driftwood press

Volume One: Issue Three

James McNulty Jerrod Schwarz

Karen Brown Rebecca Jensen Amanda Riehm Sabrina Coyle

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literary magazine

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Managing Fiction Editor, Visual Arts Editor,
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Summer 2014

Independently published by Driftwood Press
in the United States of America.

Fonts: Satellite, Garamond, Josefin Sans, & Existence Light.

Cover Design: Jeremy Jailal
Front Cover Image: Nathaniel Saint Amour
Back Cover Image: Susana H. Case

Digital Edition: July 2014

ISSN 2331-7132

Please visit our website at www.driftwoodpress.net.

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Rachael Dunlap Ratliff

The Bishop came first.

His black onion dome of a hat caught the tiniest sliver of sunshine and lobbed it at Walter from beneath the morning glories.

"Trash," Walter muttered, more of a wheeze than a curse. "God. Damn. Trash."

The yard was full of it - cigarette butts, broken Schlitz bottles, useless shards of slate. Walter had even found a wig. He had paused for seven long seconds before smacking the parched soil with his hoe once more. No human remains had been beneath it, thank god.

Now Walter stalked toward the bishop and bent to retrieve it with a prematurely gnarled hand (harsh soap, hot water). It was a black one, shiny and smooth, much heavier than it looked. Probably belonged to a nice chess set once. Walter ran his thumb along its bulbous curves. It reminded him of that colorful cathedral in Moscow - insomuch as something can remind someone of a place they have never been. Walter had never seen Moscow; had never really left New York City. The cathedral, he recognized from a postcard his mother had kept in her bureau drawer until the day she died. Only after the funeral did he turn it over. The postage was Russian. It had been mailed from Yelets, her home town. But the card was blank, save for their old address on Montgomery Street, inscribed in solemn capitals.

Walter pocketed the bishop and returned to his trash pile. On and off for weeks, he had hoed and raked, sifted and shoveled. By now he had a trash pile that reached his knees. Each evening after work, he scooped a shovel-full of trash into a crumpled plastic bodega bag and deposited it in the cans out front. Not a few times, the bag ripped, sending an avalanche of lives lived across the floor of his small living room. The smell – soggy paper, cat shit, stale beer - took several days to dissipate, no matter how quickly he swept it into a new bag, no matter how hard he scrubbed. He could pay a couple of neighborhood kids fifteen bucks, have the whole pile gone by sundown, but it had become a ritual for him. He looked for-

ward to this little bit of progress as he rode the bus from his new job at the bakery to his cramped one-bedroom apartment. Little by little throughout the week, the pile eroded, making way for the garden. But on his days off, he would dig a bit deeper. The trash was never-ending, and each drag of the rake revealed one more brick, one more candy wrapper, a cache of peeling linoleum tiles. And so his pile grew, in hopes of shrinking, and the garden was put off one week more.

The garden was his therapist's idea. After the incident at the bar, he had been placed on probation and assigned to a therapist who specialized in violent offenders. *Violent offender;* he couldn't believe that. He'd lost his apartment not long after he lost his job at the bar. Frankie (whose real name, according to some tax papers Walter had come across by chance, appeared to be Samuel) looked like he had a bitter pill stuck in his throat as he broke the news. "Have to let you go, bud," he said, staring intently at the beer on the counter between them. "That kid's parents are scaring off customers, out there with their signs, the mother weeping to every poor soul trying to buy a pint."

Walter had been Frankie's only employee, and he had been a good one – punctual, quiet, not much of a drinker. Tending bar wasn't exactly his passion, but he never really had figured out what his passion was, or if he had one at all, and drinks needed to be poured. After so many years, Walter had come to consider Frankie a friend, family almost, which made the whole situation all the more embarrassing.

Walter had almost missed his first appointment with the shrink. Expecting a large hospital with endless hallways of sterile padded walls, he had walked right past the nondescript red-brick office building with only the street address painted across the dark green awning. He'd had to double-back twice and was in a real mood by the time he finally found the name he was looking for on the board by the elevator.

"I understand your wife passed away recently," Dr. Brockman said, perched on the edge of her chair.

She was tiny. Evie had been petite too, but with a round substantialness to her. The woman in front of him was frail and skittish, like a mouse caught between the cat and the cheese.

"Lady, you don't understand nothing," had been his reply.

Walter had no business seeing a shrink. He harbored a deep-seated distrust for medical professionals, and he definitely didn't respect this woman, with her tired grey eyes and her pointy high heels. She knew nothing about him, about Evie, about anything. But, on his fourth visit, when she asked him about his new living situation, he opened up the tini-

est bit and mentioned the small yard out back of his apartment. She instantly suggested a garden.

"A space of your own is hard to come by around here, Walter, you should get out and enjoy it."

"Evangelina worked at a nursery." He patted his shirt-front pocket, looking for a cigarette. He couldn't smoke it in the doctor's office, of course, but he needed to know it was there.

"Your wife?" The therapist said it cautiously, as if he were a horse she might spook.

"The kind with flowers, not the kind with kids," Walter corrected. "She never liked kids much, but she loved flowers. Our whole house was full of them, the tropical kind. Her own little Puerto Rico right here in Brooklyn."

He said it with certainty, as he often had while making small talk with the guys at the bar, but now he wondered for the first time if it were true. They had met when he was thirty-six. She was thirty-one, fresh out of an ugly sort of marriage. She had never asked him for children - too little money, he supposed, or too little time. Either way, by the time the thought crossed his mind a decade later, her window had passed. He told himself they were better without. And, looking back at those quiet mornings - her reading the paper aloud (ads included), him sipping coffee and watching the hair fall across her face, neither of them having to share the other with anyone else - maybe they had been.

In the weeks following the bishop's appearance, Walter found five more chess pieces: a knight, two pawns, a rook, and the king. It seemed as if each had been given its own distinct burial; the rook amidst a crumble of red bricks, the king lying in state beneath the graffiti-covered rear wall, as if it had been erected for the sole purpose of serving as his monolithic headstone. The pawns were buried the deepest, sunk haphazardly in the black dirt. Walter polished each of them with a damp bar cloth and lined them up on the windowsill above his kitchen sink.

He had been polishing glasses with a similar rag when Evie saw him for the first time. As she told it, she had gotten all dolled up with a friend of hers – this was right after the divorce – in her green dress to go grab a drink. Before they even had a chance to slip their coats off their shoulders, the bar had erupted in screaming and yelling. Some customer was leaning over the bar, red-faced and practically spitting in Walter's eye he was so angry. It made her nervous, how much the blind rage on that man's face reminded her of her husband – former husband, that is - but then she saw Walter standing there calm as you please, polishing a rocks

glass. Finally, the man slumped back onto his stool, exhausted by his own fuming. And Walter held the glass up to the light to check for smudges and placed it gently on the shelf. She walked right up to him then and there and ordered a Cosmopolitan. She'd never had one before, and later on she admitted that she didn't like the way it tasted all that much, only that it felt fancy to drink and it got Walter's attention.

It was one of the few stories Evie ever told in front of a group. After years of classes and spending her teens in the strict, English-only household of an aunt, she spoke almost perfect English, but she was a quiet woman, usually content to listen while others did the talking.

She was too pretty for him, Walter knew. He was tall, bordering on gaunt, with ruddy skin that always looked wind -chapped or sunburned, depending on the season. He had what would have been a distinguished sort of nose, if it hadn't boasted such dramatically flared nostrils, which were plainly visible from the front, sides, and possibly even from a bird's eye view. Such a nose, paired with unnaturally dark irises, gave him a reptilian look. He was not handsome. And he certainly wasn't rich. But he was calm, and he knew how to handle something fragile. For Evie, he supposed, that must have been enough. They married seven months later in the local courthouse.

They lived with his mother for the first few years. Lonna was a stoic, angular woman, with dark eyes and thick curls that refused to turn grey even into her seventieth year. The only round, motherly feature on her were her cheekbones, high and exaggerated, like some old-timey cartoon character's.

She had immigrated in her twenties with a baby on the way, but rather than seeking out her fellow countrymen in Brighton Beach, she had moved to Crown Heights. She was an outsider in her new life, surrounded by those black islanders and Jews (her words). It was a lonesome sort of choice, but home was behind her, she reasoned, and that was that. When Walter was born, she chose a name out of the morning paper and went about mothering him in an almost professional manner, feeding him her own rendition of stewed goat and ground provisions, an homage to her new neighborhood that forever soured Walter's taste for Caribbean cuisine.

Sharing the apartment was tense at first, with Lonna elbowing Evie out of the kitchen at every opportunity and Evie refusing to accompany Lonna to Sunday Mass (a ritual Lonna never missed, ever, despite her lack of apparent enjoyment). Evie's Catholicism had almost made up for her Puerto Rican-ness, in Lonna's book, but Evie hadn't yet forgiven herself

for the divorce, no more than she had forgiven the church for putting it off for so long.

Living under his mother's roof should have been stifling, and at times it was. They were, after all, newlyweds. But there was something exciting about it, too - the two of them rushing to their bedroom the second they heard the front door click behind Lonna, their lovemaking almost frenzied during those few treasured, un-hushed moments. Lonna doled out rules, issued pointed ultimatums about how chores were to be done and by whom. The silenced chuckles and stolen glances united them, made them feel like teenagers again.

It must have sustained Lonna in some way - mothering them - because when Walter and Evie finally got a place of their own, after years of sharing her apartment, Lonna began to draw inward. She had never been an outgoing woman. Even during the riots in ninety-one, when bottles were flying and funeral processions were dissolving into massive protests, Walter's mother had carried on as if nothing were amiss. She didn't linger in the bodega to whisper about the Rebbe's man fleeing the country after the car wreck that killed that little boy, nor did she invite her agitated neighbor over for tea to worry over the stabbing that occurred shortly thereafter. She just shut the door, turned on the radio, and set about cooking dinner for the three of them. The world had its business, yes, but she was minding her own.

This final retreat inward, though, was something different. Evie was the first to notice. Each day, Lonna seemed to speak one word less than the day before, to drink her tea one degree cooler. They tried to draw her out with walks to the park and Sunday evening dinners, but there was nothing to stop her fading into the wallpaper, sinking into her soup. When she finally did slip away, on a Monday at the age of 77, her passing was no more surprising or traumatic than apples turning soft in the fridge. And though he remembered her fondly, Walter convinced himself that he felt neither disturbed nor distraught by Lonna's death, only unsure of what to do with her things, and unwilling to think too hard about the sender of the blank postcard.

Evie organized a simple funeral. She brought flowers from work and assembled two large arrangements – one for the casket, one for the kitchen table. A small handful of people dropped by, mostly acquaintances Walter had made at the bar, all of whom seemed uncomfortable to be interacting in so much daylight.

Evie was diligent in her mourning, and over the following weeks she coddled Walter more than usual, smiling sadly as she handed him his cof-

fee in the morning, waiting up for him at night so she could trace the line of his spine with her meticulously manicured nails while he pretended to sleep. She cooked his favorite meals and cleaned up after him as soon as the last bite was chewed. She didn't fuss at him when he tracked mud into the apartment, or ask him to take out the trash. She trailed behind him wherever he went, fixing, cleaning, perfecting. It was then, for the first time, that Walter understood why her first husband had hit her.

She was so innocent - long lashed, with the close-set dimples of a child. Hitting Evie would be like flinging a glass against a brick wall just to see it shatter (something else he had never done). He wanted to see her brown eyes swollen and purple. He wanted to bash her neat row of teeth against the kitchen counter. He wanted so badly to destroy her that it nauseated him. Without explanation, he stormed out of the house and sat down at the bar he spent his days polishing. He drank beer after beer, then shot after shot. Frankie eyed him warily, but kept on pouring. And when Walter got home, he spent the night retching violently into their leaky toilet, relieved to be down in that porcelain bowl, his head pounding among the piss stains and the errant pubic hairs while Evie paced the hallway unharmed.

It was almost December before Walter found the other rook. The yard looked like a mine field pocked with giant craters, the whole scene muted by a thick coating of dust that clung to everything. It was much too late to plant anything anyway, Walter reasoned, and there were still gaps in the ranks of chessmen that lined his window. He sifted the dirt now, meticulously separating it from the trash by passing it through a fine screen. He hunched over the makeshift sieve like a prospector panning for gold, and he was rewarded week after week: three more pawns tangled in some old hosiery, the remaining knight beneath an armload of rotten roof shingles. One by one, the pieces of his team appeared, always black. There was no sign of the pale opponents. Eventually, the only piece missing was the queen.

The therapist was worried about his lack of progress.

"Still getting the place tidied up," he told her.

She pressed her lips together, shifted her focus to his work. *How was his new job going? Did he enjoy the change of scenery?*

He told her about the bakery where he washed dishes. More of a warehouse than a bakery, he said. It was drafty, and a long way from his apartment, but he got to listen to whatever music he wanted to and nobody gave him a hard time about smoking too much. In fact, he wasn't sure if they noticed him at all. Most of the other workers were young,

much younger than he was. They stayed in the mixing room, only braving the cold to put something in the oven, or to deposit precarious towers of bowls and bus bins, leaving Walter to linger in the smell – a sweet funk, not unlike the beer-soaked linens at Frankie's.

They seemed to take their jobs seriously, these bakers. At least once a week, there was some catastrophe or another that resulted in shouting, and occasionally a garbage can full of dough that oozed and belched while the staff received a lecture on proper scaling. On the good days they laughed and joked and ripped on eachothers' music choices, but they rarely spoke to Walter, except in loud, slow phrases, punctuated by charades. They assumed he was just another foreigner, washed up on American soil to clean up after them. Walter didn't bother to correct them. He had no desire to talk to them. One in particular reminded him of the kid in the bar.

The therapist scooted closer to the edge of her seat, though it hardly seemed possible.

Did he feel anger towards his coworkers?

"I don't feel angry at anybody," Walter spoke evenly, trying yet again to convince her that he was a calm man, that the night at the bar was a fluke, that he'd been deep into the whisky again, that he didn't mean to beat that little hipster piece of shit within an inch of his life, that the boy just struck a nerve strutting into his bar, smirking, sick with glee as he proclaimed it a true dive bar, complete with "legit sad souls crying into their whisky doubles."

Not even at the doctors?

All the anger and adrenaline that had been brought to a boil in Walter's ears and stomach drained away, leaving behind a sudden, disorienting stillness, like stumbling out of a rowdy bar into a snow-quieted street. He wanted to snap his fingers or pinch his forearm, something to bring him back to the therapist's office.

The doctors had sent her home. The doctors had said she would be alright.

He stood abruptly, knocking over the chair he had been sitting in, and stumbled out. Maybe the therapist called after him. He didn't hear. He needed some noise, a cold breeze. On the street, the wind flayed his neck and face. It snaked its way into his shirtsleeves and up the legs of his trousers, but Walter did not go back for his jacket. He did not reach for a cigarette. He crammed his hands into his pockets and turned toward home.

The swirling chaos of Brooklyn crashed against him – horns honking, ten-dollar scissor cuts, Halal Chinese food, kids in fights on the play-

ground, kids in matching striped sweaters, shopping carts bearing mountains of cans in clear trash bags, *hey man how 'bout a dollar for some breakfast?,* $4.99 lunch specials, three-dollar gourmet coffee, tattered men preaching the gospel, well-dressed men hissing and catcalling, women with large feet crammed into small stilettos rolling their eyes, crispy chicken, organic body oil, the subway rumbling below the grates. It was all around him, denying him even an inch of space to call his own, but Walter heard only medical jargon. Walter saw only Evie; Evie coming home from the hospital, stitches on her forehead, Evie crying about the totaled car, Evie shying away while he huffed about, muttering about the canceled car insurance, Evie saying she was fine even though he hadn't asked, Evie slumping against the bathroom sink, fingers clawing into her own chest.

For too long he sat there clutching her, begging her to tell him what to do. At that moment he realized he'd never been the caretaker, not for anyone, not ever in his life. When her eyes rolled back and her body went limp, Walter wept helplessly, screamed for help like a pitiful child before he finally gathered his senses enough to reach for the phone and carry her down the stairs.

Aortic Dissection, the doctors said, *most likely a result of trauma from the car crash.*

Walter stumbled down the street, one more crazy man muttering to himself in the cold. Cars whipped around him, a bumper halted inches from his kneecap, but all he saw was himself worrying about the car while Evie's heart ripped down the middle.

Finally home, Walter navigated his apartment like a blind drunk, bumping into table corners and stubbing toes until he made it to the backyard, into one of his craters. Walter sat in it for a while, looking like an oversized child in a play pool, scowling against the cold. The shovel was leaning against the rim of the hole. Without really thinking, Walter pushed himself to his feet and began to dig. At some point, a window opened above him. One of the neighbors - he had never spoken to any of them - called down. Walter shook his head, burrowed the nose of the shovel into the gray, silty earth once more. Snow began to fall in heavy, damp clumps, muffling the thwack, scrape, thwack of his efforts. Walter's fingers throbbed. His back ached. But he dug, well into the night.

At some point, Walter realized he needed to urinate. Only then did he notice how far down he had taken himself. Before hoisting himself out of the hole, he surveyed the yard from his new perspective. The yard seemed smaller somehow, though it should have been the other way around. He analyzed the morning glories – shriveled wraiths, now, ghosts of spring-

time, the slack chain-link fence, the warped, meaningless letters in spray paint on the concrete wall. Each seemed a scale model of itself, too small to be real. As his eyes tracked back towards the morning glories, something caught his attention.

Walter approached it slowly, afraid his eyes were playing tricks on him. But there she was, her ebony curves drinking in the hazy orange glow of the city at night. A sigh, or a gasp, escaped his lips. He forced his stiff cheeks into a smile, but stopped short of rejoicing.

He stared down at the soil around him, still studded with broken glass and bits of foil. It glinted and glittered in the flickering glow of the street light. Walter squeezed the queen tight in his palm. He had a sudden urge to toss her over the fence, to un-find her. He wanted to crawl back into his hole. He wanted to keep digging. But now there was no point. Now he saw the chess pieces for what they were - meaningless pieces of plastic, abandoned debris from someone else's life.

This would not be his garden. He would not find his queen.

Interview

Rachael Dunlap Ratliff

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

I generally give my stories a working document name, just to keep things straight, but I don't title them until I have a better idea of where I'm taking the characters. This story's working name was "Pawn," because I knew the character was going to start collecting the chess pieces. I decided on "Rituals of Lonely Men" much later, when I decided to focus more on his personal life, rather than his career or his role in the community (or lack thereof. He really isolates himself).

When did you write "Rituals of Lonely Men"?

I wrote it in the fall of 2013, and then I left it alone for a while. I wanted fresh eyes when I started editing in early 2014.

What inspired "Rituals of Lonely Men"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Actually, yes. My husband, my brother, and I moved into an apartment in Brooklyn last summer. The best feature of the apartment was the yard, which is pretty large yard by Brooklyn standards. We thought we'd be able to just rake up the bits of trash and glass, pull up some weeds, and have a gorgeous space of our own. We were wrong.

Our best theory at this point is that the space was once an alleyway. Everything in the story and more came out of that dirt, including beer cans from forty years ago. It was really interesting at first, fun even, but at some point we had to just stop sifting.

Eventually, we did succeed in getting grass to grow, and flowers. Shoes are still mandatory, though. Broken bottles work their way to the surface on a weekly basis.

Also, I do work at a bakery, though my experience there is a positive one, unlike Walter's.

What was the hardest part of writing "Rituals of Lonely Men"?

Exploring Walter's desire to hurt his wife was difficult. Domestic violence is an issue that has always troubled me. Why do people hurt the ones they love? Why do people stay with people who hurt them? It's very far from a cut-and-dried issue, and it isn't something that I have personal experience with.

Walter is very calm on the surface, but I think he has a lot of repressed anger, at the world, at himself. I don't think we ever really understand that we will lose the people we share our lives with. Of course, logically, we know that death is part of life, but I think we actively shield ourselves from understanding what we will lose and what that will do to us. It's too scary. Too upsetting.

I think Walter's sadness and anger after his mother's death catches him off guard. He isn't angry at Evie, but he almost lashes out at her. I had to make Walter's impulses seem believable, even though it made me cringe. But I had to use restraint, too. I wanted to achieve more than just shock value.

Which part of "Rituals of Lonely Men" was conceived of first?

The idea of someone sifting through decades of buried trash came first. I knew I wanted to use that image somehow. Then, one day, I was riding the bus and this gentleman got on. He had a really interesting face. I couldn't tell how old he was, or where he might be from. He seemed incredibly isolated and withdrawn, but not sad about it. Maybe it was just his nature. He sparked my imagination somehow, and I developed Walter's character from there.

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

Initially, I thought I might make a pawn the chess piece I focused on. Walter is middle-aged, living paycheck to paycheck, not very engaged in his workplace. But that concept never even made it onto paper. I was more interested in his personal life, his world, rather than his role in the world at large.

Do you primarily write fiction?

Yes, these days I'm focusing on fiction. I earned a degree in Journalism and started to pursue that after college. I really enjoyed it, but I discovered a passion for cooking around the same time (part-time jobs can be sneaky that way). I focused solely on that for several years, but I

missed writing. So, I decided to give fiction a shot. Now I'm hooked.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I don't think this is something unique to me by any means, but my mind works best when I'm on the move. Walking, running, laminating and shaping croissant dough (my day job) - all of those things are almost meditative for me. I develop my ideas very far from my computer. I carry a notepad with me, so I can jot down any images or details I think are particularly good. Eventually, once I feel like I have a narrative going in my head, I sit down and start typing.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

I almost always have two or three library books checked out at any given time. I love reading, and I try to vary what I read regularly. I'm still developing my writing style, so I can't say that my work is necessarily in the same vein as the authors I recommend, but I love reading Barbara Kingsolver, Michael Ondaatje, Ann Patchett, Zadie Smith, Gabriel García Márquez, Ernest Hemingway, Michael Chabon, Téa Obreht, and Cormac McCarthy. I could go on and on.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I recently had my first story, "Entrails," published by Blue Mesa Review, in Issue 29 (bluemesareview.org). This is my second publication.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I discovered Driftwood Press when I was browsing the Poets & Writers Database. I liked the design of the website, and of the issues themselves. I also thought it would be exciting to be a part of a growing publication, especially after I read the list of journals you recommended reading to get an idea of where this press is heading. I find it all very exciting.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

Only that I'm excited to see it in the pages of Driftwood Press and that I hope your other readers enjoy it.

Caretta Caretta

Kyler Campbell

When I was a kid, my parents and I spent every summer at Folly Beach. The three of us would make the three-hour trip from the South Carolina upstate and spend a week on the beach. We wouldn't go sightseeing in nearby Charleston or visit historical areas. We just lazed in the sun for days. The only activity we ever took up was riding bikes under the oaks and palms lining the side streets. The sound of the waves roared over the dunes, and the gull calls mixed with all the other bird noises and marked the rise and fall of each day, and every night I walked the beach looking for fiddler crabs and turtle nests. Sometimes when I think about those vacations, I think about Mom and how she'd smile at me and act like Dad didn't exist at all. I think about how after my tenth birthday, she left us for good.

Every time we went to the beach, I brought an extra bag for seashells and other collectibles. By the end of each trip, I carried two full bags of seaside memorabilia. While the other kids ran through the surf and splashed in the tide pools, I walked up and down the shore, picking up shells, skeletons, and anything smooth or pearlescent. I waded into the water as well, just to see the flash of fish cross my path or the glint of a jellyfish pulsating through the sand and the water. I'd run back to my parents, both sitting underneath a blue and white umbrella, and show them what I'd found. Dad asked about each one while Mom rubbed lotion across her bronzing skin. She'd smile down at me and ask if I was having fun. Looking back now, it's all terribly depressing. Dad would pretend to be interested in my finds, while Mom really couldn't care any less. She already knew she was leaving at that point. She was waiting for the right time to do it. But now, even with the impending loneliness in that memory, I still remember being together.

• • •

Ten years after she left us, I'm back in Folly Beach. I'm not on vacation though. I live here. I'm not rich or a local merchant or anything

glamorous. I'm a College of Charleston dropout who collects parking fares. I have an official polo shirt, an all-terrain golf cart, and the ability to write parking tickets on behalf of the city of Folly Beach. That's what I'm doing this morning. A green sedan is parked in front of a fire hydrant just a block from the beach. The hydrant is hidden behind a patch of bushes, but I know it's there and so does every other parking official. This city practically runs on parking fines. We ticket parked cars if one tire is even a quarter inch onto the pavement. The fine for parking in front of a fire hydrant is $250. I write a ticket for $125.

As I look to the saw grass marking the start of the beach, I see her. She's no older than six, maybe seven. The air is already hazy in the summer heat, even just across the road she's out of focus. The wind is carrying that salt smell over the man-made dunes, just enough of it to stick to your skin. I cross the road and when I squat down, she doesn't look up at me. Her bright green shorts are covered in sand, and her t-shirt is too big, probably a hand-me-down. She's piling sand on top of a children's book about sea turtles. The pages are made of kid-friendly cardboard, and the entire book is as thick as a large stack of quarters.

"Little girl," I say. She ignores me, so I repeat myself. The second time she looks up, puzzled as if the sand had come to life and started a conversation. She has eyes as big as a Bigeye Tuna, a *Thunnus Obesus*. Her blonde hair is scattered, and I see the large sea turtle on the cover of her book peeking out from underneath the sand.

"Where are your parents?" I ask.

"Knock, knock," she responds.

I can barely hear her over the gulls cawing to life around us. Even though I don't want to, I instinctively respond with "who's there?" I can't think of a better way to respond to a child telling a knock, knock joke, so I let it go and wipe the sweat from my neck.

"Canoe."

"Canoe who?"

"Canoe let me inside? It's cold out here." Without smiling or laughing, she goes back to burying her book.

I laugh at the joke, partly because I want to go back into the shade and partly because it's a mildly funny joke. "What's your name?" I ask. "Where are you from?" I look at her book and see that she's piling sand on top of a picture of a turtle egg. She doesn't respond to my questions, so I grab my radio and tell Herman at dispatch that I've got a lost child. Lost children are as common as sunburn at the beach. They wander off on their own, or some over-excited parent misplaces them. She seems like a wan-

derer. I give Herman a description of the girl, and when I look down she's tearing up blades of saw grass, sprinkling them over her bare feet.

"Do you like turtles?" I ask the girl.

She nods.

"Have you ever seen one?"

She shakes her head. "They bury their eggs."

"That's true," I say, relieved that she didn't tell another joke. "After it hatches, a baby sea turtle is only a few inches long. They're called hatchlings."

"How do you know that?" she asks with legitimate curiosity.

There's a long answer to that question, one that involves two years of studying marine biology, flunking out of college, an absentee mother, a mountain of student debt, and menial jobs. I decide to give her the short answer.

"Because I'm smart." I point to the picture of the egg that she's buried in the sand. "Are you trying to hatch that one?"

She looks at me incredulously. "It's not a real egg, silly."

Herman crackles through the radio, saying to bring her in, but to check boxes six through nine on the way, that he'd put her information onto the radio waves. It's not unusual for him to make me collect parking fares first. They're our first priority during the tourist season. I've got to check the parking boxes before the 10 am rush. If people can't jam their wadded up dollar bills into the slots, they won't pay. And then the city would go broke and it would be my fault, or that's how Herman would tell it. I've got to get things moving with this little girl. "What are your parents' names?" I ask.

She contemplates the question, brushes the sand off of the book, then tucks it under her tiny pink arm. "Knock, knock," she says.

• • •

I flunked out of college during my sophomore year. As my grades were falling, I started using ADHD medication to enhance my study time. The first time I used was the night before an Organic Chemistry midterm. My roommates said I'd taken too much, but I didn't care. I only cared about the chapter on entropy. It was only five pages long, but I memorized every word. What I didn't realize at the time was that the test wasn't on entropy. It was on alkenes, simple bonded structures. But I couldn't focus on anything but entropy. One paragraph described how everything in the universe is slowly falling apart. All of a sudden, I was afraid for my life because the universe and matter would eventually disband into noth-

ingness. After the panic set in, I tore apart my room, looking for a box of old photos. I dug until I found the photo of Mom and Dad and me at the beach, the last photo I had of her. I studied every color and grain of sand and each one of my crooked little teeth. I memorized the wrinkles in Dad's shorts, the stripes and folds of Mom's tankini and oversized hat, and the shadows that all three of us made as we huddled underneath an umbrella. The sun glared behind us, but we were all smiling. And as I came down from the panic and the medication, I wept.

• • •

The girl and I have been riding up and down the coastline in my city issued golf cart. In an hour it will need to be charged, so I have to find her parents before then. I'm listening to the radio chatter for missing children from other parts of the beach. There have been several this morning. Two girls, but neither who matched her description. They were dark haired; she is blonde. They were nine or ten, but she looks closer to seven. They were wearing pink or purple swimsuits. She's wearing an oversized t-shirt and green cotton shorts. The other missing children weren't described as carrying a book on sea turtles either. She hasn't put hers down.

She's on her second read through of the book. I'm moving up Arctic Avenue (a truly ironic name for a road that borders the beach) and watching tourists come to seek the "Edge of America" as it's called on the maps. The beach rats are heading back to their houses or trailers, escaping the steady mob of tourists. A man crosses the street in front of us carrying two beach chairs on his back. He stops to call to his kids, and I stick the brake to the floor, jerking us to a stop. He waves. When he turns around I flip him the bird. He ducks underneath the shade of the palm trees that are sprouting amongst the oaks and dogwoods, then heads on to the pier steps. He waddles like a hermit crab. *Pargurus Bernhardus*. Most mornings I try and remember the classifications of various sea creatures. This morning, I'm on a roll.

I turn and again ask the girl what her name is again.

"Knock, knock," she says.

"Who's there?"

"Dwayne."

"Is that your name? That's a funny name for a girl," I say, trying to make a joke of it.

"Knock, knock."

I sigh. "Who's there?"

"Dwayne."

"Dwayne who?"

"Dwayne the bathtub. I'm drowning." She chuckles to herself then turns the page in her book.

Up ahead is one of my last three parking boxes. I pull to the shoulder, straddling the asphalt and the sand. "Come with me," I say and hand her the lockbox for the cash. To my surprise, she follows me. I unlock the box, and count the number of bills for each space. Everyone is paid-up except for space number five. There's a red Jeep parked in space five, but no money in the slot. The Jeep looks familiar, but I'm not sure why. There's a College of Charleston parking sticker on the front windshield and Connecticut plates. That's how I know it. He lived two houses down from me, a dark-haired Yankee with a passion for late-night ping-pong games and redheads. They seemed to be leaving that house almost every morning. I turn to the little girl, still holding the lockbox like a poor church orphan.

"Can you write?" I ask, miming with my hand. She nods.

As we hop back into the golf cart, I laugh thinking about the girl's elementary scrawl on an official city document. The ticket has my number on it, and it's on my route. There will be reprimands. But I don't care anymore.

"Do you like Italian Ice?" I ask.

She nods.

• • •

Sometime before she left me and Dad, Mom and I used to spend afternoons together in the garden. I don't remember how long we spent outside or what we were planting, I just remember the smell of dirt and the warmth of sunshine. Whenever I come across that smell, real dirt, black and moist, I think about her. When I think about her, I can hear her voice. She used to sing in the garden. Somewhere, in some magazine I think, she'd read that plants grow better when you sing to them. I'd listen to her soprano voice climb over the small rectangle of plants while she made holes in the dirt with a spade. Over time though, the songs changed.

The first one I remember was "Keep on the Sunny Side." She'd whistle it then sing it into the summer air. But as the days got shorter and colder, the songs changed too. I remember one that had a line about someone's face turning a whiter shade of pale. I remember it because the melody was the saddest I'd ever heard. She'd pull weeds from the dirt, grabbing the stalk at the base, and hum the tune between the lyrics, haphazardly flinging dirt on my hands and arms, burying them in the topsoil.

One time I asked her to teach me the song so I could sing along with her.

She smiled and said, "Mommy likes to sing alone, sweetie."

Change has always bothered me. You can't see it or mark it in time, but it's irreversible, like smoke going up a chimney and out into the wider world. Mom started changing that year, the year I was ten. She changed without us, me and Dad. She went up the chimney alone and left us to sit and wait, to fend for ourselves. And now whenever I smell rich dark soil I think about that song and about Mom, the solo singer.

• • •

We're just a block from the Italian Ice stand now. The girl is scraping her feet back and forth across the floorboard of the golf cart through the fine layer of sand, making that scratching sound. The sand is everywhere here. You come to deal with sand being in your bed, your carpet, even the fridge. After a while, most people either move farther inland or they just deal with it. I don't notice it anymore.

I glance over at her to see a two page spread on the loggerhead turtle, *Caretta Caretta*. Her book doesn't say that, but I know the genus classification. I figure that she must be looking for turtles out here. That must be why she wandered from her parents. It's rare that any would nest this far north. The females come to shore to lay eggs and leave the young ones to fend for themselves. I don't tell the girl that. I don't tell her that *Caretta Caretta* is an endangered species, prized for its meat and eggs in places like Mexico. I don't tell her that she's at the wrong beach for turtles. Here on Folly Beach, there are no recorded turtle nests. Mostly they're all on Isle of Palms or Sullivan's Island. Even so, there are fewer and fewer nests every year. I don't tell her that they're becoming a rarity. I do tell her the Latin name for Loggerheads and that they're South Carolina's state reptile.

"*Caretta, Caretta.*" She repeats the name carefully, as if trying to memorize each small movement of the tongue. She pauses for a moment. "Why do the mommas leave?" she asks.

"Nature tells them to."

"I don't think they would make good mothers anyway," she says in a matter of fact tone.

Without meaning to, I say. "My mother would've made a great sea turtle."

She doesn't acknowledge my comment. She's staring at a bright pink house. The paint is peeling off and the windows have a fine layer of film on them from the salt in the air.

"What's this one?" she asks, pointing to another picture.

"Leatherback turtle." She blinks at me, waiting for something else. "*Dermochelys coriacea*," I say. I explain the difference between the two turtles, the Leatherback and the Loggerhead, how they have different types of shells. Leatherback turtles have softer shells, like hard leather, whereas Loggerheads have a more traditional shell density. She is riveted, and for the first time I have her full attention. I should ask about her parents, but, for some reason, it doesn't seem like the right thing to ask. Plus, I've heard my fair share of knock, knock jokes.

She pauses, contemplating the turtles, I think. Then, she surprises me.

"My mom would make a good turtle too," she says.

For a moment, I'm not sure how to proceed.

"Why is that?" I ask.

"I don't get to see her in real life anymore." She stares at the picture of the turtle. In the picture, the hatchling is sliding into the surf, leaving a definite trench in the sand behind it. I think about putting my hand on her shoulder or telling her that it's going to be okay, but I can't because I don't know for sure. I don't know that she'll turn out okay or that she won't end up just like her mom or mine, our great vanishing sea turtle mothers.

I catch a whiff of soil on the wind, some enterprising homeowner who wants to grow the biggest hedges probably. But it takes me back. I think about Mom, and suddenly I hate her. I've tried my best over the years to not think about her, but I haven't been very consistent. The feeling fills me up, and I hate her for everything that's happened to me, things she has no idea about. I hate her for every terrible decision I've made and every equally terrible result. I hate her for leaving this little girl by herself on the beach, in the sun and the heat, to fend for herself with nothing but oversized clothes and a book of sea turtles. I hate her because through all my hate, I'm still content with everything that's happened to me.

The girl reaches the end of her book, then flips the pages back over to start again.

• • •

I make good on my promise of Italian Ice. I order cherry, and she requests a rainbow concoction of grape, strawberry, pineapple, blueberry, orange, and watermelon. The cart girl doesn't do a good job of the stripes, so her ice looks brown. I'm moving through mine quicker than I should. The sun is beating down on us now, and I'm sweating more than normal.

"How many *Caretta Carrettas* are there?" she asks, putting special emphasis on the "t" sound.

"They're endangered. There's less than there should be," I say.

"When the hatchlings are born, where is the daddy turtle?"

I'm impressed by her memory of the word "hatchling." I'm also not sure how to answer that question. Once the male turtle mounts the female, he's beaten up by the other males, sometimes killed. The answer to her question is probably that the daddy turtle is off healing up for his next lay. But I can't tell her that. I can't tell her that nature is cruel and stacked against creatures like her.

"He's off waiting for them. He wants the hatchlings to make it to the water, and then they swim off into the ocean together as a family."

She looks at me, and I know that she knows that I'm lying. But she has more grace than most people, so she says, "Knock, knock."

"Who's there?"

"I am."

For a moment, I think I may finally get this little girl's name, that she'll be open and honest with me, so I say, "I am who?"

"Did you forget who you are?" she says and then she laughs at her own joke the way that children do, and I laugh too. We're both laughing while the Italian ice girl scrolls through her phone. We laugh as the tourist families in their hats and sunscreen and rubber flip-flops stride by in the heat of the day. We laugh, and I forget that this girl has a family somewhere out there looking for her, maybe even worried about her.

We walk across the road to the beach. She wants to see where the turtles cross the sand on their way to the water. We're sitting near one of the concrete barricades that lend stability to the sand and serves as a home for graffiti messages. Ours reads "Class of '08."

The girl is smiling, watching the waves roll and break on the bronze sand. Other supervised children are wading in the tide pools just ten feet from the surf, but she doesn't seem jealous, only content to watch the water from a distance.

"Turtles lay their eggs this far back?" she asks.

"Sometimes," I say, although it's true. We're nearly twenty yards from the water. Seagulls are landing and taking off, searching for stray picnic pieces and brave hermit crabs. I think about thirty or so hatchlings, all boiling out of the sand at once. They'll surface in the dead of night, start from the beach grass, and make their way toward the moonlight, slowly flapping their way to the water. I suppose the journey makes them stronger, but nature has never been that kind or poetic.

As I'm daydreaming, the girl sets her ice cone down and walks toward the water. She's dragging her feet, leaving small trenches in the sand and

broken shells. The sun is falling behind us and casts her shadow long and skinny, a needle of a girl shuffling to the waves. The radio on my belt crackles and Herman says he thinks he's found the girl's father, that he described her down to the shorts and turtle book. I unclip the radio and set it in the sand.

I stand so I can see the girl across the twenty or so yards of shoreline. The tourists slowly pack it all in and head for their cars. Her green shorts are visible, and she's dangling that turtle book by one hand. My radio is still squawking, Harold looking for a response. I tell him we're on our way back, then set it in the sand. Soon I'll grab her by the hand and lead her back to her dad. But for now, I'm watching those small trenches she made, as the girl makes her way into the rising surf.

Interview

Kyler Campbell

Which part of "Caretta Caretta" was conceived of first?

I've always been fascinated by what people do for a living. My wife and I were on Folly Beach last year, and I watched a young man in his twenties drive from parking lot to parking lot emptying the metal parking boxes. I thought, *I bet he finds the craziest things in those boxes*. I carried that image for a few months, just sitting on it while it gestated. The first part of the story I actually wrote was that same image, a young man checking a parking box on the beach. As I finished the first few pages, I had another thought. *What's a crazier thing to find at one of those boxes than a little girl*?

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

The original draft of "Caretta Caretta" focused a lot more on the narrator's drug habits and his struggle with addiction. The more I read that draft (and the more comments I received on it), I started to realize that the story wasn't, at its core at least, about the narrator's habits and struggles, but about his past and the relationship he develops with the little girl. The heavy focus on addiction really drowned out the heart of the story, two people looking for some missing piece in their lives.

These two characters begin to form the relationship that both of them are missing. You expertly develop this while pulling in the parallel of the turtles. Tell us about the process of weaving these multiple facets together.

I had already written some of the interaction between the narrator and the little girl, but it was missing that thematic thread to tie it all together. One night, my wife and I stumbled on a PBS documentary about Loggerhead nests on the coast of South Carolina. After they hatch, the hatchlings (almost literally) boil out of the sand in the dead of night, climbing all over each other to break the surface of the sand, and use the light of the moon

to find the water. Even at night, the rate of survival is very low. As we watched these two-inch long turtles swipe their way into the surf, I thought, *where are the parents? Why would they leave their own offspring to die like that?* And for a bit, I really hated turtle dads and moms. But as the hatchlings crawl across the sand, they start to follow the tracks of their siblings who went ahead of them, eventually leading each other to safety. By the end of the documentary, I had the thematic thread I was looking for.

Do you primarily write fiction?

I do now. In college, I started writing poetry during my senior year. I published two short poems before graduation and wrote several more before I eventually burned out. I started writing fiction as a way to deal with some personal issues and developed a passion for storytelling. I applied to earn my MFA at Converse College and finished almost two years ago.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Setting is essential in everything I write. Someone much smarter than me once said that every setting should be as essential to the story as the characters. That's typically where I start. I try to make sure that the story is unique to the locale in which it's set and then go from there. For "Caretta Caretta" I was struck with the beauty of Folly Beach and the people who live there. Once I was set on the summer beach season, I started playing with characters and let them react to not just the environment, but the history and culture of the place as well.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

I've taken a lot of cues from some great short story writers such as Marlin Barton, Ron Rash, Leslie Pietrzyk, Raymond Carver, Rick Bass and a few others. I have a huge crush on Flannery O'Connor right now as well.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I recently published a story called "Cutting the Trap Lines" in *Hawaii Pacific Review* and another titled "Gator Bait" in *Cutthroat: A Journal of the Arts*. Both of those are available online.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

Recently, I've been attracted to journals who publish free online content, such as *Driftwood*. I like the idea of making stories open and accessible, of sharing experience without limitations. While some online magazines are essentially blogs, sites like *Driftwood* seem to take pride in design and aesthetic value. It's nice to see your work featured in such a beautiful format.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

After almost a year of writing and editing, I'm just excited to see that it finally has a home.

Monument

Eli McCormick

Our days boiled down to bricks. They crowded around, big red piles rising higher than us three little girls. Ivy a tiny thing of eight, Willow, twelve, and me two years older spending all our time building. We had us a system now. I passed bricks on up to Willow. She passed up to Ivy, who spread mortar thick like butter on bread. If I dropped a brick, Mama'd holler down from the porch, "Coriander, you clumsy girl."

The creak of her rocker and clack of bricks was what we heard all day. Sometimes the creak became a snore, but after Willow ran off and got a whupping, we learned to just keep working. Mama slept with one eye open. Swear to God. Sunup to sundown we built. Before dinner, Mama inspected our work, though she didn't know any more about masonry than we did. But even if it weren't up to snuff, she still fed us, had to keep us strong so we could keep building.

Once Ivy asked if God was mad that we was trying to build up to heaven like the story in the Bible. Mama looked like she was gonna cry or shout or maybe even smack Ivy, but all she did was pat her head. Maybe 'cause Ivy looked so much like Rowan: big eyes, green as leaves in spring, a tiny nose, brown hair, curly and unruly. Willow and I took after Mama: flat face, gray eyes, straight brittle black hair that dried out in the sun.

Willow wasn't scared of Mama. Once she said that Mama should build the Goddamn thing herself. She got two smacks, one for backtalk, one for taking the Lord's name in vain.

"Rowan would've never acted out like that," Mama said.

***

Rowan made me a pole, taught me how to fish, how to tie the line, how to cast it just right. How to wait. He was just a plaything to Ivy and Willow, giving horsey, piggyback rides.

We never talked to Mama or each other about our brother.

At night though, when the three of us kicked against each other in the same bed, Ivy would ask about Papa. Where he'd gone, why he left us,

and if he's ever coming back.

I used to ask Rowan the same questions. His answer was always the same. It was the same thing I told Ivy, that he had important things to do, that he'd come back when he was ready. Ivy always wanted to hear what I remember of Papa: his bristly mustache, thick strong arms, soft voice. He used to always sing me to sleep.

Ivy never asked about Rowan, she knew he wasn't coming back; Mama told us he went to a better place.

And Willow always whispered, "Anyplace is better than here."

"Hush up," I told her once. "You got a roof over your head, don't you?"

Willow turned away, didn't talk to me for a day.

Our hair got long, wild as weeds. The underneaths of our fingernails were always red from brick dust. Mud stained the pinks and periwinkles of our dresses.

It grew, our tower. We had to borrow ladders. We got slower. But I was beginning to feel proud. Some nights, when I couldn't sleep, I'd look out the window, see what we were building swallowed by moonlight, and think it was a castle. We weren't building up to God, just building up till eventually we could look down and everything below would be far-off and little.

***

One day the schoolteacher, Miss Ross, came by. We hadn't been in school for months, ever since we started building. She was the tallest woman I'd ever seen, taller even than most men in town, tall almost as the ladder I was standing on.

"Hi, Coriander," she said. From up above I could see loose strands of her hair blowing in the wind. "You've been busy."

Before she could say anything else, Mama had come down the porch. "You leave my girls alone."

"Now Mrs. Finch," Miss Ross said, "I don't want to cause any fuss, there was just an awful lot of talk in town, and I had to see for myself."

"See for yourself?" Mama snorted. "If you wanted to see someone crazy you needn't look far past your own kin. Your cousin's the one you should be watching. My girls are safe here, I ain't lettin' them leave."

***

Miss Ross's visit must've stuck something in Mama, because that night, after we were sleeping, she woke us up and told us we had to tear it down and start over. Said Rowan had come to her and told her it wasn't looking right.

We tried all night and into morning to smash the tower, banging away with hammers. Eventually Mama used some of the money she kept hid and hired men from the mill to break it down. It took them a day and a half.

We spent that day at the creek. I fished, but Ivy kept wading in, scaring the fish away.

Willow said, "Cor, we should run off." I ignored her, but she kept saying, "We should run off; we should go away."

"Shut up," I hissed.

It was quiet there, only the caw of crows and the trickle of the creek, but I still thought somehow Mama could hear us. I couldn't leave 'cause I had a responsibility that Willow wouldn't ever understand.

***

When we got back, it was broke, all dust and rubble. Nothing to show for all our work.

Mama made a honey cake with cherries inside; Rowan's favorite. It was the biggest I'd ever seen, sweet, delicious, the cherries popping with juice. Each time I finished a piece, Mama shoved another towards me. Turns out it was Rowan's birthday, and only Mama'd remembered. That's why she made the cake. She started humming to herself, then she started crying. Ivy went to hug her, but Mama brushed her off, told us to keep eating.

The next day we started a new tower.

***

Rowan had been dead for a year and a half. How he died might seem a little strange, but around here, it wasn't too out of the ordinary. That doesn't mean we weren't choked up on it. He'd gone down to Brooke's General Store to pick up some groceries for Mama. The end of February; a cold and mean winter just bottoming out. No one can know how it was and why he got down that ravine ten miles from town. He was missing three days; the crows found him first. Mama looked away, but I just couldn't. It was the last time I'd see him, and even though his face was scratched, his eyes pecked away, he was still my brother. I didn't cry though, don't know why, maybe it was too cold. I wished I would've. The ground was frozen, so we cremated him. Put the ashes in a little box that Mama kept beside her bedside table. In spring we had a funeral, put up a headstone and everything. But nothing in the ground. Mama kept him beside her bed, that little box.

Not long after, a crinkly faced man came with bricks. He taught us a little, how to spread the mortar, how to lay the bricks, how they had to be

flush, one against the other. Mama didn't say why we had to do this. It didn't make much sense to us; we were just kids.

***

The tower never was tall enough. Mama kept telling us, make it bigger; that's what Rowan wanted. He kept coming to her. When he ever came to me in my dreams, he looked the same he did the day we found him, crow-scratched and ugly. Didn't say nothing at all.

We ran out of brick, so Mama went away to see if she could rustle up more. She told us to wait in the meadow, she'd come get us when she got back. Wasn't too far from home, and the creek wound past it, so I could fish while Willow watched Ivy. I cast my line in, let the current drag it along. Ivy wanted to go play on the playground in town. But people'd begun to notice. Anytime we went to town, there was whispers that Mama was evil, or possessed.

Willow couldn't handle much more, she'd never been good at fishing, was never good at waiting.

"Wait it out. Mama's gonna come to her senses, and things'll go back to the way they were," I told her.

"That ain't ever gonna happen, Cor," she said. Willow was a skinny thing, but unafraid. She'd fight a bear if she had to. "Papa's never coming back, and Rowan ain't either. We gotta go."

I shook my head, "The time ain't right."

We let that sit, simmering between us. It got real quiet, just the creek trickling and breeze blowing by. Took us a second, then I realized Ivy had gone.

Our house was in the foothills around Green Springs. Ivy was scared of the forests that crawled up the mountainsides, so we knew she'd head to town. That didn't make me worry less. Rowan'd gone to town too, and he never came back. We ran down the road.

I relaxed when I recognized Ivy's laugh. It was late afternoon, children had been let out of school. They were swarming around the playground like ants.

"Ivy, we got to go home," I shouted. She waved at me, just another little girl in a crowd of kids scrambling, running, twittering like a nest of baby birds. I thought for a second I should just let her play, that it wasn't always going to be this way for her.

She grabbed my hand, started pulling me toward the slide. "C'mon, Cor."

"I'm not going on the slide," I said. I almost said damned, but I tried not to swear around Ivy. "We have to go."

She looked at me with those eyes, Papa's eyes, Rowan's eyes. So I waved her off, let her play. Near the bench I sat on, magpies argued. Mountains, tall and strong, surrounded us, low clouds hanging over them, throwing their shadows on the valley floor.

"Your Mama back yet?" a voice above me asked. It was Miss Ross.

I shook my head. A big fat magpie told the others to leave him alone.

"I'm worried about you girls. Every time I try to talk to your mother, she won't listen to me." When I didn't say anything, she carried on. "You need to come back to school."

She patted my shoulder and left. I wasn't gonna tell Mama none of that. I knew she wouldn't have it.

Willow hollered, "Don't be picking on her!" Ivy was standing behind her, a big splotch of mud cross the front of her dress.

"Mama said we weren't supposed to talk to you," said a fresh girl with red hair and freckles. "She said your Mama's gone cuckoo, and there's demons in your house." The girl whispered, "She said you're dirty. You ain't took a bath since your brother died."

Willow would have fought them all. But I pulled her and Ivy away. Shook Willow's wrist until the rock she held clenched in her hand fell to the dirt.

We waited for Mama back at the meadow. It was getting near dark. The grass glowed golden. Long after the moon rose and was shining blue through the trees, and the nightbirds was singing, Mama still hadn't come.

"Let's go," I told them.

"Mama told us to stay," Ivy said through a yawn.

Willow started walking home. I picked up Ivy, who was soon sleeping and slobbering on my shoulder. There wasn't much to eat in the house. The fish hadn't been biting that day. I fed Ivy some bread and jam; Willow refused to eat. A wind blustered, setting the branches to scraping against the roof. It kept me awake. If we'd had any bricks left, I might've just gone out and built.

The stairs creaked. Willow snuck down, a knapsack slung over her bony shoulders. She crept to the door, found a shovel, and started off down the road. I followed her to the meadow we'd been fishing at. She started digging. Must've seen me though, because she waited till I was there.

"Don't try and stop me," she said. Her eyebrows scrunched, fierce and determined.

Once she had a big enough hole, she reached in the pack, pulled out the box that Mama kept by her bedside, the one that was full of Rowan.

"It ain't right," she said, putting the box in. "He should be in the ground." She was only twelve. What was she supposed to know. She couldn't know how much Mama's heart had been broken.

She covered the box, shouldered the sack and walked away.

"This place is cursed, and it ain't ever gonna change. If you want, you can come with me," she said.

"Just wait a little longer," I said.

Willow didn't even look back.

***

Mama returned the next afternoon. It was a bleary day, the sky smudged gray with clouds. An old man drove up pulling more bricks. I won't lie; when I saw those bricks, my heart leapt a little. I didn't realize how used to it I'd gotten, how much I needed to feel the rough bricks and the sticky mortar in my hands. Mama sat next to the driver. Beside her was Willow, her face cinched up tight.

Mama hugged us tight, smooshing me and Ivy up against her. "Rowan came to me," she said. "He doesn't just want a tower. He wants walls, all around the house. That's what will keep us safe. " She squeezed us extra hard when she said that last part.

It wasn't until nightfall that Mama saw the box was missing.

"Where is it?" She shook my shoulders.

The candle she held made her face orange, and up close I could see, for the first time, just how old she was, how her hair was gray, how her eyes never seemed to quite open all the way, how tired she must've been. Ivy started crying. Mama told her to hush up. Willow didn't say nothing.

So I just said, "I don't know, Mama. You always tell us not to go in there."

She started crying, and that got Ivy going again.

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That next day we started on the wall; it was easier than the tower. Willow wasn't much help. She sulked, made a mess of things. The rocker wasn't creaking either, Mama'd taken to bed, sick. Maybe I should've told the truth, dug up the box and brought it back. Took the blame myself. Mama said she didn't want no doctor to come; when the wall was built, she'd get better.

I was so wrapped up in working that I didn't hear Miss Ross until she tapped me on the shoulder.

"Coriander, where's your mother?"

I pointed to the house, went back to laying brick. I thought about how the wall would look when we were done. Spread out long, curving over

the hill ridge, lines of red tall as a man. We'd build a tower on each corner, one for each of us: Ivy, Willow, Rowan and me. And the house would be in the middle. Like a castle. And people couldn't leave without our say so.

Miss Ross rushed out of the house, long steps like three of mine. A while later she came back with the doctor and the sheriff. Heard some shouting from upstairs, some crying. Mama came down on a stretcher. She looked real skinny. Her hair had grown long, near down to her waist.

"Tell them, Cor," she said as they carried her past. "Tell them it's what Rowan wants."

The sheriff leaned down to talk to us. He wore cowboy boots, chewed tobacco, had a nice mustache.

"Your mama's real sick," he said, "and you girls are gonna go stay with Mrs. O'Brien a little while. She's a real nice lady. She'll take good care of you."

That night I had a bath for the first time in as long as I could remember. The water was hot. I poured some over my head, let it run off, through my hair, over my eyes. The warm water felt good against my skin, but I couldn't shake the feeling that it was wrong. Us being here and not at home. We'd just barely gotten started. There was so much more to do.

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Mama stayed in the hospital, and we went back to school. Sometimes we'd visit her. She'd gotten even skinnier, 'cause she wasn't eating. When she did talk to us, she just said we had to finish. Other times she just moaned, "I couldn't make him stay. Everyone always leaves me."

One day I snuck away from school. I wasn't worried about anyone catching me. It was getting to be fall, leaves were browning. The winds came down through the canyons turning the creek icy to the touch. I couldn't stop thinking about Mama at the hospital, Rowan's eyes poked out, Papa off somewhere doing his important work. It was like all of them were waiting on me to do something.

"I won't tell," Willow said when she saw me sneaking off.

I didn't answer her, and she called out, "You'll come back, won't you?"

Our tower hunched in the shadow of the mountain. What little we had built of the wall stuck out the side like a thorn, piles of bricks beside it. I mixed some cement, knelt down and began building. The sky had gone gray. A sheet of clouds drawn straight across the blue. There was no wind, no breeze, the world was still and quiet like it was just holding its breath. Above, a hawk swung in slow circles, me and it, the only living things in sight, lonesome creatures with work to do.

Interview

Eli McCormick

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

The title for this one came pretty easily, very early in the writing process. It felt like the title that best fit with the themes I was working with as well as the plot of the story, the monument of the tower standing as an eternal reminder of loss. The title stuck throughout the many drafts, and I never really considered anything else strongly.

When did you write "Monument"?

I wrote Monument during the winter and spring of 2014, so it's a pretty new story.

What was the hardest part of writing "Monument"?

The hardest part was crafting authentic voices for the characters, especially since I was writing both women and children. Shaping a plot also proved difficult, getting the right balance between something slow and atmospheric but also with enough of a pulse to keep people reading.

Which part of "Monument" was conceived of first (e.g. premise, theme, ending, beginning, character, etc)?

The premise came first, this idea of these girls building a tower. Then the rest of the story flowed out from that central image.

Do you primarily write fiction?

Yes, though I've dabbled in poetry and nonfiction.

Why did you decide to use dialects? Dialects are very easy to over-

use or underuse; was it difficult to find a good balance?

Part of the decision to use dialects stems from the choice to write in first person from Coriander's perspective. The voice flowed from that pretty naturally, and the dialect was part of that. I think the most important factor (at least for this story) was consistency in the way the dialect was used.

How did you come up with the children's names?

They had a musical quality I liked. I think often names are interpreted as defining the characters who have them, rather than the parents who gave the names. I think in some ways the names of the children reflect on the mother as a character, as being someone who was always a bit eccentric.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

Some favorites include Borges, Calvino, Kundera, Ishugiro, Atwood, and O'Connor. Everyone should read Moby Dick and The Brothers Karamazov. People who enjoyed this story might like The Burning Plain by Juan Rulfo, Train Dreams by Denis Johnson and Close Range by Anne Proulx

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

This is my first publication.

Judy Dives

Amy Fant

The day Judy told her husband she was taking up diving, he shook his head and drove off to work. They had been standing in the driveway of their colonial home, Judy's bathrobe haphazardly bunched around her waist.

"Driving?" he had asked.

"Diving." The car starting was loud. "Scuba diving," she said louder. The third time she said it, she yelled and reached out to pop the hood of his car with her palm.

Her husband's mouth turned down. "That seems like a colossal—"

"Don't—don't say it," she stopped him, raising her hand. He rolled up the window.

Judy had always been a planner. She had collected 64 of the 80 pieces of the Mikasa Parchment Fine China set, and asked her husband months in advance to build her a new China cabinet in anticipation. For his birthday, she had planned an entire weekend in the Adirondacks down to the very minute of driving the scenic byways, wine tastings and visiting the Town of Chester Museum of Local History. It was on that trip that Judy first noticed her husband rolling his eyes—little flashes of extra white below the dark blue curves.

The eye rolling became more and more frequent: once as she handed him *Growers Almanac* on the first day of Spring, chirping, "Ready to go?," eight page corners already turned down with selections of Pacific Pearl onions, Early Wonder tall top beets, Santo cilantro and the like; once when she served him his favorite spaghetti for their weekly "Spaghetti Sundays;" and twice he rolled his eyes when she poured Total into her

cereal bowl one Wednesday morning as she offered to pour his. All she had said was, "It's Total day, dear." There was one time she could have sworn she heard him roll his eyes through the phone when she called him at the usual 2:30 time on a Tuesday afternoon, buckling her seatbelt. She was going grocery shopping and called to check again—just one more time, just to be safe—that there wasn't anything else that he needed her to pick up.

It was a Friday morning when she finally said something. She had laid out his pressed suit pants and his cobalt blue button down shirt on the bed. And when he walked into the kitchen in his off-white sweater she asked, "What's this?" her voice slightly pausing after the word "what."

"What's what?" He reached for a coffee mug.

"Didn't you see your blue shirt—I laid it on the bed?" She took the coffee mug from his hand and replaced it with another one.

"I saw it." He wouldn't look at her. He put the coffee mug on the counter and reached for another. "I wanted to wear a sweater."

She pouted. She took the new mug from him. "Hm. But Friday is the blue shirt. You always—" Her voice trailed off. She gently placed her hand on his arm. "Is there something wrong? Does it need to be ironed again? Should I—"

And there it was.

"Why do you do that?" She stammered, the five words quickly piling up on themselves.

"What?"

"That—that eye roll."

"Judy, I'm not rolling my eyes, I'm just." He stopped, finally looked at her. "Why do you have to be so—? Stop being so, so—predictable." Her chin thrust forward with the last word, and he threw the coffee mug into the sink. "Honestly, Judy."

And so Judy decided to be unpredictable. She Googled it: "How to be unpredictable." She drove sixty miles to meet a woman she found on Craigslist. The ad had read, "Women WITHOUT kids. Are there any out there? Need a friend, not a mommy's day out." They met for coffee, and

Judy laughed recklessly at the woman's description of her husband and his motorcycle. "All you need are good girlfriends," she said as she hugged her new friend before leaving. On her way home, she picked up take out (for one) from the Chinese restaurant on the bad side of town. She went through the car wash—twice. She bought a puppy.

Her husband didn't come home. The next day, she phoned the diving company. She bought a wetsuit and ordered a book from Amazon: The Complete Diver: The History, Science and Practice of Scuba Diving. She bought neoprene socks and an LED diving light with gloves. She drove from her house to the marina three times to track how long it would take her so she wouldn't be late on her first day. She took a bath and timed holding her breath under the water to see how long she could go without oxygen—just in case.

These are the things that Judy thought about while under the bath water: the puppy's paws' incredible capacity for soaking up water and leaving it printed on the hallway rug, her husband's balding head, barely escaping a coral reef, the amount of oregano in the pantry.

When her husband didn't return again, Judy talked herself out of calling his cell or driving by his office. "Be unpredictable, Judy," she told herself. "Be *Unpredictable Judy*." She smiled at the name.

Four days into her new life, Judy's husband returned. He slept in the guest room and finished the Total. They didn't speak over breakfast, and Judy didn't offer to launder his four-day-old clothes. After following him to his car and watching him drive off, Judy casually tried on her new scuba suit. It flattened her tummy in such a way that she turned around three times in front of the mirror. "Colossal waste," she mumbled, wetting her hair so she could get the full effect. "Not one bit."

That afternoon, she drove to her first lesson. Before she left, she threw her husband's clothes in the wash and grabbed her grocery list. She would stop by the store after diving.

The water was cold. Cold like sharp triangles jutting into every new fabulous angle of her scuba-suit-tightened body. She stayed close to the shore and examined the dock's underwater legs with precision. Judy

thought about the leather seats in her car and how damp they would get. She thought about the grocery trip that afternoon and how her hair would still be dripping as she made her way down the pasta aisle. *We need Windex*—she made a mental note. She thought about heart conditions and how she'd read it wasn't smart to submerge yourself into such drastic temperatures at her age. She thought about her husband's balding head.

That was the first and last day of her scuba life. Twenty-four solid minutes of cold, unpredictable diving. On her way to the grocery store, she phoned her husband. She wanted him to call, she wanted him to ask what she'd been up to, where his clothes were for the rest of the week, if she had really gone diving.

"Hi Judy, what's up?" He sounded the same.

"Just coming from diving."

"Oh?" She could hear him typing.

"Yes, it was wonderful. So many beautiful fish. Did you know we had so many different types around here? You just wouldn't believe."

"Wow."

"Yes, and I even saw a shark. I mean, I dove with a shark. The instructor said I shouldn't. But, you know me."

She heard him stop typing.

"Judy."

"It's crazy, I know," she said. "Anyway, I'm just stopping by the grocery store on my way home." She glanced at the clock. 2:59. "Need anything?"

He didn't say anything. She coughed slightly. "Hun?"

She tried and she tried and she tried.

He responded, finally. "We're out of Total," he said. "So, if you don't mind."

Interview

Amy Fant

When did you write "Judy Dives"?

I wrote "Judy Dives" in March of this year.

What was the hardest part of writing "Judy Dives"?

The dialogue. I've primarily written poetry, so writing natural dialogue in fiction doesn't come easy to me. I had a hard time making sure I was writing what a typical conversation might actually sound like between Judy and her husband—people who've been married for years—in the kitchen, on the phone, etc.

Which part of "Judy Dives" was conceived of first?

I began with the character of Judy. Actually, I began with the idea of a person practicing for diving or scuba lessons by holding their breath under bath water. I remember doing that as a kid—a kind of test of my endurance—and I thought there was something so endearing about a grown woman preparing for her first diving lesson like that because it's the only suitable way she can think of. The rest of the story came when I considered how this person might plan for everything else in their life—even planning for how to come across as spontaneous to a person who has known them as anything but.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Generally, when writing fiction, I tend to write as much of the story as possible in one sitting only because I know that if I don't get a good start on it, I tend to lose interest. Next, and I'll be generous to myself and call

this a "process," I let the piece sit for a little while, usually a couple of weeks, before I come back to it to write more or revise. I find that the story is still rolling around in my head even when it's sitting, and I'll think of something a character might say or a mannerism they have (hardly ever the direction for a story, unfortunately), even as I'm working on other things. Those little things make me excited to get back to the story.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

You can find my work online and in print in The Cumberland River Review, Weave Magazine, Rock & Sling, Squalorly, and others.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The recommended publication list was the first good sign. When I saw the issue covers, I was sold.

Little Fingers

Gabriel Valjan

In the world made perfect for us there was only one sound that frightened Mother more than any other and that was the sound of a harmonica that imitated the chug-chug of a train, the huff and puff of steam heard in the street. It was the oddest of noises because there were no tracks into the forest, no wooden ties or steel rails, although Mother said that we had been ferried here aboard a train she called Destino. I don't remember the trip and neither does my brother, and our thoughts move like the second-hand of two watches, always in time, on time.

In our world we had blue skies, white clouds like feathers, and breezes scented with pine and sap. When autumn raged, the trees were a riot of colors, and in winter, the snow would come and quiet the earth until the secrets of spring were ready to be told into the sleepy days of summer.

The harmonica we heard always arrived after breakfast and Mother would sit at our table, kitchen cloth tight in her hand. My brother and I waited for the sounds, the slow one-two, the soft *choo choo*, and then the increased tempo of gasps of steam from coal in the tender. Mother closed her eyes when the music passed through our lane, and she released her eyes without a sigh. It always let out a long sharp whistle that signaled its arrival. My brother and I had wagered marbles once that Destino had regular stops in our sector because every morning we heard the harmonica.

Father worked at the factory. His face betrayed a need for a holiday, but he never complained. No matter how often he washed his hands, no matter how hard he scrubbed them, there was always some grease and grime under his fingernails. He read us fairy tales every night, about magical creatures such as elf kings, fairies, exiled princesses, trolls and wizards, wise men and crones. When we asked, he said that he was doing his part and that we were doing our part in hiding from the wicked princes of the world. Almost all the stories he chose from the book were in a forest like our own and almost always he read them as if he were trying to speak to

us through a fog. Though we did have a Bible in our house, neither he nor Mother ever reached for it to read to us, so my brother and I remained pagans in the woods.

On a morning not unlike any other, we had breakfast without Father. Mother sat down and waited. The harmonica's rhythm seemed as crisp as the air outside. It chugged and chugged with vigor into the world, through the forest, and its wheels we imagined turned hard and the whirrs of whistles started out small and louder until it reached its target. Mother's eyes tightened to slits and her hand trembled like a lily in a field of red poppies. *Choo choo.* Release. The harmonica let out a slow, sad whistle. There were footsteps and then a single knock on our door.

Mother looked at us. She set down her red cloth, ironed it flat with one sweep of her hand. The expression on her face changed. She had accepted the sound as we did the alphabet. She rose and answered the visitor.

A man entered, a tall man who smiled at us. If he had said something to us, we did not hear it because the black leather of his boots shone with a dazzle, the dark winter coat shimmered like black velvet, and the white skull and bones on his hat had frightened us. We knew he had said something, but it was in a language that we did not know. Mother knew some of the man's language, but understood it poorly at best, but she accepted whatever it was that came out of his thin lips. He handed her a piece of paper and said one word, "Vertrag."

We had thought it rude, so odd, that he had handed her this piece of paper without taking off his gloves. The dark man approached us. The harmonica glistened like a shard of steel against the leather of his gloved hand. He leaned down and spoke to us now. This time we understood, for he understood our language, though it sounded strange with his accent.

"Ready to do your part, boys?"

My brother and I nodded. He stood erect, proud. "Excellent then." He urged us to the door. "We need all the help we can get during the Emergency."

My brother and I had shared our thoughts without speaking. Though we were identical twins, though we felt the same things, though we appeared alike to everyone, we had our differences: he spoke and I observed.

"What is it that we can do?" he asked the man.

"Hush yourself," Mother said.

He held up his hand in the air and smiled a perverse smile. "I'll answer

him." We had our backs to the door. "Give me your hand," he said. My brother gave him his hand.

The man considered my brother's hand for a long time before he applied a slow squeeze. I could feel the man's strength crush the fingers of my right hand. My brother could smell him. I could smell him. Like burning peppermint. His eyes were gray, his teeth so perfect, like white squares; and his incisors, pointed, like those of the wolves in Father's tales. He grinned before he spoke.

"The factory needs small hands. Little fingers, to be precise."

The glove released him and my brother snatched his hand back. I could sense the surge of our blood rush to the numb areas. It hurt. I watched in awe. My brother stared back at him and asked, "Why?"

"Little fingers can find and fix things that big fingers cannot." The man held up his black hand as an exhibit. "You will help the Director meet his objectives. Little fingers can do great things."

I knew what my brother was thinking. He wanted to ask the man what would happen when our little fingers became bigger, but I stepped on his foot. The tall man saw it, found it rather amusing and said to my sibling, "Listen to your brother and you'll do just fine."

The factory was on a hill. One square block of a building faced the world from behind gates, and behind that building was another building, where we would stay and behind that, two towers that billowed white smoke all day and all night. I imagined that if a bird flew overhead and looked down it would see a mouth, a mask, and two horns. I never did see any bird fly overhead, though, but I did see the blue sky and before we walked through the gates I smelled pine needles and another odor, which I could not place, something stronger than sap. The clouds were still white as feathers in flight, but away, always away.

We went up together to the Administrator's desk. He had no name, only a title. *Verwalter*. This gnome of a man sat behind a thick slab of wood. He knew our names, our dates of birth, and where we lived. There were other boys like my brother and I. We were all twins and all fair and blue-eyed. This Verwalter called out boys and sorted them. Some boys he dismissed without a word, just a look and a grunt; others he pointed out at with his blue pencil and the guards understood and took them wherever it was that they were to take them.

We approached and we waited. He asked us for our left hands and he decided then and there which fingernail he would paint white and which he would paint black. He applied each color with a delicious lick of the

brush with a master's satisfaction. His lips curled in concentration. I was white and my brother was black and we went separate ways when the guards walked us down the corridor.

All the new boys had a brief tour of the factory. Each pair of twins had either black or white nail polish. We were told that we had been selected because we had little fingers. We were special. We would learn how to fit small but very important pieces of steel into bigger, critical pieces of steel. We would learn precision. We had aptitude, the man said. We had potential. We were helping others outside the forest. My brother and I felt like knights. The damsel in distress was not our mother. All mothers, our future wives and daughters, and the future and fate of all unborn children depended on our duty. We ate together and then dispersed for the evening. Black went with black and white went with white.

I shivered in the top bunk in a room of row after row of bunk beds. I shared the bed with another boy. The sheets were cold, but the blanket was thin and ravaged, the pillow gaunt and yellow. I tried to sleep. I took in the darkness overhead, the cold night air. I could feel my brother warm in a bunk alone but comfortable. My brother and I were there in this blackness together, in separate places in the compound yet conversing as twins do through the moonlight.

The next day was like many of our future days: work. We were trained, drilled, and tested. We were assigned stations. I had become skilled at finding imperfections, setting defective pieces aside, and this earned for me the supervisor's smile and checkmark. My brother asked too many questions. I would squeeze my eyes tight and send him my thoughts. There were hours and hours of conveyor belts, hundreds of pieces that had to slide in, twist and fit inside other parts. Each part, each piece had a role in the battle between them and us, life and death, victory or defeat. Speed had to be fluid and efficient as strong coffee.

A hand tapped my shoulder one day and I turned my head. The supervisor said, "The Director would like a word with you. Know that this is an honor."

Two escorts marched me down another long corridor. I felt pangs of anxiety, my brother's hunger in my belly. I stood before wooden doors. The supervisor left and another man said, "This is a rare honor. You will meet the Director."

I nodded. I pushed back my shoulders, retracted my chin, and let this man know he could open the doors. I was ready. The doors parted and my station and number were announced. The sentry's voice receded behind me. Father's voice said to me, "Have pride." Mother's voice whis-

pered, "Dignity in all you do."

The Director, a nondescript man in black uniform, seemed preoccupied with paperwork. He was standing meters in front of me behind a neat desk. Dozens of stacks of paper awaited his attention. I walked forward and stood there waiting for his words.

"You do good work."

"Thank you, Director."

"There is a bar of chocolate on my desk. You may take it."

"You are kind, but may I ask you something?"

The papers wrinkled. "It is not wise. You should not think of yourself at a time like this. " He sat down and faced me.

"Not me, but my brother and family."

"Patriotism is its own reward. These days demand great sacrifices."

"I understand."

He placed his piece of paper on his desk. "I've asked you here because I wish to promote you."

"Promote me?"

"To auditor. Your ability at detecting imperfections saves time."

"Thank you, Director. I wish to ask about my brother?"

"Persistent, aren't we? Your brother has been reassigned, if you must know, but there is no need for you to worry. We will determine where his talents lie."

"My family?"

"Your family receives a generous payment for your services, more so in the future now that you have been promoted. I'm sure that they will be proud." The Director opened a drawer in his desk. He extracted a small bottle. "Put your hand forward."

"Which one?"

"Your left. The one painted white."

I did and I watched him lay down the first coat and then a second one. Black. He relished eliminating the white. I let my hand rest and dry.

"Black like our uniforms. Wear it with pride." His face approved. The Director was a man of medium height, with a pale, though noble, face as if he had been an officer all his life, along with his entire family, several generations of loyal soldiers. His eyes were bluer, compared to my shade of blue; his hair, blonder than my blond. Just that day it had dawned on me just how much of their language I had learned.

"You disprove the theory," he said.

"Sir?"

"Impressive for your kind, and you could pass under the right circum-

stances."

I said nothing because I did not know what he had meant, although I had a vague idea. He might've interpreted my silence as obedience, or as acceptance. I do not know.

"You are the new auditor. New world for you, and you'll have privileges, and more money home to your parents, as I said."

I had no more dreams, but I felt my brother's daring. "Vertrag?"

"Indeed, it is." He shuffled a page in front of him to read it. "You are a quick one."

"And my brother? What will happen if he has no talent?"

"Every boy has a talent. We'll find it." The Director hunched forward to sign papers. His pen started to move as he answered me. "Only thing that can stop him is if his fingers are too big." He blew on the ink to dry it. "In that case, we'll send him home."

We were identical twins, exactly alike in every way. A day did not pass that we did not feel each other's presence. His heart beat the same cadence as mine. I felt the same joys and pains he did, whether it was our favorite game or the doctor's hypodermic. I felt it. He felt it. We felt it. I saw that my fingernail was now black. I said nothing.

"Go on, now. You've proven yourself useful. You are the new auditor. Fulfill that duty and do not disappoint me." He turned his attention to applying his signature and I understood this as my cue to leave the room.

Auditor meant a room of one's own with a better bed, sturdier frame, a fat pillow, and laundered sheets. I had seen my predecessor only once, and then he was gone. At the start of each week, a slip of paper would slide under my door with a list of numbers for the week. The Emergency required increased production regardless of the available number of hands and little fingers. In my room, someone had placed a map on the wall: the State of Emergency, in which black symbolized progress. I curled my fingers and examined my lacquered finger. I had work to do.

I supervised all day and stopped once or twice to provide instruction and to take a sip of water from the ladle. I had a clipboard and a pencil. Production exceeded projections.

One day the machines stopped and the boys glanced up in confusion. The machines never stopped. The men we knew in black left to determine the cause of the interruption. We heard nothing for a long time and then we heard a commotion, the sounds of men arguing. Different languages.

The door flew open and men in gray uniforms with red stars appeared. They yelled at my boys, who scattered at first but then formed a line for

inspection since soldiers understood soldiers. I stood at attention in front of my workers. I was the auditor. I waited for two men: one in a drab uniform with the largest red star and another man in no uniform at all. The door closed and locked.

We heard yelling and then silence on the other side of the door. We then heard the sound of a harmonica playing an upbeat jig and then the collective sound of levers being pulled and then the single crack of rifle fire. Nothing.

The red star crouched down. The hat and the face came into view. He offered me a bar of chocolate to entice me into cooperation but held it when I touched it. He said something that I thought sounded familiar, but I was too afraid to answer him. The plain man, impatient, asked from behind him, "Ask him if he knows where the Commandant is? I want to find him."

This man in front of me with a wide face and skin smooth as stone and patient eyes asked me again, but I didn't understand him until he said one word. Commissar.

I answered, "No" and smiled as I took the candy from the hand that released it.

"Why did you give him candy?" the other man asked. He pointed at me. "He said no. Even I could understand it."

The Russian rose to his full height. "'No' means yes in Polish."

"That makes no sense."

"Neither does this place."

The door unbolted and the heavy steel door groaned open. More men in uniforms came in and filed the boys out of the room. They had rifles slung over their shoulders. Other soldiers started collecting all the paperwork from the stations and soon enough all the documentation disappeared into boxes. I enjoyed my chocolate in small bites.

Another disturbance and men appeared with the Director, with his hands behind his back. The man without a uniform demanded that they hand him over to him. They refused. The man who had given me my chocolate went over and ordered them to release him. There was a brief exchange of words. I heard whispers; soon thereafter we were alone in the large room, with the hushed machines around us, and the light through the window.

"Sprechen Sie Englisch?' the shorter, plain man asked the Director.

The Director nodded. "What will become of me?" he asked and, after his eyes focused on me, he said, "If you are to shoot me, then do it."

"I don't plan to shoot you," the man said and went behind him and

undid the handcuffs.

"What then?" the Director asked as he rubbed his wrists.

"Don't worry. We need people like you back where I'm from."

The Director's hand touched my shoulder as we walked down the long hallway to the front entrance. I heard English yelled at the soldiers, "Careful! Remember all this is fragile!" As we walked out of the factory, I saw the other man's hand. Little fingers.

I would find my way home through the forest. Mother was there, but not Father and no brother. I sought the reflection that I never needed any mirror to see, but he was gone. I listened but none of the words, none of the ideas, our shared thoughts or sensations came to me. When I had crossed the threshold, I knew: we had been cleaved, separated from each other, though the scent of pine needles remained ephemeral, twigs snapped, and the bite of sap touched like steel. I will go on in the world made for me, where there is no harmonica, no train out of the forest and no factory, yet smoke floats up from the two towers. White smoke.

Interview

Gabriel Valjan

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

No difficulty with this title. In my strongest writing, where I have control of the trajectory, the scenes play out in my head and I let my fingers translate it through the keyboard. The title often comes first and finds its way into the story.

What inspired "Little Fingers"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Thankfully, none of the themes are autobiographical. The inspiration came from watching parents of identical twins distinguish one twin from the other. A common strategy is to paint their fingernails different colors. Prior to writing the story, I had read that children would work in munitions factories because their smaller fingers enabled them to do tasks that adult fingers could not.

Identical twins are the result of a zygote that splits into two embryos; they share the same DNA, and they are mirror images of each other, although with time and familiarity parents can tell their twins apart from the subtlest of physical features and behavior. This idea of the double both fascinates and disturbs me. Longitudinal studies have shown that identical twins share the same sensations, think the same thoughts as if they have a unified consciousness, a form of telepathy, even when they are separated for decades. They tend to pick similar spouses and professions. To use a word associated with Kafka, it is very unheimlich, or uncanny to me. In some instances, they know when their other twin has died. The identical image is the doppelgänger, the physical manifestation of the shadow Self. I find all of this compelling and I wanted my protagonist to have this connection with his other Self.

What was the hardest part of writing "Little Fingers"?

I found it challenging to logically convey *why* the child takes the second candy bar after he says, "No". To solve this problem I revised the beginning of the story. "Mother knew some of the man's language, but understood it poorly at best." I threaded in this idea that the conflict is multinational on several levels, including language. The American with the Russian soldier would not know that 'No' often means 'Yes' in Polish. If there is anything drawn from my life it is that my grandmother, who spoke Polish and some German, used to confuse me when she would say 'Nie' to her friends when the context dictated 'Tak.'

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

In the draft, I had written more interior dialog around the child's confused reaction when the Director said, "Impressive for your kind…" A child may not understand that statement. A twin might, although I had intended the Director's statement to be ambiguous: impressive because he is an identical twin or impressive because he is a Slav? In either case, "other" is implied, as we know that the Nazis saw all non-Aryan people as untermenschen, or less than human. I originally had the child think about something his father had once said, but then I decided I wanted to keep the father absent and the child in the moment with this dubious authority figure.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I don't spend time analyzing the creative process. I sit down and explore an idea, which can start with a word, a scene, a snippet of overheard conversation, or an image in my head. Most of my ideas come from observation and making curious connections. Writing amounts to time in the chair and fingers on the keyboard in front of a screen. I don't write longhand. If there is anything unique about my writing habits, it is that I write in the morning and I indulge my tuxedo cat when he demands lap time. He may not edit but he has insistent paws. I read my dialog out loud and I take his squeaks as signs of approval.

"Little Fingers" begins as a fairly whimsical piece, but is revealed to be taking place during a war. How did you decide on this plot twist?

I wanted to misdirect the reader into thinking they are getting a fairy

tale, a magical time that we associate with childhood, but subvert the expectation with adult realities. I hope that the aura of menace creeps in with the accumulation of small details. The harmonica simulates a train that does not exist. Parents make a world for their children, but in this world in the forest the parents are not in control. There are "wicked princes" out and about in the world. The Bible is present but unread. The harmonica passes through the lanes like an Angel of Death. Life changes when he stops one day. Fairy tales use simple language and deliver a lesson. I wanted to avoid moralizing and deliver cost. The plot twists are the connection between the two unnamed twins and my reversals on the connotations of the colors: black, white and gray. Black is acceptance, the reward of Life, whereas the color white, the absence of any color, is Death. The one person who knows what to do wears gray, a color associated with uncertainty and indecision.

Can you give us the historical background on the real world war that inspired this story?

"Little Fingers" is an allegory about the Second World War. Readers may not know this, but the Nazis had several types of camps: the Konzentrationslager, or our English word, 'concentration camp,' the Vernichtungslager, or extermination camps, and the forced-labor camps, Zwangsarbeitslager. The details are crucial because American journalists and the photographer Margaret Bourke-White documented the concentration camps, not the extermination camps. Auschwitz had the infamous distinction in that it was both an extermination and labor camp. American and British troops liberated Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, and Dachau, all of them concentration camps.

There were six extermination camps, all of them in Poland, all destroyed by the Germans; and all liberated by the Russians, who seized all the paperwork they could find as they moved westward toward Berlin. The paperwork was crated and sent to Moscow. If I had a camp in mind then it would have been Treblinka because it is located in the forests of northeastern Poland. I hope that my focus on the choice of Polish is clear.

In "Little Fingers" the gray uniforms of the Russians show up at the end to free the children, yet the Director prevails. The American has little fingers, but he is certainly not childlike. True to the historical record, the OSS, which was the precursor to the CIA, sought out Nazis in Operation Paperclip as early as May of 1945 in order to conduct intelligence operations on the Russian atomic program. The engine of World War II coasted into the Cold War without changing gears.

In using 'factory' I also kept in line with the Nazi penchant for euphemisms. The Nazis were masters at documenting everything in coded language. They 'cleansed' and 'purified' a 'question.' They had numerous expressions around transportation and treatment that were pure euphemisms, with which they endeavored to conceal their cruelty of their actions. In the story I have appeals to patriotism and duty. I had used the word 'Emergency' as my own euphemism for war, just like modern politicians say 'conflict.'

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Winter Goose Publishing publishes my novels, the Roma Series: *Roma, Underground*, *Wasp's Nest*, and *Threading the Needle*. Installments four and five, *Turning to Stone* and *Corporate Citizen*, are scheduled for 2015. The series follows an American forensic accountant named Alabaster (or Bianca if you prefer her alias). She is difficult to know, extremely intelligent, and dichotomous at times in her thinking. She sees things others do not, yet she struggles with intimacy and trusting others. She is also on the run from her employer, Rendition, a rogue government agency. Dante, her boyfriend, is a nice guy, a little too patient with her at times. Farrugia is a stoical investigator with an edge to him. His peer Gennaro is a widower who has never forgiven himself for causing his wife's death. Alessandro has brains but picks the wrong women. Then there is Silvio, the ambitious and humorous interpreter. The series belongs to the suspense-thriller genre, but I see it as a group of friends who love and trust each other in a morally compromised world.

Interested readers can also Google my name. They'll find numerous short stories and interviews. *Bombay Literary Magazine* published my one and only poem online. I have a blog called *gabriel's wharf*. I was short-listed for the 2010 Fish Prize, and won the inaugural ZOUCH Lit Bits Contest. Rachel Anderson of RMA Publicity is my publicist.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

New Pages directed my attention to Driftwood Press. I perused the inaugural edition and browsed the second issue to see whether my writing would be a "fit" and then decided to take a chance. What I enjoyed most about what I read was the consistent feature of interviewing authors. I appreciated the answers, the glimpse into another mind at work and play.

The Doll House

Brittany Kerfoot

The house in which Turner and his fifty-seven dolls live is a detached ranch-style home, though Turner refuses to call it as such; there is nothing mid-western or farm-like about it—he just doesn't have stairs. Even with all the lights on, each room in the house seems to be cloaked in shadow, as though it were perpetually late evening. Nearly every inch is filled with the wooden and plastic faces of his friends and paramours, each carved or painted or molded with lifelike detail. The dolls sit in dwarfed chairs in corners or casually lean against walls, their miniature arms and legs crossed, solitary expressions on their faces. There are arm puppets, wooden dolls, marionettes, plush dolls, and silicone dolls, a beautiful collaboration of online purchases and creations of his own hands. If he ever had any guests over, they would have struggled to clear a spot on the couch or at the kitchen table, every inch occupied by a cotton-stuffed body, a hard synthetic face, a drawn raised eyebrow.

Barkley, his first puppet, is a brown-spotted dog with floppy ears. Its seams have long since unraveled and been re-stitched, its colors faded, but its mouth still smiles when Turner opens his hand inside of it. His mother made it for him out of felt when he was just a toddler, and underneath the scent of dust and mildew, he swears he can still smell her. Fifteen years ago, a mere ten days after he tore away the wrapping paper from Barkley on his tenth birthday, the authorities found his father drunk and unrepentant in a motel four hundred and seventy two miles from where Turner had been staying in the Second Chances Group Home. The chief of police shoved his father's head into the caged backseat and charged him with murder, or more aptly, pushing his wife down a flight of stairs.

Turner has had breakfast with Leonard, his fourteenth creation, every morning for the past eleven years; he allows fifteen minutes for eating, fifteen minutes for small talk, and the remaining fifteen for washing dishes and preparing Shelly's first meal. He washes his hands before touching the food, pushing the soap into his hands as though he could clean the slen-

der bones inside. He counts a slow twenty seconds aloud before rinsing each sud and bubble thoroughly away.

Turner often gripes to Leonard about the high cost of homes these days and laments how glad he is he purchased his quaint abode in a buyer's market. Leonard is a ginger-haired forty-something of plush and plastic sporting black-rimmed glasses and a pea-green sweater vest; a bushy moustache hides the better part of his thin upper lip, and the vacant look in his marbled eyes tells Turner he cares little about markets and mortgages. Each day the two of them eat dry toast and grits and sip black coffee, Lenny's moccasined feet hanging motionless a foot above the linoleum kitchen floor. When Turner clears the table, Leonard's food is untouched, his napkin clean and still folded. Sometimes Turner is offended by the doll's refusal to eat, and he wonders if it's his cooking or if perhaps Leonard raids the fridge in the middle of the night instead. He ignores that, day after day, nothing has been touched—there are no crackers or bread slices missing from the cabinets, no newly dirty dishes in the sink—and continues to pour his friend a mug full of coffee anyway.

After breakfast Turner walks into the living room where Shelly is usually asleep in her cage. He pulls off the canvas covering that signals to her it's time to rest and unlocks the metal door; the sound shakes her awake and she instinctively knows it's feeding time. Turner lets her sit on his lap while he hand-feeds her cooked carrots, raw snow peas, and pieces of a baked potato. She chews the food vigorously, her stubby tongue searching for the next bite. Bits fall onto his jeans and the floor. "Good girl," he says, and strokes the gray fluff on her chest while balancing the paper plate of vegetables in his other hand.

Turner bought Shelly with the money he'd saved from odd jobs and allowances he received during his time in foster care. On his eighteenth birthday he left his twelfth and final placement home and purchased the bird from a newspaper ad that evening. He moved into the first studio apartment he could find and spent the rest of his money on birdseed.

After feeding Shelly, Turner lets her perch on his wrist, her talons leaving dent-like impressions on his pale skin. Before returning his friend to her cage, he always sings her favorite song, the song his mother would sing to lull him to sleep after a nightmare or a particularly rough bout with his father. She'd stroke his sweat-soaked hair, working the tangles with her long fingers, and coo:

And the songbirds are singing,
Like they know the score,
And I love you, I love you, I love you,

Like never before

And I wish you all the love in the world,
But most of all, I wish it from myself.

Placing the bird back in her cage, Turner bumps Mr. X's limp limbs that hang next to the faded red curtains cloaking the shuttered window behind him. Invisible strings, made more noticeable by tiny, clinging flecks of dirt and dust, are looped around his joints and neck. Mr. X, his ninth addition, is one of three marionettes in the house, but is the only one without a face; he does not wear clothes. On occasion, when Turner sings, he holds the puppet's control bar loosely and makes him dance, his sculpted feet clicking against the floor like tap shoes. When he is not strung up and his body is allowed to assume its own shape, he is listless and lifeless; only Turner can resurrect him with the flick of his wrist. As he was carving and drilling and screwing and putting Mr. X together, he could not help but recall the sight of his mother's twisted and broken feet at the bottom of the staircase and his utter inability to fix them.

He walks back into the bedroom to wake his girlfriend Petunia.

Petunia is not his first lover. His relationship with Jade, his twenty-first conception, a blonde-haired Marilyn lookalike clad in a tight black mini-dress with a perfectly round mole on her left cheek, served a different purpose than he had originally intended. He wanted to love—he thought he might be good at it—so he scoured through Internet images from his search for "the perfect woman" and after three months, he had built Jade. Jade has a plush body and a soft plastic head; she is a voluptuous maven with eyes the shape of almonds lined in black and eggplant purple. Her corset pushes her breasts of cotton and cloth up to her manmade clavicle. Standing at 4'5" tall when held upright, she is nearly the size of a human middle schooler. Before she was complete, Turner cut a slit in between her legs using his trimming shears; he left her mouth closed.

In the beginning, Turner spent all his time with his new courtesan, preparing her meals for which he found recipes on YouTube, ordering her new lingerie online and securing it with safety pins, and watching the news with her and giving his opinion on gun control and fracking (he is for and against, respectively). But something was missing. Jade didn't seem to reciprocate his affections; she was a lackluster lover, rarely able to make him come. Her skin was dry like new bed sheets, her hair as coarse and tangled as a horse's mane. Her constant blank stare proved to him her artificiality; she slept with her eyes open.

"How do you feel about our presence in Afghanistan?" he would ask her, but she had no opinion.

"I'm not big into politics," he would hear her say.

"Do you think I should start working out?" he would ask her.

"I think you should do a lot of things," he would hear her say. "I think you should shave your moustache. I think you should wear nicer clothes. I think you should leave the house once in a while. But it doesn't matter what I think; you'll never do those things." Her words echoed in his head like a nagging whisper, coaxing him awake in the mornings and keeping him from sleep at night.

Jade was also offended by Turner's strict schedule, his need to pencil time with her into his daily calendar that hung on the fridge. She resented Shelly because he spent more time with the bird than with her. He didn't hold Jade after their lovemaking, or smooth her straw-like hair away from her face before he got up to wash and urinate. Whenever Turner spent too much intimate time with someone else, Shelly would squawk and caw for attention or yank out her feathers with her mouth until they littered the ground below like sidewalk trash. Like a morning alarm, he would obey her, rushing to her side to sing his song and rub her beak with the soft pad of his pointer finger.

After a year of courtship, Turner and Jade were sleeping in separate beds.

"I feel like we don't even know each other," he told her.

"We don't," he would hear her say.

Recently, when he looked in the mirror, Turner could see his face had long since paled from the darkness of the house; he could see the gray circles tattooed onto the thin skin under his eyes. With some color and a comb through his hair, he could be considered almost handsome, but he wasn't one for grooming. When he and Jade first got together, he made sure to shower every day and even spritz on the cologne sample he'd received in the mail, but he quickly let that all go. He wished he had someone for whom he wanted to dress up, to impress, but none of his other housemates cared how he looked—they told him so.

Petunia is the only companion he has not made with his own hands; his blood is not in her bowels, his sweat never slipped into the stuffing of her skin. He had been saving up for her, setting aside weekly allowances from his paycheck as a software engineer. His salary was limited from the start because he would not meet on site, setting the requirement early on that he must consistently work from home. But didn't mind the cut; he

was never an extravagant spender, buying only the necessities for himself and Shelly and his dolls. After three years, he had put away more than the $6,000 he needed to bring her home.

Six weeks after placing his order, the doorbell rang and he knew she had finally come. Once inside, he pried open the life-sized wooden crate and removed the plastic packing in as much of a hurry as he could without disturbing the girl hidden underneath. Her eyes were closed when she arrived: a sleeping beauty that only his touch could awaken. He stood unmoving in the middle of a pile of Styrofoam, paper, and plastic. The crate looked like a coffin where she lay with her hands by her sides, her thick lashes grazing her sharp cheekbones. He stood her up and her lids snapped open. A diamond-like stud the size of a freckle winked at him from the side of her nose. The crevices of Turner's palms grew damp like tiny rivers, and his chest tightened with anxiety.

"Welcome home, sweetheart," he managed to say.

He had changed only one thing about her since she had arrived. Petunia was not her given name; RealDollz.com had named her Leila, but Turner didn't feel it fit her. Her lips were full and soft like flower petals and she smelled new, fresh—Petunia.

For the first few weeks after her arrival, Turner found himself unable to interact with his newest houseguest. He slept on the couch and gave her the bedroom so she would feel comfortable, but still found himself tossing and turning with nervousness. When he accidentally grazed her French-manicured hand during "Jeopardy" or absent-mindedly walked out of the shower without a towel and caught her eye, he shuffled to another room and pinched the skin on the top of his hand between his thumb and forefinger until he could breathe again without difficulty.

"You're too good for me," he told her once, when he had begun to feel a touch more at ease in her presence. "You could do so much better."

Petunia stared at him with her lips gently parted, the locket necklace he ordered for her sitting comfortably in the cavern her plump breasts made, a picture of the two of them with Shelly hidden inside. "I don't want to do better," he imagined her saying. "I want you."

Turner read her his favorite books, taught her about politics and economics, and showed her how to feed Shelly, laying dishtowels over her arms so the bird wouldn't scratch her pristine skin. He stopped writing in his calendar and started sleeping in. After a month, while Petunia sat with the newspaper in the thin cotton pajamas he had ordered her, his hand found its way to her lap and hovered above her exposed knee until the muscles in his arm were exhausted. With a quiet quivering in his fingers,

he slowly lowered it onto her thigh, never once taking his eyes away from the blank space on the wall in front of him. A few minutes passed and his hand began to grope, his fingertips pushing into the PVC piping that was her bones. As he probed, he noticed a gray film on her skin and a dullness to her hair like an old penny. Like a flash, it hit him: he had never considered how he would keep her clean.

He immediately concocted a lie, telling her he had to finish some work in the study, and rushed to the Real Doll message boards. He searched "cleaning," "washing," and "bathing," hoping he would find an answer that contradicted his fear: he would have to get her naked. He had changed her many times, but she kept on her underclothes. And then there was the intimacy that a bath implied. With Jade, he felt no shame in seeing her undressed; when she looked dingy, he soaked her in a tub of warm water and set her to dry overnight. But Petunia was different. They had been growing closer, that was true, but he wasn't ready for this stage of their relationship.

He walked back to where Petunia was still sitting and turned on the television; every channel he settled on pictured a couple kissing, a professor and his student hurriedly touching on top of a desk, bikini-clad housewives in Aruba. He flung the remote on the floor and shuffled over to Shelly's cage in the dark corner of the room. As she crawled out and grabbed firmly onto his wrist, he hummed her song and watched her sway like a foxtail in the wind. She pushed her small head under Turner's unshaven chin when he began to sing. Hours later, when his anxiety could no longer triumph over his exhaustion, he set Shelly back on her perch and approached Petunia on the loveseat.

"I need to talk to you," he said. "I don't want to do anything you're not comfortable with, so please tell me if I'm out of line here." His hand moved to her shoulder, fingering the lace on her sleeve. "I was wondering if you would let me give you a bath."

He could swear he saw her eyes brighten at his request, so he rushed to the bathroom and began filling the tub. He had no bubble bath, but there was a bottle of Petunia's perfume on the sink, so he added half a dozen sprays into the running water. He closed the door while he shaved, extra careful not to nick his neck. Drops of water rested atop the high cheekbones of his fresh face, and he inhaled deeply enough to taste the bitterness of aftershave on his tongue. He turned off the lights and went to fetch Petunia.

He carried her into the bathroom, her arm around his shoulders, and set her down on the side of the tub. His fingers trembled as he combed

out the tangles in her hair, took a warm cloth to her face. He reached for her shirt but dropped his hand before he lifted it past her navel.

"It's okay," he thought he heard her say. "I want you to."

He slid it off and folded it neatly, setting it on top of the closed toilet seat. He had seen the pink corset dozens of times before, but tonight it looked different—the color appeared brighter, the ribbons sleeker. He knelt down, his face at her stomach, and removed her shorts and panties in one movement. After taking some deep breaths and squeezing the skin on his hand until the pain forced him to stop, he reached both arms behind her and unfastened the three metal hooks of her bra. As he held the thing in his hand, he took in her small brown nipples, the curve where her back met her bottom, her painted pink toenails.

Once in the bath, he lathered soap between his hands and massaged it onto her shoulders, her arms, her chest. After several minutes, he replaced the bar back in the dish and submerged his shaking hand. He lingered by her knee for a while with a tightness in his chest like he had swallowed too much water all at once. Between her legs was pink and sweet and blossoming—Petunia. He kissed her mouth for the first time and tasted sterile traces of soap, his hand frozen inside her. This is what he imagined she would feel like: soft and fleshy and warm.

His face was suddenly flushed and hot, and he hoped the water was the right temperature for Petunia. He pressed her closer to him, splashing water over the ceramic and onto the tile floor. As they shifted, he caught sight of the tiny impressions the stubble from his chest left on her skin, and made sure to hold her less firmly. Finally he began to wiggle his fingers as though he were scraping icing out of a can. His head was spinning; he imagined himself on the moon, weightless and free.

In the quiet of the encounter, he thought he heard a whisper, a faint sound in his left ear, his other pressed firmly against Petunia's chest. He rose up from the water, his hair dripping into her heavily mascaraed eyes, and listened; it sounded like a cough, a wheeze, a labored breath. He struggled to get out of the tub and nearly slipped on the puddles of water on the floor. He rushed to the living room and lifted the cape that concealed Shelly's cage; she was bent over with her eyes closed, a constant sneezing noise escaping her opened beak. He took her into his cupped hands and sat on the floor.

"What's wrong, girl? Tell me what's wrong. Please."

He noticed she had defecated profusely down the side of the cage, and she hadn't touched the food he had left for her earlier that evening. He raced to the study and searched for symptoms of sick birds, possible caus-

es, remedies. He found a user on a pet health forum whose bird exemplified similar symptoms, but most other members told him there was nothing he could do; the best thing for the bird was to be as comfortable as possible so it could die in peace. His naked skin was wet with bath water and sweat as he worked to swaddle Shelly in several of his T-shirts. He set her in his lap and looked up the phone number of the nearest vet.

"I'm sorry, sir," the receptionist on the other line said. "I wish I could help, but there's nothing we would be able to do."

"How did this happen?" he asked, his cheeks suddenly wet. "She was fine earlier. She was just fine!"

"Birds are prone to hide their illness until it overcomes them," she said. "It's like they don't want to admit they're sick. She may have been ill for some time now."

He pleaded with the woman, offering every dollar he had for surgery and medications, but got the same responses. He hurled the phone into the wall and returned his gaze back to Shelly. He pushed all of his faith and hope and frustration into her, willing her to live. After several moments he looked down and was shocked at the whiteness of his knuckles, and only when he relaxed his grip did he realize how tightly he had been holding her. Her beak was still slightly open, her eyes still closed, but she was quiet now. He sat with her listless body for hours, stroking the soft fluff on her chest, singing "I love you, I love you, I love you like never before."

The next morning he awoke on the floor, Shelly still shrouded in his clothes. He carried her into the bathroom to find Petunia still naked, immersed in the cold bathwater. She looked at him with both concern and surprise, her lips slightly parted. Turner held Shelly in one hand and used the other to lower himself into the water next to the doll. Putting his arm around her small waist, he hoisted her upright and took her hand. He sat with her in the water for a long time, his pruned, sodden fingers interlaced with hers, rubbing the wrinkled tips across the smoothness of her skin. Her body showed no signs of submersion: her makeup was un-smeared and the edges of her nails were still firm and the color of a Georgia peach. He shuddered and released her hand, letting it fall back into the cold water, and watched it slowly sink until it settled on the tub's floor. He kissed the mass of cloth and feathers that was now Shelly and set her on the soap dish.

Turner reached over Petunia's hard body and let the frigid water slip down the drain, plugging it back once the tub was empty. He turned the

faucet to the hottest setting and let the basin fill to an inch below the brim while he pulled and tugged at his waterlogged clothes and let them drop to the floor with a slap.

He was surprised to find himself steady, not shaking or nervous, as his thumb slid around the smooth circle surrounding Petunia's nipple. He put his mouth to hers and she kissed him back, passionately circling her tongue up and around his, her hand groping through his hair. Without thinking, he closed his eyes and slipped inside her, his body both tense and utterly relaxed all at the same time.

"It's okay," she told him, and her voice was soft and sweet. She smiled, and in a flash he lost control, and a kaleidoscope of colors swirled around in the dark space behind his eyelids—red and yellow and orange and pink. A flood of pink.

Seconds later, as he lay still in the water, so hot now it nearly burned, he breathed heavily into Petunia's chest. His hands were weak and useless, though they ached to hold something—Shelly's stiff body, Petunia's soft hand, a mug full of coffee with Leonard across the table. He looked up at the hidden body of the bird and felt the air leave his lungs. He thought of the sudden stop of her organs, wondered how a living thing could just cease being, what it felt like for it to all just shut down.

He spent the rest of the morning with Petunia, fixing her breakfast and reminiscing about Shelley and making love. The idea of burying her, of disposing of her tiny, pathetic body, was not yet even a seed planted in his mind, and instead, he focused his thoughts on the friends and lovers who would never leave him, would never fall ill or perish or die. He lay on the floor and sang Shelley's song to Petunia, to all of them, and relished the thought of their unchanging faces and their perfectly preserved skin and their flawless, newly beating hearts.

Interview

Brittany Kerfoot

When did you write "The Doll House"?

I wrote "The Doll House" in my first year of graduate school for a workshop in 2013.

What inspired "The Doll House"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I watched a documentary about men in relationships with "real dolls" that was filmed in the UK and I was intrigued. From there, I spent hours on message boards and scoured the Internet for stories, pictures, and information. The more I researched, the more I understood that these men just wanted to love and be loved like anyone else, and I wanted to try and portray that through Turner. Not everybody is obsessed with dolls, but I do think any reader could relate to Turner's feelings of loneliness, isolation, and longing; I know I can.

What was the hardest part of writing "The Doll House"?

Originally, I thought that making Turner a believable but relatable character would be the hard part, but that actually came much easier than I thought. The ending, however, was much more pain staking. I must have re-written it a dozen times! My colleagues who read it gave it rave reviews, but they were unanimously unsure about the ending, no matter which version they saw. It took almost a year, but I think I finally came up with a fitting conclusion.

Which part of "The Doll House" was conceived of first?

I was definitely struck by the general idea first, after watching the documentary about the dolls. I knew I wanted to write about a man who was in love with one, but Turner's actual character didn't materialize until much later, after my research. The story itself was written very quickly as I felt incredibly inspired once I picked up steam. The revising, however,

was much slower work!

Do you primarily write fiction?

For the most part, I'm a strictly fiction writer. I dabble in non-fiction (mainly personal essays), but I think that's more for cathartic purposes than anything else. I love creating my own worlds and giving life to characters who represent a certain type of person, or who embody a theme better than anyone I can find in the real world.

Arguably the most stunning thing about this work is its emotional honesty. Did you struggle at all to present such a nonjudgmental view of a unique character?

At first, I thought it would be difficult to make Turner likable since a lot of people see his obsession as "weird." I definitely wanted him to be eccentric, but also tender, with a good soul. To be honest, though, I fell in love with Turner; out of all my characters, he's the one who has my heart. As I was sketching him out, I was informed by a lot of real men I read about on message boards, and even though I don't share their fetish, I understood their desire for companionship; it's a basic human need, and I wanted to stay true to that universal idea when writing the story.

Was it difficult to write the sex scenes? The story wouldn't have been as honest had it skirted around them.

I actually went to a seminar on how to write a good sex scene, and that helped me tremendously! I didn't want to write about sex just for the sake of writing about sex—I wanted it to mean something, both to Turner and to the reader. It was tricky making sure it felt real and honest, but not lascivious or over the top. That moment was a milestone for Turner, and I knew I had to get it right or it could ruin the whole story.

The death of Turner's bird taught him not to value life more, but to rely only on things that won't die. How did you decide on the pessimistic ending?

I never thought of the ending as pessimistic, but instead realistic. I knew the ending had to carry a lot of weight and that there were questions that needed to be answered; I also knew I had to make a choice: was Turner going to finally become self-aware and snap out of the fantasy in which he had been living, or was this trauma going to push him further into the world he had created? Turner suffered a huge loss with his mother dying early in his life, which contributed to his obsession with the

dolls; experiencing another tragic event would likely trigger anyone in his position. He never truly dealt with his past, so he feels safer in his imaginary world than in the real, more painful one. Who could blame him, really?

Is fear of death a prominent theme in your works?

I teach English Literature at George Mason University and my class' theme is "Love, Sex, and Death." I do write quite a bit about all three of those, but I think what really ties my work together is the theme of feeling misunderstood. Most of my characters do not lead lives that society would consider "normal," and that can be frustrating for them. They have all the same wants and needs as everyone else, but their varying circumstances cause them to feel like outsiders for it.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

I recently read Rebecca Lee's short story collection *Bobcat* and it's brilliant; the title story alone will blow you away. Another new book I highly recommend is Jenny Offill's short novel *Department of Speculation*; it's funny and weird and heartbreaking, among so many other things. As for the classics, Nabokov's *Lolita* will always hold the most coveted spot on my bookshelf.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My short story "Something like Winning the Lottery" was published in *Paper Tape Magazine*.

The Color of Guinness

C. Wade Bentley

I.

When I tell her that her eyes
are the color of Guinness, she leaves
the bar without a word. By the time
I finish my drink and follow her out,
she is long gone. I sit on the walk
beneath the awning, lean my cheek
against the cool brick, and notice
amber light filtering from the bicycle
shop across the street, passersby stepping
through it thickly, for a moment preserved.

II.

Dad is at his workbench in the garage,
bolting an old lawnmower engine

and cannibalized tricycle wheels

to a plywood chassis. “Hell’s bells,” he says,

as he looks up through the window

at Penny Harmon washing her dad’s car

across the street—the street up and down which

I would soon race the go-cart nearly

seven times before it launches me

face first onto the asphalt. In the moment

before the pain, I remember seeing

the motor, now separated from the rest,

gasping and whirling like a sick fish.

III.

I awoke in the desert, once, with sand spackled

to the side of my face. It seemed unwise to move,

so I passed the time watching a yellow-brown lizard

on a red rock. The sun was low enough

to make his shadow twice his length, and more

real, somehow—like a dark purple welt, edges

sharply etched—than the lizard himself.

Interview

C. Wade Bentley

When did you write the poem?

Early 2014.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I had been thinking about memory—how and whether and for how long and how accurately our brains store memories—and then remembered that *Jurassic Park* mosquito trapped in amber and, lo, a metaphor was born. It occurred to me that my memories tend to take on that color, that sepia tint—a good indication of how inaccurate and edited our recollection of past experiences can be. From there, it was an easy leap to something of a similar, amber color, though in an appropriately darker shade: Guinness stout. The color then provided the link between the three sections.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I don't typically write poems in sections, as I did with this one, so basic structural decisions—how many sections, in which order, etc.—were a challenge. Also, while I wanted the color to connect the sections, I didn't want it to be obtrusive, i.e. "can you find where Wade has inserted the color in *this* section?"

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

Beyond the bare bones of memory and color, I didn't really have an original conception. I typically don't like to begin a poem with a road map or blueprint, and I don't generally like the results when I do start with a firm plan. An unexpected theme that emerged as I was writing, however, was the notion that we often seem to prefer the fantasy or the skewed recollection, that it can become more real and meaningful for us than the actual event. We begin to live in amber.

Does the theme and symbol of alcohol, and its effects on people, appear frequently in your poetry?

No, sadly, I'm not much of a drinker. I'm sure I'd be a better poet if I were.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes. Forty years ago I was sure I would write great novels. Alas, no. Then it was short stories. I had a bit of success with that genre but, sadly, stories tend to require at least some skill with plot and dialogue, and I had none. So, about ten years ago, I decided to get serious about poetry. I seem to be writing shorter and shorter pieces. If this poetry thing doesn't work out, I may be down to writing individual words.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I suppose one stereotype about true artists/writers/poets is that they suffer for and labor mightily over their art. I hear of poets who spend months letting ideas germinate and gradually intersect, and then months more getting the words and lines just so. Maybe because I came to poetry later in my life, I didn't feel I could afford that kind of time. Whatever the reason, I write a lot, and I write quickly. If I have an idea that intrigues me, I can't leave it alone. I have tried to slow down the process and be more deliberate—perhaps it would result in better poems—but I simply can't. I hate it when I think of a good idea late at night because I know I won't be able to sleep until it is at least sketched out on paper. For me, I love being in the middle of a new poem, getting my hands dirty, walking the edge, not knowing if I will emerge with something worth keeping or something painfully bad.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

I would love for them to read more of it! My website lists my publications:

www.wadebentley.weebly.com

I also have a new book of poems coming in March from Aldrich Press. Thank you!

The Animals Receive Their Imperial Commissions

Kevin Honold

Demons dressed the girl in a robe
embroidered with comets and crescent moons
and placed her on a throne. The animals passed by
in review and she gave them names,

as children will, to fit their natures.
According to their natures, so did she name them.
When the girl saw the buzzard she
summoned torches the better to see him with.

She peered at the bird as the flames cast
fiddling shadows on the walls, and the bird
peered back. She took his song away and in return
slipped the jesses that bound him to this world, dowered him

with a silence only foxes wandering forests can hear.

DOUBLE AGENT

Mary Crow

He is eyeballing
the lush juncture
of her breasts.
Lying beside her
he inventories
the opulent iconography.

He props himself
on his elbow—
she's like green
blown glass,
a fish-shaped flask
he stumbled across

as he lugged away fire.
He's amended
the pain of once-
only, to track down
the roots of
his coming betrayal.

Broken China

Natalie Nixon

I watch the rough woman
who sorts broken china at a bench downtown.
Her tangled hair swings about her ears like threatening mice.

I watch her lean forward, arranging again.
Nails and fingers and palms
blur like wet newsprint, huddle and stretch.
She says to chips and shards,
"Act faster, Madagascar."

I think she was small once.
A girl, breezy as bat wings at dusk.
Walking tall, cracking heels on sidewalks,
crack- like mullein stalks after the yellow has gone.

I picture her father. He waits beside a big blue truck,
his daughter gone missing in the head.
Fence rails behind him coolly turn out
the congestion of night.
And, tired as saddle leather, smoking a Chesterfield, he waits.

That woman, as a girl,
played parlor games on the railroad tracks, corraled green-horned caterpillars
who huddled in a crescent on the iron slab.
Her thumbs and fingers and arms hovered, she declared
"I will compensate the survivors with cigars."

Now, the whites of her eyes have become the browns of her eyes.
I wait, for another breath from her parched lips,
for the expletives my children shouldn't hear.
Bleached china rattles; I enter a nearby diner.
I meet my husband, order a safe cheeseburger
and sane chicken strips for the kids.
And wonder.

A fearful longing wells up- to feel such an ache-
white-hot-
to mend something without glue,
put the pieces of it all together
with only the heat of my brain.

Interview

Natalie Nixon

When did you write the poem?

I wrote "Broken China" in the fall of 2011. At the time I was taking a poetry writing class at Northern Arizona University with Professor Barbara Anderson. The prompt for this poem was her directive to choose a subject that had been bothering us, something that we had seen or experienced, and couldn't get out of our mind.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

One sunny afternoon when I was strolling around downtown Flagstaff with my children, I saw a homeless woman. She was standing at a wooden bench, the kind designed for tourists to relax on. She stood there, bent over the seat of the bench where she had arranged broken pieces of dishes. I watched her from a wary distance with my children, fascinated despite myself, as she moved the pieces about, as if she were trying to sort out a puzzle.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

The resolution of the poem did not come to me right away. I have an active imagination, and always find myself wondering about the background of people I see while people watching. Inventing a childhood for the woman—a childhood laced with the powerful possibility of eccentricity—was the enjoyable part. Reconnecting the poem back to myself took some thought. I had to think hard, *Why had this homeless woman's actions fascinated me? Why could I not get her out of my head?* The answer, when it finally came, was a truth that was disconcerting—there was a freedom of expression in the woman's mental illness, a kind of freedom that I had never experienced. She was free to speak, and act, outside the bounds of society. What a breath taking possibility.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that

didn't make it in?

No. I found myself adding elements beyond my original conception.

Your poem has a strong sense of narrative. Do you write primarily narrative poetry, or is this different from your other work?

I am primarily a prose writer, and all of my prose is very narrative in style. In the pursuit of my degree in English I took several poetry writing classes in which we explored many styles of modern poetry. I feel that those classes improved my prose writing tenfold. If I could ever offer any advice to someone seeking to improve their creative writing, whether it be flash fiction or family memoir, I would emphatically say, "Take a poetry writing class! You will learn to be spare and brutal with your language, and you will begin to think outside of the descriptive box."

Do you primarily write poetry?

In high school I spent a year using poetry to work through some tough issues. I still have those poems, and they can bring me right back to that teenage confusion. But I am primarily a writer of short stories, both fiction and non-fiction. I also have a novel in the works, which will be finished the summer of 2014.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Barbara Anderson, my poetry writing instructor, offered me the best writing lesson that I have yet learned, and I used it to good effect in "Broken China." She called this creative writing technique "the running theft." The way I interpret this lesson is thus—first, you work out the bare bones structure of the poem you are writing. Then, when it comes to improving the descriptive language, you randomly take another book or magazine, open it up, and start scanning it for unique words or phrases. You jot these down, in long lists, and then you go back to your poem and start incorporating the "stolen" words into your own work. The bigger the rift between your poem and the magazine, the better. If your poem is tackling the subject of romantic love, grab a technical computer journal to throw in unexpected language.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Recently I discovered the literary fiction of Brady Udall—his descriptive language blows me away. I also found a gem in a book called *Sometimes We're Always Real Same-Same.* I grew up in Alaska, and author Mattox

Roesch brilliantly captures the intricacies of life in a small Alaskan village.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have had short stories published in *Curios Magazine*, *Reunion: the Dallas Review*, and *Cliterature*, a literary journal devoted to issues of women's sexuality.

Small cento: Edna finds a lover for tonight

Melissa Boston

This is what she loves: more people.
The cocktail hour finally arrives: she, like my lovers,
takes my drinks stiff and stuffed in plastic.
My billfold full of rubbers; what else can you do
but lie down with the dogs?

Like my lovers, I used to wake beside
the same body for years: this body
would care for me as a stranger:
fiddle-dee-dee and poof: the fantasy
to let this body die young, die with legs in the air:

such a pretty corpse. Soon the scent
of burning leaves is too much.
Edna's slight chest heaves,
her limbs naked, blooming,
barley moon.

Ladies in the street hollering eggs, eggs, eggs.

Interview

Melissa Boston

When did you write the poem?

I wrote "Small cento: Edna finds a lover tonight" in 2011. I was living in Las Cruces, NM at the time and reading a lot of D.A. Powell.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

"Small cento" was inspired by D.A. Powell's *Cocktails* and witnessing several hook-ups at this bar called El Patio in Mesilla, NM. I decided to repurpose lines from different poems in Powell's collection to create a narrative for Edna's nameless lover. For me, this poem is a discovery of the other person's thoughts during the initial meeting and the aftermath of that meeting.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

The hardest part of writing this particular poem was deciding which lines from *Cocktails* to use and figuring out how to alter the lines just enough to where my voice and Powell's voice streamlines together in a coherent fashion.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Readers can find more of my work in *PMS, Bird's Thumb, Moon City Review, The Fourth River, Blue Mesa Review*, and the forthcoming September issue of *I-70 Review*.

My Parents Have Me

Rachel Jamison Webster

in a banana box on the bald lawn
while they build the house.
Inch a finger through the worn corner,

touch dust, stone, a mouth
tasting the lime-dry taste of time.
He hangs the door. It is blue,

fitted to hinge, to jamb.
He wants it to swing open like an eye,
a measured question answered each time

with a final thud on rubber.
She orbits, sifting sticks,
clearing rocks from the lot.

Locusts rake a song overhead,
the sprinkler throws its aureole to the sky.
She circles, returns, twists ragweed,

crabgrass, Queen Anne's lace
from their clutch, carries them in her arms
to a mound in the back.

That night she dreams she has dropped it
in the dark margin beside the washing machine.
Gone for years, it's grown

into a mass of larvae, petal, arrowhead, tooth.
I wake with a sputter from the other room,
assuring her she will not lose this

like a sock, a thought. She begins
that day making wreaths for the door:
weaves of branch, leaf, burred weeds.

The lawn grows lush. He cuts it
three times a month for ten years, metered lines
running vertically, horizontally, diagonally.

Until I mow a single jagged letter through it: R.

Interview

Rachel Jamison Webster

When did you write the poem?

I wrote this poem just after college, as part of a writing workshop around the theme of memory. The assignment was to write without using the first person, and so I chose to write a memory of being a baby, when I would have known myself as my sensations, my environment, my parents—when I did not yet feel like some separate "I."

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The poem is based on a truth—my parents "finished" the house I grew up in, putting in grass seed for the yard, building the interior cabinets and baseboards, etc. I was just five months old when we moved in, and they would set me in a cardboard box and move around the box as they worked in the yard or the house. They liked to tell me that they didn't even have to give me toys—I could be happy just staring at the sky, or looking at a rock, or examining my own hands. I think they see this as emblematic of me —that fascination!— and the beginning of my inner life. So this poem is based on the stories they told me of my first days, on my own memory, and on my knowledge of their different personalities.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

Probably not using the words "I" or "Me." I realized how often I used the first-person! And I only allowed it in the title.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

This one developed pretty evenly. I wanted to have a sensual setting of scene, and then I needed character notes on both my mother and father—my mother's love of nature and the wild, which connects to her fear that she could lose me like something accidental, and then my father's respect for order, which is illustrated in his door opening like a measured

question, and his mowing of the lawn in metered lines. I rebelled against his sense of order constantly as a child, and the ending of the poem is also true. In order to get out of helping with his perfectly tended yard, I mowed a big "R" in it when I was nine. I wanted people in an airplane to see my initial, and as I'd predicted, he never let me mow again. While I identified more quickly with my mother, and her love of all things growing and found—arrowheads and burred weeds—I realized writing the poem that this sense of continuity, my dad's "metered lines," and the patient way he always answered my questions, certainly allowed me to become myself, as well.

Your poem is a stark, honest look at the intricacies of family. Do you find it easier to engage or harder to permeate the topic of one's own family?

Thank you. I don't write about my parents as much as I used to, but I still find family one of the most compelling subjects. Now I tend to write about my own daughter, and I hope I will be able to write more and more honestly and evocatively about both the failures and joys of parenting—and all the mixed emotions that family brings.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes. I have a memoir that I am just finishing, and I occasionally write essays and short stories, but my first love as a writer, and the most natural form for me, is poetry.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I try to write something every day, and I need to in order to feel balanced and happy in the world. And awake. I write poems longhand first in a notebook and then come back to them when I hardly remember them. I revise somewhat obsessively, chewing gum and chanting aloud all the while.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Virginia Woolf, Walt Whitman, William Faulkner, W.S. Merwin, Louise Gluck, Meghan O'Rourke, Linda Gregg, Gary Snyder, Linda Hogan, Marilynne Robinson, Marguerite Duras, Jean Toomer, Laura Kasischke, Brenda Shaughnessy, Robert Hass, and many more.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been pub-

lished before?

Yes, I have a book of poetry out now called *September* (*Northwestern University Press*, 2013) and an essay in *Labor Day: Birth Stories by Today's Best Women Writers* (*FSG*, 2013) and you can look me up online and find links to some poems through the Poetry Foundation and my own website:

www.racheljamisonwebster.com

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

Well, first I really liked your name. I grew up near Lake Erie, and would collect driftwood, beach glass and strange wash-ups almost every day. I love driftwood, and still have buckets of it—silver and smooth, and no piece alike. And then when I read your journal, I was very impressed with the work you publish—which I'd say is unusually textured, verbally vivid, while also being emotionally clear. I know what the poems are about in *Driftwood*, and they feel like life.

Soon, the casseroles will come

Anna Meister

Across town, we dress for school & Mom
brings our cereal to the table.

Jackson points out how her eyes look
like the cherry tree in summer.

When she says Steve, her voice
cracks like the ice tray.

A bowl overflows with Cap'n Crunch.
I cry at the mess of everything.

Mom tells us her braid is a brick
plunging to the bottom of a lake.

She excuses herself to make phone calls
& iron a shapeless black dress.

Interview

Anna Meister

When did you write the poem?

I wrote this poem last spring as a part of my Division III (senior thesis) project at Hampshire College. The final product is a full-length poetry collection exploring childhood memory, loss, and conceptions of home entitled *the mess of everything* (from a line in this poem!).

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Much of the manuscript examines familial grief, particularly in relation to the death of the speaker's uncle. This poem is definitely autobiographical, consisting of what I remember about the morning my mother's brother died.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

Figuring out which details did (and didn't) need to be there. This poem went through many drafts, changing its shape and pacing a number of times in revision. The struggle was really in lingering at that breakfast table, letting the images and moments build, letting the discomfort and grief be felt.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

In earlier drafts, the poem was much longer. My attempt to move the reader through multiple locations & introduce additional characters was taking away from the poem's immediacy. Lots of lines I cut from this piece became different poems.

What is the significance of the title of the poem?

This title refers to the act of bringing food to a grieving family as a way of saying *I'm sorry, I love you, I'm here*, which is maybe a church-people thing? I grew up as a pastor's kid and strongly associate certain dish-

es/types of food with funerals and death. "Soon the casseroles will come" was originally the poem's last line. My professor suggested I leave the poem on the simple image of the black dress, but I didn't want to lose the line completely. I have such a difficult time with titles. They're almost always the last piece of the poem that fits into place, often plucked from discarded first or last lines.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes. It's the form/way of making that most moves/makes sense to me. That said, I wrote the first page to many, many mystery novels as a child.

How often do you write narrative poetry?

Telling a story in my writing is hugely important to me. My poetry could maybe be described as "narrative-lyric hybrid" in that I'm more interested in writing moments (a single moment, a string of them) than sticking to a strict linear structure in my telling. But yeah, poems are stories. I'm definitely more likely to connect to a poem I'm reading if there's a narrative thread.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Reading is so hugely important, always. Reading other poets (aloud!) helps my ear catch new patterns & rhythms & inspires me to write into/toward other styles/spaces/subjects. Whenever I finish reading a book, the first poem I write always seems to be, on some level, an imitation of the writer with whose work I'd been living inside. And while you've gotta push through that to make sure you're not just biting someone else's voice, I think there's a lot of value to it as a jumping off point. I mostly write on my laptop, but always have a notebook with me for those moments when I need to write down a line/phrase/word that pops into my head. I definitely think I work best when I have a theme or "project," and I'm very much searching for that right now. Memory is one of my biggest poetic preoccupations, and I often use old photos to help me enter the world of a poem.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

I am forever returning to the work of Aracelis Girmay, Ross Gay, Marie Howe, & Patrick Rosal. I carry these poets' books around with me and

keep them beside my bed. They are each *that* continuously influential to my way of moving through the word. I love Matthew Dickman for his long, long poems and the way he writes about family. I recently finished Annelyse Gelman's "Everyone I Love is a Stranger to Someone" and was taken with how it was at once hilarious and incredibly tender. I'm so impressed by poets who do humor well. Oh! And Hélène Cixous' writing is very important to me and made everything connect in college.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Boiler, Potluck Mag, Nailed Magazine, The Bakery, NAP*, & elsewhere.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I think it's exciting to be a part of a literary journal when it's young and carving out a space. I'm also very into this interview series. It's neat to learn how a writer arrived at a poem.

Search Engine Optimization

Grant Clauser

All our queries return as snow,
wind piles it against the shed doors,
the driveway sheeted in ice.
Between the pine tree and its scent
is a hemorrhage where blue jays
fight each other over seeds.
A poltergeist of wind scatters
cones across the yard.

We refine our terms, narrow the options
while a neighbor's cat stalks
the bird feeder by the rear shed.
Between the feather and the flight—
long moments of nothing.
He's almost stone, patience
the weight some people carry
on their backs.

Disappearing is easy for wind.
It laughs out of reach even from snow.
Between the snow drift and the night
there's hunger and hope
that what you want to know falls
out of the sky, covers the yard
in white, and all you see
are the footsteps of who was here,
blood and feathers on the ground.

Interview

Grant Clauser

When did you write the poem?

This poem was started in February of 2014 when Pennsylvania had been inundated with snow for several weeks. My office overlooks the backyard, so I spend a lot of time looking out to see what the weather is up to.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The title refers to the practice of optimizing a web site to make it easily searchable by Google and other web search engines. In my day job I write for and manage a web site, so trying to create content that will rank high on search engines is something I do every day. I think staring out into the snow-covered yard, where everything is hidden, made the term seem more resonant to me, so I wanted to explore how I could play with that idea, absent the tech concerns. The bird and the cat are both searching for things while the weather goes about obscuring and making things more difficult.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I like to load a poem up with image-heavy details, and use sound and rhythm to keep the momentum flowing, and then have some sense emerge. Those three aims don't always get along with each other, so that's always a challenge for me.

Is snow, and more broadly natural elements of winter, a theme that occurs regularly in your poetry? Is this poem unique in that sense?

Snow comes up in a lot of the poems I write in winter because I spend a lot of time outside. Weather, plants, landscapes… all those outdoor things populate my poems. When I'm not outside hiking, fishing, boating, I'm usually inside thinking about those things, so my poems are full of natural, animal and landscape reference. There's so much metaphorical

potential in the places I like to go, so I keep tapping them.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes. I've tried a few short stories over the years, but I don't have the patience for them. Plus I spend too much time thinking about lines, sounds, appearance on the page. I write articles and features for a living, so for my creative outlet I need to focus on something that's very different from my pay outlet.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Oh, this is tough, but I can't not include Jack Gilbert and Richard Hugo on my list. My favorites probably change frequently.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Links to some other online poems and links to my two books can be found at my blog:

www.unIambic.com

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I first heard about it, I think, via a call-for-submissions on some list I subscribe to, but when I visited the site I was first impressed by the design. It's creative and effective. Then of course I dove into the poems and found many I really admired.

A Steady, Quiet Rain

Dylan Youngers

I.

We peeled the husks off grass,
a steady, quiet rain pulling
leaves down.

II.

For warmth, I lit a lighter
in the pocket of my leather
jacket.

III.

The shoreline began to fall
apart as the rain tore into
the bluffs and our hands
claimed the dirt.

The Man Steps into Nettles on the Way to Mass

Tobi Cogswell

Dressed in his "church pants", he cuts through a field
like a rabbit on skates. Late as he often is, he'll get "the eye"

from some chuntering old usher—get nothing but grief
from postman to pub to his mother and wife,

who left ahead of him–early–gently walking the road,
the sway of her contentment like a velvet metronome.

Sometimes they walk together—he pestering the edges
of her hair with bawdy words that pink her cheeks,

that she'll remember later, after family obligations
and a quick snippet of cake allow for their own time,

curtains pulled to shadows, a vase of yellow on the table
and the two of them, a rippled alchemy of lust and love.

But not today. And now the nettles, thick around his legs
like fire ants, pay him back for being slothful,

one of his sins. He will sit toward the back and pray
for the sting to dissolve in the distance, his whispered psalm.

Interview

Tobi Cogswell

When did you write the poem?

I wrote the poem April 18, 2014.

What inspired the poem?

My boyfriend (poet Jeffrey Alfier) and I were going to Ireland on vacation. In advance of the vacation we wrote lists of poem triggers that we could each use. The list has grown and shrunk as we have used lines or added lines. At one point there were some lines "Not my first trip down the footpath/ leaning into fences and stepping/ into banks of nettles". Those were the lines I used as my inspiration for the poem. I added the relationship parts myself.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

Writing a good poem. Even though I used our Ireland poem triggers, this was not intended to be an Ireland poem necessarily. I just wanted to write a good poem.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

Not really. Even if I start with a conception, I know that what comes out is going to be what wants to be written. I don't try to force my writing to stick to some preconceived idea.

Is religion a reoccurring theme in your poetry?

Not really. For me, it's generally food, loss, failing bodies, music, sex and doors. And now Ireland.

Your poem has a strong sense of narrative. Is this common with your poetry, or is this poem unique in that sense?

I generally describe myself as a narrative poet.

Do you primarily write poetry?

I do. I blogged for a summer for Fogged Clarity and that was fun. I have written a few reviews and jacket blurbs, and a few pieces that could either be defined as prose poetry or flash fiction, but I'm primarily a poet. I do like to try new things but they usually end up being 35-line poems, no matter what.

What is your creative process?

Sometimes I have an idea but when I sit down to write, it decides how it wants to be written. Sometimes a title or line wakes me up and I write it down, getting up and down all night to add a line, add a comma, and so forth. Regardless, I always let my poems sit overnight to see if I still respect them in the morning before I even consider submitting them.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Beckian Fritz Goldberg, Nick Flynn, William Wright, Ron Carlson, Ellen Gilchrist, Joe Millar, Diana Abu-Jaber, Howard Norman, Barbara Kingsolver, Jeffrey Alfier…

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

Please tell me. If I can touch one person I am humbly grateful and I'd love to know.

Where can readers find more of your work?

I have a chapbook of selected poems entitled "Lapses & Absences" that's on Amazon and Amazon UK. I have some online publications in *Red River Review, Steel Toe Review, Mojave River Review and Press, Illya's Honey* (which used to be print but is now online). The majority of my work is in print but if you google me you can find samples in the oddest places. I also have about six readings on YouTube.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

I have gotten some lovely reviews over the years, but mostly I just hope that you enjoy it.

Going Home:
An Interview with Ilmar Lehtpere
Conducted by Bill Wolak

Ilmar Lehtpere and Bill Wolak have a long history. They met in Ridgefield Memorial High School in New Jersey during the sixties. They were both drawn to the poetry of Garcia Lorca, underground films, and the folk music of the Incredible String Band. Subsequently, both friends became poets and translators.

Ilmar Lehtpere is a translator of Estonian literature into English. He has concentrated on the work of Kristiina Ehin, having to date translated nearly all of her published and unpublished poetry, prose and drama. He has translated eleven books by her and is currently working on the twelfth. *The Drums of Silence* (*Oleander Press*) was awarded the Poetry Society Popescu Prize for European Poetry in Translation in 2007, *The Scent of Your Shadow* (*Arc Publications*) was named Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation in 2010, and *1001 Winters* (*Bitter Oleander Press*) was shortlisted for the Popescu Prize in 2013.

His own poetry has appeared in Estonian and Irish literary magazines, and together with Sadie Murphy he has published a volume of poetry entitled *Wandering Towards Dawn* (*Lapwing*).

Bill Wolak is a poet who lives in the United States and teaches creative writing at William Paterson University. He has just published his tenth collection of poetry entitled *The Lover's Body*. His most recent

translation with Mahmood Karimi-Hakak, *Your Lover's Beloved: 51 Ghazals of Hafez*, was published by Cross-Cultural Communications in 2009. His translations have appeared in such magazines as The Sufi Journal, Basalt, Visions International, World Poetry Journal, and Atlanta Review. His critical work and interviews have appeared in *Notre Dame Review, Persian Heritage Magazine, Gargoyle, Southern Humanities Review, The Paterson Literary Review, Ascent, Florida English*, and *Prime Numbers Magazine*. He was selected to be a featured poet at festivals in India four times: at the 2011 Kritya International Poetry Festival in Nagpur, at the 2013 Hyderabad Literary Festival, at the Tarjuma 2013: Festival of Translators in Ahmedabad, and most recently at the 2014 Hyderabad Literary Festival.

You left the United States in 1980. Could you describe the circumstances that caused that life-changing trip to Germany?

At the bottom of nearly every life-changing decision is love. In the summer of 1980, I met and fell in love with Sadie Murphy, the woman I was to marry, who was spending the summer in the U.S. with our mutual friends (yours, Sadie's and mine), John and Joan Digby. Sadie grew up in the big Irish community in Birmingham, England and, when I met her, had been living in Germany for eight years, teaching English, writing poetry and plays in English and German, and leading drama and poetry groups. I knew that she was the woman for me, and in December of that year I moved to Essen, where Sadie lived.

You lived in Germany for many years. How did you support yourself there?

Yes, 27 years. I gave English lessons, mostly at a language school called Stevens English Training, but also privately.

You are an Estonian-American. After living all those years in Germany, what made you decide to move to Estonia?

It's a bit jarring to hear myself described as an Estonian-American. I stopped identifying with the U.S. at a very young age. I was bullied relentlessly at school, mostly because of my unusual name and, oddly, because of my father's name, Kaljo. I spent much of my time developing strategies to avoid humiliation and physical violence. Even some teachers made me

feel like an outsider and most turned a blind eye to the bullying. Already as a young child I was perplexed by the notion of America being a great melting-pot–I looked like everyone else, but my name was enough to exclude me and make me an object of ridicule and abuse. At home, within our four walls, it was essentially Estonia–on reflection, I suppose I sent out other subtle cultural signals that, in addition to my name, singled me out as "different", signals that the bullies unconsciously picked up on. This led me to embrace my Estonian and European roots all the more, roots which were quite fresh, as my parents had arrived in the U.S. only a matter of months before I was born. And in the sixties it, of course, led me to embrace the rebellious counter-culture that was growing in Europe and North America, a culture, at least in its beginnings, founded on tolerance.

But coming back to your question, I often think that Sadie and I should have made the move to Estonia much sooner, but such is human nature, that we get bogged down, trapped in the security of our routines. In my heart of hearts I always wanted to live in Estonia, but I didn't take the bull by the horns until 2007. We have many good friends in Germany, but life there grinds one down with its uniformity and inflexibility. It just wasn't home. We travelled to Estonia several times every year and suddenly it just seemed like a realistic possibility to move there. Everything there was familiar to me from my childhood. I wanted to go home.

We have recently moved on to Birmingham, England, where Sadie was born and grew up in the city's large Irish community. It is now her turn to go home. I have always felt a strong affinity for Ireland and the U.K. since I first went there and travelled around for three months in 1975, though I must say I miss Estonia.

Are you an Estonian citizen now, or do you maintain dual citizenship?

In a formal sense I always had dual citizenship, since children of Estonian citizens are automatically citizens as well, and according to the Estonian constitution, citizenship can't be revoked.

Ten years ago, while still living in Germany, I wrote to the Estonian Embassy in Berlin to inquire about getting an Estonian passport. The consul wrote back, in Estonian of course: "Dear relative, please phone me regarding this matter. My great-grandmother was your grandfather's sister." This is a typical Estonian experience. In such a small country, everyone is somehow connected with nearly everyone else. Needless to say, he quickly organised a passport for me and one for Sadie to boot.

Five years ago, I decided that I should take things to their logical conclusion and renounced my American citizenship. I wrote to the American Embassy in Tallinn and was asked to provide my reasons in writing and go for an interview to begin the process in person. I was expecting a very frosty reception, but in fact there was nothing of the sort. The young vice-consul I dealt with was a very courteous, thoughtful young man who went so far as to say that he understood and respected my reasons.

I was asked to return a week later, together with two witnesses who could testify to the fact that I was sane and that I wasn't being coerced. Whoever established that requirement obviously overlooked the fact that the witnesses might also be insane or the ones who were coercing me.

You did not move to Tallinn, the capital and largest city in Estonia. You chose to live in Viljandi. Why did you select that city?

Viljandi actually chose me. When we decided to move to Estonia, I asked all my friends to keep their eyes open for a job and a few months later a friend told me she had organised an interview for me at Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia, a college of the University of Tartu specialising in the performing arts, where they were desperately looking for an English teacher. We went to Estonia on holiday; I went to the interview and was offered the job.

Viljandi is in many ways a vibrant town because of the Kultuuriakadeemia and the folk music centre located there, but my roots–through my parents–are in Tartu, and I would dearly have loved to live there. Tartu is the cultural heart of Estonia. If I had been able to choose, I would have chosen Tartu.

You are the "official" translator for the well-known poet Kristiina Ehin. When did you first become aware of her poetry? What first attracted you to Kristiina Ehin's poetry?

I first came across a few of Kristiina's poems on the internet ten years ago. Soon after that I went to Estonia and bought her second and third books of poetry, which had just been published (the first was already sold out). Once in a while, very rarely, you read something that grabs you by the scruff of the neck and takes you to places in your own heart that you've never consciously been to before. You know straightaway, without any critical analysis, that this is it, this is the real thing.

Quite late in life, through reading Kristiina's work, I have begun to understand what it means to be a woman, to be a mother. She was already an astonishingly mature writer at a very young age, and it has been a great

joy and privilege to accompany her on the journey and watch her continue to grow.

You've been working with Kristiina Ehin for many years now translating her poetry, fiction, and other writing into English. Can you describe the translation process that the two of you have developed over the years? Do you make drafts and email them to her, or do you prefer to work together face to face?

A good translation is the product of spiritual kinship between author and translator. It is an expression of love for the original work. It's difficult for me to think in terms of process against this background. I don't think we have a process, as such. I translate a poem, a story, a chapter and send it to Kristiina. Sometimes she has a question, a suggestion, or a correction, but she usually leaves things as they are. We don't spend much time discussing details.

We devote far more attention to planning her many readings abroad– choosing what she is going to read, in what sequence and how best to introduce the various pieces. Kristiina likes each of her readings to be an organic entity with each piece leading on to the next, the entire reading having a clear beginning, middle, and end. If possible, she doesn't like to do the same programme twice.

Many translators work on dead poets whose work and biography is all that he or she has to make the poet come alive in another language. You, on the other hand, translate a living poet who can answer the most probing questions concerning the meaning of what she has written. Is this a blessing or a curse?

That depends on the poet. In Kristiina's case, it is most certainly a blessing. Our collaboration is based on mutual trust, respect, and friendship.

I once had a nightmarish experience with a poet who bombarded me with emails querying my translations and declaring again and again that "My dictionary says . . ." followed by lists of words. No amount of patient explanation could persuade the author that a dictionary can be a very helpful tool but is not a very useful arbiter when it comes to poetry translation. That project didn't live very long.

Recently Kristiina was invited to read at the Poetry Parnassus Festival at the South Bank Centre in London, just before the Summer Olympics. You accompanied her to help with the translations. Can

you describe that experience?

The festival was certainly the largest poetry festival ever held in the U.K., and perhaps in the English-speaking world, with one poet invited from each of the 240 countries taking part in the Olympics. I wasn't formally invited by the festival organisers, but David and Helen Constantine, at that time the editors of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, which was also the festival magazine, and Reet Remmel, cultural attaché at the Estonian Embassy in London, made it possible for me to go because one of the only six books to be launched at the festival was Kristiina's *The Final Going of Snow* in my translation.

What I enjoyed most, of course, was helping Kristiina prepare her readings and translating a poem she wrote at the festival so she could read it the next day. But it was a delight to also meet so many fascinating people from so many different countries, including a few I had corresponded with for years but not had the opportunity of meeting until then. And, of course, to discover so much poetry. For us the highlight of the festival, however, was translator Alexis Levitin's impromptu reading of his translation of Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen's "Quando" to Kristiina, Sadie and me on a bench in the South Bank roof garden. Alexis has become a good friend and has even visited us in Estonia.

The overall attitude to translation at the festival was a great disappointment to me. Seventy-eight of the 240 poets in the otherwise excellent festival anthology *The World Record* write in English, in spite of the dedication: "To all translators." This is no reflection on the quality of the poetry, just an expression of bemusement. One poet commented during his reading that his work had been translated by several different translators, "but who cares?" Since he didn't bother to acknowledge them, he obviously meant "who cares?" Other translators were also ignored. Many of the translations projected on the screens behind the poets were abysmal. The poets deserved much better, though I expect that in most cases they provided the translations and therefore had only themselves to blame. In any case, for all its shortcomings, the festival was a very rewarding experience.

Have you translated any other Estonian poets?

I have concentrated on Kristiina's work–eleven of her books have appeared in my translation, with the twelfth on the way–but I have translated books by other poets as well.

Sadie and I have collaborated with the poet Mathura (penname of Margus Lattik) to translate two volumes of his poetry, *Presence* and *Sõstra-*

helmed–Currant Beads (*Allikäärne*).

Kristiina's parents Andres Ehin and Ly Seppel are both among Estonia's most highly respected poets. I've translated a book of Ly's poetry entitled *Mälujuur–The Root of Memory* (*Lapwing*).

Sisemine hobune–Inner Horse–An Capall Istigh (*Coiscéim*), a trilingual Estonian-English-Irish volume of Andres' poetry, has just been published. The Irish translations are by the Irish poet Aogán Ó Muircheartaigh on the basis of my English translations. I only wish I had translated a book of Andres's poetry while he was still alive–he died very suddenly in December 2011. I expect it would have been a very different book indeed with his editorial input.

Kristiina's sister Eliisa is also a very fine poet, though she has published very little. We all put together a volume of the Ehin family's poetry, also in three languages with Aogán's Irish translations, entitled *Tandem neljale–Tandem for Four–Teaindim Ceathrair* (*Coiscéim*). Andres took a very active role in editing the book but sadly didn't live to see its publication.

I've translated a book of poems entitled *A Handful of Light* (*Lapwing*) by the much underrated poet Livia Viitol. It is really a mystery to me why she hasn't received the acclaim that I feel she deserves in Estonia.

And I've translated what I regard as a truly remarkable, idiosyncratic poetic work entitled *Sõja laul: The Estonian Song of War*, a book-length poem compiled by Hella Wuolijoki in 1915 from old Estonian folk songs about the horrors of war, seen very much from a woman's point of view. It is in the two-thousand year-old form of regilaul, or runo song – highly alliterative trochaic tetrameter. I spent over twenty years, on and off, trying to find the key before I succeeded in translating this work. It was published in the U.S. by the Feral Press (in the form of three booklets) and in Belfast by Lapwing. The Lapwing edition is entitled *My Brother Is Going off to War: Variations on a Theme*, and also contains a poem and short story by Kristiina inspired by the same cycle of folk songs. Bertolt Brecht, by the way, said it was the most pacifist war song in the world and made a German version of the poem, but unfortunately to my mind his translation isn't particularly good.

You are also a poet. Do you write in English, Estonian, or both?

I'm only a poet in the sense that all good poetry translators are poets. I've published a few poems in Estonian and Irish magazines, and Sadie and I were very honoured to have a small book of our poetry published by Lapwing in Ireland. I've been writing poetry for nearly 50 years, but I

don't have much to show for it. I used to write in English, because Sadie was my entire readership for many years. Kristiina urged me to write in Estonian, which I actually find easier–Estonian is such a poetic language–and I make English versions for Sadie now if I think the poems are any good. A few new poems will appear soon in an Estonian literary magazine.

What is the next project that you are working on now?

Last year Kristiina published a book of very poetic prose reflections on growing up in a small market town in Soviet Estonia entitled *Paleontologist's Diary*. I'm working on that at the moment. We haven't found a definite publisher yet, but I'm sure we will.

Three Poems by Kristiina Ehin
Translated by Ilmar Lehtpere

(Untitled) [1]

A giant airplane
a Boeing 757
fell in love with a grey heron
oh how it wanted
to fly over the marsh
where the heron stood
on a rough stump
slender legs
so thin and long
eyes half shut within itself
feathers the colourless colour of dreams
to see for a moment the black of its wings
the sharp brushstroke of its open beak
oh how it wanted
to set down its hurrying passengers
to leave its tedious everyday work
and swoop down to the heron
to twirl and to dance
to whirl wildly
on the rusty bog
its oh so bright and shining body
yearning to feel the nearness of bird feathers
to fall asleep wing in wing
against the heron's colourless colour of dreams

[1] First appeared in *The Drums of Silence,* published by *Oleander Press*.

and then it would whisper to the heron
wake up heron
look how full of fiery stars
the sky is
up there I only felt
the heat of the fuel
the call to hurtle on

UNREQUITED LOVES [2]

1

Unrequited loves drift through the city
They swim along the river upstream
like shoals of fish
They walk dripping by on stiletto heels
along Gildi and Küütri Street
They sit on a bench by St John's and wait
with brimming eyes full of yearning
lilac blue and sad all over
they gape at you

You come and spread out your hands
And they rain into your lap
But one particularly quick unrequited love
insinuates herself into your heart
She becomes summer
Her hair is almost the colour of grass
Her skin is the smoothest and silkiest road
Her whisperings wash you like the rain
Her glances crash into you like lightning

2

Of all unrequited loves I am the hardest case
I am at once muddy and pure as reed
I am the only unringed bird of my kind
My body smells of river barge tar
My heart is a big river mussel
Slowly and painfully
a pearl is growing in it

[2] First appeared in *The Final Going of Snow,* published by *Modern Poetry in Translation.*

Vast city smelling of spring fires
Vast sea that I have never seen
Vast numbers of poplar blossoms on the shores of my shoulders
Vast numbers of unrequited loves
flitting and seeking
I am the hardest case of them all
I don't flit I crawl
I don't seek I thirst
I am muddy unringed and pure as reed
My body scorches like midday sand
I smell of tar and sweet sleep
My heart is a big river mussel
Slowly and painfully
a pearl is growing in it

(Untitled) [3]

Before going we pack up
our blossoming apple trees
our West Estonian meadows
our old chestnut trees guarding the gate
We pack up our
primeval woodlands
our neighbours with their doghouse
and stable
where a couple of untroubled mares and stallions
are sleeping
We pack the forest as well
we'll be needing it
the ruins of the watermill
of course
We don't pack the fast road
everything passes by fast enough as it is

We take the ski trails and boat landing
those evenings the colour of lilacs
and high scraping fiddle tunes
windstill moonlit water
the only thing we are reflected in so clearly
We take the crickets
and the northern lights
before the spring equinox
we peel the film of ice from the puddles
that too

We sit a little before going
all our belongings with us
the snow of summers to come and
unwritten songs

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[3] First appeared in *The Final Going of Snow,* published by *Modern Poetry in Translation.*

Running Teal

Nathaniel Saint Amour

Alberi

Alessandro Andreuccetti

Alberi-rossi

Alessandro Andreuccetti

Interview

Alessandro Andreuccetti

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Through my work I try to analyze and represent the life that surrounds me or passes me by, just brushing. My favorite subjects are human figures immersed in their world, educated, that is, in poses and attitudes that identify the mood and suggest their personality. What interests me most is to discover the relationships between shapes and colors that are evident from the careful observation of reality and this is expressed in a strictly personal representation of the object. Through the filter of my work, observers can therefore grasp my own point of view, but they are also free to interpret the subject as they please, and so participate in the re-creation of the work. Ultimately with my colors, my drawings, the shapes that I paint I suggest a possible interpretation of reality, mine, but the case remains open to the infinite possibilities of the personal experience of each.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Sometime it's very difficult to add a title to an artwork because the artwork is born in its own way, sometimes the painting derives directly from a title I have in mind. In both cases, I try to elaborate titles that speak about the artwork.

When did you create the accepted piece?

During 2013. These pieces are part of a series about woods and trees.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

Preparing the surface. I applied plaster on cardboard, than painted with tempera.

How did you conceive of the piece?

I got the idea while walking in the countryside. Observing the edge of

the woods, I was struck by the particular texture that was drawn from the trunks of trees.

Did you have any goal in creating the piece?

My intension was simply to provide the viewer with my idea of color and form that has always been my visual poetics.

Is this the medium that you're most invested in?

No, my main medium is watercolour, but I love this medium too.

What is your creative process?

Each painting has its own history and its own staff gestation. Everyone can contribute to the initial spark, a picture, a phrase, a song. Before starting I spend much time thinking about the overall design of the new table, the patterns of colors to use, what to emphasize and what to leave in the background. Generally I take a lot of notes, sketches; I feel the colors, shadows, scoping the subject in portions then recompose otherwise, schematically various compositions. This whole process can take days or weeks but when it's time to paint the work is spun down without a second thought.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

Winslow Homer, John S. Sargent, Joseph Mallord, and William Turner.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

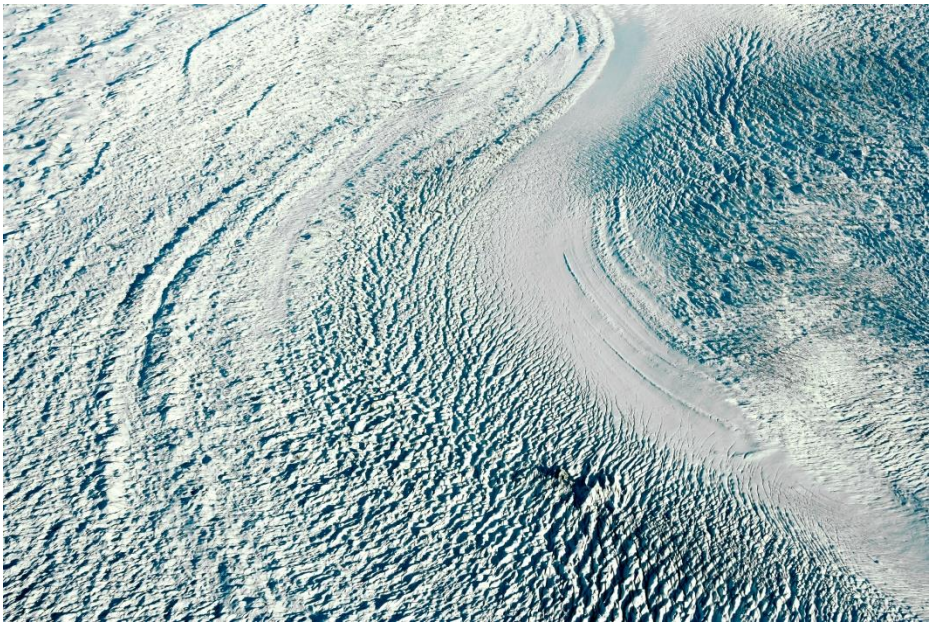
My site is a good place to start:

www.andreuccettiart.it

I'm featured in *Toscanacultura*, *Internatonal Water Colors*, *Inspire First*, *Tutt Art* websites.

Malaspina

Brett Murphy



Tension

Brett Murphy

Interview

Brett Murphy

How would you describe your aesthetic?

In my work, I try to strip the 'noise' out of a thought, idea, or concept from my daily life and what surrounds me at any time. I liken this process to distillation: isolate one desired element from something larger, but not to the point that element is unrecognizable or unrelatable. In fact, the very purpose of distilling the idea is to strip away clutter to make it more relatable. Say more with less.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Yes, a title often can add to the noise we experience on a daily basis and thereby dilute the point of the photograph.

When did you create these photographs?

Malaspina: On the job in October 2012 on a mobilization flight from Junea to Anchorage, AK.

Tension: While exploring the Hellroaring Plateau of the Beartooth Mountains, MT in 2008.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit these?

Yes, I have ethical qualms about over-manipulation of images, but the fact of the matter is cameras pale in comparison to the human eye. Also, our eyes have an imagination behind them, which makes it much more difficult to truly reproduce an experience through a photograph presented later on and out of context. Digital manipulation helps produce images with the same visual and imaginative effect we achieve as we experience the world around us.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

Malaspina: Scale. Each crevasse in that glacier is big enough to entirely swallow our Cessna Grand Caravan, which if it had seats would be about a 14-seater sized plane. This is the biggest glacier in the world, and nothing about it is small.

Tension: Deciding how much color I wanted in the shot. I almost went for monochrome, but the rust in the cable itself and its staining of the wood was irresistible.

What camera was this image taken with?

Malaspina - Canon Rebel T2i w/ Sigma 18-250mm lens

Tension - Canon Rebel XS w/ Sigma 18-250mm lens

What is your creative process?

In camera, my only goal is to expose properly and use the edges of the frame to cut out as much as possible to really hone in on what caught my eye. For shots like this, there is absolutely staggering beauty out of the frame, but to catch all of it is simply impossible. The first several years of my photography is defined by me being overwhelmed by the landscape and getting greedy with what all I wanted in the frame. One can simply not have it all. What I've come to realize is despite the fact I have removed a ridiculously beautiful landscape and climate from the frame, their collective effects are seen in the shot. The weathering of wood, rust, windblown sediments, snowdrifts, glaciers, battered pieces of equipment, and mountains ripping the sky apart all are capable of standing alone and telling a story of grace and brutality.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

Almost all of my photography is taken on location for my job. I have the best job in the world, especially for a photographer. Coworkers of mine, namely Ben Krause and Michael Oldham, inspired me to up my game, buy as much camera as I could afford, and get to it while I am still in a position that sends me to remote locations from Central America to the Arctic Circle. I must give credit to my employer for putting me in these amazing places day in and day out, doing work that has the potential to vastly help us understand the world around us, and the amazing people I work with who make me want to do this job forever (Quantum Spatial, WSI branch).

Naklo Onirycznie
(The Oneiric Palace in Naklo)

Grzegorz Chudy

Kotki Dwa I Wieza
(Two Kittens and an Old Watertower)

Grzegorz Chudy

Interview

Grzegorz Chudy

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I call it retro-watercolours, but sometimes people say that my paintings have elements of magical realism.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. In many situations, the title comes first. I often paint places, so in most situations you can find the name of the painted place in the title.

Did you have any goal in creating the piece?

My only goal was to put the red balloon on it- it's kind of my signature.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

Not really. I'm happy when people find the occasion to smile, reflect, and dream while watching my paintings.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

I'm a lover of old classic painters like Bosch, Breughel, Vermeer. Some modern artist like Mucha but top of the top is represented by polish painter Jerzy Duda-Gracz- the master of painting people and colours.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

On my website:

www.grzegorzchudy.pl

I published last year in a volume of poems: "Picture from Silesia" by

Ewa Parma. My watercolour was inspiration for her. More about this project here:

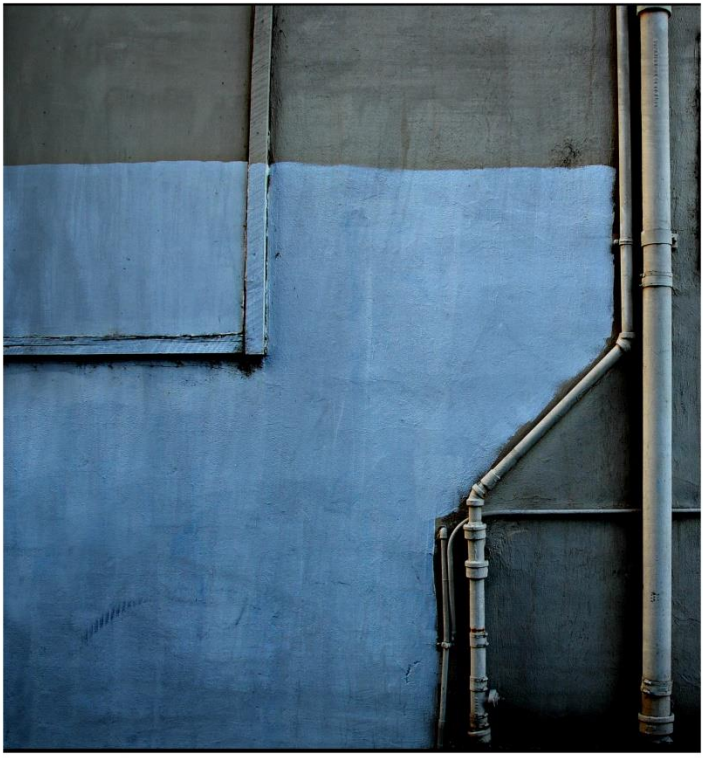
www.facebook.com/obrazkizeslaska

You can also find English versions of poems there.

I'm also a musician playing celtic music in Beltaine.

Filling in the Spaces

Thomas Gillaspy



Interview

Thomas Gillaspy

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I'm interested in capturing the essence of a moment and stripping it down to its fundamental elements. I look for the stillness in the busyness, the silences on the periphery of the day's commotion. I choose a minimalist approach because I want to eradicate distraction, distill the moment in its unique intensity and energy.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

No. I believe in Kerouac's "first thought, best thought." I look at the photo and I name it as I see it.

When did you capture the photo?

The photo was taken in 2013 in an alley in old town Oroville, CA.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

I am not a big proponent of digital editing. This image had minimal editing.

What inspired the piece?

An attempt to find patterns and symmetry and unique contrasts in color, shape and angle.

What camera was this image taken with?

Nikon D3000.

Are your other pieces similar in subject or focus?

Yes.

What is your creative process?

I find I need to work alone when I am looking for potential subjects to photograph. I like to find hidden places, those that other photographers might overlook.

I try and photograph the temporary patterns that form when elements of the urban landscape start to fall into disrepair. I find unique imagery in structures that start to break down, despite our attempts to maintain them.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

I admire the photography of Gregory Crewdson and the late Francesca Woodman.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My work has been featured in over ten magazines this year including: *Apeiron Review, Streetlight Magazine, Citron Review, Compose, Hothouse Magazine and Disquieting Muses Quarterly.*

I have a public stream of new images that I update monthly at:

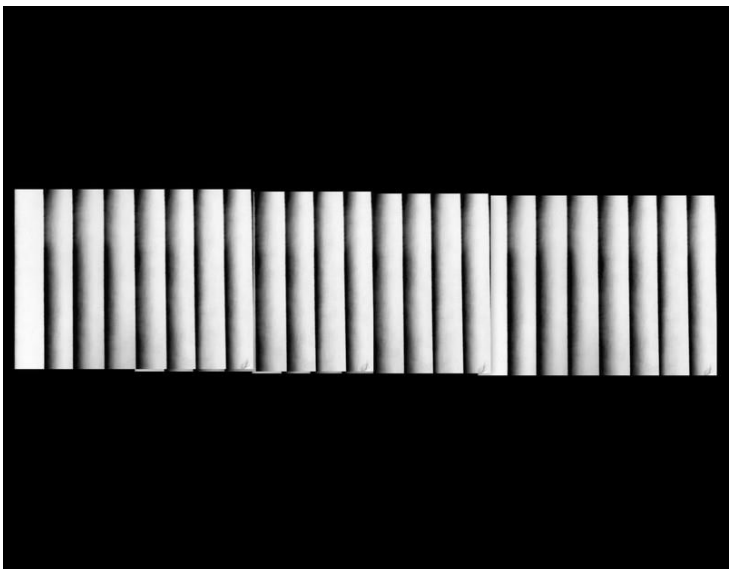
www.flickr.com/photos/thomasmichaelart

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I was impressed by the previous photographers and artists that you featured.

Any Minute Now

Jack Galmitz



Interview

Jack Galmitz

How would you describe your aesthetic?

That is a very big question, so I will give a brief reply. My aesthetic is eclectic, fanciful, deeply psychological, and often fortuitous. I pay no attention to the world. All of my work is an expression of some inner state of my being, which at any given time requires expression. I do not analyze what it is but find a way to manifest it in an artistic form. So, it is mimetic in the sense of being imitative of emotions, associations, memories, feelings, experiences, all of which surface at once. My work is not mimetic insofar as representing any object.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

I sometimes enjoy giving titles to my work, but generally don't bother. It is like signing my name. I never sign my work. If I give a work a title it sort of steers the viewer to interpret what they see or read in a specific way and I want to avoid that. Once the work is finished, I leave it open for the viewers' many interpretations. On the other hand, I do personally enjoy giving some works very simple titles, as references.

When did you create the accepted piece?

I believe I created the particular piece you have published when I first received an ordered Nikon camera. I took some photographs of objects on the roof, as we live on the top floor of an old converted warehouse. I'm not sure what the object is in the piece you've published. It is something my wife brought to the roof for some purpose or other, maybe to hold down something else. I was intrigued by its shape and shades of gray tone and its composite nature.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

I do digitally alter images of photographs or drawings I've done on the computer. I use a basic platform for this, Picasa, and I do not make considerable changes. I do not cut and paste, as I do not have this capacity. I do not create visionary work through a photoshop program or a fractal one. I usually increase contrast, perhaps sharpen, add shadow and light and if necessary crop out something not essential to the subject. The photograph you've published I manipulated by putting two of the same images beside one another and using collage to create a longer trail of metallic pieces in the picture.

Did you have any goal in creating the piece?

I did not have a goal when I took the photograph. As I've mentioned, I don't consider meaning, but rather consider what affect the appearance of something has on me. I do not believe that photographs or art for that matter should concern itself with aim or goal or meaning. I believe that a photograph, for instance, should be about the elements in it, that's all; it is an object in the world, in other words, and has no reference to anything other than itself.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

Although I did not have a conscious theme or idea in making this photograph, once there was the one image something within told me to double it or lengthen it as much as possible. Why? I can only hazard a guess. The continuity of the central image surrounded by black could be a repetition of the same, just as in nature all things grow by this method. It may be that the repetitious nature of the image was psychological, that is, a repetition compulsion, and by taking this on I was attempting to master past events that keep repeating themselves by turning this agonizing constant into art, transforming its nature, mastering what could not previously be mastered. Or, it might be my addition to the assembly-line nature of American production and commodification. Oddly, although we would all agree that no two minutes are the same, it certainly feels as if we or I am stuck in some place and it is this road that keeps repeating itself that is bared in this photograph.

Is this the medium that you're most invested in?

Lately, art has been the medium I am most invested in. But, just previously I spent fifteen years writing minimalist poetry. I continue in between art work to add four word poems to my Facebook page and have produced two books as a result. So, I suppose I alternate the media I work in.

If by this medium you mean specifically photography, I would have to say no, it is not the major medium of my attention. I draw. I make collages. Sometimes I paint. I work with colored pencils or graphite. Whatever works.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

I have a fascination with the work of Paul Klee. I find him to be one of the most imaginative of all artists and I find him impossible to imitate (as a means to learn and absorb a method). He was deeply involved in color. He realized at one point that everything was light and color and it was at that moment that he recognized himself as an artist. His figures are often crude and simplistic- almost like brut art- yet even then the pictures sing with their colors. He constantly painted landscapes without concern for solidity, but most for color. His work was generally flat surface painting, as he had no wish to engage in representational art. The attributes of Paul Klee are important to me in my visual work. If anyone enjoyed my work, I would recommend probably to throw it away. Unlike the East, where an art is studied under a master for many years before one is considered mature enough to create their own style, in the West we take pride in individualism. I think, at least in the arts, this is important. If there is something to be learned in my work, take it, steal it, use it, and then throw it away and go on with your own business experimenting until you find what you are looking for.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

If readers are interested in my work and they are on Facebook (and who isn't these days), they can find my work at the sites The Abstract Pencil, Abstract/Minimalism or minimalism. They can also find a good number of my art works in the last half-dozen issues of Otoliths, a e-journal of poetry and visual art. They can also find my work at the Museum of Computer Art (although I don't remember which category). I have done some journals covers- Roadrunner, which is no longer operative but which keeps an archive, one of the issues of Otoliths, and some others I'm afraid I've forgotten. Just search under my name on Google and you will find plenty of works to absorb you.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I was drawn to Driftwood because of the quality of its poetry and visual arts. Plus, I wrote an early book of poems called Driftwood. But primarily it is your dedication to finding the best work you can that makes me respect Driftwood and consider it a place to submit work to.

Fence and Feather

Sheila Lamb

Interview

Sheila Lamb

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I like to see how natural sunlight works with an image, finding the contrast between shadow and light. For this piece, the black feather against the sand stood out.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

No, I prefer titles. If nothing else, it keeps me organized. Having "untitled 1, 2, and 3" or "JPG_678" does not work well in my digital files.

When did you create "Fence and Feather"?

September of 2013 in Kill Devil Hills, NC.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

I did add a basic antique effect in iPhoto to add a little more warmth.

What inspired the piece?

Being in the Outer Banks in the down time inspires a lot of photos. Last September was cool and stormy, perfect days to grab the camera and see what there is to see.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

For me, angles. I sit down, stand up, take a picture to the left and right. I'm never sure until I import all twenty-seven different ways, which was the best. Ironically, though, it's usually the first shot.

What camera was this image taken with?

A little digital Canon Power Shot. I have a great Canon 35mm that uses film (remember those days?) I can't seem to part with it even though I

rarely use it.

How did you conceive of "Fence and Feather"?

Walked by and it caught my eye.

Did you have any goal in creating the piece?

With most of the photos I take, it's about capturing a moment in time. There is something beautiful in an arrangement of how things naturally fell, as with the jet black feather and the weather-beaten fence.

Is this the medium that you're most invested in?

I'm a writer of fiction first. Photography seems to be where I go when I need a break. I grab the camera and go for a hike.

Are your other pieces similar in subject or focus?

Many of my images are nature-inspired. I like finding that one angle of light or the natural set up of feather/fence/sand that is striking.

What is your creative process?

I find creativity works best for me in the morning. I generally write best first thing, well after lots of coffee, and then switch over to taking the camera outside or tweaking photos. That's my summertime schedule. I teach so during the school year, I do what I can in the evenings and weekends. With the images, though, most of the time it's having the camera at the right place at the right time. We had some tremendous melting icicles in March and I took a slew of photos but I figured everyone's tired of seeing ice and snow for a while.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

I've always loved painters such as Georgia O'Keefe, RC Gorman, Mark Rothko. I tend to follow local photographers and their exhibits, such as Sharon Kalstek, Shannon Hibberd Andrea Williams, and Tim Dugan. They are doing great work in the DC/Baltimore area.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My first print photos accompanied the story, "A Country Market Driving Tour" in Virginia Piedmont magazine:

http://thepiedmontonline.com/page.cfm/go/archives

Others are published with Referential Magazine.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The artwork. I tend to peruse various literary journals to read stories, poems, and examine the art and found Driftwood. The work you all publish is striking.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

It was being in the right place, at the right time, and capturing in nature something beautiful.

Doorway

Susana H. Case

Interview

Susana H. Case

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Largely documentary in nature, strongly influenced by early figures in that style of photography, such as Riis, Hine, etc.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

No, I always title my work.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

I don't do much to images other than to try to correct the color to what I remembered it being in real life.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

With architectural elements, it's a question of capturing something other than the architecture.

What camera was this image taken with?

It was shot with a Canon digital camera.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

Doorway is part of a larger series on odd elements in architecture.

Is photography the medium that you're most invested in?

I'm mostly a poet at this point, with a new book of poems, *4 Rms w Vu*, *Mayapple Press*. The poems address various elements of looking and seeing, so one could say the visual is highly important to me, whatever the medium.

Are your other photos similar in subject or focus?

In general, yes. I am interested in aspects of culture and also in mysterious-seeming architectural elements.

Who are some of your favorite photographers? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

My tastes run toward the documentary photographers, Sebastião Salgado being among the best, as well as Robert Polidori.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Yes, in a number of literary journals, including *Blue Hour Magazine*, *pacificREVIEW*, and *San Pedro River Review*.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The interest in the visual arts and the emphasis on design elements on the website and also in the journal. I'm very pleased that Driftwood Press showed an interest in my work.

Summer 2014

Fiction

Rachael Ratliff
Kyler Campbell
Eli McCormick
Amy Fant
Gabriel Valjan
Brittany Kerfoot

Poetry

C. Wade Bentley
Kevin Honold
Mary Crow
Natalie Nixon
Melissa Boston
Rachel Jamison Webster
Anna Meister
Grant Clauser
Dylan Youngers
Tobi Cogswell

Featured Interview

Ilmar Lehtpere

Visual Arts

Nathaniel Saint Amour
Alessandro Andreuccetti
Brett Murphy
Grzegorz Chudy
Thomas Gillaspy
Jack Galmitz
Sheila Lamb
Susana H. Case