

Aoi

m a g a z i n e

issue 9. fall 2018.

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Artists & Authors

in this issue

Glen Armstrong

Glen Armstrong holds an MFA in English from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and teaches writing at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. He edits a poetry journal called *Cruel Garters*. His work has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Conduit* and *Cloudbank*.



David Axelrod

David Axelrod is the editor of *Sensational Nightingales: The Collected Poetry of Walter Pavlich*, published by Lynx House Press. His new collection of poems, *The Open Hand*, appeared from Lost Horse Press in the autumn of 2017. Other work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *About Place*, *Cloudbank*, *Crazy Horse*, *Fogged Clarity*, *The Hopper*, *Hubbub*, *The Singing Bowl*, and *Terrain*, among others.



Gaby Bedetti

Gaby Bedetti is the American translator of Henri Meschonnic's work, a contributor to Lexington's poetry blog (<http://lexpomo.com/>) and a teacher at Eastern Kentucky University. Her photos have appeared in *Ground Fresh Thursday* and *The Light Ekphrastic*. Her photo essay appeared in *Italian Americana: Cultural and Historical Review*. Taking a photo is one way to stop time. Most of her images attempt to capture a moment fully while at the same time peeking backward or forward.



Sarah Joyce Bersonsage

Sarah Joyce Bersonsage received a doctorate in English literature from the University of Rochester, where she specialized in seventeenth-century British literature. Her work has appeared in a number of publications, including *Antiphon*, *About Place*, *Fire Poetry*, and *Boston Accent Lit*.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Beau Boudreaux

Beau Boudreaux's second book collection of poetry, *Rapunzel's Braid*, was published in 2016 by Five Oaks Press. His first book of poetry, *Running Red, Running Redder*, was published in 2012 by Cherry Grove Collections. He has published poetry in journals including *Antioch Review* and *Cream City Review*, also in anthologies along with *The Southern Poetry Anthology*. He teaches at Tulane University and lives in New Orleans.



Isolda Dosamantes

Isolda Dosamantes was born in Tlaxcala, Mexico in 1969. She is the author of several collections of poetry, including *Paisaje sobre la seda* (2008) and *Apuntes de viaje* (2012), and *Después del hambre* (2017). In the US, Toshiya Kamei has published English translations of her poems that have appeared in *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *The Griffin*, *International Poetry Review*, *Minnetonka Review*, and *Pank*, among others.



Darren M. Edwards

The first photos Darren Edwards ever took were with a Quaker Oats canister that he turned into a camera. Edwards spent years as a skate punk kid documenting the best tricks and skaters he could surround himself with (his friends). Later, Edwards would spend years doing photo journalism. His first book of photography and writing was published in early 2017 by The History Press. It explores the early sport climbing culture in Utah. But his true love and focus in photography is abstract images and pop photography.



Kerry James Evans

Kerry James Evans is the recipient of a 2015 NEA Fellowship, a Walter E. Dakin Fellowship from Sewanee Writers' Conference, and his poems have appeared in *Agni*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, and many other journals. He is the author of *Bangalore* (Copper Canyon). He lives and works in St. Louis. He is an Assistant Professor of English at Tuskegee University.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

John Garmon

John Garmon is a writing assistant at the College of Southern Nevada, Las Vegas. His poetry has been in *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Aji*, *Radius*, *The Oregonian*, *Commonweal*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Journal*, and many other places.



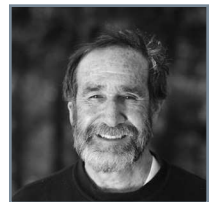
Elizabeth Gauffreau

Elizabeth Gauffreau is the Director of Liberal Arts Programs at Granite State College in Concord, New Hampshire. She has published fiction and poetry in *Foliage Oak*, *Serving House Journal*, *Soundings East*, *Hospital Drive*, *Blueline*, *Evening Street Review*, and *Adelaide Literary Review*, among others. Her novel *Telling Sonny* is forthcoming from Adelaide Books. Learn more about her work at <http://lizgauffreau.com>.



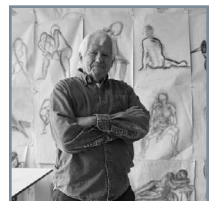
Joel Glickman

Joel Glickman recently retired as Professor of Music at Northland College, where he taught from 1974 through May 2017. He maintains close ties with Northland, including studies with poet Cynthia Belmont. His poetry and songs frequently reflect his obsession with Wisconsin's lakes and rivers, with fishing and with waters everywhere.



Mark Yale Harris

Born in Buffalo, New York, Mark Yale Harris spent his childhood enthralled in a world of drawing and painting. Though honored for his creative endeavors, he was encouraged to pursue a more conventional career. After finding conventional success, the artistic passion that existed just beneath the surface was able to present itself. Harris began sculpting and has since created an evolving body of work in stone and bronze, now featured in public collections, museums and galleries worldwide, including: Hilton Hotels; Royal Academy of London; Marin MOCA; Four Seasons Hotels and the Open Air Museum - Ube, Japan.



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John Jacobson

John Jacobson lives and writes in the Catskill Mountains of New York. His writing has appeared in *Kaatskill Life Magazine*, *Clearwaters*, *Mid-Atlantic Fly Fishing Guide*, *Nature Writing*, *About Place Journal* and is forthcoming in *The Curlew*.



Mercedes Lawry

Mercedes Lawry has published poetry in such journals as *Poetry*, *Nimrod*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She's published two chapbooks and her manuscript "In the Early Garden With Reason" was selected by Molly Peacock for the 2018 WaterSedge Chapbook Contest. Her manuscript "Small Measures" will be published by Twelve Winters Press. She's also published short fiction and stories and poems for children.



Mabel Lee

Mabel Lee is a native of Philadelphia, where she teaches middle school Spanish, engages in literary and poetry groups, and dabbles in sketching and painting her surroundings. She is a language, travel, and food enthusiast who enjoys backpacking in different countries whenever she gets the chance.



Michelle McMillan-Holifield

Michelle McMillan-Holifield is assistant editor for *Edify Fiction*. Her work has been included in or is forthcoming in *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Stirring*, *The Collagist*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Whale Road Review* and *Windhover* among others.



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in this issue

Mike McNamara

Born in Northern Ireland but living in S. Wales, Mike McNamara has had a collection of poetry, *Overhearing The Incoherent*, published by Grevatt and Grevatt in 1997. Mike is lead singer with Big Mac's Wholly Soul Band and a published songwriter. His poetry has been published in *Envoi*, *Orbis*, *Tears in the Fence*, *New Welsh Review*, *Acumen*, *The Dawntreader*, etc. Mike also had a selection of poems published in *The Pterodactyl's Wing* (Parthian, 2003).



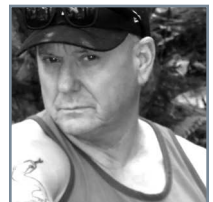
Ralph Monday

Ralph Monday is Professor of English at Roane State Community College in Harriman, Tennessee, and has published hundreds of poems in over 100 journals. A chapbook, *All American Girl and Other Poems*, was published in July 2014. A book, *Empty Houses and American Renditions*, was published May 2015 by Aldrich Press. A Kindle chapbook, *Narcissus the Sorcerer*, was published June 2015 by Odin Hill Press. An e-book, *Bergman's Island & Other Poems*, was published by Poetry Repairs March 2017. A college humanities textbook is scheduled for publication by Kendall/Hunt in 2018.



Daniel Edward Moore

Daniel lives in Washington on Whidbey Island. His poems have been found at *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, *Columbia Journal* and others. His poems will soon be found at *Hawaii Review*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Twisted Vine Literary Arts Journal*, *Broad Street Magazine*, *The Museum of Americana*, *West Trade Review*, *Frontier Poetry Journal* and *Flexible Persona Literary Journal*. His book, *Confessions of a Pentecostal Buddhist*, can be found on Amazon. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Visit Daniel at danieledwardmoore.com.



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in this issue

Carmel Morse

Carmel L. Morse earned a Ph.D. in English with a concentration in creative writing from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln in 2009. She also holds a graduate certificate in women's studies from Wright State University. She has been published in *Connecticut Review*, *Pudding Magazine*, *Darkling*, and *The Furious Gazelle*, among others.



Tom O'Brien

Tom O'Brien is a native of Kilmacthomas Co Waterford Ireland and is a writer, playwright and poet. Performed plays include *Money from America*, *Cricklewood Cowboys*, *On Raglan Road*. *Johnjo*, *Gorgeous Gaels*, *Brendan Behan's Women Down Bottle Alley*, etc. Books include *The Shiny Red Honda*, *Cassidy's Cross*, *Cricklewood Cowboys*, *The Waterford Collection*. He has also had two collections of poetry published. He lives in Hastings, UK.



Rhett Pritchard

Rhett Pritchard is a photographer and writer based in southern Louisiana specializing in abstract and fine art photography. He has been taking pictures of strange things and writing even stranger things for a few years now and would like the world to see some of this strangeness. He has been working on an ongoing infrared photography series, as well as a variety of other series and creative ventures.



Charles Rammelkamp

Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore, where he lives and reviews for *Adirondack Review*. His most recent books include *American Zeitgeist* (Apprentice House) and a chapbook, *Jack Tar's Lady Parts* (Main Street Rag Press). Another poetry chapbook, *Me and Sal Paradise*, is forthcoming from FutureCycle Press.

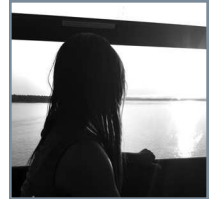


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Dorsía Smith Silva

Dorsía Smith Silva is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, and her poems have been published in *POUI: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing*, *Adanna*, *Rigorous*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Tongvas*, and the book *Mothers and Daughters*.



Catherine Eaton Skinner

Catherine Eaton Skinner grew up in the Pacific Northwest surrounded by the fresh and salt waters, majestic mountains, and old growth forests. She received her BA in Biology from Stanford University while simultaneously studying painting with Bay Area Figurative painters Nathan Oliveira and Frank Lobdell. Working 20 years as a biological illustrator, Skinner specialized in the ecological integration of marine invertebrates and algae of the Pacific Coast. She presently divides her time between her studios in Seattle and Santa Fe, working as a multidisciplinary artist: painting, encaustic, photography, printmaking and sculpture.



Pepper Trail

Pepper Trail's poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Atlanta Review*, *Spillway*, *Borderlands* and other publications, and have been nominated for Pushcart and other awards. His collection, *Cascade-Siskiyou: Poems*, was a finalist for the 2016 Oregon Book Award in Poetry. He resides in Ashland, Oregon, where he works as a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Helen Tzagoloff

Helen Tzagoloff was born in the former Soviet Union and came to the United States as a child. She has held a variety of jobs, among them as a proofreader, research scientist and Small Claims Court arbitrator. Her poetry and prose have been published in magazines and anthologies, among them *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Barrow Street*, *Karamu*, *Poetry East*, *Louisville Review* and others. A book of poetry, *Listening to the Thunder*, has been published by Oliver Arts and Open Press. Another book, *Fears and Pleasures*, is forthcoming this year.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Sarah Uribe

Born in Querétaro in 1978, Sara Uribe has lived in Tamaulipas since 1996. Her poetry collections include *Lo que no imaginas* (2005), *Palabras más palabras menos* (2006), *Nunca quise detener el tiempo* (2008), *Goliat* (2009), and *Siam* (2012). In the US, Toshiya Kamei has published English translations of Sarah Uribe's poems in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *Harpur Palate*, *The Journal*, and *So to Speak*, among others. *Words More or Less*, the bilingual edition of her 2006 title, is forthcoming in the US.



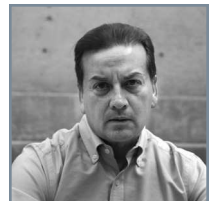
Courtney Wilber

Courtney Wilber recently graduated from Queens University of Charlotte with a B.A. in creative writing and has been accepted into the Vermont College of Fine Arts M.F.A. program in fiction. Her poems will be published this summer in *Prairie Margins* and *3Elements Literary Review*, and her poem "Convert" won the Paul Baker Newman Poetry Award. She lives with her boyfriend and kitten in Charlotte, North Carolina.



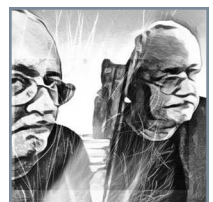
Cèsar Alejandro

Cèsar Alejandro is a filmmaker with 22 feature films written and produced (twelve of those he also directed) and a professor of film. He began in New York, where he was an actor for Spanish Rep (off-Broadway), and then INTAR (off-Broadway) from 1986 to 1990. He has written, produced, and directed four message dramas, and 15 action films. Cèsar has a Master of Arts from UTEP, and three of his creative non-fiction essays have been published already.



Jim Zola

Jim Zola is a poet and photographer living in North Carolina.



Editor's Welcome

“It is the business of the very few to be independent; it is a privilege of the strong. And whoever attempts it, even with the best right, but without being OBLIGED to do so, proves that he is probably not only strong, but also daring beyond measure. He enters into a labyrinth, he multiplies a thousandfold the dangers which life in itself already brings with it; not the least of which is that no one can see how and where he loses his way, becomes isolated, and is torn piecemeal by some minotaur of conscience. Supposing such a one comes to grief, it is so far from the comprehension of men that they neither feel it, nor sympathize with it. And he cannot any longer go back! He cannot even go back again to the sympathy of men!”

-Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (1886)

Three of my favorite books are David Grann's *The Lost City of Z*, Hampton Sides' *In the Kingdom of Ice*, and Ian Baker's *The Heart of the World*. I love to peruse the nearly maniacal obsessions of explorers from my sofa, lost in exotic lands I would never dare to visit. Whether on a quest for El Dorado, the Northwest Passage, or a sacred bejil hidden in a Tibetan waterfall, these explorers were spurred on by cryptic maps and in some cases, simple hearsay. They tested themselves against the forces of nature and often lost far more than they gained.

Percy Fawcett disappeared into an Amazon jungle that is now quickly being razed, indigenous people, endangered species, and potentially life-saving remedies be damned. Perhaps the final frontier is not space after all, but the territories inside ourselves, mapped by mystics and psychiatrists like Carl Jung, still wild and to a large degree unknown. Humanity seems to have discovered that it is far easier to destroy the wilderness and its inhabitants than than it is to understand or control the compulsion to do so.

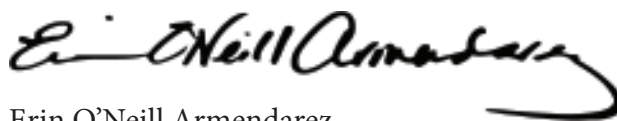
The stories, poems, and essays in this issue introduce readers to characters that are hopelessly lost, their hopes bound by Blake's "mind-forg'd manacles," which today seem as binding as ever. There are no easy answers here; instead, you'll find a steady

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supply of ordinary dilemmas terrifying because of their close proximity to our own routines and our own unquestioned assumptions about what it means to be human, to live fully.

Let me take this moment on the page to thank *Aji's* summer 2018 intern, Ruth Burks, who wrangled the myseries of Submittable unfailingly, ferreting out the elusive work that kept disappearing as I accepted, archived, and cleared a path of amazing submissions into the order you see in this issue. In addition, I offer my sincerest thanks to Erric Emerson, Sarah Kersey, William Nesbitt, Tammie Rice, Sherrel McLafferty, Jenean McBrearty, and Erin Schalk, all of whom took time out of a busy summer to review submissions with attention, expertise, and grace.

I sent a call out into the vast, unknown territories of cyberland and was amazed when this issue's guest reviewers so quickly and so generously responded. My sincerest thanks to them, to our intern, and to our devoted *Aji* staff, without whom this fall issue would not have been possible. Enjoy!



Erin O'Neill Armendarez
Editor in Chief



Writing for No Reason:

A Conversation with **Josh Malerman**

by *Melissa Gish*

My favorite genre is horror. I think I have a genetic predisposition to the enjoyment of terror. As a little kid, I lived for the Saturday midnight movies on TV. Instead of reading Dr. Seuss, I poured over pages of the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Crime*, enthralled with images of bodies strewn about after the 1929 Valentines' Day massacre and of Ed Gein's final victim, Bernice Warden, hanging in Gein's barn, dressed out like a deer. I had a weird childhood, yes.

Like many horror fans, I first dipped my toe into the horror fiction pool with Edgar Allan Poe when I was about ten years old. There was no such thing as "Young Adult" (or "YA") when I was a kid. At twelve, I was swimming in the deep end with Stephen King, Clive Barker, Dean Koontz, and John Saul. Later, I learned to appreciate a different kind of horror with Flannery O'Connor, Shirley Jackson, and Ira Levin—the kind that seems all too plausible and thus more terrifying than vampires in Castle Rock or Cenobites from hell.

Today, as I peruse the stacks at Barnes & Noble, I see many fresh voices in the horror genre—those that combine atmospheric Jackson-esque dread with tangible, bloody Barker-ish beasts. I'm oversimplifying, of course. Today's horror fans are more demanding when it comes to pacing and punch. We want to get where we're going in a hurry—but not so much of a hurry that the hairs on the back of our necks don't have time to stand up. And we want to be blown away by what we find when we get there—not because we've never seen it before but because we've never seen it like THIS before.

One of my favorite new voices in horror fiction is Josh Malerman. His novels, novellas, and short stories are as different from one another as they are from the work of his contemporaries. His debut novel, *Bird Box* (2014, ECCO/HarperCollins), follows the plight of Malorie as she struggles with two small children to survive an unseen terror from another world and make her way to what she hopes will be a safe haven. *Black Mad Wheel* (2017, ECCO/HarperCollins) is a twisted tale of psychological horror. And his latest novel, *Unbury Carol* (2018, Del Rey), is a western/horror mash-up that takes on the relentless terror of being buried alive.

Josh's writing career is tied to his experiences as a singer/songwriter in the Detroit rock band The High Strung. Upon joining the band in 2000, while touring—and performing 250 shows a year—Josh drafted many of his works, including a series of six novellas that were published as the limited-run collector's book *Goblin* (Earthling, 2017). Josh shared with me some of his experiences as a horror writer and his thoughts on horror fiction.

Gish: Your debut novel, *Bird Box*, blew everyone away. What was your path to that first publication? Why, of all your previous writing, did you decide *Bird Box* was the one to sell?

Malerman: Ah, what a strange path it was. I didn't know that at the time, of course, but I can see that now. I'd written some eight or nine books, and I'd been posting online how excited I was that



I'd finished another when a friend from high school called me and said he'd seen the posts. His name is Dave Simmer, and Dave is an incredibly level, intelligent, good guy. He told me he knew a lawyer who represented authors and would I mind if he, Dave, sent the lawyer one of my books? Who knew what might happen, right? I didn't know what to make of the phone call from Dave because I hadn't tried to get an agent or publish a book, and I hadn't even considered self-publishing, nothing, none of any of that.

So here I had nine or so books to decide between. Which one do I send to Dave to send to the lawyer? It's funny to think of how vague the term "lawyer" was to me in those days. Unreal. Anyway, in the end, I foolishly chose *Goblin* because I figured a book of six novellas gave me six times the chances that a single story would. If the lawyer hated one, he might love another! I know, I know. Crazy thinking. But, man, it worked. Wayne, the lawyer, called me up and told me he thought there was something special in *Goblin*; he thought it could be published one day, and he had a manager in mind, two actually, a duo named Ryan and Candace. Would I mind if he sent *Goblin* their way? You gotta vision this, how broke I was then, living in friends' basements for at least four years, and this after six years of touring the country in a van without an apartment or home to speak of. So I said, sure, send her along.

Soon after that I got a call from Ryan and Candace. They loved *Goblin*. But (wisely) they didn't think a book of novellas was the thing to shop to an agent. What else did I have? Well, I'd just finished the first draft of *Unbury Carol*, so I told them about it and they said sure, let's work on it. We spent quite a lot of time making it better. And just about the moment when Ryan and Candace were going to send *Unbury Carol* out, I told them I thought this other book I had, *Bird Box*, was a better "debut." Not a better book. I still don't think that. I don't make best-of lists, and I don't have favorite authors. Phooey on all that, and I don't have favorites of my own books either. I see the books as an album. Like a sequence of songs in a row. And it felt like *Bird Box* was a better lead-off song than *Carol* and some others. Now, as you know, the first song on an album isn't always the best, of course not. But there's typically an introductory quality to it. And I thought *Bird Box* was a good "how do you do."

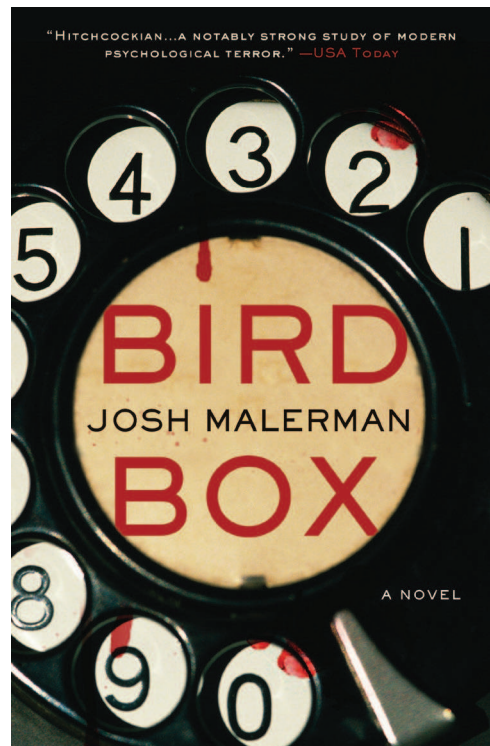
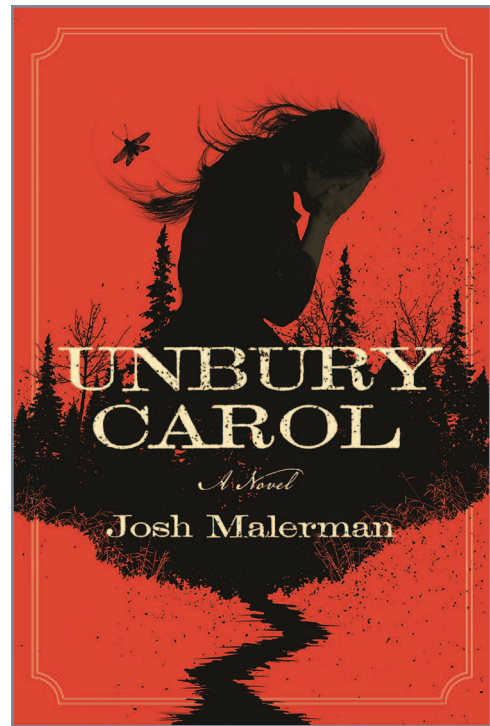
So we worked a bit on her and sent her out to an agent, Kristin Nelson, who really loved it. I had my first Skype session I'd ever had with Kristin, and that was it. At some point in the conversation she

mentioned that she'd need my bank routing number in the event we landed a book deal, because moneys would be deposited that way. And, I tell you, I didn't even have a bank account then. I asked her, "Can you wire any possible money to the copy of *The Witches of Eastwick* I keep on my bookshelf? Because that's where I keep whatever money I have." I can only imagine what she thought of me then.

Then, as it goes, she shopped *Bird Box*; it went into something of a bidding war, was picked up by HarperCollins, and Ryan the manager sold the film rights to Universal. So, in hindsight, what I think happened was, I got lucky with the phone call from Dave Simmer, but I was absolutely 100 percent prepared for that moment by way of having written for a decade already, written close to 10 novels, and had sent the books and any potential career every dollop of good energy I could possibly have found to give them.

Gish: I read that you pounded out the first draft of *Bird Box* in 26 days. Can you tell us a little about the process of getting through that draft?

Malerman: It was a big and bright explosion of a session. At the same time, it was steady. I woke up at seven each day, got to writing by about eight, and wrapped the day's work around noon. I had birds at the time, finches, and I felt weird about having them in cages, so they flew freely around this space we'd been renting at the time. The birds flew all around me as I wrote the book on the third floor of an old awesome Detroit mansion and I pounded out about 4,300 words a day. The rough draft was something of a brick of a nightmare as there were no chapter breaks, twice as many characters, the word count was twice as long, no indentations, no quotation marks, and the entire draft was written in italics. This is all true. Back then I saw the book as a sort of vague nightmare. And the lack of rules helped in writing it so fast.



Gish: How has your writing or editing process evolved from *Bird Box* to *Unbury Carol*?

Malerman: Well, now I know that the real meat happens in the rewrites. The rough drafts haven't changed much for me; they're still like shooting drum sets out of cannons on the Fourth of July, but I'm completely aware of how much work is going to follow those drafts. The rough drafts are sacred to me. You know, sometimes I receive emails that describe publishing trends and what might sell at the moment, and for the most part I ignore those emails. I don't mean to come off as sounding so noble; I just value the core original idea above all things, in all the books I read, too. And there's no place like the rough draft for discovering those initial, untouched flares.

Gish: Your female protagonists speak with such authentic voices. How do you think you accomplish that so well?

Malerman: This I have no answer for! But I can tell you this: I feel much more comfortable writing a female's voice than I do a male's.



The narrator of *Bird Box* is Malorie, a woman who finds herself pregnant and alone in a new and terrifying world created by an inexplicable invader.

Malorie wakes from dreams about babies. It is either early morning or very late at night, she guesses. The house is silent. The farther along in her pregnancy she gets, the more vivid her reality becomes. Both *With Child* and *At Last . . . a Baby!* briefly discuss home deliveries. It's possible, of course, to do it without help from a professional, but the books are wary of this. Cleanliness, they say. Unforeseen circumstances. Olympia hates reading those parts, but Malorie knows they must.

One day, the pain your mother and the pain every mother speaks of will come to you in the same form: childbirth. Only a woman can experience it and because of this all women are bonded.

Now that moment is coming. Now. And who will be there when it does? In the old world, the answer was easy. Shannon, of course. Mom and Dad. Friends. A nurse who would assure her she was doing fine. There would be flowers on a table. The sheets would smell fresh. She'd be doted on by people who had delivered babies before; they'll act like it was like removing a pistachio from its shell. And the ease they'd express would be exactly what calmed her impossible nerves.

But this isn't the answer anymore. Now the labor Malorie expects sounds like that of a mother wolf: brute, mean, inhuman. There will be no doctor. No nurse.



Gish: I'm interested in how you approach setting. Your novels vary greatly, from a post-apocalyptic world to the 1950s to the Old West. Where do your ideas for setting come from, and how do they fit into the plan for a book?

Malerman: Like I was saying earlier, seeing the books as songs on an album, I see them as episodes for a TV show, too. A TV show called *A CREEP'S CAREER*. Or something like that. So the first episode takes place in suburban America, the second in the 1950's, the third in something like the Old West. But none of those settings is entirely nailed down. Is the problem in *Bird Box* still affecting the whole world by the time Malorie makes for the river? Is this a global story or a neighborhood story? In *Black Mad Wheel* all of time is completely twisted and we jump from Detroit to Africa often. And *Unbury Carol* . . . is it the Old West? Instead of the F-word they say "hell's heaven" and they call people by their profession. "The doctor." "The outlaw." "The husband." Where and when is that? I'd like to think that those malleable settings are the result of an active imagination, but sometimes I worry they have something to do with being uncertain of depicting an actual place exactly as it is.



The title character of *Unbury Carol* is Carol Evers, a woman who *dies* over and over: she falls into a coma—a state that lasts for days, prompting those around her to prepare her "corpse" for burial.

In her mind's eye, Carol saw her friend John Bowie sitting up in his grave. Barefoot and unboxed, he raised his right hand as if about to suggest something.

Then Carol felt a hand upon her shoulder.

John!

But this was not the hand of John Bowie. This was no friend. The burn she felt from its subfreezing temperature told her so.

Carol tried to look, to see who had touched her, if such a thing was possible at all. But turning her head was just as impossible as turning her body, and so Carol only stared into the darkness through which she fell.

Someone's in here with you. Someone's in here with you. SOMEONE'S IN HERE WITH YOU, CAROL!

Carol had never felt another person in the darkness. Not a moment's contact with Hattie ever translated into the coma itself. Even as Dwight and Farrah carried her body upstairs, Carol felt nothing.

But now . . . fingertips . . . a palm . . . a hand rolling her over.



“Write what you know’ is a much deeper thing than the facts you know and the research you do. It’s the ways you’ve felt while experiencing the thousands of different, and seemingly (at the time) small moments throughout your life.”

-Josh Malerman

Gish: Do you have a preference for short stories or the novel form? How do you know if an idea will become a short story or a novel?

Malerman: You know, I’m not sure. I love them both. Reading and writing. I feel just as “accomplished” when I wrap a short as I do a novel. I wrote some fifteen novels before I started writing shorts, so I guess I’d say that’s my natural state. But the short story is so where it’s at in horror. Sometimes I think the ultimate medium for a horror story is the four- or five-sentence ghost story your friend tells you, how he or she saw their grandma at the bathroom mirror as they passed the open door in the hall. The longer the story, the harder to sustain that mood, yeah? But I love them both. And how I know when an idea is a book or a short . . . I’m not sure that I do. Obviously you can sense the scope of a thing, especially if you’ve been writing for years. But sometimes you surprise yourself. And other times you gun for a novel and start to feel like you’re straining something, like you’ve ballooned a tiny thing that’s gonna pop.

Gish: What are some ways your experiences inform your writing? I’m thinking of a connection between your being a musician and the characters in *Black Mad Wheel*, perhaps? Other connections?

Malerman: I’m always thinking of the sequence of books and stories like an album, and I’m almost always playing to an invisible drummer, the rhythm of the book, some guy who’s as elusive as the Wendigo, always just out of sight, but playing along, setting the speed for me. You know, people say “Write what you know,” but that doesn’t mean a doctor has to write about a doctor. That means remember how you felt the time you saw your brother fall on the ice and how you worried about him. That means write a book about a fella who worries his brother might be in trouble, maybe he suspects his brother’s house is haunted. You know? “Write what you know” is a much deeper thing than the facts you know and the research you do. It’s the ways you’ve felt while

experiencing the thousands of different, and seemingly (at the time) small moments throughout your life.

Gish: Would you consider yourself more a musician who writes fiction or a fiction writer who plays music?

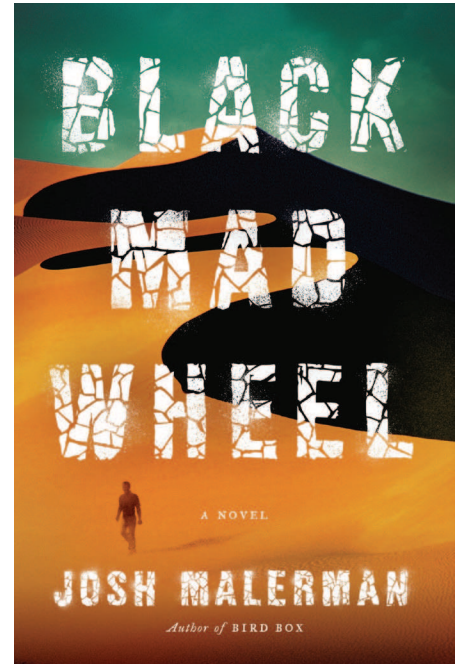
Malerman: I was trying to write books before I learned anything about music. So I just see myself as a writer. Of both. My band mates (also my best friends) were already playing music when we were ten years old. I didn't get into music until we were about nineteen. I think the fact that I wrote poems and short stories was what led them to asking me to play with them in the first place.

Gish: The horror genre often asks readers to focus on the causes and effects of violence or violation. How do you decide on the level of horror you want to include in a book? I'm comparing, for example, *Bird Box* and *The House at the Bottom of the Lake*—two very different approaches to what frightens us as readers.

Malerman: I wrote a short story that takes place in the world of *Bird Box* called "Bobby Knocks" and it's much more violent than the book. Why? I'm not sure. Maybe it has something to do with the amount of space you've got and the size of the punch you're looking to throw? But when it comes to a book, I really try not to force the horror. If it's there, fantastic. But I trust readers can sniff it out when you're just tossing it in there. That said, almost all my ideas, and, I imagine, the ideas of everyone else in the field, all our ideas have that room available, a room for horrible horror, and it's up to us to figure out how much we wanna mix in there. For me, the steady hum of a freaky story is usually scarier than a balls-to-the-wall shootout. But not always. I don't know. I think the answer to this question comes in one word: INSTINCTS.

Gish: Where did your interest in the horror genre begin? What are some of your influences?

Malerman: I was ten or eleven, playing basketball outside with my cousins, when my uncle asked me to come inside. He told me he had a movie he thought I'd get a kick out of. To this day I have no idea why he chose me or picked me out as the nephew who might like the movie, but he did, and I'm eternally grateful. The movie was *Twilight Zone: The Movie* and it changed my life. The fact that it was an anthology movie, with a number of short stories, did something to me, too. Because it showed me a wide variety of scares all at once, all in my debut experience with the genre. To tell you the truth, I



kinda believe all of it. Every horror story I read. I haven't lost that ability to believe in these horribly dark things, even if only momentarily, and for that I thank the genre. Horror is the fountain of youth. You drink from these supposed impossibilities and they make you feel like you can do and become anything, absolutely anything, in the world.

Gish: What do you find most frightening . . . in fiction or in life?

Malerman: Lately I've been noticing that the sudden scare gets me in fiction. When the author hasn't telegraphed a thing, where in one sentence the old hag hadn't even been introduced yet and in the next she's standing on the kitchen counter as Jon or Mary cooks spaghetti. In real life, my fears are too many. I mean that. I'm working on being braver, on all fronts. I'm tired of being scared of shit, of events, of feeling peaked out. I'm working on being "myself" in all situations, whether they're intense situations or not. I'd like to achieve that, being the same man, the ME, rather than being so influenced by whoever's around. You ever notice that you're funnier when you're around people who think you're funny? And I don't just mean you get more laughs, I mean the content of your jokes is actually better. What is that? I'd like to get rid of that, be the sharpest me at all times, no matter what.

Gish: What elements do you think make horror fiction successful today?

Malerman: I'm tempted to say it has something to do with the books and movies that are attempting something fresh. But then a movie like *The VVitch* was about as original as a dad joke and is somehow a fantastic movie. I think one key to a book or movie being scary is the sense, for the reader or viewer, of who made this? A lot of the great horror movies have this going on. Because we're all afraid of the unknown, yeah? So if the style of the movie itself is unknown to us, we're immediately put in an awkward and uncomfortable place. The unknown doesn't have to stop with "what's behind the door?!" The unknown can be . . . who is this writer, this director, this musician? Because I've never experienced their exact voice before and that's gonna freak me out more than anything they achieve. Because if you don't recognize the look or the feel or the voice . . . how can you know what's coming next? A unique cinematographer can make a movie scarier than even a script.

"I'm working on being
'myself' in all situations..."

-Josh Malerman

Gish: Can you share any advice with beginning horror writers?

Malerman: I'm not one for literal advice. You use too much word echo? Good for you. You're not developing your characters enough? Sweet. So many great books develop their characters well. Maybe if you don't, then your book will feel freakier for not being familiar. I mean, seriously . . . who knows? But what I can say is this: get rid of the words "good" and "bad." When you're working on the rough draft, especially, these words simply do not apply. You will change 90 percent of that draft by the time it's done, so the question becomes: would you rather have 300 pages that need to be fixed . . . or no pages at all? Write from a place of legitimate energy. And write all the time, even when you don't want to. Inspiration is a monster. It stands just outside your office door and often doesn't enter, teases you, lurks. It wants you to wait for it. But whatever you do—don't.

Gish: Can you tell us about your current or upcoming projects?

Malerman: *Bird Box* the movie is coming out in December. *Unbury Carol* has been optioned for film and a wonderful screenwriter is working on the script as we speak. I've got a book coming out with *Cemetery Dance* on Halloween: *On This, the Day of the Pig*. I can't wait for this one to go live. And next April sees *Inspection* coming out on Del Rey/Penguin-Random House. Short stories along the way. And I'm about 924 pages into a huge novel that I have no idea what I'm going to do with. And right now I don't totally care what becomes of it. I hope to God I write for "no reason" forever. Because that's what opened the doors for me in the first place and that's always been, for me, where the joy's at.



Josh Malerman lives in Ferndale, Michigan, with his fiancée, artist/musician, Allison Laakko. Read his latest short story, "Your Boy," at his website: www.joshmalerman.com. *Bird Box*, directed by Susanne Bier, will star Sandra Bullock, Sarah Paulson, and John Malkovich. It will be released on December 21, 2018, by Netflix. Malerman continues to work with the band The High Strung, who recently wrote and performed the theme song for the hit Showtime series *Shameless*.



an interview with featured artist

CATHERINE EATON SKINNER

With a career spanning decades and disciplines, we were so excited to have the chance to chat with this month's feature artist, Catherine Eaton Skinner. We find both her work and words inspirational and hope you will, too!



Katie Redfield (KR): You have quite a resumé. Can you tell us a little bit about where and how you got your start as an artist?

Catherine Eaton Skinner (CES): As a young child I picked up my first pencil and crayon and I began to draw. It became clear I was able to reproduce what I saw and so was on the path of an illustrator/artist. My first twenty years as a professional artist began at Stanford University, illustrating for the Biology Department, and later, I illustrated marine invertebrates and algae for field guides, books and research papers. I began to paint in earnest again in my mid-thirties, now working full time in two studios, located in Seattle and Santa Fe.

KR:Who are/were your mentors and role models?

CES: Nathan Oliveira was my painting professor at Stanford University. Later, I spent two weeks in his residency at the Santa Fe Art Institute, where later I was also in a month-long residency with Anne Truitt. Joseph Goldberg was a self-taught encaustic artist like myself. James Havard, a friend and role model, still works after a stroke, albeit with his left hand now.



Passages IX, above
Passages III, page 26

KR: You have a very large body of work. Can you tell us a little bit about the different styles you've worked in?

CES: Illustrating for twenty years in biological illustration, I learned many skills. In my mid-thirties I began painting again in oil on canvas, avoiding the use of black so prevalent in illustration and forcing myself to explore color and texture. Since that time, I have completed over 2200 paintings in addition to numerous drawings and monotypes. At times I spiral back to a series. I work full time and often think about what I will do next when in the process of another painting. Over twenty years ago I developed ways of working with encaustic wax that continue today. My photography skills have advanced, and travels increased, which complement my portfolio of images and connections to various cultures and times. A constant thread in my work is the elemental archetypes of the physical and cosmic world.

KR: Can you tell our readers about your use of line, as well as the repetition that appears in your work?

CES: Line and mark-making have always been something I have been comfortable exploring, from contour drawing to exacting illustration. In college drawing class we used sumi-ink, bamboo pen and brush, never able to erase. I still use this medium, plus graphite. After completing my book *108*, published by Radius Books, my new body of work, *Accumulations* and the *Reiterations* series, is basically an extension of using repetition, just not concentrating on the count or grid. Eastern thought emphasizes repetition of pattern, mantras and image in order for a dissolution of the self into the whole. In repeating free line and archetypal forms, each mark has its own character that then adds to the coherent whole of the painting.

KR: Your choice of color and material gives a very vintage, classic feel. Can you share a bit about your selection of these colors and materials?

CES: The use of transparent layers of encaustic wax reduces the intensity of what is beneath. Adding the more transparent oil stick and even slight staining with color is then fused into the wax layer. If there are images below, especially my photographs, they become more distant. This back and forth of layers, scraping and filling, and opposing colors adds to a feeling of memory or dream. Each artist has their own color sense found over time. I have an earth red that continually speaks out; indigos and ultramarines with the opposition of pale tinted grays and the blacks are often Payne gray or mixed. I use many papers, old and new, collected around the world in my travels.

KR: How long do you typically spend working on a piece? How do you know when a piece is finished?

CES: This is the question that gets answered with how old I am! The work will speak if you listen. I have an intuitive sense of composition and when it's partially completed I will turn a painting all directions to check the balance. When about 95% completed, I let it sit on the wall. Often when I come into the studio the next time, something jumps out as needing a bit more. When work comes back from a gallery, I have been known to go back in and change something.

KR: How long do you usually spend with a style / collection before moving on? How do you know when it's time to move on?

CES: Some artists are compelled to work and rework the same subjects their whole careers. This would be difficult for me. Between solo shows there will often be time to explore new ideas that have been gelling on my wall, in my notebooks or in my head. I allow myself time to try new ideas and techniques. Some of the *Marking Sacred* series, including *Kibo* and *Kunzi*, are quite limited in numbers, as usually there might only be one in an exhibition.

KR: What do you feel is your strongest attribute as an artist?

CES: My constant attention to my work, whether in the studio or not, and an inherited work ethic.

KR: What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of being an artist and how do you deal with it?

CES: There are a few, but the idea is to “do the work”. I do not have much control over the rest. All my costs continue to rise while collectors are into deeper discounts. Many buyers in the art world are concerned with the latest trend to be on their walls. Biggest seems to be the new norm. When working I am centered on each piece at that moment.

KR: What keeps you motivated to continue creating art and expanding your knowledge and skill set?

CES: When I have a solo exhibition, I have already started on new work before the opening, engaging me and overcoming any slump after completion of the show. I make sketchbooks as I work, now with over fifty completed. I write, draw, glue, paste, and collage my photographs and works of other artists. I do columns of words and notes on my reading at the time. I continually go back and add to the older books. When I travel, I make books, drawing

“WHAT I EXPERIENCE FEEDS ME. I CONTINUALLY SEE, OBSERVE AND VISUALLY REMEMBER EVEN THE COLOR OF A STONE OR NEW GROWTH ON A FLOWER.”

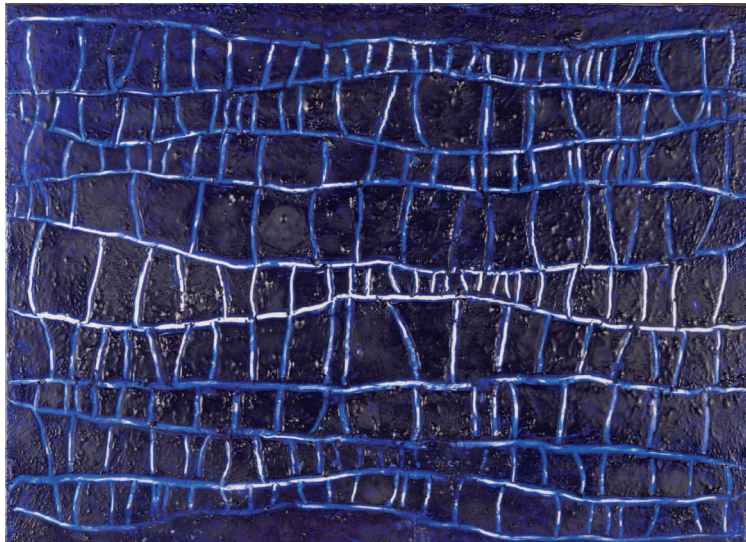
-CATHERINE EATON SKINNER



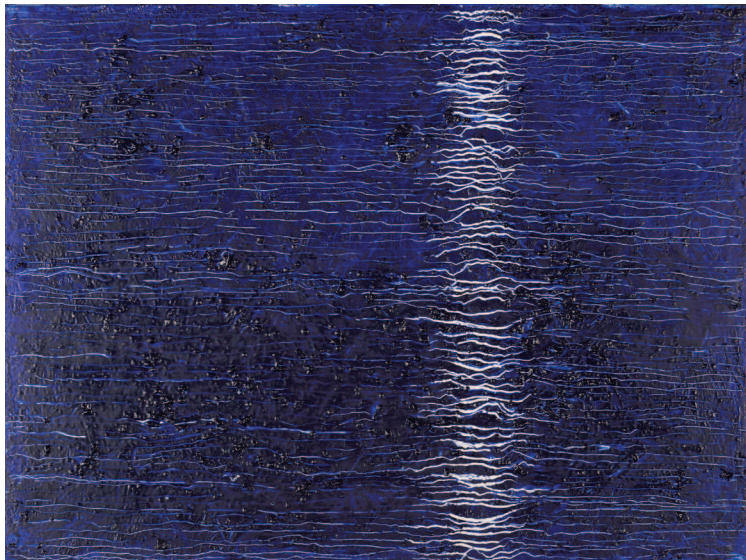
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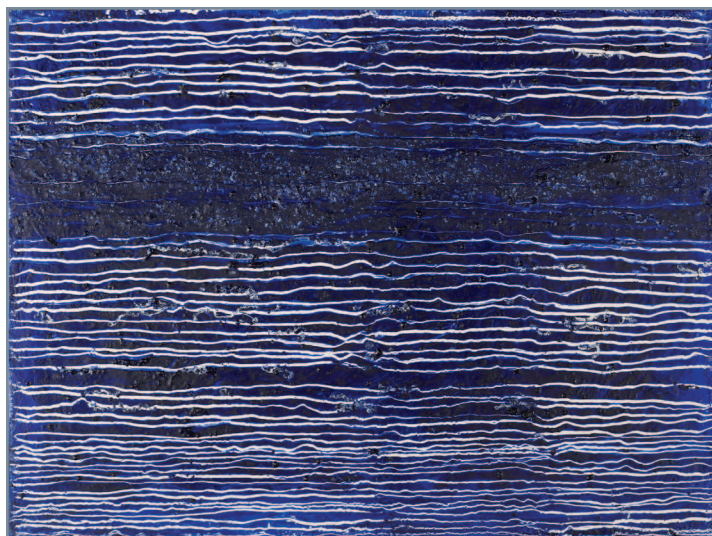
Reiteration III



Reiteration IV



Reiteration VI



Reiteration VII

and collaging out of magazines my visual impressions of the day. These all are my history, my conceptual log when I need a new idea. I rarely take a long break from making work. What I experience feeds me. I continually see, observe and visually remember even the color of a stone or new growth on a flower.

KR: What feelings, thoughts, or reactions do you hope your work evokes from its viewers?

CES: I am fortunate to have collectors who understand the depth of my work and also collect in multiple series. Viewers may react to the image, color and texture in the beginning. However, I hope their reaction goes farther, reaching some experience, physical, psychological or spiritual that resonates with them.

KR: What goals do you have for the future?

CES: To keep working and exploring for many more years, being willing to change as I grow. I would also like to work on a museum exhibition that curates my *108* book that included 14 years of using this number of such arithmetical power and numerological symbolism. I am working towards my next book, probably a mixture of my poetry, work and photography.

KR: What other artists would you recommend we check out? What do you admire in their work?

CES: I have admiration for any artist willing to place their work in the public eye.

KR: What advice do you have for aspiring artists?

CES: I can only pass on what I was told by my mentors. You must do the work. If you only work occasionally to do your art, you will not be there when something happens. Keeping good records of process, of where and when the work changes. Work on paper and materials not too precious to explore. Allow yourself to play. If you are thinking about what piece will sell and where, you are not engaged in the actual creating. Be present. It should be about the making of the work. Listen to what others have to say, but always do what is in your heart.

Follow Catherine Eaton Skinner online:

Website: <http://www.ceskinner.com/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ceskinner/>

Pintrest: <https://www.pinterest.com/catherines0299/>



*Hard Winter DT by
Mark Yale Harris*

My Father's Accident

The lives we live are mostly shaped not by our actions or our desires, but by our reactions to external forces over which we usually have no control. We would like for our existence to go accordingly to what we want and enjoy, but in most cases it doesn't happen that way. From a very young age I knew the arts were going to be in my future (actor, singer, performer), but my father had other plans for me. I was going to follow his footsteps whether I liked it or not, but...destiny dictated otherwise. I worked with him diligently in his butcher-shop-supplies business ever since I was twelve, and it was the utmost pleasure: I learned a lot from him, and we were the best of friends. As for my own kids, I let them decide their own careers, and only my son Oscar chose to follow my footsteps. I directed him in his first feature starring role when he was six, and right after he graduated from film school, we did two features, and are currently working on a documentary. My own relationship with my dad wasn't that dissimilar at first, but then it drastically changed.

The year I turned seventeen, we had a large grinding stone with a powerful engine to sharpen meat-grinder knives and strainers. This type of work pays too little and takes too much time, so we stopped doing it for money. For his best customers, though, my father set up special treatment; we would sharpen their items free of charge. His clients loved the price so much that in return they would buy all of their butcher shop equipment from us, just one more of my Dad's many tricks as a master salesman.

A friend of ours, who was a mechanic like his father before him, told us several times to buy a metal cover for it, but my father never listened. He argued that now we didn't use it that much, so it wasn't really necessary. Well...it was.

One cold, gray Autumn Saturday morning, my father was going on a merchandise delivery trip, but he had forgotten that the owner of one of the biggest supermarkets had given him three meat-grinder knives to sharpen. He woke me up at 6:30 a.m. to perform this task. It was always a pleasure to do something for my mentor as a budding salesman, for my boss, but also for my dad. Those particular blades were very expensive, so I took my time.

My father stuck his head into the tool shed, which was just outside the house by the open garage, and asked me, "Are you done?"

I said, "Give me ten minutes."

He came back five minutes later, and I was already working on the last one. The way you sharpen these knives is by facing the grinding stone so it's turning right toward you and then gently and carefully pressing their sharp edges on the narrow side of it. He was looking impatiently at me from the other side of the door, which was right next to the grinding stone, and that made me make a mistake, almost breaking the knife.

He immediately snatched the knife from my hand and said, "I'll show you how to do it properly!"

I switched places with him, so I ended up where he was before. He faced the rotating stone and expertly pushed the knife against its narrow end, creating an array of tiny sparks. He then moved back and looked

at me with a beaming smile, clearly signaling: this is how it's done. Suddenly there was an extremely loud blast that made me fall backwards. As I was falling to the ground landing in a sitting position, I saw my father's feet move up as if he had been lifted by a crane a meter from the ground. The grinding stone had exploded right in front of his face.

The discharge was so powerful that it broke the stone into three parts. One of those hit him on the forehead making him fly up while opening a gash on the left side of his head that seemed to go on forever, from the front of the hairline all the way to the top back of his skull. I got up in a daze; he had landed in such a strange pose (like a marionette when you place it on the ground), plus he was breathing in spasms and shaking. The worst part was that through that horrific open slit I saw a fearful sight that nobody should ever see, my own father's brain contracting and distending, as if it was breathing.

I ran into the house right on time to stop my mother from coming out. She had heard the loud detonation and wanted to know the cause.

"Call an ambulance, and then call la Clinica del Parque" (The Park Clinic, the best hospital in town).

I grabbed her hand gently and said, "Let them know that the grinding stone exploded and hit my father in the head." She cringed and so I put my other hand on her shoulder as I pleaded, "Please, don't come out. You shouldn't see this. Your help with the phone is what we need right now."

I think it was the first time ever that she took instructions from me and acquiesced to them. I went back. He was still in the same position, but this time, as if he had been crying for a long time, sighing and sighing. Something had to be done, and quickly.

I went running a whole block around the corner to get my Cousin Toñeta. She had just graduated from medical school, and her knowledge and assistance could be valuable. Her mother opened the door. I left her with the "good morning" in her mouth and went directly to Toñeta's room. She was in a floral robe and had curlers on her head, which she was beginning to undo. I grabbed her black-physician's bag with one hand, grabbed her with the other, and pulled her with me.

"Hey!" She blurted.

"My father had a terrible accident!"

Right before we exited her house, she grabbed the side of her entrance door with her free hand, stopped our momentum, turned to me and said, "Let me just change into --"

I forcefully and rapidly pulled her onto the sidewalk and kept us moving. "He's in really bad shape!"

Needless to say, she fought, pulled, shoved, and tried many pleas, but I wasn't listening. I just kept pulling her closer and closer to my dad. I finally left her with him and went to see my mom.

"The ambulance is on its way, and at La Clinica del Parque they'll be ready for him. How's he?" She asked nervously.

I looked at her, and then patted her hand again: "Toñeta is with him now. Call the ambulance again. They should've already been here!"

She shook her head, covered her mouth with her left palm, and started dialing with her free hand. My father and Toñeta were already entering the house. He was walking on his own, a very good sign. Bringing her had been a very good move.

And that's when it started: there was blood trickling down from his wound, two little drops of blood coming out of either side of that long opening, one hitting the front of his jacket and the other the back. That dripping, dripping, and dripping of the precious red liquid stayed with me throughout the whole ordeal to such extent that I would hear, of course inside my head, the sound of those globs as they hit my father's jacket, then their bouncing trip with a long fall all the way down the length of his pants, and how they would splash on the floor –all this with a loud echo of swirls, swishes and splashes.

Toñeta was right behind him looking at me, her eyes almost coming out of their sockets. She pointed at his lesion, like I hadn't noticed it before. The sheer scope of the trauma turned out to be too much for a recent medical graduate without the proper experience.

With her other hand she grabbed my arm and yelled, "We need to take him to a hospital, now!"

"I know but the stupid ambulance hasn't arrived!"

My father went into his office constantly repeating, "I have to go. I have a lot of things to do," as he would move dripping, dripping, and dripping north and south.

They were tiny trickles, but they were directly from his brain.

We brought him back to the parlor and sat him down gently. When he sat down, my point of view changed his wound to a gouge again.

She was still gawking, and then turned to me with a very frightened face: "He's going to need a neurosurgeon."

I ran to my mom and yelled through the open door, "Call the hospital and tell them that he's going to need a neurosurgeon!"

"I can't wait for the ambulance anymore!" I yelled to Toñeta as I was running out of the house.

Toñeta didn't answer. She was blankly staring at my father's trauma as if in a hypnotic trance. I had to take my father's car (it was full of merchandise) out of the garage and then bring our second car in. I did it in no time, left the motor running, and went inside to get him. The ambulance driver appeared at the door, saw my father's long and bloody cut, and stopped in his tracks. He was tall. Most everybody in the north of Mexico is taller than my father, even I am, and I am five foot eight, so from that vantage point he could easily see the extent of the damage, plus the dripping, dripping, and dripping, which made him do an instantaneous about face.

"We need the stretcher!"

Toñeta and I gently led my Father to the door, as he kept repeating his circuitous workman's prayer. He was lucky he was the only one that couldn't see the top of his head, but he started feeling that warm liquid. He brushed the falling beads aside a couple of times. He also began walking with very hesitant steps, as if he realized he wasn't really going to any business trip. Maybe his brain was releasing drugs to help him calm down and avoid pain, so he shifted from a decisive business-driven step to a sauntering, sedated glide.

The men in white came in with their rolling cot. Toñeta and I convinced my father to sit down on it as if it were a chair. We didn't want to rattle him for fear of doing even more damage, as if that were even possible. I remember the two globules on both sides of him as he finally sat down on the stretcher, and how they turned the white linen pink with their dripping, dripping, and dripping. Another strong image entered my brain: those two droplets were a ruby candle that was being burnt at both ends, slowly, steadily, and quite dangerously.

As if in a rehearsed drill, once my father was lying down on the stretcher and had the straps securely on, he became a vegetable, no talking, no moving, and no life in his eyes either. The only constant from there and on was the dripping, dripping, and dripping of those two never stopping little fiery spheres, always at the same pace, and more vermillion every single time. Their trip was shorter now, just from his head to the movable bed's surface, but it only augmented their clashing sound inside my head, and the changing hue of the now cerise-white cover. That liquid should always remain inside your body, because its leaving can only mean one thing, for me unthinkable that day.

One last time, I ran to my mother's room and yelled, "Let them know we are on our way!"

"I'm on the phone with them!" was her reply.

As I went out, I grabbed the doctor's bag. They had already put him inside the ambulance. I also grabbed Toñeta with both arms in a bear hug, pulled her up, and pushed her inside the ambulance with me, just in case she could still be of some service. Even though inexperienced, she still had more medical knowledge than me.

She screamed, "I have to change!"

The driver and his partner just looked at us in disbelief, as they were deciding what to do with us.

"She's a doctor," I told them as I pointed to her.

She just nodded her head and forced a smile that made her look like a confused robot. They closed the door, and off we went. Seconds later, they opened the window in between the cabin and the back, "Where to?"

"La Clinica del Parque," I quickly answered.

The driver yelled back, "The Central Quirurgica is--"

I didn't let him finish, "La Clinica del Parque! They're already waiting for him there."

Toñeta spoke, her voice was a couple of registers higher than her usual pitch, with a very eerie tremolo, "Take us anywhere close now."

I turned to her and said, "It has to be the Clinica del Par--"

"I'm the doctor, and I say anyplace close!"

This particular disagreement I have to explain. The Central Quirurgica was a nursing school with a clinic

attached to it only nine blocks from my house. I was adamant, somehow, that we had to take my father to the bigger, better hospital, which was another extra thirty blocks away.

I think it was my grandfather's legacy, since he always used to say, "Whenever it comes to health, go to the most expensive doctor. Anything else will just kill you faster."

After all, bringing her wasn't a good move, so I had to do something to deviate, to avoid, and to stop this nonsensical change of location. The back doors had a couple of handles, like those that you see on school entrances, but here they were vertically placed on both meeting ends. They were hollow, so I was able to put my arms through them, thus making a live-flesh latch with them. We arrived at the Central Quirurgica, the ambulance stopped, and then I heard the paramedics' steps moving fast, so I braced myself.

"Hey, what's going on?" they yelled.

"Not here!"

"Let us open the door, you rascal."

"To the Clinica del Parque!" was my very loud and direct reply.

"He's going to die!"

"If we leave him here, he sure will!"

They kept trying to open the door, but my stiff limbs wouldn't let them.

Toñeta tried to get close to me, but I just turned and stunned her with a menacing growl, partly to scare her, but also out of frustration for her lack of help to me.

She jumped back with fear in her eyes.

"Listen you...this is not a game!" The voices outside kept yelling.

"La Clinica del Parque, or nothing else!"

"This is life and death!" They kept shouting and pulling on the doors forcefully.

They were already hurting me, I guess, but I couldn't feel a thing. All I could hear was my father's cherry colored fluid slowly leaving him, turning him pale as a candle, then its clashing with cloth, turning it crimson, dripping, dripping, and dripping.

"We're losing time!" I yelled from the top of my lungs.

Toñeta was already next to me (she took advantage of the confusion), first pulling me, then shoving me, then pinching me to try to free the passage.

They kicked the door really hard a couple of times. Toñeta, drenched in sweat from the physical exertion, finally gave up and moved away from me. She crossed her arms and totally rested and relaxed her body against the back of the ambulance as she yelled, "He's not budging. Let's move! My cousin is bleeding dry!"

The driver kicked the door once more, and then yelled, “We are not responsible for whatever happens after this!”

It was the longest ten-minute ride of my life. I kept my flesh and bone bolt in place, as if that would prevent anybody from opening those gates as the ambulance was moving at full speed toward the only destination allowed that morning.

When we finally arrived, Toñeta had to help me remove myself from my own bone latch. She told me later that not until the third time she yelled right into my ear, “We already are at The Clinica del Parque!” did I let go.

People’s voices began to sound like the bubbles from my father’s laceration, and I began to feel numb all over, a lost somnambulist among white shapes frantically moving around me. Before this, only the dripping, dripping, dripping, and its resonance were in slow motion, but now life itself was moving at a musical ritardando. Our positions completely reversed, since it was now Toñeta who was actually carrying me off the ambulance, so after all there was a good reason for her to be there. Once I saw a benevolent nurse in a soothing pastel uniform, and two doctors in pristine white rolling the stretcher into the hospital’s elevator, everything went black.

“You had finally accomplished your mission,” a psychiatrist would explain to me months later. “That’s why you fainted.”

You might think that an exhilarating story like this should have a happy ending, which did come, but with a lot of baggage attached. My father underwent many surgical operations and was in ICU for a month. The neurosurgeon told me personally that if we had gone to any other hospital... “You saved his life! Only La Clinica del Parque is properly equipped for this type of critical and highly technical surgery.”

He lost half of his vision in one eye, was seeing double out of the other one, plus he became very weary of the way he looked. His head had a misshapen form (a crude result from the powerful blow). Furthermore, he wasn’t only hurt physically but also mentally (the before-mentioned baggage).

When that kind and candid, trouble-minded physician finally explained this to me, my father had already been out of the hospital for a couple of months. Sadly and painfully, his mental wounds superseded the others and made him change, especially and directly toward me. He was the one that told me to move and took my position, but inside of his badly damaged brain I was totally guilty of the calamity, his poor vision, and his grossly crushed head. So a way-above average father and son relationship was morphed by that erupting tool into one of suspicion, rivalry, and plain hatred. But it was only one sided: from him to me, and never, ever the other way around.

He used to tell everyone that I was evil, and that I was stealing from the company. It was unbearable for me and for those around us, so I moved in with my grandparents for a while. However, I still had to work with him daily. He couldn’t drive, so I had to drive him. The rift just kept getting bigger and uglier until it became as horrid as that scarlet red, open-spouting mouth he had had on that abominable occasion. There was nothing else to do but to make a drastic geographical change. I decided to go and live in Juarez, Mexico, 250 miles away. It was a painful situation for me to swallow, but I was happy and thankful that he was alive, and that’s actually all that really mattered. A couple of years later, I went a step further and

crossed over to the United States. I joined the United States Army, and was given a green card in return to match my uniform.



My father is now 84 as I write this, and our relationship has never improved. Nowadays, people say that when I'm not around him, he always mentions me with pride and says he watched one of my movies and also boasts about how talented I am. But when I happen to be with him, which is not very often, he is still never nice to me. He's not as mean as before, but never loving or fatherly. I sometimes ponder: was that explosion really meant for me? Do accidents happen for a reason?

What I'm actually sure of is that his precious-life-giving juice is always circulating inside of him, as it should be, and that he was able to live forty more years and counting. And as for those two lingering questions, mortals like us just can't answer them. Fate is as powerful as the oceans when they're angry, and we're just puppets in its wake.



“Growing Golden” by Rhett Pritchard



Time and Chance

“Again I saw that under the sun

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong

Nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent,

Nor favor to the skillful;

But time and chance happen to them all.”

Ecclesiastes 9.11

It is October. The sun is already below the horizon when I arrive at Emmon’s Pond Bog after an hour drive from work. It’s quiet in the meadow that slopes down to the pond and pine woods. A few bees are collecting the year’s last nectar from fading golden rod. The chorus of crickets I remember from a couple of weeks ago has dwindled to a few individuals.

A lone dark-bottomed cloud drifts slowly from the Northwest. Its white, cottony top glows first yellow, then a delicate pink as streaks of saffron and rose cross the sky.

A milkweed trembles in the wind. Its pods have darkened and split. A seed in the uppermost pod clings by the very tips of its silk filaments. It dances with the slightest breeze. Finally a stronger wind comes. It breaks free and the filaments that had been anchors to the mother plant puff into a luminous umbrella-shaped means of flight. It lifts high above the surrounding golden rod and soars across the meadow.



On Christmas Eve, 1999, I married Claudia here. A Presbyterian pastor and a small group of family and friends trudged through two feet of snow with us across the meadow to the pond. We made our promises to each other. My brother-in-law Walt dropped our rings in the snow. We got down on our hands and knees laughing and dug them out.

We came here together often after that. We held hands as we walked through the golden rod and milkweed. I would reach back to Claudia when she crossed the planks laid across the spring run and she would take my hand, even though she needed no help. We carried binoculars and looked for birds and wildflowers. Claudia saw more birds. She laughed and said, “You’re always looking down. I’m looking up!”



I sit on the ground at the spot where we were married. Light dims. The saffron and rose streaks deepen and spread, reflecting on the pond until it seems to have lit aflame. A flock of geese flies in and settles on the water. They call to each other. As darkness gathers water turns to silver.

Venus shines like a distant lantern above the southwestern horizon. A gibbous moon, nearly full, rises. Waves of silver and shadow flow across golden rod stirred by wind. Landmarks I navigate with by day are lost in darkness.

I try to remember the last time Claudia and I came here together. I can't. It seemed so ordinary. It seemed like something we would do again and again for a long time. I lean back and feel the cold damp of the grass.

Claudia is home tonight. She is in her hospital bed in our living room. She has been there since 2007. She is probably watching "Downton Abbey" with one of her aides. I can't stop wondering why this has happened. I want Claudia to walk across the planks over the spring run again.

Claudia can use her hands, but she is slow and clumsy. Someone often has to put her pills into her mouth and guide a straw to her lips for her nighttime medications. She is unable to stand. It takes two of us, one pushing, one pulling her from inside across a slide board to get her into a car. We are careful what she eats. Her swallow is weak. She is constantly either constipated or plagued with diarrhea. Her illness has taken away all dignity.

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When she was first ill, her doctors told us she had bad MS. They said that the good news was that it was the relapsing-remitting type. It could be treated with medications.

First she was prescribed Copaxone. A few months later she woke up unable to move her left arm and leg. I worried that she was having a stroke, but it turned out to be a relapse. She spent a week in Albany Medical Center getting doses of Solu Medrol through an IV. She was never as strong after that.

Her doctor changed her prescription to Rebif. Like Copaxone, it was an injection. I gave it to her every other day, rotating sites. It was painful. Claudia dreaded each one. We persisted, hoping that this medication might be the right one.

Then one morning Claudia woke up completely paralyzed on her left side. It was another relapse. It was heartbreaking to see her lose so much.

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The bright W of Cassiopeia, the envious Queen of Aethiopia, chained to her chair in legend, is overhead. Schedar, the star at her heart, is 230 light years away. Gazing up at her I am looking back toward the beginning of time. Time and space are one vast emptiness. I feel alone and small.

I experience the world around me in a primordial way. I measure distances by eye without thinking about it. I see light and shadow, sunrise and darkness. Wind blows on my face. Birds call.

Uncertainty lies at my core like it never has before. Claudia and I have made no plans beyond the next doctor appointment for years. This is so different from how we lived when she was healthy. We were always planning a dinner out, a new project or vacation. I wonder how long Claudia will live like this. How long will I? What are our chances?



I am still sitting here on the spot where Claudia and I were married. The sky has darkened. I can't see much around me. I don't know how long I have been here, but I am beginning to ache. It has been a long time.

Cassiopeia has traveled some in the sky. Venus has disappeared below the horizon. The stars are brilliant in the deep darkness. A lone goose occasionally calls. It stirs a loneliness I never expected to feel at this time in my life.

Cathy and Jimmy and Clarence Makes Three

Cathy sat on the couch with her feet propped up on the coffee table, pushing her hair off her forehead and letting it fall back down. She frowned at the small metal bookcase standing in the corner across the room. Her and Jimmy's wedding picture was in the place of honor on the top shelf, her smile thin-lipped, Jimmy's broad and crooked from the fruit punch. Two photo albums lay on the right side of the middle shelf and a white leatherette-covered Family Bible on the left. A red and yellow fluted glass vase, a present from Jimmy on their first wedding anniversary three months ago, sat on the bottom shelf flanked by a green ceramic frog and a small cedar box that said Souvenir of Plattsburg, New York on the lid. Everything was properly arranged, but the middle shelf bothered her. Jimmy had bent it when assembling the bookcase, and even though she bent it back after he left for work at the pulp mill the next morning, it had never looked right.

Jimmy and Cathy's apartment was on the third floor, over the Ben Franklin. Cathy didn't mind living over a store, although her mother, on first seeing it, had said, "Well, your first apartment is always special, sweetheart." And it was special for the first few months. Cathy made curtains out of blue material with big yellow flowers on it for the three tall windows in the living room. ("Cheerful," her mother said. "Yeah, nice," Jimmy said. "I have some nice beige drapes I was going to bring over," from Jimmy's mother.)

Cathy still liked the blue and yellow curtains; they were thin enough to let in light and fresh air. None of the other rooms had windows, however. You walked through the door into the kitchen, then through a narrow hallway into the living room. The two bedrooms were off the hallway. These rooms always smelled musty, and Cathy spent most of her time in the living room, watching television or looking out the window. She had placed the room's smallest armchair by the window. ("What do you want it there for?" Jimmy had said. "Why don't you put it where it belongs? It looks out of place.") At 11:20 each morning she would sit in it and eat her sandwich, watching the kids from the high school gather in the park. The girls would talk in whispers, glancing over their shoulders. The boys would talk loudly, cursing and turning their heads to spit. The kids never actually did much of anything, but every move they made, every flash of a smile, every chop of a hand in negation looked intense and important and somehow self-conscious, as though they knew they had an audience, or if they didn't know, as though they felt they deserved one. Cathy found it hard to believe that only two years ago she had been one of them.

She watched her baby crawl across the floor, dragging his right leg behind him; he couldn't even crawl and do it right. He paused to bite the coffee table, then grabbed his mother's pant leg with both hands and heaved himself up. He stood there, weaving, bobbing like a marionette, grinning. Still no teeth at ten months. When the old ladies would stop Cathy on the street to coo and goo at him, they'd insist on sticking knobby-jointed index fingers into his mouth "to see if Mommy missed one." If he ever does get teeth, Cathy thought, I hope he bites one of the old bags so hard it draws blood.

She stood up, sending the baby to the floor with a thud. He started to cry and Cathy laughed. In his bulky diapers, he looked like one of those weighted dolls with the tiny heads. Even when you punch one of them as hard as you can, it pops right back up again. "Hey, pinhead," she said.

She flipped on the television and sat back down. The baby smelled bad, and she knew she'd have to change him, but that could wait. She chewed on her thumbnail and shook her head. He hadn't turned out at all as she'd expected. For one thing, he looked just like Jimmy, not a bit like her. When she was pregnant she had pictured her baby with blond curls and blue eyes. His name was Jonathan. But in real life he had two patches of dark brown hair, one on the top of his head and one in back and eyes the color of wet sand. And his name was Clarence.

"But I want to name him Jonathan," she'd told Jimmy at the hospital.

"Jonathan's a name for fags." Jimmy gave her the limp wrist. "Besides, I promised my dad if I had a son I'd name him after him."

Cathy sat up straight and leaned forward. "You did. That's the first I heard about it. What about me? He's my son, too."

Jimmy smiled and patted her hand. "Don't worry, we'll have plenty more kids for you--"

"Not with names like Clarence we won't!"

"Let me finish. I was going to say that we'll have plenty more kids for you to name."

Cathy eased herself back down on the bed with her hands. "Go to hell, Jimmy. Just go to hell."

The next day at visiting hour, Jimmy brought in reinforcements, hordes of his relatives who kept yammering away at her: "Oh, Clarence is so pleased to have a little namesake; he was hoping for a grandson. There were tears in his eyes when he told me. There were tears in his eyes."

After the last relative trooped out, Cathy turned to Jimmy and screamed at him, "All right, you win. Name him any goddamned thing you want. But I never want to see any of your relatives ever again!"

She bit a piece of her thumbnail and spit it out. I have to see them, all right, she thought. They're over here most of the time. I never thought Jimmy was such a Mama's boy. Always playing Mr. Rugged.

The baby smelled worse. She wouldn't be able to put it off much longer. She traced a worn spot in the couch's plaid upholstery with her finger. Maybe Jimmy would get a raise some day. He'd come through the door smiling, holding one hand behind his back. His hair would be freshly washed and he wouldn't be wearing the red windbreaker with the STP patches on it. He would kiss her tenderly on the mouth and say, "Guess what, sweetheart? I have a surprise for you." He'd pause for effect. "I got a raise! I'm making five hundred dollars a week now."

And she'd coyly flip back her hair and pretend to peer around him. "What's that behind your back?"

"Just a little something I picked up for my lovely wife."

And he would be holding the hand of--a maid! Not a beautiful maid, of course, but a workhorse of a maid who would insist on taking care of the baby.

Cathy looked down at the baby and picked him up. “Come on, kid, let’s go. You’re enough to gag a maggot.” She changed him quickly and dumped the diaper into the toilet to soak. The door slammed and she heard Jimmy’s footsteps coming down the hall.

“Hey, what’s for supper? Jesus H. Christ, this house smells like shit.”

“Macaroni and cheese and green beans.”

“Oh.”

Halfway through his second helping, Jimmy looked up and stared, chewing, at Cathy. He pushed his plate toward her. “Here, finish this for me. I’m full.”

“I don’t want it. I’ve had enough.”

He took another bite but left the plate in front of her. “You know, babe, you’ve been looking kind of peaked lately. You should eat more.”

“Peaked?”

“Yeah, peaked. That’s what my mother says. You should take Sonny for a walk every day. Fresh air and sunshine and all that.”

She smiled. “Sure, if it’s nice tomorrow I’ll do that.” She saw herself taking the stroller out with its yellow plaid fabric and shiny chrome, the baby holding onto the bar and gurgling. She’d walk up Main Street--no one would stop her to say hello--and up Route 105 past all the farms. Cow, she’d point. See the cows? Cow. She’d push the stroller through East Berkshire, through Richford to the Canadian border, waving as she passed through customs. Walk across the dull, flat land to Montreal. Non, pas de vache ici. And farther, now west to the Yukon, marching across the frozen tundra. Caribou, see the caribou? Caribou. Then farther still, to the Arctic, the North Pole, to the other side of the globe--

“Jimmy? What’s on the other side of the North Pole?”

He laughed and pushed his chair back. “How the hell should I know? You planning on taking a trip?”

“No. I forgot my geography, that’s all.”

She washed the dishes up quickly and took a desultory swipe at the counters and table with a damp rag. Jimmy had turned off the TV and put the Rolling Stones on the stereo. He sat on the couch, head back, eyes closed, mouthing the words to “Satisfaction” with pouting lips. The baby sat at his father’s feet thumping the floor with his hand, head bobbing, always bobbing. Jimmy started thumping the arm of the couch in time to the music. The men’s thumping sounded like jungle drums, louder and louder. Cathy waited in the doorway, holding her breath, for man and son to leap up, dancing, twirling, naked and painted around a jabbing fire.

The song ended; Cathy joined Jimmy on the couch.

“That’s a good song,” he said. “I’ve always liked the Stones.”

“Yes, I know.”

He lit a cigarette and smiled. “Do you remember the time we went to see them in concert?”

She nodded.

“That was a trip, a real trip. I was so stoned! I’ve never been so stoned in my whole life. And then we stopped at that little store in Richford for Cracker Jack and the old guy couldn’t figure out what we were laughing at? He says, ‘What’s so funny? You kids drunk or sumpin?’ And we laughed so hard we couldn’t even tell him what we wanted; we just grabbed ten boxes of Cracker Jack off the shelf, threw a five-spot down on the counter, and ran out the door. Then he hollers out after us, ‘What’s the matter with you kids? Don’t you want your damn change?’”

“And you told him no, keep it--”

“And he called me a Communist. That was really funny.”

“A riot.”

He reached over and slapped her leg. “What’s your problem, Sour Puss?” He pulled her to him. “Give me a kiss.”

She kissed him quickly and started to turn her head away, but Jimmy drove his tongue into her mouth and clamped his hand on her breast and she wanted to scream. She wanted to scream until the dust blew off the bookcase, scream until the red and yellow vase was shattered into a million pieces, scream until the walls collapsed. She wanted to scream until Jimmy said, “You are everything to me. I need nothing else.”

She wrenched away, smoothing the front of her pullover.

Jimmy tossed his head to flick the hair out of his eyes. “What’s the matter?”

She took a deep breath. “The baby,” she said, nodding her head to where he lay on his back examining his hands.

“What about him?”

“He’ll see us.”

Jimmy laughed. “So what if he does? Maybe he’ll learn something from the old master.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake.”

“All right, all right. Don’t get yourself in an uproar. Why don’t you get us a couple of beers and we’ll sit and talk, like we used to.”

Cathy came back into the room with one beer, which she handed to Jimmy. She sat down next to him and closed her eyes. A few moments of silence went by. Then Jimmy said, "Do you remember the time you and me and--"

Cathy jumped up. "Excuse me. I have to go to the bathroom." The diaper was still in the toilet. She picked it up and dropped it into the diaper pail. She flushed the toilet, washed her hands, and brushed her teeth. Taking an emery board off the shelf, she went back into the living room. Jimmy was putting another Stones album on the stereo. "Don't you think you'd better put Sonny to bed, Cathy? It's almost ten o'clock."

The baby had fallen asleep on the rug and his body in Cathy's arms felt as though he were a big, limp doll--a doll so heavy and ungainly no little girl ever wanted to play with it. After she put a clean diaper and gown on him, Cathy stayed in his dark room, picked up his blue teddy bear from the crib, and began stroking it. The toy smelled sour and its fur was matted and stiff, but its pink embroidered grin, which she traced with her finger, was as happy as ever.

"Hey, Cathy. What're you doing in there?"

"Nothing."

Jimmy had on his red windbreaker, and his hair was combed. "I'm going out for a little while. I won't be long."

"Take your time."

He dropped the car keys he had been jingling on his palm. "What's that supposed to mean?" he said, bending down to pick them up.

"Just what I said. While you're gone, I'm going to invite guys in off the street and have a party, so don't hurry home on my account."

Jimmy opened his mouth, then shook his head and slammed the door on his way out. He laid rubber halfway up Main Street. Cathy stood at the window watching his taillights, sneered, "Big deal," and stuck out her tongue. Then she yelled, "Stick it where the sun don't shine!" and gave him the finger.

The apartment was quiet and she prowled it, touching things--the spider plant on the kitchen table which had died from lack of sunlight, just as she knew it would when she put it there, the raised pattern of the wallpaper in the hallway, the back of Jimmy's recliner, the telephone. She wondered who she could call. If she called her mother, she would think something was wrong. Even if Cathy told her that she just wanted someone to talk to, her mother would think Jimmy had gone out and she was lonely. She called her friend Marie instead and asked her if she would like to come over for a while, but Marie said, "You must be crazy. Just because Jimmy went out barhopping doesn't mean you have to wake me out of a sound sleep. I have to be to work in the morning."

"Jimmy's not out barhopping. He went to see his parents."

"Okay. Look, why don't you come over to my place tomorrow after I get off work. We can talk and I'd love to see Clarence. I'll bet he's grown a lot since the last time I saw him."

“I’ll have to see if Jimmy has anything planned for us.”

“All right. I’m sorry for what I said about him.”

“Forget it. I shouldn’t have called you so late.”

After she hung up the phone, Cathy stared at it, wondering what had possessed her to call Marie. She couldn’t talk to her anymore. Marie always had to be somewhere, do something, meet somebody. Even her sleep was an important, scheduled activity.

Cathy looked at the picture on the bookcase. Jimmy, she thought, really is a stupid person. And he gets more stupid every day. She spoke aloud, “You are stupid, Jimmy,” and felt only a little silly.

She went into her bedroom, yanked off her pullover and baggy jeans, and threw them into a corner. Sitting on the edge of the bed in her underpants and knee socks, she reached for her nightgown on the bedpost. Maybe she would read the new *Woman’s Day* her mother had brought over. Or watch the Creature Feature on TV. Probably watch the Creature Feature. On second thought, she wouldn’t watch TV; she’d never be able to sit still for all the commercials. She put the nightgown over her head, then took it off again before it had fallen to her hips.

She dressed quickly in a glittery pink top and the tight Jordache jeans Jimmy had bought for her for when they went out. She combed her hair without looking in the mirror and put green eye shadow on her lids and blusher on her cheeks.

As she tiptoed into the baby’s room she held her breath--he was sleeping as soundly as usual--and didn’t let it out again until she was down the stairs and outside. Main Street was very quiet this time of night, the park full of shadows, more than likely sheltering a sleeping drunk or a hitchhiker who had given up for the night. In midstride on his mound, the doughboy, who looked foolish during the day clutching a broken rifle, looked menacing now. He could easily turn the butt of the rifle into a club.

Cathy walked away from the Ben Franklin, faster and faster until she was running down the street, not daring to look behind her. When her side began to hurt she slowed down and caught her breath. No hollow bronze footsteps pursued her and she laughed at the thought of them. What had she to fear from the doughboy? He was the one who had worn a crooked white brassiere in public last Halloween, wasn’t he? She laughed again and wished she had thought to grab a pack of cigarettes out of the carton on the kitchen table. She didn’t have any money on her either, come to think of it.

She didn’t go to The Quincy; Jimmy would be there. Sylvester’s Bar and Grill was at the end of North Main Street and she walked quickly towards it, swinging her hips and giggling. Outside Sylvester’s she shivered in the cool night air and tucked in her top. Pushing open the door, she stepped inside, blinking at the sudden assault of cigarette smoke, thumping music, and laughter. She took a step forward, straining to see if anyone she knew was at the bar.

Jimmy was leaning over the pool table, and his father and older brother were standing on either side of him with pool cues grasped like spears in their hands. They looked as though they were guarding Jimmy as he performed some sacred and magic ritual. Cathy backed out the door and didn’t stop running until she got home.

The baby was still breathing; she laid her hand on his back to make sure. Her breath was coming in gasps she couldn't control, and she stepped into the hallway so as not to wake her son.

She started for the living room, then went back into the baby's room. She leaned her elbows on the crib railing and stood looking down at him in the dark. He still didn't smell too good and she felt a pang in the pit of her stomach. She really should have bathed him before putting him to bed. And changed his bedding, too. Well, tomorrow she would. She would bathe him and let him splash in the water. She would wipe the sour milk off his crib and scrub the linoleum on his floor with disinfectant. She would hang brightly-colored pictures on his walls so he would have something pretty to look at.

He did look like Jimmy. But he doesn't have to be Jimmy's, she thought. I'm with him all the time; he can be mine. I'll *make* him mine. I'll buy him more toys--balls and big wooden blocks. I wonder what Jimmy will think when he sees his son and me having so much fun together without him.

She squatted by the crib, reached her hand through the bars, and stroked the tuft of hair on the top of the baby's head. "Clarence," she said.



Image 7715 by Jim Zola

Death in the Amazon

After the war you're called in
to transition language

from a conquered tribe's
lone survivor—the only key

left to their secret speech.
You rush in, desperate

for cacophonous coils
undulating ululations

tumbling over
a phonetic dreamscape.

You can't see the prisoner
you only hear his cackled

words, frazzled, hassled
but spectacularly luminous.

You shiver. Knots quiver
in your stomach.

You feel mythical. In your mind
you're already indexing

particles of sound
every groan, every discordant

crumb of speech emerging
from the craggy grooves

of the tongue. You immerse
yourself in the dream

of twenty new words for rain.
But cruelty declares herself queen

in this jungle. Your survivor
the lone cipher

rises from his squat cage: a squalid parrot
feathers slick with blood

dappled in grief. He balks
at his captors, squawks at you.

He is a clacking mirage, noise
without interpretation, sound without reason

pungent echo, reverberating
as his words fly, dying.

Camerawomen: Canadian Tundra

Arial Camerawoman

The Gyro-stabilized Cineflex Elite pans the tundra where a thousand caribou graze. That glamor! Sun glinting off backs. Lost sight of the ground crew in the expanse: gear shrunk into specks. Particles. But that maze of antlers ranges for miles.

Land Camerawoman

The two-day old calf buffs his forehead on a rock. How it must itch, his new skin, his tender body. His mother cradles him to her stomach. Her sticky tongue licks his buttery fur. When he bleats I hear my own son's put-upon plea as I muss his curls, "Mo-om. Sto-op."

Arial Camerawoman

Rogue wolf roves into the herd. Massive glaze of bodies—a hedonist's feast. Caribou wave splits into a V like rippling dominoes. That much panic on the ground, caribou leave their young behind. They can have other calves.

Land Camerawoman

For minutes, there is nothing. Then. Stampede. Deluge. Desperate plodding. Rupturing tundra. Above everything, a thousand despondent bellows. Boorish, spooked. This animal panic alien to my ears, now akin to my heartbeats: erratic, aching for that calf, that baby once cradled next to Mama. Rushing crush of caribou. All calves have lost their mothers. They wail. Little frantic lambs. Desperate orphans.

Arial Camerawoman

Spindly calf, hounded by the wolf, clears streams the width of a strand of hair. Over and over, the calf angles, evades as if born to run, born to outrun. Come on. Come on. Ah. Feet tangle crossing a dime-sized crater. Copter lurches to line the shot. Cineflex slants and spins. I'd go to my grave to get this shot.

Land Camerawoman

The wolf snips at the orphan whose hooves skipped like stones across the stream. Calf stumbles over his own clumsy legs and the wolf is on him. My feet and palms go numb. I feel, I hear the throb of my own heart beating; it beats and beats. I cannot stop it from beating. It beats until I can no longer feel it, no longer hear its grieving in my ears.

Ice Fishing

Everything warm in the alphabet died
on a hook at the end of a cold steel thought.

Some conversations have infinite holes,
frigid wounds glowing with artificial flames.

Some locations are chosen each year
to teach boys the virtue of waiting,

for quivering gills under heavy black boots,
for youth filleted and revised.

Depending on the distance from bliss,
the space between thrill and terror's next tick,

determines how long the innocent stare
stays attached to god's hairy wrist, where

a tiny glass face held by two leather straps
is a metronome for his breath.

Feelings cannot afford to weigh more
than a hand on the pole. Man's hood keeps

the head bent down, halting the traffic of speech.
It takes hours for a vowel to vibrate the lips

and days for a shack where the beautiful shiver
to dream of becoming a home.

Meanwhile I skate on the air between words.
Meanwhile falling means nothing.

The Gospel of Regardless

In chapter 7, verses 8 through 16
in the *Gospel Of Regardless*, I multiplied risk

like loaves and fishes, a Eucharistic dish
at the *Chateau De Save* where women

were told not to weep, but mother refused to listen.
She was a star in a shepherd's cold sky,

an immaculate sliver of heaven with hair, so black
the moon was ashamed to shine, so dirty, Kings,

sent men with swords to cleanse her womb of power.
That's where I dreamed about walking on water,

about burning down kingdoms with words.
That's where Love, my Bethlehem whore

rocked my cradle to pieces, hurling me into
a dying world that held me closer than

she ever could, regardless of divinity's
faithful breast and the milk coming in so soon.

Resurrection found me eating death
with the Emperor's fork and spoon.

Two bites for me, one for you,
and none for the ravenous lambs.

Menopause Dream

It comes every quarter like late
menstruation, a belated full
moon, a hollowness buried
in the gut. I see a pod

cocooned in flesh and blood,
layers peeling in time-lapse speed,
then a maroon vein bursts. Still birth
and blackness.

Only the heart flutters, skips
a beat then drops hollow
point bullets in my
stomach. *Uterus mortis*,

eggs shrivel into raisins baked
in the oven of half a century.
Grief spreads like nightshade,
its purple-veined bellies

choke the brilliance
from the burning bush.
This type of loss felt only
once before at my sister's death.

Awake at three a.m.
a single candle flame eclipses
the rim of my wine glass
just like the summer

sun halos on my daughter's
blonde hair. Why is one
child enough for thirty
years, and then is not?

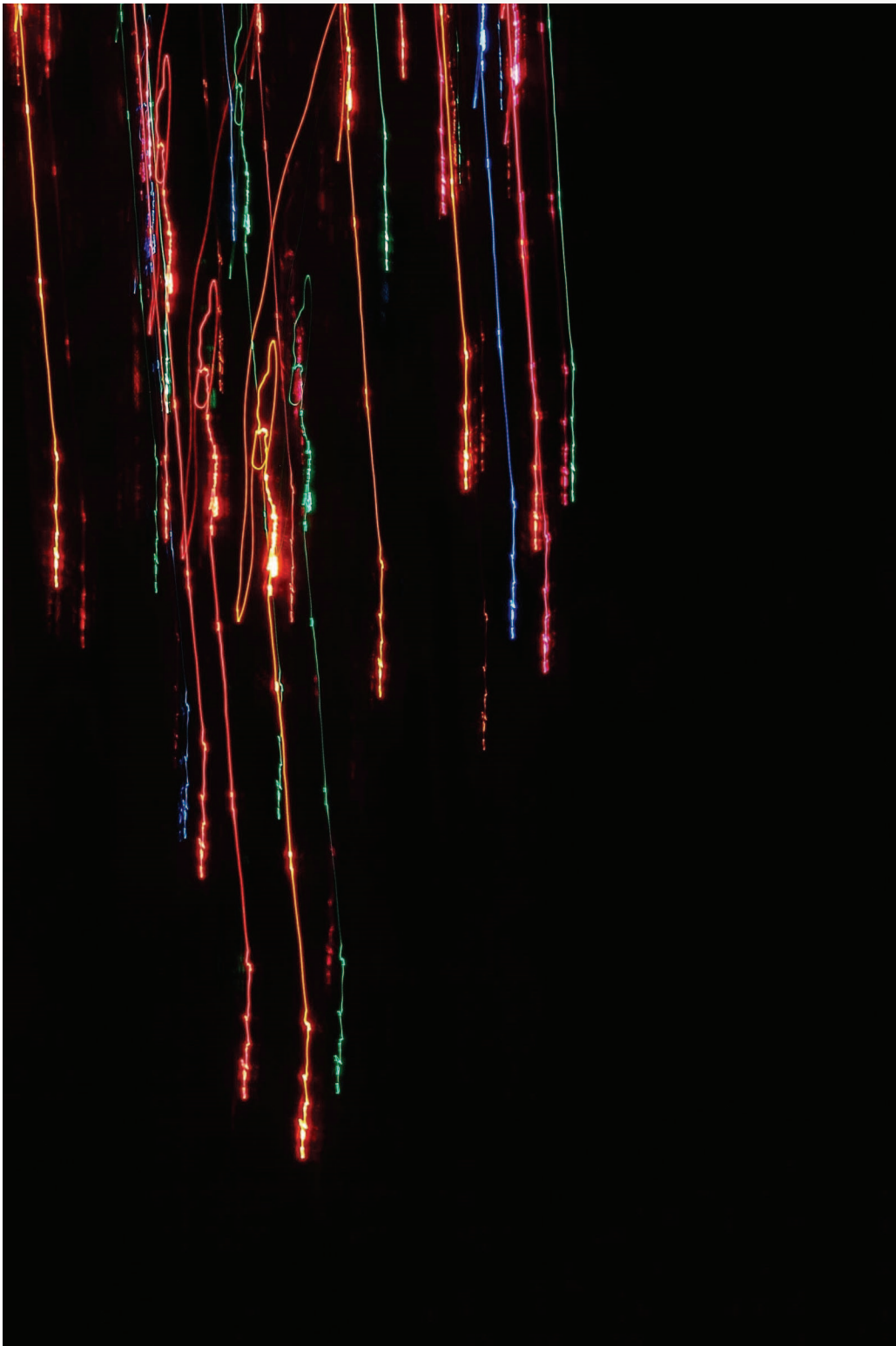
Knowing Her

It is an unexplainable sixth sense
traveling in matrilineal conduit,
sparks of knowing passing
in utero through the mother
to the daughter to the granddaughter
and on and on, spiraling
a flawless coil in time.

The spark a musical note
in the umbilical cord,
creating one perfect tone, a pitch
so pure it's like purified water
through a siphon singing the blues.

Each heartbeat thuds,
tightening ligaments
like a guitar string tuned
to high C that the daughter
hears through the catacombs
of arteries in the womb every time
her mother moves her hips,

a cradle like the faultless arc
of a dreadnought guitar, bowed,
fertile, woman-curved, perfection
of a plump moon.

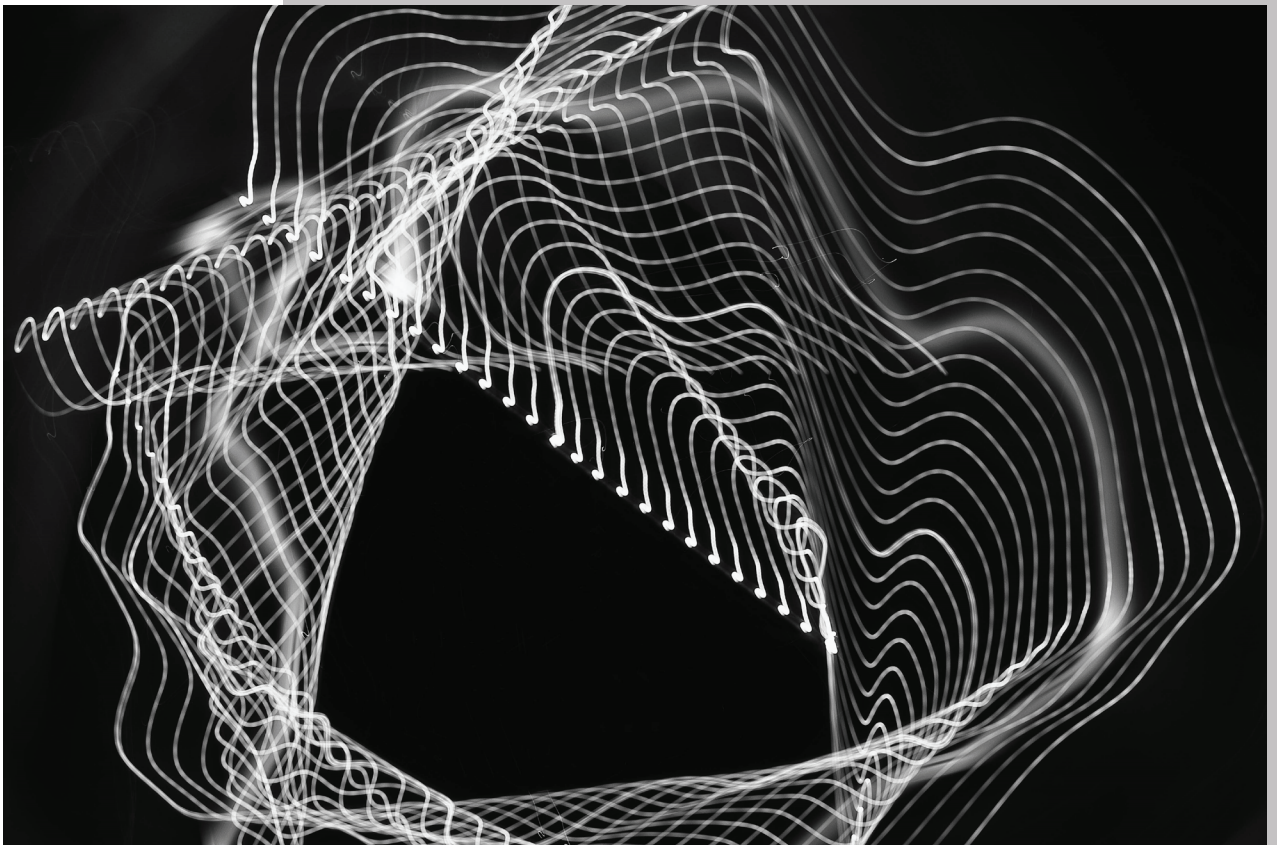


“Some days, it all comes out as sadness. Your creativity. Your beauty. Your strength. They all bleed out of you as though even your best parts were wounds from long dead wars. And in truth, they are. We are all casualties of life; some of us have just refused to drop.”

-We Bleed Creative by Darren M. Edwards



Cause and Effect by Darren M. Edwards



Full Circle by Darren M. Edwards

All the Women I'm Not

Translated by Toshiya Kamei

all the women I'm not
and I've never been stare at me
they strip me of dust and ash
spread my legs
and find in my pubic hair
two or three explanations
two or three cosmogonies

there's no mirror
that keeps its promise

They dictate
and I write down their words
like lies
no one pays heed to

I hide their meanings
under my womb
to soak them in the rain
for your hand to touch them

so that I won't forget
I'm only a word
mispronounced
by all these women I am
and I have been

todas las que no soy
las que no he sido me miran
me desnudan del polvo y la ceniza
abren mis piernas
y en mi pubis encuentran
dos o tres explicaciones
dos o tres cosmogonías

no hay espejo
que no cumpla su promesa

me dictan
y yo escribo sus palabras
como mentiras
a las que nadie presta atención

yo escondo los significados
debajo de mi vientre
para que la lluvia los moje
para que tu mano los palpe

para no olvidar
que sólo soy un vocablo
mal pronunciado
por todas esas que soy
que he sido

Bunker on Portland Bill

This windowed concrete slab
Touching the hedgerows
Bunkered in leaf-strewn soil
Chivvies me

Muskets were reddened here
By shorter men than I
Defenders of a long-gone realm
Stooped between fissured ceiling and creviced floor

What mayhem bedlamed this rocky causeway?
Its cannons foddering the deep
The stun of steel slamming granite
The stench of gunfire turning stomachs
Loose limbs cluttering pathways
Death hovering

All quiet now on this promontory;
Sheep nibbling, tea and scones in the old armoury
Picture postcards of battles fought and won
Day-trippers picnicking
In the shadows cast by the big guns

Squirt Gun

I answered the door
with a water pistol in hand –
a friend's New Year's Eve party,
music blasting in the background,
all of us already stoned –
and shot the woman in the face,
a blond girl I'd never met before.
Her initial shock turned to anger.
Somehow in the hilarity of the moment
I'd assumed she was in on the joke.
Swallowing my guilt,
the apology filling my lungs
as if I'd been waterboarded,
I turned the gun on myself,
pulled the trigger,
soaking my face
And then she got it,
anger melting to amusement,
amusement to forgiveness.
Later that night,
we made out on the couch,
just as the countdown to midnight,
like a dripping faucet,
pooled around us, warm and wet.

The Barn

There's something behind the barn,
knee-deep in the black blade petals of grass
attracting a secret name
that you try to make out in the dark unfolding:
shaking through the fields
over damp dirt and lavender.

How will the bloated belly dissolve, I wonder.
Will it appear like a run-end beast,
storm over a makeshift prayer,
or dive into a poem
and nest to life again?

No one wants to consider it,
how the swollen bits of body would feel,
too cool for the touch,
too heavy for naming.

Still, the flies blanket everything in a hurry,
along with the ants,
like vines across slabs of pastures.
How everything shifts
and covers everything.

Half Living

The heart, the old heart, is dead
Bare wood rising, twisting right, broken
The cavity at the base, stuffed full by a woodrat
Another higher, where a raccoon is sleeping
The top still sound, but ants at work
Clearing galleries and chambers, tending eggs

Everywhere else, the oak is alive
This May morning each twig stirring
Soft new leaves gesturing in the breeze
Caterpillars looping along their margins
Pursued by warblers, fidgety and relentless
As a kingbird trills from the crown

How to be so, half living and half dead?
A riddle for the ageing, we who gather
Lift shaky limbs and stretch toward the sun
Anchor our feet and bow to earth
Ask, breath by labored breath
Hold us, hold us one more day

Awakening III Monumental
by Mark Yale Harris



Wind Talking

Winter wind talking last night in long violet
waves blowing from the arctic, gale flurries
flattening the waters. Gathering wood I listened
as the wind out talked the locomotive sounding
its whistle , machine a poor gladiator for torrents
of air, of breath, the thinness of space vibrating
form from vacuum.

The moon talks, the wind says, the sky whistles,
the wind said. I speed the moon over Rome; I guide
the bat to the cave; I wrench the acorn from its
branch & plant it in a secret place.

Wind talking I am form, substance, nothing but
what pierces the ear, licks the face.
Old Diana knows the transparent tongue grazing
among her ruins, marble deaf mute waiting for the
tree to fall in the forest that no one hears.

Wind talking, the believer's voice mates air to water,
sun to sand, fire to fury, glassy serene lucidity locked
down by layered rivers floating in air, in air, tongue
talking the moon, twisting hieroglyphics wrenched
from a shell's heart where only in winter does the
wind talk with a congregation of consorts.

Late Winter Nocturne

Loading wood for the fire in a wheelbarrow
the wheel trundles through wet mud pointing
to strange blue clouds in the east as though they

are mired in season's end, & the
wheel rotating like the solar system in the outer
arms spiraling around the galactic center.

Flying birds are fall's fugitives as they too
spiral like Fibonacci numbers or the primary
colors of a limited palette.

Like we spiral around life's flame watching
the concentric circles of a tree expand year by
year calling out the name of far, dry cities where

people shuffle by gutters unrecognized.
This is where I long to be—at the head of a holler,
dreaming of rocks shagged with ice, perfect order,

perfect form.
The moon has been here, coppery umbra; the sun
fled in the time of the Romans. Their numerals

cannot scribe this place. No poor pen can graffiti
meaning like hemlock roots tapping the mysteries
of Stonehenge, Gobekli Tepe, Baalbek,

living requiems played out in triple time that
modern steel cannot match high in gray skies
where night comes in chiming waves,

a clock measuring out a past never dead, imperceptible,
chaste, no passion, no rage, no love nor hate,
only a deluge rolled by as silent pyramids

where white-clothed women sail through as wraiths
singing an old, old song that
brooks the coming revolution.

Roast Beef

The first time I had roast beef,
I found the pool of blood sickening --
I grew up on baked chicken and *kotletyi*,
patties of meatloaf, breaded and fried.
I could not finish the huge chunk and
let the plate be carried off. What a waste.

After coffee and cognac I was
introduced to a couple, the man big,
red-faced, his wife thin and petite.
“I can never finish such an enormous
piece, but my husband loves roast beef
and I’ll make him a sandwich
for lunch tomorrow. I slip the meat
inside my bag,” the wife told me
while the men were getting our coats.

She unclicked a beaded evening bag
and there on the soaked white satin
lay a cold, greying slab of beef.

Witchery

translated by Toshiya Kamei

When I name you
green stars
fall
one by one.

one grey hair, two, ten years,
a return of dreams
twenty years and you come back.

I hear the dark circles under your eyes.

We would walk along a street together
if you weren't oil that burns and consumes.

From the mud we melted spirals
hotel sheets
stir at a distance.

You're just a bad day
back pain
a weight I don't want to shoulder.

With this spell I order you to go away.

Brujería

Cuando te nombro
caen
una a una
estrellas verdes.

Una cana, dos, diez años,
retorno de los sueños
veinte años y regresas.

Te escucho pintadas las ojeras.

Caminaríamos una calle juntos
si no fueras aceite que quema y se consume.

Del barro nos fundimos espirales
las sábanas de hotel
se agitan a distancia.

Eres sólo un mal día
dolor de espalda
un peso que no quiero tener.

Con este conjuro te ordeno que te vayas.

Origin

translated by Toshiya Kamei

I

We were born in
 a lost city's mud
coal stains our lips
 and rosy white cheeks
We could have been fetuses in the sewers
but we descend from the dead
We rob the graves
in search of a star
hidden among the bones.

II

Ghost shadows
 pale-faced, we dance when the sun is born
to find in an instant
 the ravens that flee from their graves.

III

And our haggard eyes
keep up their fight
our animated eyes dig tombstones
It rains in the middle.

It's a rain of stars
that blinds our hands
and turns them into stones
we look for a spot in each coffin
 ghosts spy on us with their footsteps
 and follow us in the dark.

Origen

I

Nacimos en el lodo
 de una ciudad perdida
mancha carbón los labios
 rostro de rosa blanca
pudimos ser fetos en las cloacas
mas somos de abolengo entre los muertos
asaltamos las tumbas
en busca de una estrella
escondida en medio de los huesos.

II

Sombras de fantasma
 pálidos bailamos cuando nace el sol
para encontrar un instante
 a los cuervos que escapan de sus
tumbas.

III

Y nuestras ojeras
continúan su lucha
los ojos animados cavan lápidas
en el centro lluvia.

Es lluvia de estrellas
que ciega las manos
las convierte en piedra
buscamos un rincón en cada féretro
 fantasmas nos acechan con sus pasos
 y acompañan bajo tinieblas.

Bindweed

There is,
again and again,
light extinguished

Blue-black
thunderstorm
rearranges her bones

Could a cloud
be pushed
into a box?

Come down
to the river
disappear (with) me

August is failing
The sun is spitting
the last of its pennies

Early bees
glutted with red
blooms, wounded apples

If you go
past the fence
mind the rogue cow

There is a kind
silence and one
that will chew your bones

The bindweed
of loss
strangles mercy

The branches lean
so far down, I am
embraced

Little or no
sleep, liars
wait on the stairs

Earth Ruin

Only wings remain, no birdsong. The choked river is a psalm of sludge. The moon is but scuffed glass. Gone are stanzas, equations, instinct. Like any apocalypse, there were warnings, tiny threads and filigree, dismissive, derisive, lies laced with pomp and bluster. Poppies burst into red splatter, trees of aching brown, the charcoal stink of the yellowed creek. Cacophony in dialect. Elemental, the last sounds, the final hush of a gutted earth.

What Ways the Water Runs

An unlikely moon hovers, an immense plate
above startled ground

where the river has lifted in subsequent flood,
pouring over a rupture of rocks in a cold rush.

A ragged wind bites at the Sitka spruce,
the hemlocks. No nightbirds call,

stilled by the water's strangled surge.
River-spill teases the new shoots with its hurry,

as if they could discard roots and travel down
around the bend and further.

Stalwart sword ferns and salal, cinder lichen
and hummocks of emerald moss

reach past the bank and into the forest's
deep green. It is this place

they will know, with its seasons of shade
and brittle light, a wedge of blue, the starry
crane flies stammering over leaf litter and mud.

Rio Celeste

The day we trekked along the Rio Celeste
and I was so angry
I wanted to leave you behind

our guide paused to pick buttercups
which you photographed
we had gifted him our foreign coins

a sky sedated with rain
all day seeping into my eyes
my boots slogged
through paths of muted brown

No blue was to be seen
and the river surged
swollen in muddy torrents

Faster
like how I wanted to be
alone now that we were
bereft of blue

only water and gray
brimming pores
sliding down rocks
the great din of the rainforest
and indifference
and I wanted it all for myself

Predatory

Ask the thorn.
Ask the prong if you can.
Find one.
Ask the fishhook and its barb.
Ask the stainless-steel implant.
Nothing saintly slides from the body.
Without trauma.
Wipe away the mucus.
Save your kisses for the artistic.
Interpretation.

Ask the canon.
And then corroborate its answer.
With the balls.
We've heard enough from walls and bridges.
And fidgety worms.
Ask the field mouse if the lady's ermine.
Fur collar offends.
Flip to the ending where that perfect.
Mix of hagfish and cliché.
Waits with tongue extended.

Foreign Policy

It's not about what a man can become,
but what he can forget long enough
to get through, and while I am hardly
Agamemnon, I would like to think
Hector might see as well as Tiresias,
when wandering the underworld.

Can you hear how the dead ache
for a man to grow old? Outside this bar
my younger self stumbles past dumpsters,
but he'd rather be home, listening
to the buzz of a bee hive pollinating
Grandmother's flowers:

a variety of gladiolus and Queen Anne's Lace,
stems trimmed delicately enough
for a wedding, only to be
tossed on her grave. Heaven
can be any of number of things,
but it's hard to believe it exists here

with me rocking on the balls
of my feet. I lean against a dartboard
pecked with chalk fingerprints,
nectar distilling in my stomach,
while the college students gnaw free pizza
from paper plates. I am in love

with the moose head mounted
beside the television, the pool table's ivory
diamonds sloping toward the sewage drain,
but I am not in love with myself, not
with my debit card resigned
to the bartender's sweaty jar.

The bullfrog croaks until dawn. Pizza
is an afterthought. Two days ago,
I read a Chinook carrying Navy Seals
was shot down in Afghanistan,
which is a major blow to our efforts
to stop insurgents. Now people

are worried about homegrown terrorism,
but the bats chasing golf balls
at the country club aren't interested.
Eventually, we all run dry,
this last glass of beer, this half-decent
food truck a modern reminder

of a lesser French revolution, one
sandwiched between the Jacobins
and the Tennis Court Oaths, maybe Napoleon.
Crowned corporal. No different than me,
save the separation of class offered
by a monarchy and late rent,

a welcome allegation for the grandson
of sharecroppers whose pricked hands
might well have paraded an aristocrat's head
on a pitchfork, celebrating the onslaught
of our capitalist nightmare. They knew better.
They kept their heads by bending at the knee.

The Carousel

Never now, when it's unseasonably perfect
for the 8th of May—irises
unraveling beneath a maple dappling
morning light like the minor basilica it aspires to be—
each new leaf turning a full season early.
To think of leaves turning is also to think
of the future. To think at all is a bore.
How can I be so sure I am here,
when all the chefs have gone home,
their knives folded in black leather cases?
They look more like messy lawyers,
and less like the kid whose mother cried
over a burned ketchup sandwich,
because that was the first thing
he'd ever done for her. It's always
tomorrow when our mothers die,
when the economy tanks and fascism
overtakes us like a rogue wave
in a sea so cold hypothermia
is an afterthought, and the kind chef says,
Okay! You're right! But what do I do?
He unrolls his black case, and out spill
the knives—sharp and polished
like colts sprung from the gate,
and I want to give the most angelic-sounding answer
—something from another world, or
another time, then I wonder,
Who appointed you to give answers?
You know less than a crow!
And I can hear the crowd yelling,
their feet stomping metal bleachers,
demanding a climax, the horses
leaning into the final corner, the wind
catching a pink hat and that pink hat
sailing off—away—far away
from the flash of the photo finish
and no, it wasn't the favorite who won.



Miss Priss by Gaby Bedetti

The Professor

The first to arrive at the conference,
I was too early to receive
a decoration for my nametag.

So I listened to a speaker who drew cheers,
whose heart elicited good deeds
and produced tears. Still, I recalled

my ovation and returned to collect
a scalloped ribbon with gold lettering.
An attendant struggled to attach it.

The twisting badge hid the notice.
“Author,” it said. A passing
student sported eleven ribbons.

They fell past her waist, mocking my
tribute for the *Key to All Mythologies*.
At twenty I carried *Middlemarch* in my backpack.

Alone in the Vatican, I was Eliot’s
Dorothea, fixed dreamily on a streak
of sunlight falling across the gallery floor.

Once dazzled by possibilities, I am alone,
deluded with pride, dusty with yearning,
Casaubon at the conference.

Before the Days

Before the days of public houses*
I built a home for fish
down in the marshes
and warmed the water
and fed them bubbles.

In the days when every chimney smoked
I found a corner in the ruins
and made a crumbling cosy parlour
far from the mariners'
cold black bay.

*A public house is the term for a drinking establishment in the UK, pub for short.

Hogwarts Letter

You'd have started this year
with Albus Severus Potter—and maybe,
for your birthday, I'd have sent you a Hogwarts letter.
We wouldn't have had the money to go
to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter
in Orlando—but that would be all right.
I'd have taught you to prefer
the version in your head.
I'd have read all seven to you by now—not as she did,
the woman who wrote in the New York Times
about reading Harry Potter aloud to her son,
about how she changed the story, so
Voldemort didn't want to kill Harry.
We wouldn't flinch like that.

And I didn't flinch
in the office of angels with the bombproof walls
when they asked if I was certain.
Eager to please, I told the ultrasound tech
about how I volunteered for John Kerry's campaign.
Good girl, she said,
but I wasn't— I
became a woman then,
not at ten in a McDonald's bathroom,
with an impatient father waiting
and blue jeans full of blood—
not even at fifteen,
on an old leather couch,
fucking a man I didn't love
because I didn't love him—
but then. She kept the screen turned away,
though there wouldn't have been much to see.

I wouldn't see you
in the mirror of Erised— yet
sometimes
when I dream (as I do
every few weeks) of being pregnant,
I wake up groggy and expect to see
the walls of my childhood bedroom—
lavender, covered in movie posters—
where I waited for my letter and hoped
(not so very much later)
for you.



The Infrared Yacht Club by Rhett Pritchard

Night Journey

When he took the seat next to mine
I flinched
because he wore a baseball cap
and a jersey and no socks
and was forty years old, with two missing teeth
at least—
even now, I am
too much a good Democrat, too accustomed
to racist acquaintances, to mention—
and so I flinched and wondered
whether my mother had been right, to say
that I should have taken a plane
(though none of us had the money for a ticket).
Like him, I could not afford to fly—but I flinched,
and he saw.
For half an hour, we did not speak.

But then
all the other conversations turned to snores,
and the bus was taking the curves too fast,
hurtling along the ridges
of western New York in the black,
and little by little he began to tell me
how he was traveling to Georgia,
to bury his brother.
And he apologized—
as if it were the same as swearing,
to mention such a thing.
(And we were then in Mormon country,
in the country where the Mormons come
to see the angel on the stage.)
He asked me to distract him.

And, for once, I did not prattle,
anxious to impress, about
the class I had just taken
and the class I had just taught—for it turned out
that we both liked Game of Thrones.
We agreed that the Starks were overrated,
then began to plot how the queen might come
to conquer the world with her dragons.
And all the while the sky was growing gray.
I lost him in the station.
He carried on south, I suppose,
with his funeral suit in his backpack
which he would guard for three more days.

On the bus to Michigan,
I found my earbuds at last, and watched
the fog still thick on the fields.

Homecoming (Flint, Michigan)

And I came back
like a doomed salmon— hear
the fish-slap
of my liver on the rock.
Whiskey on the rocks
I could order
like my father
in the bar called the Torch
a deep
dive
named for a thing to raise.
Here they will never hold the Olympics.
They'd have to raze the whole city—and they try
they try
every devil's night
when a raven looking down could see
the dark city and the fires
bright as torches.
In the Torch old men drink dreaming
of what will never be— in the room
as dim as Hades, they raise
their glasses to the dead
then order another round—and I have come around again
trapped on this carousel of ghouls
this parade of the damned stuck in a loop
on the street that runs over the river
that may as well be Acheron
for no one leaves this place
and those who do
return
in time.

Beds of Blue Mussels

Down current from offshore fish farms
Beds of blue mussels
Cleanse the salty water.
Plato may have seen this coming.
Knowledge waits to be discovered,
Toxins filtered out by living beings.
Farming in human-made holding pens offshore,
Too many fish together, like too many pigs
Or too many chickens, and poison floats.
Then beds of blue mussels are planted
And the experiment is a success.
The blues work night and day
Without mercy or consolation,
Like silkworms weaving faithfully,
The mussels form an undersea crescent.
Below the surface, half-illuminated,
Like a handful of dim stars,
They extract death from the current,
Diligently capturing and straining
All known danger from the water.
The blue mussels work in solitude.
Deep perfection of their labor
In saltwater thresholds
Keeps the nourishment clarified.
Surely some dormant murmur
Among the many voices
Whispers a secret narrative.

I Dreamed of the Poet, Jasmyn DiMeglio

for Jazzy

Whoever haunts one's sleep comes uninvited,
and so I did not dream of William Blake
or Juan Ramon Jimenez, or Sappho,

but of the poet, Jasmyn DiMeglio
as she rode the craggy swells, upon the lake,
tossing in a small boat, rowing, rowing,

unmistakable despite how tiny
she appeared against the wideness
of the water, her lissome body dancing

at the oars, sliding down each blue-green
trough then up the crest and diving down
again into the breach as I walked along

the sandy spit till I ran out of beach,
and I just stood there in the frothy surf,
the secret turf of all the unknown poets.

She never saw me watching as she rode
the jagged chop, and each sinewy stroke
pushed her forward like the sharp nib of a pen,

an ephemeral sort of longhand on the bay,
a loop and then a loop and then another,
while seabirds stood in rows upon the sand,

skinny legged and hungry *legionnaires*, looking
for a chance to feast upon the verses swimming by,
schooled up like silver fry there in the shallows.

*Herring gull, herring gull, piping plover,
tell me, when will this strange night be over
so Ms. DiMeglio can come ashore?*

*- Soon! We are just searching for some words,
one word, another word, and then one more.*

We're Standing on the Green Line

and a fine rain starts falling all the length of Meadow Creek,
a porous, scattering blue,
and everything in five dimensions, us included,
dissolving into it—

sedges and bunchgrass, the marsh wren,
yellow violets and cinquefoils,
the pink hair of prairie smoke opening at our feet
and a friend's voice nearby

singing to osier dogwoods,
*hold the creek bank in place, heal the skin of a small world
torn open here centuries ago,
its people murdered or chased away, returning now—*

it takes that long for violence to recede,
for a scent this sweet and damp as nectar
to return us to what's steadfast
even in its absence half the year.

The lost and dear have trembled awake
a bumblebee nest beneath our feet—
and we were never more dazzled than by this
intricate, finite way the rain falls—

our lives aboard this rotting boat
someone long ago scuttled near shore,
and now it's grown new masts fore and aft,
its sails a green mist filling with the heat of the hive

and glimmering with the wings of bees.

Discipline

My wife claimed *he's an angel*
I knew better—

skip just sixth months
his tantrums, cleverness, gifts

the deal—bargain how
to raise one despite my blood

rising, jaw clench, hand of this father
not clip his wings

too short, as he runs wild across
the green practice field despite

the game, whistle from coach,
another school report

from Miss Clare—throw our hands up
in the air, Christ, he's three

hasn't bitten anyone, yet.

Animal Poet

I press my ear like a petal to the dewed grass
searching for the beat of my poetry. Like, I know
it all sounds familiar, could recognize my lyrics
on the street if I saw them spilling from someone's
laundry.

I want to know that animal secret: how to find home
once you've left it and pissed on someone else's tree.
I want to know how to get them to feed you
once you've shown your true side.

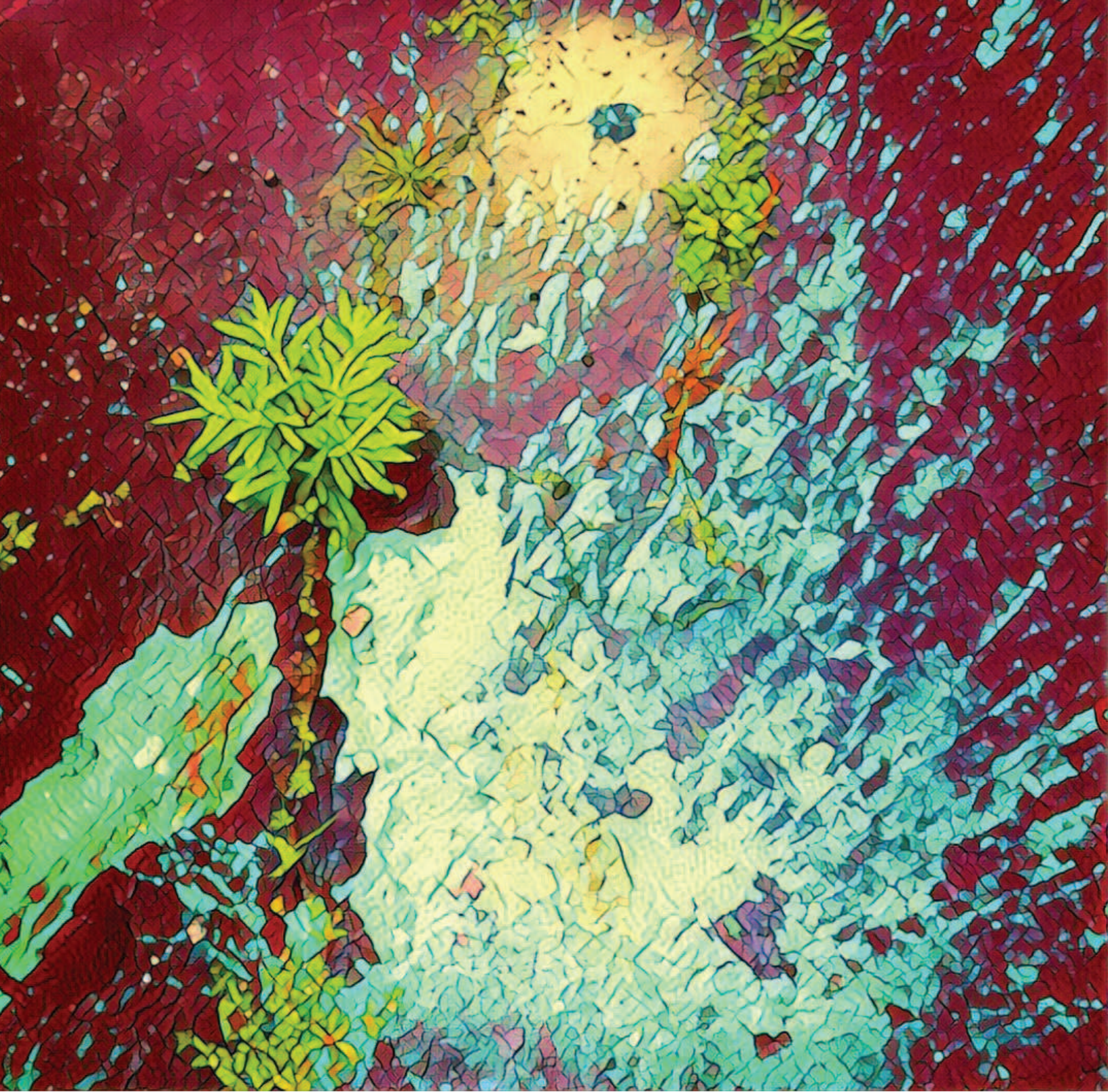


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