


Towers



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Contents

ARTWORK

ALEXANDER AGHAYERE
Parts of Me / 26

MARIA DIMANSHTEIN
4 / 33

ELIZABETH GRAEHLING
Squidtestines / 34

VIRGINIA HOESLY
Mango the Emperor / 13

NICOLAS LEYBA
Albany Park/ 25

CATHERINE TROMP
Dark Magic / 27

LAUREN TROMP
Damsel in Distress / 8

SARA WILLADSEN
*Greater Than Less Than / Cover
Entry / 7

POETRY

PHILLIP BANION
Spectress / 28

GABRIELLE FISCHER
Silence on the Stoop / 24

NICOLAS LEYBA
“Cretan” / 12

JARED MOORE
Smoke Signals / 20

JESSICA TARRAGANO
February 17th, 2012 / 14

S. WILLIAMS
*Nightmare Mirror / 30

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

JESSICA VOLKENING
*Uprooted / 32

FICTION

REBEKAH CASTIELLO
My Hill of History / 9

ALAN HERRERA
Through the Lens / 2

GALEA RAIN
*Fallen / 16

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ALAN HERRERA

Through the Lens

AN unknown entity appears to an unsuspecting narrator who lives an ordinary life. Dim left me breathless when he first appeared in my snapshots. His blurred figure stood behind a warehouse's dirty glass pane. My hands trembled as I watched his sunken eyes lifelessly peer through the photograph's glossy surface. I threw the picture back into the liquid in front of me and shut my eyes. I tried to recall if I had in fact seen anyone when I trespassed onto the warehouse's grounds, but I only remembered a pressing eeriness of seclusion. I clenched my eyes tighter and recalled the exact moment I had taken the snapshot: I had turned the lens and focused on the window, but nothing out of the ordinary had stalked me then. I opened my eyes and examined the photograph again. Dim wavered under the fluid, haunting me with his devilish presence.

I removed my glasses and rubbed my eyes. I sighed and knocked on the side of my head.

"He's just a strange reflection from the window," I whispered to myself, but still I could not shake my unease.

I left my developing room and walked down the short hallway into the kitchen. I began to pour water into a glass when the hairs on the back of my neck shot straight up. Chills crept along my skin and I shivered irrepressibly. I veered around, spilled water on the floor in the process, and gawked at the living room. Everything remained the same: the couch unmoved atop a Persian rug; in the leftmost corner, the lamp's cord dangled in the wind from the open window; the coffee table in the very center cluttered with things I never bothered to clean up. When I looked at the television set, the glass of water slipped through my fingers and shattered. I stammered broken syllables when I spotted a lowly presence in the wide-screen reflection. No longer in a photograph, Dim sat in the couch's dark reflection, his face blacker than the blank screen.

Dim appeared on numerous occasions thereafter. When I brushed my teeth one morning, he stood behind me when I looked up at the mirror only to vanish when I turned to look. On the few times I slaved away in front of my computer, well past midnight, I caught glimpses of my eyes in the glare of the screen, except they weren't *my* eyes. Coal colored eyes, surrounded by purple bags and too many wrinkles, stared back at me.

During lunch one lonely Friday, I ate a turkey sandwich, washed it down with watered-down iced tea, and convinced my logic that Dim existed only as a figment of my imagination.

"I'm under a lot of stress," I told myself as I ignored his shadowy presence in a nearby mirror.

Just before Dim had appeared the first time, my boss had given me an extra workload. He had poked his head over my tiny cubicle and, never taking his eyes off a clipboard in his porky hands, said, "I need you to take three more assignments. Here are your subjects. I need clean, well-focused pictures. If you do not develop them flawlessly, you won't receive your pay."

I have yet to finish the third assignment, but I completed the first two in due time. Unfortunately, my boss sneered at the photographs and withheld my pay. Forced to tighten my day-to-day spending budget with superfluous pressure plaguing my conscious, sleeping became a difficult task. Fully awake at night, all the while averting the mirrors in my room, I thought about the job that ruled and changed my life. Friends I could not remember never called and colleagues I once barhopped with no longer sent invitations. Noah, too, had left me.

One month ago, before Noah vanished into a stormy night, he packed a small suitcase with books, his pictures frames (*without* our photographs), and all of the clothes in the bedroom closet. He had wanted to roll up the Persian rug we bought when we leased the apartment, which he had "bought with *my* money," but I wouldn't let him.

Mornings became hell. My alarm clock beeped incessantly, forced me awake, and I

grudgingly switched it off, solemnly remembering how Noah used to nudge me awake just before dawn. I trudged into the bathroom, brushed my teeth, and ignored Dim's malicious reflection that hovered above my shoulder. I took a quick shower, slipped on clothes, grabbed my camera, and left the soundless apartment.

I smirked at the overcast sky: it would do perfectly for my final assignment. I faced a broken wall in the slums of the city and inspected the multihued graffiti painted on the concrete. I paced left and right while I premeditated the outcome of my pictures. A few feet from the wall, I lifted my camera to my eyes and took the first snapshot. I walked past a river of rocks and balanced myself on the steel of the train tracks. The same wall, now yards away, gloomily faced me. The clouds above rolled by silently, billowing and gray. The lake, not too far off, swished quietly under the sway of the soft wind. I smiled. I was alone. But my smile rapidly disappeared when, once again, I peered through the camera lens and saw Dim.

I froze.

Minutes passed before I managed to cool my shock. He stood just under the red and orange of the graffiti. Unbothered by the wind, he contrasted the gray of the cold ether with his black aura, alienating any light. I adjusted the zoom of the camera and trained on his face. I took several snapshots. When I retracted the camera, he had vanished.

Just before bed I developed the photographs. Five pictures dangled on an overhead wire. Each one displayed Dim's face clearly. The chills in my veins stopped fifteen minutes after I memorized his face: cracked lips, blackened eyes, a pale face. His fractured skin reminded me of clay left out in the sun. I blinked a few times at the photographs. Dim's demonic features proved his existence.

Dim was real.

I dreamed of Noah that night. Last year's badly decorated Christmas tree blinked happily above presents that neither of us had been eager to unwrap. Two coffee mugs sat untouched on the coffee table. I sat on the couch toward Noah with my hand on his knee. He stared blankly at the phone, as if he waited for his father to call back and yell, "April Fool!"

Half an hour ago, Noah's father had informed him that his brother had passed away this morning.

"My mother denies it, but my father thinks it was suicide," Noah whispered. I bit my lip at the lack of inflection in his voice. "My brother often spoke of dying, but we all shrugged it off as his illness speaking. He was never quite right."

Noah took a deep breath and shut his eyes. He grinned sadly.

"You know what's odd? My father says that my brother recently talked about seeing a girl in the house. She followed my brother around, and she watched him through the living room mirrors. My father said he'd never

seen my little brother so scared."

I woke with a start. I sat straight up. Sweat dripped from my brow. Noah's face lingered in my mind, but fled when I spotted an opaque shadow in the corner of my room. My body trembled. I heard Dim's breaths – harsh, raspy sounds that chilled my blood. I swiftly clicked on my lamp, but, once again, he had disappeared.

My boss, who praised the grungy model in my photographs, handed me a paycheck at the end of the following workday. I used the money to buy a large bouquet of yellow roses. When I entered my mother's hospital room, her face glimmered with newfound joy. I held the roses close to her face. She cupped her frail hands over mine, closed her tired eyes, and sniffed slowly. She smiled the entire time I struggled to fit the bundle into a tiny vase.

Finally, I sat on a chair beside the white bed and looked upon my mother. She fondly eyed the yellow roses beside her.

"They're my favorite," she grinned.

"I know, mom."

"They smell just as I remember. And the way they brighten up the room! Just lovely."

"How are you, mom?"

She answered my ritual question in high spirits: "Splendid!" Although the hoarseness of her voice proved otherwise, she continued: "Though I do wish the nurse would let me watch more television. I've missed so many of my dramas."

"You know the deal, mom," I smiled slightly, "You can't strain your vision. It's bad

for your health."

"Oh I know," she said and waved her wrinkled hands dismissively, "I'm all about getting better, trust me. You know how badly I want to live to see that house you promised to buy me."

My mother grasped my hand with hers and gazed at me. I laughed quietly and looked upon her. Oxygen flowed through tubes attached to her nose. Her faded, unkempt hair needed days' of brushing. Her lips quivered at the ends, like smiling itself exhausted her.

"How are *you*, my dear?" she said affectionately. Her chestnut brown eyes twinkled radiantly. She wished to hear good things. She wished to feed off of positivity I might give her. Unfortunately, I could never lie to her, so I answered truthfully.

"Unwell."

"Why is that?" she responded with a tiny frown.

"I'm dissatisfied with my life."

My mother pursed her lips and gave my hand another squeeze.

"You're still young, honey. I don't think anyone your age is satisfied with their lives. You can only use what you have and make the best of it."

We remained silent for a while.

I cleared my throat and asked, "Are you scared, mom?"

"Of what, darling?"

"Dying."

"Oh heavens, no! I made my peace long ago. I'm quite lucky to have done so."

"So you were once frightened?"

"Yes, of course I was," she replied softly, "I was scared for so long. But not just of dying. I was scared of so many other things in my life. There was only one other thing that used to scare me as much as dying once did."

"What was it?"

"The fear of being a mother. Being pregnant with you terrified me. I had no idea how to *be* a mother."

"But I came out fine."

She smiled again before she coughed for a minute straight. "Yes, I suppose you did, even after the... oh, no, I shouldn't be telling you this."

I gave her a hard look. She combated it with an apologetic one.

"Oh all right," she said, "but please keep in mind how young I was. Six months before you were due, I decided I didn't want to keep you. I had invited a woman to my apartment who promised that a few combinations of her teas would do the job. Some sort of herbal medicine. So we had a tea party and she left to let the teas do their job.

"The next morning, just before the sun came up, I saw a child. No, I don't think I could call it a child. It was a tiny thing. It had miniscule arms and legs and tiny, closed eyes, and skin as white as snow, as if it were frozen. It stood in the dark doorway of my bedroom. I was so shocked I could not move. When the shadowy thing started to walk toward me, I flipped on the lights and it vanished!"

"I knew at once what the darkness was. I knew at once I didn't want my baby to die. I called an ambulance and they saved me. They saved you."

Not wanting to dwell on burdening thoughts, I asked my mother another question. "What about your fear of dying? How did you overcome that?"

"Overcome? I never used that word," she wiggled her finger at me, a sly smile on her face. "I said I made peace with it. Some nights I'm still scared of the new shadow that haunts the reflection in the television, but I know that until the darkness creeps closer, I have nothing to fear."

She fixed her eyes on something over my shoulder. I turned to look. The television hung in the corner behind me. I faced my mother again. She didn't look at the set. She looked below it, and she smiled.

"Mom?"

She squeezed my hand yet again and searched my eyes. After a moment, she sadly stated, "You have a darkness too."

I waited by the phone when I arrived home. For some reason, I knew I'd be getting the call. At nine, the hospital rang to inform me that my mother had died. I scribbled the name of local funeral homes they provided me with. I hung up, turned around, and confidently stared at the living room. I looked upon the television set without fear because I knew I wouldn't see Dim anymore.

The phone rang again. My speech froze when Noah's voice said, "Hello... Hello?"

I cleared my throat. "Yeah, it's me."

He stayed silent for a moment.

"Er... Are you there?"

"Yeah," he hesitated. "I'm here."

"Why are you calling?" I asked him.

"Weren't you the one who said it would be better if we didn't talk?"

"I know, I know," he said, "It's just..." he sighed. I remembered his long, sad sighs. "I went to the cemetery today to visit my little brother, and I felt like I might need someone to talk to. You were the one who was with me the day he died."

"Yeah, I remember that day."

He sighed once more and he stammered out a reply: "How are *you*?"

"My mother passed away today," I said casually.

"You're joking," he said, and when I didn't respond, he added, "Shit, I'm sorry. I had no idea. How are you managing?"

"I'm better than I thought I'd be.

Thanks for asking. I can't talk right now, though, but we can get together. If you want. Coffee tomorrow?"

"Sure."

I hung up the phone. A sly smile on my face, I walked to the couch, flipped it over, and gazed upon the extravagant Persian rug underneath. I rolled it up, prevented it from unraveling with crude duct tape, and propped it against the wall. I replaced the couch and sat down, glowing in my new living room.

Entry
SARA WILLADSEN



Damsel in Distress
LAUREN TROMP



REBEKAH CASTIELLO
My Hill of History

So much history lies within the layers of my aged being. I am a solemn hill. Long were the days of old when I used to hear people use my name but only to tell of a place of torment. A name long forgotten that it is heard only in the oldest of tales, a legend to all. I stand, my friends, as Golgotha's Hill. My cracked, old earth bears one story, just one. A story so important that my soil hungers for its recount, for from one day I became a hill of history.

The third of time was my birth. My Creator spoke me into existence. He made me of exquisite, ashen rock that when placed in the night, glowed with an unearthly hue. My soil is rich in minerals. Erected high above a town, I stood. Bequeathed with a mark, my Creator sanctified me from every other hill. A skull was etched into my rock of perfection. From whence came Golgotha's Hill or ancient Hebrew for "The Place of the Skull." I would not have guessed the importance to Him that I one day would be. Rounded I was shaped, and placed with very few trees as my companions. Luscious, olive green grass became my clothes, and soil sat as my skin. The few trees that were placed on me were of a deep mahogany hue. The delicate leaves turn a pale pink in spring, white during the heat of summer. My Creator orderly placed the small trees at the bottom of my body. Very few animals chose me as their earthly home, for I was bare of fruit trees and shelter, save the handful of trees at my base. Mortally, I lived on as peaceful and solid as any one hill could be. Then as time grew on, I became wearied of the unpretentious place around me. All I saw was the outskirts of a small town christened Jerusalem. It was a quaint town with buildings made from brick and mortar. It was clean, and had markets that sold every type of item available. The people of Jerusalem never came upon me except for the occasional meanderer. However, the day I hungered for a taste of flesh on my earth, I got it.

Humans and trees were the first sign of life I had felt hundreds of years. I lifted up my unaccustomed eyes and saw an overwhelming multitude of heated people shoving in order to gather around one man fastened to a cross. Made from the cruelest sort of tree, this cross ripped uneven grooves into my imperfect skin. In addition to the cross-bearer, two other men trudged behind with crosses also. However, the first man seemed to be all that mattered. I tried and hardened my spineless earth to give relief to the holders of the crosses. Nevertheless, I still smelt the stench of salty sweat on their saturated brows. I tasted the iron of blood as it dripped into my soil. As the ruthless men dug the unwieldy crosses into my earth, I felt myself break

with the yoke of pressure. I gave yield to the foreign matter. I hoped of rain, for then would my cracks be healed. Time rolled in sinister, black clouds. They began to choke the blue sky with their mountainous bodies of evil. My little trees quivered under the thunder that rumbled through the earth. The lightning pierced my skin and fed my soil with its minerals. But no rain came, however threatening the heavens appeared.

After three long suffering hours of endured pain on my parched and crack earth, I began to taste a sweet vinegar. I yielded up my roots to this taste that brought me nourishment. Never again did something as sweet as that touch the very tips of my surface. Soldiers offered the expiring man, who hung on the middle of the crosses, this sweet vinegar. He shockingly declined the offer. My roots questioned why this man, so dire for nourishment, refused so sweet of a drink. Soon the sky once again dealt out its aces.

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour” (Luke 23:44). I became as cold and unforgiving as the water of the very iciest of rains. It was then that my ears beheld a statement the man on the middle cross said which made me realise this event that is taking place was not an ordinary one. He cried with an agonizing voice that I heard only once before: my birth. The words spoken were Hebrew saying “Eloi, Eloi, lamasabachthani?” which echoes the words, “My God my God

why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). On that old rugged cross hung my Creator. I never envisioned myself to be the hill where my Creator bled and died, and for what? I didn’t understand. But I did know that for Him, I stood as a hill of kleos.

I then felt the hurried feet of restless men, lustful for pain, approach the brutal crosses. I heard the cry of agony as the merciless soldiers broke the two men’s legs as they hung there on their crosses of doom. They snapped their aching legs to hasten their last, dying breath, for the next day was the Sabbath, a day of rest and holiness. No man was ever to be found hanging on a cross of sin on this holy day. I then focused my eyes upon my dying Creator. Curiosity passed me as I watched the soldiers pass His body without crushing His bones. Instead, the one reached for a spear and slit open His side. Out poured the blood and water in twain. That was the sign of death taking its hold upon His body. I refused to swallow the precious blood of my Creator, and I closed up my thirsty earth to its seepage. Tears of women, lamenting His death, rolled into my soil. I drank their salty tears, and my earth became a haven for their weeping souls. They surely felt as wounded as I was honoured to see the death of our Creator on my land, once spoken into existence by Him. My smell was brought around by the calloused, rotting feet of men rushing to leave me. I felt the populace forsake me and melt away into the small city of Jerusalem. I began

to feel the ache of the holes where the three crosses tore into my earth. The two men on the outside had been lugged away. The man I heard called Joseph of Arimathaea, carried away the disfigured body of my Creator. He left me that day dead, but I knew I would see Him again.

After a few days’ time, the atmosphere still hung with an air of somberness. I skimmed the people and began to take notice of their condemning glances at my hill. Their looks spoke louder than words. Glances rebuked me as if I was at fault for the crucifixion of my Creator. I sealed my eyes to them and never felt disgrace. I remember the time I hungered for people to gaze at me: now I am made fat by their looks. Three days after the travesty, I began to hear tales of rumours pertaining to the death of my Creator. I gathered from the secreted whispers that my beloved Creator had risen from the dead. “Impossible” were the words spoken by the unbelievers and believers. However, I was there from the dawn of time and I knew the truth. I believed He rose again. Maybe they never knew a Creator can not be conquered by His creation.

On walks time, and slowly I became a hill of the common. Many people now stroll past me and are never tempted to take a second glance. I am just a sovereign, spoiled, old hill to them. Occasionally the common spectator lifts his watchful eyes upon my hill and absentmindedly says “Look at the skull

carved into the side of that hill, interesting.” Somehow they forget the meaning of Golgotha. There is a Book I heard speaks my name and tells this very story. Some say it is His Book. But I guess I shall find out one day why my Creator humbled Himself and died, and for what? But I live to serve Him, and until my time is done, to that I shall do. It is now some two thousand years since that crucial event took place on me. I still remember every detail of that day. Although man may never know what had happened on me many moons ago, it only gives me glory to know that I did indeed hold my Creator. That is my history.

Poetry
NICOLAS LEYBA
Cretan

the one eye ghastly stubble man gusts an uncanny whistle in seven offbeat caves,
enchanting the bottom dwellers to bring him salted foods and shells,
fish skeletons with indented grooves hang alongside him,
the sand still, is hot,
even when shaded,
ancient ruins bear him in mind,
for he is the son of the motherland,
father of a bastard; possessed by a dogs red eyes,
for he holds the devils DNA on his left hand,
for one day to answer and create,
a clone.

Mango the Emperor
VIRGINIA HOESLY



Poetry
JESSICA TARRAGANO
February 17th, 2012

Sometimes I think I can still hear you.
When I close my eyes, my lids tight, in a
jailed wrap, the lashes prickling my skin until
your voice, presses on them, pulling
them free, making me realize I could never hear
you again. You never liked it when I held on,
to what wasn't there.

I was in _____. Pulled under covers, in my
cocoon, a hard wired outer layer, that wove over night.
I heard the still hum of my phone

but I didn't want to move.

My breath was like the dish washer
singing the tune of the womb
a silent startle, and rustle
and back to the womb

I heard the phone again

but I didn't want to move from the womb.

(Pick it up, it's 9:30am—your sleeping too much)
I roll and tumble off the bed,
smack against the carpet, warm like my cocoon
and I look at
my phone.

Missed call
from ____

8:45am, 8:55am, 9:05am, 9:10am

My breath sank in, and swallowed back
down my lungs. Dry sticky breath, that
tangled in my throat, clotted my breathing,
clotting my mind,

How many times did ____ call?

My hand could not steady. Nobody calls four
times in a row, for every ten minutes if it wasn't
something bad. I didn't want to call back.

Hello? (my breath clotted)
my feet dragged out of the door, scratching the carpet
(my breath still not coming out)
(Hang up you don't want to hear this)
(clear your throat—unclot your lungs).

GALEA RAIN

Fallen

HE watched him just as she always had his whole life. He smiled in his sleep and she wondered what he was dreaming of. Lately he always smiled when he slept. She rolled over in the clouds and closed her own eyes. She never dreamed because she never slept. What was it like? What did he see that always made him smile? He only smiled when he slept. During the day his golden brown eyes always looked so sad and his lips never turned up. But after sleeping he always glowed and he woke up with deep forest green eyes. What was it about him that she couldn't stop thinking about him? He was just supposed to be her job but he was so much more than that to her.

She reopened her eyes and looked back at him. She wanted to be near him. Spreading her wings she dipped through the clouds and flew down to his side. She folded her wings as she sat on his bed and placed a luminescent hand upon his own. She wished she could feel the warmth of his skin. Many nights she sat by his side for hours and not once did he know. It shouldn't have mattered; guardian angels are just meant to protect and guide. However, there was something about this man that kept her intrigued, that made him more than just her duty.

He let out a sigh and rolled over into her. She was in his head again. Who was this mystery woman he dreamt about? Her long blonde tresses and grey eyes haunted his every dream. She seemed like a ghost but with a voice as sweet as honey. He floated among the clouds by her side as they talked about the world. He felt safe with her. Was it possible to fall in love with your dreams? She danced and the clouds danced with her covering her luminous skin like a dress.

"Are you real?" he asked her. She just nodded and pulled him into her arms. Ever so gently she brushed her lips against his. She tasted like sunshine, if tasting sunshine was even possible. Suddenly she faded away and he was left in darkness, an odd ringing resonating around him.

She flew off into the clouds as soon as he stirred from his sleep to answer the phone. It was sad to leave his side but guardian angels were not supposed to be seen. True they had ways to be unseen but they could never truly be invisible. Humans always talked about the sparkle of light or movement in their peripherals, what they were really seeing were their guardian angels. Often the angels were mistaken for ghosts since they moved about usually transparent, it was the closest they could be to invisible. Some humans had seen their angels under rare circumstances, usually after serious accidents or on their death beds. She wished she could reveal

herself to him and let him see her as she truly was.

Pain in his voice reached her ears and she focused her thoughts back to him. He had finished his phone conversation and was in the shower. She could tell by his defeated manor that the person on the phone had been his girlfriend. She

could protect him from harm but not a broken heart. Every time he talked to the girl they just ended up arguing. He was unhappy yet he kept trying to fix it. It brought tears to her eyes to see him so hurt. Anger suddenly flared in his golden eyes and he punched the shower wall. Blood started pouring down his knuckles. She flew down to him, keeping herself transparent, and wrapped her wings around him. He calmed down at her presence though he was unaware of it. Her wings guarded him and made him feel safe. A tear escaped her eyes as she began to heal his knuckles. She didn't understand how he made her feel this way. She wished she could hold him for real and not just surround him with comfort.

She knew she would need to stay close to him today; it was going to be one of those really bad days. She didn't know why but she felt it was going to be much worse than normal. She watched as he dried himself off and started to bandage his hand. His body intrigued her. She could tell he was strong but he had no muscular definition. She wanted so much to explore his body like many women

had done. She could see why women were drawn to him. She almost wished he wouldn't put on any clothes and she didn't quite know why she felt that way. Regrettably he did put on his clothes and she followed him as he got into his car. She already knew where he was

going and she was most displeased. Once again his phone

rang and she rolled her eyes as he answered it.

"What?" he answered obviously annoyed. "I'm already on my way so could you just relax. I'll get there when I get there...Why do you always have to argue with me? If you keep this up I'm just going to leave. I don't have to put up with this!"

He hung up and threw the phone in the passenger seat. It started to ring again. "Fuck!" he shouted. A shiver ran up her spine and into her wings. It was her senses telling her something bad was about to happen. In his anger he failed to notice the red light and went right into the middle of the intersection. He didn't even see the minivan coming at him. She flew in and tried to shield him from any life threatening damage. The impact of the van ended up crushing his legs and the seatbelt broke one of his ribs. Broken glass got into his arm but thankfully did not hit his arteries. She held his neck to cushion it from whiplash. When the cars stopped moving she flew to the nearest passerby and whispered into their ear to call an ambulance. While waiting for the ambulance to show up she tried to bring him

He felt safe with her. Was it possible to fall in love with your dreams?

to consciousness. The air smelled of blood and he was beaten pretty badly. She tried to ease some of his pain.

“My angel,” he whispered and she looked up at him. His dark forest green eyes were focused on her. In her rush to help him she had forgotten to stay unseen. She panicked but before she could do anything he spoke again. “You’re the one in my dreams. You are real.”

“Yes,” she answered back to him. Then it hit her, she was the one he dreamed of. There was no use lying to him now. He had to know the truth about her. “I am your guardian angel. I’m always watching you and trying to take care of you.”

“I think I’m in love with you. Is it even possible to be with an angel?”

She looked sadly into his eyes and shook her head. A trickle of blood poured down his forehead. Apparently at some point his head had been hit and she didn’t even realize it. He slowly closed his eyes. Sadness had filled them after she said she could not be with him. It made her chest ache.

The ambulance had finally arrived and she flew back to the clouds to watch him from afar. She had done what she could for the time being and she knew he would recover perfectly fine. His dark curls fell into his face. Suddenly she realized they had been green. When he looked at her his eyes were the forest green she always adored. She was the one he had been dreaming of. She

was the reason he woke up happy every day. He had said he loved her. What did that even mean?

The ache in her chest grew and suddenly she realized it was heartache. That couldn’t be possible. Angels didn’t have hearts, they didn’t need them. How was this possible? Perhaps it was because she loved him too. But angels couldn’t date humans. The pain worsened. She wished she could be at his side and kiss his lips. Then it happened. The memory of those forest green eyes and the words he whispered to her caused her to fall through the clouds. As she rapidly hurtled to Earth her wings were being ripped from her back. She felt as if she were splitting in between her legs. She screamed in agonizing pain. The ground rushed towards her. She hit it. She could barely move. What was left of her wings began to wither away. She sat covered in blood calling for help. Then she felt it. There was a rhythmic beating in her chest. She had a heartbeat. She was human. She smiled as she started to pass out from the loss of blood.

“I think I’m in love with you. Is it even possible to be with an angel?”

She woke up in a hospital bed from a very strange dream. She was heavily bandaged but still she sat up to look around. In the bed next to her lay a man with dark curls. He seemed rather familiar to her. She tried to think about where she had seen him before when she realized she had no idea who she was let alone where she was, besides from a

hospital. She had no memories. She didn’t even know why she was in the hospital. She tried to remember anything about her life but all she could think of was the strange dream she had woken from, a dream about angels. Pain shot through her body as she tried to move again and she let out a yelp. The sound seemed to wake up the man next to her as he let out a sigh and started to stir. He opened his eyes and turned to look at her. His eyes were a deep forest green. She froze. She knew those eyes from somewhere but she couldn’t remember where she had seen them. Realization crossed his face and he immediately sat up.

“It’s you!” he shouted. She stared at him blankly. “You are real! I can’t believe you’re actually here.”

With some effort he pulled himself into a wheelchair by his bed. His legs were in casts and his chest was bandaged. One of his hands was covered in bandages right at his knuckles as if he had punched something. Stitches covered his arms and side of his head and yet he still forced himself into the wheelchair and rolled over to her. He stared at her adoringly and she continued to be confused. He seemed even more familiar but she still couldn’t remember why.

“Now that you are here,” he whispered in her ear. “Maybe we can be together. I love you and I have since I first started dreaming about you.”

She looked taken aback and opened her mouth to protest the audacity of someone falling in love with a dream. Before she could

say a single word his lips were upon her own. Memories flew through her and she realized it was no dream she had woken from, it was her fall. She had been his guardian angel but she fell from heaven because she was in love with him. She could feel his warmth against her. His scent was intoxicating, his taste even more so. It was everything she had ever imagined and more.

“I love you too,” she whispered back when he finally pulled away.

“Do you have a name?” he asked. She had never really had a name before and she took a few moments to think about it before finally answering.

“Yes, it’s Angelica” she responded. He smiled and kissed her once more. As he kissed her she finally did something she had always wanted to do but had been unable to, she ran her fingers through his dark curls.

Poetry
JARED MOORE
Smoke Signals

Those gnarled branches reaching
up, up, brushing solid breath of time from the sky
with every twig quivering in the chill
reminds me of why fall is old
and full of transactions. It remains
simultaneously a separation, a bridge,
between life and our collective ruin; taste the scent
of berries, crisp cologne, gentle molding breath:
all inertia in the divide. In that dim place

I remember my grandfather approaching, lighting
the darkness with kerosene leaves. Each fall
was a similar ritual, a ceremony of color
of changing, and there, the same pile I used
for play yesterday, flying skyward
like little gasps flicking
the unsaid, unthought prayers that I
never knew I had to some arresting
God I had never considered
outside of picture-book stories—
These dramas tended to be full
of some tacit forgetfulness. Children are to be

seen, he would begin, and I was
a violation, often forgetting his law
by speaking into silence, by filling
the unmentionable space: I wondered
at the incense grasping towards the heaven
my grandfather tried building in his burning—
towards the heaven grandmother
climbed, and is waiting. Did he think a sacrifice
would gather her spirit, would push those
empty piano keys down into singing
again? And how numerous those veined reflections
of childhood, those little endings of innocence appeared
to the pale shroud covering
my child eyes widening, having never seen
or feared the affect time etched on the faces
of those who warred against beginnings.
I never understood the silence
as my grandfather's way of coping with the loss.

And wasn't I to follow him as he followed
 his? Time waited in our parted mouths, ashen, as star points
 flashed out and hid behind the curling
 smoke that tendrilled through us, filling our lungs
 and expelling in misted whispers,
 in futures laced with dead pasts, shaped
 into prayers we drenched with the heaviness of living, and the smoke
 only built, only grew, only shaped itself further
 to the memories we offered it. Burning our throats,
 it spoke in our stead, a rite of purification.

Alert as a priest, he directed the vigil,
 and it must have been with tired,

dreamy eyes that I imagined
 him hunched over, with the shape of a beam
 on his back to feed the flames
 he would sooner entrust to me.

We were alone, but the smoke hovered
 above, and though we were inarticulate to express it,
 it touched us; it smelled of everything the year
 couldn't place for us. It poured out all those pains
 we never made time for under the crackling

of our humanity. Somewhere, it made room
 for the shooting leaves of April
 we would sooner try to forget, surrounding, reminding
 us of all the life we try to handle
 when peering through darkness
 into the fury of that fire's light.

Now, imagine: children, a day and some miles
 away, playing tag around a Japanese maple, and one
 pauses to admire the lit sky filling the spaces
 between the golden leaves. The drifting smoke
 has pulled together. He says
 look, those clouds! and another, no, not clouds,
 a rocket! another chides, my guardian angel!
 and the girl tentatively mentions, my family, see them?,
 finding its replica having cascaded past heaven
 into reality—they see, gripping
 that rough bark, all of the possibilities
 that have yet to be offered.

It took prayers to render those
 shapes from smoke and ash: those children,
 having never gazed through God's eyes,
 will never realize that none of it is truly theirs.

GABRIELLE FISCHER
Silence on the Stoop

The engines of speeding cars hum through the windowpanes of this room,
And it's too late- or too early- to get out of bed, because the world
is hovered under blankets and heavy sleeping pills.
Tiptoeing across the floor, I am breaking the silence into pieces with each
and every step, and it's just shouting at me to go back to sleep.

Outside, the autumn air bites at my cheeks, but the sobering freshness overwhelms me.
And just as I wonder if you're worried, you join me on the stoop.
A silent smile.
A silent understanding.
You light a swisher that we share, and the hum of speeding
cars becomes our soundtrack for the night.

Just us, just silence, just being.

Albany Park
NICOLAS LEYBA



Parts of Me
ALEXANDER AGHAYERE



Dark Magic
CATHERINE TROMP



Poetry
PHILLIP BANION
Spectress

Echo, bellow
the spirit, I hear it
Reeling as I feel the blissful kiss
I reminisce of how
I miss her face, her warm embrace
how she caressed me and
blessed me with a divinely peaceful mind

But shaken, my tranquility taken
by her surreal visage, the appealing image of US
of who she used to be sets me free

Liberation, from her indignation
Her perpetual presence is in essence
my now tumultuously tortuous and seemingly infinite existence

Kneeling and dealing with the fact that she's changed
dementedly, mentally deranged, estranged from even her closest of friends
A trend that eludes and confused me

Sue me for I cherish the perished person, the lovely lady
now a scornful shady little girl, my blackened world
once a beacon now reeks of bitter scorn, a quitting torn
apart heart screaming for a second chance
entranced by sins I did not commit

With grit and the skin of my teeth
I sheathed my far too dated self hatred
and stood and could once again endure the demure lure
of inspired conspiring admirers

but the thoughts lingered, delicate wringing fingers
with a singing touch, now a stinging clutch that crushed me
and rushed me into the arms of other lovers
hoping to cope in those rope arms of partners I trusted too soon
swayed by swoons strewn across the air,
impaired and half hearted affairs, I dared
to push and shove to call them love

Gloves and masks tasked to hide the twisting
mistress in my mind, in the form of fists and smiles
all the while dreaming of my own lost Lenore
the one I hand once before, before she broke

Spoken tokens I still remember, smoldering embers of
long forgotten years that smear my queer ideas of love across the wall
Appalled by how you made me suffer, ache and shake
during dark and hopeless, cope-less nights

my bed a memento of what we had been through
and when you had bent to lustful thrusts of trust
and un-rusting connection that beckoned us
like destiny had sent for us and been for us
and asked for "when" from us
and we said "now and then for us, forever us!"

an endeavor, us
never again must
I see your face, but just a murky grimace in its place?
I'll save our pictures just in case.

S. WILLIAMS

Nightmare Mirror

Waking up in bitter cold
 Nightmare new but also old
 Sweat dripping and coating my skin
 These are things that make me grim

I get out of bed and start to the door
 But what I hear makes me stop short
 Down the hall is my mother and stepfather
 People who view me as a possession and bother

Howling like hyenas with laughter
 They speak loudly and banter
 Like a nimble cat I inch down the hall
 All the time I want to bawl

I look into the mirror
 There is something wrong with me
 There is something I can see in me
 There is something weird about me
 This isn't the person I should be
 I twist, I turn, I walk back and forth
 Trying to figure out the itch
 That I so badly want to ditch

Then I see it in my reflection
 The thing that gives me rejection
 My maleness down below
 The thing that brings me so low

Without thinking, I want it to go away
 Something to take it away
 Anything to take it away
 Why won't it go away

I tuck it in between my legs
 This starts to make me sway
 Not with guilt, not with shame
 It makes me sway with utter bliss
 This is how I should be
 This is me
 The way I am inside
 Yet the way that everyone is so blind

I am female, I am a girl
 I am your daughter; I am real to the world
 There never was a boy, why don't you see
 This is what makes me cry, this is my plea

JESSICA VOLKENING

Uprooted

WE raced down the trail as fast as our prepubescent legs would allow us. Playing in the woods was a lot like training for a sport. Our feet knew every bend and every obstacle on the trail. Our eyes were trained to look for roots attempting to burst out of the ground and grab our ankles and cobwebs reaching down from menacing low-hanging branches to tangle around our faces. Fatigue was catching up with us, but our opponents were on our heels. The birds were circling us; one dove down and came frighteningly close to our heads. The fort was just ahead! We sprinted the last forty feet and collapsed under the safety of our finely built stronghold.

There's not a memory I have of my childhood with Em that isn't out in those woods. What now seems like a relatively small piece of land, one acre, was vast unexplored territory when it was first introduced to us. We woke up early, packed a lunch, grabbed our shovels, and went to work. No day was the same, but every day was the same. The same trees, the same smell of the mustard weed, the same snaps of critters watching our daily progress, but different projects. We never stayed in a finished fort too long. The more area we covered, the more sanctuaries we could build. We would go back and reinforce old ones if needed, and try to camouflage them as best we could so no one but us could find them.

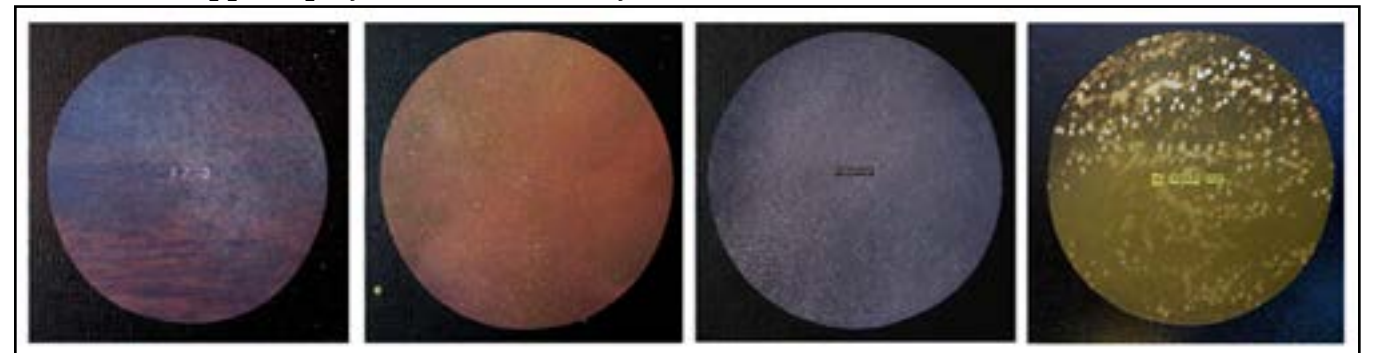
The first fort was known as the bouncer log. Yes, we were quite clever and original in our naming of things at seven and eight years old. A giant fallen oak tree marked the front of the fort. It had not been down for long because the inside had not yet started to rot. Because of this, we could continuously bounce on the giant V-ed branch suspended several feet above the ground. A lot of kids my age had trampolines; not many of them could say they had a massive bouncing log to play on. Behind what I thought was the greatest form of entertainment ever discovered was the rest of our haven. We didn't have to do too much work to it: the trees seemed to circle up around the cleared away brush, and the leaves on their branches overlapped to provide a canopy over our heads. We suspected deer probably frequented there and thought if it was good enough for them, it was certainly good enough for us. We used our shovels to clear away pricklers and dig random holes. We found small logs overgrown with leaves and used those to build a wall surrounding our area. Rarely would we cut off a branch or attempt to mangle a perfectly good tree. The woods was never unkind to us and we were adamant in returning the favor.

Em is older and therefore was always in charge of our missions. I'd like to think she

believed it was all real just as I did, and that she wasn't just taking advantage of the naivety of her younger, smaller cousin. When the evil lord of the vultures swooped down on us repeatedly, she covered my head to protect me from it. I was never truly scared of the birds, but I liked the feeling that came from the adventure too much to not play along. I had unlimited freedom of my imagination, but also grounded comfort. There was no reality, only bliss.

We rarely had an agenda until we actually got out into the woods. The last fort we ever built was by far our most impressive. My two other cousins, Erica and Michelle, had come over for the day and enjoyed playing in the woods just as much as Em and I did. A new tree had fallen sometime during the week and was an optimal base for a new fort. We ran home and got my mom to show her what had happened. She assessed the tree and helped us come up with a plan for a teepee fort. We hauled ten feet logs off the floor of the woods over to the fallen tree and braced them slanted up against the side. We continued this process until dusk and barely managed to finish. Our craftsmanship was superb because to this day I can still walk inside it. The next day we came back and camouflaged it with leaves and decided to reinforce the ceiling with bark after first laying down an old burlap bag we had found on one of our previous adventures. It was perfect.

Our breathing was intense, but eventually began to regulate. We rewarded our narrow escape by eating the sandwiches we had stashed at the fort earlier. Em picked leaves off the mustard weeds and we added them to our sandwiches. We pretended to know exactly what plant they were and that eating them connected us to the woods somehow. Actually I don't know that we had to pretend the latter. I've always felt pretty connected to the woods. It is still a sanctuary for me. It is a place that brings me serene happiness, but also a feeling of loss. I miss it. I miss the smell, the adventure, my childhood, my innocence. Stepping onto the trail restores all of that. For fifteen minutes I am running through the mustard weeds with Em thinking about nothing but the next turn. But as I take the final turn, and see the end of the trail ahead of me, I am tripped up by the roots of reality.



Squidtestines
ELIZABETH GRAEHLING

