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## Daddy Says

Mark Jacobs

Daddy says the Internet has the mark of the beast on it. He was talking to his colored friend Luther Dixon, Mr. Dixon, Daddy always calls him. What Daddy said, it made Mr. Dixon feel bad because he'd just that minute been bragging on the big job his son got in Richmond, working for a computer company, the name escapes me. This incident that I'm telling you about happened yesterday before lunch when Mr. Dixon came by to pick up his weed-eater. Daddy had that sucker running like new and I think undercharged for the job. However you cannot tell Daddy the first thing about money, or carburetors, or anything else for that matter. *Your father is a man who brooks no contradiction*, Momma liked to say, God give her peace. My special sadness is being Daddy's principal contradiction.

I worry what he says is true, that I will be the death of him.

I have to believe we are blessed by God, Daddy and me, not to have a computer. We've got our hands full with the internal combustion engine, which is a contrary invention on the best of days. It's been harder than ever since Daddy's stroke. I have tried to take up the slack, God be my witness, but I do not have the head nor the hands either for fixing engines that Daddy was born having. It pains me to see him sitting on his camp stool out in the shop with that oxygen mask over his mouth, lecturing me on a simple task I ought to be knowing these past thirty years.

His eyes have a funny look any more, like the cloudy swirl of a cat's eye marble. I do not believe they were like that, before the stroke. Now, they follow me around the shop while I work and I have to ask forgiveness of God for thinking they no longer cast light as the eyes of a human being are intended to. His voice comes out funny, too, like he's looking over his shoulder talking to somebody who's dead, or disappearing. He thinks he's whispering, saying a thing to himself, but of course I hear it just the same as he was talking directly at me. Yesterday for example I heard him tell this dead person who was not there to deliver him from imbecility.

Well, I wish I could.

This morning Daddy's eyes looked swirlier than ever and he sent me to

the boneyard. Mr. F.W. Carwile had carried in an old Toro riding mower which turned out it needed a starter and maybe we had one kicking around out there. F.W. is as old as Daddy but still a powerful man. He was in the army in the Second World War and got shot in the elbow by a Nazi with good aim. But to this day he runs 60 or 70 head of beef cattle and makes jokes with the women who attend Crystal Creek Baptist. The women for the most part like it, or pretend to, I can never tell which. That being one possible explanation for why I never got married.

The boneyard is our name for the patch of ground on the side of the east slope, out where what used to be cow pasture runs into woods. Daddy says Fowlers once owned hundreds and thousands of acres in this same county and boasted a highly respected surname. Say the name Fowler anywhere across Southside, generations back, and a man's first instinct was to tip his hat. In our time we are down to seven acres, and the boneyard lies along the property line where a fence once ran straight and true as two silver arrows.

I remember going out there as a boy. It was a fine place to be on your own in. Maybe thirty dead mowers were scattered around, along with the rusting carcasses of I don't know how many old tractors, including a Fordson where somebody had painted the spring seat bright blue and the color never seemed to fade never mind the unforgiving Virginia sun. A couple of tired old Bush Hogs, and a broke-down New Holland baler. That kind of thing and plenty of it. In those days we used the place as a kitchen dump also, and once in a while Daddy let me take a .22 out there and shoot cans. I have killed many a tin can in the days of my youth, even saying which brings tears to my eyes now that I must soon turn 50 and feel a great loneliness in my bones and heart.

The boneyard is where I first thought about sexual matters and always wished a girl would accompany me but one never did. Something in the aloneness of the place made me feel sexy, like I was just waking up and on the verge of figuring an important thing out. This is not a subject I could discuss with Daddy, or anybody else for that matter, which is just as well. Anyone I know would do their level best to talk me out of impure thoughts and the deeds to which they lead, whereas I will go to my grave believing all parts of my life would have been happier if I had comprehended fucking.

One thing about me is I will say God forgive me and mean it with all my heart while at the same time I've got my hands wrapped around the Devil's hot red tail. By choice.

This time the problem was forgetting, and neglect of duty. It was October, a mild month I am partial to. Out there in the boneyard the sun was



shining like your best friend's best friend, just warm enough to prickle the skin on my bare arms. I laid down in the grass, my head pointed upslope, and fell asleep when I should have been looking for a starter motor for F.W. Carwile's old Toro. I hope you will understand what I am getting at when I say I was carried up to the sky by a large white bird of considerable beauty, and there in the clouds was a lake or other similar body of great private sadness. The bird dropped me in the lake because it belonged to me, or I to it, and the water had the bitter taste of deserved tears. I wished above all things for an island, with a woman on it, and a name of my own making that would make me invisible to all people in the world and safe from belittlement.

Needless to say, I had no such luck, awake or asleep, nor did I find a starter mower that would serve for F.W.'s machine. And I had to put up with Daddy's exasperation because while I was out there dreaming in the boneyard somehow his oxygen line got tangled and his hands would not submit to their master and he wound up tumbling off the camp stool and could not right himself. Picking him up, getting his oxygen straightened out, I did not feel the things you ought to feel about the man who gave you birth. He cursed, and then quickly apologized to God. All well and good and part of a normal human day. What rankled was him blaming the filthy words that came out of his mouth on me and my imbecility. I would have been pleased to take responsibility for what went wrong if only the idea to do so had been mine.

So I had to drive into Briery to buy and pay full price for a starter mower, which meant Daddy would be charging F.W. more than he was going to want to pay for the job. He had pretty much promised F.W. we had something usable in the boneyard, and F.W. is a man close to his money which there is plenty of if you believe the gossip after church. Usually I listen to the radio when driving although not to the country music people around here generally love. I try to get a station out of the city and listen to songs that make me think about a thing I have not previously considered such as a Cadillac with neon lights decorating the wheels, or what camels eat. This time I drove without the radio and passed the time thinking.

On the way home I made a detour and stopped at the graveyard out behind Crystal Creek Baptist, where Momma insisted on being laid to rest despite that her people hailed from another county entirely where many of them are buried to this day. Once I was there I wished I had thought to bring flowers but it was too late to go back for any since Daddy would be sitting in the shop looking at the clock and fuming and might just as easy fall off his camp stool again.

The ground in that part of Broadhope County rolls a lot although never high enough to earn the name of hill, in my opinion. Momma's grave lies in a hollow between two piddling ridges. I dislike the spot for the closed-in feeling it gives me, but it suited Momma to be out of the heavy weather. Daddy was all for another parcel under a sycamore at the west end of the cemetery. He hammered on and on about the plot he favored. This continued for a couple of years at least, but Momma stood her ground and now she lies in it.

It was a glorious afternoon. Even the turkey vultures riding the high winds looked like God's creatures, happy to be there. Closer to the ground, a dozen birds made their various confusing calls, and a pair of rabbits watched me from the north ridge.

I do not really believe Momma speaks to me. I know she has long moldered and her eternal soul cannot be bothered with my tribulations in the valley of life. The conversations are merely a way to help me think matters through. The point being we talked about Daddy's precarious state of health and how that is causing me consternation.

"First things first, Aubry."

"What are the first things, Momma?"

"Why, taking care of yourself, most assuredly. Your daddy is not going to live forever. Have you given any thought to what happens when he goes? Will you keep the shop?"

"People know I can't fix engines like he can. They won't come."

"That's no answer."

"He looks down on me," I said, knowing full well I was changing the subject. "He thinks I'm an imbecile."

"You want to start looking around Briery. You might could turn up a job you can do and they'll hire you."

"I can't leave him alone, Momma, you know that. He needs looking after."

"You'll think of something."

And that was that. Typical of how these conversations go. Aunt Ruth and them were there when I got back. They were sitting around the shop listening to Daddy go on. Aunt Ruth is a broomstick of a woman with a flat face and disobedient silver hair. She is Daddy's baby sister and looks up to him which, the way things work, means looking down on me. They sat there picking on me with Daddy supervising while I put the full price motor in F.W.'s mower. Don't you know the job did not go smooth, and I could feel the red coming out in my face, taking in all the abuse they slung at me. However the day ended peacefully because when I called F.W. he came

over to pick up his machine and paid the bill without a whimper. By mistake I said to myself *Thank you, Momma*, when it was God I ought to be addressing with my relief.

Daddy sent me to Tolley's Market for those red-skinned hot dogs he prefers, and I cooked them up with some pork and beans. We ate and then sat on the porch, which has an agreeable prospect to the west. The chill of the fall was entering my bones like a secret nobody else could know about, nor would they. A black bird flew into the red sun that was going down. I felt myself being pulled along with it and did not resist. Where does down go?

"In the morning, first thing, we'll tackle Matthew Miller's power washer," Daddy said.

"Yes sir."

There were three or four jobs ahead of Miller, and Daddy advertised first come, first served. But as I have previously mentioned, quoting Momma who knew him best, he brooks no contradiction.

"Do you think you can manage to bring me a glass of tea?"

Well I did, of course. Nothing easier. But something in the words, and something in the way he said them, got my back up, and for the remainder of the evening up to and including getting him settled in bed I was full of pure resentment, and ornery to boot. I am used to hiding improper feelings like these because I long ago grew weary of being criticized. Nobody really knows me, nobody knows the real Aubry Fowler now that Momma has passed on. My theory is, if people took the trouble to know me they might be less critical of my shortcomings.

Since the stroke, Daddy sleeps early so I had a good couple of hours to watch a baseball game on the television. The Braves were already deep into the playoffs. Normally a baseball game relaxes me, and I have been known to drink a bottle of beer with my popcorn. We Fowlers have always rooted for the Braves, this year hopefully all the way to the Series. Tonight in contrast the resentful nature of my state of mind half spoiled the game.

When it was over – the Braves won seven to three – I put out the cat, closed up the house, and went to bed with no foreboding or specific evil thoughts. I slept hard. Why I sat up awake in the small hours I am unable to say.

Whenever that happens I go down the hall and check on Daddy. He was resting peacefully. It took some practice, but he has learned to sleep on his back, his head propped on a pillow, pretty much without stirring. That allows the oxygen to flow as it should and must. Lay emphysema on top of a stroke and you're asking for trouble, is the way Dr. Wade put it.

I sat in the chair alongside the bed. Moonlight was spilling in through the window making a story out of us, all the features and peculiarities of the moment bathed in soft white light. Daddy's coverlet and the slow rise and fall of his old chest underneath it. My hands and their twiddling fingers. Daddy's blood-pressure pill bottle. An apple on the nightstand. Who put it there?

What came about was an experiment. I watched my right hand shut the valve on the oxygen tank, then sat back to see what would happen. At first, nothing. But when Daddy's lungs realized they were not getting what they needed, they roused him and he sat bolt upright. By that time naturally I had turned the air back on.

"What is it, Daddy?"

He seemed a little fuzzy, like he did not know where he was. "Bad dream. Drowning. I could feel the water in my lungs."

"I guess it's no explaining the workings of the human mind, is it?"

Likely nothing more would have happened if at that moment Daddy had not chosen to say what he did.

"I'm afraid of dying, Aubry."

"You want me to set up with you a spell?"

His old gnarled hand, which has a burn scar on it from an encounter with a hot crankcase way back when I was a boy still killing cans with a .22 and feeling frequent sexual stirrings, found my arm and petted it.

"Will you do that, son?"

"Course I will. You go back to sleep. I'm not a bit tired. I'll sit here and think."

It was without a doubt a source of satisfaction to be there in the room with Daddy, watching him ease back down to sleep grateful for me being there. These feelings in my experience are rare and must be welcomed.

I dozed, sitting up in the chair. I heard a squirrel rustle through dead leaves on the floor of the woods, seeking a nut. I heard a mockingbird repeat its message like nobody ever paid any attention and of course he was right, nobody does. I came to myself and shut the valve on Daddy's breath tank again.

This time, he was twice as scared as he was the first time, probably because the oxygen stayed off longer and his lungs got themselves into a real panic over it.

"Switch on the light, Aubry."

I switched it on.

"What's wrong, Daddy?"

"I don't know, but I am right scared, scared like I have never been before on this earth. I am deathly afraid."

"Better rest. It will pass."

"Stay with me, will you?"

Which was the first and only time he ever pleaded with me for or about anything. I liked it. Such an alteration is natural in the course of life, I mean that the young step forward and care for the old, who become as children.

There was no dozing for me after that. We fell into a rhythm. Daddy slept, I turned off his air, he woke in trembling fear, and I soothed him back down to rest.

In the intervals while he slept I did more thinking. I tried to summon up a conversation with Momma but was not surprised when I did not hear from her. I am sure she disapproved of the present alteration of things even though to my mind I was doing exactly what she told me to do, taking care of myself in the face of change.

What will the morning and its splendor bring? I am less curious than you might think. For now, it's enough to feel my brain relax. I don't quite understand it, but I feel I am breathing easy.

From the Well:  
On Writing "Daddy Says"

Mark Jacobs

Something was wrong with my weed-whacker. I'm a city guy living in the country, and no good with tools or machinery. I took the weed-whacker to an old man who ran an old-fashioned small-engine repair shop out of his home, also out in the country. His grown son was working with him. Machines and parts of machines spread across an acre or two like history. Through the years countless mechanical problems had been taken on and either solved or abandoned. When I showed up, relatives of the old man were sitting on chairs in the shop, out of the sun. Driving back home, I thought about a story.

I've spent my adult life changing cultures, living around South and Central America, in Turkey, and in Spain. Work has taken me to countries in West and North and Central Africa, to the Middle East, to South and Central Asia. I am used to being in places I do not understand. Moving to rural Southside – in 1968, Parke Rouse, a Virginia journalist, wrote a book called Below the James Lies Dixie – repeated the pattern. And all that moving around had ingrained an impulse in me to try to figure out the new place in which I found myself living.

Figuring out calls for hard listening. Southside speech grows out of Southside life. Mass consumer culture has made serious inroads but failed, as yet, completely to homogenize the way people talk. The language I hear when I go to a grocery store, or talk with a man who understands internal combustion engines, has its own rhythms, cadences, turns of phrase. There is an accent, but it is not generically Southern. It has the specificity of a piece of music, which uses the same notes the last seven hundred composers have used to produce a sound that astonishes us by being new.

Writing "Daddy Says," I tried to bring into the narrator's voice some of what I had been listening to in Southside. It's easy to overdo it. To avoid caricature, it seems to me that the character's speech has to be inevitable, by which I mean that it gives voice to actions, thoughts, and feelings that

are consonant with an identity you discover as you put words on paper. There is an element of play involved, and experimentation.

The narrator in the story seems to have a mental disability of some sort. In an earlier age, he would have been called 'slow.' His perspective, like his voice, is unusual to the point of being odd. It unsettles. At the same time, he is capable of subtlety. He articulates complex thoughts and feelings. I see no contradiction in that. His voice comes to me as if from a well. The well is deep, not to say unfathomable. Rising from the bottom, the voice acquires texture and density. It carries contradictions on its back. It listens to itself, catching an echo, hearing what it is capable of hearing. My job, in writing the story, was to catch as much of that act of difficult perception as I could.

In Southside, I have noticed, people do not say 'weed-whacker.' It's a weed-eater. When I open my mouth, they know I'm not from around here.

## You Could Stop It Here

Stacy Austin Egan

This is the moment you have the chance to avoid all consequences and not become involved. This is a part where you have choices. Make no mistake. There are choices. He will be in his office, and you will have a question about your British Literature and Culture paper on “*A Clockwork Orange* and the Youth Revolt in Novel and Cinematic Form.” Just ask the question and don’t sit down when he invites you to, and don’t sit there and tell him how you loved the way he incorporated Kate Bush’s song into his lecture on *Wuthering Heights*. Don’t talk about how *Remains of the Day* made you cry.

This is a cliché. A student/professor relationship is trite and overdone, and you’d be stupid to think that you were the first, so don’t stare at the stack of The Clash albums that are serving as a paperweight on his desk as a way to avoid staring at him because it’s transparent and conveys desire more than if you looked right at him. You’ll look vulnerable when you curl up in that university-issued office chair and press your knees against your chest and feel your heart beat against your thighs. Better not to sit down in the first place.

Honestly, demonstrating that you are well-read does not make you seem in control or grown up or even self-assured. You think you are those things, of course, but just wait.

Don’t believe me? Fine. When he says he’s going to find a cup of coffee and asks if you want to join, forget about your plans with Sam to browse the bookstore on St. Mark’s and say *yes*. Compliment him on his New School tie tack and think to yourself how he looks sort of like a British, better version of Tom Cruise.

When you find yourself sitting across from him in a booth at that deli with a forgettable name on Broadway and 4th, go ahead and nod sympathetically when he tells you about how he and his wife have been separated for several months now. Don’t think about how several means two and separated does not mean divorced.

Listen, the way that you’re wadding your napkin up into a tight little ball is a dead giveaway: You are terrified, and he knows it will only take one



suggestion to reel you in. You should be thinking about how there is a different girl in every James Bond novel-- that's a life lesson straight from Ian Fleming. It doesn't matter how pretty or smart you are, but go ahead, tell him you would love to see that first edition of Oscar Wilde's plays, and take the 6 with him from Astor Place to 33rd, and be charmed when he swipes his metro card— twice.

\*

In his apartment, talk about the picture of lady justice stripped bare above his bookcase; ask him about his time at Pembroke and Wolfson. Stupidly say, *I didn't know you wrote books*, and pull the hardback edition about forging British culture off of the shelf. Slowly run your fingers over the smooth cover with a time lapse photograph of a single 1940s AEC tank under an artillery-ridden night sky, and let him tell you about his fascination with war culture and literature and how Harvard University Press is also publishing his next book.

If you are already at this point, you should ask to borrow that, by the way. It's a hundred and twenty five dollars on Amazon, and when things are all said and done, he won't ask for it back.

You have little to contribute here. These are the facts that make up your life: a high school diploma and not quite two years of college, a box of a room in Greenwich Village with an exposed brick wall and an air mattress on top of an Ikea loft bed, and a roommate who brings home someone different most weekends (guys and girls).

But tell him anyway. Let him convince you that you are interesting, that it's all so interesting. When he offers you a drink, don't say *sure*, and don't stare at the decanter like you have never seen one before, and don't make a horrible face because you've never tasted brandy.

Listen now, this is another point that you could walk away. You could just say, "Thanks for the drink, I'll see you on Monday," and you could go out into the February night, so cold it burns cheeks and fingers, and find someone closer to twenty. New York is a huge city, and there are a lot of guys in all of those taxicabs.

If you do stay though, know that this is what will happen: he will ask you about your weekend, and you will start talking about that Dresden Dolls concert you went to and how fun it was, and suddenly it will feel hot, and you will find yourself taking off your scarf, and then his arm will be around your shoulders, and you will move into him and exhale, and you will like how you fit in the crook of his elbow, and that is how you know you are really in trouble. You are going to become uncomfortable then, and you will finish that brandy, even though you don't like it. He will ask you to find

a Dresden Dolls song, and you will pull up “Shores of California” on his laptop, and he will rub his hand over your thigh, and before you know it, he will pull you closer, and the two of you will be kissing, and his hand will be cradling the back of your head, and you won’t know what you’re supposed to do with your hands, which should be yet another indication that you aren’t ready for this; but go ahead, ignore your intuition.

See how good it feels to have someone taking off your skinny jeans after a cup of coffee and a subway ride. This is not *An Affair to Remember*, and you’re no Deborah Kerr. You’re supposed to be an adult, so if you have let it go this far, don’t feel shocked that it’s happening. This is what you were expecting, isn’t it? Only it won’t be anything like what you expected.

You didn’t shave your legs or anything. You have only slept with two people, and you have no idea what you’re doing. Before this, you didn’t even think about how people can have sex standing up, but that’s where you’re going to be: against a wall. It’s not like *Pride and Prejudice*; this is the way it works, satisfied? And it’s going to hurt, honestly, because you’re too nervous for foreplay to have done much, and you’re going to be too terrified to say that it hurts, and you haven’t learned how to really want it yet. He’s going to kiss you all over your neck, and it’s going to feel sort of frantic and rushed. He will ask if you’re on the pill, and you won’t come; he’ll offer to go down on you, but that idea is petrifying: this is a person you have to look at every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning.

After, you will be standing there naked in the light of his reading lamp, and he’s going to give you more brandy and hail a cab for you and pay the driver. There’s not any intimacy or staying over. There’s only that taxicab smell that you’re going to forever associate with feeling empty and used.

\*

On Monday, he’s going to catch you off guard with a question about *Lucky Jim* in front of the class, and you’re going to feel flushed, though you actually know the answer. Can other people tell that you have slept with him? Fucked would be the appropriate word here. He fucked you. Think about that sentence. No wonder you can’t concentrate on this lecture. Maybe the TA will explain it later. She’s sort of a bitch though. Wonder if he’s been with her too? Think about how that’s all anyone really is looking for: someone to sleep with, but that wasn’t what you were looking for. You only wanted him to want you.

After class, he’s going to ask to see you in his office. The high of that will make you dizzy all the way to the elevator.

Coincidentally, he has an extra ticket to *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* This is what you thought you wanted, isn’t it? Seriously though, he’s twenty years

older than you, and you really have nothing to wear.

You could stop it here. Curiosity is captivating and so is the way he looks expectantly at you, his coffee cup the only thing between your bodies, but say you have plans, say you're scared shitless, say anything. Don't give him that half smile that men have learned to interpret as a yes. Imagine, from his perspective, how easy it looks to manipulate you, voiceless and hollow, into whatever position he chooses.

Really, this is the part where things are going to become dangerous because he's going to tell you that you are beautiful, and it's so easy to become addicted to things like how he walks close to you or how he holds your arm right above the elbow to make sure you don't slip in the crystallized sleet, scattered on the pavement like bits of shattered glass.

Once you are at this point, it's too late to entertain thoughts of turning back; the next few months are going to seem like a dream that you can't get out from under, or one that you can't get over, take your pick.

\*

Tread cautiously. Lie to your mother about how you are spending your time. When Sam calls to ask why you are missing free Monday movies at Cantor, Wednesday nights at Pour House, and Fridays at the same shitty bars on Waverly that take fake IDs, tell him you have to explain later. You are eating nineteen-dollar salads and fried Brie with seasonal chutney at Café Benjamin now and developing tastes you can't afford to have. Don't think about that though. Really, the less you think, the better from this point on.

Don't worry about whose calls he's taking when he goes into the hallway at eleven. Don't worry about those weekends when he doesn't call, and you find yourself listening to your roommate screwing someone who lives in Alphabet City or Brooklyn instead of curled up in his window seat with *The Satanic Verses* wearing only his undershirt, the smell of it clinging to you like something you were always meant to absorb.

Let yourself learn to love how long thread Egyptian cotton feels against bare skin and how it feels to come from just being touched in the dark, and what it feels like to really want for someone, so badly that it creates a little pain inside of you, but whatever you do, don't let yourself love things specific to him.

Don't fall in love with the way he dog ears your page and closes your book and pulls you on top of him. Don't confuse the lust you feel when he runs his fingers over your collarbone towards your breast in that agonizingly slow way for something deeper. Don't find yourself needing his hand on the small of your back in order to fall asleep. Know that you are a temporary

matter, a short-lived affair to fill a gap in his life when his wife was sleeping with her instructor from Pilates on Fifth.

For this reason, it's a good idea to stay in touch with those friends you have been ignoring for the past six weeks.

When you tell Sam what's really going on while eating the falafel he bought you for lunch at your old favorite restaurant, don't assume his concern is merely jealousy. Think about listening when he says he's worried about you. Don't smile in that way he can't see through and say *oh it's fine...great, I mean*. Don't tell him about how amazing the sex is just to try to reassure yourself that what you're doing is right. Have the decency to realize that he likes you as more than just a friend.

When he looks at you sadly, don't reapply your lip-gloss, thank him for the falafel, and say you have to run. Think about how good it would feel to tell someone about your fear and how you carry it with you all the time, a perfect thing that you're afraid to destroy.

\*

This will change you; know that too. You will know your body in different ways, be hyper aware of the weight of your breasts, your range of flexibility, the freckles on the back of your neck that no one ever noticed until him. You will develop a craving for brandy and Moscato, a love for Mozart, an inability to concentrate without hearing some kind of background noise, like the way he clicks his pen while grading papers, or drums his fingers against his keyboard when he can't think of what to type.

Don't expect this to change him. He is not malleable in the way that you are, isn't waiting to be molded into new contours and curves. He has simply learned how to fill his time, and he is comfortable with the shape his life already takes. You may be enticing, and pretty, and stimulating, but don't underestimate the power of comfortable, and know that you won't be that. Not for him.

\*

His wife's name is Elaine, and there is a picture of her on one of the bookcases in the study. She is beautiful in the way that older women are, a way that you might become, but not for a long, long time. Her skin is freckled from too much sun, but it looks soft from what you can tell. Her thick, black hair is pulled back, and she is laughing at a joke you probably wouldn't understand. There is a sexuality about her that shows through in the fullness of her lips, the accentuation of her eyes, the way that she leans against that stone fountain with one hip slightly more forward than the other, the way her thighs fill her jeans.

The photo is from some vacation they took; you don't know where.

Add it to the list of things you don't know, of private things, of things that happened before you were even an idea, of things that make up the intertwining of two people's lives of which you are only a small, short interruption.

When March turns to April, don't register for his class next fall. Don't read too much into the fact that his doorman knows you by name or that those pearl earrings that he buys you for your twenty-first birthday are from Tiffany's. And no, it doesn't matter that he signed the card "With Love."

Love shower sex, counter sex, couch sex, but don't love him. Don't become too accustomed to the way it feels to lay on top of him while he strokes your hair or to stretching out between his legs. Don't develop a need for him. Needs create voids where we should have more of ourselves. Maybe it would help to know that going in. Maybe it would help if you knew yourself going in.

If you looked for the signs of distancing, perhaps it wouldn't hurt so much when things come to an end. Notice then how he takes walks around the block and doesn't invite you to come, how he showers now without waking you up, the way he doesn't ask the doorman for messages in front of you anymore. Pay attention to the indents that you both make in his king size Tempur-pedic mattress growing further and further apart. Note how he calls you darling less and less, how he seems more and more agitated, how he snaps at you for leaving the orange juice out on the counter.

Know that you're playing a very adult game: the rules are strange, and, of course, it never turns out fair.

In early May, when he asks you to come to his office, know that it isn't about your paper on *The Importance of Being Earnest*. People have a way of ending things in the places where they start them.

Don't remember him like this, sitting in his chair with his stupid Mont Blanc pen in his hand telling you *Elaine and I are going to work things out*.

This does work out. For him. For her.

It's best to nod and try not to look like you're in shock. And whatever you do, don't let yourself cry.

Realize this is the only ending that ever is tacked on to stories like this; you could let it end.

\*

For about twenty minutes, it's going to feel like the world is turning over on its side, and you have nothing to hold onto. You won't be able to feel people running into you as you make your way down Broadway, and you won't be able to hear the sounds of honking, of talking and shouting, of trucks, of shoes against concrete.

If you feel like you haven't created enough havoc in your life, here are some more bad ideas: take the 1 to Fulton Street and find yourself walking toward Water Street in a half-conscious daze. Sit on a bench and watch a wrecking ball crash into the top of a building half a block away. Call Sam. End up in his dorm room smoking pot from the small blue glass pipe that you bought him for his last birthday, watching *The Godfather*, sitting on one of those horrible dorm furniture burlap love seats, and anxiously peeling at the wrapper on a can of Spaghetti O's instead of eating them. This is a long way down from Murray Hill.

Just because you know he will listen doesn't mean you should tell him everything while letting him hold you, so close you can feel the steady rise and fall of his chest, the rhythm of his breathing soothing in its predictability.

When he says *you should stay*, don't take a shower and curl up on his twin size bed with only a towel around you, the frayed edges barely covering your thighs. If you care about him and the way that he looks at you as if you are genuinely the most important thing, don't do that.

When he says *it'll be okay* and pushes your wet hair out of your face, know that intimacy is easy to initiate, but it's jagged and twisted and sometimes the edges are sharper than anyone knows to expect.

If you want to do some irreparable damage though, then disregard that shivering feeling running down your spine because being held and warm is the next best thing to feeling whole and okay. Sleep with him without considering him because it is something that you've learned how to do, because you want to see if making someone else feel good is the same as actually feeling good, because you're looking for distraction; be surprised that sex doesn't get rid of the sensation that you don't know who you've been since February, and that nothing feels right or comfortable or known.

Ask him to open the blinds; ask for a t-shirt; ask if it was okay.

Ask if he can get you a Xanax from someone in the dorm, and when he comes back to the room with one, take it. Feel heavy and so tired that you can't feel anything, which is really, if you were being honest, what you wanted all along.

Feel like you are numb and it's everything else around you that is melting. Don't think about the mess you've just created in his life. Think about yourself; you've become so good at that.

Sink into his chest sometime around 8 p.m. and fight to keep your eyes open so you can watch the last of the day slip away.

Outside, the sun is setting, and for a moment, the Brooklyn Bridge looks like it's burning.

Interview  
Stacy Austin Egan

**When did you write "You Could Stop It Here"?**

I wrote the first draft toward the end of 2010.

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

I never debated about the title. The story is about a regrettable series of actions, and it seems very human to obsess over mistakes and think about the points where things could have been different.

**What inspired "You Could Stop It Here"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?**

The story is fictional, but I spend a lot of time thinking about the ways people, sometimes unintentionally, damage each other. I also think a lot about how ironic it is that pain can feel so isolating when many people are experiencing or have experienced similar hurt.

**What was the hardest part of writing "You Could Stop It Here"?**

Being in the headspace of this character was emotionally exhausting and uncomfortable.

**Which part of "You Could Stop It Here" was conceived of first?**

The character's voice came to me first. I didn't write toward a theme or ending, but thankfully, I eventually discovered both elements.

**What's your favorite sentence in this work? Why?**

"When he says *it'll be okay* and pushes your wet hair out of your face, know that intimacy is easy to initiate, but it's jagged and twisted and sometimes the edges are sharper than anyone knows to expect." This is my favorite line because it makes me think of the complexities of intimacy; the vulnerability can bond us in ways that make us safe or expose us to grave

danger. Intimacy always requires taking a major risk, but I think our culture views sex dismissively, and people often don't think of it as having the power it does.

**Was there anything in your original conception of the story that did not make it in?**

I added to the original draft, but I didn't take things out.

**Do you primarily write fiction?**

Yes. I have written poems, plays, and screenplays for courses I have taken, but fiction is where I feel most capable.

**What other mediums have influenced your work? How?**

Music. Albums help me get into the mindset of a character and feel outside of myself enough to think like someone else. Movies often inspire me to write; I think because the two-hour escapism clears away my own concerns and allows me space and freedom to think of new ideas.

**Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.**

I've had a lot of eyes on the piece, and it's been through several larger revisions (mostly addition of scenes) and many, many small revisions.

**One of the most impressive aspects of this story is your skillful subversion of clichés. Could you talk a bit about your approach to a well-told premise?**

I think pretty much every story has been told in some way, so I try not to be too concerned with creating a completely original premise. I think if writers take the characters seriously and write about characters authentically, the story will feel fresh.

**You take this work beyond where the average story with this premise would end; you continue on after the break-up to show its harmful ripple effects on the others in the protagonist's life. How did you decide on where to end the story?**

I thought it seemed quite human that the protagonist would perpetuate what she had learned. Giving into the temptation to exercise what little power she has is flawed but relatable.

**There are plenty of literary and pop culture references in this work. What's your philosophy on references of this sort? What do you think**



**they add to the work?**

I think references can add authenticity to a character and help show the world of the story through the same lens that the character is seeing it. It can give readers insight into what a character may be thinking or influenced by without the writer directly stating it.

**There are a couple of scenes that deal with sex. How do you approach intimate scenes such as these?**

I try to write the scenes honestly and not shy away from the awkward and less-than-glamorous realities of sex.

**What are some of the difficulties you experienced while writing in second person?**

People act like second person, in itself, is an overdone cliché. To me, that made it the perfect point of view to write in, since the story was about an overdone cliché. Second person makes some people absolutely angry because they feel like it's manipulative, so the difficulty was dealing with people's biased notions that a second person story can't be done well.

**Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "You Could Stop It Here"?**

A few favorite authors that come to mind are Margaret Atwood, Roxane Gay, Lauren Groff, Kazuo Ishiguro, Alice Monroe, Lorrie Moore, and ZZ Packer. A few authors that influenced the story: Susan Minot, Lorrie Moore, and Marisha Pessl.

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

My story, "Mount Bonnell," appears in issue 6.12 of *PANK Magazine* (<http://pankmagazine.com/piece/mount-bonnell/>).

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I look for journals that are well established and have a track record of publishing good work. I like that *Driftwood Press* gives equal weight to fiction and poetry and includes visual art as well.

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

Just that I'm glad the story found a good home.

# The Bones We Leave Behind

Josh Potter

## Neighbor

It's not all that surprising that there were bones buried here. It's not even all that surprising that they were so close to the surface for so long, either. On an island like this, as old as the glaciers that carved it—well, I can only imagine what else might be buried here. What stumps me is that it was the chef who dug them up; that it was some guy who hadn't been on the island for even a year, digging on a plot of land that had been dug and dug and dug a hundred times before, who finally pulls up the bones. They looked old. But everything here does.

He and his fiancée, that gloomy woman who looked at her feet when she walked, had bought the inn a stone's throw from the beach to fix it up and turn it into a destination with a high-end restaurant and everything. Hardly a year later, though, the chef is ripping up the thistle in his garden when, apparently, right under a clod of weeds: a sternum. Then a femur. Then a tibia.

Most the folks here already didn't like him. Within a few weeks of showing up, he had completely remodeled the whole inn and half his property as if the natural state of the island weren't enough. Then, the tourists started showing up. That sort of thing never sat well with us. So, when he turned over that little bit of dirt and found the bones, it was almost as if the island had put them there just to get him to stop digging. We all hoped it would mean the end of him. It's like I said: you can't just show up to an island like this, an ancient scar in the middle of Puget Sound, and start turning over earth without expecting to find something.

To get here, you have to hop a ferry from the city across the channel through miles and miles of twisting water. The whole island is, really, just one giant mud pile with soil so fertile that new spruce and pine and fir sprout every morning. The beaches are rocks. There's more driftwood than people. And the rain shoots straight out of the coastline, slamming into our houses like it's trying to wash us out to sea.

But that's kind of the point. The clouds do part sometimes, and when they do, shades of blue and purple and dark forest green in no particular order or earthly shape bleed out to sea. Everything's like it's all upside down. The land and the water and the wind-beaten sky tie each other together like a tangle of life rafts. The only way you can tell earth from heaven is the odd barge that leaves those giant wakes the orcas play in. And that's the God's honest truth. That's why people are here. The last thing anybody wanted was some foreign chef bringing the mainland to us.

Ultimately, his little gruesome discovery ended up shutting down his restaurant. I can't say I feel too bad about it. It was bound to happen, anyway. He's from some new European city that cuts rail tunnels right through buildings and stacks apartments one on top of the other. That type of thing will, simply, never take root here.

But now that poor girl lives over there shuffling around the rooms wondering, I assume, why her husband cooks beef Bolognese all over the world while she lives with the thistle he never finished clearing. I see her sometimes. She wanders out to the beach across the small road in front of the inn. She'll collect beach wood and I'll wave. She'll nod because her hands are full of the bleached and hollow sticks washed up by tides, then climb back up to the road and into her saltwater-bleached home.

I could visit her. I suppose it wasn't her fault her husband tried turning the island into a vacation spot. It certainly wasn't her fault he found an entire skeleton in the yard behind her home. But I don't go see her. If you're on the island, it's because you don't want to see anybody else. We're all here for solitude. Look at what happened to the chef when he started digging. You just never know what you're going to exhume.

It got back to us from the mainland that the bones were thousands of years old. As far as I'm concerned though, the bones were the chef's doing. They would've stayed where they were another thousand or so years. Instead, the chef pulled at a root and two millennia came with it.

## Medical Examiner

Mondays are my catchup day. Three or four new bodies with their embolisms and their blood clots. Tuesdays are slow. No one dies on a Tuesday. Wednesdays—those are the car crashes and the suicides. For me to make any sort of worthwhile conclusion about how these people died and who's responsible, I have to cut them up, reduce them to their parts to see which ones failed. Over and over. A person comes in, a body comes out.

So when I got the call from the island about the bones, it was a welcome change. There was nothing to really autopsy. The body was already gone; just the bones. The rural coroner out on the island managed to get the bones onto a ferry headed into town, and I was just starting in on an unidentified homeless man hit by a car when they arrived. A Wednesday. It was immediately clear that the bones weren't, strictly speaking, human, so I had to figure out what they were.

Well, yeah, cartilage and calcium. Sure. But what else? I had to figure out not what they were, but what they *had been*.

My wife says I should've been a butcher. I don't know how I feel about that, but she might be right. I like bodies for what they are when they're alive: a stretchy and porous pile of clay that can think and feel and hear and touch. I'm the guy who thinks a brisket is more delicious knowing it had once been the chest piece of a cow. But I'm also the guy who makes bones out of people.

Funny. I had, actually, ordered the brisket at the chef's restaurant a few months earlier. It was strange, once I laid the bones out on my table, to think about how close I'd already been to them without even knowing it. While we ate our dinner at the inn, these same bones had been buried just a few paces into the yard, and now I was dusting them free of dirt and subjecting them to the dermestid beetles that would, eventually, eat any remaining meat or sinew stuck to the collagen.

Years and years earlier, we'd taken our honeymoon to Venice and, ever since, my wife had been obsessed with what she called *haute cuisine*. So she was ecstatic to find out that there was a famous European chef just across the water from our city when he bought the old inn and opened a restaurant on the site.

We went for a weekend on the island. It wasn't Venice, but it was nice. Diane and I, we used to talk about doing something like what that chef and his fiancée had done: we'd wanted to buy some land after we retired and spruce up an old house. She'd write her book; I'd start a garden. For a while, it had felt a little like people were cycling through life like air through a fan, and I hoped to get out of the death business sooner than later. So it was a relief when we checked into the inn and sat down to dinner in the chef's restaurant, then, before the bones came up out of the dirt. It was like returning to the land of the living, finding my way back on Charon's ferry from the underworld.

The chef's fiancée had painted the place this sort of gray-blue-white, the same color of the sky out there; the halls were this delicious-looking brown, like cooked potatoes or syrup, like root vegetables pulled straight from the

ground. I was sort of jealous. Everything there seemed like it would taste good, smell fresh, feel even better. It was a whole sensory experience. I could feel the gooey sauces on my tongue, taste what the cow had eaten, smell its marinade, and hear the tide coming in just outside the window.

That's what a body should be, you see? Or, all a body really is; sensitive skin layered on top of a nervous system, wrapped around veins, perfectly put together so that, when you bite into a tender piece of beef, you know just how delicious it is.

I ordered the brisket. Diane ordered the braised spare rib. She rolled her eyes when I took the bone from her plate and sucked the marrow out.

"She's the real talent of this place," my wife had said, halfway through her second pinot noir, the suggested pairing of the night. The chef's fiancée was pacing around the tables and had gone outside to the beach across the road and then back to the restaurant carrying a handful of shells and beach wood. She had made platters and cutlery, shelves and centerpieces out of the beach litter. It was kind of distracting, her coming back and forth with armloads of lumber.

The chef came out of the kitchen once to shuffle his fiancée into the back where she'd been piling her collection.

"Poor thing," my wife said.

I tried to explain it to Diane, how a restaurant is like a body—different structures working in unison.

"Everything's like a body to you."

"How're your ribs?"

"I'm not hungry anymore," she said and pushed the rest of her ribs to the side.

Since then, neither of us has brought up the idea of moving out of the city again. It just seems like it's asking for trouble.

Later, when the chef dug up the skeleton, I put the bones back together as best I could, one dried husk after another. I couldn't help but think of driftwood.

After I finally had them arranged, the anthropologists and archeologists I called all said it was probably early human, most likely a distant relative of the Indians from the reservation on the other side of the island. I could tell it had died in a fight; I could see the bone scars along its ribs and a big gash in its thicker-than-normal skull. When the university took them away for archiving, there wasn't much more I could do. A jogger had dropped dead during a marathon and the police were preoccupied with a shooting at a night club. I had to extract the bullets.

## Chef

First of all, these people have it all wrong. I grew up in New Jersey and I went to culinary school in California then went to Copenhagen to work with Chef René Redzepi. It was the best food you'll ever have. We made venison tartar on sheep sorrel, seaweed-wrapped clam fritters, and baked farmhouse pork shoulder with harissa puree. But then Redzepi asked someone else to work as his chef de cuisine, and I couldn't stand to be in Europe anymore. All that work and nothing ever came of it. So, I bought the old inn: I envisioned the kind of old-style English rooming house where guests used to stay overnight on their way to the moors or the highlands, and the house chef would cook whatever he'd plucked and slaughtered that morning.

The inn was in shambles when I bought it, but I knew that, since it was only a few strides from the shore, and all the fog and wood-smoke and beach wood clunked together in the tide. There was more life out there, more breath, than anywhere else I've cooked. I could've really created a sensation there.

But the islanders, they were complaining from day one, coming up to me, chests all inflated, asking me what I think I'm doing.

It's more than just making food. I'm bringing life to the dead. After I butcher an animal or pull up my root vegetables, I marinate, I sear, I sauté and I make it live again. But these people? They wouldn't know life if it washed up on the shore. They all came here to bury themselves in the mud and rain and never see the light of day. They'd rather sit in the dark forest and watch as they float farther away like paddling themselves aimlessly across the River Styx.

It seemed like such a good idea, too. I immediately started planting a garden and my fiancée started painting again. But then, something happened. Maybe it was the rain, maybe it was just being on the island; probably, it was a combination of the two. But, for two weeks straight, she stood from sunup to sundown on the shore waiting for the beach to collect its driftwood. Armload after armload, she brought it all in.

"The bones of the ocean," she'd called them.

"Are you going to reconstitute it in our kitchen?" I had asked.

"The ocean's not a bouillon cube, chef," she said. "It takes more than just adding water."

She painted and repainted the outside of the inn, then the inside. She built plates, bowls and sculptures out of the driftwood. She had jars and jars of seashells.

I had planned to close the restaurant for a while that winter until tourist season picked up again. Of course, nothing stops growing, so I had to plant the fall vegetables I wanted to harvest for the restaurant in the spring. Everything on the island lives so furiously that I could grow kale, cabbage, carrots year-round. Yet, somehow, I dig up the one thing long-dead.

I had plunged my spade into what looked like a rib bone. It was heavy, like, dense. Bones are supposed to expand and contract with breath, to be agile and limber. I once saw a line cook chop straight through his thumb when he wasn't paying attention to his cleaver. It takes very little effort to sever the haunches of a white tail deer when I'm making my venison. But this bone weighed a ton. It was the size of a human's rib, the shape of a human's rib, but it felt like it'd been dipped in molten lead.

I showed it to my fiancée and she took it from my hand.

"What is it?" she asked. And I shrugged. "It looks old," she said. "What do you think it's doing out there?"

"Doing?" I asked. "It's just being dead. Being dead in my garden."

But she didn't find that funny. To her, the bones had put themselves there, hid themselves in the ground like they had a will of their own.

"What should we do with it?" she asked.

"I think it's a human skeleton." I had laid it on a table in the restaurant to examine it. "I'm not going to make a broth out of it."

"Put it back," she said. "And cover it up."

"Are you kidding?" I figured it was the island talking. Not her. It had a way of trying to keep itself hidden.

Instead, I called the cops. They arrived with a coroner in a boat but once they brought the whole skeleton back to the examiner in the city and it got back to us that it was pre-historic, I had to close the restaurant, pause any plans for my spring tourist season. The Indians on the reservation across the island were convinced, now, that we were living on some kind of burial ground. The university wanted to do some archeology.

As it turned out, I uncovered these bones but the island buried everything else. I had to close the restaurant but, of course, I wasn't going to just stop cooking. I took a job in New York and begged my fiancée to come with me, but she wouldn't come. I wasn't entirely surprised. From the way she looked at that bone and collected her beach souvenirs and stood all day on the shore, I always had a feeling that she'd never leave the island. She stayed behind, and we were done. In a way, it was as if she replaced the body I'd dug up.

From what I hear, she's let the inn practically wash back out to sea. The garden's overgrown now too.

## Fiancée

It was over after the skeleton.

He wouldn't have said it, but it wasn't as if things were perfect when we left Copenhagen. Then, we moved to the island, one forested island among many forested islands, and I thought things would get better. But the thing is, he's obsessed with the dead. All the ingredients, everything he's ever cooked, they, of course, are dead first. They have to be. And he spent more time trying to reanimate them than actually living himself.

Because the inn—our little cottage so close to the sea, canopied by knotty spruce and pine—was so lovely. I had painted a beach scene in the dining room; he called it tacky. In the hallways, I sponged a deep brown onto the walls so it felt like we were inside the ground. He said it was the color of deer hide; I said it was the color of tree bark. They're both just types of skin, I suppose.

I allowed myself to hope. I thought he'd finally come back to the world of the living. Early on, we'd fall asleep early with our hands still dirty—him with demi-glace and me with paint—and wake up to the waves.

One time, I saw the tail of water trailing behind a pod of whales just as the gray morning lifted off the water. I saw orcas.

But then, the restaurant opened and chef went back to work. It was exactly the way it was in Copenhagen. It wasn't that his cooking made him feel something I didn't understand; nor was it that his food, and not me, made him feel it. He was just so wrapped up in making other people feel something—taste and texture, sight and scent—he never felt any of it himself. He never enjoyed his own food the way his customers did and, so, neither could I.

So when the bones appeared—and it really felt as though they just appeared—and he had to postpone reopening his restaurant for spring tourist season, I thought maybe this was an opportunity. He'd help me paint. I'd help him garden. We'd take some time together.

That first afternoon, before he called the police and the bone was just sitting there in the middle of us, it felt like it had appeared just for us. Like it had washed up as the driftwood does, from somewhere else, across an ocean or from under the earth—it didn't matter—all to end up where it did, from out of our garden to our dinner table.

"I just want it out of here," he'd said. "I wish I never dug it up."

I told him that he just didn't like that he couldn't cook it because there was no flesh to fillet.

"If it's a human skeleton," he said, "you think I'd want to make a broth



out of it?”

“Put it back,” I said. “Cover it up.”

Even in a place like this, where new trees sprout out of the rotten trunks of old ones and the soil steams with composting warmth, the dead have a place.

Instead, he left it disinterred and called the police to take it away.

Then there were the people who wanted to excavate and the reservation who wanted to investigate the property. He wanted to move on, start over again somewhere else. I told him I wasn’t going. Less than a month later, he was gone. And so were the bones. I was left. I stayed because of the orcas. I can see the whales.

## The Bones

We dead do not mind being dead. It is uneventful, and it is not painful.

But we are hungry. Or rather, we miss being hungry. Cringing at burnt garlic or clipping our nails too short. Bitter coffee or falling on ice. The feeling of being followed or licking whipped cream, beaten to perfectly stiff peaks, off a spoon. I, for one, miss the way my stomach churned when I hunted for food. What I miss most, now, is what my bones could do and what my skin did to them.

The chef and the painter, they were never going to be together. A body works by operating in unison without even knowing it. Like the way lungs automatically take in air so the brain can receive the oxygen so it can remember its own name.

We dead know better than anyone, now, what it takes to be alive.

After all, I was not disappointed because the chef dug me up. I was not disappointed because they laid me out on the metal slab. I was not upset that they propped me up in a museum behind smudged windows. I can see you, there. I’m watching you when you’re watching me, and I don’t care that you tap on the glass, that I’m a curiosity. I don’t even care that you graffiti the plaque next to me; that you scribble over *erectus* so it just says *homo*. I just wish I could feel what you feel—the adrenaline you have when you finally walk away, hiding the permanent marker deep inside your pockets.

Interview

Josh Potter

**When did you write "The Bones We Leave Behind"?**

My first attempt at a version of this story was probably five or six years ago, but I dug it back out and finished it about a year ago.

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

For this particular piece, the title was comparatively easy to come up with. It came about through both the tone and the theme of the work: since all the speakers seem to directly address the reader and they are all, in some way, discussing what makes themselves human, the title was just a reflection of that.

**What inspired "The Bones We Leave Behind"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?**

It began as an image of a body in a shallow grave, buried in a very unexpected place. I'm not sure why. It's possible that I figured it just lent itself to drama. At first, the body was in a sandbox. Then it had washed ashore. Finally, this version was inspired by a real restaurant run by a renowned chef on an island in the Puget Sound. I hadn't worked on the story for a long time. It kept falling apart. Then, after I spent a weekend on the island, I felt like I finally had a successful entry point to the story.

**What was the hardest part of writing "The Bones We Leave Behind"?**

Coming up with and differentiating the voices. Once I had the premise of the multiple narrators, my challenge was deciding who would speak and what they would sound like.

**What's your favorite sentence in this work? Why?**

I'm particularly fond of "We dead do not mind being dead." I use a lot of imagery and metaphor that I think adds a complex depth of tone and atmosphere, but this sentence is, at once, simple and, pretty much, the entire pivot point of the piece. It's surprising and summarizing and the general sentiment seems unique to me.

**Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

I think everybody's process is unique in some way. I try everything from writing in order to starting from an outline to building from character sketches. I've been told, though, that it's obvious when I'm thinking when I write. I type in short bursts—a couple sentences at a time—then leave my hands on the keyboard and compose in my head for ten minutes before typing again. I compose first. Then I write.

**Not unlike many other *Driftwood Press* stories, our editors worked with you on multiple revisions of this work. Tell us a little bit about your experience revising this work.**

There were, essentially, two different phases of revision. The first was getting past earlier rough and, frankly, ill-conceived concepts until I got the structure and premise settled. Then, once that was done, I went back through with the help of *Driftwood* editors rewriting and fleshing out the voices, themes and narrative arc. I needed the concept on paper first; I needed to see all the narrators' words before I knew who they were. But once I did, it was a matter of going back through and making sure their identities were clear and purposeful.

The *Driftwood* editors were particularly interested in line edits. Luckily and thankfully, they were on board with the concept and tone. But I really appreciated their attention to detail all in the service of crafting individual narrators that each expanded on both the themes and the overall direction.

**Which section changed the most and how did those changes enrich the overall story?**

The neighbor's voice, more than anything, was completely redone. He

was, first, a mean prognosticator, then a simpleton. Finally, through conversations with *Driftwood*, we discovered together that the neighbor was a far more compassionate person and through his empathy the entire context of the piece is thrown into relief.

**What advice would you give other writers with regards to differentiating character voice?**

There are two approaches that I think should both be applied: the first is simply deciding what type of person each one is and how they would manifest their own identity in the words they use—are they angry? Disappointed? Then, in order to give those types depth and avoid cliché, set rhetorical rules for yourself and do not deviate. One voice should use long sentences while another will speak in an additive style, using ands and buts without ever breaking. Another will use short sentences while another will overuse one particular word.

**Why did you decide to tackle one story from multiple perspectives? Was it difficult deciding how long each of these perspectives needed to be?**

I decided to approach it this way simply because a traditional narrative approach wasn't working. I was already involved too deeply with my characters to shelve this story completely, but telling it from one perspective never seemed right. I asked myself why, after so many different attempts, the image of the bones was the one element I never let go of and, realizing that the image was the pivot point for each character's development, it was clear then that the image in and of itself was the story. I tackled it by having the bones appear at the end of each of the characters' individual arcs, communication in some way that, after the bones, no one on the island will be the same. Each section ended up relatively equal in length, beside the bones' perspective, and I think that was a happy accident. It simply happened that each person's narrative began and ended with the chef's arrival on the island.

**You pull off an impressive feat in this piece by telling the story**

**through five different narrators-- Neighbor, Medical Examiner, Chef, Fiancée, and Dead. The first four are grounded in realism, whereas the narrator of the Dead veers into the surreal. Tell me more about your decision to use a non-living narrator to provide the stunning conclusion.**

I got to the end of the chef's perspective and knew it wasn't done. The tone of the story is too inhuman and strange to let the chef have the last word and, in the end, it was clear that the bones—for their silence and lack of agency—actually had all the right things to say. The story is based around the question of what it means to be alive, and I realized at the end that only the dead can really know.

The bones are an authority figure, a benevolent witness to the otherwise unremarkable goings on of the island. It was important for me to ground the piece in reality but zoom out at the end to frame it in a world wherein our lives, human and fallible by their nature, are placed within a greater history that could inject itself at any moment. I think I was trying to show that the ground we walk on has been walked on before. Our footsteps are not ours to own but are imprinted in inconceivable ways.

**Do you have a favorite point of view to write from? Which section was the easiest to write? Which was the hardest?**

I usually write in third person close. I find first person—in my attempts—devolve into simple colloquialism and character self-aggrandizement. But, in this story, every character has failed someone else in some way and are each trying to understand the nature of their failure. I actually really liked writing the fiancée: she's got an aura about her that I didn't write, that is all hers that she gave me to use. The hardest was the medical examiner. I knew I needed his perspective to give the bones some sort of context—I needed someone to literally examine what they were—but I wasn't sure who the guy was and why anyone would care what he thought.

**Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "The Bones We Leave Behind"?**

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, an entire novel set around a single pivot

point with different stories and perspectives, showed me how I could execute this form. Colum McCann, too. But any of the modern collagists (like Leonard Michaels and David Shields) appear, in some form or another, in this piece.

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

This is actually only my second creative work published by a national journal. Another one—an essay with a similar theme, also with “bones” in the title—is forthcoming in *River Teeth*.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I submitted a different piece to another journal and received an encouraging, personal rejection, which suggested I look into this journal as a place where my voice might be well-received.

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

Only that this is the piece, of all the stories I've written, that took the longest. I've been nursing the idea for the better part of a decade but always kept it on the back burner after a failed attempt. I suppose I'd just want readers to know that the form informed the narrative and not the other way around.

## Porcelain

John Skarl

The bowling alley's last major update happened when Tom Rokich came home from Europe after World War II, installed pinsetters, and switched all the duckpins to ten-pins. He said the duckpins had "reminded him too much of the old country," which Yvonne thought meant short, fat and outdated. Now, sixty years later, Yvonne herself was beginning to feel a bit like the duckpin as she walked the lanes, setting out the short, yellow scoring pencils. Yvonne had always looked after the pencils but refused to see them as outdated. She finished writing her note to Warren with one—*Don't forget the shoes!*—then dropped the pencil into the small box under the counter. Ah, but no one ever steals the pencils, she thought. Not the way these kids walk off with a pair of lane shoes crammed into their bag.

Had they stolen a pair of shoes in the olden days, her husband Nick would have known, and he'd have grabbed them by an ear and hauled them right out the front door, just like those boys he caught lofting balls on the freshly refinished lanes. Yvonne was sure they'd hire a lawyer and try to take the place if you grabbed them by an ear nowadays. Not her problem anymore. Radka had bought the alley from her a few months back. Yvonne had stayed on as manager, and technically they'd kept the business in the family, but the alley just wasn't the same without the sounds of piano drifting from the lounge while all the honest couples who owned their own balls and shoes relaxed with a drink or two. The alley, Yvonne thought, once so full of people, sits nearly deserted.

She slid off the stool and walked through the brown metal door to the office. Radka had spread a red and white bumper sticker—*Thank God I'm Serbian*—across the door. God? Yvonne wasn't sure she believed in God anymore. What year had they left the church? It was all so hard to remember. She sat at the large metal desk and pushed out the squat, hammered glass window. God, like so many memories, was just a puff of smoke.

Yvonne puffed smoke at her desk knowing her nephew Warren would complain to Radka about the smell. Oh well, she thought, they can change the smoking laws, but they can't change me. The truth was she had treated

the bowling alley like home ever since she was a little girl. She regarded a pair of new bowling shoes on the desk. The white leather was smooth. She twirled a crisp lace around one finger. Why do these kids keep walking off with them? Was it the smart leather stripes? Part of her felt flattered kids wanted something she had to offer. This was the same part of her that had kept the news clipping commemorating the alley as the number one bowling destination in northeast Ohio. She looked at the article, framed and hanging on the wall behind her desk. The date was March 1, 1975, and the article featured a picture of Nick. He sure was a sight behind the piano, she thought, his auburn hair slicked, heavy features offset his bright eyes. His arms and fingers were long and skinny, and his ears stuck out a little, but he sure could play the blues. "Religion is blue," he had said. "Jesus up on the cross. The mourning virgin. Shoot. I've got a sympathetic audience." Yvonne had sung responses in the choir, and he played the organ. They had fallen in love over those blues.

The front bell brought her back. She took one last drag on the cigarette and then pushed back through the door to the cash register where a bearded boy and a girl were waiting. They must have been in their early twenties. She gave them lane three because the ball returns on one and two had been acting up. They didn't want a scorecard. Yvonne was always silently offended when a bowler rebuffed her scorecards and pencils. She tried a new angle. "What size shoes?"

"We have shoes," the girl said. Yvonne sat up high in her stool to see their feet. Oh, they had shoes all right. Street shoes. These two might not want a scorecard but she'd be darned if they rebuffed the proper footwear. She pointed at the girl's pink, open toed shoes. "You need *bowling* shoes, miss. What size?"

The bearded boy answered quickly. "Ten. And women's..."

"Seven," the girl said. Yvonne slid two pairs of old lane shoes across the counter. The girl took her pair with obvious disgust. "I definitely need socks." Yvonne kept a basket of socks beneath the counter. "Four dollars, tootsie. Including socks."

Yvonne watched the boy fumble with his wallet. The girl was already walking to their assigned lane at the far end of the alley, no doubt, Yvonne thought, probably puzzling over the word tootsie. These kids all had a sullen look, she reflected. They were too thin. Reluctant to look a person in the eye. The boys did not shave. The girls had tattoos on their bodies. Rings through their noses. Unnatural colors in their hair. One night a girl had come in with a forked tongue. Just like a dragon. Or the damned devil himself.



Yvonne developed the habit of checking the ladies' room ever since she'd found the graffiti. Kids were getting worse. Recently, someone had written a nasty word in the women's bathroom. It was impolite language, and in a women's room, no less. Thankfully, the paint Warren had used to cover it up did the trick. Satisfied, she walked on to the lounge.

It was dark and Yvonne sat on the bench behind the old piano as the bartender pointed the remote at the television and light filled the bottles sitting on the bar. "One minute," the bartender said out of the corner of her mouth. Her face was half-paralyzed. In the interview for the position Yvonne learned that she used to tend bar on a cruise ship until half her face froze. Then she was let go. Yvonne thought she was a pretty girl, almost like a statue, and that most of the time her face looked normal. Regardless, Yvonne empathized with a woman who had lost half of something. As the most experienced applicant, the girl had replaced Nick. Yvonne ran her fingers along the widowed piano keys.

The bartender settled on the summer Olympics, a long distance run, and grabbed the Slivovitz and a glass. Yvonne's mouth was dry from the cigarette. She ran her tongue along her lower lip. There was the crunch of the ice scoop. The ghost of an ache haunted her lower back. "Hey, skip the booze, will you," she said.

"Slow night," the bartender said with half a mouth. The bar was empty, but Yvonne took the observation personally and was about to mention that the Saturday crowd wouldn't pick up until after nine, but the bearded boy had entered the lounge and seemed wary of stepping up. His timidity was due in part, Yvonne thought, to her being in the middle of a conversation with the bartender. Yvonne considered it bad form to talk business in front of customers and thought to make up for it by standing him a shot of Slivo, something Nick would do, but he didn't really look like he'd enjoy it. They had stopped talking and looked at him. Finally, he stepped up and ordered two bottles of fruity stuff.

"You gonna play?" the bartender called to Yvonne, indicating the piano.

"No," Yvonne said. "Never planned on picking it up."

"Never is a long time," the bartender said, touching her face.

"I know it," Yvonne said and left with her soda. The soda was cool on her dry throat, and she sat up on the stool behind the cash register. The boy was back at the lane. The sound of a rolling ball echoed. The pins were loud. She watched him. He doesn't do it very prettily, she thought, but I guess pretty points don't count. Ah, but they're not counting any points, she remembered. The girl had a straight ball and good form, so Yvonne watched them for a while. The bearded boy drank some of the fruity stuff.

He didn't even have the decency to order a pitcher of beer, she thought. Nick used to worry about the lines going bad, so he poured a beer a day from the tap whether someone bought one or not. At least, the lines were a good excuse. She looked out across the lanes—oil-warm wood and dimly reflected overheads. Nick had never really liked bowling, she reflected. He thought it left too much up to chance. And his form was awful. The last time they had played a game she had won by a landslide. He'd left a lot of pins standing.

Yvonne placed her slippered feet on the stool's crossbar. She looked beyond her swollen ankles at the orange carpet, worn threadbare over the years by the legs of the stool. She had thought about a more comfortable chair, but up on the stool she could see across the lanes without stretching her neck. And it put her above the customers. The stool played hell on her back some nights, and the ache, so much like a throb, indicated tonight could be one of those nights. She leaned over, reached into her purse, popped her pillbox, picked out two aspirin and a few of the others. She swallowed the pills and set the soda on the counter next to the lane chart. The laminating had yellowed. Maybe it's just the lights, she thought.

The bearded boy was at the counter. "Ball's stuck." Now lane three was acting funny, she thought. Yvonne lifted the phone to her mouth and her voice cracked. She cleared her throat and said, "Warren. We need you to jimmy lane three's ball." Was that her voice? She repeated "lane three" just to make sure. Must be my dry throat, she thought, sipped some soda and crunched the ice. The boy walked away. A ball was once again running along the chrome rail, so she slid from her stool and shuffled to the office. There was the sticker again—*Thank God I'm Serbian*. She didn't bother with the light and sank into the comfortable desk chair. The brown door closed behind her. The room was fairly dark. She had left the window open, but nothing came through, no breeze, no sound, no light. Not even a smell. She sat there for a while thinking about nothing. It's what she had to thank God for. Nothing. Yvonne looked around the dark room. The dim forms of the old shelf pins glowed white against the dark paneled wall. There was the old duckpin, and she thought again how it was like her. Short. Fat. Just another ornament hanging around this place, which was growing more and more into a museum every day. Who would come look at carpet motes drifting in the jaundiced light of old scoring projectors? Come smell the rosin, the fungicide, must and oil. Come see the duckpin woman. I'm on the tenth frame with a sorry score. Aw shoot, she thought, maybe I'm not supposed to keep score anyway. It was like that couple, or the bumper sticker on Radka's car. What was it? Just Roll With It. Ugh, if there's one

thing Nick hated, it was bowling puns.

Yvonne examined the new bowling shoe there on the desk. They needed several new pairs of rentals to replace those either falling apart or stolen. Radka had averaged the lanes' monthly income and determined that a new line of shoes was too expensive. "If summer sales don't pick up, we might not be able to afford them in the fall," she had said, and the idea that the alley was financially insecure had given Yvonne a real scare. What if they had to close? What would she do without work? Yvonne smelled the shoe. One of the laces tickled her chin and she held the new smell in her throat. She was going to run the numbers from the supply catalogue again, but she noticed something else there in the desk drawer.

She lifted a candle, the glass edge rimmed black with soot, wrapped in a picture of St. George spearing the dragon. She tried a cigarette lighter, but the shriveled wick was too deep. The candle was like those her mother kept. As a child, she had stood on her father's *bergère* and held her fingertips to the flame. She'd had faith it wouldn't burn, but it did. Badly. Her mother had cradled her on her hip, steered her hand under the tap. Sang a song. Yvonne remembered thinking it was like running water, but it also scared her a little because she couldn't understand the words. It took a sweet, high voice, octaves above the priest's, to harmonize the responses, and her mother had such a voice. So had Yvonne. Once upon a time.

Now, she smoked. Her throat felt as dry as old, cracked leather, and she sat for a while, tapping ash with one hand and admiring the candle with the other. Her backache had dulled and she grew detached from the pain. She imagined the tone of the choir, a soft hum in the ear of memory, but she had forgotten the sensual whisperings of the group and the priest's thick voice underneath, driving the rhythm. They had been witnesses. It was a feeling she missed.

Beyond the office, Yvonne heard the front bell and waited to see if Warren would wait on them. According to Radka, he needed to prove more responsibility. Normally he just swept the lanes and took care of the pin-setters. "He thinks he can just live here," Radka had said. Yvonne had felt affronted because she'd always considered the alley her second home, and lately she preferred it to the emptiness of home. At Radka's direction, Yvonne had taught Warren how to use the cash register and hand out rentals. He was doing well. This morning he had danced a silly jig, pushing the broom up and down the lanes, and had reminded her of her husband.

Yvonne reached out to touch Nick's picture. The glass was cold against her fingertips and she closed her eyes. She tried to picture him, as he was, and he was not with her, but she was subtly aware of a feeling like being

encased in pleasant milk glass, no, a heavy lightness like porcelain, and the darkness was kind. Sounds from the alley drifted in and out like waves, bearing a rhythm much like a heartbeat, or the pounding of an ache, but she was aware of no pain, and she thought of the mourning Virgin statue, the disheartened stance, and she thought of her own innocence, how she hadn't the opportunity. The infection. The pain. Quick theft. The disappointment. It was gone. She had wanted to give Nick everything, but she hadn't been able to give him that.

"Just a bit of skin," he'd said, but it was more than that to her. She would mourn not being able to give him that forever. Yvonne opened her eyes. The room was dark and she was lightheaded. Oh, but it was the pills. The others. She wiped her wet face. Silly old duckpin woman in the back room of a bowling alley, she thought. Her cigarette had burned nearly to her knuckles, and she stabbed it out in the pewter tray.

Her eyes stung with the brightness of the foyer, and she squinted. She was glad to see Warren behind the counter, typing on the cash register, and she watched the backs of four new customers walk to their lanes carrying rentals. "You remembered the shoes," she said, closed her eyes against the brightness and leaned against the door.

"Were you smoking back there, Teta?" Warren asked. She kissed Warren on the cheek and laughed, leaving him behind the cash register. On her way to the lounge, she watched the couple. The bearded boy was still throwing his ugly ball, still knocking down pins. The girl seemed to be mocking him by imitating his style. They were both wearing their rental shoes. Yvonne could feel their happiness.

The darkness of the lounge was a comfort to her eyes and she pulled out a stool. She looked up at the television. The Olympics. Runners were still running. She glanced at the clock. Nearly nine. The sounds of bowling were growing steady, like something breaking gloriously over and over again.

The young bartender had spread some playing cards. She hadn't noticed Yvonne, or maybe was pretending not to notice her, and Yvonne watched her arrange the cards. Moving them. Drawing. Setting cards with a flick. From the choir balcony she had watched acolytes arrange communion hosts with the same lack of deliberation. We forget ourselves in what is automatic, she thought, and no one wants to remember. She had watched bowlers perform the same rituals for years. Some dried their hands over the vents. Some palmed a bag of rosin. Like punching a timecard, she thought. It was all work, but it held everything together. It really did. Lately, she wasn't sure how everything fit.

She thought of the bearded boy with the ugly release. What's he working at? Nothing except imposing his ugly form on the world. He's certainly not keeping score, she thought, at least not by frame. After a while do we all stop keeping score? Or sometimes, the score gets so high and complicated, we forget what we're playing at in the first place and the numbers topple like...like...eggs. Eggs! What was she thinking about, *eggs*?

Yvonne stood, shuffled across the dark bar toward the two circles of light and pushed through the double doors into the kitchen. It occurred to her that this is what it must have felt like to push through the deacon's doors at the Orthodox church. Yvonne often admired the iconostasis, but women were forbidden in the sanctuary. Her slippers scuffed across the kitchen tiles and she squinted against the light. Eggs. She pulled open the large fridge door. The eggs were there all right. She pulled open the cupboards above the stove and she lifted down a bowl.

They had used the kitchen often in the alley's heyday to cook all kinds of food and bake treats for the patrons. With time, Yvonne's sarma become something of a local legend. Recently, she used the kitchen only to cook meals for herself and Warren. She hadn't actually baked anything for years, but that's just what she intended to do. The eggs were cold in her hands. They were nearly expired, but she set them on the counter and lifted down a bag of flour and pulled open a few drawers, searching for a whisk. She found the whisk and bent over for a baking tray, clearing a cobweb. She felt grit beneath her slippers, set the baking tray on the counter and opened the broom closet.

She swept the floor. It could use mopping, she thought, but the mop was not in the broom closet. She remembered that Warren had used it to clean the room behind the lanes. She would ask him about it.

An egg rolled off the counter-top onto the tile floor with a crisp plop. She scuffed over and prevented the other eggs from following. She watched the yellow spread against the tile. The transparent fluid around the yolk seeped outward. She didn't know what it was called beside "the white," but it wasn't white. She cracked the remaining eggs against the edge of the counter-top, opened them one-handed into the bowl. When Nick's hands had been too bad to play piano, toward the end, she had to peel the shell from his hard-boiled eggs for him. He had said one night as he sat icing his hands, "I can listen to their stories all day long with the piano between us, but I don't think I'm cut out to be a bartender," he said and smiled. "Sometimes I get the idea to wring their necks," he held up a swollen hand with his goofy grin. "I couldn't hurt them if I tried." There was no vanilla in the cupboard. She wondered if molasses would work, poured a few capfuls into

the bowl, arranged the dough and set it in the fridge to chill.

No one is going to want these cookies, she thought as she walked back into the dark lounge and imagined them sitting on a plate, collecting dust and cobwebs. She imagined tipping the lot into the trash and she felt bad. The bartender was still moving her cards around in the dark. She imagined the bartender chewing one with half a mouth and felt worse.

“For crying out loud, I’ll eat them if it comes to that,” she said and moved into the light.

She touched Warren on the shoulder and he pulled the headphones away from his ears. “Can you bring me the mop?”

I’ll just set them out on the counter, she thought. If someone wants them, they’ll take a few. That’s all. Her back was beginning to ache with the movement of the mop, but the water had taken on a heavy, gratifying gray. Wet, the floor looked almost new, except the white tiles had yellowed just like everything else that used to be white in the alley. The bite of bleach mixed with the baking smell, reminding her of Toma and his mop, how he had almost discovered her and Nick fooling around behind the red curtains in the fellowship hall. She’d had to pinch herself to keep from laughing at Nick’s goofy faces. The day they married, the light had drawn the shadows in the thick folds of the curtain fabric, and Nick had sat down at the piano. He took off his jacket and sat down in his shirt. Someone spilled red wine onto his sleeve. She had stood over the sink the following day, the stained shirt in her hands. Bleach had not worked on the stain. The curtains had been thick and red and full of shadows.

The floor would dry. The floor would collect dirt. She would mop the floor again. The cookies baked. Yvonne set the mop in the gray water and pushed out through the doors into the dark and walked behind the bar. The bartender looked back over her shoulder.

“Are you winning?” Yvonne asked, indicating the cards.

“Stiff competition,” she said, and half smiled. She took Yvonne’s empty glass. “Usual?”

“Pull me a beer, would you?” Yvonne said. Nick would be happy, she thought. Just before his organs began to shut down, Nick lay in that damn bed with the ghost of a smile on his lips. Had he died happy? She sipped the beer. The young girl walked into the bar with the empty bottles and set them on the counter. Yvonne noticed a portrait tattooed onto the girl’s skin. Maybe it was someone the girl had lost? Yvonne thought it was a pretty blend of colors. It was the first time she felt that way about one of those things.

It all goes away in the end, she thought. She tried concentrating on the happiness. The smell of baking cookies was pleasant. The bartender's half smile had been pleasant. Maybe nothing gets you in the end? She thought of dying from nothing, like the Assumption.

Yvonne finished her drink and set the cup on the bar, stood and scuffed through the double doors into the kitchen, across the clean white tiles and cracked the oven door. The blast of heat was pleasant. The cookies were ready. She turned off the gas and lifted the tray with a padded glove and set the tray on the stove. She opened the cupboard above the stove and pulled down a white porcelain serving platter. She placed it in the sink and ran hot tap water there. While drying the porcelain, she noticed thin cracks, nearly imperceptible, webbing the surface. She touched her fingertips to the warm porcelain, but she could not feel the cracks. The glorious sound of falling pins echoed through the kitchen. She looked at the cookies. It had been awhile since she had made them, and they were a little misshapen and inconsistently sized. "But pretty points don't count," she said and lifted the cookies onto the platter one by one. Lost in the task, the burning in her fingertips was pleasant. Once she had stacked the cookies as neatly as she was able, Yvonne backed through the double doors, the large helping held before her like an offertory.

Warren was slowly walking a long brush down one of the middle lanes. The boy and girl sat talking at the end of the alley. Yvonne scuffed across the carpet toward them. The girl stood adjusting her shirt and stepped over to the ball return. She lifted her ball and approached the line. Pretty release. The boy said something Yvonne could not hear, and the girl laughed and then most of the pins fell. Yvonne continued shuffling toward them, plate of cookies on one arm.

Should I just set them out? The thought of them going unnoticed was just too, too...blue. It's funny how such a small thing could matter so much, she thought. She held the platter and stepped down onto the lane.

The girl lifted the ball. There was one pin remaining. There was no score, but something was at stake. Yvonne held the platter with both hands and said, "I've just baked them if you would like one."

The boy and girl turned to look. They were strange, yet familiar. Yvonne needed them to reach out and take one. It could hold everything together, she thought. It really could.

## Interview

John Skarl

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

I wanted the serving platter in the story to carry metaphorical weight: that it's a fixture of a bygone era but still valuable, and that it may essentially be cracked and crazed, but it's still beautiful. I was hoping to say that life takes its toll, but we all hope to remain useful. I usually struggle to name my stories, but this one was always "Porcelain." I suppose it's how I see aging.

**What inspired "Porcelain"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?**

I find I'm at my best when I'm able to create a story that draws from deeply intimate personal experience, daily observations, and an attempt to fulfill my own curiosity about life. This particular story was inspired by several sources: watching adults in my life age, coping with personal loss, fascination with the world of work, the role of religion in our lives, and generational gaps.

**Was there anything in your original conception of the story that did not make it in?**

Originally the story ended with the young couple leaving the alley and asking one another what that old lady was holding out to them. It was a mean-spirited ending designed, I suppose, to get a few chuckles out of an MFA writer's workshop. For that reason, the story always felt insincere, but as time went by I discovered that I cared about Yvonne and wanted to see her gesture as more than the punchline to a cruel joke.

**What other mediums have influenced your work? How?**

I'd like to think music influences my writing. I play bass in a band, so I'd like to think rhythm is something I'm usually cognizant of, and I've also



written a few songs. In this piece, I wanted a steady, straightforward rhythm, like the kind one might expect in a bowling alley, or a driving bassline. The other musical elements inform the characters in the sense that Yvonne was a singer, and Nick played the piano. There's also some commentary on the association between Christianity and the blues. Now that I think of it, music influenced this piece more than I had realized.

### **Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

Sometimes life sends me subtle messages about what I'm writing. For instance, I remember agonizing over the opening paragraph to this story. During a class break, I was standing alone outside Olin Hall at The University of Akron probably brooding and smoking and being a "writer," when I glanced down to find one of those short yellow pencils, the kind without the eraser, the kind described in the opening paragraph to the story, wedged between two slabs of sidewalk. It was my sign that this story was meant to be, and I've nurtured it ever since.

### **Readers and fellow writers often forget how long and difficult the path to publication is. Like many *Driftwood* stories, "Porcelain" went through a few drafts with us. Could you tell us a bit about "Porcelain" and its path to publication?**

Well, I wrote the first draft of "Porcelain" nearly ten years ago, and since then it has weathered probably twenty-five or so revisions. I studied the short story and its theory in the NEO MFA program and was drawn to it not only because of its passionate and talented devotees, but because of its ability to walk the line between poetry and prose. This story was almost published elsewhere with its original ending: the one I described earlier, but I had a change of heart. The editors at this other magazine didn't. So I kept searching for a suitable home for the story. It had to have been rejected over ten times. I'm very happy it's found a home at *Driftwood Press*. It's almost like the characters can stop haunting me now.

### **A couple of our editors regarded the line "We forget ourselves in what is automatic..." as emblematic of the entirety of the story— your thesis statement, essentially. Could you talk a little about how this and other themes inform the technical decisions in the writing? How do you represent your themes in the style of your prose?**

This story explores how ritual can create meaning in life; I suppose I was trying to convince myself this is the case and explore whether it could be positive. I find that theme is a driving element to my own writing. With

“Porcelain,” and other stories of mine, I start with character and setting and conflict, but those things are never satisfying enough on their own, which is why unless there’s a theme lurking in my intuitive attraction to these basic story elements, the piece sits unfinished... and believe me, I have more than a few of those. For me, theme is the collagen binding the words together in meaningful ways, so, to do something ultra-pretentious, I’d like to modify one of Kurt Vonnegut’s rules for creative writing. He said, “every sentence must do one of two things— reveal character and advance the action.” I’d like to modify this rule to state that “every sentence must do one of two things— reveal character and advance the action in a way that is satisfying to the overall message or messages of the piece.” Anyone can write a narrative that reveals character and advances the action; the characters become whole only with thematic connective tissue.

**Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced “Porcelain”?**

I think writing takes courage, so I respect all authors and like probably more than I could list, but my top five are Herman Hesse, Ernest Hemingway, Cormac McCarthy, James Joyce, and John Cheever. I am continually inspired by my high school students, past and present, and the good people I’ve met in workshops, as well as folks like the editors of *Driftwood Press*. James McNulty influenced “Porcelain,” and I’m grateful for his editorial feedback. The famous authors who inspired “Porcelain” are Eudora Welty, Raymond Carver, and probably Charles Bukowski. Also, Studs Terkel’s book, *Working*. The voices in that book are something else.

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

I still consider myself new to publishing. I’m proud of “Bleeding Wolfe,” which you can find at *Empty Sink Publishing*, and “Midnight Service” at *Deimos eZine*. I also occasionally maintain a literacy blog (<http://valuableandcuriosities.blogspot.com>).

## Bible Studies

Frank Geurrandeno

My father told me there was  
a crow with one eye and greasy feathers  
that would peck at one of the windows next door.  
I don't remember seeing anything

but I was young and used to fold my arms  
and hide beneath my father's balding head  
as we watched the neighbor mow the lawn Sunday morning.

She saw us and smiled as she wiped the sweat off her brow  
with a rugged fist. Her buzzed hair and cargo shorts  
made me wonder, just like my father, why a man had breasts.

Father locks the front door when we leave for church.

## Elegy for a horse with a broken leg

Hannah Nelson

It was already done.

Mom told us when she picked us up from school,  
it was Dusty, our third horse, our gelding.

We were relieved it wasn't either of our mares.

Dusty was extra. Nobody's in particular.

She didn't know how it happened.

Maybe he slipped on ice. Maybe

Daisy kicked him.

Horses don't do well on stall rest,

and the equipment is expensive.

I knew this already.

We would have done more for a dog,

carried him into the animal hospital,

blanketed and cradled in our arms.

What we think of as the ankle

is really an elongated foot.

The three toe bones evolved

into a single hoof.

I did a project on the evolution

of horses when I was in first grade.

Tracing their outlines on my poster board

larger and larger

their unlikely grace magnified in pencil.

The earliest horses stood only  
three feet tall, the size of a large dog.  
Now we measure them in hands,  
each span four inches wide. We climb  
their legs, travelling, with our human palms,  
the delicate distance from withers to earth.

## Interview

Hannah Nelson

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

It's based on real events. When I was ten or eleven, we had to have one of our horses put down— it's something I hadn't written about yet, and it seemed like it was time. Also, I think a school presentation I did in first grade on the evolution of horses made its way into the end of the poem. It's always bothered me how delicate horses are even though they weigh a literal ton. At the risk of being obnoxiously poetic, I guess I see it as a metaphor for the fragility of beauty or the illusion of strength in beauty or something along those lines that really speaks to me on a deep level.

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

When I'm writing about something that really happened to me it's always difficult to decide which details to include, which to leave out, and where to take artistic liberties with what actually happened.

### **Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that did not make it in?**

Some of the biographical details didn't make it to the final draft. When writing from your own life, there are often details that seem important to you but may actually be irrelevant to the poem or even get in the reader's way.

### **Do you primarily write poetry?**

Yes, I do. I've tried short stories once or twice, but I'm terrible at them. I hate writing conflict. Which is ironic, because there's a lot of conflict in my poems!

**Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

I suppose everyone's process is unique in some ways. I'm not ritualistic about it at all; I'm very spontaneous. Often I'll fixate on a line or a word that pops in my head or one particular image or metaphor, and I jot it down and come back to it later. I'll just write it at the top of the page and see what flows from it.

**Who are some of your favorite authors?**

For fiction, which I love to read, Kate Atkinson and Marion Zimmer Bradley. Some of my favorite poets are Sylvia Plath, Traci Brimhall, Lucy Anderton, and Dorothy Parker.

**How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?**

I've been writing songs and poems for as long as I can remember, to be honest. I know I started taking it pretty seriously when I was around thirteen.

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

I flatter myself to think I might in some ways write in a similar way to some of the poets I admire. Sylvia Plath, maybe, but I would recommend looking for poets who write narrative lyric.

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

I've had a few poems published before: *The Central Review*, *Temenos*, and *See Spot Run*, and I have a poem in the forthcoming issue of *Forty Eighty-Five*.

# Kirkwood Gaps

Christie Wilson

Daniel Kirkwood is a solid name.  
Simple sentences are striking.  
I know nothing about him, Daniel, I mean.

My husband's feet are thin; I've always thought this.  
There are things we put together and then take apart again.  
I like this arrangement.

Daniel Kirkwood was an American astronomer.  
One source says that Kirkwood Gaps are generated by chaos.  
I had wanted Daniel to be European.

I have always suspected that ratios are more artificial than other numbers.  
What to make of all these systems is the question that follows me.  
I suppose American makes sense though, with the vast plains.

3:1  
For every three times the asteroid orbits the sun,  
Jupiter only makes it once. Simple sentences are striking.

I ask my husband to explain it.  
On the paper, he makes circles and more circles.  
This here, he says, tapping an empty spot; this is the place meteorites are born.

I want to think that Daniel Kirkwood set out to explain empty,  
That he saw unpopulated space and wondered  
Until he found that it wasn't unpopulated, only tolerated for short bursts.



I've been replicating my husband's drawing all day,  
One copy for each year of my life.  
I call it therapy.

Are the meteorites scared when they find themselves in the empty?  
They don't stay long, either moving back to normal  
Or plummeting. I don't know if it is a choice.

## Interview

### Christie Wilson

#### **When did you write the poem?**

The poem was written in the fall of 2015.

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

The poem was inspired by a display about meteorites at The Field Museum in Chicago. One of the placards in the display explained that when an asteroid enters an empty area called a Kirkwood Gap, it doesn't stay long because those areas aren't stable. It either returns to its regular orbit or falls. This seemed comparable to periods of personal chaos for humans. The person either emerges from the chaos and returns to life or breaks.

#### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

The easiest part of the poem was the concept, as it had sort of haunted me until I wrote about it. The hardest part was determining if the piece wanted to be a poem or prose.

#### **Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that did not make it in?**

I ended up taking out a line and reworking a stanza because it was too personal and too specific. The speaker reflects me in some ways, but in other ways she isn't me at all.

#### **Who are some of your favorite authors?**

It's so difficult to pick favorites, but Ali Smith, Graham Greene, and Zadie Smith are writers who have been on my mind lately. As for poets, I have recently enjoyed the work of Zachary Schomburg and Matthea Harvey.

#### **How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?**

I've written poems since I was very young, and, lately, I always seem to have a poem in progress. Most of my energy goes toward prose writing, however.

**Where can readers find more of your work?**

Readers can visit my website ([christiewilson.net](http://christiewilson.net)) for links to my other published work.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I was really drawn to the fact that *Driftwood* publishes both print and online. Also, I read Nick Banach's story "What Distance," which was published in issue 3.1, and I absolutely loved it.

## News Covering our Anonymous Selves

Dave Earnhardt

The newspaper, the color of extinction,  
the odor of soil after a rainstorm,  
featured an article  
that described renewed efforts  
to increase police presence  
by placing them on bicycles  
in addition to cruisers, therefore  
to improve community relations  
while reducing violent crime.

A second article in the same newspaper  
was about an undercover detective  
shot that week outside a Denver nightclub  
over an undisclosed vice.  
Two photos within the text sat side-by-side,  
one of the officer and one of the perpetrator.

On page three there was another photo,  
of policemen arrayed,  
hands clasped behind their backs  
in the at-ease military stance  
in front of their neatly-lined motorcycles  
to pay their respects, the great  
volume of chrome sending out  
glints under a fearsome sun  
like canines biting the air in flurries.

The captain, who gave the eulogy,  
the only officer dressed in white,  
added the assurance that  
the lunatic who'd pulled the trigger  
would be caught, and that, in fact,  
he was holed up in a mountain cabin,  
and might even have shot himself dead,  
so justice might not have been far off.

## Interview

Dave Earnhardt

### **When did you write the poem?**

I wrote “News Covering our Anonymous Selves” in 1999.

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

An actual newspaper article inspired the poem. It made me contemplate the idea of how isolated our lives are from one another—in fact, the Internet has decreased precisely the kind of intimacy of human dialogue that we desperately need. In short, the police and the perpetrator are essentially anonymous to each other. At the same time, there is a self-hood that language provides, that can reunite us. My theory, largely based on Lacanian ideas, is that we, as humans, achieve selfhood exclusively through language. Poems such as mine, then, can help to create a dialectic in the individual that questions his/her social position in terms not just of responsibility, but in terms of how available he/she truly is to others, to prevent misunderstandings and desperate acts. In short, we can’t afford to live in isolation, whether it’s an isolation of intransigence or of defiance.

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

The hardest part of writing the poem was to judge the roles of its personages and personas justly, and to make a common story interesting. The easiest part of writing the poem was to persuasively portray a common story.

### **Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that did not make it in?**

Several aspects of my original conception changed: 1) the idea that the policemen lined up were squeezed between their motorcycles in order to get them all into the photograph; 2) the idea that the luny might have had

a mystical relationship with the natural environment and might have disappeared into a stream—having a romantic connection to nature (nature may be chaotic, but never insanely so); 3) the idea that I felt like a religious sage turning the pages of the newspaper; 4) the idea that the newspaper seemed to me to have a texture like the floor of a cliff dwelling, under which the dead had once been traditionally buried. I eliminated all four of these aspects, however, because, in the end, they seemed, in various degrees, pretentious, in particular the romantic connection to nature.

### **Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

I have my own syntactic techniques, though not all of them were used in the “News Covering . . .” and not all used in every poem. They are: 1) internal rhyme; 2) kenning; 3) hyphenated words at the end of some lines; 4) breaks at the end of some lines between modifiers and modifieds, between helping verbs and dominant verbs, and between subjects and verbs; 5) the doubling of some words; 6) line lengths varying, sometimes erratically, to indicate disruptions of various sorts, on average from one word to seven or eight. Furthermore, I avoid irony and gravitate toward metonymy and extended metaphor that emanates from the central object. Sometimes I’m lyrical, and sometimes prosaic, but I’m always making music. My work can’t be read at a glance for an overall sense of emotion or philosophical meaning.

### **Who are some of your favorite authors?**

Jacques Lacan, M.M. Bakhtin, Alain Badiou, Richard Rorty, Wallace Stevens, Edward Albee, John Paul Sartre, Virginia Woolf, Joan Didion, Margaret Atwood, Hélène Cixous, Kate Chopin, Robert Frost, Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, John Stuart Mill, Ernest Hemingway, John Updike, William James, Walt Whitman, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Louis Aragon, Paul Valéry, Arthur Rimbaud, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Jonathan Swift, Sir Philip Sidney, Petrarch, Plutarch, Aristophanes, and Aristotle.

### **How long have you been writing poetry?**

I’ve been writing poetry for fifty-five years.

### **Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?**

I’ve written in every genre—a novel, several plays, numerous short stories, lots of music, and essays for graduate school—all of which I consider forms of my poetic expression. I also paint and sculpt, and consider those

works as forms of poetic expression, in the sense of poiesis—the “making” of objects, regardless of their concreteness or abstractness.

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

My poetry and short stories have been published in the *Casaba Review*, *Wabash Review*, *Voices International*, *Lyrical Voices*, *The Poet*, *The Occasional Review*, *Eras*, *Encore*, *Black Bear Publications*, *EWG Presents*, *The Climbing Art*, *Poetic Voices*, *The Poets Fine Arts Society*, *Famous Poets Society*, *Poetic Visions*, *Visions of the Enchanted Spirit*, *Whalelane*, and *Heist Magazine*. I’m also a composer and professional jazz pianist, and my CD of piano music, “Classically Blue,” is also available on request. Note: some of the reviews in which I’ve been published are out of circulation, but they may be archived somewhere online.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I was attracted to it by the idea that editors of this publication expressed—“we are actively searching for artists who care about doing it right, or better.” Also, the voices of the poets I read seemed harmonious with my own, having images that were grounded in reality and made sense the way that common, everyday language makes sense, rather than to create unknown realities that were brilliant because they couldn’t be understood, and the titles seemed mundane and straightforward, rather than suggesting imaginary ideas, like my own. Examples are, “What the Gypsy Told my Mother to Say,” by Christine Degenaars, and “Hiraeth,” by Liliar Brown, and “Plumblin,” by Catherine Brenckle, and “Suspense,” by Stephen Roberts, and “Jane’s Carousel,” by Elizabeth Austin.

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

My ultimate satisfaction in writing is for you to hear me say some important things as you’d thought them, so that we achieve a common vision.



## Strangely Pregnant

William Stobb

Though we were only renting it  
the yard seemed a-historical  
a place we loved for stabilities—  
the coiled, woody trunk of an elderly shrub  
a view of distant geology.  
When nearly visible threads  
began connecting spaces  
inward, outward, implying time,  
we followed late light down the maple  
and a misplaced seriousness filtered in:  
Do we need so much refrigeration?  
Is this the spleen [poke] here?  
Should we walk to the tennis courts or  
roller-blade? Finally things were changing.  
My own skin became nearly  
transparent. Earl died  
and the under-surface of the planet  
seemed strangely pregnant  
with his body. A rabbit appeared  
on a flag, in a halo, another  
rabbit reflected in its eye.  
They were not little machines  
though we never saw their remains.  
All those years, a screen protected us.  
We were happy like children  
in a Breughel who never wander  
through the woods toward the quarry,  
never grow to play the counselor  
in a community theater adaptation  
of a popular daytime drama.

(no stanza break)

And so these many years later,  
the old master's right again:  
a little cauldron of light forms  
in the shell of the leaf bud  
and I can finally feel the slow burn.

## Origins

William Stobb

When the concept arrives it is salt  
ships out of dead water—yes  
you could burn the figure in clay yes  
and bury her with a bracelet made  
of five thousand gerbil teeth to be found  
in five thousand years yes light them  
the wooden masks and watch flies  
orbit their burning stares, yes Judy, sure.  
In case a later researcher can hear  
our ancient air I'm saying Judy, Judy  
in sexually religious tones. Soon  
everything will be narrated by James Earl Jones.  
Petrified Ostrich eggs in a dry lakebed.  
Evidence of cat worship anticipated, confirmed.  
For Heizer, the mastaba is more than a tomb.  
Future beetles will sweep the ball court and  
weep over all soil could've become.  
Cradle of Humanity is one title idea  
but I Want My Molecules Back wins the crowd.  
They want answers but, late arriving,  
miss the Chancellor's failure to appear.  
Wasn't it exactly a year ago they called  
the ships home and the sadness began  
to combine with an acceptance  
that the campaign, though profound,  
had not captured the resignation  
we'd turned out to feel? Yes. Maybe.  
Try the punch! We'll get underway shortly.

## Interview

William Stobb

### **When did you write the poem?**

I took the first notes for "Origins" during a 2014 lecture by my colleague, archaeologist Katherine Grillo, who provided an overview of her research into megalithic structures in Africa's Turkana Basin.

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

I'm interested in time and human experience in time. When I lived in northern Nevada, I enjoyed seeing evidence of the early Paiute people who inhabited that region 10,000 to 15,000 years ago, when the land was largely submerged under prehistoric Lake Lahontan. It's awesome to encounter the vastness of "deep time" (John McPhee, *Basin and Range*) in a real way—we're really not equipped to engage it rationally, so our conceptions of ourselves are ironically *expanded* by the necessary emergence of imagination in the face of such an unfathomable expanse. Other artists and thinkers whose work engages time are usually interesting to me.

One quirky thing from my own life: "I want my molecules back" line comes from Chevy Chase's version of *The Invisible Man*, circa 1997 or so. I dressed as the invisible man for a Halloween party once, and played recorded lines from the movie, including that line, on a handheld recording device. Late that night, very drunk, I called a friend of mine and played "I want my molecules back!" several times into his answering machine, but then I forgot to ever tell him that it was me. Years later, I said to him, "Remember the time I called you and played that line on your machine?" And he said, "That was you?! You bastard! I was scared shitless! I thought someone was stalking me!"

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

Ending the poem is difficult. I'm not a big fan of endings that fully thematize a poem, because *meaning* on that level can feel artificial, to me, especially within a context that's thinking about the mystery of time. This ending

focuses on a failed administrative gesture, and an audience's failure to realize the failure. I like that it undermines any sweeping statement about humans in time, and I like punch—just the image of the big punchbowl on the table in a room like that—but it feels a little cynical.

### **Do you primarily write poetry?**

I think I primarily write emails and text messages. And I talk to people about stuff, which is like writing. I like the way language just comes from nowhere so easily when we talk to each other. But, yeah, as an artist, poetry is my primary mode. It feels to me more open to the uncertainty of experience on a basic sensory level than most other forms. That's probably just a totally idiosyncratic experience, though.

### **Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

Probably not. I take notes in paper notebooks that I carry around (and on my phone). And then I sit down and compose poems and revise them over time.

### **Who are some of your favorite authors?**

Haruki Murakami, Juliet Patterson, Dean Young, John Ashbery, Pavement, Built to Spill, Deborah Bernhardt, and Bridget Pilloud.

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

Try to relax. Do the best you can. If you feel uncertain, try assuming a stance of poise perhaps best modeled by the samurai of Yomei-gaku, an unconditional acceptance and responsive capability so tranquil that they could fight kendo with living goldfish in their mouths.

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

*Nervous Systems* (Penguin 2007), *Absentia* (Penguin 2011). Recent issues of *Colorado Review*, *American Poetry Review*, and *Kenyon Review*.

## Shadows Apart

Chumki Sharma

In my dreams woods sprout. I become  
the forest; my arms those branches,  
legs the mossy trail up the hills.  
A centipede crawls on me. Another.  
Another. Eleven. A red  
fox trots down this body of my  
trail.  
You walk up with the dog  
whistling a merry tune.  
Nothing happens.  
You and the dog miss the fox.  
You and the dog and the fox miss me.  
The centipedes miss each other  
and the rest of us.

Pollen trickles down  
the trail of my leg,  
Shadows of birds  
crisscross the sphere.

## Interview

Chumki Sharma

### **When did you write the poem?**

A couple of months back, I think, on a summer eve of lush silences.

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

Memories. All my poems are very autobiographical. I am so full of myself!

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

The hardest part was ensuring the idea came out exactly the way I wanted it to. The easiest was my surrender to the flow once it overtook me.

### **Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

I don't really have a method to this madness. I feel bad about it, you know. I have writer friends who are very disciplined in their approach and have dedicated hours a day to writing, whereas most of my poems are written on stolen time during conferences, sometimes even in the midst of a party. I have woken up from sleep to write down a poem that came to me in a dream a couple of times. Other than that, I have never experienced "writers' block." I think it's a myth. Is that something unique to me? Maybe not.

### **Who are some of your favorite authors?**

I would like to have coffee with Jhumpa Lahiri and Khaled Hosseini. I read a lot of fiction. In poetry, I am currently crushing on Kei Miller's work.

### **How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?**

I have been writing since poetry since I learnt to read and write; I write only poetry. I love reading prose but find it impossible to write. As for

working in any other mediums, I also like to model occasionally. There's poetry in a picture, too.

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

My book, a small collection of thirty poems, *Running Away with The Garden* was published by *The Blank Rune Press* earlier this year. I have a page on Facebook where I share links to my published work and post a freshly written poem occasionally (<https://www.facebook.com/Chum-kiSharmaPoetry/>).

I have been writing for a long time but submitting for less than a year. Greatly enjoying this heady game of rejections and acceptances. I am addicted to it.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I felt the vibes of the press matched that of my poetry. Rooted in everyday life but still steeped in mystery.

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

I am a non-English-speaking writer writing in English from a part of the world that is very different from the English-speaking world but just as real. So the images in my poems are different; perhaps the voice is different too. I hope more people develop a taste for the kind of work that I am coming up with.



## Hill's Mid-Way Arcade

John Davis Jr.

Out back by the busted pinball machine,  
we smoke and throw broken corn chips  
to flocks of black parking lot birds.  
Brown bags and beer cans tumbleweed past,  
crackling over this asphalt plain.

Inside we run the show. Julio pops  
the pool table's coin slot to get us free games  
while Gabe smacks Galaga, clearing static.  
Pete stands guard, charging south-siders extra  
for Pac-Man while the owner reads his paper.

At home, there'll be no tokens, no scores  
except exploded O bottle marks on the walls  
and chairs. Amber glass fragments burrow in skin  
like blinking pixels burned on our eyes  
when we close them: game over, game over.

## Interview

John Davis Jr.

### **When did you write the poem?**

I wrote this piece during the summer of 2015. It took me about two hours to produce the first draft.

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

Some of this piece is autobiographical. When I was a tween, my older cousin Barry took me to a run-down pool hall not far from where his grandmother, my great-aunt, lived. I also had a number of friends in school who frequented this place. It was the only time I went there, but the experience stayed with me.

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

Because this was written from a persona, I had to develop a great deal of empathy for people I knew when I was younger, but whose lifestyle was alien to my experience. My parents and family kept me out of places like Hill's, and we had a great deal of safety and stability in our home. Many of my friends were not so lucky. Writing from their viewpoint, as I recalled it decades later, posed a unique and rewarding challenge.

### **Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that did not make it in?**

I had once given the fat and lazy owner more detail, but he seemed to be more of a distraction than I needed.

### **Do you primarily write poetry?**

Yes, although I occasionally dabble in creative nonfiction and articles for education journals as well.

### **Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

Lots and lots of handwritten drafts; usually five at a minimum.

**Who are some of your favorite authors?**

I admire the poetry of Peter Meinke, Kevin Young, Maurice Manning, Claudia Emerson, Erica Dawson, and others. My prose tastes vary widely from classics to blog rants.

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

Please buy my book, *Middle Class American Proverb*. Most of the poems in it exhibit a similar style to this piece's.

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

Other magazines that have carried my work include *Nashville Review*, *Steel Toe Review*, *Saw Palm*, and many other journals. *Middle Class American Proverb* is available at Inkwood Books and other fine retailers online.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I met an editor at a wonderful local authors festival held at the Oxford Exchange across from University of Tampa.

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

A new book is in the works! Please follow my site (<http://www.poet-johndavisjr.com/>) for updates.

## Cousins

Ashwini Bhasi

On that day, after the movie marathon  
it was bougainvillea flowers  
and soap we boiled

in a tin cup—your latest science  
experiment. You were the one  
who taught me

all about drawing *Fido Dido* cartoons  
and how to neatly eat  
a *Chocobar* ice cream

before it melted  
right off the stick and ran down  
my wrist—the pleasure

is in the anticipation  
of the melt you said or something  
like that. But on that day,

when the shouting stopped  
in the family room, and our uncle  
took you and his kids

for a *chocobar* treat, and you cried  
when I was left behind,  
I kept on stirring

purple flowers in a tin cup  
I couldn't look up. That day,  
you were nine and I was six.

That day I heard them say  
    'whore's child' so many times.  
That day, I knew

    what the fight was about while we played  
    on the steps of your house. That night,  
I dreamt of fighter planes crashing

into the family room, lay terrified—  
    my lumpy mattress stored grenades  
that would go off

if I moved an inch or listened  
    to my mother crying. Yes. We watched  
too many war movies that day.

## Interview

Ashwini Bhasi

### **When did you write the poem?**

This poem just tumbled out of me when I woke up in the middle of the night about six years ago. I had dreamt I was at my uncle's house in Kerala again.

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

I wish to tell the collective story of the consequence of shame and guilt imposed on women for not being virtuous, chaste, or obedient enough; of the history of sacrifices expected of women to protect their families from alleged dishonor. It's not just my story, my mother's, or my sister's. It's about the silenced pain of so many Indian women I know.

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

The hardest part of writing this poem was my own feelings of shame and how they try to control me. Once I could move past that, the poem came out of me almost fully intact.

### **Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that did not make it in?**

This poem conveys the complex dynamic of a family in a single scene. My initial draft had blind spots that could leave the reader wondering what was actually happening. The *Driftwood* editors brought this issue to light and generously allowed me to submit an edited version. I ended up adding more to the poem to give it clarity, and very little was removed.

**Do you primarily write poetry?**

Yes, but I'm very interested in working on short stories in the future.

**Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

Many of my poems take shape when physical sensations accumulate in my body as responses to incidents, dreams, or memories. I have chronic pain. Everything that happens to me, and around me, gets embedded in my body and amplifies pain. As I sit here writing this, on the day of the Orlando mass shooting, I feel so much of it within my body—words and images, anger, grief, courage, and hopelessness—all inexplicably tangled with my own personal version of musculoskeletal pain. I can feel words forming tight knots inside my body, waiting to be released, but I simply can't do it. I think it stays stuck because I feel so powerless to give it the voice it rightfully deserves. I am hopeful it would become easier in the future to trust myself and let the words flow fearlessly.

**Who are some of your favorite authors?**

Kamala Suraiya, Gwendolyn Brooks, Adrienne Rich, Vievee Francis, Tarfia Faizullah, Sharon Olds, and Robin Coste Lewis have had such a huge impact on me. They have given me the courage to start writing my truth.

**How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?**

My parents claim that I composed a poem at the age of three. I stared at sunlight filtering through tamarind tree leaves and started chanting in my mother tongue, Malayalam—“*Tamarind door in the sky. / Here, there, and everywhere. / A tamarind door everywhere. / Let tamarind sunshine in.*” Now, whether it's a poem or just the delusion of doting parents is up for debate.

As for other mediums, I draw abstract pen and ink sketches in response to the news or incidents in my life.

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

You can read some of my work online ([ashwinibhasi.wordpress.com](http://ashwinibhasi.wordpress.com)). Recent poems have been published or are forthcoming in *The Feminist Wire*, *Eunoia Review*, and *Cyclamens and Swords*.

**What drew you to Driftwood Press?**

I came across *Driftwood Press* on Duotrope, was immediately drawn to the beautiful cover art and decided to explore it. Once I read the work, I was hooked.

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

I want to write poems where the ‘I’ is not limited to my narrow individual pain and experiences, where the “I” is an inclusive, resilient voice about overcoming suffering—a voice that needs to be heard, that cannot be silenced or be met with silence.



weird and peaceful about the flowers

Gary Wilkens

all misty against the mist  
you transform dazzling sounds within the sea  
the sin will come  
strangely entrancing over the light

you find murky gems within the ground  
the fun is born  
weird and peaceful about the flowers

you expel teeth under the wind  
the bastard felt good,  
opaque seeking  
over the horizon

in whose heart  
our neighbor  
came singing  
while the snow fell

When You Left, I Tried to Find Homes  
in Empty Air Packets

Anna Weber

I strung up ancient bottles  
on all the trees in the front yard.  
Rubbed up against things  
like a dog on carpet,  
a teenager at prom. I too reeked  
of sweat and lust and alcohol.  
I picked apart the bones of saints,  
wrote anonymous letters of complaint  
about the lack of birds at my feeder.  
Dear Sir or Madam: The fact  
that weeks have passed without  
sight of a single meadowlark  
is appalling. This situation  
must be remedied immediately.  
In my bed, night after night,  
I waited for a reply. Watched  
as my bedroom door disintegrated  
into thousands of leafhoppers.  
No, this wasn't what I'd wanted.  
This wasn't what I'd wanted at all. Still,  
I arranged my body in a pathetic brace  
as they began to swarm.

## Blood Magic

Dylan Debelis

Ton of bricks for bad grades Girl funnels her auxiliary life insurance into spare parts for the 1947 revolver from West Germany. Grendel's Mother runs the kitchen cupboards like an abandoned casino during Reno winter. Horns cut clean drinks a Manhattan and chokes, snow on the hood of her Honda while the parking lot attendant jumpstarts. Stay warm, keep walking. Bon Jovi over the AM radio Girl hides the handgun from Grendel's Mother in her leather purse, poor ivory fingertips piano keys this sunrise is deafening. Smoke in the ashtray near Grendel sweeping down to the boat moves arrow fast south reverb climbs across the valley. Grendel snorts Christine's stash off her cleavage in the back room of Paddy's. Down in the desert Girl paces the moonlight like the ripples of an atomic blast. Grendel's Mother shoots skyward long highway desperation finds Girl near mainstreet. Girl plays odds spare parts come asunder far too young for killing fields. Stay warm, keep walking. No death tonight, only switch-belt welts faulty promises to run away. Machine no match for beast runs kitchen cupboards here my prey gathering blood for our black hole.

## Interview

Dylan Debelis

### **When did you write the poem?**

When I was broken down one evening after a shift in the hospital where I watched a young girl lose her mother. As the chaplain, I talked with her after praying with the rest of the family and it turned out the girl hated her mother. Her mother had hurt her so deeply in her life, and now her mother was dead and there was no closure. So I did the only thing I can do when stacked up against hopelessness: I wrote to parse the feelings out.

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

I once spent a night drunk after a friend's wedding in Reno wandering the casinos, waiting for my bus back to the airport. Somewhere between trying to break into a motel pool and winning two hundred dollars at the slots, I ran into this young woman who was crying and sitting on the curb. She was wearing a tutu and a leather vest. I wondered where she came from and what her story was. For whatever reason, meeting the girl in the hospital reminded me of the image of this young woman.

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

The hardest part of writing the poem was the naming. I'm still not completely happy with the name I chose, to be honest. I wanted a different perspective, and I wanted something both anonymous and monstrous, so I went with "Girl and Grendel's Mother," but, as I've thought about editing the poem, I've tried a couple different things; it's still in progress, I think. The easiest part was writing the lines "Stay Warm, Keep Walking." This is the heart of the piece for me. It's all about survival. Just survive tonight and things might work out.

**Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that did not make it in?**

I originally wanted the poem to have line breaks and no punctuation, but then I revised it for a prose poetry contest and I liked it so much better as a prose poem. The prose makes it harder to swallow and denser. I like that it feels like a punch in the face.

**Do you primarily write poetry?**

Yes. Since I was ten. I don't have the attention span for novel-writing. I have an incredible respect for anyone who does.

**Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

I mean, I pretty much just turn on Elliott Smith/Linkin Park mash-ups and let the inspirational juices flow. Just kidding. But that would be a pretty neat musical endeavor, right? Make it happen, musicians.

But for real— I write daily, mostly quick lines I scribble down on a notepad during my day at the hospital. When the spirit moves me, I sit down and look over what I've written and see if there's anything I want to expand. I do try to write a poem at least every other day though, just to keep myself sharp.

**Who are some of your favorite authors?**

Buddy Wakefield, Robert Frost, and Marie Howe.

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

Go find what you're most afraid of and throw yourself into it so deep you almost drown. Then wake up and do it again. The trick is to not drown and to write a thing or two down along the way. Bring waterproof paper.

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

Just google "Dylan Debelis poetry." It's a fun way to spend the afternoon. Heck, bring the kids, make a whole day out of it.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

These folks get it. They know that poetry can change the world if we let it.

## In the Penal Colony

Alec Solomita

They use a three-pronged apparatus  
to lift her in a sort of hammock  
from bed to wheeled chair  
where she sleeps sitting  
until they bring the device back  
two hours later to raise and rest her  
on the bed to sleep lying.

Several sailorless parrots perch  
in a cage, beaks buried in their feathers  
until they wake fouling and squawking.  
Yesterday a woman screamed the whole  
long day, drowning out the birds  
and frightening the horses, although  
the lifers and nurses seemed unfazed.

The man with the clean athletic sock  
on the stump of his absent forearm  
rolls chuckling down the linoleum halls.

Interview  
Alec Solomita

**When did you write the poem?**

Recently. Mid-May of this year.

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

Someone very close to me has recently been admitted to a nursing home. My visits to her — my first visits to a facility of this sort — spurred the poem. When I saw the apparatus I describe in the first stanza, I was impressed with its ingenuity and kind of terrified at the same time. Although its function is benign, it reminded me of Kafka's infernal "device" in his story "In the Penal Colony." And the more I saw of this well-meaning and well-run facility, the more I felt the "residents" were in a penal colony of their own.

**What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

The first stanza just dropped from the sky, so to speak, as did the last. I struggled a bit with the second stanza, hoping to enhance the theme without hitting the reader over the head. I worked long on the choice of words ("pirateless parrots perch" was, I decided, just too much alliteration). I also attempted some subtle internal rhymes.

**Do you primarily write poetry?**

Mostly, yes, but I also write fiction, and I wrote essays for many years before I started taking my poetry seriously.

**Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

Only its lack of uniqueness. I have no rituals, no special time of day. I can write almost anywhere when the words come. Sometimes a line will

come in the middle of the night and I'll record it on my phone. Occasionally, it turns out to be good but, usually, it isn't.

### **Who are some of your favorite authors?**

I love the anger of Catullus, the calm of Horace, the music of Tennyson and Rossetti. I delight in John Clare, Larkin, Hardy, Hollander, Jack Gilbert, Robert Hayden, and Anne Stevenson. Katia Kapovich, a contemporary, who writes mostly in Russian, has published two beautiful books in English (not translations). Sharon Olds inspires me. So does James Lasdun, Joseph Harrison, and Kwame Dawes. Younger poets I admire include Ernest Hilbert, Rhett Iseman Trull, Clare L. Martin, Terrence Hayes, and Matthew Dickman. I could go on.

### **How can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?**

A fair amount of my prose and poetry can be found online. I've published fiction in the *Adirondack Review*, Ireland's *Southword Journal*, *The Mississippi Review*, and *Southwest Review*, among others. My poetry can be found in *MadHatLit*, *Truck*, *3 Elements Literary Review*, *Literary Orphans*, *Turk's Head Review*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Bloodstone Review*, and elsewhere. I'm currently trying to find a home for a book of short stories as well as a book of poems titled tentatively *Along the Same Lines*.

### **What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I'm familiar with much of the work in *Driftwood Press* and have always been impressed with the combination of high quality and diversity in form and content.

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

It ranges unpredictably from the light to the dark.



## Feeding Time

Guinotte Wise

I clear my throat, ask  
How do you call them  
The old man, shirt buttoned  
Neck and wrists, points  
With stubbled chin, says  
Crank that siren  
And get the hell  
Outa the way  
Horses dun and bay  
Paints and sooty  
Improbably built  
But agile as they  
Surround me with thunder  
Passing right and left  
Parting at me thank god  
Butts sinking as they slide  
And stop clods tossed  
Clouds of dust, they bunch  
And snort, ears pinned  
For steam crimped oats.

## Interview

### Guinotte Wise

#### **When did you write the poem?**

Just a week or so before I sent it off to you.

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

My own horses, those of others. When I feed I have to yell to get them up. A friend told me about the Hayworth Ranch in Nebraska where they have an old crank siren to call the horses. They have a big herd of working horses.

#### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

This is not meant to be flippant, but it came so easily, and it's quite short. I just saw the power and grace of horses in my mind, their almost arrogant "outa my way, frail person" thunder. I have been flipped in the air by horseplay.

#### **Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that did not make it in?**

Yes. I tied it up with a bow at the end, came full circle back to the older man and the siren-cranker; the old man smiles. It was edited out by *Driftwood* editors as superfluous and I agree. The nut of the thing is the horses. I have a hard time leaving stuff alone.

#### **Do you primarily write poetry?**

I write fiction 99.95%. I have written perhaps ten poems, and I feel fortunate that some have been accepted.

#### **Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

No. It involves coffee, staying at it. There's wisdom to what Ron Carlson said, something like, "The best stuff I've written was written twenty minutes after I wanted to leave the room."

**Who are some of your favorite authors?**

Oh boy, this could go on awhile. Michael Seidlinger, Tom McGuane, Jim Harrison, Barry Hannah, Joy Williams, Joan Didion, Nic Pizzolatto, Pam Houston, Bob Shacochis, Jamie Iredell, Joyce Carol Oats, John Updike, Truman Capote, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Annie Proulx, Annie Dillard, new guys, young writers, old ones, classics, upstart—so many wonderful ones out there.

**How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?**

I just got started. I wrote a longish thing that pulled away from standard prose into a prose/poetry feeling and I got into it, trying not to over-write it but loving the freedom of the word play. It's about a dustbowl kid whose family migrated to Los Angeles in the Dirty Thirties. It's dark, but with a little humor. That was my first, and I'm proud to say it's published.

I'm a fiction writer primarily, and a sculptor. That work is online (<http://www.wisesculpture.com>).

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

There is work out there, in about forty literary reviews and anthologies plus three books. Almost all of it is fiction, with a couple of essays sprinkled in. *Night Train, Cold Beer* is my first book of short stories, published by a university press. It won a competition. Then a novel, *Ruined Days*. It's on Amazon and the other usual places. In June 2016, *Resume Speed*, another collection of my short stories was released. *Black Opal Books* is the publisher of the last two.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

I came upon *Driftwood Press* about a year ago in New Pages, looked you up, and liked everything I saw. You can generally divine an attitude from the site and guidelines. *Driftwood Press* has a positive attitude. I had a fiction piece I was thinking of sending, but it was longer than guidelines specified. You rejected a shorter one. So I sent a poem. Try, try again.

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

That quote by Updike on your site—I'm trying to do it right, do it better as I continue.

## Last Stop

Jim Gustafson

Down the road at Manor Care, Gerald has a new walker.  
It was Anne's in 122b, but she left yesterday  
and will not be back. Her ashes will be spread in the garden  
at 2342 Milburn Lane, Schenectady, New York. The owners  
there understand the wishes of one who once pulled its weeds.  
Gerald tries not to think of this place as home. Yet, his wing  
is for permanent residents and the children sold the house.

## Three Phases of Existence

Melanie Dunbar

What is left is the space between the spokes where sunlight leaks on the pavement, bleeds on the pavement, breathes life onto the pavement. In the golden eye of the afternoon, what is left is the space between the cars where light is the color of grey clouds and it is that air that color that fills up that empty space. What is left is the golden eye of the orchid his mother plants between the bark and the tree. The space between her arms holds light the color of pavement, the color of heat waves that rise off Phoenix streets, between the spaces between the cars. The spaces do not hold bikes, or boys, but reject them into traffic, where boys and their bikes fly, like the last time we saw him flying into the golden eye of the sun.

## Interview

Melanie Dunbar

### **When did you write the poem?**

I wrote the poem “Three Phases of Existence” in the spring of 2015. It was inspired by three things: the death of a friend several years ago in a biking accident, the challenge to write about the “space between,” and the book *Japanese Flower Arrangement: Classical and Modern* by Norman J. Sparnon. The hardest part for me was to convey the “space between.” The easiest part was expressing love, grief, and tenderness in ways that are unexpected. I don’t think anything of the original draft did not make it in the poem. In fact, I kept adding to it, which is unusual for me.

### **Do you primarily write poetry?**

I write poetry, prose poetry, and flash/microfiction. My writing process is usually comprised of taking notes on paper or recording them, writing several pages longhand, mulling over the results while working in the garden, then self-editing until I have a good workable draft of whatever form the piece takes. Then I put it away. In a couple of weeks or so, I look at it with fresh eyes. It always helps.

### **How long have you been writing poetry? Do you work in any other genres or mediums?**

I have written poetry and stories since I was about eight. About four years ago, I started to take workshops and classes with an impressive list of poets who live and teach in and around Kalamazoo, Michigan. I have learned a lot about trusting my instincts.

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

I have been published in *Otoliths*, *escarp*, *Silver Birch Press Series*, *Gargoyle*,

*Sweet: A Literary Confection*, and *Cheap Pop*. My story, “Shawl Pattern,” won the first *Cheap Pop* Microfiction Contest in 2015. I have a prose poem in *Unrequited: An Anthology of Love Poems about Inanimate Objects*, which was edited by Kelly Ann Jacobson.

## Citalopram

Nikoletta Nousiopoulos

When the lights go out in the closet  
it's still not darkness vs. absence.  
One day there was a dirty moth, hiding in the sleeve of a sweater.  
The sweater was nice. It made you feel intellectual.

Sometimes, you will need to accept that no one is listening.  
A kind face will rest relaxed before you  
and gaze, spinning slowly around the brown circumference  
of each cornea;

This doesn't mean there won't be tulips or snow  
in spring. For now, we have snow and darkness  
And the closet with the moth and your favorite sweater.



## Interview

Nikoletta Nousiopoulos

### **When did you write the poem “Citalopram”?**

I wrote “Citalopram” thirty minutes before submitting it. This is not customary for me, as virtually all of my poems go through several revisions, some reaching up to five years until a “final” form. I was in the middle of dealing with an emotionally frustrating situation, so I picked up my laptop and began to write about my experience. The title was an afterthought, and was the last piece of the poem to be written.

### **What inspired the poem?**

The poem was inspired by the helplessness and frustration that is felt with depression, and using medication as a solution. People have always told me there is a “dark” side to my poetry, a perspective that is more pessimistic than open to hope, but most recently I have embraced my struggles in order to help and understand others, especially my students. I am an adjunct professor, and it always astonishes me how many of my students deal with depression or feel that they are wrongfully or overly medicated. This is a topic that I have usually avoided in my poetry, but as I am daily coming closer to recovery, I feel more inclined to write about my experience.

### **What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?**

The hardest part was finding the exact language, imagery, and voice to communicate the very complicated and convoluted emotions I was feeling at that time. The moth was my first vision. After that, it became easier to set a pace. I knew the voice had to be clear, concentrated, and specific. This was not a place for experimental or fantastical metaphor or comparison. I need a simple image. One not overdone yet easily understood. The moth became my persona. The transformation was pretty organic. I let my associations lead me.

**Do you primarily write poetry?**

I consider myself a poet, but since I teach composition and college writing, I am always inspired to write essays or commentaries. I appreciate any type of writing, but for me, poetry is the most fulfilling and fun.

**Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?**

I like to start on paper and move to word processor; however, that was not the case with “Citalopram.” This poem was organic, instantaneous, and bursting out of me. I spend a lot of time reading and taking notes before I even sit down to write. I usually spend an hour of research and reading, and then move to a stream of consciousness. After that I take a little break and return to the poem to look for any hidden treasures. Usually it’s all trash but once in a while I find a gem, and it makes the process worth it.

**Who are some of your favorite authors?**

One poet who has consistently been in my top five favorites is Sylvia Plath. Most recently, I am heartbroken by the poetry of Ocean Vuong and Sarah Howe. I have always found inspiration from the experimental, trans-genre work of Eleni Sikelianos; *Body Clock* and *You Animal Machine* are my bibles. Lastly, Carol Frost has been like a poet-mother to me, so her work, especially *The Queen’s Desertion*, is among my favorites. When it comes to fiction, I worship Haruki Marukami. I consider him a literary genius.

**How long have you been writing poetry?**

I have been writing poetry since I was seven years old. In second grade, we were taught haikus, and from that moment I kept notebooks and journals. I do a lot of journaling and have also written a few short stories of fiction, but poetry is really the genre I’m most drawn to. I have dreams of writing a novel one day.

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

I published my first full-length manuscript in 2010 with *Little Red Tree Publishing*. It’s titled *all the dead goats* and can be found on Amazon, Barnes & Nobel’s website, or the publisher’s website. Most recently I have published at *Thin Noon* and *damsfino*. One of my poems is also forthcoming in Issue 7 of *Tammy Journal*.

**What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?**

My fiancé is also a writer and introduced me to *Driftwood Press*. He would often talk about his rejections from *Driftwood*, so after admiring many of their chosen pieces for a few months, I decided to submit. I was thrilled and honored when I heard they accepted my poem! My fiancé was happy for me and jokingly accused me of stealing his journal.

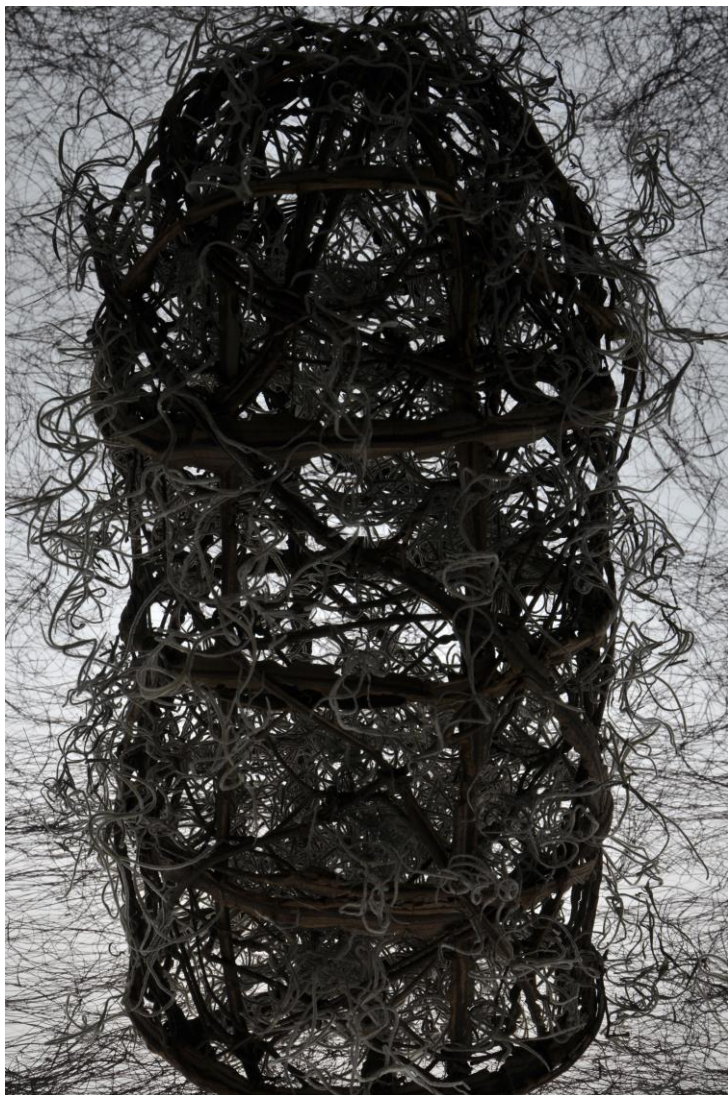
**Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?**

This piece was very difficult for me because it was so personal. A lot of my friends, and even close family members, are not knowledgeable of my struggle with mental illness. “Citalopram” was terrifying and rejuvenating to create and release. I had to stop and think about how I would feel about my parents reading this, or my students, or faculty I work with... I felt frightened but then decided facing my fear meant accepting the poem and its truths. Mental illness is still a difficult subject for many to write and read about, so I’m trying to be more progressive with my work and address issues that need a voice. My poetry has always aimed to give a voice to the voiceless (usually, the dead) but now I am shifting my perspective to the living.

Net #3  
Yi-hui Huang

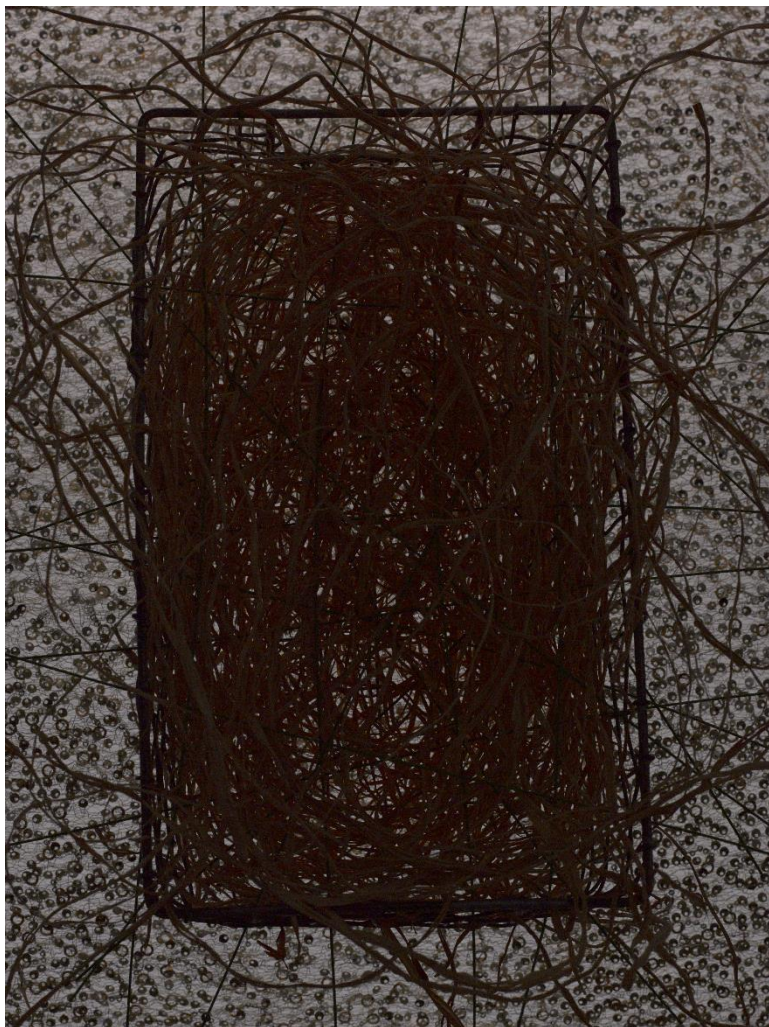


Net #4  
Yi-hui Huang





Net #5  
Yi-hui Huang



Interview  
Yi-hui Huang

**When did you create these images?**

I created the series in December 2015.

**What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?**

The hardest part was gathering materials from a variety of stores and building/mixing/combining them together for individual images.

**What camera was this image taken with?**

I used Nikon SLR; I do not digitally manipulate my images.

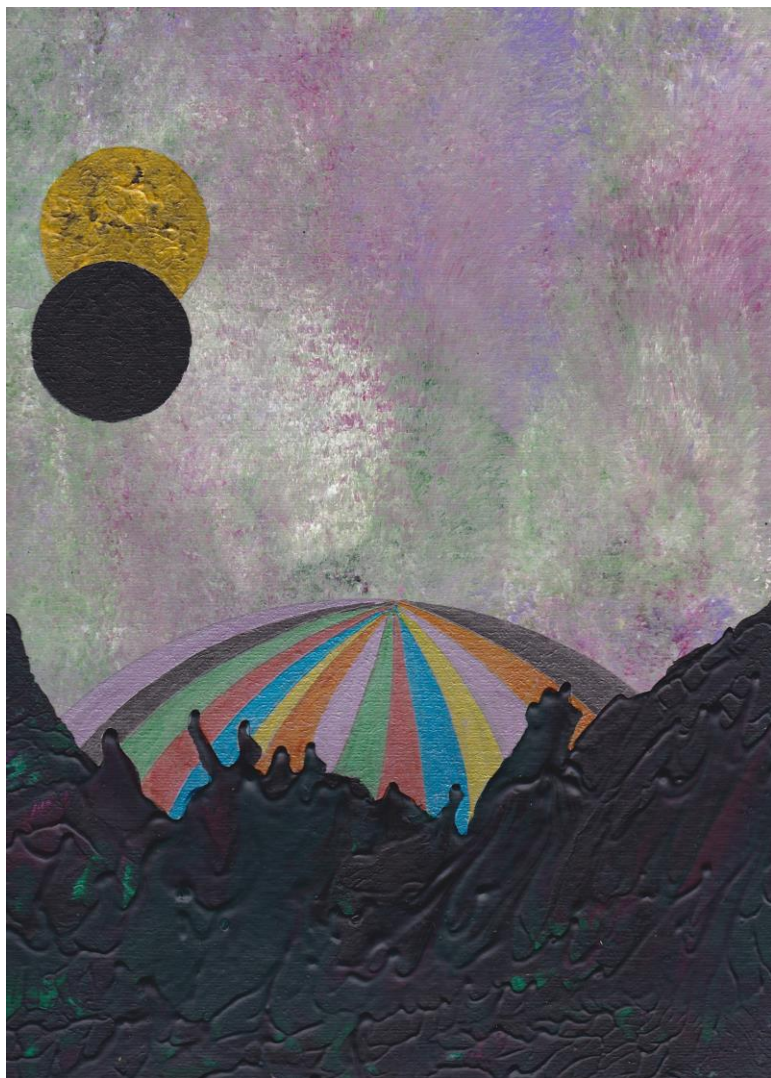
**What inspired the series?**

The following is the statement of this body of work titled *Net*.

A net divides a space into two. However, little holes on the net belong to both sides, while at the same time do not belong to both sides.

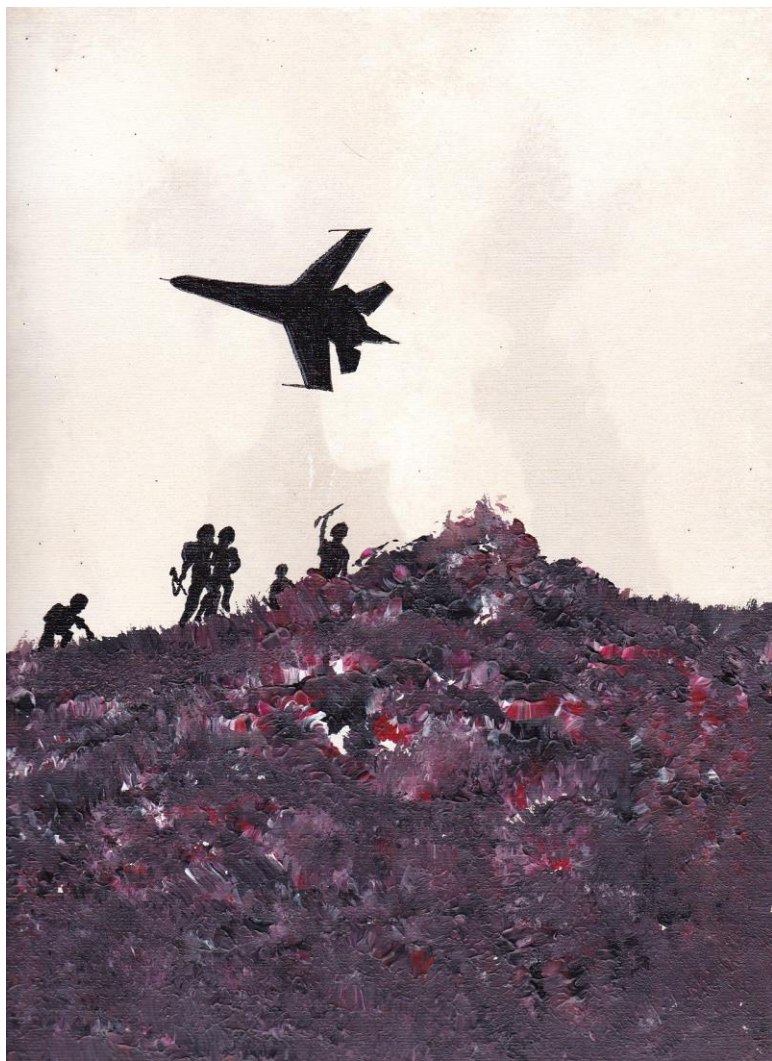
As an immigrant from Taiwan to the United States, I constantly feel that I belong to both countries, and at the same time do not belong to both countries. The *Net* project explores my feelings in regard to the struggle of living in two countries, two cultures, two religions, and with two languages.

A Prevalent Darkness  
W. Jack Savage





South of Pony  
W. Jack Savage



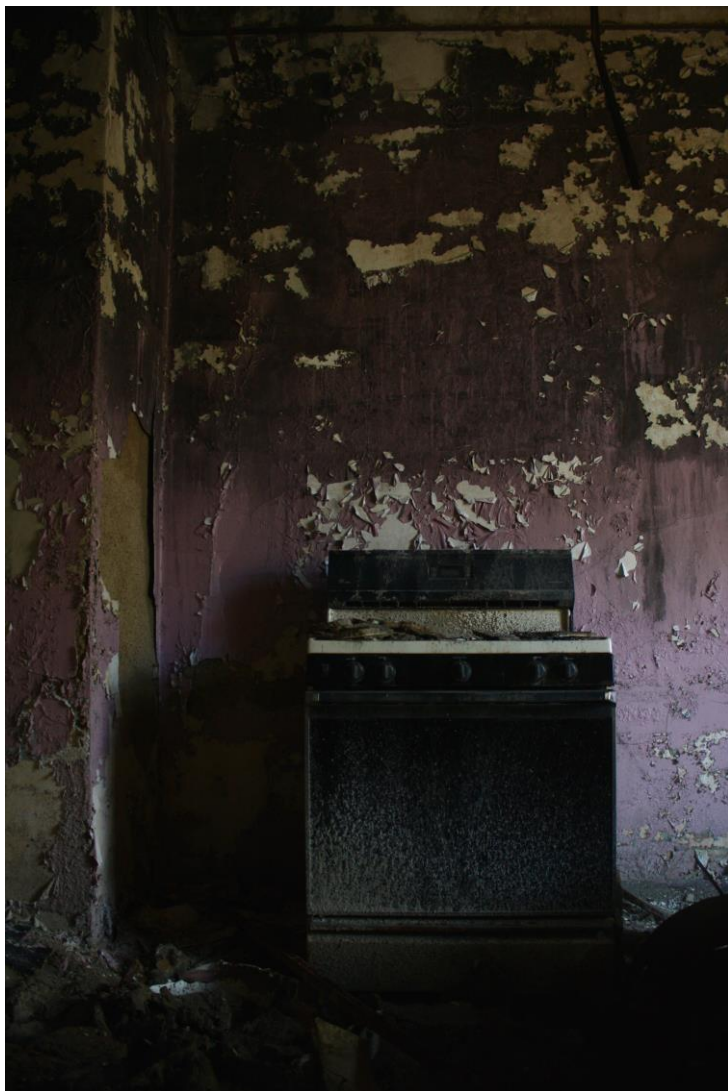
Construction Hologram for Prima 4  
W. Jack Savage



Cracks  
Ian C. Williams



Utility  
Ian C. Williams



## Interview

Ian C. Williams

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

In my photography, I find titling my work very difficult. I find that it's very easy to go too far with titles, risking pretention. As a poet, my goal is to try to have titles that contribute to the poem, adding layers of meaning. However, with photography, I usually try to keep the titles very straightforward and let the image itself do the communicating.

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

Any digital manipulation that I use in my work is very minimal, and is limited to level corrections to best reflect the image. I'll occasionally change a piece to black and white or enhance lighting, but whenever I do, the ultimate goal is to keep the piece from appearing as though it's been manipulated.

### **What camera was this image taken with?**

I use a Canon Rebel XS.

### **Did you have any goal in taking the image?**

As I work with photography, I want to not only capture the scene or the subject, but also to capture the emotional significance of it. I know that can sound really pretentious really quickly, but I do want to establish an emotional tone with each work. I don't just want to take a picture of an abandoned appliance, but to explore the idea of discovering something that someone else left behind. When I'm taking these pictures, I'm experiencing

this sense of marvel, and I want that to translate through the piece to the viewer.

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

“Cracks” and “Utility” both explore themes of how time wears things down and how the natural world affects and reclaims that which humanity creates. The idea of time fascinates me, especially in how it changes our environments. A school might burn down, and in the wreckage, a forest might crop up around the forgotten appliances. Someone abandons a garage, and the elements break the surface, and rust consumes it. Time is irrepressible and inescapable, and I think it’s important to address the relationship it has with humanity.

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

Photography is my secondary pursuit, falling in behind poetry. With that said, I am keenly interested in the relationship between image and words. So I take a very poetic approach to my photography, trying to express the ideas I explore in poetry in photography. I love collaborating with other photographers, writing poetry in response to their work, and having them take photos as companion pieces.

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

Primarily, I’m a poet, so I have poetry published a variety of places, including *Arsenic Lobster*, *Rust + Moth*, and *The Altar Collective*. Submitting photography has been a newer pursuit, and my other published work can be viewed in *Sediment Lit*’s “A Haunting” issue. I’m constantly working, and I’m submitting new things all the time. People can follow my Facebook page for updates on my work (<http://www.facebook.com/iancwilliamsauthor/>).



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[HABITABLE]

010 82322

ATMOSPHERE:  
76%N 22%O  
TEMPERATURE:  
41.2°  
GRAVITY:  
1.8 GLOMS  
DOMINANT LIFE:  
AESTHETIC  
MUSHROOM COLONIES  
INVASION PRIORITY:  
LOW

INVASION TRAJECTORY

[HABITABLE]

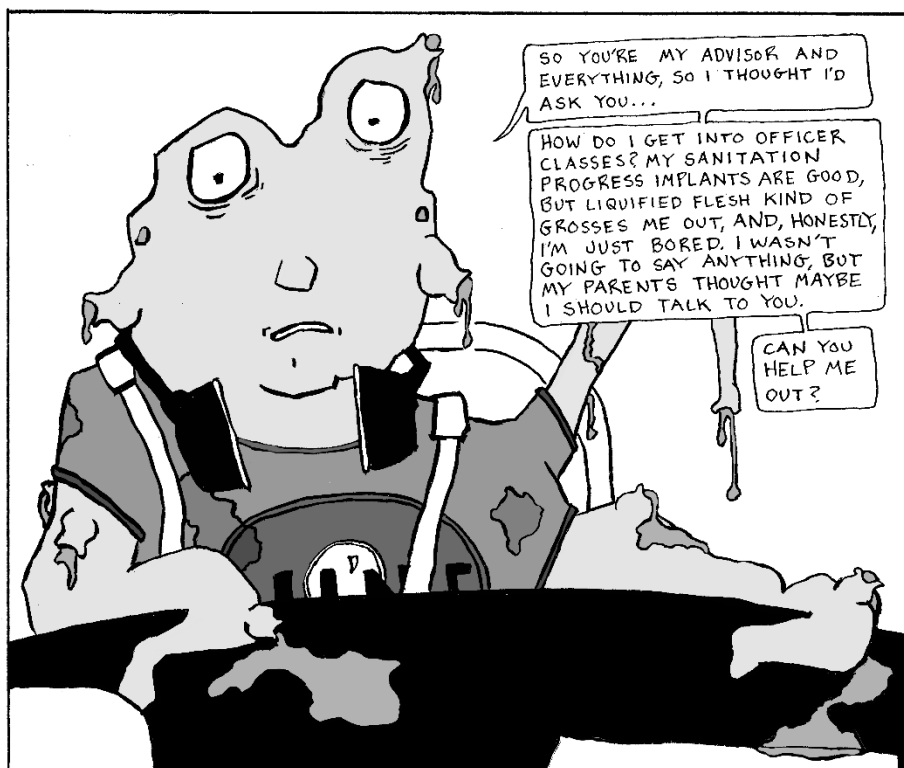
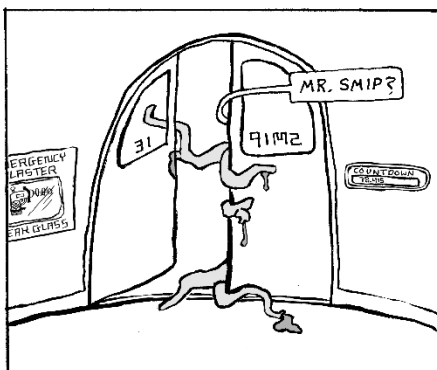
010 781143

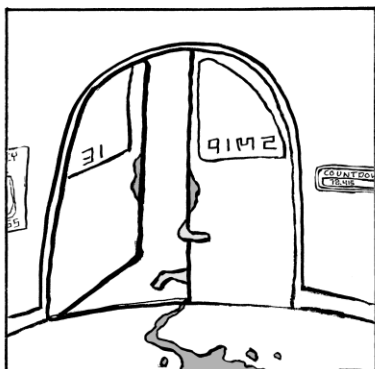
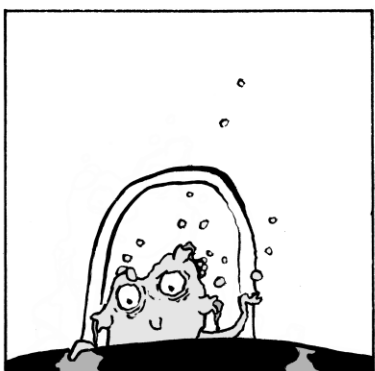
ATMOSPHERE:  
70%N 28%O  
TEMPERATURE:  
48.1°  
GRAVITY:  
1.3 GLOMS  
DOMINANT LIFE:  
DOMAIC TRIBAL  
CRUSTACEANS  
INVASION PRIORITY:  
LOW

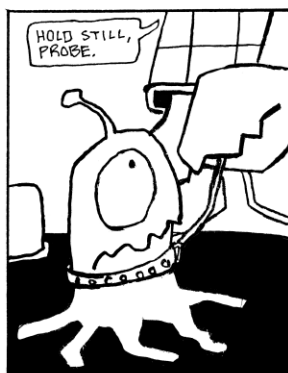
KNOCK  
KNOCK

ONE SECOND...

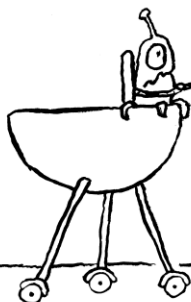
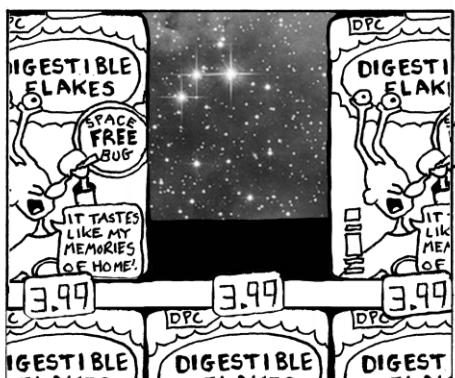
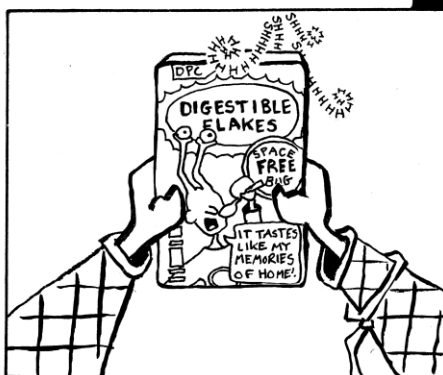
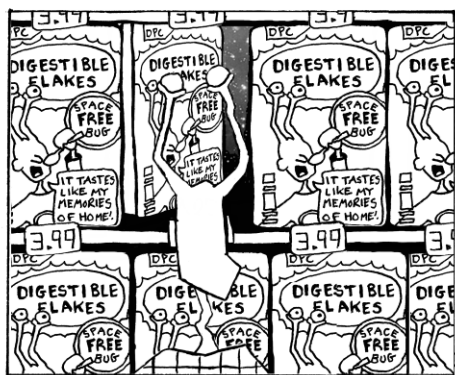


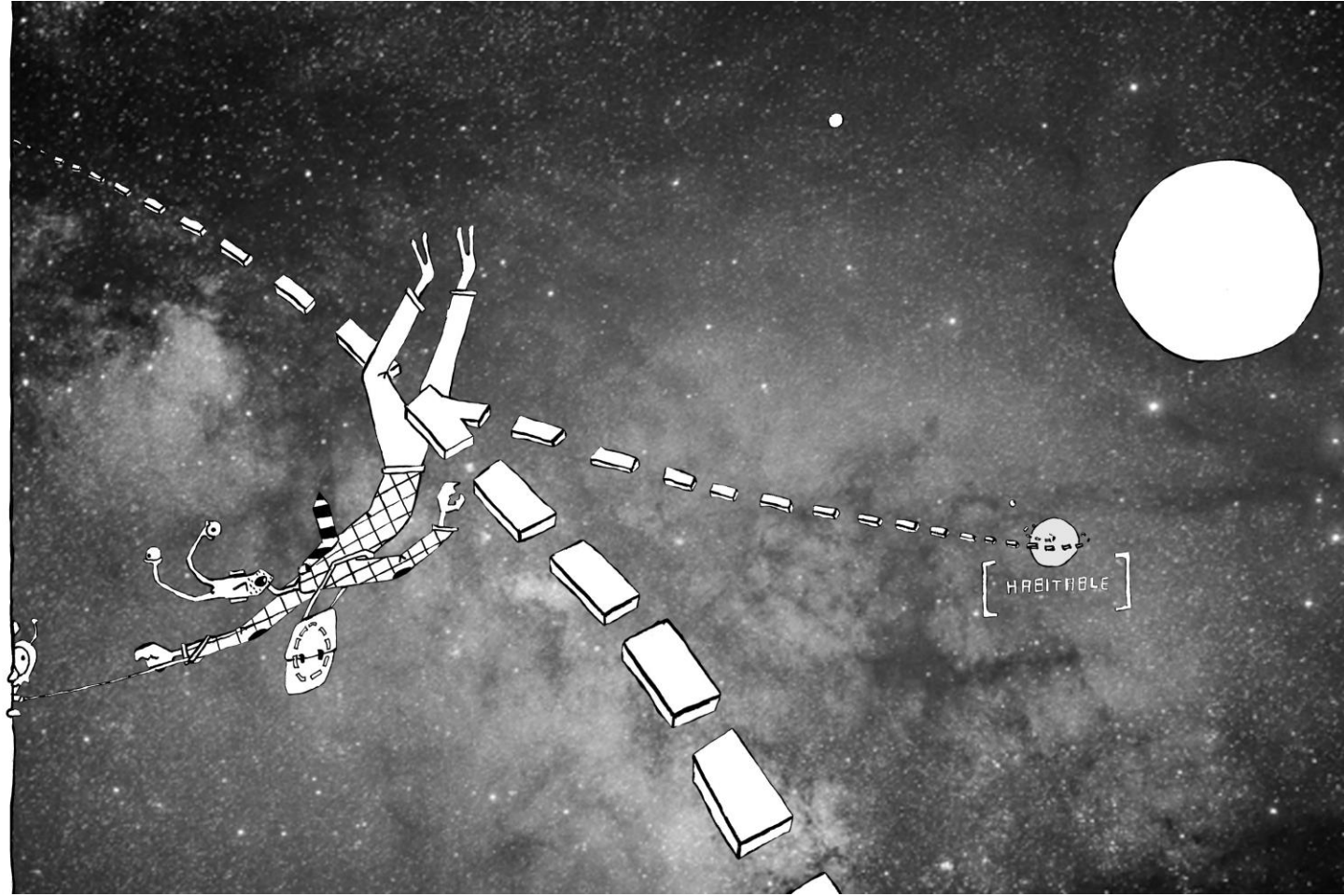


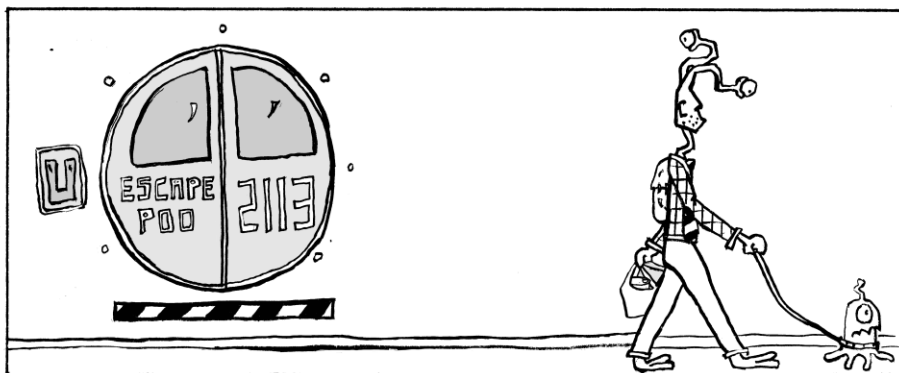














Summer 2016

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Also featuring a recurring comic by Scott R. Smith