so it began. I never finished any of my work because there was somebody in town each day who wished to eliminate his or her position. I listened. I consulted the polls. Some were permitted, others were not. I had an obligation to defend and find solutions for the public good.
Those who succeeded in elimination were shortly after elected to various municipal positions. It was an alchemical imperative.
Eventually, I grew tired of consultations with the public. It was exhausting, this empathy. I was Mephistopheles, interpreting the dreams of others with the polls, but I longed to become Faustus. The solution was elimination.
I needed to confirm this hypothesis.
Now that mayor Bremmer had been dismissed for a variety of infractions I put my name on the write-in ballot. The special election is next week. I am scheduled for elimination. The polls indicated favorable results.
He was at my mercy. I could’ve done anything at that point. I could’ve wristlocked him, broke his arm, broke his leg, broke his neck, done anything.
—Professional wrestler Gorilla Monsoon after fighting Muhammad Ali

I am unyielding like the rain, ferocious sky blooming wide with dead branches, with shade. Out at the quiet edge of a fight, a man cannot know what waits for him to fall.

A boxer is all dashing fists and angry jaw set for war, reckless hands exploding, jackrabbits through cemetery grass.

When you can whip any man in the world, you never know peace—I am sequoia and antler, a furious wall impervious to cross or jab, those frantic movements a fighter makes just before he discovers the limits of his body.

Too often, a man discovers himself defeated, upheaved for an airplane spin, dropped where grave meets sky, where orchards wither for headstones.

I am whalebone and monument to men who pick fights with idols then yield to that grit kicked up by tornados.
I am always the thunderstorm, eroding all those splintery vows a man makes when he stands against another man.
I will not just be the rain. I will not simply be grief. There is always violence. There is always everything.

GORILLA MONSOON, ANYTHING  W. Todd Kaneko
There were the three brothers my father loved. There was the bad luck.

Every story is an apocalypse:
Andy falling
off the back of the snowmobile in Utah, the winter
the woodstove exploded and the house burned down.

My father laugh-crying about Mike accidentally killing the bobcat, burying it
tracking tags and all, how the game warden came looking.

Every story is Mike with a shovel, standing over
the bobcat’s unmarked grave.

Or Joe’s empty house on that hill
and his widow remarrying so quick.

Every story is lung cancer. Roachdale, Indiana is like Green Gables
except more tumors less shade.

When we camped, Mike let swarms of flies land on his ankles.
When he visited my father in the hospital, he kept his back stock straight.

Their bad luck is like a wick
marked the Last of the Fischer’s TNT. Look, my father was always saying
how it was just a woodstove.

He was always asking, how do we get ourselves out of these ruts?

Andy had a farmhouse haunted
by the most shut-in of ghosts. It could not bear to leave.

I want that ghost to speak, to answer. Say: On QVC those knives could cut straight through
a Pepsi can then straight through a loaf bread then straight through a tomato. On QVC, they tell me my gemstone is emerald.

Ghost, who do you let over your threshold? Just Andy? Just Mike and my father
as they come in from sawing logs, spent. Ghost, who are you
waiting for? When they knock do you let the Jehovahs in?

January on the shore of Lake Huron, how your shoe slipped on the ice.

How the waves took your guilt & brought your guilt
& you sat in an abandoned lawn chair & watched it all happen.

That I was somewhere else. Dressed for a party.

That I didn’t go, that it didn’t matter either way. The question always: chicken or fish.

The consummate pineapple pizza. Our lady, apple-buttered bread, full of grace.

On College & 16th I drive slow to see the wreck of the fire we once chased. How the whole
street of buildings was ablaze, how the flames were pulsing, so cliché
how the mosquitoes ate us alive for choosing to follow the smoke,

how we had to know what burned. And which came first. Chicken or the egg.

See it like this, see it like that. Smoke before fire, my father said, but I know you
disagree. On Tansel Road, look behind the trailer park named Lake of the Lanterns,
behind Robey Vacuum & Co., behind the stock car race track. There’s a horse farm

I never showed you. Watch how everything exists easy without us. Like cake.

Watch how the winter wheat is learning to sway. Red: it leans. Goes.
CONTRIBUTORS

Scott Brennan,
an artist and writer, lives in Miami, Florida. His work has been shown at the Diana Lowenstein Fine Art Gallery, Luna Star, The Brattleboro Museum of Art, The Franco Center, and elsewhere. His work has been featured in a number of magazines including Superstition Review, Callaloo, Palooka, Big Bridge, Unlikely Stories, and Gypsy, and he has created illustrations for the Boston Modern Orchestra and University of Arizona and University of Alaska presses. Scott earned a BA in English from Truman University and an MFA in Creative Writing from The University of Florida.

George J. Farrah

Jim Fisher
is a poet and collagist with close family in Waconia, MN. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow in poetry at Stanford, his writing appears online in Salon, The Bay Citizen, DIAGRAM, and The Paris Review, and his collages in SLEEPINGFISH X. He is the sole proprietor of 99centbroadsides, an Etsy shop featuring the poetry of Clayton Peacock.

Natalia Fernández
is a Los Angeles based writer, born and raised in Montevideo, Uruguay. She holds an MFA in Film Directing from Chapman University, which she attended on a Fulbright Scholarship. She has worked as a journalist and is currently part of the writing team of an upcoming television show for SyFy channel.
Rick Henry’s most recent novella, *Chant*, was published by BlazeVox Books (2008). His other books include *Lucy’s Eggs: Short Stories and a Novella* (Syracuse UP, 2006) and *Sidewalk Portrait: Fifty-fourth Floor and Falling*, a novella (BlazeVox Books, 2006).

Julie Henson is an MFA candidate at Purdue University where she serves as poetry editor for *Sycamore Review*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Pinch*, *Yemassee*, and *Madison Review*. She was a semi-finalist for *Boston Review*’s 2014 “Discovery” poetry contest. She lives in Lafayette, Indiana with her cat, Pippa. Connect with her on twitter at @heyjulies or juliemhenson.com

Jenna Le was born and raised outside Minneapolis. She is the author of *Six Rivers* (NYQ Books, 2011), a Small Press Poetry Bestseller. Her poetry, fiction, essays, book criticism, and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI* Online, *Barrow Street*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Pleiades*, *The Southampton Review*, and elsewhere.

Elijah Rankin is majoring in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature and minorig in design at UMN. The cover image is a result of experimentation with a disposable camera, sunlight, and water. Additionally, he has had an image titled “Layer of Youth” published in the 2013 edition of *The Ivory Tower*, a UMN literary journal.

Jenn Stroud Rossmann teaches mechanical engineering at Lafayette College. Her stories have appeared most recently in *failbetter*, *Cobalt Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. She throws right, bats left.

Jenn Stroud Rossmann teaches mechanical engineering at Lafayette College. Her stories have appeared most recently in *failbetter*, *Cobalt Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. She throws right, bats left.

Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco lives in California’s Central Valley with her husband, son, and a big black dog. Her poetry has appeared in *Coachella Review*, *decomP magazine*, *The Curator Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *The Tule Review* and *Paper Nautilus*.

Rob McClure Smith teaches film studies at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. His work has appeared in *Gettysburg Review*, *Manchester Review*, *Barcelona Review* and many other literary magazines.

Jenna Le was born and raised outside Minneapolis. She is the author of *Six Rivers* (NYQ Books, 2011), a Small Press Poetry Bestseller. Her poetry, fiction, essays, book criticism, and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI* Online, *Barrow Street*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Pleiades*, *The Southampton Review*, and elsewhere.

Elijah Rankin is majoring in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature and minorig in design at UMN. The cover image is a result of experimentation with a disposable camera, sunlight, and water. Additionally, he has had an image titled “Layer of Youth” published in the 2013 edition of *The Ivory Tower*, a UMN literary journal.

Jenn Stroud Rossmann teaches mechanical engineering at Lafayette College. Her stories have appeared most recently in *failbetter*, *Cobalt Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. She throws right, bats left.
Louis Staeble
lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. His photographs have appeared recently in Petrichor, Iron Gall, Blue Monday Review and Paper Tape. His work can be found on the web at staeblestudioa.weebly.com.

Charles Trimberger
lives and works in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He finds that poetry informs his therapy practice and makes him a better healer. Charles has studied poetry at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and has been an associate editor of their literary magazine. His Minnesota connection lives through many small towns, but also St. Paul, where he graduated from Hill H.S. in 1962. “Invasive Species” is inspired by an actual murder that occurred within a mile of his home.

Jenny Wu
is currently an undergraduate at Emory University pursuing a creative writing major and an art history minor.

W. Todd Kaneko
is the author of the Dead Wrestler Elegies (Curbside Splendor, 2014). His prose and poems have appeared in Bellingham Review, Los Angeles Review, Barrelhouse, the Normal School, the Collagist and many other places. He has received fellowships from Kundiman and the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop and lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan where he teaches at Grand Valley State University. Visit him at www.toddkaneko.com.

Jim Warner
is the Managing Editor of Quiddity International Literary Journal and Public Radio Program at Benedictine University and the author of two poetry collections: Too Bad It’s Poetry and Social Studies (Paper Kite Press). His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals including The North American Review, PANK Magazine, Five Quarterly, and The Oyez Review.