

The Tulane Review

fall 2012

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Cover Art: *Play* by Monika Daniels. Full image: Page 61.

ISSN-2166-5001
ISSN-2166-501X

The *Tulane Review* is a literary and art journal published by the Tulane Literary Society twice a year. Submissions are judged by review boards in an anonymous selection process and final choices are made by the editors. For submission information, consult the submission guidelines on the last page or visit review.tulane.edu.

Funding for the *Tulane Review* comes from the Undergraduate Student Government of Tulane University and the Tulane Literary Society. The works published in the *Tulane Review* represent the views of the individual artists and are not the expressed views of the Tulane Literary Society, Tulane University, or its Board of Administrators.

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On Johnny Cash's "God's Gonna Cut You Down"

Engram Wilkinson

He makes it clear from the beginning: you can run on for a long time, run on for a long time. I haven't been jogging recently—this September was laid down with large cracks between its days, the streets of this month poorly planned, their uneven sidewalks guaranteed to give me shin splints. But now it is October and how desperately I want my legs to ache. I use my calves to climb onto the roof through my tiny bedroom window and shout into the early light, If it must be cold, let it be cold absolutely. Every morning I am ignored. The leaves pretend to change and Life, which supposedly begins anew in the crispness of Fall, is suspended in the humidity, in the dew of trees whose branches and resins are stinking up the mornings with a new definition for sublimity. Everywhere I am alone. You taught me about the fourth dimension, during conversations on nights like this one, how every human is essentially a worm, forever attached to the long trail of past lives. Past mistakes, I corrected, and quickly changed the topic. We were messy in those days—now I'm different. I'm not feeling well yet but today I tidied the living room, even ran a disinfecting wipe across the coffee table. If you could be here now I'd show you how orderly I've arranged the books on my bookshelf, I'd play the song that has gotten me through all this, this country song I think you'd actually like, one of Cash's best. I could talk about the enigmatic midnight rider, the liar's long tongue, and how the entire song begs we speak. It begins with a shuffle-clap, something thunderous, the sound of the ground growing hard. How I read it: our remaining wild places fail to resemble one another: north, a disorder of roses; south, white-tailed deer afraid, like me, they've been the wrong animal for this life. If I could live this life in starfish forms I'd never tire of any arm, five possibilities for touching you all at once.

I want to grow these arms and live underwater. I want you to agree there's something heartbreaking about Johnny's octave-rise as God commands go do my will. How do we contain our memories, make them manageable and handheld? If you want a souvenir I have emotions I could sneak into the bottoms of cereal boxes, small shapes of me prepared for your hands, your curiosity. This poem is meant to warn you about the fragile slipperiness of a brain turned about in the hands, like an oval of soap or dead butterfly. Maybe you're tired of warnings, each boldface note typed along the bottle: TAKE WITH MEALS. TAKE WITH WATER. Is it not enough to take each surrender? To God I say, I'm submerged, I'm busy, there's no way to cup the water in these hands and swallow. My mouth is under my chest—lately I've had to eat my prey whole, climbing over clams and forcing them down. Some mornings I forget breakfast, only coffee, which I leave on the windowsill when I go walking along the roof. I've almost forgotten this song, the one you've never heard before, the one that still shuffles. It rattles the aquarium and other animals fall under me. In a dream I swam and had many arms, used them to conquer the ocean, made it sound my own song in 4/4 as it arrived to you in New Jersey. I am trapped in the stomach of myself, the stomach of a starfish, of a worm and efforts to escape sink me lower. I wonder how tightly I can squeeze the long, writhing body of your own life, your stopped time, and expose an opening through which I could crawl, digging into that quiet stomach and—somehow, without arms—rescue you into the warm air, the ocean's gasps.

Place Your Bets

Max Schramel

No fair! The kids all yelled.
But I wasn't a kid.
I was a nephew, a friend, an uncle.
Robert was my uncle.

Booze covered overalls.
A scraggily yellow beard.
A short statured Jockey.
A man with beliefs.

Oh Robert, my dad would say, Robert!
Can you wash the dishes?
I can drunk the wishes.
Little brother we ride tonight.

Born in North Carolina, the second.
Prince Robert Schramel, the second.
I stand up, the second.
Can you please listen...for a second.

Oh Robert, my dad would say, Robert!

Wet-Cotton Days

Monika Daniels

I remember dry-grass days
when the blades scratched our soles through socks
and the breeze was the world's collective sigh
reddening our cheeks
and turning our fingertips to ice
when we lay intertwined on your mother's quilt
and murmured secrets into each other's hair
and tasted autumn like pecans
every time we took a breath.

I remember dead-grass days
when the aspen trees blinked beneath lashes
and we felt fire between naked skin
as the trees shed red and gold around us
when we crumbled brittle leaves between our fingers
and spoke about the whole world
and how it was wet cotton in our lungs.

I remember white-grass days
when we pressed hushing fingers against lips
when our thoughts threatened to overwhelm us
and all we wanted was to retrace our footsteps in the frost.
We were two fragile birds, then, with
damp wings and damp eyes
that melted under the hazy sun
and dripped from the branches onto the winter grass.

I remember days
when aspen eyes watched
as we stooped, shivering, in the snow.

For the Nourishment of Ephemeral People

Jessica Kagansky

The difference between a good day and a bad day is on a good day
I can see the 7:21 PM sunlight illuminating the backs of women
and know that there's something unknowable buried under everything.
I know that Tony Kushner knows this train I'm on is not really a train,
we're not really here on earth,
and Ossining and Paris are actually the same place.
We all wait like teacups in a meadow, for something like knowledge
but stronger to pour into us from an even height,
amber and steady, hot with slate-colored steam carried from it by the wind.
This gallery I'm going to has many refracted yellow lights
that are going to make me feel like I am hosting a firefly ball
this coffee I'm about to drink has grains of you in it,
sleeping with your limbs wrapped around a shred of cardamom.

Beyond Bakersfield

Jeffrey Alfier

He has signed for the keys to a small house
he now owns a block from Armand's
Diesel Road Service, which tows lame
engines and overheated truckers
off interstates that map the valley.

Scanning the beggared Eden of a backyard,
he takes in the itinerant rage of crows
in the sole camphor tree, the quiet
scent of cottonwoods, and the whisper
of windfall apples decaying into the earth.

Inhaling the pungency of wrought iron
and failed gardens, he turns to gaze across
the street; young daughters of a migrant
farmer pull fistfuls of gold poppies, just
to clutch their brilliance, as their mother

sings a ballad that ascends the midday
heat. Her tune will stay with him like the din
from pry bars and wrenches of Armand's
workers, like the silence of all the women
who said they'd never leave without him.

What We Long for in Desert Towns

Jeffrey Alfier

From your father you learned a peasant's
faith in work, that merciful decades
with a forgiving wife means time is a plea
bargain between beggars and angels,
that auto shops and stray dogs attend
them all in this town with two truck stops
to blunt what fails on main street, a new
gypsum plant men hope displaces shuttered
cotton gins that laden haulers could reach
from four exits off an interstate that signals
how empty your town really is, how cattle
guards are here for nothing but ghost herds.

Respite from it all comes with county
fairs – corridors of colored lights to dazzle
the dust, amusement rides to spin townies
into gritty air, barkers daring passersby
to pitch balls or rings into thin spaces;
candy apples, funnel cakes, anything
deep-fried and impaled on sticks you're led
to believe can be had nowhere else,
and always the bright signs in gothic letters
for sights 'never seen outside tent flaps'
– 'Bizarre and Exotic Creatures,'
all the caged freaks you could ever imagine.

forgetful

Rory Demaio

once upon a time
i dreamt of
gingerbread legs
pounding the ground
to hide away
from ravenous mouths.

they called out
and couldn't be caught
as they disappeared
under couch cushions
and slipped through
cracks
of a faulty foundation.

but when i'd awake,
your words would
scamper through my troubled head
and i'd coax it all away
to sit down
beside you
as something
(beneath me?)
 crumbled.

Equinox

A. Anupama

Every one flying away sure
as
the last robin
of autumn
 which no one notices, flown away,
 yellow leaves blown away
or turned
dry brown, red
no choice
 change the season
no choice
 change the season
 to spring
and bloom until you fall off the
trees
tease
the robin's
toes with petals.

Old Man, How Is It That You Hear These Things?

Gregory Crosby

David Carradine (1936-2009)

It takes calm to live a life on the edge
of ridiculous sublimity, descended
from Shakespeare & horror, grade B.
Take the pebble from my hand, Frankenstein.
Rev the engine, but do not move from the still
point, where the lens makes love in deep focus.
You bear the mark. No man may take vengeance.
(Women are another matter). Nirvana
is the light beneath flashing waves, high above
Sunset; you know this, though doomed to wander,
bound not for glory but for that peace, elusive
& treacherous as a serpent in its egg.
Master, what we have learned: you cannot kill
that Bride, eternal yin to briefest yang. Rest,

grasshopper. Rest.

This is what we do when it all comes back

Michael Gebelein

all it takes is a flash in the mirror of an old face to set me back
over 5,000 hours to a moment when all of that agony
was still fresh.

the papers were still crumpled and left sliding across the floor
from the wind coming in through the open doorway—

hours of unopened letters and

sideways glances across the hall

and maybe it will get easier when I can tear this madness away
but for now it just

clings to me like a shirt three sizes too small, constricting all
the flow of blood to my head until greasy yellow and green spots
stray across my vision and I beg for

my hand on a brown leg and no more nights

silently driving around town with static on the radio

because I'm not a saint either.

Illuminations

Laura Pendell

My heart is green and clouds with water. Grows rooted without seed.
Forest shroud of devil's club. A canopy. Splinter between blue. Some
fall into it. Or breathe. Hold me like a tree envelopes stone. That
completely.

The desert blooming so dense each footfall disintegrates. Fragrance
floods the salty grains. A new nexus of the skin. Of the earth. Of the
body. Visioning the interior. Lapis lazuli. A circle of fire.

The inflorescence of promise.

Two bits for the horse with wings.

I am still asleep and the world is as white as piano keys.

Self-Portrait, if I Were Matisse

Joannie Strangeland

Let out the fierce in me, orange heat
and the savage green jungle that grows
in my gut. Put on the paint bold,
a slash, a sweep. Contrast

attracts and repels. Beauty holds
more than one face and I'll leave
Helen to her own symmetry. I'm looking
for the heart, alive and pulsing.

I want the surface below my skin,
the light behind my ears. Primary,
primeval. The color waves to the eye,
tells the belly now.

I'm serious.
Play is everything.

Lonely Monday Evenings

Ryan Krasnoo

Some nights, when clouds cover more than just the sky,
I tear the butterflies out from my ribs and
rearrange the colors until they look like you.
Their wings flutter a requiem in the silence,
so when I close my eyes,
all I can hear are endless rebirths;
you and the morning, symmetrical.
And I am slowly, surely,
sewing myself back together.

Winter Comes Early

Ryan Krasnoo

In years when winter comes early,
I catch my breath in a cracking glass mason jar
and hand it to the girl selling lemonade
down the block.
I tell her it is the ocean
calling her name,
so before she unscrews the lid,
she unwraps the lemon rinds from the sun
and tap-dances on the moon
until she alone
controls the tides.

Sonnet from the Portuguese (where the Tagus meets the ocean)

Engram Wilkinson

I love
you! I love;
you swim swimmer of
brackish mouths above
starfish wild above
mounds of earth of
weeds above
bright coral eels love.

Sing.
Fado: guitar feel song feel
longing by
the sea. Memory: bring
water from here from heel
to head, I am a block of sky.

On Love

Sean Simonson

As in fishing
Most of the time
The one that got away
Was just a stick

Stairway Feng Shui

Ariel Guidry

My mother stalks my bedroom
for layabout clothes; surveys the house
for any dirt, dust, or ruin.
The beds are made,
and the garbage is out on the street.
This is the American Dream:
our two-and-a-half bathrooms
beneath the double-hipped roof.
By happenstance and disaster,
it was ours,
my mother and I. She and her
green paint, hardwood floors, and watermelon
clock, teapot, and salt-and-pepper shakers
in every home
in every place
after every move
watermelons.
Today, she swipes family photos
off walls and tables.
I leave my no-name bedroom,
loiter the hall, descend the stairs,
lock away my Bichon Frisé.
We drive circles around this town.
We drive through and through.
My mother cursing college students
down Main, Lacey her tongue in the sun,
and I, and the students, and the whole town
we are all floating in this Michigan summer,
so above it all.
Until a ring interrupts:
the realtor calls us home.

We open the front door and face the stairs.
The stairs and another lost buyer,
a buried sale.
My father has already gone
and is waiting in Chicago.
It is 2005,
the pin is nearing the bubble
and the Chinese hate this house.

Foundations

Zach Yanowitz

Played your new song on MTV but no one watched.
Knew all the words but weren't sure why you'd written
them. Forgot how to swim, which vitamin bananas
were rich in, how seeing her slowly blink and chew her
lip could rip out your guts like so much raw confetti.
Released an album about a mountain you'd seen once
on a postcard in a Colorado truck stop. Got decent
reviews but disappointed critics with your lack of
ambition. Bought weed behind the jewelry store.
Handfuls of dust, of roach powder. Boric acid and
sleeping like shit. Tore out your own throat to plug the
speakers right into the beehive of your heart. Choked
to death on blood and benediction. Honey ran through
your teeth.

Derivations

Zach Yanowitz

How we're all just creatures of light and longing. How words like desiccate find new meanings. How concentric circles in chalk on the driveway read our fortunes and then melt in the rain. How March feels like September and September felt like shit. How voices ballooned with smoke ease echoes off the walls of shallow canyons. How spines beg for the gleaming release of vivisection. How a lock of damp hair pushed behind an ear with delicate fingers tightens your throat. How passing a pen over and around your third and fourth knuckles helps you find your breath again, lets you see that slow swirl wish of intersecting lines unravel, realign, dissolve. How you slept on the floor with sand in the cuts on your feet and awoke forgetting the names of the children you don't have. How a sky bloated with malice spread its arms and welcomed us, bleeding, into the swollen heart of the storm. How you sometimes dream of a café you've never been to where dusk ignites the treetops. How blue is ocean, red is wine, white the pale curve of her shoulder in the lambent haze of dawn.

Wings, Rushing

Joannie Strangeland

Whiter than lightning scarring the night, he gallops into your quiet moments. Always you believed in a horse at dawn lifting you over a world you didn't live in. Paler than the moon you remember, he silvers across the clouds, flies in the smallest hours, the wind coughing, a death rattle, shoving rain into the windows, thunder rumbling your chest, hard to catch your breath. Outside, the puddles bloom, each hoof print a new pool, the damp tracks of him flooding the mud. A slippery dripping. The earth erupts with fountains, the firmament crying itself to sleep, a symphony, company. Fold your arms against your ribs. Hold yourself and feel the sky running hard, leaving its ruins.

Failure To Thrive

Tiffany Quay Tyson

Sunday morning and I jumped on the bed chanting, “Fatty, fatty. Two by four. Can’t get through the bathroom door.” Daddy laughed, sloshed coffee on the bed sheets and smashed his cigarette into the full ashtray on his bedside table. I could always make Daddy laugh. Mama’s face crumpled and she pressed her lips together until they turned white. One month later, Mama gave birth to a blotchy, red-faced, squirming mass that she and Daddy called Ann.

Ann was never well. Mama dragged us to the doctor’s office every week. I sat on a hard wooden chair behind the doctor and listened to Mama complain. Ann wouldn’t eat. She wasn’t growing. She cried all the time. The doctor poked Ann with shiny metal instruments and placed her on a scale. He told Mama to stop nursing and to feed Ann store-bought formula. He told Mama to feed Ann every three hours. Mama bought the expensive formula and stayed awake around the clock, but Ann refused to eat or she threw up anything she managed to swallow.

At night, I listened to Ann scream while my parents fought. I crawled under my bed and clamped my hands down hard over my ears.

“You have to shut her up,” Daddy yelled. “I have to work tomorrow.”

Mama’s voice was softer. “I know. I’m trying. I’m doing the best I can.”

“It isn’t good enough,” Daddy told her.

He left. The front door slammed shut and I held my breath, waiting for it to open, to hear my Daddy’s voice again. All I heard were Ann’s gasping cries and my mother’s weeping. I steeled myself against the two of them. I believed he would come back for me. He would remember how cheerful I was, how I knew so many jokes and songs. I clenched my jaw and didn’t allow one tear to fall from my eyes. If I became one of them, one of the weepers, he’d never come back.

I tap danced through the house. I sang. At night, when Ann’s cries kept me awake, I practiced bits in my head. I knew all the words to the Sesame Street theme by heart. I memorized sketches from Saturday Night Live. I yelled, “Jane, you ignorant slut!” at our next door neighbor, until Mama heard me and slapped me hard across the face. I watched television all day

and all night. I could do anything as long as I stayed out of the way. Mama never looked at me except to roll her eyes. I didn't care what she thought. I only cared what Daddy would think when he came home.

Ann stopped crying.

I woke up and the house was silent and I knew that something had changed. Sun streamed through my window and threw prisms of light across the pink and green quilt that draped my bed. I tiptoed across the hall to Ann's room. Mama slumped on the floor, cradling Ann in one arm. She jumped up when she saw me and placed Ann into her crib. Ann didn't move or cry.

"You're up," Mama said. "We should get some breakfast, don't you think?" I followed her to the kitchen, hearing the slap, slap of her slippers for the first time in a long time. Mama poured flour and milk into a mixing bowl and stirred, splattering batter across the counter. She babbled. "How about some pancakes? Would you like that? Wouldn't pancakes be good?" She stirred and poured batter onto a hot skillet, watching for bubbles to rise and then pop before flipping the fragrant rounds over to cook through. She piled the golden disks onto a plate and added several pats of butter, which melted into yellow squares of salty liquid. She poured half a bottle of syrup over it all, pulled two forks from the silverware drawer and set the plate between us. "Dig in." Her cheeks bulged as she chewed.

I ate so much that my stomach ached. I put my fork down and sat back with my hands across my belly. Mama pushed the food into her mouth until the plate was clean. Syrup dribbled down her chin onto her nightgown. She tucked the last bite between her glistening lips and sat back in her chair. She closed her eyes. I thought she might fall asleep, but her eyelids flew open and her face turned hard as if she'd slipped on a mask.

I looked away.

By the time the ambulance arrived, Mama had shoved her syrup-stained nightgown into the laundry hamper. She'd pulled one of my father's left-behind sweatshirts on over a pair of jeans that she usually wore only while cleaning. The men in the ambulance took Ann away, but did not turn the lights and sirens on as they drove off. As most of the neighbors had come onto their front porches to peer at us, I was disappointed at the lack of fanfare. Mama picked me up and carried me into the house. I settled into the unfamiliar warmth of her arms and buried my face against her chest.

Mama said Ann was in heaven and that sometimes God took babies who weren't happy here on earth. She said Ann wouldn't cry anymore now that she was with Jesus. She said Ann would be happy. I didn't think that was fair; I wasn't happy.

"Daddy can come home now," I said.

Mama put me down on the floor and walked away. I hoped that Ann would not be happy. I hoped she'd be in a bad place instead of with Jesus.

Days passed. Daddy did not come home.

I stood in the middle of the living room and sang every song I could remember from Sunday School while Mama devoured the cakes and pies and pastries that neighbors brought to our house. I belted out “Father Abraham,” “Zaccheus Was a Wee Little Man,” “The Wise Man Built His House Upon a Rock,” “Deep and Wide” and “Jesus Loves Me” until my throat was sore and my voice took on a raspy, breathy quality that made me sound older. When I ran out of church songs, I switched to show tunes and music I’d heard on the radio. I was partial to Captain and Tennille or Elton John’s more upbeat songs. “Love, love will keep us together,” I assured my mother. “Don’t go breaking my heart,” I sang. “I won’t go breaking your heart.”

Finally, school started. I was in second grade. Every morning, Mama dropped me off at the small, blond-bricked schoolhouse and every morning I said, “Don’t forget to pick me up later.” Mama needed reminding.

If I did not remind Mama to do the laundry, I would not have clean clothes to wear. She never cooked, but did bring home grocery sacks full of sweet pastries. I begged her to buy other things – milk and peanut butter and bread – but she forgot. I carefully copied the words off food labels, so I could leave a list for Mama before she took me to school each day. Teacher said I was the best writer in the class.

I imagined that Daddy was watching me every day when Mama dropped me off and picked me up, her baby blue Volkswagen creeping forward in the circular drive. I believed that someday he would rush forward and save me, take me somewhere beautiful and cool. When he didn’t appear, I decided he must be very far away. I imagined that he was working somewhere exotic where phones and post offices and transportation were rare and inaccessible.

Mama had eaten so many pastries that she resembled a mound of greasy dough. Her breasts and stomach swelled against the dingy gray housedress she wore every day. Her bosom was forever dusted with the fine white sugar that coats powdered donuts.

A boy whose nose ran so much that the teacher forced him to carry around a roll of toilet paper greeted me each day with the same question. “Are you gonna be a fat pig like your mother? Oink, Oink!”

He laughed and slapped his thigh and snorted. Every day I answered him. “No,” I said. “I’m not.” Even though he knew the answer, he kept asking the question.

On Valentine’s Day, we were supposed to put on a show for our parents and teachers. Every year, the show was the same. Every year, someone was chosen to sing “Won’t You Be My Valentine?” and someone else was chosen to sing “I’m a Little Valentine,” which was really just “I’m a Little Teapot,” but with different words. Even though I already knew all the words to all the songs, I wasn’t chosen to sing anything. I was supposed to just stand

in the back and sing only when everyone else was singing.

We made paper hearts and folded them in half. We copied down information about the show in red crayon. We were supposed to give them to our parents as invitations. I tossed my heart into the round, wicker trash basket beside my bed. I didn't want Mama showing up in her gray housedress. I feared the flimsy folding chairs would buckle under her weight. I feared the boy with the toilet paper roll would point at her and laugh.

On the day of the show, I wore my pink church dress and allowed Miss Teasdale to pin a red paper heart on my chest. She poked me with the pin and a spot of blood seeped through the pink cotton fabric.

We performed in the lunchroom. The long tables that usually filled the space had been removed and metal chairs had been lined up in straight rows facing a small, makeshift stage. The room smelled of warm milk and tomato sauce from a can. Paige O'Connor stood at the front of the stage, chewing on a piece of her long blond hair. Paige had been chosen to sing the first song even though her voice cracked when the notes were too high. I took my place at the back of the stage with all the other kids who didn't have speaking parts or singing parts. The teacher called us the chorus, which was just a nice way of saying the losers.

Parents started arriving just before show time and I was glad that I had not invited my mother. The mothers who came were young and thin and pretty. They greeted each other with smiles and delicate waves of their hands. They wore nice dresses or slacks with colorful sweaters. A few fathers came, though not many. Fathers were too busy with work to come see second graders perform. Fathers were important.

Some of the mothers worked too. It was easy to spot the mothers with jobs. They wore blazers over their dresses and looked at their watches between smiles.

Paige's mother swept in just as Miss Teasdale cued the pianist. I knew it was Paige's mother because she had the same blonde hair and the same upturned nose and also because Paige spit her hair from her mouth and pasted on a big phony smile when the woman came in the room. Paige's mother sat in the back row and placed her purse on the seat next to her. Paige sang "Won't You Be My Valentine?" Her mother smiled, but kept looking over her shoulder at the doorway. Just as Paige finished, the door creaked open and a man walked in.

The man was my father, my Daddy. We were well into the chorus of "Big Red Heart Rock," which was just "Jingle Bell Rock" with different lyrics, and Daddy was here to rescue me. I sang louder. It was important that my voice be heard above all the others. I grinned and did my very best jazz hands. Daddy looked me in the eye. He smiled, but not a big smile. He was too excited to smile big, I thought. He was too happy to see me. Maybe he was nervous after

so long. I was nervous too. We would be nervous and happy together.

He whispered something to Paige's mother. I wanted to tell Daddy about Ann, tell him that the crying had stopped. I realized that I didn't want Daddy to take me away. Instead, I wanted Mama to be the person she was before she had Ann and I wanted Daddy to come home.

I sang and danced my way through the rest of the show. It was my best performance ever. I could almost hear Miss Teasdale thinking that she shouldn't have stuck me in the chorus. We all stood together on stage, held hands and bowed deeply. The parents stood and clapped for what seemed like a long time. I couldn't stand it anymore. I broke away and rushed off the stage straight to Daddy and threw my arms around his legs. He sat back in his folding chair and pushed me away.

"I was afraid of this," he said to Paige's mother.

"Daddy," I said. "You came."

"Look, honey," he said. He cupped my chin in one hand and looked down at me. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be here."

"No, Daddy," I assured him. "I'm glad you're here."

"Really?"

"Really and truly," I said. I put my face in his lap and breathed in his familiar odor of stale cigarettes and Old Spice.

He pushed my head away and held me at arm's length. "Ann is gone," I told him. "There's no more crying. You can come home now." Paige's mother reached out and touched my hair. "Oh, honey," she said. Her hand was cool and dry as paper. I shoved her away and looked at Daddy. He looked at Paige's mother.

Paige came over and stood next to her mother. She raised her pale blonde eyebrows. "Why are you hugging my mother's boyfriend?"

A cold wave ran through my body. "He's not your mother's boyfriend," I said. "He's my Daddy." I leaned over and sank my teeth deep into the flesh of Paige's cheek. Daddy pulled me away. I stared at the round, red mark shining through the tears on Paige's face. Her mother bent down and swiped at the mark with a printed scarf from her purse.

"How dare you!" She glared at me and shook her head. "Honestly, Ted, I see what you mean."

I looked at Daddy. I waited for him to tell me that it wasn't true. I waited for him to defend me and to yell at Paige's mother.

"Look," he said. "I shouldn't have come here. I'm sorry." He held my shoulders and talked somewhere above my head. "Miss O'Connor is a friend," he said. "We're going to have lunch together and I came here to pick her up. I didn't know you were in this class."

That's when I knew. Daddy didn't leave because Mama was a weeper or because Ann was always crying, he left to get away from me. Why would he

want the girl in the chorus when he could have the girl out front with the solo? My breath came in ragged gasps and my nose ran. I stared at my father, who was looking at Paige's mother. I felt hot all over.

"It's not fair," I yelled and hit him with my fists as hard as I could. I kicked his legs and stomped on his polished shoes. I tried to bite his hand, but he pulled it away. I cried. I didn't care if my tears stained his shirt or if I wiped snot across his pants leg. I sobbed and flailed until Miss Teasdale came over and pulled me away.

"My goodness," Miss Teasdale said. "I don't think I've ever seen this child cry."

I kicked and punched the air with my fists, but Miss Teasdale held me anyway. She pulled me tight into her chest and wrapped her long arms around me, saying "shhh, shhh, shhh" in my ear until I stopped struggling and fell limp against her. She smelled of crayons and green grass. I pressed my head against her neck and closed my eyes so tight that rainbows danced.

"Your mother's here," Miss Teasdale said.

I shook my head. I thought she was asking a question. A pair of arms lifted me away and I smelled the familiar rank sweetness of my mother as she pulled me close. I opened my eyes and looked over Mama's shoulder. Daddy was gone and so was Paige's mother.

"How come you're here?" I asked Mama. She was crying too and the tears flowed down her bloated cheeks like a river. I reached up and felt the wetness against my hand. Mama held the crumpled heart from the trash basket in my bedroom and it floated to the floor as she pulled me in close and nestled me against her soft breasts. I sobbed, drenching her chest with my tears until I fell asleep on her lap.

When I woke up, we were home. We sat together on the couch watching soap operas and eating cookies from a cellophane wrapper. I didn't sing or dance or even talk. I was quiet and still and invisible, just like Ann. Just like Mama.

Mr. Moonlight

Amogh Havanur

For a long time I had waking nightmares. Each time the same apparition, the same spectral presence, would come to torture my shadow. This was in Bangalore, where I have lived all my life. I was six.

My parents knew nothing about it, or perhaps had some idea but never fully gathered what was happening. At any rate I never told them. My father hung on the cusp of promotion at his engineering company, and my mother was then in the yearlong process of mediating, over the phone, some bitter, deeply-felt quarrel that had sprung up between three of her cousins. Meanwhile their younger son, my brother, had just begun to talk, and deciphering his garbled speech took up much of their free time.

“It’s like reading a letter when half the ink has smeared,” my father told me.

In those days the side of my bed was pushed against the windowsill, so the moonlight that fell through the curtains would cover the room with a luminous blue tint and draw out all manner of shadows. The door along the side wall. The pleated yellow lampshade. The plastic Pandava and Kaurava figurines staring each other down from opposite sides of my dresser, specks of dust hanging illuminated between them. I played a game where I would focus on a particular object for a few seconds and then, with my eyes closed, try to work out exactly where its shadow ought to be. Then I would turn to that spot in the room and verify my guesswork before starting again. In this way I lulled myself to sleep.

One night the shadow of the door swung open, flattening into the side wall, and a silhouette of a man with a toothpick in his mouth entered my room. The door itself never moved. Only the shadow of the door, which this toothpicked outline soon closed behind it. Then it moved to the far wall on my right and watched me.

It was a hard smooth silhouette with sharp lined edges, dressed in what seemed to be a long coat and a peaked hat. The thin black line protruding out of his mouth rose, then wavered and fell, surrounded by translucent blue moonlight. I knew the moment had passed to scream for help.

I couldn’t see his eyes or face, both of which were pitch black. But I could

feel his vision on me. He didn't need eyes to see. I raked the covers up to my chin. My mouth went dry as sand. There was no other sound, not even the faint buzz that passes for silence in Bangalore. The silhouette stood there making his observations, and the curtains that hung on either side of my bed framed him in shadow as he stood across the room, motionless except for the awful oscillating bob of that toothpick.

Then with a casual movement he eased out of his spot and by traveling flat along the walls came to the wall at my bedside. My shadow was shaking now. Or possibly it was me.

He gripped his toothpick between two fingers and traced it along my shadow's jawline, from one earlobe to the other. Then he tipped his hat to me and left the room.

My own hands were perfectly still when I held them up. I'm sure of this. But my shadow's, I saw, were trembling.

"Amma," I asked the next morning, over breakfast. "Where do shadows come from?"

My mother said, "It all started because Brother Sun and Uncle Moon love you so much! 'Hmm!' said Brother Sun. 'We must have two of Amogh, he's such a good boy! But how can we do that?' 'Well,' said Uncle Moon. 'I know! You remember that black p—'"

"Oh stop it, Gouri," my father said. "No need to insult the boy."

"You tell him then." She held a spoonful of hot paisa to my brother's lips and moved it in slow, small circles until he opened his mouth. "Amoghu, ask your Appa where shadows come from."

"Appa, where do shadows come from?"

"Spoon," my brother said. My mother smiled and tapped his nose.

"When light hits a solid object," my father explained, "It gets absorbed. So other light goes around you, but there's always an outline where there's no light. That's a shadow."

"They're not alive?"

"Hmm? No," he said. "If they were alive, they could do whatever they wanted. And who would want to follow me around the whole day? Your Amma married me, and even she can't be around me more than eight hours at a time."

"Eight hours?" my mother said. "You flatter yourself, mister. Thirty minutes."

My father laughed.

Two nights later Mr. Moonlight walked in, and this time he went straight for my shadow. With a swift kick he sent it flying off the bed and onto the floor, where it clawed weakly for the shadow of my bedsheet. I screamed but something kept my mouth from opening. All that came out was a low wheezing sound. Mr. Moonlight turned halfway around, and then slammed

the small of my shadow's back with both fists. It lay twitching in a corner. Help! I couldn't scream. I'm going to die. He's going to kill me. He's going to kill me with a knife or a gun or a cigarette. It only comes down to time. Somebody please listen to me!

But I told nobody, and so nobody listened to me.

Mr. Moonlight came back every two or three nights. Each visit brought something new, something more grotesque than the previous one. Nothing I tried—closing the curtains, refusing to sleep, hiding in my covers—made any difference. He lit a shadow of a cigarette and eased the black flame into my shadow's nostrils until intangible black dots of his blood stained the floor. He took out his toothpick and ran it through my shadow's eye sockets as if puncturing an egg yolk in a frying pan.

For weeks I watched this happen, pinned to my bed and incapable of anything but soaking the sheets with my sweat. Paralyzed as I was, I grit my teeth as my shadow was dragged away from me and flung onto the floor. I sat motionless while it mouthed the same words endlessly at Mr. Moonlight's waist.

At first it annoyed me, this sign of weakness on my shadow's part. Why bother to pray, to ask this thing for a reprieve? But I think now that he was begging to be killed, if such a thing is possible for shadows. In fact I have no doubt.

In the days I went to school and in the evenings my family would take us walking through Vijaynagar. This was a longstanding custom my mother called "family time." And on these walks my parents, who trusted me enough not to scrutinize my every move, must nevertheless have noticed my fatigue and timidity and newfound skittishness. They must have seen how I walked in sharp zigzag movements, never in a straight line, and seen as well the vigilant watch I kept over my shadow as we passed under streetlights and past the flickering lamps of roadside stands. I suppose I was afraid of bruising it.

"What's the matter, raju?" my mother asked me one night. She was sitting on the side of my bed. My father was in the other room rocking my brother to sleep.

"I'm fine," I said. "Nothing's the matter."

"Is it school? Are you sleeping enough?" She pressed her hand to my forehead, and then ran her fingers quietly through my hair. "Me and Appa are worried about you, you know. You always look so tired."

"School is fine," I said. I closed my eyes.

We fell silent for a time. I felt her fingers comb my hair, fingers that radiated body heat, unconsciously smoothing out the parts that the rest of the day had mussed up. Each stroke sent a fresh warm throb of electricity purring down my spine.

"My poor baby," she said.

Sometimes my shadow would go limp on the floor, but Mr. Moonlight was always ready to revive him for fresh torment. Then he would tip his hat and leave, and in the morning I would wake up and my shadow would be laid flat out alongside me, with no traces of the previous night. But after my mother tucked me in and left the room I saw it rock back and forth in terror, or fall at its feet the moment the shape of the door's shadow change.

Once he ran a match across a knife until black steam floated from the tip. Then he raised the knife to my shadow's lips and moved it in slow, small circles until he separated them from the surrounding skin. My shadow arched back and opened its lipless mouth, the ridges of the teeth clearly visible. There was no sound, but it was screaming, and in my mind I could hear the screams, these senseless howls that welled up inside me.

At that moment I gave in.

Whenever I remember this I visualize an isolated table, with one half lit but with the other side shrouded in darkness. Camphor permeates the room. I sit down and begin to plead. I don't know who I plead to, or if I speak to anyone at all, or how long I do speak. Please, I say, to whatever, real or not, is in that room. Please, I don't want this anymore and I don't understand any of it and I don't want to. I don't know what I have to say here. Just do it to someone else. Anyone else, I don't care about being good any more. Let them suffer. Anyone but me.

When I came to it was almost dawn. My shadow was slumped over and did not move. Mr. Moonlight stood by him, on the far wall where he had observed me that first night. He ran his fingers slowly, delicately, through my shadow's hair. Then he tipped his hat to me and left the room.

I never saw him again. Each night I would lie cowering in my bed with my gaze fixed on the shadow of the door, expecting the worst, but he never came back. In the mornings I woke up safe, and drop by drop my guilt and shame receded. The worst was over.

But then one night a few months later my brother roused everybody in the house with his crying. My mother took him to the main corridor where the four of us had assembled.

He had very curly hair when he was young. As my mother bounced him against her side the curls shook and blurred. "What is it, baby, bulloo, thuskie," my mother cooed. "My raja, devaru, my santhosha? Really, what's gotten into him?" she asked my father.

"Amoghu hug kodu!" he cried. Over and over. Amogh hug give. To this day I can remember his voice breaking as he howled this. We all looked at each other.

"Go on, Amogh, hug him," my mother said, holding him out.

When I think of what I did then, I think of two things.

There's that imaginary room, one half too bright and the other too dark,

where I begged for myself back with all the capital at my disposal.

And then there is my brother as he was at that moment, wretched and pitiful and ruined by what I'd done, screaming for me to protect him or save him or console him. And it strikes me that whatever passed in that room needn't be thought of in terms of right and wrong, that I have lived a good life outside this one black act, that it is a good thing to provide comfort to anybody, but especially to the condemned. This is what I tell myself. That I acted as kindly as I could and I should never think about any of this again.

Because what else could I do? I hugged him and put him back to bed.

Sound Advice

Beth Newcomer

Never wear white shoes or carry a straw purse after Labor Day.

Moisturize daily. Find a face cream you like and stay with it no matter what. And whatever you do, don't neglect your throat.

Two-dollar bills are lucky and silver dollars are magical. Keep them in the false floor of your jewelry box. Don't forget they are there.

Put away glasses and cups upside down on shelf paper. Change that shelf paper every spring when you take the winter coats to the cleaners to be put in mothballs.

Make green beans in the pressure cooker with bacon, sliced onion, peeled potatoes, and carrots. Even if you do not like carrots, add them anyway for color. Never, under any circumstances, prepare or serve beets. They are a loathsome vegetable, and a person who likes them should be kept under close scrutiny.

Which reminds me: You can't count on men.

Be sure you always have a little money saved away someplace in case you need it. This is called "mad money"—available in the event you get mad or go mad.

Hold a piece of yourself untouched, even when you think you're in love. If you give too much to a man at one time, he'll waste you.

Never trust a woman with a name that ends in "ie" or "y." Tammy, Susie, Laurie, Sherry—when they aren't giggling morons, they are slutty cheerleaders who will steal your date.

When you prepare the laundry, it's not enough to sort by color but also

by the texture and type of fabric. Use hot water and bleach on towels, sheets, and underwear. Never wash dishtowels with bath towels. Men do not know this. Never let a man do the laundry. Not that they ever would. In fact if you catch your man doing the laundry, make a note of it: He is undoubtedly up to something.

Being smart is more important than anything else. Nice gets you walked on. Pretty fades before you learn how to use it. Happy dissolves the moment you recognize it. But smart keeps you informed. And being informed will keep you armed. When armed you are safe.

Always serve beer cold with a frosted mug and a cocktail napkin. Put out a bowl of salted nuts. Store the mugs in the freezer and buy cocktail napkins for each season and holiday. Salted nuts keep a long time in the pantry and go well with beer when visitors drop by unannounced. The men will not use the mug, but the women will—which is a good thing because you can swipe the lipstick from the rim of the glass and compare the color with the bright-pink smear on the Kleenex you found in the bathroom trash. Certainly it is not your shade; only sluts wear bright pink.

Patience is the most difficult virtue to develop, and the most worthy of the effort.

When another couple is coming over to play bridge on a Saturday night, be playful and affectionate with your husband in the afternoon. If he is relaxed it will be easier to read his mind. This will give you an advantage at the card table during the bid, and also later when the pitcher of Manhattans is empty and no one can tell the spades from the clubs anymore, and the four of you have left the card table and are lolling around on the sectional sofa down in the conversation pit. Let him feel relaxed and free to be himself, free to exchange a glance with Cindy, to touch her knee, to look at her again just a moment too long.

Watch him carefully. Watch and wait.

He'll make mistakes.

Soon you will have enough evidence that you no longer need a confession to be vindicated.

Evidence is your comfort. Information is your power.

The Limo Driver

Louise Smith

Five years I've worked for Sullivan driving his late-model stretches and black Lincoln sedans. The stretches are a pain in the butt to corner on narrow neighborhood streets, but I never complain. Sullivan and I have a tacit agreement: He gives me weddings and funerals—no rock stars, no professional football players, and no Jacuzzi parties. For my part, I never say anything to Sullivan except, "Yes, sir."

Aside from the job making me take seven years to graduate from college after a late start, things are working out. I sleep in my sister's basement in exchange for home maintenance repairs, \$400 cash a month, and occasional babysitting. I'm on the other side of forty, but I'm the only person I know in my senior class who won't be graduating with a whopping debt. In September, I'll be teaching high school English in Queens.

Weddings are the best. I'm tall and broad-shouldered, and I stand at the open car door, putting on my haughty servant face, so the bride can pretend she's on Downton Abbey. At funerals, no one cares what the chauffeur looks like as long as he's patient and helps Grandma into the car.

I've learned a lot about brides and grooms and how to sense if it's love radiating from the back of the car or something else. My second most surprising couple were in their eighties—and not the fit, tanned, stretched-flesh eighties either. Those two looked like my own grandparents—no white dress or tux, just their church clothes.

We were in the Lincoln, no glass or intercom between me and the passengers, so we were close enough for conversation and for me to catch in the rearview mirror the look of deep comfort between those two. As I pulled gently away from the curb, the old guy took a little box out of his vest pocket and said to her, "We're both late." They took their pills and washed them down with water the guy had brought with him—not the brand we always have in the car. They settled back, her head on his shoulder, and I could see the look of bliss on her face.

"I guess you're wondering why bother at our age, huh?" The elderly groom was speaking to me. "I'll tell you why. Me and Estelle here been in love for a long time, but we're of one mind about the next big step in life.

We've got a few years left, but we're not going to leave a big decision until one of us is staring cockeyed at the ceiling with his mouth gapping open. You know what I mean?"

"I do, sir."

"Girlfriends don't qualify," he went on. "If you're in a hospital, it's got to be the wife. And a strong one at that. One who'll stand up to the doctors and have the grit to pull the plug, so the poor guy doesn't wind up having outlived his life, not even aware that he's lying there in diapers. Me and Estelle promised to be strong, right there, just now, in the church, we promised."

Other than thinking this was pretty grim talk for a wedding day, I didn't think much more about this until I was driving another wedding almost a year later. Big Catholic church. The bride was maybe seventeen, Hispanic, but the family weren't recent immigrants, I gathered from the extravagance of the wedding. The groom could have been late twenties, the kind of guy with a permanent sneer on his face.

It was the first really warm Sunday in April, a beautiful day for a wedding. We were in the longest of the stretches, a white one, of course; what the kids want, so they can get their whole posse in there. But this time it was just the bride and groom way back there in that cavernous interior. I always keep the intercom on softly so I can get any change of plans. I headed into the traffic on our way to the country club in Rye.

"Happy now?" the groom asked.

She murmured, "Sure."

"So you've got what you wanted, right?" He sounded pretty cool toward this little girl.

"You look very handsome, Chris. Didn't you think our wedding was beautiful?"

"I'm sure it was everything your mother wanted."

"You're going to learn to like her. And Daddy too. He paid for all this, Chris. Please thank him at the reception."

The guy didn't say anything more until he slid aside the glass behind my head and said, "Pull up at this corner." We were still in the crush of Saturday afternoon in the city. There was no place to slide over, but I stopped, thinking the jerk was going to run in for a beer. He climbed back to where his bride was sitting, made a little salute to her, and got out of the car.

"Wait, Chris. What are you doing?" She scrambled that voluminous dress out of the car and grabbed the guy's arm. "We have to go to the reception!"

"I don't have to do anything." He shook her off and her fancy little white bag went flying down the sidewalk.

"But my parents. All their friends." She began to cry and grabbed his lapels. By this time all the cars behind me were honking and cursing. He was

trying to drag his coat out of her grasp and gave her a push back against the car. She screamed.

I got out and pulled his arms behind him. "Let me go, asshole!" he said.

I just wanted her to get back in the car, but she took hold of him again. "Chris!" she sobbed. "What about the baby?"

"Who cares?"

"But you said—"

"You stupid—"

I grabbed his mouth and pulled him away from her and bent him over the front fender. I was very tempted to push him into the street and run over him a few times. But I just yelled to her over the honking and the cursing, "Get in the car!"

But she bent beside his face. I let go his mouth in order to press his cheek into the fender. "Chris, you promised!" Her face was a red mess. "Mama and Daddy. This will shame them. Don't you want to go? Please, just for a little while. Daddy is going to get you a job."

"No, you stupid c—" I mashed his head a little harder.

"Get in the car, dammit!" I said to her.

"Chris, why?"

"Your dad treats me like scum. Let's see how he likes this. Now get in the car like the man says. You've got your ring."

Not taking her eyes off him, she slowly backed away, pulled open the door to the front seat, and began to haul her dress inside. The honking had quieted down. The sidewalk was full of gawkers, people pouring out of the bars, and plenty of cabbies and their fares. Few people can resist a fight, but a screaming bride in an expensive wedding dress is a true crowd-pleaser. I gave the bastard one last push against the fender. He began to straighten up just before I gunned the car out from under him.

So what now? Sullivan was going to be rip shit when he heard about this—chauffeur beats up groom and takes off with bride. I kept driving. I always have lots of tissues for funerals, and I kept the bride supplied as she mopped up her tears and blew her nose and tried to repair the way her makeup was giving her a vampire look. I continued out of town, headed for the burbs. The bride told me her name was Lisa.

Finally the city gave way to strip malls and then patches of woods and houses with big lawns began to appear. Lisa looked around and said like I was a dummy, "We can't go there."

"Where to then, ma'am?" I asked in my impersonal chauffeur voice, dropping my bodyguard role.

"Anywhere! I'd rather everyone think I was dead than go to that reception."

"Want to call someone?"

“No! I just want to die. I think I dropped my phone. Can’t we just drive?”

I had a full tank, of course. It was still a beautiful day. I’d have to call Sullivan sooner or later because Lisa’s daddy was going to be all over the agency. Under the guise of rerouting a GPS, I texted Sullivan that we’d had an emergency landing, bride fine, groom flown.

Sullivan texted WTF over and over for almost two hours as we drove around the countryside, Lisa talking about jumping off a bridge, slitting her wrists, buying a gun. She said her dad was going to kill her. She said he was going to kill Chris. She said her mother was going to kill herself. Finally she ran down, just hiccuping and letting out long sighs. I couldn’t say how much reality she was facing, but she was getting herself under control. Suddenly, she said, “Look, a park. Pull over there.”

We got out. I was sweating inside my wool uniform and was grateful for the breeze. We sat on the grass under an ancient tree whose limbs could have sheltered a whole village. I looked across the sunny valley before us and saw that we were sitting on the edge of a cemetery. The headstones curved in rows up and down the little grassy hills, and that’s when I thought about the old couple who’d gotten married to help each other die—a kind of eyes-wide-open unselfish devotion, the kind of sturdy long-distance-running love I planned on finding for myself. I wondered if Lisa, given her taste in men, would ever grow up enough to luck into a piece of that kind of love. Today’s wedding had been the huge cover-up, the old-fashioned, catered disguise of coercion and fear.

We were quiet, me enjoying the breeze, and Lisa finally not talking. She would probably have me take her home soon, so she could hole up in her childhood bedroom and tweet her agony to all her friends.

Finally she said, “I wish we’d brought some sandwiches.”

Hunger, a good sign that someone has decided to live. Lisa was young and, baby or not, would be out on the dance floor soon. Wiser, I hoped.

I, unfortunately, could look forward to an ambiguous fame. I bet there were a hundred cell phone cameras recording that sidewalk scene downtown. I can probably catch it tonight on YouTube, that indelible memory bank that holds all its weddings with no distinction between the awful and the rare.

Ike

Kirby Johnson

The day before the storm hits, my mother always sends me across town for sandbags. I drive to Home Depot, pick up twenty bags of sand, drop ten off at the rental property, which was also the house I grew up in, and take ten home to put outside the back door. Each hurricane is always the “big storm,” and I pick the bags up out of love.

When I arrive at the rental property the tenet is drunk and trying to unload a keg from the back seat of his car. I ask him to not have a party and he tells me that everything is ok, that nothing is going to happen. I say something about this being the “big one” and we both don’t really believe it. We watch the neighbor check his mail while holding a shot gun before I help them unload the keg and go home.

X

When preparing for a hurricane, they tell you to do several things. First and for most you must pick up a hurricane tracking chart brought to you by your favorite local news station at your favorite local grocery store but really, only the people on TV or senior citizens do this. The rest of us walk around blindly until our bosses tells us a storm is coming and that we should go home early, but only after we give them all of our contact information and promise to report back when it’s all is over. The next steps are all about planning and hoarding. You must create a family plan, a pet plan, and an evacuation plan, but no one really does this either. After you must hoard supplies like plywood, toilet paper, and canned hams, then protect your supplies by boarding up your home up to lock-out daylight and intruders. Most people like this part the most. Hoarding is patriotic, and so is protecting your property. You can’t let anyone take your hams, let alone scare your women. Lastly, they won’t tell you until right before the storm but you must go fill your gigantic car up with gas, and you must do so in an excited panic. Gas is also very important to hoard and you will spend the last moments until the storm waiting in line

for overpriced fuel. Price gouging is also normal. Once you are done filling up, you are officially prepared and it's time to head home.

X

Several days before running around town to pick up and drop off sandbags, the news shows a large Hurricane hitting Haiti and Cuba. This is the second one in a few weeks. The news person says the rain and wind are coming our way, and we need to prepare. Mom says I have to take off of work to help get the house in order. The next morning I decide to go to work anyway.

X

To do:

Remove all potential "projectiles" from your lawn and garden.

This means potted plants, lawn furniture, and any decorative items.

Fill every pitcher you own with water.

Fill the bathtubs.

You'll want to flush the toilet three days from now.

Make large blocks of ice in the freezer.

Barricade any doors and low windows you may have with sandbags.

If water comes in, your floors will buckle and your carpet will mold.

Board the windows.

It's important that you sit in the dark, for many many days before and after the storm.

Park your car as close to your home as possible.

This will protect it from thieves and debris.

Wash all of your clothes.

X

We turn the air conditioning on as high as we can. The newscasters say the outskirts of Ike will hit the Texas coast around 1:00am, so we crank the AC and watch the news before we lose power. By midnight winds pick up and trees start falling on transformers. Loud, distant explosions can be heard every few minutes. A friend calls to say they are watching a neighbor's house burn. They are outside in the wind with a water-hose trying to save their own. From our upstairs patio, we can see fires in the distance. By 1:30 a neighbor's tree falls on the transformer outside of our house and the lights go out.

X

The weird thing about when a storm makes landfall at night is that you can't see anything that's going on. You look out the windows through the cracks between the boards and everything is dark. All you can do is listen to the low roar and the debris hitting the sides of the house and you don't know all of the fear you could own because you've never been through something this large before. Your parents had Alicia but all you've had are tropical storms here and there. You're part of a generation that's getting drunk with friends around town, not knowing how fucked up nature can be, not remembering what happened with Katrina. So you sit at home with your mom, your mom who for days has worked hard to instill fear and anxiety in you, your mom who was partially right, because you hear the roar, and you see the darkness, and yes, you are scared. But she is not scared. She's suddenly excited, asking you to come out on the patio to watch the wind and the rain blow sideways, exclaiming how beautiful the house fire is off in the distance. You feel sad and nervous and you don't want to watch the rain. You get calls from friends who are drunk and scared and surprised and you mumble something about how you told them, how you told them this would be big, but you know, you know that you didn't even believe it the first time the words came out.

X

The next day everyone goes outside to witness the damage. The street is a brownish river. There are trees on cars and trees in the road. Men take sticks and push debris away from the gutters. Women begin to clean their yards. Within an hour the street is clear and we go back inside. The following morning a thunderstorm comes through to flood the streets again. The gutters are thick with the pulp of leaves, the water doesn't drain. Houses flood again and we step outside to repeat the process of cleaning and clearing.

X

When the phone lines do not work, you must teach your mother to send text messages. Teach her to communicate through emoticons and abbreviations. Teach her about this new technology. Teach her as she cooks you a homemade pizza on the grill. Teach her and appreciate what you are sharing. Eat your pizza as she texts you, "hello ;-)" Tell her thank you and she will say it back.

X

The day after the storm, my boss sends word to go downtown the next morning. So I wake up, get dressed in the dark, and take the surface roads into the city. We are told to show our City of Houston badges when we get pulled over and I do, twice before reaching the row houses that surround downtown. When I finally make it into the city, everything looks bruised and grey. The leaves of trees have been beaten off branches and shards of glass blanket the streets. Men in rubber boots and city jackets pull hoses from alleyways and move branches from one place to another. Police cars block several roads with their lights on. Everyone looks tired.

X

At work, we sit at computers and read FEMA application questions to people who can't read very well. Most of the applicants cannot tell us clear answers, so we go to the help website to read more questions, to try and find more answers. The application takes twenty minutes to complete but everything feels longer, more drawn out. The twenty minutes becomes complicated.

These people are at the library because the mayor has told them we are open and that they can apply for aid here. So we sit and read questions. We sit and listen to their stories but only a few have needs related to the storm. The rest are there because their power is out and they don't know what else to do. Most of them are senior citizens. All of them are poor. So you hold the hands of elderly women. You read forms to men and women covered in bruises or track marks. Many of them don't have homes. They don't have addresses. They didn't have these things before the storm.

Throughout the days you meet countless diabetics and a man with an abscess. You can smell the abscess. There are women, women of every color, women with children, women who can't read and you get tired. You shut down. You shut down because helping them takes everything you have. You shut down because you cannot help them. There is no way to help all of them.

X

FEMA FAQ

My electricity is off and I lost all my food; can FEMA help?

No.

Will FEMA reimburse me for the generator I purchased after the disaster?
Probably not. Don't try.

How do I check the status of my FEMA application?
You can't, the website is down and you lost your user name and or password.

Do I qualify for "Other than Housing Needs" Assistance?
Probably not.

Part of my roof has been torn off/impaied by a tree. Can I apply for temporary housing?
You still have the rest of your house, right?

I do not have a current address, what do I do?

I do not have a current phone number, what do I do?

X

No one will touch the tree on the power line in the neighbor's yard. We call the city to get it removed. We speak into machines that record our request and address. We wait.

Some neighbors run extension cords from houses across the street, others spend the majority their time at home in the back yard, others still have purchased generators. My mother and I are in the group that sits outside. We share our time quietly listening to news radio. We listen to the mayor scorn the director of FEMA and then we listen to the County Commissioner try to apologize. We don't have much to say to each other but choose to listen to everything around us and during these moments it feels like we are living in a different time, a time when families frequently gathered outside, a time when kids played in backyards. We can hear the friendly voices of our neighbors talking to each other. We can hear them in their homes with the windows open. We can hear home phones ring and someone answering them. My mother and I live in the house she grew up in and it feels like how it must have been when she grew up. When look at her I think she feels this way too. Her face looks nostalgic but calm. She is good at living in this simple way and

I am happy to spend time with her.

When it gets dark we go inside and the generators of our neighbors are all you can hear. The noise isn't a hum, but a growl, and I frequently cannot sleep. On some nights I walk upstairs to the patio. From the balcony the neighborhood is a dark mass of houses, hungry for the glow of street lights that line the main road. The lights have been restored for drivers but the apartments and homes on either side of them are dark. Every once and a while a cop passes by. They patrol the neighborhood with heavy flood lights. They patrol the apartments across the streets the same way. Sometimes you can hear the cops on their loud speakers yelling. Sometimes you can hear their guns.

X

While cooking a sweet potato on the grill after work, I listen to a caller on the local NPR station ask if anyone has heard news from the City of Galveston jail. She says she hasn't spoken to her son in over a week and she doesn't know if he's safe. Despite a mandatory evacuation order from Galveston's Mayor, the jails on the island were not abandoned. A thousand prisoners were left with a half of the jail staff and a twenty-foot storm surge. The woman on the phone is crying. My dog sits on my lap. We listen to her and other callers. A few hours go by.

X

Grocery List:

Instant rice
Potatoes
Bread
Canned Chicken Breast
Apple Sauce
Ice
Tampons
Oranges
Tuna
Instant rice
Charcoal
Instant rice
Plumbs

Lighter fluid
Ice
Apple Sauce
Potatoes
Bread
Lighter Fluid
Charcoal

X

The city starts to move employees around as other branches of the Library are cleared to reopen and I'm relocated to a branch closer to my home. My new coworkers are nice but uncomfortable. There are more of us than needed so we double up to fill holds, clean the stacks, and sit at the desk. Sometimes there are six of us at the desk with nothing to do, but that is ok. Work begins to feel normal again. The schools reopen and in the afternoon the branch is full of noisy children: their small hands and faces, a colorful distraction from the work we finished downtown and the quiet darkness in our homes.

When the kids are in school we talk to anyone and everyone who comes into the branch. We ask them how they are and we spend time with them on the computer looking for ways to help. The patrons tell us about the damage to their homes, the dog they lost, and their insurance companies. There are no easy fixes but directions. We direct people to the tarp program, the relief volunteers down the street, or the clinic giving out medications three miles away. We tell patrons which bus lines are open and look on employer's websites for updates on re-openings and permanent closures. We talk to everyone but we also listen.

On one of my lunch breaks I take time to fill out a FEMA application for my mom and for our home. I also fill one out for the rental house, claiming that I live there. I do this but expect nothing.

X

One afternoon a cop stops into the library to say hello. We ask him what it was like working after the storm and if everyone is ok. He tells us stories about the prisoners complaining and how it wasn't as bad as the last time it flooded several years ago. He tells us how during one tropical storm, the jails flooded and the inmates spent days waste deep in water and sewage. He tells

us about how the prisoners have more rights than we do. He says they all have cable TV, all sorts of snacks, and somehow he makes these snacks sound important. He asks us if we have cable TV and most of us say no. He tells us these things knowing he is better than the men he is talking about. He tells us, not knowing who we are or if we agree.

X

A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home

Mold can grow anywhere there is moisture and honey there is moisture all over your home. There is moisture under the linoleum in the kitchen, under the carpets, and all up in your walls. Your home is moist and girl, you can't do anything to stop it. That mold will grow and it will spread. It will be in places you never thought it could find. It's thick, greenish black and people are going to want to talk about it. In fact, people will call you on the phone to talk about it. They will talk all sorts of things about your mold. They will make promises about taking that mold away! They will try to win you over with their talk but they will know nothing about mold! They will take your money and that mold will still grow. It will grow and you can't do anything to stop it.

X

Six weeks after Ike made landfall and sixty people are still missing. On the news, reporters show images taken from helicopters flying over Bolivar Peninsula. Only a few buildings still stand on the tiny strip of land, others are reduced to splinters: shards of the brightly painted homes that once lined the beach. Somewhere inside the piles I imagine ceramic bits of decorative seashells, wooden boats, and rattan furniture. I imagine bodies, their fleshy pink color, now turning grey. The reporters show Galveston bay with cars and sofas still floating in the water. They show the seawall and the beach, but the beach is gone, washed away.

I begin to dream about the tide and then the bodies. The dreams start as memories of fishing around the peninsula as a kid: my dad and me in his boat, him talking about the currents, me pointing to the GPS asking if we found the fish yet. We'd usually go off the Intracoastal Waterway near Galveston at Port Bolivar, where the calmer waters of the bay met the rapid current that the larger boats used to propel themselves out to sea—the same places where helicopters and reporters were flying over now. There we would set anchor

or hang fishing lights off a nearby pier at night. You could tell when the tide was rolling out because your line would get caught on plastic bottles and the carcasses of dead fish other fishermen had thrown away near shore. In the dreams the tide is the same and we cast and recast our lines hoping to get a bite, hoping not to snag something that was lost.

X

My mom asks me to come home for lunch to meet the insurance adjustor. The adjuster is a tall tan woman in a small truck. She brings a ladder and climbs on the roof. She comes inside and looks at the soft bulging sheetrock of the interior walls and the black pools of mold under the kitchen floor. She grunts and makes notes. She says there isn't anything she can do. She says all the damage is caused by wind-driven-rain and somehow wind-driven-rain is not hurricane related. She says the water that came in during the second day flood was caused by wind-driven-rain. I ask how the wind can blow from the ground. She doesn't laugh. I say the water that came into the house was from flooding. She repeats the words wind-driven-rain. Wind-driven-rain.

X

As weeks and months go by, the house begins to settle. Doors don't quite close. Broken tree branches slowly begin to fall on the house or in the street. The pear tree outside the window begins to rot. Everything shifts then settles again. People do their best to repair and forget. My mother and I spend our evenings doing this: repairing, scraping, cleaning, and re-painting. Then we get tired and do our best to ignore and move on. We go to work and wait for spring. We wait until there is something else to move on from. We wait until the trees grow back their leaves and mend their scars.



Play | *Monika Daniels*
Acrylic paint and paper on canvas | 12" x 9"



Self-Portrait | *Maureen Phelan*
Digital Collage | 10.55" x 13.9"



Hay! | *Bryan Beight*
Photograph



Palindrome | *Millie Yu*

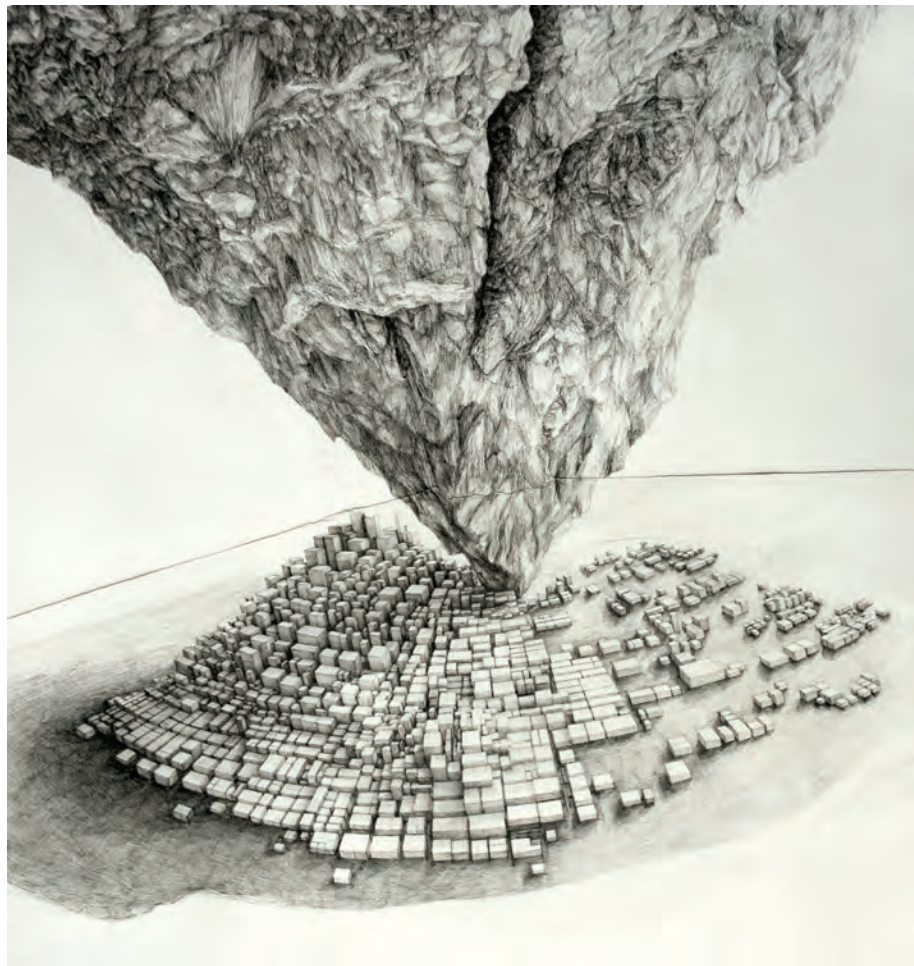


Top left: Black and white coiled vessel, white earthenware | 14" x 11"

Bottom left: Orange and metallic terra sigillata glaze tea bowl, white earthenware | 3.75" x 4.25"

Top right: Yellow and black terra sigillata glaze tea bowl, white earthenware | 4" x 4.5"

Bottom right: Set of two porcelain cups | each 4.5" x 2.75"



Make Space | *Courtney Sennish*

Micron pen drawing on somerset paper | 3ft x 4ft



Delta Dawn | *Allison Mcashan*
Oil on board | 16" x 36"



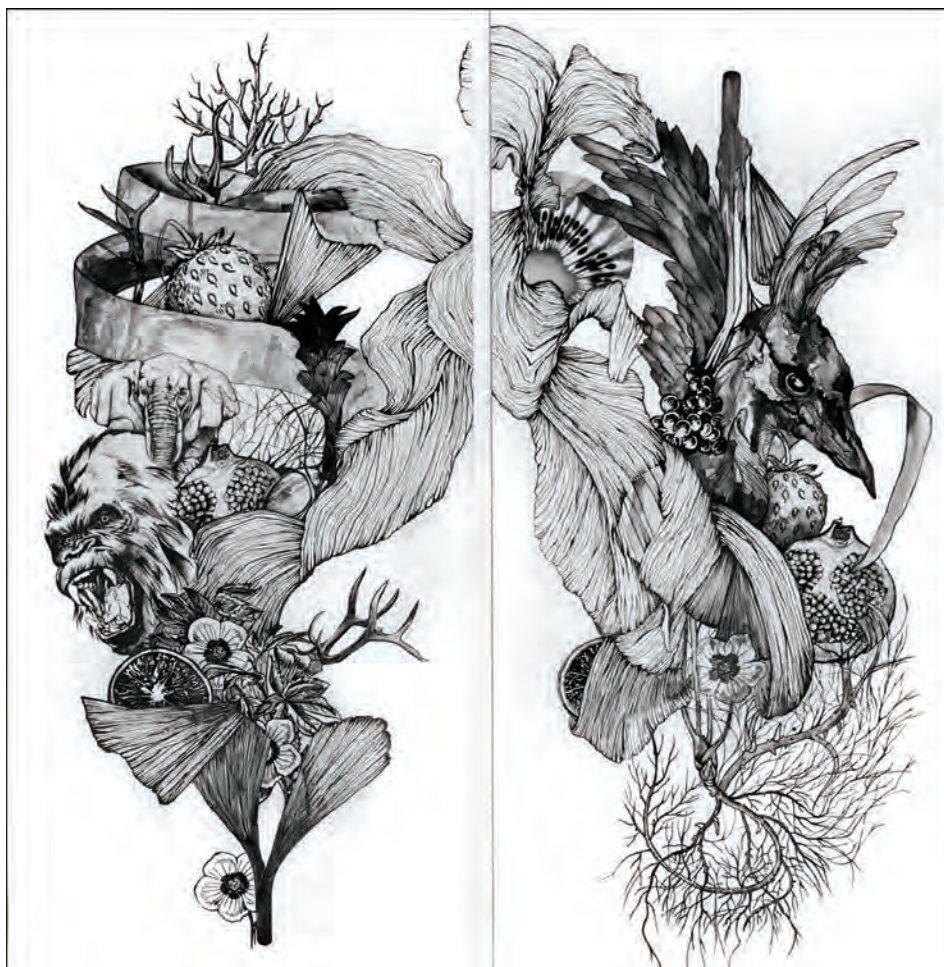
Beekeeper | *Monika Daniels*
Acrylic paint on canvas | 16" x 12"



Persephone | *Monika Daniels*
Acrylic paint on canvas | 16" x 12"



The Hero on Mount Cithaeron | *Esther Lui*
Photoshop | 11" x 11"



Fresh | *Elizabeth Feroze*
Mixed media diptych | each panel 42" x 18.25"

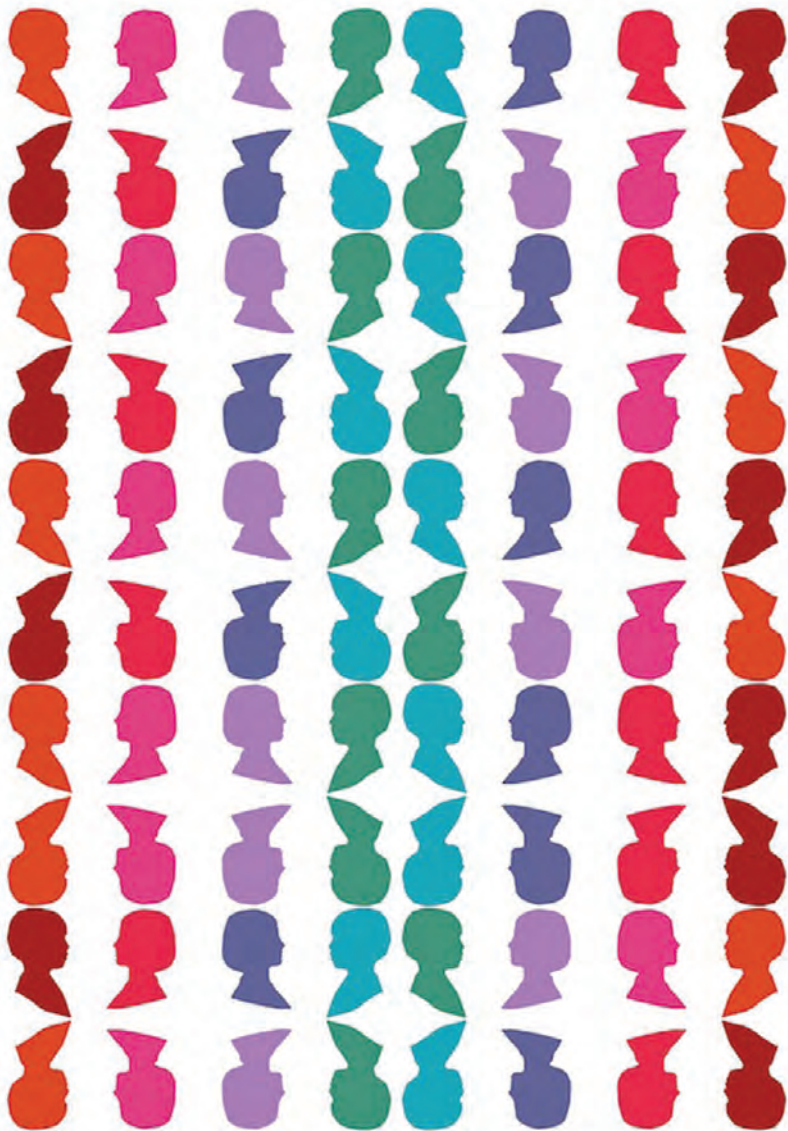


A Painting of my Grandmother in Green | *Larsen McDowell*

Oil on panel | 9.5" by 12"

20973 | *Meredith Baker*
Photogravure





William and Edith | *Edith Young*
Illustration | 22" x 16 1/2"



Piracy | *Jeffrey Fan*
Acrylic, oil | 4 ft x 6 ft

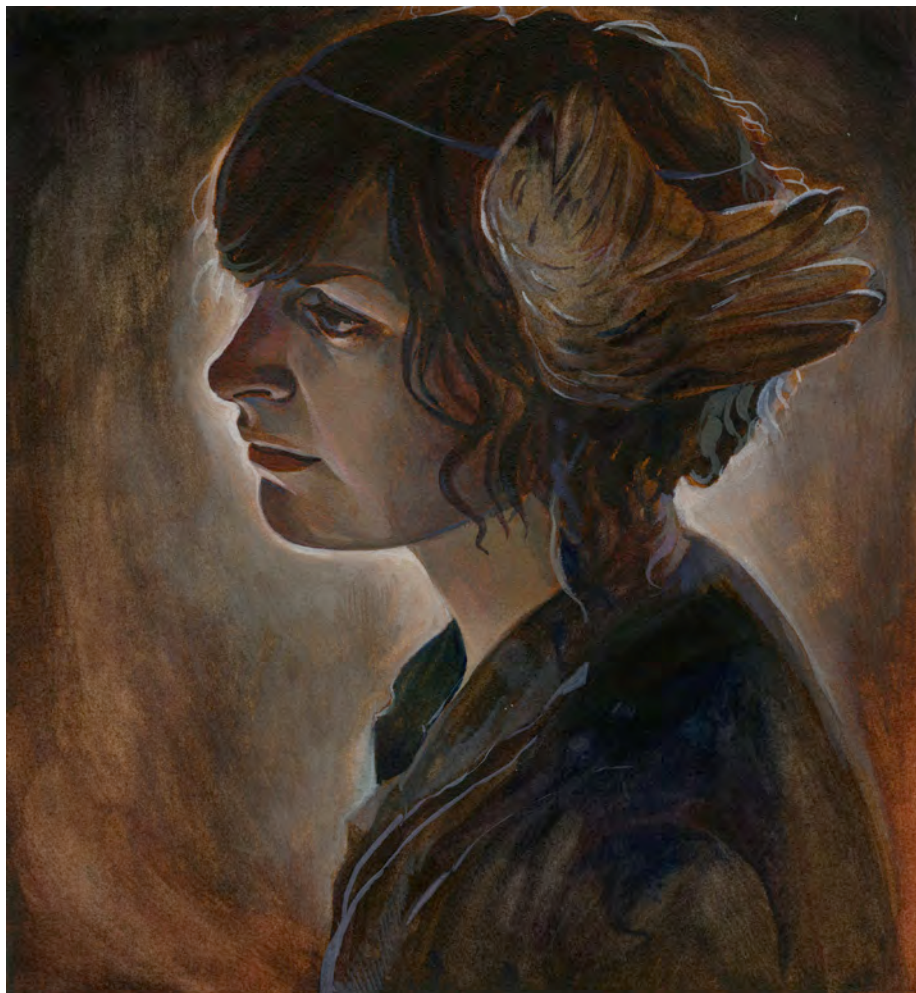




The New York Photographs | *Michael Sweet*
Photographs



Abby in Blue | *Brenna Daugherty*
Oil on canvas | 30" x 40"



Self-Portrait with Wings | *Jessica Kleinman*
Watercolor on paper | 11" x 12"



Our Yard | *Bliss Morton*

Ink and watercolor | 26" x 40"



A Dream of Two Places | *Bliss Morton*
Watercolor | 23" x 48"



Six Swans | *Monika Daniels*

Colored pencil, watercolor, and acrylic paint on paper | 16" x 12"



Cake | *Monika Daniels*
Acrylic paint and plaster on canvas | 16" x 12"



Fourth of July | *Edith Young*
Photograph



The Ritual | *Dabin Choi*
Mixed media collage | 15" x 20"

Contributors

Jeffrey Alfer has work appearing or forthcoming in Connecticut Review, Red Cedar Review, and South Carolina Review. His latest chapbook is *The City Without Her* (Kindred Spirit Press, 2012), and his first full-length book of poems, *The Wolf Yearling*, is forthcoming from Pecan Grove Press. He is the founder and co-editor of San Pedro River Review.

A. Anupama received her MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poetry, reviews, and translations have appeared in several publications including Monkeybicycle, The Alembic, and Numéro Cinq Magazine. She lives in Nyack, New York.

Meredith Mae Baker is a printmaker based in Atlanta. Born and raised in the Peach State, she is currently a senior at Savannah College of Art and Design. Although a printmaking major, Meredith often uses photography as a creative outlet. Meredith's current interests lie with a series of photogravures she has been working on since last October, one of which is "20973." Her work will be shown in the senior thesis show in May.

Bryan Beight spends a fair amount of his free time trying to take the beautiful photograph. Some of his work will also be featured in an upcoming community book about New Orleans, aptly titled *New Orleans by New Orleans*.

Dabin Choi is a senior studying Illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design. She spends most of her time in her tiny room writing and illustrating. She loves holding hermit crabs, and practices Tae Kwon Do at Brown University.

Gregory Crosby used to be an art critic, but then thought better of it. His poetry has appeared in several journals, including CourtGreen, Epiphany, Copper Nickel, Leveler, Ping Pong, & Rattle. He currently resides in New York, where he is co-editor, with Jillian Brall, of the online poetry journal Lyre Lyre.

Monika Daniels is from Alexandria, Louisiana and is a freshman at Tulane University. She plans to double major in Anthropology and English, and hopes to explore her creative writing and art interests through Tulane's English department and Studio Art department.

Brenna Daugherty, a Northern California native, has been studying art seriously since early high school. She typically works two-dimensionally in oil, graphite, and mixed media. Currently a senior Art Practice Major at UC Berkeley, she plans to move to San Francisco following graduation in December and later pursue her MFA degree.

Rory DeMaio is a writer from Lexington, Kentucky who has entertained a lifelong dabbling in the arts. She is currently pursuing a BA in Art History at Tulane University. After graduation, she plans to continue her studies in the 4+1 Program for a Masters in Art History, as well as further her writing through a currently unplanned course.

Jeffrey Fan is an Sculptor, Painter, and Illustrator. He works with a vast array of materials, often using collage and mixed media in his artwork. Currently, Jeff is pursuing a BFA in Illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Elizabeth Feroze is a Studio Art and Psychology double-major at Tulane University. Focusing on drawing, painting and printmaking, she enjoys the precision and reliability of two-dimensional creation, and the challenge of giving depth, beauty and life to flat, blank surfaces. This spring she will be studying the arts abroad in Florence, Italy. Elizabeth will be graduating from Tulane University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2014.

Michael Gebelein, 24, is a writer and journalist in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina.

Ariel Guidry is a senior at Tulane University. In December, she will complete her Bachelor's in English with a creative writing concentration. She plans to make New Orleans her home.

Amogh Havanur is a senior completing his undergraduate degree in psychology at New York University, as well as a minor in creative writing. He has been writing seriously for four years and is now working on a collection of short stories.

Kirby Johnson is pursuing her MFA in prose at the University of Alabama. Her work has appeared at Better Magazine, Everyday Genius, and HTML Giant. She is the founding editor of NANO Fiction.

Jessica Kagansky's work was most recently featured in ROAR, Minetta Review and on NYU's Creative Writing website. She was the runner-up in the 2012 "Paris: Soto and Beyond Creative Writing Prize" competition. She lives in New York.

Jessica Kleinman is currently in her third year at the Rhode Island School of Design. After graduating from RISD she plans to pursue a career in Illustration.

Ryan Krasnoo is a junior at the University of Michigan studying Sociology and Creative Writing. Originally from New Jersey, he is a two-time member of Michigan's Slam Poetry team which competed at the College Unions Poetry Slam Invitational in 2011 and 2012. Ryan was also most recently invited to perform at the 2012 TEDxUofM Conference in Ann Arbor last March. He is an aspiring sports journalist and novelist, with his first book currently in the works.

Esther Lui is a junior studying Illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design. She likes intricate patterns and strange color combinations. When she isn't in the studio she likes to spend hours on the Internet reading comics and looking at videos of baby animals. She also has a weakness for cake.

Allison Mcashan is a Senior BFA Studio Art Candidate in Painting at Tulane University. Allison paints in oil and acrylics drawing on her southern influences, abstracting undercurrents of the psychological landscape. She is a native of New Orleans, La.

Larsen McDowell is a Senior at Tulane University. She is a Studio Art major and an Art History minor. The primary focus of her practice is painting.

Bliss Morton was raised in Calaveras County. She studied art at Columbia College and attained her bachelors in art practice from UC Berkeley in 2012. Her imagery is often an exploration of dreams, memories or emotions. Her most recent work looks at her childhood memories. She works primarily with watercolor, ink and pencil. Her artwork has been shown at UC Berkeley's Worth Ryder Gallery.

Beth Newcomer's fiction earned her a spot as one of six finalists in the Seventh Annual Emerging Voices Show of the New Short Fiction series in Los Angeles. Her non-fiction work has been featured in *Whole Life Times*. When she isn't engaged in literary pursuits, Newcomer owns and operates a graphic design firm, and promotes her husband's cacti and succulent nursery in Fallbrook, California.

Laura Pendell began writing poetry in college and participated in the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Place in New York City in the late seventies. Her poetry has appeared on the web and in *Limestone* and will be in forthcoming issues of *Talking River* and *Sounding East* and *Jelly Bucket*. She lives in the Foothills of the Sierras where she raises ponderosa pine, oak and manzanita when not writing or making handmade books.

Maureen Phelan grew up in East Tennessee, and now lives in New Orleans studying Studio Art and Art History at Tulane University. She creates experimental and abstract photography, often staging spirit scenes and arranging her work in narrative installations. One of Maureen's supernatural photographs recently won the Juror's Award for Photography at the annual Undergraduate Juried Exhibition.

Tiffany Quay Tyson is a writer and PR professional living in the suburbs of Denver, Colorado. She serves on the board of directors of Lighthouse Writers Workshop, and her recent work has appeared in *Peeks & Valleys: A Southern Journal* and *Colorado Runner*. She was born and raised in Mississippi and attended Delta State University (home of the Fighting Okra!). She's currently at work on a novel and full-length play.

Max Schramel is currently enrolled at Tulane University as a Junior. He is pursuing a major in English with a minor in History. Inspired by his family and friends, Schramel loves to write, paralleling his poetry with his unique life experiences. Having taken numerous poetry classes and workshops, Schramel continues to progress as a writer.

Courtney Sennish is a senior at the Rhode Island School of Design. She will be graduating with a BFA in Printmaking with hopes to become a master printer. Her work spans a variety of disciplines including drawing, etching, woodcut and ceramics.

Sean Hunt Simonson was born and raised in New Orleans, but also spent many formative summers in Monterey, Tennessee. He is currently a senior at Tulane University, planning to graduate with a major in anthropology and a minor in ecology and evolutionary biology in the spring of 2013.

Louise Farmer Smith, author of *ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF MARRIAGE*, grew up in Oklahoma. Smith has taught English, trained as a family therapist, and managed a Congressman's office. Her stories have appeared in magazines including *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Glimmer Train* (Contest winner) and *Bellevue Literary Review* (Pushcart nomination.) She lives on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

Joannie Stangeland's book *Into the Rumored Spring* was published last fall by Ravenna Press. She's also the author of two poetry chapbooks—*Weathered Steps* and *A Steady Longing for Flight*. Joannie's poems have appeared in *Tulane Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and other publications. Joannie is the poetry editor for the online journal *The Smoking Poet* and an associate poetry editor at *Cascadia Review*.

Michael Ernest Sweet is a Canadian award-winning educator, writer and street photographer. His first full-length collection of street photography is forthcoming in 2013 from Brooklyn Arts Press. Michael divides his time between Montreal and New York City.

Ingram Wilkinson was born in Birmingham, Alabama. He is now a senior at Tulane, where he studies World Literature and Creative Writing. His poetry has previously appeared in *Wag's Revue*, *Vox*, *Metaphor*, and *Glass Mountain*. Lately, he's enjoyed the novels of Virginia Woolf, food trucks, and his roommate's Catahoula Leopard Hound.

Zach Yanowitz lives in New Orleans.

Edith Young is a recent matriculate at the Rhode Island School of Design. Edith possesses a deep-seated fear of historical re-enactments. She can be found rewinding the 35 mm film in her camera on the streets of Manhattan. Her photographs have donned the covers of *Tulane Reviews* past.

Millie Yu is a sophomore at Tulane University. She is studying biomedical engineering but loves studio art.

Submission Guidelines

The *Tulane Review* accepts poetry, prose, and art submissions. Poetry and prose submissions should be sent electronically to litsec@tulane.edu and be included as attachments. Hard copy submissions will be accepted and should be sent to *Tulane Review*, 122 Norman Mayer, New Orleans, LA, 70118 with an SASE. Please submit no more than five poems and limit prose submissions to 4,000 words per piece. Hard copy submissions should include the artist's e-mail address. Art should be submitted electronically to tulane.review@gmail.com in high-resolution format. Please include dimensions and media. Please include a cover letter with biography for all submissions.

The Tulane Literary Society normally acquires first North American serial rights but will consider second serial publication.

For more information, visit our website at review.tulane.edu.