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RC Alumni Journal



# RC Alumni Journal



Vladimir  
Putin



Fall 2018 • No. 2



No. 2 • Fall 2018

# Introduction

Welcome to the second issue of the *RC Alumni Journal*!

Last issue, we featured RC Creative Writing graduates from across the nearly 50 years of RC Creative Writing. This issue, we have expanded things to include work by RC graduates, not only Creative Writing ones.

This issue, we also include a section of alumni publication (and performance) updates, at the very back.

If you'd like to financially support the journal . . . , go to [lead-ersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/scu/lsa](https://lead-ersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/scu/lsa), click on "Write In Your Gift," then put in "331802, RC Alumni Journal" and whatever amount you wish to contribute. Or of course you can always send a check to Carl Abrego, or Robby Griswold, at the college.

You can also give to the Emerging Writer award. Funded by a writing alum, it gives an annual award to graduating writers "who demonstrate excellence in creative writing but have not previously received a writing award recognizing their writing achievements." Its "giving" number is 323069. There's more about Emerging Writers on p. 120.

Visit the RC Writers site for various posts and updates throughout the year ([sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters](https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters)), as well as to view PDFs of all journal issues. (To minimize costs, print copies of the journal have all interior pages in black and white).

Let us know if you'd like to receive an occasional e-blast about readings and others writerly events in the Ann Arbor area (email Dan at [dmadaj@umich.edu](mailto:dmadaj@umich.edu)).

We hope you enjoy this issue, and hope you are having a wonderful year. We look forward to seeing you next year for our third issue!

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 and support from the Residential College.

Dan Madaj served as editor, etc.  
 Contact him at [dmadaj@umich.edu](mailto:dmadaj@umich.edu).

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# Excerpts from **The Penny Poet of Portsmouth: A Memoir of Place, Solitude, and Friendship**

**Katherine Towler**

## **Chapter 1: Whidden Street**

Barely a block long, Whidden Street comes to a dead end at the edge of South Mill Pond and has no real business being called a street. Houses pressed close together face each other across a strip of pavement not much wider than a hallway, their shuttered facades suggesting a scene from an antique postcard. In their mix of colors, cranberry red and white and mustard yellow, the older houses have the solid look of something that has been here a long time. Others are of a more recent vintage, rougher upstarts

that match the broken pavement on their front stoops.

Our first night in our new house on Whidden Street, I stood at the window and gazed out at the rooftops bathed in the glow from the single streetlight. I had lived in other New England cities, but none of them had felt this old or this quirky, the very shape of the streets telling the story of the past. It was midnight, and I still hadn't found the sheets in the maze of boxes that surrounded me. The sound of bells tolling the hour made me pause for a moment in my frenzy of unpacking. Though the steeple was blocks away

in Market Square, it seemed I could reach out the window and touch those solemn notes. They brought the night close and made the darkness familiar in an unfamiliar place.

The dank smell of the pond came in through the window, mud laced with a hint of fish, and in the other direction from downtown I heard the piercing note of a boat's whistle out on the river. The hourly tolling of the bells and the traffic on the river would become the soundtrack of my new life, noises that would soon fade into the background, but on that hot night in June of 1991, when I arrived somewhere I would stay longer than six months or a year, they struck me as the essence of this place I could not quite believe I was going to call home.

For more than a decade, since graduating from college, I had wandered up and down the Eastern seaboard in a restless search for a job, a relationship, and a life that made sense. All too often, I had packed everything I owned into a hatchback and started over, certain that another beginning would be the answer. This time I wasn't making the move alone, and I was taking up residence in an actual house, not a one-room studio apartment. The man I was about to marry had driven a U-Haul truck loaded with both our possessions from Boston that morning and now searched through the mess of boxes with me, as exhausted and apprehensive as I was, both of us nervously excited to discover where we had landed. In retrospect, our arrival in New Hampshire has a sense of inevitability, the moment when I finally stopped running, but that night as I sorted through our ill-packed possessions, I felt like I was

standing in a doorway waiting to see whether I would step through to the other side.

We were woken at five-thirty the next morning by a very loud and raspy voice barking out the declaration, "Gonna be a hot one." When I raised myself on one elbow and drew back the curtain, I saw a large, unshaven man standing beneath the window in the middle of the street. He wore paint-splattered work pants and construction boots. Beside him stood a petite woman in her sixties with a stack of newspapers in her arms. She handed him one and said, "If it burns off."

"Oh, it'll burn off all right," he said.

The woman went back up the street, but he remained beneath our window with a coffee mug in one hand and the newspaper in the other, glancing from side to side as though expecting someone else to appear and continue the conversation. I would learn that Ed greeted the woman who delivered the newspaper like this every morning.

Fog hung over the pond in a milky sheen that gave the water the look of a clouded mirror. I made my way down the back stairs to the kitchen, thinking that even the weather here had an old-fashioned feel, the wispy fog seeming to trace the shape of tall ships coming in to the harbor. The steps beneath my feet were worn down, hollowed into small depressions by nearly two centuries of use, and they were so narrow I had to descend carefully to avoid tumbling straight down the whole flight.

The existence of this staircase was one of the house's idiosyncrasies. It was only a few feet from the front

staircase, which rose from the hallway right inside the front door. Why two sets of stairs were necessary in such a small house was a mystery. This had never been a grand residence, even in the 1800s, the sort of place that might require a second staircase for the maid. I would become used to making the mental calculation – front stairs or back? – several times a day, a choice that seemed to link me to a host of people who had gone before me in this place.

I walked through the rooms strewn with random pieces of furniture, rolled up rugs, and stray lamps, uncertain where to begin. It was then that I heard someone sneeze. Jim, I thought, still upstairs, but a moment later I heard him opening the refrigerator and realized the sneeze had come from a different direction. I crept to the window in the bathroom and peered around the edge of the frame. The profile of a woman was clearly visible behind a curtained window level with mine and only a yard away. She was setting a coffee mug on a table. It appeared that we were going to get to know our neighbors well.

The house needed a good cleaning before we could even begin to unpack, and after breakfast I unearthed the vacuum and set to work. The place had clearly seen hard use by previous tenants; the walls were pockmarked with nail holes, and the paint was worn. Still, it felt like a palace to me, with three rooms downstairs and three upstairs. I wasn't used to having this much space, and I found the sloped floors and narrow closets with their tiny, latched doors fascinating. Evidence of just how old this house was – 1830, the rental agent had told

us – was there wherever I turned: the thin lintels of the mantelpieces, the ceramic doorknobs with their amber hue, the antique glass in the windows that gave the scene on the other side a wavering quality, like a drawing done in sand. I was enthralled with this shabby old place, with the idea of living in a house so quintessentially New England.

When I set off later that morning to find a supermarket, I stepped out the front door directly into the street. There was no room for a sidewalk. Cars did not belong here, though the residents owned them, of course, in some cases two or three vehicles to a house. Where to put all these cars, we would discover, was a constant source of conflict. I had to inch out of the single spot beside our house to avoid hitting the house across the street.

When I returned from the supermarket, a tow-headed boy came running from a house a few down from ours, extended his hand, and said, "Welcome to Whidden Street." He went on to recite a litany of facts about dinosaurs at a rapid speed that made it impossible to follow half of what he said. At the end of this breathless outburst, he said, "I'm Ty. I'm six. Do you have a cat?"

Yes, I told him, we did have a cat.

"I thought I saw a new cat."

"Was he gray?" I asked.

"Yup, gray."

"That's Zane."

Ty nodded and zipped off as quickly as he had come.

We met most of our neighbors over the next few days. It was hard to avoid, living in such close quarters. Eleanor came over to introduce herself from the house directly across the

street, where she lived with her mother and her niece. Her parents had owned the place since the 1940s, she told us, and she had grown up there. Eleanor belonged to the group of old-timers on the block whose houses, like ours, remained pretty close to their original states. Ty's family was in the other camp, recent transplants who had restored their antique houses to a polished authenticity. Being renters, we fell somewhere in between the two groups. No matter how long any of us had been there or where we had come from, though, we were united by the cats. Whidden Street really belonged to them.

We had just Zane, a fiercely smart and independent stray Jim had taken in down in Boston, where he had been living when we met, but our neighbors had two or three cats each, which meant that the felines outnumbered the humans on the block. The lone plot of grass adjoined our house, and it was here that the cats congregated and engaged in a contest to determine who would rule this corner of town. The contest had been decided before we arrived on the scene – Roscoe, a mean orange tabby, would tear up any cat who challenged him – but Roscoe felt compelled to remind the other cats of this fact on a regular basis.

Those first weeks in Portsmouth, I went out walking, exploring the town by wandering its maze of skinny streets. Most days I encountered a tiny, gaunt man somewhere on my route – crossing Market Square, emerging from the post office, or seated on the stone wall by the eighteenth century gravestones on Pleasant Street. He moved with a slow delib-

eration, shoulders hunched forward, in a flimsy black trench coat and a flat cap, a styrofoam coffee cup in one hand and a cigarette between the fingers of the other. His face was framed by glasses with thick, black rims, and a bristled mustache obscured his lips. He seemed to be a fixture downtown, a part of the streetscape, and I assumed from this and his worn clothes that he was homeless. He had the look of someone who wandered with no destination and might not have eaten in some time.

This strange, little man moving like a leaf nudged by the wind, his body bent in such a stoop that he appeared not much more than five feet in height, though he was clearly taller, belonged among these streets that had once been cow paths. He struck me as a figure, like so much in the landscape of Portsmouth, out of another century. One afternoon when I happened to glance out the window at the right moment, I saw him passing by our house. What was he doing, I wondered, all the way at the dead end of Whidden Street? The next day I paid closer attention and caught him emerging from the house on the other side of our patch of lawn, by the pond. Shortly after this, I stepped onto the street one day just as he did so. He raised his head, and his eyes darted away, the only acknowledgement I received.

Our house, like many in the neighborhood, had a dirt cellar. When I took the shallow stairs into its dank depths, I could see the rock ledge on which the foundation rested, jutting from the dirt wall behind the furnace. Almost two centuries earlier, the earth had been carved to hold the house,

and it was easy to imagine men with shovels executing the job. A window not much bigger than a business envelope was cut into the base of the foundation. We left the window unlatched so Zane could go in and out. When the garbage men backed their truck down Whidden Street, he would fly through the window and race upstairs to hide under the couch.

One evening we found Zane crouched by the basement door hissing. Further investigation revealed Roscoe pressed to a moldy corner of the basement. We propped the window open, but he did not budge. After fifteen minutes of attempting to coax him toward the window, we went out into the yard to call him from the other side.

Jim and I were standing next to the house, calling Roscoe's name, when the diminutive man I had observed downtown came down the street. It was a cool night, and he was wearing a brown corduroy jacket that looked like a relic from the 1960s instead of his trench coat. He stopped when he reached us and said, "We have a rene-gade cat, do we?"

I had not articulated it to myself, but clearly I had formed an expectation of what it might be like to hear him talk, because I was so startled by his speech. I explained that Roscoe was in the basement, refusing to come out. He bent down by the basement window and called, "Roscovitch, my dear Roscovitch, do come here."

He sounded like he was reciting Shakespeare in his soft and lilting voice. After a moment, Roscoe jumped through the window and went darting toward the house next door.

"I do apologize," he said. "But I'm afraid that cat has a mind of his own." I thanked him, but he had already turned away and evaporated down the bit of pavement between our houses.

## Chapter 6: The Pigeon Lady

One afternoon I encountered Robert as I passed through Market Square. He came toward me on the brick walk, head raised, eyes lively, and called out hello before I had a chance to speak. I returned the greeting with the sense that being so publicly acknowledged by him represented a breakthrough of some sort.

He withdrew the hand sunk in the pocket of his trench coat and held it toward me. It took a moment for me to realize there was something there, in the palm of his hand, that looked like a square of yellow paper.

"I have that book for you," he said.

What book, I thought. "Your poems?" I said, comprehension dawning on me. He nodded in the affirmative. I took the small book from his hand. It had the handwritten title "Watching the snow" across the top with a little block print of a snowflake-like design beneath. Under this was simply "Robert Dunn."

"What do I owe you for this?" I asked.

He gestured toward the book, indicating I should turn it over. On the back cover, off to the side, was the notation 1 cent. I felt, for the first time with Robert, something like annoyance. I did not intend to give him a penny. I fished in the pocket of my jacket and found a five dollar bill.

"Oh dear," Robert said. "I'm afraid I don't have change for that."

"I don't want change."

"No, no." He curled his fingers closed in a gesture of refusal. "If you don't have a penny, you can give it to me another time."

"How about a dollar?" I took out another bill.

He pulled back the hem of his coat and extracted a collection of coins from the front pocket of his corduroy pants. I watched as he counted out pennies and nickels and quarters.

"I don't want the change," I said.

He ignored me.

"Robert, really, keep the change."

He didn't raise his head. When I persisted, he agreed to accept a quarter from me. I would have paid him twenty dollars for the book if I could have, but this transaction, like any with Robert, would happen on terms he dictated or not at all.

I went on to the post office, and he crossed the street to the Athenaeum, leaving me amazed, as he often did. I had not quite believed he actually sold his little books for a penny. As I made my way home, I remembered the expression of pure delight on his face when he extended his hand with its small offering and wished I could embrace that sort of delight myself more easily. My initial reaction was that the transaction had felt all wrong; in giving him so little money, he had forced me to adopt his standards, financial and otherwise. This was the genius and beauty of his penny books, but how confounding and humbling I found the experience, how much it asked me to reconsider my understanding of being a writer.

## Chapter 11: Vesper Sparrow

On the eastern edge of the country, night comes quickly in winter, bringing a darkness that seems impenetrable by four-thirty in the afternoon. I never quite become accustomed to setting off for the post office in the dark, swaddled in scarf and gloves. One day that December I had to make the trip by walking in the middle of the street along the river because the sidewalks were covered in mounds of snow left by the first storm of the season. The moon, just coming up, emerged from behind elongated clouds to cast a wispy light.

As I made my way back home, my head was level with windows that allowed me to peer into my neighbors' lives. I passed a young man seated at a computer, so close to the sidewalk that I could have reached out and touched him if the window had been open. He did not turn his head as I went by. I spotted another man in a second story window, also at the computer, and thought how we are all tethered to our electronic devices day and night now.

Since his hospitalization, Robert had been on steroids and an array of other drugs, one designed to counteract the side effects of the next. The drugs made it possible for him to breathe and eat. He could walk short distances – over to the bank or to the bookstore – but the rest of downtown was out of reach. That night as I covered one of his old routes, the emptiness of the street came home to me. It wasn't just the hour and the silence of winter, and the single figures in the windows bathed in the glow from computer screens. Robert was missing.

Bystanders at heart, writers are practiced in the art of watching. We live each moment twice – as human beings who inhabit these bodies and interact with others, and as writers who note what can be used and file it away. Every story someone tells us is potential material, every overheard conversation possible inspiration. Uncurtained windows are opportunities.

Robert was a practiced observer, his watching honed to a heightened sensitivity. He made Portsmouth his canvas, and for thirty years covered these streets with an eye to picking up every unexpected treasure, every small revelation, every window into other lives. The novelist Wallace Stegner, in an essay titled "The Sense of Place," says of Americans: "... always hopeful of something better, hooked on change, a lot of us have never stayed in one place long enough to learn it, or have learned it only to leave it." Robert had clearly "learned" Portsmouth.

Robert's fundamental contentment with himself and the world enabled him to see more. He was not, like the rest of us, constantly looking over his shoulder to reevaluate the past or trying to make the future bend to his will. He understood that the search for something better was a false search. Whatever he needed, which wasn't much, could be found right here.

There's an irony in our looking to someone like Robert, who deliberately defined himself outside the mainstream of human life, to tell us about the living of that life. This person watching from the sidelines should, it seems, be the least qualified to illuminate our experience, but this is what we ask of writers. The ones who produce the most lasting books are

often ruthless at separating themselves from the world. In this riddle lies the uncertainty at the heart of the writer's work. We have no right to make claims for the rest of our human brothers and sisters, but this is precisely what we do. We plant a flag at the summit of human experience. We assert that though we might be quiet, watchful types prone to lurking in corners, we have some insight into the lives of our more active neighbors that gives us the license to tell their stories.

Solitude is not a recipe by itself for good writing, nor does good writing necessarily require solitude, but often when these elements come together at the highest levels, something sublime occurs. Robert is a good example. He was beloved as a poet, among those who knew his work in New Hampshire and beyond, because he had his finger on the pulse of a few significant truths and translated them into language that, though the voice might have been quirky and unpredictable, was instantly recognizable as our own, common language. He stood outside the world while giving it back to us whole.

*Katherine Towler (English, 1978) is author of the novels Snow Island, Evening Ferry, and Island Light, a trilogy set on a fictional New England island. Her memoir The Penny Poet of Portsmouth was published by Counterpoint Press in 2016. She is also editor of A God in the House: Poets Talk About Faith. She teaches in the Mountainview MFA Program in Writing at Southern New Hampshire University and lives in Portsmouth, NH. When she is not writing, she spends most of her time birdwatching.*

# International Womens Day gif

Hannah Nathans



A gif to honor strong, inspiring women, as well as trans women, non gender binary folx and men, working to make the world a brighter and more equitable place.

*Hannah Nathans (RC 2015, Arts and Ideas; BA, Graphic and Visual Communications, U-M Urban Studies, 2015) is a graphic designer with Ralph Appelbaum Associates, a museum exhibition design firm in NYC. She received a 2015 Bright Award at the RC, where she served as the Art Editor on the RC Review, facilitated Urban Forum, tutored with PALMA, and founded The Sirens, an a cappella group.*

# Fulfill My Destiny— And Save the World!

Matt Forbeck

## FULFILL MY DESTINY— AND SAVE THE WORLD!

by The Master of Time

**This is not a live project. This is a draft shared by  
The Master of Time for feedback.**

Note that all projects must comply with the [Kickstarter Project Guidelines](#) to launch. The Master of Time may disable this link at any time.

**0**  
backers

**\$0.00**  
pledged of \$1,000,000 goal

**30**  
days to go

**Back This Project**  
\$1 minimum pledge

This project will only be funded if at least \$1,000,000 is pledged by March 31.

I have already conquered the world, but I need your help to build my time machine to make sure it happens. Or we all die.



## About This Project

I realize how insane this might sound, but you must believe me. In fact you (or some vital values of “you”) already have.

At the moment, I’m an average person—someone just like you, although likely a lot smarter and more ambitious—but I have a higher destiny to fulfill. By the time this Kickstarter ends, I will have enough funds to build the prototype of my time machine, and I will use that device to take over the world.

You could try to stop me, of course, but by any worthwhile definition, you are already too late. Instead, the wise thing to do is submit your pledge for this Kickstarter now to help ensure your place in the new world order.

## About Me

You’d love for me to tell you more about myself, I know, but I’ve gone to great trouble to erase all existing clues about my past. Otherwise, traitors from the future might try to go back to the days before my birth and exterminate my ancestors.

Let’s just say that you’re about to get to know me well enough in my identity as the Master of Time.

## About My Machine

It is a thing of rare beauty and wonder, and that’s just the hypermathematics that make it work. My initial prototype is a bit clunky—and about the size of a truck—but you should see the things my future self has done to integrate it via nanotechnology into his immortalizing subdermal endoskeleton. No more losing track of the machine while exploring the Jurassic period!

Suffice it to say that there will only ever be one functional machine, and that it will be mine. That kind of power is just too intoxicating to share with the less gifted. The risk isn’t worth it.

## About My Reign

There’s no need to fear. I’m not doing this for my own edification. I’m doing it for you.

Just look at the world today. You can see that it’s falling apart. All forms of government have failed, with politicians either falling into the pockets of the wealthy or already hailing from their ranks. Wars rage all across the planet. The poor starve while the rich glut themselves on the fruits of their laborers.

The only solution is a global government led by a benevolent dictator. Most people agree that this is the most efficient and fairest form of rule, but they worry about happens once that wonderful ruler dies. Will his heirs botch it?

Will the people come to fear the system that gave them so much comfort?

With access to the technology of the future, I can guarantee myself immortality. I will rule the rule forever and well. So lay aside those fears.

But why me? Why should I be the permanent ruler of humanity?

Once I travel into the future, I’ll bring many of its advances back to my people today. Imagine leaping forward a hundred years at once as a people. Or a thousand!

While you might fear that this could cause a paradox, my future self assures me that it works well. His existence here in our time should serve as stark proof of that. He knew there was a small risk of disaster when he launched himself along that path, but the potential benefits outweighed that by several orders of magnitude—and proved far too vital to resist.

With your help, I will put an end to want, to fear, even to death.

All I require is your absolute loyalty. And your pledge. Now.

## Stretch Goals

I already know how high this Kickstarter will go, so I can guarantee that we’ll hit some of them. Telling you all the details, though, could alter the future and—worse yet—would destroy the fun. However, should we reach two million dollars—just double the initial goal—I’ll release a copy of my initial version of this Kickstarter.

That includes the text I was working on before my future self arrived to reassure me of my inevitable success. It’s hilarious, let me tell you. I was so naïve!

For every million dollars that we raise after that, I’ll move my timetable forward one month. Originally, I thought this might take me more than a year to pull together, but with my future self’s help, we should be able to bump that up to—well, whenever you want!

\* \* \* \*

## FAQ

### Does the time machine look like a DeLorean?

No.

### Does the time machine look like a British police box?

No.

### Do you retain your clothing when you travel through time?

Yes. And whatever else you're carrying. Believe me, it makes conquering the world much easier.

### Can I be your companion?

Sure. If you can spare a million dollars. (See the top reward level.) Note that you will have to share duties with my current companion, Rita Wong, a.k.a. the Lady in Orange. Or fight her to the death (Rita's choice).

### Why bother with this Kickstarter? Can't your future self just give you the time machine?

He could, but we need to somehow close the time loop his return to the present began. Rest assured that if I can figure out a way for that to happen without reaching out to you for your help, I will. In that case, *this drive will never launched*. However, I'll keep the unlaunched page around for historians to examine.

....

## Reward Tiers

### Pledge \$25 or more

0 backers

I won't kill you—unless there's no other choice.

Estimated delivery: Instant

### Pledge \$100 or more

0 backers

Not only will I not kill you, I won't have you killed. Standard caveats apply.

Estimated delivery: Instant

### Pledge \$500 or more

0 backers

If I have to kill you, I won't have you erased from existence.

Estimated delivery: Instant

### Pledge \$1,000 or more

0 backers

BEST BARGAIN! Protect yourself and your entire family. (Only loved ones living under the same roof qualify).

Estimated delivery: Instant

### Pledge \$10,000 or more

0 backers

Not only do you get to live, but you can name someone else for me to erase from existence. It's the perfect crime. How is it murder if they never lived?

Estimated delivery: It's already happened. You just don't remember it.

### Pledge \$100,000 or more

0 backers

Allow me to take you back to any point in time and any place on Earth for a one-hour visit. (Past-trips only, I'm afraid. The future is mine!)

Estimated delivery: Your choice. (Within the limits stated above.)

### Pledge \$1,000,000 or more

0 backers **LIMITED (1 left of 1)**

Become one of my top advisors and travel with me through time. See the FAQ for more details.

Estimated delivery: When the time is right.

\*\*\*\*

## Risks and Challenges

As you can see in the video, my future self has already brought back news of my eventual triumph. Since my reign is fated to happen, if this Kickstarter drive should somehow fail—however unlikely that might be—that would cause a massive and disastrous paradox.

So what, you say? Who cares about a paradox?

Every paradox damages the time-space continuum to an extent commensurate with its importance. The time stream might be able to sustain and even

recover from a smaller paradox, but surely not one that determines the fate of the entire planet. The repercussions could shred the fabric of space and time and cause the dissolution of reality of we know it.

All of us will cease to exist. In fact, it may be that we never happened in the first place.

Can we afford to take that chance? More to the point, can you?

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*Matt Forbeck (RC Creative Writing, 1989) is an award-winning and New York Times-bestselling author and game designer with over thirty novels and countless games published to date. His recent work includes Halo: Bad Blood, the new series Dungeons & Dragons: Endless Quest books, the Star Wars: Rogue One junior novel, Dungeonology, and The Marvel Encyclopedia, plus work on Assassin's Creed: Origins, Ghost Recon Wildlands, and the Shotguns & Sorcery roleplaying game based on his novels. He lives in Beloit, WI, with his wife and five children, including a set of quadruplets. For more about him and his work, visit [Forbeck.com](http://Forbeck.com).*



## The End

Julia Byers

Dylan used to tell me sunshine on funerals was a good thing, like rain on weddings was good. When I asked him how he knew, he said it was obvious, because more babies were born during storms than when the sun was present and white and hot, and weddings and babies promised the same thing: a new beginning. So sunshine on a funeral was a good thing, too, since it was the opposite: the end.

I don't believe him, though. With the way the sun's shining through the pine needles way up above, reflecting off everyone's shiny black shoes and pooling too bright against the newer gravestones that still haven't been worn rough by bad weather, I can't help but think that sunshine is an awful thing at a funeral, because

it makes everyone slow and sleepy and content in their rows of rickety white folding chairs, while inside I am screaming, and reeling, and dying myself, staring at his casket beside the hole.

#####

Dylan used to tell me there was one four leaf clover in every field, if you just looked hard enough. When I told him it was BS, he scrunched his thick eyebrows low until they brushed against his eyelashes to tell me no, it had to be true, because it took a certain amount of luck for a piece of land to become a field for kids like us to play on, and therefore there must be a four leaf clover hidden somewhere. I don't believe him, though. We were

lying out in a field, the group of us from the Regent High Photography Club who went out for burgers after our meeting instead of going home, when the bee stung him, and his throat swelled shut so fast he couldn't even finish chewing his mouthful. If that field had been lucky, the bee wouldn't have landed on Dylan's cheek. It would have found my hand instead, which was just inches away in the grass. It would have stung me and it would have hurt, but not like this, since I am not the one who was allergic to bees.

Dylan probably would have said the field was lucky once upon a time, and someone just stole its four leaf clover. But Dylan can't say anything anymore.

#####

Dylan used to tell me the lines on the palm of your hand determined how long you were going to live, and while he traced a finger over my sticky skin with the heat blowing in on us through my open bedroom window, I'd ask him how he was sure, and he'd reply in that slightly gravelly, never serious voice, "Because yours say you're going to live 'til you're a hundred, and I wouldn't have it any other way." I didn't believe him though. Now he'll never know, will he? He'll never know if I'll live to a hundred, and I'll never know what the lines on his hand said because I never dared look—I was never brave enough to see when he'd die. Thinking back on it, I still don't know if I'd rather have known or not. Maybe the bee was there because he had to die; maybe it was his time, and his hand said that, and it was not just

some random occurrence, some twist of chance, like Janice tells me over and over again when she calls me on the phone, crying, every night. He never said he loved her. That's what she talks about mainly, when she cries. He never said he loved her.

#####

Dylan used to tell me that God lived on the biggest cloud in the sky. When I asked him how he knew, he said he didn't. But when he looked up there on sunny afternoons, when everything was too bright and too intense and too concentrated—so alive you had to squint and it made you tired just to breathe it in... when he looked up at the sky, then, there was something in his face that made it seem like he did know, after all.

I believed him, though. I believed him that God lived on the biggest cloud in the sky, because although I didn't believe in Heaven, I did believe in the strong curve from Dylan's chin to his ear, and the way the little blond hairs along his jaw would catch in the sunlight, like they were shining too. I believed in the swoop of his thick, straw-colored hair along his forehead, and his rounded cheeks, and the way his eyes were never quite blue or green or grey, but a mixture of all of them, like that swirl of colors the sink turns when you rinse out a paintbrush.

And now my stomach is burning, cold and hot and not quite painful, but not quite okay either. And my eyes are burning too, but they're more like that sort of pain you get from sprinkling salt over a rug burn,

and the inside of my left cheek throbs from biting it to keep back the screams. My hair is twisted away in a too-tight bun because the counselor told my mom not to leave it down or I might try ripping it out again. My dress is navy blue and too short for a funeral, with an off-white cardigan thrown over its spaghetti straps even though it must be ninety degrees, because I never thought Dylan would die, so I never thought I'd need something conservative and black and impersonal to wear to his funeral. Janice sits beside me and sobs with the heels of her hands pressed against her eyes, strawberry blond hair done in curls, down around her shoulders, but I am silent and still and staring, while inside I tear myself apart.

#####

The day Dylan died he told me, "I need to get home, Alexis. I've got a chemistry test tomorrow," and when I said it wouldn't take all that long to get burgers, we were just going to the McDonald's down the street with the field out behind it, he said, "But I need to study real, real bad."

I didn't believe him, though. I said, "It'll take twenty minutes. A half hour tops."

And because the thing Dylan hated most in the world was disappointing me, more than he hated disappointing his chemistry teacher, or the people looking over his college applications, or Janice, who he was supposed to be studying with later, he said, "Fine."

And with the sun beating down on us, the group from the Regent High Photography Club walked down the street to McDonald's, while Dylan walked away from life. His fingers were warm, brushing against mine on the way there, as he pointed to the sun and told me how it meant the end.

*Julia Byers (RC 2016) graduated from the Columbia Publishing Course UK in 2016. She runs the writerly nonprofit Chapter One Events, is an amateur photographer, and is an assistant for a children's literary agency.. She lives in New York City, where among other things she worked as an editorial intern at Scholastic. "The End" was originally published in the 2012-13 issue of the RC Review.*



## Belated Glimpse of the Obvious: Some Thoughts On How to Be a Woman in the Kitchen

Erin Fairbanks

Working in a kitchen ruled. People thought I was a badass. I'd drop the line, "oh I'm a cook" at the bar or a dinner party and the response was almost exclusively: "Wow that is so cool, that must be so cool, my job is so...lame, boring—I could never do that..." I'd usually think, looking them up and down, "Yeah, you probably couldn't. You probably couldn't hack it."

Working in a kitchen ruled because most of the time, in my experience, everyone really wanted to be there. They loved it. On days off or after a twelve-hour shift we'd get together and talk menus and techniques. We'd read books, and blogs, and magazines. It never felt like there was enough time to do all the things you wanted to do. It was like being around a bunch of people who are dopey in love.

Frankly, you need the love because objectively everything about the job sucked. The pay was shit. The hours were long and I'd make them longer, literally showing up before I was even allowed to punch in. I would come in early and find places to hide and start my prep work—a sous chef would give me a chat: "Hey, you're not allowed to come in before 1:30PM and you can't punch in until 2PM—that is your scheduled shift, ok" I'd nod, say sorry and ignore him.

Half the time I'd be so caught up in my prep that when 2pm rolled around I would forget to punch in and then, not even get paid for my scheduled hours but I didn't care. I was just happy to be there. I just wanted to have a good service. What did I need money for anyway? All I did was work and sleep.

In a kitchen, it's hot; a box of hastily opened cornstarch is an employee bathroom fixture—prevents chafing. The job is physically uncomfortable in almost every way—things are heavy, spaces are awkward—there is fire and heat and steam everywhere. You are dressed head to toe in flame retardant poly blends that are not cut for breasts or hips and ass.

When I worked as a line cook a good meal was something I could eat out of a quart container that didn't require a lot of chewing. It had to be calorie dense enough to get me through service and I usually ate it bent over a garbage can, literally shoveling the food into my mouth. The luxury of chewing salad greens was for front of house. I didn't have time to chew. Service was coming.

I spent four years working in two well-regarded New York City kitchens:

Gramercy Tavern and Savoy. The chefs and owners in both of these farm-to-table restaurants were incredibly supportive of me and the other female cooks. If you looked across the industry they were above average in regards to hiring women and putting them in leadership positions. The men and women I cooked with from 2005 to 2009 had incredible talent. They have gone on to lead kitchens and businesses across the world. I am so proud of the work we got to do together.

But today, when I look back at this period I am so struck by the amount of time and effort I put into playing a role. Not the role of cook—my job, but the role of "Mommy," the role of "Sexy-baby" or my time as "Just one of the guys." If you'd asked me then I wouldn't have described these environments as hostile to women. I wouldn't have said that the men I worked with were dicks or misogynists—I liked them. I wanted them to like me. I wanted to get along.

When I was in "Mommy" mode I'd soothe and build up egos. I'd make sure my station partners had all they needed. I would run interference for them with other cooks, porters, or dishers. I would make them breakfast. I would get them coffee. I would watch their back and then some.

I'd help out weaker cooks because it was better for me. It was better for service. Being a team player in the kitchen is important. Everyone has to work together to get the job done. If we weren't in sync you felt it right away.

On top of being a team player, on top of doing the extra work, I had to figure out a way to help without



hurting anyone's feelings—or making them feel threatened by me. When I was the stronger cook I had to pretend the difference wasn't our skills but some other factor; let's say I came in early and had extra time or the AM cook had really set me up.

It couldn't just be that I was the better cook. They didn't want to be seen needing help from a girl. No one said this but you got the message. If you skipped the step where you pretend you have extra time because you're station is light, or whatever, things got tricky. If you forgot to couch your offer of help with the right amount of ass kissing—guys acted like dicks and didn't take the help they needed and then they went down in flames during service and fucked up your night too. It was easier to play the role. I didn't even know I was doing it. I just knew it made things run more smoothly for me. It made it easier to get along.

"Sexy-baby" was a role needed for a different audience than "Mommy". In this role I'd trade on sexuality to get what I needed. I'd ignore the porter who always seemed to need to squeeze past me when there was plenty of room. He'd look out for me when vegetables came in and pull the best of them aside for me.

There is a degree of scarcity in a well-run kitchen. Ordering is a science. In New York City, kitchens are usually small and there isn't a huge amount of cold or dry storage space. So orders come in every day. Deliveries hit the back dock, they get unloaded, sorted, put away and then pulled for that night's service. There is usually just enough of everything, just what is needed. If you are like me you

want the best of it for your station. You want the most perfect of everything. So, if the guy in receiving helps you out by pulling things aside for you—so what if he gets a little close? What's the big deal?

So what if every day you walk past a "tsss tsss mami" paired with a vulgar gesture and a penis shaped parsnip—you laugh. "Oh papi..." If the disher thought you had pretty eyes you got your pots when you needed them. When you're cooking on a hot line things move fast. Each dish starts fresh—each component needs a place to cook or heat or a vessel to pass it down the line. You need a steady supply of dishes. You need them to be there when you reach for it because you don't have time to wait or ask or run to the pit and get them.

Your goal was to be perfect, to make perfect food. I did everything I could to set myself up. I worked to give myself every advantage I could. It's not like I was sleeping with the boss to get ahead—it wasn't a big deal. Everyone used what they had to get an edge. I'd build in innuendo. I'd ignore blatant body grabs. I'd make jokes about how my chef pants squeezed my hips and ass—"look how tight they are." I'd flirt because it was an easier way to get along. It was an easier way to get what I needed. I figured it wasn't a big deal and, it worked.

The role I most regret is: "Just one of the guys," aka "cool girl." In this mode I didn't blanch when a group of cooks was laughing about a server getting so drunk that she slept with so and so and, like, didn't even remember it. I participated in rating

other women in the kitchen—who's cute, who's sexy—I talked about their bodies, their makeup, who they sleep with or might sleep with. I just went with it. I knew all the secret codes for hot girls at the bar: "side of rice at position six"—hot Asian girl. "Yo, it's a full line-up of 'rubbers,' out there tonight"—easy girls, girls to dump in. I wondered what they said about me, when I wasn't in the circle. I hoped they like me. I hoped they wondered if I was a better cook than them. I drank more than I could or wanted to because it's important to keep up and be one of the guys. You bond and you blow off steam over endless Budweiser's. I drank so much I couldn't make it to the train without needing to duck between two cars and pee. It was hard to come down after the rush of service and there wasn't a lot of time to do it, beer was easy.

The scope of NYC narrowed. There was the tunnel I moved through between work and home—nothing else really mattered to me. If I wasn't at work, I was sleeping or going out to eat somewhere or reading about food. The kitchen was really the only place I wanted to be. Everywhere else felt sleepy and slow, I had no energy for it. I had no interest.

So I cooked. I cooked as hard and as well as I could. I used all the tools I could think of to get better to be more perfect. I stepped in and out of these roles as needed. It was often many times every shift. I mixed it up based on who was I prepping next to, who was running the pass that night, who was working roast. I adjusted and I went with the best choice based on my experience. Just

being myself didn't feel like an option. I saw what happened to women who didn't play along. They were bitches, they were uptight, no fun, bad cooks, party-poopers—they just didn't "get it" they weren't part of the club. And when you're working this hard, you need that, you need to feel like you fit in, like someone has your back. The idea that we are supposed to move through the workplace impervious to all of this is laughable. I needed support. I needed a team. If those things came with tradeoffs, oh well. If there wasn't room for everyone, too bad—not everyone can hack it.

The thing is, I was there to work not to perform my gender. I wanted to be a chef or at least a really good cook. I didn't want to be a whiny baby who couldn't cut it and ran to the boss when the boys got mean. I couldn't imagine sitting down across from my chef and saying I was upset because someone kept making penis jokes with the produce or so and so kept talking about how I looked. No one thing felt big enough to be worth talking about. It would have been too embarrassing. Besides what could they even do—this is just how things are. This was just the way it was.

What I know now is this culture is built by us. It is constructed by the cooks, and chefs, and porters and owners. We get to make it—it is not inevitable. If you've never been on the receiving end of this type of sexism it can be really hard understand the toll it can take. It is really easy to dismiss. Privilege is not even seeing it. Privileged is not having to play a role. Privilege is just getting to be a cook. Just doing your really hard job. I own my decisions but frankly none

of these roles felt like a choice, they felt necessary. I needed them. All the performing took up a lot of time and energy. In retrospect I think it really held me back.

How much time would I have saved? How much mental energy and creativity could I have brought to my work if I wasn't trying to be so creative just navigating all the sexist bullshit? My best guess: 2.5 hours a week or 130 hours a year—that's 2–3 weeks of missed work. How much better could I have been? How much stronger could the industry be? What are we missing out on by not dealing with this?

I wish someone had told me that the feelings I was having, the reactions I was getting—were common. It wasn't just me. My discomfort was valid—I was right. I wish I had known that it didn't have to be this way, that I didn't have to play a role. I wish I had said something to the guys next to me because they were good men and I think they could have understood. I think they would have tried. I think this culture was hurting us both.

At the time, I believed I was living in a post-feminist world. I grew up with Title IX, unfettered access to birth control (thank you Planned Parenthood,) I knew moms that worked, there were as many women as men in my college class—I was sure I could do anything I wanted. My parents, teachers, and bosses seemed to echo this.

When I walked into the kitchen, I wasn't on the lookout. I didn't know what sexism looked like. I didn't know how it felt. I didn't know that I could do something about it. I didn't even realize how my behavior played into it. I thought it was just me and this is

just how it was. I liked being tough and doing things not a lot of women did.

I wish I would have said—"hey, that's not cool" when a group of guys was dogging on a woman they felt threatened by. I wish I would have talked to the other female like cooks about how they were doing or how much we got paid—I found out years later that a colleague of mine at the time was making \$9/hour. I was making \$11 because I had asked my boss for more. We had the same job, she didn't know she could ask, it hadn't even occurred to her. I wish I had stood up more. I wish I had reached out more. I wish there was someone on the leadership staff who had been on the lookout for this and actively checked in with us.

I wish the conversation about sexism in the kitchen didn't start with the idea that women don't know when or how they will have a family. I was 25, I wasn't worried about having a baby. I wanted to be a badass cook. I was young, I was inexperienced. I needed someone to show me the way.

The headlines lately can feel overwhelming, each passing day brings a new sexual harassment or assault claim and it's all pretty messy. I keep coming back to the work of unpacking my own stories. I keep thinking about my mistakes and where I could have been better. I know now, despite all the progress, that being a woman impacts how the world sees me, it affects my opportunities, it shapes who I am. I am on the lookout now. When I see it I call it out. When I feel myself still slipping into the old roles: "Mommy," "Sexy-baby" and "Just

one of the guys"—I check myself.

*Originally published in Medium (medium.com) on December 11, 2017.*

**Erin Fairbanks** (RC 2001) is chief operator at GROUT Consulting, a social impact consulting firm based in Brooklyn, NY. She is founder of Ladies' Night a monthly hang that partners with female owned businesses to explore leadership and workplace empowerment in the company of women she loves, trusts, and admires. Erin also volunteers weekly with Metropolitan Jewish

Hospice Society (MJHS). She sits on the advisory council for both Glynwood, an agricultural non-profit serving New York State's Hudson Valley and the Julia Child Foundation. She is the Junior Board Chair for the Food Education Fund a non-profit that serves the students of Food and Finance High school and also sits on the board of Equity Advocates a nonprofit that prepares and trains food movement leaders to be powerful advocates. Other loves include books, biking and cooking meals with friends.

# Salt

Kathryn Orwig

Salt  
a simple thing  
White, small, a ding-a-ling  
Shook on, ground down  
On almost every dish it's found.

What happens when it's gone?  
It becomes a drawn,  
Pain-filled memory of once joyous times.  
Seeing those tears shed down as limes

Squeezed and juiced upon Thyme.  
Like my mother's face as she stands behind  
The kitchen cabinets,  
"We can't even afford salt," she laments.

I view.  
What can I do?  
At the mall with friends the next night  
They order food, I feign delight.

"I'm not hungry," I say.  
I lied that day.  
As we walk to a spot  
My eyes alight on a shiny dot.

Of hope,  
Of salt.  
In white packets they stand  
In their holes they band.

My friends walk on.  
I look behind me  
To the left and right of me,  
I grab a tiny handful  
In my pocket, thankful.

At home, I give the winnings  
To my mom, grinning,  
"Salt."

*Kathryn Orwig (RC 2017) is working as a screenwriter for It's Not a Phase, Mom LLC, an animation company, developing content for 20 episodes that will be shown online. More about Kathryn on page 51 and at her website: [www.kathrynorwig.com](http://www.kathrynorwig.com).*

# The Art of Storytelling

Jeanette Bradley

Picture books are meant to be read aloud - to be, in a way, a performance on a very intimate stage. While seemingly simple, a picture book is actually a complex, interactive art form that combines visual art, literature, and theatre. When it works, the interaction between image, text, and reader creates something more than the sum of its parts. People often ask me which comes first - words or pictures? The answer is that I have an iterative process where I am constantly

switching back and forth. Writing a picture book feels less like writing and more like figuring out a really complex, 3D puzzle. While I'm working, I ask myself: How do the words sound when read aloud? Are the page turns building dramatic tension? Do I even need words here, or can the illustrations carry this part of the story? These five images and story snippets come from unpublished picture book manuscripts - books-to-be that are still missing a puzzle piece.



If there is the tiniest accident with your jewel-encrusted goblet, (and the tablecloth, and the candlesticks) then remember: victory can be won with a jug of lemonade.



If you are invited into a dragon's lair, then back away slowly, and say you couldn't possibly, being much too busy with, er, stuff. Stuff that has absolutely nothing to do with slaying dragons.



Kit can crouch, and leap, and track.



Mission fail!  
No belt earned yet.



"Cake! Cake! Cake!" sang Isobel, twirling around the table, "Now we can live happily ever after!"

*Jeanette Bradley (RC 1994) has been an urban planner, an apprentice pastry chef, and the artist-in-residence for a traveling art museum on a train. Her debut picture book Love, Mama was published in January 2018 by Roaring Brook Press. It contains no cities, pastries, or trains, but was made with lots of love. Forthcoming is Taking the Mic: Fourteen Young Americans Making Change, co-edited by Bradley, Keila V. Dawson, and Lindsay H. Metcalf, and illustrated by Bradley (Charlesbridge, 2020). She currently lives in Rhode Island with her wife and kids.*

# in which I did, in fact, reside.

Alex Kime

*dedicated to the queer and mostly here,  
and the time we spent in the island of misfit noise*

let's start with an image: your bicentennial baby/ fresh  
from the pipeline and the RC graduation minute where, because my parents  
were watching and observance creates more layers of performance,  
my thoughts were serious, and stayed. I talked of growth, of pushed  
towards you and finding community

but here, now, let me be honest.  
during that minute I was really fucking tired.  
and maybe, it was off the commencement pregame  
and it is definitely accurate to say that I am, in fact still tired  
but I'm here homaging a space  
I only ever heard nostalgia about, turned sanitized java blu  
the moment I moved in and did my time

I think I read a poem in there once,  
winning some cash prize I spent irresponsibly  
and maybe the message was about love  
(that we were ~reading Neruda~)

mostly, I was making the poems as my electrified  
insomniac meatsack wander-studied  
in the building's most empty, 5am and winter break, mausoleum hotel  
that did not kill the ghosts I called company,  
grateful for the shadow amidst the mess of my mind

and thus, thank you weirdness, and thank you Gender Inclusive Living Experience  
letting me be a part of things when I was "just an ally"  
thank you space to grow and be so much more than just  
about almost everything  
thank you concrete ledge behind the pink house on hill street  
where I inhaled fresh air  
thank you secret poems whispered into the polar vortexes  
thank you snow days for saving my depressive ass  
thank you pizza house right before they close at 4  
to say nothing of the side of someone's neck,  
and the marks we wore to class the next day,  
proud to be monuments of late teen desire  
thank you Ken Mikolowski who, when returning my manic journal

my first year told me *burn it* and also (*once*) to make a  
poem *longer*  
thank you Sarah *I was a witch before I became a Buddhist* Messer,  
thou cheese-making question-asker  
thank you Solange, both Knowles and Muñoz, thank you RC Spanish  
cada lágrima de sangre valió la pena y lo siento Crísthian,  
thank you art on the walls and thank you students who put it there  
to piss off housing  
thank you Catherine for books and bodies, thank you Kate for a stage,

and thank you too, Carl, for that A  
you gave me, even and *especially* after I yelled at you  
about how anti-affirmative action beliefs  
presuppose an even playing field of other resources  
and I'd be happy to have that conversation again

I'm across the street now, socially working,  
and I rep my undergrad  
because I bring it back to colonialism always,  
poetry mostly, I sassily raise my hand in class  
and I want creative solutions to the mess we call personhood

I gave a speech this past winter where I talked of a self  
so afraid of its own nature that a way forward always seemed impossible,  
tragedy trajectory.

here we are, back again at growth.  
so thank you place, thank you people;  
thank you magic of small classes and tiny corners.  
thank you dreamers, and thank you tangles.  
thank you to the random alums who, upon seeing my sophomore self,  
were overjoyed to see something of their flung-back selves/ still present  
in the hotel

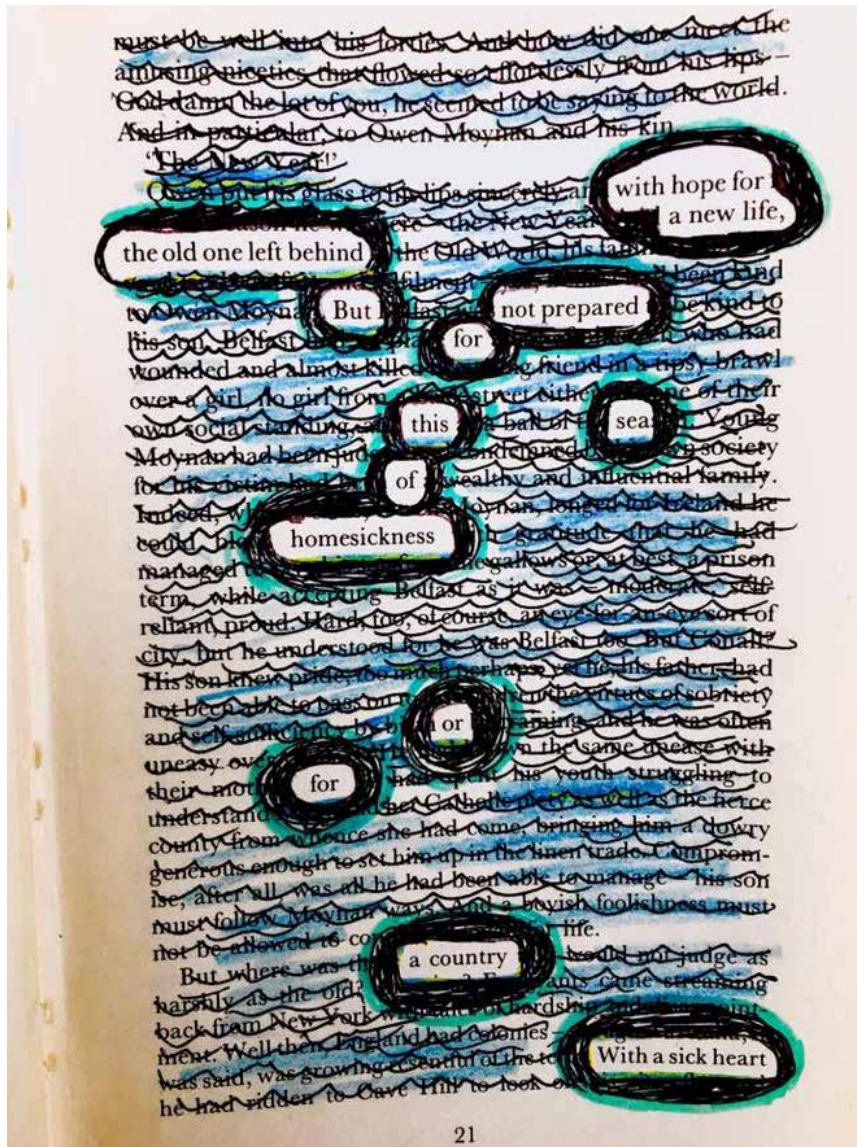
*because* of context, and **despite** the time.  
thank you fragment. thank you through-line.  
I cannot wait for who is next.

*Alex Kime (RC 2017) is currently a U-M Master of Social Work student concentrating on Social Policy and Evaluation alongside Community Organizing and a National Community Scholar. They graduate in December 2018. They have worked as a teaching artist, facilitator, and social justice educator through various organizations on and off-campus. Receiving Highest Honors on their undergraduate thesis, a manuscript of poems, they were the recipient of the 2015 Jeffrey L. Weisburg Memorial Prize in Poetry, the 2017 Student Speakership at the 94th Honors Convocation, and the 2017 Patricia Gurin Certificate of Merit in Intergroup Relations. Their poems can be found in Current Magazine, the Michigan Daily, Café Shapiro, and others.*



# To My Parents

Esha Biswas



Esha Biswas (RC 2016, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, minor in Music) is now the RC's Student Affairs Coordinator, and is also an MS student at U-M's School for Environment and Sustainability. After graduating from the RC, she worked as a wildlife rehabilitator at the Bird Center of Washtenaw County, where she helped rehabilitate and release wild songbirds. She is passionate about the environment, photography, music, and making the world a better place, little bits at a time.



## After the Flood

Dan Madaj

Just ask poor Bessa Mae Mucco, she'll tell you it seemed real enough, that Brad Spritzer was about to drown in his own tears and was turned away from the hallway so he didn't see her pounding on the glass of the XC basement study carrel. He didn't seem to hear her screaming, either. But others did. Someone found a janitor, who unlocked the carrel's glass door, spilling Brad's salty lament over the janitor, Bessa Mae, and a few other students sitting on the floor further down the hall.

Today, you probably wouldn't notice the row of three holes drilled near the bottom of the glass door, a simple yet practical way to prevent future drownings. More obvious is the sign pasted to the glass saying that students can be bumped at a moment's notice for

administrative priority! I guess the idea was that making the carrels feel more temporary would be a kind of remedy. And meanwhile, others at the university were hard at work with other preventive solutions: preferring admission of XC students with less than normal tear-duct activity or those who were members of their high school's swim club.

Almost no one is comfortable with the supernatural overtones of the episode, Brad included. Brad would rather tell you how it goofed up romance for him, if only because Bessa Mae and then other XC women made assumptions about him based on his copious tears. Like most creative writing students, most of Brad's tears were primarily self-expressive.

Experts claimed that simple phys-

ics prevented Brad from producing enough tears to drown himself, even in such a tiny space, and even over several hours. That would be more comforting if regular physics had anything to do with this.

Just one more thing, Kay Minnow kept telling herself, as 5:30 became 6 and then 6:30. One more thing and then she'd head for home. But the Fall semester was only a few weeks old and each day's plans were ambushed by emergencies real and imagined, so she was getting basic things done in the quiet, after hours. She was new to the job, and didn't begrudge the extra effort, especially since at the moment there wasn't much very exciting in her personal life, now that Rick had moved out and away.

Sometimes when she worked early or late, she remembered that time as a typist when a professor was shocked his paper, which he was dropping off just a few moments before 5, would not be typed by 8 the next morning. "I'm giving you fifteen hours to type it!" he exclaimed, not believing she didn't work 24 hours a day. Today, there was the lecturer who interrupted a call with a frantic parent by leaning over her desk and pawing through its top drawer, searching for a sharp pencil. And there was the professor angry that a mailing hadn't gone out, only to learn he was the only person with the mailing list, which he hadn't shared.

She smiled, remembering the 1000-pill bottle of aspirin her predecessor had left in her desk, mostly empty. Finally, Kay forced herself up, filled the coffee maker with water, filled

the drip basket with grounds so that a press of a button in the morning would get the brew going. She grabbed her sweater and was just turning off the lights when Burton Downey, the new XC director, returned from a late college meeting, the first chair-and-director meeting of the new semester.

Downey didn't seem at all surprised to find Kay still at the office; if anything, he seemed annoyed that she was leaving! He chattily told her about sitting with the new "dream professor" from Psychology. He made the old joke that he may or may not have been dreamy to look at, but no, he was quite famous these days for his dream work. Downey had asked him to look in on the Brad Spritzer matter, not that there was any indication that dreams were involved.

"He'll probably drop by in the morning," Downey said. "I told him we could arrange for a little stipend for his trouble. I know it's late, but I told him maybe you could have something for him tomorrow. Maybe by lunch?"

Darryl Koshwar, the so-called "dream detective," had bribed Brad, offering a free lunch at the Outside Inn down the street from the XC in exchange for some information. In Darryl's undergraduate days, the Outside was a student-run grease pit in the XC basement. In recent years it had closed, then been reborn when several alums took over a vacant dive up the street. So far, business was good.

Darryl arrived early, and the place was mostly empty. He took a seat in a booth with a good view of the

front door. He was studying the menu, intrigued by the preponderance of Greek food on the menu (spanakopita, horiatiki, dalmades, avgolemono, galactoboureko) when he heard someone slide into the booth across from him, then heard a woman's voice say, "It's those Greeks filming the Aristophanes plays." An XC project produced these annual plays; it was an unexpected financial boon when Greek sources paid to broadcast the spring productions back home.

Darryl put down the menu and was not surprised to see Matrisha Forsythe, although he was always startled by the surgical intensity of her blue eyes in an otherwise pleasant, friendly face. Back when a student, Trisha was famous for her tiny vegetarian restaurant, New Trisha's Delights, although everyone called it "Clara Voyant's" because of Trisha's startling "feelings" about the viability of the relationships of her guests. You'd bring a date, hoping "Clara" would smile . . .

Her honesty was not good for business, it turned out, especially when she'd refuse to serve you, say, fried foods but suggested a small salad, at least until you lost some weight. Then when several former staffers opened the first Sign of the Mind Reader (with its more superficial but much more hopeful prognostications), Trisha closed her restaurant, finished her degree in art history, got married, but stayed in town. She had worked in the Inn during its XC days, and so she helped out when it reopened down the street. Recently she helped develop the XC's newest undergraduate major, Culinary Arts and Ideas. Yes, at first there were the standard jokes about students minoring in "marijua-

na brownies." She now teaches a cooking class, and continues at the Outside, so it was not unusual that she was there when Darryl came in for lunch.

After grad school, Darryl left for a teaching job on the west coast, where he grew famous for his "dream detective" work. He fell into it quite accidentally. You might have already heard of some of these cases:

There was the celebrity who had somehow lost the "wall" between himself and the dreams of others. His fans' fantasies became overwhelming and it was harder and harder to appear in public. A little was fun; a lot was terrifying. So Darryl helped brick that wall back up.

There was the woman who somehow switched places with her dream self. Her awake self enjoyed her time in the dream world; it was the dream self who came to him for help. She found the waking world so over-run with unfiltered emotions and hormones!

Darryl was most famous for finding an abducted toddler. He was able to enter the toddler's dreams, then use his lucid skills to notice details (the abductor's face and clothing, the sound of a waterfall outside), enough for the police to find him.

Darryl was back "home" as a tenure-track associate professor, but the return was bittersweet. For one thing, most so-called "dream detectives" go crazy or kill themselves by 45, and Darryl's already 40. He used to dismiss that notion, but now he can feel a tug from that other side . . .

For another, his parents are divorced, both have moved away, the

family home sold. He had a brother, but he died a few years ago in a boating accident. He can't shake the feeling that he's following guidelines that are at least 10 years too old.

Despite the free food, Brad was 20 minutes late. And even then, he's distracted, answers hanging in mid-sentence, nervously glancing down at his phone.

"First day back," Brad eventually says, in a rush of words, "I meet Vicky, Vicky Hale, and we hit it off. Wow, what a great start to the semester!"

He smiled, sadly. "I remember thinking: I wonder if she was admitted as part of the university's *The University Needs More Victors* campaign." He then clouded over. "And guess who became her victim?"

Darryl tried not to roll his eyes.

"After a few days spending every moment together, I thought I'd surprise her with dinner at the Mindreader. I mean, I thought it would be a nice way to formally acknowledge our relationship. But . . . I guess she felt pressured. She stood up, walked out, and she's hardly said two words to me since then!"

Brad paused, gulped, looked like he might start crying again.

"That night, I wandered down into the XC basement, feeling sorry for myself. I found myself in one of those cubicles . . ."

"Carrels," Darryl corrects.

" . . . whatever. I felt very sad, and it's weird, as my eyes got moist, thinking about how sorry for myself I was, the tears started flowing, and there was like nothing I could do to stop them! Like, it didn't even feel like me."

Brad wipes at his eyes with his

shirtsleeve. "Sure, I've heard about the floods down there. And I'd heard about the underwater library . . ."

The what?

Brad doesn't know much about it, but Darryl asks around, later. It was only operational for a few weeks. Quite a disaster. In fact, while the university was cleaning up the basement from the flood, the library was moved upstairs, and ended up staying there. But there were additional floods, roughly in the same area, after the University's renovation . . .

Why would anyone think an underwater library a good idea? Well, there was this massive gift from a massive student . . .

If you bumped into him today, you'd likely still consider Russett Davenport a large man, maybe even over-weight, but he's just a wisp of what he was in his XC days. He'd say some of that was because of the fellowship: a generous stipend if his weight stayed above 350 pounds, and there were weekly weigh-ins. He laughed, telling Darryl Koshwar about it: "It wasn't too hard to do, with all those late pizzas, and those warm cookies and donuts delivered to the dorm!"

And even though Russ told his parents about the fellowship, they still sent money. The family business did well, and the over-sized son was part of the over-sized family flush with over-sized generosity.

But as Russ talked about his life after graduation, Darryl saw a kind of magical success: seemingly without effort, each of Russ' enterprises were successful. He liked this college town, and convinced his dad to

open a branch of the family business here; he ran it; it thrived. His love of pinball and other games led him into computer games; his designs were unusual and successful. Or when his favorite greasy pizza joint was going out of business, he bought it, revived it with some new ideas (his was the first pizza place to finish cooking the pies using the heat from the delivery car's engine, so the pies arrived hot and fresh). Within a few years he had bought a large house on a hill just out of town, with a small orchard, a tennis court now in ruin, and a large swimming pool, which Russ swam in almost every day.

One thing Russ hadn't been very successful with was romance, and he now reconciled himself to living alone. He had some part-time help: a maid, a cook, a gardener. Recently he added a trainer, and spent at least an hour a day with specific exercises. He claimed to have lost over 100 pounds since his XC days.

When Darryl asks about the underwater library, Russ blushes. "It's true," he said. "I'm well aware that I'm responsible for the library getting moved out of the basement, I mean after the flood."

He had gone to a wine party in the library, drank a lot of wine, and fell asleep in a comfortable chair in one of the back rooms. Even when the music stopped and the lights went out, he stayed asleep: he was deep into a dream or reverie . . .

He laughed; just as well that E.J. was the librarian that night, because if someone competent was working he'd have noticed Russ was still there, woken him, and then all this wouldn't have happened!

It was only a few years later that the library was halved, then halved again, and now was only a tiny room, kept locked. It was true that Russ started the process going, but not true that he was responsible for what happened after.

"I keep dreaming about when the library was underwater," Russ mused. "It only lasted a few weeks, and thank God no one drowned or got hurt, but I was very happy. I'd spend as much time as possible down there. I even got a part-time job there."

He looked worried. "This may sound dopey, but I felt warm and supported, down there. Almost as if I was hanging out with a good friend . . ."

With a little gentle prying Darryl learned that the feeling of warm support had begun up in his dorm room, late in the evenings, as he fell asleep after another night of smoking and pizza.

That evening he attended that wine soiree in the basement library, he fell into a deep sleep. "It was almost as if I went through a door into a place where I had a good, good friend. I never saw him, but I could sense him . . . You know, he seemed to be larger than even I was, back then. Much larger." He left the dark library around 4 in the morning, went back up to his dorm room.

"I started going down to the library almost every evening for a little nap. I began to have an overwhelming sense of warm, friendly water, and then this idea popped up to flood the library . . . It was easy to see how we could protect the books: the water would only be about half the depth of the library and there would be raised beach areas, all the books up above,

and little waterproof sleeves to transport the books down and over to the checkout desk.

"The vision was so powerful that I made an appointment and talked with the XC director about it. Of course he was skeptical, but then I started mentioning funds. We did reach a certain threshold. I guess to him this was too much money to pass up."

But of course the idea was impractical, and dangerous. Within a week, a major leak had sprung and all the library's water drained into the rest of the basement . . .

But those dreams. Darryl muses about them. That night, he spends the night in the carrel. Has to wait until 3 am until the basement is empty and he can sleep . . .

Almost immediately, Darryl is aware of an unusual presence. Underwater! Massive. Swimming effortlessly.

The creature is excited: a visitor! And someone aware of him!

It was largely as Russ remembered it: Russ had smoked so much dope that he would fall into an altered-state stupor, and the creature, swimming in the underground reservoir below the XC, sensed that state. The creature entered Russ' dreams. What fun they had! For a brief time,

the area around Russ was filled with water and there were others like him, swimming, sometimes able to sense him . . . But then that went away, followed by noises and blasting and construction, and then nothing! He had lost touch with Russ! In frustration, he lashed out, once, twice, causing flooding in the renovated XC basement. And then, there was that crying boy . . . The creature tried to comfort him, but the boy was too enveloped in his own pity to notice him. The more the creature tried to help, the more the tears flowed . . .

Darryl could sense the vastness of the underwater reservoir. Probing, it was an easy matter to feel the tug of water from Russ' outdoor pool. He showed it to the creature.

Oh, such happiness when they were reunited!

*Back in the early '70s Dan did in fact write a proposal for a flooded Benzing-er. And, okay, he did have to close Benzing-er early once because he was too high. Once! You can probably see the influences of "McElligot's Pool," Buffy, Puff (the Magic Dragon), and Arnold Lobel's "Tear-Water Tea."*

*Otherwise, Dan was in the third RC class but didn't graduate until 1982. He worked for U-M for over 40 years, including various jobs in East Quad (kitchen, custodial, office, Benzing-er).*

# Untitled

Esha Biswas



*Esha Biswas (RC 2016, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, minor in Music) is now the RC's Student Affairs Coordinator, and is also an MS student at U-M's School for Environment and Sustainability. After graduating from the RC, she worked as a wildlife rehabilitator at the Bird Center of Washtenaw County, where she helped rehabilitate and release wild songbirds. She is passionate about the environment, photography, music, and making the world a better place, little bits at a time.*



# Two Poems

Mike Parsons

## Judy's Cups

Hey blue eyes  
Your number's still in my book  
I found it there, today  
But I won't call

You've still got my china cups  
And my letters from everywhere  
You didn't write back much

Carried you with me  
On the subways of Europe  
There's a picture you might like  
I took a lot  
But you're not in them anymore  
They're just pictures of things now  
Castles and cathedrals

Tell you what  
You keep the cups  
And the letters  
I'll stay home this time

*Mike Parsons (Scandinavian Studies, 1973) has a JD from the University of Tennessee and worked as an attorney in all corners of Tennessee until 2018. He lives in Nashville with his wife, Cathy. While at the RC he performed in several plays, notably "Mr. Straight" (see p. 111) and "The Banana From Outer Space" (see our first issue).*

## Virginia Rollover

Virginia rollover, Honey roll.  
Can you see the future through these  
trees  
at the side of the road?  
There is a point of no return, it seems.  
Vectors and coefficients to read  
from the skid marks  
But you know that.  
Now

Virginia Rollover, Honey roll.  
On your back in this Virginia rain.  
You knew your name.  
When they find your name,  
Then you can drive away

Honey, roll



# How Attempts to Force Equity in Math Classes Can Protect Kids from Learning

Barry Garelick

*Attempts to reduce achievement gaps in math often do so by eliminating achievement altogether. This doesn't help anyone (except consultants).*

I currently teach math at a middle school. I teach in the manner that I learned: a traditional form that has served many people well over the years. The traditional mode of teaching has been under fire for two to three decades as having "failed thousands of students." Certain practices such as tracking students — particularly minorities — are considered part and parcel to traditional modes of teaching.

Tracking typically means placing students into classes at their ability level, rather than their grade or age

level. This has come under criticism and is often derided for "reinforcing inequality." While such practices are no longer implemented as they once were, they exist in other forms as unintended consequences of those who seek to protect students from the ravages of the much derided traditional modes of teaching.

Over the past several decades students have been so "protected" with the goal of eliminating the so-called "achievement gap." The result is that the achievement gap is being eliminated by eliminating achievement.



## Meet My Classmate Raymond

To put things in an historical perspective, I offer a brief description of my experience when I began high school. I attended Mumford High School in Detroit, from the fall of 1964 through June of 1967, the end of a period known to some as the golden age of education, and to others as an utter failure. For the record I am in the former camp, a product of an era which in my opinion well-prepared me to major in mathematics.

I was in tenth grade, taking Algebra 2. In the study hall period that followed my algebra class I worked the 20 or so homework problems at a double desk I shared with Raymond, a black student. He would watch me do the day's homework problems, which I worked with the ease and alacrity of an expert pinball player.

While I worked, he would ask questions about what I was doing, and I would explain as best I could, after which he would always say "Pretty good, pretty good"—which served both as an expression of appreciation and a signal that he didn't really know much about algebra but wanted to find out more. He said he had taken a class in it.

In one assignment, the page of my book was open to a diagram entitled "Four ways to express a function." The first was a box with a statement: "To find average blood pressure, add 10 to your age and divide by 2." The second was an equation  $P = (A+10)/2$ . The third was a table of values, and the last was a graph.

Raymond asked me why you needed different ways to say what was in the box. I wasn't entirely sure myself,

but explained that the different ways enabled you to see the how things like blood pressure changed with respect to age. Sometimes a graph was better than a table to see this; sometimes it wasn't. It was not a very good explanation, I realized, and over the years I would come back to that question—and Raymond's curiosity about it—as I would analyze equations, graphs, and tables of values.

Over the study hall presided a high school counselor whose office was in the corner of the great room. On the day when we were to sign up for next semester's courses, she called out the names of the students in her custody. Raymond went in for his appointment. During the discussion the counselor, not given to sensitivity nor controlling the volume of her speech, suddenly blared out in unrelenting anger for all the study hall to hear: "You want to take algebra 2? You didn't finish Algebra 1, and you got a D in the part you did finish! You will take General Arithmetic, young man!"

Raymond walked back and took his seat next to me. I said I was sorry about what happened, but he didn't look in my direction. I was 15 and didn't quite know what to do, so I didn't do or say anything else to him. He didn't speak to me for the remainder of the semester, and when I worked my algebra problems he found something else to do.

I have related this story to others over many years. While most are sympathetic with Raymond, others have accused me of exaggerating the situation and eliciting sympathy only because Raymond was African-American. "If Raymond had been

white, would anyone care about the story? Was his goal to take algebra unrealistic, but nevertheless the counselor was supposed to nurture that little spark of 'algebra 2 looks fun' in order to get Raymond working harder, and that someone let down all the African-Americans by putting them in the lowest math class and not rekindling his spark?"

I don't know whether his interest in math was based on me making it look easy, or whether he would have made a serious effort to get up to speed. I also don't know whether his poor performance in the algebra course he took was because of poor teaching, lack of ability, or because he was a victim of neglect who had been passed on and promoted to the next grade as many students had been. I doubt his counselor knew, either. Whether his counselor would have reacted differently had Raymond been white is also something I don't know. What I do know is that in the name of equity for all, students no longer have to be a minority to be put on a track that leaves them behind or to be told they may not have cognitive ability.

## Mischaracterizing Traditional Teaching

I have written previously and extensively about math as it was "traditionally taught" because I feel strongly about it and it is what I know best. Two of the main criticisms about traditional math, which have also been levied against education in general for the era, are that 1) it relied on memorization and rote problem solving, and 2) it failed thousands of students.

This last criticism refers to the low numbers of students taking algebra and other math classes in the 1950s and '60s and is taken as evidence that the techniques of traditional math—drills, memorization, and word problems not necessarily related to the "real world"—worked only for bright students who learned math no matter how it was taught. Another and frequently unmentioned side to this argument, however, is that the low numbers of students who took algebra and other math classes during this period was because of the tracking practices in force.

The history of tracking students in public education goes back to the early part of the 1900s. By the '20s and '30s, curricula in high schools had evolved into four different types: college-preparatory, vocational (e.g., plumbing, metal work, electrical, auto), trade-oriented (e.g., accounting, secretarial), and general. Students were tracked into the various curricula based on IQ and other standardized test scores as well as other criteria. The educational system in the U.S. pitted many groups against each other, so skin color was not the only determinant. Children from farms rather than from cities, and children of immigrants, for example, were often assumed to be inferior in cognitive ability and treated accordingly. During the '60s and '70s, the progressive education establishment's goal was to restore equity to students and to eliminate the tracking that created splits between social class and race. The end product, however, meant merging the general track with college prep, resulting in college prep becoming increasingly student-

centered. Classes such as Film Making and Cooking for Singles were offered, and requirements for English and history courses were reduced if not dropped. Social class and race was no longer a barrier for such classes, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of white students taking them.

### **The Elimination of Ability Grouping**

By the early '80s, the "Back to Basics" movement formed to turn back the educational fads and extremes of the late '60s and the '70s and reinstitute traditional subjects and curricula. Progressives' underlying ideas did not go away, however, and the watchword continued to be equal education for all. While such a goal is laudable, the attempt to bring equity to education by eliminating tracking had the unintended consequence of replacing it with another form of inequity: the elimination of grouping of students according to ability.

'Full inclusion' is now so commonplace that theories have emerged to justify its practice and to address the problems it brings. The elimination of ability grouping occurs mostly in the lower grades but also extends to early courses in high school. "Full inclusion" is now so commonplace that theories have emerged to justify its practice and to address the problems it brings. "Learning styles" and "multiple intelligences" are now commonplace terms taught in schools of education, along with

the technique known as "differentiated instruction," to address how to teach students with diverse backgrounds and ability in the subject matter. Teachers are expected to differentiate instruction for each student, and to minimize whole-group instruction. To do this, the teacher gives a "mini-lesson" that lasts 10 to 15 minutes. Then students are told to work together in small groups. The limitations of differentiated instruction work hand-in-hand with other aspects of the educational beliefs that shun "traditional" modes of instruction. (The current trends are described in accurate detail in "Raising a Left-Brain Child in a Right Brain World" by Katherine Beals.) It is not unusual to hear parents concerned over art-based projects in English classes that call for book reports in the form of a book jacket or poster—in which the artistic merits of the poster or book jacket may count as much as the actual composition.

Exercises in grammar are almost extinct. Essays now are "student-centered," meaning students write about how they feel about certain events that occur in a story, relating it to themselves. This extends to history classes as well. They may be asked how Hester Prynne or George Washington on the eve of battle would write about themselves on Facebook. Objective analysis, along with grammatical drill, sentence and paragraph structure, and other tenets of a basic education, are considered passé and not a fit for the current catchphrase, "twenty-first-century education."

Brighter students are seated with students of lower ability in the belief that the brighter students will teach

the slower ones. Frequently this occurs, although the inconvenient truth that the brighter students are often obtaining their knowledge via parents, tutors, or learning centers is rarely if ever acknowledged. Another inconvenient truth is that in lower-income communities, there are unlikely to be students who have obtained their knowledge through outside sources; they are entirely dependent on their schools.

### **Exchanging One Inequity for Another**

Students forced to endure this form of education do not progress as rapidly or master the essentials necessary to be successful in high school math courses. An exception to this trend, however, is found in "gifted and talented" courses. In general, such programs consist of a traditional approach for math and other subjects. Thus, students who qualify for these courses are exempted from the one-size-fits-all, student-centered classes. Students forced to endure this form of education do not progress as rapidly or master the essentials necessary to be successful in high school math courses.

In either case, students entering high school have been unintentionally split into groups of students: those who qualify for honors classes and those who will not. Depending on the high school, the non-honors courses may be watered down versions often by necessity. In some schools these students are passed on through the system; in others they receive failing grades. Through circumstances beyond their control, students may

end up "tracked" in sub-standard courses and will be ill-prepared to take math courses in college, thus shutting out possibilities of a career in the sciences or engineering.

A study by William Schmidt of Michigan State University observes such differences in learning opportunities and concludes they are a function of the education system structure. Thus, there are differences in content depending on the school district, and there is a fundamental relationship between content coverage and achievement. Schmidt states that with respect to mathematics, if the districts examined in his study were to hold generally for the country, then "any student can be disadvantaged simply due to differences in the rigor of the mathematics taught in the district in which they happen to attend school." While a variety of factors contribute to disadvantaging students as discussed above, eliminating ability grouping is a big one. Through the efforts and philosophies of otherwise well-meaning individuals, full inclusion and equality for all has served as a form of tracking.

### **Not Good Enough for Traditional Instruction**

Critics of the traditional model of education, particularly math, argue that traditional methods worked only for gifted students (who, it is assumed, will learn what they need to know no matter how it is taught). The corollary to such thinking is that non-gifted students are not good enough for the traditional method. The corollary to such thinking is that

non-gifted students are not good enough for the traditional method. The move to homogenize skill levels in the classrooms has been entrenched now for several decades. It has come to the point that students who have been forced through circumstances into non-honors tracks, and judged to not be able to handle the traditional mode of education, are thus “protected” from it. Thus they are not presented with the choice to work hard—and many happily comply in a system that caters to it.

This brings us back to Raymond and whether reaction to the story I described would have been different had he been white. That is a key problem. Many students—not just minorities—are put on the protection-from-learning track. Many such students then fulfill the low expectations that have been conferred upon them.

The education establishment’s view of this situation is a shrug and the response that “Maybe your child just isn’t good in math”—despite continuing to justify their weak inquiry-based and student-centered approaches. Their response carries to subjects beyond math and is extended to “Maybe your child isn’t college material.” While a “college for all” goal is indeed unrealistic, the view that so many students somehow are lacking in cognitive ability raises serious questions. Simply put, you no longer have to be a minority to be told you may not have cognitive ability.

There are still Raymonds in the educational system, and in an ironic application of equity their ranks include all races and colors. There is now an inbred resistance against ability grouping and using explicit instruction (more-so in lower grades than in middle or high school). That such approaches may result in higher achievement, with more students qualifying for gifted and honors programs, is something that the education establishment has come to deny by default.

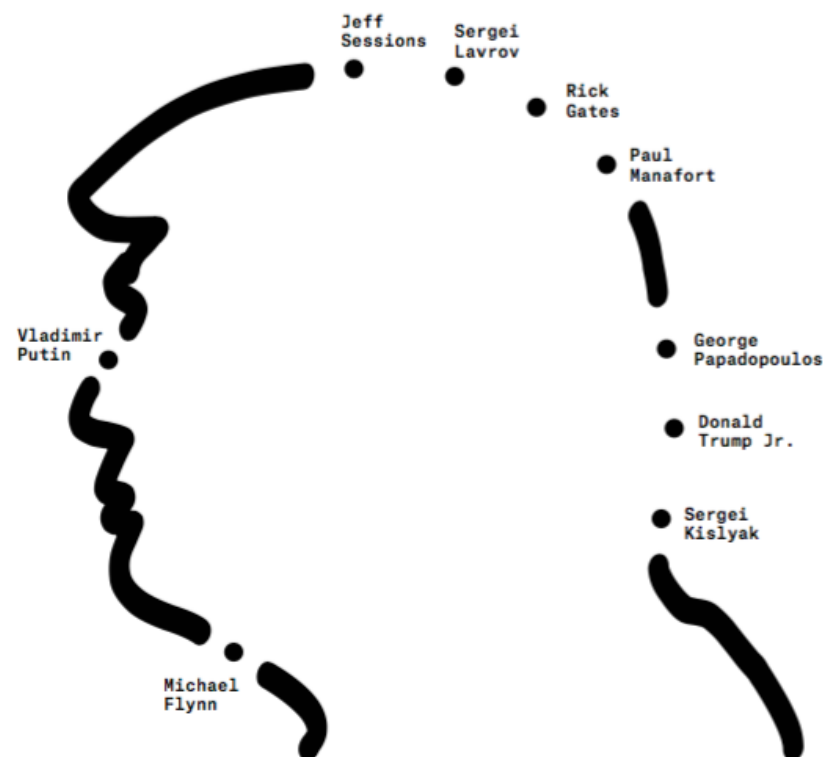
What they have chosen instead is an inherent and insidious tracking system that leaves many students behind. And many of those left behind despise education and the people who managed to achieve what they could not.

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*Barry Garelick (Mathematics, 1971) is teaching math in middle school as a second career and is deeply involved in math education advocacy. He has written articles on math education for The Atlantic, Education Next, Education News, and Heartlander, and has published several books; the most recent is Math Education in the U.S.: Still Crazy After All These Years (2016). Barry was a presenter at the 2016 ResearchED conference at Oxford University, which was devoted to math/science teaching. Barry lives in Morro Bay, California; he and his wife have a daughter who recently graduated from California State University at Channel Islands.*

# Proposed New York Times Op-Ed Illustration

Hannah Nathans



Proposed illustration for an opinion piece about Trump’s reliance on the word “collusion” to exonerate himself and his colleagues. “[Collusion is] a term with a legalistic feel but with close to ‘no legal meaning whatsoever.’” (Note: this illustration did not actually appear in the Times).

*Hannah Nathans (RC 2015, Arts and Ideas; BA, Graphic and Visual Communications, U-M Urban Studies; ’15) is a graphic designer with Ralph Appelbaum Associates, a museum exhibition design firm in NYC. She received a 2015 Bright Award at the RC, where she served as the Art Editor on the RC Review, facilitated Urban Forum, tutored with PALMA, and founded The Sirens, an a cappella group.*



# A Memoir of Kindness

Kathryn Orwig

I'm not going to describe how the boy who fell, fell. Or how the sign gave way. I know from watching out my bedroom window, unable to do anything, that I couldn't fly over or wave a magic wand. And his two friends standing on the parking deck know that; all they could do was watch as he disappeared from beside them. One moment standing in the sunshine on a cloudy fall day, and the next not. No one should know what it is like to watch another human being fall through space for seven stories. What it is like to watch the last few seconds of a life. Of his life.

But this story is not about the fear, the grief, the flashbacks and the endless questioning of "What is life for?" "Why are we here?"

This story is about the kindness, compassion and the ability for astonishment at the capabilities of humans to care, and how they show it. This is a story about what happened after, how lives that never connected before, now wove together tightly. How one thoughtful gesture can make a lasting, unforgettable impact. And how we never know what words or actions will stick with another when we say or do them. But our fingerprints, our voices are there, for the betterment or chagrin that entails.

That November day was warm, and sunny. There were great big Michigan clouds in the sky, at least that's what my California friend calls them. I'm never in my room at that time of day, or doing homework at my

desk before the window. Since it was election day, I was supposed to be at the polls, but my mom had just called saying how it took them an hour and a half to get through line. Since I had class in an hour I wasn't going to push my luck and maybe have the lines be faster by thirty minutes. My bedroom window overlooks the University of Michigan Diag from eight stories up. Trees with bright colors danced in the sunshine. Ink dyed purple, sunset red, and hints of lively green still mixed in tri tones on the leaves. The only building close in height is the parking garage, a flat gray thing. People come and go all day long, driving up, then walking down the stairs only to come back at the usual five o'clock traffic mess we seniors dread to be a part of soon. But with nearly one and a half semesters to go, I was still many months off from worrying about finding a job. Let alone the right job and entering into the work force traffic. I never pay the people on top of the parking garage any attention while doing homework or writing out a new story. They're living their lives, I'm living mine writing another discussion question while multi-tasking on reading ten chapters and writing a paper.

Yet, that day was different. I don't know why I looked up. Was it the light coming out from the dark under bellies of clouds that highlighted the three young teenaged boys? Or was it how they were almost skipping across the deck? They looked totally free to be without worry and piles of homework sitting beside them. To be fair, there wasn't as many cars on top, so those three stuck out like tall chess pieces among the spaces marked out for small cars. I watched them hop

across the deck. Smiles on their faces. Their bodies swung in youthful excitement at being on top of the world. There was no hesitation, no fear. Only fun.

I spoke to the police after the ambulances left. It's weird to be the one to tell the police what happened instead of learning what happened from the police on the news or reading about what happened in a paper. I didn't think about the absurdity until after the fact. Of course the police aren't at every fight, murder or accident, people must tell them what happened there, the ones who saw. Otherwise there would be no news to tell.

"Is there a way to know how the boy who fell is doing?" I asked the policeman as we stood at the mouth of the alley. There were large garbage bins to my right and cement all around us. I've never gotten used to being in cities. I constantly look for trees or wish there was grass under my feet. People walked by us. They didn't know someone just fell, down that alley they were striding by while talking on their cell phones. It felt so surreal to have a completely different perspective on an alley then most people ever would. Because my moment in time was different than theirs.

The boy who fell. That was my way of speaking about him when I didn't know his name. And sometimes after, too. It was more real with a name. I don't know if it is some coping mechanism or if it was the fastest way to let people know who I was referring too. Like instead of saying John, or David and someone has to ask "Who?" The boy who fell summed up "who" without me having to say it twice.

But that afternoon, what mattered

more than anything as I stood there looking at the policeman, was that the boy who fell had lived. I didn't want a memory of watching someone die. People don't watch others die that way. People are supposed to die in their sleep, when they are very old, ancient even. Not as a teen. I could live with watching something scary if the person made it out okay, there would be a happy ending then.

"You could go through this police line of victim crimes," the policeman said. He was tall, and dark haired. His questions had been factual, but phrased kindly. He had done this before, there was no question of that. He let me have a minute to review the scene anytime I had to pause for a moment in concertation as the images repeatedly replayed in my head. He handed me the card, then paused. "But you know what, instead if you asked these two," he pointed to the two friends, who were sitting nearby. "You could exchange numbers and they would probably let you know how he is."

I nodded to his words, but when I looked at the two crying teenagers, I didn't think I'd ever step in and ask them for numbers after what just happened. I could still hear their screams as they called for help, the sounds bouncing through the alley as they ran behind the parking garage. It was fine, I would just never know who fell, and if he lived or not. Maybe that would be better. Then I could pretend everything worked out.

I started to answer the questions when a man came over to the two teens. He gave each of them a hug. I thought it was odd that a policeman would hug these boys. I mean, he

looked like a policeman, very serious, but composed. Like a detective from a movie. He came over to us.

"Is that the mom who called 911?" he asked the policeman, nodding to my mom down the alley with my dad, talking to another officer. Yup, has to be a detective, very astute and matter of fact, too.

I'm nodding for the policeman. Yup, that's my mom. She looks so little in the alley. Short brown hair, her glasses on, a flowered coat and the buildings rising around her to the sky. My dad stands beside her, gray hair and stout wrestler's build. They were walking back from the polls when I called my mom, starting to cry. While her phone rang unanswered in my ear, I ran through my apartment to go to a neighbor's, ready to pound on their door, ask them to call 911 for me. I knew I couldn't call. I still wasn't sure I had actually seen someone fall. That's just not something you see every day.

Who do you call? 911, of course, but what if your brain is freaking out and you're not sure you really saw what you saw? I had no one to confirm it with. Or how badly he was injured. Did he need an ambulance for sure? There were buildings starting at the fourth story, he fell from the seventh, maybe he was fine. It wasn't until his friends ran from the parking deck stairs that it sank in. And they ran faster than I've ever seen anyone run before. None of us had screamed out loud, just watched, unable to stop his fall. I felt a scream, but my mouth didn't make a sound.

I was already bursting into tears when she picked up, my hand on the apartment door, shaking, gripping the cool metal ready to rip it open.

"Mom, I think I just saw someone fall from a parking garage." My voice broke.

"What? Where? Which one? Which parking garage?"

"The one behind us. The one right behind us."

It turned out my parents were at the door of our apartment building, just steps from the alley. There was a brief pause.

"Yes, there is someone in the alley, I see him," my mom said.

"Do I call 911..."

"No, I am now." She hung up. There was a person lying on the ground. I really did just see someone fall. She later told me that she called 911 as they ran down the alley. I dropped my phone and started praying that he wasn't dead, and then contemplated throwing up between the tears. I couldn't go down. I imagined what bodies look like after falls. Then the two friends' screams began to echo against the brick buildings of the alley, floating up to me through the open window.

"Help us! Please somebody help us!" I could hear them crying through their screams. I stood near the window. The screaming stopped; my mother must have arrived. But I could still hear them crying. I watched as the ambulances went the wrong way down State Street. They need to turn on University or Washington, the alley was between the two streets, a tricky spot to describe.

"Please, please don't let him be dead. Please, please, please."

I would learn later that the slowness of the ambulances didn't matter. He died on impact. After, I wondered if I should have been there, gone

down that alley. My mom said it was good that I hadn't. There was nothing more I could have done, than what I did. Only his two friends and I saw what happened. And from my angle, I could tell the police it was an accident. His friends weren't even close enough to reach out and grab him. It was so fast. It was a terrible accident. And everyone now knows that. His friends won't go to jail, no one can accuse them of pushing him, of horse play. It wasn't their fault, just as it wasn't the fault of the boy who fell. A sign broke.

The detective man looked to the policeman and to me. "And the daughter, are you the daughter?" he asked. Breaking me out of yet another round of seeing without seeing what happened.

I nodded again. I didn't have any words.

"Thank you, thank you." He shook my hand. I just nodded. Why is he thanking me? What did I do? Who is he? Did I miss a few words in there?

They must have said a few words after that I didn't catch either, because he stepped away. The policeman talked into his radio set, a part of his blue uniform. "Just spoke to the father, he is en route to hospital. I repeat, just spoke to the father, he is en route to the hospital."

Oh my god. I just met his father. And he *thanked* me. But why? I didn't call 911. My mom did. But it should have been me. Later, talking with my mom, I understood it was better that she called. She guided the ambulances to the right spot. I couldn't have done that from my apartment window. Neither could his friends, who were crying in the alley over his body.



Which hand was on the sign? What happened then? Where were his friends? How far away from him were they? What were they doing at the time? How long were they on the deck? Which floor? The police questions were easy and hard to answer. I knew what happened, but saying it out loud made my hands tremble. It really happened. That reality hit me every time I looked at the crying teens sitting on the ground, their backs against the brick of the parking garage. One couldn't stop crying, and the other sat there, completely numb, his eyes staring at nothing but his feet.

They asked my mom, dad and me to stay for a moment longer until the detectives arrived, in case they had a few more questions. As we waited by the two teens, I surprised myself and spoke.

"Hi. I'm so sorry about your friend, I saw what happened." We still didn't say the word fall. "Is there any way we could exchange numbers and you let me know how he is doing?"

The one who wasn't crying anymore, sitting in shock, nodded. He took my phone and typed in *let me know how he is doing* and sent the message to himself. I didn't know his name and he didn't know mine. But it didn't matter. I figured he'd send me a text the next morning from the hospital saying the boy who fell was doing better.

I went to class. I knew I could have skipped, but I wanted to go. I wanted to be with my friends, to hear their voices and listen to them talking. It was a way to pretend to be normal for a moment, and be around the living. So I sat in lecture, replaying the

scene over and over again. As I sat, I got a first text from the friend of the boy who fell, and I texted back. Bobby—the friend—was still hopeful, and so was I. Bobby also said thank you. From Bobby I found out the name of the boy who fell and how old he was. From the news I learned what happened. I stood by the couch in my living room, after classes finally let out and I was done voting at the polls when the news covered the story of the boy who fell. He had died.

I got a text message, I half expected it to be Bobby. I looked down at the little screen in my hands, the light glaring.

*Hey, are you okay?* It was my neighbor next door, Henry.

*No. Did you hear what happened?*

*Yeah, do you want to talk?*

Did I? Could I talk about it without crying? Did it matter if I cried in front of them? I decided it didn't.

*Yes, I just found out he didn't make it.* I grabbed my shoes and went over to be with these neighbors who before all this happened, I thought were just nineteen-year-old goof balls. Boys who would play tennis in the apartment, the ball gliding through the air to narrowly miss their TV. The boys who would hit all the buttons on the elevator as they got off so a person would have to stop at all the floors on the way down. They played Kesha loudly before exams and moved things around the apartment building for kicks.

They listened, they talked, they hugged me. It was what I needed. Humans are funny like that, we need others when shit hits the fan, and others want to know what happened, to be a part of the know and to offer

whatever help they can. The smallest ways, listening, being present in that moment mattered more to me then they will ever know.

In the following hours, friends and family texted, and the girlfriends of our neighbors made us cookies. They hadn't been ready yet when I had visited earlier. That was kind since I'd only meet the girlfriends in passing. I didn't even know their names then. But I thought a lot about Bobby, his friend, and the father I had just met that day. They knew and loved the boy who fell. I only watched him fall.

I texted Bobby the next day and he felt bad for not being the one to tell me the boy had died. But that wasn't his burden. I also learned there was a reason we all didn't know the boy was dead on impact. There is this reaction that happens in the body, the nervous system can still act without any vitals present. So he had been technically "breathing," chest rising and falling in rasps, when the ambulances took him. That's why we had hope, but he was already gone.

Bobby asked me on Wednesday night if I wanted the information to the funeral, just in case. I said I would like it. But I wasn't sure if it was right that I go.

He followed it up with another text, *Are you going to go?*

How astute the young one was. He pegged me.

I said, *I don't know. I don't want to make the family uncomfortable.* Who was I, but someone who watched their son die? I had no other connections to them. Just this moment in time. This really tragic moment. I didn't want to be a reminder of that to them.

Bobby said they wouldn't mind.

*Besides I'm inviting you, so you're invited.* I still wasn't sure. I asked him—if he didn't mind—to ask the father of the boy who fell if it was all right if I came.

Bobby checked and said it was more than okay for me and my family to come. He said what time he was going, and I said I'd be there at that time, too.

My mom and I went to the wake. I was nervous. It was hard to see the friends and family of the boy who fell, so saddened by his death. Bobby stood at the open casket, and when he left the room crying, it about made me cry again. Only I've never cried at funerals. It's a public kind of grief, and I cry, instead, in quiet moments of remembrance.

My mom and I went to go find the father of the boy who fell. My mom had been in the alley, talking to 911 by guiding them to the alley. While she was talking, the father of the boy who fell called his son's phone. The phone of the boy who fell had dialed the father a few moments before. The father thought it was a misdial since there was only static, a butt dial. But he decided to call back. Bobby and Thomas—the other boy on the parking deck—couldn't speak through their tears. So they gave the phone of the boy who fell to my mom, pleading with her to explain where they were and what happened. She spoke with him on the phone while the ambulances came, while the boys cried, hands waving over his body. You're not supposed to touch someone who's fallen. The parking attendant had rushed over at the teens' cries for help, and told this to my mom and

the boys. My mom prayed over and over again while the father drove as quickly as he could to the alley.

As we went out of the casket room, Bobby started to walk back in. I reached out, hand on his arm. "Bobby, I'm sorry."

He grabbed me into a hug. Even at fifteen, Bobby was a head taller than me and pressed against me.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. It always feels like you have to whisper at wakes. Almost like the dead can't hear you then. Like any loud noise will shatter the person next to you.

He nodded and pulled away as I did. He stepped back into the casket room and we stepped into the family reception area. I found the father instantly, he is a hard man to miss. Very tall and solid in build. We waited our turn in line. About a hundred times I wondered if this was right. Should we be here? We don't even know anyone here. Besides Bobby I guess. Then it was our turn. Who goes first? What do we say? How do we introduce ourselves? Hi, we are the people who were there as your son left this earth?

My mom started. "Hi, I'm the one who talked with you on the phone." She gave a nervous smile.

"Talked with me on the phone? I'm sorry when?" He smiled, confused.

"When your son..." She didn't even have to finish before he was hugging her.

"That phone call, oh my goodness I'm so glad you're here. I will never forget that phone call. You praying for my son will stick with me forever. You don't know how much that meant to me."

"It was the only thing I could think

to do," my mom said.

"And is this your daughter, what's your name? Were you..." He reached a hand out to me.

"Yes, I saw what happened. I'm so sorry." He didn't remember me from before.

"I am so sorry you had to see that," He said while he hugged me. I was stunned he could muster the words to say that. It was his son.

"We are so sorry for your loss." It was probably my mom who said this. I can't recall the exact words.

We started talking about the boy's fall. I didn't tell them what I saw. Other than what they knew. That the sign broke in his hand from the solid cement parking garage. They didn't need to remember him that way, falling. I saw all the pictures and heard the stories around me. The boy who fell was vibrant, funny and had plans for the future. I overheard his mom telling the friends still here to remember him with stories. It's what she said the boy who fell would have done.

I found Bobby before I left, and gave him another hug, then two. It was our second time to speak in person rather than through glowing texts.

"I'm sorry for your loss." I started. I'd probably said this too much by now. But what else do you say?

"Thank you. Thank you for coming," Bobby said. "It means a lot to me that you came."

"Thank you for inviting me. And asking his father. It means a lot to me, too. If you need anything, you or Thomas, let me know. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Take care Bobby."

"You, too." A final hug. Another moment.

Moments are funny. We really don't know which ones will affect us for years, which ones will make us smile or laugh out loud in remembrance. Moments we watch and are apart of that we can replay willing, or unwilling, in our heads. I used to try as a kid to close and open my eyes superfast, to see if the scene would still be the same around me. And match the memory in my head to a few moments later. See the trees behind my eye lids.

So what is the meaning of life? Why are we here? I think it's to laugh and live loudly, vibrantly, experiencing everything this world has to offer. Maybe it's to see all the sunsets and the stars brightening and fading into dawn. Or to experience the feeling of sinking a hand into an animal's fur. Perhaps it is to hear the first notes of a piano hammer into the silence of a waiting auditorium filled with beating hearts. Or it could be to show

people our ability to be kind, and to receive kindness in return. To choose compassion. To choose to be present and listen for an hour, maybe two. To reach out and grab another in a hug because we are here, together, in this moment. This moment is all we ever need to be kind.

*All names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved. "A Memoir of Kindness" won a Summer 2017 Nonfiction Summer Hopwood Award.*

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## Aerosol

Megan Cummins

I built a fire in the backyard using lint from the dryer as kindling. It curled up and disappeared almost instantly, but after I added enough of it, the twigs caught and the flame committed itself to eating the logs. Everything was bright and contained in the pit I'd made out of cinderblocks, which I'd dragged from the neighbors' backyard where a pile of construction garbage sat from their stalled addition. Money problems, I guess. We had them, too.

My sister, Sarah, was supposed to be staying with me that week. She went to school in Ann Arbor, but it was her spring break now and she had some time off. Spending the week bonding with Sarah was the

deal I had made with my mom, who'd gone to Florida with her boyfriend and had wanted me to go, too. They were sailing on his boat; they'd started in Daytona Beach and were winding all the way around the southern tip up the gulf coast to Sarasota. Hours and hours of sitting on a boat as the hull slapped the water repeatedly. I'd Google-earthed the route, zoomed in so I could see the Gulf Coast sand beneath the blue glass of shallow water. It looked pretty, but Ken hated me and would probably toss me overboard mid-voyage. "I'd rather die," I said to my mom—which had started another fight, of course. She did that thing where she pushes her fingers into her temples to let me know I'm giving her a headache. She

was angry, but also tired, and her thin lips trembled and I wondered what she really wanted to say.

We didn't speak much the day before she left. She explained the numbers on the fridge, reminded me it was really important that I answer the phone when the realtor called because she might want to set up a showing, told me again how to thaw a chicken breast, that sort of thing. We hugged goodbye. Her shoulder blades were two sharp stones in my hands. I didn't get her, and she didn't get me.

"So," I said, when Sarah and I were sprawled on the couch watching Jon Stewart on Thursday night. "What are you going to do all next week while I'm at school?"

"Actually," she said. "As long as you're okay here, I was thinking of staying at Chris's apartment. I can stop home a few times, if you want."

"Sure." I'd already driven my mom's car to the store to buy deli turkey and cheese and a jar of pickles. I didn't want to touch raw chicken. "I'm a survivor," I said.

Sarah laughed at me.

So that was how I ended up alone.

I built the fire because it seemed fun, and because I'm entering a time in my life when I would have to fend for myself, and because I'm working on a novel in which the heroine will probably need to build a fire. She's going to fall into a pond, and her foot is going to get caught on the root of a water lily, and just as she's about to pass out, the light above her will change and the sky will spin and the weed will disappear and she'll be able to kick her way to the surface because

she won't be in her world anymore. She'll be somewhere else, somewhere unknown.

So the fire was research.

In shorts and a t-shirt, I lay on the grass by the flames I'd coaxed into existence and thought of names for my character. Jamie. Matilda. Elsbeth. And names for the brooding but beautiful guy she meets, the archer in the rebel army: Hayden or Harrison. Or maybe Parker.

Imagine just how strange the world will feel when Jamie emerges from the pond, the sky above her not the blue she's used to but violet, with black clouds. The trees will blow in a thicker wind than her wind and the birds will be singing in different tones. She'll be confused, at first, because that's how it always is in books—even though if I'm ever transported in space and time I'll think yes, finally.

But then, gradually, she'll realize the change has enhanced her life. She's trading in the boring details for the wild ones. She has a purpose, suddenly; she's emerged from the pond baptized, the old pains and boredom cleansed from her body. Emerging as someone new, but also realizing she was that new person all along. Love, war, valor—in fantasy books, they're all a disguise for the simple feeling of wanting to be someone a little bit special. A little bit worth remembering. Her fears vaporize as her clothes dry beneath some bright faraway sun that looks bigger than her sun at home. All her raw courage is reforged into a sword.

My idea was good. I just had to get the words on paper.

The light faded and my eyes tricked me into thinking the fire had gotten

brighter. Our house backed up to a thick patch of forest—a good selling point, according to the realtor who'd stuck in our front yard a big sign with her face on it. She'd hung a little box on our doorknob with a combination lock, and nestled inside was a key so she could get in anytime. It was like the house already wasn't ours.

Overhead, a hawk swooped gracefully into its nest. The stars popped out one at a time, like giant fiery mosquitoes. If I stared long enough without blinking, they began to vibrate. It was peaceful. I would miss this house. I didn't know where we'd go when it sold—probably with Ken, who rented an apartment here in Michigan but had his boat docked in Florida.

I felt the pain piercing my thigh before I heard the pop of exploding metal and a hiss. I didn't scream, but all the air rushed out of me. I could almost see it, the way you can see air get sucked out of astronauts' mouths in movies when they go out in space without their suits. A rusty aerosol can, tucked into one of the cinder-blocks: I hadn't noticed it before, but the heat from the fire had made it explode. I froze as I looked down at my thigh, at the shard of metal as wide as my big toe embedded two-inches deep in my flesh. I didn't breathe, not until I couldn't stand it any longer.

My mom met Ken in AA, where she'd met all of her boyfriends, including my dad twenty years ago. I'd told her the AA pool was too small and that she needed to meet someone from somewhere else. Or she could look on the Internet. But instead she'd brought home Ken, then kept bringing him home. He had thick gray

hair that fell to his shoulders and he walked around with his hands in his pocket, shaking loose change. He was tall, and he slouched because of it.

Mostly I wanted her to let my dad move back. Since she'd tossed him out, he'd stopped calling her, stopped begging her, and he'd also stopped calling me from Minnesota, where he'd gone to rehab, and where he now rented an apartment since my mom had decided he couldn't come back. He had a roommate. Fathers weren't supposed to have roommates; they were supposed to live with you.

My mom feels like she's wasted time. And there's nothing scarier than adults who feel like they've wasted time, with the ends of their lives burning their heels like hot coals, like death is something that starts happening the minute you reach a certain age. At least, that must be why she's into Ken: she's afraid of dying alone. He has a job and his sobriety—things my dad doesn't have—but he also has a pathological need to be right and he expects us to clean up after him. He came into our house ready to assume the position of the patriarch. And my mom expected me to immediately adjust. I tried to tell her how I feel—I didn't have the same anger against my dad as she did, and what I thought what we needed was a little bit of time because she and I were a team—but she didn't want to hear it. She asked me if I expected her to be alone for the rest of her life and then she called me spoiled. And maybe I was. I was the baby of the family, and I hadn't grown up as quickly as my sister. I still liked fantasy books. But none of this changed the fact that Ken grossed me out. And that's what hurt

the most: my mom didn't think my opinion mattered. She didn't think I was anything but an immature teenage girl.

I finally breathed, quick inhalations of air that hit my lungs like a staple gun. I stared at the shard of metal for a second, completely bewildered. I reached for it, but my hand hesitated like my fingers didn't have the muscles to pinch it and pull it out. Then I did it. Quickly, but it still seemed to take forever—metal separating from flesh. There was a pause, everything was still and it seemed like even the flames stopped flickering. Then the blood flowed out and I rushed at the wound with everything I could find: my math homework from my back pocket, leaves from the ground, my t-shirt pulled down to cover my thigh. "Oh no," I said. "No, no."

Wasn't there an important vein in your thigh? I'd never seen so much blood; it seeped through my fingers and ran down my wrists. I stood and almost fell into the fire. Droplets of blood went flying and sizzled in the flames. I left a trail of blood that dotted the grass like dewdrops as I limped inside.

In the bathroom, the fan sputtered and one of the light bulbs flickered. I propped my leg on the counter and lifted my hand and my math homework to look at the cut. It was gouge, really, my skin completely opened in a bloody trench. I tried to press the pieces back together, but the pain hit me even harder. I leaned over and threw up on the floor. Another moment passed, and then a few more. I had no idea what I was

supposed to be doing.

Then I tore through the cabinets, leaving bloody handprints on everything. I found small band-aids and hydrogen peroxide. I couldn't wedge my thigh under the faucet so I limped upstairs to the bathroom with the shower, still trailing blood—god, the house was going to look like a crime scene—and upstairs I stood under cold water without even taking off my clothes.

This was Saturday, day two of being alone, and I was watching bloody water swirl down the drain.

Two questions I have about the fantasy novel: why does the character get transported from her home in the first place, and does she ever come back? These questions are more important than whether or not she falls in love with the brooding archer boy. Also, let's face it, she definitely falls in love with the brooding archer boy. Who could resist?

There will be a section where she gets wounded, because she'll take naturally to a bow and arrow and join the army against the dark lord. She might get separated from her company, stumble into a forest, delirious, with beasts roaming among the trees and their yellow eyes gleaming hungrily. But she'll mix a salve, she'll use her wits, because girls in fantasy novels always have hidden talents.

When I was out of the shower, I poured the hydrogen peroxide over the cut and watched it fizz as it cleaned the wound. The bleeding had slowed a little. I wrapped half a roll of paper towels around my leg and taped them with masking tape. I needed stitches. I needed wound

evaluation. I should call Sarah and have her take me to the hospital. But our insurance had been my dad's insurance, and we'd lost it when he'd gotten fired. An ER bill would cost thousands of dollars. I didn't know how much my mom had in the bank. I had \$300 saved from birthdays and my irregular babysitting gigs. More than anything, I didn't want to have to ask Ken to pay. He'd demand a repayment plan from me. He'd take credit for saving my life.

The morning, I thought. I'll see how it is in the morning. I was very tired, and I felt very woozy, and so I limped to my bedroom and wrapped myself up into a burrito with my blankets and fell into a really deep sleep.

There was this one time a few months ago when Ken and my mom were fighting. It was about my father. Ken didn't think my mom was being aggressive enough with him, and he was threatening to answer the phone himself the next time my dad called. Maybe it was the thought of Ken trying to intimidate my dad, who was weak right now and drug-addled and desperate to have his family back. It made me sick. Ken and my mom were fighting in the kitchen, and when I couldn't take it anymore I burst in and told him to stop yelling at her. I told him he better not dare talk to my father.

"Your mom and I are trying to have a conversation," Ken said.

I raised my palms up. So what?

Ken only needed to take one step to close most of the gap between us, like he was using his size to intimidate me. I turned to my mom and said, "God, can this idiot please just leave

for two seconds?"

Ken took another step. He glanced at my mom, then at me. "When are you going to learn to respect people's privacy?"

He was close enough that his spittle landed on my cheek; his breath smelled like coffee. I'd never felt tense in this way before, like I might have to deflect a blow. My mom was saying "Whoa, whoa," and pulling Ken back a little. But it was too late—she'd brought him into our house, and for the first time ever I felt unsafe there.

It was a nightmare, what happened next. Three-way screaming. Everyone was red in the face. My mom was crying. I stormed upstairs because I'd be damned if I was going to let Ken see me cry.

I woke up late the next morning. The same old sun blazed above the house, except that now there were spots in my vision that made the sunlight look moldy. One empty-headed minute went by before I remembered everything that happened: the fire, the aerosol can, the deep cut on my leg. I rolled over and my skin tore away from the sheet. I felt a new oozing. The blood had dried and now the cut was wide open again.

In the bathroom, a repeat of the procedure: hydrogen peroxide, new paper towels. The cut was seeping, but not gushing blood. Maybe it would scab today. I just had to keep it clean. Keep paper towels on it. Everything would be fine.

The house, though—the house was a wreck. The blood would be easy enough to clean off the hard-

wood stairs and hallways, but there were drops of it on my mom's rugs in the living room. The vomit had dried on the bathroom floor, and blood was on everything I'd touched.

I started cleaning, but I felt so tired. My leg hurt and too much movement made the cut split open. So I cleaned up the vomit and sprayed carpet cleaner on the rug. I had all week to clean the rest.

The phone rang. I was lying on the floor next to the rug and didn't think I could reach it in time, crawling, but I did. It was Sarah, telling me she was coming over for dinner.

"No!" I said, though no one was there to hear me; she'd already hung up.

I waited for her on the front stoop. I had to keep her from going inside. The wind blew cherry blossoms from the trees and the blossoms spun twister-like and landed on our black-top driveway. Little blushes of color. I toed them with my good leg. The other leg I'd wrapped in more paper towels and duct tape before putting on loose pants. The vein throbbed beneath the bandage, as though it was trying to bust loose. I compulsively pinched the fabric and shook it out, checking for blood.

I leaned all my weight on my good leg, slung my messenger bag over my shoulder, slipped my thumbs into my pockets. The thing with real life is that you have to do something to make yourself less miserable. You can't just fall into ponds and emerge a warrior.

A big gust made all the leaves talk over one another and brought my sister's car swooshing around the corner and up the driveway. Chris

was in the passenger seat. He rolled down the window and said, "I thought you were going to cook us chicken breasts."

"Let's go to Olga's," I said. "I'll buy us those bread things with the cheese dip."

I took small quick steps to the car, hoping they wouldn't notice that I was limping. But as I slid into the backseat, Sarah said, "Are you limping?"

"Just twisted my ankle," I said. "No big deal."

Sarah looked at me in the rearview mirror. I smiled really wide because I thought that would let her know I was okay. But instead she snorted. "You're grinning like a maniac," she said and put the car in gear.

Sarah made a quick turn out of our neighborhood. The motion made me dizzy. The houses and stores and billboards passed in a blur as we glided through every yellow light. I thought about how important timing is—how it decides everything. Sarah got out of the house at just the right time. Jamie falls into the pond at just the right time. Hayden hears the splash because he's nearby at just the right time. Then the clock resets, and everyone who wasn't there at the right time is stuck.

Monday, I had to go to school. I packed the hydrogen peroxide and extra paper towels for the mid-day wound-cleaning. As I drove there I thought about what might happen to the girl in my book if she slipped back into her real life. Maybe she gets struck by an arrow, and dying in her new world means returning to her old one. Would she go back to school?



Would she try to get back to Hayden, or whatever his name is, to continue fighting for the cause? And why does she feel so attached to a cause she just found out about, when she never really did anything to help any cause in her old world? Maybe it's because suddenly everything that makes her comfortable is gone, her whole system of social support gone, with no one around who remembers it. That sort of thing would rattle a person, would maybe make a person see things she'd ignored before.

I parked the car. I limped into pre-calculus late because I couldn't race the bell. A few people looked at me as I slid into my seat, but no one said anything—I was too quiet in school for people to take much notice of me—and Mr. Simon was oblivious as usual. All day I was dragging behind, walking slowly so it wouldn't look like I was limping. At lunch I started sweating. "Is it hot in here?" I asked my friends, who shook their heads and said they were cold.

In the bathroom, I propped my foot on the toilet seat and gagged as I peeled away the paper towel and saw the congealed blood. The skin around the cut had gotten puffy. I could feel my pulse beating in the wound. More hydrogen peroxide, more paper towels. On the way home, I decided, I would get proper bandages.

By third period I was feeling dizzy again. By fourth period I was flushed and feverish and I thought I might pass out if I tried to play my flute. The idea of all that air rushing out of me, air I needed, air that would be hard to get back, made me feel even sicker. I didn't have anyone to call me out

of class, though. My mom had only listed herself on the form the school sent home. So I stood by the front entrance for a second, considering. The parking lot monitor had parked his SUV at the curb and was chatting with the ladies in the main office.

The engine of my mom's car whined brightly when I turned it on. I didn't look in the rear view mirror as I drove away from the school. Maybe Jamie would try to return to the other world, so that she could finish the fight and be with her love—only to find that she couldn't return because she'd already died in that world. There was only this world, her home, and the only option was to find a way for Hayden to get here.

At home, I rolled pickles up in deli turkey and dipped them in mayo. I wasn't that hungry but hadn't eaten much the last few days. I got cold again, wrapped myself in the throw blanket and shivered while reruns of *Gilmore Girls* played. I watched with glazed eyes, one episode after another, the bubbly music rising and falling over me. I'd seen them all before but the show was comforting.

My mom called a little while later. I tried to be polite, told her everything was fine, and she told me she was having the time of her life. She'd held a hose over the dock at the last marina so she could give fresh water to the manatees that had swum up out of curiosity. Ken's idea, she said, as though to prove he was gentle or something.

She sounded happier than she'd been in weeks, and I thought it was probably because she was away from me. I should've let it go but I couldn't help it. "You know, it's illegal

to interact with manatees," I said. "You're not supposed to give them water. You're supposed to just watch them."

My mother sighed.

"I'm just saying, if Ken claims to be so knowledgeable about sailing he should know this."

"Erica, please."

"Tell him to stop messing with the manatees or I'll report him!"

My mom's voice got really low; it was almost a growl. "If you ruin this for me," she said, "I'll never forgive you."

There was silence. It beat in my ears like it had wings. Never—such a big, lasting word, a word that keeps expanding and never stops, never gives up. It's its own universe, that word. She'd already decided he was more important than I was. And maybe I shouldn't have been so defensive about the manatees—I mean, what's really so bad about giving them fresh water?—but my gut reaction was to find something wrong with whatever Ken did because he was wrong for us, and it wasn't fair, and my mom was going to uproot us and make me move like it was no big deal.

I'm not sure which of us hung up first. We'd already left the call, was the thing.

I fell asleep. I woke up sweating, kicked off the blanket, limped to the freezer and got an ice pack to put on my forehead. I turned on the light above the stove, rolled up my pajama shorts. The wound was sticky and inflamed; the veins surrounding it were like a map, the blue lines creeping further and further up and down my leg. I thought of Jamie shaking

through a fever in the woods and waking up having made it through. She wouldn't need help. I found a Tylenol and went back to the couch.

The hours crossed the border into night slowly, on foot, and I moved in and out of sleep like my brain was a pendulum—one side sleep, one side restlessness. When I woke it was maybe to raccoons knocking over trashcans outside or night-bruised headlights slicing through the windows. Time felt loopy. The clock on the wall ticked but didn't tock. Water didn't help my dry mouth. What if I was getting too sick, getting past the point of being able to make rational decisions? I wondered if there were any leftover antibiotics in the medicine cabinet. It was possible, but I couldn't muster the energy to get up and look.

If Jamie were back in her home world, back in school, would she be distracted and uncertain? Would she think her time in the other world had all been a dream? She couldn't tell any grownups; they'd make her go to therapy, or worse. She'd stay quiet, burdened with a secret and heartbroken and not equipped to deal with any of it, but she'd get through it. At night she'd go to the pond where she'd fallen in and sit and breathe in the muddy smell of the water, tear up blades of grass and roll them between her fingers. She'd write messages on rocks and throw them into the pond, but they'd go unanswered. Fall in, her messages would say. Or I'm waiting. Or maybe she'll realize that even though she can't go back to the other world as a human, she can go back as a ghost. And she'll fall in and emerge shimmering, floating, a specter gliding across the blood-soaked fields of

war. She'll find Hayden in a field tent, injured and dying, and she'll cloak him in her invisibility and guide him back to the pond where for the last time they'll look upon his world and understand that they'll never be able to return because she's dead and he's dying and the war is almost lost. So they'll sink into the pool together, the water a silk cloth around them, the other world breaking into smaller and smaller pieces until it disappears. They'll emerge gasping for air on the banks of the pond near Jamie's house. Hayden will be fading, like a filament in a light bulb starting to pop, and in Jamie's world she'll give him antibiotics and vitamins and clean water. And he'll recover.

I woke up hours later. The clock radio in my room had been sounding its alarm for a long time. School had started; first period was almost over, in fact. The phone rang and I let the answering machine get it. It was the attendance office, inquiring about my whereabouts since no one had called in to excuse me.

I looked at the cut and saw it had started to ooze yellow pus. I tried to stand but the ceiling started spinning, and I collapsed back onto the couch and put my head between my knees. I wasn't breathing very well. I got the phone and dialed my dad's number. It rang and rang and he never answered. All the anger I'd been wrestling with before now just felt like sadness. My mom just wanted love, and yet for some reason we couldn't figure out how she could have that without tearing everything apart.

If you ruin this for me, I'll never forgive you.

I wondered if Jamie would begin to feel like she'd made the wrong choice after bringing Hayden back with her. They might have fun at first—go boating on a lake, and he'll never have experienced speed so fast, and it will take his breath away, and he'll associate all those good highs with Jamie. He'll eat pizza for the first time and feel the tickling cool of air conditioning. But then depression will sink in because his friends and family back home have been destroyed, and he wasn't able to help them, and he won't feel like he belongs in this new place (even though somehow everyone speaks English in the book). He'll be homeless, because there's no way Jamie's parents will let a boy move into her room with her. He won't be vaccinated against the diseases of this world. He won't understand the politics. He'll have no past he can talk about without feeling blue. They'll look at each other and think what a bad idea their being together had been.

"Oh my god."

I opened my eyes. The realtor stood across the room. I hadn't heard her open the door. The little box with the key—I'd forgotten about it. Usually she called before she brought people over, but maybe she had and I'd been sleeping, or maybe she called my mom's cell.

Behind the realtor stood a man and a woman. Their hands covered their mouths as they looked at me and at the blood on the floor and on the back door. The tangle of blankets and the blood that leaked from my wound onto the couch. They looked horrified.

"Are you okay?" the man asked.

Nausea swelled inside me and I got up and tried to limp to the kitchen sink but threw up on the living room floor instead.

"Oh, honey," the realtor said. She dropped the folder she was carrying onto the coffee table and knelt beside me.

Without saying anything, I rolled up my shorts and showed her the cut. A horrified look darkened her face. She looked at the cut, then looked at me like I was a stranger, though we'd met before and she told me she'd played the flute in high school, too.

"Where's your mom?"

"I thought it would get better." I watched her dig her phone out of her purse. "Wait—don't call my mom!"

She wasn't. She was calling an ambulance. I wondered if a doctor would think I was crazy. I prodded the cut. It did look a lot worse.

I sort of knew then that the damage had already been done. It would be a long time before anyone would trust me again. This—this was what my mom would never forgive me for ruining.

Antibiotics dripped from an IV bag into the inner fold of my elbow. Machines beeped out my vitals. A psych evaluation was in the works, though I insisted I wasn't crazy. The hospital had called Sarah, who had called my

mom, who was waiting on standby to get home.

Maybe Jamie and Hayden will run away and try to start a new life. Maybe they'll go back to the other world and live as ghosts, floating around for eternity like eerie balls of incandescence. It sounds good but probably won't be that much fun after a few days. All the things they love have to do with being alive.

I was stuck. I didn't know how to make the book something that wasn't depressing. I didn't know how to end it. It all seemed so small and senseless now, all my ideas, my book, my quest to get my mom to realize Ken's a jerk. Maybe one day I'll think bigger. Two years from now I'll graduate. Maybe then I'll be on my way to college, or I'll save up for my own car and drive to a place where people are just waiting for a stranger to come to town.

*Megan Cummins (RC 2009) has an MFA from Rutgers-Newark and an MA from UC Davis. She is managing editor of A Public Space and has worked as a reader in the fiction department at The New Yorker. Megan's writing has appeared in Guernica, A Public Space, Hobart, One Teen Story, Ninth Letter, among other places. She lives in Brooklyn. "Aerosol" previously appeared in One Teen Story.*



## Spring Offensive 1971: (Excerpts from A Sonnet Cycle)

Peter Anderson

### MAYDAY

Julie, Tom

A spring offensive, Washington, D.C.  
The plan's to stop the government, disrupt  
The flow of traffic in and out for three  
Whole days. *But*. Nixon is the one who's upped  
The stakes. If we can't stop the war at least  
We'll stop all business in the downtown core,  
Block intersections north, south, west and east,  
We'll park our cars on bridges. *Cool*. There's more  
You'll come with me? *With you?* And drive? *But when?*  
*And we'll stay where?* My parent's house. *You're sure?*  
They're cool. They're both in government. They were.  
My dad still is, but he won't mind. *So then*  
*We'll crash with them?* Is that a yes? *Okay,*  
*Like when?* Mayday. *You mean?* We'll leave today.

### VOLKSWAGEN

Leaf

Volkswagen, that means, what, the "people's car"?  
Like "Free the People, Heil Hitler," right?  
Yeah, thanks for stopping, you guys going far?  
I thought that I'd be stuck there through the night,  
Watching while America passed by:  
Families frowning like they wished me dead,  
The kids in back all waving at me, shy,  
While Mom and Pop up front stare straight ahead,  
So thanks for stopping. MAY DAY! Going down!  
That's pilot talk for crashing, man. D.C.  
Is where I'm headed: Riot right downtown!  
We'll stop the fuckers then we'll all be free  
And Tricky Dick, the dick, man, what a joke.  
Can shove his war. I got some pot, you smoke?

### LIST

Haldeman

Got a bullhorn? Anyone can speak:  
The Maoists, Stalinists, the Trotskyites,  
The non-believers, zealots, Jesus freaks,  
The Left, the Right, unbuttoned and uptight,  
Do-gooders, evil-doers, pacifists  
The violent and non-violent, deviants  
The Catholics, beatniks, doctors, anarchists  
The hippies, yuppies, lawyers, every stance;  
Draft dodgers, wounded vets, old Socialists,  
Resisters and deserters still at-large,  
Black panthers, students, strident feminists –  
All on the list, but no one is in charge.  
The only thing in common that's at play  
Is what unites them – their naiveté.

## OLD MAN

Leaf

My old man tried to teach me discipline  
By smacking me: his palm, his fist, his belt.  
In sports, like football, when I didn't win  
The next day I'd like sport a bruise or welt.  
He fought in Europe, never said a word  
To me about the things he did or saw  
Just said "enlist." But I flipped him the bird.  
Go fight for what? Old men like you? Hurrah.  
Expected me to be like him. Okay.  
One day when I mouthed off and he attacked  
I decked him with a shot like Cassius Clay —  
I mean Ali — my old man knew for fact  
He couldn't teach me nothing after that;  
He touched me, I'd be gone in seconds flat.

So when I told him "Hell no, I won't go,"  
He called me coward, gave me so much flack  
"You're no son of mine" — this great big show —  
And told me to get out and not come back.  
So, fine, I'm free at last to come and go,  
Now freaks, not him, are like my family.  
That crewcut, beergut, tattooed working Joe;  
Me follow in his footsteps? Not for me.  
He worked his ass off for the System, right?  
For what? A house, a car, TV and shit?  
A loaded gun next to his bed at night.  
My old man's dead to me, I'm glad of it.  
A racist, sexist pig whose time is past —  
Nothing that he's clung to's gonna last.

## RED WHITE AND BLUE

Julie

I love my country not the governments  
Or companies that profit from its crimes.  
I love my country not my ignorance,  
My willingness to go along each time.  
I love it here, that's why I don't want us  
Involved in someone else's civil war.  
What if the innocent we've killed haunt us?  
Civilians die but no one knows what for.  
I love my country but the middle class  
Is blind to all the suffering in the world.  
"My country right or wrong." No thanks, I'll pass.  
Salute the flag each time it gets unfurled?  
Love it or leave it. How can I be proud?  
Red, white and blue's the color of a shroud.

## COMPROMISE

Dad, *Julie*

But making compromises is the way  
To see beyond ourselves and get things done.  
*Like what?* Like what? Well, more than this May Day,  
A lot of things ... the Voting Act for one.  
I'd say we've given compromise a chance  
And worked within a System that's corrupt  
But what good did it do to dance that dance?  
One bombing campaign stops, two more erupt.  
But when your tactics are extreme, you lose  
Support among the people. You have a voice  
In our society, you're free to choose,  
To vote. But there's no choice, no real choice  
When we are being drafted, asked to kill  
By old white guys who draft bill after bill.

## HOME

Tom

A swampy jungle, that'd be the worst;  
I couldn't breathe, my lungs, from all that mould.  
Bronchitis, asthma'd prob'ly kill me first;  
Just one attack I'm dead, turned blue and cold.  
I had my choice, the desert's number one;  
I'd go to war someplace the air was dry.  
My allergies'd get cured in the sun;  
At least then I'd be healthy when I die.  
If not the desert, mountains' number two;  
Up high above the tree-line, fresh, clean air,  
Where people live long like I hope to do.  
But why not fight at home instead of there?  
Let them come here, so I can sleep at night  
In my own bed, wake up refreshed and fight.

## DRAFT

Leaf

Yeah, fuck the draft, you're lucky you're in school,  
No football scholarship for me, my grades  
Sucked bad so no deferment, no, it's cool.  
Like some guy said, "Where there's a will, evade."  
So I get called up, I don't bathe for weeks,  
I never change my clothes, I never shave,  
And never brush my teeth so when I speak  
My breath smells like it came out of the grave.  
The day before I'm due for my exam  
I take a buncha hits of 'ludes and speed  
And waltz into the center. "Here I am!  
I wanna kill for you." and then I peed  
"Ain't I," I yell – my piss there on the floor –  
"Insane enough to fight your insane War?"

One look at me and, wham, I'm out the door,  
Cause Uncle Sam apparently wants guys  
To be attractive when they land ashore,  
Before they're in some swamp attracting flies.  
To be well-groomed before they torch the ground  
And massacre survivors in cold blood,  
A body and a mind that's clean and sound  
Before they're dead and face down in the mud.  
How else could I get out from going there?  
Go to Canada or fake disease?  
The draft's supposed to what, make it more "fair"?  
Hey, no offence but look who's overseas.  
Where I come from, they all enlist like that –  
From high school prom to 'Nam in seconds flat.

## MID AIR

Tom

A Motown party in my college dorm,  
The Miracles, Supremes, freaks everywhere,  
All stoned and dancing, kegs of beer: the norm.  
I see this high school pal, a vacant stare.  
Don't know him very well, but well enough,  
I helped him out once on an English test.  
"You're back from 'Nam?" A nod. "Like was it tough?"  
Temptations cranked high thumping in my chest.  
As bodies shake the floor we're sprayed with beer.  
He looks at me, says, "*Yeah. It rained a lot.*"  
I think that's what he said, I can't quite hear.  
"*You want to know...*" he takes a toke of pot  
And coughs, then leaning in "*... know what it's like?*"  
The speakers blasting Marvin Gaye's "Hitch Hike."



*I saw my best friend next to me shot dead.  
"Hey, man" he said and then his face was gone.  
He dropped his gun, fell down. "Hey, man," I said,  
"Not now, not here, c'mon, get up, what's wrong."  
I'm standing there, I'm frozen, like in shock,  
And then I lost it, grabbed this baby from  
Its mother's arms and smashed it on a rock.  
Then everything went silent, just a hum.  
I did a thing like that and now I'm here.  
I swung it by the feet, the mother cried.  
Now nothing kills that thought. Not pot, not beer.  
I party on the outside while inside  
My friend is gone, the baby's in mid-air.  
The Four Tops singing "Reach Out, I'll Be There."*

## **EVER WAS**

Mom

There's nothing certain, things that are are few  
And far between. Like war. It seems to me  
That men have fought since time began. What's new?  
There's always war, more war will always be.  
Men's cruelty to other men's old hat,  
One tyrant's killed, another heeds the call.  
Our nature's dark and nothing will change that,  
You might as well try stopping night to fall,  
Protest the tide, the orbit of the sun,  
Or time itself for all the good it does.  
The fact is death will come to everyone,  
To all that is, will be, and ever was.  
To live means living with a broken heart.  
Put out one war, another war will start.

## **TRAITORS**

Cop

They'd plunge the world into anarchy,  
This lawless, unemployed and obscene bunch,  
Dope addicts, marijuana, LSD,  
Free love, free food, free everything, free lunch.  
These rich kids with their daddy's credit cards,  
A lark to them, an idiotic spree,  
Breaking windows, lights, and trampling yards,  
Throwing rocks and whining like they're three.  
Except their temper tantrums hurt our cause  
And worse give comfort to the enemy;  
Treat it like treason – that'd give 'em pause.  
They want to play at War, then let them see  
What it's really like; no muss, no fuss,  
The Viet Cong shoot traitors, why not us?

## **OH MAN**

Leaf

It's all like, man, I mean, y'know, all so  
Like, man, far out, I can't begin to – what,  
I thought, wow, yeah, oh man, y'know, like whoa,  
And then I thought it's open, what was shut –  
My mind, my eyes, the sky, that wall of cops,  
It's all unfolding, man, before my, wow –  
Jump-cuts in time, the movie starts and stops.  
Go with the flow, y'know, like in the Tao.  
Oh, wow, I mean, like man, like I don't know,  
Y'know, the meaning or the thing behind  
The thing, the veil, the thing we see, the Show.  
Then everything turned red, oh man, my mind  
Was blown. And when I touched my head, my hair,  
Oh man, my skull was bleeding everywhere.

## LEFT FIELD

Tom

The baseball stadium was filled with freaks,  
The buses rolling in and out all day.  
Martial law. You couldn't even speak.  
They busted anybody in their way  
For littering, or loitering in groups,  
The least excuse. Nobody knew the score  
But with each busload came the latest scoop.  
Twenty thousand of us, maybe more.  
Passing weed and wine in dixie cups,  
Some partied while some others planned and rapped  
And plotted how to fuck the whole thing up,  
Overload the System till it snapped.  
We pushed, our bodies squashed against the fence,  
Until it fell and we were free. Intense.

## RELEASED

Julie

They thought I was involved with bombs and stuff.  
Graffiti sprayed in blood: "The War Machine."  
Induction center blown up. I'm handcuffed.  
They claimed my fingerprints were at the scene.  
"We're after five ringleaders, give us names  
And you can go." I asked if I could call.  
They said "Shut up, girl, we're not playing games."  
And led me to this bare room down a hall.  
They tried to scare me acting real tough.  
They called me terrorist, an enemy,  
"You've got no evidence it's just a bluff.  
Go on and charge me with conspiracy."  
Good cop, bad cop, stared at me. "I'll wait  
As long as you. I know my rights." Checkmate.

They had to free me then. Called me a ride,  
And acting like they're gentlemen – assholes –  
They opened up the door for me. Outside  
A cab dropped off two of the night's last souls,  
Thick clouds of smoke and soot, tear gas, exhaust,  
I waited, then hopped in and off we drove,  
The cabbie was so nervous he got lost.  
There's roadblocks everywhere. Gunshot! I dove  
Below the dash, then realized: backfire.  
It took forever making our way home.  
We had to stop two times to fix flat tires  
From broken glass, barbed wire, chunks of stone.  
We almost hit an overturned cop car.  
It was the best ride of my life by far.

*Peter Anderson (RC 1972) studied at the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre before moving to Canada in 1977. He's the recipient of six Jessie Richardson Awards, a Bay Area Critics' Circle Award, Leo and Gemini nominations for best performance (The Overcoat), and a NY Drama Desk nomination. He lives in Vancouver with his wife, maskmaker and writer Melody Anderson.*



## Excerpt from The Animal Lover's Guide to Changing the World

Stephanie Feldstein

### Plastic Detox

*Sea turtles face the greatest threat of their life right after they hatch, when they have to leave their cozy nest on the beach to make a mad dash for the water, where they'll spend the rest of their days. Imagine running for your life across sand on flippers, as a newborn, through a gauntlet of predators waiting to pick you off before you reach your home for the first time. No one ever said nature was fair. Also unfair is when sea turtles survive that epic beach race and have the chance to grow up, then one day they think they've found a tasty*

*jellyfish snack and wind up getting a deadly mouthful of plastic bag instead.*

Haunted by images of birds and turtles shackled by loops of plastic, I became a dedicated cutter of six-pack rings from a young age. I felt better knowing that if an animal came across that particular six-pack ring, I'd provided an escape hatch. But then I learned about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, sometimes referred to as the Pacific trash vortex (which appropriately sounds like it's the portal

to an alternate dimension full of trash demons), where bits of plastic from toys and bags and bottles and clothes and countless other things collect in the ocean's currents. I realized those six-pack rings were a drop in the tsunami of the plastic problem wildlife was facing.

We live in a plastic world. Right now, wherever you are, you're surrounded by plastic—it's in electronics, medical equipment, cars, building materials, furniture, yoga mats, fleece jackets, drinking straws, toothbrushes, action figures, games, packaging, and millions of other products. Plastic has become one of the most ubiquitous materials in our lives, thanks to its durability and convenience. Except it's not so convenient if you're a wild animal.

Plastic doesn't belong in nature. It's easily mistaken for food, but it's not digestible. In its many forms, it can tangle birds, turtles, seals, dolphins, whales, and other marine life. Plastic is also full of toxic chemicals, including

persistent organic pollutants (POPs). As the POP name implies, not only does the plastic itself not go away, but its toxicity hangs around in the environment, threatening the health of animals and accumulating up the food chain (which isn't good news for those of us at the top of the food chain: the toxic chemicals eaten by little fish are eaten by bigger fish, then eaten by even bigger humans, bringing our pollution full circle).

And there's that one not-so-small fact that plastic manufacturers would prefer our climate-concerned society continues to ignore: Modern plastics are made from petroleum, contributing to our fossil fuel dependence. Imagine every plastic bottle of water filled one-quarter of the way with oil—that's how much fossil fuel it took to produce the plastic and process and ship the bottled water to the store.<sup>1</sup> So, in addition to saving ocean life, a plastic detox will also help fight climate change.

<sup>1</sup> "Bottled Water and Energy Fact Sheet," Pacific Institute, February 2007, accessed May 28, 2017, <http://pacinst.org/publication/bottled-water-and-energy-a-fact-sheet/>.

### Warning: Choking Hazard

Modern synthetic, carbon-based plastics came on the scene in 1907 with the invention of Bakelite. The next few decades brought the invention of polystyrene (such as Styrofoam restaurant carryout containers), polyester (the favorite fabric of workout clothes and cheap uniform designers), PVC (used in everything from pipes to shower curtains), nylon (found in ropes, rugs, and rugged clothing), and

polyethylene (the most common plastic in the world, primarily manufactured to package other manufactured things). With each decade since then, we became more and more dependent on plastics.

Here's the really scary part: Since plastic takes somewhere between several decades and several centuries to decompose, most of the plastic that's been created since 1907

still exists in the world. In fact, the majority of plastic ever created was produced in the past ten years, so it'll still be around for your great-grandchildren.

Actually, it gets scarier: By 2050—less than 150 years after plastic was invented—there will be more plastic than fish in the sea<sup>2</sup> and every shorebird in the world will be eating the stuff.<sup>3</sup>

Our oceans are choking on plastic. Six-pack rings are just one of the dangers. Plastic shopping bags float in the water, looking like jellyfish and entangling unsuspecting sea life. Bright bits of plastic trash on the beach look a lot like insects, small fish, crustaceans, crab eggs, and other shorebird delicacies. Sometimes these plastics, like the jellyfish-imposter shopping bags, can pose an immediate choking hazard. But even more frequently the small bits of plastic—the pieces that have broken down but will never biodegrade—slowly fill the stomachs of birds, fish, and other marine animals so they think they're getting food while they're actually starving to death. One recent study by Swedish

researchers compared young fish chowing down on plastic to teenagers hooked on fast food, finding that even when they have access to nutritious alternatives to eat, the kids just can't resist the lure of plastic.<sup>4</sup>

At this point, you might be thinking, I'd never throw plastic in the ocean. Littering was so 1970s. I believe you, but sadly the litterbug has not gone extinct. As recently as 2008, more than 25 percent of people interviewed admitted to littering in the past month, and 35 percent of people were observed being litterbugs in action, though they flat-out denied it when asked a few minutes later.<sup>5</sup> Whether they didn't want to fess up or didn't consciously realize what they'd done, it's clear that we've still got work to do to make sure garbage gets into bins instead of the mouths and beaks of wildlife.

For those of us who dutifully put trash where it belongs, our detritus still has a way of blowing around, tipping over, and being raided by raccoons and other wildlife. Although recycling programs have grown, they're very limited when it comes to plastic products that aren't bot-

tle-shaped. Only 9 percent of plastic is recycled in the United States, compared to 26 percent in Europe, while as much as twenty million tons globally finds its way to the ocean every year.<sup>6</sup> The only way to be certain you're not contributing to plastic pollution is to stop contributing to plastic production.

<sup>6</sup> "Global Plastic Production Rises, Recycling Lags," *Worldwatch Institute*, January 28, 2015, <http://www.worldwatch.org/global-plastic-production-rises-recycling-lags-0>.

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<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, and McKinsey & Company, *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the Future of Plastics* (Cowes, UK: Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Chris Wilcox, Erik Van Seville, and Britta Denise Hardesty, "Threat of Plastic Pollution to Seabirds Is Global, Pervasive, and Increasing," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 38 (2015): 11899–904, doi:10.1073/pnas.1502108112.

<sup>4</sup> Oona M. Lönnstedt and Peter Eklöv, "Environmentally Relevant Concentrations of Microplastic Particles Influence Larval Fish Ecology," *Science* 352, no. 6290 (2016): 1213–16. doi:10.1126/science.aad8828.

<sup>5</sup> *Littering Behavior in America: Results of a National Study* (Stamford, CT: Keep America Beautiful, 2009).

# Two Poems

Esha Biswas

**Part I: Dadu** you learned that I loved mangoes.  
so you sliced a hundred of them into  
bite-sized cubes of orange always  
with a tiny two-pronged fork  
(the perfect size for my tiny fingers)  
and I'd gobble them up  
plate after plate after plate after plate  
getting bits of stringy sunshine stuck  
between my baby teeth and sweet sticky  
yellow nectar dripping down my chubby arms and  
you kept slicing mangoes  
a hundred more  
a hundred more  
(a hundred more)  
until I thought I didn't love mangoes anymore.  
but you kept feeding me mangoes  
until I loved them again and now  
I pay too much for mangoes sometimes  
because they remind me of you.

**Part II: Dun** you gave birth to my mother  
without ever knowing yours.  
I don't know if you remember but  
you taught me how to braid one  
sunny day on the balcony you  
took the black string you use to tie up  
the end of your long plait  
and tied it to the rusty door handle instead.  
you taught me how to weave three strands  
in and out and through each other  
left over middle under right over middle.  
the little girl in me still watches in awe today  
when your fingers scramble deftly  
zipping through your waves until they're all  
neatly woven into a perfect rope  
of black and glistening silver  
tied with the same black string at the end.  
you gave birth to my mother  
without every knowing yours and  
you braid and she weaves and I braid  
three strands intertwined  
one rope of black and glistening silver  
tied with a black string at the end.

Gold

My wealth lies in sunbeams.

I find riches in golden delicious apple,  
In buttercups and gentle flame.

I find brilliance in pollen dust and star dust  
In marigolden sunrise  
And honey soaked cloud.

My pot of gold is filled with flaxen dreams and turmeric.  
With amber power, moonlit strength,  
And a daylily - sunny side up.

I find prosperity in shimmering coins of  
Autumn birch leaf  
Sunflower petal and  
Drops of mustard.

My wealth lies in dazzling bells and egg yolk.  
In lavish cups of nectar and laughter and growth.

I find luxury in buttery afternoon sun and  
Goldfinch song and kernels of wisdom glitter.

My wealth lies in the glimmer of daffodils at dusk  
In brown skin and the hum of bumblebees.

My gold rush is goldenrod blooms  
And dandy lion mane.

Within me I find a temple  
Worthy of any goddess  
Filled to the brim with waxing moons.

My wealth lies within me.  
Within sunshine  
within power  
within bloom and  
within strength.

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# Morning and Afternoon

Katherine Towler

In the attic room where I wake  
hunger grows close. Wind may people  
distant orchards, but here my company  
is a dance. Squirrels tap across the roof

dipping down to peer through the glass  
with eyes black as winter ponds.  
Sunlight, that old friend, makes  
no attempt to track the hours.

I would be frantic, tiny fingers  
working, working. I would be full of mission  
and message, the bright chatter  
of morning and afternoon.

The work I do is not so quick,  
holding thread to a famished needle  
over and over, praying just once  
the thread will pull through.

*Katherine Towler (English, 1978) is author of the novels Snow Island, Evening Ferry, and Island Light, a trilogy set on a fictional New England island. Her memoir The Penny Poet of Portsmouth was published by Counterpoint Press in 2016. She is also editor of A God in the House: Poets Talk About Faith. She teaches in the Mountainview MFA Program in Writing at Southern New Hampshire University and lives in Portsmouth, NH. When she is not writing, she spends most of her time birdwatching.*



# The Bookrunner

Matt Forbeck

I enter the shop, and I can smell the books already. After a glideboat ride through the fresh air of Manhattan's wider canals, the musty stench makes my nostrils itch. I wrinkle my nose and repress an urge to sneeze.

The store's owner—a young Caucasian woman with a long red ponytail—sits behind a glowing display counter to the left, and she glances up from an old copy of LIFE as I walk in. I don't need to call up the instant ID layer in my optical display to peg her as a Luddite. The cats-eye reading glasses perched on her nose mark do that for me

I punch up the layer anyhow, and my NSA facial recognition software kicks in. The glowing text that hovers around her labels her as Adina Clark. She lives in a boat-up apartment

in Chelsea with at least three other people, probably more either bunked in illegally or timesharing their beds. She homeschooled through Khan University, graduated three years ago, with honors.

Officially, she's unemployed because officially this building doesn't exist. It was scheduled for demolition a decade ago, but the city council doesn't have the stomach for it, so here the shop squats in a space that once housed a jazz club. It's stacked floor to ceiling with shelves and shelves of books: paperbacks, hardcovers, even deluxe leather-bound slipcases. Everything from coloring books to encyclopedias, all used and long past their expiration dates, their pages yellowing, even crumbling, sliding through their

slow-motion decay into dust.

A crimson halo appears around Adina, and I blink at the alert. The system inside my eyelids scans my retina and IDs me as having proper access to the NSA's criminal database. Her long rap sheet scrolls out alongside her. Nothing violent, mostly information charges like possession of unlicensed materials. That's one of those so-called victimless crimes that no one cares much about, me included, but she's also been arrested for dealing and trafficking. So far, no prosecutor's been able to make those stick.

She puts down the magazine and wipes her hands on her jeans as she stands to greet me. They get plenty of older Asian-American men like me around here, I'm sure, but she appraises me like a first-edition Hemingway. Something about me—maybe my shaved head, or more likely my cheap suit—must scream “undercover cop.”

“Can I help you, Officer?” I fake a smile I'm sure does little to affect her opinion of me. “I didn't think a bookseller would have the optics to recognize me.”

It's a dig at the fact that few people in her profession can afford retinal displays like the ones burning in the back of my eyes, but it glances off her emotional armor. She doesn't bother to return the smile. “I know the smell of bacon, but not your name. Can I see your badge?”

I fish my ID out of my jacket and flap it open on the glass-topped counter. A weathered copy of *No Country for Old Men* stares up at me past it.

Agent Lao Wai of the National Security Agency? She looks at me over the rims of her glasses to compare my

face against the image on the card.

I nod to confirm her suspicions.

“You're a meme killer.”

I stuff my badge back in my jacket.

“We prefer to be called vaccinators.”

She rolls her eyes at me just like my great-granddaughter does, and I repress the urge to smack her. I've had a lot of practice at that over the years.

“Aren't you trolling in the wrong threads?” she says. “Don't you have some sort of vicious clip of cuddling kittens you need to rub out?”

I make a point to peer around the store. “Dangerous information comes in all kinds of formats. Some of them might not look like as much trouble as The Prepper's Bible channel on the surface, but that just makes them more pernicious.”

“Those guys were just loudmouth assholes exercising their First Amendment rights.”

“And their Second.”

“Once you went after them, sure. You could have just left them alone.”

I grimace at her naiveté. “Rights come with responsibilities. Like not shooting at federal officers serving a warrant.”

She crosses her arms. “Do you have a warrant?”

“Are you going to shoot me?”

She repeats herself, stopping between every word. “Do. You. Have. A. Warrant?”

I shrug. “Isn't this place open to the public?”

Without looking back, she points at a sign attached high on the bookshelf behind her. It reads, “We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.”

“It's all about rights with you, is it?”

“I think you have a responsibility to

respect them.”

I turn and stroll deeper into the store. “Actually, I have a sworn duty to uphold the law.”

She slips from behind the counter and follows me as I browse the books on the shelves, inspecting them at random. Maybe they were placed in some kind of order at one point, but if so that plan's long been abandoned. They're loosely grouped in sections by genre or subject, but when I spot a *Dungeon Master's Guide* stuffed next to a set of Osprey books about the Hundred Years' War in the history section, I see they haven't applied much rigor to that criteria either.

“What do you have against books?” she asks as she trails behind me, watching me like a mother wolf anxious about her cubs.

I run a finger along one shelf. It comes back covered with dust. “Nothing. I learned how to read on books. Not the electronic kind. The ones you hold in your lap while you turn their pages.”

I glance back to see her goggling at me. “Just how old are you?”

“Old enough to know better. But then, so are you.”

She narrows her eyes at me. “You're a Methuselah. Indentured, right?”

I spread my arms wide in surrender. “Guilty. What gave me away?”

She snorts. “No one with an actual job can afford total organ replacements like that.”

I gesture toward myself. “It's not the principle that gets you. It's the maintenance.”

“So you signed away your life for your life.”

“It beats dying.”

“I would rather die on my feet than

live on my knees,” she quotes.

“I'll send flowers to your funeral then.”

Most people poke at me about my unnaturally extended life out of jealousy. They're both repulsed and intrigued at the same time. They don't enjoy the idea of having to work for a sponsor forever, but they appreciate the notion of a long, lingering death even less.

The trouble is that sponsors don't offer up deals like that unless they have absolute trust in you. The procedures are too damn expensive, and you can't just repossess upgraded organs. So if you want them, you have to earn an offer within the span of a single lifetime—and show unwavering loyalty along the way. Few people are up for it, and the top candidates compete for a small number of slots.

Most of them grow out of it. Age has a funny way of reworking your principles for you.

I pull one of the books off the shelf. A hardcover of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I check it for a price but can't find one.

“How much does something like this run?”

“One dollar. Cash.”

“Only a buck? That seems like a bargain. But who carries real money these days?”

“You'd be surprised.”

I pat my pockets and grimace.

“Guess I'm out of luck.”

“You could bring in a book to trade.”

I cock my head at her for teasing me like that. “I don't happen to own any. Not anymore.”

She shrugged.

“You realize that selling books without a license is a federal offense.”

"Of course."

"And do you have such a license?"

"You already know the answer to that."

I scan her face. "You don't seem too bothered."

"I don't sell books here."

I heft the *Hitchhiker's Guide* in my hand. "You just offered to sell me this."

She shakes her head. "You asked me how much it runs, and I told you. But we don't accept money of any kind here, virtual or otherwise."

I glance around at all the stacks of books, and it hits me. "You're running a library."

"We call it a book-lending cooperative. Libraries have to keep electronic copies of their records and make them available to the government. As I'm sure you know."

"Do you keep records of any kind?"

She shakes her head. "We operate on an honor system."

I can't help but laugh. "An honor system? For paper? Do you know how much these things are worth on the black market?"

She pushes out her chest, defiant. "And yet here they are. People see the value in our un-library, even if you don't."

"Call it whatever you like. We can let a judge figure it out."

I let the implied threat hang in the air as I wander deeper into the shop. She waits for a moment, thinks about it, and then tags along after me.

"Do you like your job?" she asks.

I consider the question. "Like is a strong word for something I've been at as long as I have. I respect it. It's a job worth doing."

"You make it sound like blocking the free exchange of ideas is some-

thing noble."

"I've saved a lot of lives."

"By keeping people from thinking."

"From thinking the wrong thoughts."

"And who gets to say what's wrong?"

"The NSA, also known as the employees chosen by the appointees of your duly elected representatives. And the Supreme Court. Don't tell me you're too young to remember Hollywood."

I look at her, and I know I'm right. She couldn't have been born when that happened. Still, no one grows up in this country without learning about it. Even revolutionary terrorists like the ones she hangs out with.

"Hollyweird, you mean?"

"Let me guess." I point at the books all around us. "You 'read' about it."

She shudders with frustration, but she still recites the facts as she knows them. "April 11th. A screenplay supposedly from the hottest writer of the day is released to all the studios simultaneously. It contained weaponized memes, and everyone who read it became a frothing sociopath. They go on a killing spree that only ends after the feds shut down the entire internet and permanently cordon off the city." She swallows. "I suppose you're going to try to defend the bombing."

"A lot more people would have died."

"So you say. But does that make it all right for the U.S. government to murder thousands of its own citizens?"

"If it saves millions?"

"Bullshit. The government wanted to kill those people. They wanted to destroy Hollywood and cripple the

internet, and they were all too happy to use whatever excuse they could find. Or construct."

I laugh, and she glares at me. "Oh." I wipe the wry look from my face. "You're serious. How can you be an educated person—a reader, no less—and believe that black flag nonsense?"

She counts off the reasons on her fingers, one at a time. "The government had the means, the motive, and the opportunity. And just look how well it's turned out for them. People are afraid to read."

"You're living in a different dimension than me. Where I work, the President made the only call she could to combat a nasty, hyper-infectious meme like that. You either cauterize the wound, or you let it fester until it kills the entire body."

She goggles at me. "You really think you can weaponize an idea."

"You don't? Just look at history. Watch how certain revelations sweep through it, both good and bad. Everything from dictators to religion to even science. The internet only made it worse. Now ideas can spread globally at the speed of electricity, with little in the way of friction to slow them down."

She opens her mouth to interrupt me, but I press on.

"In the old days, people just stumbled over the ideas, concocting and spreading them on their own. Once we figured out the science behind them, it was only a matter of time before someone turned it into a weapon."

"You've been working for the government too long if you buy all that."

I allow myself a vicious grin. "You want proof?"

She gives me a dubious nod.

"Ever see those notices about flashing lights they put on some videos or games? How they can induce seizures in some people?"

"In epileptics." She doesn't see how this connects.

"That's an accident, a strange circumstance that shows just how external stimuli can affect susceptible brains. But if you know what you're doing, you can do the same thing on purpose, and through the language centers of the brain instead."

She lets loose a troubled sigh. "I think you need to leave." She knows that's not going to happen.

I say a word no language can spell. I modulate my tone and pronunciation in precise ways, and I tailor my efforts especially for her.

She hears the word, and she freezes. She doesn't realize it, because it's probably her first time, but I just induced a petit mal seizure in her.

She stares forward, her eyes wide open but blank, her mouth hanging open without a word on her tongue. I walk around and stand behind her, and I wait.

Half a minute later, she blinks and gasps. "Where did you go?"

I tap her on the shoulder as gently as I can. Despite that, she screams.

She whirls around and spies me standing there, giving her a little wave.

She screams again.

"What? Did you just teleport?"

I shake my head. "It only seemed that way to you."

She backs away from me, her skin crawling in revulsion. "Don't ever do that again."

"I think I made my point."  
 She draws a ragged breath. "What do you want?"  
 "Out of life?" I know what she means, but I want to hear her say it.  
 "From me. Why are you here?"  
 "I'm here to close this place down. Unregulated offline information storehouses are just too dangerous."  
 Her face grows drawn and pale, as if she's been sick for weeks. "You let people read whatever they want to on the internet."  
 "Within well-monitored limits."  
 She fades another shade of white. "You admit you're controlling the content on the internet?"  
 "Me personally, no."  
 "But the NSA denies that. Always."  
 "Every time."  
 "And that never changes?"  
 "We get better at hiding it." I give her a sympathetic shake of my head. "What did you expect? We created the internet. We own it."  
 "It's open source. And global."  
 "Which means open to us too. We have bots that scour the entire web, aggregating data and hunting for dangerous memes. They locate and eliminate those threats better and faster than any team of humans."  
 "But they can't work outside of the internet." She looks like she might vomit. "That's why they still need people like you. And so you're here."  
 "I have a job to do. At the moment, you're it."  
 "Me?"  
 "And your shop."  
 She juts out her jaw. "But I'm not doing anything wrong."  
 "So you say. But offering unregulated and unmonitored access to books of any kind is a felony."

She tries to act unfazed but fails, her façade starting to crumble. "It's not my place. I just sit here and read."  
 "Ah, the lies we tell each other. And we just met."  
 She takes a step back, "I haven't done anything wrong."  
 "Maybe not wrong. But illegal? Yeah."  
 Since she's giving me my space, I decide to poke around a bit more. I work my way farther into the shop.  
 "You need to leave."  
 "If it's not your place, then you don't have the authority to kick me out."  
 I've caught her in a trap. To give me the boot, she needs to claim at least custodianship of the store, and if she does that, then I can charge her with that. Which I'm planning to do anyhow, even if she still seems to hold out some hope against that.  
 "Why don't you go find the owners?" I say with my smarmiest smile.  
 "You don't want me to do that." She says it like it's a threat.  
 "Oh, I really do."  
 She hesitates, and I keep moving.  
 "What will they do with all the books?" she asks.  
 "The crime scene team will catalog them for the trial. The good ones in decent shape often go to a real library."  
 "One where you can keep track of the things people read."  
 "The rest get pulped."  
 "You can't do that! These books are classics. They aren't making ones like these anymore. Literally."  
 I turn the corner and stop dead in front of the shelf waiting for me there. It's filled from top to bottom with thick books of onionskin paper bound in crimson pleather stamped with

gold foil.  
 Gideon's Bibles. Hundreds of them all jammed together and forming a wall.  
 I think about taking one out to examine it, but I fear the entire structure might avalanche down, burying me beneath a stack of moldering scripture.  
 "That's a lot of hotel rooms raided." I hated working that detail. Most hotels turned their books over voluntarily, but not all. I still check everyone I stay at, out of habit.  
 Adina stands behind me and gazes up at the books. "People need to read, right? They wind up someplace alone, nothing to do. A book offers them comfort. Enlightenment even."  
 I scoff at her words.  
 She slips past me and plucks a book from the shelf. I flinch, but the shelf remains upright. She opens the book and starts to flip through it.  
 "Have you ever read the Bible, Agent Wai?"  
 "It's the bestselling book of all time."  
 "But have you read it?"  
 I nod. "It's been a while."  
 "What's your favorite passage?"  
 I don't hesitate a second. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."  
 She purses her lips at me, impressed. "For they shall be satisfied." She finds a page and hands me the book. "This is the bit I think says the most."  
 Someone had taped a piece of paper there inside the Bible, right between Matthew and Mark, and the words printed on it had been designed to find a spark of sympathy for Adina's cause and fan it into flames.  
 And damn me, it works.

I look down at the printed words, and before I can help it, I'm reading. The words flow into my head like water through a torpedoed dam, and I can't stop them. I try to shut my eyes, but it's too late.  
 The weaponized meme's already in my brain.  
 I fight it hard. My training kicks in automatically, probing the new ideas flooding my mind, hunting for some kind of exception.  
 I feel like the Grinch. My heart grows three sizes, bursting with books.  
 Mentally, I jump up and down on the words that erupt from them—from every book I've ever read. I try to stomp them back, but they take me like a toddler in the tide.  
 I have a strained relationship with books. I love them, but I know how dangerous they can be. Despite the fact I work with them every day, they make me feel like a moth charging straight into the flame.  
 Somehow, I always manage to hold myself back. At least till now. The words in Adina's Bible strap a jetpack onto my back and rocket me straight into the heart of the sun.  
 As the meme cements its hold, the scent of Adina's free library stops making my nose itch. Now it smells like brewing beer, the scent of rising yeast leaving me heady.  
 The shelves no longer tower over me like traps. Now they surround me like the walls of my childhood home. Tight, cozy, safe.  
 Adina herself doesn't seem like a danger any longer. Or a perp I'm here to arrest. She's a curator, a fellow lover of books, a compatriot with a common cause.

When I'm done reading those damned words, I look up from the page, and she eyes me like a teacher who just got her worst student to answer the hardest question.

"You think you're the only one who understands the power of words?"

I shake my head, and my cheeks flush with shame. I want to knock her to the ground, cuff her, and call for a pickup, but the meme won't let me. The library needs to be protected, even from people like me, and that demand echoes in my mind so loud it drowns out everything else.

"This is exactly the kind of thing I'm supposed to be on guard against." I grind my teeth in frustration. "I let you lull me into a sense of superiority. It made me overconfident."

"And the pull of a powerful curiosity didn't help," she says.

"At least I come by that naturally."

I wonder how long she thinks those words will affect me. Could they be permanent? Will they fade from my memory after a while and set me free? Do I have long enough to find out?

I was exposed to words like this during my NSA training. On purpose. They wanted me to know how it felt to get memed, and learn what I could do about it.

The short answer? Not much.

I got over that test meme by staying up for more than forty-eight hours. Then I crashed hard and woke up to a brutal alarm after only a few hours' sleep. That kept my brain from sorting my short-term memories into long-term ones, and once I couldn't recall the words any more, they lost their hold on me.

I had a full NSA support team helping me out that time. I don't think

Adina plans on allowing me that kind of aid.

I decide to be blunt about it.

"What's your plan now?"

She stares at me with lost eyes for a moment, then walks back to the front of the store. I follow in her wake. I don't have to. I want to, which makes it that much worse.

"Did you bring anyone with you?" she asks.

"I came alone."

"Does anyone else know you're here?"

I shake my head. "No."

She casts me a suspicious look over her shoulder. "But eventually they'll realize you're missing. What happens when they do?"

I shrug. "I'm supposed to report in at the end of the day, but I skip that often enough I doubt anyone will notice until tomorrow morning."

Her shoulders lower a couple inches. She's been holding the world on them, and now that she thinks it won't come crashing down on her, she can relax.

"By then, we should be long gone."

"Where are we going?" Meme-induced camaraderie with her aside, I can't help but be a little nervous.

"You're just going to abandon all these books?"

"If we have to." She shows me a sad smile and then gazes at the shelves that surround us. "I'll put out the word, and people will converge on the place and scavenge what they can. If we move fast, we should be able to save most of them."

"And what about the new ones?"

She impales me with a surprised glare. "You know?"

"Shaking down free libraries is a lit-

tle below my pay grade. They send me after serious smugglers—bookrunners like you."

She blows out a long sigh. "I should have guessed."

"Just be glad you stopped me." I put on a weak smile. It seems to make her feel better.

"More than you can imagine." She pushes her glasses higher on her nose and then leans in and speaks to me in a conspirator's whisper. "Would you like to see them?"

"They're here?"

She grins, her relief growing into giddiness. "Follow me."

She walks me back to the wall of Bibles. I stare up at them, wondering if she'll pull the shelf back on well-oiled hinges to expose a hidden printing press and bindery. It's hard to come by blank paper these days, especially in the quantities you need for making books, but the big bookrunners manage it.

It's like any other prohibition, I know. You can't fight basic economics. Back when the USA made booze illegal, the demand didn't stop either, and the price shot up. Rumrunners brought in liquor just like bookrunners bring in stories now, and they backed their play with bribes and guns.

It got damn bloody. This time around, though, it's about a lot more than money, so it promises to be even worse.

Adina reaches up and pulls a random Bible down. I half expect the shelf to swivel aside like something out of an old horror film. Instead, she opens the book to the title page and hands it to me. There, in crisp black ink, it reads:

## Fahrenheit 451

*Fahrenheit 451—  
The temperature at which book paper  
catches fire and burns*

Ray Bradbury

Introduction by Neil Gaiman

I haven't read this story since I was a kid, and I don't need the meme's help for the sight of it to make me smile. The fact that it's wrapped in a cover from a Gideon's Bible feels right. I raise it toward my face and inhale the smell of fresh print.

"New insides with an old outside?"

"The covers are the most expensive part of the book, and the Bibles are so thick we can often stick a few different stories inside them. We have them printed in Mexico." She swells with pride. "Immigrants bring them across the border for us, just a few a time, and they make their way north."

"And if they get caught?" The NSA's seen an influx of new books, and we've been trying to stop the flood of them for months. So far we've failed. Now I know why.

"How many Homeland Security officers worry about finding a few Bibles in an immigrant's pack?"

"None." For them to spot the problem here, they'd have to open up the books and read them. Bibles are so common that most people don't give them a second glance, especially ones that look like they were swiped from a hotel room or a dump. A diligent officer might flip through a few pages, but most DHS agents are skittish



about actually reading the printed word. With what's storming around in my head, I understand why.

"So far," Adina says.

I offer to return the book to her, but she refuses to accept it. "Keep it," she says. "How long has it been since you've read a real book?"

"For fun?" I try to remember and fail. I end up chuckling at myself instead. "What's next?" I ask.

She freezes. "I'm leaving, of course, but I'm not sure what we should do with you."

"Is there someone you should ask?"

"I wish." She winces and smiles at the same time. "We're not nearly as well organized as the NSA."

"I don't know. Grouping into independent cells that can't give each other away? Sounds smart to me."

"Except when I need a fast answer for a dilemma like this. Do I send you back to work for the NSA as a mole? Do I just take you with me and run?"

"Or do you kill me?"

She blushes, and I know this is the question that's burning at her most.

"I don't know. It seems like we'd be missing out on a huge opportunity if we do, but I can't see how safe it is to keep you alive."

My guts run cold. I want to talk her out of this, but the meme weaving through my head forms a net I can barely see through. "Either way's not safe. But you probably already knew that."

"I don't want to kill you." The stress lines forming on her face show me she's not lying.

"Have you ever? Killed someone, I mean?"

She pales at the question, but she doesn't answer. She doesn't strike me

as someone who would kill unless forced into it—but that hardly means she's innocent. Or incapable.

"Have you?"

"It's not easy. But sometimes it comes with the job."

She sets her jaw. I can see sometimes it comes with hers too.

I rub my chin. She's looking for a way out of this situation, and I need to help her find it. "Who else is in your cell?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can't run this whole place by yourself. You must have some kind of help. Maybe they can help us get some perspective on this. How do you get a hold of them?"

She chews her bottom lip. "Betsy's due to take over from me in a few hours."

"Well, we can probably wait that long before we have to decide, right?"

"I don't know," she says. "Do you?"

"No one else from the NSA should disturb us until then. I think."

"What would make you sure?"

"A crystal ball. I'm about ninety percent certain we won't have any troubles." I let the unspoken "but" hang in the air like bait.

"But?"

"Just in case, are there any other ways out of here?"

She sizes me up one more time, then curls a finger at me and leads me farther into the shop. She takes me through a triple-locked back door that lets out onto a fire escape that looks out over a watery courtyard. Someone's bolted a floating dock to it, and I climb out onto it.

I point to a lone alley-canal off to the left. "So you take deliveries in through there?"

She joins me on the dock. The sun's setting somewhere else, and the hole of the sky we can see straight up blazes a fading purple-orange above us. "They come in under the dark of night. It's the only way."

I bob my head in an approving way. Then I lean over and look into the still waters. It smells awful back here, but that's like much of Manhattan these days. You can't chlorinate the canals.

Adina stands next to me and peers into the waters too, watching our dark reflections. I've been wrestling with the meme's restrictions and reconstructions in my head, and I think I spy at least a partial way out. I hate to do this, but I don't have much choice.

First I make sure she's listening.

"Adina?"

"Yes?"

Then I say the seizure-inducing word.

I don't have much time, and I have to struggle against the weaponized meme's effects every instant. It compels me to support the bookrunner movement, but it's nebulous about her.

Sure, she's one of them—one of us, the meme's internal logic tells me—but I can separate the person from the group. Mentally cull her from the herd.

I kick her into the water, and I watch her sink to the bottom, her unprotected lungs filling with filthy water. Long seconds later, the seizure ends, and she starts to thrash about in the darkening pool. She reaches for the surface, but it's too far and too late.

I reel backward against the railing of the fire escape, and I struggle to catch my own breath too. I've stopped her maybe, but the meme still has its

hooks in me good. It can't force me to grieve for her or regret what I've done, but I know I have to stay here and wait for Betsy to arrive to relieve Adina.

What may happen then, I can't say.

I go back into the free library, and I walk through it, trying to ignore the books, but failing. I reach the front counter, and I sit down in Adina's chair behind it.

I crack the Bible she gave me, and I turn to the first page of *Fahrenheit 451*. I begin to read.

The book opens with an epigraph from Juan Ramón Jiménez. It says, "If they give you ruled paper, write the other way."

I wonder if I can force myself to think the other way instead. But I keep reading.

I may never stop.

*"The Bookrunner" appeared in the 2013 anthology Sojourn.*

*Matt Forbeck (RC Creative Writing, 1989) is an award-winning and New York Times bestselling author and game designer with over thirty novels and countless games published to date. His recent work includes Halo: Bad Blood, the new series Dungeons & Dragons: Endless Quest books, the Star Wars: Rogue One junior novel, Dungeonology, and The Marvel Encyclopedia, plus work on Assassin's Creed: Origins, Ghost Recon Wildlands, and the Shotguns & Sorcery roleplaying game based on his novels. He lives in Beloit, WI, with his wife and five children, including a set of quadruplets. For more about him and his work, visit Forbeck.com.*

# Eight Poems

Haley Winkle

*interior (with dusty vents)*

lavender from a Paris souvenir shop resting  
on an empty windowsill facing east

yet the large remainder of the room  
has the faint scent of a damp towel

on the door's back. piles of worn clothes  
gathering wrinkles on the teal, maroon,

indigo striped comforter. reminders to use  
the chestnut drawers beneath the bed and

the bed itself. a plastic fan just whiter than the  
sheets and four walls surrounding it always

plugged in, ready to drown any sounds  
in its own white noise, push dusty air

from vents collecting the days  
in tiny gray particles. the room

collecting the months in stubs and  
fingerprints on eggshell walls.

I cough now and then, never thinking  
to better the little things in my daily life.

*Whitefish Point*

the bluest water I've ever seen is not the Atlantic, nor the  
Cote d'Azur, even at first sight. instead, Lake Superior. cold  
even in August, freshwater letting each curve of tiny pebbles lining  
its mouth shine. if the tide did not foam as it pecked my feet, I  
would've scooped a handful of pebbles without expecting the sharp  
shock of the northern water, so clear on the shore. so invisible. yet  
ahead, true cerulean with ultramarine folds like wrinkled crushed velvet.  
horizon is shy pale, polite before the gradient begins. far above,  
a mirror. the smooth blue of sky begins to mimic, or  
the other way around: wise mother looks over her child, playing  
in the lake and sees her same blue in his. she's proud.

*ode to a magic lightbulb*

room dressed in pink light, until it shifts to purple, and the white of the room  
is no longer. light wooden headboard smooth enough to be mistaken for  
velvet. I waited so many months for this. the burgundy of my hair pretends to  
be black like yours. all texture in your curls grows soft, which is not to say that  
it wasn't already comparable to the warmth of a midwinter coat, but now,  
it's a cloud in its most feathery form. don't tell me not to call this rich warmth  
home, don't tell me you didn't curate this color just for me. there are no hues  
untouched by a layer of fuchsia. we both become neon, this was my favorite  
part, skin glowing as plum shadows fall behind us.

*taste of persimmon*

the Italian  
mother gestures  
a plump round fruit  
resembling tomato,  
red as autumn leaves  
crisper than  
those falling from trees.  
cachi, I don't know  
in English, try it.  
I feel the skin  
protecting its mushy  
insides, juice anxious  
to escape its home. I  
run my fingers over  
its maroon blisters,  
watch the young  
daughter beside us  
take a bite,  
bitter skin drowns  
in sweetest  
flesh red to match.  
dolc-iss-imi, daughter  
sings only sensation  
dancing in my mouth  
as the center sits in my  
wet hand, sticky, pure  
sugar coats my tongue  
color resembling the  
berry as it greets my  
body for the first time.

*second taste of persimmon*

I pluck the fruit, yellowish  
orange and freckled  
this time, from the ever-  
present basket on the  
kitchen table – basket  
bearing yellow and  
orange and red and  
walnuts. it's firm this  
time, my teeth scrape  
instead of sink, work  
to bite off the meat  
less tender than it  
should be. like magic,  
moisture vacuums  
out of my mouth, this  
fruit is not ripe, I can't  
taste the sweet but  
try to find the flavor  
amidst the tannins  
taking more bites  
than I should  
wishing my glass of  
water wasn't so empty.  
try again, struggle to  
form the right saliva  
to shape my confusion,  
I give up. wrap the hard  
yellow half-eaten berry  
in a napkin to sneak  
into the trash bin  
below the sink.

*tourist dogs on Gianicolo Hill at sunset*

from the bench between  
a road and fountain, I  
sit watching dusk turn  
Rome from beige to orange  
to pink to dark, shadows  
sharpening just before  
complete sunset softens  
them. small lights glisten  
like sugar crystals beside  
distant mountains, new  
week beginning beneath  
them. you would love it  
up here. behind me, the  
fountain streams ice-blue  
water through basins,  
animal statues. a dog  
sneaks a taste on the far  
left, beside its owner and  
three girls photographing  
the bubblegum pink car  
parked nearby a wedding  
party having their own photos  
taken. in front of me, tourists  
photograph the city center's  
changing colors and another  
dog stretches to the guardrail's  
top so he, too, can watch the  
view by which his owners are  
so taken. the perfect family  
of three takes it in, mother  
holding the dog's leash,  
making a perfect parabola  
before it's time to go home.

—after Ocean Vuong

*on the morning of November 13th, 2017, a high school poetry and English teacher, friend, and elected father figure, Chris Bullmer, killed himself.*

*I was 4,708 miles removed from the grief.*

1

2

3

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<sup>1</sup> three years before I / traveled six hours ahead, / we chatted for the last time / in your classroom. / somehow I knew / so vividly / you wouldn't make it / you knew it too. / I wished you didn't do it / but really / I knew nothing / I wished / for the first time / that we were back in time. / that I could

<sup>2</sup> somehow convince / you to walk beyond / the seventh circle of earth / just to see / what the eighth one / has to offer / watching sunrises / each morning / I spilled early ink / from my self-assigned seat / in your carpeted classroom / which, the year before, I / helped color yellow / an inside joke / you hated yellow / and in which, two years / before, I learned / what poetry was,

<sup>3</sup> and in that / yellow year, you / shared an essay / on the importance / to you / of our friendship / to which I responded / by spending the next hour / learning how / not to care about / crying in public / and after which, I / thanked you. but / why / did you do it? / cut away those yellow strands of your life / us, and your own bright girls / and later / or now / leave only your / uncharacteristic absence / to your daughters / both blood and chosen?

*flying over Montana*

it seems  
like a hand from below  
the surface reaches,  
thumb and pointer finger,  
cinching the earth so  
rivers squiggle  
around mountains  
their cones  
shadows  
like brushstrokes, the  
kind resembling stipples  
with a medium sized  
dry brush, somehow  
dark blue beneath  
white crests  
and when they dip  
into valleys,  
the rivers twist. then,  
trees start to show,  
first with a scatter  
growing into a forest  
of green eventually  
taking over the white  
which coated Wisconsin  
just after a mosaic of  
ice lining the large lake.

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*Haley Winkle (RC 2018) lives and works in Ann Arbor with her cat, Bianca. Currently, she works as an assistant with University of Michigan Press, is a barista, and practices photography and poetry. She was involved with the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program and Comprehensive Studies Program during undergrad at U-M, and briefly studied/lived in Barcelona and Rome. Her writing can be found in Vagabond City Lit and Hooligan Magazine. She can be found trying complex recipes and scouring poetry sections of bookstores. Keep up with Haley on her website: [fragolafolio.wordpress.com](http://fragolafolio.wordpress.com).*

## Excerpt from This Weird Animal

Mary Gallagher



Win sent Anthony to polish the nose at the third hole. When he'd left, she yanked the pile of tarps to the side, grabbed the heavy steel bucket below, and pressed her foot into a rock at the base of the boat. A small door opened in the rusted steel. Win slipped inside to the familiar sound of low animal grunting. She closed the door to just a crack, and fingered the sharp crease of the envelope in her pocket. Bri's birth announcement.

Bri had eased out of Win's life slowly, so that Win hardly knew what was happening until suddenly she was getting a birthday card and a Christmas card and hadn't seen her daughter since the wedding three years ago. The glossy birth announcement had

come in the mail yesterday. She hadn't even known Bri was pregnant.

Win reached into the bucket with her thick gloves and tossed the slippery contents out into the dark. There were snarls and squeals. She never should've let Bri go to that community college. After that, it was too hard to say no to her transferring to the state school an hour away, not after she'd gotten that scholarship; and then there was the internship in Chicago; and now she was in Vancouver, the other side of the continent, and she'd gotten pregnant and given birth and Win had had no idea. Ultrasounds, vitamins, nursery painting, everything

had happened without her.

The sounds of struggle had died down in the dark, replaced by gnawing. Win knelt to the dirt floor, flipped a switch on the generator. The cavern flooded with pink light. This brood was only a few months old, too young to expose to direct sunlight. She still felt shivers of guilt and revulsion when she thought of what had happened with their brood last year. It was nobody's fault, she'd told herself all winter, after Toxie had stumbled back to the wild. The windmill had stood there for years, hadn't shown a crack before it collapsed. The loss of 15-B, 15-C, and 15-E had been tragic, but at least Toxie had survived. That was the problem with those goons from Contamination Control. No sense of perspective. One thing goes wrong, and suddenly they panic and lose all trust in her. She thought of the pick-up truck in the parking lot. Toxie trusted Win again, had come back in August. That should've been good enough for the Department.

Every spring, when the young were big enough to lurch around and hunt on their own, Toxie would start to get sick of them, restless. Win took them from her, giving them away to a probably-better life with the Department of Contamination Control. Toxie moved on to hunt on her own for the warm months, larger prey than Win was able to catch for her. Every August she came back, belly swelling. This year, the brood was small; only two survived past the first few days. When they were first born, Toxie always looked at Win with terror on her animal face as they suckled, unsure how to handle the whole thing again. It took her a few weeks to warm up and

start actively caring for them, and by that point all but the most energetic of them had usually died.

Win knew it was Bri's husband's fault. She thought she'd been dropped into a Jane Austen novel when they first met at the engagement party: he was an officer in the Canadian Navy, polite in his stiff white uniform, younger than Bri (and better-looking, Win noted). Win circled him a few times when he introduced himself, to see if there was anything propping him up behind, but Bri had glared her off before she'd gotten a good look.

Win had expected it to be a starter marriage for Bri, but here they were with a fat, irreversible baby. Win had warned Bri over and over again to wait to have children. If only Win had waited, if only she'd graduated college, who knows what she could've done. Don't get stuck like I did, she'd tell her every time they bent over Bri's homework late at night. I'd have had the whole world to give you, if you'd waited a few years to show up. Even after Bri had graduated college, even after she'd graduated veterinary school, Win had ended her voicemails with a warning—wait, wait a little longer.

That's why Bri hadn't told her earlier, probably. She was ashamed of her weakness, that she'd given up on herself and fallen into motherhood. The thing to do, Win thought, was to buy a plane ticket and surprise her daughter. Show up, give her the motherly advice she needed right now. But Toxie and her brood needed her support for at least another three months. Anything could happen in a few days' absence, and with

Strutt'n'Putt closing for winter, Win needed the brood as big and healthy as possible for sale.

Below the high-pitched squeals of the babies, Win heard Toxie's low moaning as she woke up. Toxie could have torn through cement with half her strength, but the birthing process for her species was so long and dangerous that she wouldn't recover for another few weeks. In the meantime, all she did was sleep as 16-A and 16-E suckled, and Win brought her food, and occasionally she tore a small hole in the time/space fabric. Win had no idea how the creatures reproduced safely in the wild, without human help. Maybe they had mates, or maybe their daughters were smart enough to ask for their mothers' help. By the time February came around, Win had to keep Toxie from making a snack of her brood, she was so sick of taking care of them, so ready for her freedom.

Win inched forward on all fours, scooting the steel bucket ahead of her until she could make out Toxie's broad, scaly form. She reached into the bucket, and pushed the soft liver she found there up to Toxie's black, beak-like mouth. Toxie picked it up limply, and struggled to swallow. Win gently turned the massive head to the side so that the innards slid down Toxie's throat. Toxie flicked her long tongue gratefully, her square pupils pits in the glowing yellow eyes.

Floating in the air near 16-A's nubby horns was a patch of matte blackness, the size of a fingernail. Portals like that were too small to be picked up by the Department of Contamination Control, as far as Win could tell. Toxie tore them when she was bored or stressed. The one in the woods must've been torn months ago, and had gotten split wide when that little kid got stuck in it.

Win felt around in the bucket, but all she found was a small collar with heart-shaped tags. She had to go out hunting again. Another sleepless night, and she was already so tired. She stretched, and yawned, and curled up beside Toxie. 16-E nestled under her armpit as he suckled. Anthony would watch the register. As blood soaked off the floor into Win's clothes, the animal's warm, slow heartbeat lulled her to sleep.

*Excerpt from Mary Gallagher's story, "This Weird Animal," from her zine Monsters of Washtenaw Avenue. For a pdf or print copy, email her at mary.ambrose.gallagher@gmail.com*

*Mary Gallagher (RC 2014) works at the Neutral Zone, a teen center in Ann Arbor, and writes for Current Magazine. She is in the accelerated nursing program at Wayne State University, and plays guitar in a band called Fat Angry Hens. She's never gotten through a first date without discussing capitalism and Kelly Link, and she's not sorry.*

## Three Poems

Bob Clifford

Slither through the brush  
Looking for the dead bird to bury  
On a warm sunny morning at the  
Poor Farm

Slither through the brush  
Found a dream  
The train of coal coming  
Every night  
Then we would shovel the coal off the  
Train into a hole of  
    dark, dark, dark brain  
That brain belongs to you  
the coal belongs to you  
the train belongs to you

Black coal steam engine train visits  
Every night on the same track to the Poor Farm  
As it taunts white optics

Need to find the bird to shovel into the ground  
before the coal goes into the furnace

Before the train does not come

The bushes now hide the dead bird from the ghost train of coal  
Can we sleep before we rise and scream



As my childhood disappears on a clear day with the clouds the shape  
of my nose

My eyes crawl to the lids peaking out not knowing what I see

The waves of the Belmont beach reach to take me into a secular  
freedom

The wave is in charge  
The black wall  
The confederate flag  
The dirty room

The salvation army bus just delivered the shakes for the pots and  
pans

The shakes immigrants from American street corners of redemption

The ocean waves did not take them for a ride so they cannot return  
clean

Where is my mother  
What is she looking at  
When will she look for her flock

The clouds are hiding what is in between  
The nose has shifted downward

The nose wins the day

my spider gallops up the web  
She did a reverse to check out the rear view  
mirror

clawing to the top to the edges of the daylight  
peering through the white lines  
looking down at the spiral earth  
waiting for gravity to react  
for gravity to catch  
for gravity to upend  
for gravity to fail

my little spider with no wings to fly away from  
the empty spiral that defies gravity

shadow of the sun on the web that is home  
shadow of the spider waiting to capture dinner  
an insect as its self looming over the buffet of bugs  
which will be best to strangle by the web  
and choke to die

to eat.

*Bob Clifford (RC 1979) is a poet, and former associate director and coordinator of academic programs. He retired in January 2018; he was Director of Athletics at New Mexico Highlands University and for 13 years was Senior Associate Athletic Director at Oregon State University.*



## Define a Generation

Hannah Levine

I lay awake staring at the ceiling until it seemed like it was at least a semi-reasonable time to get up. I slowly slipped out of my bed and tiptoed to the doorway. I could tell Danny was still asleep by the steady rise and fall of his chest, but I couldn't bear to look at him for more than a few minutes. I turned away and made my way downstairs, narrowly avoiding the creaky floorboard by the steps.

I started the coffee machine and ripped yesterday's date, September 10th, 2001 off of the flip calendar, then went to the laundry room. Inside I chose the first clean outfit I could find that didn't make me look like a twenty-year-old on a trip to the mall. Navy slacks and a striped dress shirt were hanging from the hook by the door, fresh from the cleaners. Danny must've picked them up on his way

home from work last night. I smiled to myself. Knowing how much he hated picking up the dry cleaning, it was always a pleasant surprise to see he had done it anyways. I eagerly put on the clothes, grabbed a to-go cup, and went to get my car keys. After a few minutes of searching the house—I really need a key hook—I realized I left them on the nightstand. Shit. I crept back upstairs and went to the bedroom. As I was reaching for the keys, Danny grabbed my hand and made me jump.

"Lauren, you don't have to be at school for another hour and a half. Come back to bed. We didn't get to talk last night, and I really think we should." I hardly heard the sleep in his voice. Maybe he wasn't asleep when I left the room earlier?

"I've got a staff meeting, hon. We'll

talk later." I was careful not to mention when exactly later would be.

"Alright, but after school it's you and me. Okay babe? I'll make dinner and we can talk."

"Mhm," I said with a sweet smile, cautious to hide my emotions. Then I turned around and sped out of the room.

It was still dark when I pulled into the school parking lot fifteen minutes later. I didn't have a staff meeting, but there was a reason I went to sleep at seven thirty last night and there was a reason I woke up at four thirty this morning. I just wasn't ready to talk.

It wasn't that I wanted to keep avoiding Danny—I didn't—but I had to get away from him. I wanted to try starting our family again, too, but I couldn't stop thinking about the last time. We had just told everyone when I miscarried. I couldn't imagine going through that again. Danny knew how much it hurt me, hurt us, but he was ready to move on. He wanted kids. He wanted to be a father. He wanted to see me as a mother. Danny would be a good parent, too. But me? I wasn't so sure anymore. Plus, I had my students to think about. They were like my surrogate children, especially after the miscarriage. While there were times when I couldn't stand them, I figured that was just part of being a teacher. I loved them, and they loved me. They hated long-term subs, and to be honest, so did I. If I got pregnant again, I would have to leave them with a substitute for longer than I ever have before. Could I do that? Was it worth it?

Judging by the cars in the lot, I was one of the first people here. I recognized Janitor Josh's SUV and Beth the

principal's Buick with the bumper sticker of a rainbow frog holding up a peace sign, but that was it. I sat in my car for a few minutes listening to the radio hosts chit-chat back and forth about some celebrity who accidentally showed a nipple on TV, but didn't care enough to figure out who the celebrity was. I stared at the stubby brick building in front of me. In World War II the dark, damp basement was converted into the town's bomb shelter in case the attacks reached Michigan. Maybe it could protect me from all of the turmoil in my head.

When the next song came on, something ridiculous by Destiny's Child, I stepped out of my car. As I walked into the school, a six-foot banner proclaiming "Michigan's Best Elementary School" in big maroon and gold letters greeted me. I laughed. Our test scores may have been higher, but we weren't any different than the other public schools in the state; why should anyone be awarding us for doing what we were supposed to do?

Inside my classroom I relished in the silence of the empty school. I loved when I could sit at my desk and watch the sunrise over the tire swing. I waited for the rays of light to reflect off the dented metal slide before finally getting up and writing the schedule on the board for the students.

After about a half hour, the other teachers began to arrive. Chris, the fourth grade science teacher who always wore colorful bowties, stopped in the room to offer me coffee or a bagel, but I just waved him off, too much on my mind.

Janitor Josh popped his head through the open door. "Lolo," he always called me that, "you sure you don't want a cup a' Joe? I just made a fresh pot and you know I make the best coffee in town."

I smiled at him and politely declined. He was one of my favorite people at the school. I wasn't sure why, but I just couldn't call him Josh like everyone else; he was always Janitor Josh. Maybe it was the alliteration. Maybe I just like titles.

The first kids, latchkey kids, arrived around 7:30, noisily slamming backpacks in lockers and skipping down the hall outside my door. Only a half hour left before the seven year olds in light-up shoes and pigtails would stampede the room. Sitting alone in my classroom felt like a little too much time alone with my thoughts, so I went to see Beth.

Beth's office was a warm and cheery place. Pictures of children's book covers, *The Little Engine That Could*, *The Rainbow Fish*, *The Sneetches*, hung on the walls and she always had a bright bouquet of flowers on her desk. Her door was open, so I knocked on the doorframe before stepping inside.

"Hey, Beth."

"Lauren! I'm so glad you came in early! I was just about to come see you! How was your first week in second grade? A lot different than first, isn't it?"

I nodded. I couldn't believe it had already been a week. "It really is. The kids are so much more confident in their reading. And so much bigger too! They almost feel like real people. I really do love it."

"I know!" she exclaimed.

Beth and I used to teach side by side in the first grade department before she was moved to second grade and then principal. That was a few years ago already, but I still missed prepping classes and grading spelling tests together. She always knew how to lighten the mood after hours of stressful planning in the warm classrooms of Burt Elementary. Come to think of it, I've never seen her look stressed out in the entirety of the four years I've known her. We talked for a while about the summer and our plans for the year until we could hear children screaming and laughing down the halls and I had to go back to my classroom. I peaked at the cover of *Papa Please Get the Moon for Me* behind her desk and made a mental note to come back at lunch to talk about Danny and my fears of starting a family, but most importantly about the pregnancy test hidden in the bottom drawer of my desk. It was time for some friendly advice and all I needed was my favorite childhood book to remind me of that. Thankfully, Beth had it hanging on her wall right in front of me to do so.

\*\*\*\*\*

A couple hours later I hung up the receiver and looked down at my shaking hands. I must've been clenching the telephone harder than I thought because they were an abnormal, ghostly white. I could feel a hot burning in my cheeks and knew they must be a bright and betraying scarlet red. I turned away from the kids while they eagerly awaited the new spelling words Jennifer was handing out, afraid that if they saw they would ask me what had happened, and I knew I

wouldn't be able to keep it together. Not yet.

I scanned the wall for something to distract me. Unfortunately, the only thing I saw was the calendar I kept behind my desk. I stared at the colorful letters making up the month at the top of the page and the black boxes below. I followed the X's I had marked for each day we'd been in school until I got to today. Tuesday, September eleventh. The red number ones seemed bigger than the rest of the numbers, standing tall as they announced the day. I looked at those two numbers until they didn't look like numbers at all, but like two towers looming over ten and twelve.

It was Beth who had called. She told me she was calling every teacher in the elementary school individually to tell him or her what had happened. She was crying, but I could hardly tell. She's so good at stressful situations. She suggested that I find a way to take a look at the news on one of the school's televisions or computers to decide whether or not I should tell my students what had happened or keep it to myself. Typical Beth, always leaving all the decisions up to the teachers. What did she do as a principal anyways? I was hoping she would have some sort of better direction than "figure it out yourself," but she didn't. No direction for me. No plan. No anything. No one knew what to do. Not in this situation.

I had to decide, alone, whether or not to tell my students, my second grade students, that someone, some evil monster, had deliberately hurt thousands of people. Then, I had to decide whether or not to turn on the classroom television and show them

that too, because according to Beth it didn't matter what channel, every television station was showing the same footage over and over again. Planes crashing. Buildings collapsing. Smoke, an endless billowing of smoke, floating high into the air. People running. People jumping. People crying. I had to figure out whether or not that was appropriate to show my second graders!? I wished Danny were here with me. How could I call him without the kids hearing me? I thought about the bomb shelter in the basement and cursed it for not being able to protect me from all of this and had to consciously resist the urge to cower down there anyways.

I went to the door and poked my head out, hoping someone, anyone, would be walking by. I needed to find another teacher or someone to watch my kids while I went to the main office or the library to figure out what to do, or at least to the bathroom to cry. I wanted to call Danny, to know that he was safe in his office making phone calls and spreadsheets as usual. What if he didn't know yet? What about my parents? What if they didn't know?

Just then, Janitor Josh walked by with a mop in his hands and a grim look on his face. Beth had clearly already told him what had happened and because he could wander around the school, he'd probably seen it on one of the TVs too. I called him over and asked him to watch the kids. He nodded, gave me a quick hug, and stepped inside. I could hear the kids' confusion as I left the room, but I didn't bother turning back. I didn't want to.

I went to the library and barely

even stepped inside before I could see the attacks flash terribly across the television screens hanging above the information desk. I gasped and turned back toward my classroom to relieve Janitor Josh and escape the horror on the TV screens. I didn't need to see more. I decided I would have to wait to call my family. I had a roomful of second graders wondering why a man with a mop was talking about their favorite books and their teacher was nowhere to be seen. They needed me.

Inside my classroom I came to the sad realization that I still didn't know enough to decide whether or not I should tell my kids. It wasn't like I could turn on the TV without them seeing, and the other teachers were busy with their own classrooms, so I did the only other thing I could think of. I told the kids it was silent reading time and sat down at my desk. I moved the mouse until the computer's screen lit up. I typed my password into the school's login page and found the Internet Explorer icon on my desktop. I clicked on it and waited for the school district's maroon homepage to load. As I waited, I thought about what I would type. Attack? Terrorist? World Trade Center? Pentagon? Anything with the word "horrible" before it? I decided on "terrorist attack—" that's what Beth had called it on the phone—and began typing it into the search bar. Something stopped me once I got to the word "terrorist," though. My fingers hovered above the letter T like a helicopter above a traffic accident. I didn't want to type those words. Not now, not ever. I backspaced until the Yahoo search

bar was empty once more.

"Current news" would have to do. I sat quietly while I waited what seemed like forever for the results to pop up, listening to the murmur of the kids whispering to each other. Some of them were wondering why I hadn't said anything to them for so long, but most of them didn't seem to care. They took advantage of the opportunity and discussed what game they would play at recess, and whether or not they were buying pizza for lunch or they had brought their own. Apparently, Annabelle Lawson would be having a peanut butter sandwich and no jelly because she was allergic. Drew Walsh, who always looked like he had just been at the biggest and best surprise party of his life, had a horrified expression on his face at the lack of jelly. One group of second graders, the one closest to my desk, was talking about their families.

Tommy Flynn told Jennifer Applegate that his mother was a doctor and his father was a fireman. "He even gets to park wherever he wants!"

I smiled at the triviality of that aspect of the profession. "He even gets to save people from burning buildings!" I thought. That was far more important than a parking spot, especially now, especially after watching so many men and women dressed in heavy gear run inside those towers on the library television screen. I took a moment to bless the fact that Mr. Flynn wasn't a fireman in New York.

Jennifer looked impressed. She told him her daddy was a painter, but her mommy was a soldier. "I only get to see her on holidays, but she's doing something really important, even

though I don't really get what."

I could practically feel the pride in her voice. She had clearly practiced that statement many times before. Where was Captain Applegate stationed now anyways? I prayed she wasn't anywhere near the Towers or the Pentagon.

"My daddy said we could call her after school today, too!" Jennifer continued excitedly. "I hope she answers!"

At that moment I knew I had to tell them.

I turned away from my still loading computer and got up from my chair. I walked to the center of the classroom and told the students to quiet down, that I had something very important to say and they must give me their full attention. Everyone but Drew looked confused at my sudden change in demeanor; he still looked as shocked as ever, but they settled into attention quickly nonetheless.

At first I wasn't sure what I would say, but after I began, the words started to come easier.

"This morning, some very angry people did something very bad." Jennifer and some of the other goody, goody students straightened and looked more intensely and questioningly at me. My heart thudded inside my chest and I could feel beads of sweat forming on my back. I imagined Danny squeezing my hand for assurance and went on.

"These people decided to hijack—" Jennifer's hand shot into the air like a rocket, "—which means take over," it lowered, "four airplanes. One of these airplanes crashed into a field, but three others crashed into two important buildings in New York City, and one important building near the

capital in Arlington, Virginia. Many people have died, or will die, today. This is a tragedy."

The teacher in me threw in the future vocab word at the end before I could even stop myself.

"Will this be on the test?" Asked Jennifer, her hand up in the air.

The student's eyes widened. I shook my head no and let my words sink in. Tommy, innocent Tommy, and a few other kids looked at me. Annabelle and some of the other girls looked down at their hands or pulled on their braids uncomfortably. Drew and most of the other children looked at each other, unsure of what to do or how to feel.

I continued, "I am telling you this because it is important. I know you don't understand now, and I want you to know that you are not the only ones, but this will define your generation. When you're older, the other people your age are going to ask you where you were and what you were doing when you found out about these horrible attacks. This is what people do whenever something like this, whenever something bad, happens. When you get home, you should ask your parents or grandparents where they were when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. They will know." I paused while I decided whether or not to show them. "Now I am going to turn on the television so that you may see what I am talking about. It might be scary and it might be sad, but I have decided that it is important that you see this today, right now. If anyone would like to talk to me about this, they may. You can ask your parents more when they pick you up from school this afternoon. I

will write a short letter to your mothers and fathers and ask them to call me if they have any more questions about why I showed you this."

I stopped talking and waited for the impact of my words to hit. The students were confused. They didn't understand why someone would hijack a plane and crash it. I didn't tell them that I didn't either. I didn't tell them that no one in this country understood why someone would hijack a plane and crash it. I let them loudly discuss what I had told them while I walked to the television and found an appropriate news channel. Their voices filled the air. Their confusion made me feel less alone.

At first the kids watched deeply and intently. After a while, a few of them began to whisper to each other, and then a few more. Some decided to draw pictures with their crayons or read from their library books. I let them do what they wanted. They saw what they needed to see. I kept watching, though, kept watching and thinking. I needed to call Danny. How could I even consider bringing a child into the world when crazy people were flying planes into buildings? I took the pregnancy test out of my drawer and threw it in the trashcan. If I was pregnant again, I didn't want to know it. Maybe if I had another miscarriage that wouldn't be so bad.

The kids who were still interested in the television screen snapped me back to attention. They sat next to me in a huddle and occasionally asked me what was happening.

Every time the videos switched to people jumping from the towers in a blazing glow of fire, they winced. This was the hardest for them. It was the hardest for me, too. I thought about

turning off the television, but I found myself immobilized by the repetition of despair I saw on the screen.

"Why don't they walk down the stairs or take the elevator?" Drew questioned.

I sat in silence in response. The South Tower collapsed.

"Why did the building fall?" Jennifer asked.

I shook my head. Then the North Tower came crashing down in a billowing of black and gray smoke and ash.

"Why did the other building fall?" asked Tommy.

I didn't have any answers for them. I just sat there and stared blankly at their faces, patting their backs or squeezing their hands when the moment felt right.

As the news spread from home to home and office to office, more and more students got picked up from school. It seemed no one wanted to be alone; they wanted their families nearby to hold and to hug. Everyone was afraid. Afraid the attacks weren't over. Afraid the schools weren't safe. I was afraid too, but I couldn't leave to be with my family. I had to stay right there in that warm classroom surrounded by second graders.

By noon, I only had fifteen kids left in the classroom out of my usual thirty-three. The ones left seemed angry. Surely they wondered why they were stuck at school while their classmates got to go home. I tried to explain to them that the other students weren't going home to play, but they didn't get it. Every time the PA system announced another child's name, Tommy perked up, ready to grab his backpack and escape the

quiet, depressing classroom. The other fourteen seemed to have given up hope. Again, I considered turning off the TV and playing a game or teaching a few extra credit spelling words, but the screen was mesmerizing; I couldn't take my eyes off of it. I kept telling myself this was for the students, so they would know when they were older, but I knew it was more for me than for them. I thought if I kept watching I would understand; I would see something different or they would get some new information, but nothing changed. I felt just like the second graders, confused and hopeless. I was supposed to be able to give them answers, but for the first time, I just couldn't.

By three PM only three kids were left. Either their parents hadn't heard the news of the attack, couldn't leave work, or they thought it would be better for their children to stay at school. I guessed it was one of the latter. One student raised her hand.

"Yes, Annabelle?" I heard myself say it but I didn't remember opening my mouth to do so.

She pulled on her braids. "Mrs. Christenson, my aunt lives in New York City. Do you think she could smell the smoke?"

I stared at her in disbelief as my eyelids grew heavy. At first all I could think about was how close Annabelle's aunt might have been to the collapsing towers, but then I remembered that she was one of the three. She was still at school. She wouldn't be here right now with Tommy and Jennifer if her aunt had been inside one of those towers.

"Yes, she probably could. It must

have been very frightening for her."

Annabelle nodded. I wanted to give her a hug.

"That's what I thought."

The bell rang signaling the end of the day. I waved to the kids as they grabbed their backpacks and headed to the circle drive to meet their parents. Then I went back inside my classroom and closed the door, the tears I couldn't cry earlier falling down my cheeks. My school phone rang.

"Lauren? Thank God." Danny sighed. "I've been trying to reach you all day but the phones, the emergency. Are you okay? God, I love you so much. I'm home. Come home. It's time to come home."

"Yeah I'm okay. I think. I'll be there soon."

I grabbed my keys and purse and stood to go to the door. Then I took a deep breath and sat back down. I reached into my trashcan, tucked the pregnancy test into my purse, and got back up. At the door, I stood looking at the calendar behind my desk. Then I closed the door and locked it behind me. Danny was right. Time to go home.

*Hannah Levine (RC 2016) is Digital/Social Media Editor at the Detroit Jewish News, and recently held an internship/assistant position in Events and Publicity at Sleeping Bear Press in Ann Arbor. After graduation, she attended the Denver Publishing Institute, then volunteered abroad. Her story, "Two Hot Ciders," was published in the second issue of October Hill Magazine. More about Hannah at her website: <https://hannahlevine.weebly.com/>*

# spanning

Alex Kime

the same night I'm lonely  
& in my mushiest feelings  
Ariana's hands transfix me,  
untangling a slinky bent  
by a boy she used to care for.

continuing to be a people-pleasing  
piece of shit, I empathized  
with the malleability,  
what we sometimes bend  
for & into one another.

it is a beautiful room:  
two windows full of trees  
a view of the good street below.

the lighting is warm  
& every night so fleeting,  
but more often than not  
I spiral off before I can catch myself  
with each new thing I can't unlearn

here I give a masterclass in tension,  
caught between the world  
& the moment.

strung

every time a good thing  
I cannot stay in the moment of,  
too soon in mourning  
for what has not yet left me/you/them/us  
but is this not also an essential  
place to be? what does presence mean here?

this globe as filled with horror  
as it is exclusive wonders,  
gilded moments, as glorious  
as anything that comes with doors  
& borders could ever be.

it is a tangle. a both/&.  
the multiple where I must stay.

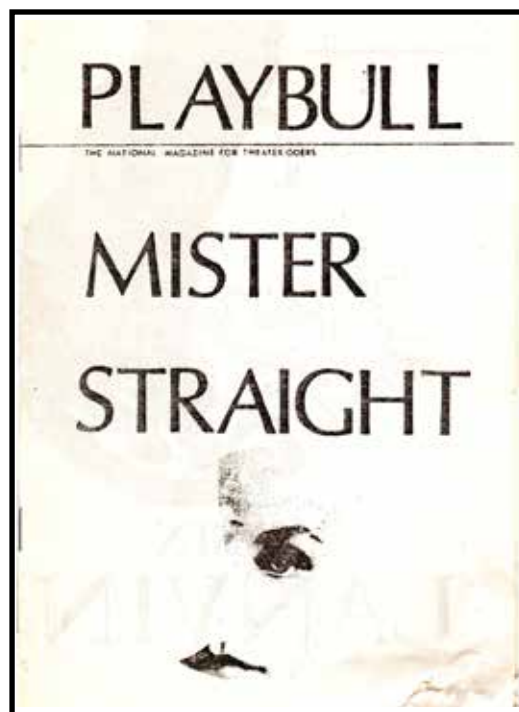
**Alex Kime** (RC 2017) is currently a U-M Master of Social Work student concentrating on Social Policy and Evaluation alongside Community Organizing and a National Community Scholar. They graduate in December 2018. They have worked as a teaching artist, facilitator, and social justice educator through various organizations on and off-campus. Receiving Highest Honors on their undergraduate thesis, a manuscript of poems, they were the recipient of the 2015 Jeffrey L. Weisburg Memorial Prize in Poetry, the 2017 Student Speakership at the 94th Honors Convocation, and the 2017 Patricia Gurin Certificate of Merit in Intergroup Relations. Their poems can be found in Current Magazine, the Michigan Daily, Café Shapiro, and others.



# An excerpt from **Mister Straight**

Barry Garelick

*Performed on March 12 and 13, 1971 at the R.C. Theater which was named the David P. Olson Memorial Auditorium for the occasion.*



## Opening Scene

*Mood has been set by playing through the speaker system: Ain't She Sweet, Toot Tootsie Goodby, and Buckle Down Winssocki, all while the audience is being seated. The lights are then dimmed and an alarm clock is placed in the center of the stage. When the alarm clock goes off, George P. Creighton enters through the back stage door, turns off the alarm clock and throws it offstage.*

Creighton:  
God! There's nothing like getting up at 7 in the morning. Birds singing, wind blowing, music in the air...

*Piano and song follow*

Creighton:  
It's a great day to be alive!  
God it's great to be alive  
In Nineteen Sixty Five,  
The birds are singing  
And the trees are swingin'  
In the breeze that's blowin'  
Through the good old world  
That's waitin' for its work-to-be-done!

Gee it's great to be alive  
In Nineteen sixty five,  
With things the way  
they are today  
And postage stamps just  
waiting to be licked

It's great! It's great!  
I tell you it is great!  
It's simply great to be straight

in nineteen sixty eight  
There's nothing to be  
furthered for our cause  
Because the sky's up there  
And we're down here  
And you're out there  
Patiently listening to our pleas  
With the birds in the trees  
Swingin' in the breeze  
And it's great to be alive  
Oh it's great to be alive,  
Yes it's great, great, great to be alive  
Oh it's great to be alive in 1965  
BUT...  
It's nineteen seven-teeee!

Chorus:  
BUT... It's the same DAY every day of  
the YEAR  
So who cares, so who cares  
It makes not one bit of difference to  
me or to you  
So c'mon let's go  
And on with the show

Creighton:  
Yes c'mon let's go  
Let's get on with the show,  
We've got work to do  
*(sound of typewriters and adding machines)*  
We've got food to eat  
*(sound of chewing, gulping, burping, etc.)*  
We've got stamps to lick  
*(projection of postage stamp on front screen)*  
And we've got-a-life-to-live  
In the straight...world...of...to-  
DAYYY!

*Chorus do-do-do's the opening music as the ten commuters make their entrance upon the stage and exchange hello's; they say such things as "Hello JB; How's*

*the wife? Still doing her gardening (they laugh)? What do you think of President Nixon's latest strategic maneuver? Now there's a man you can trust. How's your son doing at the big university? Oh he dropped out and he's shackled up with some girl. I hope to hell he gets her pregnant; it would serve him right. While they are still shaking hands, and making small talk, Creighton speaks.*

Creighton: (to the audience)  
My name is George P. Creighton and I'm second banana to Mr. Straight in this show.  
*(Chorus applauds).*  
Not an easy thing to be in this day and age.  
*(Chorus makes affirmative responses like "Yesiree", "You said it")*  
Speaking of that.  
Have you got the time, Grimsby?

Grimsby:  
Yes sir GP. It's eight o'clock

*(Chorus swoons and Creighton stands at the head of the stage; chorus forms a triangle behind him)*

Creighton:  
Eight o'clock! My god! He's late!  
*(Music)*  
He's late. He's late.  
It's eight. It's eight.  
And Mr. Straight is late.  
He's never ever late, but now,  
But now, On our working day  
We can't go on.  
We can't possibly live in 1968,  
without a man like Mr. Straight  
Who can set things right,  
and who can keep his asshole tight  
MISTER STRAIGHT!

Chorus:  
MISTER STRAIGHT!

Creighton:  
You are late!

Chorus:  
You are late!

Creighton:  
We don't know what we're going to do!  
*(Chorus hums the melody in the background while Creighton speaks)*  
(Addressing audience): No, we don't know what to do without Mr. Straight. Because, my fine audience, everyone in this world is not as straight as us. There are people you know who need bogueing out. And only Mr. Straight can show us the way.  
*(Music)*

Chorus:  
Show us the way!  
Only you can do it right  
With your asshole kept so tight

Creighton:  
Yes, kept so tight (tries tightening his asshole)

Chorus:  
Oh so tight

Creighton:  
Sup *(gasps)* er *(gasps)* tight...*(faints from exhaustion)*  
*(Knocking is heard from outside front auditorium door. Usher opens it. Mr. Straight makes his entrance.)*

Mr. Straight: (Singing)  
I'm Mister Straight—how do you do!  
*(Chorus and Creighton ooh and ahh with relief)*

*(Mr. Straight walks down center aisle swinging umbrella and shaking hands with people as he sings)*  
I'm sorry that I'm late!  
But as you can see  
I'm still on the beam today!  
'cause it's great to be alive in 1965!  
The birds are swingin'  
The trees are singin'  
And the breeze is tellin' me  
That there are people trippin'  
Right here with us today  
So come on!

Chorus:  
Yeah, come on!

Mr. Straight:  
So come on!  
We've got a lot of work today, let's GO!  
It's so great to be alive...

Chorus:  
Yes it's great to be alive!

Mr. Straight:  
In 1965!

Chorus:  
In 1965!

Freak No. 1 in audience:  
Oh wow! This is so spaced out; like really far out man!  
*(Everyone in chorus and on stage looks at one another astonished and all heads turn in silence to Freak No. 1)*

Freak No. 2 in audience:  
Oh shit! Now you've done it. What the fuck did we have to trip for and run into Mr. Straight?

Freak No. 1:  
Well how should I know, man? I'm so

tripped out right now I can't even see, man, like how should I know, man?

Freak No. 2:  
Well shit, he's gonna bogue us right out, man

Freak No. 1:  
Nah, just ignore him, man just...

Mr. Straight:  
*(He's been grinning throughout this dialogue and slowly approaching the two freaks)*  
Hi boys! Ho's it goin'?

Freak No. 1:  
Pretty good, man

Freak No. 2:  
Uhh, yeah, uhh, like man it uhh, yeah, yeah

Mr. Straight *(seeing his opportunity)*:  
Are you guys, uh-hh

Freak No. 2:  
Oh no, we're not tripping!

Mr. Straight:  
I was going to ask you if you were from Detroit.

Freak No. 2:  
Man, I'm boguein' out, like this guy's too much...  
*(Chorus and people on stage are snickering)*

Mr. Straight:  
Well, I've got to go guys, take it easy.

Freak No. 2:  
Well, man, like nice seein' you, man, take it cool...

Mr. Straight:  
Yes, well thank you very much, same to YOU, YOU, YOU, ARE STONED!  
*(Freak No. 2 screams and Freak No. 1 carries him out screaming through the front auditorium door, while the chorus and people on stage cheer. Chorus marches up on stage and sing)*

Chorus:  
He did it!  
The first one of the day!  
Bogued them out, right out of their minds, ohhhh...

Mr. Straight:  
It's a great day to be alive

All:  
YES YES!

Mr. Straight:  
It's so great to be alive in 1965  
And it's great to be straight in 1968  
And even though it's nineteen seven-  
teeee

All:  
It's the same day,  
every DAY of the YEAR  
And Mr. Straight is here,  
now there's nothing to fear

Mr. Straight:  
Yes, so what d'you say boys,  
What d'you say—let's EAT!!  
*(Projection of word EAT! on front screen)*

Mister Straight was directed by Patrick McCord

Mr. Straight: Mike Parsons

George P. Creighton: Robert Honeyman

Freak No. 1: Jeff Charney

Freak No. 2: Dennis Foon

Bob Barker: Ian Stulberg

Tongueless Wonder (Prof. Smirnoff):

Rick Gans

Chorus (some of whom appeared in other roles throughout the play):

David Aronson, Katy Fortin,

Tim Hall, Steven Hynson,

Lynn Kleiman, Debby Krant,

Leora Manischewitz, Gail Reisman,

Mirieum Schey, Daniel Spulberg

Music composed and played (on piano) by Richard Lehfelt

Lighting: Cal Vornberger

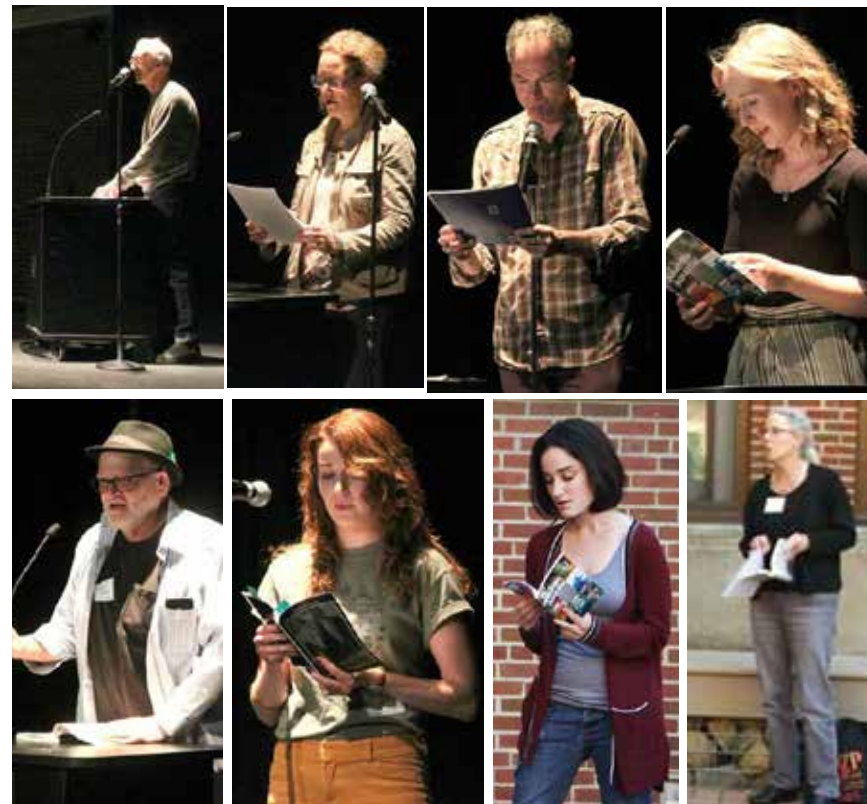
Sound: Chad McCabe

Choreography:

Wendy Shifrin and Donna Kost

Barry Garelick notes: "True to Broadway tradition, we gave our ushers some scotch to get drunk on. Usher's Scotch of course. And the head usher was Steve Usher. On opening night, one of the drunk ushers insulted the reviewer from the Michigan Daily; so much so that the reviewer left in a huff. "

Barry Garelick (RC Mathematics, 1971) is teaching math in middle school as a second career and is deeply involved in math education advocacy. He has written articles on math education for The Atlantic, Education Next, Education News, and Heartlander, and has published several books; the most recent is *Math Education in the U.S.: Still Crazy After All These Years* (2016). Barry was a presenter at the 2016 ResearchED conference at Oxford University, which was devoted to math/science teaching. Barry lives in Morro Bay, California; he and his wife have a daughter who recently graduated from California State University at Channel Islands.



Several authors from the first *RC Alumni Journal* and other alums read from their works during the RC's 50th Anniversary celebration in October 2017. The event began in the Keene Theater and continued in the south courtyard. Pictured: Peter Anderson, Ellen Dreyer, Ian Singleton, Lauren Stachew, Marty Sherman, Logan Corey, Allison Epstein, and Katherine Towler. Not pictured: Bob Clifford and Paul Meyer. Photos by Esha Biswas. Thank you, Esha!!

## Program News

One highlight (of many!) of the RC's 50th Reunion celebration in October 2017 was a celebration of **Warren Hecht** and **Ken Mikolowski** at Dominick's. Warren retired at the end of December 2016 and Ken at the end of Winter term 2017.

**Lolita Hernandez** retired in 2018, after 12 years as an RC Creative Writing lecturer. A native Detroit,

she has moved to Las Vegas to be closer to family. Lolita has an MFA in creative writing from the Vermont College of Norwich University, a BA in journalism from Wayne State University, and a BA in psychology from U-M. She was a General Motors UAW worker for more than 33 years, and her poetry and fiction draw from the rhythms and language of her Trinidad

and St. Vincent heritage. She is the author of two collections of short stories: *Making Callaloo* in Detroit (Wayne State University Press, 2014), which is a 2015 Michigan Notable Book, and *Autopsy of an Engine and Other Stories* from the Cadillac Plant (Coffee House Press, 2004), winner of a 2005 PEN Beyond Margins Award. She also is the author of two chapbook collections of poems: *Quiet Battles* and *snakecrossing*. She was a 2012 Kresge Literary Arts fellow. For more about Lolita, visit her website: [lolitahernandez.com](http://lolitahernandez.com)

**Laura Kasische's** 2017 poetry collection, *Where Now: New and Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon Press) was nominated for a National Book Award, and **Laura Thomas'** 2017 short story collection, *States of Motion* (Wayne State University Press) was nominated for an indie book-of-the-

year award.

Although not directly "program" news, RC grad **Hannah Ensor** was hired in early 2018 as the new Assistant Director of of the Hopwood Program. Poet **Keith Taylor**, who coordinated English's Undergraduate Creative Writing Program, retired at the end of December 2017.

**Emerging Writers Award.** Since 2014 the RC has given Emerging Writer awards (funded by a writing alum) to graduating writers "who demonstrate excellence in creative writing but have not previously received a writing award recognizing their writing achievements." In 2014: Allison Epstein; in 2015: Angeline Dimambro and Vicky Szczepkowski; in 2016: Alexander Miller and Sydney Morgan-Green; in 2017: Ashley Bishel and Lauren Theisen; in 2018, Emily Miiller.

## Alumni News

*Some recent publication and performance activity by RC alums.  
(Alums are RC Creative Wrting graduates unless otherwise specified).*

**Beenish Ahmed** (2009) was featured in an article in the November/December 2017 issue of *Poets & Writers* magazine, about her new venture, *The Alignist*, a bimonthly book subscription service that provides readers a different way to understand sociopolitical issues and to engage with other cultures.

**Erik Anderson** (2000) published *Flutter Point*, a collection of essays in March 2017 (Zone 3 Press) and *Estranger* in 2016 (Rescue Press). An article about a recent visit to East Quad in The September 2016 issue of *The*

*American Scholar* (titled "Endurance Matters More Than Talent").

**Peter Anderson** (1972) has a small, non-speaking role as Joseph Goebbels in two episodes of the second season of *The Man in The High Castle*, available on Netflix. Peter appears in episodes 8 and 10, "Loose Lips," and "Fallout." This summer, Peter is reprising the role of Coyote in "Law of the Land" for the Caravan Stage Company in British Columbia; Peter wrote the play and starred in its original production in 1982.

**Elizabeth Block** (Anthropology,

Honors) had a fictional memoir excerpt from her manuscript *The Pump Room* nominated for *Best of the Web*, Sundress Press in 2016. BlazeVOX published her *Celluloid Salutations* in 2014.

**Jeanette Bradley** (1994) published her debut picture book, *Love, Mama*, in January 2018 (Roaring Brook Press). Forthcoming is *Taking the Mic: Fourteen Young Americans Making Change*, which she co-edited and illustrated (Charlesbridge, 2020). More about Jeanette at her website: [jeanettebradley.com](http://jeanettebradley.com)

**Carmen Bugar** (1993) became a George Orwell Prize Fellow in 2017. *Releasing the Porcelain Birds*, a collection of poems, was published in 2016 (Shearsman Books). She teaches at the Gotham Writers Workshop in NYC.

**Anna Clark** (2003) published *The Poisoned City: Flint's Water and the American Urban Tragedy* in July 2018 (Metropolitan Books). She she was a 2017 Knight-Wallace journalism fellow at U-M.

**Bob Clifford** (1979) published *Gasping for Air*, a collection of poetry, in 2015. A second volume is forthcoming.

**Megan Cummins** (2009) is managing editor of *A Public Space* and has worked as a reader in the fiction department at *The New Yorker*.

**Ellen Dreyer** (1983) published *The Glow Stone* in 2015 (Peachtree Publishers).

**Lucy Eldersveld Murphy** (1975) co-edited *Frenchtown Chronicles of Praire du Chien, Wisconsin* by Albert Coryer, published by the Wisconsin

Historical Society in 2016, and published *Great Lakes Creoles: A French-Indian Community on the Northern Borderlands, Prairie du Chien, 1950-1860* in 2014 (Cambridge University Press). She is professor of history at Ohio State University, Newark.

**Allison Epstein** (2014) published a story, "Pandemonium", in *Metaphorosis*, a fantasy and science-fiction magazine, in November 2016.

**Cameron Finch** (2016) writes a monthly column for Ann Arbor's *Current* magazine, and recently received an Honorable Mention from *Glimmer Train* for her story "Frozen Locks."

**Dennis Foon** (1973) had *Indian Horse*, based on Richard Wagamese's award-winning novel, premiere at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival. His script for *Sawah* is slated for production in 2018.

**Matt Forbeck** (1989) recently published *Halo: Bad Blood*, the new series *Dungeons & Dragons: Endless Quest* books, the *Star Wars: Rogue One* junior novel, *Dungeonology*, and *The Marvel Encyclopedia*, plus work on Assassin's Creed: Origins, Ghost Recon Wildlands, and the Shotguns & Sorcery roleplaying game based on his novels.

**Alyson Foster** (2004) published *Heart Attack Watch*, a collection of stories, in 2016 (Bloomsbury), and the novel *God Is An Astronaut*, in 2014 (Bloomsbury).

**Mary Gallagher** (2015) writes occasional columns for Ann Arbor's *Current* magazine.

**Barry Garelick** (RC Mathematics, 1971) published *Math Education in the U.S.: Still Crazy After All These*

Years (2016). Barry was a presenter at the 2016 ResearchED conference at Oxford University, which was devoted to math/science teaching.

**Amy Gustine** (1991) published *You Should Pity Us Instead*, a collection of stories, in 2016 (Sarabande Books).

**James Guthrie** (1973) continues as editor of the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, published twice a year by Johns Hopkins University Press for The Emily Dickinson International Society. Jim has been editor since 2016.

**Merrie Haskell (Fuller)** (2002) published *With Mouths Unsewn: Five More Stories* (June 2018) on Amazon Kindle, and previously published *Among Green Roses: Five Speculative Romances* (May 2017) and *In Spindle Towers: Five Stories* (December 2016) there. Her novels include *The Castle Behind Thorns* (2014), *Handbook for Dragon Slayers* (2013), and *The Princess Curse* (2013).

**Clare Higgins** (2017) works for Dark Horse Enterprises and served as crew on the forthcoming *The Umbrella Academy* and *The Witcher*.

**Laura Kasischke** (1984) published *Where Now: New and Selected Poems*, a poetry collection (Copper Canyon Press). It was nominated for a National Book Award.

**Hannah Levine** (2016) has published a story, "Two Hot Ciders," in the second issue of *October Hill* magazine.

**Mark Molesky** (1990) published *This Gulf of Fire: The Great Lisbon Earthquake, or Apocalypse in the Age of Science and Reason* in October 2016 (Vintage). It was the winner of the Phi Alpha Theta Best Subsequent Book Award, and a *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize Finalist.

**Christine Montross** (French Literature, Environmental Science, 1995; MFA, Poetry) has a forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Acquainted With the Night: Mental Illness in the American Prison System*. She presented a chapter in a June 2017 lecture at Dartmouth. Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, she received a 2015 Guggenheim Fellowship.

**Kathryn Orwig** (2017) is working as a screenwriter for It's Not a Phase, Mom LLC, an animation company, developing content for 20 episodes that will be shown online.

**Liz Parker** (RC 2009) writes two blogs: Yes/No Detroit, and Books I Think You Should Read. She also writes articles for CBS Detroit.

**Nicholas Petrie** (1990) published *Light It Up* in January 2018, the third book in his Peter Ash series (G.P. Putnam's Sons).

**Paige Pflieger** (2015) has joined the staff of WOSUNews in Columbus as a reporter. Paige worked at Michigan Radio in Ann Arbor, interned at NPR headquarters in DC, and was associate producer of WHYY's The Pulse, in Philadelphia, a national health and science show.

**Elena Potek** (2015) had a "30 day/30 women" social media project on Facebook in 2016: each day she posted about a different woman in her life who has inspired her, and who embodies "a wonderful trait that lights up the world around them."

**Anna Prushinskaya** (2008) published *A Woman is a Woman Until She Is A Mother*, a collection of essays, in Fall 2017 (MG Press).

**Jenna Rose Robins** (1995) published *Faithful & Devoted: Confessions of a Depeche Mode Addict* in March 2017 (Redwood Publishing). The book was 2017 Finalist for the BookLife Prize.

**Damiann Rogers** (1993) will publish a memoir, *An Alphabet for Joanna* in 2019 (Knopf Canada). She published her second book of poetry, *Dear Leader*, in 2015 (Coach House Books).

**Matthew Rohrer** (1992) published *The Others* in May 2017 (Wave Books).

**Molly Roth** (2010) published "Seven Wonders of the World (Wide Web)" in the April 29, 2018 on-line issue of the *New Yorker*, as well as other comics for the *New Yorker's* Daily Shouts.

**Elizabeth Schmuhl** (2006) published *Premonitions* in Fall 2018 (Wayne State University Press). She illustrates essays for *The Rumpus*, and co-edits *CheapPOP*, a twice-weekly micro fiction journal.

**Ian Singleton** (2004) published "First Time" in the 2016 issue of *New Madrid*.

**Carrie Smith** (1979) published *Unholy City* in November 2017, the third book in her Claire Codella Mystery series (Crooked Lane Books).

**Holly Spaulding** (1997) published *If August*, an extended poem, in May 2017 (Alice Greene & Company). She was the 2017 Ann Hall Artist in Residence at the Leelanau Cultural Center (Michigan). She founded Poetry Forge in 2012, and teaches creative writing for Interlochen College of Creative Arts.

**Laura Thomas** (1988) published *States of Motion*, a collection of stories, in 2017 (Wayne State University Press). The book was a finalist for the 12th annual National Indie Excellence Book Award for short stories. Laura was also featured in "5 over 50" in the November/December 2017 issue of *Poets & Writers*.

**Katherine Towler** (English, 1978) published *The Penny Poet of Portsmouth*, a memoir, in 2016 (Counterpoint Press). She is also editor of *A God in the House: Poets Talk About Faith*.

**Carol Ullmann** (2000) has ten overview chapters forthcoming in *Twenty-First Century Novels* (Gale). She previously published other overviews in this series. Carol has been a professional editor for 11 years and professional writer for 7.

**Brooke White** (2017) published an essay in the Winter 2018 issue of *Midwestern Gothic*, and an essay, "In A Box With A Few Tiny Teeth," in the March 2018 issue of *Swamp Ape Review*.

**Elizabeth Witte** (2003) has poems forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly* and published poems in *Prelude* and *Word for/Word* in 2016. Her chapbook, *Dry Eye*, was published by Dancing Girl Press in 2014. She received the Massachusetts Cultural Council's 2016 Artist Fellowship in Poetry.

*Of course, send corrections, additions, and info on other RC alums to Dan Madaj at [dmadaj@umich.edu](mailto:dmadaj@umich.edu)*