driftwood press 2.3

driftwood press

literary magazine

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On the Morning of the Day of My Death, Part I

Mary Imo Stike

The strange man inside me
rose from the sofa,
carried his drink into the kitchen,
and became a woman
much better looking
than I.
Her words, sharp as ice,
pierced through me;
the sight of my blood
was still a surprise.

A bird with the head
of a tiny Boston bull terrier
lew, barking, into
the dust rising
at my feet.

Late On Irving Street

Rachel Adams

Listing in the vapor
of light-scatter,
    the moon, flat and slight,
    is an empty paper plate —
its flour barnacles removed and
frozen for the evening —
    under the green fluorescence
    of a cake-shop window display.

Filling Out Forms

Alysse McCanna

Now, she halts at the question *Father's Occupation*,
writes *Deceased.*

The same way she always hesitated at *Check One Box*,
clicked *Black*
& White.

When the form asked for her *Name*
she wrote *Closest Living Relative*, 23.

When the form asked for *Last Known Address*
she wrote *bends of fingers,*
a sack of meal.

When the form asked for *Preferred Religious Service*
she wrote *carrying the coal mine*
inside.

When the form asked for *Identifying Marks*
she wrote *flame tattoo*,
lifted the morgue's plastic skirt
to see.

Beta Testing the Gaelic Wars

Nate Duke

The Belgian plains
opened before you like
you were in fact the big OV
(Original Vercingetorix)
When in fact you're
at the bottom of the great white ladders
scaled daily by his hairy gods.

Hard to be content here
when you know great granddaddy
accosts you for being herechecking
his watch at you,
accusing you of being
seven decades late.
Just imagineyou
could've helped schlepp
the radio across the swamps.
You're both at fault.
Glory moves slow over flat land.

Interview

Nate Duke

When did you write the poem?

August 2014.

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

This is really a poem about place and history. The grey lowlands of Belgium were fought over by the Romans, Gauls, Vikings, French, Spanish, Germans, and most recently, Americans. There were days and hours for great deeds and those times have passed. My generation missed them. I was also contemplating the ocean of drudgery (radio schlepping, etc.) that heroic acts float upon.

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

I wrote this on the train from Brussels to Amsterdam, so the hardest part was physically writing it on the lurching train hah. The easiest part was the words—I took one look out the window and I saw them out there in the dreariness.

Do you primarily write poetry?

I'm more of a music journalist at the moment, but I'll be starting an MFA at the University of Montana in the fall so I plan to get back on poetry full time.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

When I can write from the comfort of home, I start by making a whole lot of noise. I blast music, dance around, and slap the beat onto walls and tables to get all my latent energy out before I sit down to concentrate.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

E.E. Cummings, Robert Bringhurst, Wallace Stevens, William Wordsworth, William Faulkner, Dostoevsky, Albert Camus. Those are the first that come to mind.

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

I've been writing poetry since my first creative writing workshop, in Spring of 2013, when my then-professor Stefan Delagarza told me I was allowed to write. Other than poetry, I'm secretly developing my fiction into something presentable.

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

In terms of this poem about inter-generational relationships, I'd recommend Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *100 Years of Solitude.*

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

Red Cedar Review, Black Heart Magazine, The Nude Bruce Review, and *some change.*

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

When I first learned about submitting poetry to journals/magazines, *Driftwood Press* was on my initial "Hit List" of places I wanted to get published. I loved the artwork on the website and in the journals— very enigmatic and intriguing. I imagined the magazine floating ashore from an undiscovered continent. The excellent writing in *Driftwood* helped too, of course.

the trick is to hold your breath longer

Tara Westmor

than your sisters. When we play mermaid tail in
the East China sea, my sisters say they are Mool-Gwishin,
slippery. But I complain that when I die, I want a pyre
a not too wet ocean farewell. My sisters say, in Korea,
I cannot have a pyre, but ghosts love to swim, so I could
be happy, like that, silvery and see-through. It could be fun
to jostle the boats, to tell the dolphins to play, and besides,
it is best to be a Gwishin if you are woman. I wonder
if the dead get thirsty. I wonder if they enjoy shellfish and salt.
I tell my sisters, say I could be a sea specter, say I could live
with brine, say I know the ocean loves me when we are in its throat.

Interview

Tara Westmor

When did you write the poem?

I first started writing this poem in April. This year I am attempting to write a poem every day, and this one came out of that process.

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

I write quite a lot of poems about my childhood in Dayton, Ohio, but it has been difficult for me to write about growing up in South Korea (where I had spent about four years). When you are a child, it is easy to think of these places as home. And it is not until you grow up that you realize how problematic it is to write about your childhood as a colonizer. These Korea/sister poems are an attempt to reconcile and reclaim childhood innocence with a memory that is otherwise displaced.

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

It's difficult to write about memory in a way that does not falsify them. But, actually, isn't that what memory does?

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I enjoy writing about the difference between history and memory. My google history lists the strangest things: taxidermy heart, the Kettering Bomb, invention of the straw, WWII Battle of France… I believe everyone should take his or her history personally.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Poets: Claudia Emerson, Danielle Pafunda, CD Wright were all my early heroes. But also anthropologists: Michael Taussig, Kathleen Stewart and Ruth Behar are writing idols as well.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other

genres or work in any other mediums?

I'm working now on building an anthology called "Anthro/Poetics" that blends the genres of Anthropology and Poetry.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I read *Tin House*. One of my friends recommended that I read *Driftwood* as well. I picked up a journal and have been reading from the journal since.

Holland Island Fantasy Baseball

Sarah Ann Winn

Hard to support the home team
when the odds and the ocean are against you.
The coach penned the last lineup,
half already recruited by the water,
poaching players and dugout
in a tidal heist.

Imagine the diamond. Line up
every castaway named Robinson
and hope a Jackie will appear,
hope the cranes will take over,
and produce from their nests necessary
planks for stands, at least enough

for the diehard fans, the birds.
This game's against Atlantis at Atlantis.
Down three runs and it's the bottom of the ninth,
bottom of the Bay and the last man's up.

Four Recollections, Stillborn

John Wells

1
One about the mother
with her five kids
I gave all that money to
at the grocery store
when I was drunk—
out of guilt for something—

and she said *thank you*
before counting it
and I said *thank you*
which didn't help.

2
And the truth is
I did go to my house,
different now
because no one lives there—
because it was years ago
I made jokes,
but I've not laughed
at anything the same since.

3
Silly as it sounds, now:
he was alive;
I wasn't so desperate;
she wasn't a widow.

4
Finally counting the money, the mother
yelled after me, "Wait, stop!"
But I never stopped
running out to the dark.

Interview

John Wells

When did you write the poem?

"Four Recollections" started off as "Four Poems" a long while ago: 2010.

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

I think a lot of poets reject the notion that poems are necessarily autobiographical, even in a psychoanalytical sense— but this poem happens to be. In particular there was one bad night— a lot of negativities plaguing me all at once— when I found myself kind of gawking at this little swarm of children laying siege to their mother at the grocery store: climbing into and out of her arms, tugging at her dress, clinging to her legs. Our little narrative appears pretty authentically in the poem; it was a strange thing to do. Otherwise, the intervening sections are also factual despite their subjects being more obfuscated.

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

So much of poetry— mine at least— attempts to reconstruct the ineffable in some recognizable way, exploring the gulf between our lived experiences (even internally) and what we can know of them. So the hardest part of writing "Four Recollections" was trying to clarify for myself what was in those memories that held my attention for so long— how and why they felt so linked and important. Subsequently, I had to make peace with those linkages being apparent enough within the poem structurally— for example, I struggled for a long time with the choice to use sections (not a habit of mine), although the title eventually helped alleviate some of that apprehension. But maybe those connections were always sort of underdeveloped— something felt but not utterly known — which I try to account for with a modification to the title I added only recently: "Stillborn." The easiest part of the process was indulging the instinct to explore a handful of memories more closely, meditating on their connectivity.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?
So, so much has been cut out since the first iteration of the poem: a conversation about Christmas— a lot more about Albert (the deceased "he" in the 3rd section)— a Maserati that nearly ran me over in the parking lot of the grocery. But this poem just kept growing more implicit— I think a lot of my poems do that, distilled sometimes over years, although maybe that's almost everyone's process.

Do you primarily write poetry?
Certainly over the past decade that's been the case— I write more poetry than anything else, although I do write in other genres.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?
I wish I could say yes, definitively—but just about everyone I know writes sort of the same way where process is concerned. We see inspiration as an active as opposed to passive process, and we try to nurture that impulse— inspiration, at some point, is predicated upon observation, and the industry of writing it down is a byproduct, a seemingly necessary side effect.

If anything, perhaps my approach to titling work is a little distinctive. When I was young I poured over liner notes to albums for hours— I would read through them dozens of times, organizing cd and record covers on my bedroom floor like an art instillation. But I think itunes has, to some extent, annihilated that opportunity for youngsters these days, and perhaps dampened our collective sensitivity for things like titles. I rely heavily on a title to galvanize and clarify a poem for me— it can be such a helpful thematic directive that sometimes I'll spend days or longer figuring out the title before writing another word.

Who are some of your favorite authors?
I attended a small liberal arts college in the early 2000s, so to some degree I think my favorites are endemic to that environment and my generation: Kundera, Auster, DeLillo. Poets: David Baker, James Wright, Ben and Sandra Doller, Jim Harms— people I studied with or through whom I trace my poetic lineage. Jack Gilbert and Frederick Seidel are as significant as can be to me— Carruth and Gluck as well, although this is like asking about someone's favorite musicians— there are a lot of them. Ad-

ditionally, one hundred percent of human people should read Motley Crue's "The Dirt."

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

I think writing poems is a brand of instinct; even at a young age, maybe six or seven, I understood my ideas and even my words as transient, ephemeral things that I might try to capture through a poem the way one captures a scene in a photograph. I hated to think of my thoughts and my words as insubstantial things that flitted into the ether the moment after being said or thought— so I loved the idea that I might keep them and even refine them through poems.

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

I think our culture resists poetry to a great degree because of our collective social velocity. My recommendation would be simple: slow down, read softly, and as often as you can. This same recommendation I give myself most days.

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

I have some poems out or forthcoming in *After the Pause, Flights, Spittoon* and others— I have flash fiction in *Melusine* and a longer story coming out in *Best New Writing*, an anthology.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The artwork and limited edition print issues were, I thought, very cool— and the poems were universally lovely, with a great deal of actual breadth within the genre— *Driftwood* doesn't appear to have hitched its wagon hastily to one style or another, neither some fixation on the avant-garde, nor rigid narrative transparency— I've always admired journals like *Driftwood*, one's that can set aside, to some degree, reductive stylistic tendencies, and instead encourage, more simply, good work, whatever the leaning.

My Mother's Thighs

Meggie Royer

Once opened like azaleas to the man
who would lead to me. Put two and two together,
and out comes a year of pain.
The house was never dusted,
candles and pears swallowed in soft grey rain.
Enter the living room
and the chandelier would burden you with cobwebs.

Interview

Meggie Royer

When did you write the poem?

I wrote this poem several weeks ago in mid-May!

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

This poem was inspired by all the bittersweet hardships of familial life and parent/sibling bonds, and how sometimes we cherish these bonds while simultaneously wishing they would disintegrate. The theme of disorganization/clutter and how a life can gradually grow messier was inspired by my aunt's hoarding.

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

The hardest part of the poem was describing mess in a way that was somehow beautiful. The easiest part of the poem was combining pain with delicateness when discussing birth.

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

Yes- I had written a few more lines about ghosts and how a female ghost always visited my father's bed, but my editor suggested these lines be removed, as those last few lines could not keep up with the intensity of the first few.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, I do! I do however, write prose pieces a few times a month, and a few of my short stories won national medals in the 2013 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, but I haven't written a short story in two years, something which I'm hoping to change soon!

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I tend to incorporate news headlines/content from articles I've read throughout the day into my daily poems, and oftentimes I'll get ideas for a poem title from my professors in class when they discuss something in relation to psychology. I get a lot of my poem ideas from psychology- I'm a psych major and find it fascinating how the brain/mind works and how people interact with one another through so-called "normal" or "abnormal" methods.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Bob Hicok, Richard Siken, Sharon Olds, Maggie O'Farrell, Marguerite Henry, Charles Frazier, Clementine von Radics, Ocean Vuong, Aracelis Girmay, and Michael Cunningham.

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

I have been writing poetry for about three years now! I also write prose pieces, as well as short stories and occasional essays, often centered around feminism. I often dabble in surreal/fantasy/dark poems as well.

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

Yes! I would recommend the work of Clementine von Radics, Caitlyn Siehl, Lora Mathis, Shinji Moon, Kristina Haynes, and Azra Tabassum, as they are all Tumblr writers as well, and they write about similar themes/and in similar styles as I do!

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

Yes, I have been published before! My readers can find more of my work in numerous literary journals, including *Melancholy Hyperbole, Spry Literary Journal, Literary Orphans, The Harpoon Review, Lumen Magazine*, and more. I also have a poetry book, *Healing Old Wounds With New Stitches,* for sale on Amazon, and my third poetry book, *The No You Never Listened To*, will be available for purchase soon from *Words Dance Publishing.*

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

Its beautiful cover artwork, as well as its often sparse and heartwarming work. *Driftwood Press* seems very welcoming and homey to me, and I can tell it strives to make the voices of less-privileged/less heard of writers expressed. This has always been a focus of mine when searching for liter-

ary journals to submit to!

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

My work often centers around the themes of empowering women, survival, the intersections of violence and beauty, familial generations, and gratitude. I would particularly like my work to be a safe haven for women who have experienced various forms of abuse.

The Art of the Drawknife

Jeff Ewing

You put your ear to the wall and heard
your future lapping against the studs like water
far underground, a river polishing the crude
baserock to granite, ice-gray and belly-slick,
coursing in half-formed channels through sleep
while the rain tapped against the glass.

Tapped and spilled through some magic or other
into a narrow valley in Washington state
where you stood, emptied of any expectations—
your wife gone, the kids up and grown—
above a creek at the edge of the last lot line,
cold rain in lines indistinct as dragonfly wings.

You shed your sodden clothes and chose
from among the spruce and cedar the straightest
grain, stripped and caulked them with clay
the way it used to be done—lightning and stars
for light, birds for company calling from tree
to tree. And rain, as always, webbing the needles.

Now someone finds their way here—
your son or a climber down from his solo
route. You want to press your hand against their
fixed selves, to take in the closeness of dinner tables
settled in the folds of their clothes, but instead you
laugh and pull a chair to the west-facing window.

Clothes Horse
Westport, Mayo

Amanda Bales

Threads snipped from flour sacks
seamed shirts sink-washed
and draped over dowels to dry.
Clothes horse, mother said,
but smoke and drink and toil
split the sibilant fricatives,
so I heard *clothe whore*
and guessed the sturdy
acceptance of all overlaid
the notion of the name until
a poem tacked on a pub wall—
and on the writing desk next to an old
clothes horse and a lopsided mirror
that had come through it all
—as if those words fastened
so that my eyes might darn
the sounds surging beyond
our tattered poverty
to the fray of her tongue.

**from Gerald Dawe's "The Bay Tree"*

Interview

Amanda Bales

When did you write the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The first full draft of "Clothes Horse" as we see it now was written earlier this year, but over the years I have written many other poem and essay drafts about my confusion of the phrase "Clothes Horse" with "Clothes Whore," and the moment the Dawe's poem revealed this confusion to me. Although the speaker of the poem is separate from myself, the fray of the mother's tongue is also the fray of my mother tongue. For the speaker of the poem, the confusion arises from the physical limitation of the mother. For me, the confusion arose from the misogyny in my language. In either case, it is poetry that mends our tongues.

PEACH SEASON

Morgan Songi

He came to me smelling of peaches. "My mother
taught me," he said. "She didn't know she was doing it,
didn't want to teach me 'woman things,' but I sat
in the doorway of the kitchen and pretended
to read a Batman comic book, watched her move
in the fog of thick wet steam from the copper kettle
while she dropped the peaches in, took them out and
dumped them into cold water. That's what you do.
Put them in boiling water until the skin sticks up
in tattered edges, then straight into ice cold water and
slip the skin off." He lifted one hand,
long fingers curving around an invisible peach.
"Hold it nice and firm. Start at the stem end
and stroke it down. The skin sloughs off slick
and easy and you've got a rose-pink ball of sweet
smelling fruit in the palm of your hand."

Ripe summer peaches sit in the wooden bowl
on my kitchen counter, their perfume heavy in the air.
The hummingbird outside my window hovers,
drinks clear water from the fountain beside
the Buddha with the miniature tower of smooth
stones at his feet. A fiddle fern leans soft and
feathery over Buddha's shoulder and in the distance
a rumble of thunder. I cradle a fragrant rose-red orb,
press my thumb into it until a ragged edge of pit
slices my skin. Sweet juice mingles with blood,
runs along the length of my thumb and settles
in a copper-scented pool in the palm of my hand.

Interview

Morgan Songi

When did you write the poem?

The first draft of "Peach Season" was written about seven years ago.

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

Each of my pieces spring from a single line or an image that resonates in my imagination. Regarding poetic inspiration, I've always liked what Robert Frost said on the subject, "to begin in something more felt than known." I started "Peach Season" with the memory of stories that my gay friend, Doug, shared about his relationship with his rigidly conservative mother and felt my way through memories of learning "woman things" from my mother.

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

The hardest part was pulling back from the emotionally loaded fact of Doug's death; it became much easier when I let myself go deeply into the sensual details of the living, breathing world around me. Let myself feel the sharp cutting edges that wait in the homiest of moments and accept the coming together of the sweetness and the blood.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Whether it's a personal essay, a short story, or a memoir, poetry with its musicality, rhythms, and repetitions becomes an integral part of each thing I do.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I've had to accept the truth about my process, that it's intuitive. I've lived with it long enough now that I trust it, and am often pleased about the unconscious work that gets done in service to the piece.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

First and foremost, Robert Frost, then e e cummings. Galway Kinnell, Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich come to mind.

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

Unlike the prose pieces which come together primarily in a collage fashion, my poems arrive full-blown and of a piece. Because I tend to work from the bare bones out, I add textural details to flesh the body out.

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

I show up randomly in literary journals in the US and Canada. Having come out of year where my time and energy was depleted in large measure by medical issues, I'm hoping to make appearances in a more routine manner.

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

Berkeley Poetry Review, Heron's Nest, Two Hawks Quarterly.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The innovative art attracted me.

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

Jungian depth psychology, dreams, and an indwelling sense of mystery all influence my poetics.

To Arrest Motion

Douglas Koziol

I have been reading Robert Farmsworth since college, and now he is standing at my front door. He sports a corduroy jacket and a tan driving hat over his bushy white hair. His nostrils, coated in snot, glisten in the morning sun.

—May I come in?

Farmsworth is the author of four novels, a collection of essays, a chapbook of poems, over a hundred short stories, and one critically and commercially unsuccessful children's book. When I first stumbled across his second novel, *Pantomime*, in the library those fifteen years ago, there was a searing pang of recognition; his mind seemed to operate like mine—all swirling patterns of reasoning and gridlocks of self-contradiction. Not surprisingly, he looks much older standing in front of me than he does on his book jackets.

I tell him of course.

—How did you find me? I ask, gently closing the door behind him.

—I've read your work, he answers, removing his cap.

When I was nine, I published a poem in our town paper about the gulping sounds a lake makes when fish jump at night. This is my only "work" I can think of.

—They say you've disappeared, I tell him, gesturing for him to enter the living room.

—Well, here I am, he offers, kicking off his loafers.

It is true. Here he is.

That night, we sit across from one another at my kitchen table, eating grilled salmon and refilling glasses of pinot noir. Farmsworth, or Robert as he insists I call him, has taught me how to marinate the fish in a lime butter sauce. Between greedy bites and gulps, we chat idly.

—Under Reagan's neoliberal policies, there was rapid deindustrialization here in the States and a greater push for production abroad, Robert says, dabbing his buttered chin with a paper napkin.

—The industrial open-net cages in salmon farms result in waste feeds contaminating the ocean floor and nearby coastal communities, I say, scraping up the last pink remnants on my plate.

Our conversation carries into the living room, where I sit in my maple rocking chair and offer Robert the couch.

—Faulkner said the purpose of art is to arrest motion, Robert says.

I rock back and forth, my eyes closed, my brain feeling like a buoy caught in a hurricane on account of all the wine.

—Shit.

I open my eyes to find Robert standing with his glass tilted in his hand and a maroon splotch the size of a silver dollar on one of the couch cushions.

—It's all right, I assure him as I stagger to the kitchen for the stain remover. It's my fault for having an off-white couch.

While I scrub vigorously at the spot, Robert mumbles something about thighs, his voice almost wilting, but I can't entirely make out the meaning. I return to my rocking chair, and soon he is lying on the couch, a soft rumble of snoring escaping from his nose. I grab a wool blanket from the cedar closet, drape it over him carefully, and head to bed.

When I leave for work in the morning, Robert is right where I left him. My head feels like it has been sent through a trash compactor, and I envy him sleeping there soundly. But unlike me, he has worked hard to earn this late-career period of lethargy. All I do is sort mail at a small publishing house—manuscripts, queries, letters to authors—those kinds of things. It's mindless work, but it pays the bills, and occasionally I come across letters from major authors.

When I return on my lunch break, he is nowhere to be found. However, my teal ceramic bowl rests in the center of the kitchen table, plastic wrap stretched tightly across its top. It is filled with egg salad generously dusted with paprika. Lying next to it is a note scribbled onto the back of a Ralph's receipt:

Eggs-cuse my eggs-igency (hunger),
but I cooked something up:
white phosphorus - the first form - not a
free element on Earth.
America, thank you for lending
me your home of the brave.

I hate egg salad, but I slip the nonsensical note into my pocket and make some tuna fish. It's the thought that counts, really.

On my way out the door, I see the stain on the couch. It is light pink now and has morphed into the shape of a kidney. Will I ever be able to get it out?

I sit upright in bed. Beads of sweat poke through my forehead like sewing needles. My heart is beating in a free-form jazz time signature. I wait for the sound again.

There it is. A rubbery scraping, followed by an echoing collapse, like a tipping freight car.

I talk to God for the first time this year:

—God, I know I say I want to die a lot, but most of the time it's not true, especially not now. Please save me, God.

As to be expected, there is no response.

With my putter in hand (I like to practice by putting into cups that I lay on the living room floor), I tiptoe down the hallway. The orange light shines through the crevices of the bathroom door and out into the surrounding darkness. I raise a fist to knock before remembering that this is my house. Spare the formalities for trespassers; I will swing the door open and crack through this person's skull, the element of surprise on my side.

The head of my putter never meets that of a stranger. Before any blood is spilled, I realize that the naked body—one skeletal arm dangling over the side of the tub, chest collapsing, blanketed in flesh pale blue and sagging, testicles shrunken to the size of a Hacky Sack and covered in winding purple veins, knees sharp and pointing to the ceiling, festering in a murky yellow swill—belongs to Robert.

He got lost this afternoon looking for the library (he has spent little time in Glendale and is used to the tidy grids of New York City) and finally found his way back here, he explains. He knocked, but there was no answer (I am a heavy sleeper) and finding the door unlocked, let himself in (for all my fears of a possible home invasion, I am horribly forgetful). Sweaty and exhausted from wandering for miles, he thought he'd take a bath, but once inside, found himself unable to get out and has been trying to do so for what feels like hours.

I grab a slippery arm and yank. Robert, other arm gripping the side of the tub, rises a few feet before collapsing back into the fetid water, which splashes against my white walls. After catching our respective breaths, I ask him if he wants to give it another go; he nods.

Same approach but this one sticks, and Robert comes crashing into me, his skin like soaked cardboard slapping against my T-shirt.

—I'm sorry, he says while I towel him down. I'm such a burden. Just

ask my wife and daughter.

He is divorced and no longer has a relationship with his only child. This information is widely available in interviews.

—Not at all, I reassure him, though I suspect it is a half-truth. But then again, isn't everything? —Your work has helped me through so much, I continue. It's really the least I can do.

This is closer to being wholly true.

He wraps himself in the towel. I bend over, flip the drain open, and watch the filthy water ceaselessly spiral down.

I spend next afternoon's lunch break researching senior care facilities. A spoonful of yogurt stuck in my mouth, I scroll through pictures of sprawling, sterile, white buildings with names like Shady Acres, Seaside Grove, or Garden View Center for Late Adulthood Cohabitation. They all boast tennis courts, Sunday brunches, golf carts, saunas, and, of course, weekly Bingo. I think, for a second, that I wouldn't mind ending up there myself—sprawling out across a plastic beach chair, a nurse at my side, bearing a silver tray with a glass of orange juice and my daily medication. Then I remember that I don't take any medication. Does Robert? My cursor hovering over an image of a well-lit bedroom with vinyl flooring and seafoam green walls, I think of *Pantomime*'s protagonist, Elliot Whitmore, standing in his aunt's hospital room shortly after she's had cancerous tissue removed from her jaw, which has left behind a sizable hole that gives "a whole new meaning to the term 'slack-jawed.'" There he is, unable to stomach looking at the woman who practically raised him in his mother's absence and who is so clearly hurting and desperate for affection, but who is also undoubtedly aware of just how difficult she is to look at. Whitmore is fully cognizant that to avert his glances is to callously reject a loved one in need, and at the same time, to just grin and bear it would be all at once disingenuous and completely transparent. So instead, he just kind of stands there and fumbles with the TV remote, while staring at a spot on the wall just above her head.

And it's so much like my own situation right around the time of discovering the book—losing Kathy, not to death or disease, but to my own hang-ups and fixations. Naturally, she couldn't rough the friendship for too long, with my second-guessing everything I did or said on account of my gnawing longing for her, which she certainly perceived but had the decency not to ever bring up. An example of this in action: we're sitting in a booth across from one another at a pub, and she casually points out one of the bar-backs that she has a bit of a crush on—a wiry looking guy with

shoulder-length brown hair and a patchy beard. As her friend, I'm obligated to offer a supportive response and perhaps even encourage her to slip him her number. But as someone who is also constantly overwhelmed with the urge to bury his head between her thighs, I can't help but be smacked with jealousy and want to dissuade her of this notion. Yet to do so would betray my loyal friendship and not to do so would go against that more primal part of me. And so instead, I just sort of fidget with my beer and nod and dart my eyes all around the place.

It's this similarity in failed mental gymnastics that led me to copy Robert's address from a letter he sent to the publishing house some time ago (he was trying to snag an advanced copy of a new edition of *Lire Le Capital* we were putting out) and to pen him a tortuous, confessional letter of my own. And it's clear now that he did in fact read it and felt at least somewhat similar. And it's clear that even if I could afford it, it wouldn't be fair to dump him off on others. To force them to deal with his failing eyesight, hearing, and mobility. Why should somebody else listen to him ruminate on expressionistic rhetoric as a tool of venture capitalists or how anyone who claims to be able to discern between brands of vodka is a grade-A fraud? He showed up at *my* door. I am the one who gets to do it all—who gets him.

Robert cannot sleep on the couch anymore; it is not good for his back. I've bought him a high-end air mattress, which I inflate every night. He is banned from bathing when I am not around. I come home to the house smelling like pot roast or lasagna or shepherd's pie or flank steaks or cornish hens or short ribs and baked potatoes—Robert likes a hearty dinner. He continues to leave behind notes, and I collect them all in a binder that I keep under my bed. Some are thematically linked, dealing with such heavy concepts as the metaphysical space in which the author resides or Los Angeles traffic. Others are more idiosyncratic, detailing the optimal way to transcribe a phone message or the benefits of sitting on the floor versus a chair or sofa. All of them are increasingly bizarre but almost poetic in their fractured rambling.

It is a Friday night, and we are watching *Jeopardy!* in the living room. I am doing my usual rocking, my slippers scraping softly against the carpet. Robert is sitting on the floor, back against the couch, wool blanket covering him up to his neck like a massive bib. He has only gotten one question wrong, and it was in the category of "Lake Poet-ry:" *In the room the women come and go/Talking of this largest Central American lake, amigo*. He said, "Lake

Atitlan," while the correct response was "Lake Nicaragua." He is still mumbling curses. I have found it's best to leave him alone when he gets like this.

—I fucked up.

His pride is wounded is what it is.

I assure him that it's just a game and remind him that even the contestant who has won twelve games straight and has amassed $269,000 got the same one wrong.

—No, that's not it. That's not it at all.

His voice falters. I mute the television. This sounds important.

—I'm so goddamn tired, but I haven't even scraped the surface of anything I'm supposed to be doing. I can't believe how much time I've wasted, how much energy I've spent saying absolutely nothing.

I tell him that his work has helped me make sense of the absurdity of quotidian existence.

—I couldn't hold a conversation with my wife without it devolving into my own neuroses. She suffered for thirty years before finally escaping.

I tell him that there had to have been some good moments, that I've mostly enjoyed *our* time together.

—Lucinda, our daughter, those were the happiest moments of my life. Holding her tiny, pink fingers as she tried to walk on her own. Afternoons at the beach, watching her fling herself into the waves, swallow gallons of seawater, get right back up, and do it all over again. But then where was I? Locked in my office, hunched over a typewriter, slamming my head against my desk, trying to rearrange the words just right, so they could do all my living for me. *Sorry, honey, Daddy can't come out right now; he's working. I'll be there later.* I'll be there later.

I tell him that his work is important, that people will be studying it for the next hundreds of years.

—It wasn't enough, he says before breaking into a phlegm-filled cough.

I will probably have to wash that blanket tomorrow.

—I'm so lonely, I ache. My bones feel like they are slowly splintering. My skin feels heavy, like it's magnetically drawn to the earth. I don't know how much more of this I can take.

He pulls the blanket over his head.

This is maudlin, desperate. It is nothing like his writing, which is self-aware, often ironic, but still emotionally sharp. This is sloppy, and I feel somewhat embarrassed listening to it.

—How about some tea? I ask, not knowing what else to say.

The cloaked figure nods.

I get up and head to the kitchen but not before un-muting the television. It is "Final Jeopardy," and the category is "Women in 20th Century Literature." Hopefully, this will get his mind off things.

The next day, I come home from the supermarket to find the house empty. Robert is probably on one of his afternoon walks. He likes to go to the park and feed crushed Saltines to the pigeons. I find an orange pill bottle on the kitchen table; underneath it is a note jotted down on an envelope:

> *This is filled with enough sleeping pills so that I never have to wake up again. I am exhausted but too weak to do it on my own. I need you to do your part. Please crush every single one of these pills into a fine powder and pour it into my wine. I, of course, will be on the floor, wrapped in my blanket. I will be as content as humanly possible. Thank you for everything. I couldn't have done it without you. Really.*

I fold the note and slip it into my back pocket. I examine the bottle, the thick blue pills rattling against the sides. This is far too lucid to be more of Robert's usual maundering. He's even reverted to prose. It wasn't long ago that I thought he was lost to the world. Now, he is a friend who is honest-to-god hurting, and I'm the only one he trusts to bring an end to it all. What choice do I have, really? But if he is punching out his final timecard, so to speak, I have no idea what I'm going to do with myself. Who will I come home to with a list of names that showed up in my mailroom that day and expect a story about at least one of them puking out the back window of a gypsy cab? Besides, is it even my choice to make? Nature is running its course; I'm not qualified to intervene. Look at me, I'm ensconced in solipsism. He dictates his own autonomy. He's rendered virtually every facet of life as we know it onto the page; I think he is allowed to ascribe his own meaning to those final, aching hours. I am really going to miss him, but there is nothing left here for him anymore. He stumbled onto my doorway for reasons I still don't know, and I can't let him down. He is far older and wiser than me. I'm being selfish. He is hurting. And he is my friend.

Robert lies on the floor. He did not make it to the air mattress. His empty wine glass rests on the coffee table above him. The pale blue flicker of the television provides the only light in the house. I can't bring myself to turn it off. Only a short while ago, we stumbled upon Ingmar Berg-

man's *Wild Strawberries,* at the scene where Ingrid Thulin and Gunnar Björnstrand are sitting in the car after she's told him she's pregnant. They are soaked from standing out in the rain and are lit in medium to high contrast; dark shadows surround the edge of the frame, and lighter, wavy ones stretch across Thulin's classically beautiful profile. She asks her husband what his ultimate desire is, and he tells her it is to be dead, "stone-dead." The camera quickly zooms in on Björnstrand as he turns away, from his wife, from us, from life, and then cuts to the present day Thulin, her face wet, not from rain but from tears which shine in the afternoon sun. Watching her light a cigarette, my chest began to twinge with craving for one, despite the fact I haven't smoked since college. So I just watched, raptured in silence, even though I can't count how many times I've seen the film. Now, I sit immobile in my rocking chair, until my eyes feel like they are going to vibrate out of their sockets, and their lids fall like sandbags, and I slip into a static-filled sleep.

The second-to-last note Robert ever left behind was sketched in black felt-tip marker across the side of an empty and partly caved-in carton of watermelon juice:

Here rests an empty vessel
I've tried to squeeze the life
from it, but all in vein,
the blood's run dry, and I
can't keep recycling.

It sits on my desk now, next to my personal computer, and I study it with the binder spread across my lap. I begin to type, *Here rests*—the black text marring the field of white on my screen. I stop and hold *delete* until it disappears. It's surprisingly easy to erase meaning. And it's just as easy to assign it a name. Everything inside this binder was created here, with my pens and pencils, on my household items—brilliance etched onto the mundane. The process might belong to Robert, but the product is partly mine. I know all he wanted was to be stone-dead; I don't know what he would want done with all this. But I can't let his work go to waste; it's a new pinnacle in his career—high modernism in a postmodern age. Or something like that. But who on earth would believe that Robert Farmsworth bestowed the last remnants of his staggering body of work to some mail clerk? It's better that it be done through me. It's the material that matters, not the moniker. The cursor continues to blink slowly at me. God, who am I to lay claim to these carefully constructed byproducts of decades of vivid madness, wrenching agony, sinking regret, and occasional

relief? Look at me. I am the Nurse, the Inn-Keeper, the Entertainer, the Confidant, the Friend. I am not the Author.

I grab the carton and crush it between my palms, further collapsing its center and giving it an hourglass shape. Exhaling slowly, I turn the whole warped thing over in my hands, and I can see where Robert must have smudged the ink. That's the problem with writing in freehand when you're a lefty—you end up ruining the words you've just left behind. Once, I suggested to Robert that he make use of a typewriter that's collecting dust in my basement, figuring he was more acquainted with that technology than my computer. We were sitting in wicker chairs on the back patio, watching a clementine sun sink into a magenta sky and filling glasses from a pitcher of sangria. Robert cautiously set his glass down on the armrest of his chair and proceeded to explain that, in his advanced age, typing felt too permanent, that he needed the more immediate freedom of his hand transporting his thoughts to the page, and that if it were convenient to bypass the pen altogether and dip his finger in ink and get it all down that way, he would. He went on to say that lately he found his thoughts more fleeting than ever and that the only important thing was that they were recorded somehow, someway, and that if he were lucky, maybe a few people would read them and get something out of it.

I let the deformed carton fall to the floor with a soft, hollow thud and return to my keyboard. *Here rests* . . . I don't have Robert's hangups with typing. And I see now that this was his parting gift to me, that I'm picking up where he left off—another part of the production process. I clank away at the keyboard, slowly at first, then gradually picking up speed; falling into a steady, unconscious rhythm; occasionally flipping the binder's pages with my left hand, while my right crawls across the keys. My focus softens, and the rows and rows of text shift into squiggly black lines, like a battalion of caterpillars. And I continue on, well into the night.

Interview

Douglas Koziol

When did you write "To Arrest Motion"?

I started it in mid-February and submitted the first draft to my fiction workshop sometime in April. It didn't appear in this final form until late-May.

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

I have a difficult time titling everything I write. If I could just label everything "Untitled," I would. At the same time, I admire great titles and realize they're an important component of a good story. "To Arrest Motion" is something I've wanted to use for a long time— I love that Faulkner quote— and I was excited it fit into the story somewhat organically.

What inspired "To Arrest Motion"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

There's a Jim Jarmusch quote about stealing from work that inspires you, where he says, "Don't bother concealing your thievery— celebrate it if you feel like it." And while that might be true, I still feel a tremendous sense of guilt whenever I do steal (which is often). In a way, when I write, I feel like I've found a corpse on the side of the road, and I'm pilfering what I want from its pockets and leaving the rest there to rot. I wanted to explore those feelings.

What was the hardest part of writing "To Arrest Motion"?

Balancing the more absurdist tone I was going for with the reader's need for something in the way of an explanation or rationale. The original draft had Farmsworth showing up at the narrator's door and the whole thing never really being questioned. The sense I got from the people in my workshop and the others I showed it to was that it wouldn't hurt to get a little of the characters' motivation, and I think that instinct was right.

And I hope the whole piece still feels very strange.

Which part of "To Arrest Motion" was conceived of first?

The first sentence, which is never how it works for me (though it appeared slightly different in its original form). Usually, I jot down pages and pages of notes and half-formed ideas before I even attempt an actual sentence. This time around, I was lucky enough to have one of those rare moments where I just started writing and then followed the words wherever they took me.

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

The original draft ended with the narrator bringing his/Farmsworth's manuscript to an editor at the publishing house he works at and her looking it over and her bright red lips turning up into a thin smile—it was really hokey. I think it works better with the narrator having convinced himself it's all right to take Farmsworth's work, that he has his blessing, but still having that ambiguity. The reader doesn't know exactly what his next steps are.

Do you primarily write fiction?

Almost exclusively, yes. I recently took a nonfiction workshop as an elective for my MFA program. It was a good experience, but I quickly realized I wasn't cut out for the genre. I don't think I'm honest enough with myself to write personal essays (I ended up writing about myself in the third-person to get around this), and I find an allegiance to historical truth too constricting for me to write about other people or actual events. I've also written a couple of un-filmable screenplays.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I doubt this is unique, but I'm always desperately looking for any distraction from the whole lonely process of writing, so I need absolute silence when I do it. Even the quietest of background instrumental music is enough to snap me out of the whole thing.

Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.

It consisted almost entirely of lengthening sections. Aside from the terrible ending I mentioned above, I don't think anything else was cut, which is rare for me. I found that I needed to remain in certain moments a bit longer, crawl further into the narrator's head, push some stuff

around, and figure out what exactly is going on in there. The decision to euthanize someone you admire is not a particular easy one to make; it can't happen in one paragraph.

Bergman's "Wild Strawberries" plays a significant part in your narrative. Could you explain why and how this particular film was influential to your story?

At the literal level, there's the parallel of it being a movie about an accomplished, elderly man looking back at his life and his career. But for some reason, the scene that always sticks out to me (aside from the opening dream sequence) doesn't involve Victor Sjöström's protagonist but is the one that appears in the story, between Gunnar Björnstrand and Ingrid Thulin. The former's absolute certainty that the world is unfit for human life and that he only wants to be dead is something that must have really impressed itself upon me on first viewing, and I think it's a different form of that same certainty that Farmsworth adopts. The film itself isn't overwhelmingly dark though—I mean it ends with its protagonist's parents smiling and waving to him while fishing—and, tonally, it's a different kind of balancing of life's light and dark moments that I hoped to achieve with my story.

Is Robert Farmsworth based on any particular author?

He's more an amalgamation of reclusive authors like Gaddis, Pynchon, and Salinger (all of whom I admire). Part of me wishes I could vanish like that and let my writing exist untethered from me as a person (not that I'm some kind of public figure), which comes into direct contrast with the part of me that's more narcissistic and ego-driven (hence me being excited to do this interview).

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "To Arrest Motion"?

I was reading Donald Barthelme's *Sixty Stories* at the time of writing it and hoped it would end up similarly concise and absurd, but as I went on, it ended up getting away from me and becoming this longer, slightly more grounded thing. I think it wound up for the better though. Barthelme is an influence that you don't want to wear too prominently on your sleeve, as very few people can do what he was doing. Look at "City Life," for example; the way he's able to condense a female-focused, coming-of-age, contemporarily urban novel into about fifteen-pages, all while simultaneously parodying and honoring the genre, is inimitable.

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

I've published a couple pieces with *theNewerYork*, and it seems my undergraduate journal—MCLA's *Spires*—has archived every issue except the one I appeared in, which is probably for the better. You can also follow me on Twitter: @Manos15.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

We share some favorite authors, primarily DeLillo, David Foster Wallace, and James Joyce. I also appreciated the fact that you publish comics, which I haven't seen many journals do. And your cover art is fantastic.

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

Just that I'm glad it found a home here and that it's my favorite thing I've ever written, which means I will undoubtedly hate it in a few weeks or so.

Bat out of Hell

Taylor Garcia

Margaret assures herself: leaving Mom here, at an OXXO convenience store at Benito Juárez and Constitución, a few miles deep into Tijuana, is just like Mom used to do to her as a little girl. Except then, it was in New Mexico, in their hometown of Clayton. Mom would drive Margaret and her sisters down First Street, promising them a Slush Puppy, but when they'd get to Allsup's, Mom only gave enough money for a pack of Newports, and she always sent Margaret, the youngest, in to get them. Margaret would come out with the cigarettes, standing alone in front of the store, cars gassing up, the street so far away, to find no Bel Air with Mom, Joana, and Tina. They'd left her there, like a dog, as Mom would say. Then after a while they'd barrel back around the block, laughing their heads off, Mom in charge of it all.

"Get in," she'd say. "And quit crying."

Now, in front of the OXXO, under a darkening sky, Margaret considers locking the doors and scrapping the whole deal. This will ensure her a direct ticket to hell, but she'd get her life in return.

"Mom." Margaret taps her sleeping mother's shoulder. "We're here."

Mom comes to. "Where?" she says.

"We're getting some sandwiches. Go on in. I'll park."

"But look at me," Mom says. "I don't have my face on."

Classic Mom: always thinking one day she'll be discovered.

"Just go inside. What are you getting? Turkey? Roast beef?" Margaret says.

Mom opens the passenger door, sets a slippered foot on foreign pavement.

"Go ahead." Margaret's guts twist up. "I'll meet you."

This shouldn't be how it ends. Yet it was either Mom goes or Margaret's family goes. Even her son Cameron said it, bless his little heart. "When's Grandma going home?"

"Shut the door, Mom," Margaret says. "I'll be right back, OK?"

Mom closes the door. Margaret rolls down the window. "Go on."

Mom shuffles up to the front door and pushes. She looks back once more at the minivan. "Roast beef," she says.

"Good. Me too." Margaret rolls up the window, nods once with resolve and a growing lump in her throat. She presses down on the gas.

* * *

The Odyssey zips over bumps in the boulevard and dodges two fast cars turning into her lane. She lays on her wimpy horn at the pink taillights stopped for no reason. She speeds back up under street signs she can read, but barely understand, her Spanish all but gone. Mom's always criticizing her for that. *Garita*, Margaret knows, is the border crossing.

She shakes her head. People are going to ask, "Where'd your mom go?"

Oh, I took her back home. What? Oh, no. She doesn't live with us full-time. She's just visiting from New Mexico. Where I grew up. You see, her home isn't my home. My home is my home. Mine and my husband Eric's, and my daughter Lacey and my son Cameron's home. Just ours. All ours.

Margaret steers onto a northbound highway. *Is this it?* She blasts some cold air, shivers after a few seconds, then turns it to heat. *Too hot. Oh, God, Oh, God, I had to. I was going to kill her otherwise. I could have pushed her down the stairs. Choked her. Suffocated her. Mixed up all those meds to give her one hell of a forever-nap. Shit, I could have drowned her in our pool. Made them all look like innocent little accidents. No, officer, I just found her face down, floating there. This was better. More humane. By now, Mom probably realizes she's not in San Diego.*

Right up until Margaret had had it, Mom was on a loop with that story about her and Margaret's alien abduction. The kids thought it was cute for a while.

"Again, Grandma, again!" they'd shout.

"It was late," Mom would start. "The movie ended and all the cars had gone home. It was just me and Midge at the drive-in. I had to clean the snack bar, so I told Midge to go play outside. I finished cleaning and emptied the till."

"What's the till, Grandma?"

"Cash register."

"Then I called Grandpa—*que Dios le bendiga*—to tell him we were on our way back to town. It would only take fifteen minutes, no more than that."

And she'd get quiet then. It was how she told all her stories, to hook you in, but those last few times, when she started going on repeat mode, her silence between beats was more her getting lost in her own lie, the

eroding of the story she'd been working on her whole life.

"We left the drive-in at eleven o'clock," she'd say.

"Why was Mommy out so late?" the kids would ask.

"Things were different back then. It was the summer. And a hot one at that."

"Then what happened?" they'd ask.

"I drove on the Texline highway toward Clayton in the pitch dark. Not a car in front of us, not a car behind us. Midge was in the back, taking a nap."

And the kids would cackle—one, at their own mother's nickname, and two, at the fact that she could take a nap at eleven o'clock at night. Midge, Mom said, was a cute form of Margaret, but really it was for midget, Margaret being the shortest of the three girls.

"Then all in a sudden, a light, the brightest light I ever seen, brighter than a thousand flashlights, flooded the Bel Air. It was so bright I had to hide my eyes. I gripped the steering wheel and pumped the brakes, but I couldn't stop the car. It was like the car didn't work at all. Then the car started to shake and jerk forward."

Mom shimmied her torso, her ample breasts swaying for effect. The kids were both riveted and disturbed.

"Midge woke up and shouted, 'What is it, what is it?'"

"What was it, Mom?" the kids would ask. "Did you scream?"

"She was too young to remember," Mom would say. And Margaret agreed with her, a willing accomplice to the legend, but actually, she had no memory of it all. Margaret had been eight, maybe nine years old, and the only lights on that lonely highway were truckers trying to get back to Texas as fast as they could.

"And then all in a sudden—"

"It's all *of* a sudden, Grandma. All *of* a sudden," the kids would say.

"Then all of a sudden, the light disappeared!" Mom slapped her hands together. "And—just like that!—the light was gone. I got control of the car again and drove like a bat out of hell back to Clayton. Me and Midgey cried all the way home."

The kids would look to their mother for validation. "Then what, then what?"

They knew the payoff, but they waited for Mom to say it with that faraway look in her eyes, the look she was no longer faking in recent months.

"We pulled into the driveway, and Grandpa came running outside to meet us. I held Midge in my arms—she had fallen back asleep. Grandpa hugged and kissed us like he'd never seen us.

"'Where have you been?' he said.

"'In the car. On the highway. We saw a bright—' I tried to tell him, but he pulled us into the kitchen and showed us the clock.

"'It's two in the morning!' he said. 'It's been three hours since you called!'"

The kids would grab at each other.

"And that was it. We didn't remember anything. We don't know what flew over the car, or where we went for three hours," she'd say.

"Was it a plane? A helicopter? Was it a U—?"

"Shhh, shhh, shhh, don't say it. I don't want to think about it. The only thing I know is both me and Midge have this little mole right here on our necks that we never had before that night."

Her finishing touch to the story. She'd point to the tiny raised freckle at the back of her neck, right side, far behind her ear, nestled in the nape of her short, old-lady haircut.

"Show yours, Mom," the kids would scream.

And Margaret would lift her hair to show hers. Sure, it was identical. But they're mother and daughter. They're going to have some similarities.

"Was it like where they—" Always from Lacey, taking it a step further.

"Shhh, shhh. I don't want to know," Mom would say.

I don't want to know. I don't want to know. Margaret gets off at an intersection now less than a mile from the border. The crush of cars reminds her why she hasn't been to Tijuana in at least eight years. A young homeless woman and her three small children walk through the idling cars, the mother shaking a cup. A man in a beat-up tracksuit smacks Margaret's windshield with his hand, begins spraying it with a bottle of brownish liquid, then wipes it with a small squeegee.

"No, no, no!" Margaret waves her finger at him. The light turns green. She brings that finger to the mole on the back of her neck and pulls ahead.

* * *

She inches forward, still on the Mexico side. Vendors push rugs, sodas, *tamarindos*, *chicharrones* at her. No, no, no, no gracias. She wishes she had a cigarette. Just once in a while isn't going to kill you. But that was so much like Mom. Margaret fiddles with the radio dials. Every channel crystal-clear this close to all the towers, but nothing worth listening to. Not on a Sunday night. Ten minutes turns into an hour.

She approaches the INS inspectors. Nothing to worry about. No drugs. No merchandise. She breathes. Practices her speech.

—*What were you doing in Mexico?*

Just visiting some relatives.
—How long were you there?
Half a day.
—Where are you from?
Oceanside.

More vendors claw at her car. No, no, no. She waves her finger. One last try to get a buck out of all the Mexico escapees.

Margaret pulls up to the booth, rolls down her window. The officer peers inside.

"Nationality?" he asks.

"U.S."

"Traveling alone?" he says.

"Yes."

"Passport."

Margaret fumbles through her purse, almost grabs her mother's passport. On the way into Mexico, she'd whispered a story to the officer. "She's been sick. We're trying to get her down to see her cousins. She's really tired."

The officer almost hadn't let her pass with a sleeping passenger, but the two U.S. passports made him more lenient. "Have a safe trip," the officer had said. Mom snored on, head tilted back, mouth wide open.

Now, the officer hands back Margaret's passport.

"Ma'am," he says, eyes steely and steady, "please pull ahead and to the right for further inspection."

She complies. *Further inspection? They're not keeping records, are they? No. No, no, no, no. They do this to all Hispanics. Yes, of course they do. They just have to check.*

An officer sidles up to her window in the secondary inspection zone. Mom left nothing in the car. No bag. No shoes. Margaret checks her phone. No service.

"Ma'am, please step out of your vehicle and wait over there by the curb."

She gets out of the car. The officers open doors, look under seats.

Margaret rubs her neck, runs her finger over her mole.

An officer approaches Margaret, stone-faced. "All clear, ma'am. Please proceed."

"Was there something wrong?" she asks.

"No. Just your car. Minivans."

Margaret rubs her neck. California twinkles in the distance.

"Let me take another look at your passport," he says.

She takes it out, hands it to him.

"Ruth Velasquez?" he says.

"Oh, sorry." She rifles through her bag. "Here, this one."

"Whose was that?"

"My mother's."

"And where is she?"

"In Mexico. She's staying. I'm coming back down to get her. I just forgot to give it to her."

"That's pretty important to have when you're in Mexico," he says.

"Gosh, I know. I'm so stupid."

She smiles the smile Mom taught her and her sisters a long time ago. When confronted by a man, especially Daddy, smile like you're shy. They melt every time.

He reviews her document, scans her up and down, glances back at her car.

"Okay," he says. "Have a safe trip."

Margaret gets back in, fires the engine. Interstate 5 is just ahead, past the series of colossal speed bumps. *What do I tell Eric and the kids? I drove Mom as far as Arizona. Yes, that's where Aunt Joana picked Mom up. Yeah. And for Joana and Tina? OK, Mom went for a walk one afternoon and she never came back. You know she was starting to slip. You know she was starting to need more of the meds. Forgetting having been to places. Repeating stories. It was only a matter of time. Oh, who cares? Joana and Tina don't even call to check in on her. They sent her out to me because I'm the youngest. They were done with Mom's bullshit a long time ago.*

The cars move ahead and the wide lanes of California's artery open, pumping them back into circulation. Red and green lights flash from Margaret's purse on the passenger seat. She fishes inside and grabs her phone, glowing with new voicemails and texts. She flings it on the seat.

On the interstate, the base of Margaret's neck starts to ache. *Tension headache.* She runs her fingers over the mole, where the pain is most sensitive. She presses at it with care, the throb building quicker than other headaches. *Goddamn Mom. Sending signals through her alien receiver.*

Margaret speeds up, the bruised night sky wide and welcoming above her. Despite the neck pain, a long-missed feeling of freedom bubbles inside her. She wants to keep driving into the night, like she did when she first left New Mexico to move to California twenty years ago, the sound of Mom's voice chiding her all the way to Yuma. You can only run for so long, Mom always said.

The pain in her neck now feels more like a poking from under her

skin. She exits at Palm Avenue in Imperial Beach, lands her van in the dim side service entrance of Discount Tire to tend to the ache. She flips on the dome light and rummages her purse for her pill box, ignoring her buzzing and beeping phone. Usually a couple of ibuprofen will knock it out. No pill box. Only a handful of the little wet naps Mom's always picking up from the casino. *Where are my pills?*

She holds the spot on her neck. It was never a receiver. Just a god-damn stupid mole. Then light, brighter than a thousand flashlights, pours into the rear window van.

Oh, God, not again.

The light brightens, followed by the horn blare of a tractor trailer. She starts the van, moves forward to the back lot. She dives back into her purse, takes out a wet nap, unwraps it, presses it against the ache in her neck. She sits back, drops the wet nap in her lap, and starts bawling.

Jesus, she's not a dog some Tijuana family's going to adopt.

The phone quiets. Margaret adjusts the rearview mirror to see herself. She wipes her tears, sees the face Joana and Tina call Mom's spitting image. Not even a hairstyle can change that face. *Yet. Oh, hell. Is she that evil? Under all those stories and stupid sayings and little things that bug the shit out of me, isn't she a good person? I really fucking hope so.*

Margaret sends Eric and the kids a text. "Be home late. Mom needs more Depends."

She takes out the passports, then snaps her purse shut and throws them on the empty passenger seat. She takes the I-5 southbound ramp to Mexico, the Odyssey ready for flight. Her neck ache begins to subside on its own. Breathing a little air into it does the trick. She's almost about to top the van's speedometer out.

She slows, the line up into Mexico just ahead. It won't be that bad going back in at this hour. Coming back into the United States, after she finds her, if she finds her at all, will be another story. *Let's just hope to God she's there. Let's just hope she's doing what she always told me to do when they'd leave me at the store: stay right there until we come back. We'll always come back for you. That's why you should laugh it off every time,* mi corazón. *It's only a joke.*

Interview

Taylor Garcia

When did you write "Bat out of Hell"?

I started writing it in March of this year, however the story itself had been flying around in my head for years.

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

Titles are tricky. I always seem to have trouble coming up with them. The title for this story came much later in the process once I figured out the speech patterns of the Mom character and what she would say. The original title of the story was "Working On It," which went on to be the title of a different story.

What inspired "Bat out of Hell"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

My family is full of story tellers and yarn spinners. Many of the stories in our family have a folkloric quality, and so I was inspired by some of those homegrown tall tales.

What was the hardest part of writing "Bat out of Hell"?

Navigating between the present-tense action, the protagonist Margaret's interior monologue, and the past (i.e. the story within the story) was the hardest to write. I found that staying as close to the present-tense action kept my writing focused.

Which part of "Bat out of Hell" was conceived of first?

Many years ago, I had heard a segment on the radio about the rising trend of "grandma dumping": families leaving their elderly members, either with their mental facilities or not, in places like malls when the families didn't want to, or couldn't, care for them anymore. This terrible image of abandonment had haunted me since, and so I wanted to tell a story

about what that might be like for a family.

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

The early versions of this story take place only within the US, with Margaret going from San Diego to leave her mother in Fresno, CA. With San Diego being so close to Mexico, I took this concept a step further and chose Mexico as the location.

Do you primarily write fiction?

Yes, in addition to personal essays, and the very occasional poem.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I'm a gatherer of ideas. I'll hear or see one thing (like the story about grandma dumping) and let it sit in my head for a long time. I'll hear or see another thing, and another thing, and yet another thing until I have this list of disparate images, sayings, thoughts and ideas swirling around upstairs. I then try to figure out how they can work together. Often times it's just one little thought or memory or idea that's haunting me, to which I blend in with all the other gathered fragments.

Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.

I always have to print and read aloud to myself. I also share with one, or maybe two other people to get their thoughts. I take as long as I need to revise because there is always a typo or too many words lurking about.

Any personal U.F.O. stories?

The U.F.O. story in "Bat out of Hell" is based on a story my aunt has told for many years. She claims she encountered something out of this world while driving with her daughter in the eastern plains of New Mexico. Whether or not it's really true is hard to say. Growing up in New Mexico (home of the infamous town of Roswell), it seemed like every third person had some story related to U.F.O.s. There are a lot of wide open skies in the desert Southwest. Who knows what's out there?

What's your favorite scene in this story? Was it also your favorite to write?

My favorite scene in this story is the very beginning when Margaret leaves her mother. It's so crystal clear in my head. It's not, however, my favorite to write because it's so poignant and painful.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "Bat out of Hell"?

I'm deep in the Vonnegut, Twain, and Saunders camp, while I worship Garcia Marquez, Fitzgerald, O'Connor, and Steve Almond. O'Connor's dark redemptions, Garcia Marquez's entangled familial struggles, and Saunders wit influenced the writing of "Bat out of Hell".

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

I keep a blog (www.orbitalyarn.wordpress.com) where I post short stories, essays, and poems. There you can also find links to other published stories and essays from journals such as The Good Men Project, Chagrin River Review, and Fifth Wednesday Journal.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

Driftwood is an ambitious journal with high artistic standards. I immediately gravitated to their emphasis on quality work that speaks to an every growing world of modern and discerning readers.

Doctor

Alexandra Kessler

You want to tell her an urban legend you read about somewhere. There was this depressed man, you want to say, in Ireland. Or maybe Montana. You don't remember. But he was depressed. Decided to end it all by shooting himself in the head. So he went out and bought a gun and he did it. Here you would pause. Is that it? she would ask. And then you'd keep going. You'd tell her that his neighbor heard the gunshot, ran into the man's apartment. You'd tell her, with details, the little buildups that she likes but you think are a waste of time, how the neighbor saw the man there, gun dangling from his fingers like a smoking steel cigarette, blood bubbling thickly from the hole in this man's head. But the man won't be dead. He'll be up, tracking sticky-tacky footprints across the floors. He'll be talking, telling jokes even, telling his neighbor that you know what? It's really something. You know what? This is the best I've felt in years. You'd tell her how the neighbor rushed the man to the hospital where the ER doctor, stunned and flooded with a newfound faith in God, religion filling him like a dam had broken in his hard, logical, heart, explained that the bullet, instead of killing the man, effectively excised a malignant and inoperable brain tumor that he did not know he had. Don't you see? you want to tell her. If he had never tried to kill himself, he would have died.

You and Claire are sitting on the concrete-slab terrace of the apartment you share in a small suburb of Baltimore, where you and her go to college together. After the ceremony tomorrow, you will have to say it's where you and Claire *went* to college together. Your matching blue caps and gowns are hanging in the hall closet.

Yesterday, Claire tried to kill herself. You feel angry with her, frustrated that she couldn't wait it out until after graduation, until after you had moved away and weren't around to see it. You don't tell her the story about the man shooting out his brain tumor because you know she won't see in it what you see. Claire took pills. A scooped-up handful of thick white cylinders. You are a very smart girl. You have just completed your

chemistry major. You have just been accepted into medical school, right out of undergrad. You know what it means, down to the molecules, to take as many of those pills as Claire did. You know badly she wanted a technical knock-out.

Claire takes a long sip of the orange Gatorade you bought for her at the 7-11 across the street from your apartment. You know she has added a steady trickle of Smirnoff to the fat plastic bottle. You know that vodka isn't supposed to be ingested by somebody who has just gotten their stomach pumped. After all, you are very smart. You know what people need, how to balance their insides. But you let Claire drink without saying anything, because for one moment you want to create a gentle space in this world.

You and Claire have been best friends since you met freshman year. She is a poet, she is beautiful. She is everything that you are not. She knows everything about you.

But some things, you have never told her. For instance:

There was that boy in your organic chemistry class. He was tall, with hair the color of cork board and an easy laugh. You were pretty sure that he was smarter than you, but later you will find out that he was rejected from the all medical programs that you were accepted to. Hearing this, however, you are still convinced that he was smarter than you, that it must have been a fluke. He was always smiling, making stupid jokes in class and reading novels on the quad. He was on the lacrosse team. Defenseman. He snuck cans of Natty Boh into the dining hall with his grass-stained teammates. Healthy, solid boys. Biceps swollen from years of micro-tear recovering. You believe that anybody who seems happy must be smarter than you. You believe, that even given his stack of rejection letters, his life will be far more fulfilling than yours.

Junior year you invited him to your dorm room to study for an exam. He brought an armful of thick binders and a bottle of cinnamon whiskey. You labeled hydrocarbons and took shots and sniffed Adderall out of his cupped palm. At a certain point, he leaned across the river of papers between you and kissed you, hard.

After he had been inside you for a little while he looked down at you, flushed, smiling. Bioluminescent Organism. Touch it and it lights up. He said: I've wanted this for so long. You said nothing. And then you asked him to hurt you. His smile faded. This is you, you are a killer of light. You are a thumb and a pointer finger soaked in spit and ready to pinch out the nearest flame. I'd never hurt you, he said. I like you, he said. You tell him you need him to punch you.

Pretend this is lacrosse. Pretend I'm getting in your way. He said he wouldn't do it. It was decided. Stop asking.

After that, he wouldn't look at you. He would never talk to you again, making sure he sat rows behind you in class. But in that moment, he still fucked you until he finished. Fireflies will continue to emit a glow for up to fifteen minutes after their death. Smash the body between your fingers and write your luminous name on the sidewalk.

During your interview for medical school, you sat in front of a white Formica desk in a room with floor-to-ceiling windows. The doctor behind the desk was bald, but not old. He was supposed to be brilliant. You'd read papers about him and by him. He had a nose too long for his face with a pimple on the tip, full to bursting. You're still not sure if ugliness can really be brilliant. But you're also not sure if you can be brilliant without it.

He ripped a fresh sheet of paper from a yellow legal pad and put it in front of him. He hovered the tip of his pen over it, waiting for you to say something worth writing down. You can't recall one thing that anybody's ever said to you that was worth writing down.

You know, he said, many people apply to medical school because it is what is expected of them. Because their parents were doctors. Because they want a career with financial security. These are not good reasons to become a doctor, he said.

You tell him that your father is a construction worker and your mother works at an outlet mall. You think about your parents. About how your father's fingernails have permanent purple and black bruises bloomed up underneath them like faded ink. How your mother spends all day helping people pick out blazers and raincoats and half-priced khakis so that they are well-dressed for lives that she's not a part of. You think of them sitting together on the splintery back deck of your house that your father built himself with stolen lumber, drinking Southern Comfort on the rocks and listening to the crickets. You think about how they are people whose high expectations for anything had left them long ago.

The doctor behind the desk nodded and smiled. He told you that his parents were farmers. And it passed between you, that knowing that you both were the Smart Ones and that you both Got Out. That your brains were more beautiful because they weren't gifted to you by genetics. You and this doctor, you two were the Pure Ones.

What made you want to become a doctor? He asked you.

You told him about how when you were six years old, your mother gave birth to twin boys after a twenty-two week pregnancy. The hospital

named them Baby A and Baby B. Apparently, twenty-two weeks was not enough time to make a baby in full.

Baby A died immediately. But Baby B, he held on. He was laid in a see-through incubator, with enough tubes coming out of him that you thought a squirming octopus had been pulled out of your mother.

Baby B's neonatal nurse had curly hair and a beautiful face. She told you her name was Nurse Dorothy, like from Oz, and that she could take you to visit Baby B if you wanted. She held your hand while you walked down the hospital hallway together. She gave you special gloves to wear and let you stroke Baby B softly on his marbled head, through a passage in his little incubator. Baby B held your finger with his hand, a hand so blue and tiny that nothing, as far as you can recall, would ever make you feel so big again.

You looked up at Nurse Dorothy. Am I allowed to love him? You asked. Of course, she said. He can feel that you love him.

Baby B only lived for another week, so you learned early that you weren't very good at loving.

The doctor behind the desk nodded at all of this. I'm sorry about that, he told you. But, he said, I also have some good news for you.

Claire took you out to celebrate the good news of you getting into medical school. The two of you took six shots of vodka each and then walked to the Greene Turtle, a bar down the street that had a rooftop and a two-for-one special.

You and Claire met two guys who bought you drinks all night. They were roommates. The one that liked Claire was short. Shorter than you, and you aren't even tall. But Claire didn't seem to mind. She pressed herself against him and laughed at the soft things he said. The one that liked you, you don't remember his name, but you know it started with a D. D told you he was in chiropractor school. He asked if you knew what a chiropractor was. No, you lied, what is that? You did not, under any circumstances, tell him that you just got into medical school. Boys like to explain.

Claire was very drunk. I want to go home, she said. No, you said, just hang in there. D and his short roommate want us to come over. It'll be fun. It'll be ok. He's a chiropractor.

So you, D the chiropractor, and the short roommate walk Claire back to their apartment. There was wall to wall carpeting that was visibly dirty, white streaked gray. You thought it looked like the house from The Blair Witch Project, but you didn't say that. Nobody would have laughed. D the chiropractor and his short friend packed a bowl, and the three of you smoked it while Claire passed out on the floor of the living room.

You were in D the chiropractor's bedroom. He asked you if you knew anything about anatomy. You say no, absolutely not. He took off all your clothes and pointed out your major muscle groups. He ran his fingers down your spine. You have mild scoliosis, he said. Did you know that? No, you said, what does that mean? You wore a back brace under your clothes through all of high school.

D the chiropractor fucked you twice, and then fell asleep. You stayed awake. You heard noises coming from the living room. You thought you heard Claire cry out, a sound like a muted gunshot, but you weren't sure. You got out of D the chiropractor's bed and walked into the dark living room. You saw the short roommate on top of Claire, you saw her head turned to the side, wheezing softly. Stop, she whispered, trying to push the short roommate off of her with hands that folded like rubber, please stop.

You went back to D the chiropractor's room and stared at the ceiling until sunlight dripped through the blinds. you got up and dressed without waking him. Claire was waiting by the door. Her shirt was on backwards. Please, she said, let's go.

You walked home together in silence. You didn't know if she saw that you saw. Looking back, you would have said something, put your hand on her shoulder. Looking back, you didn't know she would take all those pills. Looking back, you wouldn't assume that everybody's body feeds off of pain like yours seems to.

If you were being honest, you would have told the doctor at your medical school interview this: That Baby B wasn't what made you want to become a doctor.

You didn't bleed, your first time. Though you wished you had, because of how scary redness is. Because you thought the sudden presence of a bright color would somehow bind him to you. Afterwards, he fell asleep next to you on the chilled concrete floor of your parent's garage, his head on your shoulder. He had gotten the fourteen-year-old you so drunk that you couldn't, for the life of you, remember how you'd earned the purple-black bruises trailing down your forearms, elbows to wrists, a neat row of buttons. You could smell his hair, all boy-grease and pot smoke and sex-sweat and Axe body spray. You were overcome with a hunger to cut him open, lovingly, and lift his organs out of his body one by one, to feel their weight in your hands, to make sure everything was pumping at full force before sewing him back up.

You want the comfort of knowing that things are working just right, that any given system is strong enough to hurt you when you need it to.

You wonder if your own greed for wounding will render you incapable of healing other people. You think maybe you should drop out of medical school before you get a chance to find this out. You think of bank robbers on television, guns pointed at quaking tellers. Put the money in the bag and nobody gets hurt.

Claire asks you if you want a sip of her vodka-spiked Gatorade. You say no. You press your hand to your belly, trying to finger the tiny growth that D the chiropractor put in there without his knowing. The lady at the clinic said that between eight to twelve weeks is the best time to deal with this. That before eight it is too small. After twelve, too complicated.

You did not tell her that you know this already. You did not tell her that you are a Very Smart Girl.

You wonder what Nurse Dorothy would tell you to do. You wonder what she would say, this time, when you asked if you were allowed to love it.

What you want most of all, more than anything, is for somebody, just one person, to tell you, yes, it's possible. It's not likely, not even a little bit. But somewhere, in Ireland, or was it Montana? Somewhere, it is possible that a man excised his own vicious cells with a miracle bullet and got a second chance.

Interview

Alexandra Kessler

When did you write "Doctor"?

I wrote it the week before my college graduation. That event is what anchors the story, in a way.

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

I didn't, and there weren't. Since the protagonist has no name, I wanted the title to get as close to a name for her as possible.

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

I liked the idea of a healer who enjoys injury, a person who is being educated on how to preserve life and ease pain but wants only the opposite for themselves. In terms of being taken from my own life, I would have to say of course I have a great empathy for self-destruction, but I have never had the burden and gift of being able to heal others. So I have never had to balance that.

I also heard the urban legend about the man shooting out his own brain tumor when I was a kid, and it's a story that has always been rolling around in my head. The idea that you could accidentally save yourself is attractive. Although, obviously, it's not real.

Which part of "Doctor" was conceived of first?

The theme, for sure. And I knew I wanted the urban legend at the beginning and the end, going in.

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

I always had all of the scenes that made it into the final draft, but the order changed a couple times. There was also a subplot about the narra-

tor's relationship with one of her professors that I cut.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I like to write a lot very quickly. I can write a story in a day but edit for months and months.

Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.

It was mostly about re-organizing scenes, and then just cutting on the sentence level. I really wanted to maintain a sense of disconnect and keep the narrator at arm's length, emotionally.

What were some of the difficulties that came with writing in second person?

I actually found it to be very grounding and natural.

Our editors found this story to be emotionally crippling. What part was the most difficult to write?

The most difficult thing for me was to decide what not to write. As much as I wanted to resolve some issues for the narrator, ultimately leaving it open-ended felt best and most honest to me. Although, I do see her interest in the urban legend and her longing to hear that it could be true as optimistic.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "Doctor"?

Raymond Carver is my favorite Writer. I've been reading a lot of Mary Gaitskill, Amelia Gray and Lydia Millet lately, so those authors have inspired this story greatly.

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

My story "Fish" is published with *Fiddleblack Press*, and "Signs," an excerpt of a novel I'm working on, was just published at *Spartan Lit*.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I thought it was a unique independent press that promoted great work.

Equinox

Todd Outcalt

On the 21st of December Joe Oliver rose before daylight to make coffee. His son, Corey, was sleeping upstairs in the pre-Christmas darkness, his bedroom littered with the cut cardboard and red wrapping paper of his excitement. It was a Sunday morning, and when the phone rang, Joe quickly dropped frozen waffles into the toaster and picked up. Moments later, he was padding up the stairs to his son's bedroom. He cracked the door and said, "Get up, buddy. The pastor called and he needs help clearing the sidewalks at church."

Corey, fourteen and weary with the thought of staying with his father over the Christmas break, woke slowly and did not appear in the bathroom to urinate and wash his face until his father reminded him of the urgency. "Put your boots on," Joe said. "Get your coat and gloves. There's a shovel in the garage."

Corey cursed under his breath, his tousled brown hair and acne-dotted face betraying the apathy for his divorced father and the brief holiday interlude the judge had determined—five years ago—for the two of them. After more mumbling, Corey followed his father's instructions and slipped outside into the frigid air carrying a plastic snow shovel, his father a good four paces ahead, parting the floury snow with his wide boots.

"Hurry," Joe said, immediately lamenting the curtness in his voice. He was still trying to navigate his role as a holiday father, his son little more than an occasional voice on the phone or a magnetic image dangling from the side of his refrigerator. "I'm sorry," Joe said, thrusting his vaporous words into the dry air in wispy little ghosts. "You'll like pastor Nelson," he continued, struggling for a connection. "He likes teenagers."

Following his father along blocks of window-lit houses, Corey ruminated over the few silent days he and his father had spent together, their conversations encapsulated in shrugs and grunts. Still, his father had promised to fulfill all of his Christmas requests: offering him the DVDs and books and gift cards that comprised the bulk of his adolescent de-

sires. In return, Corey had hastily wrapped a package of black dress socks and a cheesy necktie some days before his arrival in Indianapolis—an act of attrition witnessed by his mother, who had watched him prepare the gifts while smiling smugly at his dissonance.

Now, as Corey and his father trudged through the powder, Corey intentionally drifted behind and followed his father's lead as they wafted over the undisturbed snow toward the high church steeple outlined with light. There was nothing in Corey's recent memory that connected him with the Methodists who worshipped there, but his father, momentarily, reminded him that he had been baptized in the church. "Your mother never did buy into religion," Joe told his son, "but she didn't prohibit me from taking you."

When they arrived at the front steps of the limestone edifice, the pastor was waiting for them in the gloom. He was a younger man—heavily bundled in a herringbone overcoat and green sock hat—and he smiled at his good fortune of securing two helpers. "I doubt anyone will come to church this morning," the pastor explained quickly, "but we might as well clear these walks just in case. There's a foot of snow, as least."

Joe approached and shook the pastor's hand. He made some small talk with the pastor and then turned abruptly and said, "You probably don't remember Corey. He was a little tyke when you baptized him."

"Of course I remember Corey," pastor Nelson said half-heartedly, extending a gloved hand. "How you doin' Corey?"

"Fine," Corey answered, his handshake limp with disinterest.

"It's really swell of you men to help me out," pastor Nelson said. "Especially on such a dark morning. You know, today is the equinox. The longest night of the year. And right before Christmas like this—Constantine didn't get the timing quite right. I promise to get you home in short order, and the sun will be coming up soon."

Joe lifted a hand and motioned toward the east. "I think Corey and I can take this long run toward the front steps, pastor, if you want to tackle the other side."

"Sounds like a plan," Nelson said.

Corey followed his father down the block, confused by the concept, but then realized that they would be making their way back toward the church as they shoveled. His father dug his shovel into the snow until he hit sidewalk and then heaved a load of spray over his shoulder. "You've got to put some muscle into it," he instructed under the glow of the street light. "It's a fine powder, though. Not heavy."

There wasn't much else to do but finish the job, and Corey wanted to

get home as soon as possible. His body craved sleep and his stomach was growling—a rabid combination that angered him beyond articulation. He dug in, heaved a few loads over his left shoulder, and then paused to calculate how long the endeavor was going to take. Being good at math, he tried to estimate how many times he would have to bend the knee and heave snow before meeting the pastor at the front steps of a completed job.

He shoveled in a rhythm, created a pace.

In a few minutes, Corey was breathing heavily under his winter coat; he hocked up some phlegm and spit it onto the crest of the level snow. His father, working just a few feet away, didn't flinch. He kept time, like a piston working inside an engine, and his spirit didn't waver.

"You know," Joe said, pausing after some minutes to inspect his work, "you probably didn't think you'd be shoveling a church sidewalk over Christmas break."

Without looking up, Corey shrugged and completed another mental calculation. Might be something like a hundred more shovels-full, he thought, before they reached the steps.

"I liked to shovel snow when I was your age," Joe told his son. "But I didn't have your mind, either. My friends and I used to shovel driveways for money. We could make a hundred dollars on a good day. The more snow, the more we made."

"People paid you?" Corey asked.

"Back then," his father continued, "people expected the kids in the neighborhood to shovel walks and driveways. Nobody had snow blowers. Snow removal wasn't an industry like it is today. It was an opportunity."

"I wouldn't pay anyone to shovel my walk," Corey said flippantly. "It's stupid."

"Maybe," his father said, angling for another jab at the snow.

Corey pulled a large shovel-full of flakes from the sidewalk and heaved it into a slight breeze. The wind caught the powder and churned it to a cyclone, creating tiny whorls and eddies that lived for a moment and then died in a heap. Fascinated by these forces, Corey tossed more snow into the wind and imagined his creations as entities—some of which took on the appearance of people, or birds, or animals. It was like watching a lifetime in a moment: the snow figures birthing, maturing, and then dying in a flash—an encapsulated peep show of form and force. There was a surprising joy in the instant the forms took shape, and an accompanying sadness in their departure.

"When we get home," his father said suddenly, "we could make some

hot chocolate. I could bake some cookies."

Corey didn't let on. The plan sounded good, even stupendous. He kept shoveling.

"Look over there," his father said, pointing to the east. "There's dawn peaking."

On the horizon, Corey noted the orange-red glow of the atmosphere stretching across the roots of the trees. The dawn was like a fire burning in the embers of some primeval forest. And on either side of the row of trees, street lamps and houses dotted the halo with pinpricks of white light.

"I'm ready for this to be over," Corey said abruptly. "I'm not sure I want to do it."

"What? The shoveling?"

"I don't think I want to spend my Christmas break here," Corey said. "I'd rather be with mom."

Joe leaned against his shovel and sucked at the heavy air, his cheeks constricted to yellowed points. "I hate to hear you say that," Joe said. "This is the one time of the year I get to be with you. It's a lousy thing to say."

Corey stepped away and playfully sculpted a mound of snow with his shovel. "What I mean is," he continued, "there's nothing to do. There's nothing to talk about."

"What do you want to talk about?" his father asked pointedly. "Tell me what you want to *talk* about." When angered, his father had a lift to his voice that bordered on hilarity. But Corey had never grown used to it, and he backed away.

"Nothing that matters," Corey said. "There's nothing."

"You'll have to help me, Corey" his father said forcefully. "You'll have to give me an opening."

Corey resurrected another snow figure and watched it die in the wind. "I can't imagine you and mom being married," he said suddenly. "She doesn't like you."

Joe laughed—a type of injured animal noise—and then said, "Well, I can assure you, she liked me a lot when we were first married. We were pretty happy there for a while. But things cooled."

"Why?"

Not one to revisit the past, Joe tossed back a couple of vacant shovels-full of snow. "There's some complexity in the *why*. And I'm not sure I have an explanation for it. We were just different people. I'm not sure your mother understood me. I'm not sure I understood her. We were hot

and cold. Oil and vinegar. We mixed. But not well."

"Okay," Corey said, shrugging. "I guess I get it."

"You may not understand this," Joe continued, "but you were the calm spot in the hurricane. I just hated it when it ended. I had to move here for the job. We talked about it in court. But unfortunately you got lost in the transaction."

"I guess it's okay," Corey said, not fully cognizant of the implications. The dawn was emerging as amethyst and orange and the work was hastening toward an end.

Momentarily, Corey found himself near the front steps of the church, the pastor not far away. They were converging from their respective shores, like the building of the transcontinental railroad, ready to hammer home the final golden spike—a last shovel full of celebration.

Corey made haste. So did his father. And so did pastor Nelson. They met in the middle.

When they had finished, the pastor drew back his shoulders in a great swell and said, "I can't thank you enough. This is good work. Let's take some pride in it." On either side, the walk spread out before them like a clean slate—a concrete ribbon cutting through the ocean of snow. The town had not yet come alive and a stillness lay around them like a pall.

Joe shook the pastor's hand and said, "Glad we could help. You sure you don't need us to stay and do the front steps?"

"I got it, guys," the pastor said. "You stay warm out there and have a great morning together. Enjoy the day."

Corey turned to lead the way home—backtracking across the tundra in his father's footsteps. The wind had covered some of the prints, but it was easy to follow the path they had forged, the daylight at their backs casting shadows into the craters. Rounding the corner, Corey headed toward home, eager to get at the warmth of the house and the promise of a breakfast and adequate sleep. He could hear his father lumbering behind, the whoosh of snow and air puffing up under his boots.

But as they neared the house, Corey tired; he dropped back in his gait and suddenly felt the heft of his father's hand upon his shoulder. There was nothing more to his father's touch than the weight of it, glove upon coat—but Corey stirred beneath the gesture and at once tried to free himself from the grasp while hoping to linger under it without appearing eager. He could feel his father's grip, the energy and promise of his concern, but Corey jostled his shoulders and pulled away from the radius of his father's reach.

He was the first to enter the house—and after removing his coat and

gloves, he placed his boots by the heater vent. Corey watched his father; they exchanged nothing but silence. And by the time his father had removed his boots and padded into the kitchen to boil some water, Corey was in the living room reclining on the couch.

He stared up at the ceiling while his father made breakfast.

Wind batted at the windows. A tiny figure of snow appeared at the pane and vanished in a second. Corey was hungry. Through the doorway he watched his father work in the kitchen, the smell of waffles rising from the toaster.

Anticipating the appearance of other snow figures, Corey peered through the window at the pink horizon where, with each successive morning, the light would lengthen like a reach over the northern hemisphere. Corey considered his Christmas. He counted the days remaining in his vacation. And when the breakfast was served and Corey's eyes were heavy, he rose from the couch and decided he would stay with his father.

Interview

Todd Outcalt

When did you write "Equinox"?

The first draft of the story was written in December of 2011, with further revisions made until present.

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

The title of the story came to me as I was working on the story in December and seemed like a natural bridge to the concept of both natural and personal change.

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

Nothing deeply personal in the story, although the walk home from church with my own father is a memory that provided some of the detail found in the story.

What was the hardest part of writing "Equinox"?

"Equinox" is at once a story about a father-son relationship and coming-of-age. I wanted to relate the story from the vantage point of the son and his experiences related to his parents' divorce, so writing in a younger mindset was challenging.

Which part of "Equinox" was conceived of first?

This is not always the case with my fiction, but the first scene I wrote (at least mentally) was the walk home from church— which comes near the end. Knowing where to begin came later, and then the ending of the story was a natural progression of the Christmas the father and son shared and the son's decision to remain.

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that

didn't make it in?

I do recall cutting or revising both the beginning of the story and another conversation near the end--both needed to make the story tighter and less cumbersome.

Do you primarily write fiction?

I am primarily a non-fiction writer in terms of what I usually produce through the course of the year (two to three non-fiction books annually and nearly a hundred essays), but I am always writing fiction, too. I think fiction offers a more creative canvas from which a writer can explore relationships and truths. Fiction affords me both the joy and the hard work of delving into ideas and themes that non-fiction cannot always address.

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

I am a working writer; meaning that I write every day. Since I produce so much, it is imperative that I write methodically and carry forward the disciplines that make it possible to meet deadlines (for magazines, journals and publishers). I don't wait for the 'muse' to inspire (though this is a bonus when it happens). Writing for me has always been about working at the craft, not giving up, putting words down and revising along the way.

Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.

Most of the story came easily after I conceived the central scene of the walk home, and I tend to revise as I write (paying close attention to sentences, words, even pace, as I write).

The relationship in "Equinox" is a very subtle, human one. Are there any specific relationships in your own life that informed the story's?

Yes, I would say my memories of walking with my dad-- though we have always enjoyed a close relationship. In addition, I have worked with hundreds of young teens who have had to navigate the rough waters of their parents' divorce, and I'm sure this informed the story as well.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "Equinox"?

I have always appreciated John Updike (whose work I miss greatly) and to a lesser degree authors like John Irving, Marilyn Robinson and Anne Tyler. Among short story writers, Bernard Malamud is hard to beat.

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

All of my books can be found on Amazon and at bookstores and libraries, and I always seem to place four or five stories a year in various journals and magazines— which I appreciate for the forum they offer to both writer and reader.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I like the type and quality of work that *Driftwood* publishes and noted that many of the themes and ideas were similar to what I like to read and write.

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

I did enjoy writing "Equinox" and hope it is both a pleasing and revealing story.

Disappearing Act

J.T. Townley

—We were at the funeral, right? When we heard Heather was missing? I think it was snowing.

—Do you understand this weather, Maddie? Because I don't get it. It's still the middle of winter, last time I checked.

—Everyone dressed in their funeral best. Black dresses, black skirts and blouses and shoes, black pea coats and leather gloves and wool hats, even black umbrellas. The men in black suits. There were men there, I think. Weren't there, Trish? Fathers, brothers, uncles, boyfriends? Jillian always had so many boyfriends.

—I could use a parasol, if you've got one handy. Do women carry parasols anymore? Any old umbrella would do.

—Don't you remember the funeral, Trish?

—When was the last time we saw winter?

—The one in December, I mean.

—What month is this? January? February?

— Jillian's funeral, the first one.

—I always hated winter. The Arctic cold and all those layers. The freezing rain and sleet and snow. The icy streets and sidewalks and hearts. I miss it so much now that it's gone.

—I can understand why you wouldn't, Trish. Don't feel bad. How many have there been? Ten, twenty? I've completely lost count. All I remember is, Jillian's was the first. The very beginning of everything.

—Like everyone, I thought it would come back. It's what all the weather people were saying. Jet stream, southerly winds, warming trend. They said it would last a week, maybe two. They're always wrong, everyone knows that, but have they ever been this wrong?

—Who's taking them? What for?

—I boxed up all my winter clothes, Maddie. Can you believe that? In the middle of winter? Boxed them up and gave them to charity. People said I was crazy, especially my mom. You'll need those, she told me. Keep

them in storage. Send them home if you need more space.

—I mean, they were no different than us, right? We all look exactly alike, mostly. Same clothes, same hair, same backpacks full of books we haven't read.

—It's sundresses and sandals from here on out, I guess.

—They all disappeared at night, I think. Do you remember, Trish?

—That'll get kind of boring, won't it?

—Or maybe some vanished in broad daylight?

—And sunglasses, Maddie. Can't forget those. We'd be blinded without them, what with all the sunshine. I mean, every day? Seriously? Not a cloud in the sky to break up the monotony? Gets oppressive after a while, right?

—Doesn't it make you nervous? All the disappearances, I mean?

—Must be what it's like to live in the desert.

—Jillian was walking by herself on a desolate pathway at three in the morning. Same with Heather, Tracy, Stacy, and Amber. I'm not saying they're to blame for what happened, Trish, not at all. It's just, you can get your head around it.

—Honestly, I'm all dried up and leathery, can't slop the lotion on fast enough. It's getting spendy.

—But what about all the others?

—And forget about crying. I can't work up the tears anymore, Maddie. Can you?

—Like Michelle, who was at a party, right out on the dance floor, until she wasn't. Or Caroline, who went to take her trash out, then poof. Gone. Jennifer, Mary, and Sarah were at a calculus review session. Jen went to the bathroom and never came back. Mary went to look for her, same story. Sarah wandered after her friends and was never heard from again. How do you explain that?

—I could still cry at Jillian's funeral. I remember my tears. The air was so cold, I thought they might freeze. But now the frigid weather's long gone. Everything's scalded by the hot winter sun. At first, the tears evaporated as they ran down my cheeks, then they dried up before they ever trickled from my eyes. Now I simply can't cry at all.

—What if we're next?

—I'm ashamed to admit it, Maddie, but I've stopped trying. It's a losing battle. So I've waved the white flag of surrender. I've thrown in the towel.

—It's a terrifying situation. We're being terrorized, Trish.

—I wear sunglasses all the time now. Even at night.

—Why won't the police do something?

—But we all do, right? Gucci and Prada and Ray-Ban. Fashion frames and sports models. We wear them to class and in the dining hall and in the shower.

—I mean, this is a college town. It's supposed to be safe.

—I even wear them in my dreams, when I have them.

—The disappearances are one thing, Trish.

—They're mostly nightmares.

—But the reappearances are worse.

—Anyway, what happened to the fog and drizzle? What happened to the gloomy, overcast skies?

—It's bad enough when they're taken. But at least we can hold out hope they'll escape or be rescued or simply show up in sociology, unscathed.

—What happened to the short, cold days and long, cold nights?

—But it's all over when they reappear. They're not young women, college coeds, sorority sisters anymore. They're just bodies, cold and stiff. Corpses left to rot in some half-blind farmer's fallow field.

—At least when we still had winter, we could huddle together around the hearth, weeping.

—Who's taking them, Trish? Why won't the police do something?

—Don't you miss the gray skies, bitter winds, and slushy streets? I never thought I would. But at least we could grieve, right? We could sit by the fire, tears dribbling into warm glasses of mulled wine.

—Aren't you afraid? I mean, what if we're next?

—Instead, we keep having to get darker and darker lenses. The breeze is hot. We all have amazing tans.

—What if we're taken by whoever's doing the taking?

—It's all bright colors and floral prints, Maddie. You wear them, I wear them, everyone does. Even the men, who are becoming intolerable since there are so few of us left.

—This is a college town, not the big city. Nothing bad happens here, or so they said when we came for our campus visit. Remember?

—Not to mention the actual flowers. They've been blooming for months. Tulips and roses, daffodils and azaleas and hyacinth. Bumblebees buzzing, hummingbirds humming. Zip-a-dee doodah, zip-a-dee-ay. It's not natural, Maddie. It's not right.

—It's supposed to be safe.

—How can we mourn in all this sunshine?

—Aren't you afraid, Trish?

—It's simply not possible.

—We shouldn't have to feel like this all the time. Looking over our shoulders, spooked by our own shadows.

—Maybe we should stop trying, Maddie.

—Would anyone notice?

—In all this sunlight?

—Would anyone miss us, Trish?

—Sadness isn't for summertime.

—There's almost no one left to come to the funerals.

—At this point, Maddie, it's almost inevitable.

—Unavoidable?

—Inescapable.

—Fated?

—Ineluctable.

—Destined?

—Foreordained.

—It just doesn't seem possible, Trish. It doesn't make any sense.

—Let's put it this way. By now, it's only a matter of—

—A matter of what, Trish?

— …

—Opinion? Semantics?

— …

—Tradition? Taste? Trust?

— …

—Trish, what?

— …

—Trish?

—…

—Trish?!

Interview

J.T. Townley

When did you write "Disappearing Act"?

I wrote the story in early December 2014.

Were there any other titles you were considering?

I played around with several other titles, including "Reported Missing," "The Freshmen Abductions," and "Disappearing Acts." The singular "Disappearing Act" finally seemed like the best choice.

Which part of "Disappearing Act" was conceived of first?

I started with the situation and conflict. Then came the characters and their voices, and finally, the form.

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

Almost everything, actually. I originally imagined the story would assume a more conventional form, with a first-person narrator, a recognizable setting, a wider plot arc, etc. But I stripped it all away almost immediately, focusing instead on the story's essence: two characters, one scene, and dialogue.

Do you primarily write fiction?

Yes. I also translate fiction from French and write occasional essays.

Tell us about your revision process.

As I see it, an initial draft's only purpose is to exist, so on the first go, I simply try to get the story down, without indulging in too much hand-wringing or second-guessing. Once I have a draft, often a chaotic mess, the real writing begins. I work through one draft after another (usually ten or twelve), cutting and compressing, restructuring, developing images, sharpening sentences. When I think I have a story in decent shape, I'll do

one or two "read aloud" edits, working on the phrasing, adjusting the pacing, refining the dialogue. Then I have a friend read the story and give me feedback, which I'll often sit on for a few days before diving back in for another draft. Eventually, a polished story emerges.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

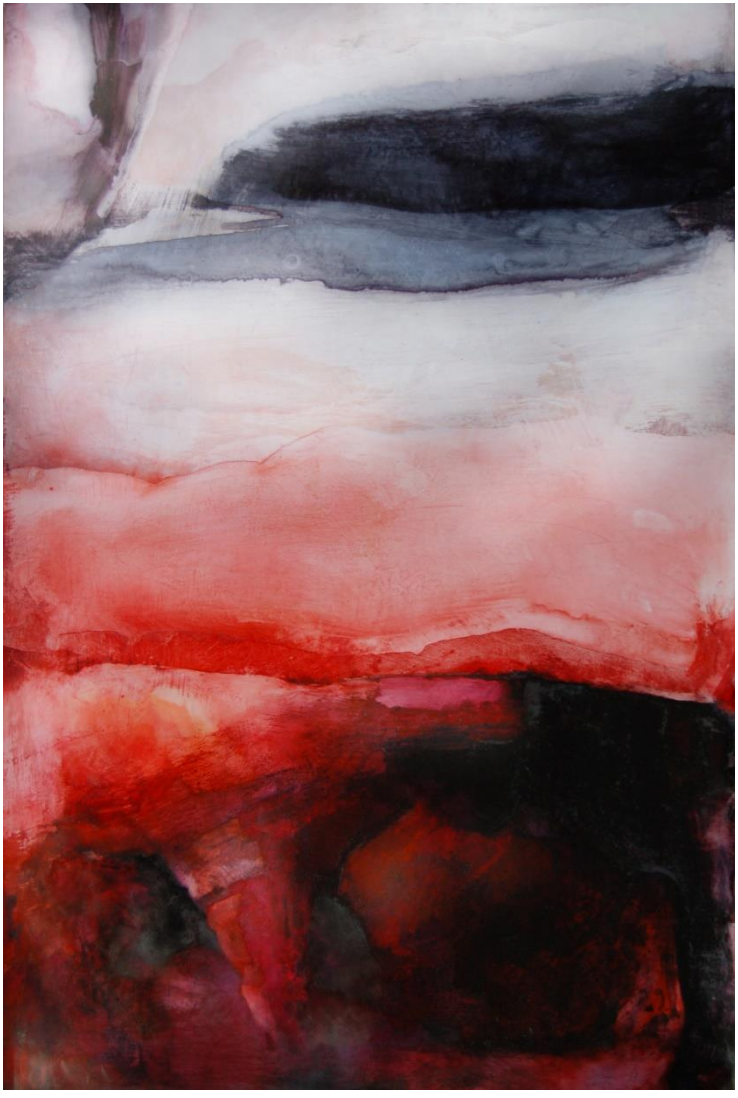
Some of the writers I most admire include Donald Barthelme, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Julio Cortázar, and Gabriel Garcia Márquez.

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

I have published in *Collier's*, *Harvard Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Threepenny Review*, and other magazines and literary journals. Readers can access much of my work via my website (jttownley.com).

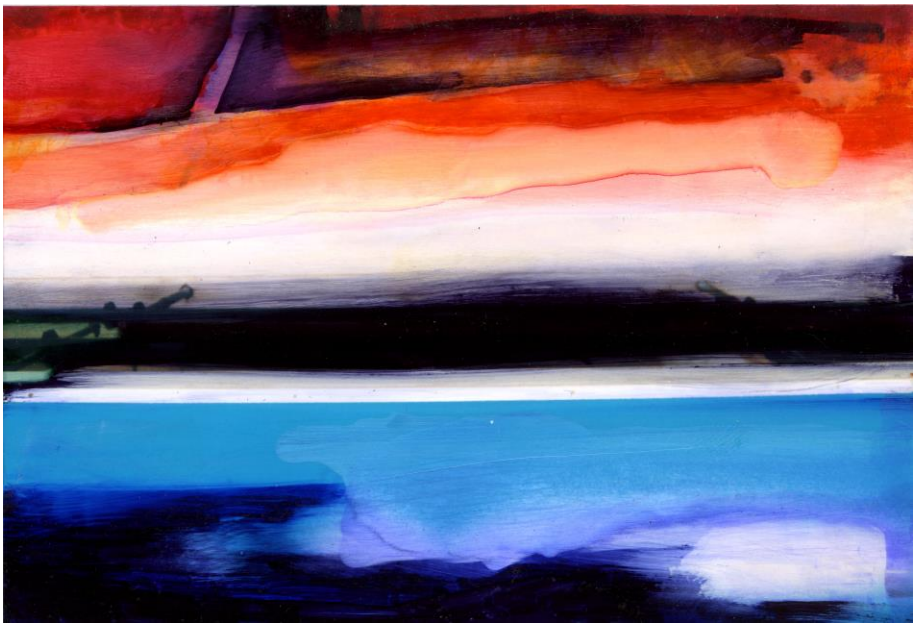
Cutting Board

Aaron Schwartz



Omni Loop

Aaron Schwartz

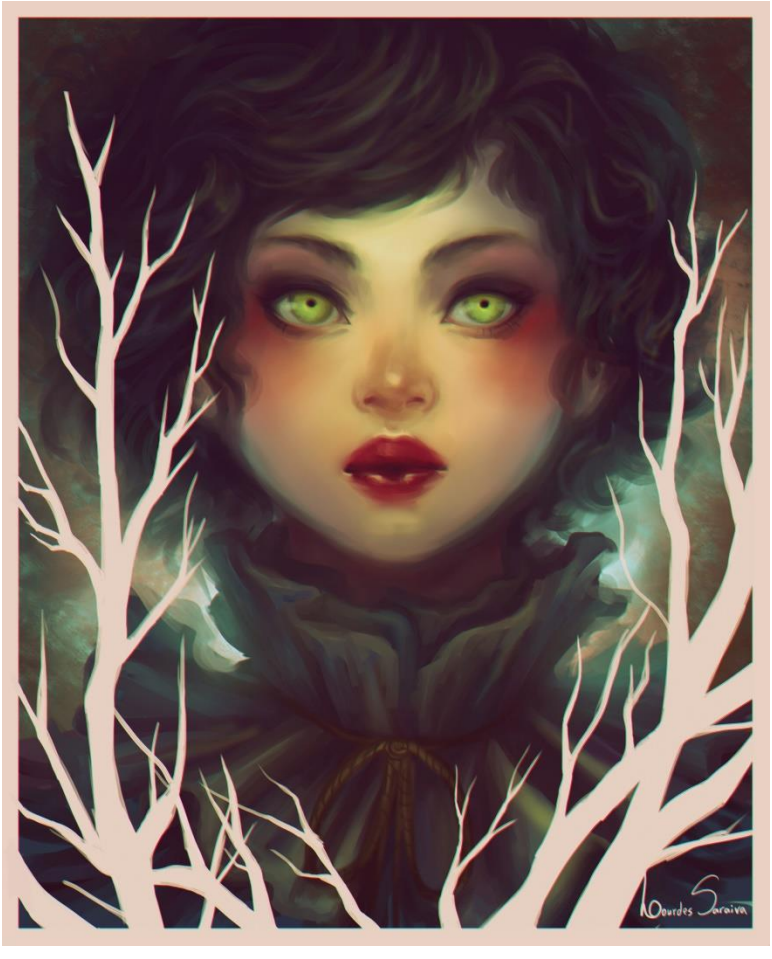


The Girl and The Crow

Lourdes Saraiva

Deep Forest

Lourdes Saraiva



Interview

Lourdes Saraiva

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I very much appreciate the use of organic forms in portraits (sometimes they have a tendency to be inclined to realism). In addition to this, I also like to use expressions with suggestions of purity and indifference (they bear some resemblance to a bit of "apathy', as it were), as well as natural elements.

When did you create "The Girl and The Crow"?

The work was done due to a friends' request, but he had no specific criteria, and, in addition to this, it was also created in order to describe what I am usually fond of doing. It was a piece of work which took up some days in order to be completed and whose result pleased me quite a lot.

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

In actual fact, it is really difficult to name something which, most of the time, comes into being from a spontaneous wish. It is customary of me to think about the elements of compositions, and how this makes me feel. Furthermore, I'm also inclined to think about the theme which was reflected upon in the painting. Lyrics of songs and extracts from books occasionally are of great help in the process.

What inspired "Deep Forest"?

The composition should remember a girl living in some inaccessible part of some forest. It portrays a child who could be either a fairy or a witch. I thought it appropriate and attractive that she should express a gloomy and innocent look at the same time on her face.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

Actually, broadly speaking, the hardest part of it is when I am not sure of how the composition will be at the end (in the sense of bearing a resemblance to what I used to imagine at first). There are paintings which take me a long time so as to finish them, and they arise from some lapse of creativity. I like to take advantage of my moments of inspiration.

What is your creative process?

As I work in a publishing house of children's books, I have the opportunity to seek references and practice new techniques all the time. At home, I like to listen to some music that maximizes the specific feeling of something I want to paint, or that make me want to create something that should be likeable to me.

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

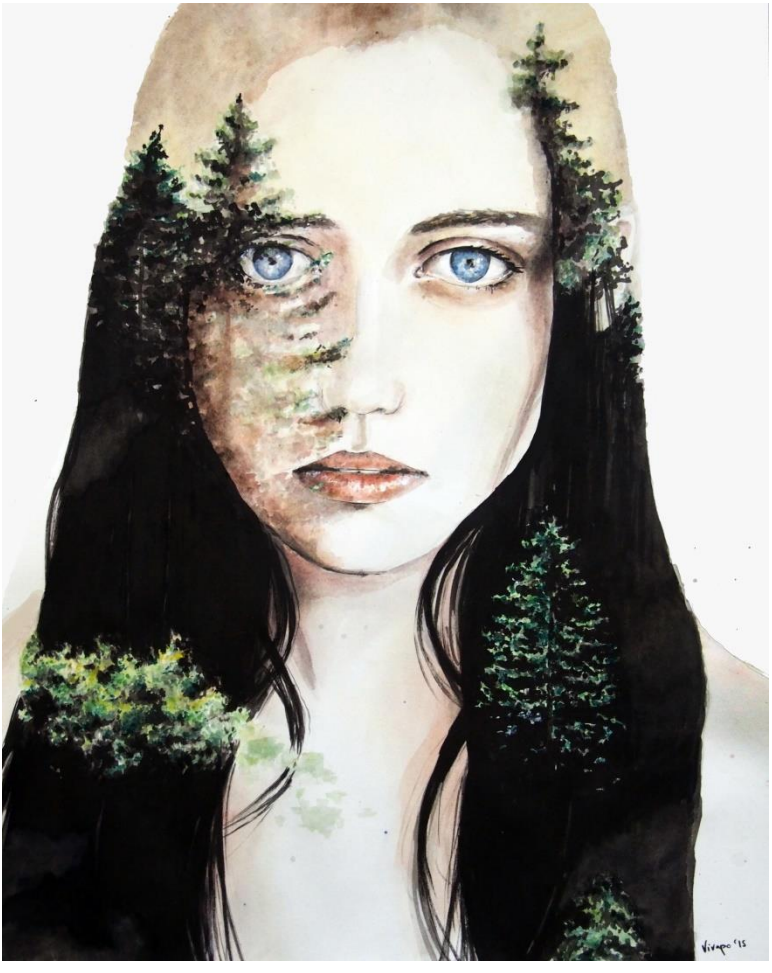
My favorite artists are some whom I have come to appreciate since childhood, such as Charles Vess and Arthur Rackham and others who captivated me in my adolescence and others who took my fancy when I got older, such as Yoshitaka Amano and Sulamith Wülfing. All of them feature aesthetic elements that I highly esteem in a composition.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I received a proposal to send some of my artwork, and then I took a look at the work already released. I was surprised by the quality of publications, and I will definitely try to follow the magazine's publications in the future.

The Water Sustains Me Without Even Trying

Vivi Vargas



Upstairs

Vivi Vargas

Interview

Vivi Vargas

How would you describe your aesthetic?

A mix of classic portraiture and modern lines.

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

A lot of my work is inspired by music. "The Water Sustains Me Without Even Trying" is named after an excellent Laura Marling song.

What inspired "Upstairs"?

One of those clichéd periods of intense soul-searching that happens after getting too comfortable.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

Creating the composition- it was my first time working with transparency.

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

I really enjoy the work of my contemporaries Derek Overfield and Agnes Cecile. If anyone likes my work, they will *love* what these two guys are doing. They're amazing.

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

I've been published in *The Adriondack Review* and on the cover of a super obscure Neuropsychology textbook. You can fine more of my work on my Facebook (www.facebook.com/vivivargas).

goodnight, sweet prince

Corazon Higgins

Interview

Corazon Higgins

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

These works address some ideas about covering our faces, either in actuality or metaphorically, in order to evoke playfulness, deceit, sexuality, or to 'save face.' Masks are important storytelling props, but also simple toys. I am more interested in animal masks that can be worked into a narrative that joins human and animal behavior.

What is your creative process?

With this series, my process involves reflecting on scenarios, memories, or fantasies that include one or two characters interacting in a situation where they find it necessary to hide their true faces. I decide on the composition and setting, sketch it out, and then typically employ gouache and fine tipped pens.

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

Deciding on a title is a strangely magical experience sometimes! When the piece is finished, I give it a good look and start to think about the situation in the picture. The title really just makes itself heard, like a voice from the picture itself! The titles of this series in particular are part of the story being told and address either the setting or the real situation that the painting is depicting.

When did you create "goodnight, sweet prince"?

The series started as a response to a personal experience where I found myself questioning the integrity of some people in my life, including myself, but it soon took on its own momentum as far as looking at a number of different behaviors, both real and imagined.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

The challenge with these is to maintain playfulness in color and line without veering into it being too cartoonish. I experimented with different types of paints to maintain a flat matte appearance. I was hoping for something almost like a vintage circus look!

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

I have a web site (www.corazonhiggins.weebly.com) if you'd like to take a look at more of this series.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

When I saw *Driftwood Press* for the first time, I was very impressed by the quality of work and felt good harmony with the look and themes addressed in it. I'm really pleased to be a part of this issue!

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

There is so much out there to love but just recently I saw an exhibit of Nick Cave's sculpture/costumes and was overwhelmed with joy!

Mad Mondiaan

Tina Oloyede

Interview

Tina Oloyede

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I am a fractal artist.

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

Not really. The colours in this piece are akin to the works of Piet Mondrian, but instead of the straight, perpendicular lines and shapes seen in his work, it uses distortion effects to create a random, jumbled pattern, hence the title of the piece.

When did you create "Mad Mondriaan"?

In 2006.

What inspired "Mad Mondriaan"? How did you conceive of "Mad Mondriaan"?

Mad Mondriaan was the result of testing out some new fractal formulas written by Andreas Lober, which combine stark geometric shapes with several distortion and texture effects. When beta-testing the key is to try and test out every parameter option within the formula, as was the case in the creation of this piece.

I don't usually start a new work with a particular concept; the image tends to evolve as I work on it. In this case, I was working with very specific formulas.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

For me the hardest part in the creation of any fractal art work is the waiting while the image renders to disk, usually several hours, but occasionally it can take several days!

What program was this image created with?

I used "Ultra Fractal" (www.ultrafractal.com).

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

No– just to get the most out of the formulas that I can. I really enjoy forcing as much colour, texture and composition into something that has started out as very simple geometric shapes.

Is fractal art the medium that you're most invested in?

Yes, without doubt! I have no training or real skills in traditional art, and am self-taught in the field of fractal and digital art.

Are your other works similar in subject or focus?

Yes, I have worked on many pieces that are similar types of abstracts and geometric patterns, although my portfolio contains a wide range of different styles of fractal art, from the typical Julia spirals through to figurative fractals representing realistic-looking flowers.

What is your creative process?

I almost exclusively use "Ultra Fractal" to create my art. I nearly always start a new piece afresh with a single greyscale layer, which combines a basic formula with a colouring algorithm. I work on this layer adjusting many parameter settings until I have a basic image that I like. Additional layers are added by duplicating the base layer, each one adding something new, for example texturing, colours or definition. It varies a lot! On average, a finished piece will have somewhere between 10 and 30 layers, although the figurative works will normally have many more.

It's rare that I will finish a piece in one sitting. I will save often as I go along, and will sometimes have 20 or 30 files by the time I reach an end point.

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

Henri Matisse is my favourite traditional artist (among many others). Fractal artists whose work I greatly admire are Janet Parke, Samuel Monnier, Etienne Saint-Amant, Kirsty Tudan, and many others!

For people who enjoy fractal art and want to try creating some of their own, there are many different software programs to choose from, several of which are free, or free to try.

Ultra fractal is probably the most sophisticated of the 2-D fractal generating software programs, as it combines the ability to work with multiple

layers, in much the same way as standard graphics programs. In addition there are thousands of formulas that have been written specifically for Ultra Fractal, so the possibilities are, quite literally, infinite!

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

I have an account at DeviantArt, which is kept more up to date with my latest works, journal entries and tutorials (http://aartika-fractal-art.deviantart.com/).

I also have my own website (www.aartika.co.uk).

My work has been published in various books, magazines and calendars over the years, and has been featured in several online 'showcase' galleries.

It has on occasion been licensed for different uses such as book covers and even powder-coating motorbike parts!

I have also exhibited several times in the UK, and some of my works have been successful in International Fractal Art competitions.

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

Mad Mondriaan is actually one of my favourite pieces. It renders to disk very well at high resolution and also prints well. It's one of only a couple of my own works that I have hanging on the wall in my home.

Architectonics

Leonard Kogan

INVASIVE STUDIES
UNIT #2
SCOTT R SMITH

NOW IS THE TIME TO SAY GOODBYE
DEATH. IT WILL NOT SUFFER. NOW IS
FROM YOUR BENT, SIMIAN SPINES AND GIVE YOUR CULTURE A SWIFT, MERCIFUL
ING THAT YOU LOVE THEM. IF YOU HAVE DEVELOPED ART, VIEW IT BEFORE
WE FEED IT TO OUR INCINERATORS. SOON, WE WILL LIFT THE BURDEN OF CHOICE
APOLOGIZE FOR YOUR GENETIC FAILABILITIES. AND TELL YOUR OFFSPR-
THAT YOU USE THIS TIME TO END YOUR TERRITORIAL DISPUTES.
HAS ADVANCED FAR BEYOND YOUR OWN. WE SUGGEST
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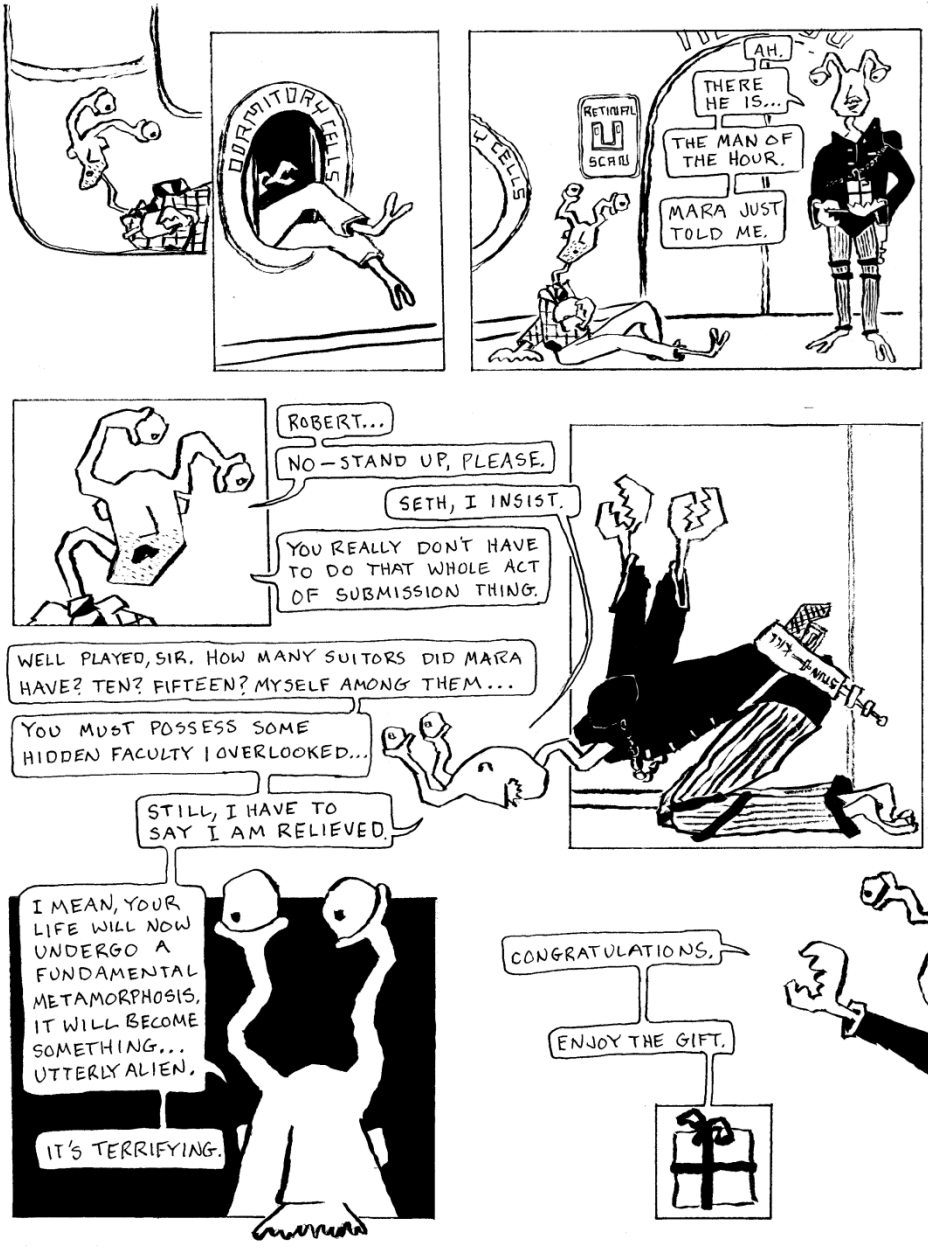
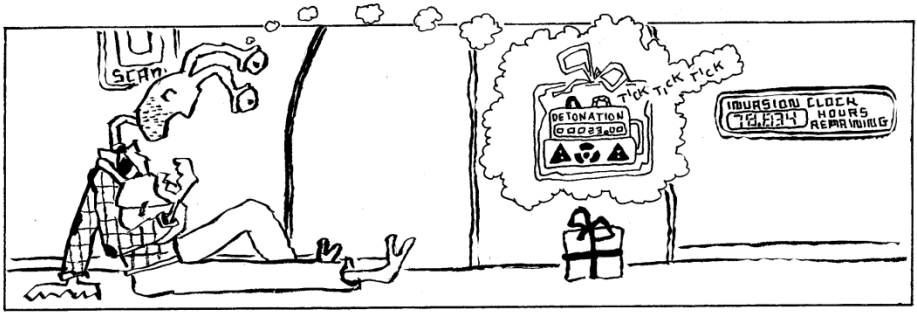
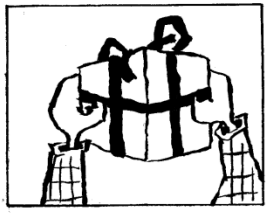
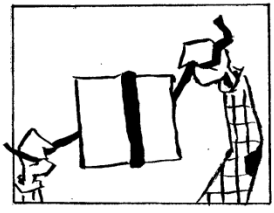
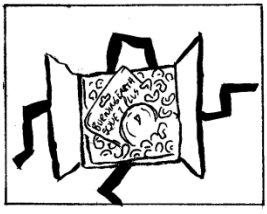
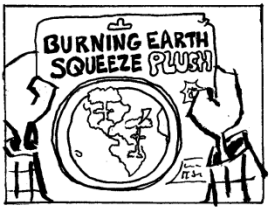

DORMITORY CELLS
RETINAL SCAN
AH.
THERE HE IS...
THE MAN OF THE HOUR.
MARA JUST TOLD ME.
ROBERT...
NO—STAND UP, PLEASE.
SETH, I INSIST.
YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT WHOLE ACT OF SUBMISSION THING.
WELL PLAYED, SIR. HOW MANY SUITORS DID MARA HAVE? TEN? FIFTEEN? MYSELF AMONG THEM...
YOU MUST POSSESS SOME HIDDEN FACULTY I OVERLOOKED...
STILL, I HAVE TO SAY I AM RELIEVED.
I MEAN, YOUR LIFE WILL NOW UNDERGO A FUNDAMENTAL METAMORPHOSIS. IT WILL BECOME SOMETHING... UTTERLY ALIEN.
IT'S TERRIFYING.
CONGRATULATIONS.
ENJOY THE GIFT.


SCAM
TICK TICK TICK
DETONATION
00023:00
IMMERSION CLOCK
HOURS
REMAINING

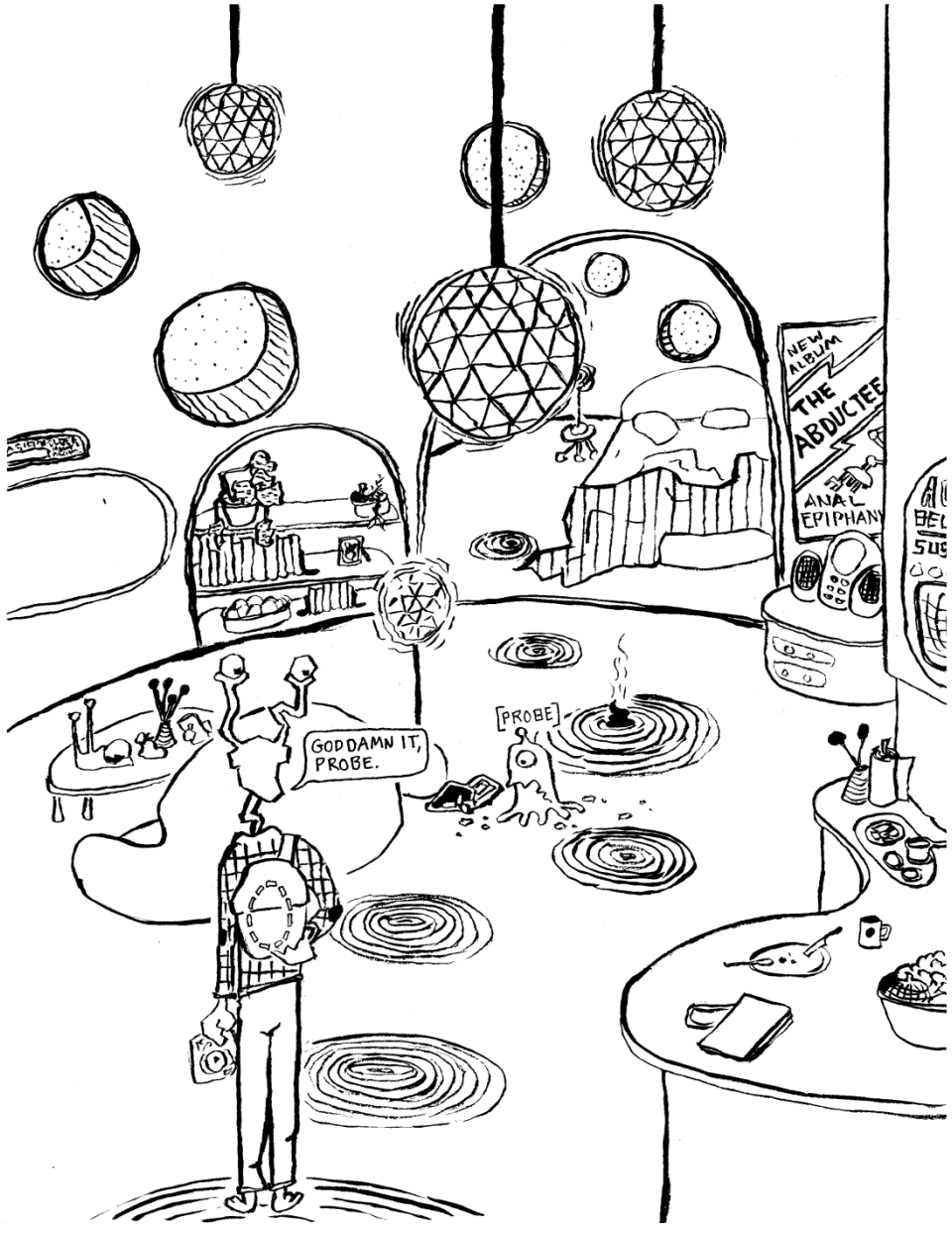




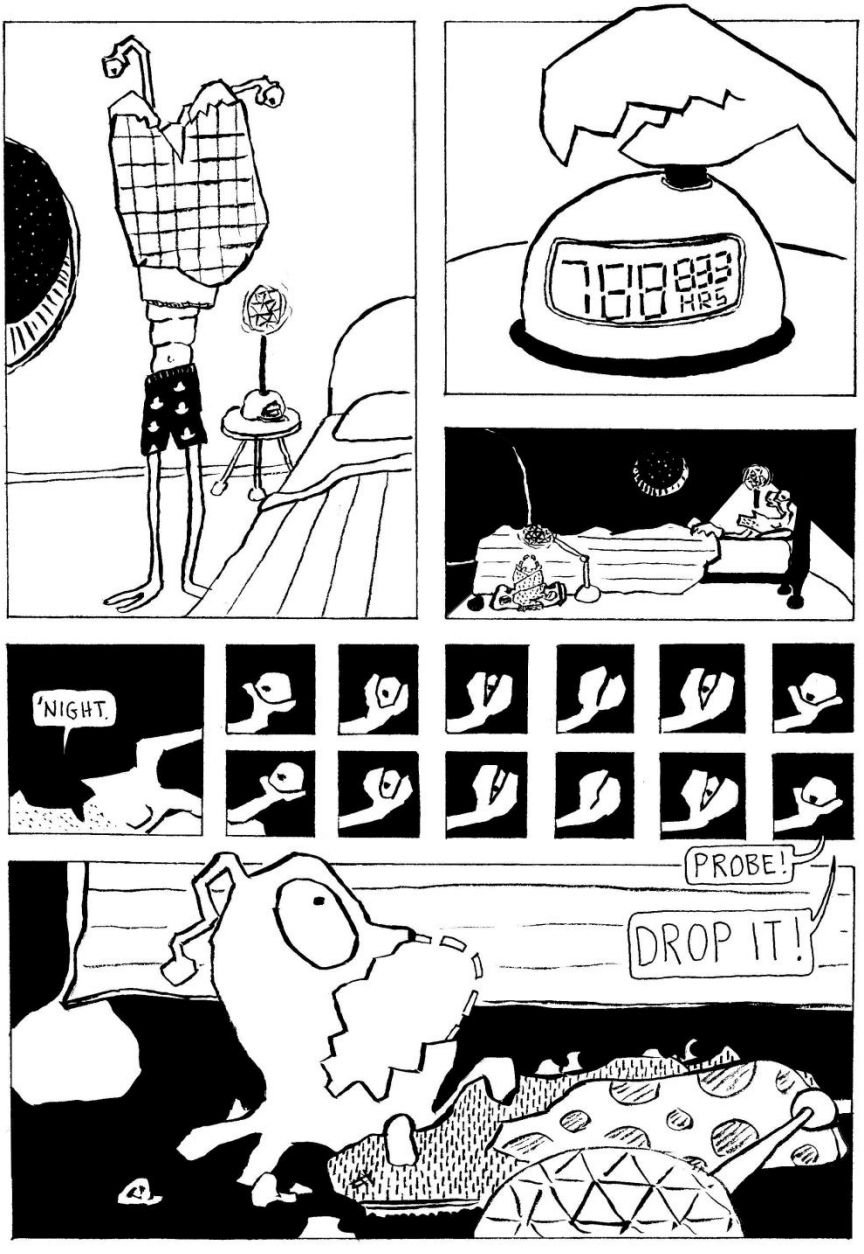


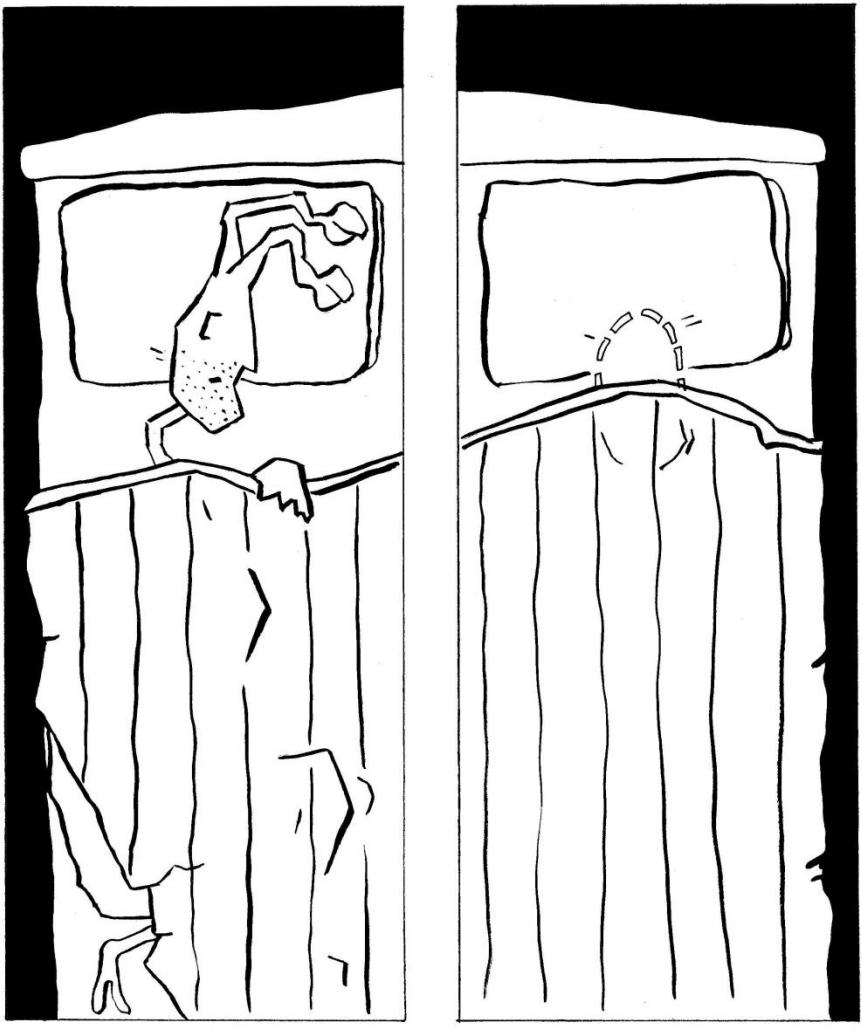

BURNING EARTH
SQUEEZE PLUSH


LIGHTS.


NEW ALBUM
THE ABDUCTEE
ANAL EPIPHANY
GODDAMN IT, PROBE.
[PROBE]


GOD... MARA... WOW. THIS IS AMAZING...
WHAT DO I- YOU KNOW- HAVE TO DO?
WHAT?!
YOU'RE SO EASY.
KEEP IT ROTATING AND DON'T FORGET THE WEIGHT AND DENSITY CHECKS. IT FEEDS ON BLOOD, OF COURSE.
JUST KEEP IT SAFE AND WARM.
LAMP
TOILET PAPER
PILLOW
TOWEL
DOES THAT LOOK SAFE AND WARM ENOUGH TO YOU?


'NIGHT.
PROBE!
DROP IT!



Summer 2015

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Also featuring a recurring comic by Scott R. Smith