SPIRES

TWO THOUSAND ELEVEN

SPRING

SPIRES

intercollegiate arts & literary magazine

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Front cover "Printemps" by Kait Mauro
(photograph, Washington University in St. Louis)

Back cover "Elephant Print" by Kait Mauro
(silk screen, Washington University in St. Louis)

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Introduction

Dear reader,

Thank you for being part of Spires.

Spires is not simply the group of editors that reviews submissions each week. The magazine isn't limited to the members of the Wash U community who pick up copies around campus, nor is it exclusive to the artists that are featured in our publication each semester. I have always been intrigued by the ways in which the works we review enter into conversation with one another. For example, it's unlikely that the student from Ohio studying photography at a large Southern university knew exactly how to accompany the work of a poet from Alaska writing in the Midwest—and yet these "happy accidents" happen all of the time.

It is fortunate, fascinating and comforting that no work is produced in isolation. The dialogue that takes place among everyone involved with Spires is, I hope, reflected in this issue as it has been in past issues, and I invite you to join in. Putting Spires together each semester feels like tapping into a current that runs through the lives of painters, storytellers and readers all over the country. I look forward to seeing what we all come up with next.

Judith Ohikuare
Editor-in-Chief

Key Note

Before eye-scanning technology existed, keys existed. Keys worked for everything. There were house keys, car keys, room keys, answer keys, Key West, key lime pie, and metaphorical keys to the heart. Keys were easy. Sometimes the slightest bit of guesswork may have been involved, often caused by overcrowded key rings, but when a key fit, a person knew it.

Cool, metallic, and posing no problematic alternatives, keys never dealt with those big life questions. Is this going to turn out for the best? Are you entering into the right things? When it was for the best, when it was the right thing, the key would open the door. It was as simple as that. There was either the right key or there wasn't.

Keys used to mean safety, a tight lock between you and out there. But one day a boy and a girl were on a date, and they wanted so desperately to have some place where they could be alone. So a clever boy, in a moment of desperation and insight, discovered that he could pick a lock by fashioning a makeshift key from a girl's bobby pin. That's when things started changing.

Basic keys were not enough anymore. People no longer felt safe and secure relying on simple methods and immediate answers to uncomplicated questions that satisfied all their basic needs. People wanted more. More things, more complexity, more protection from this sudden paranoia and the powerless feeling that maybe keys weren't enough to keep them safe at night. Who could guarantee that someone would wake up tomorrow morning if keys no longer kept outsiders out and insiders in?

So the key evolved and took on new shapes and structures. Keys were no longer tangible and didn't depend on form as their defining attribute. The new keys were absolutely unique. Keys began to rely on computers, electronics and scanners that could identify a person by the white of his left eye, the tiny sparkle of color that is just off center, and the curvature of his cornea, the cause of the astigmatism that has made his contacts less effective since the fifth grade. Keys changed so much that they no longer resembled keys at all. They had elongated, looped formally at the top, added a dot of punctuation and conglomerated at the end of thoughts.

Yes, keys had become questions.

Danielle Metzger
Washington University in St. Louis

“Infinite”
photogtaph

Jordan Gamble
Washington University in St. Louis

Origami

I.

It is a city bird, you say, but
only because I should know better:

that creature I wrestled from
the sewage of raw sugar, festering
deep in the bowels of your coffee cup-

ped beneath the urban creases
and back alleys of your dark palms.

II.

His sisters reside, reticent, in the ashtray
on your desk, paper plumage

smoldering in the graves of last night's
cigars. Here, ugly women dance
on the backs of cranes, swollen hips should-

ering the credence, shuddering
as they are carried, unclothed, away.

III.

Your beak gnaws at my ribcage,
a relentless martyr, anxious for release

from these hollow cravings. Years pass,
and I still rest on your windowsill. I watch
the slow death of one, lonely swallow-

ed whole, considering the taste of your
fingertips and how they are no longer sweet.

Alexandra Comeaux
Arizona State University

Under the Willow Tree

Like many young boys, I was often employed by my older, female cousins in their games of house: as a servant, or husband, or even as the family dog. While the other male cousins ran across the fields to avoid being caught in this girly play, I often remained, whether due to some lack of reactive ability, or general good will, I honestly don't know.

The Other House at these family reunions was never indoors. Instead, we always played within the folds of the great weeping willow that grew next to my grandmother's farmhouse. Many of my memories of these reunions are devoted to this tree: crouching inside its branches during hide and seek, attempting to swing on its vines, or fleeing into the green during games of tag. To my three-year-old mind, the tree was more than enormous. It was gigantic, titanic in the truest sense, its bent arms ever reaching out. All of the cousins preferred the Other House to the true one. Indeed, the tree's dense branches bending down to kiss the earth gave the illusion, when the wind blew just right, that the tree was in fact bigger than my grandmother's house; as though we were the ones growing on its land.

And yet when it rained, my cousins and I could sit in the Other House perfectly dry, and that shadowed world was our own.

But despite the happy memories the tree gave me, it was also irrevocably linked in my young mind with death. The alliterative breath in which one speaks its name, Weeping Willow, suggested another to me. Weeping Widow. My grandfather had died two years previous, and although I never saw my grandmother crying, there was always a certain sadness in the distance she kept, and in her seeming apathy.

And so it was that, when my own wife, Mary, became sick, I began the monumental task of transporting that weeping willow from my ancestral plot to my new home in the next state over. For those of you who haven't had the pleasure of translating such a tree, trust me when I say that it isn't easy. The success or failure of your enterprise depends just as much on luck as anything else. The roots of such an ancient tree are deep. But I had the money, and the time, and the need to keep myself occupied. And I didn't want to be alone.

The land that the tree stood on didn't actually belong to my family anymore. We had sold it, just as we sold everything of my grandmother's when she died: the farm, the fields, even the scratchy quilts from the beds upstairs. Everything, that is, except for the odd mementos. I myself had taken an old aftershave bottle of my grandfather's, and few of his dog show trophies. A four-year-old's choice, but not one I regret. The green glass of the empty bottle is shaped like a 1930's automobile, and to me seems etched with the class of times gone by. And perhaps more importantly, when I pop the cap, I can still sense him. Some dead scent spices

the glass with just the merest hint of his history. I never really knew my grandfather, so I am at least glad that I have this.

I don't know why I didn't want any mementos of my grandmother, except to say that she seemed to me a cold woman. By the time I was old enough to know her, I suppose, she was already reaching that age of panic, in which you have no choice but to stare down death. My grandmother always seemed afraid to me, and in some indescribable way this made me afraid of her.

Towards the end, I think, my grandmother hated the willow. Perhaps she too drew some connection between its life and hers. Perhaps she despised its longevity. My grandmother hated too to see us playing under the willow. If she happened to be sitting on her porch, as she often did, and saw one of us emerging from its recesses, she never failed to call out to us in her cracking voice, imploring us to leave it alone. My grandmother seemed to think that the willow was rotting. That it could fall at any minute, from the slightest touch, taking her house, her grandchildren, and her life with it. I don't think I once saw my grandmother in the Other House, beneath its dark branches. As I say, my grandmother was afraid. The Chinese, I've heard, believed the branches of the weeping willow could keep away the spirits of the dead. Perhaps my grandmother feared the tree for the exact same reason. So close to death, perhaps she wanted that company, to hold her and to guide her. Perhaps the willow made my grandmother feel alone.

I purchased the willow without much trouble from the people who live on my grandmother's land now. A nice, generic Kansas family, they seemed all too willing to part with it. But then, not everyone cares for weeping willows. Their roots spread wide, tearing up earth and water lines, and their branches inevitably trail throughout the yard, wrapping around mower blades. A willow planted too close to a house is a danger as well. The branches, bending easily in the wind, can smash windows, strip paint, or tangle in phone lines. But I have the perfect place for the willow, right outside Mary's window but far enough from the house to frame its swaying branches against the horizon. There, she can watch it as I watched it as a child, and be lulled to sleep by its nightly dance.

It's the trouble Mary has in sleeping that seems the true irony of her illness. As far as the chemo goes, Mary has never once complained of the nausea, or the fact that her hair has started to thin, or the fact that it is so totally and utterly unfair, at her age. But all of us know how unfair it is. But no, it is the fatigue, I can tell, that kills her. It's the lack of energy, and its concurrent lack of hope, that makes her truly hate the disease. Yet despite all those afternoons forced into recumbence, Mary never seems to be able to sleep at night. But the willow, I know, will fix this, just as it fixed everything in my

childhood; the strangeness of my grandmother's house, and the scratchiness of the quilts, and the sounds of the house settling, all masked by the pendulous sound of its branches in the dark.

But, as I say, removing such an ancient tree is no small feat. With roots that deep, and that spreading, you have little choice: you can only dig so deeply before you have to start hacking at the roots. It's this murder, this violent transgression, which you hope will eventually lead to rebirth. Hiring a crew, I completed the deed, using an excavator to dig as deeply as we could before shaking the tree free of its foundation. Transport too was a unique problem. Unlike its cousins, the branches of the weeping willow cannot hold the weight of the trunk when the tree is set on its side. A type of harness is necessary, to hold the tree aloft and prevent it from crushing its own appendages.

The tree certainly made an impressive sight, rumbling down the highway above the bed of an open trailer. It is amazing how Midwesterners, so accustomed to the regional oddity of moving entire houses from one place to another, tend to gawk at the strangeness of a travelling tree, as in the old stories.

At last, the willow reached its destination intact, with a hole already awaiting it a few hundred yards from our lake.

Now that the tree is here at last, my life seems to have become all about waiting. Will its roots take in the new soil? Will the ground have enough nutrients? Will the willow settle, in the new home I have made for it? I do what I can, of course, dragging a bucket from the lakeside to water it every day. When the days are particularly fine, I often try to convince Mary to sit underneath its branches with me. I gather her up in my arms, and carry her, laughing, through the curtains of its still recovering leaves. But Mary rarely has the energy to do more than talk, now, and so we talk of the world outside, in the green light. Sometimes, as we sit together, our backs pressed against the ancient bark, I allow myself to hope. I think of how in a few months, a year, Mary may be better. I think of how we will take the boat out onto the lake, and laugh as the willow waves to us from the shore.

But at night, when the willow whispers outside our window, I can't help but dream. My grandmother is there, as she was in life, sitting on the back porch and yelling at me to get inside.

That willow is rotting, she calls to me. That willow is dead.

But in the dream, the child who is me can never hear her. He's safe in the Other House, playing at the life he should have had.

Anoff Cobblah
University of Missouri - Columbia

April Morning

I call for Mother to lift me from bed;
she appears full-skirted, long patient pleats
dirtied from the garden, barren hands spread

to breed dead tulips beneath my bare feet.
She smoothes my hair down, talks to me in mild
milky verse, breakfasts me of toast and plums.
I am blood-warm from the womb, flower child
blithely orphaned to hyacinth blossoms.
Mother walks in pedantic steps and bends
to drop her seed deep in the hallowed spaces
she cuts in the ground. She picks lilies, spends
hours arranging them in porcelain vases,
places them above my skull as the earth
stirs around me, fecund with my unbirth.

Ella Ray Ott
UNC - Chapel Hill

Minnow

Rivers Johansen didn't learn to swim until the summer he turned nine. His cousin Kelsey had suggested a family trip to the beach, and because she was seventeen and beautiful, he refrained from telling her that he was as useless in the water as a fish was out of it. To impress his cousin, Rivers was determined to at least learn how to float.

The two weeks before the trip, Rivers spent every morning from seven to nine at the neighborhood pool. He chose this time because the lifeguard gave swimming lessons from nine to ten. At nine sharp, Rivers would take an extra long time drying off and then, hiding his SPF 50 waterproof sunscreen under his towel, pretend to tan while secretly listening as the lifeguard imparted her wisdom to water-winged five year olds perched on kickboards. After much eavesdropping and much more early morning practice, Rivers could swim freestyle and breaststroke with the finesse of a Beginning Swim Class graduate.

When the Johansen family arrived at the beach, Rivers sat in the backseat and tried to swallow his excitement. Being excited wasn't cool. Rivers wanted to walk out into the water, past the smoothly worn stones on the beach, past the breaking waves, past the foamy water crests, to where the ocean rose and fell as though it rested upon a great sleeping sea monster. He would float there in the soft swells, treading water while Kelsey told him what a good swimmer he was. That would be cool.

But first he had to recite the rules. Rivers' parents knew he thought himself skilled and irresistible as a merman, strutting around in his shark print swimming trunks, and knew they had to take some preemptive measures before their little minnow bit off more than he could chew. And so they made Rivers recite his rules: no swimming underwater, no swimming under the pier, stay close to an adult at all times, and only swim where the ocean is shallow enough to stand up. Rivers rolled his eyes as he repeated the rules, but his parents were pleased enough that he had at least remembered them and let him out of the car without asking him to check his attitude. No need to create conflict on a family outing.

Soon, Rivers was in the ocean. He felt the sand beneath his feet and filled his nose with the stinging smell of salt and breaststroked to Kelsey, who was floating on her back and feeling the waters swell under her. She couldn't see him with her eyes closed, so Rivers stood instead of treading water until she opened her eyes to make sure she wasn't drifting toward the pier. She saw her cousin and smiled, and Rivers quickly lifted his feet from the ocean floor. Glad to have an audience of her own, Kelsey asked Rivers if he wanted to see a new trick she had learned at the pool.

Rivers gave her the okay and she made him move back a little to give her room as she did a backwards somersault. It was hard to see because of the murky

water, but Rivers clapped anyway. Then Kelsey asked him to try.

Rivers thought about this. He had promised not to swim underwater, but this wasn't really swimming. He would be staying in one place, and Kelsey counted as an adult (he had asked specifically), so he technically wouldn't be violating any of the rules. He took a deep breath and squeezed his eyes shut, praying he would succeed. Rivers pushed himself from the wet sand under his feet and landed on his back, shuddering a little as he felt the cool ocean water rush over his stomach and chest. His skin tingled.

As Rivers' face entered the water and he kicked his feet in the air, he realized it would have been wise to hold his nose. When Kelsey did a flip, she blew little air bubbles furiously out her nose to keep the water out, but Rivers didn't know that. Salt water flooded his nostrils, burning his nose and throat and making his eyes prickle with tears.

Rivers felt a tug.

Water was suddenly rushing past him, sweeping through his hair and scouring his skin as its invisible force dragged him backwards through the waves, tumbling helplessly. Rivers writhed in the water, groping for the safety that lay just outside the current that had captured him. He stretched his arms out and thrashed them about, hoping Kelsey would see. But his arms never broke the surface of the water and she was practicing her backwards flip again, not having noticed yet that he hadn't resurfaced.

Rivers couldn't remember anything he had learned from the lifeguard at the pool over the past two weeks. He didn't remember the lifeguard telling them to hold their breath; he had already opened his mouth to yell and now found his lungs burning as he tried not to cough. He didn't remember watching the lifeguard demonstrate how to kick properly, with strong, precise strokes. Most importantly, Rivers didn't remember the chorus of beginning swimmers reciting the two most important words: DON'T PANIC.

But as a strange calm descended, this is what he did remember. Two summers before, he had attended his best friend's birthday party. His family had a pool in their backyard, and all the other kids were playing monkey-in-the-middle in the deep end of the pool. Rivers had just left the shallow end—there was no one there anymore—and was sitting on the wall at the deep end of the pool with his feet dangling in the water. The sun beat down on his back, drying the water from the shallow end and initiating a sunburn that would later tell his mother to invest in some waterproof sunscreen, preferably SPF 50. As Rivers had perched on the edge of the pool, trying to submerge as much of his legs as possible to cool down without falling in the water, one of his friends pushed him.

Rivers had reacted then much in the same way he had when the ocean wave swallowed him. His shock caused him to breathe out unexpectedly and he flailed his arms in an attempt to reach the surface, but nothing seemed to work. Terror filled his stomach as the sweetly sharp taste of chlorine filled his mouth and made his eyes burn.

Abruptly, Rivers felt himself being pulled from the bottom of the pool. Hands wrapped around his skinny arms and tugged him to the surface through a shroud of bubbles and aquamarine. The hands lifted Rivers from the water and stretched him out on the burning pool tiles. He began to cough. Rivers never learned who had pulled him from the pool that day. Now, facing the same predicament in the murky ocean, Rivers thought he would like to find out who had saved him. If only he knew the name to call, perhaps then he would find himself being hauled from the water. He would choke back to life stretched out on the scorching sand of the beach, far enough from the ocean that its bitter waves couldn't snap at his toes and threaten to drag him back in. He would promise never to swim again if only he had the name! But as Rivers tumbled through the salty ocean swells, fighting to find the surface before his burning lungs gave out, he realized he would probably never know.

Emily Stein
Washington University in St. Louis

November Abstract II

Isolations of order in the snow
Isolations not of the idea
But of the absence of the idea:

Of the blackbirds on the telephone wire,
And the garden without a single leaf,
Or flower; without a single image:

Without a silence without sound, without
The silence of a sound or the communion
Of grief without the memory of home.

We are surrounded by images of
The divine: of the terror of the snow,
And the absolute bewilderment of love.

Matthew Gasda
Syracuse University

Raising Children

We lived next to an all-boys' high school.
My uncles wore its uniform before
they put on army fatigues. I built
toad temples with crushed dandelion and dirt
and the schoolboys kicked them apart
walking past untucking shirts and learning to spit.
My grandmother stood at attention uniformed
in flowered apron and red rubber gloves
and quietly told them to throw away
their goddamn cigarettes somewhere else.
On rainy afternoons she kept us cooped up
in the kitchen quarreling and compliant.
One uncle did pushups with me
draped like a starfish on his back
while another uncle did dishes.
She collected cheap umbrellas for rainy afternoons
when forgetful boys ran splashing mud,
calling them to a halt and ordering them
to take a goddamn umbrella.

Sue Hyon Bae
Washington University in St. Louis

Weather

My father's name was John Brown, my grandfather and his daddy before that. But that is not what they called me. Back in the war, my father beat a German fella to death with a stick of firewood out in the cold and the snow. He took the boy's Luger as a souvenir.

My mother said that he came home something awful, came back thirsty, a drinker. I guess I never knew any different. She always said that that was the devil down there in his belly. But I think with all that drinking, the devil can probably swim better than folks let on.

* * * *

It was the summer of 1951 when I first saw the wolf: a scarred up hound with his barred teeth, and ratty shirt, and sour mash. He had woken me up falling over his own feet just outside my window.

Something heavy was being dragged across the floor downstairs; I could hear it raking across the wooden slats. I got up quick and quiet from bed, pulling the covers with me as I crept out onto the landing of the worn, cedar steps. My mother had pulled one of the dining room chairs out and shoved it under the handle of the door. There was one heavy knock, and she said as soft and still as she could,

"Now, go on. You've done drank too much, John. Go on."

He was tapping on the door then, patient as a cinder.

"Go on and sleep this off out there in the barn loft...," she said.

"You had better. better. open. this damn door, woman," he slurred.

Right then Momma put her shoulder to the door, her face was flecked with sweat.

"John, please. Please," she said, "just go sleep".

He could smell her fear, and that lit on fire all the liquor in him.

He went to banging on the door, kicking it, howling, and he beat the thing to splinters; busted the steel bolt clean through the frame. And there stood my mother frozen in place, terrified, fighting to be calm, her hands straight out in front of her.

The wolf's eyes were on fire, endless burning coal shafts smoldering down to gulfs of ash, and he said just as soft as brass shavings, "Now then," as he ran his fingers through his beard. He emptied the thick, glass bottle down his gullet, every last drop on down to stoke the flames. He stretched his arm up and brought the bottle down hard, with all the weight of hell, to the left side of her head.

And she didn't scream, didn't start crying, just laid there brave, wrenching, and dying.

He sighed and lifted his head. And that's when he saw me, all crumpled up, and filled with spent nerves and gouges of hurt and terror, bundled up in the thin quilt that she had sewn for me. I think that it startled him, like he forgot that he had a son, forgot someone else was in the house. But he remembered now, and my steady sobs fed him, turned all the embers over. He shot toward me, skipping steps, until, when he stooped down, he was an inch from my face. And he whispered to me. He looked me dead in the eyes and said, "Just a secret between me and you."

He stood up, collected himself, and straightened his collar. He flattened his hair, and casually walked back down the stairs, carefully taking each deliberate step after the other. At the bottom he stumbled straight for her, tearing the shining, golden locket from her neck. He opened it, read it slowly, and gave a sharp laugh, dropping it into one of his trouser pockets.

Slowly, he went for the phone. He flashed a saw-toothed grin and dialed the sheriff. And the clever wolf said through necessary tears of beaded glass, "Oh, Ascel, something awful's just happened..."

He told the sheriff that he had heard screams from the house. "I was sent off to sleep in the barn for the night, you know I get carried away with the drinkin'," he confessed. "Well, I got up when I heard them screams, and headed for the house. There was a man just inside the door there, dressed up in black. He had his face a covered with a piece of cloth with holes cut in it, and was trying to rip the locket off of her neck. Well, I run up to him, I was gonna stop 'im. But he was too damn quick, and I was just too drunk," he rubbed his jaw through his thick beard as his empty chest shuttered with every pause. "He cracked me right in the mouth, and put me out just like that!" He snapped his fingers. "When I come to, that man was gone, run deep into the night, and my wife was a layin' there, just as cold and dead as she could be." His chin quivered. "I guess she just put up too much of a fight."

* * * *

And so they all came and went. They split green pine, and drove coffin nails. And they dug up earth and said their prayers. And we all buried Momma at the base of a poplar tree that was in full bloom and terribly beautiful.

* * * *

The years pulled life away. Seasons shifted from blue to gray, and the rain came. All the rivers broke their banks and took the bridges with them, and the tilled rows of black soil washed away on down toward the mouth. And then the sky froze over, and all that water turned to ice. Trees burdened, that creaked and moaned, all lost their limbs, and icicles like teeth hung from the eaves.

The horses had to have their water broken. I got a hatchet, and made my way to their troughs; my boots crunched on the lifted clay. After I climbed over the fence, though, I saw only a single foal. He

was pacing around the far side of the fence, his bay coat black with sweat and frustration. An iced-over limb had given way and broken clean through the boards of the fence. All the horses had escaped except this single, little colt that couldn't quite figure out how to navigate through the debris.

Christ, I didn't want to have to wake him up. I just wanted to find the horses, and fix the fence, and be done with it. But as I made my way through the swaying trees with their brittle leaves, I realized that I wouldn't be able to round them up and get them back to the pen alone. I would have to wake him, have to tell him that horses were loose, missing, and that a section of the fence was busted.

* * * *

No dawn made its way into his room; covers had been nailed above the windows. I remember the smell of stale Chesterfields and horrible bourbon. He was badly hung over and barely awake. Every bit of that devil twisted, and jabbed, and clawed inside of him; made him angry, aggressive: a hurt dog will rip you to bits.

I told him what had happened, mindful of every growl and motion made. He sat up slowly, took a long breath in, and lit a cigarette with the last match of the book. He didn't say a word; just got up and dressed.

Outside he glared at the mess the fence was in. He said, "Tie that little one up over there to that telephone pole," as he leaned on a beam of the fence, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

I went into the barn and got a piece of rope and a handful of sweet feed. I coaxed the little bay close enough with the feed to get the rope into the chin of his bridle and calmed him best I could with words until I could get it knotted. He seemed alright; led fine, didn't try to take off or anything.

I got him tied up to the creosote soaked pole and started walking back towards ol' John Brown. But when the rope went taut on that little horse, it spooked him. He went to fighting, and jerking, and screaming, his eyes darted wildly back and forth. Foam gathered in the corners of his mouth as he brayed. Then he reared up, the poor beast, and lost his footing on an icy patch of earth.

Several crows cawed lonely where the evergreens met the sky. The little horse laid still and scared. He had pulled his head loose from his backbone. As he'd fallen, the rope went tight and held on that sticky pole. And as his body had continued down, his head remained in place. And there he layed, handsome and bay, piled up on the frozen ground. John Brown was walking away, headed for the house.

Briars began to sprout in my chest. I listened to the foal struggle to suck breath through his lips, watched his legs that doddered in place, his young nerves firing signals that would never be received. His eyes were frightened and dilated and looked like little balls of burnt motor oil.

I got on my knees close to the horse, untied the rope, and carefully held his head as it slumped

down onto my thighs. Something freezing touched my neck. When I turned around I saw the wolf, hungry and holding the Luger, smiling like hell.

"Put him down and out of his misery," he said, tapping the pistol on my neck, as all those briars wrapped and grew. I didn't look up at him, didn't need to. I could hear him gritting his teeth; serrating them into fine, white, ivory lines. He bent down, and the starving wolf, he said through locked jaws, "You best fuckin' do it, boy"

And I did it, full of thorns, with tears in my eyes. I kept my hand on his heart, said that it was all going to be alright, gonna be just fine. And I took a shallow breath through the wiry thistle and put a bullet in the baby horse's head.

The wolf crooned and stretched, full of warmth and pap, and pried the gun from my hands. He said that it was time to go for the others. I swallowed hard and stood up. Eventually, after I hauled all the splintered board of the fence away, leaving a clear opening to the pen, we started off. Half a mile into the dark woods we found them, all milling around aimlessly in a frozen creek bed, pawing at the straw. The wolf took an old mare by the bridle and walked her, indifferently clicking his tongue. And as the others dumbly followed, I took the rear, a little yearling, and tugged him hopelessly along, on back to the fields.

* * * *

Then, in 1965, Vietnam caught on fire; it blazed with incendiary bombs & tracer rounds. The compost had been calling me for quite a while, and I figured that it was about time I answered.

I told ol' John Brown that I was taking the truck to town for a load of hay and that I'd be back in an hour. Rust had eaten holes in its bed, and the vinyl seats had split from years. I drove straight across the bridges and down to the registry where the army was starving for young men to send. The enlistment papers were crisp and white. They had a printed war eagle at the top that held silver arrows as all the olive branches burned away. I signed and dated in wet, black ink, smudging the end of my name with the side of my hand.

When I got home it was near dark, and the wolf was waiting in the barn, drunk and eager.

"Where's the hay," he managed. "Where you been, boy?"

"I enlisted."

His fists tightened to granite at his sides. "You did what?" He coughed through his cigarette.

"I am going to war," I said like badly slipped gears.

The old dog's muscles twitched, and ached, and begged to tear me apart.

I let the old man take the first swing. It caught me right above my left eye, twisting my head. I grabbed his wrist before he could draw his arm back again and brought my knee up hard into his hip, split his

"a picture of good health"
photograph

Julia Terle
Washington University in St. Louis

"Bambi"
photograph

Jordan Gamble
Washington University in St. Louis

"mi media naranja"
photograph

Julia Terle
Washington University in St. Louis

“Migration/Navan”
photograph

Kait Mauro
Washington University in St. Louis

rickety bones. I bashed him in the cheek. He yelped and fell whimpering to his back. The thorns, they spread like fever through my body, and I beat that old wolf until his breath was only gurgled blood.

I got up, knuckles split like seams, and backed away heaving for air. The dog struggled to his hands and knees. He hacked and gagged on the taste of copper, tried to steady himself. He started laughing, softly at first, through sticky and drying blood, and reached into the back of his pants. He pulled that old, tarnished Luger.

I charged towards him, my feet sent up little plumes of dust behind me. His swollen eyes went wide trying to aim his shot, but he was still too drunk, still too rattled. I knocked the pistol out of his hands and sent it tumbling through the dirt. And I watched the eyes of the dog that I had feared above all else as he panted for air. I bent over and picked up that pistol, and said my peace through gritted teeth.

I remember the barn floor, red with clay and boiling blood, and how the evening pressed through the thatch. I straightened his shirt and flattened his hair, drawing dirt and lumber dust deep into my lungs. I reached into the wolf's hip pocket and pulled out her locket. It had been worn featureless down to a pitted, matte finish. I opened it, and there on the right side, in scrawling cursive, it read: "All bad weather's bound to turn."

Devin Pitts
University of Mississippi

I Am

"According to the most commonly accepted interpretation of quantum mechanics, individual subatomic particles can behave in unpredictable ways and there are numerous random, uncaused events."

- Richard Morris, The Edges of Science

of the rare lucky ones, blessed
one, awoke with left
index finger missing -virtual
particle evidence- a rare circumstance,
to have seen firsthand mass
exodus of so many atoms all
at once. Fortunate to not have
gone entirely, remainder was rather
fond of what, now, is lost.

No longer need the beckoning
finger. Many women draw
near, inspect frayed edge, made
one cry, said she'd remembered
her lover who fell before her
in Alfred P. Murrah Building,
the frayed edge of it. Stroked
her hair with that stub-fingered
hand, eased tears, eased love

David VandenBerg
Washington University in St. Louis

Nettle Swans

At St. Julian's Academy for Wayward Girls, she had been weaving for years. She would weave and they would dance. At first the other girls sneaked out to steal slippers and rough satin shoes from the graves that littered the no-man's land between St. Julian's and Malad Hollow, but they would wear through them in a single night. The school refused to pay the two dollars and seventy-nine cents for new slippers every night, so after each performance, Sister Beatrice would give them each a generous dose of triethel ventaloxine, or mermaid's tongue, as it was known in the vernacular, and they'd be out for three hours. During that time, she would cut through their swollen feet, drain the pus, pull the skin tightly together again and stitch the flesh before soaking the newly reconstructed feet in a homemade mixture of alcohol and pine sap.

Leah had tried to dance once at Madame Brackwell's with the other eleven orphan princesses (or so they were called) of St. Julian's. But, the stage lights were hot and her false eyelashes fell into her line of sight, making all the world a cage and all her steps out of sync. Sister Cara said her feet were too weak, but the other girls knew that her mind was in other places, far from the musky velvet-draped Madame Brackwell's.

And so, she would dance upon the pedals of her loom, lightly guiding the nettle thread back and forth, back and forth. Ever so slowly, cloth would appear and be bought by the seven rich gentlemen who lived past Bernsten & Crock's in the hills. The adults of St. Julian's never questioned the eccentricities of the rich and the girls never told.

Heloise was the youngest of the dancers, but enjoyed the attention of the cigar-scented men much more than any of the other girls. Leah would watch her as she returned from her late mornings with a cheap silk violet stuck in her hair. "My darling, darling Heloise," the men would all say. Sister Beatrice said Leah's features were too plain to entertain anyone, so she was kept behind, weaving.

Some days she would gaze out the asylum windows, imagining that she was gazing out at the sea. She had a distant memory of a past that wasn't hers, spent by the coast with family and picnics among the rocks. Her silvery scars would glimmer like the wave caps in the sunlight as she wove, and she'd pretend that she was dancing at a rich seaside party, the summer sun setting around her. But when the light was gone, she'd be once more surrounded by the bleak cement walls of St. Julian's and the girls' gossip from Madame Brackwell's.

Neither Leah nor Heloise could remember much from before. They would chat about their imagined lives while they stacked up the bleached bones and splinters of metal by the cliffs. The no-man's land had been there since before they were born and few of the girls really cared about the stories behind it. What caught their interests were the young

men who traversed the cliff-road on their way to Bernsten & Crock's or the hillside estates and the traveling beauticians who sold lipstick for fifty-three cents a tube. Every now and then there would be a skirmish on the road and the girls of St. Julian's would be put in charge of cleanup.

Usually it was a customer fresh from Madame Brackwell's, his mind heavy with whiskey and thoughts distorted from the twelve dancing princesses. Rather than deal with the paperwork of Bernsten & Crock's, St. Julian's assumed damage control duties and everyone was complacent.

Leah enjoyed the chance to be outside, despite the gruesome work. The bones in her hands soon came to be nothing more than sticks and she would twirl about on the parched earth, indulging in her seaside daydreams as Heloise told stories of glamour and dancing. But, there would always come moments when she would look up at the sky and think of her brothers who left long ago. And then the sticks in her hands became bones and the rust on the metal was a bloodstain from a now-extinguished life. Heloise hated the work. For her, the bones were always bones and the metal always hurt her flesh.

Despite their friendship, a deep rift still existed between Leah and Heloise: the same rift that existed between Leah and everyone. She worked hard to ignore it, but at night, through the metal bars at the stern of her bed, the truth would always creep up, wrapping itself up her thin limbs, huddling against her for warmth and recognition. But she would shift and try to throw it off, her knuckles white around the worn tufts of blanket.

Some days, she imagined her brothers flying in from the sea, flying back to carry her home—in a sling made of her nettle-thread. But the thoughts were merely smoke-clouds that the wind soon swept away. Sometimes the wisps of smoke from Heloise's cigarette reminded Leah of swan feathers, and she would imagine ghost-like swans slowly passing over the no-mans' land, off the cliff, and into the nothingness. Perhaps one day she would have a gown of feathers from the swan-ghosts and would dance into the nothingness with them, gliding her wings about in an elegant dance.

Every Tuesday at ten, one of the rich gentlemen from the hills would arrive at the doorway of the asylum, and a girl would greet him, perform an odd bob of a curtsy, and scamper down the long concrete hallway to Mother Editha's office.

This particular Tuesday, Leah and Heloise laid in wait. Heloise, just barely fourteen, gripped her knees as she peered around the worn doorway.

"...no, won't take less. Well sir we do have a business to run here." Mother Editha's ruby-stained lips pursed as she ran her eyes up and down the gentlemen, her eyes wrinkling as she took in the fine lines of the tailored suit.

Leah's breath caught in her throat as she stared at the wide sling that swathed the young man's left arm. A breath of smoke escaped the office and vanished by his arm, the feather of a ghost-swan

gone astray. She wanted to cry out, but Heloise pinched her thigh before she could.

The young man was talking, trying to negotiate some sort of business deal. Mother Editha crushed her cigarette out in the now-empty brandy glass.

"Too costly. Too much work to be done around here, anyway," she spat. Her eyes moved to the window and blandly took in the empty mine shells and bricks that littered the yard.

"Please madam, you must understand."

"He bowed," whispered Heloise, as she looked up at Leah.

Her companion merely nodded. "He's the only one left," she thought to herself. "He's hiding it, but he's the only one left." She had always wanted to be a swan, to be able to fly far, far away as her brothers had. But it was her curse to be left behind. That would always be her curse. Of that she was certain.

"That much? Well...I suppose I can't refuse an offer like that," Mother Editha tossed the coins around in her palms as the visitor left.

"You can't be comfortable like that," the man spoke to Heloise, still scrunched up in the corner. She bounced to attention, twisting a girlish grin onto her features. Leah remained silent behind her, thin vines of silver scars covering her hands and feet. The man merely nodded in her direction and resumed walking, Heloise draped around his arm.

The knife would be cold and she would be free. Because this was her life, she knew it. Nothing would change and this was her life. Leah leaned forward, lying to herself that the sea lay just beyond the no-man's land. Once she could smell the sea, she'd be complete again, she told herself. Just a bit farther she leaned and it pressed into her delicate white flesh. Just a bit farther to see the sea-birds and wave caps as it carved in deeper. Almost now, yes, that was the ocean spray that tricked down from her throat to her fingers. She was free and could fly now. She needed no nettle sling or host of birds to lift her away. All of her scars lay behind. They wouldn't cling to the bones: the bones that would form a new loom. A new cloth would be woven for her to dance upon: a cloth of sky and of ocean waves. Of dreams and ghost-swans that would accompany her minuet. She abandoned all desires, all dreams, and leaped towards the sea.

Kelsey King
UNC - Chapel Hill

Étude for Cello

I paused midbreath as a famous man entered
the closing subway doors. He propped his cello,
long necked with mahogany skin, beside me
on the bench and then fell asleep. I watched it,
nothing but the promise
of solemn music going round and round, waiting
for its stop. Its strings sighed, voice reverberating
in the train. I imagined it was remembering other legs
around its hips, other hands fingering those strings.
I waited as it quieted, and told it
the oldest story I knew, of a time before Mozart,
Brahms when music was the sound of too many voices
in a dark cave, echoing skin drum beats
like the pulse of a heart. It didn't seem to listen,
but I continued, my voice a buzzing hum, tapping out
on my bones a counterpoint to the shrieking
of the wheels. And we rode until he woke,
wrapped his arm around it and stepped out
at his stop. I remained, on the train
and watched as the people came and went, in time
with the opening and closing of the doors.

Sarah Bouwman
Washington University in St. Louis

A Fence

Hal is driving a long road in fruit country on a cold night with no moon, but even if the moon were out, no one would see it through all the fog. The soil in the vineyards is hilled-up around the grape vines, breakers to the cold, and the trees in the peach orchards stand stony and naked. In the dark and fog, Hal has to lean close to the windshield, squinting to track the place where the cracked road and his headlights disappear into the haze.

He might have been home two hours earlier, before the fog settled, but he'd promised Jean that he would bring home a Christmas tree from her cousin's lot, the one out past Visalia. When the kids were still at home he'd have company on this errand, but they are all grown and gone. Fifty-eight years of marriage. Fifty-eight trees he's chopped down and dragged home, littering needles from driveway to living room. He looks over his shoulder to make sure that the giant fir is still chained to the truck bed; number fifty-nine. The last thing he needs is to be wrestling with a tree in freezing weather in the middle of the highway. He's solid for eighty-two and able for his age, but maybe not that able.

He turns back around and blinks hard, trying to distinguish between the blurriness in his vision and the blurriness of the weather. On the right side of the road, a person materializes in the mist, walking in a ditch. It is a young man, tall and thin and hunched against the wind. Hal registers the rucksack and tan fatigues and hits the brakes. This is some bad luck; he doesn't want to pull over. He wants to go home and present the blessed tree to his wife and have her sit with him while he eats his re-heated dinner. But everybody knows that if you see a soldier walking along the side of the road, you stop and offer him a lift. Nothing else a man can do. He'd come home the same way, from his own war, twenty-two and hoofing it along a dark country road. No cars came along that night so he'd walked the whole ten miles, cheeks stinging where they weren't covered by a three-day beard, focusing on the cold and the sound of his own steps and Jean. Beautiful Jean and the life they'd planned before he'd gone: a white farmhouse, endless bushels of nectarines, a newborn every other year—beautiful things in life for which he fought and wasn't sure he deserved. Though he'd hardly admit it now, on that night he walked home, he'd been thinking about getting himself run over. He'd thought, if a car did come along, and it didn't see him in the dark, that he might just step out in front. As simple as a misplaced step on the gravel shoulder. It took years to trust himself to walk alone along a road again.

Now he sits and waits, exhaust pouring out of the tailpipe and merging with the fog, until the boy walks up to the passenger-side window and looks left and right, as if maybe the truck has pulled over for somebody else. He has big eyes and not enough eyelid and reminds Hal of the llamas they used to raise at Turk Friedman's place. Impatient, Hal reaches across the cab and pushes the door open so

that it bumps against the boy's chest.

"You need a ride?" His stomach drops as he realizes who he's stopped for. Benny Shupe, filled out and without that floppy hair. He knows Benny from basketball, a blundering beanpole who never did anything but ride the bench. Tall but slow and clumsy—Hal always thought it was a shame. Hal is assistant basketball coach at Riverside High. He used to be head coach and instead of retiring at sixty-five like everyone else, was asked to stay on and assist. Hal couldn't imagine giving it up. Shupe was the only kid who ever took off before a game was finished. He'd put the boy in after a string of shit-luck injuries had left the team a man short. Down by two, Shupe had the chance at a perfect three and missed. He'd walked right out of the gym, twenty-five seconds still on the clock. Never even showed up to clean out his locker. Hal remembered the father too—Paul—a man who bristled when Benny sat out during whole games. Hal always felt bad when the son had the build and the father had the fire.

"Thank you, coach," Benny mumbles, and climbs in.

"Good to see you, Shupe, almost didn't recognize you," Hal tries to mask his disappointment. "Where are we going?"

Benny says, to the windshield, "14 Kenrick."

"Way out in the country."

"They didn't know I was coming, otherwise they'd have picked me up," Benny stammers, an explanation that wasn't asked for. "We don't talk much. I didn't say I was coming."

And they take off, heading east on Manning. In the last twenty years, Hal has watched the farms along Manning Road get sold and parceled and re-sold. Developers halving halves with dyadic fervor, building taupe kingdoms over plowed-under plum orchards. Hal's relatives had owned most of the land. The Tillmans, the Janzens, the Rempels, Uncle Bill and Aunt Peg, and the Askin dairy out by Reedley; all this used to belong to his people. His parents had sold the family farm when they moved to town. Almost everyone did.

The truck jolts over a pothole and they are both momentarily lifted, before coming down with a thud. "I didn't know you'd joined up," Hal says, glad to see a previous waste of space finally doing something useful. A man in uniform. "Where were you stationed?"

"Baghdad, coach."

Hal shakes his head like Baghdad is an old friend who died young. "Real shame, real shame. For how long?"

"I, ah, one tour. Got last-minute leave for Christmas." He visibly struggles to keep the conversation going.

Hal coaches the same way he led as a lieutenant. Big and fearless and sharp as an arrow. No one ever

gets a compliment, but he binds his men together and can give a speech to make a boy's heart race. He could always do for his men what he could never do for himself. Sitting in the car with another soldier, for a first time in a long time, Hal feels like having some war talk and he doesn't care that it's with the worst player he ever coached. "No kidding, that's decent of them. Served in the Second World War, myself. We celebrated Christmas by not getting shot to hell."

Benny doesn't answer.

They turn off Manning, onto Fourth, and head through the center of town. Tonight, the deserted downtown looks warped, like something frozen into the center of an ice cube, because it is one of those rare, below-freezing nights when everybody hides inside, pampering their water pipes. Hal ignore red lights and stop signs, anxious to get home and do the same.

"You and I, we're lucky." He goes on. "My younger brother never came back. Jon was younger, just nineteen, and MIA for almost a year after we'd all come home. I married Jean that year, nobody standing where the best man should have been. My mother got so upset that she and my dad moved across town—couldn't bear to walk by his empty bedroom anymore. We fought about that, I kept thinking that Jon might come back to the farm and find it empty. Or somebody else's family living there." Hal pauses, regretting his choice of story. "Of course," he says, in a last-ditch attempt to make the story redemptive, "later we got word that Jon had been blown to bloody bits, so the move seemed kind of justified." Benny finally looks at Hal, but it's more disbelief than understanding. Hal hums several bars of "Fine and Mellow."

He has more stories, but doesn't know how to tell them. He was a sharpshooter, not that he's used his skills in years. Grew up picking apricots off the trees from fifty-yards. With his M1, he could thread a bullet through the eyehole of a tank at a distance of five hundred yards. Earned a silver star and a purple heart for taking a slug in the thigh, though he never claimed them; he didn't want jewelry for doing his duty. The certificates are still folded neatly in his desk drawer, yellowed and growing thin at the creases. They're in the same drawer with his marriage license and copies of his children's birth certificates and the deed to the Chevy dealership. When he came home he'd become a car salesman, rather than follow his father into farming. He carried the memories of war better than most men he knew, but couldn't stand the orchards anymore; queasy about the way the trees hung when they were heavy with apricots.

Hal almost asks Benny what he thought about Germany and has to remind himself that Benny's been fighting a different war. "Never did care for the towel-heads," he says, continuing his internal conversation aloud. "No such thing as a good, Iraqi work truck. Though, I dealt in Chevrolets, so maybe I should be thanking them." He laughs and Benny looks out the window, pretending he didn't hear.

After that, they drive in silence, until Hal spots the mailbox with the "14" and takes a sharp turn onto the dirt drive. They bounce violently in the cab and Benny holds his rucksack tighter. This is a fairly big orchard, nectarines on one side and peaches on the other, certainly big enough to have its own packing shed, Hal thinks. A high, chain-link fence divides the orchard from the main property, but the gate is open, lucky for them. As they approach the fence line, Benny starts to clear his throat in little coughs and whips his head left and right, like they are driving off a cliff.

"Stop," he feels around for the door handle. "Um, please stop. Stop. Please stop."

Hal thinks that maybe the kid is going to throw up so he slams on the brakes.

Benny exhales. "I won't," he says, pointing to the fence, "I can't go in."

Hal kills the engine, realizing he might have a problem on his hands, that the boy is shell-shocked and gone crazy.

"Son?" He says, trying not to upset him.
Benny isn't crying, just shaking his head. When he does talk, his voice comes out raspy and snags in his throat. "Can't go in there, coach, can't. That fence."

The fence is taller than most, crowned with a spiral of barbed wire. It is a wartime fence. He himself had been captured by the Germans. He'd spent three months as a prisoner-of-war in Hesse, at IX-B, before the Reich fell. He didn't come home scared of fences, but for years and years it was noises that got him, harmless noises that wouldn't startle anyone else. The deep bark of a dog, the slamming of a garage door, a dead bolt being thrown. He once gave his little boy, Chuck, a split lip for knocking over a ladder on the patio. So Hal gets it, but getting it doesn't help. He has a spooked soldier in his truck and it's freezing outside and he's toting around a damn Christmas tree.

"Little too familiar, huh?" Hal takes his hands off the steering wheel and laces them across his stomach. If he had to be honest with himself, he'd never fixed his problem with noises. He doesn't have any counsel for the boy, except: Don't lie down in the middle of the road, and that seems like the wrong thing to say. Benny gets out of the truck, dropping his bag in the dirt, and walks several paces back towards the road, shoulders rising and falling with deep breaths. Hal grumbles, "Well, well, alright--" and gets out. "Just stay put," he says to Shupe. He zips his worn leather jacket and heads the other direction, a half-mile down the driveway.

It is a nice place, he thinks, like his parents' old farm, which isn't far from here. The whitewashed house is lit up from the inside and, sure enough, the packing shed is set back, maybe fifty yards, along the narrow drive. A new basketball hoop is tacked up on one side of the building and Hal wonders if Benny has younger brothers. Otherwise it's a waste of a good hoop. There are two Chevys parked under a shiny, metal carport. They are both new, but Hal's dealership has been closed for ten

years now, which means that they came from Bill Haddox's place in Fresno. Hal hates Haddox and his gimmicky television commercials. He tries not to let that prejudice him against the Shupe family. He knocks on the front door, high on the frame, avoiding the ornate wreath.

A woman in jeans and a Disney sweatshirt opens the door a crack, looking skeptical. Talk around town is that two tree-huggers are going door-to-door, interrupting dinner-hour and causing trouble. She is reluctant to let the heat out or the devil in.

"Mrs. Shupe?" He says, holding his baseball cap in his hands, "Hal Wells, I coach ball over at the high school. I got your kid out in my truck at the end of the drive."

She just stares at him.

"Ma'am?"

"Benny?" She asks, incredulous, letting the door swing open. Hal nods. She falls on him, crying. Her husband appears in the doorway, a broad and balding man, clearly concerned that his wife is now embracing a stranger.

"Kit—" he starts, but then recognizes Hal. "Coach Wells."

She turns and takes her husband's hands. "It's Benny, Paul, he's brought Benny home."

They don't bother to get their coats. As the three walk back to the truck, Hal tells them about the problem with the fence. From Paul's silence and the way Kit holds her husband's arm like it might break off, Hal guesses that Benny's departure had been strained. A soldier calls ahead if he's expecting a homecoming celebration. He shaves and gets a haircut and his family does the same. When they get to the truck, Kit runs to Benny and holds him. He is well over six feet, but looks small in her arms, being kissed and petted. She moves away so that Paul can shake his son's hand. Hal rubs at a scratch on the hood of the truck with his shirtsleeve.

"Good boy," Paul says, smiling, a hand on Benny's shoulder, "Come on, let's go back to the house." Benny looks down at his shoes and shakes his head. Paul stops smiling. "No, come on now. Coach here told us you're shy of the fence, but let's go in now." Kit wraps her arms around Benny's shoulders and echoes, "Come on, sweetheart."

Then Benny starts to cry. Hal looks away, so that he won't see the tears dripping off of the kid's chin.

"Don't do that," Paul says, "Stop that and come on."

"Well, it's like I said." Hal steps closer to the family. "I was a soldier and I can tell you, that'll do things to your mind."

Paul nods thoughtfully. "I appreciate that, coach," he says, a biting emphasis on coach. "I do. But he's just got to get over it. There's nothing wrong with my boy's mind."

Hal remembers that Paul is not a patient man. The kind of parent that stood with his toes on the sidelines and screamed, swollen faced. Hal had thrown Paul out of the gym on multiple occasions, claiming that he was distracting the players, but really because Paul's urgent shouting rattled Hal's nerves.

"Oh no, nothing wrong with him, it's just the fence," Hal says, gesturing at the fence lamely, "Can't always explain these things."

They just stand, between the peaches and the nectarines, looking at each other and their shoes, which look black, like the ground and the trees.

Paul flexes his jaw, embarrassed. "Okay," he says to Benny, "When you dry yourself off, you know where to find us." And turns and walks away. "Kit!" He calls and she follows.

They make it thirty yards down the drive before Hal catches up with them. "I think your son's honest-to-God scared of that fence, friend," he says. But they keep walking. Hal grabs Paul's arm gently and Paul spins around, shaking him off.

"You can get off my property, pops," Paul says, lip curled.

"See, I just can't leave that kid out there, it's damn cold."

"Then he can come in the house."

"Well, due respect, but I don't see much sense in torturing the boy any more."

That sets Paul off. He points two fingers at the fence and shouts in Hal's face, "We just paid five-hundred dollars to put in that fence," he takes a breath, "This is my farm, my house, and my goddamn fence!"

Hal's mouth is half open and his chest is tight with the familiar panic, but he's surprised to find anger mixed in with the fright. He turns to look at Benny, where he's still standing next to the truck. He's angry on behalf of Benny Shupe, of all people. That Paul Shupe would kick all that money to god-forsaken Haddox for new trucks and then throw a fit about a five hundred dollar fence—

Hal decides to throw a fit of his own.

He goes to the back of his truck and unhooks the chain that is crossed over the truck-bed and climbs up. It takes a few good shoves to push the tree into the dirt.

Paul takes a step forward. "Don't you leave that here," he says, but Hal gets into the truck and starts the engine. He puts the truck in gear and backs up fifty feet.

"Alright Benny," Hal calls out the window, "Move the hell out of the way."

Paul, who has stood watching, jumps forward but

he's too late.

Hal punches the accelerator as hard as he can and drives straight into the fence, tearing the wire mesh free of its pole supports and crushing it under the truck's tires. Kit and Benny cover their ears to block the searing sound of twisting chain link. Then he throws the truck in reverse and backs up to where Benny is standing on the drive.

Paul, momentarily stunned by the crash, now starts to run toward the truck, cursing and screaming. "You son of a bitch, I'll have you arrested, you old bastard!"

"All right, son," Hal says to Benny, gesturing to the toppled tree. "It's all yours." And he cuts a wide circle in the gravel drive, narrowly missing Paul, who's attempting to grab the handle of the passenger-side door.

He leaves the boy and his father there, at the tree line, and drives home, speeding the whole way. He rolls his windows down and thinks fondly, for the first time in a long time, about being a boy, before there was a war, and riding his bike on the same road. Back when he was unafraid and at home, flying over the aqueducts and past the orchards; rows of trees making sharp angles with their trunks and their branches and the sunshine.

Susannah Long
UNC - Chapel Hill

We Called a Truce

The dice tumbled upon an illustrious cardboard world. My pawns lined up behind a fortress of dominoes; my brother's action figures guarded his castle of cards. We didn't know the rules, so we called a truce.

In his room, down the hall, was a little green action figure with black sunglasses, a plastic overcoat, and matching hat. I took it from his closet. My brother saw me remove its disguise. It was sudden, like a dream pushed me out of bed: he pushed me and the carpet burned my arm when I hit the floor. We called a truce then, and shook hands. I could tell it was too formal.

On playground wood chips, we shook hands and swapped splinters. On the playground wheel, we locked our eyes. Other children began rotating the metal turntable. Soon, the children were whisked into a blur; I focused on my brother across our island of iron. We picked up speed. I felt like I was standing on a coin during its flip, or on a dice for its roll. Gravity was changing. The physics were testing us. It stretched the bond of our truce. I held on until the sun-basted metal bars burned the splinters off of my palms. Then, I fell into the shattered wood cushion and stared up at him through doubled sight, the one whose laughter oscillated stereophonically, the big kid—unscathed—who held out his hand. I could never understand what he meant.

Adam Vatterott
Washington University in St. Louis

“Appearances”
photogtaph

Kait Mauro
Washington University in St. Louis

Days of 2009

You were drunk before you went to work:
The miniature sno-cone stand next to our hardware store.

All day you sat inside on an empty crate, staring at the ceiling,
At the tack-board with co-workers' phone numbers, the white calendar,

With no business, no company. Still they lashed out at you
Daily, calling you out on your selfishness.

When the stand was robbed, they blamed you,
Yet you spent your days stoned and happy.

With pills you showed no restraint, you swallowed a bottle of aspirin,
Had a heart attack. I remember you came to my door,

Shaking from a night of excess, a night of blankly pushing your body's limits,
Your hands hidden in the front pockets of your jeans.

Or were they exposed, open palmed facing upward,
An intricate system of lines flooded with dirt

Asking for something you couldn't find at the bottom?

Andrew Volding
University of Missouri

Shook

I'm a Japanese-American,
and last summer I moved across the ocean
to try and get at the left side of that hyphen.
I wasn't completely whitewashed, growing up,
there were things.
We didn't wear shoes in the house,
sometimes we ate with chopsticks,
kids would cheat off me on math tests—
even though I got mostly C's in math,
and I tried to tell them that, but they wouldn't believe me
till they got their tests back.
And all of those things, they were alright, but
they felt more like listed bullet points than identity.
Once I tried to ask my grandma what Manzanar was like.
She just looked off and said that's where we were.
Sometimes there's a war, and things happen in war.
And I don't know, I figured she just didn't want to talk about it.
Couldn't blame her.
So after college I moved to a place called Chiba Prefecture
and I said I'd come back when I knew something.

* * * *

It was Friday and I was in a convenience store,
looking to get something for a snack—
everything started shaking.
Shaking is really the only word here.
Shaking like this world was a Magic 8-Ball and we were
on a side of the cube through the window.
The cashier came from behind the counter

and stood in an aisle with his arms out forward,
trying to keep a shelf from falling.
It was like the walls were a thick rug,
hanging on the line and getting beat with a stick.
I struggled through the door,
putting my hands on things so I'd stay upright.
I thought the building might come down.
Outside I could see the ground, it was moving,
rolling, like dry waves under the cement.

* * * *

We were in line at an improvised relief center, waiting for food.
Parts of the streets were torn up, vending machines were
tipped over, light poles had uprooted.
I saw a woman and her young son,
both wearing SARS masks for the radiation.
He didn't look scared and she just stood there and held his hand.
If my Japanese was good enough to talk to her about what happened
I think she'd tell me that sometimes
when you live by the sea
it rolls over top of you.
And this is where we are.

KJ Kern
Washington University in St. Louis

Neverland

Stench of overwashing, overcleaning
overkilling exudes
from the idle equipment –

dim tint of Jaundice,
light vomiting its hue
upon the bleached tiles –

single lamp beside
a toppled stool.

A bulb is
shining, crackling with aged filament,
illuminating through the lens that is waiting
for an eye.

A thin strip of skin
stretched wide,
pinned in place.

The tiny canals
have been dammed,
damned to eternal
existence in stasis.
Nothing is allowed through,
all is comatose,
an overdeveloped photograph
of a warm day and the paleness,
though the heat is set
with the sun.

This skinny remainder,
feeds on the ticks
and the tocks of the past
of the clock's roman face.
It's epitaph: "I was
a translucent maze,
kaleidoscopic and variegated –
a zebra in Wonderland.
Where is that zebra-hole now?

Ethan Brandt
Washington University in St. Louis

Of Networks

1. Cells

How assumptive of the lysosome
to degrade the chunks of garbage
as though we weren't afraid
of losing the fullest wholesomeness
and dying on the anonymous barge,
drained of our minimalist selves.

2. Microchips

The transfer of sorted information
generates the wonder of why
knowledge knows no restrictions
though simple understanding is limited
to the commandment of license for one
to say, "I understand," but does not.

3. Metropolis

What does the scale of a unit matter
when it walks beneath a steel shadow,
when the curve of the Earth adds distance between
the spires of skyscrapers,
extending the spatial disconnect
of the already distant units?

4. Language

Seasoned with all the uncertainty
of people-emotion, still attempting
to foster a line of brittle contact,
the scribbles on fresh parchment
and vocal tremors attract, at least,
a want for continued communiqué.

5. Clans

Using the fire is never the same
as lighting the fire, in the vein
that cooking the bow's work
cannot release the stringed arrow;
the men roar lust-loudly,
fall prey to women's fingertips.

6. Train Tracks

To sprawl across in metal tandems,
reaching for the next and the from
while hubs collect you into bundles,
gives the satisfaction of intention
to carry but never to hold onto,
cold, waiting, forgotten, often.

7. Ants

Solidarity through stability, vice versa,
goes the motto of the colony
because unity begets the immersive
and the immersive makes sense
in the sense that sense is produced
through fidelity to the entity.

8. Networks

What the entity knows of parts:
zilch but the trick of pain and prosper,
believing the death of garbage produces hurt
and the fortune of sense creates delight,
though the truth of entity is accident—
the living pieces mean the worth.

Josh Barbeau
Washington University in St. Louis

Out Here

Concrete, steel, the rhythm of days, the static of crumbling radio towers: this is what we left behind. This is what we left behind to wolves and warhawks and middle aged women, tight-lipped and gray, switching through static in the ruined suburbs, half-hearing voices from other half-lives. This is what we left behind. Some rhythms we forgot, others we discovered in lonely grottoes with calloused fingers, in cotton fields left fallow and forgotten. And aren't things different now? Didn't you plunge your hands into the dirt, and breathe, and smell it, and wasn't the smell dark earth and fecundity? Didn't you rub your back bare against tree bark, and when it had rubbed you raw didn't you throw back your head and sigh, and didn't pleasure escape your lips? Didn't you snatch flowers from their feral beds and smear their scent across your face, catching yellow pollen on your eyelashes? Out here where we roll our bodies in ivy, drape sun-burnt shoulders in wisteria, lap pine sap from our palms, I say that we are the nameless sentinels of civilization, out here where what we left behind is nothing more than an anemic radio signal, a cinderblock sprouting weeds.

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