

> **kill author**

a literary journal for the mostly alive

<http://killauthor.com>

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Issue 7: O'Connor



Name: Flannery O'Connor

Died: 3 August 1964, aged 39

Cause of death: Complications from lupus

Quote: "I am not afraid that the book will be controversial, I'm afraid it will not be controversial."

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Letter from the editors

The last thing that anyone wants to read is a piece by an editor of an online literary magazine telling their readers how tough their job is.

First, because in most cases it isn't an actual paying job, and second, because it's only ever going to get one hard but fair answer: you chose to do this, nobody forced you. If you don't like it, stop doing it. Go offline and catch up on all those episodes of *Lost* you missed instead. (It wasn't a real island, you know. It was purgatory. If you never saw it, just thank us for saving you five and a half years of your life.)

Issue Seven, then. It's been a difficult one to put together. Or maybe we just got lucky with the previous six, which all seemed to fall into place so smoothly, whereas the collection of fiction and poetry in front of you now has only been kicked, punched and generally beaten into its final form in the last couple of weeks.

This time out, we found ourselves turning down lots of excellent work that really was—in the words of the rejection email cliché—"not a good fit" (and our apologies if that phrase slipped its way into a few of our replies, because we promise that we try avoiding it if at all possible). It's not a great feeling when you read pieces that consistently hit a high standard, have lots going for them, but just aren't *right* for the journal you're putting together. But we wouldn't have it any other way, because we do have very definite ideas in mind for > **kill author**, and in turn we're inspired by, we read and we admire those publications that also seem to have their own unique personality. Is that approach limiting? Is it a bad thing for literature on the web? We don't think so. Obviously not. The number of literary magazines continues to grow, and while your epic fifty-eight stanza poem about a gang of crime-fighting kung fu dolphins in the Hong Kong underworld might not be a good fit for us, we're sure you'll find a home for it somewhere out there.

We're not going to cling rigidly to our manifesto though, and there are some subtle changes in our character in this issue. We're not opposed to conventionally told, well-structured stories, even if some people might occasionally get that impression. So there's Garrett Socol's *Island Envy* — a story, yes, but one that's definitely very *us*. Following the change to our submissions guidelines to allow for longer pieces of fiction, there's Roxane Gay's story (yep, another one) *Used People*. What about humor? You should read Misti Rainwater-Lites' *Circus Cunt* for some of that. And that's just three of the twenty-one writers in Issue Seven. We'll leave you to discover the rest.

*

Dzanc Books' long-awaited Best of the Web 2010, edited by Kathy Fish and Matt Bell—who is also featured in this issue of **> kill author** with Xarles, Xavier, Xenos—will be published on June 15, but is already available for pre-order. We were thrilled when we heard back in February that two stories from this journal were going to be included in the collection, and after looking down the full list of contributors we're sure that it's going to be a treat to read. Get yours today.

Finally, thanks to all those who responded to our blog post, plus our messages on Facebook and Twitter, about the lack of work being submitted by women. As we said at the time, the debate about the imbalance between the numbers of male and female writers in literary magazines and journals has been a very lively one in recent weeks, but aside from that we were (and are) genuinely concerned that each issue of **> kill author** should feature a split between men and women that's as equal as possible. We didn't quite make it to fifty-fifty for this issue, but we'll keep working on it (with your help).

Remember: we're not what you think we are.
Except when we are.

Best,
> kill author

What Happened to the Bishop's Daughter

Amber Sparks

When you said you were off to the Duke of Salt's place to help him haul away a corpse, we weren't exactly sure of your truthfulness. On the one hand, he *has* been hanging out at the medical college, where the purple-brown bloaters in the rescued from the swamps are stored. But. On the other hand. Everyone knows he's banging the Bishop's daughter and after all *she's* a medical student, so there you are. Or were.

Our sources tell us the Duke stops at the college every afternoon at two. She emerges like a running joke, pushes her hair over her eyes and brows, and tosses the white coat out the window. Jalle has to retrieve the thing every day, because the Bishop, you know, isn't made of money. (The Bishop sometimes rolls his eyes heavenward and prays for his daughter to be struck by sense or, absent that, a little divine fire. A light, crisp tongue of vermillion flame, licking at her silly feet and her pert little bottom. The Bishop enjoys dreaming this holy retribution.)

You say it's more than that. The Duke drives the Bishop's daughter to the desert, where she performs small surgeries on the wounded outlaws there. They trust her, because she always buries herself in the sand first and cries out for a savior, so the outlaws keep their dignity as they climb out of their caves to save her. Their wounds are usually no bigger than a Post-It Note, but they keep her in practice.

You said that last time, one outlaw was a carcass, a skin sack full of bullet holes. So in the name of science the Bishop's daughter hit him in the back of the head, dragged his dark, flattening veins out and dried them in the sun. She then ground them up, packed the powder in a little leather case and sold it to the healers at the market for a marked-up sum. The skeleton she packed in Styrofoam pellets and donated to the college.

But the Duke had seen too much; he was full of thinness and inbreeding, and he had no wish to be brave. Or so you say. You say that you and he went to a small copse he frequents and he asked the dark for answers, and that the North Star opened its jaws and bit the Duke hard on the nose. Blood burst from the Duke's face like a spiral galaxy starting, softening as he stanching it with a handkerchief. You say that you told him: if you are led the length of the earth by the night sky, you can never be wandering. You can never be lost. And that his face started to look like iron and his mind started to look like madness and you were afraid you might have given him the wrong-ish idea.

And now that the Bishop has Jalle printing posters and putting pictures on milk cartons, we think we understand what you mean. We think we see the map in the mystery, pointing back to our hearts as always the answer, always the cause of the corpse or the copse or the caves where we hide our deeds half-buried and forgotten forever.

Delicacies

Audra Puchalski

I have a butterfly in my mouth I worry
for its wings they brush across my palate scrape
against my teeth scuff their tiny scales
onto my tongue

And

I want to suck them clean, to
taste their ultraviolet dust remember I
was six last time I pinched a wing with two fingers
and rubbed terrible
that off-kilter walk

I'm afraid even now
to hobble blue or ruin webbing. Even now
 I crave the silky flakes that smudged my fingers
with muddled color they'll taste
I think musky or moldy or
they'll have the fishy kelpy
flavor of seawater Do I hold it
 keep it safe
do I open and let it totter out do I press it
between tongue and roof
 of mouth and swallow
I have a small mouth and a protective urge
 sometimes

and sometimes
one gets stuck in the other

Violent analysis *(after Hannah Ensor)*

Audra Puchalski

You'll find bodies
are all the same:
grids, unstrung tendons,
kidneys, sanctity
of the stomach.
You'll find vivisection
a kind of flirtation. You'll find
bodies to be differing
translations. A plum
is made of exocarp,
mesocarp, endocarp
and so is a peach.
Each skull is lined with hard
mother, spidery mother,
soft mother—these divide brain
from skull and you'll divide
them, cut cell-thick slices you'll drape
across slides and hold up to
the light. A kind of protection.
A kind of creation, the first
kind: light from dark, form
from formlessness, muscle from
bone. Your outflung limbs,
unlike a cat's only because
of what you dissect with them.
To separate is to make
better, to make useful: a frog
or stray cat pulled apart
in my hands, the gloves
that divide them. What
could have offended you—
leaky arteries, unspooled
intestines, an idle appendix?
The discarding of these?
No matter. Anyway—you'll find—
the earth keeps everything.

Recession

Audra Puchalski

This is how to build a house of air.
The trick's positioning: our cash erodes
circuitous riverbeds, meanders
through this fiscal wilderness.

We feel it: season of drought,
the dried up Dow Jones.
We try not to sweat, because
we sweat nickels. We stand
in dusty riverbeds and pray, we lie
in the rushes and wait. We must
stay here—must drag our bodies
through mud, must wear neckties.

When the next flood swells
above the banks again, we'll flail
for something stable, pocket
what river rocks we can,
but be subsumed, trade abstractions.
For now, we await a greater recession,
the whirlpool door to the dark. We laugh
or grit our teeth and grind away
our molars. There's always money

to be made. Our houses are plus signs
and water vapor, igloos and ponds.
Our wells reach deep for groundwater.
Where does value go when it goes
down? Water table, mantle of earth,
dense as the clay of the riverbed.

It was Peruvian ceviche, it was months ago

Audra Puchalski

I woke up thinking about raw fish. Pink,
tender, soaked in sweet acids, falling to shreds

between my tongue and the roof of my mouth.
I thought about raw fish for days.

I thought about throwing the trout's head
to a stray dog after eating the tiny pillow of its cheek.

My mother said that's the best part of all, and that
you should leave the head on while you cook it

because it flavors the rest of the body. My stepfather
said, when I die, cook me with my head on.

The Number Being Served

Autumn Humphrey

Brandy, dripping wet, her hair a frizzy mess of mousey brown, held her ticket as she waited, not taking her eyes off the sign showing the number being served. The flap had not flipped and the noise had not clicked since her arrival. The condescending number 23 glared at her in its permanence, and reflected back on itself through her hazel eyes. Looking down at the soggy ticket she held between puckered fingers, it snickered back at her, the inky number 44 running like mascara on porcelain skin.

Fifteen minutes passed and still no click had come. Brandy felt the warmth of a single tear slip out of the corner of her eye and run down her cold skin. She knew she had been there, waiting, for several hours, but still she dripped onto the white tile floor. Looking around, she realized there was no one else waiting. She stood alone in the quiet white room, just her and the sign showing the number being served.

She attempted a pensive “hello,” but there was no response, save for her own echoing voice. In a wet collapse she folded onto the floor, trying to remember why she was there. The water continued to drip and pool around her, rising and covering her legs, up to her waist, soon reaching her neck. Brandy’s scream turned to a gurgle as the water reached her mouth. When her eyes slid under the coldness, the last thing she saw was the sign showing 23, the number being served.

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The Man Who Drank the Multiverse

Brian Le Lay

1. Bloody Show

The walls crumbled like creatine sandcastles
I drank your dimensions like curtains to a vacuum

Every last one of you, fur around my lips

2. Sermon Muzak

Cemeteries sprout through my capillaries
Six billion unattended funerals gleam in my eyes

3. Necrophobia

Sleep apnea is me short-changing death
like the secrets you stash in a wax museum, echoing

The figures emerge through turnstiles
singing your sins in the streets
with shackles around their ankles
and a vendetta to end you

4. Inorgasmia

I run naked through the void
stamping ashen-white footprints
like I dipped my feet in an urn
testing the waters, tempting death

I pound glory holes in the abyss
with the swell of my fists,
black holes hungry for machinery like
the mouths of billionaires, politicians
insert themselves between the teeth—
What's new? Who cares?

Where I'm going is a mystery solved by
the great detective of James Patterson's
abortion-in-progress—

all the great detectives of time
have intimacy issues

5. Whiplash

Now in dreams I'm naked
My skeleton tagged in graffiti as the Metro of my veins

The zephyrs blow over me
forming the open fist of the zodiac

My lashes will never accept the loss of skin
Myopia will never miss the meteor shower it never saw
standing stargaze on the hood of a shawl

6. Pre-Natal

Swallower of the sun the moon
the stardust the suffering

polishing the chrome
on my millennium alone

as sailboats lie dormant
in the sea of my blood

The Rain on Hollow's Eave

Brian Le Lay

Ever since my uncle dropped dead, there has been a gaping hole in the family, flapping as a collapsed lung in a staircase, a hole like paper windows in Japan, post-rain, thrashing. The hole is dense like Nietzschean philosophy, drenched in rhetoric, saccharine, ever-expanding blackness pregnant with itself. I lean on the ledge of oblivion screaming his name into a megaphone. I scream his name so often that it has been forgotten. The syllables bleed together like inkblots fucking. Sometimes the echoes take centuries to ricochet, a miscommunication between open palms, palisades and crag of an immeasurable canyon. I scream his name often enough that I can't decipher the difference between screaming his name and silence—standard procedure like I love you over the telephone. They have ordered me on look-out like a tape recorder that plays the sound of a dog barking. At times I scream his name and I think it's him screaming back. These years we've been kindred skeletons on opposing shorelines, screaming over shipwrecks, airplanes ablaze, those screams caught on the spires of chandeliers, silenced by the shhh of the ocean's whipsaw currents—smoke signals to the moon. There's a masquerade ball raging on a bed of rippling glass. According to the manual I've been given, should my uncle show his face, an iota of skin on the wall of the void, I'm to do this, this, and this. I'm to say that, that, and that, as though I were a fireman coaxing a severed lover from the edge of a parking structure. You spend more time dying than living, I say, these being the first of my words that I have understood in some odd years. In ten thousand seasons we'll have successfully compressed the ocean like a pearl as to mend the shores. I hope the pieces fit. The living and the dead will interact on an equal mind-body ratio, like ventriloquist's dolls around a dinner table discussing politics. I'm to do this, this, and this. Yadda yadda. I compose a mannequin on hollow's eave out of TV sets and flimsy pillows.

We share the same eyes, static. Sleep. Awake. The pillows, gutted. Feathers tumble into the void like helicopter leaves, as a thousand grains of static, Technicolor, antennae like arms, the void expanding. Home. Holes in the paper windows, guns that shoot rain. Couches against the doors, jars of change rumbling. He shows his face, an ever-expanding blackness.

...strip the skin from your skeleton, the tarwater a gripping gum, a birthing goo—

David Peak

eyes alight with the blackness of tarpit sludge,
or light trapped inside stones—a stream of primordial
imagery flooding his bucking brain: the mash meshing
with his body, sliding into his spine, melding its history
into his blood, its story into his skull, memories into his
marrow—it unfolds as a stream of iridescent light,
its brilliance beyond words, its colors from outside
the realm of the rainbow, from before the dawn of the sun

—that space of hidden sound—

fanning outward from nothingness, from beneath the
carpet, the floor, the ground, the dirt, the stone,
the clay where the monsters decay,
somewhere in that churning,
boiling molten core,

a birth of heat and pressure and earthen blood—

the ancient creature skeletons locked in place
—the elders, the eyeless ones—
stripped and skinned, structured solid and
floating through the void—calcified bones
—the blackness a sludgy glop, cooked to bubbling,

spewing volcanic ash, streamed and spit
through crooked cracks, the earth's ruptured seams,
the pressure-tears, tectonic terror rips—
blasting up from beneath, a heat unleashed,
a cooking fire,

the dark lodge of mighty beasts beaten by
their own sloth, by the parasites, the beetle bugs
and suck-nose fleas, crawling, always crawling,
stealing blood-meals from amongst the forest furs.

This is where the great gross being learned to grow:
the winged beast—Lurk—the blackened skull 'n' bones
moon-rider, a man in shape, his heritage a disheartened
breed long dead, weakened by the ash skies,
the sunless eras—the years of raining
fire and sloshing sulfur seas—his time that of nightmares,
his claws as old and hard as the black stones.

Eons and eons, all spent without eating, within
a soft-shell, a warm and wet egg, membrane of his
mother's memory—the time passed without articulation,
before the forever egg bubbled up from beneath the boiling goo,
spewed him out into the world of ash and blackened bones,
his will iron-clad—*to eat*—eyes bloody with the throbbing
torture, the aching newness of hunger.

Thus the birth of Lurk—the demon king, his blood the blood
of boiled beasts, his knowledge the knowledge of ancient
stones—history's great parasite—

the nightmare of nothingness:

*There is a blackness in the center of the eye that eats light,
there is a silence in the sounds between the clickings of the bedbugs—*

*and it is in these places
where Lurk hides.*

Remembrance of the dawn before the dark...

David Peak

A great breath was breathed, from beyond the beyond,
clouds parting, breaking and cracking, thunder clacking,
and the lurking baby broke free of the blastula,
spread his wings, still weak from the darkness of slumber,
still slick from sleep, and soared into the sky—

blown tossing and turning in the winding red wind—
this time of tornados—bone-faced and blackened
razor-beaked birds; he learned to wield the lashing tail, control
its arrowhead point,
his flight, inflict pain on the weak—the sub-species—
reigning over this new land of broken insect shells,
exoskeleton armies.

In the time of the sun—the ash cleared and the dome blazed
bright, a forever burning sheltering sky, convex panorama—

his fingers were solar flares, stuck into the gaping eye sockets
of bleached skulls, a king, the overlord of a ruinous mountain,
the tyrant of blazing white light, of skin-stripping earth's breath.

This is how it was—for so long, so many years.

And when the giant sleeping lizards rose up,
with earth's crust in the folds of their big black eyes,
Lurk was there to feed, fingernails plunged into their scaly
hides, their plates of tough tissue, dagger-teeth bared,
jaws cracked open and forked tongues lashing, a howl
of unbelievable intensity, of canyon-carving ferocity,

the howl of the strong beast being bled from within, being eaten
from a parasite beyond its vision, beyond the reach of its
hooked claws.

It was the meal of unending magnitude—the giant lizards kicked up
great clouds of dust in their struggle, in the savagery that went on and on
and on, until Lurk's body grew heavy, until his wings sagged, and his feet
touched down upon the earth's surface.

And then—as it was before—
the dust clouds thickened, tightened, blocking the rays of the sun, and
the earth grew dark and crawling with shadow:

Lurk was fed.

But he was cold.

His stomach lined with zippered teeth, gnawing
the tough meat of the lizard skin, tearing apart the tufts of
armor plate—his digestion began.

And as he grew stronger, he learned to float, heavy wings hanging
over his thorny head—still and silent—curled inward, knees at his chest,
floating upward into the sky, until he revolved the round earth,
a gargoyle satellite, black angel—
saving his strength, preparing for the next opportunity to feed,
the next rising-up of sub-species, his next meal.

Rites of Spring

Finnegan Flawnt

1.

He noticed a short, strong white hair from his beard on his tongue and decided to not take it out but see what would happen. A moment later, a tiny bear emerged from the cave of his mouth, grabbed the hair and pulled it on his lap to play with it. It was a furry sensation and the beginning of a long friendship with things coming out of his orifice. It made him want to dance, shave and dance in the rain shaved, to feel the water run over his clean cheeks and celebrate the connectedness of everything with everything else.

2.

When we arrived at the Factory of Blind Infants very early in the morning, I saw the dog patrols. I lost a left foot on the first day and my right arm on the second. It didn't matter much because many of the Infants were incomplete. The games we played would have scared me before. Our stories revolved around limbs going around alone, begging their former owners to account for them. They mercilessly drilled what was left of us. After three months, I became an agent. I received a uniform and a gun and was declared ready for fieldwork. I learned that pride is a measure of loss and that there is no substitute for comradeship. I also learned that drugs could help me forget and that the loudest music comes from within, like water oozing from a stone.

3.

Shaking and trembling. You imagine strident sounds made by strangers when their right hands are roasted over the fire by feds, who, a moment ago, had their hands down someone's pants because there was a tic toc and a tac tic coming from the aluminum-encased, sleek, ogre-sized detecting device radiating X-rays and dizzying your cells. Hymning slews. Working next to one of those machines might change your entire life: you must scan the perimeter, looping, with your especially developed anti-terrorist gaze, which will bring any offender to his knees, thereby creating another sound, the sound of a slowly keratinizing human. A final shaking, then silence.

4.

Two leathery lovebirds set off to a jog through bewitching countryside. The stench from the fields was sharp and brought the animal out in Fred. His wife, Frieda, was belting along the dirt path despite her seventy-eight years. Fred's little Martian stirred merrily at the thought of the Venus trap between Frieda's legs. If the stars were aligned he might get lucky tonight he thought, all the way to his death that awaited him at the end of a seemingly infinite patch of bluebells, whose little heads

were bobbing towards the place where Fred would fall and lie, his eye turned upward for as long as it took him to imbibe the beauty of the world for one last time and carry it wherever he'd be going, as alone as he hadn't been in half a century, while Frieda was storming ahead of him, her chin stuck out, a fighter to the last breath, an incandescent wife.

5.

On the terrace outside of the commons stood a small bucket labelled 'Nürnberger Würstchen', filled with green water. This is where students dropped their butts. It has been observed before: fags look like little musty, wiggling worms. What hasn't been said before is that here they actually *were* worms, with eerie eyes looking for idlers who were desperate enough to rescue them from the depth of destitute, drying and reusing the tobacco for roll-ups. A small contribution to a greener, better world. We called this place 'Wormwood': it was easy to meet women there, hanging onto a stub, enabling and indulging addiction, slinking away from intimacy, eyes on the sausage.

6.

Every morning this same set of choices: to eat or not to eat. To drink or not to drink. And how much. To shit or not to shit (no issue with volume there). To smoke or not to smoke (you still with me?) And moods! Go down in flames like a cleansing Easter fire or hold my breath indefinitely as we all learnt to do it, years at a time, swallowing sarcasm. Uncomfortable morning truth: I'm not a bird. I feel my bones, every one of them, nasty needles. I can fly but I must write my own wings first. Shall I touch the tender spot above my April blooming heart for help?

7.

Fifteen monarch butterflies. Six and twenty snow drops. Ribbons with hearts on them. A dozen blown out eggs painted as Chinese policemen. Lost in last year's brown leaves: my glasses. Wandered off by themselves to look for the ridge of a nose that knows what it wants. Bunny-shaped mole on the skin on the back of my hand. Hundreds of white horse hairs clinging to my spring step. Greetings to all wayfaring strangers lost in elaborate egg hunts! Nothing can hold us back now: the best time of the year is upon us!

8.

When Elmer found the hedgehog's diary one spring morning, he was a happy man. The text confirmed a number of his ideas about insectivorous mammals, shed a new light on the concept 'pricks of conscience,' and contained as one major zoological behavioral sensation the information that the quarrel between foxes and hedgehogs was not a Darwinian necessity but was, in indubitable fact, a stage play, enacted continuously for entertainment, a choreography that brought, according to the hedgehog's copious notes, considerable pleasure to the ostensibly hunted.

9.

He kept his pants on and made a stupid face, or so it seemed to him. There were no limits to the stupidity of faces on a man. He put it down to a lack of experience. Writing was so easy, too easy, but doing the right thing with a woman, a new woman, was difficult, too difficult. It required much more than imagining, which he was good at; it required dedication to something not just outside of himself but quite outside of his universe, something he could not own or imbibe or eat up. Still, he continued to bang his head against that particular wall, carried on pissing in that particular corner hoping for that particular look from her that would signal, once and for all: I'm yours.

10.

Early in March, the snow had just melted, his glans showed white spots. "Probably a fungus," his wife said, "perhaps you should wash there more often." He imagined his penis as a rainbow-colored canvas where mischievous little devils played arty games, painting it this way or that. He might wake up tomorrow with a blue cock. Hypochondria did not set in, while only the tint changed. But the next morning, he found tiny feathers under his foreskin. That scared him. "Maybe angels visited you last night," his wife suggested, trying to be helpful.

11.

From my window I can see myself on the other side of the world, almost neckless, in a place where I don't have a shadow, where my fingers are fused to the keyboard forever and my tongue licks the screen hoping to pick up those very last pixels that escaped my wandering attention. There is no weather, only weariness. A crow comes to visit at odd times, dabbing my shoulder covered with corduroy. When spring arrives, I raise a storm in my palm and watch it listlessly, hoping for a merciful tide that sweeps me along into the wild, where I will live as a bear and cool my paws in the sunny water. I promise.

Island Envy

Garrett Socol

They met on a deserted island called Phog East, fifteen miles off the coast of New London, Rhode Island. Evan Cooper's rowboat had capsized while he was fishing for a compliment, and he swam to the remote island in freezing water.

Fanny Gurk grew up with four strapping brothers in a busy fishing village practically run by her megalomaniac father, so at an early age she was adept at handling a rod. Attempting to make sense of a romance that fizzled (in addition to several other personal dramas), Fanny went fishing for logic when a powerful (though predicted) storm tossed her into subzero temperature water and transported her to the western part of Phog East. Soaking wet and freezing cold, she washed ashore in one shoe. The fierce waves had whisked away the tartan ballet flat that had been on her left foot.

On the day they met, Evan had explored the island while Fanny caught up on her rest and resentment. Just as the fog was rolling in, Evan came upon a discarded barbecue and a deceased pig. With the confidence of a master chef, he began preparing his first meal in two days. After lighting the barbecue the old-fashioned way, he secured the sow onto one of the sticks that doubled as a spit.

At first Evan thought he was hallucinating. Out of the thick, eerie gray fog emerged what looked like a lovely young woman in a tattered black tunic and one shoe.

"Hello," he said to her.

"Who are you?" she asked with suspicion.

"Evan," he said, approaching.

"I'm Fanny," she quietly said. Beautiful in a quirky way, her face was a bit roundish and the eyebrows a bit thick, but these imperfections made her vastly more interesting than some skinny model on the cover of *Cosmopolitan*.

"You're beautiful in a quirky way, you know that?" Evan asked. "Your face is a bit roundish and your eyebrows a bit thick, but these imperfections make you much more interesting than some skinny-ass model on the cover of *Cosmo*."

"You're a prick," she snapped.

Evan liked the fact that she was feisty.

With major attitude, Fanny turned away from him and searched for a spot to call her own. After finding a suitable patch of brown grass, she plopped down. "What's on the barbecue?"

"Pig," he announced. "Please don't tell me you keep kosher."

"I don't eat meat," she said. "Strict vegan here."

"Soon you'll be a strict *dead* vegan," he said.

"Any side dishes?" she asked.

"What are you in the mood for? Steamed spinach? Poached string beans? I don't want to brag, but I make a mean rice pilaf. Just tell me your pleasure and I'll whip it up."

"You don't know when to quit."

"Leave room for dessert," he added. "I have a lemon meringue cake in the shape of Stonehenge. Why no meat?"

"Because the idea of it sickens me," she explained. "I don't want to look at what became of cattle that were shot in the head with a metal bolt before bleeding to death, or cows that were dismembered alive, or squealing hogs that were submerged into boiling water to loosen their hide."

"Gotcha," Evan said. He took a few steps closer to Fanny and descended to the ground, facing her. "It looks like we're the only ones here, so why don't we try to get along? We obviously started off on the wrong foot, but *you* know as well as I do that in time we'll bond. We have nothing but privacy here, so we'll undoubtedly become very close and wildly attracted to each other. Why don't we skip the middle part and jump to the inevitable?"

"Inevitable?" she asked.

"Passionate sex. Frenetic fornication. Right here, right now. It would be a terrific ice breaker, don't you think?"

She gazed into his droopy brown eyes. "I think you need a serious psychiatric evaluation. But feel free to toss any other ideas my way."

"Well," he said, the wheels spinning in his head, "would you mind very much if I borrowed one of your legs for a while? Either one, left or right."

"I don't think so," she replied. "I might want to walk someplace in the near future."

"I would hug and kiss it, that's all," he explained. "Five short minutes." His voice was pleading.

Fanny shut her eyes, then covered her face with her filthy hands. "Do you think anybody's searching for you?" she asked, ignoring the request.

"The entire Coast Guard," he said. "How about you?"

"I'm not sure," she replied, opening her eyes but avoiding Evan's. "I have a feeling everyone I know will think I disappeared on purpose. I've done that before."

"A bit of a rebel? I *like* that in a girl."

"You're a bit of an idiot. I can't stand that in a guy." She glanced up at the limpid sky, and emitted a sigh. "How long have you been here?"

"Two glorious days and two exquisite nights. You?"

"Three."

"What do you suppose the lesson is? There has to be a lesson to learn when you're shipwrecked like the skipper and Gilligan."

"The lesson is don't try to kill yourself by sailing into a heavy storm."

The smile that had seemed sewn on Evan's face, collapsed. For a few tense moments, he was silent. "You were trying to kill yourself?"

"I would've jumped off a roof but I'm deathly afraid of heights."

"Drowning in freezing water is a more pleasant experience?" he asked.

"Much."

"Damn," he said, suddenly feeling a wave of tenderness for his new acquaintance. "Was your life really that lousy?"

Fanny stared gloomily at the sea that had kept her alive, instead of drowning her as it was supposed to do. "Worse," she said. "Do you want to know the *real* reason nobody's searching for me?"

"Sure," he said earnestly.

"Because nobody will miss me. I haven't made any lasting impression on anybody I've ever met in twenty-four years. I tend to alienate the average person."

"No kidding."

As the sun began to set, the sky turned pale pink with thin strips of purple. The moon was a round, radiant blur. "Some people would envy us being on an island away from the cold, cruel world," Evan remarked.

"I guess some would," Fanny ruefully said. "But even *this* island isn't far enough. My greedy bastard of a father tells me I'll be more forgiving as I get older. So I don't want to get older. I don't want to be forgiving of corporate thugs who take away what rightfully belongs to people who struggle for simple necessities. Have you noticed that the lower class is expanding at an enormous rate?"

"When you say *expanding*, you don't mean getting fatter, right?" he asked.

"Right, moron."

"Well, obesity is *another* serious problem."

"I'd bet the house you've never volunteered at a food bank or donated blood."

"Ding ding ding!" Evan shouted. "We have a winner here!"

"I once donated so much blood that I passed out and was rushed to the damn hospital. One of the damn nurses actually recognized me from the time I overdosed on valium and vitriol and damn near exploded."

"Damn," Evan muttered.

Soon after the sky became a dark ceiling dotted with stars, Fanny felt a deep sleep approaching, but she continued to chat about her unique view of the world. She actually nodded off in the middle of a sentence.

The following morning, Fanny awakened with the sun and watched Evan as he dreamed, changing expressions every few seconds. She was so entertained that she couldn't help giggling. She also couldn't help noticing he had thick, beautiful lips some of her female acquaintances would pay good money for. Very gently, she placed her opened hand over his face, an inch away. She could feel his breathing on her fingertips and the warmth of home on the palm of her hand. When he began to stir, she swiftly backed away.

"Good morning," he mumbled as he opened an eye.

"Hello," she responded

"Are we still stranded?" he asked, yawning.

"Stranded and starving," she announced with cheer.

Evan lifted the top half of his body and looked out to the sea. Then he looked at Fanny. Then, in a very slow double-take, he looked back at the sea. "Is it my imagination or is there a boat out there?"

"I think there is," Fanny said. "But it's too far away. We wouldn't be able to get its attention."

Evan nodded in agreement. "How about breakfast?" he asked. "Should we go to the farmer's market and get some fresh fruit?"

"You are truly twisted."

"And you're brutally honest. I never met anybody like you."

"I'm honest about things people don't *want* me to be honest about."

"But they need to know about these things," Evan said. "You have to make them listen. That's your gift."

"Gift or curse?" she asked.

"Gift," he stated with conviction. "I wish I could be more like you, but right now I need to pee." He jumped up and jogged to the sea. Fanny watched him and she was strangely content. Evan was so simple, concerned with simple, basic activities like eating and urinating. Refreshingly optimistic, he exuded a childlike charm that Fanny hadn't noticed until that morning.

When he was finished, he splashed cold water on his face. "Fanny!" he shouted with excitement. She came rushing over. "It's definitely coming our way," Evan exclaimed. With its large sail, the boat was heading toward the island. Evan started screaming and flailing his arms. "Over here! We're here!"

"I think they see us," Fanny nonchalantly said. "Looks like we're going to be rescued."

"Promise me something," he said, looking her in the eye. "Let's go to the farmer's market next Sunday morning. Any farmer's market."

She chuckled. "Sure."

As the boat approached, the large sail came clearly into focus. "My God," Evan whispered.

"My God," Fanny repeated.

"I can't believe my eyes," Evan said with disbelief. "Is it what I think it is?"

"I think so," she said, stunned.

"A floating Starbucks."

"A fucking floating Starbucks."

The recognizable logo appeared boldly on the large sail. A swarthy barista was busy at the cappuccino machine while a grinning guy in an apron steered the vessel. As the boat was docking, the barista shouted to the castaways. "Can I start a beverage for you?"

"Tall non-fat latte," Fanny shouted back.

"Mocha cappuccino," Evan yelled. "Venti." Heart racing, he stepped toward the sailboat, clutching Fanny's warm, welcoming hand.

The Gift Shop

James Tadd Adcox

i.

We burnt down the gift shop, but they built it again. After that, when we got too near, we could hear it breathing, see its walls expand and contract.

ii.

In the gift shop we found a book of little-known facts about Einstein, such as: near the end of his life he began to wear an infinite number of wristwatches, each stopped at a different time. Such as: he spent hours every morning on his hair to achieve exactly the effect he wanted, then, when he was satisfied, he would scruff it up into the mess we recognize from his pictures. "The important thing," someone once told me, "is to show time who's boss."

iii.

"Will you love me when my breasts sag down to my thighs?" Janie asks me. "Will you love me when you have to press back the wrinkled skin to see my eyes? Will you love me when my teeth are sparse and translucent? When my knees no longer bend? When my mouth is brown and creased? When the fire is exhausted from my loins?"

iv.

The gift shop is attached to a museum containing a number of impossible objects. These include a dictionary that defines each word by a list of things the word is not, a vacuum cleaner that powers itself entirely through its own suction, and a young girl, alive, growing from the trunk of a tree. In the gift shop each of these is reproduced in miniature. Janie, her back to the salesclerk, slips a lighter shaped like the museum into her pocket, a gift for me.

v.

A couple in the far corner of the gift shop is having a quiet but intense conversation. "Are those going to be the last words you speak to me? Think carefully. Are those going to be the words you remember?" And, "Two things. One, you're not getting my daughter. Two, I don't want you even touching my daughter." Thanks to the gift shop's perfectly engineered acoustics, everyone present can hear this.

vi.

Janie keeps trying to ask the salesclerk for things the gift shop might not have. "Hairbrushes?" The salesclerk produces a hairbrush. "Prescription eyeglasses?" He sits her down in a chair to test her vision, then presents her with a selection of frames. "Plaster molds of human teeth?" Etc. He never smiles at any of her requests, only rushes to present her with whatever she's asked for.

vii.

I pick a fight with the salesclerk. "Where do you get off," I say. And, "You clearly think you can just cozy in, huh, Bub? Like it's as easy as that?" I never stand a chance. My lip's split, my eye's swelling before I can get away from him. Janie takes my hand and we race through the door. "I'm so proud of you," she says, smiling.

viii.

We escape to the courtyard behind the gift shop. Janie presses her sooty hands onto my white button-down shirt. We pass matches back and forth between our teeth. Security guards come to pull us apart. "We were young once, we understand," says one, cracking our heads together, spitting in our eyes, dragging us by the necks to the open trunk of their armored security car.

Trivial Pursuit

Jennifer Gigantino

Pravda is the Russian word for *truth*, and also the name of a Communist newspaper that ran from 1912 to 1991. *The father of the Jazz Age* was F. Scott Fitzgerald. I like kissing you as much as I have ever liked drinking. Women received the right to vote in 1920. Shirley Temple is the youngest person in *Who's Who*. Don Rickles was also known as *Mr. Warmth*. You leave your sweat on my sheets like a crime scene. Hamlet's sidekick, Horatio, is said to be the first recorded crime scene investigator. Area 51 is located in Nevada. The last Pony Express ride ended in Sacramento, California. Cindy Margolis is the most downloaded woman on the internet. Your name is my favorite blues song. U2's "Angel of Harlem" is about Billie Holiday. Leonard Cohen's "Chelsea Hotel #2" is about Janis Joplin. This poem is about you. Tristan Tzara invented Dada. The Eiffel Tower in Las Vegas is half-scale to the one in Paris. There is a motel room in my head with your name all over the wallpaper. You will recognize the shape of the chalk outline on the carpet. The dedication of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* reads *Once again, to Zelda*. This has no dedication, but it is, once again, to you.

What I Did Before I Set You on Fire: A Morality Tale in Reverse

Jennifer Gigantino

I watched you flinch. It
tasted like stale Fritos and cum.
I swallowed the laughter bubbling
into my throat like bile. I struck
a match. I aimed for your lips but
it fell onto your chest hair instead. I
tipped the bottle at an unlikely angle.
I uncorked the whiskey. I kissed you
until your lips turned into lightning
bolts. I tore off my mustache with a
badly timed flash of drama. I came
in through your bedroom window.
I left your girlfriend fellating security
guards in front of a jeering crowd.
I took her to the Museum of
Modern Art. I rented a tandem
bike and a bunch of wooden roses. I
glued a little fedora onto each
one. I bought a box of matches. I
disguised myself behind a black
mustache and a monocle. I
found out that love is
the lowest form
of arson.

Going the Way of the Dodo

Johnsie Noel

In thunderous folds a belch reverberates
down her rocky spine. We pitch
and lurch in face of the affront
beginning subtly enough with a tremor,

her expressive sigh releasing. Sated.
The last of our kind, evolving flightless
we remain on the ground, culling
through corpulent consumption.

Fatted pigs. Deforesting fruits
of our labors, we eat our young
and spit out seeds of climbing invaders
fair scented creepers blocking the sun.

Along highways and byways we lay
our wastes; discarded relics for some
posthumous diggers to extol what
we valued. Fossilized landfills of stuff,

hoarding tundra for the freeloading
homeless and throwaway pets, dotting the land-
scape, goading the patchwork dress
she struggles to keep seamed.

Stretching the natural fabric with
polyester food supplies, we outlive
our use by date and slowly grow old.
Fashioned resistance to die, playing God

we try to outrun the predator as she
swallows back tidal waves and yawns
in hurricanes, her menses of volcanic
eruptions birthing canals of cratered

mire tilling us over. Mother prepares
to bury yet another child and we grapple
to aid the Dodo, unable to unearth any
skeletal remains proving their existence.

Boredom Seeds Bred in 1990

Johnsie Noel

Pundits espouse on TV,
the principles of
an impoverished nation,
mocking the viewers
who miss that they are
the punch line, corpulent
in girth but not financial aptitude,
eating away their profits.

Margins of error
in this free-to-eat
Frito-Lay
on Mom's sofa all day.
Rest for a while -
(not awhile).
They've earned it! Somehow.
In 1990 the boredom seeds bred,
sowed nuts off the tree of apathy
and now lay down in its shadow -
Rip Van Winkle style.

Henpecked generations,
wasting in overgrown
lumbering, don't see the costs
as pages go unread
in exchange for channel
surfing Lazy-boy realities.
They rot atop an earth
refusing to reduce, reuse
recycle themselves into some
pulpy fiction.

Noxious Zygote

Johnsie Noel

I wasn't the twinkle
in my mother's eye, more
a lump on the tongue,
a taste-bud gone rogue,
a masticated wound gnawing
inside the mouth.

Her car at full throttle,
never out of first gear.
Five hundred miles
to go, back
in 1968.
Huffing and puffing.
He was there.
She was here.
Not near. Enough
was enough. Alone,
lonely, she would fix—that
cancer of the throat.
Scapegoating herself into
"I'm dying." Checking out
the rear-view mirror, looking
for signs of new growth,
missing the affliction
budding on the end
of her nose.
Liar. Liar. Pants on
fire. Better put out
that smoke.

She stood on the stoop
in a telling goodbye—seduction
of tongue on a nicotine roll.
Smoke rings hung like a halo.
He said she was his angel.
Together they conceived
a new lie.

Milk & Meat

Kirsty Logan

The sky is the colour of ointment and the sun is lost. They move away from the inside of bleach and sour breath, towards the outside of grass and air. The mother stumbles on the steps, once, almost; the daughter puts out a bruised and steadying hand, which the mother does not take. They walk down the spine-straight pathway.

- How long?
- They won't say.
- I just want to know how long, for your room...
- They won't *say*. They don't tell.

The mother tightens her jaw, looks at the sickly sky. The daughter imagines the shadows of their postures, the black shapes they would hide from the sun. The air chills them under their skin, an IV drip cramping cold into their veins. They feel a throb in their heads, quick and hot as a hectic fever. Their words feel heated on their tongues, warmed by fighting past the fever.

- How are the meals?
- I don't know.
- Didn't they read your list?
- Yes. No. I... they didn't say.

The path begins to turn, twisting like viscera between the ankles of the trees. The daughter glances back at the building and its cataract-white windows. The mother feels the pulse beating in her throat, her belly. She steps in time to the pulse, imagining its steady barbed wire scrawl on an ECG. The daughter walks slower, imagines the creeping drip from the bags of blood and saline, the flow through the plastic tubing, through the tubing of her body. The women move obediently along the twisting path, feet placed within the borders. The mother pauses, loses the beat of her stride, so that the daughter can draw level.

- Can I come back?
- It depends on what they say.
- I've told you, they won't say!
- Then you will have to stay, until they say...

They speak at once; stop; let the words fall. The silence is quick and sharp. The words cast shadows. Above them, low in the sky, the moon is coming to life. It

lights up nothing outside itself, a rich yellow glow like globules of fat. The mother's heart, the daughter's heart, beat together: louder than silence and louder than words.

- All they do is take from me. Blood and fluids, everything. They come in and take it, and I can't say anything, I can't even...
- They can't just take it. That blood belongs to you. You made that flesh. I made it.
- Then we could...
- We should...

The mother shifts her foot to run away down the obedient vein of the path and she stumbles, once, almost. The daughter puts out a bruised and steadying hand. The mother takes her daughter's hand and the women step off the path, their feet soft on the uneven grass. They walk wordlessly away from that red-white building, the blood and eyes of bodies, the chaotic snarls of flesh. The fat cold moon lights their way across the grass into the new night.

Candle Findings

KJ Hays

the embers fall
forming spectral

cocoons of blacker
dusts disclosing a

stupendous blip of
a difference barring

the thoughtless moths
blanketing their bods

in shiny curiosity, and
those that barely taste

this sleepwalk of glowing:
we record no writhing in

surprise as a pious clergy of
tongues wed them to agony

only the soft hiss of flames
skittering after each other

in fading reds granting a
final churlish indulgence

for these beings of kindling

Excerpt from Left Open Hell Window

KJ Hays

no joystick in this dim screen game
mashing forever at knees going badly
the man will not hop fireballs; never
mind the Sun slobbering corrosive jets
of light gnawing our youth clean off

the no gold coin poor slapping questions
from their neighbor's skulls with flyswatters
in the shape of prick "will fight for you" esquires
while the rich die alone over and over in their
mansions looking for communications major
waitresses to blow their extra cocaine lives
on like kids looking for secret nowhere levels
in the warmer sewer holes some call orifices

because when it comes to LIFE supply exceeds
demand
through windshields with old wingtips
through wrist veins with a sly syringe
through the trigger by pointer finger
through the cigarettes drag by drag
through the pills filling a popcorn tub
through the subway making a last stop
through the gentle scalpel of Dr. Botch

NOTHING will reverse the architecture of these our man maiden
meanings we waste our time on in tiny handfuls like shy flower girls
who will be bitter at the superficial in high school for a few years
until they meet a man who says that he used to hate the fake then
once upon a time he fucked Barbie, and they'll all laugh happily never

L

A G T

U H E R before leaving complaints in the suggestion
BOX of this poem:

The word "girl" jars. Use "cunts" or "twats" next time for us please.
We have a "that which was not meant to be" feel in the piece.
Replace us with that which did not happen. No, Thank You.
This poem might as well not end here...

after each cab riding round of fucks in the backseat of a hangover driving
past another kiss goodbye to every barking dark dog at 3AM waking all the women
i loved from their emails, letters, vex messages designed to roll me out of bed the
day i passed out full of cashews i bought with the pornography writing money
OYSTERS and CHOCOLATE gave me for a story about a witch who enchant FUCKS

a

g u y T O deeeeeath as she dreams dreams of turning her back on all of the
wondrous ways there are to sin so Perfection can take her from behind like a
misshapen

c o m p l i m e n t

comparing one woman to another woman coming from
a man

dumb enough to bet on the horses

AT

the carousel and win

always

like the time i decided to start opening my white out PEN after opening up my
FORTUNE cookies

because

there was a time when Fate played a play within a
play on me until

it got bored, left me to my own devices at this
terminal point of knowing

my becoming will never stop at meant to be

sometimes death must tap the ash

sometimes death must let it fall in the ash

tray of a data entry worker who becomes

so dead inside she develops an emoticon

smile in an effort to reconnect with every UNITED STATES GRASS LEAVES

citizen telling themselves hahaha we'll

be the first to take that vow of silence when we're free as the words we used
in the falling out we had with our mothers the day we were born on

the front porch of a house where only friends come to solicit money in the form

of human ads we prepare for by inviting them to come over on bloody SUNDAY

when the newspaper will be thick enough to hold the news we are about

to break

by letter opener

hidden under the

WELCOME MAT

where a letter waits for me
from a WRITERS' WORKSHOP
i applied to that had a typo on
its
website:

Applicants who opt to download and mail the Graduate Application Form (see below for more information), should send a copy of this application to the Workshop along with their other application [sic] materials full of personal statements such as:

poetry is the ill conceived touching of another who knows and likes it still

i'm tapping into your GAME OVER music too

The Middleman

Lydia Unsworth

1.

His job is neither pleasant nor interesting and yet he has been at it for centuries. It requires of him no legwork, no brainpower, is not backbreaking. His job is to hold two parallel lines in place.

He holds his own well. And in this climate, in this time, that is something to be proud of. He has strong hands with a firm grip, and rarely a day goes by that somebody doesn't comment on the condition of his knuckles. He stands in position, between two straight lines, projecting them into space.

His hands are tied, bound to the tall tubular cylinders. His hands are bringing bread into his life. They are earning the crust. They are holding on to the handlebars of life.

He has been at this job for centuries and he is neither interesting nor pleasant. He has no need to grasp the intricacies of social engagement; he is never tagged at the end of questions. He simply stands between two tall poles and keeps them apart by the required distance, while ignoring the flinches and protests of his muscles. He does not think about anything other than retaining the complete parallelism of the two poles. While on duty, he does not once think about his personal life. He likes to separate things.

He stands in the middle of these two pillars of purpose, never once reflecting on the years that are passing him by or the youth he looks set to waste. Centuries have flown already and the skin around his fingers seems to incline toward the ground rather than the sky. His arms extend at ninety-degree angles to the bulk of his person. His hands are closed into patient fists.

The two straight lines on either side of him do grant him a sense of perspective. He sees where the earth ends and what a long way it is until the sky begins.

He has not taken a sick day since he started here, way back before time had any memory, and he has never taken annual leave. The weekends fall into a grey rust of unproductivity, his knuckles ache. His hands are not used to these more primitive forms; to the pointing, grabbing, the lying open at 'rest'. To him, after so many years of employment, these are not natural shapes. His empty hands close into tight fists, and he feels that hole in the middle where the pole should be.

He feels nothing more intensely than this space.

2.

The two straight lines are very important. They keep the foundations of the world in place by providing the public with a visual reminder of order. They obey

strict mathematical law and function directly in compliance with the rules and restrictions sent down from the offices of Physics. Their design has been greatly improved over the years and different ways of presenting them have been piloted and scrapped.

A move to more adventurous depictions of reality, such as sine, cosine and tangent, were given a trial run in several states but have since been deemed inefficient. Rain would collect in the troughs, and the peaks became scratched and dirtied by the wheels of rebellious skateboarders. Two lines that converged to a point but never met was very popular a few millenia ago until, with the budget cuts in the Representations of Truth department, it became impossible to continue sending someone up there to check on the validity of the asymptote.

Several other innovative displays came and went until it was finally decided that two parallel lines was the best direction for this venture. It was simple. It was effective. It was less is more. It had a simple formula. And best of all, it was cheap! It required just one dedicated employee.

3.

This is how the middleman came into being, hoisted up from the depths of parental squalor into a career with one sure-fire (and straightforward) path to the top.

The chosen middleman needed training from an early age, in what promised to be a rigorous and intensive regime. Due to the prestige of the role, interest was enormous. Parents offered their strongest babies. Fathers hacked away at the dates of birth certificates, trying to make their stupid boor of a premature son a little more eligible, a little too late. Young lovers stopped using protection in the hope that conception would be immediate, and with the ridiculous illusion that in nine months time the position would still be vacant.

Children were taken away from their progenitors, snapped right out of a hereditary string. The skyline of the city became filled with lines, the tops of which could be seen over estates of childless chimneys, reminding parents of the sacrifices necessary for a successful and meaningful career. Lines of two metres in height and not more than five centimetres in diameter trailed off into the distance like the remains of lonely wind-farms. They would sway with all the uncertainty of young arms and volatile careers.

One by one, the children were broken in. Shaped and caressed into a form of the company's choosing. Until an arm gave way, until a more urgent desire settled in. The spoiled children would be sent back home, weeping like little stolen babies. Poles between their legs, arm muscles pounding. Most went on to work in the security sector. A few dealt in haulage and removals. This became a city of strong-armed offspring, yet all but two of those arms harboured a biting sense of failure that served to haunt their carriers for the rest of their days.

4.

The middleman has since grown into his posture. He has been carefully manipulated like young vines. There was never any doubt. There was never any sense of dissatisfaction. The middleman grew up tall and straight with his arms outstretched, never needing to trouble himself with what most of life means.

There are a number of words (a vast number, an uncountable number, a number for which no sheet of paper or program file is large enough, a number that only exists in the deepest chambers of scientists' brains to be discussed infrequently in hushed tones as they near the end of their careers when they have nothing else to lose and everything to gain), there are a number of words which the middleman has found no use for, which he has never reiterated nor had explained. For example, the middleman cannot define one single word ending in '-ness', having never had need, during his perpetual pole holding, for the subtleties of abstract nouns.

The man has grown into his lines, has grown strong and long and parallel. Lines have grown into the man's skin, into his hands, into palms not fit for reading. Grass grows around the man's feet.

The earth sunk to make way for the middleman's comfort. The man grew into a small valley and from there he shoots his two perfectly balanced achievements, out and up past the unimpressive heights of buildings; and two straight lines, taller than the world itself, longer than the material expressly shipped in to make them, rise past the whines and grinds of ordinary folk, and on past the imperceptible size of the ether.

There are a number of words the man has never had use for. There are a number of times townsfolk have been and gone, trying to find common ground, trying to get a little closer. The man is admired: it isn't every day one gets the opportunity to hold two parallel lines in the correct position on behalf of society for several millennia. It isn't every day one is born at the right time, in the right place, with the right set of hands to really take one places. It isn't every day one gets the opportunity to give birth to a proud set of parents. Or to watch them fall away and still maintain the rigidity of mind, of the kind that only comes with purpose, to keep one's arms on the job at hand and continue holding two straight lines in place.

The man doesn't mind that these townsfolk come and go and that he doesn't really understand a word they are saying. He doesn't mind that their faces change and their skirts fall down and the cut of their lapels alters. It doesn't seem to worry him that they perform their madness and their praying and their carnal escapades before him. He doesn't understand the words they shout with their heads held high nor the ones they whisper breathily to one another. He doesn't understand this kneeling on the ground or that lying two by two and undulating. He doesn't understand the small ambition of using one's arms just to hold another body, a body that is already holding your body with its arms. Or that even smaller ambition of using one's hand to hold nothing more than one's other hand; a motion that immediately negates itself.

The man feels the two tall poles between his palms and fingers. He feels the perfect curve of their two lengths so aptly filling up all the necessary space in each

closed fist. He may not know words or understand superfluous movement, but he feels solid. He knows what an angle is. He knows he was built for this.

His veins are pumping simple blood up and down his pipelines. He is built of lines and angles. He is the sum of vertices and breadth and axes. In his perpendicular and completely equilateral existence, the space between his body and arms and the lines and the earth creates an undeniable quadrilateral.

He doesn't notice that the average annual rainfall is gradually decreasing. He doesn't notice that the words he has never had use for are becoming out of date.

The man doesn't notice the alarm clock go off to signal the start of his lunch break at the end of each new decade.

5.

This man is a fine example—unshiftable, unmoving—a fine example of dedication, of prowess. He ideally represents to us the promise of our efforts, the harvest that can be born of a century of sowing seeds.

This fine young man continues to brace the weather, continues to be strong and ageless. He continues to remind us all how we have failed ever so slightly, how we are all getting drunk on life and amounting to little more than nothing. Even when multiplied together.

He continues to remind us that we do not hold ourselves tall and proud, that we have bad posture, that we cannot think straight.

He stands long and hard between two parallel lines, kept at arm's length from two important momentous occasions. He stands firm and lifeless between two unforgettable points in history, two milestones imprinted into the hearts of the nation.

The man stands between two tall poles stretching to infinity: three parallel lines that will never meet.

Xarles, Xavier, Xenos

Matt Bell

And all around me, only disappointment: only my house, slowly sinking into the ever-muddying earth. Only my horses, my one remaining milk-cow, lying together upon their sides, moaning in the swamp of our fields. Only my crops, my husk-barren corn plants unable to grow past my kneecaps.

Only my son, with his gray skin and strange skull, his cleft-lipped voice, his useless hands making the arts and crafts his mother taught him as all around us our world sinks into an earth suddenly less solid, less able to keep us above its porous skin.

While I spend my days adding new supports to our house, burying new beams in search of solid ground, this son—this boy I no longer wish to claim—he makes portraits of his mother with the cheap watercolors we bought him as a child. He paints her eyes wrong, colors her hair black instead of blonde, and so every night I take away his papers and throw them into the puddle of our yard.

Every night, I tell him, Again you didn't paint her right.

I say, Nothing better to do all day, and still you can't remember your mother's face.

I say, All our house surrounded by this new swamp, this mad earth that swallowed our neighbors, that sucked deep your mother, when you would not set down your dolls to save her.

This world has taken everything from me, and still there is you, sitting here doing nothing, while I have to farm, to herd, to build the struts and floats keeping our house atop this shivering earth.

I say, What use is a son, if he is a son like you?

Oh, and the hurt in his eyes! So unfair he thinks me, so cruel! Perhaps so, but in no less measure than he deserves, when even after this speech he only puts away his paints to pick up his clay, ready to begin another set of misshapen family figurines, another pairing of plump mothers and tiny crack-chested fathers.

What tears when I smash them with my fist, when I crush their bodies upon our food-bare table!

What good tears, so that he might get them out, so that without them he might become the man I want him to be!

For another week, I come in from the fields each night to pull down his construction paper mobiles, to wreck his finger paintings, his collages cut from our family photo albums.

For another week, I indulge his teenage wastefulness, and then I say no more.

Then I say, Follow me.

With my rifle in my hands, I say this.

On our porch—warped atop this land of mud-paths and quick-muck—I put my hand on his shoulder.

I put my hand on his shoulder, and then I take it off.

I say, I have decided I would rather have no son than have you.

I say, I will give you a fifty-yard head start, and then I will shoot just once.

If you aren't killed, then good luck to you.

My sensitive son, always he cries! So unfair, he says. So wrong to do this to your own child, no matter what our differences, sending him out into a world unstable and wet, where who knows which paths might lead to safety, and which to sinking death?

I say, You don't know, but I do. I know which paths, because I have trodden them every day, growing what crops might grow, caring for what horse and cow might scrape by even now.

You have done none of these things, even when asked, even when I wished to teach you to be the man that I am, and so you do not know the world outside our walls, outside the confines of your stupid and strange head.

I say, I have never liked you. Not when you were a baby, and not now, when you are less than a man.

I say, I do not want to kill you, but I suppose I want a chance at it. Just to see what this thing I have dreamed for so long might feel like.

And then I kick him off the porch, and then I tell him to run.

I wait until he reaches the sycamore slanted at the edge of my once-yard, slanted as crooked as his own limping run, his body pulled this way and that by his heavy head, and then I raise the rifle.

I pull the trigger, glorious despite all this awful world left for me to live in all alone, and then I am no longer disappointed, for at least this moment: The short blaze of a muzzle flash, the uncertain flight of a bullet, the razor-edge of chance between one bad outcome and another.

Marginalia concerning a postmodern idiomatic Klondike

Michael Loughrey

So as not be tempted to lie through them, I have sold my gold teeth to a milkman who rolls cigarettes with one hand, using his other hand to bid at auction for broken timepieces.

Like gold, lies are precious, and as such are subject to hoarding. Like gold, lies are secreted in vaults such as the mouth. Like gold, lies are malleable and can be moulded and shaped into all manner of forms, including being hammered into micron-thin leaves which turn to dust if you so much as breathe on them. The milkman paid me with a promise and a Pepsodent smile, making off on a black mare after advising me to call my mother and the emergency services. Telephonic communication is a hoax. Hello? Ma? You're six feet under? No matter. I thought you oughta be the first to know; I've sold my teeth, and my right ear is on fire.

Interlocution contaminated by subterfuge can lead to spontaneous combustion of the ear. Telephonic communication is a hoax. Akin to Chinese restaurants, where there is only one vast subterranean kitchen with a myriad of pneumatic conduits through which food is dispatched to eateries worldwide, telephonic communication is a hoax. Hello? Vivaldi dunked in molasses. Sinatra with extra cheese. Hello? Shanghai Diner? Sweet and sour mendacity is on the menu, right? Add a bucketload of dim sums to my equation. MIMIC clears its throat. Crackle of intergalactic static, a vocal data search. Antiquated, but what's an attosecond's delay between nonentities? How are you? Want flied lice? Me? I'm fine. Divorcees really make it. How about you? Spling lolls? Put you through to customer service? We're sorry, your call cannot be taken, the Justice Department is on hiatus. Perfect pitch. All the right quirks of pronunciation, patois, euphonic nuances, glottal stops, and lexical flavours-of-the-month. Hip-hop remix of mummified matriarch. Castrati chorus of chilled Fire Department. And standing before a vibrant flag that conceals shady obscenities, our sponsor mutters prayers. Please no need read fortune cookie, got plenty bad news. Want bill please now yes?

*

MIMIC gets on its feet to cut the rug. In its normal state—that's to say inside its bottle—the zoomorphic MIMIC resembles a comic-book Cro-Magnon dwarf. Released, the observer will note that it is double-jointed, endowed with a polymorphic physiognomy, kinetic hair, chameleon skin, hypnotic eyes and a forked tongue, MIMIC can transmute into one and all. I love you. Only through war can we achieve peace. The corporation regrets your dismissal, but will not tolerate your choice in neckties. Want flied lice? The cellphone melts. A glance in a passing

polished toecap reveals one ear, mutilated, spattered with globules of molten silicone chips and warped circuitry. From the phone's remains Vivaldi, Sinatra ... a cartoon voice squawks ... I lay my hands on you, you are dead meat. With extra pepperoni? Wires perpetually crossed. MIMIC does a persona shift. Solly, liss Chinese lestlaunt. Spling lolls? Clispy duck? I don't love you anymore. Pass me the hammer, for my lies are obese and impure. All major credit cards excepted. Our mechanic couldn't find anything wrong with your vehicle, but our resident gumshoe says your orientation predicament is because someone ingested your steering wheel. Found teethmarks on the gold vinyl dashboard. I'm really sorry about your ear. Maybe it's karma—that Van Gogh T-shirt you wear twenty-four-seven. For the record, I never lied. I merely dissembled the truth. That noise? Just my personal trainer doing push-ups in my back parlour. It—we—was all a terrible mistake. Shanghaied? Sweet and soured? We must do lunch. Gobble your gear lever?

*

Go forth as a panhandler and prospect for lies. Get blind drunk on distilled starry eye mucus and daydream as oldtimers spin yarns to moths orbiting a magic lantern. Drag your hangover to a bayou of a gender of your predilection, spit on your palms and reach for your pickaxe. A fine sieve is a vital piece of equipment. As is a pair of laboratory balanced scales. Sellotape your eyes shut and estimate the weight of your excavations. Not a bonanza of Klondike magnitude? Dig and pick until the tide runs red with gore and your head spins at 78 r.p.m. Vivatra. Sinaldi. You are in a queue and your call will soon be answered. We appreciate your custom.

Lies, like gold, are precious and are buried beneath layers of other material. Lies, like gold, get moulded into things they are not. Clispy duck? Once, before it got shanghaied, it had a head, beak and webbed feet, and beneath its delicate plumage beat a heart of pure gold.

Lies, like gold, can be forged for convenience. Wedding rings. A crucifix. A sarcophagus. Micron-thin sheets which turn to dust if you so much as breathe on them. Teeth.

So as not be tempted to lie through them, I have sold my gold teeth to a milkman who rolls cigarettes with one hand, using his other hand to bid at auction for broken timepieces.

Circus Cunt

Misti Rainwater-Lites

Walli was wallowing in the divine. Balmy April night with the windows open. Virgin Mary candle lit on top of the dresser she painted herself. Cerulean, her favorite color. Walli was buzzing from the vodka and orange juice and her astrology numerology poetry fix. Thank you, Linda Goodman. Thank you, *Gooberz. Love Signs. Star Signs.* Walli was an Aquarius with a Virgo moon and ascendant. Birth eight, name four. Doubly fucked. Hampton Dumbo, the man she loved and worshiped from afar, was a Leo with a Gemini moon. Walli didn't know Hampton's ascendant because she didn't know what time he was born and she was scared to ask him. There were boundaries and Walli tried to be respectful of those even though her flaky Gemini mother hadn't raised her to believe in boundaries or decor. So much pretension. Dance your disco sweat all over the world, stomp on the world's toes and show no motherfucking mercy.

And his name... obviously it was a name he had chosen for himself. Walli wanted to know the name his mommy had given Hampton at birth. She wanted to know his true surname. But she was too timid to ask. She was too afraid that asking such a common question would make her seem uncool, unhip. Retarded, maybe. For Hampton, Walli strived to always be intriguing, exciting, an agile mental gymnast bursting with intellectual delight. For Hampton Dumbo was the most brilliant, perverse, thrilling, original man Walli had ever met.

It all began with his poetry. Walli had first encountered Hampton's genius in his full-length poetry collection, *Unholy Dingle Dangle*. She'd found the self-published book at the bowling alley, of all places. Someone had left it on the bar. There was a wet ring on the cover from an icy glass of something soothing. A Whiskey Sour, most likely. Walli had sat there drinking numerous Mexican beers, reading Hampton's poems with wet panties and a singing heart. The poems throbbed with a heady blend of passion, cynicism, ebullience, humor, despair, rage and singularity. Hampton Dumbo was a man very much at home in his skin. The world was his playground and he was flicking cigarette butts, hawking loogies, pissing and puking with wild abandon. The man was marking his territory on planet Earth. Walli loved him at first read.

Walli took the book home and it became her Bible. She read *Unholy Dingle Dangle* when she was horny. She read it when she was depressed. She read it when she was restless. She read it when she was searching for some kind of answer. Eventually it occurred to Walli to do a Google search of Hampton Dumbo. He wasn't at MySpace. He wasn't at Facebook. He wasn't at Twitter. He didn't have a blog. He popped up in a clown sex forum, inexplicably. Walli read his posts with rabid fascination. He was a vociferous proponent of clown sex. He loved all kinds of sex but had a special place in his heart for sex that involved clown make-up and the traditional clown props. Hampton made it clear that he wanted to be the only clown

in the equation. He wanted to be the clown fucking the beautiful, glamorous trapeze star. Walli immediately ordered a trapeze artist costume, false eyelashes, glitter eye shadow and glittery pink lip gloss on eBay. She gussied herself up and took a ton of self-photos. She studied the photographs for hours until she decided on one she thought was hot enough to turn Mr. Dumbo on. Walli signed up for a user account at the forum and uploaded the hot trapeze artist self-photograph. The user name she chose for herself was Dolli Cumbeaux. Walli worked up her nerve and posted a comment on the board.

I've never had sex with a clown before. Well, only in my dreams, never in the waking world. I love the circus! I love poetry about cunnilingus. Got a plane to catch. Bye.

Walli disconnected her computer and paced around her small den. She would stay off the internet for the next week. She didn't want to appear too eager, too easy. If Hampton took the bait, Walli would make him dangle like a worm.

Hampton's looks were secondary, but Walli kept staring at his author picture on the back cover of *Unholy Dingle Dangle*. He was bald. He wore black sunglasses and a white wife-beater. He had colorful tattoo sleeves. He was smoking a cigarette in the photograph and holding a bottle of wine. In his thumbnail picture at the clown sex forum, Hampton wore a rainbow afro wig and clown make-up with a big red nose. That picture was stuck like Karo syrup in Walli's mind. What a delicious mindfuck of a man! Walli could not contain herself. She was giddy with hope, flushed with infatuation. Walli got in the battered Chevrolet pick-up truck she had inherited from her grandfather. "Universe! Give me a fucking sign!" Walli shouted. She turned on the radio. 'Obsession' by Human League was playing. Walli smiled huge and clapped her hands. *He will be obsessed with me! He will see my photograph, read my posting and be blown to smithereens! He wants to capture me! Like a wild butterfly! Oh GOD yes!*

When Walli returned to the clown sex forum she found a private message from Hampton. Her heart raced like a cheetah after its prey as she read Hampton's words.

Dear Miss Cumbeaux,

I've never had sex with a trapeze artist before. Your photograph beguiles and titillates me. Shit, it turns me on. That's what it does. I see by your profile information that you are located in Texas. I'm located in California. How is this going to work? I've written a poem or two about cunnilingus. Speaking of poetry... our last names rhyme! How about that. You're a mystery I would love to attempt to solve. I look forward to hearing from you when you return from your trip.

*Your Funny Valentine,
Hampton Dumbo*

That is how it began. They corresponded via the clown sex forum, then e-mail, then snail mail. Then they talked on the phone for hours at a time every week. The first time Walli heard Hampton's voice she had to come clean. She was convinced he was the love of her life and he had to know the truth. She told him about finding *Unholy Dingle Dangle* in a bar. She confessed the Googling of his name. She confessed everything. Hampton hung up on Walli. Walli burst into tears, turned off all the lights in her small house, played Billie Holiday on the stereo and got drunk on cheap Pinot Grigio. She sniffed some Pine-Sol and Kiwi Shoe Polish. She popped four Benadryl capsules. Just as she was dozing off on the nubby brown carpet in the dark den, Hampton called her back. He forgave her.

They had been corresponding and talking on the phone for four months now. Walli was ready to drive to California and consummate their love, but Hampton had reservations.

"Our love is so fucking fresh and fragile and fabulous. I'd hate to fuck it up," Hampton said over the phone late one night.

"Say that three times fast," Walli mumbled.

"Aren't you worried at all about the demystification process?" Hampton asked.

"No."

"No?"

"No, I'm horny for you. Goddamn it, man. Aren't you horny for me?"

"Of course I'm horny for you. I'm burning for you, baby. Like iguana guts on Arizona asphalt. But there's more to us than sexual attraction. Isn't there?"

"I'd say so, considering the fact that I fell for you on the basis of your poetry. I love your mind. I may or may not love your penis. The sex between us might suck. But I doubt it. Sex starts in the mind."

"I know, baby. I've just got a really shitty track record."

"So do I! This is different! This is huge! Gargantuan! Our stars are so aligned!"

"If you say so."

Walli closed the windows and blew out the candle. She got in bed. She tossed. She turned. She wanted to masturbate but decided against it. Walli wanted to save her orgasms for Hampton. She would drive to him tomorrow, just show up on his doorstep dressed to kill in her trapeze artist costume. Walli was ready for the circus. The circus of love. The circus of fuck. The circus of OH HELL YEAH. Hampton didn't have to be ready. She was ready enough for the both of them.

Particles

N. God Savage

When I listen to the rumble of my subatomic collisions, I know I must see inside my particles. So I pick and claw at them, crack each one open like an egg, and I want there to be oil within, a scratched blackboard, chalk, heat, panic. But instead I find them empty, stillborn, even air too big to fit. An aggregate of pinpricks, our pointillist bodies dissolve into a hollow haze. I try to multiply a vacuum by a vacuum, but a million holes is just a bigger hole. The mathematics of our innards becomes a null set; the giddy sickness as our cheeks touch a miracle.

Cover

Parker Tettleton

He brushes his teeth, pregnant from Chinese. Her legs the temple beneath a *Finding Nemo* blanket. A polka dot glass of water on the nightstand. He pulls on the sheet. He pulls farther.

I started to answer

Parker Tettleton

the question is unlivable lofty specimen nothing and everything still; the silence that will not leave the world

Next Door

Parker Tettleton

The man next door changed the channel. She stuck her tongue like a fork into my stomach. The skin shook a little. He marches in his sleep, she said. He changed it back.

One Way

Parker Tettleton

It cried. She held. He sped.

He blinked at *There's Only One Way to Reach* and put all to rest.

The Boss' Son

Robert Kloss

The boss held his newborn son, nude and dripping, to the lamplight. Like a sort of skinned squirrel, wrinkled, purple and red. The boss turned to his wife, pale and spent amidst the white sheets. "He's *much smaller* than I expected," the boss finally said.

Smoke uncoils out the factory's ten smoke stacks and the darkness spreads over the town. Children call their black sand castles "coal castles" and the black snow is "coal dust." Old men remind strangers on the sidewalk that nobody actually knows what it is.

The boss' son dreams of a heavily trained army of Pinkertons roaming the streets, brandishing *their sticks* in his name.

The boss' son wears white breeches and brandishes a riding crop like a General storming into battle. When enraged, the boss' son thrashes at the air with his crop, sometimes at the machinery, sometimes at Pembleton's face.

"If my wife died in childbirth then I would understand why I hate my son," the boss tells his *lover*.

Pembleton finally falls to the floor with a bloody face and blood pouring between his fingers. We don't hear his screams over the machinery nor can we hear the fearsome cry of the crop through the air, though we feel it in our marrow.

The boss sits in his office overlooking the work floors. He is a shadow, a voice, a name at the bottom of a new series of pay cuts. We have seen only his hand on a doorknob or the wisp of his white hair. His yellowed teeth we know from our dreams.

The boss' son sneers and spits at the floor where Pembleton writhes.

The boss keeps two farm boys stationed by his office door. He dresses them in navy blue uniforms like policemen and calls them Pinkertons to his son. As in, "if you ever come near my office, child, my Pinkertons will smash in your brow with their sticks."

The boss' son pulls us from the machines and lines us against the back alley walls to brow beat us again. The boss' son struts along our rows wagging a finger in the black smoky air. From the unattended machines, we know, pour hands and heads and legs of plastic infants. The limbs pile like bodies in a mass burial.

At night, the boss dreams of his son overthrowing him. He dreams of a Popular Uprising with his son at the fore. The boss smiles as he thinks of his son with friends now, friends who believe in him, friends who are willing to kill and die for him.

The boss' son dreams of Vietnam. Of orange smoke and burning children, their blackened skin crumpling to ash like paper on a lit cigarette. He dreams of strange animals emerging from the darkness with blood in their eyes. "I would kill

them," he tells the boss' lover, "with my Bowie knife. But afterward I would feel as if my brother had died."

The black smoke curling from the ten smoke stacks blots out the sun.

The boss curses the day he bought that pony. "It should be a horse by now," he thinks. Later, without warning, he tells a group of strangers at the polo grounds, "in fact, it should be dead."

On the street below, the townsfolk openly wonder *what all goes on up there*. "They make plastics... you know..." This satisfies nobody.

The boss' son calls us cowards for not overthrowing him. He tells us we will never have our precious higher wages or health care or forty-hour work weeks until we are not afraid of him, as true men are unafraid of other men. "Although you consider me a *mere boy*," he sneers. He tells us that had he been a *few years older* he would have fought in Vietnam. He tells us he is unafraid to die for his country.

"All my life I only smelled what you call the terrible noxious smell of molten plastic." In the mouths of children, beef jerky and Coors, cakes and marmalade taste of plastics.

The boss' son drank grape juice on a picnic cloth outspread on the green lawn, while the boss watched from the polo tournament. In white linens the boy seemed a puff of smoke. His little face smudged with juice, like a dog or a *heathen*. Right then, the boss considers his son proof of the absence of divine justice in the universe.

The boss' son challenges us to open combat in the break room. He thrashes us while we eat our Cheetos and drink our cola. He says, "you're just afraid because of *who my father is*. Well, he doesn't care if you fight me. He wants you to fight me. He's pitting you against me right now."

Pembleton's ghost howls and rattles his chains outside the boss' office. Seeking vengeance or recompense or some form of apology, he cannot say. Go in, we tell him. His Pinkertons can't hurt you anymore. But Pembleton's ghost lacks all courage.

The boss' son rides past the convenience store while we drink our Coors and eat our beef jerky on the curb. He is astride his white show pony. The riding crop wisps through the air and the pony neighs with delight. Steaming dung piles gather under the pony.

At night we smell of the black smoke and melted plastic and our sweat and the metaphoric blood on our hands because of Pembleton and the real blood from where the boss' son has nipped our ear lobes and our necks. The boss' son tells us from a cafeteria bench, as we punch our time cards, that if he were the boss he'd see us docked for a *most lackadaisical day of work*. Outside, the parking lot smells of his pony's dung and the flies fill the air with their buzzing.

The boss built his factory on the highest shoulder of the highest bluff overlooking the town. Rumors of why he chose this site are varied. Some consider the boss fearful of floodwaters. Others of Communist hoards. While others believe he considers himself one of the gods.

The boss' son pulls us aside and, over the roar of the machines, he quotes Chinese maxims or explains that he is reading a book about the construction of the Great Wall. He will say, "I feel... what's the word... at peace with Eastern

Philosophies. You may think it queer for a fellow, in a factory like this, surrounded by brutes and black smoke, to consider these weighty profundities. Perhaps you're right. But it's my Birth Right, isn't it?" Other times he will say, "I will go to a private college. Did you go to private college? Of course not."

We see Pembleton's ghost by the candy machine in the break room. He tells us his soul will remain tormented until he is freed. Pembleton's ghost has settled on *vengeance* as the means to freedom. He does not remember telling us these things already. He has forgotten some of our names, but won't admit it.

The boss wears tweed jackets and maroon slippers. The boss drinks too much whisky and claims, to his son, to have fought a brown bear to a draw.

The boss' son pulls us one by one into his office. He reads from a list of failed initiatives and missed quotas. When we yawn or stare off, the boss' son thrashes the Playboy '02 wall calendar with his crop. "Do you know who my father is?" he says, smirking coolly.

The limbs pile like bodies in a mass burial.

After Pembleton's funeral, we consider grabbing the boss' son in the parking lot. A burlap sack over his face. We will strip him naked and tie his wrists and ankles with cords. We will drive him to a public square. The public fountain bubbling behind us, we will thrash him with his crop until the stripes across his pale figure make him a sort of *bloody tiger*. We will snicker loud enough for him to know it is us, and then we will leave him mewing in his urine.

There is nothing but black smoke.

The boss dreams of his own bloody head on a pike.

We shy away at the last moment when Saunders admits losing the burlap sack.

The boss' son crouches behind his pony with his Bowie knife clenched between his teeth. His face is painted green and brown. He waits for the boss to emerge. "With or without his stooges," the boss' son has vowed.

The boss never emerges.

Used People

Roxane Gay

Isabelle decides to break up with her longtime boyfriend Oyster, who works in a pawnshop. She's tired of being put in the awkward position of having to deal with the discarded detritus from the lives of others. Oyster always gives her other people's belongings on special occasions and all the minor occasions in between. On their seventh anniversary, Oyster gives Isabelle a narrow gold band—simple but elegant. The ring still smells like its previous owner, holds a certain warmth. As Isabelle holds it, she sees clearly that the woman who wore it for 57 years was loved, though perhaps not as well as she would have liked. Oyster gives Isabelle this ring, says, in his heart, they are already married. He makes this gesture having avoided the marriage question for the entirety of their relationship. Isabelle snaps. She throws the ring in Oyster's face, then pauses, holding herself perfectly still as her anger cools into something she can manage. She stares right at Oyster and stands so close she can feel the nervous energy from his body against her skin. She presses her hand against his breastbone, firmly, knows she will miss the shape of his body beneath her hands. She says, "You listen to me, Onofredo Passiglia. You will regret the day you didn't do right by me." Isabelle takes a step back and points her long, perfectly manicured finger at Oyster. Her anger has grown so cold, so overwhelming that her entire body shakes. She curses Oyster, his mother, his seven aunts, five sisters and his grandmothers on both sides. She rifles through her purse for the picture of the two of them at Coney Island, a happier time, and marks a heavy red lipstick X over Oyster's likeness, then crumples the image of their smiling faces, arms wrapped around each other's waists, and crushes it beneath her boot. She spits on the floor and covers her ears while Oyster demands she lift the curse. He believes in that sort of thing.

Oyster believes in curses because of Vincent Franchetti. Upon discovering her husband's penchant for Staten Island whores, the wife of Oyster's neighbor, Vincent Franchetti, laid a curse on him so powerful his hair instantly became a shock of thin, brittle white. Vincent has also since walked with a stiff limp. Oyster has a head of thick, black hair. He is known for his hair. He spends a great deal of time maintaining the lustrous, enviable quality of his infamous hair. He grabs his head instinctively, tries to ignore the chill winding around his spine. The phone rings and he holds a hand up, a plea for a cessation of hostilities. Isabelle pauses, lets her indignation fester silently. It's Oyster's mother on the phone. The strangest thing has happened, she says. His sister Teresa has broken out in hives and, perhaps because of Teresa's fondness for drink, she is crying tears of red wine. Oyster needs to come home immediately to take his sister to the hospital, his mother says. As Isabelle leaves the pawnshop, Oyster's body is covered in a terrible sweat. There's a tightness in his heart. He finds it difficult to breathe.

Isabelle is no stranger to disappointment—she has only been with three men: two boys and one man, really. She lost her virginity to Rocco Santini when they were in the 10th grade at St. Margaret's. He always stared at her, smelled like sweet garbage on the New Jersey Turnpike and had a glandular problem. Isabelle would walk behind him in school and see tiny sweat creases on the back of his corduroys. When she asked Rocco about it, he instantly turned red and stammered, "It's my knees. They sweat." Isabelle thought about what Sister Mary Louise had told them in Catechism about charity and goodwill. She told Rocco she would be his girlfriend. They dated for a month and a half, had sex seventeen times and broke up in front of her locker minutes after Michael Bonaventura, who had perfect hair and manicured fingernails, asked her out. Sister Mary Louise's lesson was long forgotten. Isabelle and Michael Bonaventura didn't last long because he was largely uninterested in sex, but he introduced her to Oyster. Michael is now dating a man named Danté Contini, who is also Isabelle's mechanic. Isabelle still sees Rocco around the neighborhood once in a while. He works in his father's corner store and spends most of his time sitting behind the counter, his feet propped up, reading magazines. He still smells like sweet garbage and his knees sweat against the creases of his jeans. He pretends he doesn't know her.

When Isabelle tells her dearest friends, Maria Monteverde and Giovanna di Cosimo (also Isabelle's cousin), about the breakup, they laugh. Then they worry. They are sitting in the food court at the mall, keeping Giovanna company while she is on her break. Giovanna works at Dog Gone It, a hot dog restaurant carrying fifteen different kinds of hotdogs and sausages. Giovanna has to recite this fact when she greets a customer, so she prefers to work in the kitchen and take her chances with the hot grill even though she goes home on those nights smelling like pork and grease. The women are eating free hot dogs and sharing a large basket of French fries. Isabelle carefully lays out her rationale for dumping Oyster. Maria rolls her eyes because Isabelle is always reading self-help books and looking for answers in the wrong places. Maria is deeply religious. She believes that the Bible and the Ten Commandments provide the only answers a woman needs. She reminds herself to pray for Isabelle before she goes to bed. After twenty minutes of listening to Isabelle dissecting the minutia of her relationship with the pawnbroker, Giovanna pushes her chair away from the table and says she has to go back to work. Maria makes her excuses too. She presses her rosary into Isabelle's hands before she leaves. She knows Isabelle needs it more.

Frankie Fats asks Isabelle out on a date when he hears that she and Oyster have broken up. His last name is Fatone, but he goes by Fats because he is extraordinarily thin and has never been surrounded by original people. He has been called Frankie Fats since the seventh grade. Frankie sells cell phones from a kiosk in the same mall where Giovanna works. He finds out about the breakup while getting lunch from Dog Gone It. Giovanna recites her spiel about the fifteen different kinds of hotdogs and sausages and adds, "By the way, Oyster and Isabelle aren't together anymore," because she knows how Frankie feels. She grins at him as she hands him his food and Frankie's hands shake while he covers his hotdog with extra onions, relish and two thick lines of ketchup. When Isabelle agrees to go out with Frankie, he buys a new shirt. He brings a dozen pink carnations to their first date, dinner in

Manhattan, at a restaurant where the bill will cost nearly an entire week's pay. Isabelle is impressed by the gesture and beguiled by Frankie's awkward attempts at charm during dinner. He orders lobster and she orders a steak because she doesn't care for seafood now that she's no longer seeing Oyster. They drink a bottle of red wine and pretend to enjoy it, even though they both find the taste bitter. Isabelle forgets the flowers when they leave. Frankie's heart breaks a little.

On the train back to Queens, Frankie and Isabelle make out. He is a sloppy kisser but so is she. There are three other people on the car—an old man wearing a fedora and holding a newspaper in his lap and a young couple dressed from head to toe in black clothing; they all stare at Frankie and Isabelle kissing and groping and making wet, happy sounds. Frankie still lives with his mother, so they go to her apartment above her parents' garage. When Frankie tries to turn on the light, she tells him to leave it off. Her parents stay up late and will call if they see she's up and then her mom will want to have coffee and talk about her date and the last thing she wants to do, Isabelle says, is see her mother right now. She stares at Frankie, his narrow face and his wide gray eyes. She pulls her blouse over her head, lets it fall to the floor, walks toward her bedroom. She doesn't look back but she reaches behind her and Frankie leans into her hand. They stumble through the darkness until they fall on her bed. Just as they're about to have sex, when they're both naked and trembling beneath the covers, Frankie admits that he doesn't have a condom with him because he's not an optimist. Isabelle groans and fumbles in her nightstand, hoping Oyster has left an unused condom behind. When she finds one, she says *yes* under her breath. Frankie Fats comes as she tries to slide the condom on him and they are left paralyzed in that awkward moment, Frankie biting his lower lip to keep it from trembling.

Frankie offers to leave, would really prefer to skulk back to his mother's basement to have a stern conversation with his cock, but Isabelle kind of likes him. She tells him two things: he can call her Izzy and he can stay the night. He smiles and quickly falls asleep. Isabelle puts on Frankie's new shirt and goes to the bathroom where she washes her hands, then her face. She stares at the water as it disappears down the drain. She wants to look up and see Oyster standing behind her in the mirror. She wants to see his lazy smile, feel his lips on her shoulder, his hands on her waist, between her thighs. When she looks up, all Isabelle sees is herself. She looks away because she doesn't like what she sees. She shakes her head and returns to bed, where she tries to get comfortable with the sharp angles of Frankie's body taking up space that doesn't belong to him.

In the morning, after they successfully consummate their relationship, Frankie leaves. He has to open his kiosk. There are cell phones to sell. He sends Isabelle a text message telling her how much he likes her. When she wakes up and reads his message, she finds it charming, though she is underwhelmed by Frankie's eager but timid exertions. She takes one of Oyster's t-shirts into the backyard, digs a shallow grave, spits in it and buries the shirt after inhaling deeply so she can better remember his scent.

Flush with the success of fornicating her way through the initial sorrow of breaking up with Oyster, Isabelle goes to his pawnshop and leans on the glass counter near the cash register because she knows it annoys him. She crosses one

foot over the other and presses her fingers against the glass, the oils creating random patterns. Oyster sits on a stool behind the counter, arms crossed over his chest. She pretends not to notice the muscles of his forearms. She has a weakness for a well-toned man. Oyster begs Isabelle to remove the matrilineal curse. His voice shakes as he makes his request. When the bell rings announcing a new customer, Oyster waves them away. He has to direct his full attention to the troubling matter at hand. He realizes that he should have never doubted his mother's assessment of Isabelle as a strange girl with a *Mal Occhio*, an evil eye, who should never be crossed. In the tense hours since the breakup and the foul curse, Oyster has spent most of his time in church or the hospital chapel, on his knees, praying that the women in his family come to no further harm until he can make things right.

Isabelle steps behind the counter and reaches into the case, pulling out a display of necklaces. She twirls a thick rope of gold around her finger and says, "You shouldn't worry so much about my curse, Onofredo. If I were you, I'd be worrying about the curses lingering in all these things that have been separated from their rightful owners." Oyster frowns. He hates when Isabelle uses his given name. "Everyone that comes into my shop gets a good fair price," he says, his face bright red. Isabelle laughs, traces the fine line of muscle along Oyster's forearm. She leans in and bites his cheek, enjoying the sensation of his flesh between her teeth. "Keep telling yourself that," she says. She spits on the floor again and leaves, her heart pounding painfully. She licks the ridges of her teeth, hoping to taste Oyster.

As he watches the door shut behind her, Oyster buries his face in his hands and wishes he had married Isabelle after she graduated from beauty school. He wishes he hadn't found her so beautiful when Michael Bonaventura introduced them. He wishes he hadn't been so cheap and had instead bought her a new diamond from one of the brokers he knows in Manhattan. Oyster keeps on wishing until the phone rings. It's his mother, on the verge of hysteria, telling him his aunts Alessandra and Anastasia, the twins, have been involved in an unfortunate incident at morning mass involving incense, an altar boy, and a young priest who has now locked himself in the rectory. Oyster's stomach churns. He promises his mother that he is on the way to the hospital. He wishes he had never met Isabelle di Cosimo.

That afternoon, Isabelle receives an increasingly urgent set of messages from Oyster, solicitous at first, then increasing degrees of irate. In the final message, Oyster's voice cracks as he details an incident involving his sister Gina (named after the Lollobrigida of the same name), a vacuum cleaner, and an unexplained water leak. Isabelle is at her salon, doing her mother's hair as she does every Saturday afternoon—wash, blow dry, curl. Her mother is irritated that her hair is taking so long because Isabelle has to stop every few minutes to press some buttons on her phone, once twice three times. Oyster calls her names that make her blush. When the messages finally become somewhat pathetic, she briefly considers relenting and removing her curse. Then she considers Oyster's disproportionate ratio of actions to words. She remembers the used necklace Oyster gave her for their third anniversary, and how the necklace's owner accused her of grave robbing when Isabelle was spotted wearing it at a local bar; how the woman, much larger than Isabelle, tore the necklace from her neck, leaving an angry red cut she nursed for weeks. Isabelle remembers the toaster Oyster gave her parents that only worked to

warm bread and never actually converted it into toast. She remembers the used exercise bike with the broken seat he gave her because he thought she would look even hotter if her ass was a little more toned. She yanks her mother's head back and brushes furiously.

Isabelle is also receiving text messages from Frankie Fats. She had nearly forgotten about their date and the awkward incident with the condom, followed by their vaguely satisfying sex that morning. She finds his messages equally troubling. He wants to see her again. He gets off work at seven. He wants to meet her parents. He says all the things that good Italian boys are supposed to say. While most women would find it endearing, the newness of Frankie is hard for her take—her body is plagued by the memory of the only man it has known for years. Frankie's overtures make her almost nostalgic for Oyster: his bulging physique, his ineptitude at navigating a relationship with a woman. Nonetheless, she can't help herself. She is still angry with the pawnbroker, so she agrees to meet with Frankie later that night after her parents have gone to bed. It's too soon to get serious, she tells him, but they can hang out in her apartment and get to know each other a little better (where "hangout" is "have sex" and "get to know each other" is "drink lots of wine, preferably from a box"). Frankie, so happy that Isabelle is even acknowledging his existence, is willing to agree to any set of conditions that will facilitate more time with her. This time, while Frankie is inside her, Isabelle squeezes her eyes so tightly her head starts to ring.

At mass the next morning, Isabelle can feel Oyster glaring at her from his pew across the aisle and several rows ahead. Next to him, his aunts, the twins, are sitting perched on the edges of their seats, their heads wrapped in thick bands of gauze. Anastasia, younger by eleven minutes, has her arm in a sling. The twins are no longer identical. On the other side of them sit three of Oyster's five sisters. Teresa and Gina are nowhere to be found. The church is filled with a strange, burnt smell and the priest refuses to make eye contact with anyone. Oyster's mother sits in front of him. She too glares back at Isabella during appropriate pauses in the mass, her eyelids twitching furiously. Just before the homily, Oyster's mother points a bony finger at Isabella and makes a wide sweeping motion across her throat. Isabella gasps then reciprocates the gesture, adding her middle finger.

After mass, Isabelle convenes a panel with her friends. The three women, each bearing two bottles of wine, meet in Isabelle's apartment. The alcohol will be needed to assist the work ahead. Similar panels have been convened during crises over the years—when Maria contemplated entering the convent because she spent two weeks having sex with a nameless but stunning Italian girl with dark hair and blue eyes, while visiting her grandfather in Palermo; when Giovanna got pregnant and wasn't sure if the father was a black guy from Brooklyn or a Puerto Rican from Jersey; when Isabella thought Oyster was cheating on her with Maria LaGuardia, the girl his mother wished her son would marry. Isabelle quickly drinks two glasses of wine then explains the silent death threat she received in church. Maria fumbles in her purse for her new rosary beads, quickly rushing through a series of prayers to balance the sinful behavior that took place in the Lord's house.

"I don't know what to do," Isabelle says sadly, as she drains her first bottle of wine and then stares down the narrow green glass neck for answers or absolution.

"I can remove the curse, but then Oyster won't have a reason to think about me and his mother will get what she wants. I can refuse to remove the curse and live with the guilt if something truly terrible happens. The incident with The Twins was bad enough, but then there was the thing with his sister." Isabelle's cell phone rings and when she looks at the display she sighs, then shoves the phone under her thigh. She opens a second bottle of wine, drinks straight from the bottle and then cradles it in her arm like a baby. "And of course, there's Frankie Fats, who doesn't understand what's really going on."

Maria performs two signs of the cross in rapid succession. "What are you doing with that poor boy?" she asks, then brings two fingers to her lips and shakes her head. "Don't answer that question."

Hours later, Isabelle, Giovanna, and Maria are slumped together on the floor. Little has been resolved, but Isabelle is comforted by the presence of her best friends and their unwavering support in the wake of her inability to effectively manage her personal life. She goes to the bathroom and splashes some water on her face, scribbles a note that she sticks to Maria's chest, and then walks slowly, ignoring the throbbing beneath her skull, to Oyster's pawnshop. She tries to reconcile herself with being in love with a pawnbroker: a man who deals in the broken lives of others, who has no respect for another man's treasures and is only concerned with the cents on a given dollar.

When she arrives at the pawnshop, Isabelle sees Oyster sitting on a stool behind the counter tinkering with some kind of electronic device, his long dark hair falling into his face. His beard is longer than usual, unkempt, and he looks tired. For a moment, Isabelle feels like the viscera binding her heart might come loose. She knocks on the glass door. When Oyster looks up she stares at him until he stands and slowly makes his way toward her.

Inside, Isabelle sits on the counter next to Oyster's workspace, one leg crossed over the other. He stands in front of her, his arms wrapped tightly over his chest. She gently traces his forearm muscle. "I deserve new things," she says.

Oyster nods. He is willing to concede most anything to succeed in encouraging Isabelle to lift the curse she has thrown so effectively. He thinks about his mother and his aunts and his sisters and cousins and all the women he has ever known, who are now depending on him to do the right thing. He thinks about the statue of Saint Monica, the patron saint of mothers, buried in his mother's backyard, and how that gesture hasn't helped—just that afternoon his mother had been attacked by a swarm of dragonflies appearing out of nowhere. When he came upon this calamity, the dragonflies had somehow taken hold of his mother, as if to carry her away. He ran through the swarm, waving his arms wildly. He grabbed his mother around her waist and pulled her back to the ground. She whispered mournful things in Italian, spoke so quietly he could hardly understand her. Any time he let go of his mother she started to drift upward, so Oyster filled her pockets with gold coins until he could come up with a better solution.

In his pawnshop, Oyster takes a deep breath and holds Isabelle's hands in his. He explains that he hates how people bring him their used things, items containing everything that has ever gone wrong in their lives, how they expect him to make it all better. Oyster tells Isabelle how every moment with her, even when she makes

him crazy, feels new and clean and free from all the sorrows of the world. He says that he doesn't know how to talk to her about this kind of stuff, so instead he gives her things like Mrs. Costella's wedding ring, which she sold to Oyster after her husband of 57 years passed away because she could no longer bear to see the ring on her finger when she woke up alone each morning. Oyster says it wasn't about giving her something used but, rather, giving her something with an interesting history.

"I slept with someone else," Isabelle says quietly, studying Oyster. "It meant nothing and I'm sorry for it." He clenches his jaw and the muscles in his forearms ripple. She says, "I'm used now. Maybe you'll love me better."

Oyster tries to clear his throat—something large and bitter is lodged there. "Please don't do that again. I will love you as best I can."

Isabelle smiles, though she is filled with something like sadness. Suddenly, she wants to take back every cross thing she ever said to or about Onofredo "Oyster" Passiglia. She lifts the curse, even though she doesn't really believe in such things. She apologizes for her rash behavior in recent days, though when Oyster tells her what has befallen his mother, she is secretly thrilled. Isabelle also wishes she could undo the things she did with Frankie Fats; she doesn't want to know his intimate failings, and regrets breaking his heart by getting back together with Oyster. In a few days, Frankie Fats will have an unfortunate encounter with Oyster's right fist, and will then fall in love with Maria because she is a good girl who won't break his heart—until she does when she decides to return to Palermo to find the stunning Italian girl with dark hair and blue eyes who she always remembered abidingly, fondly.

Sometimes, the poem has a tenuous hold on memory. And sanity.

Troy Urquhart

I will not go mad while writing
this poem I will not go mad while
writing this poem I will not go
mad while writing this poem
I will not go

The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum, a confirm'd case

even when I write the words

Father.

Rage.

Memory.

Sometimes a poem begins as a memory
you'd rather not have.

the cool pine presses against your back / you clutch knees to chest / one-sided
shouting tears of rage / frustration / short-sleeved blue pajamas a race car on
the front / it is summer / the room is warm / you shake bite your lower lip /
not wanting to be found.

Or

A wrenching metallic sound.

A terrific crash echoes.

A front door slams.

An engine starts.

A family van drives away.

Father, why hast thou forsaken me?

A quiet uncertainty that
hangs in the air
until he hears the door
opening. The boy's eyes
wide with panic.

Or sometimes a poem begins,
You were sitting on the porch / when the car pulled up in the drive

And then it ends,
something spent that can't be bought back.

Truth: My father was a teacher

You stand at the blackboard, daddy, / In the picture I have of you

and once on the back of a blackboard
that leaned against the wall of my room
no doubt a remnant of his classroom
I crawled behind and wrote in lip balm

My dad is mean.

over and over and over and over
my mother found it and
understood.

Sometimes, a confession.

Troy Urquhart

*This hour I tell things in confidence;
I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.*

William Carlos Williams might begin

*This is just to say
I have eaten / the plums*

But we might just as easily begin

*This is just to say
I lied and said / I heard the voices*

When really I didn't.

In a dream I had I was afraid but told you anyway
the thing I am about to tell you now. / I am afraid.
But sometimes there is a sort of pleasure in fear.

Here's something true:

When I was thirteen, a searing ache
filled my gut. It escaped medical diagnosis.
I missed school. I drank chalk and lay
very still while they photographed
my stomach. An IV dripped
radioactive dye while I lay
on an X-ray table. It tasted
like a cheap spoon. I collected
urine in a gallon jug. I gave
blood. And more.

I still don't know if the pain was real.
Most of the time, I suspect
it wasn't.

This is just to say
Forgive me

**Sometimes, there are things so horrible no
poem can contain them.**

Troy Urquhart

I can write the words

Swastika.

Genocide.

Rape.

but there is no poetry
in them.

Contributors' biographies

Amber Sparks is 5'3", with teeth and hair and skin. She sometimes thinks she would have made a great chorus girl, especially in one of those Busby Berkeley movies where you didn't have to dance well, just twirl a parasol and show some leg. She lives in Washington, D.C. and blogs at <http://www.ambernoellesparks.com>.

Audra Puchalski is in Buenos Aires, listening to the cuchillero's funny little flute trills on her second good hair day in a row.

Autumn Humphrey is in voluntary bondage at a factory not far from here, where the sound of the machines is click-clickety-click and everything else is silent.

When **Brian Le Lay** was in kindergarten, he told the teacher that he had a twin brother buried in his backyard. He and his buried brother blog at <http://conceiveyourself.blogspot.com/>

David Peak lives in a castle in the Carpathians, where he looks after a large family of wolves. At night he haunts the woods, whispering long sentences filled with dead words. He blogs at <http://davidpeak.blogspot.com>.

Finnegan Flawnt is a fictitious writer and purveyor of fine podcasts, who lives under Milk Wood with two females and a bad conscience. Though he is a staunch supporter of Stravinsky against Schoenberg, he does believe in the elimination of conscious will in art and writing. In this spirit, the 11 pieces of "Rites of Spring" hang together like a weak resolve to write on a spring morning after a long, arduous winter. Finnegan flaunts it when he's got it, in all seasons, at <http://flawnt.me/>.

Garrett Socol thinks there should be a law that prohibits lyricists from rhyming "sorrow" and "tomorrow" in any song ever again.

James Tadd Adcox is the editor of Artifice Magazine: <http://www.artificemag.com>. He lives in Chicago.

Jennifer Gigantino is a hypothetical marina trench explorer, performance (and otherwise) poet, and experimental filmmaker. She sometimes tours the country as one-half of the performance poetry duo The Pincushion Orchestra, and won the 2009 Viscera Award as one-half of the film production duo No-Penis Productions. She enjoys bad whiskey, good footnotes, and inappropriate children's books. She has never been in the Navy.

Johnsie Noel is a North Carolina based writer, with a penchant for writing that is metaphorically metaphysical, makes her manically moody, casts slant-ways

shadows on the sublime or silly, and tries to nail human conditions within the flora and fauna of life. She's loved more pets than people, and her best work to date is her daughter. Her published and forthcoming work appears in Metazen, PANK, Referential Magazine, The Legendary, Picfic, The Shine Journal, FlashFire500 and Emerald Tales. In her spare time, Johnsie Noel trains in equestrian Dressage.

A recent article in The New Yorker said that **Kirsty Logan** has too many books. Kirsty likes coffee cupcakes and sticking pins in maps, and she has a semicolon tattooed on her toe. Say hello at <http://kirstylogan.com>.

KJ Hays lives in America with his dog, Mr. Bear. He is a very interesting, tall man.

Lydia Unsworth is 28, and from Manchester in the UK. She studied art, but liked writing about it better. She often runs away to foreign countries, gets disillusioned and comes home again. She is currently studying Maths, which is probably a reaction against something. She writes at <http://gettingoverthemoon.blogspot.com>.

Matt Bell is the author of How They Were Found, forthcoming from Keyhole Press in October 2010. His fiction has been selected for Best American Mystery Stories 2010 and Best American Fantasy 2. He is also the editor of The Collagist and of Dzanc's Best of the Web series. Find him online at <http://www.mdbell.com>.

Before becoming a recluse in an undisclosed rural location, **Michael Loughrey** lived in Paris, New York and Los Angeles. His writing has appeared in Word Riot, 3:AM Magazine, Hobart and many other fine publications. For the past two consecutive years, his short stories have been included in the Million Writers most notable awards.

Misti Rainwater-Lites has a sloppy mouth, but don't get your hopes up. The kitchen is closed. Read her at <http://ubiquitousdandelion.blogspot.com>.

N. God Savage lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland. His writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from, The Catalonian Review, Word Riot and Mud Luscious. Find him at <http://www.godsavage.com>.

Parker Tettleton is an English major at Kennesaw State University. He plays online Scrabble far too often and loves having shortish hair for the first time in thirty-six months. His work is featured in or forthcoming from Right Hand Pointing, The Chimaera, Short, Fast, and Deadly and elimae, among others. He blogs at <http://parker-augustlight.blogspot.com/>.

Robert Kloss generally wrote this story with scissors and tape. More stuff can be found here: <http://rkbirdsofprey.blogspot.com/>.

Roxane Gay's writing appears here and there. She is the co-editor of PANK. She is trying to finish her dissertation in the next three weeks. She is online at <http://www.roxanegay.com>.

Troy Urquhart lives in a quaint central Florida town and teaches writing and American literature at Montverde Academy, an independent international boarding school. He is over thirty (some would say considerably so), but he can still hear the high-pitched noises that his students swear are inaudible to people over thirty. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in journals including PANK Magazine, The Corduroy Mtn., and Willows Wept Review. His first chapbook, titled *Springtime Sea Bathing*, was published by Greying Ghost Press in 2010. You can contact him online at <http://www.troyurquhart.com>.

Forthcoming



“My loathings are simple: stupidity, oppression, crime, cruelty, soft music.”

The eighth issue of > kill author, named after Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), will be published during the first half of August. Read our guidelines and submit your work to us now.