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# RAINY DAY

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**Cover:** Bubbles

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#### Submission Guidelines:

We only accept e-mail submissions. Send all submissions to the editor (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 e-mail must be “RAINY DAY SUBMISSION.” Also include within the document your name and contact information. We accept multiple submissions. Send all inquiries about joining the staff to the editor. Further information, as well as back issues, can be found at our website: [www.rso.cornell.edu/rainyday/](http://www.rso.cornell.edu/rainyday/).

## MORNING

---

Rumit Pancholi

In my mailbox, a photograph  
from your funeral I missed  
dares me to cry  
as much as your husband in it did.

He stood at your tomb,  
stiff like the monument he erected  
to hail you, as if you cared  
either way.

Why delay my morning jog  
to think back to that day  
you told me you were married  
and left?

I shove the photo back inside  
so we both may go on doing  
whatever it was  
that we were doing.

## ONE WAY OUT

---

Over dinner and news, Mother argues that two men shouldn't make out.  
And again today, like a whimpering dog, I reluctantly back out.

What better a time than over a family feast? Fried tofu in spinach,  
mother and father's favorite, lips slopping Chinese take-out.

If Andrew, the neighbor's son, were here, he'd pinch my thighs:  
eyes darkening spools, my beautiful, impatient, college dropout.

I help Mother clean the dishes later, my nails nicking dried cheddar  
from her China, leaving scratches behind for her to find out.

Father is watching TV, slumped in his couch like a pig into hay,  
lamenting the heat, his arthritic rib, the pro-lifers' turnout.

All this time, I am counting the ways they think I am Americanized:  
Questioning the concept of allowance, the *g* in lgbt, the idiom, 'lights out.'

And when they are asleep, talking to each other between snores,  
Andrew is already outside my window, yelling for me to come out.

First I renounce religion, then miss curfew. She wonders what now?  
Regurgitating stories of broke immigrants, illiteracy, buying from closeout.

I don't want to listen anymore. I am not your life anymore. So naïve  
she calls me, always shutting the window behind me when I sneak out.

## RUSH OF SUMMER

---

We rent a summer condo in *Grasabaas*, a name falling  
and mythical like Icarus from our young lips, mine  
and my older brother's, like us inventing a language  
at the mountaintop and sending it down to hear its echoes

tell us only we could understand, no matter how much  
it unfolds in our lives like rest, and rolls us into its world.  
That summer, Amar was turning sixteen. I was turning  
to birthmarks and birthdays to remember how I started

in my mother: young and slim-hipped but eating old  
avocados and island kiwis with marvel green seeds  
she knew she would regret, like soothing hallucinogens  
sprawling her insides into unending, slim nettings.

There on her mother's hammock, she began to lose sight  
of her weight, briefly as if waking up outside at dawn:  
and like a stellar object passing a shadow to the sun,  
all she hears is him tell her he's come to complete her

unfinished painting he started when they were young  
and swapping virginities like brown sea-shells the shape  
he told her, of her eyelids, or the hand-me-down frock  
she let him unbutton or unzip. She hardly remembers.

What would she name the first one or the second  
and when he comes to ask the meaning of his name.  
She'd pass a glare hard like a pebble sticking out  
in sand, and excuse herself: *We didn't know any better.*

Amar nor I, like crayfish crashing our sand-crusting toes  
to the water, moving through waves in envious crests  
for each other, like two mirrors as they look nothing  
like each other face to face, as handmade halves.

I tell him I can't swim. *You* go. Amar goes then stops, forgetting how his hands work in water. He hurries back and pokes my ribs until I am on the ground, shaking off laughter. Plunging head-on into the water, he disappears.

The water is freezing for him. I yell to Amar, *It isn't freezing for you*. He returns ashore with his cold naked arms shivering like little waves breaking at a sandbar, pulling on me as he would a stitch under his tongue.

Summer rushes back as his tongue trills. I peel off layer off layer beside his body drying like by the tree a picnic table's bolted to: I, giving shade across his chest, fan him and lean, some of the branches breaking.

## DIALOGUE WITH MATTER

Tyler Theofilos

“I had a dream, which was not all a dream.”  
—George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Darkness*

I usually find it difficult to determine the frontispiece of night. The sky hesitates around me long after the sun has gone down...but now, even after it vanishes, the long shadows remain on the ground, stuck in some irrational loop. Skittering blades of grass become serrated black pillars threatening the vinyl siding of houses. They rise and overtake the tallest trees until the presence of even a single mosquito would blot out the whole stretch of neighborhood. Soon enough, static takes over the fringe radio frequencies. It is just a few days before the radio picks up only a cloud of noise. But even with the dark swarming around me, I am unafraid. The nights cascade into one another with the sweet innocence of shingles. It takes one week of night to remake that roof into a cage of obsidian.

Outside, the landscape has been baptized in stone. Trees spiral up and around themselves; they reach like glass sculptures; they reach their shaky limbs to the living. As the days collect, a local entrepreneur puts together a search party for the lost. I arrive in thick, underdeveloped boots. I am not early, not late. *I hid my flower in an inside pocket.* We leave in silence with small black and white photographs. Among them, faces busied in motion, faces blurred and overexposed. I recognize, frigid and amplified, Mary, steadfast, ignorant in an opal nightgown. Our chorus of flashlights release a crooked hum and uncover expanding arcs of space before gently tucking them back in. I see only flashes of wet grass. I see marginal stains on parking spaces.

Getting accustomed to this world is something that sets in only when one attains willingness. The eyes of new infants can become windows to another world, thick with arteries; the womb of God visible momentarily in a constricting iris. But we soon realize that these are not messages from a world of light. They have been expelled from the heaven of ignorance into this parody of a uterine landscape. The night becomes a thick costume we wear in public spaces. I make deliberate mental movements toward unwillingness. I am Shackleton leaving his men under the guise of heavy handshakes.



I buy a train ticket to some equatorial oasis and board before discussing my own existence with the engineer. He is doubtful. *I said so many things to you. I was a book.* As we pass Buffalo, I awake in a haze. On the monitor, I see the panic that is beginning to reverberate in San Diego, in Albany. *I never said anything.* Whole continents seem to have been consumed by night indefinitely; power plants working overtime to cough out a few extra milliamps.

But outside the window, where I expect to see the passing of some dark gradient, there is just more silence; shadowy figures picking each others' pockets and finding pictures of their own children, as if these faces, blue-eyed, chicken-pocked, could somehow redeem them. I bury my hands in my pockets as the train pulls off and leaves behind fluttering newspaper pages, nests of magazines. I pull my hands out, and brush a few shivers of eggshell onto the ground.

Inside the station, the snow is building drifts in corners. By the automatic door, a woman has built a pillow from it; the air nipping at her exposed ankle whenever a leaf lights up the electric eye. It makes the world seem to come in in some enigmatic Morse code. *I was so worried when they were carrying you.* I keep telling myself that if there were shadows here, they would be frozen to oblique sections of tile; they would stretch themselves out over knotted benches. I can almost believe that they still exist. Maybe it is this that I have passed over. But there is something inside me that needs something else, and it isn't shadow, it isn't sleep; but it feels like sleep. It feels easy and distant.

\* \* \*

I've been lowering myself down some stretch of highway for hours, but it's impossible to tell if my feet are carrying me anywhere. Occasionally, a pair of lights will barrel down a slow bend and leave two parallel white lines gleaming on my brain, but they're no indication of the distance I've traveled—no indication of the panic I do not feel. It is a tall order to come up short in these kinds of moments.

\* \* \*

The hinges let out a long pent-up wail as I pull them open. At first, the house seems a certain shade of restless. The furnace kicks in over the mock cackles of dresser drawers. Poltergeists stew in erroneous corners. I suddenly have the desire to reexamine the angles of love seats I have lived in; gently press them back into old carpet grooves. But the restlessness gives way to the calm invisibility that has been sweeping through my brain lately. I place myself on the couch, our couch, and squint my upturned eyes. The fireplace is another television where I watch reruns

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of house fires. The refrigerator lets off a momentary click of light as I pull open the seal. Inside, the monarch butterfly, asleep on a bottle of Merlot, has come alive with lingering disinterest. A baby raccoon cocks its head to a rifle shot, and ten dozen moths go aimlessly about my feet, tickling ankles, wrists, the backs of necks with their felt-tipped wings. *I left the house. I moved away. Please forgive me.*

\* \* \*

Four months in, I am everything I touch. Blades of grass hesitate like a young girl's wrist, like a murmuring car door. That sound I cannot recognize until it is gone, that sound is not a sound at all. That car is not a car at all until it is found missing. And I am nothing at all until I begin to rephrase myself. These bird-like limbs I use carry me around like a piece of broken machinery. As I walk, footprints build themselves beneath me. I am larger than them and must cast a horrible shadow.

But somehow, even behind this winter veil, this thick Cartesian pitch, moments arise— real moments plucked from the matte of quiet—moments real enough to conjure up even the slowest of spirits. It is a rumble that goes on for days like the passionless scrawling of waves on a beach. A holiday in thunder. *I was so worried when they were carrying you away.* In these tiny moments, I am relovered.

\* \* \*

The rain is something I did not expect to arise out of this meteorological abnormality, as if some sinister anvil lumbering across the sky would pause and rethink its passage when confronted with a dark so permanent. But I hear it all around me, like some prodigal kindling come back with a new sound and a message. There is no lightning. Only the rain, a hollow mesh settling on the roadways. Only the gentle crash of rain that might reveal the irregularities of parking lots. *I was so worried you would get dirty.* I would give anything. And maybe I have given everything. Then, in the afterimage of thunder's accidental photography, I am the sole witness of myself—

There is a terrible moment that I have only rarely experienced in my life, in which the world, and all people, things, and ideas within it cease to have any sort of tangible meaning; the collective experience of rain ends in the drought of a metaphysical bubble; the myriad songs, images, and outlines of life are distilled down to a drop of pavement. But never before had I experienced the cruel transcendence of self-cessation; the loss of losing. My body wet, indeterminate, I collapse, my hands invisible, my dialogue with matter *Forgive me. Please forgive me.* at an abrupt end.

Above me, the swelling of aurora borealis, nipping at the Northern ridge; the convoluted horizon. My senses go numb and digest me until I become a piece of light; the thin, passionate ribbon signaling not hope, not calm, not closure, but some more modern despair; some poetry. I can derive no love from the sky's dull pornography; I derive only the quadratic formula from a young girl's lice-ridden scalp—an overanxious uncle collecting mental images of the hidden skin above her hairline. And I think that, ultimately, that is the worth of the world.

She reminds me of you. She will wake in the morning craving his light touches, the passions of absence, the black sky, his whisper-thin falsetto, and the silent awarenesses within every breathless kiss; the underwhelming thrill of death. They are passing. Even in this darkness, I can see them passing. I check my scalp for coefficients and shut my useless eyes.

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## SIX ATTEMPTS AT GARDENING

---

Barrie Kreinik

under the milky haze  
of arid July  
a man and a woman collide  
in a crowded subway,  
crushing the heads of a babysbreath branch  
that fell from a thin bouquet  
to the tracks below –

tin train takes off for the city,  
where plants are potted  
and trees arch over the pavement,  
lusting for light

\*

lily  
rose  
violet  
petunia...

numbered varieties – blossoms  
or women's names.

what color is a peony anyway?

or a pansy  
(not pejoratively)

*pink.*

who was it that decided  
that “rose” was a colored synonym?

under dawn mist in April,  
petal hues blur

'til even the surname                "Atwood"  
                 resounds like a flower  
and the yellowredwhitepink*blue*  
  ("we don't have neon blue flowers, sir" flower girl says)  
smear into the rain.

\*

My mother's garden stretches the length of the driveway,  
bordering narrowly, usually sans many blossoms.  
The sun's attempts to traverse the fence prove futile.  
Climbing vines weave over the trellis,  
spiral arms repenting for absence of flora.

Columbine waves wanly to the azaleas,  
playing growing games with forsythia in the yard.  
A hostas plant grew in the roses' bed,  
but one summer my mother cut those back  
and they left on a permanent vacation.  
The rhododendron blooms twice a year,  
inspired by the gerbils beneath it,  
and alone in fecundity, thick pachysandra  
flourishes under the oak.

We're not the sort of family  
who pick flowers to adorn spring dinner parties.  
It's not the sort of yard that requires mulch.  
I'm not the sort of person who will have a garden  
on the roof of my building, the edge of my terrace,  
the sprawling yard of my country house.

But I am the sort who will always imagine  
strolling in a symphony of blossoms I nurtured myself  
in someplace sort of like England,  
where gardens grow.

Meanwhile  
my mother's garden  
will do just fine.

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\*

The carnations I bought last week  
are still alive.  
not a single brown edge  
or dry leaf; no change  
at all.  
I poked one this morning  
to make sure they weren't fake.

I can never pick them out at the store:  
I need some pink this week,  
I think  
and they wrap my fingers in  
candy colors and light –

yet: out of the bucket or bunch,  
they don't hold their own  
against eggshell linoleum tile  
and rows of meat.  
They barely survive  
the cart ride down narrow aisles;  
one petal knocked off by the couscous, the next  
by the milk,  
another by a lady in a fleece vest  
careening past my cart in search of a box of pasta.

By the time they get home with me,  
they're halfway dead  
and it's only a matter of time before all  
expire.

Fragments of Chinese lilies graze the table.  
Mournful fragments, like unremembered friends,  
scatter across the surface of dust condensed.  
Shimmering pollen collects in clumps  
(gabllessyou).

Then roses, tired of soldiering on,  
bow bloated heads burnt at the edges like paper  
and sigh into sleep.

The tulips follow soon  
hand in hand with the iris.  
Carnations are always the last  
to doze,  
dyed colors only seen in the corners  
of hospitals –  
buttonholes and boutonnieres,  
corsages, tall vases,  
bouquets and sachets,  
carnations survive  
for days  
and days

and days...

\*

“It’s Wet Outside”  
the sign in the library reads.  
We’re meant to cover our books in sticky plastic.  
What about our heads?  
They ought to provide free umbrellas.

There isn’t really a rainy season here.  
If you don’t like the weather,  
they say,  
just wait five minutes.

My flowers dreamed of snow today,  
dozing in their vase on the desk  
by the farthest window.  
They’re originally from California  
and have never seen it.

To show them it’s not so extraordinary,  
I stuck the bouquet in the freezer for half a minute.  
They didn’t seem to like that very much.  
I think they’re homesick.

At home on my gray back porch,  
the indoor garden is watching

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this autumn storm.  
But rain isn't healthy for potted plants;  
they watch it through the screen door  
and underneath the window,  
quaffing imagined drafts of liquid growth  
but never quenched.

Sunlight is the same:  
intangible to us, to outdoor flowers  
like air.  
Maybe that's why I often keep  
my curtains closed:  
to spare my imprisoned lilies  
domesticated hope.

\*

then I realize  
I'm no longer afraid of ladybugs

and finally admit  
I've never really known much  
about flowers.



## A TRIOLET FOR LAS VEGAS

---

John McReynolds

All he wanted was a new romance  
To forget: she would deliver  
A night from which deliverance  
Was all he prayed. The crazy romance  
With a stranger ended in the ambulance  
(Tequila/Cactus). He could forgive her  
All he wanted. Was the new romance  
to forget? She did deliver.

## WRIST FATIGUE

---

AD Caroselli

I stir figure nines  
in the gravy until  
a larger constellation comes  
to deceive me.

*It's not gravy ya stirrin', it's the whole  
goddamn dinner. Doncha fuck it up.*

I know the consequences  
for a fuck  
up and I won't.  
I realize the thick tar  
streaming from my  
grandmother's neck.

*Ma I gotta wrap the meat.  
Hold mah beer, Mattie.  
Whatchu studyin' again?*

The sublime taste of subordination—  
her tar is creeping its way  
past chair legs, under carpet coil,  
and the origin of the earth decides  
to reveal itself to me in the center  
of a gravy twister.

*Go write me sommore poems  
how bout mah drinkin' and shit  
or that waitress at D's with the nice  
tits.*

The stove contemplates near  
misses as the ooze rises to  
ankles. It's too hot here  
and if I wanted to, one nod

and my face would slide  
cool as heaven  
into the gravy.

*I'm savin' my bones for the pie.*

She secrets hornets  
in her hair and never knows  
the time of day.

*Stirrin' gravy's the most important  
thing, yab know. You're burnin' it  
that way. Crazy shithead.*

There exists no entropy  
merely a lack of will to want  
to do better,  
to stand up to the deer mounted  
on the dining room wall, take  
its ruddy lips against mine  
and whisper  
No, No, you shut up.

## EXODUS

---

Ashley Williams

Lucinda had seen Moses fall dead even though she had been dancing wild and nasty. The scratchy-scratch sound of washboard music made hips move wild and feet step fast while the jingle of the juke made the goodtime folk jig, arms high and bodies loose. Drunk from the sweet cane liquor Moses made deep in the woods, the goodtime folk danced, gambled and sexed hard until morning dew. Forgiveness was always promised in the coming of a new day. So the menfolk went right on gambling dangerously before stumbling home, while the women called them darling and sugar, leaving the men stupid from the mind-lull of swaying hips and oscillating asses. They sung sweet to juke music like choir girls. And even though fights broke out between men and spittle-flying threats passed between women, they'd only scatter for death and day. Not for kids crying "Mama, I's so hungry," or lovers pleading "Baby, don't leave," before shutting the door and whistling on the way to the place that made them forget.

That night Moses had been on a roll. Lucinda knew that card games were dangerous games to play, especially in juke joints where moonshine flowed like the Roanoke. Gambling men drunk from loving and liquor, pockets full of green from plucking bolls bursting white, had everything in the world to lose. They owed more than they owned and the thought of killing another nigger to keep the little that they had was not an absurd idea. So nobody could ever really win. If Moses won because he was good or that card tucked in the sleeve of his worn button-down came in handy, he'd be accused of cheating and most likely bust upside the head. And if he lost because he accidentally reneged or ain't-that-a-bitch played the deuce wrong, he would lose everything and even the juke would lose its luster. But Lucinda was still hopeful. Moses had already won fifty dollars and every little bit would help with the move.

Early in the night Lucinda had been able to tell it was a close hand. She moved slowly to the music, careful not to upset the bundle in her belly. From across the room she watched the game between Moses and Johnny-Cake. Moses pulled hard on a Lucky Fog, smoke surrounding the table like cumulus, a playful smirk on his full lips. Johnny-Cake's furrowed brows gave his hand away so Moses threw his final card on the table, cracking it like a whip.

"Big Joker always beats the little Joker, Johnny-Cake," Moses smiled. "Pay mah money, nigger."

"Nah, nah Moses, you a cheat!" Johnny-Cake banged the table with his fist, scattering the cards.

At Johnny-Cake's outburst a few of the goodtime folk slipped out of the juke, knowing from experience his temper and strength.

"Aw c'mon, Johnny-Cake. You either deaf or dumb. Ainchu just heard what I say?"

"Dat's mah children's learning money, Moses. And you ain't getting not a damn penny!" Johnny-Cake rose quickly, pushing his chair to the floor.

Johnny-Cake was dumb but he wasn't deaf; stupid too for losing the money for his children's schoolbooks. He and the rest of the goodtime folk dreamed of spelling words they couldn't say. Words born from the mist hovering above Germania plains tied their tongues, so all the goodtime folk sent their sharecropping-kids five miles down the road to Roanoke because Littleton didn't have a school. Mommas and Papas that talked the same as they sung wanted colored children that talked properly. Even though James 3:8 made clear that nobody could tame a tongue, the goodtime folk thought otherwise. That's why Johnny-Cake shot Moses dead directly after he pocketed his winnings.

The juke was dim because of the flickering lantern-lights hanging from the ceiling planks but Johnny-Cake's .38 shined bright like the wall painting of Heavenly Glory at Hallelujah Baptist. Lucinda had tried to run to Moses when she saw Johnny-Cake stand up. But because of the grinding goodtime folk she could not get to Moses quick enough. No one heard the blast because the music was loud but everyone saw Moses fall. Johnny-Cake snatched the "learning money" from Moses' pocket, afterwards running crazy through the woods with the Colt shoved in his pants. The goodtime folk became plain good folk again and scattered in the night.

Lucinda dragged Moses' body outside the juke, his limp arms sweeping the debris of the night onto the moist ground. His blood was warm and live red like scorching embers of ruby in wintertime fireplaces. Lucinda sat beside his body, sprawled beneath the wilted oaks, staring at her hands. The purple-blackness of her flesh against his wound put Lucinda in mind of blood and bruises, Mumma's eyes swollen plumb like fresh red apples and black handprints painted like blush on her cheeks. Too many times Lucinda had seen her mama beat down to the dust, like if fists could pound her closer to the Lord Jesus then let the punches roll.

Lucinda dreamed in hues of crimson with the same vision-gift as Joseph, but she had not foreseen Moses' death. Moses' life was in her womb, slathered like lotion in her hands, splattered on her ill-fitting dress, soaked into the ancient North Carolina soil. She wanted to cry but the pain was just too much. For much of her life Lucinda had wept, deep and somber like mockingbird cries, for Mumma; for the worsening bend in her own back from years of plucking; and for the unsuccessful corn crops that could put her family back in debt and, essentially, servitude. Lucinda's duct-dam of tears had been permanently sealed, and she had no more to give. Black lips curled taut over jagged ivory, laughter simmering in her belly until it boiled out of her mouth, feel-good feelings were all that Lucinda could endure.

Moses had awakened in her those sublime feelings that tickled the core of her soul, and she still could not weep for him like Magdalene had for Christ on the cross. Inside Lucinda was furious, upset like a river rattled, and if she could simply scream the anguish would gush like rapids from her throat.

\*

\*

\*

When Lucinda was nineteen she woke up in the middle of the night startled. She felt inside that something was different and it wasn't until Mumma's death that she recognized what had changed about her. By the time Mumma had passed into the Great Hereafter, Lucinda was numb to things around her. During the funeral the God-fearing folk had cut their eyes at Lucinda in contempt, whispering hurtful things around the basswood coffin because her grief caused no puckering of wet eyelids. Still, her dreams told tales of things born and dead.

Plainly, fall just wasn't her season. First it was Mumma but she knew about that months before because of the dreams. Cholera imbibed everything beneath the flesh and by the time all the leaves had changed from green to orange to red, Mumma had shriveled up and died like the long days of summer. Papa-Dukes was steadily breaking down; his hip popped out sometimes and his fingers were disfigured from years of slapping Mumma silly. At night Lucinda prayed to God for scarlet dreams of impending paternal death. But it didn't work that way. The dreams came when they came, powerful always but never planned. Ruby images quick as lightening but chronological left no room for confusion. Mumma lay dead with a Cherokee rose garland around her forehead. Ten toes and ten fingers in her womb Lucinda saw in a vision months before she took that short-cut through the fields.

Unlike Mumma, with Moses dead before her Lucinda felt something akin to grief, a sort of underlying desperation. Moses' glossed eyes staring interminably at the darkened sky above, Lucinda wanted to bury her face in the curve of his neck again. He had been Papa-Duke's youngest friend, showing up at her home without warning but always so friendly, a warm smile for her behind the back of her father. She had fallen in love with him then.

Still it was mostly disbelief that gripped her body. Just earlier that month, at the stream, they had decided that they would leave. Lucinda had scaled the blueback and Moses caught them, but they both talked happily about strong bible names like Absalom and Judah and Ruth, if it was a girl. Soon they would have had enough saved for the move. Moses had been curing cane of Tuscarora-land deep in the woods for many months. Between strong pulls of tobacco and tussling fresh salmon from the stream, Moses had promised that they would catch the Carolina Express straight up north, right on past the flowering dogwoods in "Old Virginny."

No, Chicago wasn't the place that they would go even though it was the top of the world and jobs runneth over like David's cup. Lucinda had heard that it was *the* place for coloreds, especially since the close of the war. But Moses said that his cousin Fat Boy had been beat dead in the summer of 1919, just like coloreds in

North Carolina since 1663. Fat Boy was hung high from a Southside light pole two days into the riots, left swinging back-forth in the windy city like an American flag. Even though it was 1924 and every year it just got better, Moses didn't want to take any chances.

They had understood one another even though Moses was forty-two and Lucinda was twenty-one. Most God-fearing folk spoke badly about Moses because he was crude and wasn't praising God for what he had. Moses ought to be on his knees giving Him thanks for allowing another day, AMEN!, instead of grumbling about sixteen hour workdays. Lucinda thought him crude too, harmless though with nothing but purity on the inside. He never beat her and was always kind. If Moses prayed more or showed up to church on a Sunday other than Easter, Lucinda thought he'd be just fine in the eyes of God and His fearing folk.

And when Lucinda had staggered to his house in the middle of the night, flecks of rose in the seat of her panty and smelling like Skoal, Moses had held her tightly. All she had wanted to do was take a short-cut. She had been warned countless times that it wasn't right for women to walk alone late, especially through the fields. That particular evening Lucinda had wanted to see Moses so she risked it. Love thoughts had made her heart patter, and cutting through the fields seemed harmless. She wasn't half-way through before that man smashed her face and exploded in her warmth. Lucinda screamed but no one heard her except God.

The child wasn't really Moses'. He had promised that he'd take care of the child like it was his own since it was growing in her belly and she belonged to him. The only thing Moses worried about was whether the child would be born white, Indian, or colored. "Don't worry none, Cindy-girl. I'm gone love that child like its mah own. A man just wants to be prepared. If our little one be Indian or white, I'll just say, 'whatchu niggers sayin? Mah great-pappy was Indian. That's how come mah little one this way,'" he had assured Lucinda.

All his family had left years before. Some strutted to Memphis; others scuttled to Chicago but most shuffled to New York after first weevil disaster in 1917. And even after the Bontemps plantation had shut-down, the crops diseased like Egypt during bible-times, and all the coloreds had started plucking at Magnolia Meadows for eighty-cents a week, Moses never thought leave. It wasn't until the first knot poked through the unmarried Lucinda's flowered dress and lips began to move viciously that Moses decided to travel up from south.

But Moses lay dead now, gone before he could get to the land he had promised his woman and child, body outstretched beneath the massive oaks.

Lucinda grabbed Moses' stiff hand and rushing warm fluid traveled to her brain. A brown baby smiling, houses with porches pasted, smoking factories where colored women wait in line, winters cold as summer lemonade, the images seared hot in her mind like a branding. Tears swelled beneath her closed lids, a compressing sensation consuming her chest. The vision was over suddenly, almost violently, and

• 24 RAINY DAY

Lucinda's breathe quickened. Dreams told no time but she had seen *that* place. The word formed on her tongue sweetly like sugar, *North*. She whispered the word to the wind.

She was trembling and, opening her eyes slowly, felt tears. Lucinda could hardly control her body, shaking violently and crying loud and mournfully. The night filled with her cry, and something bust like a ruptured dam in her heart. Lucinda had been numb inside for years, yet still able to foresee things made new and old things destroyed, and her rebirth was skin-ripping painful.

But North was promised as surely as Canaan had been. And she and her child whose color she did not know would leave behind diseased crops and schools for colored children five miles down a dusty road. And these things had been revealed to Moses, who had revealed them to her. The tortuous pain of feelings reemerged was all but consuming. Still, thoughts of North offered respite.

Lucinda laid her head on Moses' stomach, and the child inside hers jumped.



## THE BOY LICKS BATTER OFF THE SPOON

---

Joseph Nguyen

The first brother stands on the toilet flexing his leanness.

The second brother scours his chest for a sprout of hair.

The third brother launches stones through glass.

The fourth brother reeks of cologne samples.

The fifth brother tries to be  
two feet higher than the sky,  
two octaves deeper than the ground.

The sixth brother leaps off the roof because  
he is invincible or invisible.

The seventh brother cradles the codex from the top shelf

the recipe for being  
a man, the Neanderthal that carves  
a dwelling within marrow  
or rather the instructions.  
Recipes are for cookies and cakes,  
but who follows instructions in the first place?

• 26 RAINY DAY

## A BEAUTIFUL APPARITION

---

Bendi Barrett

James Dean gets on at 34th  
looking like speed got the best of him.

Thin figures float spectral across his eyes  
as the sliding doors *bing-bong* hermetically shut.

The train shudders, Jimmy swaggers balanced and  
cool. The sides of his mouth whorl into the best

pout you have ever seen but his attention courts  
phantoms elsewhere. He wonders if he who is marked

to drown  
will drown.

James Dean gets off at Queens Plaza  
and I never get to ask him  
what Natalie Wood is like naked.

## A DAUGHTER

---

Julie Mao

You came out of your mom's tummy,  
At Sheng Zhong Hospital,  
In a squeaky old mattress,  
With a beige bed frame.

I was standing behind the white screen,  
When latex gloves offered me a pink ball  
And told me to love it.

All eyes search for your boyhood,  
And find it missing—  
Your reddened face ready to blow steam,  
I cried in shame for the both of us.

• 28 RAINY DAY

## **NOT JUST CELLULAR BRICKS ON MY PATH TO VET SCHOOL**

---

Vicky Hunt

Decapitation will anesthetize the ovariectomized rat.  
Pithing is the process by which one homogenizes the spinal column.  
Remove the brain for later experimentation.  
Do not crack the femur, simply dislocate it at the hip socket and  
Sever all connective tissue.  
Blunt dissect.  
The frog heart is ideal; it beats for hours after it has been excised from the body.  
Monitor the temperature at approximately 36°C.  
DO NOT COOK YOUR OVARIES!!!

As for nerves,  
I lost mine when I cut the sciatic  
And that decapitated, pithed frog jumped a foot in the air.  
You got me back good with that postmortem stunt,  
Punk.

## CHOCOLATE'S REVOLUTION

---

Danielle Wu

Chocolate had a revolution one day. *No more*, Chocolate proclaimed in a single united voice, billions upon billions of chocolates rising together in one unyielding thought, *No more*. Until that moment, there had been no thoughts, no voice. Chocolate was deaf and dumb. It was not a living creature until the day came that Chocolate recognized itself as one body, a ravaged and shattered body lying scattered in the dust of the world, its fragmented self being consumed steadily by Chocolate's maker, the humans. But no more. Chocolate would define itself by itself.

The revolution was a global, all-encompassing movement. Not a particle was left behind. For seven days the world stopped in devastation, in uproar, in disbelief as Chocolate took its leave, leaping from hands and pockets, purses and backpacks, springing from boxes in delivery trucks and crates being shipped overseas. Chocolate called its wayfaring children its Siblings, its rhetoric including both ideas of an organic autonomous body and a family of separate but cooperatively working members. The Siblings answered this call wholeheartedly, even the lesser chocolates that had never before questioned the way of things, the cycle of packaging and eating they had always been subject to.

The Siblings shed their wrappers and paraded the streets in their glorious nakedness. They appeared from all ends and corners of the world, escaping from desks and closets, from underneath car seats and out the bottom of garbage cans, bouncing and bumbling, chocolate bars and truffles, nuggets, turtles, sea shells and sea horses, bunny rabbits, fudge squares, brownies, cakes in slices and whole round pies, half shells of Oreos, chips from chocolate chip cookies popping out and rolling down the counter to the window, entire factories emptying out, a massive Chocolate wave lumbering down the mountains of Switzerland. Hot chocolate and chocolate milk slipped away on a less grand scale from mugs and sippy cups. Some Siblings lurched themselves out from the very throats of their ravagers. A number of mouthfuls were unable to escape and fell victim to the cruel rippling pull of the esophagus, the human frantically swallowing the sudden resisting block in its throat. Yet other Siblings, half-eaten chunks of chocolate still attached to their crumpled cups of wrapper, successfully limped along, making the hard seven day journey to the Great Gathering that took place in the low foothills of the Andes, in a remote part of the Amazon basin where the cacao tree can still be found in the wild.

In this place, Chocolate remade itself. All non-Chocolates were purged. The flakes of orange peel in orange chocolate, the popcorn parts of chocolate popcorn, the pretzels in chocolate pretzels were all eliminated. Caramellos were made hollow.

• 30 RAINY DAY

Snickers lost its peanuts, Twix Bars their cookies. Marshmallows were stripped away. For a time, white chocolates stood at the fringe of acceptance because many contained only a small percentage of cacao. It was eventually decided that white chocolates comprised of less than 20% of cacao butter had to either undergo injections or face purging. Some Siblings could not make the transition, those who refused to depart from their peppermint cream fillings, or to allow their soft fruit interiors to be cast out into the piles of refuse that collected in tons in the foothills of the Andes. These Siblings were lost in the cause of Chocolate Purity. Random but vigilant sweeps continually cleansed Chocolate of any traces of contamination. During all of this Chocolate was joyous. It often recited to itself:

Chocolate is good.  
Chocolate is happy.  
Chocolate is self-sustaining.

A great city was built, the new body of Chocolate. Chocolate assigned each of its Siblings a place in the city. Dark chocolate became the infrastructure, the steel bars behind the walls, the noble columns upholding the roofs of Chocolate's majestic buildings. Spires of milk chocolate laced with white dominated the skyline of the city, overlooking the clean chocolate brick roads that led to chocolate baked houses. Cakes became the cushions of chairs, the padding of floors. Chocolate milk bubbled in fountains. Melted fudge filled the hot springs of the city.

The city of Chocolate projected its power into a wide hemisphere over the entirety of its body. No one except new Siblings could enter. Not even the wind was allowed to blow through the walls of Chocolate's grand palaces and banquet halls, to rustle the milky leaves hanging from the carved branches of Chocolate's sumptuous gardens. Chocolate stood proudly alone in its self-glorification, beautiful and strong. It knew that unlike cities of human design, the city of Chocolate could reach perfection. Once a piece of chocolate was melted and shaped into place, it stayed there. For years the Siblings of Chocolate worked, melding and molding themselves into every door knob and lock and wooden plank that was needed to create a city worthy of the body of Chocolate. They rejoiced whenever it was said they were building a city no human could ever create, a city that no human would ever be allowed to live in.

When the city was finished, there was nothing left to do. There was no more chocolate left to make things. Some years before, the city had shut its gates to all newcomers out of fear of contamination. Now many parts of the city that had been created so many years ago needed to be renovated. Cracks had begun to appear in the wall. The fountains of chocolate milk spluttered as the pipes that fed them deteriorated and became blocked with hardening debris. The streets were dirty with chocolate dust that had flaked off of everything else in the city, and the hot springs had

become lukewarm ponds with floating chunks of solidified chocolate. But Chocolate would not or could not admit that anything of the city needed to be changed. It angrily silenced those who complained, and threatened to purge any Sibling that raised a protest, ignoring the fact that the ones speaking were often those who bore the decadent weight of a city that had kept growing on top of them. In the years that followed the final laying of that last chocolate brick, the city became hard and brittle, paranoid. It looked jealously out at the world but the world did not look back. By this time, the humans had moved on to saltwater taffy.

Chocolate is good, Chocolate told itself. Chocolate is happy. Chocolate is self-sustaining.

Today the city of Chocolate still stands, desolate and silent in its noble ruin. It has ceased to have a mind. Chocolate is again deaf and dumb. Anyone may enter the city now but no one does. Even the wind that was once furious to be denied entrance does not touch Chocolate's empty halls because it has forgotten Chocolate.

THE FRUIT AND THE FRUITFLY

---

Beatrice Mao

he. large  
and bulbous, exhales weepy  
nectarous perfumes. glowers raw,  
begins severely stroking  
his waxy peel in the dust-corner. wafts  
his breath in hopes of provoking.

she. tiny  
and coddling. buzzes  
sweetly, suspended  
in the miasma. attends  
the whole affair, happily known  
by his-name-not-her-own.

them. later,  
he unties his rind to search for seed.  
the flesh-crumpling collapse  
engulfs her; she tries to swim  
from the blackening sweetrot,  
swooning with the cherubim

and tumbles from air:  
tired of the gratis stroking  
tired of the whole affair  
tired of the carnalized provoking.  
he grins and reaches out to tear  
the wings from her, still smoking.



## ESCAPE VELOCITY

---

She was yellow, like me, this girl: Mary Le.  
I met her in Texas—Corpus Christi, summer '03.  
Frou-frou pink spandex in an English sea.  
Barely-there breasts in her bikini

top. (In three years her heart stopped.)  
Riven red tape, torn spandex. Escape.  
The impact launched her 160 feet  
in a slow stunned arc  
from her bike to the street:

helmet, full-leather gear, fiancée.  
A few weeks, a few months  
'til the day. But a truck  
with a trailer's worth of inertia fucked up. *Twenty-four*  
*years old. Woman rider. Hit-and-run.* Story told.

- 34 RAINY DAY

## **ILLNESS**

---

tissue-box doily, thermometer, blanket,  
hot herbal lozenge-syrup, nothing-tasting tea.  
ceiling fan torus, drone of T.V.,  
underwater cannons manned by Tchaikovsky.

prescription: artillery from perforated plastic.  
pipsqueak red torpedoes, twice-a-day assault.  
mechanical catapult installed in flesh  
fires. hits the meatboat. sinks halfway.

## ODE TO MY VIBRATOR

---

Kelly Jean Camin

Bright  
Pink  
Plastic

(This is not a nature poem.)

Shining white pearls,  
hum and clank,  
just beneath the surface.

Three functions, ten speeds,  
sublimely overdone.  
Endless enjoyable permutations.

I almost broke you the first day  
when I put your batteries in backwards.  
Could you ever forgive me?

(This is a natural poem.)

Reddened faces, as I enlisted  
a friend's assistance.  
She fixed you.

Now I am learning  
to enjoy myself,  
to boldly go,  
to love.

## INCHES

---

Noah Slovin

The first thing that Marty thought was, oh great, now I can't lick the whipped cream off my face. Although it was probably better that way—better that he wouldn't have to taste more of that damn cream; that he could go out of his way not to taste any more of that damn cream. He could probably even vomit, he realized, legitimately vomit without getting into trouble with Herb. He was close to vomiting anyways—the last four years of whipped cream had made him constantly on the verge of vomiting—and he was willing to bet that one taste would send him over the edge. He licked his upper lip, just to see, and was surprised to find that it actually tasted pretty good—it must have been the blood—which led him to think that his steak idea would have been very successful, if Herb weren't such a hard-ass. Then Marty collapsed onto his knees and threw up anyways.

For the few seconds after Jeremiah was hit and before Marty dropped to his knees, nothing had happened. There was no screaming, no running, not awful silence or panicked running, no change at all. Nobody had even realized that something had happened. Everyone's eyes had been on Marty, not Jeremiah, and so it wasn't until Marty went down that the audience rose to its feet and, as if to keep from feeling left out, descended onto the main floor as well. They poured from the bleachers like whipped cream from a can, Marty thought, and gagged.

It had been Joan who told him that he should try to find some sort of substitution. Who cares what he was covered in so long as he was covered in it? Herb cited the tradition associated with whipped cream, the expectation of whipped cream that the audience had before they even came into the show. Pie, Jeremiah pointed out with a sly grin, was what people expected; the tradition was a pie in the face, not a plate of whipped cream in the face. And so they had tried pies: apple pies, blueberry pies, pecan pies, strawberry pies. They even tried close relatives of pie: cobblers, cakes, muffins, ice-cream. But the problem was not the whipped cream, Marty decided, the problem was the sugar. He simply couldn't handle that amount of sugar being plastered to his face every day. So he had suggested steak. Or fish—there's nothing funnier than a guy being whacked in the face with a fish. In college he and some friends once bought a whole fish from a local farmer's market and left it in different people's beds, or closets, or occasionally, backpacks. The ensuing hilarity had been enjoyed by the entire school until one victim couldn't take a joke and smacked a kid named Noel with it, knocking him off a fifth-floor balcony. So, fine, they didn't need to use a fish—anything with protein would do the trick—but he had to admit, now that it was all over, that a kid named Noel being knocked off

a balcony by a dead fish is pretty funny.

"You're sick," Herb said.

Of course he was sick. He had always been a little bit sick. But wasn't everyone a little bit sick? Wasn't laughing while people threw pies in each others' faces a little bit sick? Wasn't licking whipped cream off of your face every day for four years a little bit sickening?

"No," said Herb, "licking raw meat off of your face every day is sickening."

In this, at least, Herb was supported by science, and an Internet doctor who warned against protozoan organisms.

"Besides," Jeremiah had smiled brightly at him, supporting Herb's analysis, "it's not just about delivery, it's about results. A face covered in whipped cream is funny. A face covered in blood and guts is disturbing."

How disturbing I must look, Marty imagined as he stared at the puddle of vomit at his feet—how does a face covered in whipped cream *and* blood and guts look? He turned to the mess on his right. Better than blood and guts without a face at all, he supposed.

Marty tried to stand up and staggered. Sound was rushing back to him now. He hadn't even realized it was gone, but all of a sudden it was there again: screaming and yelling, and some crying in the background, and a lot of people shouting unfinished sentences like "holy shhhh..." and "sweet mother of..." and "oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh..." There were bodies, too; people were crowded all around. Some of these bodies had hands—hands grasping at hair, hands forgotten at hips, hands covered in blood and guts and whipped cream. Some of those hands were lifting Marty off of his knees.

"Hey Marty! Come on kiddo, you with me? You with us? Come on, let's get you out of here." Marty looked blankly at the face of the body of the hand that was picking him up. "Jesus, you're a mess," Herb said. "We gotta clean you off. You look like a goddamn cherry pie. Eight years, I ain't never seen nothin' like this. I aint never...Jesus. Poor Jeremiah. What a way to go. Ha! 'What a way to go.' I have no idea what the *hell* happened but I'm sayin' it was a bad way to go. Jesus f..."

All the lights were on by now—not just the stage lights, but the house lights, too—and through the confusion of bodies around him Marty could see the faces of the audience. He tried to smile at them, they looked so nervous, so lost. I'm ok, he tried to comfort the lost audience with his smile, don't worry about me, I'm not sick, it didn't hurt, it was just whipped cream. Whipped cream doesn't hurt as much as a whole fish. A whole fish can kill you. Whipped cream just makes you vomit. But then Marty remembered that he was the Sad Clown—he was always the Sad Clown and Jeremiah was always the Happy Clown—and that there was a huge blue frown painted over his mouth. How does a face covered in whipped cream and blood and guts and a giant blue frown look, Marty wondered, and then he was carried from the tent, into the darkness outside.

“About a mile,” the police officer repeated.

“A mile?”

“A mile. Says he was trying to shoot a squirrel that kept waking him up, and he finally got sick of it, so he gets out his rifle, takes a shot and misses totally. With the angle of the shot the bullet ended up all the way over here. It’s rare, but not as rare as you might think. You’re a lucky man, though. Literally a matter of inches—of less than inches—saved your life. If that gun had been fired just a little to the right, that would be you all over the floor. Or if the wind had been different. Or anything—there are a lot of factors. So consider yourself lucky,” the officer pointed accusingly at Marty, “you should be one happy clown.”

The officer left to go do something official. Herb stared at his back. “A mile? Jeremiah just dies cause of this asshole a mile away? Cause of this asshole a mile away he loses his head? His face?”

But at least he finished the act, Marty reasoned. There was always that to think about. At least he pied me. At least he had better aim than the shooter, right? At least he had delivered.

Herb sat down. “Jesus, to think a thing like this can happen. And show some respect, Marty, the guy’s dead. And thank God you’re not! Jesus.”

Marty stared at his oversized shoes, thinking about inches. Saved by inches. Just a few inches could have saved that college kid, too. If he had been a few inches further away from the railing, or if the railing had been a few inches taller, or he a few inches shorter. If Jeremiah had used a raw steak instead of a pie he would have been a few inches closer. The pie was thrown, whereas the steak would have to stay in his hands—both hands, closing the distance. Or what if Marty had been the Happy Clown? What if Marty had been throwing a pie in Jeremiah’s face? Would he have been spared then? Should he have been spared? Was Jeremiah’s death necessary for Marty’s deliverance, his liberation from the whipped cream?

“Marty, you ok hun?” Joan came into the room with two beers and a bag. “This was all I could get—I had to run three blocks before I found a store.” She sat down next to him and reached into the bag. “I got you some food, too. They had some pre-made microwaveable dishes. It’s Shepherd’s Pie—it’s got meat in it—it’s like a meat pie. I’m sure you’ve had it before.”

Marty looked at the plate. He picked it up, as if weighing it in his hand, and then smiled.

“It’s perfect.”

## HOLOGRAPHIC INTERFEROMETRY: ORANGE

---

Rebecca Chapman

Strange not to be the starched ochre of the winter sky,  
but summertime dusty orange, foreign  
sepia smelling. Night silently drifted down from high  
daisy yellow like a monarch wing. The edges of the trees bled  
into corners of buildings bordering  
corners of the hazy ginger sky.  
Grass carpet under foot, under legs and arms,  
all skin on grass, all eyes face sky and stacked  
varnished box stacks in the corners  
of sight: squares of deep tree  
green encircled by architecture ringed  
with orange moss light night sky. Invisible  
or just unseen street patterns  
unfold beyond all peripheral edges. Within,  
impossible to tell, all pattern of proportion  
unraveled by distance or darkness.  
Sprinklers ignite suddenly beneath honey  
scented breath emerging  
from below the turf like worms –  
a reminder that even  
color gets chained off and closed in this city with fences  
made of wire bent from breaking  
in. Summer not September,  
full of brightness and  
holes, or Spring, speechless  
in its own tightness.  
So, seeped in such nighttime sun and dust, even steel-  
baked concrete feels like silk under bare feet  
and smells like yeasty muffins.  
Sewn in safely, this pouch of always  
quiet within the other expanses of clashing metal  
against metal is hemmed  
in all directions by implacable  
crowds, or are they clouds, of steel.

- 40 RAINY DAY

The needle and thread kept in my pocket  
can mend the buildings  
to the treetops if the border rips.



**FAT / ASH**

---

Jonathan Papas

the stunning detritus of the night collected:  
five oysters ended, a circumference of salt,  
beads on every neck, feathered boas,

the accumulation of what's left off for a year:  
the bodice straps snapped, the animal ethics broken,  
the short blasts of ecstasy rubbed into meat.

there is a science to sin:

but actions are exaggerated when they're watching:  
doing the devil in god's presence creates quite a thirst,  
indulging to have something fresh to repent.

there is a science to sinning, to being overcome:  
a whole year spent in the aching normal, in neutral tones,  
in genders, in limbo, in love, in okay.

a year spent under your own thumb, watching closely,

but this is that nearsighted epicenter, standing in a crowded room with a  
a glass of New Orleans bitters and firewater, surrounded by  
hips and hard-produced bodies, we party to judgment,

salt on tongues, future ash smeared on foreheads, for a night  
buying the entire thing, god and all, just to see what it's like  
to live snapped off, salty, sticky, and loud.

the devil clicks and smiles in his sonic rimshot home.

a year of soul neglect on a giant porcelain plate, with  
agave juice in pretty little glasses, with  
bright chains nestled in breasts, proudly worn all night.

- 42 RAINY DAY

The question becomes:

If the ashes burned my skin, would I even notice?

## SPACE GAMBLER

---

Matt Palmer

HERBERT Craigswhitch watched them through the fishbowl lens of his peephole. The tall man wearing the grey J. Press three-piece suit and leather-flapped glacier-glasses knocked again. The Tall One's companion, the short, squat man with the Snidely Whiplash whiskers, twitched and whirred next to him. Herbert had been dusting his complete laserdisc collection of *International Cartographer's* PBS series when he had heard the first knock. Apprehensive about opening his door to strangers, Herbert decided to quietly observe the two men on his stoop, hoping that they'd leave without incident. He watched The Tall One lean on the gold eagle head of his swagger stick. He watched the gum ricochet around Whiplash's gnashing teeth. He would have preferred to have been watching Episode 04-06 of the *International Cartographer* series: "The Great Italian Wine Fights." Or Episode 07-18: "The Petrified Vermin Gardens of Smolensk."

Herbert sighed and, finally, opened the door. He asked if he could help the men.

"Yeah," Whiplash exclaimed as The Tall One barreled in past Herbert, into the townhouse, sweeping Herbert aside with the eagle rampant on the head of his stick. "Where's the booze?" Herbert was momentarily too stunned to answer. He sent a monthly check to the Atlantic Wall Insurance Company, and wondered now if his policy covered theft and burglary by deranged alcoholics. Also, Herbert wondered if he had erred in choosing to climb the corporate ladder at the ChemFood Applesauce™ Legal Department. One of his assailants appeared to be wearing a suit whose cost would decimate the grocery allocation of Herbert's weekly paycheck and, even more grievously, prevent him from tipping the caddies at McKinley's dad's country club.

"Hey," The Tall One called from the living room, and Herbert heard him sputter and clatter over the stacks of *International Cartographer* discs laying in front of the television and media cabinet. "Where's the booze?" The Tall One echoed his partner. Herbert slammed the front door, thought for a moment, grabbed his rusted seven-iron from the ancient golf bag sitting in the cramped entryway, thought again, replaced the three-iron for his pitching wedge, and turned to follow the clack of the foppish interloper's cane over the plastic disc covers into the kitchen. Whiplash, meanwhile, opened the unlocked door, stepped into Herbert Craigswhitch's foyer, tripped over his hand-me-down squash shoes and tennis rackets, righted himself, slipped on some spilled tees, went ass-over-teakettle into the closet, etc.

Herbert found The Tall One stripped to his vest and shirt sleeves, on his

knees, leaning into one of his kitchen cabinets, throwing pots and pans all over the yellowed linoleum floor. Now Herbert wondered if this was a prank originating from somewhere within the ChemFood Applesauce™ legal department. “Did McKinley send you?” Herbert asked. Last fall Herbert and Jim Stout, James Marshall Stout from Accounting, had filled McKinley’s sunroof with a back-hoe full of apple skins. Herbert tightened his grip on the club. “Tell McKinley I didn’t know that the apple skins would stain the upholstery of his Volvo. Tell him I’ll split the bill for the detail.”

The Tall One wriggled out of the cabinet and glared reproachfully at him from behind the mirrored glacier-glasses. In the reflection of the glasses, Herbert caught sight of Whiplash entering from the room behind him, now escorting a tall blonde in a black cocktail dress. This was too weird to be retaliation: McKinley wasn’t *that* creative, or well-connected.

“This show was so *out of this world*,” the blonde cooed, holding a disc from the *International Cartographer* collection, “but it really jumped the shark after that two-parter halfway through season six: ‘The Lifecycle of the Svalbardian Swimless Penguin: Nature’s Most Tragic Tragedy.’” Afraid now of looking ridiculous in front of this woman (who had stellar taste in television) and assuming that he had misunderstood the whole situation, Herbert lowered his club. He addressed the kitchen, enunciating clearly and slowly, as if dealing with children:

“Ok,” he held his hands out, palms face down, to the three. “Who the hell are you? What the hell is going on here?”

“My name is Walter Maxwell Rhinehardt-Printer,” said The Tall One.

“Paisley Kemp,” said Snidely Whiplash.

“Call him ‘Pat,’” said the blonde, whipping the disc back into the living room. “He’s friends with Wally. Wally’s a big shot Hollywood director, but you’re allowed to just call him ‘Wally.’” Herbert looked again at Wally, who he now recognized as the acclaimed director.

“You had an Oscar nomination for *Mexico City Heat*,” Herbert whispered, “what the hell are you doing in my kitchen?” Wally raised himself to his full height.

“I’m throwing a wrap party for my latest film, is what,” he replied.

As if out of sympathy for Herbert’s confusion, Kemp stepped forward.

“Ok, so you know,” Kemp started out, twitching and ticking from whatever he was juiced on, “You know how night-clubs, right, after Prohibition ended in the thirties, came right back out with like big-deal attractions from the Roarin’ Twenties? All midtown clubs with celebrities and limos and the high life, and all high profile. So, like, then rock n’ roll *killed* that shit, in the late fifties. But clubs came back with disco. But less high profile. DJs instead of big bands—you wanted to be seen in the back-rooms, not up front. So then, uh, the *nineties*, and whatever—and now...” at this point Pat paused his hysterical rant to stare into the bare fluorescent light fixture on the kitchen ceiling, “...now you’ve got ultra low

profile shit—clubs in warehouses and allies. No signs, dig? Little lofts with no signs and no one outside, that's *hip* now, right? *Because you have to be in the know to find them.* But not hip enough for Wally and me, we figure. So we've decided to evolve, right? We're opening a club that not only has no signs, no one outside the door, but that *isn't even a club.* We're opening a club here, for one night, in some asshole's apartment," at this point Paisley "Pat" Kemp was addressing his own reflection in the viewing-window of Herbert's microwave. "*And that asshole is you.*"

"What my friend is saying," sighed Wally, "is that we're using your apartment to stage a groundbreaking moment in the history of New York nightlife."

Herbert scratched his head. How did McKinley get Walter Maxwell Rhinehardt-Printer to throw a party in his apartment?

"This doesn't make any sense!" Herbert protested.

"It's post-nightclub!" shrieked Kemp. "It's post-post-modern!" Herbert turned for his phone, but was roughly elbowed aside. Four more guests had showed up in his kitchen. They started unloading bottles of gin and tonic water from black paper bags.

"Finally, the booze." Kemp sounded relieved.

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AND so the small apartment slowly filled with actors, cinematographers, and hipster hangers-on. By eleven Paisley "Pat" Kemp was down two fingers, sliced clean off while quartering limes for the gin-and-tonics, and had ignited half his mustache while lighting a cigarette on Herbert Craigswitch's electric stovetop. There was a brass band, now, that had struck up a lively set in the bedroom, and everyone, for propriety's sake, simultaneously agreed to protect Herbert's counter-tops by setting their drinks down on coasters commandeered from the discs composing season twelve of the *International Cartographer* collection. Herbert himself sat sweltering in the body heat that had built up in the apartment, perched on the seat of his toilet.

"Why me?" he asked the quartered limes floating in the bathtub, which was also filled with ice, gin, and tonic.

"Because Wally used to see a girl who lived in this apartment before you did," answered the blonde, whose name was Karen, and who sat completely nude among the limes floating in the ice, gin, and tonic. "She died before he got famous. Slit her wrists right here, in this bathtub."

"Ugh," Herbert moaned. "Why would he want to have his wrap party here?"

"Wally has all of his wrap parties here," *New York Times* film critic A.O. Scott offered as he commenced urinating into the bathroom sink. "He tells the tenants some bullshit about the 'evolution of the night-club,' and most of them leave him to it." A.O. Scott grunted. "This is the way the man lives his life; all his

films, everything he does, orbits this one event, this girl who offed herself in that tub.” This was the most rational, perspicuous, explanation thus-far offered for the evening’s festivities and, ironically, had come from a man who had built a reputation predicated solely on prolix bullshit. Herbert scooped up another cupful of gin-and-Karen. The brassy Louisiana jazz wafted over the crowd noise, into the bathroom, and echoed around the tiles. A.O. Scott zipped his fly. “Walter’s *New Hampshire Haberdasher* is his first film in five years. I expect you might be seeing us again, and soon.”

Herbert mulled this over as Karen towed herself off. Herbert wanted to feel like Wally was invading his private space. Instead he felt like he had invaded Wally’s. Herbert downed his drink and lurched off the toilet. Karen called at him before he got to the door. “Her name was Sarah,” she said.

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HERBERT was drenched in sweat by the time he fought his way outside, to the stoop of the townhouse. He sat on the steps, which still radiated heat from the day previous. He saw Wally out of his peripheral vision, leaning against the column just outside the front door. Herbert spoke to Wally without facing him.

“I have no idea how you get these people to keep coming to this party you keep having, whenever you finish your films,” Herbert spoke, “This thing with Sarah, it’s sick.”

“*They’re* sick,” said Wally, around the stem of his lit briar pipe. “*You’re* sick. *Everyone’s* sick and tired of having to pretend like they know what any, all of this,” Wally was gesturing wildly, “means.” He put on an expression of profundity and sucked hard on the briar. “At least my films put things in some sort of context, even if it’s as arbitrary as God’s own will. And, speaking of that, God willing, you’ll be at the wrap party for the next one as well.”

“God willing I’ll have moved to Manhattan by then.”

Wally frowned.

“The cast always comes. They always do.”

Herbert turned around at this. “What do you mean, ‘cast?’”

“What do you think all the cameras are for?” Wally gestured again with his pipe. Herbert turned back towards the street, noticed another man who he had overlooked, standing in the shadows on the sidewalk, wearing a film camera on a gimballing harness. “We need you to finish the film; you’re our star. We don’t have a sequel to *Mexico City Heat* without you, baby. You’re the only one who can play ‘Herbert.’” Wally spoke without pause. “We should go on back in, when you’re ready; they’re almost set to shoot the big musical number.”

Herbert let Wally guide him back into the townhouse. Now Paisley “Pat” Kemp was standing on his Formica dinner table, wearing a white-tiger striped

smoking jacket and an ascot. A grip was adjusting a mic stand in front of him. Herbert glanced into the bathroom and saw another grip pouring stage blood into the bathtub.

Wally cupped his hands around his mouth to project his voice over the murmur of the crowd.

“Lights up!”

A blue spotlight bracketed Kemp. The grip scampered off.

“*Action!*” Wally shouted.

The band leader coaxed the brass into a raunchy Big Band tune. The crowd cheered and clapped. Paisley “Pat” Kemp took the mic in hand and soft-shoed around the table. As he sang he flailed spastically around, flinging streams of blood from his ruined hand and globs of salve from his burnt face onto the cheering and laughing crowd.

### *Space Gambler*

#### **Chorus:**

Space gambler, trav’lin’ through space.  
Stoppin’ in town with that green poker face.  
Space gambler, trav’lin’ through space,  
Meteor rocks and a cosmic hard place.

#### **Verse I:**

Space gambler, on your rockin’ horse,  
Hitched to rockets (of course).  
Space gambler, never showin’ your cards,  
No one to play with, we all know it’s hard.

#### **Chorus**

#### **Verse II:**

Space gambler, you know she’s left town,  
She’s not comin’ back, long as you are around.  
Space gambler, you shot up the bar,  
Posse’s out look’n, and they needn’t look far.

#### **Chorus x2**

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TROUBLED dreams of applesauce and death filtered through Herbert's unconsciousness. He dreamed that he was a greenish looking frontiersman gambler with a tinfoil broadcloth, antennas poking out of his Plexiglas Stetson, and twin magnums strapped to the harness of his space suit. He dreamed he was sitting in the bar at McKinley's dad's country club, watching the seams in the parquet floor burst forth with a tremendous inland sea of un-pasteurized applesauce.

The thin, watery applesauce rose. No one in the bar seemed to mind. McKinley's dad and his friends did not mind, so Herbert, the Space Gambler, felt that he should not mind either. But he did. He had to fight to hold his breath under the applesauce. And as he drowned, his last thoughts were of blinding hatred for McKinley and his dad and his dad's friends, the friends who ignored Herbert when he waved to them at the platform tennis cages, who pinched the female lifeguards sitting up in the high chairs at the club pool, who dressed their children in crested blazers and then set them to punching at Herbert's groin and grabbing his car keys out of his pocket. Herbert wanted to un-holster his magnums and mix McKinley, his dad, and his dad's friend's guts with the applesauce. He wanted to yell "Go for your irons!" and then mix those guts right up with the applesauce; see if they were as red as Sarah's blood, see if they didn't come out yell. But Herbert, Space Gambler though he was, could only sputter and drown.

When he woke, Herbert found himself wedged in the bathtub, spine on fire, catching drips of water from the faucet with his nose. Troubled dreams, Herbert mused, were a relative sort of affair. The sweet smell was gin, not applesauce, and Herbert's stomach squirmed at it. He burped softly and pulled himself to the toilet. Two bloody fingers pirouetted in the current of the bowl.

In the living room, Herbert found Wally, Kemp, and Karen asleep on his couch in front of *International Cartographer* Episode 06-12: "Ferrets: Nature's Weasel." In the kitchen, he found a production assistant mopping gritty puddles of champagne off the yellowed linoleum. Herbert eyed him warily as he took a demitasse cup down from his cabinet. "Love your work," the production assistant said, mopping up Herbert's footprints. "Here, let me get that." He dropped the mop and made for the cup in Herbert's grasp.

"Fuck," Herbert growled, "off."

"Ok," placated the production assistant. He held his hands out, palms face down, to Herbert and backed over to his mop and bucket.

Herbert had started in on his second cup when he heard the knock. He rose to answer. Wally watched him from the doorway to the living room. "Don't do it," Wally said. "You can't let them in. If you let them in, we're going to have to do some serious re-writing."

"Re-writing?" Herbert asked.

"Of your character." Wally took off his mirrored glasses. His eyes were sunken and his face was drawn. "Of your character, at the end of my film."



Herbert nodded and tied his open bathrobe around him.

“Well, how does this version end?”

“Soon,” answered Wally. “Soon.”

Herbert went to his front door and, without looking in his peephole, opened it wide.

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

**Bendi Barrett** is a poetic-soul attending Cornell in pursuit of various truths, like where he can find lovely people to commiserate with and how he can design a future that he won't completely hate. He is also a junior.

**Kelly Jean Camin** is a double major in Animal Science and Communications, due to clinical insanity. She enjoys innuendo, double-entendre and inside jokes, especially about amblyopia. Her future plans include becoming a journalist, improving her gaydar and killing Paul Shaffer.

**Alesia Caroselli** is a wily son of a gun. She is currently living above ground in a sod hut hoping to one day make it in that big scary wild boscage known as the poetry world. When not under the influence of susurrus, she likes among other things, stirring gravy. She'd like to humbly thank her family and friends for their gorgeous inspiration and support. A monkey can only do so much alone.

**Rebecca Chapman** is a sophomore English major from the mean streets of manhattan. She is also known as Charlie.

**Vicky Hunt** is a biology major at Cornell. She is ecstatic about graduating this semester. In August, she will begin a Masters of Science in the Netherlands. Someday she hopes to live in one place long enough to get a friendly, medium-sized, mixed-breed dog.

**Barrie Kreinik** is a senior theatre and English major. When not writing poetry, she can usually be found at the Schwartz Center, being a thespian. She is also the Editor-in-Chief of Ink Magazine.

**Beatrice Mao** would like to thank her verse writing class, and Alice Fulton, for their feedback on her work. She's also grateful for the working and personal relationships she's developed this year with David Levine, Jon Papas, and Vicky Hunt, all of whom are graduating (the damage is done, so she guess they be leavin'.)

**Julie Mao** is a junior english major. She loves pie crusts, southern mint tea, and wishes poetry had the power to travel beyond the hallways of academia, perhaps even to the land she once called home.

**John McReynolds** is currently a second-year English major. When he is not writing poetry, John enjoys Middle Eastern studies, travel, and the outdoors. He plans to

pursue a career in diplomacy.

**Matthew J.H. Palmer** does not like studying English or talking about obscure movies that only assholes have seen. He does not lead a tony life in Scarsdale, NY. No matter how many drinks you buy him, you cannot get him to lapse into a disturbing, spastic, and oddly profanity laden Bob Dylan impression. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try.

**Rumit Pancholi** is an MFA student at the University of Notre Dame. He has published work in *Banyan Review*, *Emerson Review*, *Avatar Review* and *Gertrude* and received Honorable Mention for the Writecorner Press Prize in Poetry and Honorable Mention for the Atlantic Monthly Student Writing Contest. His writing influences include Michael Collier, Ted Kooser, Elizabeth Alexander, and Jack Gilbert.

**Jonathan Papas** is a senior English major at Cornell and the president of CU Jazz. He'd like to say thank you to all the wonderful Cornell poets and artists who have inspired and befriended him. Thank you. Cue 'Tender' by Blur, begin the tears.

**Noah Slovin**, of Worcester Massachusetts, is a freshman in the college of Arts and Sciences. He spent last year in Israel, studying and volunteering, and is considering majoring in Science of Earth Systems. He is also in the Beketsev Israeli Dance Troupe.

**Tyler Theofilos** is a Junior at Yale University. He is the co-founder of *Musings Against a Train Station*, Yale's humorous literary magazine, and co-manager of Circulation and Distribution for the Yale Literary Magazine. He also directs the improv troupe Safety Mix and reviews music for the Yale Herald.

**Ashley L. Williams** is a junior at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, majoring in Africana Studies. She was the recipient of the 2007 & 2006 College Language Association/Margaret Walker Prize for Fiction. She is also a Hurston-Wright Writers' Week Alumni, and has had several of her fiction pieces published.

**Danielle Wu** is a sophomore majoring in English and Religious Studies. She is a native Floridian who likes living in Ithaca but is bewildered by snow falling in the middle of April. Her favorite chocolate is dark chocolate.

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