

REED  
COLLEGE  
CREATIVE  
REVIEW

2011

REED COLLEGE  
3203 SE WOODSTOCK BLVD  
PORTLAND, OR 97202



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# dear reader,

Welcome to RCCR11! It's been quite the year for us, as it has doubtlessly been for you, as well. Not only did we receive more submissions than we ever have before, we're also debuting our website, <http://www.rc-cr.org>. We can't print everything we want to and every year, quite a large number of excellent submissions don't end up making it to the printed page. We're excited to have the vastness of digital space in which to showcase even more of your creative works!

As always, there are people who need to be thanked. Beyond the Review Board and Editors, who worked quite hard to pull this year's publication together, thanks must be given to the Reed Student Body and Student Activities Office for funding us; to the treasurers for putting up with us; and to Jon Oxman, Mara Thrush, and Bridgetown Printing for being willing to work with a haggard group of college students to print this lovely magazine.

I have been involved with the Review for the past three years. In just that short span of time, the Review has grown and expanded quite a bit (in everything except, sadly, our page count). Though due to the small contingency of graduating (!) I will no longer be involved in its production, there is a whole body of dedicated and talented people who will no doubt make the Review even bigger, better, and more awesome in years to come. I urge you all to get involved with the Review if you can—submit, join the board, or just take the time to acknowledge the incredible talent of your peers!

I hope you enjoy RCCR11, and that you will all make RCCR12 the best it can be!

SACHA BANIEL-STARK '11



table  
of  
contents

poetry

Christina DeVillier	9	<i>Sketch</i>
	49	<i>Genesis</i>
Lizzy Martin	13	<i>Sick Girl, Sick Girl</i>
Camille Charlier	15	<i>As a Body Implied</i>
	50	<i>Icons in Ten Frames as They Topple</i>
Dominic Finocchiaro	16	<i>Pinup #57</i>
Madeline Kinkel	17	<i>Mismatched</i>
Sam Grenrock	21	<i>Bitten</i>
	30	<i>A Blanket on the Grass</i>
	46	<i>Imperative</i>
Rebecca Thurber	23	<i>Richard Jones</i>
Kayla Sheridan	29	<i>Pause</i>
	33	<i>On Learning to Be a Woman, #2</i>
Crystel Hadley	32	<i>Ode to a Body</i>
James Bianconi	35	<i>I Fell in Love With You Today</i>
Sam Hopkins	36	<i>Farm of Uneaten Animals</i>
Brent Lightfoot	38	<i>Like and Kind</i>
	61	<i>Water Cooler Talk</i>
Max Maller	42	<i>Unnamed Lands</i>
Sammie Massey	45	<i>Dialogue One of the Gardener</i>

prose

Stephanie Bastek	7	<i>The Lake</i>
Geena Barker	10	<i>Your Head...</i>
Lauren Seegmiller	19	<i>A Fable</i>
Sean Howard	22	<i>The Bidness</i>
Sam Hopkins	24	<i>Disability</i>
Stephanie Bastek	31	<i>A Picnic</i>
Stephanie Bastek	52	<i>Possession</i>
Erin Kleinfeld	58	<i>Birdseed</i>

art

Erin Kleinfeld	14	<i>Heidi</i>
Sammie Massey	33	<i>P33RN</i>
Kimya Ramezani	34	<i>French Kiss</i>

photography

Lanlan Jin	6	<i>Rumination Interrupted</i>
	29	<i>Scattered Thoughts</i>
	39	<i>V too</i>
	47	<i>Fourth of July Wanderers</i>
Tatiana Oudine	11	<i>Chris in the Trees</i>
	23	<i>Todd</i>
	53	<i>Alex, Oregon Coast, Postcard</i>
Rachel Cole-Jansen	18	<i>Ramparts in the Clouds</i>
	36	<i>Lightlife</i>
	37	<i>Life from Death</i>
	46	<i>A Widening Gyre</i>
	58	<i>Holes and Whorls</i>
Paulina Saba	40	<i>Taro</i>
	41	<i>Atrophy</i>
Max Maller	42	<i>In a Daoist Temple</i>
	45	<i>Washing Dishes</i>
	55	<i>Antonio</i>
Alma Siulagi	48	<i>40</i>
	48	<i>41</i>
	50	<i>North Dakota</i>





LANLAN JIN • RUMINATION INTERRUPTED • DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH

## THE LAKE

••

STEPHANIE BASTEK

The first thing I noticed the morning I drowned was that the city was melting. The clouds were falling to eye-level; the ice droplets were sliding down the windows of parked cars; my shoes were slipping on the muddy path as we walked into the woods.

I could hear Simon behind me, crunching the frozen leaves beneath his feet, and Dani further back, breathing heavily. Ahead of me, the trees were gradually thinning out, the black surface of the lake visible between half-naked pine branches. Two ducks were walking across the surface, webbed feet shockingly orange against the ice, beaks bobbing as they prowled for any green leaves spared in winter's creep across the water. The male looked at me defensively, eyes black and beady, wings glinting green in the sun, a piece of weed dangling from his beak. He broke eye contact abruptly, dismissing me to offer the weed to his mate with a nudge of his beak. In his dark gaze I could see nothing.

We came to the water's edge, bordered by tall grasses that had been bowed over by the wind. I sat down on a log and watched Dani inch out along the ice, step by precarious step, until she was standing in the middle of the black expanse.

—God, it's fucking cold! she said. I can feel it creeping through the soles of my shoes.

I didn't think it was so bad. Simon was sitting down beside me. There were heat waves radiating out from where our arms brushed.

—It's warm here, I said. With you.

I didn't actually say the last part.



Simon looked over at me and smiled, and then looked back at Dani. She was lying down in the middle of the lake.

—Come back, Dani. You’re going to freeze, Simon called as she flapped her arms and legs into a snow angel. I don’t want to have to carry your dead body up that hill.

She laughed and started crawling over to us, limbs swishing through the snow and through the grass. Her knees were wet when she sat down on the log next to me.

—It’s your turn now, she said to me.

—No chickening out, Lucy. Simon punctuated his words with a smile that could have melted icicles. I stood up and approached the lake, the frozen grasses whispering around my legs giving way to the hollow thudding of my boots across the ice.

In the middle of the lake, I knelt down tentatively, careful to evenly distribute my weight. The surface didn’t look nearly as dark up close: the ice was slightly blue above the water, with little bits of dirt visible in the whiter areas. The really black parts were where the bubbles were pressed up against the ice, scrabbling to escape into the open air. I brushed away the snow, my gloves making a scratching noise against the rough plane. The bubbles skidded below the surface like caged wolves, prowling for a gap in the ice to leap out of. It reminded me of that time in the summer when Simon and I had covered his dad’s pool with a tarp and swum underneath it, blowing out air bubbles and watching them bloat against the clear plastic. We had pressed our faces up against it, our brightly colored bathing suits butterflies beneath glass, and stared brazenly into the sun.

I smiled, remembering Simon’s laughter, ridiculous underwater. I turned around to remind him, but stopped, because Simon didn’t have his jacket on anymore. It was around Dani’s shoulders, along with his left arm.

I turned back around too quickly and heard the surface crack sickeningly. I thought that the blackness seeping into my vision looked like the ducks’ eyes, and then I didn’t think anything at all. 🦆

## SKETCH

You may want to worship the lake  
in this place where constellations of puddles  
coalesced. You may need to buy fenders for your bike  
so that the lake in its creative infancy cannot reach  
with muddy fingers to paint trees and rockslides  
on your back. Or you may allow a forest to grow there  
and to hell with the bracken and scree. You splash to a halt  
at the stoplight on 33rd and laugh at the woman  
driving the purple Volvo who—in this sun on this first day  
of spring when even the air shouts with omens—  
sits staring at her lap, reading the Tarot, you are not  
making this up, as she waits for the light to change.  
The light may never change. It is a long light.  
You watch a crow watching herself  
in the new lake like a veiled Eve  
while the English ivy hangs itself  
on the nearest budding tree.

You ride home. The old woman who lives in the white house  
across the street will come out to chase the resident geese  
as she does every afternoon. Usually you smile but today  
you may not. Today you have seen so many women  
chasing secrets. You have your doubts about all that  
because isn’t this enough—the crow, the light,  
the lake, its scribbling fingers?

Still you may tell a story. Here is the old woman  
with her red pea coat, brass buttons, bizarre hatred of geese.  
She throws rocks underhand and always misses. Sometimes  
the geese shout and retreat but when she goes inside they return  
and when they return she is always too tired for another assault.  
Someone in this story is heartbroken. It comes clear in the telling.  
The crocuses in her yard bare their purple throats to the sun.  
You may need a moment to regain your composure.  
How could you have known? Even the lake  
was a libation. Each thing offers up itself.

CHRISTINA DEVILLIER



## YOUR HEAD WAS THE SHAPE OF THE MOON AND MY HEART WAS IN YOUR HEAD

•••  
GEENA BARKER

The New Year arrived as the blue moon fell apart in the sky. The ash from its disintegration formed dark grey swarming clouds above us. Rain covered everything, liquefying the snow in the streets where my brother's head lay among the slush on the cold pavement. The headlights that faced him slowly drained the light out of him as their beams crawled along the faces of the homes in the neighborhood and made their shameful escape.

Although the sky was full of clouds that dripped with rain, you could still see the moon and the stars reflecting off the slush on the ground, which was melted from the previous day's snow. By the time the moon left us he was still in a hospital bed. There were so many tubes: plastic snakes intruding upon every opening in his body; they snarled, evil and intrusive, but their venom was working hard to save his life. The light was bluish grey and made him look gone—or maybe he was—we didn't know. He was bloated—fluid pressing on every inch of his skin. It only got worse the next morning. His head was the worst. I could barely recognize his left side, which looked like it could burst. The hair on the left side of his head had been shaved, exposing the damage the New Year had given him. A black and silver centipede of staples crawled from his ear over the top of his skull and disappeared into his pillow. The smell was horrible; rotten and chemically sterile all at once... it smelled yellow. I reached down for his hand but pulled back in shock; it was ice cold, giving all its blood to support his heart. I couldn't talk. I wanted to hold him and tell

him I loved him and that I was there for him and that everything would be fine and I wanted to tell him how important he is to me and how he can't go. I wanted to tell him that he should do everything he can to wake up because it didn't matter if he was disabled because I would take care of him for the rest of his life—I would do anything for him. But my heart and my stomach and my head were all mixed up and heavy, forming a lump in my throat, blocking the words from escaping although I opened my mouth in an attempt to release them. The empty places they had left ached. My forehead fell onto my father's shoulder. My head was numb and my eyes so exhausted from crying I almost couldn't feel the pain. I didn't want to cry in case he was in there and was scared. But having to use the phrase “in case” in my head implied that he might be gone and made me cry anyway. But no words would come out of me. Although I begged them to leave and give themselves to him, they would not leave the comfort of my throat where they knew they were safe from becoming powerful, safe from becoming words that could unintentionally warn him (or me) that they could be the last he might hear. This concept held those words tightly in my throat and strangled them.

I don't remember walking from his room to outside of the I.C.U. I remember hearing the swinging metal doors shut behind me as I took a few steps and collapsed on the ground. My stomach and my heart fell out of my throat onto the cold white tile floor as my lungs released the most painful wail they've ever



TATIANA OUDINE • *CHRIS IN THE TREES* • DOUBLE-EXPOSURE PHOTOGRAPH



given into. I couldn't think. Just cry.

I felt my dad, our dad, grasp my shoulders with what felt like the biggest and strongest hands I've ever encountered, take my shoulders and lift me from the ground and turn my heart to face his. They collapsed into one another. Our grief shook us and poured out our eyes as my father told himself it was going to be okay. I tried to believe him too.

Still no one knows what really happened that night except for the moon in the sky who fell into pieces, along with our lives. The details lie scattered with the ashes of the explosion. There were too many people involved to tell the whole story; only the moon saw the truth. It's up to the coming moons, the future, to collect the pieces and make whole what was lost that night. ✂

## SICK GIRL, SICK GIRL

I'm a sick girl with not enough vomit in my chest to cover what needs to be covered.

I'm reading an article on today's hipsters & the death of individuality, cool, & revolution;

I'm listening to the newswoman count up how many barrels of oil have gushed into the Gulf of Mexico, black bile bleeding into our waters, our animals, our senses of decency.

Gag me. Someone give me nothing to scream about;

give me a bullseye at which I can shoot to make the bullshit stop.

I spend every night that it storms with my mouth turned to the sky,

hoping the acid rain will melt the suburbs into puddles of

high fructose corn syrup, SUVs, & popped-collared designer polos,

nature taking the shit on "society" that we've needed ever since

we stopped fighting.

We stopped fighting. Why did we trade rocks & fire for fashion & self-conscious dancing?

I'd rather fight the monsters in my childhood nightmares than take a stab

at successfully telling the administration to go fuck themselves

& all of the big businesspeople with their imagined empathy.

Someone should correct their spelling:

a-p-a-t-h-y.

[& it's driving me crazy.]

How did they spoonfeed us so exhaustively?

Party drugs & reality TV? I stick their words down my throat if only to puke up

my resentment, my rage, my disgust.

I drink warm beer & smoke 99s, even when I know

a woman who died from lung cancer just by living in a place &

I watch Intervention religiously, watching the alcoholics guzzling

rubbing alcohol just to feel their throats burning with that old,

familiar scorn.

I'm sick. & we're all pretty sick. Where's that thermometer,

any thermometer, really, that could take the temperature of our

lukewarm nation?

They say adolescents fight off disease the most successfully,

but dammit, where is the fight? Where are the youth of America &

what are they doing while ethnic cleansing happens mere oceans away,

children starve in our own city streets,

& it takes more than fifty days for anyone in charge to handle

an environmental disaster?

Are they even alive? Are the youth of America still breathing?

Their pulses still suggest consciousness. But they're busy tallying

how many friends

they have on the most pathetic excuse for a social network.

Where are you? Where are you, Americans?

Where is the angry&intelligent music? The raging prose

& the outspoken poetry?

This generation got nothing to offer me.

Well, I hope I drink oil in my next glass of water.

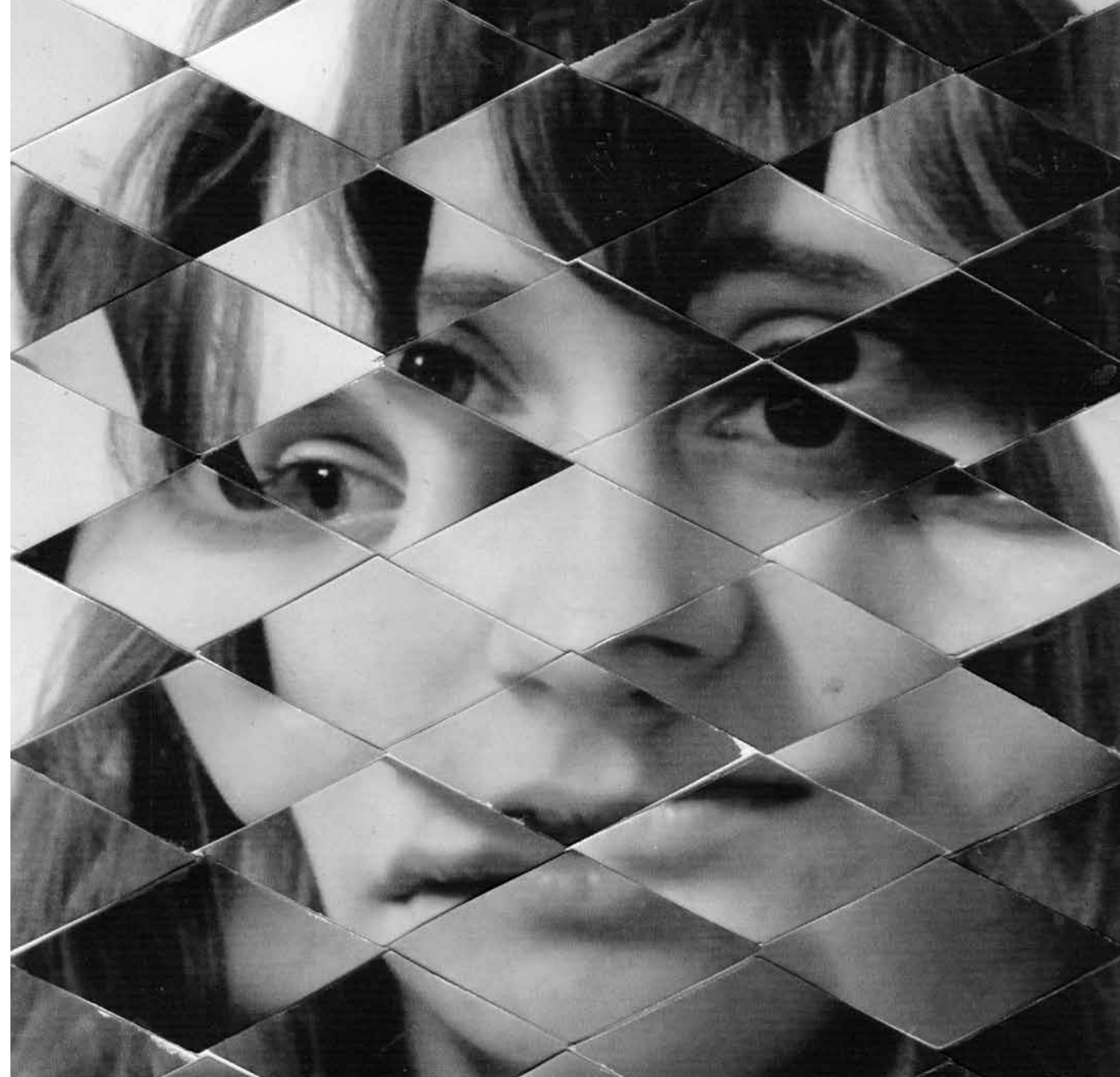
I hope all of the dead things with hearts & mouths wash up on every conceivable shore,

so those who care can set it all on fire, so someday,

someday the youth of America will start exploding again.

LIZZY MARTIN





ERIN KLEINFELD • HEIDI • PHOTO COLLAGE

## AS A BODY IMPLIED

Sometimes I am read  
as the gritty knobs of sticking drawers  
and sometimes as the Rediscovery of America  
that mounts a yawning dreamscape  
as it recoils into the distance.

At times this text flares itself  
red as the headlines of crisis,  
or as white recycled seams  
that willfully insinuate between stiff serif.

This body does not speak for itself,  
and never through secondary commentary  
is it coherently described:

Taken out of context it can mass produce meaning  
like kitsch propped on mantle pieces  
in the upper peninsula,  
dusted once a year.

Neither mass nor volume  
when standardized, mapped and extrapolated  
can pour out the story as well as old women  
with hooded eyes  
and chipped teeth.

Neither surface nor plane  
can support the weight of binary  
that codes this cross-hatched aesthetic,  
generated by a simple series of  
no, then yes.

Argument:

These lines are mere implication –  
possibilities deduced from abridged hieroglyphs  
and bone fragments  
reassembled into the vintage record,  
stationed adjacent to all 716 moth species

skewered under dancing angels.

CAMILLE CHARLIER



## PINUP #57

A girl with Bettie Page hair  
in a laundromat on the corner of  
Lust and Desolation  
winks her nose at you and  
mutters something about a  
cat in the rain, and you  
mention Hemingway but she  
corrects you—no, it's just a  
cat in the rain, and you  
stand corrected, on the corner of  
Abashed and Aroused.

A girl with Bettie Page hair  
in a spare bedroom in the district of  
Second Guessing and Over Thinking  
drinks tap-water and  
crushes mosquitoes on the  
wallpaper, and you  
offer a Kleenex but she  
says no – she likes the blood  
in the creases of her palm, and you  
stifle something like a sob.

She's dead now, you tell people,  
the girl with Bettie Page hair,  
but really she's not—really she's  
alive, in Nebraska, with a  
garden and a dog and a  
plumber, but she  
cut her Bettie Page hair, and so you  
say she's gone, because really  
she is, but sometimes you find yourself  
crushing mosquitoes on the  
wallpaper, and you never  
use a Kleenex, and you don't  
read Hemingway or  
stifle something like a sob  
anymore.

DOMINIC FINOCCHIARO



## MISMATCHED

My body wasn't made with me in mind.  
the skin and sinews mismatched with myself  
so that I wonder what inspired this most ridiculous of constructions.

I should have been made with eyes on the tips of my fingers  
all bright and all staring and no eyelids of course  
so the Siamese twin sensation of seeing and feeling  
would dismantle the distance between beauty and truth.  
I should have been born with radioactive toes  
so that no off-white, stained, mischievous  
sock could for a second steal the sensation  
of cool pavement or summer dirt  
as they echo the hum of freedom in the arched caves  
of the souls of my feet.  
On the back of my head there should have been  
a transduction panel for starlight instead of sleep  
so on those nights when the world is magic and  
the heavens decide to pour libations to the starving, joyous youth,  
the fire of life would never leave and even the next morning I would still  
burn  
with the glow, instead of smoldering in ashes when the sun rises.

I should have been made with five inches of skin  
so on those frozen days when the snow is brighter than the sky  
I could lay out and make my snow angels  
and have the fortitude to stand by and watch as one by one  
they fall into the hell of children's footprints.  
I should have been made with a thousand joints in my tongue  
so that these words I have so much trouble finding  
would have a better way out  
than this strange flap of skin stuck between my jaws  
that can't seem to comprehend the cosmos inside my head  
enough to let it out,  
the purple midnights and late summer evenings  
that paint the inside of my skull,  
which, incidentally, should have been  
put on the outside of my skin  
so the colors on its canvas could be seen  
without mundanely devised medium.

But here I am,  
ten fingers that don't connect with my eyes,  
ten toes that don't stay awake every night,  
thin skin that gets chapped far too often in winter,  
and a round head, with the skin on the outside.  
What a ridiculous sight.

MADELINE KINKEL





RACHEL COLE-JANSEN • RAMPARTS IN THE CLOUDS • BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH

## A FABLE

•••

LAUREN SEEGMILLER

He was obsessed in love with this girl who treated him like shit and had a septum piercing. She refused to address him in public. If she talked to him, she would refer to him as “You.” Or at least that’s what he’d been telling me. He mentioned that she had asked him to help her move in with her boyfriend while we drove down Marshall Drive toward the 93.

“Wait,” I said. “She asked or you offered?”

“Not really either,” he said. He pulled on the lever next to the passenger seat and inched the seatback down. He set his foot on the glove box. The road narrowed to one lane on each side. He and I met in high school, but we didn’t go to the same one. We met slinging sandwiches at a local sub franchise, and bonded over a desire to get as far away as possible. I left for Oregon and he fled to Rhode Island, where we both learned that life at home trudged on whether we were there or not, and also that meeting new people is daunting. This was the first time I’d seen him since the summer before our respective moves, but we’d talked at least once a week online all semester. If given enough time, I probably could have worked out the whole saga of the girl with the septum ring, but it always came down to the bottom line: she clearly didn’t like him, and I couldn’t care about it as anything more than a way to waste time.

“Are you wearing your seatbelt?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

During the two weeks or so in the fall when the leaves went yellow, bridges of gold reached overhead, compounding the narrow oppression of the pavement. Now that the leaves were all down, the branches looked like cracks



in the blank sky, and you could see that they never really touched from across the road. Some people maybe still had horses out there, but I think it was mostly the type of people who could afford expensive wind chimes. He was looking out the window.

“What did you mean when you said ‘not really either?’”  
“What?” He looked back at me.  
“Did she ask you to help her, or did you *offer* to help her? Move in. With her boyfriend.”  
“Well, she was, like, talking about how she didn’t have anyone to help her, so I said I would help her.”

“And she just *accepted* your offer? Even though you think she hates you?”  
“Well, I kind of had to push the issue, I guess. But why would she be venting if she didn’t *want* me to help her?”  
“Because she’s a bitch.” A big red Chevy rumbled out of its driveway and onto the road in the opposite direction. I braked a little bit, trying to edge over without going off the pavement.  
“She’s not a bitch. I mean, I’m not, like, completely innocent, either.”

“Well, do you address her by her *name*?”  
He didn’t say anything for a moment. “But I’m not like really nice to her either.”  
“But you offered to help her move. As opposed to, say, ignoring her publicly?”  
“Yeah.”  
“Into a house with her boyfriend—a man whose

position you would ideally fill.”  
“Why do you have to make everything sound so bad all the time?” he said.  
Saying he was in denial would have only started a fight about it. We’d been talking about this girl for ages, while he was having a perpetual panic

attack three hours ahead of me. We both spent nights in front of homework, facing our respective chat windows and opposite coasts. I didn’t know her in person, but I spent a lot of time flipping through her online photos. She had perfect teeth but gritted them at the camera. She played the accordion. With my finger glued to the arrow keys, I traced the evolution of her persona, backwards and forwards and *in medias res*. For a section of the day, I could crawl out from under the weight of nineteenth century tomes and the oppressive ecstasy of the Romantics. She was an artist; he was an engineer. It would have been poetic if it weren’t so obnoxious.

“Well, it was a terrible weekend,” he said, “when I helped her move.”  
“Oh?”  
“Yeah. Her boyfriend had to go up to Vermont or something, so I went to the garage where she had all this stuff stored. And she picked up a box of old books and, like, these spiders just came like crawling out. And she dropped the box on the floor, but that just scared them. All these spiders came, like, running out and she started screaming and stuff and then she pointed at me and I looked down and there were all these black widows on my shirt. And then there were these two bites on my arm.”

“Black widows?”  
“Yeah, little baby black widows.”  
“There aren’t black widows in Rhode Island. They live in the South and in the Southwest.”  
“I know what they look like, okay? They were black widows.”  
“But their venom is neurotoxic. It makes you really sick—it’s not just a regular spider bite. They can *kill* you.” I noticed the speedometer creeping up toward sixty and took my foot off the gas.  
“I *know*, okay? When I was a little kid someone I knew got bitten and he got *really* sick, and he couldn’t wear shoes because his foot swelled up. And I got pretty sick last month when they bit me. Like, I got nausea and a fever and stuff.”  
“Did you go to the doctor?”  
“No.”

“You should have gone to the doctor. That’s really dangerous.”  
“Yeah, well. I was okay in, like, a day.”  
“Okay, let me get this straight, then: this girl somehow gets *you* to help her move in with her *boyfriend* even though she treats *you* like shit. And in the process of this, you get bitten by venomous spiders that magically appeared hundreds of miles from their natural habitat. *Black—widow—spiders.*” We were almost at the turnoff. The lone traffic light went from green to yellow and then yellow to red.  
“Sure, I guess.”  
I braked slowly until the car was still. There were no cars to go through the green light. I tried to give him a look just before we turned down the 93 in the humbling shadow of the Flatirons, but he was looking out the window, elsewhere. ☞

## BITTEN

Coy little thing  
kicks zest up my nose,  
gives up crumbling pith & coral.  
I blame sunblind July  
for mulling the orange into a shape  
too sweet to discover.  
I think of you & your I won’t, lips in full pout,  
& I lay down the half-shorn fruit.  
Juice bites my fingers.  
You’re a biter too, you said once,  
as you touched my ragged cuticles.  
You kissed me once that night; I froze with softness.  
That was autumn. When salt crusted the streets  
we squeezed lemons over a fevered pan,  
sucking stung fingers as the fish braised  
& rain froze outside.  
Light springs  
out of my knife, splits  
the body into bodies.  
My teeth fire July’s  
saturation  
the way stars spike  
soft nights.

SAM GRENROCK



THE BIDNESS:  
A LETTER FROM MY FATHER

••  
SEAN HOWARD

Dear Son,

Hello my boy—you’ve grown a lot and you’re starting to become your own person. I think you’re old enough for us to finally have that talk. There comes a time in every man’s life for him to decide what’s important. Now, of all the talks we’ve had, none will be as important as this one. Whether or not you heed these words could be the difference between life and death, happiness and despair, starvation and the abundant life because Life is all about one thing.

You see son, it’s all about the Bidness. There is only the Bidness. In every nook and cranny you will find the Bidness. And the only thing better than the Bidness, is mo’ Bidness.

Let me give you some ideas about the Bidness is: Now everybody know that the Honey-bear has got the Bidness. But the mule, the mule got the Bidness too. The questions you need to be asking yourself are, “How can I get the Bidness?” or, failing that, “How can I be all about the Bidness?”

The answers to these and all other important questions lie in letting nothing stand between you and the Bidness.

You cannot let concern for unimportant things come between you and the Bidness. You might say “But what about children? Surely they are too young for the Bidness!” Let me tell you something. Kids these days don’t know anything about the Bidness. Talkin’ ‘bout “I want playtime,” and “I have asthma.” I was born in the Bidness. I sucked the teat of the Bidness. I grew up and worked

hard to become: the Bidness! And no son of mine is gonna live outside the Bidness!

I’ve compiled some sayings and writings that might help you on the path to getting the Bidness.

A haiku:

*About the Bidness*  
*It’s all about the Bidness*  
*Mo’ Bidness, Mo’ Bidness*

*“I came, I saw, Bidness.” –Unknown*

Now son, I know you’re an English major, which means that you might have strayed from the path of the Bidness, but it is not too late. It is all around you. It’s in me, it’s in you. You’re a Carmichael, son, the Bidness is in your blood.

Remember what’s important,  
Dad  
✿

TATIANA OUDINE • TODD • DOUBLE-EXPOSURE PHOTOGRAPH



RICHARD JONES

He doesn’t separate his  
doctors from his poetry  
any longer.

He directs his lyrics  
to his dentist and his optometrist,  
and wonders why

it still hurts to chew.

He finds dead birds  
in the grass in front of his house  
and the gardener doesn’t know;  
and the street-sweeper doesn’t know;  
and the paperboy doesn’t know;  
and the garbage collector doesn’t know;  
and not even the early hours of the morning  
witnessed the bird  
drop from the limb  
of the tree

that once could feel the Divine Providence  
in the fall of a sparrow.  
It has now thickened the bark on its branches  
and forgets

the origin of tragedy.  
The old lamps wait in his attic  
for their day of resurrection  
as he asks his electrician:  
How many years does it take  
to screw in a lightbulb?

REBECCA THURBER



# DISABILITY

••

SAM HOPKINS

I can't smell. I mean of course I can; that's what the cartons of soap and deodorant are for. What I should say is, I have no sense of smell. The doctors call it anosmia. If you think it's absurd that there's a medical term for such a trivial condition, may I direct you to restless leg syndrome? Or ADHD. The way I see it, I only enjoy four-fifths of the world of the living, so I deserve at least seven letters of Latin. And a little respect.

The first thing people ask about my vestigial schnoz is how I taste. With my tongue, I answer, like any god-fearing animal. But 90% of taste is smell, they insist. I'm economical. Isn't food bland? Some is—I imagine it's the same with you. Don't you miss flavor? Not often; I'll always be skinny, and anyway I bet you envy me in public restrooms as much as I envy you at the dinner table. They don't believe me, but they don't keep asking questions either.

There are more practical concerns for the smell-less. As I mentioned earlier, just because you don't perceive smell doesn't mean you don't emit smell. Whenever someone wrinkles her nose in an elevator, I'm convinced it's on account of my wretched body odor. I chain wash; sometimes I shower twice or three times a day. On nights of tectonic doubt, when the egotism creeps up like stalactites (is that creeps down?), I shove a foot or an armpit under my girlfriend's nose to make sure I'm decent. I stepped in cat shit while stumbling through one morning in the eleventh grade. Second period, Mrs. Petulante discreetly cracked the window. It was the middle of December. The girl next to me—the girl whose embarrassment two weeks ago seemed mythical or at least cinematic (film being the closest thing we have to myth) when she came back to school in a baggy pink sweatshirt after her breast reduction—she

described the smell as “reprocessed manure.” I spent third and fourth period in the bathroom, washing my shoes in the sink and drying them with an industrial hand dryer, the kind that makes your skin look like the face of an astronaut in a G-force simulator. I pressed the button thirty-three times. The paper towels were gone.

Anosmia facilitates social suicide and the real thing too. When I'm home by myself and I want a quesadilla, before I flick the knob on the gas stove I take a sharp breath and think of what a good life I've had. The click-click-click of the lighter is logical, necessary, sublime; I stare into the irreproducible moment every time the way people could watch the sun rise before the atom bomb. If it doesn't catch at first, I imagine I've cheated death, but I'm reckless, or hungry, and I try again. All gasses scare me—methane, nitrogen dioxide, chlorine, plutonium vapor. Most of all, carbon monoxide. I know textbooks say CO is odorless, but I don't trust chemists. Two years ago we installed a detector in my bedroom. On the back of the box it said you're supposed to check the battery every week. Which means they expect it to die. Which means if the leak doesn't fall on a Sunday, you're S.O.L. I would check it every day, every time I went into the basement, but my mom said she was more likely to take her own life from hearing that incessant beeping than I was to suffocate. I prefer biological detectors now. When I work downstairs, I snuggle up next to our cat. It's a symbiotic relationship: I'm her molting partner and she's my canary. But that only works when I have the presence of mind to observe her. I get drawn into my screen, her purrs are indistinguishable from the whir of the laptop fan, I bang out uncertain phrases and Mona dissolves into

probabilities, a grotesque superposition of life and death. Cruel, you might say, but come nightfall the torturer becomes the tortured. As I fall asleep and focus so intensely on the random procession of images visiting the inside of my eye that I fail to observe myself, I too am like Mona, half-alive, half-dead. Every night for a month last year, just before release, I would get that feeling you get when you're being put under and the anesthesiologist presses the gas mask to your lips and tells you to count backward from ten and you get to six before you realize you're not breathing, or more accurately, you're not breathing oxygen and you try to shout to tell the chief of medicine that both your parents are lawyers and he better have malpractice insurance from Lloyd's but there's not enough air in your vocal chords, obviously, so you know you are going to die unconscious, which is the worst way. I wonder whether a coroner has ever written ‘psychosomatic asphyxiation’ as cause of death. Incidentally, I sleep with the window open now.

I wasn't always this way. Mom says when I was a baby she would hold me up to the spice rack so I could breathe in the oregano, cinnamon, thyme. She also says that this is how it happened, that one day I snorted cayenne pepper and must have killed my olfactory receptors. I don't believe her. Or I don't want to. When I was a boy my hair was hazelnut and now it's jet black. People don't change all at once.

Sometimes I feel subhuman. Like now, here, in the teahouse of the Portland Classical Chinese Garden, as I read the flavor profile of Monkey King off the menu: “a delicate floral aroma of the wild cymbidium plants that blossoms around Chinese tea gardens.” I have no idea what cymbidium is, so even with 20/20 smell I could not possibly assay that description, but I bet the critic who wrote those lines was about as careful as the guy who translates all the fortune cookie fortunes. Chinese tea critic is the perfect job for an anosmic; you can pick phrases haphazardly with the best of them, and in fact even better since you're not a slave to perception. Still, if I could smell, I would pretend the critic is right, like I pretend with fortune cookies, and recreate cymbidium—wild cymbidium—from the swirling wisps of steam.

Any reasonable person will tell you that the Classical Chinese Garden is the third nicest garden in Portland, after the Rose and Japanese of course. I'm not reasonable, and it's number one under my criteria: accessibility (right downtown—twenty minutes on the 19), price of admission (free since my mom bought me a student membership), and beverage selection (the best goddamn tea in the world, tea so weak you'd think it's just hot water only by some homeopathic hocus-pocus it still has the essence of tea even after all the leaves are gone, tea that makes you understand why people give a shit about

I wonder whether  
a coroner has ever written  
‘psychosomatic asphyxiation’  
as cause of death. Incidentally  
I sleep with the window open now.

taxes, tea that you drink with your lungs like pot, tea that you drink with your bones and your soul). The waiter comes and asks in monosyllables for my order. I tell him, Monkey King, ceremonial style, and a fortune cookie.

I start drawing a diagram on a napkin, one of those kindergarten tests, matching the five elements of classical Chinese gardens—Rocks, Water, Flowers, Architecture, and Poetry—with the five senses. The result is unconvincing. As I listen to the rain against the lake and the waterfall outside, I pair water with hearing, and then, considering the strength of the jutting boulders in the middle of the water, remembering the pressure of the pebbles under my feet, rocks and touch almost makes sense too. Next I connect architecture and sight, because... you look at buildings? You look at other



things, too. At least I do. I match poetry and taste not so much for aesthetic concerns but by process of elimination, which I suppose is the same thing. I read once that poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits. I could see a case for taste or smell then. But no, not smell, because there I am certain. I draw a bold line between smell and flowers, retrace it a couple of times. I'm happy because the guide said flowers are the least important element of Chinese gardens. I know, you'd think flowers are what make gardens gardens, but there's the allure of the Orient: everything is upside-down. Or is that Australia?

The waiter brings my tea.

I feel obscene here, writing on my laptop, an insolent child treating this teahouse like it's some common Starbucks. Don't I appreciate the delicate balance between man and nature? Don't I understand that the architect has arranged the arches, walls, and ceilings so that the whole garden cannot be perceived from a single point in space, that something is always hidden, just as nature has arranged the life of the lily so that its whole existence cannot be imagined from a single point in time: in the spring, it's unfathomable that the delicate paper boats have any potential for ugliness in them, and now, looking at their shriveled husks, I can't believe they were ever beautiful.

I see the disdain in the waiter's precise, unthinking motions, in how, as he sets down the tea set, he coolly rearranges the flowers and candles to accommodate my MacBook. My antagonist is saying, with his reticent looks, "I'm not in a Mickey Mouse suit; this isn't an amusement park; I'm not amused."

But then, what isn't facsimile here? You can see the disgusting 70s apartment buildings in the sky. You can hear construction through the east wall. The woman in the red blouse at the table in the corner, if she doesn't have quite my temerity, is nevertheless sending a text from her phone. Hell, most of the tour guides are white. I'm just the most apish because I'm most invested in becoming Eastern: where the Chinese sage would meditate, cultivate, dissipate, and, after a lifetime, craft perhaps a dozen elegant lines of poetry, I hash out trashy genre pieces or exercises in absurdity. Here's a quick summary of my future *oeuvre*:

First... the gossamer diary of Alfred Prine, architect of the neural map, an interactive, digital replica of every synapse and neuron in his brain. His method is clinical: there are only so many cerebral connections, so in theory an exhaustive stream of inputs and outputs corresponds to a single structure. Brute force is inefficient, and the brain is fifty years out of date by microprocessor standards, but that's where modern pharmacology steps in. Under careful supervision and three-fourths the lethal dose of a generic stimulant he subjects himself to a billion synthetic seizures. In five minutes he experiences all possible mental configurations; his mind is dragged like a water-skier by a fighter jet through a phantasmagoria of lights and sounds (and smells); he's Kier Duella in the Star Gate scene of 2001, except the movie is being projected onto a planetarium or a spider's eye, and instead of hurdling towards Jupiter, it's as though Jupiter and all space is pulsing out of him, violating the gaps in his atoms, sluicing the black hole in his gut.

Prine's major financial backer is an advertising firm. His work brings rigor to marketing: a demographically representative catalogue of brains obsolesces focus groups forever. With a few clicks, Madison Avenue can learn more about the soda preferences of forty-year old single mothers than the mothers know themselves. And for only five minutes of brainfucking, twenty three hundred prostitutes make a quick buck. At first the participants of the Last Market Survey are overjoyed to see their tastes reflected in every billboard, cereal mascot, TV miniseries, but soon, the relapses strike. Forty-year old mothers wake up sweating from frenetic

The allure  
of the Orient:  
everything is  
upside-down.

Or is that Australia?

light show flashbacks. An 18- to 23-year-old male college student dies in his sleep of cardiac arrest. Somniphobe societies sprout up across the nation. Prine develops insomnia too. I tried sleep deprivation to get a handle on these final entries, but my prose came out muddleheaded, unscientific. This garden is an ideal environment for composition—it has nothing of Prine in it, so I can be sure that whatever I end up with is of my own genesis. Intention is important to me.

Next... a short story about a publisher who receives a manuscript that purports to be the first novel written without any characters (narrative, not typographic—that's another story). Attached is a bizarre letter defending the enterprise; the author claims that only in prose does the superstitious obsession with free will enjoy unquestioned authority—there are imagist poems, color fields, and so on. It's not that the final product is unimaginable, he says. Even the great Russian works with their fractal pantheons have some few lines devoted to the pathos of the wind, an etymological digression, a portrait of a dog. Consider ten thousand such sentences strung together. Not that it's as simple as writing a fable about dogs, for of course anthropomorphized animals are impermissible. Conversely, humans bodies *per se* are not out of the question as long as they are not shown to have consciousness; the best way to achieve this effect is to portray the human on a non-human scale: describe the way a cancerous tumor resembles a city and its network of highways sucking life from the countryside, or the way a mass of starving prisoners will spread across their camp like a coral reef, undulating at random.

The hardest character to excise is obviously the narrator. The reader must not believe that the work was composed by a conscious entity. Or must at least question its authorship, as a museum skeptic questions whether some abstract sculpture isn't just a pile of rocks stolen from the base of the Grand Canyon, whether that toilet isn't just a toilet. Like a telescope pointed into space that captures in its lens some petty slice of the universe, infinitely complex but immediately comprehensible, the work must flirt with chaos in a covertly engineered environment. With this requirement in mind, the absence

of impersonal narrative is at least understandable, if not excusable, because the requisite technology has not existed for long; it needs a mind that can think in a very limited way. So, as the author explains, he wrote a computer program, APHASIA, that analyzes the structure of sentences without any idea of their semantic content. He fed it everything, novels, plays, poetry, especially Shakespeare and Wallace Stevens. And in turn, it spit out line after line of parsable nonsense. But to prove there is art in nonsense, to prove it is not an academic exercise, he then became his machine. He studied the opaque symmetries of speech that could be laid bare only by the gobbledegook-izer, he developed an ear for chaos, and he began to write. The final product is an interpolation of the computer's work and his own. At the end of his letter, the author enjoins the publisher to see if he can discern which passages are which.

The publisher could, quite frankly, not. Although, he only read about three-quarters of the first page, which was all computer output, so you might say you might say he didn't give a fair hearing. At any rate, he rejects the novel automatically, not because it was written (at least in some sense) by a crazy person—that's generally a selling point—but because it was boring, which is the ultimate deal breaker.

A strange thing happens as the publisher walks home from work later that day. He finds that he is suddenly unable to interject his thoughts into the story. Instead of caroming from clever phrases directed at amateurs and hacks back to memories of his wife and daughter, the narrative shifts focus to the publisher's gait, the way his arms sway as he strolls down the sidewalk. Enraged by a lack of expressive control, he begins to make embarrassing psychological gestures, reaching out to the reader in any way he still can. The story has a hard time keeping up with his flailing, and even then it gets bored with this silly man. Instead we are shown the irregularities of concrete, the way light reflects off the windows of a glass building, pixelating the sky, the slender steel of a lamppost. Our hero has disappeared.

Finally... a fake encyclopedia of typeface descriptions, inspired by my favorite page of any book, at the extreme end, past the final action,



past the epilogue, past the index, the short, unassuming paragraph entitled “A NOTE ABOUT THE TYPEFACE.” The note follows a simple formula: a description of the incredible clarity of the font, a font so readable it all but reads the sentences aloud to you, and then a provenance of the font, tracing its seedy history back to some Italian monk in the 15th century. It’s always Italian monks. If only someone had told the Pope how many future index candidates would be printed with the aid of their little wooden blocks, they would have been excommunicated for sure.

I like these pages because they give me hope that I have a marketable skill. I can write paragraphs that nobody will read. Sam Hopkins, typeface advertiser, Sam Hopkins, Chinese tea critic; it looks good on a business card; it’s a conversation starter. But I like these pages also because they contain the whimsical notion that a novel is made up of strokes of ink on paper, pieces of paper bound by glue, words arranged in the right order. Of course it’s a sad notion too. We have no technology better than ink and paper and glue; we’re as bad off as those poor monks in the Middle Ages; we lack a language of ideas.

Anyway, the imaginary fonts are about what you’d expect. Some examples: Mosaic, a typeface based on the original inscription of the Ten Commandments. Gauche, a font designed specifically for left-handed readers. RX, which emulates doctors’ handwriting. Comic Sans, a real font but one that deserves to be imaginary. Ideally I would use the font in the description, but that makes some of my favorites illegible, like Crypto, in which every letter has the shape of a different letter, or Corsair, in which every letter has the shape of an ‘R’.

Unsurprisingly, I’m having the most success with this last work, an amusing but harmless homage to Borges and Roberto Bolaño. It’s easy to say something funny when you fear you’d otherwise say something trite, or worse, something meaningful.

Clearly I don’t come to the garden for the great artistic sensibilities it engenders. Maybe I should explain what exactly I am looking for.

What I most miss are the qualia—the ineffable sensations. In short, the awful, fetid smells that make you feel like you’re gonna die, which is to say, alive. Lord, let my nose swim through a dumpster, let me know the sulfur of hell and rotten eggs, or, at least, let me whiff one used diaper! I imagine my fellow disabled agree: the blind desire nothing more than to see those posters of mangled fetuses that assholes hold up at abortion clinics, the deaf just want to hear John Cale’s screeching violin at the climax of the Velvet Underground’s Heroin.

Sometimes I think I’d rather have no senses at all than be deprived only one. As a deaf-mute-anosmic, I could crawl up into my mind and construct a logical world, that is, a beautiful one. Beauty, despite what some German might say, ensures completeness and consistency. Now, I feel hopelessly incomplete, impossibly inconsistent: tempted by phenomena that are conceivable only in direct perception, I wonder what it would be to be whole. Would it be like being a bat? Normal people aren’t envious of bats, or electric eels, or anything different at all; why am I envious of them?

Lest you fear this essay is going to end with a too hasty eye-gouging, let me say that in the Portland Classical Chinese Garden, I don’t worry. Or worry much less. The beauty here is dense and infinitely divisible. If I pretend that everything stops beyond these four walls, that this cloister isn’t really a cloister at all but the whole city, I can smell what must be the only smell.

I raise my right arm. My hand surrounds the tea cup. The porcelain is sweet and warm on my fingertips. Slowly, I bring the cup up to my lips. The steam plays lazily against my palate. My wrist turns. My Adam’s apple moves up and back into my throat, then returns.

Outside, a pale curtain of rain strikes the lake. Lily corpses dance wildly in the storm. Slick pebble paths cast off the collected grime of tourism. The garden, knowing this sky to be otherworldly and therefore fictional, retreats into those parts of itself that are always hidden. In the south pagoda, the Suzhuo pine crossbeam seethes; its dark, resonant aroma drugs the room. A chance beam of light finds the rosewood inlay and illuminates the character for ‘cherry blossom.’ The universe is in abeyance. ❀

## PAUSE

and let us make new things sacred,  
turmeric stains and lisps, shy  
and silent younger sisters, the stillness  
slipped between an infant’s sobs.  
Let us empty out the holy,  
sing hymns instead to the wrinkles  
forming parentheses around our mothers’ mouths  
and the way we kiss the air beside  
each other’s cheeks in greeting  
as if touch would profane our lips.

KAYLA SHERIDAN







## A BLANKET ON THE GRASS

Our blanket swelled  
before it broke over the grass.  
We quieted to the earth.

Children poured over clover,  
heart-first;  
we promised ourselves to their anthem,

a flood song  
out of the sugar maples,  
the purple drunk plums,

throwing small light,  
birthmarks.

Our navels nested  
in cool compress of cotton & clay,  
& nearly  
took root,

but my hands beheld  
a sleeping book & sometimes  
what seemed all of you,  
as we closed all eyes & read  
the high leaves,  
green  
for summer.

SAM GRENROCK



## A PICNIC

••  
STEPHANIE BASTEK

Her lips are the color of unripe strawberries and she is riding the metro by herself. The three-inch heels on her feet do not help her balance against the velocity of the train. A wicker basket is slung over one arm, a corked bottle of wine poking over the rim, and she holds a notebook in one hand, into which she is writing with the fury of incredible importance. There is a trail of dark liquid inching down her leg. She wipes it away impatiently with her thumb and keeps scribbling.

The train pulls into the station—*Karlsplatz, Ausstieg rechts*—and she performs a complicated balancing act with her arms, pushing the button to open the door with her elbow. The platform is swarming with a mass of people—families with small children, color-coordinated couples sharing lovesick smiles, clusters of laughing friends—into which she carves an uncomfortable space with her overlarge basket and undersized body. The notebook has disappeared, replaced with a battered map of the city as it stood fifteen years ago, and she stands silently dripping from her basket in front of a lurid advertisement for Campari.

In the course of a few minutes, the people streaming past decide that she has been stood up, poor girl, while the homeless man leaning against the vending machine is pretty confident that she is dealing drugs. He is about to go over and ask her how much for a gram when she abruptly folds up her map and disappears up the escalator.

Outside in the park it is lighter than she expected for nine in the evening, light enough for her to see that she has arrived too late for a seat in one of the chairs lined up in front of the movie screen. She looks around for a moment, one foot slowly scuffing the pavement, left, then right, and decides to sit down

on the sidewalk between the projector and the last row of chairs. She clicks her way over to a clear space in the crowd—whoever is meeting her will have an even harder time wading through all those bodies—and puts down the picnic basket a little left of center. She removes the blanket from the top and lays it out carefully on the cement, making sure to flatten all the creases, and sits down, spreading her skirt in a Platonic oval. Her line of vision is somewhat blocked by the chairs in front of her.

Dishes begin to emerge from her basket into the slowly darkening night: salmon fillet, perfect quadrants of tomatoes, leafy greens doused in balsamic, a decadent slice of dark cake. When she pulls out a single set of cutlery and a corkscrew, the boys to her right decide that she'll die old and alone and stretch their legs in the space they had politely left for her hypothetical guest. Unperturbed, she turns her attention and the corkscrew to the bottle of wine, the loud pop of the cork an unspoken toast.

She takes a big swig of rose-colored liquid and then burps nonchalantly. The title screen floods the darkling clearing with light.

She stays in the same folded position for the entire movie, eating her salad, sipping her wine, and gasping at all the appropriate moments in the film. Once the credits begin their black-and-white descent across the screen, she claps with everyone else and repeats her ritual in reverse: replaces the wine bottle and dishes in the basket, recreates the blanket, reaches her arms above her head to stretch her back.

Within minutes, she has dissolved into the crowd, her wicker basket slung once again across her arm, lips a little redder on account of the tomatoes, her only trace a sticky pool of vinegar on the cement. ❧



## ODE TO A BODY

A body is  
crescent moons on fingernails,  
constellations of freckles,  
dark planetary movements spinning out of orbit  
But a body is also carbon from the depths of the universe  
and your body is as ancient as the vapor of your breath  
hanging  
in the air  
just before dawn.

Or perhaps  
a body is earth,  
your eyes fertile soil  
unless  
a body is the sea,  
the salt in your sweat and the wind in your hair  
and your pink and white seashell ears  
or maybe  
your body is the sky  
the heavenly arc of your spine  
unreachable, intangible, unknown.

When I peel the sinews from your bones,  
when I taste the flesh, the marrow, the blood,  
will I know you as you are,  
and will I think the taste is good?  
Your body is all I have to know you  
an imprint left in soft wet clay,  
a record of your spirit's groans,  
and even this too soon will pass away.

CRYSTEL HADLEY



## ON LEARNING TO BE A WOMAN, #2

Too much of substance, she will  
never be silhouette.  
She is flesh,  
heavy, palmfulls  
of millet grain over-  
flowing, she  
has fingernails,  
breathes garlic,  
gets dirty. She hefts  
oscillating hips, this  
moon-woman,  
looks over her shoulder with a neck  
so graceful you could sing it.

KAYLA SHERIDAN





KIMYA RAMEZANI  
FRENCH KISS •  
MIXED MEDIA

## I FELL IN LOVE WITH YOU TODAY

Me enamoré de ti ayer

I was walking,  
enjoying the city sitting in the sun,  
and I thought of you so fondly.  
Yo andaba caminando  
por la ciudad en la llovizna y  
hubo un  
ter  
r  
emo  
to  
Pero seguí durmiendo  
seguí pensando en ti

You miss me and I had avoided thinking of you  
Pensé en ti, y aún me extrañas.

I miss your bug ass eyes  
Esos ojos lindotes que me buscan  
porque ya me fui.

You didn't shower this morning  
pero hueles a helado.

imissu  
ya me olvido de ti

[I fell in love with you yesterday]

[I was walking  
around the city in the drizzling rain and  
there was an  
ear  
th  
quak  
e  
But I kept sleeping  
I kept thinking of you]

[I thought of you, but you still miss me.]

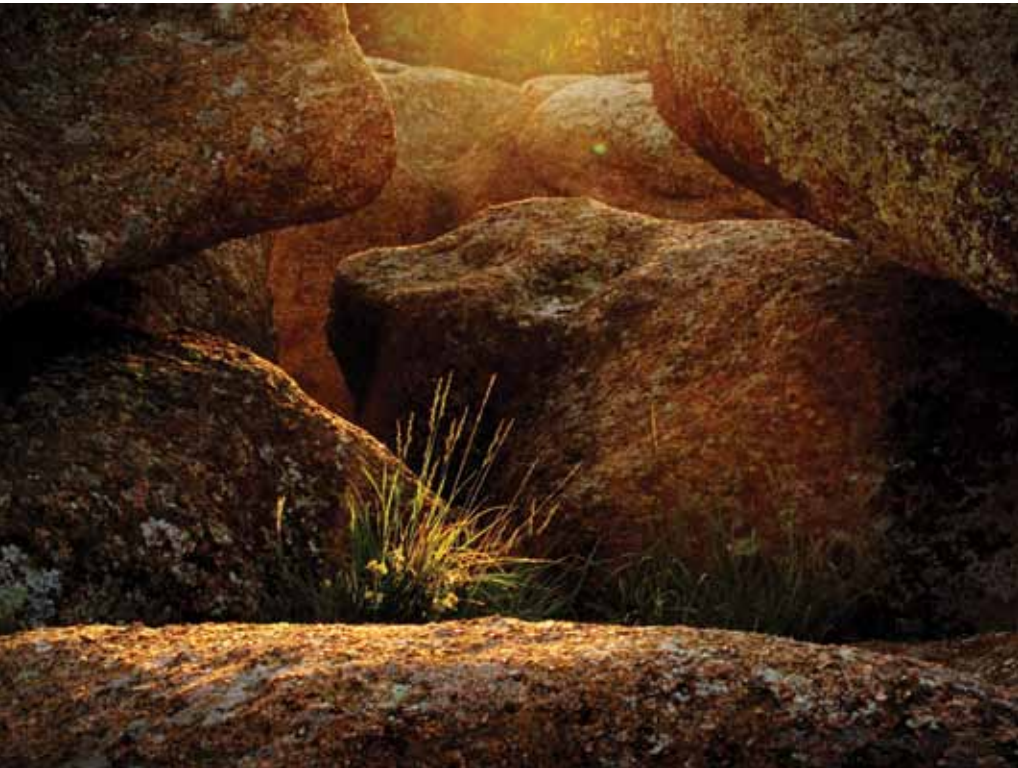
[Those big beautiful eyes that search for me  
because I already left.]

[but you smell like ice cream.]

[already I am forgetting you]

JAMES BIANCONI





## FARM OF UNEATEN ANIMALS

I didn't eat Casey on the Colorado:  
under the cold of the canyon walls  
my uncle grilled charcoal steaks  
for the boatmen and for me,  
two stacked Boca burgers.

Now she grazes on bluegrass  
and beds in a red byre.

To the north, turkey range between autumn hedgerows  
crayoned in cranberry and yam.

Three black pigs bury themselves in a trough,  
gobble slop till their bellies scrape the ground.

Creed Creek glitters like the dying summer  
that littered its banks with salmon-scale.

The rooster  
sleeps past sunrise.

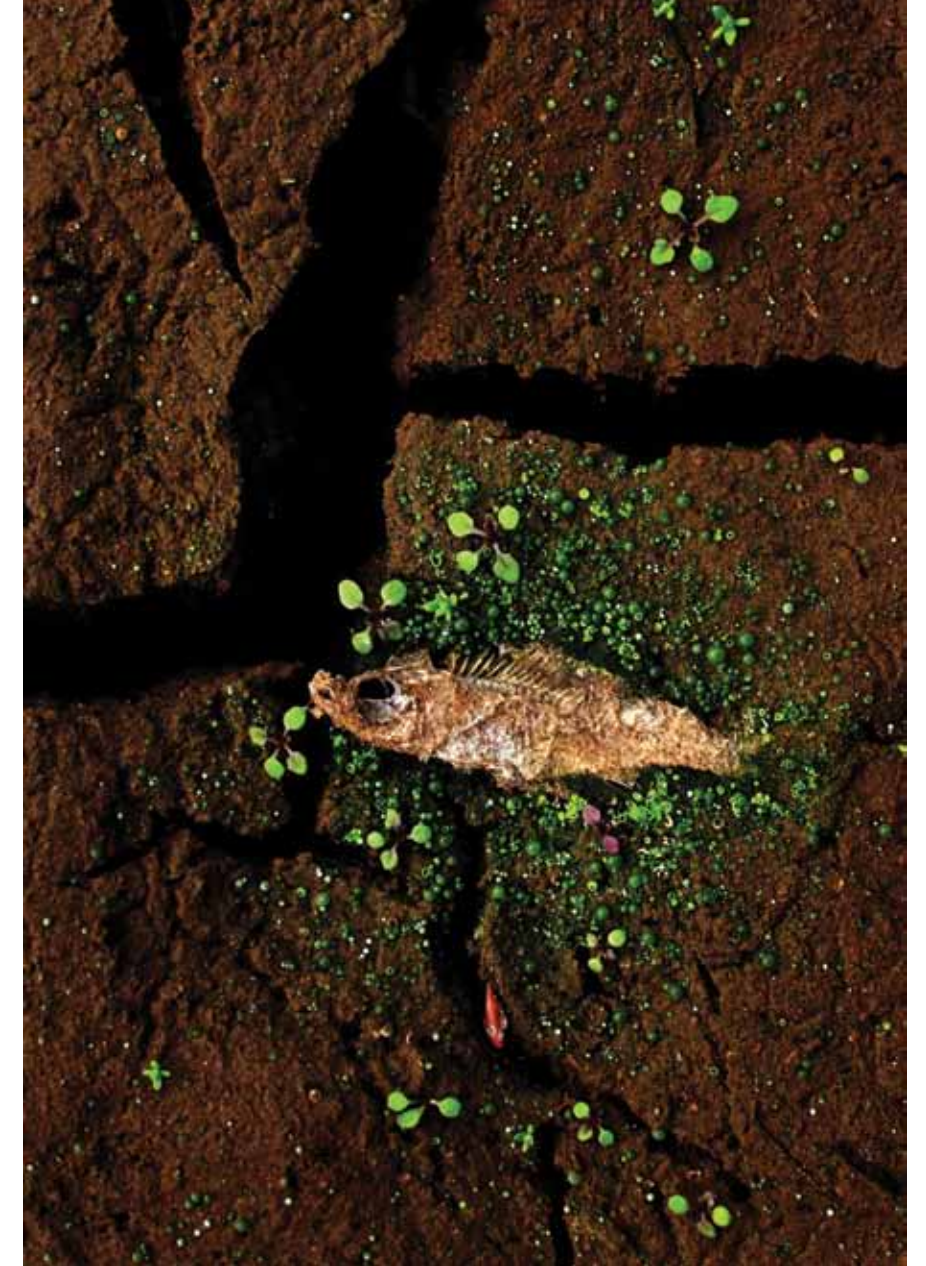
Over breakfast (a cheddar omelet) I consider  
who has it worse: my hens, cooped in wait,  
their nests straw coffins,  
or Casey, suckling her newborn  
on milkless teats.

SAM HOPKINS

FACING PAGE:  
*LIGHTLIFE*

THIS PAGE:  
*LIFE FROM DEATH*

RACHEL COLE-JANSEN •  
COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS





## LIKE AND KIND

I dreamt of a squirrel-lined dressing gown  
draping the slim shoulders of a girl I never spoke to—  
she held out a brown paper bag of acorns, said, “Stuff your cheeks.”

Often I awake to thoughts of love and its consequence:  
origins are empty bottoms for the presentist.  
He is not me anymore, apparently.

I awoke to a parade of skeletons falling out  
of *everywhichplace*—closet, cupboard, dishwasher,  
laundry machine, kitchen sink, and both barrels of garbage.

The art of escape succeeds so long  
as skeleton:boy ratio does not exceed five:one.  
Counsel the body in sight of the supposed-dead army:

Face the rattle of bones head-on,  
try not to leak the small child’s southern tears.  
Deny what you can, concede all else, cop out sincerest apologies.

But really, how does one cut a wake of such negligence  
by no more than the mean miserable age of 22?  
Sit down for a moment, consult the devil of imagination and see.

Meanwhile, I will look back  
to the playground romances of my early years,  
when the simplest state of attraction meant something special,

and innocence sprinkled our cheeks like wet dew.  
The whispered chorus of *likes* amidst clapping games,  
nervous hands dancing together, for a moment, then apart again.

BRENT LIGHTFOOT

RO|CЯ

LANLAN JIN • V TOO • DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH







PAULINA SABA • TARO • 35MM COLOR PHOTOGRAPH





## UNNAMED LANDS

Thirteen roses on the windowsill:  
the rattle and clatter  
of my great-grandmother's oxygen

machine; the enormous silver tank  
next to the only open window  
in the room. Unaccountably, her lungs—

adjacent cloudlets in a vault—are singing.  
The song is in Russian, of which I have none,  
but the words sound drunk and I am six—

seven fewer than the roses.  
Thirteen roses on the windowsill.  
Last night I dreamt I saw St. Petersburg,

snow everywhere, but the streetlamps swarming  
with yellow butterflies...  
in the shadow of the clock tower.

Therefore,  
time bounds evenly forth over this snowy town,  
over the wheezing in the corner,  
over the image of the thirteen roses,  
the windowsill—absent the year, absent all.

MAX MALLER



THIS PAGE: *WASHING DISHES* • FACING PAGE: *IN A DAOIST TEMPLE*  
MAX MALLER • COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS





MAX MALLER • ANTONIO • COLOR PHOTOGRAPH

## DIALOGUE ONE OF THE GARDENER

A gardener toils away and away;  
The truth is that he spends his days  
helping roots take and shoots grow  
and helping roots snake down below  
the ground so that he may,  
upon a flower that's bloomed a top,  
rest his eyes and sense the crop resting,  
content, like a fat hen in nesting  
with its plump feathered bottom cushioned atop  
the white-and-yellow truth, which it grew,  
and like that which it, too, grew by, once,  
as everything does—and a gardener moans,  
“And this, too, I've known,”  
but to a gardener any fool would reply,  
“Yes, however, your growth stops beneath the sky.”  
“Green skies! Green skies!” cries a gardener,  
and a fool says, “No, the skies are blue.”  
But a gardener knows they're neither;  
That you will decide for you.

SAMMIE MASSEY





# IMPERATIVE

Unfold  
like a crane, lifting,  
the way a window unfolds a chandelier.  
Unfold  
like woman legs,  
two hemispheres  
of a quivering fish.  
  
Unfold  
like a sail,  
a glass  
breaking,  
  
the way a bell unfolds the ear.

SAM GRENROCK

LEFT:  
RACHEL COLE-JANSEN • *A WIDENING GYRE*  
COLOR PHOTOGRAPH

RIGHT:  
LANLAN JIN • *FOURTH OF JULY WANDERERS*  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH







ALMA SIULAGI • 40, 41  
COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS



## GENESIS

*And on the seventh day, God saw that it was good,  
but not yet perfect, and so, although He was tired,  
He spent the morning polishing the details.*  
— *Genesis 2:2, a new translation*

Let there be indigo and wool. Let there be  
Jerry Garcia. Let there be aprons embroidered  
with sunflowers. May the moon wax. May mushrooms  
creep out of tumbled wood to stand for their days  
like a lowlit treasury of nipples. Let there be popcorn  
and porter and crème brûlée. May the gray sky  
descend sometimes to bask in the glaze  
of rainwater on certain flat rooftops.

May the brown slugs of the dull winter garden  
twist into spiral flowers as they procreate.  
Let there be private eyes and hot air balloons.  
Let there be butterflies disguised as women  
and vice versa. Today I saw a fat peaceful nun  
riding a bicycle. May she pedal all the way to bliss.

Let there be black beetles as big as your thumb  
and may all the children grin and stare. Let there be  
aluminum water bottles, gingko trees, cardamom,  
bricks. May he who will spend his whole bright day  
in a cubicle with a potent pen—may he just for a moment  
*stop*: stop feeding cattle to cattle and chicken to tuna, stop  
wiring bombs and dismantling mountains, stop  
making colorful crap out of plastic, stop  
and stare just for a moment at my perfect details,  
like the new tomato blushing in the window box,  
like the pelt and brittle tongue of the honeybee,  
like the slim shadowed shoulders of your wife  
who sits clipping her toenails on the stool  
in the hallway, your wife who worries too much  
but whose eyes are still as wide open and hazel  
as they were when you wrote on her hand for the first time  
that you loved her. I know you remember: let there be  
that weathergrey dock, the red autumn sun, her copper  
bracelets glinting, your brown arms opening,  
her freckles like a love song, the turtles, the dusk.

CHRISTINA DeVILLIER





# ICONS IN TEN FRAMES AS THEY TOPPLE

Over time the rituals change in how I recollect truth,  
as if it were some bauble lost over the side of a tugboat  
with a cargo of woodchips  
destined to be churned to thick, white sheets  
or toilet paper—fine for cleaning up shit.

Over time the practice changes,  
the features of the sacred melt and fuse  
as they oscillate between the black and white  
of hubris and despair. I wonder  
which world I would prefer:  
one that I discover, or one that I create?

- 1. If I built a world it would be so wholly  
unlike our own that it must be born only  
from the rejection of it.
- 2. If I could wrest all the secrets of nature  
from her jealous bosom  
I would find myself a villain  
and little more.

And so.

I once looked for truth  
under the velvet leaves of ferns  
and inside the skins and entrails of animals  
recapitulated in test tubes  
like some faithful augury, and I  
did not find it.

I once looked for truth  
in the eyes of the face in the mirror  
that stared back, grimacing and ashen,  
grated by the interrogation. And I  
did not find it.

The truth I sought was not like the remnants  
of saints tucked soundly  
into cradles behind bulletproof glass.  
It was the space of the church  
that enclosed it, the cicada hum of prayers  
and the waft of incense:

This defines how my eyes must meet yours,  
just how our hands touch  
and the degree of the angle at which I nod my head  
as we pass.

Perhaps our arrogance built this space,  
but we pretend to humility as we pray  
to a God who made our bones, the strips of  
flesh on our backs.  
Like the velveteen rabbit we tell stories  
until they become real.

As if we need a reason, simply to pray  
by and for, of and with, over and beyond ourselves,  
bobbing in a sea of prepositions  
that swirl the sacred around us  
like wine in a glass, fragrantly;  
our tongues loose.

CAMILLE CHARLIER

FACING PAGE: ALMA SIULAGI • NORTH DAKOTA • COLOR PHOTOGRAPH



## POSSESSION

••

STEPHANIE BASTEK

She was a constellation of ashes.

She was a constellation of ashes, and she was billowing out over the sea, soul unfurling in the Bay wind. She was united in entropic harmony with the world, her soul separating and scattering its sublime essence into every living being and nascent biological pulse in every far-flung corner of the earth. She was meeting her maker in her original form, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

No, no, no, she wasn't. She was Great Aunt Gertrude and this was still the stupidest family tradition ever, no matter how many years in a row they did it. Annabel sighed and took another fistful of dust from the freezer bag labeled *Gertrude Elizabeth Beaumont, 4 June 1945 – 8 January 2010*. Thirteen years of re-enacting the idiotic family ritual—she had celluloid evidence of baby Annabel, clutched under her mother's arm along with an urn of Uncle Albert—and Annabel still couldn't see the contents of a freezer bag as anything more than dust.

Her friends from school didn't do things like this for Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims, even though she knew they hadn't *really* celebrated Thanksgiving, hadn't done things like this. Even that strange Korean family that lived on the corner, that her friend Devon swore was responsible for the way stray dogs just seemed to disappear on their street, didn't do things like this. Or at least if they did, they didn't do it on the Monterey shoreline, in full view of the tourists passing silent judgment with their oversized cameras.

"Isn't this weather great?" Annabel's father yelled from a large rock to her left, fighting both the wind and the collar of his massive blue parka, which was pulled up far enough to cover half of his mouth.

"Yeah, Dad, it's great," Annabel yelled back as a sudden gust of wind

brought her into intimate proximity with the reindeer pattern of her scarf. She hurriedly released her fistful of ashes, lest she try to catch her balance and accidentally get aunt on her pants, and sat down on her rock. She surveyed her family, arrayed on the large, mossy crags around her. Austins, Beaumonts, Lubbocks, Tylers, all in attendance, all enthusiastically pitching sand-colored, family-flavored detritus at the ocean like they were trying out for Little League.

Sara, standing on the biggest rock, finished off a bag of Great Uncle Tom to great applause by doing a pli   and tossing the dregs from his urn over her head. A small woman with a very large camera standing a few feet back on the shore mutely snapped a picture. Annabel scowled. Her cousin was always trying to outdo her, even in activities they both hated, and now she was going to be immortalized in a total stranger's vacation album.

Why couldn't she have been born into a family that went yachting for reunions? Annabel stared with envy at the ship-shaped blobs drifting in the distance and imagined sunny days spent on deck sipping strawberry daiquiris, which her father would serve her with just a splash of rum, hon, because it's the holidays. Sara would shut herself in her room and look at *Seventeen* all day with their other cousins, Annabel's mother would sit with her in the cabin and braid *her* hair for once, and they would all eat enormous, flaky biscuits for breakfast that their personal chef would make fresh every morning with cups of steaming hot chocolate. Heck, why stop there? They could skip the hot chocolate and the entire family could all just agree to reunite during a different month, like the month of Never.

Sara had climbed down from her rock and was walking over to Annabel's, smirking. Annabel was not sure what part of scattering bits of dead people



TATIANA OUDINE • ALEX, OREGON COAST, POSTCARD • BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH



was worth smirking about. “I see you’re neglecting Aunt Gertrude,” her cousin said, indicating the half-full bag at Annabel’s feet.

Annabel glared at her. Even her sleek brown hair, impossibly unruffled by the wind, looked smug. “I see you’re enjoying touching dead people,” she said. “Necrophiliac.”

Sara laughed. “What a nerd you are,” she said, shaking her head. “Still reading the dictionary at thirteen, huh?” Annabel pressed her lips together. At least she *could* read, and did—more than fashion magazines, at any rate. But she didn’t say that. She just stood up stiffly and picked up the freezer bag, with its mortal expiration date, and hoped that Sara would go away if she turned her back on her. She looked out over the ocean. Couldn’t there at least be some crashing waves, some pathetic fallacy to reflect her anger?

Annabel yanked open the bag and wrapped her fingers around as much of the ash as possible. She could hear Sara laughing in the distance and flung the ashes so hard she thought her shoulder was going to come out of its socket. She saw with satisfaction that the little puff of white made it a good twelve feet before dissipating. She grabbed another fistful of ash.

She watched, as from a distance, as the grey mass left her hand, flew out a little ways, and then made an abrupt u-turn.

Then a shot of wind flung it into her face.

Over several years of attending these reunions, Annabel had developed a system for preparing for their annual event. She clipped her nails boy short so that no second cousins got stuck under her fingernails, brought overly large sunglasses to guard against errant uncles scratching her cornea, and began wearing windbreakers instead of pea coats (ashes just slid off the polyester) after an unfortunate incident that ended in her sporting the grey smear of her grandfather on her coat for an entire year. She even wore hiking boots so she wouldn’t tumble to her death from one of the rocks and drown in the ocean, an inconsiderate way to die coming from a family that favored cremation.

With such a wealth of experience, one would think she would have learned to close her mouth.

“Annabel, sweetheart,” someone said from far away. “Can you hear me?” Annabel realized that she wasn’t standing anymore; she was on her back on the damp surface of the beach. She opened her mouth to attempt speech. It was times like these, Annabel reflected, as little grey bits of Aunt Gertrude scratched down her throat, that she hated being an Austin.

“Yes,” she managed to scrape out of her vocal cords, and was immediately swept up by the wave of her extended family—slung over her Uncle James’ broad carpenter’s back, no doubt—and carried to the car, which drove her to the hospital that her mother insisted they visit, because what if something got stuck down there and Annabel could never be the same?

Had she been able to speak, Annabel would have asked how something as insubstantial as human ashes could get stuck in a throat, when she realized that *she had just ingested human ashes*. Did that make her a cannibal, or a necrophiliac, or something so strange that it hadn’t yet been ascribed a psychologically appropriate name?

Annabel would have gagged if her throat hadn’t been so dry on account of Aunt Gertrude’s presence.

Then she had a thought—if her family was the kind to gather every year to scatter the ashes of the dead over the Pacific Ocean, surely they were the kind that believed in spirits? They had such respect for the dead that wouldn’t they believe an emissary from the Other World—speaking through Annabel, of course—who demanded an end to the Austin family tradition?

Annabel smiled and tried her best to look possessed all the way into the emergency room: eyes wide and blank, limbs loose, mouth slack and wide to show off the grit stuck between her teeth.

Even though the nurse had given Annabel a glass of water and reassured her that she was fine, there were no medical ramifications from ingesting a handful of ash, no matter what it had been before it became ash, yes, even if it was a relative, Annabel’s mother still insisted that she remain on bed rest all day to recuperate. Annabel did not mind, because this meant that her mother brought her tea and cookies on a silver platter.

She was lying back on an expanse of white fluffy pillows in the insultingly large Beaumont home (hence the real silver tray, which was currently perched on the bedside table, no doubt also a priceless antique). Her mother sat on the coverlet next to her, braiding and unbraiding her hair while Annabel tried nobly not to purr.

“Mother,” Annabel said experimentally after some minutes of silent, feline consideration. “Aunt Gertrude wants me to tell you that it’s okay you broke her first real piggy bank and never told her it was you.” This was not technically a lie, since her aunt *had* told her this story when she was alive.

Annabel’s mother stopped her hands. “*What?*”

“She says she forgives you.”

Her mother took Annabel’s chin in her hand and examined her face. “Sweetheart, are you feeling okay?”

“She didn’t like the color, anyway. The blue one was much better.”

“Oh my god,” Annabel’s mother said, and stood up. “*Gertrude?*”

Annabel smiled. “Hello, dearie.”

The news traveled quickly, aided by Annabel’s mother’s rapid descent down the stairs and the way her voice rose several decibels when confronted with reanimated relatives. One by one, the members of the extended Austin family filed in to see Great Aunt Gertrude, to confess or to be absolved or to say goodbye. Annabel felt like a Greek oracle, or a magic eight ball.

“Gertrude,” her Aunt Linda said, staring soulfully into her eyes. “Thank you for this *gift*.” The feathers and crystals hanging from her bracelets bumped Annabel’s temples when Aunt Linda waved her hands over her head. She leaned in to whisper in her ear, “But don’t you think I would have made a better vessel?”

“I’m so s-s-s-orry,” Elise, her second cousin twice removed on the Lubbock side, bawled. “*I* killed Porgie. He chased a maple leaf right behind the car a-a-and I didn’t see him. I-I-I never meant to hit him, and I’ve never been able to f-f-f-orgive myself for blaming it on the neighbor’s son.”

“What!” Annabel said, shocked out of her saintly nodding. She coughed,

and added quickly, “Oh, dearie.”

Elise nodded, eyes a mess of tearfully smeared mascara. “I moved the body into their driveway,” she said, and burst into a second round of tears.

Sara was last to come in, and stood staring at her from the foot of the bed. “I guess you are good for something, after all,” she said, awestruck.

“Thanks,” Annabel said, and narrowly prevented herself from adding, *Aunt Gertrude says you should jump off a cliff*. “Aunt Gertrude says she likes that you don’t worry so much about being skinny,” she said instead. “Men like women with some fat on their bones.” She gazed at Sara beatifically. Sara looked like she was going to cry.

The family left Annabel and Aunt Gertrude in blissful peace while they finished preparing Thanksgiving dinner. Annabel was trying to take a nap, exhausted from being a medium for so many bizarre confessions, when her little cousin Madison wandered in clutching a pair of dolls. “Belly, will you play house with me?” Madison asked. Annabel made a face. She hated when her cousin called her anything less than the three syllables of her full name.

“Aunt Gertrude hates it when you call me that,” she said, and glowered down from her throne of pillows. Madison blinked unresponsively at her. “And she says you’re going to have to eat asparagus for dinner unless you leave me alone.” The little girl fled.

Annabel reflected that if she were indeed possessing the tortured spirit of Aunt Gertrude, it might be more persuasive if she didn’t introduce her possessed opinions in the third person. She resolved to try a different tack that evening.

“Would you mind passing the salt?” she said at dinner. “And we’d like the mashed potatoes, too, please.” Annabel was sitting at the head of the table, as her family had unanimously chosen to let Aunt Gertrude have the place of honor. Dozens of plates were arrayed before her, all delicious and colorful and created without her having had to lift a single finger all day. She breathed in the sweet smell of success, and dug into her overflowing plate.

At the other end of the table, Madison was telling them about Bruce, the



slug she had adopted from the garden this morning.

“We hate slugs,” Annabel said.

Sara looked confused. Annabel saw with satisfaction that Sara had taken the thinnest slice of bread possible. “Why? They’re exactly the same as snails.”

“At least snails have the decency to cover themselves,” Annabel replied with a sniff. “We place a high premium on appropriate dress.”

“Honey,” Annabel’s father said from the other side of the table, “it’s a little creepy when you use the first-person plural.”

“I don’t feel that you’re respecting Aunt Gertrude’s participation in this conversation, Dad,” Annabel said. “Her feelings count, too.” She took another bite of mashed potatoes and decided it was time to break the news.

“In light of what happened to me today, we don’t think that we should continue the Austin family tradition,” Annabel said.

Several moments passed in silence, as the table digested the pronouns in that sentence. Finally Aunt Linda spoke.

“Gertrude,” she said slowly. “what do you mean when you say, ‘Austin family tradition?’”

“Stop scattering ashes,” Annabel said. “It’s disgusting.”

She steeled herself for the uproar she expected to follow this announcement, but the table was deafeningly quiet. It didn’t look like Aunt Linda was even breathing. At length, Annabel’s father spoke.

“Annabel,” he said slowly, “could I talk to you in the kitchen for a second?” Annabel folded her napkin and stood up, but not before casting a magisterial, Aunt Gertrudian gaze over the rest of the table. She followed her father through the magnificent arched doorway to the kitchen, a trepidation mingling with half-digested turkey in her stomach. He shut the door behind them and gave her a shrewd look. Annabel swallowed. The twinge became a tremor.

“I’m not going to deny that there are a fair number of fools in this family,” her father began, “which has probably become clear to you over the course of the day—” Annabel nodded slowly, unsure where her father was going with this “—but this business about spirits and possession is getting ridiculous.”

There was dead silence all the way up to the cast iron pans dangling from

the ceiling. Annabel thought the turkey in her stomach was going to make a break for it, and then squashed her cowardice and raised her arms indignantly.

“Ridiculous!” she said finally. “Do you deny Aunt Gertrude’s very presence in this very kitchen? Do you not sense her quavering soul before you?”

Annabel’s insides were what was really quavering, as her father gave her a long, hard look.

“You’re going to have to tell them you made it all up.”

Annabel’s mouth widened in horror as she imagined all of the untold terrors that would follow such a confession. “I can’t tell them that! Can you picture what Aunt Linda would do to me if I told her I was faking? She’d probably hang my room with evil jinxes and cast voodoo on me. I’d be bedridden for weeks!” She shuddered, envisioning miniature ragtag dolls dancing macabrely around her bed. “It was hard enough on her that she wasn’t the one being possessed.”

Her father winced, considering the family he had married into. “You have an unfortunately good point there.” He sighed. “We’ll just have to tell them that Aunt Gertrude left in the middle of our conversation.”

Annabel raised her eyebrows. “Dad, do you seriously think they’re going to buy that? You saw them today.”

“Honey, what do you want me to do? The Austins are a stubborn bunch. These are people that didn’t change a thing even after Uncle Howard thought Great Aunt Tabitha was a jar of cocoa—oh my god that’s it.”

He disappeared suddenly into the pantry. Alarmed, Annabel followed him into the small room, filled from floor to ceiling with racks of meticulously arranged jars and cans that her father was indiscriminately pushing aside.

“Dad” she said warily, “what are you doing?”

Her father hadn’t heard, or else was too buried in dried beans to respond. “Aha!” he said finally, emerging victoriously from between the columns labeled chili and curry. “I have it.”

What he had was a dusty box of Valrhona unhelpfully labeled Poudre de cacao.

“Dad, I don’t know how to read Spanish.”

Her father waved his hand dismissively. “It’s French, sweetie, but that doesn’t matter. Take this and find me a recipe for Devil’s Food Cake. I’ll be right back.” He disappeared again, leaving Annabel swaying in the doorway of the pantry with a black box in her hands that she couldn’t read, instructions that made no sense to her, and no idea where to fit her father into the taxonomy of crazy that her family had suddenly become.

She sighed, marched downtroddenly into the kitchen, and began pulling down cookbooks.

Forty-five minutes later, Annabel walked back into the dining room laden with a platter of artfully arranged dark chocolate cupcakes. She still had batter on both elbows and the frosting was threatening to slide off the still-warm cupcakes, but what was she supposed to do when her father was so hell-bent on his plan that he neglected basic technique? She would no doubt have to answer for his impatience. The injustice of it all—her family would probably never trust her in the kitchen again.

Actually, they definitely wouldn’t, after this.

“Annabel has decided to treat us to a delicious batch of Aunt Gertrude’s famous Devil’s Food cake,” her father announced from the head of the table. Annabel smiled with gritted teeth while her family uttered a chorus of oohs and aahs.

Her father passed the platter around the table and Annabel returned to her seat, anxiously pushing her fork against the table cloth while her family unwrapped their cupcakes and got crumbs all over their plates. Their amazement didn’t stop them from devouring them in the span of minutes: even Sara was guiltily wiping chocolate frosting from her mouth.

“Gertrude always was the best cook in the family,” Aunt Linda said proudly, leaning back contentedly into her chair. “I daresay this is the best cake I’ve had since the one I made for last year’s Thanksgiving!” Despite her nervousness, Annabel managed to roll her eyes. That pistachio-raspberry-pumpkin cake had looked liked one of Madison’s kaleidoscope Play-Doh creations, and had been about as edible. Probably less: Play-Doh was at least non-toxic.

Annabel’s father caught her eye from the head of the table and nodded. That was her cue: she excused herself to the bathroom. She returned, five minutes later, with an empty plastic bag on which a thin grey film of dust was still visible. She nervously inched her way over to her father’s chair and gripped his arm for support.

“Um,” she said, clearing her throat. “I have an announcement to make.” Annabel shrank under the eyes of everyone in the room. “What you just ate wasn’t Devil’s Food Cake.” She raised the empty plastic bag in one trembling hand. “It was Uncle Ted cake.”

The table descended into uproar. Annabel covered her ears. Indignant yells and nauseated wails seeped between her fingers in an indistinguishable clamor.

*“Do you mean to say—I can’t believe—how dare—you what—Sacrilege!—oh my god did I just eat—Ted?!”*

Next to her, Annabel’s father had stood up and was waving his hands to get the table’s agitated attention. “Now, now!” he intoned, simultaneously managing to project both loudness and calm. Annabel was relieved that she could disappear into his shadow. She sidled behind him as he slowly brought the table back from pandemonium.

“Now listen,” he said, over the last of the incensed muttering. “Notice how you are all not suddenly projecting Ted’s departed thoughts.”

The family was silent.

“You’re not possessed, are you?” Annabel watched fearfully from her father’s shadow as one by one her aunts and uncles and cousins suspiciously eyed one another for signs of bewitchment, or senility.

“You’re not,” her father said, “and I’m not, and you also couldn’t have eaten Uncle Ted, because I was personally responsible for ensuring that he ended up in Monterey Bay this morning.”

Every eye in the room suddenly shifted from looking at Annabel’s father to looking two inches to the right and three feet down to the trembling arms visible behind him.

“Annabel,” her mother said threateningly, “you have some explaining to do.” With a yelp, Annabel fled upstairs. 🐉





## BIRDSEED

•••

ERIN KLEINFELD

The first time I saw myself, I was trying to catch the bus. I was late and running to catch the seventy-five—okay so maybe I don’t exactly run anymore, and it was a powerwalk—but the bus drove past me, and this huge wave of puddle-water splashed up on the sidewalk. A puddle the size of the Pacific Ocean. And there I was, slacks soaking wet, and I looked up at the bus sadly, because my mouth always looks sad thanks to gravity and decades, but also because of the sad fate of my slacks, and there I was looking out the bus window back at me. I looked down at my puddled slacks, back up at me on the bus, wiped my glasses off, and the seventy-five took off. And so I waited for the next bus.

The second time was at the grocery store pharmacy. I have to take something for my blood pressure. I take the white pills every morning with orange juice and the newspaper. I like the newspaper because it never asks me if I slept well. I stood in line and waited for my turn while these young people picked up their acne ointments and oral contraception and antidepressants and didn’t let an old man in the front of the line, the schmucks. The truth is that I don’t mind waiting in line, it’s how I socialize—become part of the world—but I can’t let them know that. I let them think I’m grumpy. Someone was taking an awful long time with my favorite pharmacist, Barbara, who is a pretty little thing who’d be a prettier little thing if she lost weight, I’m only saying because she’s pretty and nice to me. There was some geezer holding up the line! So I started my hacking cough which usually gets people’s attention, which is nice because they ask me if I’m okay, and I tell them yes, and they care about me for a little while. Soon the putz hogging Barbara waddled to the greeting cards. There was something seemed familiar about the back of his head, the grey and

white strands and brown spots.

When it was my turn to see Barb, she told me I had forgotten one of the three blood pressure meds, and here they were all wrapped up. And when I tried to get the rest of my meds, she told me she had already given them to me! I told her to start a regimen of diet and exercise and skedaddled out of there. I wouldn’t have anyone telling me I’m demented. I’m an old man, but my mind is sharp. Besides, I like my blood pressure the way it is.

The third time, I went to Moe’s, which is where I go every Tuesday for bacon and three eggs over hard and one of their undercooked, doughy biscuits. I eat the bacon because who is going to stop me from eating the bacon? But when I got there, I was already sitting in my favorite booth, all cozied up to my cup of coffee and Tuesday *Tribune*.

I said, “Listen buddy, this is my booth. There are plenty of stools open at the counter.”

But then I raised my head from the newspaper and looked me in the eye. And it was me! There was my navy wool/acrylic blend cardigan my daughter gave me for my birthday twenty years ago, the worn-in corduroy slacks, and big ol’ bifocals. And I had my face—my mirror image face! The drooping neck skin and neat white comb over. The scar from when my daughter, aged two, jammed a pencil near my eye—two scars, four grey eyes, two old men losing their minds. This wasn’t some long lost twin deal—no, this was me.

I quit my jibber jabbering and slid down next to myself. I didn’t speak, and neither did I. I looked at me looking back at me. And then I started laughing, which made me laugh, too.

“How the—”



“Hell did you—”  
“Who are—”  
“Elbert Rosenberg!” Simultaneous.  
“Are you me?”  
“That scar—”  
“From my daughter!”  
“Elenor,” I spoke in unison.  
“Well I’m just—”  
“Flabbergasted!”

The waitress delivered the bacon, eggs, and damp biscuit without comment. I offered myself a nibble. Licking bacon juice off my fingers, I said, “Well, I’m glad to meet you. Or me.” And I nodded back.

You see, I don’t have many people left. I guess you could say I’m lonesome. My wife left me; my daughter hasn’t spoken to me since the incident of the lesbian granddaughter bat mitzvah; my friends are dead. I was all I had left.

I shared my breakfast and ordered another plate. Speaking didn’t seem important, since every time I opened my mouth, I would finish my sentence for me. It felt nice to have a companion again. I smelled a little crusty, but that didn’t matter much since I wasn’t alone anymore. I watched my frowny mouth-corners suggest a smile.

I paid the bill for myself—figured it was best to start on my good side—and held the door open for me. I suggested that I go to the park. I sat on the empty bus stop bench while I stood. The bus was late, again with the puddle splashing. The kids sitting in the front of the bus wouldn’t get up until I bombarded them with a chorus of curses. To be perfectly honest, I only pretend to hate those kids, but I’m always glad when someone has the courage to be inconsiderate to me because it gives me an excuse to talk to them.

“Hey you! Get up for your”  
“elders! Don’t you have any”  
“respect? These kids have no”  
“sense of morals! Who raised ya,”  
“WOLVES?” I howled and I howled.

I insisted on having the window seat, but so did I, so I sat on the left aisle next to a sad-looking foreign woman who smelled like cabbage and I sat on the right aisle next to a lady with a crying baby. I thought I got the better deal.

I got off at my usual Tuesday stop near Chrysanthemum Park. There’s a murky pond and a playground of screaming beasts and benches that are made so the homeless can’t sleep on them and never any flowers. It’s my park. I found my bench, and I sat down, too. I pulled out the bag of birdseed I always carry in my cardigan pocket. I looked over at myself, annoyed by my slow movements, my out-of-tune whistling, the smell of age.

And my babies swooped in, all grey and charcoal and teal. These pigeons, they are my sweethearts. I am in love with them. If they were women, I’d make love to them right there in the middle of the park, with everyone watching, unashamed of my wrinkled schmekel, that’s how much I love them.

But as I fed my darlings from my hand, I was feeding them, too. Laurie, this beautiful light grey female, my favorite, my prized beauty, ate from *his* hand. The brutality of it all! I couldn’t have this. I could be me, but I couldn’t take Laurie from me. No way.

“What do you think you’re—”  
“I’m feeding my bird is what I’m—”  
“She’s mine you—”  
“Selfish nimrod!”

I grabbed me by the collar as I began yanking at my wispy white strands. I struggled, grunted, and fought as much as a man my age can fight. I gave myself a smart left hook to the nose. I knocked myself down to the dusty earth, rolling in pigeon droppings.

“I hate you, I hate you, I’ve always hated you!” I snarled at me.  
I got closer to the pond, this stinky pond, a big, deep, smelly mess. The pigeons, frightened, clawed at my face, pricking red bloody scratches. I tumbled toward the bank, dragging my slacks in filth, unraveling my sweater.  
And then—I think, I know it was an accident—I pushed me in. The water was much deeper than I thought. I couldn’t swim. I couldn’t get up. I couldn’t dive in to rescue myself. I could only watch me drown. 🐸



## WATER COOLER TALK



Working the gravel on a rich man’s drive,  
shovel and spread then sweat and breathe  
the granules of dirt clouding in the air,  
dead flies in your teeth, ground chalk in your lungs.  
We three men have ten minutes’ break  
on this hot humid swamp summer’s day.

We have ten minutes to talk down the sun  
and put a ball of ice up in the sky  
to cool off this god-forsaken afternoon and  
turn the spigot off the slow burning bath  
of our thick ox perspiration,  
a resident suffocating hair grease.

The truck bed offers solace  
for our souls warming to a crisp and  
aged by the shriek of steel digging cement.  
We pitch our bodies like tents  
around the burning logs of the water cooler.

First three and a half minutes: silence,  
and the slow steady suck  
of water from the can.  
Joe got something to say,  
you can see it twitching in his mouth,  
like a spider dying in a hole.

“Luanne, she’s sick.  
Found out yesterday from the doctor.”  
He says it to the air, limp fish in his tone,  
looking at the trees in the yard and  
the rim of the road and the wider world.  
The pale in his blue eyes  
answers the unasked question:  
it’ll be quick as it was sudden,  
Joe’s wife’ll be dead in no time at all.

Wasn’t like a star in the sky or  
a streak of color around the planet’s edge.  
Luanne wasn’t that pretty or smart,  
but pleasant and resigned, in that  
empty blue a’front a storm kind of way.  
Think of her in the kitchen  
in a faded red checkered apron,  
a lifetime of little to nothing  
wearing a rag on ceremony.

Six minutes later, half the water gone,  
Studds peers around lifelessly,  
preaching the politics of equity.  
“Hotter n’ hell out here anyways.”  
You can see the nod in Joe’s eyes.

“Break’s over,” I say, so it is.  
Back to the dirt and the dust,  
life on the slow and steady,  
punctuated by the shy word.

BRENT LIGHTFOOT



# contributors

**Stephanie Bastek** still doesn't know better.

**Rachel Cole-Jansen** "She's a mystic in the sense that she's still mystified by things." —Danny Schmidt.

**Camille Charlier** is a hybrid between a ninja and a cupcake. She has fallen out with science and cyborg embryos, and seeks to fill this yawning void with art. *Elle aime aller à la discotheque.*

**Christina deVillier** loves fishing, sunflowers and cool-headed debate. When she grows up she wants to be a poet farmer chef.

**Dominic Finocchiaro** is a senior Literature/Theatre major. He enjoys iced lattes, fantasy baseball, Marcel Proust, and watching videos of chihuahuas.

**Crystel Hadley** was born in San Francisco and raised by feral cats.

**Sam Hopkins's** anosmia has given him a heightened sense of entitlement.

**Lanlan Jin** oscillates between past dreams and future realities. She is still attempting to gain better insight into words (though she fears that this language may forever remain as a stranger). In the meanwhile, she is happy to use photography as a medium for sharing some wondrous moments with the world.

**Max Maller** is a sophomore at Reed. He grew up in a family that prized the creative instinct, with a father who turned his hobby of taking photographs, mostly of daily family activities and vacations, into a career, leaving the impression upon his children of a thoroughly blurred line between work and play. Poetry was Max's first artistic endeavor, but he began taking photos regularly one summer in Italy with a camera on loan from his father. When not taking photos or writing, Max enjoys acting, studying languages, and making music.

**Lauren Seegmiller** thinks (at 22) that she has worked too hard at her (elected or doomed, she doesn't know which) trade, with pride but she believes not vanity, with plenty of ego but with humility too (being a poet of course, she gives no fart for glory) to leave no better mark on this our pointless chronicle than she seems to be about to leave.

**Kayla Sheridan** is an un-adulterated dande-lion, on her good days.





# colophon

*The Reed College Creative Review* is published annually and distributed for free to the student body. The magazine is available online with digital media at <http://www.rc-cr.org>.

All spreads were designed using Adobe InDesign CS4. Artwork was edited using Adobe Photoshop CS4. Copy is set in 10 point Adobe Garamond Pro, and titles, bylines, and captions are set in Sylfaen. *The Review* was printed by Bridgetown Printing in Portland, Oregon.