



Moledro Magazine

Issue 3

September 2016

The Shadows Stalking Society

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(Image Credit: Archita Mittra)

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Editor's Note

I had released the second issue of *Moledro Magazine* a few hours before hearing of Christina Grimmie's death. Two days later came the news of the senseless shooting in a gay nightclub in Orlando. These two horrific events seemed to be an entrance to an onslaught of shocking violence, discrimination, and injustice – not only confined to India or the United States, but infused across the globe.

I've always believed in the power of poetry in bringing about social change, raising voices, and spreading awareness. So towards the end of June, I decided to add a themed section to Issue 3 of *Moledro Magazine: The Shadows Stalking Society*. For while there are some matters that are shrieked in the headlines, there are others that remain concealed under layers of silence. While some emit a startling shaft of light, there are others that cower in the resulting shadows. And all of these instances of bigotry, brutality, and injustice aspire to be heard – especially the shadows that can only whisper. The themed section was started to help amplify those whispers into screams.

The response to Issue 3 was the best yet: we received almost twice the submissions we had received for the previous two issues, which was incredibly encouraging and heart-warming. A few pieces stuck with me in particular – Christina Im's 'Sestina in Which Girl Outlives the Earth', Chelsea Dingman's 'On Paradise', and Kaveh Akbar's 'Wild Pear Tree', among so many others. I hope the voices of those published resonate with you, and let you leave not only with beautiful words, but also with a meaningful message.

Richa Gupta
Founder/Editor-in-chief

CHRISTINA IM

2 Poems

Sestina in Which Girl Outlives the Earth

Every version of this moment starts with shivering.
Pause given. Fluted lining of a throat—call it *after*.
As a girl, you may stand up straight. As girl, you may draw
first blood. Every movement in this new world is wingbeat, water rise—
wind tunnels around soft and straining organs. You carry silver cities
flat in your palms as letters homeward bound.

Dawn is burial beneath a skipping pulse. You: a question. Bound
to the stuttering horizon and the second it slips into sea, shivering
moonscape for miles. You: a constant. You: destined for cities
brimming with unmade ghosts. In some paler harbor of time, after
the soul-smoke clears, your ruins find themselves unmoored and rise
from their half-life. Wherever you go: not much breath left to draw.

Every so often, you come across empty houses and draw
lessons from their charcoal decay. *All spaces are bound
to burn out. Never stay to see them turn to stone.* You rise
so the dead have room to crawl. When you are shivering
on roadsides, your limbs grow loveless as the stars. After
this cold, there will be more cold. For comfort, only dream cities.

You have a skill for safekeeping. Under flesh, boys tall as cities.
Through shuttered windows, the pull of their lips. The bruises they draw
from you still. Always you are traveling heavy. Running fierce after
a world that forgot to take you with it. Your ankles strung, bound
by your histories. More than anything, you wish for an end to the shivering.
A crooked counterpoint of bodies. A tide remembering to rise.

The quiet is a living thing, nestled in your footfalls, in the rise
and fall of close-fitted ribs. Its shadow is enough to fill cities,
bring them weeping to the earth. Every night, the shivering:
a set of claws to fight. You yourself: a weapon to draw.
This story is not an old one—the hero is never alone. Truth: only bound
by duty and a working streetlight, the promise of a shapeless after.

The loudest parts of you are the places you have left. All girls take after
their mothers when enough years have hurtled by. To rise
is to forget your eyes too soon. You are lesser, gravity-bound.

You pass too many bygones and keep too few. In a handful of cities,
aircraft suspended in the careful opaque. None living now to draw
their fire. Your body: a desert. At first light, still shivering.

You no longer know why you stay, so long after the fall, such shivering
suns as you can rise to meet. Each new dawn will draw a brighter wound.
All this red, bound wetly to your back. Once-lights in these cities.

Last Days

Here is our vision of the end: pity torn tender, laid out neatly in a coffin. Salt lining the edges where once there were stirrings of breath between a dead thing's bones. Somewhere

behind the sky, a girl is becoming less immortal. When she gasps for breath, we look up, say *lightning*. The shellshock of it unwinds softly in the skull. We are blinded to the fact of our singed rooftops.

The intersection of a voice and a place for slaughter is not as crimson as we thought. Not as loud. Birds drop like stones out of cloudbursts. An arrest of wingbeats. In lieu of silence,

a wavelet traps itself in air. We have to learn to speak rainfall, confess our sins in static—*so many feathered corpses pinned under glass*. We etch fallen wings into dampened earth.

There are no gods here. No resurrections. Only cupped hands and the mirror image of prayer. Small skeletons that bear no weight. A framework for *lift*, we name it, that wait

for a higher plane to kneel on. Girls idly peel back the atmosphere, carry it down to the churchyard. Circulation showing them crescendo. Everything about us

is hungry for cataclysm. Never knew it spoke so softly—last prophet, first words. Now we can inhale it in the storm's scar tissue. The ashes over our eyes.

RICHIE HOFMANN

2 Poems

Generations

There is one photograph in which we all exist, each of us named Richard.
Four first-born sons. I am the youngest Richard.

My grandfather heard it often in the yard, where he stirred
soil, planting spring bulbs: his wife calling, "Richard—"

His father's mother said it in rough Hungarian. *It was the language we heard
at home, before the war*, I read in a letter from Richard.

For a time, we all lived in the same small town. Absurd,
I know. In Shanghai, my father is "Lucky Morals," where it's hard to say Richard.

In the end, there's me, the baby in the picture, the end-word
in a line that ends with Richard.

Originally published in *The Southern Review*.

Bakery

"I found out I have lived before I was born..."

—Pavese

I kneaded a mass of dough against a wooden table
I bundled the lettuces of south Germany
I wrapped flowers in yesterday's newspaper
for a Jewish widow I started a bakery

at Johannesstraße 13 The building
built as a convent for nuns
The man that lived there before I did
painted the insides of the dome

working in the studio of Herr Schraudolph
to make paintings "in the late
Nazarene style" for the King
who came himself to see them finished

First I saw the cathedral
over the wall Later in engravings
Once full color 4 x 6
on a postcard

I helped the painter wash his brushes
Colors diffused in a jar:
goldenrod, pink The bristles unstiffened
with chemicals I washed my hands

I spoke the same language as the emperor
though once I could not read it
It seems distant now
though I reach from time to time

for a word that feels proper
I hear two women speaking the language I learned first
How do you say it?
How is it pronounced?

Fat babies had their heads touched
with water every Sunday
That immense font separated the diocese

from the people People ate

my bread I decorated cakes for them
when their children were baptized
I brushed pastries with egg
before anyone else was awake

My name was recorded
in the book There are names
going back to 1654
Jakob is there August too

Melchior is not
Either he was not 62
when he died or he was not baptized like the others
Maybe he was born to parents

in another village as I was
In the 1950s they removed
the man's paintings to reveal
the original architecture

I saw the insides of the dome
bare again I returned by way of Johannesstraße
I wiped the wooden table clean
I set the dough to rise in the buttered bowl

Originally published in *Birmingham Poetry Review*.

ALYSSA MAZZOLI

The Head

It takes four seconds for Nico to lose consciousness after his head is separated from his body. In that period of time, he registers a few key things about his surroundings. He has time for six thoughts and three memories, laced through the pain that shoots up the stub of his spinal cord.

In the first second, Nico's head crashes into the ground. He sees his body slumped against the red Chevy that his friend, Keith, has crashed into a tree. This is the last thing he sees, as the sense of sight is the first to disappear in the moments preceding death. Here is the first thought that Nico thinks before he dies: *Keith needs a new paint job.*

The thought evokes a memory of the first time that Nico rode in Keith's car. Keith had just picked it up from the dealership, and wanted to ride through town. He drove while Nico leaned out the window to smash mailboxes with a baseball bat. They visited a fast food joint and piled up burgers and fries in the backseat. They played the radio on full volume.

The memory leads to Nico's second thought: *I wish The White Stripes were still together.*

In the next second, Nico is blind, his vision having deteriorated with the blood flow to his head. His sense of taste, however, remains intact. Motor oil has somehow worked its way into his mouth, and he loses the sense of taste with it still on his tongue. This leads to his third thought: *Has the car caught fire?*

A month ago, Nico cooked dinner for his girlfriend, Sheila, for their two-year anniversary, but he misjudged the cut of the oven mitt. His wrist sizzled on the edge of a pan. He spilled the cobbler he had made all over the white tiled floor. Later, when he tried to apologize, Sheila banned him from the kitchen for a week.

The third second revolves around touch and smell. Strands of grass twist up under Nico's ear, and a fly lands on his upper lip. This leads to his fourth and fifth thoughts: *God, that's annoying* and *Don't flies vomit on their prey?*

These thoughts call to mind a vivid image, not of the past, but of Nico's own creation: his body in a coffin, hands crossed over his chest like a vampire from a bad film. In the image, his hair is slicked back, the same way it was when he had a choir performance in sixth grade. He is wearing his old choir uniform—a white collared shirt, silver bowtie, and shiny black shoes. The thought is so clear, he almost imagines the smell of starch and hair gel.

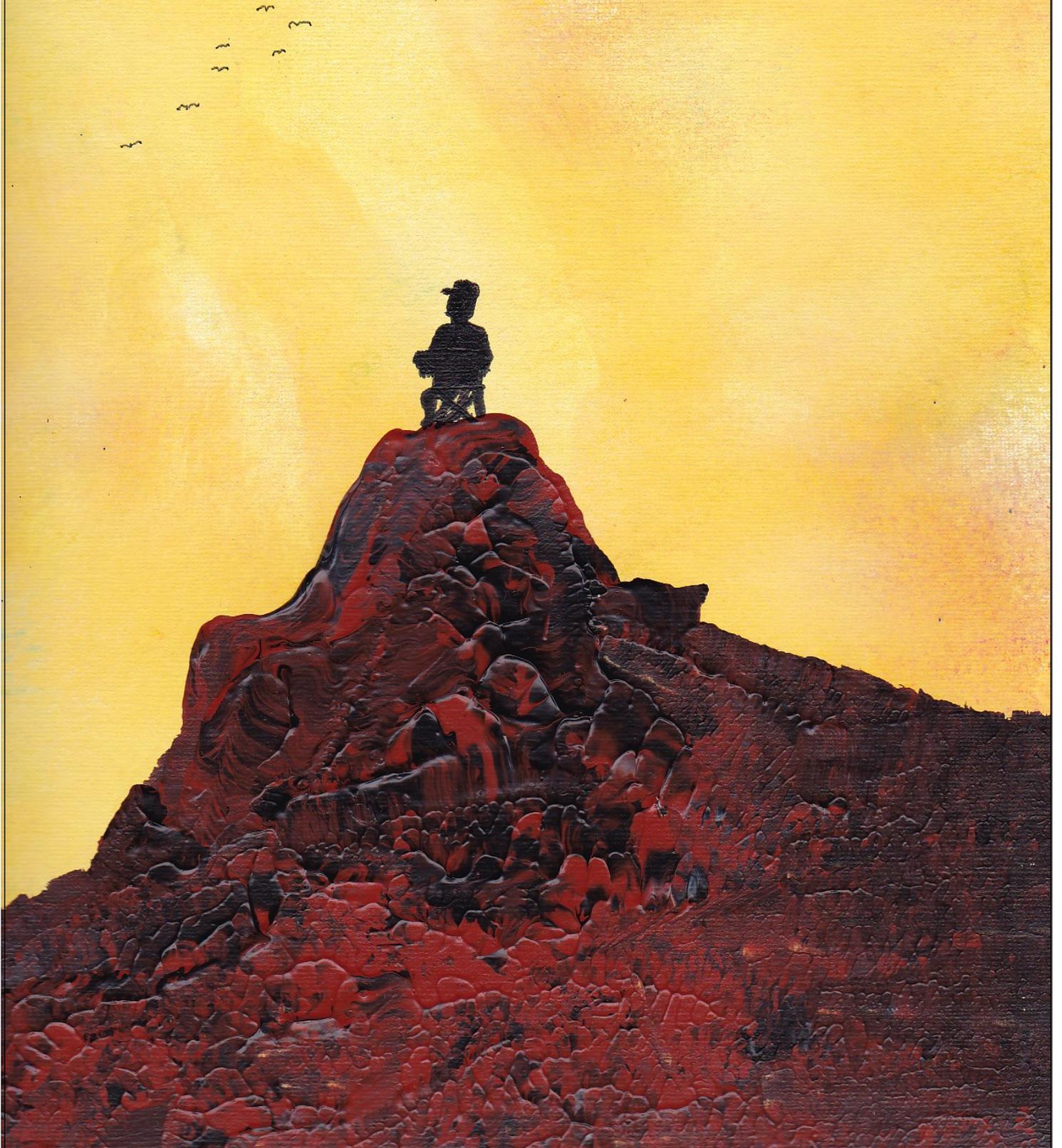
By the fourth second, the only sense that remains is the sense of sound. Nico hears a bird squawk from the tree above his severed head. He is unsure if the bird is landing or taking off.

This evokes his third and last memory. He was young, and he was tired, but he did not want to sleep. His mother sat on the edge of his bed. Nico explained to her his fear that if he took his eyes off his stuffed animals, they would run away. She listened, then picked up Nico's bear, Darth Snuggles. She tucked Darth Snuggles into the bed so that his arms curled around Nico's chest. She told him that as long as he cared for them, his animals would never leave.

Here is Nico's sixth and final thought: *Wait. Stay.*

Recharging

W. Jack Savage



ETHAN CHUA

3 Poems

Jeepney

There are seven of us, sitting together in the jeepney, knees locked upon knees in the humid Philippine air. We are heading to highway, which is near Katipunan, which is near most of our homes on a long stretch of road. Staring through the small slats where mosquitoes come buzzing through, we search for landmarks, but all we can make out is smoke and noise.

There are seven of us, with pale sun-burnished skin and thick glasses, accents imported from private school and tongues that still stumble on *naaalala*, Filipino for remembering. A lady in a green dress looks at us for several minutes, her stare as if a knife cutting into our skin. Yesterday we bought ice cream from a vendor who spelled out *sampu* with all ten of his fingers, watched sharply as we dug into our wallets for loose change. Silver one-peso coins exchanged palms and clattered into the bottom of his metal cart.

There are seven of us, some falling asleep by resting heads on shoulders, feeling the bump of every pothole on the road. Janice, who is in front, nods off, only to be woken up by a stranger at the back saying *bayad po*, his arm outstretched as he passes a twenty peso bill to the driver.

There are seven of us, watching as a woman in rags crawls into the jeepney and sits cross-legged on the floor. She is carrying a plastic bag filled with small brown envelopes; she leaves one on each of our laps with a smile. This time she does not need to spell out *sampu* with her fingers, as we stare at our knees and then at each other.

There are seven of us, quiet, waiting for the woman to say something. She stays silent, taking heavy breaths, sometimes opening her palms as if to catch rain. We glance at one another, wondering if highway is close by. Gia chuckles and places her envelope on Lorenzo's lap. Michael reaches into his pocket, thinking of taking out cash, but realizes he has no loose change. Janice ruffles her hair and checks the signal on her cellphone before falling asleep again.

There are seven of us, staring at the roadway to avoid her gaze as the woman gets up, stumbles, and leaves. At highway we find a trash can on the corner of the road and drop the envelopes into it one by one.

things found on the road to Quinapondan

Dried twigs tied together in the shape of a cross,
coconut husks on the pavement, left to dry in the heat of the sun
birdseed sprawled with palay stalks on tarpaulins tied together by electrical tape
a jeepney, David scrawled on its aluminum prow in black marker
two children in uniform walking with no school in sight - two
umbrellas and one basket laden with bread
yellow posts with the distance from Luneta in kilometers,
and a multicab, radio blaring *hallelujah*
Hallelujah hallelujah

Tricycle

The rear view mirrors are each wreathed by a rosary,
and a calendar is strung between them with the Sundays marked out in red.

On the sidecar, a yellow handle hangs from the roof,
like the ones in subway trains meant to keep you from falling.

Names are painted on the windshield in bright pastel -
Boss Mhimo and Hazel Monica; two or three forgotten senators.

Softly, the driver presses on the brake pedal,
and extends his rough palms outwards for the fare.

His passenger, no more than twelve, necktie two sizes too big,
reaches into his pockets and measures out loose coins.

The engine starts, but the tricycle's front wheel clips the curb,
falling into a groove meant for the catching of rain.

The child alights to lean his shoulder on the sidecar
and pushes as the tricycle's wheels spin in place.

Last I see, he is heaving while the cobblestone cracks,
leaving burnt tire tracks on the street.

JENNIFER BOYD

Six Reasons I Don't Play Chopin Anymore

Because yours is the face I see
when I pry open a dust ridden collection of *nocturnes*
the vitreous "night music" of fleeting feelings, luminous,
full of firefly promises. A jasmine breeze rises high, tapping
blushing crimson leaves above the bleak, brackish surface
emerging shyly, pearling in the sun

Because yours are the hands I touch
as mine graze over a familiar subtlety of guilty ivory
focused on the weathered keys are vigilant eyes
d-flat is a furtive criminal of uncharted existence
and gutterish lemon cries that harvest me
taunting me and stinging sourly

Because yours is the voice I hear
as each tormenting melody is unraveled, stripped bare, assaulted by
a feverish undercurrent of milky ambiguity masking sullen shame
the tsunami reels you in dominantly, boiling over music's simplicity
Chaos and Cacophony are the lone survivors
salvage your vanity

Because yours is the mouth I kiss
when the piece's climax is reminiscent of a holiday of patriotism and pyrotechnics
the obligatory reds, whites, and blues. Shooting away, airborne and
enveloping the steely sky with their glimmering rapture, overthrowing
the heavens, whole cannons sound, soldiers rejoice
a damaged veteran, I recoil. You made me vulgar

Because yours are the feet that flee
when the nocturne's peak is imminently abandoned, a vestige of rising
action withers, an August thunderstorm rages at brick roofs and flags dance
like gypsies in a citadel of flame. Sapphire torrents cool topaz
embers, hungry ashes emerge. A thunder song subdues to a whimper,
I quell whole note nostalgia

Because mine is the heart that shatters
when the final cadence ends on a half note
enveloped in the languishing cloudiness of d-flat minor
fingers scar-pocked and tapped, blisters peeling like Fuji
skins before a feral sinking of teeth, crumbs. A beloved nocturne

leers at me with feign detachment, loathing you

JOSEPH FELKERS

2 Poems

Most Sulfate Salts Are Soluble

I pick hangnails from a rendezvous
and regret moments that I should've
memorized my polyatomic ions.

I wish I had committed
six times
seven but instead I remember
six squared
and count up six more
but my fingers
slip —
and I lose.

I choke rhyme scheme. I force words.

Did you hear that one about the boy stuck
between a rock and a hard
salutatorian? That was me.

How many valence electrons does sulf—

Six.

Benadryl

There isn't any sleep like
antihistamine
& I wrote this poem in between
blankets of rem, but not between blankets
of dreams because when I'm hot like
an allergy I can't.

When I sigh
through my mouth the only thing
I can think of:
*how badly I'd like to hold my breath
past a cemetery.*

I've been tested spirometrically.
I know how it goes
when they pump you up
with gas & ask for you to
hyperventilate on command.

Melatonin dreams just won't
do. So now again, *I lay me
down to sleep (I pray the Lord
my soul to keep).*

Bats

W. Jack Savage



KERSTEN CHRISTIANSON

4 Poems

In Search of the Poet

Visiting the cabin of the poet John Haines.

My summer-
warmed hand
palms the
trunk, runs
the ripple
and fall
of rough
flaked
bark.

The poet
once
scrawled
words
across the
peel
of paper
birch
trees,

cast lines
of poems
to the sky,
to swans
migrating
north for
another
season.

His,
a story
of escape,
redemption;
words
of solitude

and mercy.

Forgive
my silent
trespasses –
my turning
of your cabin's
honey-brass
door knob,
the writing
on wings
of tortoise
shell butterflies,
this flippant dance
in the breeze.

In Search of the Poet II

From a sterile setting
(classroom, cold metal desk)
I follow game trails,
rutted, worn paths
around birch-
willow shrub,

black spruce trail
markers drive
my punch of numbers,
phone calls to far-
flung reference

librarians. Surely
there are notes,
old photos: the
ceramic mug
on a wood table,

the moose,
quartered, with
one glazed eye,
your lean back
to the camera

in your nightly trek
to the writing studio
on the hill. I follow
the migration of birds,
hoping to find your summer
and its shadows

packed neatly
in a musty
box
of old
photos
and notes.

Sometimes

I'll park in a driveway
that's not mine, take
in the view as if it were:
aged tugboat, pretty penny
waterfront homes, over-
priced auditorium echoing
its own silence -

I contemplate a fresh color
for a front door I'll not open:
orange moon, or teal. Starry
lobelia, red geraniums shoot
from a green moss basket, hanging
from a rusted, empty hook -

in the greenhouse that is not mine
the leafy vine hosting cherry tomatoes
pushes skyward, wraps around the center
beam, the border between *I have*
and *I dream*.

Morality

Your writers group
as a writing topic
in another "t":

For the prince
the elevator
of the top floor
at 43 - today
to "Grandma"
this world
to enter?
of doves
croak
kingfisher
this life

chose "morality"

Today, you toss

Mortality

of purple

stopped short

For your friend

answers

Must one leave

for another

To the tears

of raven's

rattle of

we wrap

in strong arms

OLIVIA HU

Blind Love

mama brings home the baby,
doesn't sing any songs to it.
instead she is a lullaby of sighs,
eyes tinged with water
clear like diamonds.
she says the baby's distorted,
leaves it on tables that
resemble surgery boards.
throws away organic milk and
picks up prescriptions instead,
gives away lotions for topical creams.
the baby smells like pain,
not honey-crackers and broth
and never cries at night.
when people call to ask how it is,
mama tells them about
its supple skin,
tells them that flowers are blooming
on every crevice of it's body.
she tells them that
the flowers are beautiful,
even if they are weeds.

RAY SONG

Night View

I've lost count of how many times I've done it: stood next to the window staring off into the landscape, suffering insomnia with the rest of the city. I wish I could use the word "expanse" here, but in reality, even on the eighth floor, buildings confine my view to only a sparse couple of streets. They cross my sight diagonally with lights embedded on both sides.

It's as if I can smell the scent of street lights from my perch by the window. They are like night elves, mysterious, perplexing. I wonder whether the lights illuminate the streets or dim them instead, brighter lights casting darker shadows. On rainy nights, however, street lights serve as beacons, tearing off a piece of the night with silver needles underneath. I have heard of urban myths in which shadows elongate into monsters under the street lights. But looking down from the eighth floor of the building, I see the streets clearly, and I think how silly those stories sound. If the mystical lights could crane their metal necks back to look for me, I would be hidden in the dark. Cars and bikes cruise under the scrutiny of these magical agents of the night, while I observe from above.

The position lends me a sense of power in supervision.

The window frames hold more than just a pane of glass, but a live portrait of the night, luring me into its powerful enchantment. The painting consists of multiple layers. As I delve into this work, layer by layer, it disabuses me of my detached superiority. I watch men and women walk by during sleepless nights. People indulge themselves, overwork themselves; whether filled with ecstasy or drained by exhaustion, the unfeeling night around them remains the same: sober and clear. Countless times I contemplate this painting, surrounded by the other millions in the city. The night, however, pierces through with a somber reminder. My heater warms my room, but the night channels the cold through.

I watch the streets under the night sky.

Mysterious lights. Streaming traffic. Nocturnal people.

From the eighth floor, I am lonely, more than ever.

SOPHIE HAMMOND

2 Poems

Land of the Dead

The Nile runs slow and dark between the eastern and western banks.
Heat devours the land. Sands waver
Beneath the all-seeing Eye of Ra.
Insects buzz, crawl on sweating flesh, are
Beaten away by the sharp edges of palm fronds.
Dry linen against damp skin is the
Most luxurious kind of torture. Kohl melts.
Myrrh and lotus weigh heavy in the air.
Then—stone overhead, solid shadow.
Cool air feels like dust. Spells whisper from the walls.
Eternity has a taste to it, but it is a taste the living fear.
The Nile runs slow and dark between the eastern and western banks.

Martyrs to Time

Light glares through glass. Delicate and glittering, cobwebs fade into yellowing lace.
Ghosts whisper in the curtains. A long-dead waltz chimes sweet like the taste of
marzipan. Snuffed candles burn. Dawn. The cracked binding of old books smells like the
tobacco of those who can no longer smoke it. Brontë, Thackeray, nothing but smoke
above the moors, purple heather swaying in the dry grasses next to broken stone walls
built so long ago, so long ago, my love. Gods with clay feet will only break if they run.
Struggling wins you nothing. A torrent of racing moments, white foam and glass falling
and shattering over the rocks, gone and gone and gone.

Kashmir

Aarshi Joshi



JACLYN GRIMM

Eleanor

i.

Her name was Lenny, short for Lenore, short for Eleanor. Born in an electrical storm, took her mother's name and life with her first cry and never did stop crying. Her father was a cold, cold man with big cold hands and a mind stuck in hell. Till his death, age 65, he never forgot the light that passed from his wife's eyes to his daughter's. He was a religious man, with a name like Ephraim he couldn't help it, and all the blood convinced him that Eleanor was his own personal plague.

For weeks nice women from church with plastic smiles brought him casseroles and condolences. All he could do was muster up a smile and wonder to himself how they didn't melt in the summer heat. Several of them offered to help with Eleanor, just for a few weeks, but Ephraim had enough trouble. He didn't need anyone doing what his wife would've done.

Eleanor got her first nickname at six months, in Gerry's Grocery. Ephraim never did understand the child seats in Gerry's carts and he didn't realize Eleanor had slipped right out with a loaf of bread until he was checking out. Bread was on his list, after all.

Isabelle did not know what to do with an infant. She especially did not know what to do with a crying infant lying on a loaf of WonderBread in the frozen section. Isabelle was a nervous woman who wore too much coral lipstick and finding the parents of a crying child was the last thing she wanted to do.

Ephraim was not a nervous man, except for that moment. If he was being honest, the idea of never finding Eleanor was relieving. Ephraim was rarely honest, so he called the manager and explained the situation.

At Gerry's, the manager was a pimply kid not a day over nineteen. Out of twelve people milling around the store, he knew less about infants than everyone but Eleanor herself. Immediately, he went to the front of the store and said on the loud speaker, "If anyone sees an unattended infant who responds to the name 'Lenore,' please bring her to the front of the store."

Ephraim considered telling him her name was Eleanor, not Lenore, but he figured since the only response Eleanor had to anything was crying, it didn't matter anyways.

Relieved to hear the announcement echoing around the store, Isabelle picked Lenore up from the produce bin she'd put her in. She hoped the parents wouldn't cry or hug her.

Luckily for Isabelle, the only person that cried was Lenore. Ephraim just sighed and held Eleanor close to him. Isabelle quickly left the store without buying anything. When she got to her car, she locked herself in and cried without knowing why.

Leaving the store, Ephraim thought about the name Lenore, and decided it fit better than Eleanor.

ii.

It started with a dog, as many things with Lenore did. She nursed him back to health when he'd come crying at her front porch steps. Lenore knew a thing or two about crying herself and she wrapped his legs in gauze and put a band-aid on his nose. Her babysitter Hadley, going on seventeen, smoked a cigarette and stretched her long, long legs.

"You're a little nurse, aren't ya Lenore?" Hadley took a long drag and starting dialing her boyfriend's number on the kitchen phone.

"No," Lenore said, because anything her babysitter said was wrong. She overheard Hadley's boyfriend say so last Thursday afternoon.

When Lenore's father came back from the shoe factory at seven p.m., Hadley was passed out on their denim couch. Lenore had taught the dog, Rover, to sit at the kitchen table and was feeding him leftover pork chops on her dead mother's fine china.

Ephraim woke up Hadley and told her he'd pay her double to babysit for another hour and a half while he got a drink. Of course, she agreed; he paid more than anyone else in town.

When Hadley saw Lenore petting Rover's head and pouring him a glass of milk, she rolled her eyes. Maybe she could get Ephraim to pay her extra for babysitting the dog, too.

"Whatcha doing, Lenore?" Hadley said, eating out of a bag of potato chips. Lenore, as usual, ignored Hadley and kissed Rover's head instead. "Hey, where'd you get a name like Lenore, anyways?"

Lenore didn't look at her when she responded, "It's short for Eleanor."

Hadley laughed too loudly, in a way Lenore hated. "Lenore's the worst nickname I've ever heard. Ellie suits you better." Lenore considered it for a moment before Rover bit her hand and didn't let go.

At two a.m., Ephraim and Lenore finally came home from the hospital. Lenore cried, not because of her hand, but because her father had taken Rover to the pound to be put down.

"Calm down," Ephraim said. "It's just a dog, Lenore."

Lenore did not calm down. Instead, she yelled, "It's Ellie!" and slammed her bedroom door shut. For the first time, she reminded Ephraim of her mother.

iii.

At sixteen, the dogs around her didn't have any fur, but rather cigarettes and beer. She'd always had a soft spot for animals.

"That girl of yours has gone a little bit wild," the old women in church would tell Ephraim during every church service Ellie skipped.

Ephraim grunted a response, as he always did. Lenore had become more than a little bit wild. The only thing he could control was his refusal to call her Ellie.

On the Saturday before her seventeenth birthday, Ephraim had enough. Ellie had managed to sneak out of her bedroom using the tree outside her bathroom. Ephraim couldn't imagine how she managed to squeeze through the window, but he'd realized he couldn't put anything past her.

The town of Allensville, PA had approximately three neighborhoods and under 500 residents, meaning Ephraim only drove around twenty minutes before he found a house pulsing with music and a street almost too crowded by used cars to drive on. When he'd left the house, he didn't know what he would do when he found her, but as he parked near the house he realized what he had to.

A kid, at least twenty, opened the door after Ephraim rang the doorbell three times. "Is Lenore here?" he asked.

The kid squinted at Ephraim, and yelled, "What?" over the music.

"Ellie? Is my daughter, Ellie, here?" Ephraim began to feel frantic. He debated whether he should go home and call the police about the party instead. He was fairly certain his daughter was there, but he didn't know how he'd find her, much less get her to come home. Often, he'd imagined she must've gotten her personality from her mother, because she was certainly nothing like him.

Behind the kid, Ephraim saw his daughter turn the corner, beer in hand. Ellie wore a dress Ephraim knew he hadn't bought her and flirted with boys years too old for her. Ephraim felt enraged; he usually felt too tired to care much about what Ellie did, but in that moment he could barely see.

Without thinking, Ephraim pushed past the boy at the door and grabbed Ellie's arm. "Dad? What the hell?" Ellie had never felt more embarrassed. Except perhaps in the next moment, when Ephraim pulled one cold hand back and slapped her.

Time did not stop, and neither did the music. The party continued around them, the boys Ellie had flirted with clearing out quickly. Perhaps Ellie had a change of heart as she began to follow her father out of the house and to his car. More likely, she was too surprised by her father's sudden anger to do anything but walk numbly, a hand clutching her face.

Ephraim couldn't believe he'd slapped her. He didn't feel particularly bad about it until further investigation showed he'd popped a blood vessel on the side of her eye. His guilt lasted only until the next morning, when Ellie got a call telling her the boys she was with the night before had died in a crash. After that, Ephraim felt nothing.

On her seventeenth birthday, she said, "I'm going by Lenny now." Ephraim agreed that Ellie was a name to be forgotten.

iv.

After graduating high school, Lenny didn't visit her father often. She'd come out of the woodwork on major holidays; Ephraim always suspected she wanted money, but she never asked and he never offered.

By the time she turned twenty-five, Lenny hadn't so much as called Ephraim. He felt as if that should disappoint him, but it didn't.

Because of this, Ephraim was more than a little surprised when a wedding invitation from his daughter arrived at his door on June 12th. As far as he knew, she was never going to get married. Lenny was not the type of girl who got married, and definitely not the type of person to print invitations on lavender colored invitations and marry a man named George.

Ephraim assumed Lenny was marrying George for his money; although, he knew better than to assume anything about Lenny. He thought about attending, but knew Lenny well enough to know she didn't really want him there. He smiled as he threw the invitation away, and for the first time in twenty-five years, he meant it.

(Previously published in The Adroit Journal)

FARAH GHAFOOR

Dying

a dispersed tornado: a body expanding
into a thousand tiny fists, hurtling
into burgundy soil. A quick, cold rain
of aimless thieves, of locked doors.

This crop of shadow follows me
like a wet grave. I aspire to cut earth
-meat as a hatchet, a final falling blade
of starlight. I aspire to reach above it
and open the sky's chest with a key
of rivered silver. Tuck myself

into the fleshy softness like a bone.
The summer night would dry its skinless
face, play noiseless widow. Await
the challenge of a grander
criminal, some heartless storm.

CYN BERMUDEZ

2 Poems

In Between

I etched lines onto the wooden floor,
hands pink stained and raw,
stripes of blood bore deep
in the cracks on my fingertips.

Windows loosely boarded.
Only vestigial moonlight
slipped past small openings.

A dirty sheet draped around my naked body,
knees to the ground, knuckles twisting.

Time meant nothing in this place.

There were no choices,
no diversion from the path,
no memory of how I got here or why,
no recollection of any kind of life
beyond this.

In the room was a single chair
I never sat on,
a mirror I never looked in,
a boarded window that led
only to more boarded windows
and a single silhouette
peering through its cracks.

The Blood We Taste

She pulled her hood over her head.
A few wisps of hair waved around the edges of it.
She ran her tongue over her teeth,
 razor sharp and ready,
 pain stabbing at her stomach.

It's not like the stories you know.

There were no super powers,
no hypnotic stare or
faster than light movement, no
lifting of a thousand pounds,
no dodging bullets, or frying in the sun.

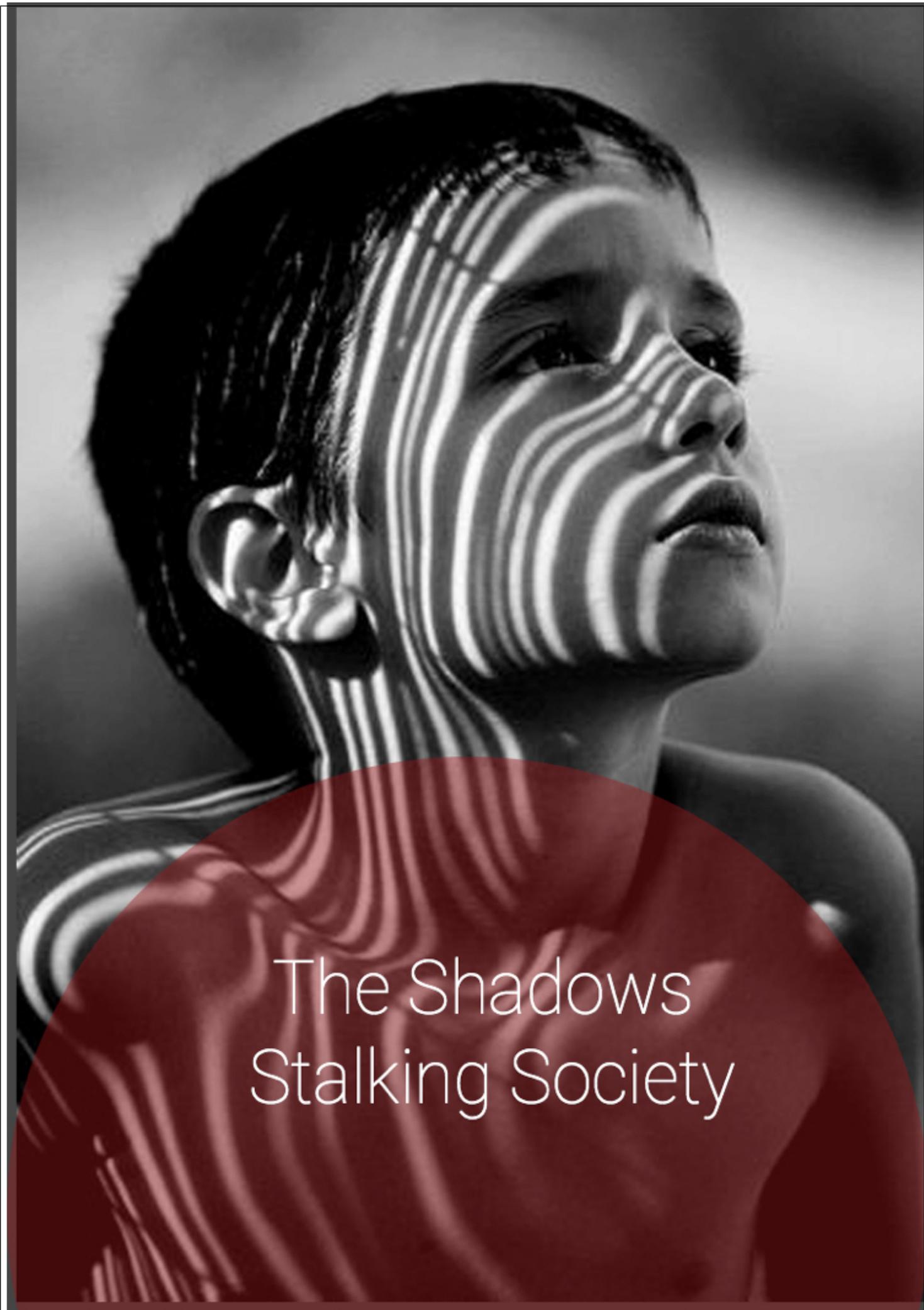
Only the hunger, an ever present,
ever gnawing desire to feed.

She wore shades even though it was dark;
her desiccated face a horrible sight.

No wonder they hide—*we* hide, she thought.

She saw him in the distance.
The young boy she loved in high school.
His heart pounded heavily in her ear.
His salty iron scent in her nose, her mouth.

 —He saw her too, in the yellowish night.
Why didn't he run? But why would he.
He loved her too.



The Shadows
Stalking Society

A. A. REINECKE

To the Piece of Germany on your Desk

It is 1948 in the PowerPoint and Berlin has been taken. It had been taken in morale before that. It is being taken now. Today. Maybe it will be in a perpetual state of that, of ceding, even when it harbors peace enough for quiet. I read an article today about pieces of the wall. It is a dark spread with a dark desk and a dark wood room, and with the white gray light of New Haven shining through the window. The words around it occupy less space than the picture. On the desk a piece of Berlin sits like a souvenir—a cheap observer to unrest.

Two days pass and in class, more years; it is 1963 in the small floating dust of the projector. Kennedy condones the construction of the wall. I think the Berlin wall is like putting a couch in the center of a room but no one will say it.

It is 1989 on the screen. We discuss the falling; I think of the way my sister's bone cracked in that white way, the sound of toffee... that cracking is not unknown to us. Because we continue: building walls and maintaining them, proposing above the cherry colored band of CNN the construction of borders anew.

The PowerPoint relives breaking. We would not need this, the blue white screen, if we would see things around us instead of looking. Of saying 'this is us only some time back and this is us still' instead of 'that is history.' I finish the article about the Berlin piece at Yale. There is a tab on my computer open, the second of three, saying there are 140 hits for 'Berlin wall' on eBay, which start at fifty-eight dollars.

People nod in class when we talk about numbers, faces, about deaths called in retrospection tragedies. Genocides. They do not touch us. We feign for them the cheap emotion you do in other's good or bad fortune, give not in sincerity but in obligation the kind of solemnity paid like ticket at door in, like reverence at church.

We don't feel history. We watch it with a kind of awed detachment. Repeated. We watch with empathy—but we do not cringe when the lights go on, when the bandage comes back, because we were never bleeding. *This is not us*, we say, and the lights go on and the screen goes up; the rubble again like dirt swept under the carpet.

I am offered a stick of gum. It is green apple. Facebook's blue bar flashes from a tab. 5:09, Hartford, Massachusetts, some anniversary. My Hartford friend has posted one word, asking 'equality.' It speaks small and in the sound of having been already put down, beaten. This is nonaggression. Appeasement. Why?

A hundred deals are made for peace today. 1943, 1945, 1957 and the creation of NATO for that purpose. Warsaw for the same and the Treaty of Rome, says the textbook, for prevention of war but for, *first*, economic gain. Because no one wants peace. They want *their* peace and they put up walls to preserve it. It is a currency fought for with men. With armies and with war. With a turning of coins in hand.

I lend someone ten cents. To print an essay.

The dime is cold against my palm and I smell the basement laundry room at Smith, and think: life does not breathe in walls, in agreements for peace propelled by other motives. It is not the disarmament of Germany in the same Hall of Mirrors where forty years prior had been its unification, in that rococo gold and glass. Life is more than that. Less cold. It is the hands of my Hartford friend teaching me how to do coin laundry at Smith and my teaching her to swim, saying, you don't taste the chlorine if you tilt your head correctly.

We see ghettos on the PowerPoint but we don't feel them. I know how to apply dates in multiple choice but I can't help thinking I erred somewhere, lapsed, because I was more afraid to touch her arm under water, than she was to push my hand back at the laundry room slots, at the Tide packet dispenser when I pushed the settings wrong. It is easy to say 'we don't put boundaries between us' ... but things get difficult in application.

Today is the test, and it is 1916—but also 1934, 1962, 1989 and 1989 again for two questions, 1918 for two inches of text everyone regrets because they want to memorize, not to know.

Facebook is blue. Out of Hartford comes 'white is a color but not the only one.' I read it thinking I'm making a print in art class that is white paint on white paper, that it looks like snow, that it was easier that way than with the dark paint because it was all close to the other, there was less chance of error. That's why we don't talk about race. It is easy to err. There are three answers wrong for every right and I missed a question about resources in Russia. I kick myself over it.

I have dinner with my School friend. She talks before we sit. There is a hardness about her, a newness that cuts in a welcomed way, like the cold side of the pillow. She has small white teeth and three Patagonia vests. And in her top dresser drawer: a pile of intricately patterned, laced bralettes that rise in Himalayan height piles, shell pink, clover green, more than two baby blue.

They have kimchi, she says. Do you know you can't get kimchi anywhere around here; do you know this is the whitest place on earth? I nod because there is a border between that and me. I've had it only at her house and even then with the sense of borrowing, of that being hers, not mine, and hers because her mother is from Oregon but Asian. Because I am white on white like the print I'm doing in art class, the velvet sound the breyer makes on plate, and for the collage tissue paper in pinks and reds and little Chinese colored shapes I won't use... because I am afraid to fill the spaces, to fearfully risk what might be a cheapening of culture not my own.

That's why Kennedy did it; why we think the Berlin wall was like putting a couch in the center of a room—but he thought it a force to quell with. Tensions eased by wall, he thought, because it is easier to forget if you do not discuss them, to keep intact your 'I'm right' with concrete than in the chaos, the color, the blurred edges and sharp expressions of the rubble. That's why no store in Chinatown would take my debit card; because that's a kind of not crossing, that's why we have between us the filament of 'we don't talk about the big things.'

The church I go to looks like a Mission; it has the clay tiles and the white stucco, but the bulletin has other shapes: the Spanish masses at times convenient to the white masses, the masses in English, fitted to them, growing small and defiant around them like moss to cobblestone, but growing. The edamame is \$6. We order it. I want to say 'they sell Our Lady of Guadalupe candles for less than that.' 'They fit their mass times to us and bend faith to sell \$5 candles at Target.'

There are fewer pieces of the wall on eBay. 137.

I am half eating, half waiting on my test score. My friend eats slowly in a way just shy of being deliberate. I remember how her vertebrae had showed on her back the day she'd had cramps, when she'd rubbed it with her tan from July. She eats the kimchi in separated bites, in a kind of small rage. It's been four months, she says. Two guys. She is tired. She wants to talk, to eat sticky rice at the small restaurant and have iced coffee together, but no one wanted that. No one wanted to say they loved you because that

was a kind of ceding. The kimchi has made a pink stain on her plate. 'But it's not like I loved them' she says.

'It's not like I loved them.'

In between her pink and purple kimchi bites and in between the bites of rice she is saying things like 'birth control comes in silver foil packets', like it was a kind of candy. These things are foreign, refreshing. I want to tell her I admire her. The fight in her which is less feminism, less the fulfilment of any word as it is a will to live. To be. It would be brave to tell her that. But I am not brave. Or I am too tired this minute for that. Because I slept two hours.

Because the Berlin wall is falling somewhere but we're over it, we're building it new in the spaces. So I watch her eat. It smells the pink-purple vinegar smell of kimchi. I see her part in awe. I see her how a foot-soldier sees an officer at a wash basin, against frigid water and steel razor and horsehair brush cold, hanging in the few sober seconds before the attack, thinking but not saying *this is both brave and stupid*.

The scores are up. I missed the question about the oil. I sit across from her and do not talk, but let there be a space. Because yesterday someone called her a slut. Because I had said for her that was a double standard, said if it had been guys there would have been high fives. But I don't say it. I sit and watch her in rice bites and in the pink-purple vinegar smell of the kimchi—thinking that this is the Berlin wall. That the east was untouched, colorless, gray in a kind of purity borne of terror of guard stations ordered to shoot when you neared them. And on the west side they yell. They jostle there but the wall is colored. It is the same wall, made of two sides, each side no less part of the structure, but one side unfree.

I can see how June will be. I will see her in June. In Hartford. There will be that dampness on the bricks that the east makes in June, together wet and warm and with the sense of blurring around the edges, of being too alive, too damp and humming to make on the surface of the world an accurate print. She will say as she has said before 'I can hear them laughing at us for this, like how we laugh when they say the world is flat.' She won't yell it. She will say it quietly, with the cheap coffee, the Dunkin Donuts on her tongue, the sound of defeat behind it.

We might talk of coin laundry and swimming but we won't talk about how we haven't used those learned skills at home. Applied them. Neither of us will say 'separate but not equal', but we will both think it and cover it with the ordering of another coffee—even

when our stomachs are full of it. Because to endure that is easier than breaking apart a wall.

When I pay for dinner, the coins in my hand remind me of the Smith basement, of chlorine, of Tide in packets. *Did you read that article?* I say. With the piece of Berlin on the desk. With the dark room and the gray light coming in. How you can see in the one chip the side which had been free, that which had been unfree. Yale, I say.

I read it, she says. And she finishes her pink purple kimchi in silence. *Screw Yale,* she says.

Do you think the wall is always falling? I say. That you can buy it for \$58.59 on eBay. A piece of it. A little piece to look at.

Fifty-eight dollars. For a piece of the wall.

Yes.

People want to buy walls. And she pushes aside the plate in a way that is foreign to me, together reckless, brave. The kimchi stain on the plate is like the residue of blood, but pink. *Screw Yale,* she says. *Looking at pieces of walls and building their own. Screw Yale because Lucy's going to harvard.* She says Harvard in lower case.

And again in her voice like the cold side of the pillow, with less feminism in it, tinted with purple-pink: *Fifty-eight dollars,* she says. *An artifact of what we have now... for fifty-eight dollars.*

ALINA YING

2 Poems

Old China

Smooth water
forms a soft word
on a little patch of cool stone,
a wettened calligraphy brush
diligently
tracing the nine strokes
of "Spring"
on the ground between
me and him,
him and I.
And I swear a thousand li
separate me
and his wind-battered hair,
fishhook silver in
the afternoon sun
(that dried his scaly skin)
His big, dewy eyes that
quietly scream help!
help!
But my father's calloused fingers
seek my hands as
we leave him to curl up and shrivel and wither
and we turn from him, the old stranger,
hunched by a trash can in the midst of a busy street
where a busy Chinese Dragon dances across the humbled home
of Beijing,
welcoming the new year
like it forgot him.

The Pain of War

A girl
as small as the thinnest shred of paper
Blown away in the wind
Insignificant.

Remember our cause -
We fight for what is right!
for
what
is
right!

But she, with her moonbeam eyes,
stares just a little,
a little bit higher.

Needing the caress of another,
Wanting the sweet kiss of embrace,
Dying for a small touch of remembrance.
She is innocent.

She has no part in the raging of countries.

A girl
Whose very rags mirror the rags of our own,
Whose very eyes desire the same desires,

A girl
her fingers tap in rhythm
to a cacophony of hunger,
a chorus of wails,
an instrumental of pleading,
the harshest symphony in all the world.

She is dying.

Easily saved.

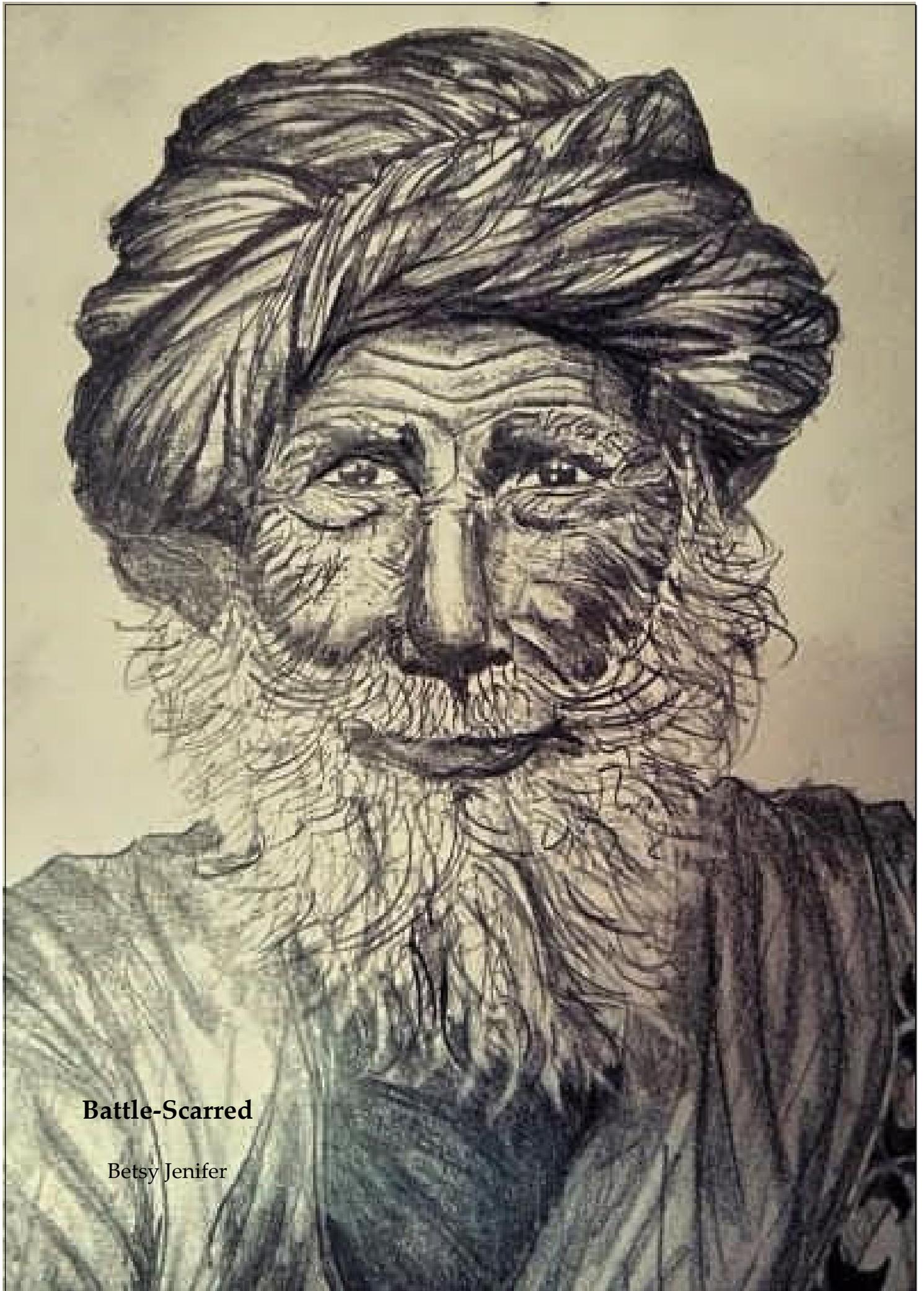
But dying.

War is painful.

War has no pity.

War is a time where humanity is inhumane.

Because saving an enemy
means killing your own.



Battle-Scarred

Betsy Jenifer

CHELSEA DINGMAN

4 Poems

On Paradise

*"paradise is a world where everything
is a sanctuary & nothing is a gun." –Danez Smith*

My childrens' hearts are American, unlike
my heart, still cold from long winters
in Canada. Unlike my husband's heart. But we all know
hurt. The kind where our hearts don't know how to beat
anywhere better. If sanctuary is somewhere where nothing is
a gun, will we mistake it for heaven? I used to think
that I was safe as long as I could feel my mother
next to me while I slept. Eyes closed, my children
could be mistaken for bodies on the news, as silence
takes the place of someone else's sons. There are lists
& lists of children, their hearts as still as wet streets
tonight. Streetlights, the only flags changing colours. The word,
massacre, a small bird that flies out of our mouths
each time we try to say their names. I'm tired
of being scared of my children's hearts
writhing, of how a heart can be shattered, of our hearts
stopping dead. How do we stop moving toward another
morning where a heartbeat means only that we still
exist? If our hearts all beat the same,
why is there no safety in the sameness of each
beat? When this world is the gun, why do we forget
we are all scared? I teach my children not to harm
the lizards & small frogs that leap into the house
when summer rains come to the Gulf. To carry them gently
to the door & release them. Even though they're young
boys, they feel the creatures' hearts race in their fingers,
& already they know sorrow for what fear does
to the heart. For the hearts fear undoes.

Rules of Endings

for Alton Sterling

Alton: I want to wake
in a world where you aren't
the latest casualty. Each day

I awaken to new loss & mourn
the deaths of leaves, fallen
to rest in burnt grasses. O Alton,

how I've grown tired of this
world. The way it gives us sanctuary
in a bar or theatre or church, only

to open fire once we're trapped
inside. Alton, you didn't die
by your own bullet. By swallowing

pills or shooting up or snorting
something. We keep hearing about
freak occurrences with no

explanations, but *what a fucking awful way*
to die is all I can think, every time,
as if there is an easy way. Alton,

if anyone else should die early, like you,
I pray that no one writes
#rip next to their names. Maybe

you don't want to rest easy. Maybe you want
to rage. If heaven is the only place
where peace can be found,

maybe you'll find some small piece
of foreign real estate that can't be
found on a map here. But, Alton,

I pray that no one writes
that clever little hashtag
next to more names,

reducing life to a few characters
on twitter. Young, my father died,
like you, Alton. I hated hearing

he was finally at peace once
he was without us. As a child, already
I knew that there was no rest

to be found in this world. Alton,
I'm sorry it's too late for you
to find peace in the hours before

the sun breaks, in the pause between
your child's breaths. I'm sorry
that no matter how hard we work,

we can't do the work of dying
for anyone else. We can't die less
alone.

Felonies with a Belt and Empty Mouths

~"Over eight years, a mom beat and starved her eight children, making them regurgitate food and eat it." - Tampa Bay Times (2014)

We don't know the four year old's name. Twenty-
two pounds of skin like brown burlap
pulled taut over bony knots, broken
branches. His ribs sing, as they testify
against themselves, a fork's tines falling
on an empty plate. At the curb,
flashing lights. But the boy has the stench of rotted
diapers & unbathed skin. He has
no hair. A scathing rash. His voice, lost
at sea in the small port between his lips. I want
to explain how a mother's hands are
usually soft. How a belt is made to hold
what would otherwise fall. How an orange tastes
when a leather belt is all he's known. Four
years is too long to starve. To wither
slowly. To be invisible to wind. But I can't tell him
we only know his pain by our own
sins. The doors we don't enter sooner.

Prey

For the family of Nicole Brown Simpson

How does the world end
like this: each wound

leading to another? Picture
blood, unlaced from her cheeks

& chin. Put her head back
on her spine. Let her stand

in the yard & say goodnight,
disappear into the house. Or let her

swing & scream at a boy's sudden
appearance. The glasses, fallen

from hands. Unblanket
her body. She could've gone

down swinging. But she'd already
tried crawling back to

herself. Tasted a man's hunger,
like a blade. The way his hands

hovered, ungloved, black-
feathered birds flying home.

DE'SHAUN MADKINS

2 Poems

Murder of ebonics

Heritage crafted into metaphors and conjunctions,
Culture delivered in dreads and du-rags.

Timberlands tattoo an isolated identity.

Ebonics pose a threat to the intellectual development of the white man.

Making it a vigilante of social order.

Dictionaries and thesaurus,
Dismantles its existence.

Leaving its people with no culture of their own.

Generational trauma

Darkness preys on subtle light;
Mysterious winds consume the night.

Vanimous drops infest the earth;
The Sun's shine awaits its birth.

Trials mislead the twisted truth;
Modern culture blinds their youth.

HARNIDH KAUR

Eklavya

Eklavya,

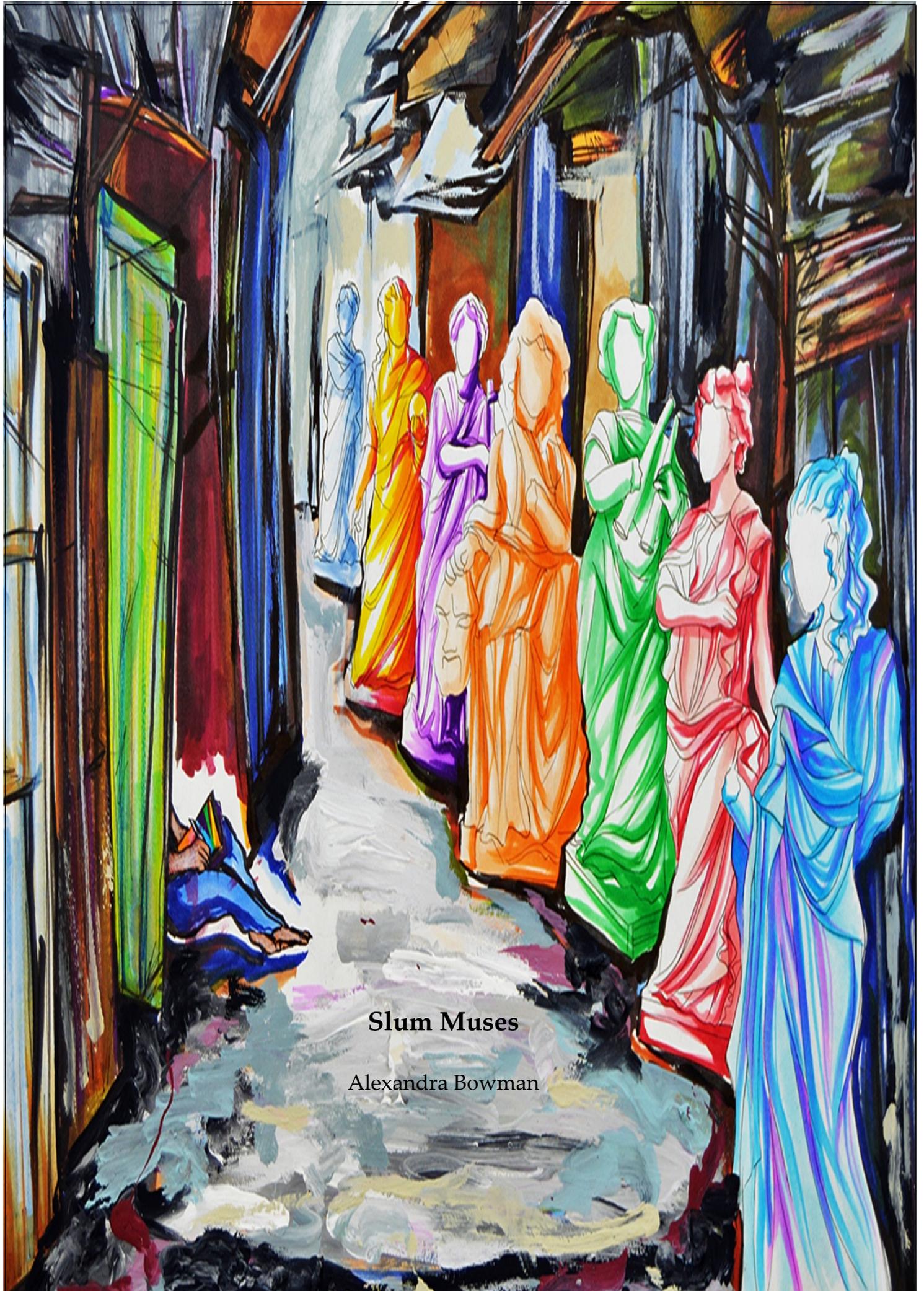
I wish you were here to see
wars fought with nine fingers
attacking a keyboard with ideas.

I wish you were here to see
knowledge gained despite, not
because of permissions.

I wish you were here to see
the reclamation of a thousand
years, generation by generation.

I wish you were here to see
us telling your stories, with
the Mahabharata as an addendum.

I wish we were there to see
you rub your thumb stump
and smile, in quiet vindication.



Slum Muses

Alexandra Bowman

GRACE WESTLIN

The Response to a Complaint in Welles Park

It's dark and he's screaming at me and I don't know why. I'm cold. I can barely feel myself but I sense millions of little spiders running up and down my arms—invisible spiders no one else can see them, but I swear they are there. I don't lie. I'm not a liar. Mama said never to lie. It's so windy even the trees are shaking, and the leaves are dropping. The spiders are still on my arms they are moving to my legs but I can't drop it. The man, he screams again but I barely hear him. I see him but he sounds so far away. He isn't making sense. The leaves crunching beneath my bare feet sound like Cap'n Crunch. I don't hear much when I'm eating it, but that's not my fault. It's the cereal's fault. They made cereal so loud, and the leaves are so loud. The man moves closer to me. He is still screaming and now he's waving his arms all crazy-like. I wish he would just stop and stand still and say what he wants quietly like Mama does. I always hear her. His mouth is a blaring alarm that won't stop. I am frozen. I am not doing anything wrong. Why won't he stop? What does he want? It hurts. The screaming hurts my head. It hurts so bad but I will not cry. I will not. I will not. I will not cry.

"Sir, move your hands above your head," he squawks. He sounds like the voice box where Mama sometimes got food if I was really really good.

The ground is dirty. I can't put my hands over my head without dropping it. I count to 3. "Think about what you want to say before you open your mouth," Mama always said. One, two, three, I count. But I don't know what to say. He isn't giving me any time. He keeps coming closer and closer. I can see the shininess of his shoes and the bounce of his belt when he walks. There are so many things on his belt. I try to stare and count. "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all," was another of Mama's sayings. I don't know what to say so I don't know if it will be nice. I want to stay quiet but he is so loud and so fast. Did I breathe? I don't even know. How many seconds are in one breath? Why is he so loud? Doesn't he know it's not polite to scream at someone? I will not cry. I will not. I will not cry.

"Sir! Sir! Are you listening to me?! I need you to put your hands above your head! Sir!"

"Ww-what I-I didn't--"

"Move your goddamned hands above your head right now!"

The garbled sounds bounce like a rubber ball in my head and I think really hard. I close my eyes and feel my head, my shoulders, my elbow. I search my body and my mind

finds hands--hands, Mama always said that when I have something hard to say I should move my hands--or just my pointer finger will do just fine- against a smooth surface, like the table in the playroom, or the movie disks. I look down to my hands and try to see them, and I'm holding the soft fabric. I pull my hand out from under it but I'm ashamed. They're dirty -- I-I have to clean them now. I wipe my hand all over my arm and leg to get the red off, but it just gets a little less sticky and more brown.

"Drop it now sir, put your hands up and--"

"-the r-red it's all o-over mm--"

"Drop it on the ground now!"

I see my soft blanket in my hands and I remember. I was going to wash it in the fountain in the park so Jack could be warm.

"It's-It's for J-Jack, though. I just wanted to t--"

"Who is Jack?"

"He-he's cold. It's so cold out, the leaves are spinning fast because the win--"

"Who is Jack?"

He seems different now that he's asking questions. He isn't so loud. I like that. His hands are on his hips like Mama's were when she was frustrated, but I knew she still loved me. He must love me. I can hear him better now. I can hear myself better now.

"Jack n-needs me he--"

"I need you to answer me now: Who. Is. Jack? Is he ok? Is he hurt?"

He starts talking real slow and serious and looking at me differently. He must love me. I realize my neck is itchy. I want to scratch it so I turn and see all of the leaves start to slow. The air is softer now. I like how the leaves fly turn into little fairies. Mama showed me fairies in the books in my room, and then the cat would push open the door and let in all of the light. It was so bright I couldn't see anything so I'd try to say I want the lights off; I want the cat gone. But Mama would just tell me to stop screaming, and that I was going to wake up Jack and she would have to leave. So the lights stayed on. I just wanted the lights off.

I smell hot dogs. It's good to share. I hope they are good people. I hope they share with me. I turn back forward again. I forgot about him. He is five steps closer. I suddenly feel hot, really hot. The spiders are back. He's going to yell at me. He's already yelling at me. He isn't soft anymore. I want to go.

"W-why can't I wash my blanket?"

"Sir! Stop moving! Put your hands over your head, Sir!"

"It's st-sticky and he needs to feel warm even though the leaves stopped-"

He's closer again. I don't know why. I did not move. He said not to move and I did not move. And now I feel on fire. I need to move. I have to get the fire off me. I know I will be in trouble. I will have to face the wall. I need to help Jack because he is hurt and it's so cold. If I don't bring him the blanket without all of the-

"Sir, I can't tell if you can hear me. Can. You. Hear. Me? I'm taking another step."

His voice is softer again. I can see his face now. It's hard looking but he is soft. His voice is soft. He loves me again. I know he does. I won't move. I have to but I won't. I look down to my hands and the dirty blanket. I need it for Jack. He might have tried to run away and hurt himself again. He might run around and cut his paw on a branch because he doesn't have the blanket.

"J-Jack is hurt," I finally am able to get it out.

"Where is he? What did you do to him? Is he alive? Sir, you need to put your hands on your head. Now. Please."

"I-I dunno."

I put my hands like he said. He has another man behind him moving closer too. I need the blanket back. The other man looks like he is going to take it. He said to keep my hands up where they are so I am but I just need that one little thing just for me and then I'll go back to my room and they won't see me again, I promise Mama. I'll be so quiet this time. I bend down to reach for the blanket and when I look up I see he has something in his hands pointing at me.

"Stop moving now."

I need it now. I'm tired and Jack is hurt and he needs me.

"Turn around and put your fucking hands behind your back." The other man is barking. My hands are tired and the wind is picked up again it's getting my hair in my face I need to itch it now. I try to tell the man that he needs to sit down just for one minute so I can get my blanket and go because my puppy is hurt and he just needs one thing from me. My hands hurt and I am starting to feel hot. I feel the spiders again and this time they are biting me, and I just need to get the blanket. I start to move towards it so that I can get it fo-- I fall backwards this time and my chest hurts really bad. A really extra bad tummy hurt. I touch my hand to it and now it's hot and sticky again. Then I look up at the stars as I lay down but there are no spiders this time and I imagine that I felt like I could come back out and see them with Mama and Jack and sometimes the cat.

JOHN DAVIS

4 Poems

Worry

The worry was so busy
 at hurting lives
we forgot
 how fast it ran
among the crowds and country,
 sped through coffee shops
and churches.
 To Muslim
or not to Muslim
 that was the question.
To find love
 or shun it with a gun.
To lockdown neighborhoods
 or trust everyone
as honest sons and daughters.
 400-some Americans died
last year in bathtubs.
 17 others were killed by terrorists.
To step up torture.
 To waterboard and drown
while carbon emissions
 will cause a storm
more horrendous than any in history
 flood the city of Brussels.
A candidate has told us
 climate change is a hoax invented
by China to harm Americans.
 We're so scared of terrorists.
Let the earth evaporate.
 But first, deploy the Marines
to guard popsicle stands in Austin.

Sugaring

His voice is wonderfully discomfoting.
Maybe he can't make a metaphor
but she's on to him
like notes on a saxophone.

He loves the way she smells. She loves
his risk-free money, his moments
of failure, his poetics of manners
when skin touches skin. If she shaves

below, she shaves for him. If she wears
black lace, it's black lace for him.
It's law school money, car money, food money,
financial aid and the rent is paid.

She has her fingerprints on the economy
and a body to bear it. She's feminist
and femme, sipping red wine, one eye
on his smile, one eye on the bar exam.

The Silver Rod

The mechanic says we need to talk
which means the news is not good news
from the god of the garage.

It's the voice of the doctor
saying the surgery didn't work,

voice of the pastor saying I failed
the confirmation program.

The mechanic wipes his hands
on a greasy rag and shines a silver rod.

His voice bounces in fits like a winter wren.

Brakes are shot. Muffler shot. Leaky gasket
and other car parts that sound more computer
than car. *Of course if you want to repair it...*

Dollar signs flash across his eyes like a cartoon.

Mufflers line the walls. Air compressors hiss.

Clank. Clank. Black Sabbath blares from a radio.

When did nickel-dime become

two thousand-three thousand, which means

I need a new car, need to bargain with a salesman,

but first, the silver rod in the mechanic's hands

that shines brighter and brighter—what does it do?

Is it the missing brake part or the missing

part in our lives? He shines and shines it

like a communion chalice. My car

is about to receive the hand of God.

The Patron Saint of Hair Dye in me

is brushing his hair just so
until it leans like beach grass
in a perfect New England beach scene
or it lies flat like a salt lick

that a race horse, hyped-up on bute,
will lick, paw his stall
when he does not get his way.
The Saint in me packs

an AK-47 under his coat
and fires it with his best
friend, Vladimir Putin,
and between hair-dye sessions,

the cost of which will
skyrocket the National Debt,
the Saint and Vlad pick off
undesirables, toss back shots of vodka.

I close my eyes:
when I lengthen *huuuuge*
into two syllables and convince
Mexico to build a wall,

the long strokes of my tongue
lather on a salt lick;
I whinny until my mane flows
and I sway inside the voice of grass.

JULIA POPE

Strolling In The Neighborhood

the sky grinned at us, blue toothed
licking his lips, following us
for the past mile or two
so we kicked him off our avenue
said "take your white tickets and
beat it,"

like the tangy man with a dented spine
always curses—with his rump side up
and face to the ground
staring at brown striped cigarette
buds poking out of grass,
charred and cracked

like the pavement we ride on
with dashed tightrope in the center
tar sloping down on the sides
runoff flowing into waffle-plated wells

but a hundred-dollar-honda parked
over that one today
a few polo-necked punks
chugging beer for laughs
with the door ajar, mid-day

below the crabapple tree
whose fruit goes unpicked—rotting
upon bowed branches
with gossamer threads wrapped 'round
holding an inchworm in place
caught in the spider's domain
woven tight and stitched

unlike the roots bursting through
spray painted, dimpled concrete
with a busted curb
worn, occasionally mended
never redone, but the memories—
live deep within its crevices
of blackened gum splatters,

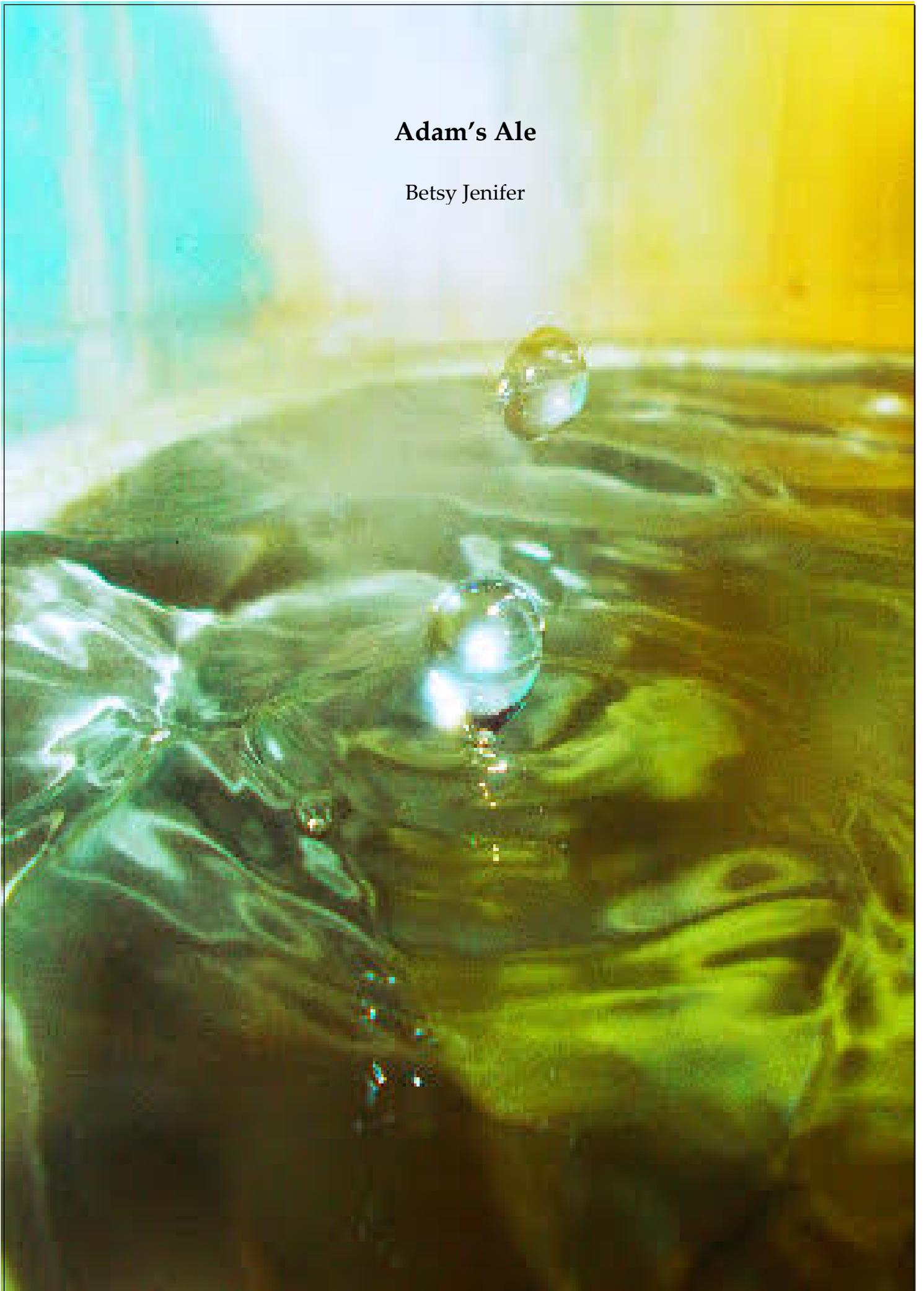
loose pennies and nickels,
sidewalk chalk residue—

from the boy who lives in the grey house
with a mailbox full of bills
a house of six political signs
vibrantly displayed on the frown lawn
often interfering with his solo soccer game—
the other kids don't like playing with him
'cause he speaks only the refrigerated words,
tattooed on the navel by his parents

we'll try to wish him free,
but I know too much about this street

Adam's Ale

Betsy Jenifer



LEN KUNTZ

3 Poems

Recall

And if you find yourself in a mall
When the shooter shows up
Brandishing an AK-47 and body armor
Trails of bullets dripping off him
Like a metallic wedding train
You should not do what I did
Don't dive into a nearby shop
And hide behind the counter
With a jackrabbit heart in your ears
Screams, sounds of shooting,
Everything ricocheting,
A collision of terror and fear
Making you piss yourself
No, what you should do instead
Is run straight at him
Lunge and do your best
To wrest the weapon away
Die like that instead of how I did
Cowering behind a counter
Without purpose or resolve
Praying he'd miss me when
He had my number all along
Three or four shots to the head
Maybe more, I can't recall
Ghosts sometimes have
Hazy memories

A Starling Message

You are tired of being tired
Heavy weight pressing down
Sky smothered with gray dust motes
Everything moving in slow-motion
Backward or sideways
Even utter chaos would be a welcome change
The walls stare back at you like bored cattle
A bare ceiling bulb the only source of light
Too much and not enough air to manage
Then one morning a starling
Lands on the sill tapping against glass
And you think this is it I've lost my mind
Until the bird flies off and you notice
What it has scratched across the window
A lifeline of sorts
Hoax or not it's the very thing you've needed
Words you haven't heard or seen in years
You are loved

Promise

Because there are mornings when the lake is a flat blue plate
Because clouds sometimes become dancing elephants on roller skates
Because the sound of the wind in the trees is dizzying
Because just now a hummingbird levitated outside the window
Because Vivaldi has The Four Seasons all cued up with a glass of wine at the ready
Because the sun is a toddler who doesn't want to go to bed and she's staring me right in
the eye
Because the smell of baked bread has flooded the kitchen
And I'm lonely and you haven't been out of bed in days
Come, Darling, let me help you. It'll all be worth it, I promise

MADI CARR

Chicago to Neptune

My blisters are
a dollhouse art gallery – masterpieces
taped to baseboards,
miniscule spectators with tiny clipboards
file out of their mouseholes
guided by the moon
that leaks
through wisteria drapes.

I am convenient...
Built-in sharpener mounted on his wall,
his nose presses into
Impressionist paintings,
his eyes sting and prick the keys of
out-of-tune pianos
smearing blurry dots with
well-water tears,
ripping out the crown of
jasmine I wove into his hair.
He's shaking
 furious
I ground his fingers to
bleeding stumps of bone
 and pink tissue paper
I'm sorry I'll fix us.

Bandages
sloppily unroll in his
trembling vellum palms.
I clutch his hands to steady them.
I knit his tendons and
 muscles and
 veins and
ligaments:
a welcome mat, yet
he welcomes no one.

fault clogs airways
rice in garbage disposal

thickheavy oatmeal
churns in my otherwise
emptygut myflyguts

s p l a t t e r e d
on the swatter like
bananas, mashed
 smeared on
the molding drywall of
the abandoned house in
Chicago we made our home.
We painted the circular window like
Tiffany glass rose in
our private cathedral,
our private waltz with God,
 or love,
 or the cosmos.

But now
the veil has either
fallen into your
soft, lustering Venus eyes
or been pulled
away from mine.

Seven and a half months I bled
iron for us to smith
railroad tracks from Chicago to
Neptune,
but

you left on that train without me

SYDNEY CROSBY

2 Poems

The Breeze

the breeze is back

it dances between the creaks of the floor boards
that dare the breeze to stay away

it whispers with the closed door
that warns the breeze to disperse

the breeze grows colder
it forces itself into the warm room

then sprints towards her
causing chills to run up her arms

the room turns frigid
letting breaths be seen

a tear drags down her face
evolving into an icicle

the breeze moves back towards the door
onto the creaky floor boards

the icicle drops from her face
the same time her door unlocks

she stares at the handle knowing
changing the locks with a short door doesn't fix the breeze

A Locked Life

Her wrinkly hands pressed down onto mine

warm meeting cold
old greeting young

a small glass locket took place as a barrier between our hands
it heats up with love

her soft eyes were reflected in the glass as she told me history was resting in my hands

her wrinkles faded away with her and I was left carrying her story

the locket lost the warmth that it gained with two sets of hands resting on it

my hands started to become numb from the bitter cold of the locket

my fingers tightened around the compacted oval filled with life

frightened her story would end for ever

my fingers loosened its grip on the glass, letting it slip through the cracks

the life held in the locket met death as the glass shattered

ABIGAIL ESCOBAR

3 Poems

A Healing Ceremony in Stanzas

This is how we carried:
Alone stumbling along the riverwalk.
Confetti from a past life tripping against
our toes and I think
the light is choking itself.
Blinding and drowning
all at once
like a day dream;
it is hazy like Tuesday nights
burying Wednesday's morning.

This is how we carried:
Like teeth to the bone,
ruby red in our gums,
eyelashes spilling the
leftover acids of our work.

Here, the water ripples
like pills placed in water
like a prayer to its god
to make the humming cease.

I Have Found a Name for the Haunted House We Once Shared

Beyond each creaky crevasse of your body
I found spider webs. Dusty villains
that held dead flies and broken fingernails
from past encounters
you discarded like used matches
or love songs you couldn't quite relate
to anymore.
You always took what you needed.

Thankfully, the crevasses
have collected dust like broken limbs
you stole from every piece of dirt
you were blessed enough to stumble upon.
Your immune system has waged a war
on its biggest enemy and causer of destruction —
the hiding places found deep in the wrinkles
of your knuckles and of the back of your neck.
It is impossible to enter all of you and
escape without burns —
how did you manage to become
both a gift and an infection?
How many epidemics lay blame
on the curve of your lips
or the way you clutch foreign objects?

While in some attic of your mind
I found a dresser full of blankets
that smelled just like you.
As if you had laid in a field of
your own skin and stared at
the stars all night, imagining which
gleaming stellar would be the first to erupt.
To explore among their own constellations,
bleeding and reeking havoc
among the intertwining galaxies.

I replaced the blankets with sorrow
They still smell like you.

Your flesh speaks to me
when it is dreaming.

Guns and Rivers

My back itches as a craving
For beauty that transcends
The physical

 Torments its curves.

Show me everything the
Guns held you from.

Show me the exit wounds

The cry of your eardrums

The pink felt of your fingertips

 On the trigger

 (pull the trigger)

Show me what it

Feels like to be alive.

What it feels like to

Have your fingers running

Down surfaces so smooth

You'd kill for them.

 (pull the trigger)

**

Cut your hair in intervals.

Leave the sections that brush

Against your face

For last.

The wisps that flare against

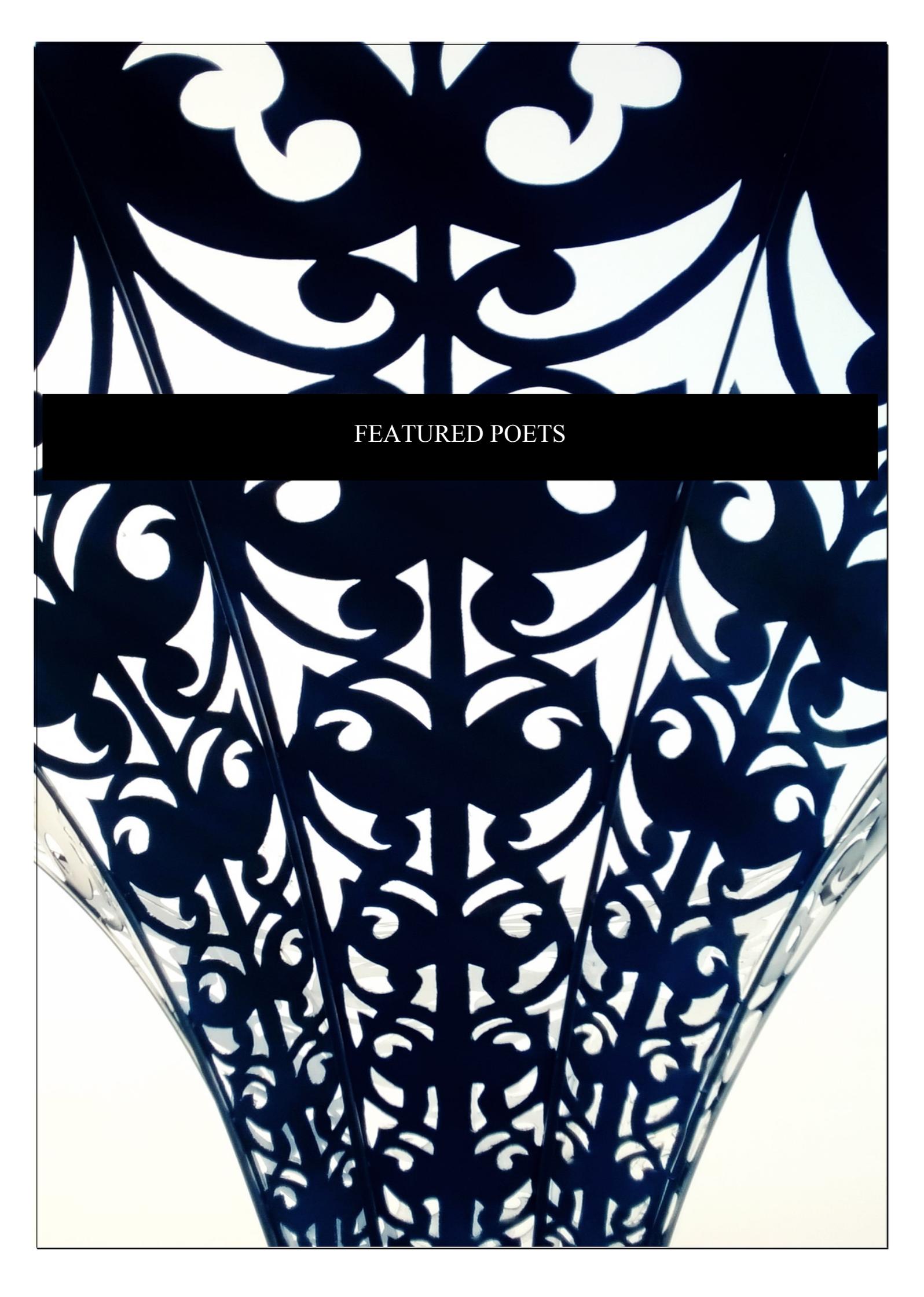
Your skin

The same skin that is

Merely a translation of

Everything you could become.

 (pull the trigger)



FEATURED POETS

JERICHO BROWN

4 Poems

Of the Swan

The luck of it: an ordinary body
Soothed once

Under God. No night ends his
Care, how

He finishes a fixed field, how he
Hollows

A low tunnel. He released me
After. Why

Else would I pray like a woman
Who's ruined

A man's ever-bitter extremity?
Men die,

But God's soul rises out of its black
Noose, finds

Bared skin a landscape prepared
For use

Where worship makes for immortality,
And I am

The Lord's opening, a woman
On earth

With pluck, with sting, with feathers
Left round my hide.

Atlantis

What I stole I took with ease
Though the sun is the eye
Of regret that burns on women

Who bend for wages they make.
What I lost holding my breath
While those women wallowed

In the name of Jesus underwater,
I watched from this new land
Of waxed legs, where God's good

Eye beams, all our teeth white, all
Our canyons right, sand and sea
Shimmering like some evening

Gown of a wealthy woman with
No noticed want, no reason
To believe the work a grudge

And good distance can do once
You leave a dangerous city
Of women below sea level alone.

What I remember about New Orleans
I never touched: the women,
Even the youngest call you baby.

Stand

Peace on this planet
Or guns glowing hot,
We lay there together
As if we were getting
Something done. It
Felt like planting
A garden or planning
A meal for a people
Who still need feeding,
All that touching or
Barely touching, not
Saying much, not adding
Anything. The cushion
Of it, the skin and
Occasional sigh, all
Seemed like work worth
Mastering. I'm sure
Somebody died while
We made love. Some-
body killed somebody
Black. I thought then
Of holding you
As a political act. I
May as well have
Held myself. We didn't
Stand for one thought,
Didn't do a damn thing,
And though you left
Me, I'm glad we didn't.

Layover

Dallas is so far away
Even for the people who live
In Dallas is Dallas far away
A hub
Through which we get
To smaller places
That lurch and hurt
Mean stopping
In Dallas and all are
From small towns and farms
If all keep going
Back far enough
Pay attention
Keep your belongings near
Everyone in Dallas
Is still driving
At 3:24 a.m. off I-20
Where I was raped
Though no one
Would call it that
He was inside
By the time I realized
He thought it necessary
To leave me with knowledge
I can be hated
I was smaller then
One road went through me
No airport
I drove him home
There had been a wreck
On the interstate
I sat in traffic
My wallet on the seat
In between my legs.

SANDRA BEASLEY

4 Poems

Cast of thousands

When they make a movie of this war
I am minute ninety-seven, soot tears
applied with a Q-tip, the one whose roof
collapses on her head before
her pie is done. Look how I look at you—
the apple and the apple's knife still rolled
into my skirt, eyes wide as gin. The blast,
then ash. The director cried *Cut!*
More ash, he said, and they bombed me again.
My death is the clip they send to the Academy;
later they will kill me in Spanish, then French.
I will die on mute, on airplanes, row after row
of my tiny, touchscreened dying. My love,
I have joined the cast of thousands: me
and the plucky urchin, the scared infantryman,
me and the woman whose laminated beauty
sells gyros on every Greek storefront—
a useful anyone who advances the story,
then drops away. In your dream
six months from now I'll make my cameo
as the customer with an unfocused smile,
offering a twenty as the register
begins to shake and smolder under your hands.
The coins will rise and spit silver into the air.
The coins will rise and spit silver into the air.
They buried my village a house at a time,
unable to sort a body holding from a body held,
and in minute ninety-six you can see me raise
my arms as if to keep the sky from falling.

The World War Speaks

When I was born, two incisors
had already come through the gum.
They gave me a silver bell to chew on,
brought me home in a wicker basket,
and kept me by the stove's coal heat.
Every morning my mother boiled
a huge vat of mustard greens,
steam drifting over to my crib and
after a few hours, souring into a gas.
I breathed it all in. I began to walk
so they fitted me with braces.
I began to run, so they fitted me
with books: Mars, hydrogen, Mongolia.
I learned to dig a deeper kind of ditch.
I learned to start a fire in three minutes.
I learned to sharpen a pencil into
a bayonet. Sometimes at night
I'd sneak into the house of our neighbors,
into the hall outside their bedroom,
and watch as they moved over each
other like slow, moonlit fish.
Sometimes my mother would comb
my father's hair with her fingertips,
but that was it. They wanted an only
child: the child to end all children.

The Parade

The parade will feature red dragons,
drums, sixty horses
and a sharpshooter in kimono.

Children will receive small flags to wave.
Women will receive small children to clutch.
You may note we offer five varieties

of yellow ribbon.
You may note we've drained the gunpowder
from your firecrackers.

Look at how the cherry blossoms
squawk and circle
before sinking their pink talons

into the monuments.
The monuments play dead.
They are fleshy with granite.

Think of these barricades as an embrace
of concrete. Look—
how your country longs to hold you.

Antiquity

We are living in someone's antiquity.
They will study our compromises—
how we used two faucets for one sink,
how we wired and cemented our teeth,
how our kids spent hours stacking pennies
in cardboard tubes. They'll wonder
why we ever took ourselves so seriously,
measuring each ideal serving of meat
with a deck of playing cards, declaring
"Estelle" the official state soil of Alaska,
going door to door every ten years to ask:
Do you live alone? With an indoor toilet?
In antiquity it will always be past bedtime.
When they tuck us in, the quilt will fold
gently over our eyes. They will tell us
the legend of hanging a curtain to divide
a city. They will tell us of the spider sent
into space, Anita, the webs she spun finer
than any on Earth. In the dark of antiquity
we will map our skull-scapes, each bump
foretelling temperament and shoe size.
We will daub perfume behind our ears
knowing it was once ambergris, which
was once a fetid, fatty white lump, which
was once the pearl of a whale's intestine,
which was once the irritant squid beak
lingering after the meal was long over,
greased until it slid free of the body.
We will corset our chests in whalebone,
knowing every heart has its Jonah song.

KAVEH AKBAR

2 Poems

Sweet in the Fruit

The word “crisp” travels from the back
of your mouth to the front as you say it. Crisp. Stranger
than that, even—that people put their genitals

in each others' mouths to demonstrate
affection. In a parallel dimension, you
have a lover's genitals on your tongue

right now this second, and while they're there
you are mouthing the word “crisp” and it is hunting
through their body for a way out, making

them want to put your genitals into their mouth
in sincere gratitude. Meanwhile the you who is here is here
because plants can turn light from a star

ninety-three million miles away into sugar and because
your grandparents loved each other. Cosmically,
all of humanity is equivalent to an uncontacted tribe

in the Amazon. Your children will experience more digital
trees than real ones. It's hard to keep from thinking
about how often you see someone for the last time —

a particularly beautiful teacher, the strong-jawed stranger
behind a steering wheel, a skinny woman
in tights reading a spy novel at the bar. More welcome

are thoughts about how to make your father smile, ways
your children compare favorably
to their peers, tricks to get Malbec out

from the carpet. Better to think about how the nitrogen
in the soil that delivered the vine was once star
dust, how the sugar in the fruit came

from sunlight, how the hand that spilled the wine
had before drawn it to your lips, how the glass tilted

until the sweet crisp violet whirled out.

(previously published in Decomp)

Wild Pear Tree

it's been January for months in both directions frost
over grass like a pale fungus like
mothdust the branches of the pear tree are pickling
in ice white as the long white line running from me
to the smooth whales frozen in chunks of ocean
from their vast bobbing to the blackwhite
stars flowering into heaven the hungry cat gnaws
on a sliver of mirror and I have been chewing
out my stitches wondering which
warm names we should try singing
wild thyme cowslip blacksnake all the days
in a year line up at the door and I deflect each saying *no*
you will not be needed one by one they skulk off
into the cold the cat hates this place more than he loves
me he cannot remember the spring when I fed him
warm duck fat daily nor the kitchen vase filled with musky blue
roses nor the pear tree which was so eager to fling its fruit so sweet
it made us sleepy I stacked the pears on the mantle
until I ran out of room and began filling them into
the bathtub one evening I slid in as if into a mound
of jewels now ghost finches leave footprints
on our snowy windowsills the cat paces
through the night listening for their chirps our memories
have frosted over ages ago we guzzled
all the rosewater in the vase still we check for it
nightly I have forgotten even
the easy prayer I was supposed to use
in emergencies something something I was not
born here I was not born here I was not

(previously published in the Bennington Review)

Gaze

Aditi Chandra

