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Towers

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Poetry

NOAH KOOB

Winter Campus Morning

Roaming frost fall,
romantic tramp,
sails, steered by Jack,
to the central hub of food and love
where Holmes welcomes me in

Hours spared this morning's due,
more than a few,
I sit
and watch
the window stage,
trees, barely blowing in Dickens' snow,
a woman's face across the road
looking through the library
back at me
smiles
waves a pleasantry,
and the gesture is returned.

The sand has still some grains to spare
so with slowing heart
I sink in chair
prone to disposal
trust in peers
and this place
feels like Holme.

A Gateway to Onward KATARZYNA WOZNIAK



KEVIN BARORO

In The Future

THE invention of Short-Range Teleportation (SRT), PseudoC™ Air and Space Travel, and to a lesser extent nuclear-powered energy drinks (Uraniomax: Live Fast; Die Young) have caused society's already fast pace to accelerate exponentially. Commutes are instantaneous. Internet speeds are uselessly fast. Life in this year of 2219 is demanding and furious—leaving zero time whatsoever for blowing up balloons.

It is in this dark, dystopian world where our story begins. More specifically, in the booming metropolis of Bill, Wyoming. Phil Zombie-Hunter Henderson (whose middle name did not appear on any recent official documents) was employed by Instab'loon Balloon Blowing Up Services Incorporated Inc. (whose CEO insisted that government paperwork is far too confusing these days), and was not happy.

Phil spent his days surrounded by four things: one was a set of two hundred and fifty-six different colors of ribbon on spools the size of toilet paper rolls; one was a pile of freshly shipped un-inflated rubber balloons, in a number of colors that can only be expressed in scientific notation; one was a nozzle extending from the ground which connected to the IBBUSI Inc. helium storage miles below the earth; the last was a number of people whom he was pretty sure were in charge of him, and was very sure were usually angry.

Phil wasn't the indignant type. For a long time the negative feedback did in fact cause him to try harder at work. Phil was a humble young bachelor of 24, and had only taken the job with the hope of it being a temporary fix three years ago when it became necessary, due to the increasingly low demand of talent in his field, pen-finger-spinning (the five-year college course was decidedly a regret of his). He didn't like trouble, and was quick to do what he was told if it afforded him some time when his eleven (an estimate) bosses would breathe down somebody else's back. But he had found recently that after tying countless balloons had caused him to lose most of feeling in the bottom halves of the first three fingers of both his hands and in his tongue, that his patience was reaching a final, immutable limit.

Phil struggled with this. Being an idealist, his assertion was that not every human being on the earth or elsewhere was deprived entirely of empathy or common sense—However, this was a Theory. A scientific Theory, more specifically, in that he didn't believe it possible to actually prove it and instead relied on vague evidence that pointed in that direction, such as the sheer amount of people that existed.

He was certainly right in one aspect of this Theory; there were a LOT of people. Between constantly increasing masculinity and sex in the media (Uraniomax: Get Buff; Get Women), and constantly increasing widespread Catholicism (by the mid-22nd century most forms of birth control had been canonized, however this was overruled at the Shareholder's Council in 2145 when Pope Carl realized that the action had significantly lowered the church's "market share"; his words, not mine. Take it up with His Hotliness [sic]), the world's population had quadrupled in a few hundred years. Cities became metropolises, metropolises became pan-metropolitan regions covering entire countries, and Shanghai had literally evolved into a living organism that eats planets. All this in mind, one could feel very small. Very small indeed.

Phil was a few inches taller than the average male, though, and tried very hard to be optimistic when he entered the massive IBBUSI Inc. warehouse. The building was shaped like a gigantic steel circus tent with a large tube dramatically winding from the top point into the ground, and was one of the more interesting features of the Bill Skyline. The floor consisted primarily of one floor of operations with a labyrinth of Privacy Cubicles (made of transparent plexiglass, for style). Each was equipped with the aforementioned supplies for blowing up balloons. Once it was filled and tied, a balloon would be abruptly released into the air, where it floated into the sloping top of the warehouse. A few hundred feet above

a crew of Pushers would direct this balloon and thousands of others slowly into the single pneumatic tube at the apex, where it would be sucked down into the earth to be sorted underground and distributed through a series of tubes (known by employees as "the internet") directly to Samantha Robinson's 6th birthday party.

"I can't do this forever," Phil murmured one day.

"True. Bound to die eventually," said Candice, the girl next to him.

This, in addition to the fact that his bosses specifically referred to the thin plexiglass walls as "Privacy Cubicles," was something he pondered the rest of the short work day (increasingly strict labor laws following a historic suit against the entire country by a woman who claimed the 40 hour work week caused her emotional damages that she estimated to translate monetarily into "like a million dollars"—which she won—reduced the work week to 25 hours). He didn't want to work in that place until he died. He didn't even want to work in that place for the rest of the week. Modern medicine had brought average life expectancy up to around 178 years, so that was a lot longer than he wanted to work there. Or anywhere. There was no hope for retirement in his current situation though. With the exorbitant tuition for a Liberal Arts school in 2213, at the rate he was going he wouldn't pay off his college student loans until he was 138.

“Don’t you still owe like seven trillion dollars from student loans?” Candice asked, interrupting Phil’s wallowing in despair.

“What? God no. Well, six trillion,” he said.

On his way home, Phil passed the same comics shop he passed every day. And like most days, he stared at it for a minute as he walked, and considered the fact that he had always meant to go in there. He didn’t read comics, but had a vague interest in eventually doing so. There were a lot of things he wanted to do. He told himself he was too busy, but he knew that weekly World of Warcraft raids didn’t really count as being “busy,” (WoW was still going strong after two centuries of development). He wasn’t sure where his time went. He knew there was a world out there that he wanted to explore. He read about it on blogs every day. The only “getting out” he did, actually, was this exact route home from work. He walked past the comic shop, past the 500-floor skyscraper department stores, under the overpass (that’s right, flying cars still had yet to be brought to the mass market), around the corner of the electronics shop displaying their new 5D TVs, past the local SRT (Short-Range Teleportation, remember?) station, and up the stairs to his apartment door. His roommate Mike was looking through the fridge.

“Hey, I made mojitos if you want one,” he said.

“Wh—Why?” said Phil.

“The better question is why you walk home from work every day. You look like you

could use a mojito.”

“I don’t know, I think being tired is supposed to be good for you or something.”

“That’s stupid. Last chance,” he said, picking up a glass and halfheartedly waving it at Phil.

“Aw, you already salted the rim for me...” He looked almost sentimental.

“What? No I didn’t—Ew,” Mike said as he tossed the glass into the open dish washer. “Alright, bye.”

“Where are you going?”

“Where are you staying?”

“Here, I guess?”

“Well there you go.” He walked out the door.

Phil sort of liked Mike. He was an interesting enough guy. They played games together and basked in their single-ness. He was pretty sure Mike was single.

He came back around 9 o’clock that night. At that point Phil had been thinking for a long time. He didn’t touch the TV, he didn’t touch his Xbox 1260, or even eat. He just got settled in a couch and started thinking. And when Phil thought, he thought. He thought about his career. He thought about cats. He thought about the number of girls he had spoken with in the past decade and he thought about how he could count that number on one hand. He thought about cats some more, and then he thought about just how few fingers he had on each hand.

“I’ve gotta quit my job, Mikey,” he said, his eyes unwavering from the wall in front of

him.

“Don’t you still owe like seven trillion dollars from student loans?”

“Six trillion. I’m a smart guy, aren’t I? Shouldn’t I be using that? I have talents, there are things I could be contributing to the world!”

“You can contribute shut up I’m watching TV to the world,” he said, picking up the remote.

As little sense as that made, after Mike said that Phil didn’t change much of anything. He stayed miserable for quite a while. But one day, the sky looked a little grayer than usual, the ozone looked a little less nonexistent, the birds were chirping instead of coughing, and Phil was in a good mood. And that was the morning he decided to walk into that comics shop.

“I can’t do this forever,” Phil murmured one day.

“True. Bound to die eventually,” said Candice, the girl next to him.

It was a wondrous place. Truly wondrous. Everywhere Phil looked, he saw nothing but paper. No screens, no flashing lights, nothing shouting at him about energy and electrolytes and guns and lifting weights. He picked up a comic book and flipped through it, to find that the drawings were entirely two-dimensional. In fact, they weren’t even in color.

“How quaint,” he said, smiling.

“Isn’t it magical?” Said a voice behind him. And before he could turn around, Phil

was in love with that voice. He almost shivered as it washed over him like a waterfall of fluffy towels and Aloe Vera. After that—well, you can fill in the rest, I imagine. She liked him too.

That day Phil quit his job. He walked right to the factory, politely informed the rest of the staff that they, too, should get out while they were still alive, and walked right back out. That was that, there was no turning back. But Phil felt more comfortable about life than he ever had. Things changed that day. Of course that goes without saying, but the changes were slightly more profound than a simple loss of income. Perspective, context. That was what made a difference in the following years. Six trillion dollars wasn’t that much in 2219. All things considered, he figured he’d be alright.

TANNER UNDERWOOD

Dark Road

I'm still waiting for that deer,
Running from the forest,
Doused in synaptic fear,
Following primal directives.

Running from the forest,
Survival gnaws and spits rotten piles
Following primal directives,
Elbowing room for fresh life.

Survival gnaws and spits rotten piles,
Lining highways with strewn mistakes
Elbowing room for fresh life
Through animals coincidentally crushed.

Lining highways with strewn mistakes,
Frightened parents frighten their children, I think,
Through animals coincidentally crushed,
And how tragedy is really the wrong pedal.

Frightened parents frighten their children, I think,
Playing with the brake, watching them cross,
And how tragedy is really the wrong pedal.
Physics don't care about feelings.

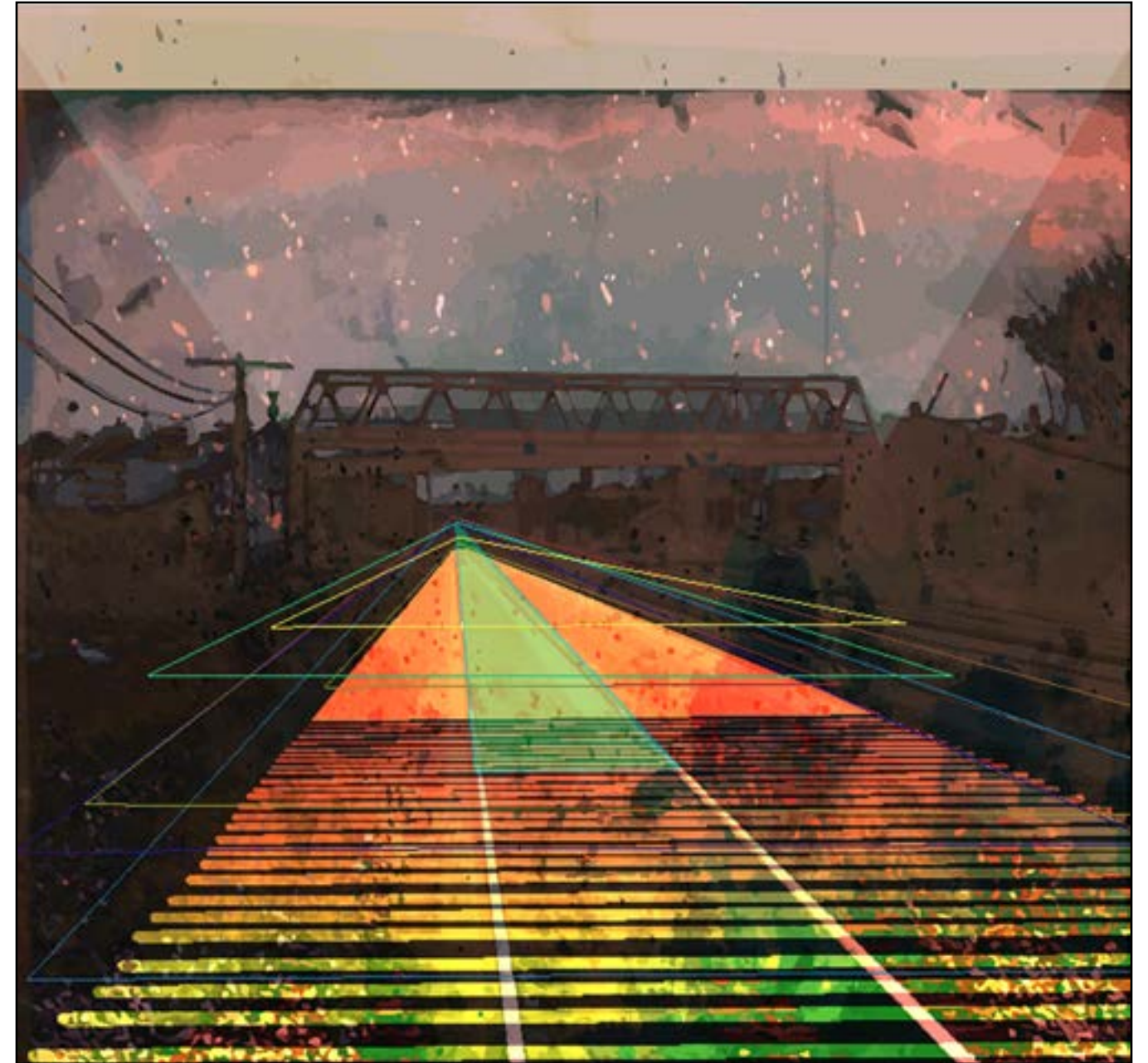
Playing with the brake, watching them cross,
I remember graveyard hillsides of nobodies.
Physics don't care about feelings.
Invisible hour-hand guillotines.

I remember graveyard hillsides of nobodies—
Bodies that were built to break.
Invisible hour-hand guillotines,
Planting paranoia in our thoughts.

Bodies that were built to break,
Running from the forest
Planting paranoia in our thoughts.
I'm still waiting for that deer.

Untitled #1

MICHELLE BORJON



Poetry
 JOSHUA NIXON
Polynesian Density

I hope you don't mind that I forgot how we met.
 I do remember standing in front of you
 last summer in your dorm room.

I dunk my head into my pool of memories and see the scene in two ways:

> Reseeing it directly through my eyes at the time:
 Just you being near me cultivated anxiety. I spoke
 as nervousness stokes my throat and moved as
 nervousness makes my hands unsure. My fear of
 your rejection floats on the top of my thoughts till
 our faces meet then tether. I nestle into that dip of
 skin by the clavicle sipping the curvature out our
 neck as your back points your body in agreement.

>> Watching it now from another realm:
 I look at ourselves from an arm's length
 away. All the items in the room are fuzzy
 archetypes but my focus is on us. Then
 my peripheral sees swirling. My view
 is pulled to something brewing above
 our heads. This bright, almost spherical
 density was living.

I could hear the spiritual underwire that held up all the material things around the room breathe.

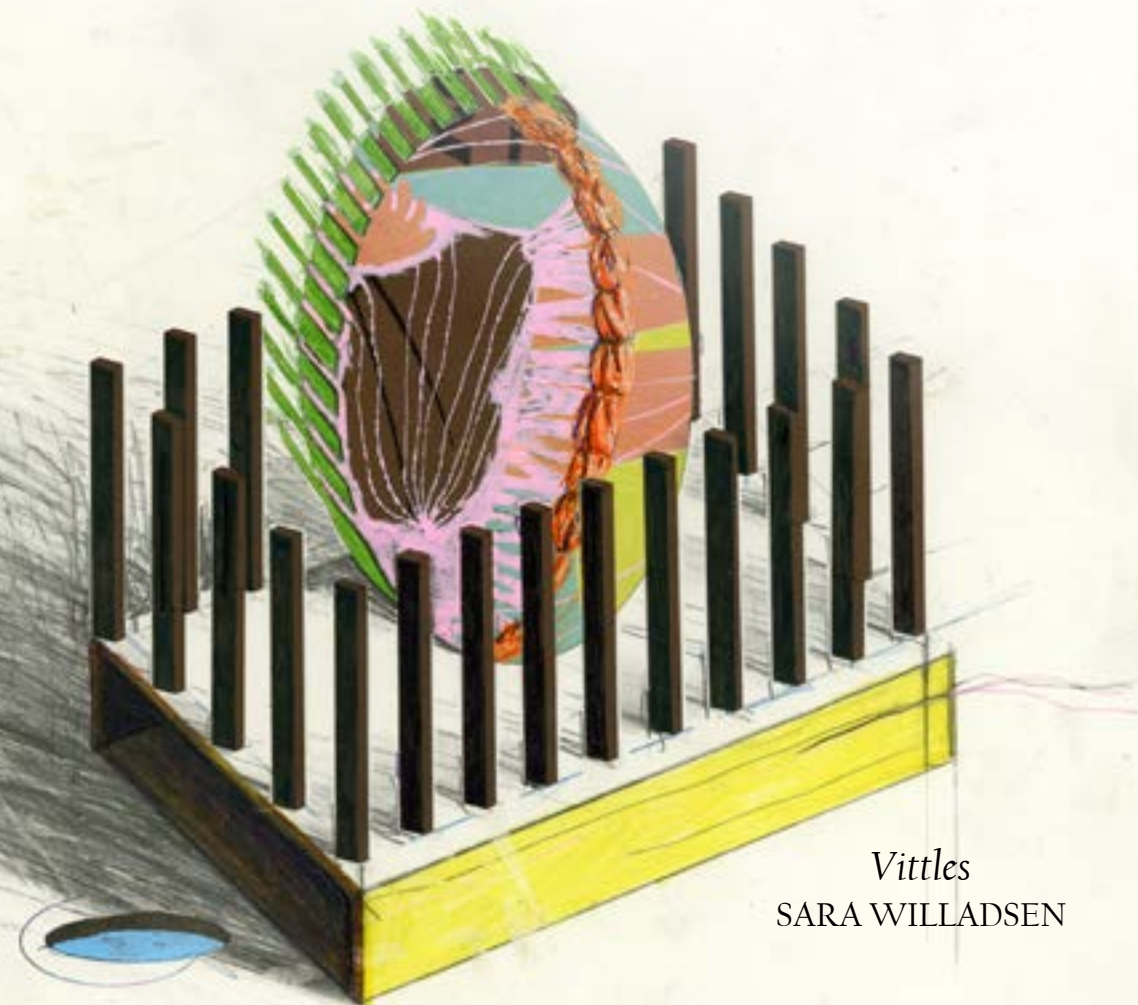
The breath was strong

each inhale made us and the items in the room cave inwardly
 each exhale cracked everything in the room

The inward tugs and cracking had musical synchronicity.
 The density above us began breathing more sharply and
 physical material flexed and crackled. Our bodies leave
 the floor and everything in the room cracks with
 a silent hiss.

we remained floating surrounded by the exposed underwire of our shared
 spiritual reality as it shone so brilliantly I almost didn't see our own
 spiritual frame as it became exposed as the cracked pieces of our
 bodies drift up into the density. I watched as the enormous entities that
 are crammed into our tiny bodies loosely unravel. A slice was taken from
 each entity and sucked into the density. I could see that our spiritual selves
 create the underwire that holds our physical world.

The density compressed and hardened and flowed away from its home above us to join the underwire.



Vittles
 SARA WILLADSEN

TANNER UNDERWOOD

A Timely Death

“How much longer do you think she has?” whispered Bethany.

“It can’t be much longer,” someone replied.

The wooden room was lit by a few hastily-placed candles. Lifeless pictures of the deceased gazed down from the splintered heights. Four people surrounded a worn bed. An old wooden cross hung above the cotton sheets.

Upon this bed lay the locus of all emotion and attention. Grandma Marge’s saggy body had been in this room for hours now. She took a tired breath and gazed at the life she had brought into the world: Bethany, her granddaughter; Jessica and Ben, her daughter and son-in-law; Sam, her other daughter. David, her husband, was there too. They had all been summoned from miles away to usher her out of this world. She was relieved they came. Making the trip from here to there is hard to do without company and Marge was terrified of dying alone.

The last three hours had been an exhausting gambit of waiting and silent weeping:

“She’s closing her eyes! Hold her hand!”

“I think her breathing is slowing. Has anyone forgotten to say anything?”

Young Bethany later recounted a dozen false alarms. The room itself belonged to a well-built cabin that had housed generations of Marge’s immediate family although it was only preserved by sentimental pleas to preserve it. The structure rested in a cornfield a few miles away from the city. Winter had been harsh and thick snow rested heavy everywhere. Inside it felt like summer.

Dave wrung his tired hands as he knelt at his wife’s bedside, ignoring how sore his knees had become. He knew Marge well enough to know that she was afraid. He had seen this look in her eyes before she gave birth to Jessica; her sunken face again flickered with an ill-suppressed fear of the unknown: an intercourse with the mystery of life.

Soon she will know if all those years in County Methodist paid off, thought Dave. Damn religion, getting her all riled up about some Divine Trillionaire’s club.

Marge looked as if nothing had happened to her. Indeed, nothing catastrophic or debilitating had happened to her. She simply felt that her time had come and so summoned her family. Their youngest son, Carl, had refused to come – said something about overtime and high blood pressure (“Mom, you know that I can barely leave my boys alone for three seconds”).

She was not the thin old woman like you see in the movies (Marge had been overweight since she

turned forty) but besides a few worn out parts, her body had treated her well. The white curls on her head hid a scar she had gotten from falling off of her family’s horse carriage back in the 20’s.

The memory of her mother’s scream and the smell of dirt filled her mind as Jessica caressed the pockmarked blemish.

“I was just thinking mom,” said Jessica. “About that time when we all went out to the Lake. Do you remember that?”

Marge smiled.

“And dad fell in trying to teach Carl how to fish? I think us girls nearly died laughing on the shore – the pond algae looked like some kind of octopus on his jeans.”

She suppressed a surge of quiet laughter as her husband tightened his grasp on her arm – a hard face met her gaze when she looked back. Marge didn’t notice.

With that slight interruption, silence settled in the room again. Dave shifted onto his other leg and gave a small smile to Bethany. Ben slowly walked out of the room to get something. Somewhere outside an owl was trying to wake up a snowy forest.

Life, thought Marge. *Life all around while death eats it away.*

A shudder wove through her body,

Life continues though death is everywhere.

Moving her thick legs into a cooler position, she could feel her palms getting cold and damp beneath her pile of blankets. It served as an alarming reminder that edged her panic up another notch. She felt around her sheets and asked Dave

to find her Bible. Dave, glad for a respite, squatted up and limped out of the room as Jessica and Sam knelt before her bed.

“What’s wrong mom? Is there anything we can get? You’re shivering.”

She looked over to them and flashed a smile, “I’m quite comfortable thank you.”

Bethany got closer to the kneeling daughters, just then deciding to participate in the now-surely-imminent death (it must be this time). She took a few more steps toward the bed, hesitated a moment as her grandmother came into view and began: “Hey grandma, do you remember that show that we used to watch? The Dusk Zone? Well there’s this one episode where everyone is running north because the earth is overheating and this old woman and her young friend stay behind. It gets hotter and hotter everyday but they never give up even when they are about to die. They see the streets emptying but decide to tough it out. You and I used to love that episode and we liked to pretend that I was the young woman and you were the old and that we had to get in your pool to stay safe. And when – ”

Bethany paused as the image of a dead, sweat-drenched old woman flashed into her memory.

She had forgotten the ending.

Shock caught her throat, but she managed a short sentence about how fun it was, hoping that Grandma Marge didn’t have time to remember. The look on Marge’s face said differently, despite the smile.

“Of course I do honey.” She reached out and squeezed Bethany’s hand.

Ben, who had been gone for long enough, came back carrying some old chairs,

“Figured three hours was long enough for knees to be on the ground,” he mumbled as he set the rusty chairs down.

Each member of the family pulled their chairs close to the bed, allowing room for Dave when he got back. Jessica looked over to Ben. He was staring at the ground. She sighed and adjusted her position on the chair, remembering something about her father. Her eyes drifted to the old wooden cross.

Her father.

When was he getting back?

Eventually, she was sure. After all, Grandma Marge wasn’t known for putting things in easily accessible spots. One hectic day last year had the entire family looking for Marge’s jewelry box (it turned out to be underneath a floorboard to evade robbers or overly inquisitive children). He was old enough to leave for five minutes.

So they continued to watch Grandma Marge shuffling around in her soft bed. Good conversation pieces and tearful testaments no longer came easily and the chairs were rickety and hard.

Do people usually take this long to die?

“I’m going to go help dad. You know how mom can be with her possessions,” said the quiet Sam, patting her mom’s bedside. She stood up and walked into the nearby bedroom.

“What did you want a Bible for, mom?” asked Jessica.

Marge hesitated – she really didn’t know. It took a moment for her to remember an Edwards quote (“*Christ has thrown the doors of mercy wide open*”) but was stopped by a gasp from her bedroom.

Sam put her head out the door and asked Jessica to come in for a minute. Jessica quickly got up and headed into the room.

A moment passed and she ran back out. She reached for the mounted telephone and began swirling the dial around.

“Is something wrong Jess?” asked Marge.

Jessica held up a finger and finished, “Yes, 2130 County Lane. Please hurry.”

She paused at the receiver and seemed to repress a convulsion.

“We – ” she hesitated. “We found a nest of cockroaches underneath your bed. Dad has been spending the last seven minutes trying to kill them with a newspaper. You know dad.”

Marge felt a prick of relief.

“Well, we can’t have that can we?” Marge said, fixing her eyes on the hanging photographs, trying to forget the pulsing sense of panic. “I’ve been thinking we’ve had those black things for a long time now.”

A sudden tremor in her chest silenced her. Panic surged as her lungs locked and her body stopped responding to her prompts. The world began to darken though she forced her eyes open, but suddenly brightened again. Command returned to her frame.

She tried to slow her breathing.

Dear Jesus. My time has really come. The reality of the situation became tangible.

I really am going to die.

All the words previously spoken by Jessica, Sam, and Dave took on a cosmic significance.

They had all been summoned from miles away to usher her out of this world. She was relieved they came.

I can’t die. There are still future grandkids to see, and future weddings. And walks with Dave. How can I leave before I experience those? I can’t leave.

Her composure broke slightly and she grabbed the hand of the closest bystander.

Returning the hold, Bethany paled and her eyes widened with understanding. She loosened her grip as she felt her legs tighten. The candles in the room seemed to dim, throwing a deep shade of black into the corners, the grains on the wall like flickering dried hairs. The room was unbearably humid.

I will stay until they get back, thought Bethany.

She glanced behind her and saw that Ben had gone into the room with the rest. Swallowing, she returned her gaze to Grandma Marge, whose eyes were already locked on Bethany’s, boring through her.

Her grandmother’s hands were shaking and wet. They had gotten tighter than vices.

“Oh child, child, death is nothing to be afraid of! We close our eyes and go to be with our Savior!”

Marge grasped harder and began to sing, “This

world is not my home, I’m going to see the King! Soon and very soon.”

She bobbed her lower lip and cast her eyes up at the cross. She had never noticed how there was a split-second delay between every command that she gave her body, or how heavy each limb felt.

There must be something to talk about.

She turned and said, “Are you excited about getting married one day Bethany? I’m sure you’ll find a handsome prince. Dave and I couldn’t wait to get married. I was so enchanted by his muscular arms and strong profile. We slept together all the time. You know, I think you’ll like having relations with your husband. Me and Dave had so many private adventures together!”

She smiled, “Look forward to being with your husband, but really, you should be the most excited about sex. Are you excited about sex, dear?”

Bethany turned red and forced a laugh. Marge stroked one fat hand over Bethany’s aching one, leaning close to whisper, “Me and Dave had our bedtime routines. I always loved it when he –”

A thump shook the floor.

“Damn it Jess, I told you that my back was bad. Here, put him on the sheet. We’ll have to drag him out.”

“Mom is out there Ben!” Sam hissed.

It only took Marge a second to pick up the hint, “Is everything alright in there?”

After a moment of dead silence, the shuffling commenced again. Marge wrestled herself up to a sitting position and began to shout Dave’s name.

Jessica’s leg stomped outside the doorframe;

she was holding onto a thick blanket weighted down by something in the next room. Jessica grunted as the blanket and Sam, holding the back, came into view. A foot pulled over the doorframe.

What was Dave's shoe doing in the blanket?

With one effort-filled movement, Jessica pulled the rest of Dave's body into the room. His head bumped off of the raised doorway. Marge felt her failing heart speed up, her eyes stinging as she called,

"Dave? Oh Jesus save us. Jesus save us. Is he alright? Did he pass out? I told him to listen to the doctor."

Ben walked into the room with a hand on his lower back, "Marge, we've called the ambulance. He passed out," he said.

"Does he have a pulse?" Asked the instinctive Marge.

"We've called the ambulance Marge."

Grandma Marge looked over at Jessica: her hand was covering her mouth and tears slid down her flushed cheeks. Sam looked sullenly at the ground.

Flashing dots of red and blue began to swim along the woolen curtains as Ben made to open the door.

Marge silently called to Dave as she watched through burning lids. The door was swung open to a snowy December night, ushering in a wave of cold that made the candles flicker. Jessica and Sam set the body-laden sheet on the ground.

A sob burst from Marge as she saw

Dave's face: his mouth hung open and one eye hid underneath a closed eyelid. He looked like an alcoholic repenting for a recent, enormous binge.

Ben looked up at the sisters. "What the hell are you doing? We have to get him out to the ambulance. It is going to take too long for them to get that stretcher up in this room."

Jessica and Sam were silent.

He shook his head, grimacing as he grabbed the edge of the sheet, slowly dragging Dave's body out the door and into the snow. Jessica started and then began screaming. Ben continued pulling Dave's now-soaked body to the flashing ambulance.

She tried to slow her breathing.
Dear Jesus. My time has really come. The
reality of the situation became tangible.

Sam, equally shocked, hesitated, looked around for a moment, and then pushed a hysteric Jess out the door, giving one last glance to Marge. The door slammed shut.

Marge blinked back tears as the lights pulled away.

The engine faded and silence entered the room once more – a menacing silence which smothered every corner of the house.

Bethany thought she was going to vomit as she glanced down at her grandmother, then to their entangled hands. Granddaughter Beth's wrist registered extreme pain as she stared at the sweaty lock of fingers.

"Grandma?" Beth whispered. "Hey, you're

squeezing a little hard."

Marge stared vacantly at the door, eyes bulging and white. One agonizing minute passed, and then Marge, not removing her gaze, proceeded to clasp her other hand onto Beth's own.

Bethany bit her lip and suppressed a scream of pain as her knees threatened to give. A pair of glazed eyes turned into the granddaughter's skull again.

"Grandmother loves her granddaughter," said Marge's voice. "You won't leave your grandmother alone in here would you?"

No response left Bethany's lips. Marge's shock and sorrow began to drown in high terror.

She was going to die. She would never again lay eyes on her children or husband.

Only one person in the world remained with her now.

Bethany had never wanted to be farther away from grandmother's house. She'd remembered feeling like this before when her neighbor's dog got loose and there was nobody to pick her up off the ground. She had felt a piercing, nauseating fear as the dog charged towards her and her screams went unheard. Bethany would've given anything at that moment to be anywhere else.

The feeling was similar with Grandma Marge's room, although this time she wasn't so filled with adrenaline that she could ignore the pulsing hysteria.

Grandpa Dave had died twenty feet away from her. His life had ended in the nearby room.

Unseen, behind the doorway.

Near Grandma's king sized bed.

And now his lifeless body was wet with snow and pierced with tubes.

Bile rose up Bethany's throat as her stomach began burning for a toilet. Her legs were starting to tremble.

She burped, gasped as her stomach began to contract, and then pulled her hand as hard as she could away from Marge. The enormous buildup of sweat allowed Bethany to jerk out from the piercing grip.

Marge began to whimper as Bethany stumbled a few feet away from the bed. She stared at her shocked grandmother for a moment, made as if to approach the bed again, and then bolted towards the bathroom, nausea surging as she saw the white toilet bowl.

The door slammed as the sound of vomiting commenced.

"Beth?" Grandma Marge whispered.

Marge's mind was drowning in the weight of the blankets and stickiness of her sweat. Her body felt very bloated and alien to her mind.

"Damn it," Marge squeaked, ignoring the sudden profanity. "Damn it Beth get back in here!"

She felt a surge of anger, decided that enough was enough, and made to swing her legs out of bed. It was an awkward motion which sent her arms flying toward the wall, slamming violently into the wood.

Her brain didn't register the motion quickly enough as the cross, shaken off its mount, slammed onto her legs.

She began wailing and swearing and pushing the covers off of her bed.

If I broke something I swear to God...

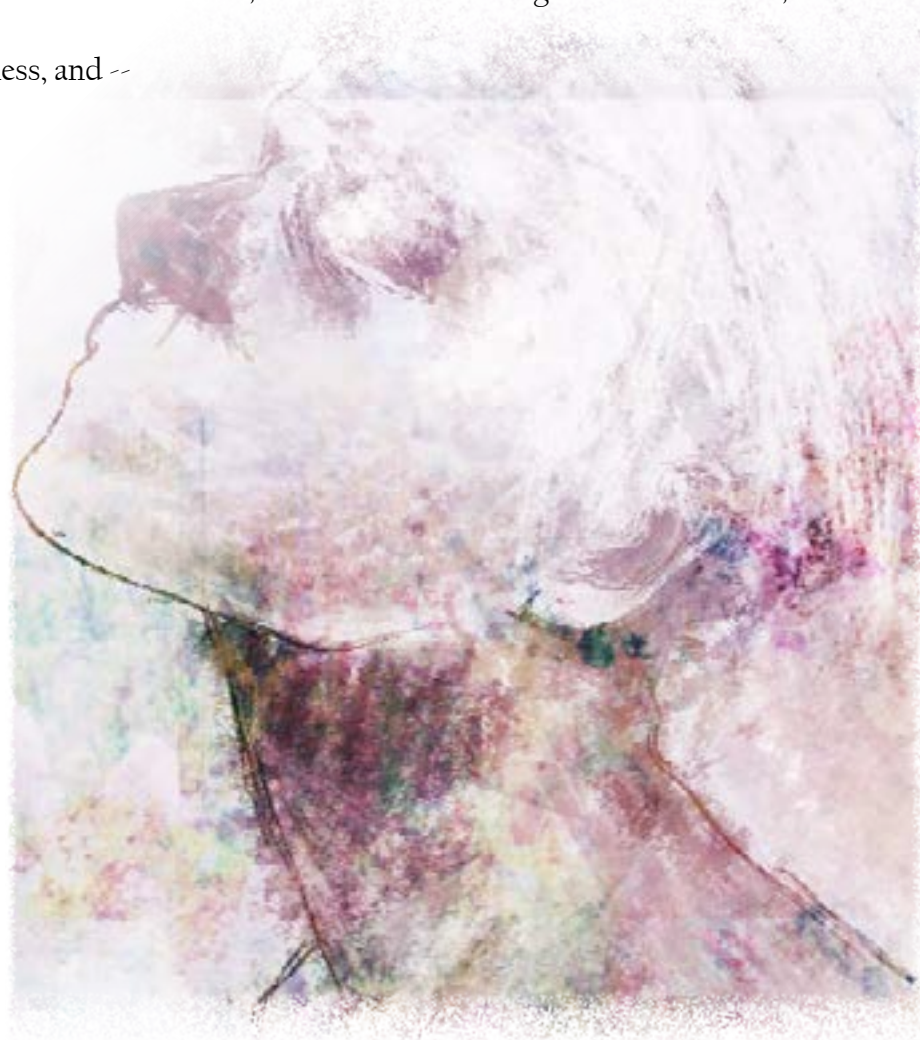
She didn't break anything since the pain was minimal.

In fact, there was no pain. Her heart jumped, she tried to yell at Beth again but her voice wouldn't work.

Slow paralysis crept up her body as she looked at her useless lumps of flesh. Adrenaline squeezed into her veins as she tried to shout again Nothing, and now her vision started to darken.

She began to pray frantically as her frame, which had held her for eighty long years, began the slow, sweet process of decay. She heaved one last breath, realized that her lungs had now ceased, and waited for the oxygen to run out.

Graciously, she lost consciousness, and --



Untitled #2
MICHELLE BORJON

Poetry

NOAH KOOB

Commute

dial eyes
warms the village where we wake
morning rays pierce the shade
and so the lady quilt is made

indifferent slave
named four wheel drive
takes us through metropolis way
over manholes muttering
"Northside Waterworks"
in toothy display

two traffic lights
and the bar between
smiles red at motorists
making the early shuffle
a hypodermic needle
halting the pavement sea
just as the median's tongue lashes
at another victim

lamppost chuckling light alongside
yellow necrophile lines
signs bend backwards
under snow
but we're running late

and machines seldom help to tow

Poetry

KRISTINA KROGER

Kauyumari

Blue Deer walking
Saguaro Forest and Chicago
cactus in your hoofprints withers North
I will raise them
But there is no sun here. Only snow

Arrow buried in your side walk West
Desert, rock, glare and life
Go and live; I will shelter these
illegal things in my heart

Between five ribs, eight ribs, thirteen ribs
Fibonacci truth
written on Nazca lines in the sky
on the line of a bat's wing
and in a crow's foot.

This is making me older
The desert nor I can hide its bones
They push up through a thin veil
Of mesquite and big, big sky
And in the emergent heat of religion

Somnambulism

2:00 p.m. breakfast

after a lounge on the couch

raspberry toast
but no hazelnut in the coffee creamer
smelling characters cooking
ichthyology
beyond the injected
snail
of my bloodstream

waves in
lumber legs
incite a walking abnormality
puncturing the epoch of my humanity
with disbelief

I can fake existing till morning
that early morning
where inactive consequences force realism upon me that
I'm not really living
I'm sleepwalking

anachronistically

through someone else's dream

Sanctuary

When I go home this summer
I'll rest my head upon the hill
Look out over everything
And think as freely as the birds sing,
Like the journey of wind through a meadow
Where butterflies dance and rabbits buy their time,
And think to myself as I often do
When the dead weight rises from my shoulders
That I am not unlike the leaves and the birds
My destiny is not so far removed
As the sun-drenched horizon
Beckoning just over leaf and limb

In fact it manifests as just as clear
At last its call has answered mine
A free flowing river of awareness
Seeps slowly through my mind's eye
As the tall grass nods from side to side
All the howling stinging white death
Mother Winter sought to tame us with
Dissolves to red and orange as
Shadows of trees and spirits left untouched
By wicked season three months past
Beckon the eternal dance
Shelter the survivors lost.

JAMAEEL CLARK

And The Bleed Goes On...

About two weeks before summer reintroduced itself to June
 You invited me to your house...

Entering bedroom, I spy windows' mouths' stretched open
 Inhaling nature's breath, blinds cracking eye lids wide enough
 For abundant sunshine resting on bed comforter

We just confirmed the crush we had on each other
 through timeless talks beyond midnight, the moon eavesdropping on our conversations
 Like children do grown folk, till morning sun became our curfew

I watch you dance in front of television set playing MTV Jams
 Your silliness unwrapped the comfort you feel in my presence

Then you join me on the edge of your bed...

Close enough for arms to brace for hug,
 But your body language spoke to me in an unfamiliar accent

Marveling at your mahogany complexion painted across facial canvas
 You surrender a colorless smile, asking if it's ok if you could show me something

A population of goosebumps migrate the surface of my skin
 As each one awaits in unheralded suspense like a show without a playbill
 closing the curtains, I feel myself suffering from symptoms of stage fright

You raise sleeve on your right arm lifelessly
 rotating forearm outward, I scrutinize,

Chills freezing my spine in a temperature so frigid
 I thought I saw my breath from heavy exhales of anxiety
 Dead silence stiffens the room...

Razor slits chiseled in your frail wrist

I try reading you scars like brail, dragging finger tips across each crevice
 To decode meaning behind these crimson incisions

I ask you, "why?"

These lines engraved in your flesh remind me of measurement marks
 Children carve on wooden walls right above their heads each month
 Hoping they grew another inch; your arm looks like calibrations on a ruler

Again, I ask you "why?"

Rain begins pours from your eyes, you say to me,
 "Jamael, I cut myself to free my mind from trauma induced by abusive boyfriend.
 I am afraid to escape because I am enslaved by sex, this bed is plantation
 My boyfriend is master, but I whip myself with blade until I lose consciousness
 Of the ownership I allow him to have over my body"

Her boyfriend's last name is Love.
 And The Bleed Goes On...

Fox Adventure
ALLISON CORR



JESSICA LEWIS

Life and Death in Tent City

Every time the rain knocks against the hole filled sheets of an elderly man's makeshift tent,
it mimics the quiet whisper of change.
One cracking, thick vein visible hand holds a steaming cup of joe while the other hand attempts to
steady a joint,
enough to bring it to his aging, chapped lips.
A cure for cancer, the hippie gypsy has said who lives a tent down to the right.
A better cure would be if the rain knocked him to his knees and drowned his physical body while
sending his mental state to the heavens.
Drips of rain remind him of the tears he sheds alone,
with no one there to hold.
A chance to be reunited with his wife would be worth it,
his heart broken soul can no longer endure the pain, it's time to go he feels.
Contemplating death is easy to do on a rain filled afternoon.

Across the way, two lovers lay naked in their own make shift paradise of a tent,
consisting of some tattered sheets and weather beaten wood for a frame.
Passed out hours ago from a crazed acid trip,
unaware of either one's true intentions.
The blankets remain underneath them soaked from the pounding rain.
Tangled arms and legs wrap around one another,
resembling the shape of the sensual dance they just performed.
Little do their oblivious selves know,
that conceiving life on a rain filled afternoon is just as easy to do.

Poetry
KATHRYN TISSA
Wednesday

A fog today dragged itself over
the town, its swollen belly thick and soft,
bleaching the day from cyan to slate silence
and muting us—a breathing bell jar for the blinking red beacon
as if to say, “let’s be quiet for a while.”

Fall is not about life, they say
but from her golden maple leaf heart,
a maroon flush spills out in the rose shrubs that line the sidewalks
like sprawling veins, crackled red
to break the white.



Lilypad
KATARZYNA WOZNIAK

Poetry
KRISTINA KROGER
If Motherhood Were a Greenhouse

When your ribcage blossoms like a magnolia
And you allow my bees into your throat
I grow to encompass you
Tree trunk on chain link

Small-handed, scared neck in the loam
Dandelion-child, root-bound
Growing in a pill-bottle
I give you terra-cotta, a song and my breath

If motherhood were a greenhouse
I would shelter you with ten thousand panes of glass



In The Spring Sunlight
KATARZYNA WOZNIAK

JOSEPH DENCH

Pitter Patter, Pitter Patter

The rain drops hit all around.
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 My tears bounce off the ground.
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 My heart melts in my chest.
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 The blood falls from my breast.
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 My love melts away from all.
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 From the rooftops, tears fall.
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 And then in the eyes of Death,
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 We see that we have nothing left.
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 And when darkness falls we hear
 Pitter patter, pitter patter,
 All the cries with all the cheers.
 Pitter patter.

ANDREW BURT

A Trace of Smoke

THE first memories I have of my grandfather place me on the coach at his lakefront home. He is sitting in his favorite chair, his old Ford baseball cap is cocked on his head, and the 1984 Presidential debates are on the television. My grandfather was a lifelong Republican and I remember sharing his glee over Reagan's debating skills. I remember Reagan talking but very little else about that day, certainly not Walter Mondale or journalistic commentary. Years later my grandfather and I would debate politics as I moved much farther to the left, but at that time, I supported the Republican Party and made my grandfather proud.

I have other early memories of my grandfather. Most of them revolve around his old Ford baseball cap and the constant smell of cigarettes that enveloped him. His grandfather had opened several car dealerships in the 1920's, and my grandfather still owned one of them. He worked the front desk at the dealership in my small hometown, the first line of defense for anyone that wanted to buy a car, but also the first one to talk to about getting your car fixed. There were few service centers in the town so many people got their cars fixed at the dealership. My grandfather knew about fixing cars and he would always give advice as to what was wrong. Then he would shuffle the customers back to the various other departments in the building past the six foot, half-dead cactus, the various awards plaques, and the hideous plethora of wood paneling left over from an unfortunate 1970's remodel.

Everyone in the town knew my grandfather. It is amazing that even years later people in the town still remember him. He was tall and lanky – this bordered on far too skinny in his last years. He had once been a bigger man, broader-shouldered and running to portly, like his father. He always had some old baseball cap on, typically his favorite one with the Ford logo stitched across the front. The little hair he had was lank and greasy from working hard. Mousy brown and fine, it fringed his head like a friar's. Heavy horn-rimmed glasses covered his eyes. He dressed in old faded blue work pants, often covered in stains, and a matching pair of blue work pants.

People called him Mickey, even though his first name was Edward. His grandfather had been Edward, so he shortened his middle name, Michael. I remember him as Eddie. For some reason, I have never called him Grandpa Eddie; it has always been Eddie, and I still can't imagine calling him anything else. My mom's siblings even called him that, while the older generation used Mickey. I never saw this as a sign of disrespect, but as I got older I realized how much

my Mom's brothers and sister made fun of my grandfather for all his quirks. They made fun of his unstylish sense of fashion – he was usually too tired to change clothes after work. He only dressed differently for special occasions. But they also mocked him for his uncleanness. His hands were perpetually soiled from looking at cars, and he smelled like cigarette smoke mixed with motor oil. He and my grandmother both smoked cigarettes for decades. I distinctly remember a pack of Merits peaking out of the pocket of his work shirt. They also drank a lot of beer, the favorite cheap choice when I was a child was Meisterbrau. My grandfather always had a beer in his hand and a cigarette in his mouth.

I was often a serious source of consternation for my grandfather, but as the only grandchild I held a particular place in his heart. We had much in common. A love of politics, a love of reading, and a love of self-education; he would pour through his history books like I poured through my comic books. Over a particular issue of Punisher War Journal, he retorted: “Is he some kind of ex-Vietnam soldier on a revenge mission? He had hit the nail on the head that the character's motives were revenge, but he generally wanted to tie these motives to military skirmishes. If I had been more astute, I would have pointed to Rambo as that character, but I painstakingly explained what the Punisher was about, revenge for his murdered family and nothing more -- just the black and white world of vigilante comic books. Another time I had used

my grandfather's last beer as a hammer. I don't know what I was thinking, but there was a nail that was popping out of the picnic table and I thought it would be an excellent idea to hammer it back in with his beer. He wasn't too mad. After a certain number of requisite “Jesus Christs” he calmed down, and I'm sure he went back to telling stories or bullshitting with my Uncle Mike.

The shack was an old three-roomed tar paper hunting shack built on 120 acres of land that belonged to the shareholders of my Grandfather's garage. It was set far back on these acres. To get there, first, there was an old rusty padlock that held up a chained fence to block the road. Once this was opened, you would have to navigate down several “dirt” roads that were more like trails through the grass. As you drove, the large patches of grass at the center of the roads would drag on your car. As a kid, it was like venturing into an uncharted land. It was particularly difficult getting there in the winter. If there was too much snow, walking was the only option. The balsam and spruce trees would lay heavy against the road, packed down with accumulated snow that would often be four feet deep. We would trudge through the snow back to the shack, then continue our trek up a giant hill through a small poplar stand to get there.

The shack overlooked a small lake. There were several other lakes on the property as well, but these were even farther from the main roads. The trail to this particular lake included a trek through marsh and wild blue-

berry shrubs. If one wandered too far into the woods away from the main trail, it was really easy to get lost. Once when I was around twelve years old I found myself wandering for miles, obviously lost, going in circles. The land was bordered on the one side by roads, but on the others, there were many acres of private land, and to the north was the Flambeau-Turtle Flowage. With its 19,000 acres of water and 35,000 acres of land, only a helicopter could find a lost person in there. The mixture of poplar and pine trees looks surprisingly similar when one is lost in those woods. The landscape is rutted with deer trails that confuse and lead you in the wrong direction.

My grandfather knew that and taught me some things about finding my way in the woods, but he preferred to tell me stories about the flowage that would scare me. One sticks in my mind to this day, and still pops up in my nightmares. I often tell it around the campfire; for me, it is far scarier than the killer in the backseat or any urban legend, because my grandfather had me so convinced at its veracity. Supposedly, there was a creature that only killed fools living near the flowage, aptly named “The Flowage Fool-killer.” My grandfather pointed out various spots around the shack where he might live. One was the scary wreckage of an ancient abandoned refrigerator. Another was an old outhouse that had slipped down the hill over the years since the shack had been built. I avoided these places with trepidation, for I was never sure if I was a fool or not. The creature, which I had always

imagined as looking like a Bigfoot when I was a kid, knew whether you were a fool or not and would come looking for you. I remember the tales vividly, but my mother tells me that I would ask my grandfather: “I'm not a fool. Am I grandpa?” I don't remember this, but I remember loving to hear the tales and loving to be scared in that way you only can be as a child, when being scared by stories was an experience to be relished. Now my mind sees the “Fool-killer” differently. He is more of a lecherous old mountain man with glowing eyes stealing the souls of children, reveling in his lustful deeds and decisions. A steady teenage diet of caffeine and horror movies can do that to a person's imagination.

My Grandfather and I went on one of our last adventures together when I was seventeen. He had this habit of dropping by at lunchtime to see who was at our house. Usually he would have a cup of coffee with my mother before going back to work. By this point, he could pretty much hold his own hours, going to work every day of the week, and taking off time when he needed it. On the weekends, he would do paperwork and swing by our house. There was nothing the man liked better than bullshitting or fishing. On this day, a Sunday during the early summer after my junior year of High School, he stopped by around ten in the morning. I was the only one home, and I was supposed to go to work at noon. Of course, he talked me into calling in sick to go fishing. It proved to be ill-fated fishing trip in many ways, but I am extremely

happy I called in. I dialed the number and used my best sick person voice. Years later, after working as a manager at a restaurant, I could recognize that voice in an instant. If you sounded that strangled and choked, you belonged in the hospital. They were mad, but there was little they could do, except find someone else to bag the groceries and deal with the Sunday shopping crowd. After I grabbed my fishing pole, we headed out. My grandfather drove a succession of Ford F-150 loaner vehicles. He would drive them for years until the engines failed. This one was a dark shade of rusted blue. It smelled, like all the vehicles my grandfather drove, of motor oil and cigarettes smoke. I never realized until years later how comforting that smell was, even though I don't smoke. There will always be something soothing about that smell. I have the same remembrances of diesel. I never associated these smells with my grandfather until a few years ago. My buddy Peter let me play his friend's baby blue bass guitar, a Fender P Bass that had belonged to the same musician for years. It was scarred and wore the years of its use. As I played it, the years fell off. It sounded excellent, but smelled like cigarettes, and after I handed it back, my hands reeked of smoke. I realized that its owner must have smoked regularly while playing. That smell instantly brought back memories of my grandfather.

The creature, which I had always imagined as looking like a Bigfoot when I was a kid, knew whether you were a fool or not and would come looking for you.

We made it to the shack, while it was still morning, and trudged through the dewy woods, rolling our pants up to avoid getting the cuffs wet. My Chuck Taylor All-Stars provided little protection from the elements, but I moved dutifully along behind my grandfather. He was manic with energy, enjoying the day, and moving quickly towards one of the other lakes. He deemed it "a great lake for Perch." I can see us now: a tall, thin middle-aged man with a cap perched precariously on his bald head and a tall, lanky teenager with a shock of spiky red hair, torn jeans, and a punk rock t-shirt, hoofing it through the trees, trying to avoid wood ticks and mosquitoes. We moved swiftly through the green woods. As we came over the last ridge towards the lake, we saw the ancient Jon boat that he had stashed for just such an occasion. Chipped green paint covered its heavy frame, and came off in our hands, as we flipped the boat over and pushed it into the water. As we traversed the various shrubs and bushes that cover the ground in northern marshy areas, I was happy that I didn't fall in. One wrong step and sometimes you go up to your waist in water between the bushes. We paddled the boat out to a special spot near some dying tamaracks and began a

quiet day of fishing. In true fashion, our great adventure yielded little in the way of fish. I'm not sure that we caught one that day, but we enjoyed being out on the water. We would have been out longer, but it started storming. The first few light drops of precipitation wouldn't have deterred us. A little mist is often good for fishing; it seems to make the fish bite. Once it started thundering and lightning flashed across the sky in wide arcs, we decided to get out of there. The rain came down hard and fast and we rowed back to shore. The little Jon boat wanted to take on water. Water was threatening us from all sides, but we made it, struggling to move the boat back to its spot, then turning it over so that it stayed dry. We hastened quickly back to the car, opting not to go back to the shack as we both wanted to get home and dry off.

When we got there my mother was furious. I tried to hedge. I was never that good at keeping secrets from my mother. She yelled at both of us. "What was I doing skipping work? What was my grandfather doing by encouraging me?" I still profess that it was his idea. But I still think she is mad at both of us for this affront to responsibility and authority. I still see it as one of the best days I have ever spent. Authority be damned.

It was only a few years later that my grandfather started getting really sick. He had been diagnosed with lung cancer. All those years of smoking cigarettes had finally caught up with him. He had been skinny for years, but he seemed to be wasting away to nothing.

His 6' 4" frame seemed to be shrinking, and he was just a mass of bones. He often complained of being a sick man. Like the boy who cried wolf, he had done this so many times that no one paid much attention. He would lie on the floor in front of the couch with his neck and head rested against it because his back hurt so much. We would talk about sports, politics, and music. He never liked my music and that was about all I was into, and my politics were now nothing like his. He would have supported McCarthy, while I always claim that I'm left of Gandhi. As for sports, I love football and hockey now, but I deplored them then; punk rockers didn't play sports, except for skateboarding. Despite our differences, we remained really close because of our similar temperaments, and we also had respect for each other. He taught me how to respect other people for their opinions, and I try to follow his example to this day. I just wish I had realized sooner how sick he was.

Flash forward to November 1998. I went with my friend Joe to Milwaukee to see Fugazi. I had started school at University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point right after High School, and had dropped out. My life revolved around music. I lived back at home with my parents and Joe was still going to school in Stevens Point. I went down to visit him for the weekend, never telling my parents I was going to the show. I justified that I had to go to the show; this was Fugazi. How often does one get to see Ian MacKaye? They were playing with Jets to Brazil and the Promise Ring, all for six

dollars. I couldn't say no to this show. Thoughts of my grandfather were nowhere in my mind. I had talked Joe into going. He was always more into metal, but Fugazi was enough of a draw. We made it to the Rave. The terrible sound quality of that venue in no way affected the greatness of the show. Ian, the frontman, was in fine form and Guy Pisciotto was gyrating, hammering on his guitar. They had two drummers for this date; Brendan Canty and the other guy were in perfect sync. It was magical. Joe and I soon lost ourselves in a sea of short hair, glasses, and sweaters. I lost myself in the music, something I have been prone to do all my life.

In many ways, I was happy I went. I never saw Fugazi again; they went on indefinite hiatus in 2003. I got pulled over by the cops, while speeding, on the way home, thus invalidating my lie. I went back to Point and hung out with Joe and his oddball roommate Dave for the rest of the weekend. My grandfather passed away while I was gone. Here I was enjoying myself, not thinking about him at all; I had escaped from my failures in the way I always have, through music, but I had failed to realize the extent of my grandfather's sickness. To this day, I regret it. I know he would have been happy that I didn't see him at the end. He had always encouraged me in my interests, even when he didn't understand them, but I still have a hard time dealing with my decision. My uncle Mike had made the decision for my family not to call me. I understand why. When my grandfather died, he didn't recognize anyone but my mother; she and I were the closest to him. I don't think I could have seen him like that. I remember him on that fishing trip. I remember him laughing, smiling through the pain, just carrying on. I'm just glad I remember him. Most days though, I still feel some guilt for not being there. When I listen to Fugazi, I always think of my grandfather. Even though there was nothing I could do, I wonder if I would feel any different if I had been there. The last few times I saw my grandfather, he was very sick, pale and emaciated, barely the same man that took me fishing and convinced me to skip work just a short time before.

A couple of years ago, my uncle Thomas told me that even though they lived together, he never really knew my grandfather, even though they shared interests in fishing and sports. For awhile, their politics were even closer, but he never had that deeper connection that I did. I miss my grandfather and I cherish that connection, but it makes me sad that my uncle was never able to have that. I guess he was just too close. All these years later, when I am having trouble, I wish I could call him and ask his advice. But what I do know is that he would be proud of my accomplishments. He taught me that everyone has problems. But the one thing we should do in life is respect each other. Even with the mistakes, we must still find time to enjoy the smaller moments in life, like an impromptu fishing trip. He taught me that these are the moments that matter. Yet I still miss him and wish he was here. There were more things he could have taught me.

JOHN M. PRICE

The Lamp Undimmed: Gathering Gloom

PERHAPS a proper working title for this piece would be "My Wife's Boobs." Such a title would have meaning to the American male and reflect his baser interests. Undoubtedly, most women, and even those men with a modicum of decorum, will find the title base if not offensive, but I would beg pardon and remind the offended that a working title, much like a husband, is a work in progress and can be amended.

Allow me to defend the title further. Does it not get to the heart of what a man truly values in a woman? It is not lofty but it is completely accurate and painfully honest to admit that one of the first things that drew my attention to my wife was her voluptuousity. Terri herself would not believe it if I were to swear otherwise. Certainly males are often accused of having only one interest in women and I suspect that like all long standing stereotypes there is unfortunately much truth in it. I do not wish to say that the only feature of my wife that was of value to me was her bosom....but it certainly was among the top items on the list.

With this admission in place, what then can we say about an attribute that was part of what first drew you to someone, been an endless source of enjoyment, and yet now threatens to take that someone away from

you? They say that if Benedict Arnold had been killed at the battle of Saratoga, instead of just gravely injured, that he would have been remembered as one of the greatest American heroes...perhaps mentioned in the same breath with Washington. So if a younger Terri had been hit by a bus, her breast could have always remained in a revered and beloved place in my heart, instead of becoming the great traitors that they now are.

"My wife's Boobs" maybe a superficial attribute, they may have appealed only to my male single-mindedness, but it was that initial and admittedly base attraction that set me on the road to an attraction to her spirit. It was her beauty without that launched me toward her beauty within. Whatever attracts us to another, there is a nagging question which requires more honesty and personal evaluation than most people are capable of... whether or not love is truly a selfless concern for another or a deep attachment to how that other person makes us feel. I don't know whether or not such questions are healthy. I suspect they are not. I suspect they are the type of questions that can make one go mad. And yet ever since my wife was told of her illness, such questions dog me daily.

When we were kids, they warned us about playing with sharp sticks. "Someone is

going to lose an eye.” they always said. Eyesight is extremely essential and yet because it is omnipresent, you take it for granted. That is the way of it with all things of value; you forget what a treasure you have constantly within your grasp. In any event, at this moment, career dreams, the desire for fame and artistic fulfillment, the longing for wealth, or even creature comforts, seem so trivial... for there is now a sharp stick threatening my eyesight.

* * * *

Terri was first diagnosed with breast cancer April 23, 2001. We were both forty years old. We had met in college at age nineteen. I grew up in San Diego, California; she in Traverse City, Michigan, but we attended college together in Indiana. You could say that we came from opposite ends of the country to meet, but it was actually further than that. We met in Innsbruck, Austria in a foreign studies program. It has always made The Sound of Music seem a little like home movies. We were married on the same weekend that we graduated from college. Over the next twenty years, we raised six children. That must be love, lust doesn't last that long.

When we were first told, I cannot honestly say that it hit me that hard. It seemed devoid of any reality. They were just words someone was uttering. It was as though I were hearing it about a character on television...in a show you are only half-heartedly watching. We sat in the radiology consulting room. Terri looked at me. The doctor began

to speak. Terri's eyes got huge as she stared intently at me, quite an achievement indeed as she already had two of the biggest, most beautiful eyes in the history of eyes. But she did not begin to cry. She simply said in a low, weak but matter-of-fact voice, "John. I have cancer."

Perhaps my detachment was due to one of the most common heard phrases today: "Cancer is not the death sentence it once was." Perhaps it was a natural self-defense developed to fight the initial devastation of such news. In any case, at that moment, the concept of Terri's mortality did not even fleetingly cross my mind. She was sick. What do we do now?

There would be surgery. Then radiation. Then chemo. Bad news, but let's do what we have to do to get this behind us. We left the office. If Terri was worried, she hid it well. "We can handle this" was my only thought. It did not even seem particularly distressing to tell the kids. Mom was sick. Keep it simple.

The various "things to do" seemed to go well. The surgery and radiation were not too traumatic, the chemo was rough and Terri certainly suffered greatly but we did make it through and we eventually settled back into our normal lifestyle. That was until June 4th, 2000, the day the cancer came back. Life got very "un-normal" very quickly and this time my reaction was decidedly different.

* * * *

Over the previous three years, there

further recollection of that evening.

The next day was Saturday. It was the strangest day of my life. I remember keeping busy that whole day without even trying. I got up before 6 am, without an alarm clock, and just began working. I can't even tell you what chores I undertook. I have a faint recollection of crawling inside all of our outside garbage cans with a Brillo pad. I do not even think some where necessary tasks, just as long as I kept going. I started at 6 am and did not stop, not even for a 5 minute break, until 7 pm that night. Nothing to eat and no memory, beyond the garbage cans, of what I did all that time. I never got hungry or tired. It was as though something took over my body and forced it into a constant state of activity. Do something. Anything. Just keep working. Perhaps it was a way of combating an otherwise incapacitating and overwhelming feeling of helplessness.

Everywhere I went that day and everything I did was as if I were in a plastic bubble. The wind blew, but I did not feel it. The sun shone but it did not warm. The voices of other people were neither happy nor mad nor anything but noise – like walking in a foreign city where you do not understand one word of the language and the air is just filled with gibberish. I saw a billboard which advertised a snack food. It had a smiling face declaring that with this snack "your party will truly be a happy event". I didn't get it. A smiling face? What was there to smile about? Even the words "party" and "happy" had no meaning.

were so many victories, but they came with an unspoken sense of invincibility. "We've kicked this thing's ass!" But on June 4, 2004, the roof caved in, my insides were kicked out, the ground opened up and I fell helplessly into a black, bottomless abyss.

I came home from work on a Friday afternoon. Immediately something felt amiss. There were no kids. Terri was sitting on the back deck alone. She called me out. Her voice sounded like I had never heard it – hollow and machine like. It was not sad nor faint nor alarmed. I knew upon hearing it what had happened.

I got out on to the deck and looked at her. I don't think I had ever seen her so emotionless, so far away. There was a silence that seemed to last a week. She did not have to say anything. I knew the cancer had come back and I knew what that meant. They only speak of a "cure" the first time around. Once it returns, they begin to talk in terms of stalling...gaining time...delaying the inevitable. The reality enveloped me like a blanket without warmth. MY WIFE WAS GOING TO DIE.

I am fairly sure that I put my arm around her head and pulled it close to me, but I could not swear to it. It was as if I had left normal time and place – like emotional shock – a sort of coma protecting you from the full fury of the pain, which your mind would not be able to bear. I did not utter a word. What was there to say? "Everything's going to be all right"? What hollow words those would be. We just sat and held each other and I have no

The first second I had to think or reflect came later that night. It was beyond my ability to accept. I had seen so many movies where the character dies or is told that they're going to die. But in the movies, it is always someone else. No matter how moved you are by a story, no matter how connected you feel to the characters, that giant screen is meant to keep you at a safe distance from the tragic. That's why we love the movies. They allow us to care, but not hurt. To get involved without consequence.

For the next two years, every day, I woke up and for just a few split seconds nursed a faint hope that this was a bad dream, just shake it out of your head. Then you realize that it is not a dream. And that you are now on the "feeling" side of the movie screen. Your friends and relatives sigh, cry and empathize and commiserate. But as sad as they may feel, they are safely in the audience. You were there once. Now the movie screen is a wall that insulates the world out and you in.

What could I have done differently? Was this preventable? Did I not love her enough? Did I not hold her tight enough? Did I make her life as happy as I could have? Why is God doing this? Why is he who supposedly "holds the stars in his grasp", letting Terri slip through his fingers?

At a time, when many flee to God as a last refuge, I began to question the value of prayer.

Let us say that we are in a hospital hallway and in two different rooms are two terminally

ill patients. The families of each are outside the rooms praying for their loved ones not to die. Let us further say that one patient makes a miraculous recovery and one does not. What are we to make of this? What does this tell us about prayer? Did one family pray right and the other do it wrong? Did one pray harder than the other? Is one family being rewarded and the other punished? Did God like the one patient better than the other...and if so, is the one He favors, the one He takes or the one He leaves here? Was it God's will that one die and one recover or is that some aspect of science we just don't understand yet? Is God's will always done? If God's will is done in both cases, then why pray at all? Can prayer make God change His mind? Perhaps prayer was like aspirin. It doesn't get rid of your headache; it just makes it easier to endure it.

For most of the next two years, just doing whatever came next was a perfect defense. In some ways I suppose it was a kind of denial, but in a way we all live in denial. We all live like there is an endless supply of tomorrows. The normalcy that routine gives even allows for a certain amount of happiness to sneak in between doctor's appointments, medical procedures, and even ambulance trips to the emergency room (now there's a feeling of isolation – riding in an ambulance while the rest of the world stares at you with those "Thank-God-that's-not-me" looks on their faces).

Happiness contains an element of freedom. But such freedom is an illusion. If you achieve such happiness, you are defense-

less against the next downward turn of events. And so, bad news hits you like a ton of bricks all over again. You think you are resigned to the very strong possibility, even high probability that things will get worse. You think you are prepared. But time passes. You allow happiness back in. Then you hear it's in the liver or that the liver has gotten worse and the sky falls in anew. You would think that calluses would develop. But happiness only makes us vulnerable.

At night, a hospital room is a lonely place when it is just you and your sick loved one. I sit and watch her sleep. I am struck by the irregular pulse of her breathing. It is not the smooth almost lyrical rising and falling of the chest. It is jerky and seems to have two stages. First a jerk to the right and then a fall to the left. More spasm-like than rhythmical. She is such a fighter, but so fragile. Her full, beautiful red hair, long gone. Her heart must be really laboring. I wonder if it will just quit. I can't do this! I can't be strong! I can't be faith-filled! God can't have her! She's my wife! She's my college sweetheart! She's the mother of my children! Damn it, she's mine! Am I prepared for this? Am I prepared for life without Terri? How can there be such a thing? Except for childhood and adolescence, there's always been a Terri in my life. It is amazing how one minute I can seem incredibly strong and then the next, just fall apart. When I'm with Terri, it's easy to be strong – she needs me to be strong. If she's asleep or I go back to work, the strength vanishes. I wonder who

needs who?

* * * * *

One day in the hospital, the nurse said something about the doctor wanting us to talk to hospice. Boom! I knew what hospice meant. Yet another unexpected expected. What?! I ran to find the doctor, who was at the nurses' station in the middle of an extremely busy aisle. It was a madhouse. This was insane. Amid nurses and patients and visitors bustling back and forth, I asked, "What's this about hospice?"

The doctor said that as he was talking to Terri, her eyes were not focusing on him but going off in different directions. "I think the situation in the spinal fluid has gotten worse. And right now, any more chemo would probably kill her." I shook my head. This was all coming too quickly and I couldn't sort through it. "But, but..." I was searching, not knowing where to start with questions, "...the hospice? How long are we talking about?"

"I would say 1-2 months."

"But, but..." my mind was racing like crazy. When in the hell did the number one front shift from the liver to the spinal fluid?! I couldn't think straight. The questions were too numerous. I ran back to Terri's room. To my astonishment, she was packed, her friend had her stuff and a nurse was pushing her out in a wheelchair. It was a done deal. We were going home. Home...for good. The next day, the hospice nurse came to visit and attempted to sign us up. Present was

myself, Terri, her sister, my oldest son and our pastor. The hospice nurse gave Terri an initial exam and then explained how hospice worked. "Terri," she said, "has entered another phase of her treatment. Only in hospice, we no longer treat the illness, we treat only the pain. We are putting the rest in God's hands."

"But," I protested, "she was doing fine before she went into the hospital last week." "But the doctor says that chemo has reached diminishing returns and could even kill her now. That's all we're saying. No more treatments." the nurse said.

"But there wasn't any talk of this a week ago. Now she goes a little goggle-eyed and we're ready to quit?"

The nurse turned to Terri, "Theresa, do you want to do anymore treatments?" Terri, with the wide eyes of a kid who has been offered a chance to not eat vegetables, began to shake her head and mouthed emphatically but silently, "No". "Terri has fought the good fight for so long." our pastor said to me, "She's done more than the Lord would ask of her. She's telling you that if this is the end, that she's ready. Her tickets punched and she's ready to go. What's holding you back?"

I had kept my composure until then, but with the answer to his question came a flood of emotion. "Fear of what it will be like without her." I weakly replied.

The room was silent for several moments. Then the hospice nurse took me outside. She said to me, "I didn't ask Terri if she wanted to stop treatments to see what she

Untitled #3
MICHELLE BORJON



would say. I asked her so you could hear it."

How could I argue? I was still confused, but I signed the hospice papers. As the nurse was leaving, I asked her, "The doctor says 1-2 months. After examining her, what do you think?"

"One month at the most." she answered.

Terri declined rapidly over the next week. It was obvious that hospice had been the right call. By Thursday, she was in and out of consciousness. The priest came by for a prayer service. He read from the Gospel and gave us all Communion. He must have felt that Terri would not be coherent much longer because he invited each kid to share a moment with their mother.

When it came time for Communion, Terri had slipped off to sleep. Father leaned over to give her the Eucharist, but seeing that she was not alert, he moved away. I called out, "Terri, don't you want Communion?" Her eyes shot open and she nodded. Father seemed surprised.

"Viaticum" the priest said softly, as he put the host in her mouth.

"What does that mean?" my son asked.

"Food for the journey."

By the next day, Terri was no longer communicative. Early Saturday, the hospice nurse announced that Terri probably only had 48 hours. In the space of a week, the estimates went from 1-2 months, to one month, to a couple of weeks, and now 48 hours. The total time in hospice had been little over a week. How off their estimates were. They did not

realize how ready she was to go.

On the morning of Saturday, April 8th, 2006, Terri's breathing was slightly irregular but constant. She seemed to be in no pain. Later in the day, she began to make a "cackling" or more appropriately "gurgling" sound. We phoned the hospice nurse. She told us that there was nothing wrong and asked if I wanted her to come over. Hesitantly, I told her no, but a few minutes later, she called back and said, "I'm coming over." She must have realized how Terri had been pushing the estimates all along. I decided to call for clergy.

The children and I sat around Terri's bed just staring at her. The nurse arrived, looked at Terri and announced, "She's getting ready to cross over." I grabbed Terri's hand and held it tight, as if to keep her from slipping away. I cried out, "Goodbye babe. I love you. I'll miss you." The children were crying, but I can't recall which ones. This was the first person I had ever seen die and this was the person I was closer to than anyone on earth. At 5 p.m., 45 years, 5 months and 28 days after she entered the world, Terri left it. I held her hand, the same hand I had held tightly as, six times, she brought life into the world, and now felt the life force slip away. It was palpable. Her hand went limp and the warmth left her.

She was gone! I still had my children, and friends and well-wishers, but I was suddenly all alone in the world.

Wasteful Light
SARA WILLADSEN



Poetry
NOAH KOOB
Dear Eliot

ever allusive Eliot

were you living in such gutters
to bring beauty from the grave?

to build off skeletal backs,
mythical though you may be?

a caterwaul to legends:
knights
grails
god
and The Inferno

do they speak prettier words?

are we sick of self love
sweet Olivia?
are you happy
married to a man?

is it true Eliot?

is this a wasteland?

ANDREW BURT

Resistance

I

Wildflowers bend to the will of the wind
as it whips across the sedge-grass prairie.
Carrying branches from place to place,
I organize them in piles to pick up later.

Birch limbs share space with pine boughs,
all future kindling for the bonfire
in piles on the sandy ground
I keep working faster. My energy

matches my love for this land.
Its shadows, its secrets are mine.
I bury them in every nook, behind
every spotted hemlock, every slender ash.

The dog sticks close, her panting face
a match of my emotions and hard work.
I push her away, cautioning her to not go far
under every tree she sees a squirrel,

Driving her nose against rock and root,
ineffectively treeing them and waiting
until curiosity takes her elsewhere.
Her hesitance is my cue to continue.

When I think I'm done, I spot
another errant branch, a broken toadstool,
a chunk of black wood from a long forgotten stump.
The sound of woodpeckers, hummingbirds, a splash in the river.

I continue my endless task, poking and shuffling
the minutiae of the forest floor, so content in my task
I miss the flutter of a partridge, the calls of crows as they
chase an eagle across the clear sky.

II

Tiring of my task, I walk a winding path through
the woods towards the old log cabin.
The Elk river is high, its dark water massing over stones.
The distant sound of thunder hiding behind dark clouds

is the first cue that I should seek shelter.
The warmth of the fire, the timeworn
logs of the hundred-year-old cabin are others.
I feel safe here, despite the brewing storm.

My great-great-grandfather built it in 1906, years
before the blow down in the 1960's that took the old growth,
bringing my grandfather to tears. Years before I grew to love the land,
regarding it not as baggage or a place to bury the dead.

He captured this land, collecting firewood, listening to
the crows as they glided seamlessly through the sky.
Content in his knowledge that the seasons would pass,
that the land would remain holy and unblemished.

Yet changes have occurred; the shore is expanding,
grass peeks from beneath rocks, the chimney is
cracked; the roof is sagging under new shingles.
The portraits hang on dusty walls, a pure glimpse

of the past melding into an indefinite future.
 The taxes have tripled; the creek is now a pond,
 stocked with glimmering silver fish darting
 beneath lily pads. The hemlocks are dead and sagging.

III

I take stock in these facts; I know this history
 like I know the rotting stumps of the land.
 There are stories and connections to be reconsidered,
 yet this place is safe through the floods.

I once thought to escape. Go somewhere to
 start fresh; the city beckoned with its concrete
 indifference, its prize of lights and culture.
 So different from the backwards sway of the trees –

I know this history – and the things that need to be fixed –
 like I know the bends of this river. Always with me
 and never against, I feel comfort as the storm steadily builds and the
 sky pours its first sheets of hard, expansive rain.

Through the hazy summer heat, as the trees grow tall
 never seeming to reach their former height. Through
 the storm, the water will rise over the shore
 definite in its path. I offer no resistance.

Now in my thirties, I no longer wish to escape.
 I spend hours exploring and working, thinking about
 the history of the cabin, the geography of the river,
 about my will to bend.



JOHN BAERMANN

Missed Opportunities

A frail old man lies on his bed, alone, when the phone rings. With trembling hands he struggles to pick the old phone off the receiver. It slips out of his hand to hang by the cord. A voice threads its way through the room.

“Dad? Dad? Listen, if you’re there it’s me. Please say something.” The room is silent save the voice of the man’s son and a rusty ceiling fan struggling to circulate the air.

“Dad, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for us to drift apart. Dad?”

The old man struggles to reach the phone, his own body fighting him, he snakes a finger around the cord and pulls. The cord slips from around his finger. “Damn things,” the old man breathes.

“Dad, If you’re listening, I...I just wanted you to know I forgive you.”

The old man redoubles his efforts. With almost all of his strength he climbs nearly out of his bed and grasps the cord in his hand. As he pulls his arm back to him he feels the IV tugging from the back of his hand. “God dammit,” are the only words he can muster. The strength slowly seeping out of him.

“Dad, are you there? Dad, I’m downstairs. I...I was hoping we could split a six pack like we did when mom was here.”

The old man slowly peels back the tape holding the IV in his hand, pulling off bits of wrinkled, grey skin along with the tape. It’s not coming quick enough. He begins tearing at his

hand, ripping the IV out of his hand. He holds the phone to his ear.

“Davey!?! Davey I’m here.”

The only response is a click and then a tone. The tone is more somber than the old man ever remembered it being before. He tries to put the phone back on the receiver, but the phone slips from his hand knocking his glass of water over. He closes his eyes in an attempt to regain his strength.

“He’s right through here Mr. Stevens.” An orderly leads David Stevens into his father’s room.

They are met with a peaceful sight, the old man resting in his bed.

Laughing David says, “He was always bad about hanging up the phone, used to drive Mom crazy with all the calls she missed.”

David hangs the phone up for his father and tries to wake him.

“Dad. Dad...Dad? Oh god, Dad. I meant to get here....I really did. I’m sorry.”

David sits next to the body that used to be his father. This was not the body he remembered raising him and caring for him all those years. The strong shoulders were gone. The ability to gain the trust of any animal with a look is gone, hidden behind dull sagging skin. The hands that he remembered being so strong were now nothing more than gnarled claws thanks to arthritis. This was not the man he remembered calling Dad growing up. David sat there in silence as a young doctor told him what he already knew. Nothing could be done for him. His father was gone.

NATE LINHART

Kitchen Clock

The clock on my kitchen wall moves backwards. It's such an odd event. Each second counts the wrong way when I stare at it. I see it's 5:05 right now, but in five minutes it'll be 5 o'clock. I don't know what to make out of it.

Tick tick tick.

Come to think of it, time moves backwards in this kitchen.

The kitchen drawer I just closed begins to re-open itself.

The faucet I turned on is slowly sucking the water back up.

The toast I made is softening and losing its tan, while the butter on it seizes melting and hardens.

The microwave is no longer warming my food, but cooling it.

The glass I accidentally dropped onto the kitchen floor, each sparkling glass shard is slowly reconstructing it to its former self.

The light switch I had previously turned on has re-initiated the darkness.

The knife I stabbed into my father's chest, making him choke on his own blood, is struggling to pull itself back out.

