

RAINY DAY



Dear *Rainy Day* reader,

Another semester has come and gone, but before it passed it gave us this: the issue of *Rainy Day* you are holding in your hands. While this spring was just a sliver of the long life of the magazine, it was my first as editor-in-chief. I am very thankful to have been surrounded by a wonderful staff that guided my decisions and were never afraid to speak their minds.

Stepping into my new position has made me contemplate why we continue to gather stories into collections like this one, in an age that encourages us to disperse knowledge, not contain it. I think it has as much to do with the process of making the collection as it does with the final product. Each of the pieces you will read in the following pages was carefully selected after many rounds of completely anonymous deliberation. They will appear fresh and new to you, reader, but they are worn and well-loved in the eyes of our staff. They reflect the variety of ideas, tastes, and values present in our staff and the national undergraduate writing community from which these pieces were gleaned. This collection represents the best kind of collaboration between writers and editors, and I am proud to have helped it come into being.

Each of the writers represented here is a new voice, contributing what they believe writing can be and should be. As long as there is a magazine, there will be a reader, and that reader is you. I hope you enjoy.

Best wishes,

Laura Boland

RAINY DAY

an independent student publication

Volume XLII, Issue No. 2

Spring 2014

Letter from the Editor 1

fiction

ABIGAIL CHIARAMONTE '14 (*University of North Carolina Wilmington*)
Proliferative Retinopathy 9-17

BRYAN WASHINGTON '15 (*University of Houston*)
Indians 22-34

MARK A. MANGELSDORF '14 (*University of Colorado*)
From Thunder to Silence 38-44

poetry

ADELLA GORGEN '15 (*University of California Los Angeles*)
Tuesday Morning 4

RURIK BAUMRIN '17 (*University of Chicago*)
You So Sleek So Real 5

HANNAH WHITE '14 (*University of Pennsylvania*)
Doubt 6

INGA LYNN '14 (*Sonoma State University*)
(this, and misanthropy.) 18

LAUREL MOFFAT '17 (*Cornell University*)
(float) 19
In the Forest 20

JOHNATHAN HARPER '16 (*Syracuse University*)
7 Weird Tricks for a Flat Belly 21

JEREMY WINDHAM '14 (*Stephen F. Austin State University*)
Our Flooded Street That Summer 35

J. RELIHAN '15 (<i>Cornell University</i>)	
<i>The Bodies of Us</i>	36
JOSH DOLPH '14 (<i>Syracuse University</i>)	
<i>Concerns, 3 AM</i>	37
Contributor Notes	45
Cover: "Extinguished" - Photographed by CONNOR ARCHARD '15	

TUESDAY MORNING

Adella Gorgen

I nibble on my chipped
 Bones and crack my strained
 Nails, looking for a place
 To hang my neck
 I unzip my veins and crawl
 Inside my pillowcase
 And just lie there
 I want to just lie there
 Let me just lie there
 I say
 Let the dust collect
 Let me rust and protect me
 From these lusty voices
 In my head
 This horrid wallpaper and this
 Gloomy coffin of a bed
 Unzip me and tear
 My tendons
 I tear my tendons and
 The pillowcase and
 I crawl inside
 And they just let me lie
 There

YOU SO SLEEK SO REAL

Rurik Baumrin

Mummy pantomimes danced in the evening fire,
synthetic calamities trickled down to hire
you, who laughed through those white lungs,
touched the skin of the panther, oh yes you did.
So real, yes you were, so sleek as you wore
satin laughter and touched to flutter much more
than the sun who took you where the roses mope
and you twinkled about to hope.
Home is him where hummers hinge, nope?
Your pony braids strangled my nape
and moaning loathing is loving your naps
especially you, day sleeper, the cat on your lap.
Your laps slap the pals, and pills slip your lips,
and I might hang around bringing dips
to your mood mangled blue and bips
and bops it boggle hops and you mimic the bits.

DOUBT

Hannah White

(sometimes)

Well,
he has to love God even more than he loves me
says your roommate as you're going around talking about your
ideal husbands and it's turning out to be one hell of a
common refrain and you're just like,
why didn't I think of that

(sometimes)

no really, you're asking, why didn't I think of that,
I mean, my god, God's not even in the back of your mind most of the time and yet
you try, you really do try, you go to church, go to Bible study,
listen to praise songs when you're depressed and/or spiraling down
down
down
doesn't it look like you're doing everything right?
Jesus Christ, but when you really get
down to the grit of it, when
you try to think about what it all really means

(sometimes)

you could swear you don't feel anything,
not a single thing at all and you're a
hypocrite, at least you know it but you're still a
goddamn hypocrite
and you don't pray before meals unless there's someone there to remind you and
sure, you say your prayers at night but it's just a script that runs on repeat
just the OCD again

and you left your Bible at home because you were trying to pack light and in fact you
tend to think the Old Testament is a little too full of its own shit and you
tend to think God was a real dick to poor Job and you're
secretly a little bit in love with Howard Roark and there are
so many contradictions that you actively overlook just to feel like

(sometimes)

a part of something.
What if that's it, then, what if you told them
you were scared of believing what you can't touch with your hands
and you mostly go to church just to be around other people and
you're meek just because of your chronic anxiety and
you're practicing abstinence by accident just because no one's ever wanted to
love you like that and you're lonely

(sometimes)

and these people are just the nicest people you
know but when they ask you what matters when you imagine your future husband and
they tell you it reveals the things you care about the most and when they ask you what
matters when you imagine your future husband and God barely grabs a foothold at the
bottom of your list.

well, what are you supposed to

Listen, you want to believe, you really want to believe,
but you suspect you might've gotten some wires crossed somewhere because

(sometimes)

you open your eyes during the Lord's Prayer and you think about how
God let Noah's sons live and his daughters die and you think about how

Eve was such a bad, bad girl for rejecting ignorance and you think about how religion tells us we have to suffer for grace and you

(sometimes)

wonder what in God's name you're doing in this place.

PROLIFERATIVE RETINOPATHY

Abigail Chiaramonte

Sheila got rid of all the mirrors when she turned sixty, so I hadn't seen myself in over a decade. She took off her makeup in the dark, but still leaned over the sink with intimacy, as if she could see her image reflected on the drywall. She felt me watching her and shut the door softly. The lights switched on. That woman spent eons in the bathroom. For me it was simple; I did my business, washed my hands, and exited. I had no idea what she could possibly be doing in there.

"Come to bed already," I said. I watched the strip of yellow light under the bathroom door. There was no sound of the toothbrush or the faucet or the toilet's flush.

"Just a minute," she said. Her voice was muffled.

"Do you want me to throw you a life preserver? You must've fallen in."

"Don't rush me, you old badger," she said, and laughed. That laugh had been famous in the fifties, when she was an actress. It was both innocent and entrancing.

The door swung open and she leaned against the frame in blue flannel pajamas. Sheila was thin for her age, and her little vertebrae resisted gravity, which urged her shoulders to arc. She flicked off the lamp on my nightstand—her saucy pinup girl movements were tempered by septuagenarian feebleness. We were in darkness. She got a pair of wool socks from the top drawer of our dresser. Our house was still cold in late February. I extricated myself from under the comforter and extended my feet.

"Did you take your insulin?" she asked. I nodded. Shadows masked her face as she pumped lotion into her hand and traced the blue veins from my ankle to my big toe. Her hands were warm—she rubbed hard to get my circulation flowing. My feet were hideous, but she touched them tenderly before easing the socks over my gnarled heels. Sheila sat on the edge of the bed, silent. A dim glow from the streetlights slipped through the closed blinds. We stayed that way for an interminable time.

"I don't want to see you anymore," she whispered.

"Sheila?"

"Don't be silly," she said. "Not like that."

"What the hell do you mean, then?" I said.

"Seeing you old makes me sad," she said. "I'm sure it's the same for you.

In my head, I'm twenty-five—I see you and I'm shocked that I'm married to an old man. Then I realize that I'm old too, and probably more decrepit-looking because three babies came out of this body. I'm going to die soon. And you remind me of

that.”

“I think you’re beautiful, Sheila.”

“I used to be,” she said. “And I knew it, more’s the pity. Vanity’s very unflattering on an old bird like me.”

“I’m the uglier of us,” I said. “And I’ll die first. I’m older, and I have diabetes.”

Her breath was ragged. I reached up to touch her cheek and found it wet. I poked her in the eye trying to wipe away the tears. She let out a strangled laugh and I pulled her into my arms.

“Well, we can’t do anything about it,” I said. “We already took down all the mirrors.”

“We can do things a little differently.” There was something in her voice—a tenuous epiphany, confidence wavering on desperation.

“Your old badger will do whatever you want,” I said.

She kissed my forehead and nestled close to me. I flicked on the light, picked up the newspaper from the nightstand, and turned to the horoscopes. This was our nightly tradition. Sheila said there was too much pressure if we read our horoscopes in the morning, but it was interesting to look before bed to see if they had any merit.

“Taurus,” I said. “That’s you. If you keep looking at your partner, you might turn to stone. Only a lifestyle change can remedy the situation.”

“You’re making all that up.”

“No, I’m not,” I said. “I can’t read the stars, just the paper.”

“What does yours say?” She leaned over to turn off my lamp again.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I can’t read in the dark.”

“You already read it,” she said.

“Old badgers aren’t beholden to the stars.”

“You’re impossible,” she said. “Goodnight.”

The next morning, Sheila went to the store and bought yards and yards of heavy black fabric—“It was on sale,” she said brightly. The sewing machine’s hum extended far past sunset. I sat, watching her thin fingers aid the endless sheets into the needle’s path. Her measurements and stitches were meticulous—the curtains would be perfect, uniform.

“Go unscrew the light bulbs,” she said.

“Why?”

“I don’t want people surprising me by switching the lights on.”

“I wouldn’t do that,” I said.

“If we’re going to do this, we need to do it right,” she said.

I took out all the light bulbs and lined them up on the floor of the closet,

behind the shoes. I punched grommets into the curtains and hung them from long metal rods. Barely any light slipped through. I made my way to the kitchen and sat at the head of the table.

“How’re we supposed to see anything?” I asked.

“That’s the point.” Sheila unplugged the sewing machine and coiled the cord that attached to the foot pedal.

“I’m going to bumble into things,” I said.

“No, you won’t,” she said. “We’ve lived in this house for decades. You know the layout by now. Coffee?”

Sheila whisked past me, humming a song from our youth. She took two mugs from the cabinet, filled them with tap water, and put them in the microwave.

“Thank you,” she said. “I think I’ll be a lot happier this way.”

I watched the mugs spin in slow circles. The microwave let out an ear-piercing ding and the rotation stopped. Sheila got the canister of instant decaffeinated coffee and put two spoonfuls in each cup.

“Milk or half and half?” she said.

“You know how I like it,” I said.

“You don’t need any sugar right now.”

“That doesn’t mean I don’t want it,” I said.

“How about a little liqueur instead? To celebrate.” She put a generous dash in each mug, then set the coffee on the table and herself on my lap.

“I love you, you old badger,” she said. Her lips were on my ear. I heard the rustle of clothes being adjusted. She took my hand and placed it on her breast.

Our home became a cave, but as the months elapsed I learned new ways to sense things: the yielding leather of my armchair, the grandmother clock’s relentless pendulum sway. I heard butterfly wings in Sheila’s breaths. She ran her fingers over my abdomen, injected my insulin, and kissed the site. We stopped reading horoscopes because we had taken the future into our own hands. The electricity bill dwindled. We put beeswax candles in empty spaghetti sauce jars and ate by their dim light. Each flickering glimpse of Sheila’s face was a moment to cherish.

We felt young; we played Marco Polo and cursed loudly and laughed when we knocked into furniture. She was once again the vivacious, charming starlet I had married. We made love for the first time in years and continued to regularly. Her skin felt like crumpled silk—darkness revitalized our marriage.

“It’s Tuesday,” Sheila said. “What was I going to put on the list?”

“We’re out of multivitamins.”

She cracked open the door of the refrigerator to assess what else we needed. Every Tuesday, she called the twenty-four hour supermarket and read off our list of groceries. We waited a half hour so the cashiers could gather all of our

items before heading to the store. I drove the old hatchback and Sheila sat in the passenger seat.

It was a balmy September evening. I took the back road because the streetlights on the main thoroughfare discomfited me. The horizon was mottled purple. I turned on my high beams and watched the black woods that bordered the road, afraid a deer would jump out. Sheila rolled her window down—the first chill was yet to come, but the leaves had started to turn. I parked in a dimly lit corner of the parking lot and left the car running.

“I’ll wait here,” Sheila said. I nodded and put on my sunglasses. The fluorescent lights were too damn bright in the store. A young cashier waved at me as I walked in. Her black hair hung over her shoulder in a long braid.

“Hey, Mr. Gooding,” the girl said. Her voice was surprisingly deep. I squinted. Her nametag read *Hello, my name is Narcisa*. “We’ve got your stuff here.”

“You recognized me?” I asked.

“You come in like every week at the same time.” She tugged at the end of the braid.

“That’s true, you’re a bright one.” I handed her my credit card for the groceries, and a five-dollar bill for a tip. She tried to hand the cash back to me, but I wouldn’t take it. “I’m sure you’re saving up for something special.”

I carried out two large brown paper bags. They were a little heavy and I lost my breath, but I mustered the energy to reach the car and put the groceries in the trunk.

Sheila patted my knee and warbled along with an old jazz song on the radio. She was a true soprano and relished hitting the high notes. I drove under the speed limit because I had a hard time seeing the median. Someone needed to put reflectors on the line. A car honked and passed me. That made me nervous, so I slowed even more. A few minutes later, I pulled into the driveway, and Sheila helped me bring in the groceries. I had tied a flashlight to the frame of the pantry so we could read the labels on our canned goods. Sheila struck a match on the counter and lit a candle.

“How about baked salmon for dinner?” she asked.

“If you cook it, the old badger will eat it.”

“Is this okay?” she asked.

“What?” I said.

“Everything. The lights. Us.”

The telephone rang and I picked it up.

“Gooding residence.”

“Hey, Dad!” It was our oldest daughter, Phoebe. Sheila started to dice an onion and my eyes stung. I was afraid she’d chop off a finger one day, but her movements were fluid and controlled.

“How’re you, Phoebe Peaches?” I said.

“Great,” came the response. “You know your birthday’s next week? Me and Carlos and the kids want to come over for dinner.”

“My birthday,” I said. “Well, I’ll be damned! You know I’m not allowed to do the planning. Let me put your mother on the phone.”

Sheila jabbered with Phoebe, the phone pinched between her face and her shoulder. Her voice rose. They argued.

“No, we will not go out,” Sheila said. “You know I hate restaurants. You really shouldn’t feel obligated to come.... He’s had seventy-five birthdays already, one more doesn’t matter.... It’ll be such a hassle for you to drive the girls all the way here.... Seriously, Phoebe. Don’t bother.” She paused for a while. “Phoebe wants to say goodbye.” Sheila handed me the phone. She started to set the table, slamming things.

“Dad,” Phoebe said. “Mom sounds a little off. Is she all right?”

“She’s just fine,” I said. “Don’t worry. We’re better than ever. We’re happy.”

“Okay. I’ll see you on Sunday at six-thirty. Love you.” She hung up.

I put the telephone in its cradle and the timer beeped. Sheila put on a pair of oven mitts and took out the pan. A wave of steam escaped the oven. We sat down to eat.

“The fish smells fishy,” she said.

“What’re we going to do, Sheila?” I asked. She chewed on a bite of salmon.

“Why should we have to change our routine for them?” she said.

“We can’t just have them over for dinner in the dark,” I said. I heard her fork scrape her plate.

“It’s your birthday, not Phoebe’s,” she said. “Let’s not let her ruin it.”

Before dawn on Sunday morning, I made a special trip to the supermarket alone. The roads were all hazy, steeped in fog. Carlos had celiac disease so we had to cook a gluten-free meal. Before Phoebe married Carlos, her second husband, I had never heard of gluten. I slipped on my sunglasses as I entered the grocery store and noted that I needed to clean the lenses; they were still covered with a film. The store seemed empty. My eyes were having a hard time adjusting to the fluorescent lights.

“This isn’t a Tuesday, Mr. Gooding,” said a familiar deep voice. The girl with the braid—Narcisa—was standing alone at the cash register. I walked up to her. She stifled a yawn. I wondered how long she had been working. It would be awful to stand in the piercing artificial light all night long.

“My daughter and son-in-law are coming to dinner,” I said. “And we need to cook something without gluten. Normally my wife does this sort of thing, but she wouldn’t make the list. She doesn’t want them to come over. They invited themselves.”

“Let me Google it,” she said, and pulled a cell phone from the pocket of her khaki pants. She punched the screen rapidly then waited, staring down at the little machine. “No bread or pasta or anything with flour,” she said. “You should maybe make steak and potatoes. And a salad with oil and vinegar.”

I pushed a buggy through the cold aisles and was overwhelmed. The store was too enormous. I couldn’t do it. Even with the sunglasses, my eyes hurt. I asked Narcisa to pick out the groceries for me—I just needed to sit down for a minute. I handed her my credit card and waited for my heart rate to return to normal on a bench outside the store. She came out with an armful of groceries and handed me a half-gallon jug of milk to carry. She wouldn’t let me take anything else. I stumbled on the curb and dropped the milk. The glass jug hit the asphalt and shattered.

“Oh, no!” said Narcisa. “I’ll get you another one, hold on.” She ran back into the store and returned with fresh milk. “You know we can deliver your groceries, if you want. Then you don’t have to drive out here.” She shut the trunk of the hatchback and shook my hand. I gave her a tip.

I spent the day in a daze. The doorbell rang promptly at six-thirty that evening. I lit more candles than normal and Sheila blew a few out in rebellion. I swung open the door, and my heart fluttered with anxiety.

“Daddy!” Phoebe hugged me with one arm. There was a large box in the other. “Happy birthday! We brought a gluten-free cake. It’s made with potato flour.”

“You know he can’t have sugar—Rose, you’re shooting up like a beanstalk!” Sheila rushed past me to hold Phoebe’s eldest daughter. I heard her kiss Rose’s cheeks loudly. Rose didn’t say anything. “And where’s baby Ana?” Sheila said. Ana came and hugged me. I noticed she had started wearing perfume.

“I’m not a baby,” said Ana.

“It’s so dark in here,” Carlos said. He flicked the light switch and nothing happened. “Your bulb is out!”

“It’s intentional,” Sheila said. “I heard on the radio that some restaurants serve food in complete darkness so you can fully concentrate on taste.” Phoebe snorted.

Carlos was teaching Rose Spanish. She named all of the items on the table: *ensalada*, *filete*, *tenedor*, *cuchillo*. Phoebe cut steak into tiny cubes for Ana and related the politics of the last PTA meeting. Apparently, the twelve-year-old didn’t yet cut her own meat. At the end of the meal, I stacked our plates and brought them to the kitchen. Phoebe intercepted me, took the dishes, grabbed the sponge, and turned on the sink.

“I know you don’t want to hear this,” Phoebe said. “But I think Mom has dementia.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” I snorted. She handed me a plate and I dried it with a towel. “Your mother is better than she’s been in years.”

“Dad, you’re living like moles. You’re human beings. You need light.”

“We are healthy,” I said, “and we are happy. And honey, it’s not your business.”

Sheila came in and scooped leftover potatoes into a Tupperware container. Phoebe didn’t say anything else. I think she was pouting.

“Carlos is on the couch. You should go talk about man things,” my wife said. Carlos was fidgeting; he always seemed uneasy in my presence. I eased into my armchair.

“How’s business going, son?” I said. I always tried to treat Carlos like part of the family, but I never liked him that much. He pulled Phoebe away from us. At least he wasn’t a gambler, like her first husband. He good-naturedly told a story about an office coworker who wanted to sell his house and live as a hermit in the woods. Rose made ludicrous interjections in Spanish and her stepdad laughed. We lapsed into silence.

Sheila came into the room and cleared her throat. Everyone started the opening refrain of the birthday song—*happy birthday to you*—and Phoebe came out with the cake. Somehow, she had squeezed seventy-six candles onto it—*happy birthday to you*—I was exposed to more light in that moment than I had been in months, and I didn’t have my sunglasses to protect my eyes. I looked to Sheila for help and realized I couldn’t define her features. My eyes were coated in something opaque—I could only see the dark regions of her eyes and her pink mouth.

“I can’t see,” I said. “I can’t see anything.” My family stood around me, frozen. Wax dripped from the candles onto the cake. Rose blew them out. It took several frenzied exhales. I sat in my armchair, shaking. I couldn’t see. Sheila took my face in her palms and leaned her forehead against mine.

“Are you all right?” she whispered. “Talk to me, old badger.”

“Nothing’s wrong,” I said. “I just can’t see anything.”

“I’m calling an ambulance,” said Phoebe, the phone already on her ear. Ana burst into tears and wailed, “Is Grandpa dying? Is Grandpa dying?”

“Don’t be silly,” I said. “Hang up the damn phone. I’m fine. Dr. Harper can come check me out tomorrow.” Phoebe lowered the phone. “Just let me eat a damn slice of cake.”

Sheila cut everyone a portion. It was a chocolate-frosted angel food cake that smelled deceptively delicious—the texture was all wrong. I chewed until my mouth got dry and had to have some milk. When I gulped it down, I was afraid the spongy mass would get stuck in my esophagus. Phoebe tried to invite herself to spend the night, but Sheila sent her home. Carlos protested halfheartedly. I locked the door behind them and unbuttoned my pants. I took off my socks and lay on the bed, listening to the grandmother clock’s steady beat. The metronomic pulse was interrupted by Sheila’s light footsteps and the mattress creaked when she sat down beside me. She traced her soft, cool fingertips over my scalp.

“What happened there?” she asked. She was trying not to sound con-

cerned.

"It was like I was looking through wax paper," I said.

"Do you need a better glasses prescription? Bifocals?"

"I don't think so," I said. "I looked at you, but you weren't just out of focus. It's hard to explain."

"Has it been like that a lot lately?" she said. Her fingertips moved down to the base of my skull. I realized I had been staring into darkness and closed my eyes.

"I think I was just disoriented because it was bright," I said. "But to be honest, I haven't been looking at anything. Even when I'm driving—I know the roads so well I don't need to see."

"I'll ask Dr. Harper to come over tomorrow," Sheila said.

"No."

"Don't be stubborn, old badger." She squirted lotion into her palm and rubbed my feet. It tickled when her fingers separated my toes.

"I don't want to, Sheila," I said. "It'll be bad news. They'll want to give me some crazy surgery I don't want and we can't afford. And he'll tell me to exercise more and cut out coffee and absolutely no desert. I can't exercise—I'm old! I like cake, not that shit cake, real cake. With flour. And I think I deserve a damn cup of coffee with it." I was shouting, terrified. Sheila kissed my ear.

"All right," she whispered. "No doctor."

I was exhausted. The grocery store trip that morning seemed like decades ago. My mind was restless, but my body was exhausted. Sheila's weight lifted from the bed. The door bathroom door closed with a quiet click. A few minutes later, she came out. She slipped between the sheets and curved her body around mine so I was the little spoon. Her warmth made me relax.

"Happy birthday, old badger," she whispered.

It was hot when I woke up. The room was full of sunlight and the bed was soaking up the heat. Sheila had opened the curtains. I could only see blobs of color. It was like looking too closely at an impressionist painting.

I went into the hallway. The whole house was illuminated; all the windows were exposed. It smelled like Sheila was cooking poached eggs and bacon. I heard the fat sizzle in the kitchen.

"Sheila!" I yelled. "Why'd you open the windows?"

"Can you see?" she asked. "If there's more light, can you see?"

I looked at her. She was composed of shades and shadows. I shook my head.

"I don't think so," I said. "But it's all hunky dory. I don't want to look at you anyway, remember? Ruins the illusion. You're a seventeen-year-old up here." I patted my temple. "I'm a naughty old badger."

She laughed and flipped a strip of bacon.

“Well if you think so well of me, I certainly don’t want to destroy that image. But you should get checked out eventually.”

The phone rang.

“Gooding residence,” I said as I picked up the phone.

“Dad,” said Phoebe. “I’ve done some research online, and it looks like you might have something called retin—”

“That’s exactly what Dr. Harper said!” I lied.

“Oh, God. It’s really serious,” said Phoebe’s voice. “Do you want me to call Alex and Bethany? What are you going to do?”

“Nothing. But we’ve got brunch on the table. Love you, Phoebe Peaches.” I disconnected the line.

“That was brilliant!” said Sheila.

“Thank you,” I said. “But I think this would be a little more romantic if we shut the curtains.”

We went through the house together, re-closing all the curtains. Our house was comfortable again. Sheila struck a match and lit a single candle. I divvied up the eggs and bacon between two plates. We ate in companionable silence. Sheila reached across the table to hold my hand.

(THIS, AND MISANTHROPY.)

Inga Lynn

when soft internal parts are exposed, new creatures
 emerge—forming a passage back to being. It seems
 very reasonable, contemplation rolling back the harsh
 covering that builds like an over-waxed floor. What remains?
 (tender spirit, connecting tissue, and dreams) The fog
 is a protective coating; sand peels back in aggregate
 of diversified strata, and I am left to wonder—when
 I was a child and could still fly, it always took so much
effort. The hardest part was losing that connection
 to Earth: broken bond a bit like a leaf as it gains
 momentum, ready to spiral out of control at last glance.

(FLOAT)

Laura Moffat

His drowning was a blip. A ripple. One pulled thread in a thousand-count cotton sea.

* * *

the hugeness of water
shattered—brittle—at the start
of skin; like a snowfield
glowing soft and whole
that frays in the instep
of footprints.

IN THE FOREST

There is something
in the way Green Mountains,
tarnished by spring,

pull clouds
from the sky

that suggests dragons.

7 WEIRD TRICKS FOR A FLAT BELLY

Johnathan Harper

1. A car compactor.
2. Eat hawk talons without chewing—digest while standing on your head.
3. Make a grilled cheese. Use provolone and muenster and when the bread is a perfect golden brown slice it in half and drink in the sight of oozing cheese.
4. Write love letters to your exes on parchment paper. Eat the paper. Write hate letters to your exes on your belly. Press your belly so flat it fits in an envelope and mail the letters.
5. Kill bees and steal their pollen. The cum of roses is your diet.
6. Hate your belly so completely it shrinks away from your glaring.
7. Love your belly so much it expands until it fills the gym you work out at. Love it so fully that it suffocates the trainers and ape-armed weightlifters. Love it so completely it bowls over your town and the next over. Love your belly so incredibly the Earth is gently pushed aside. There is so much love in your belly it begins to fuse hydrogen into helium. Love your belly so fantastically it goes supernova and reminds everyone caught in the blast that we're the dust of stars.

INDIANS

Bryan Washington

About an hour after my last game as an Indian, my cheek found the tiles of a toilet stall at IHOP. I'd told Beverly and her friends I had to take a leak.

There weren't any tears at first. Just a hot red flush in the toes. It rose to the abdomen, and then the cheeks, and then all the water I'd held for seventeen years spat itself right out of my face.

I figured they thought I was shitting. Kathy hadn't even brought the pancakes out. But I was already thinking the rest of my natural born would mimic the cool eggshell squares beneath me.

The door opened. Some unlaced loafers ran the tap.

We were supposed to lose. That hadn't made losing easier. The Eagles were bigger than us, blacker. Their running back, this All-Everything prospect, got interviewed by the news station that Monday. He took the blonde's microphone in mid-accolade. He told her, the cameraman, his class of some seven hundred students in the auditorium, the recruiters at Tech, State, North, and everyone else tuned in that the Cromwell High Indians had been extinct for a while now.

"Bitches is done," he'd decreed. Popped his gum on the final consonant.

It became the week's mantra.

Running the water hose over bruises between scrimmages, "Bitches is *done*."

A receiver whose screen fluttered just beyond his fingertips? "Bitch, *that was done*."

Chancing a piss in the grass behind a huddle, we gaggled back to the practice field, "*Bitch*, I've just done."

Crackle started it. He was the guy who'd started things.

Crackle, whose birth name was Craig, for the muffled pittance he claimed to hear when he made his cuts. Leaning into the dirt like a seismologist. Jouncing away like a memory submerged. And then again, as if it'd resurfaced. And then a final time, because this was when you heard it, the linebacker's fractures loud enough for the sideline to wince, prompting this ungodly groan from the stadium, the kids watching on their parents' sofas, the girlfriends palming their cardboard signs.

Crackle was short and stocky and fast as shit.

Hearing the prophecy onscreen, he simply burped in response. Like a burst thought

bubble. I wallowed in it, tried to breathe it up.

We watched the interview in our locker room. Nat, cross-legged on the next bench, nudged the fleece against my thigh. He'd started at right guard since our freshman year.

"That's *you*," he whispered.

I nodded, neither confirming nor denying.

But it really was. Facing a dual trap zone, both receivers lined up at a two and a one on either side; some flaking man coverage, against foot speed we never seemed to account for; or what Coach McKins deemed a STEP UP AND FUCKING KILL THE SUM'BITCH. He'd be my man. Like my entire tenure at safety served as requisite for one punk. In infancy we'd been the same size, just as athletic.

I wasn't all that great. It took the threat of rapture for our squad to keep it to themselves. Leaking a hint to the obvious truth might wash the entire team away.

And you couldn't blame them. I forgot reads on the receiver like our cheerleaders forwent condoms. Sometimes on the field I just disappeared. Started thinking about other things.

Like my job at Amul's. Or the fact that everyone on the field could've been drafted thirty years ago. Or how you couldn't hear the cheering after four months on the turf.

What I excelled at was fucking up. But every once in a while, I'd catch the quarterback's eye. Pick his brain.

After Jacoby fluttered a pass to some happenstance corner.

Or when the back split an ungodly cut, some beautiful misstep to leave the nose guard praying, just long enough for him to coast past the line and into the pastures behind it.

I'd meet him there. Right at the gate of the barn. Close enough to hear the snoring pastor's daughter, maybe the trickle of spittle drooping from her favorite mare. I'd shut the door on his nose like a punched ticket. A hunchback waiting behind the wood.

Some days I could hit and I could catch and I could run. They'd try to get up and I'd straddle their chin straps. Like a tornado in the prairie. Like a fireball in a storybook.

But we never talked about that either. I figured at some point it'd just stop.

Rosenberg isn't very big and everyone hears everything. We've got gas stations and liquor stores and a high school and a grocery store and I bagged cabbage every Sunday for three years before I'd been promoted to supervisor.

I worked with Adrian Remy. He didn't go to Cromwell. Being short and pale and infatuated with Ibsen gave us nothing in common, but neither of us could stand the clientele. We both wanted to get out of town. He'd applied for a theatre fellowship in San Antonio.

I didn't care where the fuck I went. He figured I'd do well in Austin.

"You just look it," he said, "I mean, like you'd fit in."

Amul Sathe owned the store. He trusted us to close it. Left the storage lock with Adrian and the entrance key with me. The neighborhood wasn't enthused with his surname, but he sold the freshest halibut you could find short of Houston.

I told him it was the nicest insult I'd heard in a while. We were mopping behind the checkout aisles.

"I thought they're fucking hippies."

"They're a little liberal," said Adrian. "But look at your frame of reference."

He disappeared to change the music over the intercom. Outside of business hours, Amul's speakers received their most rigorous workouts: Adrian treated them to bands I only heard in his company. He whistled back to the tune of a banjo.

I asked him who it was. He told me.

"Why're they all named after animals?"

"Because there's so many," he said. "Besides, they're not all—"

"Bears and Cats and Foxes and Monkeys."

"What about The Smiths?" he said, "You liked them."

"That's great. One out of twenty."

"You're just being obsequious," he said, leaning over the counter. He laughed when he saw my face.

"And I'm not going to tell you. Look it up."

Saturday mornings I ate with Nat. There's a McDonalds behind the field house. Far enough to avoid the rest of the team, close enough to jog back if we got shit for it.

I couldn't hold a biscuit. I'd finger my hash-brown in a booth behind the register while Nat scarfed his pancakes, our orange juices, an oatmeal, some chocolate milk, a fruit cup, four potato tacos, two biscuits, and half a sandwich. We slouched against the window, turning as the door opened to, *Nope, Never mind*, return to the cellophane sprawled before us.

"*I have always wanted to be near it*," he'd start, "*Though the day is long (and I don't mean Madison Avenue)*."

Nat was six foot three, two hundred and sixty pounds. He benched over four hundred, squatted around eight, and, in walk-throughs, had taken to dislocating the shoulders of junior varsity over achievers he'd felt had adequately over achieved. He'd resigned from the Honors Society with no intention of reapplying ("When they find me a fucking gown that *fits*"), served on French Table, and wrote an absurdist

column for the school paper, riffing on our instructor's diminishing salaries right along with lunch servers without gloves. I'd sifted through his articles for the past two years, seen him drop bear sized juniors on their eardrums.

McKins made it known he'd sit his ass for the season if he weren't so god-dam big.

To which Nat would smile, "But coach, I just *can't control it*".

He'd had the honor of being anointed Crackle's nigga. Heralded as he shook the tape from a corner's nose, or, even rarer, after he'd stumbled halfway through a pull, tripping Craig in the backfield.

"Nat, man, he'll pick a bitch up, man!" he'd shout. "That nigga Nat don't give a *fuck*!"

And he didn't.

"How're things with you and the girl?" he asked between mouthfuls.

The sun was starting to seep through the pane, giving clarity to a rice sunken abyss. There'd been a time when the land felt clogged as a plantation, all swollen palms and greenery. I've seen pictures.

"She's not my girl."

"Then you must be her girl."

I told him I could give a fuck.

"I can only imagine," he said, rubbing his belly, "All evidence to the contrary. All plaintiffs on the table."

Her name was Beverly Clarkson, Jr. Assistant cheerleading captain, probable salutatorian, Young Life chair, future Aggie. In a year's time she'd end up pulling mission work in Haiti, spooning Tylenol to toddlers. In the interim she'd made me her mission, forking what she could whenever we did.

"It's not a bad thing," said Nat. "Starter like you. People'd probably take you for a fag otherwise."

He'd all but cleared his side of the table. I told him that it wasn't like he had a girlfriend. Nat shrugged. Said No, it really wasn't.

We watched the lobby congest with early risers. Fading fathers in team sweatshirts, mothers with caps, and toddlers jostling their knees. The town was blinking itself awake.

In an hour or so, this place would be packed. The diner beside it would be packed. The chatter of too many families fueled them until roads began to dim, street lights and stop signs and porch lamps, sustaining pandemonium until they took their seats in the stadium. There they were jolted by drum sticks on tarmac, below a jumbo-tron donning sponsors and starters and statistics.

I watched some kid tug at his shorts. His mother asked which toy he wanted with his pancakes.

Our table jumped as Nat rose like the whale from the water.

"*My heart*," he hummed, "*Is in my pocket*."

Last season's safety watched from the stands. Octavius Benedict still put in his appearances at the after game parties, the parties after the after game parties, and the inevitable kick-backs at Lilly Mae's ranch house, but he'd been booted from the roster for violating team policy. Octavius, Denton (starting cornerback, 5'7", 4.65 dash time), Ellis (wide receiver, 5'11", 4.52 dash), Avery (mic. line-backer, 5'10", 4.82 dash), and Crackle were spotted blowing pot rings in the field house's parking lot. Far enough away from campus to dodge a citation, but too close to the holy grounds for a complete overlooking.

Still, it would have been unreasonable to penalize them all.

The assistant coaches congregated. They drew charts. Chewed pencils to the nub as yards to the carry, tackles to the quarter, and reels from spring practices were revisited ad infinitum.

The final verdict was that Octo could be replaced.

McKins ran the shit out of everyone else. Gassers until Avery vomited from dehydration, and then, *PHWEET*, another four for good measure.

Crackle kept his leer for the duration. Heaving, but never bending over. Always the first on the line. He claimed to have split his recovery Gatorade with a joint afterwards.

But then there was the immediate predicament of a defensive replacement. McKins deemed the safety no less significant than The Forgotten Soldier. After Crackle concocted a spin move that delivered Carlton Michael's facemask into the grass, my name was gargled from the sideline.

I couldn't find my gloves. I'd taken to stuffing them in nooks by the water tank- in the holder, beneath the wheels, on the lapel. It gave me something to do. A trainer had wheeled it away for the offense. Gloveless, I gagged to the huddle.

McKee asked where the fuck I'd been, did I know the current scheme. "22 zone split?"

The huddle groaned.

McKee called it a Jesus fucking shame he couldn't just send me home. After branding me with the correct scheme (23) I hit the field for the first time that day, that fall.

It took months of pimping parents before the district installed turf practice fields. It clung to your heels like moss. I felt like a caterpillar on the dissection dish.

Avery told me to move my ass back. I did. Denton asked where the fuck I thought I was going. Jacoby grunted the count as I shuffled to the strong side, the wrong side, and every atom on the field began its uncomplimentary dance. Through the ruckus I saw Crackle wheel behind the center for what looked like a screen.

It was a screen. He caught the ball. Jittered behind the first tackle and the backer behind him. Cut back towards the opposite side of the play's design, the sideline I'd gravitated towards.

I remember thinking how beautiful it must have looked. Some twenty odd guys between the lines, around fifty on the grass. Everybody from a different extremity of the socio-economic spectrum. Bloodied shades of white, gray, charcoal black. All of us trying to figure something out. Maybe not succeeding. But at least attempting, quantifying some incalculable equation each of us thought we'd have the answer to.

I just wanted to melt in it. And then I wanted to destroy it.

Crackle was at an arms-length. He loved a show. There'd been instances on easy runs, clear scores, where he'd run into interference for the sake a move, a cry from the audience. Something he did was plant both feet in the turf one way, start the other, and then (because the defender just knew he'd go back, he *had* to go back) sink so deep into the turn he'd have to push himself forward. And after he'd done this trick, this gymnastic *thing* determined at birth, he'd cackle.

He'd just dipped his fingers when I grabbed his chest plate. I felt his skin beneath the fabric between my thumbs. It was smooth. I picked him up and I turned him and I dropped him on his head.

I'd hardly unclenched before the trainers were upon us. The assistant coaches, McKee, most of the defense, and damn near all of the linemen were on my back. Prying me away, pulling at Crackle's helmet to get him some air, some oxygen, and *WHERE'S THE FUCKING WATER*.

It felt like I'd fallen into hell, been ambushed by angels. I saw a glove peeking from the tank as it rolled beside me. Everyone jostled and no one listened and Nat howled like a kid on Christmas morning.

Adrian congratulated me on entering the annals of shithead lore. I watched him flip through bills in the register, sorting and folding.

"You're being an asshole."

"Best I can do," he said, "I don't see how you guys do it."

The Fort Bend Herald published the statewide playoff bracket that morning. The store's front windows sported a rough stencil by Amul, layered several times over with whiteboard markers. He'd highlighted Cromwell in red, white, and orange.

"I mean, you sweat out there for weeks on end so you can do it again the next week. It's like your ends enslave the means."

"Try again in English."

"I don't think I will. If you haven't gotten it yet, there's nothing I can contribute."

I kicked the register shut.

"Fuck off," he said. "How're you and Beverly?"

She'd dropped in on me at work once, several pages of lists in hand. It took two minutes to print her receipt.

"As well as anyone can be with her."

He stopped filing to look me square on.

"She's very pretty."

"Thanks for your condolences."

"I don't know what that means," he said, filing again.

"It means that it's hard enough coexisting beside her without commentary."

Adrian transferred a pile of twenties into a plastic bag. He tossed it to me and I zipped it shut.

"Like she's overshadowing you."

"Like she's *eating* me," I said. "From the inside out."

"You didn't have to tell me that."

I told him that he was a freak, did he have the cassette he'd promised me.

"In the office," he said. "You know, people don't really do that anymore. It's a little antiquated."

"They're just being obsequious."

I caught the first bag he threw but the second hit me on the ear. A third on the shoulder, a fourth. The fifth burst over the counter.

Adrian bent to snag the loose bills. I said there wasn't anything funny about it.

For all of its fireworks, Rosenberg slept on a stoic's bedspread. Nat and I stalked the road from the restaurant to the field house. A mini-van flew by brandishing our colors. The woman driving waved.

"Cheerleader. Class of 1974."

"Too old. Mother of a thirty year old accountant."

"Played right flank."

"Left wheel."

"Shit. Publications secretary."

"Started on the bench."

"Back up bench. Second from the left corner."

"If he'd started he'd have been driving."

I waved back. Nat grunted.

The road sat by an expanse of flat land. Dead for as far as you could see without binoculars and only semi-conscious further still. The stadium sat directly adjacent to campus. About a five-minute walk. Teams from all over drove hours for the renovated locker rooms, adorned with the personalities of a platoon of microwave ovens. They drove for our enclosed stadium. They drove for the bodies in our stands. They drove to usurp our turf (manicured every week, twice a week by Remi Martinez' father) under lights that blinded. We tattered it for four hours a day, most days a month.

Some nights we just sat in the stands, letting the orchestra of mosquitoes

flex their oeuvre as we tried to make sense of the yardage. Laid sprawled on the silver like flags at half-mast, leaking Budweiser down our throats. Someone would point towards some patch of the field: the spot where Jacoby completed his first varsity pass (to the other team); the sideline where Crackle took the only body hit of his four year career. Then we'd pass the bottle back, stuffed and stifled, blinking back the space between our eyes' lids. It all felt as if there were some prophecy in our throats we'd forgotten to utter, and we made silent resolutions to sit until we could connect the syntax. Some of us were better at articulating than others (Nat called it a "shit coated blessing"), but each of us was only privy to his own piece, making it impossible to conjure the entire puzzle. And in this way we made a drunken jigsaw.

I'd brought Beverly once. I wanted to see if it was the same with someone else. She'd said she liked the idea. She'd gotten dressed up for it.

It was nice at first. I'd just felt the tug of the stadium's center mass before she said that she wanted to fuck. Right there in the stands. I don't think I meant the look I gave her.

"It's just an idea," she said, after a minute. "Other people do it."

"Well." I said.

I told her that it didn't work that way. It would've been like beating off behind a pulpit. She'd just come back from someone's party, entering that bleak interim before the interrelated invitation to another. She asked again and we tried and it didn't work.

Nat and I nursed our six-packs in the front row. The Indians had successfully avoided the playoffs for twenty-four years. Every evening we'd played for the past three weeks should have been our last, which made every dawn we'd still contended an anomaly in itself.

We had plans afterwards. He asked me how I felt about mine. I told him.

"But everybody forgets everything, eventually," he said, after a while. "Say we win this fucking game, and then the next one. Say we win State. We'll have done something. This thing we've never done before."

He chewed his tongue.

"But other kids have. And they'll keep doing it afterwards." He threw a can onto the field.

"And then it'll be over. And we'll just end up doing something else."

I tried a couple things out in my head. When he passed the pack, I took it from him, killing the rest of it.

The weekend of our first playoff win floated on coke and rum. Crackle found himself so high Saturday evening that the prospect of Sunday simply eluded him. Others trickled into cognizance only hours before their church services.

We'd been down by three with twelve minutes left when Denton punched the ball loose from a receiver all but on the spread of next morning's paper. The pigskin plodded over an assortment of gloves.

It fell into mine. I fell onto it.

Crackle ran 89 yards up the middle of the field the next play. On our next possession he took it from 74. The euphoria felt like being shat out of a pigeon.

Amul held a sale on ribs Sunday morning. It was the busiest crowd we'd seen in weeks. Every third patron gave me a second look, toddled over, asked who I was. When I offered confirmation, they extended their hands.

Thing y'did.

'Storic for the class.

Mem'ries.

Frrever.

Adrian tried playing one of his mixes over the intercom. After a third complaint he was told to shut it down. Between the hung over busboys and a broken register there was hardly time to glance at the clock. We'd nearly cleared out when he caught me by the belt.

He'd cut his hair. He said congrats.

"Doesn't that go against your ethics?"

"Sure," he said, "But everyone else thinks it's a good thing. Peer pressure, you know."

Then he was whisked away by a woman waving her purse at the window. Remi's mother, Luisa Martinez. She'd noted that Amul's bracket was outdated. Adrian thanked her for telling him, promised to fix it as soon as he could. He sauntered back inside, shaking his head.

I waved outside. Adrian frowned.

"Fucking fascists."

"Hey," I said, "That's not what you'd said a minute ago."

"There's what you say and there's what you mean."

"True 'dat." I clicked the register.

"I've got good news too," he said. "Trinity's offering room and board."

On the strength of a script he'd sent them over the summer, some mish-mash about a hick town, they'd finally come around to warming up. He wouldn't get the money until the opening term but they'd offer him a room in May. He'd take it in April.

"Brilliant," I said. "You'll bring your monologues to the masses."

I walked to the wall to shut off the service lights. I negotiated some shopping carts from behind the dairy freezer. A lone canister of eggs sat unbidden on a cereal shelf. Coupons littered the aisles.

Stalking back to the register, he asked what my problem was. He'd stopped

bundling.

"I mean, it just sounds like you're putting on."

"I don't have a problem." I said. "I'm happy for you."

"You're being facetious."

"What?"

"Sarcastic." He uncrossed his arms. He re-crossed them.

"An asshole, I mean. I wouldn't have told you if I—"

"Adrian." I grabbed his wrists. "I'm extremely proud of you. You should take the offer."

He was very quick about it. He had grape juice on his tongue.

I took a step back and looked at him. His eyes were wide. Not like a deer's, but like the kid who's just hopped on her bike, realizing half-way down the road that the training wheels were missing.

I'm not sure what I wanted to do and I'm not sure what he wanted to do but what we both did was jump at a clunk against the window.

Remi's mother pointed at the bracket.

Adrian asked what her fucking problem was, didn't she have places to be.

The cacophony preluding Monday's practice entered its second movement: of ankles being taped, straps being buckled, face masks re-aligned, gloves soaked, dried, and soaked again for maximum mental consolidation. In the training room, Crackle stooped with a heating pack on his back. Silently.

I asked him why.

He didn't even look up. I was on my way back through the door when he asked if I wanted to know a secret.

"TCU called," he said. "They want another win."

I told him this was great news, how did he feel about it.

He squinted.

"None of you niggas get it," he said, sighing.

Nat poked his head through the doorway, clad in shoulder pads and sandals. He said that McKee was waiting on me, would rupture my esophagus, would burst through the adjacent wall if I weren't in his office instantaneously. I looked at Crackle, who'd already descended into himself. At Nat, who'd disappeared.

The office had a desk, a lamp, and a laptop. Three were shared by each of the assistant coaches. Their conference room was adorned with Indian paraphernalia beside bobble heads from the boyhood gods of Cowboy, Redskin, Eagle, Patriot, Seahawk, Beaver, Titan, Gator, Raider, Sooner, Cowboy (of Oklahoma State), and Aggie lore, along with personalized cluster fucks of sticky notes stuffed in bulging folders. The Longhorns were noticeably absent from the papyrus, having been McKee's prior employment. His office had two chairs.

The lights were off. He told me to sit. I sat.

McKee's cheek grizzled as if by will alone. The tan line from his shades reared around his scalp. Fingers folded. He said nothing and stared and finally sighed.

"You work for the Arab," he said. I curled my toes.

He asked me how that was going. I told him it was alright. When he said nothing, I added that it was nice having some cash flow, something else to cheer about.

He nodded.

"I guess it would be."

His expression hadn't changed. He asked what my plans were for the fall. I said something about Austin.

"And you'll work for a grocer's there, too. If you can find one."

"Yes," I said, "Wherever there's food to be bought."

He did not laugh. The menagerie of assistant coaches shuffled on the other side of the door, slipping jackets on and off, twisting hats. They spoke in hushes.

"And Beverly," he asked. "That girl you're seeing?"

He paused, as if waiting for an affirmation that I did not give.

"Will she be following you?"

"She might," I said.

McKee sighed, slipping his hand on his cheek. Decades molded his brow.

"There's something I wanted to ask you," he said. "But I think I already know the answer."

The last of the stragglers began to shuffle out. He asked me if I was taped, hydrated. When I said yes to neither, he told me to handle it.

I asked him if I needed to shut the door. He told me to get the fuck out.

Saturday came. After we'd gotten taped and dressed, discovered the pieces of uniform we'd either forgotten or loaned, requisitioned them from the supply office or offending party, stolen the mouth pieces, screws, and laces we'd been denied, fallen in and out and through several layers of unconsciousness, and been corralled by the squealing of lacquered socks on tile, we found ourselves standing in the hallway outside the locker room, backpacks slung, shoulder pads housing helmets laced in fingers lining our thighs. No one spoke. We waited.

I looked for Crackle in the mass, accidentally brushing eyes with Denton. He grimaced. A door opened and McKee stepped out of it tailed by his assistants. We all stood there. Some praying and others not. All of us feeling everything and nothing and the same thing.

McKee asked what the hell we were waiting for. Someone opened the door.

Applause scattered. A mob had assembled on the grass outside of the field house, adorning it with a bounce house, coolers, grills, lawn chairs, pick-ups,

and skin. What began as a minor convoy had grown into a representative from every household, so that by the time we'd won the second round McKee had had to cordon a walkway. They seeped through it still, waving hands and Coors and goodwill like streamers.

McKee made something like a smile and we followed suit. Crackle scowled. Nat shuffled several players behind me, plastered from ear to ear. Someone's father offered him a beer and he declined in French ("*Mais merci*").

Hangman's luck pushed me to the outer limits of the shuffle. After someone acknowledged that they'd spotted the junior varsity stud who'd grown some balls, I received my fair share of name calling. I made the face I thought sufficed.

A cheerleader sprang from behind a wall of children. The crowd oohed, and then they were all there, freshman, j.v. and varsity squads, flipping and grinding and Goooling and when I made eye contact with Beverly I swear to god I heard her say "hmpf". And then I was pushed further along the train of bodies, along until we'd passed the outer reaches of the mob.

By the time we'd made it onto the road towards the buses, only the junior high kids were left. We gave them high fives and they asked after Crackle, *CRACKLE*, *POP*, *ZOWIE*, skipping in circles until the last of us made it on the bus. McKee stepped off and then on again. He shut the door.

We heard the entrails of celebration behind us. When someone said to close the goddam windows we did. Then it was just us. Remi said "finally", and Desmond asked "what the shit that was supposed to mean," and then half the bus deadpanned that "bitches was done," and then Nat said "meaning was relative to the beholder unless," and then Crackle yelled for everyone to close their cunts.

Then we were silent. McKee asked if everyone was on the bus. When no one answered, he started the engine.

I wiped my face and checked my watch. No one had entered a stall since I'd detached myself from the tile.

Beverly hadn't sent anyone in after me. I looked in the mirror for the thing that had changed. I didn't see it. I ran the faucet.

They'd all but eaten their platters. Kathy brought the bill. Beverly preferred a booth by the entrance. Close enough to lay a hand on everyone's shoulders, offer her condolences, and she'd done just that. We were sitting with another cheerleader and her fuck buddy, some guy named Barry or Brad.

Beverly asked if everything came out alright. The booth tittered. I knew this was the last dinner we'd share together and I smiled.

The IHOP was packed. There was no standing room. Out of what must have been respect for the seniors, the evening began silent enough. The crowd had grown. A scattering of parents filed in, and then the drunks took their places along the wall, bottles in jackets, and suddenly it had become just another night. It hadn't

even been an hour. We'd already been forgotten.

Beverly's friend asked me how it, like, felt. I stuffed my face with an omelet and thanked them for waiting on me.

Beverly said it was a tragedy, a town-wide tragedy. It was understandable if I was pissed. She said I had every *right* to be, we'd made it so *far*, and wasn't that guy an *asshole*, the one that'd been on television, tossing the ball when he'd flown into the end zone that last time, or was it the second to last.

Brad or Barry confirmed it was the last.

Crackle disappeared after we made it back to the field house, lighter clicking on his way through the door. The rest of the team milled about. Exchanging sopping hugs, exchanging handshakes with favorite coaches. McKee stood in the doorway, patting seniors on the back, rubbing the heads of sophomores and juniors on their way up the ranks. He left his post when a booster called him from the lawn. He didn't come back.

I sat by my locker until Nat limped out of the shower. The footslaps of stragglers rose and fell around us. When he slipped into his polo I asked him how he felt about the whole thing. My toe had already begun to mold around a casing of blood. I picked at it.

Nat said that he hadn't really thought about it yet.

"I mean, assuming there's anything to think about."

The door opened again. A shrill of voices exploded until it shut. I tried picking Beverly's out of the crowd.

I asked him if he was going back to the stadium later on. He said he hadn't gotten the chance to think about that either. I told him I thought it was something to do. One more time before the lights went out.

He said they'd probably been off for a while.

I'd tried a couple things out in my head, dissolving all of them. I picked at my toe.

I told Beverly to pass me the syrup. She did, fingers handling the ladle like a secret. She asked if I had plans were for the evening before amending her question to *what* they were, because Denton's parents were in Oklahoma or Atlanta and he'd have the house to himself, at least until everyone got there.

"Unless," she added, "You've got work or something."

The syrup congealed around the plate.

I listened for the sound of impact.

It soaked everything.

I looked for my reflection, but it was too thick. I figure I'm the first person who's ever tried to do that.

OUR FLOODED STREET THAT SUMMER

Jeremy Windham

We sit under the awning in broken lawn chairs
as the last round of showers lifts from the earth
to leave a modest creek in place of our street.

When our neighbors lead their children
to the water's edge and coax the smallest boy
to wade in after his sisters for playtime,

my cousins and I follow suit, peel off our socks
and parade like ducks into opaque waters swirling
with dead leaves, broken twigs, and sediment.

The mother yells, "*Ten cuidado*," to her kids
and smiles at us from the sidewalk. I wave back
then cringe as a drowned bird brushes past my elbow

and drifts down the weak current, wings splayed,
headed for the gorged mouth of an overflowing sewer.

THE BODIES OF US

J. Relihan

Science tells me I am a lake,
 albeit a small one,
 complete with mermaids and restless
 earth. My sediments move
 in waves, preserving dinosaurs
 in their merciful mud.

(I am always a basin.

Never a monolith)

Craters form, but
 a lake swallowed is merely
 another lake.

CONCERNS, 3 AM

Josh Dolph

To wend is not to go
But to have went is to have gone

If unicorns aren't real then why do we have words for them?
You just can't explain that
You can't just explain that

FROM THUNDER TO SILENCE

Mark A. Mangelsdorf

Ten.

There was thunder in the mountain, and we were disoriented in the dark. We couldn't see each other. We couldn't hear. Only touch. And smell. The smell of smoke and burnt flesh. It was Jim. We all thought it. He was closest to the dynamite.

The world was a flipbook with black, vacant pages and white noise. *Am I dead?* We all thought it as we scrambled in the dirt. When we found each other, we smiled though no one could see our blackened teeth. We stared at each other without eyes and yelled without the ability to hear: "What's happened?" We maintained touch because it was all we had to grasp the world with, and I thought of naked mole rats and I thought this must be the sum of their existence. Then, I thought of graves and my brother. We always had so much in common.

Nine.

I associated the blast of gunshot with the smoke. I figured it was something atmospheric because the sound made me think of air splitting. The next time I heard something that loud was twenty-five years later in a mine in Georgetown, Colorado; it sounded like the clap of God.

Franky showed me how to reload it and bragged of how many "Confederate Bastards" he'd kill. I said, "You'll get some kind of reward, or something." Then he told me that louder was always better, that it was manly to be loud, so I screamed at the top of my lungs, and he laughed. "Looks like you're quite the man, Henry!" And I smiled.

The next time I saw my brother, a month after the Union's victory, I had to dig into the earth to find him. When my nails finally peeled back some flakes of cold skin, I felt reality reestablish itself, and I panicked. I covered him back up and sat there in the dirt, exhausted, trying to control my shaking hands.

Eight.

Boulders rolled and crashed. We rediscover our sense of hearing just as Fletcher's bones shattered under rock.

When the air settled, King lit an oil lamp and we could see. I looked at my new brothers cowering on the ground, all of us emigrated east-coasters come to Colorado with dreams of striking gold. King was the only man standing, our father. I remembered grabbing a dusty key from his clean hand five months earlier. "Welcome to Georgetown," he said. "You'll be living by the lake." He gave me a pick and a hardhat. "See you in the morning."

There were nine dead: Fletcher and Jim and seven others. We could only identify Jim by his tan jacket – a faded pony sewn into its back, presumably by his daughter – because there was nothing left of his flesh. The others were hunks of meat.

“Stop looking.” King was always efficient, always prepared. He liked to brag about his efficiency. “Fuck.” We sat and stared at him with our noodle legs. We smelled a chemical presence in the air. “Get up!” King said. “Smells like we opened up a gas pocket. We’ll need another way out.” He held the lantern to the darkness ahead. “There’ll be no air soon.”

We moved as sheep move, and we followed as sheep follow. Our shepherd guided us. We walked in the confines of the tunnel until the mine opened up to us like a Venus flytrap.

I looked up and remembered the feel of the sky.

Seven.

The crowd cheered for a top hat and a funny beard; they cheered for justice. When he spoke, he was charismatic, and I felt something inside of me stir. I cheered with them, and mother, at my side, said, “Henry, you’re just like your brother.” I took it as a compliment, even if wasn’t supposed to be one.

He honored the deliverance of the slaves and we cheered. He honored justice and the declaration of freedom and we cheered. He honored all those who died in pursuit of that freedom and I churned internally, wanted to fight for him, for these words. “What an incredible speech!” I beamed. My mother frowned.

She left the audience but I stayed because that’s what Franky would have done.

Years later, that would be my reason to enter the mines of Georgetown, Colorado. Leanne would tell me “that’s a stupid reason to risk your life,” but I wouldn’t listen. She would get angry at me for preferring the metal in the earth to the metal around my finger. “Take a walk by the lake,” I’d say. “I’ll be back before you know it.” Then I would go to the mines. Because that’s what Franky would have done.

Six.

A man named Arthur screamed. He’d fallen into the mine pit, and I imagined the flytrap’s maw slamming shut. There was a fragile moment where he clung to the dirt like an infant gripping at its mother’s shirt. Just before he plummeted into the pit, he stared at us with glassy eyes, but we were motionless because we were horrible brothers.

King once asked, “You a hero, boy?” I didn’t say anything because I didn’t know what I was supposed to say to something like that. “You hear me?” he asked. “I asked if you’re a hero.” “Uh,” I stammered, his head already turned away, my hesitation apparently acceptable enough. As he walked away: “Good.”

He asked all of us back in the town before letting us take a swing at his

whores. And we answered with pocketed hands while we watched Arthur die. There are no heroes in mineshafts; there are only humans.

King continued the spiral descent and we followed, minding our careless footsteps as we went along. King hummed to himself and asked if I was still married to Leanne. I told him I was, and he snickered. A few of us spat into the hole on our right and counted the seconds before it splattered on the ground. We never heard the impact.

“It’s a far way down, boys,” said King. “Luckily, the tunnel out of here is only halfway down.” The rest of us nodded and stared solemnly into the abyss, then turned back to the path at our feet that was crumbling because of the explosion. We tiptoed like dancers, guided by a florescent lantern, and hoped we wouldn’t be the next to fall. With every step, our throats tightened and our heads inflated. The air was thin and we could feel its toxicity like weights in our lungs. It seemed as if the rocks inhaled it all before it we could feel it touch our lips.

I will die soon. We all thought it; I know we did. We wanted to speak, just to maintain contact, but none of us wanted to be the first to do it. Instead, we focused on dirt, and I wondered if Leanne was still walking by the lake.

Five.

The train whistle blew and steam bellowed into the heavy air. It was hard to breathe through the smog of “goodbyes” and “I’ll-return-soons.” I turned to my mother and said the same thing, but hoped that she realized it was a social formality, and that she understood the truth. She asked “Will you be safe?” and I said, “Of course.” She wiped her eye with a handkerchief. “I swore I would never have to wave goodbye to another son again.” I smiled and patted her on the back. “Yeah,” unsure of what to say. “I know.” She waved until she morphed into a speck on the horizon, and I refused to cry because men don’t cry.

When the Rocky Mountains rose like tidal waves over the dreary Great Plains, I thought of Franky and his dedication to a cause. He always knew what had to be done and how he had to go about doing it. I remembered him punching my arm after signing his life over to a Confederate bullet at Gettysburg. I told him I was proud to call him my brother. He smiled and punched me again.

When we got to Georgetown, we were greeted by King and his whores. The deal was a fuck per gold nugget. Silver got us a blow job. A wise ass asked if touching was free, but King and his whores only stared at him. I’m pretty certain he died on his first day in the mine because I never saw him after that. Or maybe he tried touching without the nuggets to show, so King had to cut his balls off. Leanne tells me it was the latter and that she was the whore he tried to touch. A man has an obligation to believe his wife.

We all talked shit about the whores. We told them they were filthy and we told them to bend over. But Leanne told me that every man she ever took to the bed

spent an hour afterwards telling her that they loved her, and they brushed her hair and kissed her nose. But they never admitted to it. Leanne figured that for every hour spent exposed, the men would spend three days insulting their whore until she swore she would cut his balls off if he ever tried it with her again. Three days for one hour, Leanne said. That was the equation.

When Leanne and I got engaged, King was bitter. The rumor around town was that he was angry because Leanne was his favorite whore, and that he never thought she'd really settle down, and that if she did, it would be with him. I asked Leanne if the rumors were true, but I never got a straight answer.

She told me she was pregnant and that I couldn't go into the mine, because I had to be a father, but a father provides for his family, puts food on the table, and we both understood the lack of options available to us, so I told Leanne that I had to go. I told her, "Take a walk by the lake," and left, leaving her with dripping eyes on the couch.

Four.

The walkway collapsed before the miners had time to scream. The vacancy of sound is heavier than the crushing of pulpy bodies under rock. Screams faded and were swallowed. Silence. I turned to find only three out of the original twenty of us remaining. King told us we had to keep going, but we couldn't help but stare into the pit and imagine their broken bodies at the bottom of it.

The tunnel slithered deeper into the mountain until our eyes hazed and our brains screamed at our lungs for oxygen they couldn't provide. We swayed back and forth, clutching the walls for support because our legs refused to move any further. We rapidly approached immobility. King said that the lift was just around the next bend, but after he'd said that seven bends back, we all stopped hoping that we were close and realized that King only said it for motivation. *This must be the life of a naked mole rat*, I told myself. *This must be the sum of their existence*.

Then, a man named David stopped moving. He collapsed to the dirt. King said "The lift is just around the next bend," and David laughed. Black spittle dribbled down his chin. He spoke of his wife and the countless things he said he'd never gotten the chance to experience, and how in the end, leaving home to get rich in the mountains seemed like a pretty hollow venture. We tried not to stare.

Only two of us struggling in dwindling light. I conserved my air with shortened breaths, and thanked my mother for forcing me to swim as a child, while King's face was skeletal. I thought of minute differences, like my dedication to smooth strokes, King's life of pipe smoke. He probably wasn't a good swimmer.

The tunnel kept winding and fatigue splintered King's stride. He grabbed hold of the wall and handed me the torch because holding the damn thing up took too much effort for him. I offered to help him, but he rejected the offer. I guess I had to admire the man's fortitude, even if it meant his death. We made it another two bends

before he collapsed.

Three.

"I don't like the dark," my brother told me the night before he left. "I don't like the finality of it." We sat in the barn with a hundred candles burning stale air. "It's a good thing we have all these candles then," I said. He laughed and punched my arm.

We walked every square inch of the farm that night looking at the ground. We didn't speak of the war, or of guns. We counted cornstalks to pass the time, because we were both exhausted, but neither of us wanted to be the first to call it a night, and when we came to the northeast corner, my brother asked me, "How many does that make?" and I laughed and asked him if he'd really been counting this whole time.

We watched the sun rise over the cornfields, setting row after row ablaze in latitudes of gold. Franky smiled and licked the light on his lips, then looked over at me. "Would you go?" he asked me. "I wouldn't want to fight in any war," I said. He laughed and asked if I was too afraid to fight. I told him I didn't like fighting. There was a pause, a stretch of silence and I could see something unfolding inside him. "I'm afraid," he said, "to be honest. I'm scared shitless."

That morning he left in a green carriage pulled by a black horse with a scar on its neck. They rode off into the east, pulling away from me, under the belly of the sun.

Two.

King whispered and I could barely hear him over the sound of my brain screaming. "I've always hated these fucking mines." He laughed and the same black tar that crusted David's chin dribbled down King's neck. I wondered if it was on my face as well, but didn't want to waste the energy to check. Instead I nodded. "I never got married," he said. "Women are good for fucking, but that's about it." He gazed up into the ceiling as if he could see through the mountain, the busty whores waiting for him beneath his bed sheets. "I'm an efficient man, Henry. I'm a good man." He looked back at me. "Tell me I'm a good man." I nodded my head because I didn't want to waste air. He laughed, "I still can't believe Leanne left my bed for you. My best whore. By far." I grimaced at the thought of my wife in another man's bed. "I suppose it makes sense." A clot of tar coughed up onto his chest. "I've spent most of my life in this hole. In the dark. Jesus, I think about that: how I've spent more days under the earth than I have under the sun. It terrifies me." He grabbed my shoulder and leaned in to me. "A life spent in dirt. A rat's death for a rat." His eyes swam like frantic fish. He released his grip and slumped back, then coughed the remains of his blood onto his chest.

I didn't think I'd live; I began to crawl. When I looked at my hands, I couldn't see the skin through the dirt. When the torch died, I fumbled along walls, hoping to feel metal. I thought of the irrelevance of time in a world that stood still, and I thought

of the rock and how it hadn't moved in centuries. The only dynamic object in a static world, I couldn't tell whether my eyes were open or closed.

Should I panic? I always imagined death would be something eventful: a parade, a baseball game, the totality of war. I thought there was supposed to be a lot of noise. But the only noise came from my shuffling along in the dirt. I didn't have enough air to make much more, and I didn't have enough air to panic.

When my hand brushed against metal, my feeble heart leaped. I tried to smile but the skin was stretched so thinly across my cheeks that it hurt when any of the muscles moved. Nevertheless, I rejoiced. When my fingers found the lever, I squeaked and forced my taut skin into a smile, and then pushed the lever up. The metal clanked and grinded against the rock while the pulley system flexed its stiff joints that it hadn't flexed in years, and the cage lifted off the ground. I opened my mouth in dire hopes for air.

I stared up until I saw the sun, and I thought of Franky, and I thought of my mother, and I thought of Leanne, and I thought of my son still nestled in her belly.

I stared down. I thought of rock, and then I thought of nothing. I turned back to the sun.

One.

There was only the sound of a damp wind. It brushed against the leaves and moved along the grass like a phantom, while I stood in a grave with broken fingernails, panting, and the phantom stroked my hair.

I knelt over him in a fugue, trying to rationalize. His chest was still and his skin was blue, but maybe that was just because of the weather, and he was just cold, and maybe he was just holding his breath; he was always an excellent swimmer. I remembered how he once said, "There's honor in a spot in the earth with brothers." So maybe that's what he was doing. Maybe he was just being honorable.

My mother would say things like, "Franky is a natural-born leader. The pride of this family;" and then turn around and tell me to think for myself. Make my own decisions. "You follow your brother like a dog." When he went off to war, she didn't like thinking about her eldest son in the earth. A short life for the family pride. She never suspected that was where he'd end up.

I touched his cheek and the fugue came to an abrupt end.

I looked up at his tombstone that was a tower that cast an enormous shadow, and even though it was brand new, the words already seemed faded. I had been in the hole for three hours and I wondered if my mom wondered where I was. I told myself only ten more seconds.

Ten. "To endure," his epitaph read. Nine. I thought of how my brother always wanted to be a man, and not a boy. Eight. He bought his first gun at the age of ten, even though our mother told him not to. Seven. I tried to buy one, too. Six. When he left, my mother hugged me and refused to let go. Five. When I told her she

was hurting me, she told me she loved me, so I let her squeeze some more. Four. He told me what it meant to be a man the day we shot guns together. Three. It had something to do with making a legend, but I was too young to understand. Two. I wouldn't understand what it was to be a man for years, and that, in truth, it was something else entirely. One. "To endure."

Zero.

There was silence. Like judgment. And I stepped into the sun with a sense of discovery.

Contributor Notes

Abigail Chiaramonte is an undergraduate student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. When she isn't writing, she's working, reading, or waiting for water to boil.

Rurik Baumrin, co-founder of Fill A Room Literacy Campaign, is a baritone in the a capella group Voices in Your Head, a honey enthusiast, jazz lover, and student at The University of Chicago. His poetry was awarded the Paul Block Award for Creative Writing and has been published in *Eunoia Review*, *Down in the Dirt Magazine*, and *Independent Voices*.

Hannah White is a senior at the University of Pennsylvania and a senior program assistant at the Kelly Writers House. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Word Riot*, *The Sensible Nonsense Project*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *Gadfly Online*, *Apiary Online*, and *Penn Review*. She occasionally finds herself writing poetry in lieu of lecture notes.

Bryan Washington is an undergraduate living in Houston. He used to work for a newspaper.

Inga Lynn is currently studying English Literature and Creative Writing at Sonoma State University. She lives in a cabin in the redwoods made of old train cars with her family and a little black dog named Maia Poohberry. When she's not writing poetry, she likes to spend her time dancing, walking in the woods, kayaking in the river, or lounging on the beach.

Laurel Moffat is a native of California who grew up in Syracuse, NY. Her unique way of looking at the world sometimes gets her in trouble when she can't explain where her ideas came from, but it makes for good poetry.

Johnathan Harper is on his third college and hopes to graduate next year after an extended stay as an undergrad. His major is accumulating student debt. The poem found in this issue was copied verbatim from a spam email.

Jeremy Windham is currently earning his BFA in creative writing at Stephen F. Austin State University where he also studies music and violin performance. His poetry can be found in *The Blue Route*, *Psaltery and Lyre*, *Steam Ticket Review*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *The Portland Review*, and is soon to appear in *The Lake* and *Southern Humanities Review*.

J. Relihan is a student of government and writing at Cornell University. This is their first appearance in *Rainy Day Magazine*. In addition to writing, they love subtitles and lemon bars.

Josh Dolph is a fool of a man who enjoys drinking tea, riding bikes extreme distances, being outside, and the collection and exudation of good vibes.

Mark A. Mangelsdorf is a writer from Boulder, CO who enjoys disk golf. He once sold a nude drawing and manta rays are his favorite animals. He is unsure of what exactly to put here.

Rainy Day is funded by the SAFC
and is free and open to the Cornell community.

Special thanks
to Professor Michael Koch and EPOCH
for their help, advice, and encouragement.

Rainy Day, an independent student organization located at Cornell University, produced and is responsible for the content of this publication. This publication was not reviewed or approved by, nor does it necessarily express or reflect the policies or opinions of, Cornell University or its designated representatives.

Submission Guidelines:

We only accept e-mail submissions. Send all submissions to rainyday@cornell.edu. You must include the submission as an attachment, preferably a “.doc” file. Please make sure all the formatting is correct. The subject in the email must be “RAINY DAY SUBMISSION.” Also include within the document your name and contact information. We accept multiple submissions, as well as submissions from colleges and universities throughout the U.S. Send all inquiries about joining the staff to rainyday@cornell.edu. Further information, as well as back issues, can be found at our website: www.rso.cornell.edu/rainyday/.

RAINY DAY STAFF

Editor-in-Chief

Laura Boland '15

Managing Editor

Sam Wolken '14

Fiction Editors

Devon Kimball '16

Alison Schonberg '16

Poetry Editor

Jacob Wang '17

Treasurer

Mark Kasvin '16

Layout Editor

Lydia Gallo '14

Staff

Sarah Rose Aquilina '14

Samantha Fischetti '16

Emma Harman '16

Matthew Ekey '16

Daniel Reinke '16

Shea O'Hill '17

Ally Findley '17

Faculty Advisor

Michael Koch

251 Goldwin Smith

Cornell University

mk46@cornell.edu