

BOTTICELLI MAGAZINE



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LITERATURE+ART

Botticelli Magazine is an online literary and art journal produced and edited by students at Columbus College of Art & Design

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Always

BY DANIELLE DOUGHTY

I want to fight over how many bananas are purchased
and who gets to eat the last one cause I've always
gotten my way like the way I got you but I still
want to battle for food in the grocery store has
always been my favorite place to shop riding carts
like roller coasters grabbing the air for Gala
apples even though apparently Fuji is better but you
know I'm always right so we'll get four and two to
please the organs top and central and even though it
seems unfair it's always how we show it.

Tangerine Girl

BY AMANDA KNITTLE

I hope you get cancer
from that fake tanner you feed upon,
indulging your ego and
burning your retinas.

Take another double scoop in a cup
or cone from your crumbling cornea.
Scrape away some of that cold
ice-collagen lip cream.
Replace with your favorite flavor of celebrity,
celebrating cellulite celibacy.

Skin still a sentinel to the silicone central
of a bumbling blonde baboon bitch
and her cream-filled cronies.
Clones, these

secreting lips, leaking
your latest lethal love affair of
collagen flavored no-chocolate-chip
in a double scoop cup with
silicone shrapnel sprinkles.

Then vs. Now

BY AMY GALLAGHER

The moon

sits, nestled in the night:
the bottom of an egg shell.

The top was there
days ago, milky and full

until you cracked it,
tipped the brittle shell to your lips
and drank,
yolk soothing
a singed throat.

A Halt in Transmission

BY AARON BRUSHART

Doesn't take much for me to get there
after I close my eyes,
When it begins,
I find my self crawling down a hole,
And when I get to the kaleidoscopic, bright, light in the distance,
I explode into a thousand birds with one group consciousness.

“An avian flu outbreak has annihilated half of Europe's population.”

Inside this infinitely horizontal cavern,
the ceiling is the only tangibility visible,
And so we claw at it with our beaks,
Sharply and wildly we dig,

“Today the government has issued mandatory taxation on air and water in an effort to dig out more foreign earthquake survivors. The world can't hate us now.”

It starts to break as we scrape and shatter boulders to fine dust
Though in the midst of commotion,
my bird's teeth fall out
Forming a mosaic of a Norman Rockwell painting
on the floor.

“Coming up at 11, a murder is on the loose, but he only kills people with no teeth, find out what new hot products will keep your teeth the healthiest at 11!”

And whilst crawling up the umbilical cord ladder,
Taking my seat in the central control cockpit
Of the sky's nervous system,
Manipulating the weather
And foreshadowing intensity
I think to myself...

“Man, I gotta stop meditating with the damn T.V. on.”

Keagan

BY JOHN MALTA

A man with thin, silky hair- the color of an old frying pan, wearing nothing but striped Tommy Hilfiger briefs stirs about his apartment early Monday morning. The apartment is of the upscale variety, stainless steel kitchen appliances, mid-century Swedish furniture, several obscure thrift store type knick-knacks scattered throughout, and a large terrarium sitting above the mantle that contained a brilliantly colored chameleon about 19 inches in length. It was around 5:15 a.m. and Keagan had just woken up. He walked over to his terrarium to see that his chameleon, James was already awake and eating the locust, cricket, and organic micro green salad he prepared for him the night before. He shuffled over to his faded-out, antique record player, it was portable, but this function was hardly ever used. His favorite record- "Off the Wall", by Michael Jackson was already sitting atop the spindle. "Don't Stop 'Till You Get Enough" came crackling through the old speakers and echoed throughout the apartment. Steam shot out of the espresso machine and distracted Keagan- he walked into the kitchen and began making himself the usual- a macchiato, extra foam, and a portabella omelet- baha style. Keagan sipped the macchiato and his mustache was instantaneously submerged into a pile of foam. When observing it with his monstrous eyes, the chameleon liked to pretend that it was sea anemones swishing and swaying throughout an ocean of caramel flavored foam. He checked his schedule and realized that he had no consultations or training sessions today. Keagan was a world-class dachshund trainer- who was the recipient of several awards and fellowships from various institutions for his work with the breed. He picked up his phone and realized he had missed a text message last night, it was from Juliet: a woman that he recently began dating. The two of them met at a wine and cheese tasting a few months ago at Whole Foods Market. Keagan was a little scruffy around the jawbones that night and Juliet made a joke inferring she at one time had a beard. She later explained that throughout her twenties she was a circus side-show performer, her ex-husband was the strong man and she was the bearded lady. But over the past nine years Juliet gained local and national attention for being the proprietor of the number one organic bakery in Williamsburg. Keagan was lost in his thoughts about her- so much so that the last of his macchiato began spilling down his chin. As the frothy water splashed down his inner thigh, James- his pet chameleon, watched on irritated that he was unable to warn him about this unfortunate occurrence.

Keagan snapped out of his chair and looked down at his inner thigh, the wiry black hairs were matted down against his skin in a wet circular shape that shimmered against the morning sun.

He emerged from the bedroom in his favorite outfit- a powder blue turtleneck, coupled with a slim fitting pair of brown trousers, and vintage off-white desert boots- in pristine condition. He Scooped James out of his cage and headed outside. On typical days off Keagan liked to take it easy, he had a 9th floor balcony overlooking the riverside, he would spend hours sun bathing with James, reading, people-watching, and endlessly listening to records. The balcony- in contrast with the rest of the apartment, had little to no decoration. "I'll Chase the Blue Away", by Ella Fitzgerald was crackling through the record player indoors, and echoing out to the balcony. Keagan sipped a glass of wine, and James caught flies- as the cars, and boats, and trains meandered along their ritualistic paths.

Mother

BY AUSTIN CHARLES

Mother says I have the prettiest eyes. Mother says they shine like blue pearls in still waters. Mother says I the sweetest boy she has ever have. Mother says I sweeter than the other boys and girls. It strange Mother understand me now. I think we are closer now. There was an apple on desk with a bite in it. The apple with bite in it was white inside.

I sad for Mother. Mother says “don’t be sad Boy. Mother will make it so they take won’t take anything away from us.”

“I not worried Mother.” I said. “Sad sometimes. But not worried.”

I told Mother this. But I didn’t mean it. I was worried.

“You don’t worry Boy. Worrying is for your mother.” Mother said. Mother stood at the foot of my bed, pulling blankets over my body.

“Where is Father?” I asked.

Mother slapped me in the mouth. I knew what Mother meant. Water stained Mother’s eyes. “Don’t mention your father Boy.” Mother said in a voice that didn’t sound much like Mother. I saw Mother’s face and it made me think when the cloud giants went clap in the skies. When sky Father beat sky Mother and sky Mother had water fall from her eyes. I didn’t want to talk to Mother. Mother said “You don’t mention your father around me. Understand me?”

“I sorry Mother.” I said.

Mother wrapped the blankets around my body and she fixed my bowtie. Mother hadn’t changed my clothes since then. Mother whispered “hush little baby” in my ears and I felt better. Mother’s eyes still ran with water. Mother lifted my hand to her face and she felt better. I worry about Mother a lot.

Mother slept with me that night. Mother says my hair was as soft as downy feathers. Mother lifted me from my bed and Mother fixed the sheets. I looked at the paint on wallpaper and thought of Mother’s necklace. Mother and I walked around my nursery. Mother held me to the window and I saw other mes playing. I saw a me-girl, and a me-boy swinging on tree branches. I said, “look Mother. They’re like me. Can I go play with them?”

It was a long time before Mother said something.

“I don’t see any other children.” Mother said. “I only see you.”

“The children playing Mother. Down there.”

“No boy. You can’t play with them.” Mother’s eyes made like water again.

“Why Mother?”

Mother set me down on the bed, my back held against the wall.

“Because boy. You’re my child. When they see you, they will look at you, your beautiful eyes, your beautiful hair, your beautiful lips and your beautiful face, and they will be jealous. They are not like you, because you’re better. Don’t be jealous boy. We have each other.”

I looked at Mother for a long time. I thought Mother was wrong.

“I never play with them Mother. Why?”

Mother’s face looked like sky Father’s again. When dog’s fought each other for bones, Mother was like that. Mother smacked me against the face and threw me against my bed. Mother shouted at me and cried like when children bump their knees.

“BECAUSE I’M YOUR MOTHER THAT’S WHY!” Mother shouted. “They want to be like you Boy. Up here with me. When they gather down there on the playground, they look up and say ‘that must be the luckiest boy in the world.’”

I lay against bed, I looked at Mother. “Really?” I said.

Mother smiled, “Yes Boy. Really.”

Mother fixed her dress. Mother wiped her hands. Mother left my room and closed door hard. I was sorry. The apple with bite in it was yellowish brown. I alone most the time. I lay on bed and hear Mother making like sky Mother after beating. Crying. Crying. Crying.

I lay on my bed all in darkness. And then when the yellow diamond came and walked across the sky, I heard Mother hitting pans. I heard Mother laughing through door. I heard Mother coming up the stairs. I heard Mother say, “I’ve got something special for you Boy.”

Mother opened door. I lay on my bed and said, “Thanks Mother.”

Mother had a white bowl on a table. Mother carried the table. Mother walked across my nursery and set the table next to my bed.

“I fixed you oatmeal and apple butter, your favorite.” Mother said. Mother took spoon in her hand and reached into bowl. Mother lifted spoon and held it to my mouth.

“Here comes the choo choo train!” Mother said.

I not hungry.

Mother lifted spoon in my mouth. Oatmeal fell off my lips. Numbly. Mother’s face wrinkled. I fell back in chair but Mother caught me.

“I can’t Mother.” I said.

“You can Boy. Eat your food.”

“I not hungry.”

“Eat your food!”

I didn’t say anything to Mother. Mother knew what I said. Mother threw the bowl against the wall and it made like bang! Oatmeal ran down the wall like sad dog eyes. Mother fell to floor crying.

“I sorry Mother.” I said.

“It’s not your fault Boy.” Mother said.

I looked at apple with bite in it and was dark brown. Flies came for apple. Holes were in it. Rotting. Mother like sad spinning top. When spinning top stops spinning that’s what Mother is like. Mother sang “hush little baby” to wall. Wall didn’t say anything back.

It hard to remember Father. Father’s is a voice I can’t hear. Father’s is a touch I can’t feel. I can’t smell Father’s skin, or see Father’s eyes. Father used to love mother. Mother didn’t speak of Father much, but said Father went missing when other fathers fought their brothers. Mother says I not around then. Mother hate Father I think. Mother says Father was bad. I think Father still like Mother.

The wall looked like it bleeding oatmeal. Mother didn’t clean it up.

I think Mother went away for a while. I heard crying.

Mother says the disease hurt her. Badly. Mother says the disease like Pandora’s jar. When Mother was young, Mother kept it hidden. When Father left, Mother was sad. Jar opened then. Mother’s spinning top stopped spinning. It was sad for Mother. I worry a lot.

Mother opened door. Mother came into my nursery crying.

“Do you love me Boy?” Mother said.

“I love you Mother.” I said.

“I tried Boy. I tried.”

“Mother.” I said. “When can I go outside?”

I hadn’t moved in longer than I could think. I had been lonely.

“Can’t you see Boy?!” Mother screamed. “I’m good to you! I’m the best mother in the world!” Mother slammed fists against wall till Mother’s hands bled.

“Can’t you see I try?! I’m GOOD!” Mother cried.

“I love you Mother.” I said.

“It wouldn’t stop! I tried!”

“I not mad mother.”

“You’re not mad? I’ve got nothing left. I’ve given everything.”

“Don’t be mad Mother.”

“I try Boy. I do”

Mother’s eyes rolled. Mother looked tired. Mother moved slowly and closed door. Mother was closer now. The apple with bite in it was black. The flies came for me.

I heard footsteps speaking. I heard Mother go down staircase. I heard boom like oatmeal against wall. I heard thump like potatoes on wood. I heard silence.

I didn’t hear footsteps again, but Mother came in through doorway. Mother wasn’t crying, Mother was smiling. Mother carried me from bed and led me downstairs. I never been downstairs before. Mother’s skin was as soft as lamb’s wool. Mother took me to doorway. Mother opened door and there was whiteness.

“What is this Mother?” I asked.

“We’ll find out together my boy.” Mother said smiling.

Black Boxes Full of Cameos

BY EMILY GALLIK

Walk around the corner, see day light
Walk around the corner , see couches sat in before, beds laid in before
Walk around the corner, see cords strewn about, waiting to be used
Walk around the corner, see a half-eaten bowl of rice, waiting for me to eat the remainder
Walk around the corner, smell the hair spray, drown in the clouds of it floating low to the ground
Walk around the corner, smell the little vials of Gucci, almost on its last leg
Vials, of soul, of eccentricity, of energy
Something lost, like tumbling acorns,
Falling falling falling down
“But it's rotten, they are rotten, they won't grow”
You don't know, do you?

Once upon a time, I had melon bread
I ate it too fast and wondered where it went afterwards
I got too sad about it, too sad about some silly Asian food
Some bread that tasted like melon
Some pink water that tasted like strawberry cream
My body is your bread
My blood is your wine
your body is my temple, my tears are your wine
Can it be? Please?
Can it be that you can come back to me,
like this melon bread I so wished for more of?
How silly of me, comparing you to bread
But, in the end, I am simple
Can't you be simple with me?

Convallaria majalis
I ran around the house, picking you up, smelling you
I knew you didn't have a smell but
You were just so beautiful
that I had to have you
but I let you go
only to come back to you the day I decided
to imprint you on my body forever
Forever and ever
Then suddenly, you had a smell, you had a presence
You had such an impact on me that I look at you every day and think
“ you are so beautiful, I'm glad I could see you, at least for a little while”
Did you ever agree with me? With my brain?

Gods and Goddesses, Creatures and biblical characters
Carved in shells, found only in the most beautiful of oceans
I have a box of them, I have a box of
Beautiful women
Whom have carved themselves into my fingertips
It hurts, it hurts very much
300 years Before Christ, how beautiful was it
to make carved out promises I could not keep
Sometimes, they wore away, sometimes I kept them saved in my
black box of Cameos
They showed signs of wealth
Power, money, and most of the time, how miserable you actually were
Dancing Eros. An invitation to love, and love lost in time
Sometimes too beautiful to look at, you would never clench your hands
only to catch a chill and your death all in one carriage ride
riddled with beautiful women whom have carved themselves into
my fingertips

When My fingertips slide with yours again
When I capture you again in my
Black box filled with
carved women

Someday I will keep you.
Walk with you through the
Convallaria majalis
tasting such sweet melon
smelling such sweet scents
You and I

Elisabeth

LIANDRA HOLMES

The air is sweet and mellow,
a breeze entrancing the fields of grass.
She sits on the swing with a broken board,
balancing her slight weight.
Her young but rough hands rake through
the hair against her shoulder again and again.
I ask her what we're having for dinner.
She looks up, but doesn't answer. She is lost
in dreams of hot air balloons meandering
over butterfly-infested forests.

Pontoon Pantoum

BY CHESTER FILLMORE

Pontoon cuts through the open water
Sun goes down and the fish ain't bitin
Grandpa talks to his daughter's daughter
Bout boys and toys, readin an writin

Sun goes down and the fish ain't bitin
Loons duck under to the great unknown
Motor sputters and the time's forgotten
Can't never ever fell so un a lone

Loons duck under to the great unknown
Daughter's daughter said what's said
Mommy's Daddy lets a sudden groan
Eyeballs roll to the back of his head

Daughter's Daughter said what's said
Pontoon circles far out from shore
We're pretty sure that Grandpa's dead
Daughter's Daughter on the pontoon floor

Four Poems

BY CHELSEA BESSE

“No I won’t use a crosswalk.”

It started off simple and swift.
Sun cooking black tar, crackling rock,
Don’t step on the cracks
...Mother will kill you.

My pink flamingo shirt,
Or was it my skin?
I ate too much shrimp again.
Easy to do in Bird-In-Hand.

I passed the cat village,
Oh what an *absolute* racket.
Tripping on tin bowls,
Metallic taste and twang.

A spicket flowed grey water,
As women did their *wash*.
Tiny pale children on dead grass,
Lend me your pineapple sherbet?

Crossing asphalt, hot on bare feet.
Bewildered, leering faces.
I can hear those faces now:
“She should have used a crosswalk.”

Rules and signs on sticks
Fly away, gulping golden nectar
In the belly of the bird.
That chupaflor adored me.

Rainbow Octopus

All the colors you can see,
Hit the human eye respectively.
Blues mesh with green:
Seaweed wrapping.

Glass is clear...cautious
“Warning! I break.”
Bull in a China shop,

You don't belong here.

Swirling eyes, reflections;
I'm not a child to be molded.
The glass, it called to me.

Shadows on windowsills;
Depth and dimension on eight legs.
Left alone, cold and gleaming,
Rainbow Octopus seems to be dreaming.

Work By Michael Hopko of Soul Glass, in Northern CA
PM Gallery

Nanny

The wire grey twirls
pinned tight
against wrinkled skin,
until it was almost smooth.
My eyes grow wide to beauty.
The traditions of old
are withered, yet wise.
I pray this never ends
your smells, cinnamon,
are sweet on the senses
and soothing to the chorus
of clocks. Aged elder,
only rosy cheeked friends
are welcome
in your kitchen.
I've always called this place home.
Maybe not.
Hush
can you hear the radio
I'll write down your favorite
songs, light the candle
in the window,
warm my frozen hands
on a wooden hearth, hear words and
prayers, soaked forever
into this oak and pine
until this wood
is singing. I will
save you, always

remind you. This tired thread
is where weak hands
knit together the stories
that refuse to die.

Grubb Ct.

Hated crowds, living in the city
Hated going back to small town Ohio, never boring
Dead corn stalks kissing the snow
Crying of crows and eagles
Hated the gnawing pit following me home

Arrowheads and pine unexplored
Hated the strange faces, dirty trucks
Gardens that flourished beans, tomatoes, cabbage
Rabbits settle into dark soil
Finding shelter beneath crisp green stalks

Hated crowds, kept to the fences
Found stretching barb wire, rusted through
Bridge covered in weeds
Water – wanted to bathe with the minnows
Murky with youth

Hated to leave – and yet could not
Hate to admire the death
Of pale flesh tombstones that dot the hill
They watch over preschoolers
Backpacks and lunchboxes withheld from them

Hated knowing it was real, nothing dreamt
Pink thick tongues of calves
Shining off those minnows
Living in the city, dirty strange faces
Everything vibrant and whole

Bluebird Migration

Mary Nemeth

The reason I am here is to listen
to you thru your time in
and of this cold, hard blue.
missing the many mists
of the new listless leisures.

The wind blew thru to hear
The low-throwing sky
not of which I am here the
real reason is to listen for you.

Do not fear or lear.
at the lear-ing lear-ing at you
I am here to hear your reason
and listen to you listless singing

Singing a few bellowing
notes of the blazing blue blues.
That is my reason for reasoning
those untruths that your blew

That skewed blue song
spewing thru your beak
missing the many mists
and you finally flew.

Blue Angels

Brittany Kotur

My eyes catching the moment.
A rise of my feet wanting to fly
with the Blue Angels conquering the sky.

Like gods of power, unleashed.
Flying thunderbeasts shining like crystals
against sunlight in the ocean sky.

The speed of flying straight up high,
as far as the eye can see. The sky as blue
as the bluest marble. The white swirls of dancing formation flying,
perfectly and gracefully by the scene.

A hearing of a song in flight to show what they mean.
Watching, being mesmerized, can't get my eyes off of what I've never seen.

Capetown Road

Daniel Foley

Journal upon an oak table,
blush-red, spiral-bound with a pen atop,
clad in obsidian black - white gleam, cap reversed
rollerball exposed and scarlet with metal luster.
The expecting mother, repose in a white blouse
on the loveseat beside.
Furtive streetlight beams
of amber light strike her shoulders,
fall across her abdomen,
hair casting shadows that reach
for cover.

Elisabeth

LIANDRA HOLMES

The air is sweet and mellow,
a breeze entrancing the fields of grass.
She sits on the swing with a broken board,
balancing her slight weight.
Her young but rough hands rake through
the hair against her shoulder again and again.
I ask her what we're having for dinner.
She looks up, but doesn't answer. She is lost
in dreams of hot air balloons meandering
over butterfly-infested forests.

En(trance)

APRYL SKIES

Music and moonglow
parade through reticent eyes,
each smile ardently unhindered
by the darkness
that steals in through the cracks
of your true intentions

Eyes glimmer with provocation,
An invitation to where smoke
curls into corners,
igniting our dreams golden
and amid the lingering sweet-dry
of your snuffed cigar
I am reacquainted with the delights
of you, my Muse
and through your *Basil Hayden* haze
you declare

*"God is a thief
Your eyes an endless treasure
of stolen stars."*

Your voice ancient like ruby scarabs,
daunting as jinn
and when the door to my heart
would not open,
(artful in your attempts to lure)
you gently forced it ajar
leaving footprints
upon the clouds of my
trampled dreaming...

'Great Men and Their Words'

SIDDARTHA BETH PIERCE

Samuel Clemens upon his deathbed
said 'Bring my my spectacles'
I suppose he was a man
who was in the end wondering what
was there to see next;
what was God's Master Plan.

Leonardo da Vinci is quoted as having said
'Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his Master'
was he attempting to teach greatness as a scholar
even though he was known
to be haughty towards Michelangelo
or perhaps he himself wanted to conquer the Master of us all.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart once spoke these words:
'To talk well and eloquently is a very great art
but to know the right moment to stop is an even greater one.'
With quill and ink in hand
he penned - sweet note by note - ending with
perfection that is timeless
and took a stand
creating his own Requiem
death within his grasp.

Einstein is quoted:
'God don't play dice'
So forget the luck and chance
Even the great scientist
seemed to believe
there was something beyond
the nature of our reality.

All men of beauty
creations True and strong
not only are their creations
masterpieces to us all
but indeed their words are too-
an author, an artist, a musician, a scientist
gone but forever here
resting within our eyes, ears, souls, and minds
men of greatness through and through.

Are there lessons to be learned from
the words that they spoke
beyond the pen, the brush, the pages
of glory-
men of greatness that strove to tell a story?

Twain with his seeking
da Vinci with his wanting
Mozart with his advice
Einstein with his belief.

They each sought perfection
living still in our memories
however the words they spoke
tell me more about these great men
perhaps even than their work
as each chose a path
of creativity-
as we have
each and every one of us-
a Godly undertaking I say to thee.

Imagine

SILVER CORBIN

Imagine that when childhood weeps in ruby shellac,
When lilacs are doused in honey
And dusted with sulfur,
The Dreamweaver falls in love with a comatose Desi.

Imagine that when the winter sun melts away the waxy coral reef,
When the cactus goes bald and dies of thirst
In the springtime rains,
The Puppet Master is tangled in string.

Imagine that when the Dreamweaver dies,
And the lilacs are shriveled,
Sulfur fills the beams of light that press through
The window of the time capsule attic.

Imagine that you are immortal.

In Another Life

TOMMY HOLMES

"...The accident is believed to be the most serious in the history of nuclear power, worse even than that at the Three-Mile Island power station in the United States in 1979, when there was some release of radioactivity but nobody was injured.

The report, from the official news agency, Tass, said there had been casualties but gave no details of numbers. It said aid was being sent to the injured..."

--26 April 1986

--1988

A pair of lights danced on the rough, abandoned terrain. Like two children playing with no regrets, no worries. Symmetrical balls of energy moved quietly through the approaching night splitting the howling wind in two. With purpose, they made a path of their own up the rugged slope. They had been there before. The sun had completed its descent behind hills, far across the horizon line. The shadow of night began to overwhelm the lights.

The car continued to curve up a desolate hill, swerving violently with every path it created. But these weren't new paths created, rather old ones that had been attempted to be forgotten. The car came to a piercing halt as it reached the hills summit. A silhouette of a lonely, coarse tree rested on the hill. Less than a kilometer away, a desolate, uncanny cityscape shrieks for attention. The subtle cries of the car disappeared along with the luminance.

The rusty door, of what seemed to have once been a white car, slowly cracked open as a dark figure stumbled out into the cold world. The liquid in his bottle sloshed back and forth, imitating the man staggering towards the tree. With a swift kick a triangulated golden sign, housing four black marks, was uprooted and sent in the air a few feet. As he approached the tree, a flashback played in his head. Blanket, basket.. The man jerked his neck and screamed, disturbing the quiet night. He fought every ounce in his body to hold back a tear. He hadn't let one go since he last saw her. He tossed back another swig from his bottle. No expression was made on his face as the liquid crashed routinely down his throat.

The large tree casted a familiar yet uncomfortable look upon Petro as he was deep in contemplation. He looked towards the tree and saw himself with Nat. They laughed, ate, drank and flirted around on a scenic day. He remembered smearing the barbecue, from the glazed lamb he grilled, on her face. She was quick to fire back at him. They shared the honey spiced vodka while watching the neighborhood children playing in the park and field below. Not a single care was given. What a perfect day. Days that he held onto more tightly than his

bottle. He was sure of what he had to do. His attention gazed towards the sky as he professed, voice cracking. "Nataliya, soon we will be together again. You won't have to wait any longer."

The hemp, nylon, twine, among other fibers were tied tightly around the trees strongest branch. The radiation hadn't done its job quick enough so Petro decided to take matters into his own hands. He looked out towards the city that once was his home, now unlivable. The city that had produced his lover, now deceased.

The loop was set around his neck, he was almost there. He made one last look towards that city. That Home. Chernobyl. A light arose from behind a large building, sparking a faint glimmer in the night. With it came a crackle. A firework. Petro, shocked, almost fell off the rock he stood on. "What the fuck? Nat you better not be behind this, my decisions been made." A feeling came upon him that he had not felt in a year and 10 months. Submitting to it, he loosened the rope and stepped down.

The perplexity of the situation finally started to kick in as Petro shifted his thoughts towards it. The city was supposed to be lifeless. The explosion. The radiation. Everyone was evacuated. It was barricaded and fenced up. Something didn't fit. He looked back up towards the dark sky. "You and your signs...Okay, you got me this time." With another pull from his bottle, he began his descent down the dirt covered hill.

The lifeless ambiance surrounded him as he began to make his approach. The ferris wheel carts moved a few centimeters back and forth making a faint noise as if to replicate the noise of laughter that once consumed the area. It had been just two years ago when Petro and Nat watched children ride on it, from atop "their" hill. From a few hundred meters away an eerie feeling came upon him. The barricades, blockades, barbed wire fences. Debris from the accident was scattered on the outskirts of the city. Abandoned cars and broken street lamps populated the area. As he approached the fence he became intimidated by the immenseness of the layers blocking off the city.

He advanced down along the border of the barrier looking for a possible defect. The moon began to shine down on him, as if to lead him towards what he was looking for. Twenty minutes into the search, Petro stumbled upon a tear in the fence. Subsequently the concrete wall directly behind the fence was chiseled down to fit the form of a body. He stood there for a second, bewildered in the situation that he found himself in. What the hell was going on. Why would anyone want to go in the decaying city.

He crawled through the brief tunnel and found himself in the city that once raised him. How twenty six years pass by in the blink of an eye. Ruins of buildings remained where he once remembered proud ones standing. He started his exploration of the city and with the first turn a nostalgic feel overwhelmed him as he converged on the path he used to take to the academy. A foreshadow of his journey as he delved deeper into the heart of Chernobyl.

Memories of happier times surrounded him, attempting to crush his spirit. He'd been through worse. Petro advanced further through the labyrinth of empty streets. Forsaken cars and forgotten salvage littered the debris filled streets of the city. At every corner he searched,

looking for the source of the light that had caused the change in his plans that night. “Where in the hell could that have come from” he spoke aloud.

In the distance he recognized the seven story apartment that had housed him and his family just years ago. With no clue of where to start looking, Petro shifted his path towards the rotting apartment. While turning at an intersection, a strong savage smell began to enter his system. He began to cough roughly as the nasty smell hit him like a punch in the stomach. One of the worst stenches he’s had the pleasure of smelling. He thought, even worse than the red deer corpse he and Ivan had to pick up back when they worked for the city. He attempted to stray away from the smell by cutting through what used to be the town grocery. After passing the carts and rounding the corner, the source of the smell stared him in the face.

He couldn’t remember the last time he has ran so fast. He tried to erase the image from his head but it continued to pry itself back in. “How the fuck did that happen?” he panted to himself. His mind was running as fast as he was. How did that happen? He was way too bloody to die of radiation. It looked like he died from a gun. Something he saw in a movie years ago. 6 blocks down the road, Petro began to slow down to a stop. Catch his breath. As his panting began to die down he heard the faint sound of voices. Like spectral whispers they began to haunt up his spine. The light in the sky, he thought. This has to be it. The sign that diverted him that night. He owed it to himself. To her.

Petro kept in the dark, following the voices slowly, readily. The clamor amplified with every block he passed. He lodged his head carefully in the corner of a corroded building’s first floor window. Two boys, couldn’t have been old enough to graduate from the old academy, sat in chairs, constricted from the legs up. Petro, many meters away, remained crouching in silence, confused, and uneasy. Behind the boys, a steel door began to rumble and open sharply. A mysterious and luminous brilliance shined through the opening as five sullen, harsh looking men proceeded through towards the boys...

Isn't It Creepy When the Dog Watches Us Make Love?

AUSTIN CHARLES

She loved that goddamn dog more than she loved me
I knew it but I didn't let it get under my skin
It was some sort of beagle wiener dog mutt
I just called it a Shitzel
Big wet nose, big brown eyes, long phallic like body
It looked like a Shitzel to me
Not the least of which was its obsession with killing squirrels and pissing in the house
It looked like the kind of dog you'd see in one of those sappy humane society
commercials they reserved for 3 am
That puppy eyed look it always gives you as you imagine that ear jerking Sarah McLachlan song restraining
your ability to snatch the dog as he shits on your good rug
It was impossible to escape his helplessness
His name was Tobey Maguire
I kid you not, how could you stay mad at a dog named Tobey Maguire?
He used to take hot runny dumps in my clothes when I left them on the floor
She wouldn't get mad at that but I would
"Why don't you stop him from doing that?!" I'd scream at her
"He only does it because he loves you" She'd say back
Right, I thought, by that rationale if I showed her how much I loved her I would be in jail right now
That dog hated me, and after he did it the third time, I smeared the shit
In her underwear while she was away and left them on the floor
I don't think my message was very explicit however
Because I realized the same week she stopped him from doing it
She also stopped making corn beef stew
Any time I got close to her Tobey would just stare at us
Every time I fondled her on the couch, in the chair, on the bed
Tobey would just stare at me, and every so often he'd growl
But Tobey took it to his grandest heights in the bedroom
I'd get in her apartment after not seeing her for weeks and throw her on the bed
And when I'd begin the business our bodies craved, Tobey would start whining away
I started to believe he got tired of staring at my bare ass all the time
We'd have to stop because she would tend to Tobey like a goddamn child
We'd start again, Tobey would be on us again
He'd watch us like that, motionless and liquid-eyed
It was spooky
It was like my bedroom moxy was being judged by a species that dragged its ass on the floor
The idea made me soft downstairs
"Just put the goddamn dog outside" I'd say
She would put him outside the doorway and he'd be silent
And wouldn't you know it? When I commenced
Tobey would start scratching and howling at the door

"Put the goddamn dog outside!" I'd say
She'd always detest that, she said he'd wake the neighbors
"Good", I'd say, "maybe their bedroom action will appease him."
"Let's just let him watch us okay?" She'd say
Fine, she let Tobey back in.
Tobey: the world's smallest and most efficient cock blocker.
We'd try again and Tobey would start howling and growling
"Christ, let's do it doggy style" I said, "Maybe he'll enjoy that"
We decided to go at each other anyway
We ransacked each other, but as soon as Tobey went nuts, my heart fell out of it
She was the one riding me, while her dog howled and snarled and slobbered
She rode me hard, clawing me, biting me, and if I didn't know any better
Tobey was doing the same to me
Jesus, I thought, we aren't making love, we're making bestiality
They were both humping me and now I was the one howling
And right before I climaxed Tobey bit me right on the calf
I screamed, she screamed, we all screamed for ice cream
And after that bizarre fiasco, I left her three days later
Tobey staked his claim and won her heart
I told her Tobey wasn't curious
Tobey was jealous

Journey of the Jackalope

MICHELLE ROSS

Jackalope is correct for both singular and plural uses.
~*Weekly World News*

In the center of the city's topiary garden,
Hidden in the shrubs is a pair of jackalope

Furry, overcast gray warriors
Enjoying their weekend break.

The jackalope can run up to speeds of fifteen miles per hour.

The jackalope play in shallow puddles,
Dancing chorus to the musical of life.

Three small children join in on their fun,
Twirling and whirling in the afternoon sun

A jackalope has only a single mate and mates for life.

Should I join them?
Or sit out this turn?

Half rabbit, half antelope
Half something, half nothing
Halved like me

A female jackalope can have up to six in a litter.

They play hopscotch and hula-hoop, rocket ship and racecar
But, this unreal fun began to end in the setting sun

The tiny jackalope trips and chips his little horns,
Shattered to pieces, he sits there and cries

The jackalope can hop three feet into the air.

Alone and forgotten, feeling unwanted
Like I was long ago, in that unreal scene at the side of the road

I cannot leave him there, broken and alone
I go to comfort him and offer to take him home

The primary diet of the jackalope is grass, but since the influx of man into its natural habitat the jackalope has developed a taste for glazed donuts.

He nods in agreement and off we go
Traveling in my silver-wheeled chariot

"Wee" he cries as we wheel up the wooden ramp
To my half empty home, half haunted by broken memories

Placed on the counter, as the guest of honor
I mend his wounds with Scotch tape and glue

The jackalope has been known to use its horns to ram a human in order to get a glazed doughnut.

He wiggles and jiggles to make sure he's set right.
He smiles with glee as he hands me the glue

A single adult male jackalope is strong enough to take down a full grown unicorn.

He points to my broken tangled legs
As if he knows what I should do

I sigh and tell him that it's no use
They are gone, like the days of the jackalope.

It is said that a jackalope's memory is better than that of an elephant's.

King Bear & Queen Coyote Are Innocent Creatures

BRITTANY LEIGH FERENCE

Dark, dusk dance floors with labeled brown bottles
filled, then emptied into our bay window wells.
Sage green, fur-fringed winter coat, yellow flower
adorned your chest. White and black patterned winter
jacket, kaleidoscope bird wings at my back.

Now, I arise and eavesdrop on the falling rain
casting down past your window pane
that a muted silver cat rests at and takes sight
of the freeway where the vehicles create the sounds
of surging and rhyming rivers that overwhelm the cement,
the same cement that floods into the city that has us cornered.
Surrender. Defender. Surrender. Defend her now.

Creature comforts for now, but not for long,
our fur is undried as we travel along, travel on
foot out that door into the settling spring rain.
In my left forefront pocket, friend,
I do hold a gun: a weapon made of sticks and stems.

One chess piece we bear down on too hard. Retreat.
The Queen is retreating in the King's oversized, oil-stained shirt.
I compose embroidered impressions on the fabric of your mind,
some threads are worn rare and some threads are worn fine
but they can be fit rugged: reinforced
and endured through this soulful blue weather.

But *only* if you can paint brushstrokes the color of naked truth:
with warm-hearted hands and a bold backbone
and bowed ribs carved into totem poles that twist on
from driftwood, drifting and floating and boating on
the sea; bowed wooden ribs of a ship that rescues me.

Then we will plant those steadfast seeds in the cracks
of our creativity; they will branch out and bundle in the summer rain.
But *only* if you shuck and jive in the drunken crowd for me.
And *only* if you choose to drift with me, sift with me
when the obsolete shadow baits and lures you in.
But now has this chess game advanced too far, danced too far?

Now, in our modern memories: We see patio furniture

take to the air from dogs tethered by leashes. We see
a willow tree girl. Next to her, a statuesque figure
with rowdy hair. We see her: channeling a mariposa red guitar
and a rooted voice. We see him: hidden by a hat and a sizable
sense of humbled humor. We see the emotion burn
pigments of rhythmic verses in paintings; a neon orange fox
wondering in the forest. But we will not see her when the King dreams
of the city. And we will not see him when the Queen gazes
at a moon as extravagant as a circus.

One word will start everything.

MARY NEMETH

One word will start everything.
For this one word will be the beginning of all thought.
One word will start this story.
One word will start a tail of this three headed creature.
The beginning will never end because the beginning
is always in the middle.
This one word will start everything.
Everything will be started, is started, has started.
The everything that our land of two trees
and four persons are made of.
For our atoms are constructed of this one word.
Mingling in this word with the
tingling tequilas in Adam's throat.
This one word is why I write now.
It is the reason why we resist reason.
It is the thoughts we think.
The only purpose of the sun that lights the world
is to illuminate this one word.
It will start all.
This sentence, that glass of cheap red wine.
That hangnail you have been picking at.
Attached by the chipping red polish that is this word
The beginning of the end of the beginning of words.
The dust under your shoes.
Skin-flakes with the only goal in their ending lives
is to become that dust.
This word is our world of which you live and don't.
It exists even when you are not watching.
This one word has not only been written
at the exact time it crosses your ears as waves of sound.
But also seven times before and five after.
It is the beginning of all the thoughts you think.
In your head the neurons firing
their missiles of information like warfare.
Only to tell you that you are thinking.
This one word that is at the beginning of everything.
Five times over, you have to think. Never-ending.
This one word at the beginning of the middle of the end
This one word means nothing.

Outside the wounds

an expiry

I wrapped myself around the corner just as the curtain clutched your life, suspended, weight moved through the room attached to shadows, lurking in the corners of mouths casted south, was your toes at my fingertips.

Dressed in vessels and sweat with the rise and fall of your chest, twenty-six to a room and counting backwards

as your heart on the monitor gained a weightlessness and your lips crawled back into you throat fishing for your system of sympathies, and we were

Nervous, trimming the fat from our fingers as death had awakened you like a gown that swallows the body wearing it, flesh over brittle bones stood stagnant as my mother watched her father die a thousand deaths with the shriek of each breath, displayed by way that cumbrous pulp in your lungs crept through

My false reality, failing me as I watch the weather worsen and tears upon your window of opportunity descend like the chronic drag of your character, now a shriveled bag of skin... once you wore so tight, choking on the pipe in your throat to ensue the one that you smoked.

Slatted roof

in mirror tercets (3 liners)

BINA GUPTA

air

filtered fistful of sky
conduit slatted roof
staked claim

staked claim
conduit slatted roof
filtered fistful of sky

light

panned day light
to banish dark
claimed birthright

claimed birthright
to banish dark
panned day light

water

rightfully
collected water
rain dripped

rain dripped
collected water
rightfully

The Cataract House Hotel

DAVE NICHOLS

There aren't any more fish-houses in northern Ohio
but we were dancing like there were hot air balloons
getting loaded off the lake and saying *and, and, and*
with three-quarters of the world spread in between.

The moon over East Cleveland lulls breathless.
It's like someone's shot the sky and built
an accomplice from all space: mansions
with high-bookshelves, wooden windows
across the bus-stops severing Euclid's flash-light
of a road. The children in them nestled in cocoons
made from eyelids of marble and the human figure

dining in Lakewood, collecting latitude. It's an old main
with rail-marks and milk-boxes attached to drag clubs,
the township where my hand stretches across the carpet under
orange mattresses, where the dust feels like liquid,
where the hammers had landed through the wood.

Everything's mere breath. Ridiculous specks of night-birds
count us from crash-bent, translucent poles from telephones
of jackson-wire, courtyards magically kept clean under the gaze
of an intricate false-ceiling cracked by endless snow.
Isn't Cleveland obvious? There were folks here who got old
and tousled grandkid scalps and left us christian empire.

You could even, despite practice, imagine that the cemeteries
over whiskey island stretch at least to Canada; it's so cold
and finger-painted from transparent air-pollution.
Chernobyl? Tremont's shutters downed with blankets
and their mascots of the Browns! The town turns mauve
under the broken into palaces of bitten-through wada,
half empty bowls of rogan josh under water-dripped
plastic, un-refrigerated, almost moving!

Slovenians in the Muldoon-taverns, where men dare
to fry a peach into unlicensed counters and speak
of catholic daughters in imprecise English and peer
half-hazed at the lengthening of Collinwood gangfire
as it demolishes the lemonade fairs and unfair gambling
covered up in tents. Cigar breath mixed in Mickey's ice cream

cups, where schoolboys have their backpacks and their smiles
stuffed. Before an orchestra of asphalt, east Italia, freshwater

soup of ages! Between a laundromat and someone's elevated
tire-shed are discount portents straining through the dark.
Payne, where we buy shrimp chips and gingerbeer with the same
rub at the candy-aisle/asian market/fish aquarium and
lift cigarettes from li-wah and toast them to our fat lids.
This existence is guff! In Chinatown, where cold misers
watch sunsets like a Bresson film and ride the foreign skates.

The Dead Boy In the Ditch

I was 25 when I saw the dead boy in the ditch
I'll never forget the day, even as I turn 43 in the next month
It was a grey, cloudy day in April, the kind of day that seems to suck the color out of everything under the sky
And despite that stupid nursery rhyme, it hadn't rained in weeks
I decided to go on a lengthier run that day, and I liked to take the desolate country roads where there were no cars
I was around 2 miles into the road when I saw him, what I first thought was someone who had fallen over
I was wrong because the person wasn't moving
There was no movement other than the wind kicking at his clothes
I jogged faster
I approached the boy cautiously, with the ease of a surgeon taking the knife to a patient for the first time
My heart did barrel rolls in my chest, and no, it wasn't the running that caused it
I didn't know what to do
I remembered thinking what those people did in the murder mystery movies and novels I had always been so fond of seeing
When were the cops going to come in?
Where was David Caruso? When was he going to come in and give one of those stupid one-liners?
Unlike the movies, death isn't an event, no sad music, no final words
Death comes swiftly, unannounced, a stranger amidst your party
Nobody knows him, but everyone thinks he looks familiar
He isn't imposing, nor rude, he just seems to eavesdrop and says that
Particular thing that rubs the hair of conversation the wrong way
He makes people shut up and really look at things differently
When you realize who it is you've just seen and talked to
It's already too late
He's converted half the party, and as you celebrate your 43rd birthday
You look up and realize that most your friends are gone
There was no hustle and bustle, no CSI guys, no John Grisham lawyers
Nothing
I approached the boy, seeing him face-first in the ditch
He wasn't even old enough to be a teenager
I expected there to be a harsh stench of decay but there wasn't any of that
The only smell was the faint stench of the boy's final bowel movement
They don't tell you about the part in the movies
I stood over him and looked down at the boy's face, batting away horseflies that had risen from his crotch and bottom, and in his orifices
His skin was the color of a salmon's belly
He hadn't been there very long
He was young, and blood dripped from his mouth, looking like spilt ketchup
His tongue hung out slightly from his lips, a stretch of taffy too big to be swallowed
His was face forever stuck in a dissatisfied frown

As if eternally wondering what his latter years would have been like
He was a fair, dark-haired boy
His eyes were open and staring at me, staring through me and up towards God
I could see that under his shirt, there was a horrible sunken-in look, as if the boy had simply been crushed by something large and heavy
An asshole driver, mostly dead himself, without the balls to even stop to see he had hit one of the live ones
I imagined the man who killed this boy
He wasn't drunk, there would have been more damage if he was
This man had a good life, too good in fact, to handle the messiness of having killed a boy
He was probably late to a board meeting, 2 or 3 talking apparatuses molesting his ears as he leaned over to pick up his daughter's spilt dinner of chicken nuggets
This dead man's daughter would live to eat another chicken nugget
And she wouldn't even realize the nugget she ate cost the life of a human being
I didn't need to check his pulse to know he was gone
Dead and lying there for the animals to eat him, a fate worse than death
I didn't want to carry the body anywhere, so I kept running
I phoned the police when I got home
They found the body and took it from his casket of leaves and grass
I learned that a boy named Timothy Gentry hadn't returned home from school that day
The police questioned me, but I took no offense to it
They gave me the rundown if only for police protocol
I went to Timothy's funeral because I felt I knew the boy in some odd, ethereal way, I went because I knew that if I didn't, I would always wonder who he was
Sometimes the dead can teach us more than the living ever could
I became good friends with Timothy's dad
We toured the bars together and got drunk, I tried to buy all his drinks but he wouldn't let me
I don't think his wife approved but she was drowning with grief in her own resentful way
Tim's father told me everything about his son
He flunked his last algebra test
He played soccer and never got to play in games
He caught him masturbating in his sister's bedroom closet, and in his tree house he had made him
He always yelled at him for breaking wind at the dinner table and he admitted to having sex with their 19 year old babysitter
He told me everything about Timothy, the good, the bad, and the ugly, but more of the ugly
I ugly is what I remember
He could have been an arsonist, a burglar, or an all around fuck up
But at least he was somebody's fuck up
It made me remorseful, not that Timmy was dead, but that in 12 years, he had already left a bigger footprint in the sand
What good is a boy without his faults? I wondered
Just another walking dead, shuffling around carrying wallets full of daughters he hardly sees, gloating about bachelor degrees and baseball trophies
My daughter's pictures, baseball trophies, and bachelor's degrees wasn't a viable currency in death
They would use it no more than they we would use a Prussian coin
I turned 43 years old a month later and I remembered the dead boy
I remembered Timothy
And I remembered that day, the day when the dead man recognized his own flesh and blood

The Encounters of Black Crow's Beak: The Third Rendezvous

BRITTANY LEIGH FERENCE

I. The Dry Road Truck Ride:

Drive me to your shepherd, the wolf
in sheep's apparel, apparently, I will play
along on this stage; be sure to leave
suitable elbowroom for dramatic effect
in this theatrical performance. In this morning
we assemble cashmere and fleece pelts
interlaced into place by wool yarn. Resting
restlessly in front of the rose-wreathed window,
surveying the tongue-tied, parched pasture.

II. Hours Before Noontime:

An upbraiding of three states, camouflage
brute buffalo. We wet our whistles
with a dead soldier's worth of whiskey wrestling
our way into that barren-fenced-in-back field: where
we dropped

that hot potato into
cold-blooded snow.

Before the moment of steam
retreating; together, soundlessly
we carried that blazing spud on our weak
winter shoulders. Whiskey thick,
hard-boiled skin broadcasts goose bumps
from the scene. Lasso me
a browbeat, covet me
a feather, tan me
a hide, hum me
a hymn on your harmonica.
I will fabricate you
a folk song fort
where we will only find comfort and ease.

III. After Dusk The Lights Must Be Turned Off:

The Wolf locked the door behind him,
leaving his cloak of wool next to the elk hide
on his bedchamber floor. Ambling
his way to the pallet, where I am reclined.

Composed himself: grounded feet, settled knees,
flush spine with the bedstead, arms steady, collected,
crossed at his chest, palms opening in towards his heart,
fingers interwoven; his eyes stargazing
blind smokiness of his den. Skyward eyes,
Earthbound spines: our corporeal cravings submissive
a respectful boundary line drawn.

IV. A Conversation Through Cimmerian Light:

"Disclose to me what you know." The Voice of wisdom
through my years has taught me to curb my untamed brain,
its vulnerable amour. Keep hushed
my twin-gentlewoman, the Wolf is preying on you,
I am praying for you; make it through the unlit space
of time alive. What is it to be a woman, sister self?

V. An Observation of Street Cats and Sun-Ripened Fruit:

The Wolf has his paws full of my kind
of creature, they promenade around him
like a carousel of cats in heat. Mundane routine,
effortless, but he is losing interest. I am adjacent
from the lubricated donut shop. While he leans
against high fructose corn syrup, sugar rush,
crash and burn walls, he still craves fruit
naturally sweetened by the sun
ripe fruit harvested, fully grown from a family tree
that has withstood proper weather conditions
to bare a flourishing yield. We have been warned,
"Do not fall in love." Do not eat the fruit.
The only nourishment keeping us all alive
in this modern life style.

The Heart-Shaped Envelope

AUSTIN CHARLES

I mailed my heart to you again
My friends say I should try email but I'm old-fashioned
It was easy to get it out of my chest
It wasn't so easy to get it into the envelope
It was slick and red, and I had to glue the seal shut
Just to make it stick
My heart came back in the mail one day
I looked at it and checked the address
6065 West Pearl Street, yes, that was it
I mailed it again and the heart came back
I thought it must be bad stamps
So I bought new stamps and put one on, thinking it was
Faulty stamps, and not a faulty heart
I mailed it again and the heart was returned
And the fourth time was like the third, and the fifth like the fourth
By the tenth time I realized you wouldn't take it
I used to think there was no use for such a silly thing
But now I've learned
And I thank you for helping me
Sometimes its better left in the envelope
Sometimes its better left on the desk
And it sits there, throbbing through paper
And I don't mind at all

The Lord's...

SILVER CORBIN

Our father who art in mind
Hallowed be thy wrath

Thy kingdom fall on the unkind
Thy will be done, in rage, as it is on earth.

Give us this day our daily rod
and forsake our tears, as we forsake the tears of those who forsake us.

And lead us not into vainglorious redemption
But deliver us into holy retribution

For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory
for ever and ever..

etc.

The Virgin

DAVE NICHOLS

I get it that we are basically our bodies. Imagine
That cement drips into a shell, arguing despite
Its own hardening, that its substance is the pail
As much as the rock sculpture of the onyx wall

As it moves and thinks and smokes lilac seeds
And quotes Sexton as we debate passive virginity
Against the huge weight of active participation
Through the lubed dynamics of flesh and person.

What else is there in there? Whose flute is this?
It watches me wave at neighbors unloading long
Sheet pizzas onto their tables alerting me
That I too am welcome to this feast. We move

Into the tree-lined aisle and eat as strangers eat,
Our marrows chomping on the fresh dispatched
Mushrooms, the blue of melted cheese. I won't
Be the last to mention to the pavement that

This position I'm stuck to changes, that every
Mosquito bite's a crisis with me, how I'll empty
Every shoe-box in my floorless hallway shouting:
Dear Self, why don't you autograph your letters?

We're exhausted with the current and press up
Glasses, or climb old trees, or keep a digest. *Are we
Merely a collection of what you haven't forgotten?*
Perhaps when you're whole, you perish, I say.

It's the morning commute pulling at our parts
Like an outrageous agenda. Our laps get held
Together by the leftovers of our public species.
Everyone's dying underneath the surfaces of their

Pale elusive structures, ones that we don't believe
Turned out right in the first place. Gathering
The sauce of white light piercing the gray station
Of a checker-table, we watch the birds instead.

Untitled

KYLIE KING

He is the only one dying in the forest. The late afternoon air is seemingly weightless sifting through trees. Three young voices stood over his body, buckled in agony, his back to a bed of multi-colored trash. The blonde boy held a long handled hammer, and with all of his violence forced it into the man's face, bludgeoning him six times. The intensity of every blow lifted his head from the ground, each time urgently more red than the last. Incapable of knowing what hit him, he is notwithstandingly still alive taking air into his entire face. The folds of his gaping flesh are pulled in with each inhale, yet only blood escapes every exit. The sound of his breathing quickly take on the last portion of liquid pulled from the bottom of a container up through a straw... he is longly and impotently murmuring the words "no". I watch him helplessly like the moon watches the earth. The voices speak quickly among one another plunging a screwdriver into his far from immobile sides and heart, the impact becomes clear in his incessant moan. Each orifice drowns like a clogged sink as he breathes his own blood laboriously. The boy plunges the tool into the man's eye sockets, stirring so deep that the interior of his skull occupies a halt... a train screams in the distance. The corners of his mouth reveal cognition in the peak of white pain as the boy rips the mans limbs from his own face bringing the hammer to it five times, as if he were chopping wood. He is honest in the shade. His hands were empty.

Varvara Ivanovna

MARY NEMETH

The voluptuous eyes of Mme Varvara
Stare down at the viewer.
Only offset of the long graceful neck
Can translate to the bust gently orienting left

My eyes place the thermal highlights
Into the valuable gold-lined crimson
Back to the eyes of my childlike sitter
They hold acceptance of payment in paint

Transfixed am I to those eyes like souls
Bound to almonds roasted and
Pushed into the exotic white porcelain
Warmed by the phoenix of life, this girl--

To be carried to distant lands on
Cascading, dark blown ringlets.
Falling like storming waves crashing
From above --her tunic-covered shoulders--

My palette is skewed with crimsons
Feeling judgment clouding over
dangerously transcending worry of failure
As the apex of igniting tampers with her soul

My brush flies on those phoenix's wings
Knowing where with all its being.
I watch the developing from an inner place
While riding on the voluptuous lips of Mme Varvara.

Alexander

HANNAH ROSS

Alexander called them the wishy-washy hours: the thriving minutes between daytimes when night reigned over the rooftops of Santa Monica with a sweltering heat and everyone was awake, but still dreaming.

Beach winds carried an air of excitement through the city and it was hot and it was pulsing and people laughed more often than they breathed. It was intoxicating. Alexander and I lost ourselves on nights when the air conditioner inside Rosarios broke down and the gentle whirl of the overhead ceiling fans seemed to make the crowded bar more stifling than before. Those nights, when the sweat soaked through our clothes and we drank lukewarm beer to feel anything but heat, were when conversations turned philosophical and we'd find brilliance in our drunken genius only to forget so in the morning.

There were the colors though too, a surrealist painter's concoction of yellows and greens sweeping through the area and on some nights I didn't drink but lapped up the colors instead, the vibrancy sustained throughout the room by faces, with words, with bodies: the kinds of colors musicians sing to and artists feel in their fingers, the kind of colors that change you, if only for a night.

But sometimes, the wishy-washy hours brought about the complexities of memories and some nights, with wine, nostalgia would seize us in sweeping, infectious gusts. We sat at the bar those nights, and Alexander would balance sleepily on the stool to my left: his cologne breaking through the barriers of cigarette smoke and I'd catch myself clinging to his bare arm in hopes that later, in the earliest moments before dawn, I would find his smell again. Sitting there, he was strong, but he was sad and my most prominent recollections of Alexander now are clouded by those lonely, heartbreaking nights. Because sometimes, through the roar of slurred madness from the Santa Monica kings and queens, I'd listen to Alexander cry.

And in the crumbling back alleys, I'd run my fingers up and down his arching back as he sobbed into his big, sad hands, stooped and broken. I'd whisper into his ears, the smell of alcohol on my breath, that it's going to be all right, it's going to be all right. Joy from the noise and the booze and the laughter would melt away in the heat. But even now, after these supposed moments of intimacy, I wouldn't say we were ever truly close. We seemed, as some friends do, separated by a disconnect of secrecy. He wouldn't tell me what made him so sick with grief on those nights, though I knew without voicing inquiry and with powerful certainty, that he would in fact, never tell me. So I never asked.

Our relationship was based on sets of fleeting moments: the mutual detachment from responsibility we shared, from the understanding that we were both deeply disturbed on most levels, and from the deep profound discussions we had under the saturated lights of bars. All those things. We talked like we didn't have ties to anything or anyone and that to each of us, our words actually meant something. He listened. And I listened. And I think that I loved him, in a way I wasn't sure I knew how to describe. Because, you know, I would miss him, and the subtleties in his manner of speaking and the asymmetrical nature of his face – but I never felt the urge to kiss him. Holding him in those back alleys as he sobbed into his palms seemed enough and satisfied his need for me and so therefore, to some extent, mine for him.

I think neither of us wanted things to change. Neither of us craved a different life or the stress of a marriage and a mortgage and we wanted to be children together forever, sharing playtime in the heat of Rosario's bar – not out in the real world. Santa Monica was our jungle gym and for the most part, when times were good, Alexander and I didn't need a thing in the world except each other's company and the sting of alcohol in our throats – acidic.

But things always change.

On the last night Alexander cried, when Rosario's lost momentum and a dull hum from the kitchen radio lifted no ones spirits, but hung in the air with a certain depressing emptiness, Alexander, sipping gin with little discretion, confessed to me in all seriousness that *he was not real*.

Above the drone of murmured conversation, I laughed, unabashedly.

What is real, really? I spluttered back to him, drunkenly challenging his philosophical statement with a sharp intellectuality. Alexander paused for a moment and blew his nose into a crumpled paper napkin. I crossed and uncrossed my legs as the man before me sank in his chair.

There were more colors in the bar that night than ever before, and shapes formed in Alexander's face like a jigsaw puzzle: triangles and semi-circle eyes and I couldn't focus on anything but his lips, his pink hexagon lips. And when I asked him what was wrong, why tears were beginning to fall into his drink, overflowing on to the table below, he began to cry louder.

So I hugged him close, in the usual way, cooing softly into his ear, telling him with little confidence that everything would be all right. But he kept sobbing noisily, regressing into hysteria, until every pair of pentagon pupils turned our way to stare belligerently and judge.

It's all right; it's going to be all right.

But even I didn't believe it, and Alexander kept dissolving before my eyes until suddenly he was made up entirely of tears and the skin of his hands and face disappeared, evaporating into salty liquid all around.

And then he splashed to the floor in a wishy-washy pool at my feet and no one seemed to see it happen at all.

And that was that. He was gone, and no one remembered. Not a soul.

And so all I could do was shake my head as I graced the pool with the skin of my bare feet.

It's going to be all right, it's going to be all right.

Driving Away

SCOTT STEWART

There's this funny thing about driving, it's like a fella' who swears all the time. The fella' goes home to family for a dinner, and he asks someone to pass the goddamn mashed potatoes, and then he tells everyone that the shit tastes good. All that salt-language becomes so much a part of the fella's words that he doesn't even know they're mixed in there, traveling like fleas on an old dog.

Driving's like that, the more you do it, and the longer you go; miles of inky tarmac ribbon unspooling under the bias-ply tires and shimmery hot air disappearing into the snarling, gaping maw of the radiator grill. The driver stays awake and aware, cutting and weaving and driving and thinking, but ask him, ask him while he's pumping hi-test and smoking a lucky at some two-pump mom and pop, ask him anything he remembers of the last four hours. You'll get a look as empty as the tank he stopped to fill while he thinks of it.

Oh, he'll remember the wreck he saw, or the joyriding punk that cut in too close, acting a jackass to impress the blonde in the passenger seat. And he'll remember the blond in the passenger seat even more. Maybe he'll recall some spectacular view, but outside of the extraordinary, he won't be able to name one thing.

At least that's how it is for me. I never ask anyone else at the gas station about stuff like that. I just go inside and pay and then stub out my butt on the chrome corner of the pump and kick it in the gutter while I cap the tank. Then I get in and shut the door, adjust the choke, throttle up and drive on, brother.

Well, sometimes if I'm thirsty I'll stop long enough to buy a bottle or two of Coca-cola. That's always pretty good on them days what are so hot that rolling the windows down just feels like sittin' in front of a furnace, and the snakes all crawl places to hide from the sun, and the rays that shine down and glint off all the chrome feels like spears in your eyes thrown by the drivers going the other way.

I always wonder about the bottles. They have that green look when the cola's all gone. It just looks clear when they're full. I probably have two or three of 'em rolling and clinking under the seats right now.

But no, I don't never talk to nobody at the gas stations, and nobody really cares. I'm not gonna ask if they saw that sun bleached and bullet-pecked Desoto off US73 just before the end of the road in Dawson Nebraska. They don't care about that washout by the mining road leading to some ghost town called Crippled Creek, Colorado. They don't give a damn about the weather in Oklahoma, and they don't give a rat's ass about how the Burma Shave signs don't make sense if one of the billboards has blown away.

I never ask where they're headed or where they been, or what's good on the AM radio in the area, and I don't ask them if they maybe might ever wonder if their radiator will run dry and make the motor shit-the-bed out in the desert, seventy miles from Nowhere, Nevada.

No, at the gas station, I just tell the man behind the counter "thanks" or mumble something-something-a good evening. And I leave.

And I never stop anywhere and talk, and I just drive and look at things and never see none of it. Except that time in Wyoming when I saw most of a bison mashed into the front of a Peterbilt cab-over.

I pulled over to see that, and I was looking at that big mess. I was looking and the driver was shaking and leaning on his rig, saying "Oh Jesus", and I was thinking that if I'd hit that I'd be dead, and someone else pulled up and they looked at the truck and the buffalo and the truck driver and at me and then my car.

And they asked me, hey man is that your car, and I said, no I was riding the buffalo, can you give me a lift? And the trucker glared at me and the guy in the car is looking and his wife is telling the kid in the back not to look because the buffalo's pretty torn to hell. Yeah that's my car.

What is it? I ain't never seen one like that. I told him it's an MGBGT, and he nodded like he knew what that was, and drove off, and I looked at the trucker and he's back to sayin' "Oh Jesus", so I get back in the car and drive off.

Sometimes while I drive I think, and there's this one thought that always circles above the car like a vulture. One time when home was more than a four letter word, someone once asked me "Why do you hurt?" I told 'em 'cause no one's ever asked me that before.

I believed that up 'til real recent, too. I'm a grim thirty-one years old and I am on another road again, white knuckled and speeding in my car. I attempt to count the number of days I've been on the road in the past eight years, and I am unable to. I mash through the gears, wooden shift knob worn smooth like a brass ball from the same touch over all these years, and I try to remember at least one other place that I was going to at one point. I never stayed anywhere long, 'cept for that time in Waukeegan where I stayed for two weeks to rebuild the motor.

Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Francisco. The west coast blends into the Midwest. Denver becomes Chicago, turns into Milwaukee. Phoenix burns into El Paso and Dallas. New Orleans becomes Fort Lauderdale. Orlando is Atlanta, Nashville is Pittsburgh, and Boston is Brooklyn. By the age of twenty-five I knew 'em all like they was women. I loved them; they fucked me.

The way Duluth smells is worlds away from the way Provo smells. Anyone could tell you that. Except Most people wouldn't know the difference. I could tell which dirt scraped off my shoe belongs in what downtown. Well, I would but I don't hardly bother remembering most of them. My life is nothing but driving and memories and money from the trust fund. I got nothing but time, and I can wait forever as long as I make it from gas pump to gas pump.

Someone once asked me "Where do you hurt?" and I reckon if I knew where she lived, I might have an answer.

Mime

ELIZABETH VEST

"Mime!"

A furious shaking of the head, then the motion repeats, more frenzied as the sand trickles through the old-fashioned hourglass that everyone agrees is more fun than the timer.

"Ladder!"

Shaking no.

"Climbing!"

"Ladder!" No again, and someone smacks the back of Fred's head.

"You just said that!"

The happy accusation makes everyone laugh, not that this is the first time, even in this round, that Fred has gotten flustered and indignantly repeats his first guess. It doesn't matter---it is always funny, just like this game is always fun.

I am cracking up, shaking with laughter so that my actions grow even harder to comprehend. The word is 'pulling.' I grab fists of imaginary somethings, wrenching them towards myself, falling over myself.

I scrap my shin against the coffee table like I always do, when I stagger around like this.

Jen is the one to gasp out the word. We fall back into the couch cushions, stealing sips of cheap wine and leftover crackers as Jen reaches into the ceramic bowl, something I'd made in a wayward class in college. It has blue swirls and more lumps than it should have. It is perfect for pulling charades out of.

I am cracking up. Fred and Jen are fairly new friends, and they don't know.

"Subway station!"

The words come out as a stutter. Not too quickly; but there is no way Fred is going to guess this one.

I pretend that the charades are random: that I print words out and cut them up without looking. This is true for most of them. Maybe half.

It's not that I want to cheat. Winning doesn't matter; charades is a game that is simply about playing, a game living in moments of confusion that click sharply into recognition. A game of blankness and light bulbs.

Fred pushes me into giving him my turn--- petulance turns the corners of his mouth down. When he frowns I am looking at Christopher. There's no way Fred can know, but we are playing a different game. A game of sweat and swearing, a tender misfortune. It is a flickering resemblance, just enough to add the proper layer of fantasy.

The atmosphere in the room changes when I realize Fred is acting out one of my special words. They tend to be different from the random ones, more complex, more emotional in nature. Fred and Jen are artsy. They appreciate the novelty it lends the game.

Fred is giving it his all and Jen and I stare, transfixed, pondering what meaning could lie behind his battered pose, his eyes filled with faux remorse. He uses our established symbols for first-person, for a phrase.

"Regret?"

Nodding and shaking his head, it is that and it is not that. Or it is that and it is more. The tension in the room rises, not thick like the tension that once paced my living room, along with Christopher and Allison, but a foolhardy fizzing pastel sense of entertainment.

While I throw out guesses, Jenny grabbing my shoulder as she sways in shaking laughter, I carefully sidestep the exact phrasing---the point is not to win. To my relief, the hourglass is full just before Jen can get the words past her lips. She pouts, brings the black suede couch pillow closer to her chest. The way she crosses her slim legs at the ankle is a portrait of Ally's body language.

I look at Fred expectantly. He shakes his head, marveling. "I didn't mean for it to happen that way," Fred says.

I am smiling sheepishly at the complexity of my handiwork. I am reaching for more crackers when I am back to that morning, watching Christopher rummage through things and throwing some into his bag, which he'll throw into his car. Which he will shortly be using to leave and never come back.

What I'm manipulating Fred into saying, well, that's not exactly how that conversation went.

I wipe the excess salt on my jeans, switching places with Fred as he throws himself onto the couch. The charade stage is in the middle of the rug.

Drawing one of the double-folded pieces of paper I smile at my own neat, printed letters. I don't have to fake my surprise at the phrase, because for whatever reason tonight the charades are playing out in chronological order. What are the odds of that? I wonder. Not good. It's a first.

I move my arms and legs. A finger to my eye. "I." It's a freebie. Then the swooshing motion of handing an invisible something to somebody. Give? I nod and shake my head---that but not that. I pinch my fingers to say it's very close. "Gave." Jen gets it. A jabbing finger in their faces. Us? No. People? Getting colder. Sand's trickling down. "You!" Yes! But time's run out. Too much time on "you."

"You guys were close," I admit.

"So what is it?" Fred demands, poking at Jen to get her to go take her turn.

I look at the charade bowl. The morning Christopher set it down jarringly on my table I hadn't seen it for years.

"I gave you that," I say, looking at Fred. Talking to Christopher.

My mind wanders when Jen takes her turn. She's better than Fred.

Allison was always nicer than Christopher, on the surface anyway. But in a three-way relationship, you are always more attracted to one person.

"Secret!" Fred shouts.

It's only if you're lucky that that person prefers you as well. Jen puts a hand on my shoulder when she reclaims her seat.

"Getting tired?" I give her a small smile. Ally was never one for these little touches, I remember, completely friendly ones.

"Are you kidding? This is the best game yet. Someone's gotta tell Fred's sophisticated friends how he acts at these."

"It's not his fault he works at a bookstore."

"Are you guys ready to play?" Fred is no-nonsense, hands on hips.

For the first time he reminds me of Ally, when she explained to me in no uncertain terms what was going to happen to our relationship. She explained and the blankness in my head clicked as the light bulb went on. For the first time I think to myself, Fred looks terrific when he stands up straight like that.

I look at the rug, the couch, the pillows, and the bowl. I feel weary. I tip over the hourglass.

We begin.

I know, immediately, what charade this is going to be. I put it in the charade bowl the first time I'd sufficiently managed to befriend these people, who reminded me of other people, enough for me to invite them over. I had desperately needed to hear the words Christopher and Ally never told me. It was a gaping crime in my mind and refused to scab over. I'd been imagining the unsaid words as an elixir that would let me return to a whiter state. But I've been hearing them, mixed in the shouts of "ladder" and "climbing", for a while now. In sentences as fragile and disjointed as our relationship was, a word here and a phrase there until it's done.

I look at Fred's t-shirt. It's orange. Everything about him is bright, down to his blue eyes. (I always give him brown in my head, why is that?)

I am cracking up, I guess, because I can tell, from the way Fred sweeps his arm, he is more graceful than Christopher ever was.

Time's up and the game is finally over.

"I'm sorry," I say, looking at Fred. Talking to Fred.

The Happy-Sad Man

LIANDRA HOLMES

I was walking down the street, and sometimes skipping, and sometimes walking extra slow just because I was trying to count my steps, and sometimes walking as slow as Mommy in her dress-up purple shoes. There is a place right beside me. I can see it and I know it is a special place, because in my favorite book the fairies live in shadows, and I know there are lots of shadows in this place.

I am on the sunshiny street with my Mommy. I know that there are fairies in the dark place between the buildings. Mommy calls them alleys, but I know better. I closed my eyes and I could see the place where the fairies live. There is just a little spot behind each trash can and other normally stuff where the light can't get in, and so it's darker than the rest of the dark place. This is called a shadow, and sometimes I thought they were scary, but now I know better. I squeeze my eyes shut and I can see the shape of the shadow, and it's just the right size for the fairies to live, cause they're only as big as my thumb.

I think they live there and dance and have parties and sing songs, and they fly around on their colorful wings that shine, and the mommy fairy doesn't yell and she never, ever makes daddy, I mean the daddy fairy, sad, and the brother fairy is always nice and always plays with his sister fairy and he isn't a meany to her dolls. I know the sister fairy has happy yellow hair and she likes ice cream. And they dance around very quiet, but to them it's loud, cause they're so tiny. I wonder if my hand would be a monster to them if I put it into the shadow. Would the shadow swallow up my hand or would my hand make the shadow go away? I thought that my hand would do the first one, and I got extra excited, cause I know if I find a fairy shadow, I could put my hand in, and then my arm and then I could crouch down *real far* and scrunch up *really* little and then I would be in a fairy world! And I would keep their secret forever. It's the perfect place to hide, because when a grown-up comes along and shines a scary light at them, the shadow always jumps to the other side and hides. Grown-ups never know anything about fairies.

Mommy told me not to wander away from her. She told me I couldn't touch the windows with all the pretty dresses behind it, and she told me I couldn't have ice cream if I didn't stay with her, and she told me I was being bad and I shouldn't wander and I should just hold her hand. But I didn't.

I guess I was bad. But I couldn't help it! Mommy was looking in her purse and there was the little street between the buildings, and I went into it, because the sunlight was on the other side of it too, but not in between, and I wanted to look at the other light, it was so pretty! And I knew there had to be fairies living inside the shadows. So I was only going to be gone for just a minute, to see if their wings would really glow in the dark, and if they would pretty please sing me a song. So I let go of Mommy's hand and she was looking through her shopping bags and didn't see me sneak away, cause I was so quiet. So I just left, just to peek down the alley at the pretty fairies.

So I walked into the alley and I was gonna sneak up on them, so I tip-toed *really* quiet to get to behind the trash pile, cause everybody knows that fairies don't like to be found. But they'll like it when I find them, cause they like little girls. So I walked into the alley and went to behind the trash cans and then I jumped. I jumped just like Missy does when I slam a door on accident and make a bang! But I didn't hiss. I just jumped.

Do you know why I jumped? There was a man that was kind of laying down and sort of sitting up behind the trash can, and he smelled bad like the trash and he looked a lot like he was sleeping. This made me feel sorry cause I knew he wouldn't like to fall asleep behind a trash can, just like I didn't mean to fall asleep on the nasty bench at the park, where Mommy says everybody leaves there germy bubblegum. So I tried to wake him up.

I whispered, "Boo!" not too loud, but he didn't hear me, so I said it louder, "Boo!"

He didn't jump or anything, so I knew now that maybe he was faster asleep, or I mean fast asleep, like how Daddy does when he gets home from work all day. So I yelled it really quick, "Boo!"

He stayed asleep for even longer, but then, all of a sudden, he woke up! And he looked straight at me like he knew I was there before he opened his eyes. And he had pretty eyes, kind of like the fairies' eyes, but they're still hiding. And he looked at me like Daddy does when he gets home and I always squeal too loud and mommy gets that annoyed look, but I can't help it because I just missed him so much when he was gone at work all day. That's how the man with the pretty eyes looked at me, like he thought I was "A sore for sight eyes" like Daddy says, but I don't know what that means.

But then the man's eyes got kind of shiny and I wondered if he got hurt and that's why he was gonna cry. I looked at his eyes and saw that they were pretty and blue and that made sense, because at Daycare, I learned that blue is sometimes the color of sad. And he closed his eyes for a second and then looked at me again, and his mouth got wide a little bit and his teeth were yellow and that makes sense because yellow is the color of happy. And I don't know why he is sad and happy. I wanted to ask him, but he just kept looking in my eyes, and I kept looking in his, cause I didn't know why he was looking in my eyes. Maybe they were pretty colors too. Or maybe he found the fairies! Cause that's what I would do if I found the fairies, I would look happy. I made the curls get out of my eyes and looked around, but I still didn't see any fairies. And then I got this really excited feeling that maybe the fairies were in my eyes, so I touched my face but I didn't feel anything.

He said something then, and his voice was low and summery like somebody old, like a grandpa or like Santa Claus, but he wasn't too much old, he was just a grown-up like Daddy. He said, "You're a ray of sunshine, little girl. Did you know that?" And that didn't make any sense, but when he said it made me think that he believed in fairies too.

So I asked him, "Have you seen any fairies in here? They keep hiding."

He laughed a pretty big laugh, and his smile got even bigger. Maybe he didn't believe me or believe in fairies, like all the other grown-ups. I was disappointed, so I looked down at my shoes.

He said in a whisper. "I thought all the fairies had run away! Do you mean there are some here right now?"

I lifted my head and looked at the happy man with the sad eyes, and I smiled too. I knew I can count on him to believe me. I whispered right back, "Shh, they don't like it when grown-ups find them." and I giggled. I couldn't help it, he just made me feel so happy, like he just found out what happy was and he was so excited it was rubbing off on me and making me giggle extra.

"You must be a very smart little girl. The grown-ups can't see fairies, can they? They only see the bad things like goblins and monsters who suck out happiness, don't they?" He sounded like he was talking more to him than to me, but it's ok, because I talk to myself all the time. "But there aren't any of those around." He said bravely, 'cause he musta knew I got a little bit scared.

"Is that why you're in here? Did the goblins make you come in here and live in the trash?" I said, and my mouth was open wide, cause I knew it would be so mean if they did that to the happy-sad man.

He just smiled, he didn't nod his head or anything, but I know that means yes.

Then I heard, "Honey, where did you go this time?" My Mommy's yelling voice is quiet cause she was far away still, on the street with the sunshine. I knew I'd be in trouble if I didn't go.

"I have to go."

"I know," he said, and his smile went away for a minute. "You shouldn't leave your mom, you know, goblins might get you next time."

"I know," I whispered, trying hard not to sound scared. I didn't know there were scary things where fairies lived, cause fairies only like ice cream and hide-and-go-seek. He must have known what I was thinking.

"Oh, there aren't any goblins here because the fairies followed you and scared them away."

I looked around behind me to make sure that the fairies were still hiding, and then I looked one more time at the happy-sad man and I knew I would miss him and it was sad to leave him all alone, but I went away to Mommy's voice.

He said one thing in a quiet voice but I still heard him. He said, "Thank you. I had forgotten all about the fairies." I didn't understand what he meant, because it's not like the fairies came back to him just because of me. Or maybe they did! This made me happy, so I had a smile in my face when I walked next to Mommy again. She was done looking in her purse now.

"There you are! Didn't I tell you if you wandered off again you wouldn't get any ice cream?"

I blinked because the sun was bright in my eyes and I thought the happy-sad man must be really smart for a grown-up, cause my mommy's face wasn't happy or sad. It was just red, and I think that means angry. But it's ok, it's not her fault. Maybe all grown-ups forget about fairies sometimes.