COVER IMAGE
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and the New Mexico Mural Project

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This year, we embraced the theme of “Panoptic – Viewing or presenting a comprehensive perspective.” Throughout the autumn months, we examined submissions from writers and artists of all ages and backgrounds. Poets shared narrative pieces on joy, meditations on death, and celebrations of everything from raindrops to pecans. Fiction writers from around the world delivered stories that brought us back to our youth—and delivered us into old age. Essayists and memoirists bared their souls, and painters, photographers, draftspeople, and sculptors sent visual representations of what “panoptic” means to them. And we’re especially proud to be including a range of dramatic writing for the very first time, including an excerpt of screenwriter Sterlin Harjo’s recent work.

The 2018 issue of the Santa Fe Literary Review was a pleasure to compile, and we’re grateful to every artist who took a risk and sent work our way. Creating this publication each year adds richness to our lives. Our editorial staff is dedicated to unearthing the very best for our readers, and our editorial meetings are lively and impassioned. Often, as we pass submissions around the table, we find ourselves weeping, or laughing, or both. We’re grateful for the opportunity to review and promote such high quality work, and it’s a pleasure – and an honor – to present this year’s issue to you.

The Editors
“But to look back from the stony plain along the road which led one to that place is not at all the same thing as walking on the road; the perspective, to say the very least, changes only with the journey; only when the road has, all abruptly and treacherously, and with an absoluteness that permits no argument, turned or dropped or risen is one able to see all that one could not have seen from any other place.”

James Baldwin, Go Tell It on the Mountain
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FOUR PILLS FOR YOUR MEDICINE POUCH

Jesse Short Bull
Badlands, South Dakota
(After Four Amulets for a Frightened Farmer, by Aimee Nezhukumatathil)

biface
Go to the agate beds, find a shard of stone.
Find one that is sharp with more than one face,
Put it to your ear and hear the song of man.
A seven-thousand-year-old tune.

trash
Go to Wounded Knee. Trod shoes across blooddust,
Climb up the small hill beside the big grave.
Run your fingers through grass, pass the cartridge,
Pass the bead, pass the smell of yellow piss. Grab a soda pop tab.

dollar
Barge into the Horseshoe Bar, threaten a white man
With a knife. Make the bar silent. Terrorize the spirits.
Tear a dollar off the wall and curse up a storm.

lipstick
Dream a Cheyenne woman in a desert city
Lock eyes with her on a dirty street.
Lick her cherry lips, count the hailstones
On her back, draw them on the pavement.
THE COVEN

Jennine “DOC” Krueger-Wright

CAST LIST
WOMAN 1 - AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN WEARING A BLACK DRESS
WOMAN 2 - AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN WEARING A BLACK DRESS
WOMAN 3 - AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN WEARING A BLACK DRESS

SCENE 1
The women move together to the center of the stage and stand in a semi circle holding hands. They look up and begin to chant.

WOMAN 1
We be outcast.

WOMAN 2
Our skin, always prepared for a funeral.

WOMAN 3
Cast spells; spells trouble.

ALL WOMEN
We be black girl magic!

WOMAN 1 (whispers)
Maybe because we know how to disappear.

ALL WOMEN
We be a coven, a circle!

WOMAN 2
(The women let go of each other’s hands and speak to the audience)
Maybe that’s why we keep going through the same shit.

WOMAN 1 AND 3
What goes around, comes around.

WOMAN 2
Maybe it’s in the cards, like potioned tarot roots
ALL WOMEN
(When the women say “altar” their bodies hunch down and their hands are outstretched, palms down.)

This is how black women altar
(The women move their hands in a circular motion as if they are casting a spell; their voices lower and become ominous.)

Double double, a skin for trouble. No justice, protect and serve is muddled
(Women laugh loudly and then “police” is said sarcastically, drawn out like pleeeease! The women use their hands to wave away the absurdity.)

Police
WOMAN 1
We bind you, cold stare with a badge, misdemeanor at best
WOMAN 2
We bind you, trainer for track season, florist for the dead
WOMAN 3
We bind you, power unchecked, personified gun

ALL WOMEN
(Chanting becomes more intense in volume and in tempo. With each phrase the women become more rigid, leading up to a fighting stance with fists clenched.)

We bind you, echoed scream, camera turned off, and report unwritten; evidence planted, procession of headlights, you hidden truth; we bind you, we bind you, we bind you
(Women pause with fists clenched. When they begin the next lines their hands are held out helplessly.)

You: a reason to write a eulogy, a reason for a new black dress. You: incantation of loss, ain’t this what the candles are for? Another dead black body? Let this circle be broken.
(The women pause and then break the semi circle they stand in and leave the stage in different directions.)
A HUNGER FOR SOMETHING LIKE PRAYER

for Hilary

Gabe Gomez

Boy collects words. Awake
In chorus. Lunges the lips, listens.

A conversation. Surgically precise.
Phrasing pauses. Breathes than/then speaks.

Less of himself copied. Sits zazen in transcript.
Less so in translation. Then all collapses.

She’s leaving. Another country. It’s far.
Time is again. Perverse and aloud.

Without architecture building starts. Edges untangle. She is distance, sentence, stanza.

Sand is everywhere...

A new meter deadens
with noise. As if whales breach.

Sit. Carve to posture. Swell into volume.
Let her take it. Let her take it all.
We castrated the bulls ourselves with our pocketknives. Since I’m her only granddaughter, she made me watch her sneak up behind one with a blade behind her back, grab the sack and slice through in one quick motion. Somehow she didn’t need to tie anything. She liked to do it when they were young. Meanwhile, Father rode his horse alongside the flock of fifty sheep for fifty miles.

People don’t know that tumbleweeds are green and flush before they dry, that it’s the wind gives them their shapes, much like everything else here. Grandma’s eyes, my chapped knuckles, the shape of our dirt roads.

When my father came home he slept for three days before eating a large bowl of mutton stew. The bowl was the size of a toilet. Bones of the sheep he’d loved the most floated to the top after he slurped the meat and sucked their marrow. He belched into his fist then saddled his horse, which he’d named Bunny. When they saw him adjust Bunny’s bit the flock grew restless. The sheep loved going for long walks through the sand and clay more than standing in their own shit in the corral.

My grandmother once yelled at me for letting one of the dogs in. The dog begged because it was cold outside, she had icicles on her tail and fur. Before she was discovered she huddled under my bed with a blanket, gnawing on chicken bones. I didn’t understand why my grandmother didn’t let dogs in, since most of our house was dirt except the kitchen. There was sand in our soup, dirt in our bread, and grains crunched in our teeth even when the winds died down. When we walked through the kitchen the tiles shushed under our feet. There was no reason we couldn’t have had a dog inside. Maybe Grandma thought lightning would strike, but this was a wintery day, and there would be no lightning until summer.

Eventually we ran out of cattle because all their balls were gone. They were too expensive to feed anyway. The sheep disappeared too, one for every year as if years were miles, in addition to what we ate or sold. Usually it was the coyotes, but one time a man lost in our desert killed one to survive. No one knew where he was going or why, but nobody questioned his reason to slaughter the sheep. He skinned it, buried what he couldn’t eat, which was most of it. The meat was still good when our father found the wooden marker.
People think that winter is hard, but really spring's hardest, especially if it's a wet one. It's hard to walk in the clay. Not only is it slippery, but clay sticks to your feet and doesn't come off until summer. One time I put my shoes under the fireplace to dry them faster, but they melted into the clay, and we had two baby volcanoes in the living room.

Before I could ride a horse my father made the rigging for me to ride the sheep. Called it mutton-busting. He tried to make me wear pants but Grandma made me a skirt I hadn't taken off for months. First time I rode I was lucky, I didn't fall shooting out the pen. I held on tight and she just kept moving across the yard and down the road. She found a hole in the fence, and I thought she must know where she's going, but we kept moving, to the windmill and the water trough, past it, down a wash, climbed up the other side. We scrambled through the sage and it scratched my arms and legs, but I didn't mind. I laughed and screamed, and the sheep tired out by the time Father caught us.

He lassoed us just as his horse halted, caused the sheep to flip and land on top of me. Father grinned as he slapped the sheep in the face. He bound her legs and tossed her over his shoulders like a saddlebag. The three of us rode Bunny home in silence. I didn't get on another sheep for a long time after.

One day I asked my grandmother where my mother was. She said ask your father. Father said she moved to a different place where it was really green, it smelled like rain every day of the year. I asked if I could visit and he laughed. He said maybe he should have been more specific.

It's not a place for young girls, or even young boys, because up there moss grows on their backs and makes them slouch, and everyone walks like this: he hunched over like he had a large boulder on him, walked like his laces were tied.

I believed him, so I didn't ask about my mother again until I was older, and when I did he said he was sorry he lied to me, that she had fallen off a horse going down the mesa on one of the coldest nights of the year. He said he couldn't get to her in time. She died in the morning, but only after the horse died, after it had kept her warm for most of the night.

When I dream of her I think of a horse with brown hair. When I dream of her I see a horse snow-angeling with human limbs. When I dream of her she has no face, and sometimes she's a sheep flying through the air with me holding on, pretending we have somewhere more important to go.
SKY BOWL

James Gould
GRAVITY

Sheryl Slocum

Springs squeak
the sound of weight
pulled toward earth's iron core
attracted by sun's seething mass

the slightest sigh
from this old mattress
as you shift in sleep
speaks a universe

I think I smell stars in your hair
INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING: ROHINGYA MUSLIMS

Connor Bjotvedt

Global humanitarian and Rwandan genocide survivor Paul Rusesabagina took to Twitter earlier this week in an effort to express his grief, sympathy, and fear over the treatment, slaughter, and subsequent forced migration of 600,000 Rohingya Muslims within the Republic of Myanmar.

Rusesabagina began by tweeting the simple phrase, “To those in the Rakhine state: I know your pain.” The tweet sparked international interest and left major and minor news agencies scrambling and working to get boots on the ground within Myanmar. The ensuing hysteria would as well lead to the global condemnation of Aung San Suu Kyi, the State Counsellor and former Nobel Peace Prize recipient, for her apparent apathy towards resolving the crisis.

“Newly christened as political refugees by the United Nations the Rohingya Muslims have fled from their homes in the Rakhine state to the neighboring flatlands along the Republic of Myanmar’s border with Bangladesh. This refugee crisis began as a state sponsored campaign of violence against “A Militant Muslim Caliphate developing in the east.”

The state’s official rhetoric surrounding the Rohingya was directly stated during an interview with Myanmar’s press coordinator, Paul Phett, who said, “We have never had Muslims in Rakhine. These immigrants do not belong in Myanmar.” Myanmar, a country dominated by Buddhists (89%), seems dead set on ousting its native population of Muslims—who were documented by Western sources as inhabiting the area as far back as 1799.

The state’s decision to target the Rohingya seems to reflect the pervasive trend of Islamophobia that has developed across the globe in the wake of the United States’ war on terror.

The central government’s intentional fear mongering and broadcast coverage
of civilian bombings abroad has allowed the police
and military to justify their actions and even gain support from the public.
Each day more and more individuals escape the Rakhine state and
enter Bangladesh where they show press crews the injuries
that they suffered in their home country. Press crews have so far been unable
to enter the Rakhine state and unable to collect the unquestionable proof
that the atrocities are being committed in Eastern Myanmar
and that they are being orchestrated by the government. Without
the unquestionable proof international organizations have been left
without probable cause and will continue to be unable to intervene.
Though the current situation seems dire, Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein,
the UN’s Commissioner for Human Rights, has assured the victims
that the perpetrators and overseeing government officials will
eventually be tried and convicted by the international court
for performing the clear and systematic ethnic cleansing
of the Rohingya population.’—John Whenn
PORTRAIT IN ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Michael Mark

It’s like she left and came back with a new haircut
left and came back with a scar
left and came back with different eyes, not
the eyes everyone said we shared
but the scar was gone
and she spoke a strange language and
left and came back without a son and
left and came back and never came back
ARRIVING ON TIME BUT LATE ANYWAY

Anastasio Wrobel
Amorette Seul sat on the porch and watched as darkness turned purple, then pink, then exploded as birds and colors awoke. She hadn’t been sleeping and her dry, burning eyes confirmed that this night was no different. She missed the sounds of him making coffee, or running a shower, or frying up some meat for breakfast. There should have been the smell of his aftershave in the air, or the sweet odor of bacon, or the musk of his sweat after his morning run.

Instead, there was only silence. She made the coffee herself.

Three days ago he came down the stairs and said, “All my bags are packed, and I’m ready to go.”

“What?” she asked, flashing to that old song.

“What?” he distractedly muttered as he surveyed the room to make sure he hadn’t missed anything important; his light blue eyes looked almost green as they swept around, passing over her briefly.

“Nothing, never mind. Have they told you where you’re going, who she is?” Amorette put down her book and patted the couch next to her.

He walked to the kitchen instead and looked around in there as well. He stuck his head back in the room, holding his body against the doorframe. “No. I don’t like to ask. I was surprised when I met you, and look how well that worked out!”

He picked up his bags and began walking to the door, stopping in front of her. Touching his heart as was custom, he looked her in the eyes and offered the traditional greeting, “I Believe In Love.”

Amorette touched her heart with two fingers and nodded. She had been taught the proper way to respond since childhood, and she didn’t even hesitate in answering, “Love Is All You Need.”

Amorette was turning thirty-five on Thursday. That meant she had four days left of her transition week before her birthday. Four days before the next one was here. This transition week was supposed to be for prepping
oneself: dye your hair; rescan your eyes for new sparkles; throw out the old memories; hire a cleanser to go through the house for old mementos; buy a new wedding dress, of course; pick out the theme for the party; and get to the government building to remove your last name.

The love scribes say it takes seven days to get ready for the new one and seven years before the new one becomes the old one. The body replaces its cells entirely in seven years. The scribes were the scientists and psychologists who cracked the biology of the love code and realized that with a new body comes the need for a new love.

After her morning coffee, Amorette squared her shoulders and decided to try to tackle her to-do list. As she left the house, though, her mind flashed to another man, not her recent love, but her first. He was fourteen and she was thirteen; he sat behind her in class. He played with her hair when it fell on his desk, and he had the most beautiful dark eyes, framed with lashes that closed like curtains when he blinked. She shook her head, knocking the memory out.

She stopped and turned to see Aiko, her neighbor, waving from across the street. Taking a deep breath, she smiled and waited for Aiko to catch up.

“Ammie! How are you? Where are you going? What are you doing? Isn’t it a beautiful day? Stephen, my Love, said it was too beautiful a day to not go for a walk so here I am walking!” Aiko always asked questions all in a row. Amorette laughed and put her hand on Aiko’s shoulder.

“Good morning, Aiko. Yes, it is a beautiful day, and I’m glad you’re able to enjoy it.” After a year of being neighbors, Amorette had finally figured out that she could just pick one of Aiko’s many questions. She always tried to pick the most innocuous one.

Aiko was twenty-three and had more energy than the sun. Stephen was her first husband. It was obvious to Amorette that Aiko had never been through a transition before, never seen how easy it is to be replaced.

“Are you excited for your new Love? Have you seen what he looks like yet? Have you picked a theme for the party? Have you gotten your dress? I want to do a princess dress next time I get married. I can’t wait.” Aiko fell into step with Amorette as the two began walking down the block.
A fevered breeze picked up the hair on her neck and Amorette felt a wave of solemnity surround her. She looked around and lowered her voice, captivated by a feeling of honesty she hadn’t felt in a long time. “I haven’t seen the new one yet. And honestly, I don’t know if I want to. I want….” Amorette paused.

Aiko slid her arm through Amorette’s. “It’s okay, Am. I bet old genetics are making you nervous. But you know the stories: our forefathers believed in mating for life. Divorce rates skyrocketed until no one married anymore. The population plummeted because reproduction rates fell. Now we know better. Once you meet your Love, I’m sure you’ll feel better.”

Amorette shook her head. “I want to…I mean…” She took a deep breath and plunged ahead. “I don’t want to get married again.”

Aiko stopped short. “Amorette! What are you saying? Of course you want to get married. Everyone wants to get married. You would be so lonely without your Love. You must be nervous, is all. Don’t say that!” Aiko patted her friend’s shoulder. She touched her heart and said, “Love Is All You Need.”

“I Believe In Love,” Amorette responded automatically.

That night Amorette couldn’t sleep again. When she closed her eyes she saw visions of the dark-eyed boy. This time they were walking out of class together. He offered to carry her books for her. She could see his blue shirt, the wrinkled collar lined in white. He kept looking at her with his dark eyes, a gentle smile playing across his face every time she met his gaze.

The next morning, Amorette was supposed to go to a lunch date with her mother followed by her dress alteration meeting and then the party planner. Instead, she stayed in bed and gave herself over to the dark-eyed boy in her dreams. Kissing, behind the school, in the rain. Skipping school together. Making out in the parking lot. A teacher appeared, yelling at them, pulling them away from each other. She jerked awake at the pain of separation.

For two days, Amorette sought the dark-eyed boy, to find him, touch him, hold him. She spent her sleeping hours trying to recapture a memory and her waking hours feeling him fade from her consciousness. Like an addict, she thought only of him.
Morning came again. She heard the door open, registered the sound of stilettos piercing through her dreams, and opened her eyes seconds before her mother turned on the lights.

“Amorette! What in Love’s name are you doing? Honestly, there is no time for these kinds of theatrics.”

Her mother was a beautiful woman on her seventh Love. Amorette spoke to her twice a month during their hour-long lunch dates. The hour always progressed in the same manner: her mother would tell her about a new city her husband had taken her to; Amorette would talk about a clothing sale she discovered. They would order salads with the dressing on the side and afterwards Amorette would stop and buy a hamburger on the way home. The women considered themselves very close.

Their routine was established after Amorette’s father was reassigned. Amorette’s mother birthed her during her third Love. Women are able to have children during their second, third, or fourth Love. Children are raised by their mothers, but most fathers still spend special occasions with their birthing family, even once they have a new Love. Growing up, Amorette’s father sent Valentine’s cards every year.

Right now, Amorette did not want to talk about clothing sales or vacations with her mother. She pulled the covers over her head. Tearfully, she called out, “Maman, please go away.”

Her mother sat down on the bed next to her. She flipped the covers back down and reached out as if to smooth Amorette’s hair down, but dropped her hand before contact was made. “What are you doing, daughter?” Amorette sat up against the headboard. “I miss him. I feel empty. Alone.”

Her mother listened in silence while Amorette mourned a lost piece of childhood and lamented a fear for the next Love. She heard her daughter yearn for a boy from twenty years ago and doubt in the power of a future man. When Amorette had finally exhausted herself, she clapped her hands and beckoned her child.

“Okay, girl. I hope that’s all out of your system now. Nothing comes from this behavior and memories of long ago are pointless. Now, let’s get you up.” She pulled Amorette from the bed and pushed her along into the bathroom. “Run a shower.”

Amorette stood in the shower a long time. The sadness flowed in her blood like the water did over her body. She could feel it relocating from her heart to her head, from fingertips to toes and back again.
After a while, her mother came in and turned off the water. She wrapped Amorette in a towel and sat her at the vanity in the bedroom. When Amorette’s tears slowed, her mother blow-dried her hair, wrapped a soft cream-colored summer dress around her body, and rubbed vanilla lotion into her arms and legs. She leaned forward and wiped the tears from Amorette’s cheeks and then applied her makeup. She put Amorette’s feet into gold and cream shoes and pulled Amorette up to standing. Her mother led her by the hand down the stairs and into the kitchen where she sat her at the dining table. Amorette followed her silently, blankly.

Suddenly the doorbell rang and Amorette jerked, glancing questioningly at her mother.

“You know who it is. It’s been seven days, Amorette. Come on now. This will help,” her mother said encouragingly, nodding towards the door.

Amorette stood slowly, shaking slightly, and inched closer to the door. She knew her role; she had played it before, but still she hesitated. The door swung open and she met the bright blue eyes of the man on the other side.

“Hello! Amorette, right? Hi, I’m Andrew.” He coughed, clearing the nerves from his voice. He spoke again, touched his heart and nodded, adhering to formalities, “Love Is All You Need.”

Amorette felt the immediate effects as hormones flooded her mind. Lightness and giddiness spread into her whole body. Unconsciously, her mouth lifted at the edges and her pupils dilated as they looked into his blue depths. Andrew’s voice was deep and kind and her stomach automatically contracted at the sound of it. She smiled and responded, “And I Believe In Love.”

Andrew took her hand and leaned down to kiss her gently. As her eyes fluttered closed for a brief moment, she worried that the dark-eyed boy would still be there behind her lids, but all she saw were fireworks as her new Love pressed against her.

“I Believe In Love,” she sighed again.
TWISTED

Kelby Bailey
He said take photos for me baby show me
I want to see
so
I took them
a series of images that are
the way I experience the world, my conduit,
my physicality, the being
of me

He was confused by the veins
in the crook of my elbow (I like
where the red lines run hard against the blue, the
in and out, my bodily tide)
He couldn’t make sense of my knuckles, ragged
and bony and faulted up into
such a thin layer of skin, tiny Himalayans
at the crust of my world
He was vaguely interested in the pink
of my mouth but what I showed was
the stem of my tongue, root
of my cypress speech and sawgrass sentences,
and a deeply rooted ability
to stay silent

He said these are cool I didn’t know
you were one of those art type girls
but you know what I want baby why can’t
you just show me
The sensation sweeps over me, engulfing my body like the waves rushing over the sand during high tide. I feel euphoric. I feel broken. I feel crazy. I feel perfectly sane. I can't tell where one feeling begins and the other ends. All I know is that I am free. In this state of mind, I could be anything: A lounge singer clad in stardust, whispering to the souls of the longing through the music binding them all together. An Olympic diver falling into the depths of still blue with the grace of Isadora Duncan. The girl at the bar ordering her fifth drink because the joy of the buzzed sensation the alcohol gives her outweighs the importance of responsibility. Somehow, I am all of them in their soulful, composed, and rash fervors, a walking harmonious collision. It's a moment in time that dances to music only I can hear. Is this madness? The result of my life’s pain bursting through the floodgates and sending me into a crisis-induced state of mania? Or is it just an escape I’ve willingly pursued to run from my own demons? Whatever this state of mind may be, I love it with the passion that sometimes drives me to write unbidden in the latest hours of the night or sing every song that embodies how I feel with a sweetness rivaling a nightingale’s tune. This feeling has the flavors of all the right words conjuring up descriptive poetry for every sentiment close to my heart and sweet chaos driving me to break from convention for the first time in my life. If this is madness, may my mind never recover and return to the chains of sanity. Sanity appears lifeless in comparison to this sensation. Never have I been so caught up in something I didn’t understand. As I head out into the night, the feeling moves me through the comforting air of the periwinkle dusk, singing to me in the sweep of the wind as I run from what once was. Oh, to live boundless in this reverie until the end of my days!

Somehow, this beautiful cacophony of conflicting emotions and a thousand states of being managed to awaken me from an unbreakable sleep. I can see the vespers of the night, diamonds framing a lunar pearl against the dark void. Normalcy never held such beauty. The trance I lived in, composed of endless steps down an empty tunnel, is broken into shards of realization reflecting life’s unseen nuances. Only now do I realize that this is ingenuity and loveliness woven together as only I could see it.
Suddenly I am someone as creative as all the Muses crooning from the heights of Mount Olympus, the ideal portrait of a writer. The words come rushing in as the feeling consumes me. Every detail of life in its infinite beauty, clearer than perfect crystal in my awakening, flows out through the words in my mind. I feel passion grab hold of me, stronger than I could have ever dreamed. The exquisite allure of this emotion filling my consciousness is spellbinding. At this moment, all I can do is put pen to paper, letting the words dance from my fingers onto the page in swirls of ink. Emotion and inspiration sing a duet in these heathery hours of the night, enchanting and bold, driving me as I write of the splendor my eyes have beheld in this exceptional evening.

All I see, hear, and taste is this pureness of vision, the singular pursuit of the world’s miraculous detail coming together through my art. I am lost in the sound of the voice in my mind. It’s a combination of music, creativity, and awe speaking only to those who dwell in the arts. Embracing it fully, I craft the words it inspires. One by one, they form a reflection on this night, a tribute to the spirit of innovation that moves me to write. When at last, the passion recedes, I find in myself a new feeling: utter delight. Now that I have known the feeling that drives the artistic minds of the world, I can revel in what it has wrought. For now I see the world in a new light, and my words on the page stand as a testament to an inner awakening.
long distance turnaround

Tom Holmes

ever since I returned to Earth
my left eyeball falls from my face
at least once per week
I can see what’s up my pants
and once per week I rotate it
around my head like a SETI satellite
before I pop my eye into its socket
but today I poked it pupil-side in
my left foot tingled and numbed
then my leg and arm and face
I saw light then gray matter
I saw a crab I once drop-kicked
into the sea play the maracas

I once played in Morocco
I saw a pair of soiled underpants
I saw my father in the leftovers
baby store ordering me for delivery
without a return receipt
I saw wide-eyed aliens swaddle me
stamp me and send me on a way
MIND’S EYE PINES

Kathleen Heideman Rydholm
NEAR BEARS EARS

David Feela

I should go there, to the mountain
where the trail to the Bears Ears begins.
According to friends, it’s always busy,
a half-dozen or so cars parked at the trailhead.
Most hikers would be climbing the bear’s spine
by the time I’d arrive.
I’m a late starter.
I’d be wandering around its ass
glancing up, thinking how much like lice
we hikers must be to the bear
that belongs to those ears.
Once coming up a trail
on the way to Kennebec Pass
a black bear stepped out of the trees
and turned toward me.
I couldn’t help it.
My eyes grew wide as caverns.
That bear still lives
inside me,
its breath shallow but steady,
it’s ears alert,
it’s eyes turned inward
toward its long cold season
of dreams.
there was a river

Shebana Coelho

The first time I heard Nasario García speak, he told a story about his abuela, his grandmother who lived beside a river that once ran. The Río Puerco. As he spoke, I began to see where he grew up—four Hispanic villages on a dry plain—and hear the stories of the elders, the viejitos.

Soon after, I adapted his first book of oral histories into a play. A year later, I began directing a documentary about him called *Nasario Remembers the Río Puerco*.

For over 30 years, Nasario García has been sharing award-winning bilingual stories that he has collected, recorded, remembered, and reimagined about the life and people of New Mexico’s Río Puerco valley (southwest of Chaco Canyon) that thrived between the 1900s and the 1950s.

To work with Nasario—for about five years now—is an experience in generosity. He understands that your vision of a story, even if it is his story, is an encounter between your imagination and something mysterious and he lets you be, lets the story be so it finds its true manifestation. Every time we returned to the Río Puerco ruins to film, Nasario saw all that had been eroded, and was no longer there. For me, everything that was lost was found again in his stories. And so we followed him, in story, in silence, to mesas and caves, and once, to a throne of rocks where he sat and suddenly yelled a barbaric coyote yawp. I knew the film needed to begin right then and there, in that moment, and it does.

The film was broadcast in October 2017 on New Mexico PBS/KNME. Side by side with responses about the preservation of Hispanic heritage of New Mexico were responses that spoke to our universal belonging to land, community, and storytelling. “You brought me a history that isn’t my own,” was one comment, “but for which I get homesick.” I understand that sentiment. I grew up in India, and lived most of my life in cities until I began to travel in wild open spaces and after many years of wandering, grew roots in New Mexico. In this encounter with Nasario García, in the memories he shared, in dust of the river and the stillness of the llano, I heard a story too, and I spoke it in film.
Nasario remembers the Río Puerco

A FILM BY SHEBANA COELHO

NASARIO GARCÍA
In this New Mexico valley, the story begins again.

NASARIOREMEMBERS.COM

Design by Arianna Borgeson
Sidesaddle on her gander and in voluptuous
nakedness, Mother Goose hovers above
the unrhyming of her rhymes.
Her canvases are trampolines for curveballs—
steady eyes from an army of nude
Ledas defiant against Rubenesque leers
and unhinged from all slithering swans.
Instead, they demand their posed universes
be picture-locked into liberating subversion—
chairs float, domestic pups screw, a slab
of raw meat prays for us all. An alphabet
of random knives, forks, and plates
punctuate the dangers served up in bold
platters of irony and the owls, those owls
that seem to know more than they should.
The summer began with mangoes, slippery and sticky in our palms as Daddy and me stripped the ones Mama hand-picked from the corner market so she could use them for a pie. The first slap of heat had just hit our house, hitting the old shingle siding. Sitting on the porch, I felt the ache between my legs as a bite from the mango I had just finished peeling squelched against my lips, a line of juice dribbling down my chin onto my dress.

“Don’t you say nothin’ now, sugar,” Daddy said with a stare as he took his hunting knife to the mango in his hand, halving it until the skin split and the hard pit stuck out, covered in stringy fuzz. His eyes never left mine while he ripped the pit out of the other half and palmed it, squeezing the last of its nectar down his taut knuckles, trickling. A brief wind hit my face as Mama joined us on the porch, and I didn’t say a thing.
UPSTAIRS PORCH

Linda Whittenberg

These days, when I go back to the place
where I grew up, I stay at a Victorian B&B
where history is kept elegant.

I request the maid’s quarters upstairs
because it has an attached screened porch,
and I need quiet

after a day spent in a town of warped mirrors.
Evenings I rock while sorting out—names
on headstones, ruins of houses my people

once called home, Main Street half boarded up,
a corporate hog farm out near Indian Point—
all this with the backdrop of eight-feet high corn.

Behind screen-wire, up where birds nest, I listen
to night sounds—moths struggling to get at the light,
rustle of critters in the grass,
cricket music, which brings back summer nights
when I lay in bed listening to the sounds
of grown-up talk.

After memories I’d rather forget, after seeing
some folks for what could be the last time,
I need the moon seen through maple leaves
that turn its light into lace. I need fireflies
in the grass below, each flicker an event
I reassess from my high perch.
People pass before me, names I’ve almost lost,
so many people, easy to forgive,
easy to love from the upstairs porch.
MY BOYFRIEND’S GIRLFRIEND

Steven Rivera

I always liked my boyfriend’s girlfriend more than I liked him.

She was postmodern Goth with a messy updo twisting like a rattlesnake lurching for its innocent prey. Her skin was pale from deficiency of the sun and translucent powder on cream colored foundation.

I loved her white crooked teeth behind matte black lips and her red forked tongue tonguing the nummies off her ID.

Her molly-induced fist bump punched holes in the roof of the black lit basement at our mutual friend’s rave themed birthday party. She shotgunned Budweiser better than the boys and sipped Turkey 101 until dawn. We played too much PlayStation and chain smoked Camel Menthols until they piled into an ashy pyramid of phlegm.

If only our tastes weren’t so different we would have tasted each other rather than him, our mutual friend, who in the end, was just another thing we had in common.
RIDE THAT PONY

Gerard Martinez
Evenings, we walked that path to barn and back, me lagging behind as I navigated cow patties and grassburs, Daddy never breaking his stride. As his warm calloused hands swung by his side, I’d reach up, land my hand in his, feel its sure strength guide me back to the path.

Skipping in from school on days too cold for plowing, I’d find his hands at work. Newspapers spread around him, he shelled pecans and kitchen warmth cocooned us as I hummed to the steady crack crack of the hulls. I watched his gloved hands shake those pecans from the trees his father planted on this land, trees I once thought would stand forever, like the towering cliff behind our house — oh, not really a cliff at all — just sandstone outcropping, maybe five feet tall. To my nine-year-old eyes that rock seemed high as the sky, solid as a father, but the fissure down its center foretold how rain and cleaving roots would do their work, and one day I found sandstone had let go, left a fractured scrabble at my feet.

This morning, my father stumbles through the kitchen in this house he built fifty years ago as though he’s tightrope walking on a starless night. Trembling, he holds out his hand. I clasp it tight, steadying his legs for this journey across an unmapped stretch of sky.
Sterlin Harjo, a member of the Seminole Nation, is of Muskogee heritage and was raised in Holdenville, Oklahoma. He studied art and film at the University of Oklahoma, and received a Sundance Institute fellowship in 2004.

Sterlin Harjo’s short film, *Goodnight, Irene*, premiered at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival, and was the recipient of a special jury award at the Aspen ShortsFest. His feature film, *Four Sheets to the Wind*, premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival—and was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize. Harjo’s second feature, *Barking Water*, premiered at Sundance in 2008, and his first feature documentary, *This May Be the Last Time*, premiered there in 2014.

Harjo’s third feature film, *Mekko*, a thriller set in Tulsa, Oklahoma, premiered at the Los Angeles Film Festival in the summer of 2015. *Mekko* chronicles the story of a homeless Native American parolee seeking to rescue his beautiful, chaotic community from a darkness that threatens.

Harjo’s recent work includes *Terlton*, a documentary about a devastating industrial accident in a small Oklahoma town, and *Virtual Standing Rock Tour*, a virtual reality tour housed within Santa Fe’s Zohi Gallery. Visitors who take the virtual tour can opt to ride a bicycle through Standing Rock, camp and chat with others, and even participate in a communal dinner.

**An Interview with Sterlin Harjo and SFLR Staff**

*I am a student taking dramatic writing for the first time. What advice would you give?*

It’s such a personal journey as a writer. Everyone is different. I think people know if they are writers or not. If you are, you write, and you get inspired by reading or whatever inspires you. Maybe it’s music, film, or art.

**In terms of making a film, what is the most intimidating part of the process, and what is the most rewarding?**

I believe the most intimidating thing and the most rewarding thing share the same answer. The most intimidating
part of the process is actually doing it. You talk and think about it, but actually going through the motions and making it happen is terrifying at first. It’s also intimidating when you have to show people what you’ve made. You get over that with experience and time. The most rewarding is the same thing... actually making it. Making the film is the most rewarding.

Are you considering using your medium to document or comment on the political turmoil we’re facing in the United States today?

Not directly. I think I can say more by telling stories. When I was younger I used to say that I wasn’t a political filmmaker, but now I feel differently. We are all political.

Would you say you have a muse?

Yeah, most definitely. It’s a lot of things and usually different for every project. It could be a family member, a lover, a friend, or a hero. It’s different every time.

What have you had to give up, or sacrifice, in pursuit of your art?

Everything.

Can you describe one of your best teachers?

Yeah, there are two. One was my English teacher senior year. I told her that I wasn’t interested in most books. She made it her mission to go into the library and find a book that might interest me. Strangely, it was *Atlas Shrugged* (by Ayn Rand). I loved it. The other teacher was my art teacher in high school. He gave me great advice; he said, “Never have a fallback plan, because you’ll fall back.” I’ve lived by that since.

Do you ever experience “writer’s block”? If so, what do you do to combat it?

I don’t consider it writer’s block. It’s more like a puzzle. The stories are in there, I just have to unlock them […] whether that’s leaving my comfort zone, or being more stable, or whatever. It’s a mystery.

What kinds of challenges have you had to face as a man of color working in a predominately white industry?

They don’t want you to succeed. They don’t want to fund your work. They don’t believe people want to hear your stories. So, you constantly prove them wrong. It’s exciting.
EXT. BRIDGE – NIGHT

Under the bridge – Mekko and Bunnie huddle near the fire at the homeless camp. Mekko is holding the postcard that his cousin painted. Bunnie is drinking – feeling good.

A man sings a Native song in the background. People stagger around like ghosts.

We hear Bill yelling around, drunk. He tries to start shit with people in the camp; they are all used to it.

Back to Mekko and Bunnie –

MEKKO
(Motioning to postcard)
We grew up at these grounds. This is how it looked. Arbors were just like that, I can hear em sing, I can smell that fire, bread cooking...cabbage.

Beat.

MEKKO (CONT’D)
I miss my town. The way it used to be. When people were there.

Bunnie swigs off the bottle.

BUNNIE
What about it do you miss?

Mekko thinks.

MEKKO
The one thing that I think of first when I think of home is the main street. I used to run down from my house. I’d head down to the drugstore and buy my mom
cigarettes. It was there on the right. There was a nice old man that worked there. I’d always walk down the sidewalk and just listen to the old people talk.

Bunnie smiles, and his drunken head bobs.

MEKKO (CONT’D)
(Laughs)
Grandma thought I could see witches.
When we’d walk into a place with a lot of people she’d say, “You see any?” She told me that the sickness got into a person... turned them into a witch. She told me that in the old days the only way to get rid of the sickness is to find the witch in the village... you had to take their heart out. Put it in a river. It would wash the sickness away.

BUNNIE
Damn....Mekko. You’re a holy man.

Beat.

BUNNIE (CONT’D)
I bet in the next life we’ll be chiefs, Mekko. We will be chiefs.

MEKKO
You are a chief, Bunnie.

Bunnie smiles.

BUNNIE
You’re right. I’m a chief. Street chief. I’m a king. I’m a Mekko.

BUNNIE (CONT’D)
I think back to when I was a little boy. Playing at my parents’ house. Not knowing what’s gonna happen. Not knowing nothing. If I could tell him the future I would’ve done it all different.

Bunnie has teared up. Fights back tears.

BUNNIE (CONT’D)
I wish I could tell that little one something. That bad that you do... it stays in you. Unless you get it out...annit?

Mekko nods.

MEKKO
You know what happened? Why I went to jail?

BUNNIE
Well...yeah.

MEKKO
No, I mean do you KNOW what happened?

Bunnie looks at him. Shakes his head “no.”

BUNNIE
I know what they said happened...I didn’t believe them though. I always thought probably fell or something?

Mekko shakes his head.

MEKKO
I hit him. With a pipe. We were fighting after he got kicked out of the bar. I tried to get him to leave. He started hitting me. He
MEKKO (CONT’D)
got on top of me. Busted my nose.
He blacked out. I tried to get in
the truck...he hit me again.

Beat.

MEKKO (CONT’D)
So...I grabbed whatever I could
grab from the back of my truck.
Swung it...just to get him off me.
Swung too hard. Hit him (slaps his
temple) right there. He just
dropped.

Beat.

MEKKO (CONT’D)
My own cousin.
(Shakes his head)
My own cousin.

Beat.

BUNNIE
We’ve all done things we regret...

Bill steps out from the shadows.
THE CHANGE

John Davis

We are all becoming light
  in white shirts
    and black slacks
      through the night
We are someone’s remember him
  warming our limbs
    in the vacant lot fire
      and stiff wind
We are the tick in the love song
  kiss me kiss me kiss me
    the uneven rhythm
      the quick solo
We are folding our lives from paper
  creasing the cold edges
    Words are abandoning us
      in the gold light of dawn
We are handing over our keys
  that unlocked our cars
    to a midnight drive
      that cut through fog
We are the high beams
  that scream across the white line
    fade
      and lose all light.
ET: THE EMBARRASED TERRESTRIAL

James Roser

Should it ever be discovered that we humans are not alone in the void, the inhabitants of our little planet ought to be terribly afraid. For if we are discovered by advanced intelligent life, our continued existence could be very much in question. We must hope they do not wish to question Earthlings about what it means to be human, or why we only value a select few forms of life. Will we be able to explain away the reasons we dream of journeying to a new home among the stars while we can’t be bothered to take care of the one we already have? On that unparalleled day when contact finally answers our oldest question, we will all be equal for the very first time since we first learned how to hate. Will our interstellar overlords elect to enslave or exploit humanity? Perhaps they will simply vaporize the lot of us into extinction. Who could blame them, if they get a look at our historical record and find out who we really are? Hurting blind and oblivious through the emptiness, it is foolish not to be afraid or to believe for an instant that we are the unquestioned, invincible masters of the gift of life. Because if other beings ever found our planet, we’d better hope they don’t behave like humans.
white liberal antics: part 1

Israel Haros Lopez

them post-neo-hyper-intelligent white saviors
sometimes come with extra treats
for us brown folks, us red folks, us black folks
us non-binary folks, us queer folks
us folks
they come with a hidden white supremacy agenda
unbeknownst to them. because they are white liberals
claiming something different and sometimes
sometimes
impose the same hidden toxicity
but it comes in the form of calling themselves
allies, bridge makers, anti-fascists
re-imposing all the isms in ways too tricky to name
sometimes
but us folks walk away with sick feelings
in our stomachs, in our chests, in our minds
wishing we could have that time back
that so-called anti-oppression movement
so-called anti-oppression march or event or organization
that ends up feeling to us folks
just like the very thing they said they were against
and it's hyperized
hypersensitive hyperintelligent hyperfragile
hypotoxic that us folks get silenced
in very tricky ways
us folks try to name it
and get called antagonistic bitter non-builders
but it's that anti-fascist talk that starts feeling fascist
to us. that anti-oppression feeling oppressive to us
and them post-neo white saviors
feel good about themselves, about what they posted
about what they said and us folks get left
holding all the baggage, all the things still needing healing
still spinning thinking something went wrong there

but

us folks try to name it
and it gets tricky
cuz it's hyper-slick oppression
hyperintelligent hyperfragile
slickness sickness
that's hard to name
hard to call out
but us folks feel it all the time
degutted
stuck with our throats clogged
with a new flavor of oppression
spinning wanting to scream
but too exhausted from the experience
to even say a single word

left feeling unsafe
and mindless
with pounding headaches
with every minute of our speeches,
our lecture notes, our poems,
our presentations looked over
to make sure our grammar
isn't too wild, too non-conformist,
too queer, too brown, too confrontational,
too inappropriate, too native, too too too p.o.c.,
too black, too anti-nazi,
too anti-non-profit industrial complex, too too
too much, too soon, too fast, too now, too too
they’re not ready to hear the truth we’ve been
living in our minds, in our bodies, in our lands
us folks get left
holding all them
neo-white savior non-complex complexities
of oppression
us folks need that to stop now
us folks don’t want to explain this anymore
we need you folks to get it
a.s.a.p.
cuz us folks are sick and tired of this sick and tired
cuz this damages us more than any kkk every could
cuz it’s slithering in every corner of our beings
these are the ones we see abusing power
in our offices, in our lecture halls,
in our non-profits, in our institutions, in line at the bank,
at the trader joe’s and the libraries
harboring something else
that gets stuck in our bodies
that self-righteous white liberal acting
like this doesn’t apply to you
NOTHING BUT A NUMBER

Claudette E. Sutton

Redeye flights are one of those things I put squarely on my “I’m too old for this” list, but if my son Ariel suggests it, I’ll try almost anything. His job was sending him to New York for a three-day conference, and he asked me to go with him the weekend before so we could explore my old haunts together. Rather than take the crack-of-dawn flight from Albuquerque Friday morning that would arrive mid-afternoon, he argued, why not take the Thursday redeye and have the whole next day—but it was his enthusiasm, not reason, that sold me.

So we found ourselves, well past either of our bedtimes, in the Albuquerque airport, in silent camaraderie with other people well past theirs. Everyone was dressed for daytime except for a toddler in jammies with a thickly-padded bottom.

Our 11:45 flight was about an hour late. At midnight the toddler’s mother, who had been keeping him busy with crayons and soft toys, started singing Happy Birthday. Mom had one of those voices that projects through a crowd. “You’re three now!” she rang out to the boy, who began to whimper and cry. “I’m not three, I’m not, I’m two-and-a-half!” he insisted, body and soul racked with despair. I flashed his mother a compassionate smile, figuring we were witnessing the existential angst of a toddler clinging to his youth. The boy whimpered things I couldn’t make out, but Mom picked up that his world had been turned upside down because she had told him that he would turn three on the plane, and they were still in the airport.

“You were supposed to turn three on the plane, but the plane is delayed,” she said, repeating and rephrasing this several times, putting what I felt was undue weight on the inscrutable word “delayed.” But this was high-stakes exposition.

“It’s midnight now,” she tried, “and that’s when the new day begins. It’s tomorrow now.” I pictured the boy as a puppy who picked up just enough from the sounds of the two-legged beings around him to discern that he didn’t need to be afraid. His world righted itself. His whimpers tapered off.

“You missed the drama,” I told Ariel when he came back from the restroom.

“So, his mother was trying to explain to him, basically, the nature of time,” Ariel said slowly. “I’m 27. Time still scares the crap out of me.” I laughed.
We spent the next three days in the City—seeing the Degas exhibit at MOMA, riding bikes through Central Park, walking the Financial District, having cocktails in outdoor restaurants—and I was grateful my son had aged to the point where he likes to do these things with his mom. Sunday we split up. He moved to the hotel in Midtown where his job was putting him up for the conference, while I headed down to my favorite hotel on the Lower East Side for three days “boots on the ground,” as Ariel said, doing research for my next book.

Monday evening we met at the Bitter End, the club in the Village where Bob Dylan and Joan Baez performed back in the day (“Oh, I’ve heard of them,” Ariel said, and I didn’t realize he was teasing me until I caught his jesting smile). I had gotten us tickets for the Moth StorySlam, an open-mic storytelling contest, where the theme that evening was “Age.” Ten people whose names were pulled out of a bowl told stories of jumping out of airplanes, taking in foster children, confronting ex-boyfriends, and other ways of facing, or avoiding, or just banging into the realities of age.

A dowdy 50-something woman spoke of posting nude photos of herself on Reddit, which she confessed was an enormous turn-on for her, and which went viral. She won the contest with this improbable tale of empowerment, although Ariel preferred the young black guy whose story included the word “pussy” about 50 times, but which had a raw truthfulness that Ariel appreciated.

Afterwards we went to a bar across the street called GMT. Ariel chatted with the cute Irish waitress. We ordered Manhattans. Ariel had French onion soup. He told me about his first day at the conference, which was darkened for him by disappointment at Argentina’s unexpected defeat in the Copa America finals the night before. He explained to me, again, the implications of Brexit, which had recently passed, which I was still trying to understand. As the clock neared midnight I was bright-eyed and happy, but Ariel apologized that he needed to get up early again the next morning for the conference.

I paid the check and pointed him to his subway, proud that I still knew my way around the City well enough to play an authority. I pulled a rain poncho out of my bag and walked down to my little hotel on Grand Street in a warm drizzle. I couldn’t tell if it was the contact high of the City that Doesn’t Sleep, the lingering warmth of the bourbon, or the time bump of coming East from Mountain Time, but when I got to my hotel I was nestling into my new favorite fantasy: that time is nothing but a number.
OPEN HEART

Paula Goldman

The zipper line down the sternum,
the airway tube in your mouth,
the blanket pulled to the chin,
I want to unzip you, climb in.

How we lean into each other:
children, houses, moving, movies.
Each year between us stores up
for future’s leaner years.

You remember those thin yellow
paper sheets for algebra and geometry
divided by our drawn squares;
the equations always came out
perfectly: So and so equals:
getting gas, stopping the mail, marketing

Morning coffee elicits, “The coffee
is good today, the coffee is weak,
the coffee is strong.”

You sit with your bowl of cereal
and fruit and the Times, twitching
your fingers. I place my hand
over yours to calm you.

Who really looks at us? “Do you like
my haircut?” “Is this jacket
too small?” “Am I thinner?”
“Don’t I have nice legs?” you tease.
Fine muscled legs, strong hands,
the same wedding ring after 50 years,
touches my obdurate heart.

And now that you’re healing,
things will never be the same.
THIS IS HOME

Anastasio Wrobel
UNTIL
Dana Stamps II

The first things you lose
you don’t notice:
oblivion, a fetus that is part of your mother
until squeezed
into birth from the place pop

loves. Named, you become lower case i.
The law says so,
and you lose oblivion to gain the need to suck,
but will not remember
anything until

a Labrador slobbers on you,
or you see
your father’s shriveled penis
in the bathtub. You lose innocence slowly,
a tricycle becomes a bicycle.

The child eventually becomes the adult
as little i turns into capital I.
The I begins to lust; the lover leaves, or dies:
it’s the same,
loss.

Finally, capital I becomes little it,
a corpse, a thing
others might remember,
until they follow,
and then only God knows, or oblivion again.
TERESA: MY MASK OF DAY

Stephen Page

My mask of day rises with me out of bed
like a wrapped sheet: clinging, covering, she hides
the scars of night; she is soft, sensuous, caresses
my muscular build, my face, my hair;

She unwraps and pirouettes before me, holds out her arms,
clasps my hand, ballrooms, tangoes:
She jumps up and down upon the dry earth,
raising dust to form a rain cloud.

She does not resee my nightmares,
or remember them for me upon wakening.
She does not see the half-bottle of scotch
I sipped into my veins the night before.

She grinds coffee and pours spring water through
the grounds, serves me in a porcelain cup.
She scrambles eggs and sets the plate
before me. She does not ask

Where I was the afternoon before,
or who I was with. She sits in the chair
next to mine, places her hand upon
my forearm, and says nothing.
I was born to be a writer. My mother was intent on making me the next Nellie Bly beginning when she found out she was going to have her first child, a girl, to whom she gave a gender ambiguous name so people would only judge her by her skills. While other mothers put headphones to their bellies in hopes of a musical prodigy, my mother, although a vain woman, did appreciate the power of knowledge and read to me in the womb. By age seven, I was sitting on my childhood home’s splintered two-seat porch swing. I took my tattered, wide-ruled composition book with a binding covered with pink and blue Lisa Frank characters and reported on what was going on in my neighborhood.

A car was going over fifty miles per hour today on our street and the speed limit is twenty-five, I wrote. It might’ve been just an observation to some, but to me, it was a record of the times. A report from a four-eyed mini reporter.

My dad was the influence who instilled in me how important education really was to a person, but he also created my perfectionism. It was never an option not to go to college. My dad did not care if I had the best prom dress, and didn’t understand why I spent so much on highlights to look flawless in my senior pictures. It was all about being smart, graduating college, and making something of myself.

I grew up in rural Kentucky with knobby knees, a gangly body, and a gap-toothed smile. I wasn’t the most beautiful girl in the room at an early age, traditionally speaking. Yet I knew I had a gregarious personality. Still, when you’re a kid, others see only the Coke bottle frames that you wear each day. Vanity was something that our family has passed on through the generations.

My grandmother dyed her hair blonde until she died at eighty-five. She didn’t want anyone to know a single gray hair existed. My mom always obsessed over her weight. An avid runner in her early years, she had me, her only child, and quit exercising.

“I need to lose this big tire,” she told me as she stared into the mirror, pulling at her stomach. She was
maybe twenty pounds overweight, but she was beautiful, always looking at least ten years younger than it said on her driver’s license. Men flirted with her at the grocery store, even at sixty. But still, my mom would say to me, “I wish I was half as beautiful as you.”

She put such an emphasis on beauty, pointing out that I needed a wax when my bushy brows got out of control and highlighting my mousy brown hair starting when I was twelve. When I reached high school, I became vulnerable, as many are at that age, to bullies. My first memory of this came from a girl on my dance team coming up to me on the practice floor.

“Getting a little pudgy there, Taylor?” she told me, squeezing my belly. I wore a cropped shirt and yoga pants. That was when the first diet began.

I was seventeen when I realized boys were noticing me. I had finally learned how to do my makeup and hair and I was dressing for my body. I was always more mature looking than my classmates, but finally I wasn’t the ugly duckling. I was eighteen when I started partying and hooking up with boys. I had dyed my hair blonde from my natural brunette, and suddenly, I was desirable, fuckable even. I entered college with a newfound sense of confidence: boys loved me and I was considered the fun, beautiful blonde I’d always wanted to be. I used my looks to gain popularity with not only the girls in my sorority, but lots of boys on campus.

Along with finding the confidence I needed through boys and booze, I was using eating and exercise as a way to control my life. I still dreamed of being a journalist, but I barely scraped by in undergrad, going from having a 4.0 in high school to landing on academic probation a couple times in college. Being smart was on the back burner; I wanted to be hot and wanted.

Both.

I’ve been told I’m pretty.
I’ve been told I’m smart.
I’ve been told I’m neither.

Turns out, I can be both.

I still wonder why it’s so hard to believe that someone can be both pretty and smart.

Pretty and smart are two things that I am, and I’m many other things, too.

I’m funny. I’m determined. I’m a good friend, daughter, and girlfriend.
I wake up some days feeling pretty. Some days feeling smart. Some days, I feel depressed and can’t think of a single positive thing about myself.

I’m a working journalist and an essayist going through an MFA program, and I know I’m smart. Some days, I feel like it’s all a sham and someone will tell me I’m not smart enough for my career.

I still want to be beautiful. I still pay way too much for highlights and watch makeup tutorials online to make sure my cheekbones are highlighted just so.

But I don’t have to choose one or the other.

I can be both pretty and smart.
ONE DAY OF PRESENTS

Trevor Thornton

At five, I never saw a Jesus like this before—at least, I thought it was Jesus, there at Ms. Cynthia Nix’s house in a picture on the wall behind some balloons. He had all the right stuff like Jesus. He had a golden circle around his head, long hair, and a beard, and he smiled a little with his tiny mouth. He had Jesus’s long, thin nose, and he put two fingers up in the air, kind of bent, like Jesus. He had colorful swirls, little pink angels, and a Bible verse over his shoulders. He held what Mama called the shepherd’s crook.

I knew what that was because we had a picture at home with the crook. In that picture, Jesus had a little smile, and you could see his heart through his shirt, with fire coming out of it. But he was happy because he held a little lamb. And there were lots of pretty, white lambs running around and smiling up at him. Mama had said that he was the Good Shepherd, and so he held the crook to keep the lambs together. And I knew I was a lamb, too. Mama also said he was the Lamb of God, and I didn’t understand how he could be the Shepherd and the Lamb at the same time. There was a lamb in this picture too, standing next to the Jesus-looking man. It stood up straight like it was marching, and it carried a cross with a flag on it. It was the Lamb, for sure, a little white one that looked like me when I marched.

All the kids running around under the picture, smiling with party hats on, they kind of looked like the pretty, white lambs in our picture at home. He sure seemed like He was Jesus—only one thing. His skin was brown. That didn’t seem right. I wondered if maybe it was like when you go to the mall to see Santa, but you know it’s not, really, because Santa works at the North Pole, not outside the Belk’s. Sometimes, it’s hard to know a thing, even if you see it. And sometimes, you keep yourself from seeing a thing because you don’t want to know it. The grown folks explain that he’s really one of Santa’s helpers, that he can give your list to the boss. So, I figured that this man on the wall must have been one of His helpers.

Mama said I was being a good helper today, because I helped pick out a present for Ada and was patient when we had car trouble. Ms. Cynthia called me a good helper a lot in school, and Mama said that Ms. Cynthia
was a good helper, too. She was my teacher at the University Baptist Daycare, and Mama was the director. I didn’t
know Ada all that well because she was in P-1, and I was in P-2. But Mama and Ms. Cynthia were friends, and us
going to Ada’s birthday party was kind of like help. Mama said that Daddy being deployed meant she could do
more, so I was happy to help. Since it was almost Christmas, we wrapped Ada’s LEGO set in red and green and
brought streamers. Mama even brought a big plate of cupcakes. “Just in case,” she said. Since I was a good
helper, I got to get a LEGO set, too.

“Is this their house?” I asked as Mama parked on the street. “It’s huge!”

“Don’t say that when we get in there.”

It was their house. The lawn was big and dark green, but the sky was gray, and there were streaks of rain
going down the windows. It never snowed in North Carolina, not even basketball season, but every year we still
hoped for a white Christmas. Today was just cold rain.

When I came into the house, Ada gave me a big hug even though she didn’t know me all that well. She
was happy, and she had a nice, new dress on. I smiled and gave her her present, and that’s when I saw the brown
Jesus-man. I got lots of hugs from my friends, and we all ran around the house like crazy, little lambs, bucking and
kicking. Ms. Cynthia taught us games like she did at school. Then she put Ada at the head of the table, and we sat
and had cupcakes.

After a while, Ms. Cynthia said a special visitor was coming. She seemed excited, and Ada did, too, and
we all looked around our chairs to see who it was. Mama and the grown ups were sitting in the back with their
coffee, and they all seemed just as excited.

Rising, they asked us, “Who it could be?”

“Pipe down, y’all!” Ms. Cynthia thought she heard him coming from the kitchen.

Then I heard jingling behind the kitchen door. I put a finger on my lips and shot my hand in the air, but it
was hard to be quiet because of who it could be. Other kids put their hands up too. It got quieter, but it was getting
loud in my heart.

“Ho, ho, ho!” came from behind the door.
And the bells jingled loud. Kids started screaming, and the grown ups started hollering in the back.

*It couldn’t be,* I doubted. *This early?*

Ms. Cynthia put her hand out towards the crowd and a finger to her lips. Ada stood in her chair, and everyone shushed everyone.

“Ho, ho, ho!” again, and a tromp-tromping of boots behind the door. The grown ups moved up from the back. I wanted them to pipe down, and they wouldn’t.

“I hope y’all been good!” a man’s big voice said from behind.

One kid stretched both her hands out toward the door, and her eyes got big. One kid put a hand on his heart. He had his head bowed and his eyes squeezed tight, and the other hand was grasping in the air. A bunch of kids started yelling and shaking their arms. I was quiet, but my heart screamed. Ms. Cynthia spread her feet wide, closed her eyes, and put her hands out like a preacher.

*It couldn’t be,* I thought. *Could it be?*

She placed one hand on the door, and I gripped my chair tight.

*My God!* I thought. *My God!*

When she popped the door open, the house blew up. We cheered as the man burst into the room. Big red coat, long white beard. Funny hat, big belly. He had all the right stuff, just about. Only one thing.

He stretched his arms out and said in a big, happy voice, “Ho, ho ho! Merry Christmas!”

The crowd of kids died down, confused. All except for Ada, standing in her chair with a big smile on her face like she had done this before.

All the little kids started laughing. Then they laughed a lot.

“That’s not Santa!” one chuckled.

“Of course I am! And I hope y’all been good, because I got presents for everyone!”

“Mmm-hm.”

Kids kept laughing, and the grown ups were laughing, too. Ms. Cynthia crossed her arms with her hand up to her nose, covering a smile.
I wasn’t smiling, though. I knew it wasn’t Santa. It wasn’t even a helper. It was Mr. Tommy Nix, Ada’s
daddy. I recognized him. He was the Chief of Police. His belly was real, but nothing else. The other kids must have
recognized him, too. They pointed.

“You’re not Santa,” one laughed.

“Sure I am!” he laughed, too. “See?”

Suddenly, he picked me up right out of my seat. While I was in the air, I saw Mama sitting in the back not
smiling. The frosting on her cupcakes was starting to sweat. Mr. Tommy flew me over to the couch and sat me right
down on his lap.

“Little boy!” he said, “What would you like for Christmas this year?” His breath smelled like pickles, and
his belly was hot. Everybody giggled, and I started giggling, too.

“You’re not Santa,” a boy said, smiling, and he came over and put his hands on Mr. Tommy’s knee. Mr.
Tommy scooped him up, too, so we were sitting pretty on both his knees, and everyone in the room chuckling like
Santa Claus. It was too much.

“Ho, ho, ho!” Mr. Tommy said, and he bounced us high on both his knees.

“Woah!” The other boy yelled in delight. “Not Santa!” he said, “Not Santa!”

Everyone kept on laughing, clapping, and slapping their knees, but I didn’t like it. So I reached up and
grabbed his beard and stretched it out from his face, and let it go. It snapped back onto his nose.

“Ooch! Lord!” he yelled.

The laughter exploded, and kids started running up to us. They giggled and shrieked and started climbing
up on Mr. Tommy.

“Not Santa!” they yelled, “not Santa!”

Then we were all roughhousing. Everyone laughed with Mr. Tommy. We all wrestled with him, and kids
kept trying to tug his beard. I looked back for a second, and Mama was still not laughing, so I laughed and played
harder. And the harder I played, the less it seemed she wanted to laugh.

We were cheering together, “Not Santa! Not Santa! Not Santa!”
I looked again, but this time I saw Ada. She was sitting in her chair, and she wasn’t laughing at all.

“He is so Santa!” she yelled over the noise, her fists in the air. “He is so!”

Did she really think that? It was her own daddy. How could she not know? I kept watching her, and I could tell she was going to cry, because she was making that silent face that you make right before you’re going to cry. But I didn’t know why. Then she was crying, and she ran out of the room. Ms. Cynthia ran after her.

Suddenly, I was in the air again. Mama had yanked me up, and we were flying toward the door. Children went flying every which way and were buckled in the backs of cars just as fast.

It was raining soft on the car windows. Mama tried starting the car, but it wouldn’t go. It kept on not going, and then the hood started smoking like a gun. She just sat there, and then she went back in. I listened to the soft rain on the roof growing softer.

After a while, I watched Mama and Mr. Tommy walk toward the car. He lifted up the hood and did something and then closed it. Mama got back in the car. I kept quiet. She started it up. She got out, shut the door, and talked to Mr. Tommy for a while. They didn’t look bad, but they didn’t look good. It was quiet inside, and it looked quiet out there, too. As she talked, Mama had her hands out in front with her palms turned up. Mr. Tommy had his Santa hat in his hands. They kept on talking in silence with their eyes down toward the ground, and then they shook hands and he went back inside, and Mama got in the car.

She sat there for a little bit, then she looked at me in the mirror and said softly, “Trevor, do you know why Ada got upset?”

I tried to think if it had been my birthday party. It would have been hard having your birthday so close to Christmas.

“Yes’m,” I said, looking down at my LEGO set. “Only one day of presents.”

Mama looked at me, and then she put her head on the steering wheel and began to cry. That made me want to cry too, but I kept quiet. I looked outside, and snow was coming down all around us. The snow started sticking on the windows, and pretty soon all we could see was white. After a while, the white faded into shadows.
RAINY THURSDAY SEATTLE NIGHT

Gerard Martinez
RAIN TAXI

George Longenecker

Soft music down a windy street  
worn smooth by light years of frustration traffic  
— The Fugs

Two red oak leaves stuck to the side window  
of an old Checker cab,  
headlights reflected in dark puddles,  
the old Hancock tower’s weather light glowed  
red for rain,  
and from a higher building a beacon  
revolved in the night,  
horns of boats in the harbor echoed through streets  
where water splashed up from gutters,  
rann down sidewalks,  
there on a corner I thought I saw you,  
you with your bag of poetry books, pens,  
first drafts,  
a stoplight glowed red in a puddle,  
and when my cab finally moved ahead,  
you were gone.  
Of course I should have known,  
it couldn’t be you,  
we wouldn’t write any more poems together,  
I’d seen you die on the first day of spring.  
I forgot where I was going,  
in all this rain,  
I didn’t know  
why the streets were so wet,  
why this cab was so old,  
I forgot what you had been writing about  
the last time we were together;  
the rain taxi crossed rivers of street lights.
The only real question was whether or not to kill myself. I had just received a two-hundred-sixty-two month federal prison sentence linked to the overdose and death of my best friend.

It reminded me of a time when I was fourteen years old. I was upstairs, alone, in my bedroom of our old farmhouse; my parents were below. I wrapped my mouth around the barrel of a loaded twenty-gauge, single-shot shotgun. With mindfulness of a Buddha, my eyes ran down the shaft to the cocked hammer. My left hand wrapped around the polished steel as my right hand cradled the stock, unnaturally, upside down. My thumb methodically broke the all-important barrier of the trigger guard and caressed that permanent key to change.

My teeth rattled the barrel and an electric shock went through my mouth to the back of my jaw. I can still taste the gun oil, the odor of which, to this day, conjures the fear and loneliness of that timeless, intimate moment. I thought about what it would mean for my parents to discover, with horror, the back of my skull and cerebral matter plastered all over my hand-painted, zebra-striped walls. Black, white and red have a harrowing effect. (Dear reader, friend and confidante, I have never before shared this with anyone.)

I was too much of a coward to pull the trigger. However, I understood what the existential philosopher, Albert Camus, meant when he concluded that the only real question in life is whether or not to commit suicide.

Enter the existential crisis—angst, dread, apathy, fear, and self-pity. I felt a compressed rage at the absurd futility of life. From the way I saw it, I only had two options: suicide or acceptance. On one hand, my view of suicide was not limited to the physical. I had the option to disconnect from my reality through many distractions: cards, porn, gambling, drugs, hooch, TV, kickin’ it with the homies, etc. On the other hand, with a Zen-like clarity of mind, I realized that acceptance demanded responsibility. I had an obligation to make sense of Ryan’s death; to change, and to find meaning and purpose in my life.

Still, my mind reeled as I tried to process my punishment. Other inmates would come back from court with five, ten, and fifteen-year sentences. One guy received two years and was seriously considering suicide.
Really? He had nothing to complain about! I had a twenty-two-year sentence!

Yet slowly, dawn broke upon the dark night of my soul in the form of empathy. It began to occur to me that suffering is relative. That is, your suffering is just as real to you as mine is to me. (Take a moment to digest what that means, for it was only through this realization that I was able to grow beyond the confines of my immediate suffering.) This, I believe, is the catalyst for real change in life: to rise above our suffering through empathy.

After struggling through my crisis I was confronted with the classic existential questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? And thus began many years of deep soul searching and action-oriented change. However, change is not a destination; it is not some utopian place where we finally arrive. Life will ever present us with that perennial existential crisis.

I recently published my first book, *Gilgul: Transmigration* (Tikkun Publishing, 2016). When I finished this obscure little text that merges the classic Nordic tale of Peer Gynt with Jewish mysticism, reincarnation and redemption, I’d served more than a decade of my sentence. It is said there is irreversible psychological damage that occurs after seven years of incarceration. I personally have no doubt about this. I was exhausted from wrestling with the guilt, shame, remorse, self-pity, and humiliation of Ryan’s death.

My religious beliefs were evolving. Years of profound soul searching had left a deep void within me. I’d lost all of my appeals, my wife and son, my sister, and like Michael Stipe of REM, I ultimately lost my religion as well. With another decade in prison ahead of me, I tossed and turned through yet another dark night of the soul.

The paradox of the existential crisis demands action, a Kirkegaardian leap of faith. This always and inevitably boils down to taking responsibility for myself.

Today, I am incredibly proud of what I’ve accomplished in the nearly fifteen years I’ve spent in prison. I’m even grateful. Daily, I remove the log from my own eye before I try to help my fellow inmate remove the sliver from his own. Over the years, I’ve taught GED and many adult continuing education classes. I’ve completed six vocational/technical programs, two apprenticeships, and throughout most of these years I’ve instructed these courses. I earned my bachelor’s degree in theology and Judaic studies. I published *Gilgul*, and my second book, *The Dystopian Hermit Monk*—a practical exercise in Buddhist philosophy and Jungian psychology—is forthcoming.
Most recently, I completed a very intensive ten-month residential drug and alcohol program.

It is said that experience is wisdom to the fool—and I can assure you that I am no exception to this rule. I’ve learned to embrace my past because this defines who I am. People often ask if there is one thing I might change about my life. Though I have regrets, I wouldn’t change a thing. I’m precisely the person I am today because of every single choice I’ve made. My experience is invaluable. To want to change anything from my past is to despise myself, and this I will no longer do. Instead, I’ve learned to let go of a lifetime of guilt and shame and love myself for who I am. Anything else would be hypocritical and negate the self.

Change is alive and ever-flowing; it is not a destination. Always there is a future, and forever, there is hope. We embrace our existential crises and emerge from the darkness not necessarily a changed person, but as a sort of new creation, an ever-changing work in progress with newfound hope and courage. Change, growth and redemption are achieved in the here and now.

All pontification aside, this is how I’ve come to realize my obligation to answer the only real philosophical question in life.
EL MURO

Isabel Ribe

Build that wall
So high
So glorious
Build that wall
Tremendous
Fantastic
That wall
Best wall ever
Strongest wall
Tallest wall
Most beautiful wall
Build that wall
Like an arrow
Shot from sea
To shining sea
Build that wall
Like a river
Flowing freely, easily
Over tall mountains
Through deep canyons
Cutting through
The long expanse
Of desert lands
Build it tall and strong
Build it true
Make us proud
Make sure no one
Can break it
Climb it
Tunnel underneath
Make sure no one
Could fly
Over
Make sure
Make sure
Make sure
WE

Are safe

Build that wall so high
it blocks the jaguars
The coyotes
The fox
The scorpions
The rattlesnakes
The lizards
The hawks
And javelinas
Make sure it blocks
The deer
And the doves
the hummingbirds
The owls and the
Jackrabbits
Make sure it blocks
The Tarahumara
The Yaqui
The Huicholes
The Tohono O’odham
The Dine
The Apache
The Hopi
The Mayans
The Aztecas
Make sure it
Blocks the children
And their mothers too

Build that wall so high
It blocks out the wind
That it covers the sun
And blackens the sky
Build the wall
Waiting rooms have a way of setting any person on edge, but for Terry, the feeling was made worse knowing that ‘on edge’ was something he wouldn’t feel again after the procedure. He stared blankly up at a poster parallel to his seat, detailing the results he would be looking for afterwards—no anxiety, no anger, no deep, wallowing depressions. If any of that started bubbling up again, even after they went in and rearranged things upstairs, there was a problem, and he’d have to call his doctor right away. He read the poster over and over.

Besides the poster, he’d already read this information dozens of times in the pre-op packet the clinic had mailed to him. He knew what he was going into, and he’d considered it for years, and the pros outweighed the cons. He had gone through the checklist enough times to know that for certain. Really, wasn’t that all he could ask before going in for something like this? But still, there was that waiting room anxiety. Inescapable. He repeated to himself in his head a sort of mantra he had developed: After this, you’ll never feel waiting room anxiety, or grocery store anxiety, or any other kind again. You get to drop your therapist, you get to drop your meds. Peace and quiet in your own head, at last.

Since the procedure had been introduced a few years ago, it had seen great success. Testimonials poured in from people of all ages and incomes and occupations talking up the wonders of living without feelings. Anxiety, depression, trauma—things of the past, all these patients insisted. Their lives were all so much easier without all those scared, sad, worried feelings getting in the way of their personal progress. Terry couldn’t wait.

Terry’s gaze slid to the right, and he eyeballed the receptionist from the corner of his periphery, watching as she picked at her nails behind the front desk. The waiting room was nearly empty—blessedly—but she kind of ruined it for him. She kept making that little flicking noise with her thumbnails, one against the other. He hated that. There wasn’t a noise on earth that a person could make with their fingernails that didn’t set Terry on edge. A pet peeve, he’d call it. Maybe something worse, though.

Bouncing his left leg up and down, he waited. Waited. Wondered when the nurse was going to come get
him. Wondered how the Fentanyl was going to feel or if he’d say something weird while he was out of it—he hadn’t had a procedure before where he’d been put under conscious sedation, so who knew?

It was on the tail end of that thought that a door suddenly opened cater-corner to him, and a middle-aged blonde nurse poked her head out and said, “Terry Mayfield? Come on back!” There was a casual smile on her face—a lot of nurses Terry met seemed as if they were permanently in the worst possible moods, or maybe they’d been born frowning and never found a good enough reason to quit. This nurse’s nametag read: Ellie Schreiber, RN. Terry nodded and smiled a greeting as he squeezed past her, through the door. Ellie was so chipper, so serene. He wondered if she’d had the procedure done herself.

In the back, Ellie chatted with Terry about his day as she took his vitals. She handed him a gown, explained things he already knew about the process, asked if he had any questions. After he changed, she laid him down, put an oxygen tube in his nose, and stuck the needle in his arm for the Fentanyl—that was one of his bigger concerns, so after that, he could relax. No anxiety—thank God. After all, that really was the point of it all. His arm felt slightly pinched, but Ellie seemed unconcerned, so Terry decided he’d feel the same.

After some time, she wheeled Terry back into the operating room and attached an IV to his arm. His anxiety hovered around his head like a mosquito, but the more the nurse spoke, the more he felt it would absolutely be okay, no question at all. Not a chance anything would go wrong—it was a very safe procedure, after all. He smiled to himself and laid back, waiting for the drugs to kick in. He felt his body relaxing and his eyelids drooping, as if he were drifting to sleep in his own comfortable bed rather than lying, sedated, in an operating room. It was only as he began losing consciousness that he wondered, ever so briefly, what life would be like without ever again feeling relief.
PARADING FOR COCONUTS

Jennifer Love

From the stage, Marissa Olive sees only coconuts: some rounder or hairier than others while the stage lights extinguish each coconut’s flesh and eyes, but those eyes still see. They bear witness to little girls parading around like live dolls.

Somewhere in that horizon line of heads, Marissa’s mother takes note of the girl’s walk and smile. Her Ma grew up in Jamaica where pageant queens become Miss Universe and then marry rich men like Bob Marley. Marissa doesn’t want to become the pretend-queen of the galaxy or marry a cultural icon.

The pageant stage announcer spits, “Marissa Olive from Fort Worth, Texas, is an A-student who aspires to become an engineer and dancer.” Marissa bites down and spreads her lips into a facial expression that should mean she’s joyful despite the lie this smooth-speaking narrator offers to the audience. Marissa can only give the smile a sense of authenticity when she thinks about playing soccer in a baggy t-shirt and shorts. She imagines chopping off her hair as she widens her smile and pivots downstage. The round of applause from the coconut heads sounds about the same as every other girl’s, and the announcer moves on to telling the crowd about Deborah Stevens from Dallas, Texas.

Marissa walks down the steps, and thanks the stage assistant for reminding her to start changing for the talent portion.

“Someone taught you manners,” the short-haired assistant says.

“I like your hair,” Marissa tells her.

The assistant runs her hand through the brown spikes on her head and smiles.

Marissa won’t feel good winning a crown, but if she doesn’t win, her Ma’ll unzip the puffy organza dress, pull down the crinoline, and before she can even remove the cubic-zirconia earrings, her Ma’ll pull her down on the bed by the ears and use some kind of leather strap over every part of her back. Marissa will be forced to wear a turtleneck—even though it’s September in Texas—for a few days. If she doesn’t place at all, her Ma’ll take the
buckle on the end of the leather strap to Marissa’s shoulder blades and tailbone. If she does win, they might go to Jack in the Box to indulge in those 99-cent tacos like when she won Miss Sunburst a few months back. After that pageant, her Ma didn’t take a belt or a shoe or an instrument of any kind to her body for an entire week. Marissa’s mouth widens, revealing more baby teeth.

As Marissa walks into the ballroom designated as the girls’ changing area, she wonders if any other mothers skipped paying the electric bill for the costumes and entry fees needed to participate in this charade. Marissa couldn’t be happier there’s a rule that moms aren’t allowed backstage once the pageant begins. She’s the youngest in this group of nine-to-twelve-year olds, and almost all the girls are taller, their legs longer. Marissa sees the one girl who’s shorter struggling with her zipper. The announcer identified the girl as Heather from Keller, Texas, and there was muffled laughter from the other girls when Heather waved at the end of the stage. Marissa thinks Heather might have Turner’s Syndrome like her mother. Big head, little body, butterfly wing-sized ears. Her short stature makes it look like she should be with the five-to eight-year-olds.

Marissa walks over to Heather. “I’ll help you with yours if you help me with mine.”

Heather pulls up her curls. She has almost no neck, just a big head and shoulders. “I’m adopted. My mom makes me do this.” Marissa unzips Heather’s velvet dress; it’s perfect for Christmas Eve Mass.

“You’re a lot prettier than your mom,” Heather says.

Marissa turns around and Heather unzips Marissa’s pink organza dress. She wants to rip the itchy gown off, stomp on it, then give it to her wolf-dog and let him rip it shreds. But she doesn’t have a wolf-dog and she can’t tear it to shreds herself.

Heather picks up her hunter green dress and holds it over her chest, the same way Marissa did as soon as hers hit the ground. They stand in the dim ballroom face to face, their fronts covered and backs bare. No one can see the small patches of purple on Marissa’s back.

“I was watching Miss America on TV and told my dad I wanna be like those girls. So he bought me a dress and here I am. But my mom says they give girls the wrong idea of beauty.”

“It’s a carnival of painted girls. It’s worse than standing behind glass in the display at the mall. My mom’s
made me do that, too.”

“People stare at me all the time anyway. They say You’re so cute. I know they’re thinking You’re a mutant.”

Heather drops her dress so she can put her curls into a ponytail, and Marissa stares at her bare chest. “At least here, the whole point is to get stared at. I don’t want to be cute, I want to be beautiful.”

“You don’t have to stand on a stage to be beautiful. You and my Ma both got that mixed up.”

“I saw her burn your forehead with that curling iron.”

Marissa tugs at her bangs.

“Don’t worry, you can’t see it. Your hair’s thick.”

“My mom tries to make it curl. It won’t.”

“Everyone else’s hair is curled up. But yours is straight like a Japanese princess.”

“I’m not Japanese.”

Heather shrugs, and the stage assistant makes a whispered announcement that the first girl has five minutes before the talent portion begins. She winks at Marissa, who winks back.

Marissa’s second-to-last. She sees Heather button up a collared shirt with cacti and cowboy boots all over it.

“Are you roping calves?”

“I’m Patsy Cline.”

“You don’t look much like her.”

“I’m singing Crazy.”

“Singing country is my dream. My mom’s best friend says I have a good voice.”

“Why don’t you just do it as your talent?”

“Dunno. Ma won’t let me. She wants me to dance.” Marissa pulls a unitard out of her duffle bag.

“Maybe she thinks you’re a better dancer.”

“I’m not. But she wants me to be.”

“Your mom wants them to see you in a leotard.”
“Close,” Marissa hold her outfit for the talent show up to Heather. “A unitard.”

“Doesn’t she know unitards are for the ‘80s? And so’s that color.” Heather tugs at the purple spandex. “But you can pull it off. And we’re just barely in the ‘90s. What’re you dancing to?”

“Flashdance. ‘What a Feeling’.” Marissa puts the white sequined headband around her head. It stings the burn but covers it. The unitard will cover her bruises.

“I love that movie. You can do that?”

“Kind of. Less flashy.”

“It’s all about the flash here. You could sing it. Bet you’ve danced to it enough to know all the words.”

“I do.”

Heather turns to finish dressing. Marissa slips on the unitard with her back to the wall, cinches the elastic belt around her waist, and waits for Heather to put on her pointed boots and cowboy hat. They walk to the backstage curtain. Marissa doesn’t like other people touching her but she stands shoulder to shoulder beside Heather and doesn’t flinch. Marissa wishes her new friend luck as she walks up the stairs to the stage.

Heather holds her free hand to her heart as she croons but her voice breaks in the final chorus. The girl standing behind Marissa, who happens to have the whitest teeth, laughs.

“You have lipstick on your teeth,” Marissa whispers.

The girl uses her index finger like a toothbrush and inadvertently wipes the fuchsia paint from her lips.

Heather is already changing back into her velvet dress for the finale when they call Marissa’s name. She asks the stage assistant for a mic and sticks it in the stretchy belt around her unitard. “Turn the music down when the words start.”

Blackness envelops the audience and stage, and Marissa drops the mic downstage in front the judges’ table. She finds the X on center stage, kneels, and the spotlight blazes onto her. The sheer purple unitard sparkles, and as the electrical harpsichord begins in B-flat, she unfolds vertebrae by vertebrae, looking out into a collection of coconuts. Rows and rows of coconuts. Marissa spreads her fingers wide and extends her arms like she’s gathering the sun—just as her mother copychoreographed from the movie. Marissa tendues her right leg out into
a split, twirls on her butt, and then contracts into a backbend. She rolls with her body fully extended on the ground and rises up to complete a pirouette. The judges are the only coconuts with faces, so she looks the one female judge in the eye. Marissa points her toes as she walks slowly toward the mic and picks it up.

As she begins singing Irene Cara’s words, a single scream erupts from a coconut in the audience. She skips around the stage, wailing from her belly into the mic while the sea of coconuts bob to Marissa’s words. Every coconut, except that one that screamed, the one that knows her, moves to the rhythm of the music.

After she wins the pageant, she’ll give the crown to Heather backstage as they pack up, and they’ll never see one another again. Marissa’s Ma won’t forgive her capricious choices, but Marissa’ll summon the same sense of mania she felt onstage. She’ll kneel and expose her back and surround herself with the bobbing affection of that blackened crowd of coconuts.
CAN I HAVE YOUR NUMBER?

Nathan Gower

TITLE UP:

“Flying is learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss.” — Douglas Adams

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL ENTRANCE - DAY

A dweeby, undersized boy wearing a backpack, DANIEL (14), awkwardly holds a pen and paper in front of him. The paper whips back and forth in his hand: a very windy day.

He gulps, extends his hands forward to—

A teenage goddess, SARAH (16), the most popular girl on the planet. She shoots a confused glare back at Daniel.

A silent beat. Sarah smacks on some gum.

She blows a bubble. It pops. Daniel flinches.

SARAH

My number? You want my number?

Daniel smiles the best he can. In the distance, SARAH’S GAGGLE OF FRIENDS snickers at the interaction. Sarah sees them, feels their pressure.

She seductively takes the pen and paper. Daniel gawks at her in shock.

SARAH (CONT’D)

Why not. Right?
She scribbles something on the paper. Daniel reaches to take it, but she snatches it back. Sarah looks back at her friends and smiles.

She folds the paper once, twice. She makes a paper airplane.

The world creeps into SLOW MOTION as Sarah glides the paper airplane over Daniel’s shoulder and into the rushing wind. Wooooosh.

Daniel looks back at Sarah. She winks. He drops his backpack, and the chase is on.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

The paper airplane flutters down the walk, Daniel close behind. He dodges oncoming classmates, nearly plows into several teens.

The wind lifts the paper up, dashes it across the—

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Daniel nearly grabs the paper, but a CAR HORN blares and startles him. He jumps out of the way and sees the paper fluttering back towards the school down the opposite—

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Daniel lunges towards the plane, but a rush of wind lifts it over an adjacent fence.

ACROSS THE STREET, Sarah’s friends howl with laughter. Sarah smiles, embarrassed for Daniel.

Daniel clambers over the fence in hot pursuit, follows the plane towards a—
EXT. PARK - CONTINUOUS

The plane flips and floats across a playground. ONLOOKERS watch Daniel zig-zag back in forth. He’s a perfect mix of sweet and pathetic.

The plane catches a branch in a hedge of bushes. Daniel catches up, reaches for it—but it pulls free, blows back across the same playground, and over the same fence.

Daniel’s tired. He drags himself over the fence back to the—

EXT. SIDEWALK

A wind gust floats the plane high out of reach. Daniel trails slowly under it, watches it lift up, up, up. For a moment, it’s lost in the sun.

ACROSS THE STREET, Sarah’s friends erupt with laughter. Sarah’s smile fades, though. Poor Daniel has had enough.

Suddenly, the wind bursts and the plane darts forward.

Daniel runs under it, staring up. He runs faster, faster, then—

CRASH! Daniel barges into someone and falls back on the pavement.

Dazed, he looks up to see an equally dweeby girl, SAMANTHA (14), gathering herself on the ground. She’s dorky, awkward, perfect with a capital “P”.

They exchange a glance. Nervous smiles. It was meant to be.

Daniel helps Samantha to her feet. They brush themselves off.

DANIEL

Sorry about that. I was just....
He looks around. The paper airplane lies on the ground a few paces away. The wind is all but gone. He glances at Sarah across the street. He looks back at Samantha.

DANIEL (CONT’D)
I’m Daniel.
He extends his hand. Samantha takes it. She smiles a perfect smile.

SAMANTHA
I’m Samantha. Sam.

They walk down the sidewalk happily chatting. Daniel casually scoops up the crumbled airplane as they pass.

In the distance, they approach a group of MEGA NERDS playing some type of geek-it-up wizard card game. Daniel hands the NERD RINGLEADER the airplane, points towards Sarah.

Sarah gawks at the exchange with disgust. The nerds high-five each other as Daniel and Sam walk away.

FADE OUT.

OVER CREDITS:
A series of text messages from the nerds to Sarah’s phone. They might say something like this:

“Hey girl . . . U wanna be the dragon in my dungeon?”

“Hey, we’re having a party tonight. U wanna be the only girl there?”
I DREAM OF KENT
Beth Anthony

I wandered down to the
crooked river waterfall
where the dreamer went
To float away...

On the rooftop,
as the trains whistled by
my neighbor’s rhythms of Africa
echoed in my heart
while potters swirled
their lumps of clay
and molten glass
twirled into spirals of rainbows.

I was welcomed by
a menagerie of visionaries.
We painted our bodies,
danced in a circle of ribbons
and sang in the moonlight.
We lived here
in a homemade haven.

The dreamer filmed
a fantastical world
of floating cars and jungle girls.
And the leading man
spoke in rhymes and riddles
while a clown did tricks and
played the fiddle.
The street of water
was a sacred place
of tribal rites and
nights of grace,
where a whirling dervish
was king of the road
when he danced in a trance
as he laughed and cried.

It was poetry slam, electric jam
ahead of its time
edgy rock steady gritty clip-clip
loose grip deconstruct
the sound of
wailing sax jazzy blues
melting into ancient moves.

The house band of poets
set the cove on firedesire
to go higher
more to give
and in that moment: to live
to live to live

I dream of Kent
when the dancing
was so eclectic
how we were wrapped in magic;
the place—it was electric.
A captivating scene
as we lived the dream.
Serene—down by the crooked river
mystical mythical myriad of souls
floating downstream.
thank you note

Jan Ball

Dear Barb, Alex and Poofie (arf-arf),

Thank you for dinner last night. I’m not sure if you saw the expression on my face when Poofie licked you lovingly on the nose, Alex, or when he slobbered kisses all over your hands, Barb. You did reassure me that you washed your hands when you cooked the excellent salmon you prepared for us but I did want to apologize for reacting with that sour look (if you saw me). I suspect some people might be surprised to see me, myself, remove an errant fly with my fork from my wineglass while dining alfresco on a summer night and then drinking the wine even though alcohol purifies everything like using hand sanitizer after riding the public bus, but I realize not everyone would agree, so I just wanted to be sure that a darling, seven pound ball of fluff like Poofie couldn’t in any way spoil our long friendship and I hope he continues to appreciate the wonderful salmon and potatoes you feed him from the table as much as we do.

Your friends,
Jane and Bill
I sat on the back deck of my not-quite-new new home and was blessed with the sighting of a doe walking along the thickets. She owned the land like I did as a child. She was mindful and wary all at the same time. When my little Maltese, Bella, barked, she stopped and turned her head to us, all stillness. I convinced her with several namasté that we were no threat. She wanted to blend into the background and I realized that her immobility is a tactic I’ve used. Flight, freeze, or fight is a natural instinct. She, like me, uses the freeze instinct to gather more information, to listen to her soul. I am rewarded with her own namaste: the beauty of her continuance along the copse. Her body is graceful, timeless in this very moment. Her movement is acceptance of me, and I rejoice in that. If only we all treated each other this way.

Namaste. I honor the place in you in which the entire universe dwells, I honor the place in you which is of love, of truth, of light, and of peace. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are one.

I’ve practiced yoga and meditation for a few years now. It is not how I was brought up. In my Western and Christian upbringing this would come closest to the Golden Rule: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

I was an adult when it occurred to me that inherent in that commandment was love of self. This love is a form of self-respect, self-acknowledgement, and self-care. Once this behavior is learned, then we can do the same with others, and fulfill the first part of the second commandment.

Even so, I appreciate the beauty of namaste. It accepts and honors the good in all beings and doesn’t search for the bad. It acknowledges that we have a commonality. That we are all children of the universe. It speaks to me of respect and kindness. A meeting and greeting that begets love.

There is that small part of us that sees the darkness in others. We are concerned with someone disrespecting our boundaries, and taking advantage of us in some way. Yet, if our boundaries aren’t strong, we are the ones who allow them to encroach and intrude, and then resent it. Then, in turn, we continue to seek the bad, never acknowledging the good. We are all a product of light and dark; there is good and bad in us all. We strive for the good, and berate ourselves for the bad. We judge others according to our own values. It is simply the way we have been taught. Namaste doesn’t make a judgment; it gives room for fault, but allows the conditions for meeting in a place of sameness.
Our differences are what make us unique: our harmonies are that we all share this world. To connect in namasté and to honor namasté we must see every other person as the same. It only follows that every creation is divine, and worthy of acknowledgment; that judgment is placed behind us as we look for the good in others.

To do this, we must place our boundaries and lovingly keep them without disrespect to those who would disrespect us. The word No is a good word (we learn from an early age that this is a bad word, to keep us safe as small children). We are not obliged to say Yes if it causes us pain and will lead to resentment. If we empty ourselves on the altar of others, we are sacrificing a divine creation. That doesn’t mean that the word Yes is bad. It just means that we can weigh what we can offer without the need for resentment and anger.

As the doe froze, she made the determination of whether she would go into flight. Too many times when we are not accepting of our surroundings, or the restrictions and needs of others, we choose flight or fight. Sometimes “freeze” is better. An answer is not always required the instant a favor is asked, or a demand is made. Take that moment to freeze, give your namasté, and weigh the options you have.

Sometimes that choice will be to accept, acknowledge, and continue your way through the thicket of life. Sometimes it will be to walk a little closer, and if you have enough of yourself, you can give freely.

I’ve traveled all over three continents, and it took a beautiful doe in my own backyard to bring this epiphany to me.

Namasté permits us to learn from all creations, just as I did on a summer evening. I looked across the beautiful hill country vista. The view boasted myriad verdant greens, fields, and fencelines of trees spread out before me. I met and recognized another creation, and learned that there is a power to respect and honor within us all. It made my world a better place.

I give you this one summer evening of my life, hoping it will do the same for you.
WATER BUGS

Nancy Beauregard
Swimming, I’m moving through the water gliding
Slowly drop in a rock plunk then emerge dripping,
Right arm cuts water hand cupped pulls water back to me.
Legs outstretched, flutter kick up down
Hardly wounding water.
Head turns to right, gulps breath, face in water again.
I move water supports me soft yielding
It continues

Memory: I swim at the downtown YWCA Buffalo pool
Four days after being raped
Heavy with grief
Anger Weight
Enter water
God I can still swim.
My body still works
I am not dead.
Moving
I am here.

Turn on my back, watch sun setting, Lake Washington.
Slow backstroke no hurry
All the time I need.
Looking straight in the light
My face a sunny photograph.
Then turn over, my belly wet.
Pathway of the sun an aisle
I move along as if getting married
My wedding gown my own skin.
I marry myself.
“World Out of Balance” was created as a response to our environmental crisis. If you look closely, you’ll see a miniature cow on a charred oak branch—a rather literary depiction of the work’s chosen title. The piece is sixteen inches long, six inches high, and five inches deep. I crafted “World Out of Balance” from silver, bronze, and copper.
THE GLORIOUS DAY GIVES

Lenard D. Moore

the yellow sun
in syncopation with the shadows
keeping time as if it too
hears the satellite jazz
as I always do, intent
to capture the rhythm in my head,
my hands steering the wheel
the way Spanish moss dangles
from the hard diameter of a limb.
How often I want to whisper
the melody, bend with riffs
and dance the way an elm might
in the warm breath of wind,
just flutter like a leaf
suspended in a vertical line of light,
a morning that gives myself
to the humming silence of the universe
then back to me, back to me.
Spring 2017

Dear Lady Bird,

I gotta tell you: the times keep a-changing. I have no memory of how long it has been since you crossed over to the other side. I can also tell you that all my heroes have passed on. The other day after my creative writing class, I was gifted with a new Lady Bird-like shero. She was wearing a t-shirt that read, “Black Lives > White Lies.” It feels like no matter one’s age, we are always searching for the future leaders and pathways that make life’s journey unique, pleasurable, and worthwhile.

My relationship with First Lady “Lady Bird” Johnson was a professional one. As a TV photojournalist for twenty-four years in Austin, Texas, our paths crossed many times. Over those years, a social relationship developed. Whenever I was covering a story at the family ranch, the LBJ library, or the National Wildflower Center, Lady Bird would always take a moment to offer a handshake, kind words, and a smile. Person to person, I was always appreciative of her respectful way of acknowledging my presence.

Today, I am amazed at how Lady Bird influenced my life. She was lovable, silly, and cute in ways only a girl from Texas could be. “Multiply me by a few million and you’ve got something,” I once heard her say. The 1965 Beautification Act is nicknamed “Lady Bird’s Bill.” I’m sure she helped write it. She was an activist for clean water, clean air, and clean roadsides before Earth Day became a reality. During the War on Poverty she would say, “If you want to see what democracy looks like in your community, visit your public library.” She was the lead organizer for what became the National Head Start Program.

Spring 2017

Dear Lady Bird,

Heart to heart, I feel that I, too, have kept your secret long enough. It is out in the world now. Trust me, I don’t think it will come back to haunt you, not as much as if you were still here. Shortly after your journey to the spirit world, I heard that your biographer was asked about your nickname. People wanted to know the story behind it. And he told them that the name “Lady Bird” had been given to you at a very young age by your black playmates…
GOSSIP

Brittney Beauregard
I cannot get
close enough, even inside
the wet warmth and gentle sway
of your tropical seas, even inhaling
the purple perfume dream of your blooming
lilacs, even filling my mouth with
your tart sweet juice
after I peel a peach.
I do not want to watch waving fields
of your sun-honeyed strands. I want
to be their tassels
trembling when you breathe. Let me be
your warm touch in the morning,
your cool caress in the dark, drops of you
rippling your surface,
the chirping you make
because you can fly.
I shall die someday in a strange land
Far from where I was born
I know for a fact and admit
That no one there will hear of it or mourn
When the time finally arrives
Do not bury me in the ground
Where I’d be imprisoned for ever
Never to be found
Cremate my body
Scatter my ashes to the wind
Let me fly free
Not confined to an urn
So that a part of me
May be carried across the ocean
And there beside my ancestors
I may chance to rest again
MATE

Sandeep Kumar Mishra
WHAT I GET I DESERVE

William Snyder Jr.

We find ourselves by the river.
The far side is stone—
customs house, the city gate—
our side grassy with a gravel walk.
We are alone. There is no moon.
A street lamp sends dim shadows
to us, to the river—a gurgle
of black and silver swirling
past the bulwark stones.
I find mucus deep in my throat,
and though you hate this,
form an O with my lips
and blow, toss it
far onto the water where it bobs,
a shining dot running down. I wager
tomorrow, and tonight you’re game.
You search deep and toss.
But saliva sprays
and dribbles down your chin
and we burst
with laughter. It is women’s
singular failing, I say. You agree,
then remind me of my own.
SISTER AS CENTER OF THE WORLD

Robyn Covelli-Hunt

On stage the identical twins prepare their instruments, one with burly midnight blue electric guitar quietly growling in the background. The other, all throat, stands front and center, articulates a joke she’s set to memory—gesticulating arms and distracting chatter.

Guitar sister waits patiently, as we sense she has done all their conjoined lives. Tuning her long neck six string as night’s audience waits on their mismatched pillows with their foggy cups of water and red wine. Sturdy knit caps tucked in pockets against late fall weather.

During the show, my friend next to me whispers, Look, their father is singing along.

Following the performance, their mother tells me her girls were born premature, yet, at nineteen inches were two fully formed forces with which to reckon.

I also have a sister typically more constrained, yet she too will tempt the weather, angry and open. Gauging what comes next with pitch perfect intuition as the moon lugs hard history into view. As hail pelts the garden that she has dug industriously with her husband.

I hear her patient sighs, as she places her ambidextrous hands in her lap. Having reminded me repeatedly that not everyone needs to know all our business—the vowels showering down from my rapid thought and deadline consonants that could kill me. Falling like ice from the sky.

But there is an energy between us that is important.

Room for desperate and contained, for banjo and single snare drum, beans in a tin can shaker, steel pipe piece gifted by a friend for slide. She is the sister who first arrived at the center. On her acoustic Yamaha guitar. As if umbrella utensil balanced and at ready. My front and her back. This fugue panorama, prime key to staying dry.

When one needs electricity, the other will find the stage right aperture. Both of us singing: Both Sides Now.

One heirloom fabric shared between us, impossible to shred. Middle of the world.

But now it’s just another show/You leave ‘em laughing when you go/And if you care, don’t let them know/Don’t give yourself away.

—Judy Collins
BEFORE I DIE

Peg Johnson

Part 1. Dreaming

Before I die,
I will stand in the frozen north and watch,
the green and silver and purple and blue lights of the aurora
create a fantasy across the sky.

Before I die,
my one and only prince charming,
will waltz with me across a grand ballroom in Vienna,
the silk of my dress swirling in \( \frac{3}{4} \) time,
the lush, romantic strings of an orchestra playing just for us.

Before I die,
I will stand in the frozen south, and
watch the tuxedoed penguins waddle across the ice,
all of us unaware of the dangers,
lurking just beyond where we can see.

Before I die,
the shrill laugh of a hyena
and the roar of a lion
will terrify me,
while the unfamiliar stars of the Southern hemisphere,
stare at me in silence.

Before I die,
I will stand in tears before that famous domed, white tomb,
and marvel at what the magnificence and conceit
of love can build.
Before I die,
my nose will be tickled by champagne,
at a sidewalk bistro in Paris,
and I will be enchanted by a city,
that hums, then sings in a language I don’t understand.

Before I die,
with South Pacific sand in my toes,
my face aglow in moonlight,
ocean breezes caressing my hair,
I will be kissed by the stranger,
who married me so long ago.

Before I die,
I will hike the length of the Rocky Mountains,
and be dirtier and stronger and skinnier,
than I have ever been.
The Continental Divide will humble me,
and place me firmly in my own infinitesimal spot in the world.

Before I die,
none of this might happen,
but I’ve dreamed it all and will not live with regret.
It has all happened to the wild woman in me,
the one whose imagination knows no bounds.

**Part 2. Remembering**

Before I die,
I will feel the strength of my father as he twirls me,
screaming and laughing in circles through the air.
I will smell his workmen t-shirts fresh off the clothesline,
smell the stale beer and old smoke of his neighborhood tavern.
My tongue thick with the cloying taste of a Shirley Temple, I listen.
His tongue, thick from other drinks,
brags to his buddies,
about his daughter, the straight A student.

Before I die,
I will hear my mother’s clear soprano voice singing old songs,
as she manages the enormity of an overcrowded household.
I will again eat my dinner so slowly,
that my father and all four of my siblings will have long since left the table.
My mother will wink at me as she places her feet on my father’s abandoned chair,
and for a few precious moments, amidst the tumult,
we are the only two people in the whole world.
The light from her eyes tells me,
that the sun rises and sets with my smile.
We will our have long grown up conversations over pots of tea,
late at night at the same kitchen table.
And I will again feel my mother’s hand on my cheek
as she says goodbye for the last time,
and the warmth of her touch will linger my entire life.

Before I die,
I will stand in the park,
the scent of lilacs in the air,
the snows of Pike’s Peak,
glistening in the afternoon sun,
and once again say those magic words,
Yes, I do,
commit myself with unbounded happiness
to this blond and handsome boy,
who stole my heart from me.

Before I die,
I will feel again feel the utter bliss
of breastfeeding newborns in the middle of the night,
wonderous eyes shining with complete and all absorbing adoration of me, a mom who is feeling her way through exhaustion to a new kind of love.

Before I die,
I will drink red wine in the soft light of a warm summer evening,
sifting one by one through the dust of memories that is a life.

Part 3. Hoping

Before I die,
I will feel the notes and minor chords, of the Moonlight Sonata,
slowly dance from my fingers,
across the keys of my old piano.

Before I die,
my bare feet will splash through puddles left from a rain,
and my toes will wiggle in the depths of a cool grassy lawn.
my naked body will sink into a muddy river,
and buoyed by water and life,
my wet skin will shine in the desert sun.

Before I die,
I will laugh with babies in the discovery of life,
feel the heaviness of a small body against my chest,
the trust of tiny arms wrapped around my neck,
and read bedtime stories to drooping lids,
unwilling to succumb to sleep, eager for just one more story.

Before I die,
I will watch children run and run
and run just for the sheer joy of running,
and chasing after them,
I will feel that freedom and delight.
Before I die,
I will lose myself in the passion and strength
of a love built over long decades,
of shared adventures and sorrows and joys,
a love that is worn and easy and comfortable,
long lasting but somehow ever fresh,
fueled by the daily music conversation and laughter.

Before I die,
I will find a way to face inevitable endings
with courage, dignity and grace,
and humor too.
I will let go of silly worries,
like how soft I am in body,
how easily my eyes mist,
how that one word refuses to leave the tip of my tongue.
I won’t care about how much is left undone,
the photos unsorted, the closets uncleaned,
the poems unwritten, the music unplayed.

Before I die,
I will stop the foolishness of wishing myself young or somehow different,
for wishes are only that.
I will just quietly keep on learning until my brain cries uncle,
and laugh until my sides split and then split again,
and love until my heart explodes in appreciation and wonder.

Before I die,
I will live, just live,
right here, right now,
and leave my kindness, my fierceness, my integrity, my tenderness, my very essence,
hanging in the air, wafting slowly, towards unknowable destinations.
CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

Martha Agan recently graduated from Spalding University with a MFA in Creative Writing. She’s a published songwriter, and her music can be heard on iTunes. Her memoir, Kissed with a Lie, is now being shopped to publishers. She’s looking forward to a late 2018 release. She resides with her two dogs at the entrance of Dale Hollow State Park in Kentucky.

Beth Anthony left Cleveland, Ohio in 2004 to work a ski season in Vail and never looked back. She was the worst ski bum in the whole town until 2009, when she made her move to enchanting Santa Fe after losing an aggravating upscale retail job. She’s currently working on a collection of poems about her adventures in Kent, Ohio, where she collaborated in dance and performance art groups and made films.

Kelby Lee Bailey is a New Jersey native specializing in acrylic abstract portraiture. He is heavily influenced by Andy Warhol and Amedeo Modigliani. When not busy, he volunteers at local organizations, including The Contemporary Austin and Dress for Success. Kelby’s ‘XXXL’ and ‘Twisted’ explore themes such as disease, mortality, and the claustrophobic nature of codependency.

Two hundred and forty-six of Jan Ball’s poems appear in journals such as: Calyx, Connecticut Review, Main Street Rag, Nimrod, and Phoebe, in Great Britain, Canada, India and the U.S. Ball’s two chapbooks, accompanying spouse (2011) and Chapter of Faults (2014) were published with Finishing Line Press. Ball’s first full-length poetry book, I Wanted to Dance with My Father, was published by Finishing Line Press in September, 2017. When not working out, gardening at their farm or traveling, Ball and her husband like to cook for friends.

Brendan Basham is Diné, born in Alaska and raised in northern Arizona. His work has appeared in Red Ink, Yellow Medicine Review, Juked, and Sheepshhead Review. He’s been awarded the Live Oak Fellowship, a Truman Capote Trust Fellowship, and was a nominee for the 2016 PEN / Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers. He’s been a resident of the Tin House Summer Workshops, Writing by Writers Workshop, and the Vermont Studio Center. He holds a BA from the Evergreen State College and an MFA in Creative Writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts.

Brittney Beauregard is a student at the Santa Fe Community College. She has a passion for photography, especially capturing the beauty of the macro world and her two very photogenic cats.

Connor Bjotvedt is a Graduate MFA student at Spalding University. He was awarded the Charles E. Bull Creative Writing Scholarship for Poetry in 2015 by Northern Arizona University, where he received a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing. His work has appeared in Rain Taxi, Three Line Poetry, Haiku Journal, 50 Haiku, and The Wayfarer.
Jasper Black is a trans-genre artist whose passions include oil painting, poetry, performance, plants, and bunnies. Born in the fierce Midwest, Black’s introspective creative tendencies were influenced by the Great Lakes, often gloomy days, and wicked winters of Michigan. Life here in New Mexico over the past seven years has provided space and time to create new work while earning an associate’s degree in Fine Arts at SFCC. More paintings can be viewed on Instagram @paintbrushjasper.

Arianna Borgeson is a graduate of California Institute of the Arts and a recent transplant to New Mexico. She has edited photos for sets of films, TV shows, and commercials such as Jason Bourne, Krystal, Geostorm, and more. Her own films and writings stretch across genres, and her videos have been exhibited at Digital Arts Expo, Chicago ArtBash, and LACDA. When she’s not working on films, Borgeson enjoys playing roller derby.

John Davis is the author of Gigs and The Reservist. His work has appeared in DMQ Review, Iron Horse Literary Review, One and Poetry Northwest. He teaches high school and performs in rock and roll and blue bands.

Behzad Dayeny is a Poetic Chef from Iran. The director of Food Services at Santa Fe Community College, he has been living in Santa Fe since 1984.

Micah Espina is an art history student, aspiring novelist, and story enthusiast who grew up partly in Santa Fe and partly in New England. This will be his first published work; more to come, eventually. Some of Micah’s writing can be found online at corvidscribe.deviantart.com.

David Feela has authored a prize-winning chapbook, Thought Experiments, and a full length poetry collection, The Home Atlas. His book of essays, How Delicate These Arches, was chosen as a finalist for the Colorado Book Award. He lives in Cortez, Colorado, and works as a columnist for the Durango Telegraph and the Four Corners Free Press.


Gabe Gomez has two published books of poetry, The Outer Bands, winner of the Andres Montoya Poetry Prize (University of Notre Dame Press), and The Seed Bank. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

James Gould is a long-time resident of New Mexico, where he explores several art forms and shares his creative spark through teaching woodcarving in the School of Art and Design at the Santa Fe Community College.
Nathan Gower holds an MFA in writing and a Ph.D. in comparative humanities. A writer in multiple genres, his work has previously been published or exhibited in New Southerner, Valparaiso Fiction Review, The Baltimore Review, Birmingham Arts Journal, 94 Creations, Louisville Magazine, The London Screenwriter’s Festival, and elsewhere. Productions of his short screenplays have screened nationally and internationally. He currently serves as Associate Professor of English at Campbellsville University.

Kathleen Heideman Rydholm is a writer, artist, and environmentalist working in Michigan’s wild Upper Peninsula. Her newest collection of poetry is Psalms of the Early Anthropocene (Winter Cabin Books, 2017); previous works include Explaining Pictures To A Dead Hare, She Used To Have Some Cows, and Time Upon Once, a book art collaboration with poet Phebe Hanson and artist Rebecca Alm. Heideman is the recipient of numerous artist residencies with watersheds, forests, private foundations, and the National Park Service – at Isle Royale, Apostle Islands, and elsewhere. She serves on the board of the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition.

Tom Holmes is the founding editor of Redactions: Poetry & Poetics, and author of three full-length collections of poetry, most recently The Cave, which won The Bitter Oleander Press Library of Poetry Book Award for 2013, as well as four chapbooks. His writings about wine, poetry book reviews, and poetry can be found at his blog, The Line Break: http://thelinebreak.wordpress.com/. Follow him on Twitter @TheLineBreak

Robyn Covelli-Hunt has siblings perfecting their instruments and others who whittle technology with which artists record. Her own personal lyric is the poetry she has written all of her life. She is currently the Development and Communications Director for Las Cumbres Community Services in Santa Fe. Her work appears in various journals. Her collection of poems, The Shape of Caught Water (2013), is available from Red Mountain Press. She maintains a writer’s blog, As Mourning Doves Persist (mourningdovespersist.blogspot.com).

Dr. David W. Johnson was chair of Sciences at Santa Fe Community College and Professor Emeritus at The College of Santa Fe. In addition to teaching and field studies in ecology, he wrote several books on the natural history of the Colorado Plateau, and contributed photographs to other publications, including two cover photos.

Peg Johnson has a fascination with words. That is what led her to a career in libraries. She has been an academic librarian for almost thirty years, but also had stints as a secretary and a park ranger. As she begins to explore words through her own poetry, she draws on not only her work experience but the complexities of life in many roles—girl, daughter, wife, mother, friend, and woman.

Daniel Kilpatrick earned his MFA in Writing-Poetry from Vermont College. He currently teaches in the creative writing program at Santa Fe Community College. His work has appeared in the Santa Fe Literary Review.

Jennine “DOC” Krueger-Wright is a mother, writer, and educator in Austin, Texas. She competed in world, national, and local poetry slam competitions, and holds four titles to include 2nd overall in the nation (2012) and 1st in group piece finals (2013). She has coached national slam teams and mentored youth at Speak Piece Poetry Project. She teaches English at Huston-Tillotson University while attending Spalding University for her MFA.
Sandeep Kumar Mishra is a writer, poet, artist, and lecturer in English Literature. He is the art instructor at Kishlaya Outsider Art Academy. He has edited a collection of poems by various poets, Pearls (2002), and has written a professional guidebook, How to Be (2016) as well as a collection of poems and art called Feel My Heart (2016).

George Longenecker’s poetry has appeared in journals including Atlanta Review, Saranac Review, and Plates. In 2017 he participated in Tupelo Press’s 30/30 project, writing a poem a day for 30 days; the poem “Rain Taxi” was a result of that project. Its name is a tribute to Rain Taxi Review of Books. His book Star Route is coming soon from Main Street Rag Publishing.

Israel Francisco Haros Lopez was born in East Los Angeles to immigrant parents of Mexican descent. He brings his firsthand knowledge of the realities of migration, U.S. border policies, and life as a Mexican American to his many creative projects. His interdisciplinary work, which encompasses poetry, performance, music, video, and even curriculum design, addresses border politics, identity politics, and the re-interpretation of histories. Haros Lopez holds a BA in English Literature and Chicano Studies and an MFA in Creative Writing.

Jennifer Love coordinates Developmental Education at the Institute for American Indian Arts (IAIA), where she also earned her MFA. She lives in Santa Fe with her three dogs—Thembi, Diablo, and Hughes—and her husband, Tim Host. She enjoys taking long walks on the concrete through any city. It’s likely she’ll then write about the experience.

Michael Mark is a hospice volunteer and long distance walker. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in Alaska Quarterly Review, Bellevue Literary Review, Cafe’ Review, Cimarron Review, Dunes Review, New York Times, Pleiades, Poet Lore, Potomac Review, Spillway, Rattle, River Styx, Sugar House Review, The Sun, and Verse Daily. His poetry has been nominated for three Pushcart Prizes and the Best of the Net. Learn more at michaeljmark.com.

Gerard J. Martinez Y Valencia is an opsimath, writer, poet, and photographer also known for his musical compositions, performances, and playwriting. Martinez holds a BFA in music along with degrees in theatre, business, and sustainable technologies. Martinez works for Santa Fe Community College and the Institute of American Indian Arts. He resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico with his two younger children on their urban farm located in the geographic center of town.

Lenard D. Moore, former President of Haiku Society of America (2008 and 2009) and longtime Executive Chairman of North Carolina Haiku Society, is a U.S. Army Veteran. He is author, editor, and co-editor of several books, including One Window’s Light, which Unicorn Press published. Recipient of Haiku Museum of Tokyo Award (1983, 1994, and 2003), and North Carolina Award for Literature (2014), he teaches at the University of Mount Olive.

Natalie Najman lives in Santa Fe, for now. However, she hasn’t always and she may not in the future. She believes home is a mental state and flight is not only for birds. As a student at Santa Fe Community College, Natalie won first place in the 2017 Writing Awards, and her work was published in Accolades. She is pursuing psychology as a discipline and a profession. Combining her love for written word with a passion for psychology, Natalie writes to explore human nature.
A native Texan, Janice Northerns currently lives in southwest Kansas, where she teaches creative writing, literature, and composition at a community college. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Roanoke Review, Southwestern American Literature, Iron Horse Literary Review, College English, Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review, The Cape Rock, Poem, SLANT, and elsewhere. She is a recipient of the Robert S. Newton Creative Writing Award from Texas Tech University.

Isabel Ribe was born in Washington, DC to parents of New Mexican and Colombian heritage. She lives in Pojoaque, and she is a poet, artist, social worker, and graduate student. Ribe’s poems embark on a journey across spiritual, emotional, and political landscapes. She voices the cadences of those silenced and the inner silence needed to find the deepest of truths. The unapologetic bilingual nature of her work addresses current issues and ancestral realities.

Taylor Riley is an award-winning writer and journalist living in Louisville, Kentucky. She is currently a news producer and features writer at the Louisville Courier Journal and will receive her MFA from Spalding University in May 2019. Riley’s writing and photography have been published by Refinery 29, USA TODAY, and Associated Press, as well as other national publications.

Steven Rivera is a poet and memoirist. He is an undergraduate student at New Mexico Highlands University working towards a bachelor’s degree in English, and plans to get his master’s degree in literature. Steven is currently working on a poetry collection and a memoir. “My boyfriend’s girlfriend” marks his first publication in a literary journal. He lives in Las Vegas, New Mexico with his beautiful dog, Lilli.

Courtney Rose is studying French and Creative Writing at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. She has a passion for art museums, antiques, and the art of tattooing. She has never before been published.

Rikki Santer’s work has appeared in numerous publications including Ms. Magazine, Poetry East, Margie, Crab Orchard Review, Grimm, Slipstream and The Main Street Rag. Her fifth collection, Make Me That Happy, was recently published by NightBallet Press. Learn more at www.rikkisanter.com.

Javier Sernas was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He attends Santa Fe Community College and majors in Film Directing and Photography. With a passion for taking professional photos, his favorite subjects are modeling, nature, and nighttime.

Elaine Schleiffer is a feminist writer and activist in Cleveland, Ohio. Her poetry has been published by Pudding Magazine, Stylus, Cahoodaloodaling, and others.

Sheryl Slocum has taught in places as disparate as Chad, Africa; Lumberton, New Mexico; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Washington, DC. Now, she teaches English as a second language in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her poetry appears in numerous small press magazines and in the anthologies No, Achilles and Masquerades and Misdemeanors. Slocum is member of the Hartford Avenue Poets and the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.
William Snyder has published poems in The Southern Review, Atlanta Review, Poet Lore, Folio, Cottonwood, and Southern Humanities Review, among others. He was the co-winner of the 2001 Grolier Poetry Prize and winner of the 2002 Kinloch Rivers Chapbook competition; The CONSEQUENCE Prize in Poetry, 2013; and the 2015 Claire Keyes Poetry Prize. He teaches writing and literature at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota.

Dana Stamps II has a bachelor’s degree in psychology from California State University of San Bernardino, and she has worked as a fast food server, a postal clerk, a security guard, and a group home worker with troubled boys. Her chapbook, For Those Who Will Burn, was published by Partisan Press, and her most recent chapbook, Sandbox Blues, was published by Evening Street Press. Her recent journal publications include Rattle, Slant, Bayou, Chiron Review, Blue Collar Review, Main Street Rag, and Sierra Nevada Review.

Claudette Sutton is known to Santa Feans as the editor and publisher of Tumbleweeds, Santa Fe’s quarterly parenting magazine. She is also the author of Farewell, Aleppo: My Father, My People and Their Long Journey Home, an award-winning book chronicling her father’s journey from one of the world’s oldest Jewish communities to a new life in mid-twentieth-century America. She lives in Santa Fe with her husband, son, and cat.

Deborah Svatos is a Creative Writing major at the Institute of American Indian Arts and a graduate of Santa Fe Community College. She plans to pursue a career in writing novels after completing college. Typically she writes poetry and short stories, often drawing inspiration from her own life experiences for the emotion they lend to her work.

Paul Swehla is a chef and holds degrees in education, theology, and Judaic studies. His first book, Gilgul: Transmigration, is an outgrowth from years of deep soul searching and draft writing. His second book, The Dystopian Hermit Monk, is forthcoming. He continues to write as he finishes the last few years of a twenty-two-year federal prison sentence connected with the overdose and death of a friend. Sometimes he gets lonely. Write him at paul@tikkunpublishing.com.

Trevor Thornton is a writer and teacher with a master’s degree from Middlebury College. He grew up in North Carolina and lives in Minneapolis with his wife and dog. His fiction has been published in Quail Bell Magazine and Err.

Diane Tintor has taught at the Santa Fe Community College since 2000. As a professor of Jewelry, Metal Arts, and Art History, her work has been on display at The New Mexico Museum of Art, the Santa Fe Art Institute, the Santa Fe Community College, Salon Mar Graff, Somé Gallery, and elsewhere. Tintor holds master’s degrees in Art History and Studio Art – Jewlery/Metal Arts. She resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Rachael Urquidez was born in 1991 in Missoula, Montana. She moved to New Mexico in 2014. In 2018, she graduates with an Associate in Applied Arts degree in Photography from the Santa Fe Community College. Her current work is narrative portraiture that explores the complexities and contrast of duality between logic and emotion. Urquidez, with her husband Peter, currently lives and works in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
Krista Vanderblomen is an enrolled member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi nation located in Kansas. She has always been an artist. Early on, her mom taught her a very simple rose and star. It was like Vanderblomen had been given another pair of legs. Once she had them, she ran. She drove New Mexico and is now attending the Institute of American Indian Arts.

Linda Whittenberg began writing poetry after retiring from Unitarian Universalist ministry. She has been waking before daylight each morning for the past twenty years. It is the time when words seem most free to jump onto the page. A chapbook and three collections of poems have been published, and poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. A manuscript, entitled Stone by Stone, is in the works for publication in 2018.

Terry Wilson has done stand up comedy and theatre in Los Angeles, and she performed her one-woman show recently in Santa Fe, called Confessions of a Failed Saint. Her pieces have been published in local publications like The Santa Fe Reporter and SFLR, and she has also been published in national literary journals and anthologies. She taught creative writing to women in New Mexico jails as an Artist in Residence through the New Mexico Arts Division, and has taught writing at the Santa Fe Community College for many years. Her book is also called Confessions of a Failed Saint.

Tyrone Wright loves telling folks he’s a native of New Mexico. Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque is where he was born. He was a TV photojournalist in Austin, Texas for most of his working career. In the fall of 2000, he moved to Mimbres, New Mexico, so he could follow his dream of becoming a community farming organizer. Presently, he enjoys being a student and working with the Spirit of Writing Collective.

Anastasio Wrobel, 29, born in Seattle, Washington, is a political visual artist who moonlights as a poet and gender theorist. Their work is made by mixing both analog and digital media processes together to loop and feed the work into various components as it is generated. They paint and collage, write, screenprint, and photograph most often. Previous projects include The Non-Binary Coloring Book and The Enby Miniatures: A Curation of 200 Artist Trading Cards. Work has appeared in Original Plumbing, Belladonna* and The Poetry Project. For more information visit www.aungrobo.us.
OLD SANTA FE TRAIL

Javier Sernas
SUBMIT TO THE SANTA FE LITERARY REVIEW

The Santa Fe Literary Review (SFLR) is published annually by the Santa Fe Community College. An in-print literary journal, SFLR features work by local, national, and international writers and artists. From June 1 to November 1 each year, we invite submissions of poetry, fiction, dramatic writing, and non-fiction of a general literary interest, as well as visual art. SFLR aims to promote a diverse range of writers and artists, and to present a wide variety of stories, styles, and cultural perspectives.

We will open for submissions on June 1, 2018, and close on November 1, 2018. The 2018 SFLR theme is “RAÍCES: Down to the Roots.”

Poetry, Prose, and Dramatic Writing Submission Guidelines: Only typed, previously unpublished submissions will be read by SFLR staff – kindly double-space prose and dramatic writing. Poetry may be single-spaced. Please include a cover letter with your name, mailing address, email address, and phone number. Include a SASE – a Self-Addressed, Stamped Envelope – for our reply. Works submitted without a SASE may not receive a response. For all genres, word limit is 2000 words; please include Word Count at top of submission. For dramatic writing and screenplay excerpts, SFLR encourages a limit of ten pages, and we ask that you submit a full-length piece or standalone scene.

We appreciate receiving submissions without folding or paper clips. Staples are fine! Address submissions to the SFLR editor you’re contacting – Creative Nonfiction, Fiction, Dramatic Writing/Screenplay, or Poetry Editor. Then, mail or hand-deliver submissions to SFLR, 6401 Richards Avenue, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87508. Simultaneous submissions are okay, but we ask that you email sflr@sfcc.edu if your work is accepted elsewhere. Previously published submissions will not be considered by SFLR staff.

Visual Art Submissions: We accept visual art submissions, including but not limited to graphic novel excerpts, photographs, visual photography, digital media, and photographs of produced art from any media. Aside from our cover, we’re only able to print in black and white. As such, we ask that artists submit works in black and white, or else ensure their works will reproduce well in black and white before submitting. Kindly submit visual art submissions as emailed attachments in .jpg or .tif formats, at 300 dpi. In the body of your email, please include the title of your submission(s), the estimated dimensions, your full name and contact information, and a brief biographical statement. Visual art submissions should be emailed to sflrartsubmissions@gmail.com.

SFLR Contributors receive two copies of the magazine and are invited to read at the annual SFLR reception, hosted on campus each fall. The SFLR is dedicated to sharing the contributions of SFCC students, Santa Feans, and writers from around the world.

To learn more about SFLR, visit us online at https://www.sfcc.edu/santa-fe-literary-review/. Or, follow us on Facebook, @SFLRSF, and on Twitter, @SFLR_
SUPPORT THE SANTA FE LITERARY REVIEW

To support the *Santa Fe Literary Review*, consider making a donation. Your gift will help students and faculty members to continue creating, printing, and distributing this publication, and will empower writers and artists from Santa Fe and around the world to showcase important work.

To donate by check: Checks should be made payable to “The SFCC Foundation - SFLR/ENGL Fund,” then mailed to: SFCC Foundation, 6401 Richards Avenue, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87508. Kindly write “SFLR/ENGL Fund” in the memo.

To donate by credit card: Call (505) 428-1855 or visit https://www.sfcc.edu/give-now/. Be sure to indicate, over the phone or in the “Comments” section online, that you’d like your gift to be designated for the SFLR/ENGL fund.

For other ideas about how to support the *Santa Fe Literary Review*, email sflr@sfcc.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!
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Beth Anthony
Kelby Bailey
Jan Ball
Brendan Basham
Brittney Beauregard
Nancy Beauregard
Connor Bjotvedt
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