Lane Community College

# DENALI Literature and Arts Magazine

two thousand fifteen



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And everyone who submitted their work. Thank you.

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# Words, Words, Words

Compiling, editing, and designing this issue of *Denali* has been a real pleasure. This magazine is a real mountain that traversed me all over – from the bleach-white flicker of the basement office, tiles screaming and pounding under the grind of machines, to the melodic smokey-incense of my friend's loft bedroom. I was taught things I didn't know, forgot a thing or two, and was bombarded by erratic words and images leaping into my eyeballs where they reflected and fired receptors deep inside of my brain. I hope your experience is at least a part of mine.

All of the works within this edition are from striving artists and writers; students learning and experimenting. Show me an artist who is not experimental, who has perfected the craft, no longer trying new things, and I will show you death.

In a very literal sense, I aimed to push the envelope and embrace creativity above all else for this very special edition — so if you feel a cringing dirtiness or a bleak and harrowing blackness while reading certain contents herein, know that I have achieved what I set out for. There are parts of this magazine that are best read on the filth—soaked floor of a highway gas station bathroom, while an angry attendant furiously pounds on the jammed door. That is not to say that this *Denali* is not without its moments of humor though. I sincerely hope you will find a thing or two that will make you chuckle.

Furthermore, my gentle, honey-sweet reader, beyond mere titillation and entertainment, I am most ecstatic to announce the inclusion of a wealth of activist writings in this issue. Included are beautiful, poignant, and moving pieces of advocacy – for recognizing the plight and rights of women, LGBTQ people, the abused, and sufferers of psychiatric disorders. Hopefully, you will not only take these to heart, but engage in activism yourself, whatever your creative outlets may be.

Enjoy, Chayne

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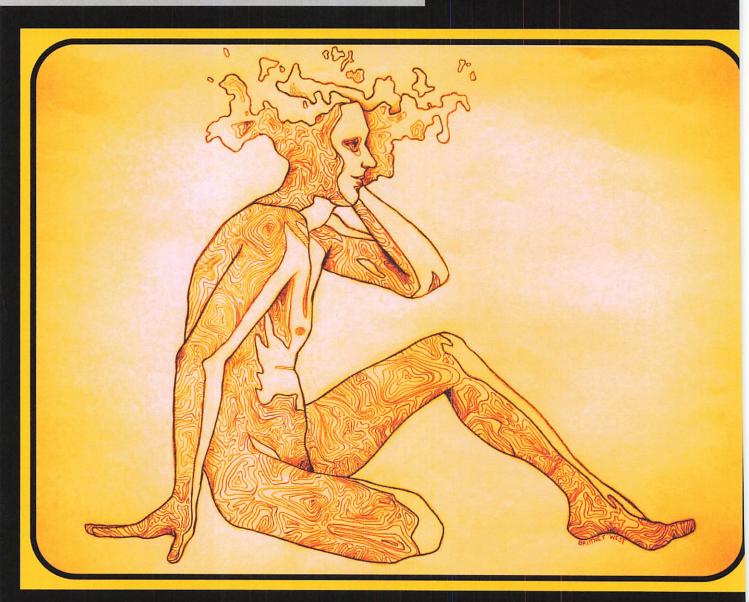
Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.

— Pablo Picasso

## Jessica Graham Dear Brother

Violated. Innocence barely experienced, torn from me before I knew the word. Violated. Trust broken. ripped from the seams of my barely formed reality. Violated. Love twisted, deformed, a monster that slept in the bed next to mine. Violated. Brother, a curse said under the breath hidden behind doors and whispers. Violated. My body invaded, boundaries crept past overrun by a crawling infiltration. Violated. Mind corrupted exposing the rotted roots of the future desires expanding in my chest. Violated. My voice lost my silent screams consumed by the looming eclipse. Violated. Defining me as victim, as tainted, as something wrong. Violated.

Brittney West
Touching on Topography,
The Abstract Terrain of the Mind



### Jessie Moyer I Call I

Lingering strands of lust Accompanied by the building blocks of love Safely guide me into the life ahead Like a rushing train, an overpass dash Twirling lights, passion dripping I fall into you and collapse For today I escape crutches of my past Remember this and carry on You Like the touching of lips upon my breast So soft, so fragrant, all to me Like the un-rested child, detached, sprinting Is my love for you Never forced in this strenuous life is a glimmer of our passion Never forced in this life in my calling to you Radiant eyes foresee our future Behind closed eyelids The vastness of your soul is ever present The inspiration, the magnetic burst of expression Boiling screams of desire accompanied by drowning hope I run to you, fruitful and fit Strong yet staggered Confidence beams from every part of me I pull you up through this drowning soul into the light of our life To again immerse you in the doting aura I call I

## Kenneth Parker Richter

The room's placidity was achieved first by lighting a stick of incense Smoke risen from the ember's terminating end broke across my face like a dry tide pirouetted up, joined the outer particulates and filled the room with an unburnt fragrance.

It was a blue diode — the second of two measures never ignored — which emitted that calming light quiet fingers of it fanning wide throughout the room's muted gray

I was sober, senses primed for your endless approach; the stairwell's predictable refrain of protest and age, your sneakers on the hollow cement

# Chayne Thomas Rumpus

Please imagine silence. You are hearing nothing, then the thoughts and voices start talking to you: "Burn it all down!" or maybe just some incomprehensible mumbling and jumbling, "argg argg argg nom nom nom", or a tonal noise, an endless "beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee." You try to match the tone, make the noise yourself aloud, but it just shifts up or down a half-pitch and continues. This isn't the kind of silence here and now. No, it is quiet. He is in the woods. Dry, mid-western woods with deer ticks. "If they bite you, you will get deathly nauseous if you take so much as a bite of meat afterwards." Well, at least it will be good for business. Jack shuffles his feet, listening for the sounds of ticks hopping along the pine needles. Silence.

Jack steps outside of his tent; the girl follows. A moment ago, she had leaned over, her zebra leggings pulled taunt as she exposed the flap. Stimulant. Why had she closed it in the first place? Well, there was the molly, secretly exchanged, small pink bits placed between lips and sucked. Salty, but with that benzocaine bitterness. Everyone is doing drugs.

"Let's go find Link," she said intoxicatingly. Jack didn't know it, but everything Zebra Girl does she does *intoxicatingly*. She is poison. Not surprising. In fact, it is expected from someone who is trained to use sex as a weapon, a means of torture and interrogation; when wielded in battle, less forgiving than a .50 in the hands of a marksman.

Big bicycle tires bobbing underneath them, blunk clunk chunk. Jack didn't even know whose these were, or where they had come from. He bounced along peacefully. The lights melted into the sky, vibrating colors like the aurora borealis, or Van Gogh. They licked enticingly at his body and mind. The smell of fresh-cut grass mingled with the leftover bitter-dryness of his mouth.

"Wow, this is so beautiful!" Jack felt like a kid, pedaling and laughing

as he followed her fat, black-and-white-striped ass across the sea. Bobbing up and down on the cruiser.

Crowds. There were more and more people the further they went — into the heart. Out of the trees, Jack could hear much better. He was following aimlessly. The distant yells, moans, and gesticulations of music creeping from behind. Music is always better at a distance on drugs. Everything happening all around him, and he is in the moment.

The needled forest envelopes everything. No more people, no more music, no more light — just a hypnagogic green mist rising around them, consuming them. He hadn't shifted yet, that would come much later, but this felt similar.

Talking. Why does everyone always have to talk and ruin everything? Jack wished to embrace the dark, fade into the mist, but Link and Zebra keep on talking. Link likes to squat low while he is speaking, his vest blends into the verdant forest. He *looks* the part, but doesn't sound it. Incessant, pointless banter. Jack, fed up, steps away without a word and heads back towards the songs and throngs.

Jack met a topless nymph and a gnome. Do they always come in pairs? His dancing feet sinking deeper and deeper into the mud-laden ground around the main stage. No one was performing. The mud was at least nine inches deep, maybe even up to the knee. You couldn't put your foot in without losing a shoe, a toe. He imagined what lay beneath the mud: the bodies of dancers who had come before? Some girl's panties, thrown off in an ecstatic frenzy? Whatever is there won't be exhumed in our lifetimes. Deep mud.

Jack slid and slid, danced and danced, not sure if the music was present. The next morning, he woke up open-eyed and alert, his old friend and a new one lying next to him, snoring with abandon. He got up, unzipped again, bright sun-rays dodging between the trees to invade the tent.

The forest smells damp in the morning; fresh dew carries the old pine up into his sore nostrils.

Mornings are always Jack's favorite. An early riser amongst this crowd, he always has some time for peace before the chaotic onslaught of day. Stretching and yawning, bending back: sun salutation part two, he

smiles and embraces life. How is life so easy?

His hand reaches back into the wigwam (\$99.97 at your friendly neighborhood Walmart) and pulls out a beer and a bag of stale granola. Later, Jack realized some of these kids didn't even bother with the essentials. At a future festival, he would someday man a hose more tenuously than a skinny firefighter — hours and hours spent drenching bottles, mouths, and clothes alike for those who forget to bring drinking water. Beer would do for now, it is mostly water anyways. He cracks the can open with a hiss while taking a piss on the Sleepy grass.

After breakfast, Jack headed to the only permanent structure nearby, a small shack known as The Kitchen. Being with established and adored friends always affords one the finer pleasures in life — in this case: access to cooking equipment, a sink, and running water (although it would still be almost a week till he takes a shower). The Kitchen is a hub of activity. Filthy hungover people trying to recover from whatever concoction of drugs and alcohol they had taken the night before; shuffling here and there looking for something they can steal to eat, or fighting vainly for the last drop of coffee — it is being brewed in a single-cup coffee press of old grounds. The warm brown aroma fills the room.

Jack nudges past the others to the sink, rinsing his face, hair, and hands for a second with cool water; he shudders as it chills his skin. A girl — we will call her Molly — comes up from behind him with a light "hi."

"Hey, how was your night?" he grins. She smiles.

She has updated her wardrobe. When Molly arrived, she had only the clothes on her back, and maybe a small backpack of essentials (no beer); however, the Captain had let her dig through his shiny pyramid of fabric to find clothes. Everything the Captain wears is bright and colorful — red melting into blue into purple into sequins, monsters, and magicians — the clothing of a clown from space. She has fashioned a skirt out of sky, her shirt swimming in lively fish. Jack is wearing a motley coat and pajama

pants with shimmering stars encircled by the moon, no shirt.

In moments, the two are dancing, leaping over tables and nimbly sliding between the coffee-ers. Amazingly, not a soul's hurt, although Jack almost

breaks his foot when it slides suddenly off of a chair — good thing he is agile. There isn't any music playing yet.

Leaping and laughing, the two sprint off with the Captain and Spice into the hot sun — the day has begun.

Selling their product is easy: one look at the pulsating-electric tone is usually all that it takes. Getting around is the hard part. The Captain philosophizes all the way. "Man, check it out, people are here for the experience. We are a part of their experience; I aim to be the most outstanding and most sensational part of that experience. I love you! You are a stardazzle!" he shouts, and goes on to explain that everything and everyone around us is essentially the lost essence of the stars. "All matter is created in violent explosions in space. You are a distant, long-dead celestial being."

They run and dance and galvanize through their flock of stardazzles, creating experience. In the interim, Jack broods: the world turns and turns. People are starving. People are dying. Does there have to be a point? Suits work and die. Uniforms die.

A naked, ash-gray shaman sprints ahead of the pack. Jack chases him relentlessly, but can't catch him. They both duck and weave, hastily moving in a blur; gray coalescing with color. Suddenly, the shaman stops, turns, crouching. He brings a finger to his lips, obscured by his camouflage. Shhh! he mimes.

Jack stops and turns the corner, and the shaman is gone, disappeared.

A young group of merrymakers trades them for some cubes. Jack chews and swallows a fistful. Bitterness, again, and musty. The taste sticks to his throat.

Back at camp, the trip begins suddenly. Trees begin to vibrate, humming their sublime message: they are disquieted. The music thrashes through them in waves, while an invisible force-field of emerald octagons emanates from their core. Jack can't stand the festival-goers, pasquinades. He wants them to fade into nothingness, leave the poor trees alone. He longs to be alone, to feel.

"A long time ago, the planet was completely green. We arched toward the heavens, radiant and glowing, spreading the wealth of the sun in the form

of protection and shelter, food and nourishment." Now, they are bombarded with discord. No matter. As with all things, it will fade. I think that maybe I'm dreaming.

The next day, dark clouds begin cycloning in the sky above the jamboree. A storm is brewing.

The only safe place is the forest near The Kitchen; the rest of the festival being wrecked and torn to pieces as the sky opens up its wrath on the bacchanalians. People flee to their cars. Jack quietly sits outside the teepee, caressing his nearby pine, as the frigid wind whips waves of needles and sticks from the trees into his face. He thinks he deserves it for taking part in this revelry. Jack sits silently in awe while the storm rages.

Of course, nothing comes of it. People are back at it again at sun-rise, getting elevated and stealing broken tents and Eazy-ups, drinking and laughing. "What a storm!" "Crazy!" People begin packing up to leave, on to the next gig. He looks upon the destruction, ashamed and embarrassed. The Captain puts his arm around Jack's shoulders, "All we can do is reflect their light, hopefully they will see." They look on.



I stop on the walkway, in my yard, as I'm leaving for work. I just stand there, I don't know why I stop, but I just stand there. Where was I going again? That's right, to work. People are in their yards with their smiling faces, getting into their cars going to their various destinations, and I just stand there. They seem very happy as they pick up their newspapers and yell to each other across their manicured lawns, morning Joe, morning Fred, see the game last night? And I just stand there. Where am I going again? That's right, to work, but I just stand there trapped in this moment unable to move.

There in the driveway is my car — all I need to do is just take a step, a simple movement of my legs, just a step - but I just stand there. Looking down at my legs I see that my shoes lack a polish, and I think these pants have seen better days. Better call work and let them know that I will be a little late. Hello Berry, I won't be in today. Nothing, I'm fine, just won't be in. I turn the phone off, and as I slip it into my pocket, I start to remember something about a phone, and a pain runs through my brain so severe I cringe. My legs start to shake: it feels as if they might give out from under me. Dropping my briefcase, I close my eyes and put my hands against the sides of my temples. Stop thinking about the phone, just stop it! The pain and the shaking subside. My body feels numb all over, and I need a drink. I turn and start for the house, but once again I just stand there looking at the front door not wanting to go inside. So, I just stand there for the longest time staring at this hinged barrier that keeps me from the emptiness that exists on the other side. I notice how much the door needs painting. The little cracks in the paint are starting to chip and the bottom part is faded more than the top. I just stand there wondering why it is that this doesn't seem to matter.

I start thinking about the lake. The lake is beautiful this time of year — the changing color of the trees, the camp fires with the aroma from the burning wood. A shiver runs up my spine as I remember Dad calling across the camp, "Want to go fishing, son?" As I feel a lump forming in my throat, I know I need to go to the lake, I have to go to the lake.

After picking up my briefcase, I not only find myself able to move, but it is also as if I'm being pulled to the car. Throwing the briefcase and my suit coat in the back seat, I'm just a little lighter, yet this large hot lump in the pit of my stomach starts to form. It will be okay when I get to the lake. A four hour trip and I need gas.

The gas station seems empty and this small piece of paper is being pushed by a light breeze across the pavement. As the attendant wearing a tattered t-shirt and old stained coveralls shuffles up to the car, I think, What a lucky guy, young and without care.

"Fill it up?"

"Yes please, I have a long way to go."

It starts to rain. I turn the windshield wipers on low. Each time the blade passes my face, I feel a calmness taking over. Each movement feels like it has a meaning, but I have no idea what it is; yet it soothes me for some reason. The tires are louder in the rain. Funny how I have never noticed that before. Dad says — "Pull the line up a bit, son. There's no fish on the bottom." God I love the rain, but how unusual. I don't remember it raining any other time we had gone to the lake. I remember the time at the lake my little sister Jenny was trying to learn how to swim, and she got really sunburned because she wouldn't stop trying. She said. "Go away stupid, I'm

swimming, leave me alone," then splashed the water without putting her head under it. She was always such a stubborn girl. I kept telling her that she was going to be sorry, but she wouldn't listen.

Only two more hours I'm guessing.

Thank God the rain finally decided to stop.

Those trees seem to be so much larger than I remember. It has been a while. When was it the last time I was up here? Not important,



just keep driving, I'll be there soon.

Jenny had become a doctor, a surgeon helping kids get better. I guess in some ways that tenacity of hers paid off. Funny how she never had children of her own. Jenny was always the smart one. Dad always told her to keep her eye on the ball and everything will turn out fine. He was always the optimist.

All of a sudden, I'm feeling sick to my stomach and think I might just have to throw up. I pull the car over to the side of the road, I'll just sit here for a while. As I stare straight ahead, I begin to question my actions about the lake, and I just sit here for the longest time listening to the car run. But I know I have to keep going. I will be okay when I get to the lake.

I press on the pedal and as the car begins to move, I feel that burning lump in the pit of my stomach once again. And now I miss the rain. It seems the rain can be pretty good company when you're driving all alone. Dad says — "Put plenty of water on that fire boy. It's important that the coals are completely extinguished." I'm getting close now. Better stop and rest; it can be dangerous driving without stopping. But I just drive right past the rest area.

I'm thinking it must be about another hour away now.

Life can be so strange. You learn all these things — how to walk, talk, and make campfires, and then the next thing you know you're taking philosophy for a major and you're married with two children, how does that? How does one go from making campfires to trying to figure the philosophical characteristics of the world? Why can't just making campfires be good enough? There's a lot to be learned sitting around campfires, and who cares about the story of some damn thoughts that stream together with no end to them, why the hell do we just keep going in some direction that has no reason to it? It just keeps going and going! Wow where did that come from? I have always loved learning; I must be getting tired. I'll be there soon — the road is getting curvy. Jenny hated this part of the trip; car sickness must have been a miserable thing for her. No wonder she always insisted on driving.

Must be getting close to noon now. My hands seem to be very sore for some reason, and that lump in my stomach has become very large — it's no wonder I'm not hungry. No sign of clouds now; they must have traveled north. Jenny always loved looking at clouds. "Can you see the dog?" she would say, or "That one looks like a mountain." She would go on for what seemed ages talking about what she saw in those clouds. Funny thinking back to those times when I loved my little sister so very much, and before I became so very angry with her.

There's that viewing point that we always liked to stop at to gaze out across the valley. I wonder how many times we had stopped over the years, simply to look out over where it was we had just came from. But I drive right by it. I remember the last time I stopped — well, no reason to go there, besides you can't really go back, now can you? What was the promise that I made to her there? That's right, I'll never stop loving her. The sun hurts my eyes as I drive on, and as I look towards the mountains, it makes the emptiness inside me more intense and that missing something more real. Just keep going — I'll be okay when I reach the lake.

There's that spot where Dad pulled over and Mom was so frantic in the front seat of their car. By the time I got there he was goneheart attack, they said.

As I drive past I can almost feel his presence, and I miss him all the more. Mom never really recovered from that day and was never the same. But I couldn't have been more proud of Dad for stopping that car before he passed away — and saving Mom's life because of it.

Wow. is this a tear?

I haven't cried since — well you know damn good and well since when — and that was five years to this day. Funny this crying thing, and how someone can just stop. But sometimes you have to end some things before they get out of hand. People make too much of things — "It's not healthy," they would say, you have to let things go, let them out, let them breathe. What do they know? Would you let a tiger out of its cage, and let it go?

My hands start to shake as I make that last long turn around

the steep part of the mountainside — just before you see the lake. A memory starts to form and that pain in my brain returns and I just want to scream. "Stop it, stop it!" I say, as I press against my temples and close my eyes. The pain subsides and I feel so very weak. I open my eyes and see that I am stopped in the middle of the road. The car still running reminds me that I need to keep going. I roll the window down to get some fresh air — that's all, just a little fresh air and I'll be all right. There, that's better. Almost there, no turning back now.

There it is. Man, it seems so much smaller than I remember. What's this? The park is closed for the season? What the hell do they mean closed for the season? What's wrong with these people? I pull my car over to where the No Parking sign stands just before the gate, get out, and decide I will hike the rest of the way.

As I walk, it seems as if the lake is growing larger with each step, and I keep thinking I've forgotten something. I turn and see that I have left the car door open, I know there's no going back; I just haven't the energy.

When I arrive, there is so much missing — the sound of children playing, the aroma of the camp fires, and people sitting around talking and playing games. Where are the families and barking dogs? Where are the young lovers who hold each other's hands as they stroll along the paths? I look out over the lake and I'm drawn to the reflection of the mountain peaks that ripple gently across the water. Like the movement of the water, I see the memories moving across time with visions of warm camp fires and loving moments with my wife and children. I find it hard to breathe and as the tears run down my face,

How could Jenny have been so foolish? I told her it was just one more day: work had been so busy and I just needed one more day to finish up. She said, "Why don't you come on up to the lake after you finish? We have two weeks and you can take your time with work. Besides, your wife and children are chomping at the bit. Especially Athea, she wants me to teach her how to swim. I will let them know

I feel the missing parts that had made my life so wonderful.

that you will meet them there after you're finished."

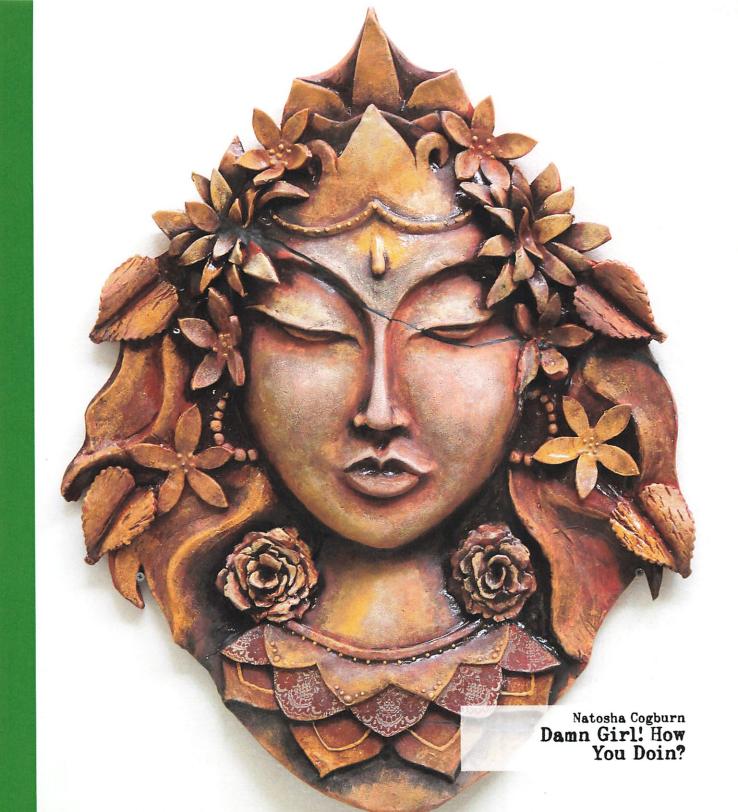
"Please just wait," I said. "You just finished working a double and are in no condition to drive."

"Nonsense," she said, "you always worry too much; we'll be just fine."

It was midnight when I got that call — Yes, This is he. And then I just listened as this man took from me all that was important in my life, leaving me with that strange little ring tone in place of the family that I loved so dearly.

As I stand here looking out over the lake, I feel my wife's hand in mine, I hear my son asking, "Dad, are we going fishing later?" I see the look of my daughter's bright green eyes as she sits on my lap while we roast marshmallows over the fire. I want to walk to where we used to camp, but I just stand here. I want to hold my family one last time, but I just stand here. I want to tell my wife that I will always love her, but I can't.

I just stand here.



# Selene Steets The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth

I have heard that women are kind because oppression conditions one to empathy. So which of these is the revolution:

For woman to refuse her conditioning or for kindness to inherit the Earth?

Yet already I have spoken of woman like she is a thing.
I did not claim ownership of her,
I did not say "us", I did not say "we".
We continue to study ourselves from afar, as a man would study us, as an object
or a curiosity.

As to my question,
It is a false dichotomy.
Just as this world is broken
into halves,
each the other's opposite,
so too are my thoughts broken.

I have a fractured thought that feminism is the study of wholeness.

Man has had his say
and he says:
"it is this, or it is that"
"it is greater, or it is less than"
"it is useful, or it is worthless"
"it is me, or it is not me"
and we have listened.

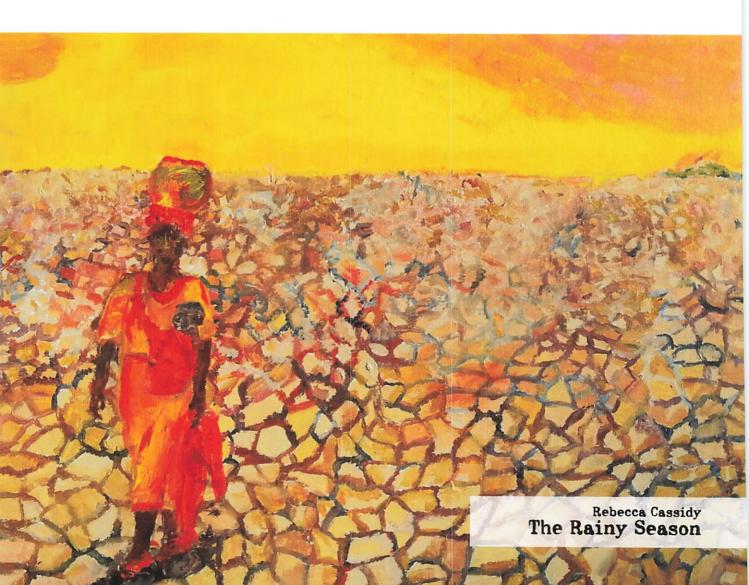
Now we say:
That is true enough, brother.
Also, this is true.
At the very heart of all creation lives a paradox, and we each contain a multitude of contradictions.
Your categories are both real and illusory.

So,
We deny that we are any different from you,
because we are the same.
We celebrate ourselves, separate and unique.
We embrace that we are the voice of your neglected shadow,
because in the shadows we have learned what man is lacking.
We have picked up all the pieces of discarded fears,
which can never be destroyed,
and we have hauled them a very long mile.

As we carried this weight, our bodies grew strong. Today, with solid arms we hold fear up to the light. and we see that what had been named weakness is Strength so deep, so old, so vital that it could not be contained in category.

We are the justice that seeks no revenge.
We are the power that seeks no subordinate.
We are the tenderness that is fierce and unyielding.
We are the bonds between equals.
We are the brightness of an individual who is free.
We are a part of you,
the part you banished long ago,
into the land of your Sister.
But we are standing right beside you

here to give back what you have lost here to take back what you withheld from us. They say the female bird looks plain because we do not have eyes to see her splendor. Let the unseen colors come out of the darkness, and break the bondage of mystery.



### Cameron Wallace Efforts in Vain

With an ever slow and steady deliberation, Tortoise was un-crimping metal. His eyes glazed, their lenses reflective pools that shone brightly, the moonlight bouncing from them downward, downward to his self appointed fixation.

As I spoke to him, I could feel my words falling on ears not deaf, but indifferent, all but shut off, receiving sound with no intent to interpret its meaning. An unaware series of hushed "uh huh" and "yeah" transmitted from Broca to plica vocalis in a timbre that fell somewhere in the realm of detached tenor, the words, not spoken but falling out, could be roughly translated "I am elsewhere". He did not mind punctuating my obvious monologue, was not in the least affected by its incessance. Unbothered, barely aware, his knee jerks serve to enable my intoxicated yammering.

The folds of metal fell, not one by one, but in groups, not to the ground, but to the process. Their tightly stamped shapes relaxing as, one by one, they are unfolded into one another meticulously with a needle nosed pliers. They are rejoined into their previous oneness, a oneness that was never broken despite dubious appearances.

I, lepus, cannot know the patience of his thoughtful deliberation. How diligent and accurate! He sat calmly and simply faced his mission, longneck bottle disregarded, aside, was it discarded? Would he return to it at long last, warm and flat after his long suffered metallic toiling? I cannot imagine possessing the want to celebrate his victory with a less than ice-cold commemoration, but I am not he, and cannot imagine committing to his initial task, or disregarding the alcohol to do so in the first place. He is a mystery to me.

I watch intently as the folds continue to fall and I try to insert myself into his head, as if I could will myself into the chasm where the wisdom or insanity that drives him swirls wildly, like a dark and brilliant

cyclone, letting it carry me gasping and spiraling upward into glorious understanding. I curse his impenetrability as the crimped steel disc expands upon itself to nearly double its original size, yet still it is distorted, it's surface warbled like voices heard from under water. From those depths I can hear the mindless motoring of my own pretty mouth, but can scarcely make out the words for the blaring volume of my turtle friend's progress. The words bear no meaning, all that matters is the careful restoration of a bottle cap to its former glory, slowly coming into sharp focus, a nearly smooth metal disc.

I hear my voice surfacing from the beneath the murk. It is horrible, shrill and distant. I desire to unspeak it, to remove it, to cut it out and banish it from discovered sound.

"Is it finished?"

He turns the flattened cap over and over between his middle and forefinger, cutting rows through his thick, greasy black hair with the digits of his free hand. His fingertips snap in effortless response, sending the fruits of his labor soaring over the rails and off the ledge to be swallowed whole by a seemingly infinite darkness below. Eyes still glazed, staring blankly out over the void, his hand seeks out the warm lager and he pulls and swallows hard.

This is how I know and remember him. This was his unshakable truth. Regardless of possessing an incredible kindness and words that always rang with optimism, his actions would always, ever so casually betray that every effort was, in the end, nothing.

# Hillary Wilson Shepard

(dedicated to Mathew Shepard and my fellow LGBTQ)

I am a daughter of Him. Alas. I am told one of my fundamental survival instincts, the very humanly urges of mine, are wrong. are unnatural. It's natural to me and everyone like you, basically loves just like me. Love is action. love is reaction, it's the lover's faction. You - cannot separate - the two. So don't - lie - to me. I can see it in your eyes. In the same way you suggest - "sin of the flesh" through sympathy through pity you rip me apart and embrace my scraps with love. You shame me. tell me I'm perfect just the way I am, try to deconstruct me, and change my clockwork to fit your mold. Are - YOU - my fellow christian? Or are you - JUST - the messenger? A Shepard paved a way for his black sheep. Abandoned October 6th, 1998,

he hung there - crucified on a fence post in Wyoming, a tattered scarecrow - left for dead discovered 18 hours later. - so... ...cold -He arose from the dead to Heaven never to be forgotten October 12th, 1998. And my siblings endure as they vanish everyday. The Ls The Gs The Bs The Ts The Qs vanish everyday. They weave in and out of your eyes. Those eyes may not hold the malicious knife wrought into what makes my fellows of - THAT - group stay in the closet die - in - the closet die - out - of the closet. But those eyes still hold a trillion needles made from what vou believe is - YOUR - god's will (not my god's) coming together in unity to poke holes in my pride in my sanity in my - self ... worth -Those eyes of sympathy

or pity

I can never decide..

"We'll go to the bank and I'll withdraw the money to pay your dealer. Just show me where he lives." he said. "No way," I replied, "I'm not showing you that. Just drop me off at the bank and I'll be home in a couple of hours." He understood and reluctantly agreed.

Several hours later, I came home. "Everything alright?" dad asked. I nodded with affirmation. He continued, "I'm not putting you through college, boy," he said with the most disappointed look I had ever seen. I nodded again but remained silent. "You are grounded, too."

The next day, while dad was at work, I snuck out of the house. Showing up hours later, I was hoping he wasn't there but he had indeed come home early. "I thought you'd sneak out," he said angrily. I still remained silent and showed him what I had in my hand, a piece of paper with the Marine Corps Eagle, Globe, and Anchor as the letterhead.

"What's that?" he queried. "It's my induction papers," I replied. "I've just enlisted and have been sworn into the Marine Corps' Delayed Entry Program."

"Oh Jesus, you didn't go in 'open contract,' did you?" he asked anxiously. When you don't specify your job preference to your recruiter, they put you wherever they think your best suited. In the Marines, this usually means you will become the backbone of the Marine Corps, which is an infantryman, a basic rifleman — a grunt. This was obviously a concern of dad's since he had mentioned in the past how he didn't want me to be another bullet-catcher. If I ever did join, he wanted me to get paid for my intelligence. "Of course not, sir," I replied. "I'm going into the Marine Aircraft Wing. It's written in my contract, guaranteed in black and white. I'm going to train to be an Air Support Radar and Radio Operator and I'll get paid for my brain, not my brawn." He breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed. He was proud of me; at that young age, it was very important to me.

I always knew I'd be a Marine as I had grown up surrounded by many Jarheads, admiring all of them. I aced the military entrance exam, the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery, and ten months later, I once again raised my right hand, only this time it was for active duty. It was June 5th, just ten days after graduation.

After the second swearing-in at the induction center, we became the official property of Uncle Sam. We received physicals, immunizations, and we signed a lot of paperwork. Some of the inductees were weeded out at this time. Because my father was a retired Marine, I was promptly put in charge of carrying the travel orders for our whole group.

Our flight wasn't until the next day and we had some time to kill so we went to the hotel, ate, and decided to see some of downtown Little Rock, the location of our Armed Forces Entrance and Examination Station.

The following morning we went to the airport, anxiously awaiting our flight to San Diego, California and the Marine Corps Recruit Depot. The bartender at the airport, a cute little redhead named Angie, was pouring all of us beers as we were sitting in the terminal. We were clearly not of legal drinking age, but she served us anyway. We were tipping her well and she was really nice. She knew we were leaving for Marine Corps boot camp and she questioned me about the official looking package I was guarding so closely. Her dad was a former Marine and Vietnam veteran. She recognized the emblem on the envelope. We talked, flirted, and she quickly deduced that I was in charge. She liked leaders. She made the phone sign with her thumb and pinkie finger, putting it to the side of her face, and slid a napkin across the bar with her number on it, mouthing the words "Call me when you get back." Of course, I never saw her again.

Our flight was called on the intercom. "Gentlemen, that's us," I said. The crew jumped and it was clear who was in charge — I was going to be a squad leader. Soon after, we boarded the plane. I had a few too many and was a little tipsy so I took a nap and the flight went by quickly. It was early afternoon in the central time zone when we departed Arkansas and we gained two hours as we flew towards the west coast.

We stepped off the plane at fifteen-hundred hours. There were seven of us. San Diego in June is sunny and dry and we walked slowly through the airport. "Let's take our time, fellas," I said. "We're gonna get our asses kicked soon enough."

In those days, people were allowed to smoke at almost any public place, so as we were making our way through the terminal, I lit up. Minutes later, we arrived at the Marine Liaison counter, clearly marked with a block-lettered sign reading USMC RECRUITS REPORT HERE. Two NCO's, a sergeant and a staff sergeant, were standing there, smiling. They were both dressed in modified class-C uniforms. Dress-blue trousers with the khaki, short-sleeved shirt; the uniform Marines wear on recruiter or embassy duty. With a cigarette dangling from my mouth, I was ready to ask if we were at the right place but I didn't get the chance.

"Pardon me, sir, is this where...?"

\*POW\*!!

He almost knocked me silly and simultaneously removed from my mouth the last cigarette I would enjoy for about a month. Embers and ashes flew everywhere. He had seen me carrying the manila envelope with the letters USMC printed on it along with the Marine Corps emblem emblazoned on the other side — he knew right away who we were and why we were there. He snatched the envelope from me, with an angry, unnecessary scowl. The staff sergeant just watched, silently, and with approval.

I jumped. The startled look on my face must've drawn attention to us, causing passersby and those standing within earshot to stop and gawk. He then screamed point-blank right in my face, "You lock your fuckin' body when you speak to me, maggot! You're in the Marine Corps now!" He yelled so loudly that it rattled my skull. I could smell his breath and taste the spittle that was coming out of his mouth. My last thought as a civilian:

"Oh shit. What the hell have I gotten myself into?"

# Daniel George The Fruits of Knowledge

In all of life's little mysteries the most important question has always been "why am I here?" The answer is obvious, to learn and understand knowledge.

The secret of life is hidden within the knowledge we consume. Throughout life what helps us the most is the knowledge we acquire, whether it be through learning or experiencing. Getting the best of knowledge is to understand what you know, for that truly is wisdom.

It is said that when we depart this world we take nothing with us. Truly I say unto you; this is not so. For everything you learn and experience remains with you. If not there would be no real purpose to eternal life, if all that we gain is to be lost in the twinkling of an eye, then what purpose would it serve?

In all your understandings of life remember these three rules:

learn all you can,

know there is always hope,

and keep forgiveness in your heart.

Again I say unto you; learn all that is before you, consume its fruitfulness and thereby will you multiply your blessings in this world and the next.

# Edith Hober My Bucket of Lemonade

I've always been told that if life deals you lemons, you make lemonade. Well, for three years — eight years ago — I made a lot of lemonade. At the time, I wondered if there were people watching my life on a television screen and laughing at my pain. I didn't find it funny, though. In the first year of my marriage, my father died. Two years into it, my now ex-husband decided that we should no longer be married, and a year later my brother died. This all not only happened in three years but also in the same month of each year.

I will never forget the day my father called to tell me he had cancer. It was the first time he'd ever said he loved me and the last. My world tilted in that moment, and breathing became hard. I cried myself to sleep that night. He died October 28th, 2006. Two years later, on October 15th, 2008, my husband asked me a question that stopped my heart. He asked me, if I thought we married too young, and he asked this in the middle of Walmart. He couldn't have picked a worse time or place to have done so. This, too, caused me to cry myself to sleep.

A year later as both these dates approached, my bother, D.J., got sick. What came next reminded me of what Forrest Gump said, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get," as D.J.'s cold quickly turned into pneumonia and later we found out he also had E.coli in his lungs. A few days after finding this out, my bother's heart started to fail and he was soon living solely on life support. When his heart beats got too low, we had to have the doctor cut off the machines. This happened on October 21st, 2009. October has become my least favorite month, and I only look forward to Halloween.

"There're only two approved uses of the word, and that isn't one of them:" The Thought-Police growl. Their suspect, cuffed to a chair, is probed mercilessly by their electrified batons. The smokey-hotdog smell of his flesh fills the white interrogation room. It hisses and Pops under the humming glow of the halogen lights.

"Fucking liberal!" One of them snarls.

The Suspect, in a mixture of pain and ecstasy, suddenly laughing leaps from the small metal chair, handcuffs flipping off of his wrists in a blue electric haze — they make a loud Pinging noise as they strike the walls of the cell.

"I've discovered the meaning of life!" He howls. White-hot sparks fly from his fingertips engulfing the officers, who tremble in shock. Their clothes melt to the floor in a black mess as their countenance changes — naked, sniveling boys, clutching at each other with abandon as they are burned into crispy crisps.

The Suspect flees down the street. Straight for the nearest Catholic school. All girls, of course.

The head Nun, replete in her dark robes — pussy dry, shriveled, covered in cobwebs — halts the young man at the door. "Don't think you are coming in here for even one Minute." She pokes at his exposed ribs with her ruler.

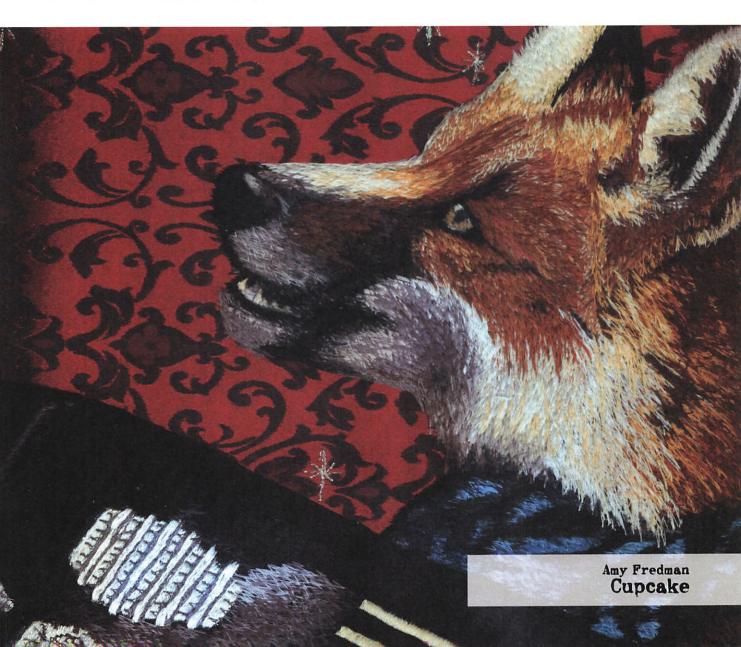
He is still naked, and gets a raging hard-on the instant the ruler touches him. He smiles as pearly white drops form on his turgid tip.

A young girl is wistfully looking out of the window during a frightfully boring grammar class upstairs, searching for a sign of God, when she eyes the Suspect's boner waving at her from the street below.

"Look!" She exclaims. The sweet wet musky smell of young horny girls fills the room. Panties hit the floor under every desk as the class descends

into complete anarchy. One of the girls leaps out of the third story window in ecstatic frenzy, moaning as she hits the pavement below with a wet Slap. The Nun rushes over to her corpse.

"Slut! SINNER!" She shouts, smacking the girl's wrists with her ruler over and over again. Neither she nor the girl ever meet God. The Suspect sneaks past with a grin.



### Jarrod Hyam Like a Dream

"Like a dream thou came'st, like a dream thou art dissolved"

This verse wrote itself on July 26, 1982.

amidst protoplasm, blood and wailing cries, none of which have ceased, to this moment.

Do not be fooled: these words do not serve to symbolize or to communicate; they are cataclysms, shards of life that slice open veins, breathing birth into floating vessels of thought.

the numberless seasons, brushstroked in flame birthless — imprinted in flesh, etched in each contour of skin, every aged crease in countenance. Singing dawn and windseared dusks scarlet-dyed tapestry of autumn turned silently white.

awaiting Earth: it is You alone I worship, You alone I prostrate before, lying on thy soft soils, again no more than dust.

ancestors adrift in these cells awaken to speak: lynched by the limbs of my family tree.
as my grandfather,
indigenous revolutionary —
child of Aztecatl, Mexica —
collapsed on the green grass
to die quickly,
all songs silenced by
addiction's esurient demons.

And you:
you, who once perched on nearby limbs,
bemused muse,
dweller of mine dreams,
midwife of these poems.
Your beauty split my skin,
birthing universes from these lips,
nebulae of countless colors strewn 'cross chasms.

engulfing tidal waves crash against and stain these cliffs. I felt your wings unfold long before you took flight. the gravity of thine beauty finally dashing our dream.

and I
again drift
alone,
upon infinite seas.
hoping, praying,
that these sighs
may reach you.

Set aloft: bathed in unborn æther. Longing, innocent ache between souls.

And life's concealed lover —
death —
I know her too well.
her sweet Circe song
seduces our weary skins.

How many times
have you greeted me?
I can taste you on my lips.
as coursing life sifts away,
ebbing,
tears and blood drained
in final release...

and all we are is water flowing life; nothing begins; nothing, no one to bid adieu —

surrender.
Be the night stars
that illumine the outstretched
canopy above.

In childhood,
psychosis first appeared.
followed for years by
his cousin neurosis.
still beckoned by my friend, schizophrenia.
Blessed by schizoidal
splits of dissociation,
join the sixteen conversations spoken by
my multiple personae & personalities,
who breathe manic lunacy and
moonlit dementia.

and sorrow.

Sorrow.

Ah, you, old lover,
thou skulking temptress.
at night you descend.

Paralyzing.
freezing every neuron and tissue...
her sister melancholy asked for marriage vows
and union in matrimony.
your waters ever call out
among the breath of sky...

But NOW
the eternal moment
stretches in
infinite directions;
do we hear it?

take these words —
these inert sounds —
let them blossom in mid-air offering
to the roving clouds!

exorcize every mote of suffering!

bees, flock to this body, for it is drenched in honey!

every season pulsates, the coming thirst of Spring, effulgent flames of Summer, divine pallet of autumn's yearning downswept leaves.

these limbs stripped barren burst roots unto Earth! sacred sphere orbiting 'round a glowing orb of nuclear fusion, their fervid shared love — incomprehensible.

celestial trumpets blare and deafen,
entire legions of seraphim croon angelic songs,
tears of those myriad wailing, moaning,
dissolved to carnage in bombstrewn streets,
transmute to molten lava:
frozen images of memories past
burn among the sacral fire,
morphed to dust — blown asunder
by cosmic winds...

unseen novas imbued with stardust —
Tenger! Tenger! Holy One!
Vast Sky of Boundlessness!
You whom some call God — Father Sky;
rivulets of trickling clouds murmur
the ancient songs born before the millennia,
before Before.

all forms bursting forth from soil to decay instantly in Kali's blood-drenched fangs.

music of the spheres: now maniacal laughter!

course through mine veins!

mouthpiece of primeval prophecy
devour this veil of mortality.
pierce beyond all life,
awake: waterborne upon
the celestial sea.
all striving, all joy, hatred, desire,
impassioned ambition — failures — yearning;
dissolve to primordial birth.

sifting protoplasm coalesced in Earth's first cells.

Do you remember?

double helix
savior
nucleic acids
cleansed of soul
greeting
endless
death —

to be reborn innumerably.

and this infant knows nothing achieves nothing remembers nothing carries nothing!

thoughtless in birth: may we beam this dream, shared behind open eyelids...

## Leo Rivers The Anger of God's Allies

(Thinking of Simone and her vision of the Iliad)

Fighting men flaunt the fates by
setting sword to cleave
the glory from some fool boy's gore
then blink when
some cousin or uncle bond
to that now empty skin
by family contract fulfills the obligation
which lifts their hand, then
set it on the offender's neck
to force another chapter be written
when, with a righteous bellow,
it is pressed in.

And then, one more slave
boy to a queer orgy
at the previous boy's finish, rushes in
to replace him.
This brothel's Slave Owner,
IDEATHI, has in his pen
an endless supply of them.

With the last sighs of death
the sails of war are ever buxom with
momentum.
Men, if slaves to spoils, are
greater slaves to the promise of them, cursing
to stab with their ores
unwisely at an ocean
moody and always willing

to swallow up armadas in search of gold and slaves and sink them in great caravan unto the deserts of the deep.

All such Odyssey
end the celebration in which
the celebrant sleep a sleep
in which, strangely, none
seem to snore
- if you can call death sleep...

I think their adventure suffered Mission Creep.

### James Riley Below the Line

I see the bright, shinning sky.

Illuminating, goading the plants to growth. The warmth as it blazes on my pale skin. And yet, no experience trembles within me. Neutral body floating, sky bound, just there. Aware of its celestial significance. Yet feeling no connection.

The neutrality impales just as deep.

A bereft feeling in the heart,
Composed of mass, but lacking in empathy.

Not negative, not positive... just there.

Marks of affinity, simple kisses and hugs.

Sparks of electricity flowing to and fro.

Your arms in mine, lips intertwined.

Short hums, buzzes of energy falling short on the insulator of my frame.

A short dial jump above the equilibrium, a blip at best.

I feel you there, briefly, as it falls away to neutrality.

Breathing, staring, smiling, existing.

And yet, never close enough
I can't connect the synapses, can't feel your joy.

Have you ever seen a future made bleak by lack of desire?

No aspiration, no dream, no direction, no goal.

All I see is infinite negative possibility.

Bolstering, cringing for the blows to come.

Below the line is easier.

I see you now.

You don't get caught in the cold rain under the bridge, in the sewers, in the basement.

So why do I still get caught off guard when misfortune comes?

I chose to believe in a future you sold me.

The snake oil salesman posing as the apothecary.

Paid you in my heart, as you sat smiling.

Showed you my frustration, my desolation, the dearth that is my consolation.

Still, you gave me your hand, promised the panacea.

Tasting sweet medicine from your full lips as I lay in your embrace.

Joyous sound reverberating from ear to heart.

Growing a love I didn't think I deserved, but still trusting.

Why couldn't you leave me dormant?

No quick cure is worth my current ailments.

So, you tried and tried and tried.

Thought the very weight of my character, my emotion was something easily altered.

Now gone off to your own duplicitous salesman.

Promising cures for my contagion inside of you.

Your once soft, caressing hand let go, as my limb falls dormant to my chest.

Back to the nothing I felt.

It's easy to live below the line of normal expectation and experience.

Solace in the sheer ignorance as to what exists beyond the haze.

Yet, when you are pulled above for even a short while the soaring vistas entice you.

Remaining perched, for all the world is yours to view.

And you, my now long gone love, pulled me higher than ever before.

As I now free fall back to my clouded quagmire -

My boon and my curse all the same.

I wish to see the glorious landscapes again, with or without you.

The problem remains, there are no shortcuts this time,

no saddling your wings in a hugging embrace to move me on.

So now, as I gain my breath after falling so far to cold earth,

I prepare for my new journey.

To climb an insurmountable behemoth of tangled emotion.

Fate willing, I will reach that perch again.

Maybe to find you in some way, waiting for me....

### Gabriel Lutes Human

In every grain of sand is another. A plethora of possibility, so we must dissipate into the rock and slate. This eyelid of the sun, copper, brass, inkling of the dawn. Repeats again and again. A thousand moons. A thousand suns. Every eye blinking simultaneously. Every breath stirring on the shore. At this edge of light a giddy sensation repeats past experience. To love, hate, and die is human, so are these statues of despair. Their whispers are merely secrets of the dead and constant confusion bitters their knowledge. There is a Great Wall at the end of infinity. Reach past this wall and gaze up. Focus, for to love, hate, and die is human.

Bonnie Fjord **Menopause** 

threats like a basket weaver with no materials or a lonely woman like a basket weaver who experiences menopause, all taught and lying prone, at the mercy of the unsympathetic world in which the basket weaver learned to guard the secrets of her craft, tucked away at a high altitude, some nubile oracle with legs splayed, libidinous folds of insistence and recollection both clothing and deity. It was a conscious decision brought him to the point of thinking much too intently as the joints of his bloodless fingers became zealous in their rote attack against the keyboard and yes it was certainly a sad thing to loose faith in. grammar or to pack his anxieties into the crutch that couldn't be thought of as even remotely ancillary to the problem but think of basket weavers and their simple aspirations or their quaint leavings, like something placed on the pyre after each solitary and fibrous sentinel standing exceptionally still in bright epiphanic clumps learns it is just the age to be gaily burnt

## [ anonymous ] Illness Inventory

Bipolar
Panic attacks
General anxiety escalated
In my past, possible correlation
hospital
Celexa

Schizophrenia mental health related Panic Anxiety Depression

Mania, highs and lows — extreme unsure
Trigger from childhood puberty?
Straw that broke the camel's back
Two breaks.

Initial spark, genetic predisposition
Yes, meds everyday
evens me out
Lamotrigine
Forced therapy — more relaxation, self awareness

No, it doesn't get better
I hide myself from the world,
put up guards
Being normal

### Shyana Swanson Dark Passenger

I cannot write beautiful things today. I curl inward with every word that leaves my lips. It is not me who is speaking.

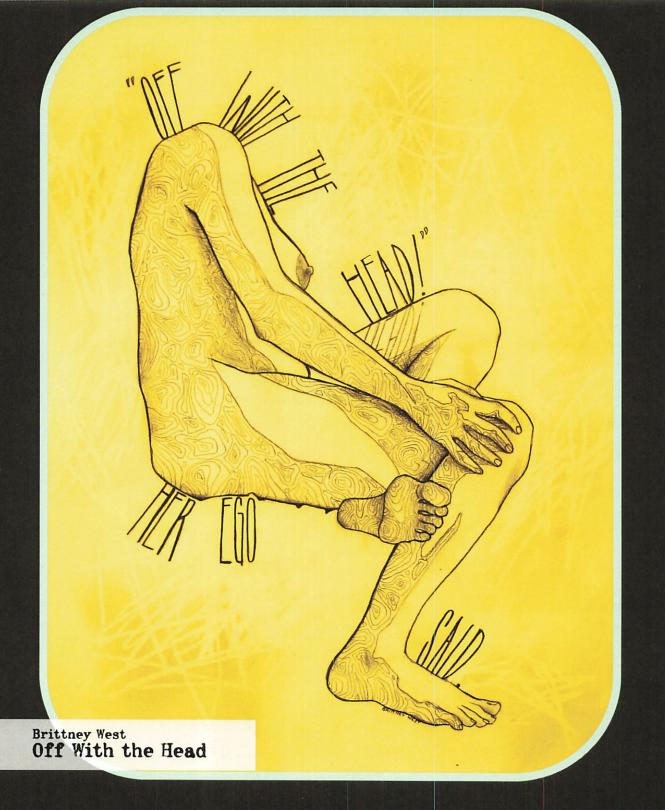
The dark passenger must've crawled into my skin while I was sleeping; I dreamt of awful things. He is heavy. His feet must be made of led because I can hardly lift mine.

I am a hostage
in my own body,
in my own bed.
I am trapped
in the darkest
of places:
my own head.
I don't dare meet
my reflection today
because he will
laugh back at me—
He is not a funny
creature.

My fingertips feel foreign. I trace my bodytrying to remember what I feel like.

I peel the covers away from my body one layer at a timelike broken pedals of a dying flower.

If you peel away what weighs it down, maybe it will live.



Leo Rivers
Lady Pale by Bright Sword Light
Might I See thy Mark by a Blush Tonight

(A Beginning to a Part 4 for the Cottage Grove Trilogy)

We want to live our lives, repeat pleasures forever,

not be shown
misfortune
in children's faces
nor
bad luck
in their daddy's eyes.

The WORLD is too big for us
to move.

Our WORLD is like a field
where water wells up
in your foot falls...

If you dig a hole the
slurry fills it even
before the 'start' is dropped in!

...and then, and then the leaves will curl with spider webs and the root turn rotten.

Every day I start over again retrace my steps from coffee to coffee watching school children walking home from school, some praying for a way to run away, some waiting, (as if at a bus stop), for graduation.

The Army and Navy has just opened twin little storefronts in the mall behind the freeway on-ramp and the gas station.

The Dollar Store is there, the Donut Shop, (their favorite stop on the way to the Bus Stop), the Salvation army too, (for picking over the nicer things to wear).

Walking by each day
the more resolute girls
and the taller boys
look at the posters of Soldiers
and Sailers embracing orphans
and receiving diplomas

I spy, I spy, I see them sigh as if to say 'goodbye to High School' and lower their heads looking straight ahead to being Dad or ending up like Mom.

Pulling up weeds, often missing the root, I cuss, knowing I'll just have to pull them out again.

I rear, arms crossed to rest on one knee to see some children go in to the Army Door or the Navy both of which have Inicel big brother types one in each door, joking, waiting just to talk to them. Ernest as young Priests in their 1st perish.

Smiling. Like used car salesmen.

The taller young men, the more resolute
young women walk out...
no more beer and pot with the gang
at the lake
for them - the 'last Summer after school lets out'
is over [forever] for them.

S0, I straighten, stretching my back, a fist in each kidney.

The Garden must wait, so it seems.
Night has fallen again, and
with the moon rise
the tide comes in
with depression lapping
at my feet
for I must consider
selling this house
and just let go.

Just let it go.

It's been twenty years, She's never coming back. And I know I'll never marry again.

The back yard, and here in front - I've done all there was to do.

I turn off the hose, one foot against the other, scraping mud off my shoes, looking down to see water filling my footfalls

looking up to watch troop transports rising slowly from the base like whales somehow riding the wind like logs being driven up a river by strong men with long poles.

So many transports.
All our children.

As if each small town in America puffed on a dandelion and made a wish to go as an angel with them.

It's time, it's time for me too. I'm 62. time to grab a long pole and take it to that WORLD too big to move.

Another Hogwatch alone this year I fear. Sad smores and tepid beer.

Maybe Lady Susan will come and bring me Cheer. Come my Lady, in your Father's place, for when I see your Face, an honor my dear, to take your hand, and, on rain gutter stand completely at Peace. Untroubled by Fear.

### Oshrit Livne

#### If I am a woman

I will count on the truth,
And I will listen to my body's truth
And I will lead myself with truth
I will share my truth surrounded by you with a gentle smile and love
We will be one and the air between us will be clear and fresh
Because we share our truth.

#### If I am a woman

I will know when to say "No," my friend,
And I will feel at peace (because I listen to the truth)
I will share "Yes" when love surrounds us with its melting nature
We will be one and the clear fresh air will unite us
Because we share our love.

#### If I am a woman

I will love to feel your heart, my beloved,
And know that you are more than your income and your profits
We will dance together because we are investing in our happiness
I will feel joy in my body and my lips will relax and my eyes will shine
We will be one and the clear fresh air will enthrall us with its dancing steps
Because we share our heart.

#### If I am a woman

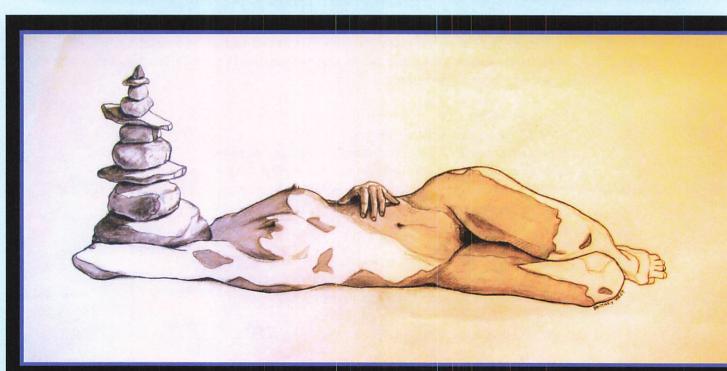
I will relax beside you, my sister,
And I will know that we can share friendship together
As we are refreshing our solidarity and unity that we have known
We will be stronger together and we will share peace and harmony in the world
Because we are women.

Because I am a woman,
I will look into your eyes, my world,
And nourish our life together with truth, a golden heart, and trust
I will love to feel your love and know we are safe
And our wold is safe
Just because, I am a woman.

Shyana Swanson **Drown** 

The quiet of the night
makes for loud thoughts.
I try to drown you out
with the sound of the rain
kissing the pavement—
making love and leaving
puddles... and you come
flooding back to me.

Brittney West
The Cairn & the Initial Indication of a Direction Known



There seems to be a sentimentality born solely from the season of Winter. During these inclement, cold days we seek asylum from all that is frigid in our hearts. We create seasonal well-wishes, passing affinity on to the ones nearest and dearest to us. Taking a pause from the anger, frustration, dismissive pessimism towards an existence that exonerates its own guilt under the premise of being simple reality. Yet, in an act of self-absorbed interest during this time of giving I make a plea to you all: a Christmas wish for any and all who read my words. I aspire to make the acceptance and understanding we practice during that time of year into a static state of mind.

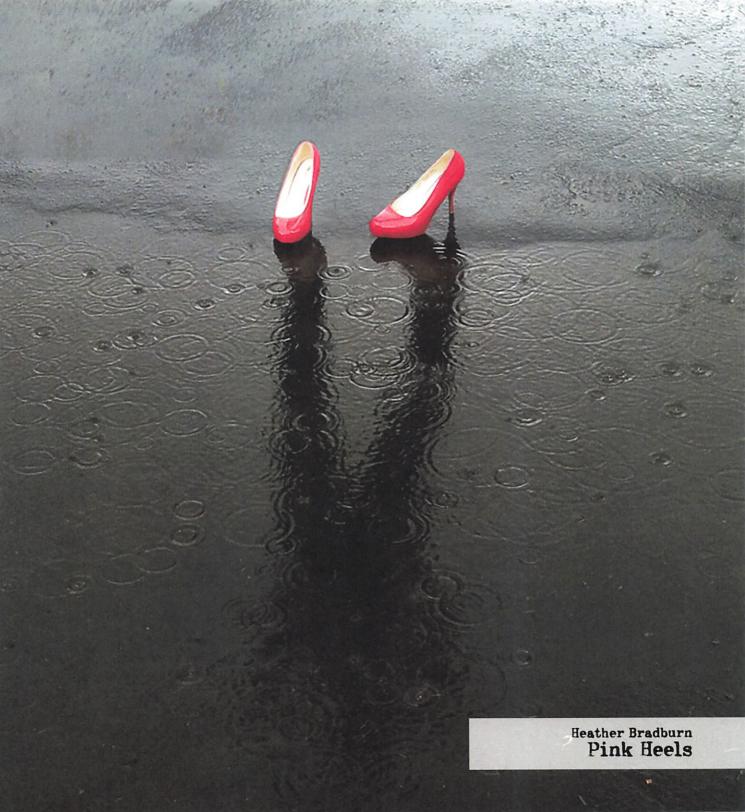
I simply desire permanence.

I see a world of great potential. Admittedly, I see the world with a more depressed undertone than most. Within that wasted positive potential lies the conception of my depression. To understand and accept a person for who they are with no context as to what they do, what their gender is, what they have done for you, how much wealth they possess. This love is a line of thought most people only wish to practice for a few weeks out of the year. To them, this openness and caring exists merely as an ever fluctuating constant within their psyche, one whose potential permanence is only recognized by the oblivious. Instead we focus on a world of competition, labels, haves and have—nots. We all stand complicit in this crime of complexity due to our naming structure. It does little but muddle up the potential of the individual. It exists as a game we all choose to be a part of to provide shifting consistency in minds made malleable due to the desire to fit a homogeneous worldview.

Through this lack of empathy and caring for one another year round, with the exception of what we deem as "The Holidays," what is earned? Harvesting divinely corrupted epithets of what it means to be a human

in the name of being productive and functional. Titles such as: Manly, Pretty, Self-reliant, Wealthy, Hardworking, Sexy, Intelligent, Normal, Strong, Democrat, Republican, Christian, Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Agnostic, Atheist. From this desire for social titles we give birth to: isolation, frustration, anger, sadness, hatred, lack of contextual meaning. The negative emotion that provides contextual gravity for most mass in a nebulous, shifting world.

I seek permanence of the potential love that exhibits itself during that time of year, to withdraw our tactlessly tacit requital of love after the season has passed. For everyone to understand that there exists potential for our greatest moments to be our worst, and for our worst to be our greatest due to twists of fate. The only variable within our control is ourselves and how we aspire to treat each other. In being human I have done many terrible things to others. Things I wish I could take back, wish a simple apology would fix. Those moments will never be again. The pain that comes with tragedy doesn't lie within the tragic events, but rather the moments we will never have again due to said tragedy. So, for those of you whom I have harmed, those of you I have hated, who have hated me, for those I have let down, for those who still choose to remain with me, I have one simple phrase: I love you all. Even after the snow has come and gone, I love you all. I will always love you all and I will sit and wait for your love in return. While it is not required, I wish nothing more than to have your care and concern. So please, always have a good life and know that you are not alone.



## Chad Jensen Spheres of Loneliness

No one (really) knows ... the difference between the meaning and the feeling of a single tree engulfed in a flooded river. How roots cling to disappearing ground shifted by the waters. The stiff knobby long fingers, twisted up remnants of a giving life. are weathered and bare the way a worn out old handdry, creeky, clubbish and painfully frozenis no longer able to open to greet a new friend. They soon will be released from their grip on life as it is washed away. This one part of oneness grew to a giant, standing its ground amongst and around the great river. out of Earth broken by its ancestors from their fascination in life.

Its very seed dropped by wings that grew with all the ramifying branches evoking each wonder of being. This culmination of memory was nourished by many generations of life and their degradation. This sensitive producer of progress flourished, basking in the soaking sun with leaves as lungs to breath the air of consumersliving enchantment between the shade of the tree community and the meandering waters bringing and giving life. No one can see the exposed roots beneath all this surplus, losing touch. No one hears the lilting tree voice calling, crying, drown out. No one feels the terror of being cut off from the land,

### Chad Jensen Ominous Reset

doomed clandestination. This island in individual isolation fights to remain upright-born in the tree community and now bathed in swollen swishing swirls eroding the base of existence. It is not as if individual tree islands have volition to re-reach or re-grasp at the broken Earth. let alone in the midst of breeching river chaos. Roots remain fixed. fallible, immovablerivers meander and relentlessly run. This tree island will splash down into the future. It will become, just as it became.

the late evenings feel embrace inspiration of pink-sky-haze ... at the end My fleshy soft soul pops, thuds and splits, explodes like a bladder of soft parts against the base of the skyscraper built by another spattered soul. Slimy insides on synthetic outsides and my cold blood sprays the normal days As they brush off brain's; wipe the wet warm clotting blood from eye's, and lip's; scoop, scrape, and box those insides on outsides to build another empty skyscraper for another to view the beauty of sunset, finally above the end again.

## Joshua Isaac Finch Non Compos Mentis #3

They were in a car, heading... he wasn't sure where. He could see nothing outside, nothing save for the thickest of fog. It was thick in a way that never happens outside of a slasher-flick. This was the kind of fog manufactured for the purpose of blinding viewers, and trapping doomed protagonists like oh-so-many psychotics, in boxes that, save for the fog, could be walked right out of, weren't, in fact boxes at all, which would be plain to see, save for the fog.

"Goddamnit, Les." Tristan spat, chew spittle speckling the useless windshield "Where in the hell is it that we're goin?" He jerked his head toward Leslie, bloodshot eyes breaking completely from the road, staring daggers. "Well goddamnit?? Does that fucksack mouth of yours work?"

Leslie felt a welling up inside of him. It was a sharp, sudden lurch, like the moment your body realizes it is already falling. He didn't want to let Tristan down, but was certain he had no idea why they were here. Where the hell were they going? His hands fumbled for his pockets, but found himself wearing pocketless sweatpants and slippers.

Tristan shot out a palm that connected hard with the entire upside of Leslie's head. Tristan stared him down hard, with eyes bulging as if they were about to burst forth, birthing huge, watery pupils that gaped with each syllable as he spoke. "Boy, maps work a fuck of a lot better when you unfold 'em"

Leslie cringed, part in fear of a second blow, part at the discovery of the mostly folded road map draped over his right leg. Where in the world had it come from? Not even sure if the map belonged to him or to Tristan, he began to sheepishly unfold the map. "Highway 201, right?" he asked, unsure if highway 201 so much as existed. "Highway 201" Tristan nodded. "Jesus god almighty, boy. Sometimes I have no idea where you go. It's like you leave the whole planet, but are still somewhere inside that head of yours. Maybe down 3 flights of

stairs, in the basement... jerkin off in the dark and smokin reefer or something, but wherever the fuck it is, you're far as hell away from reality, tell you what." His gaze returned to approximately where the road ought to be. His knuckles cracked loudly as he tightened his grip on the wheel. Leslie was pretty sure that he was too high to be driving, but feared the repercussions of voicing his concern.

"Y'know when I drove truck, those long hauls, it got so quiet, and long that you'd have to more than drink coffee to get by. You'd try singin with the radio, counting outta state plates, prayin to jesus, course that never worked and you'd wind up snorting lines or chewing up pills, and praying all over again... sometimes to stay busy, sometimes cuz you took too many pills and lines and... haha, I remember writing a story on pills..." Tristan jerked his head to the side to look Leslie in the eyes with those oversized pupils that made you swear it must be the pitchest black in here. They twitched as he spoke, almost as if they did the talking. "You go ahead and unfold that map and I'll sing you my story... it's a real good one, Les."

Leslie stared back into Tristan's eyes, the old black leather interior suddenly shivery cold against his skin as he tried to pry his gaze away, tried not to ask himself if Tristan's eyes had any color but black in them. They tore on down the highway and Tristan cracked a jagged smile and began:

"In the dark his eyes, they came to an eventual focus
Finally, makin' sense of them slowly erodin' ceilin' tiles.
The breeze what come from the barely cracked window
did little to prevent the sweat and hair pastin' up his forehead,
or to cool that stuffy, gloomy bedroom..."
Leslie, unable to look away, unfolded the map slowly as Tristan went on.

"It didn't feel like no November 3am... no sir.

This was an unseasonable mid June of a swelter.

He struggled with blankets what tangled and bound him to no avail. It was useless. He was useless.

His lover, sleepin' soundly, didn't disagree nor would she have had her soul been conscious."

The timbre of Tristan's voice shifted in intensity, and Leslie hung on each word, leaning in and those gaping pupils swelled and shuddered, like deep terrifying pools.

"He'd once watched her sleep and just admired her beauty, but now, he watched and stewed. She looked so calm, damn her, at pure rest even, The way he never was, and goddamn him to hell, he couldn't not resent her."

Tristan's voice began to tremble, and his body stiffened. The needle rose to 80 as they barreled blind into the mist. Leslie stammered, trying to speak, but to no avail.

"They'd been together for so long and now he was just so full of anger anger that she dared be granted a reprieve that he was not. It was as if she shrugged off her wakin' anxieties and transplanted them into his chest to fester as she slept, cursing him to harbor them without comprehendin'..."

Leslie panicked, his gaze still locked, he struggled to free his tongue, to beg Tristan to face forward, to slow down, anything, but his jaws clenched painfully tight as he slipped deeper into the grasp of Tristan's story.

"God, he hated her. The anxiety, the insomnia, his own stupid fuckin' face in the mirror, ravaged. He didn't dare look into his own red, achin' eyes, glazed with indifference, not from wakin' not from unendin' wake, but from merely existin"

It felt like a vice was cinching down on Leslie's chest, he could hardly breathe, his eyes, unblinking were watering profusely and he couldn't fight them closed. He felt trapped inside his own body, screaming inside to escape, begging inside his head, crying out to anyone who could hear him for help. His fingers peeling open the map, feeling the pull of that mission anew, as if he could make this all stop if he could just unfold it... Tristan spat the words, now, eyes bursting forth, spilling a thick syrupy

blackness that flooded the cab of the car as they buried the needle.

"Layin' beside his sleepin' wife he felt more alone than he'd ever felt. Desperate Desperate

Desperate
Des-pair-ate..."

Leslie jerked the folds of the map apart, feeling the clutches of Tristan's gaze giving ground. He could hardly see for the tears as Tristan's razor-toothed maw spat the same black filth that poured from his eyes, the windows exploded around him, fog spilling into the car. God help me. He begged as he approached the last folds of the map.

"The fool, he began to pray, as the desperate among us always will, and despite his pathetic-ass blubberin," ever so softly from the depths of the back of his mind crawled a small voice, in response..."

Tristan's voice broke and he vomited a rush of black bile, showering Leslie in filth. Leslie tore open the final folds of the map, feeling whatever grips he was in release. Eagerly he turned his gaze to interior of the huge roadmap, clutching the edges and gazing into, not a map at all, but a window into a vast, cold expanse, full of stars. It was the night sky, held here in his hands, stark, beautiful, impossible. The portal shuddered, exposing a viscous surface, and before he could so much as comprehend what was happening, he felt fingertips clutching at his neck, digging into his throat and pressing his face into the gooey membrane of the portal, thick, ooze flooding his mouth and nose as he frantically tried to scream and break free.

He felt the razor-wire scratching of Tristan's unshaved face pressing up against his, lips brushing his ear, laughing, imparting a calloused punchline as everything went dark...

"Maybe ... God is just a place you go when you're lonely ... "

### Jessie Daher How to Remember a Lover

Step 1: Remember, correctly.
Remember
she was baking bread,
and you rose to tell her,
"It's over."
She wouldn't look at you.
She looked out through the kitchen window,
answered, "Okay,"
put the bread in the oven and walked out.

Step 2: Remember, fondly.

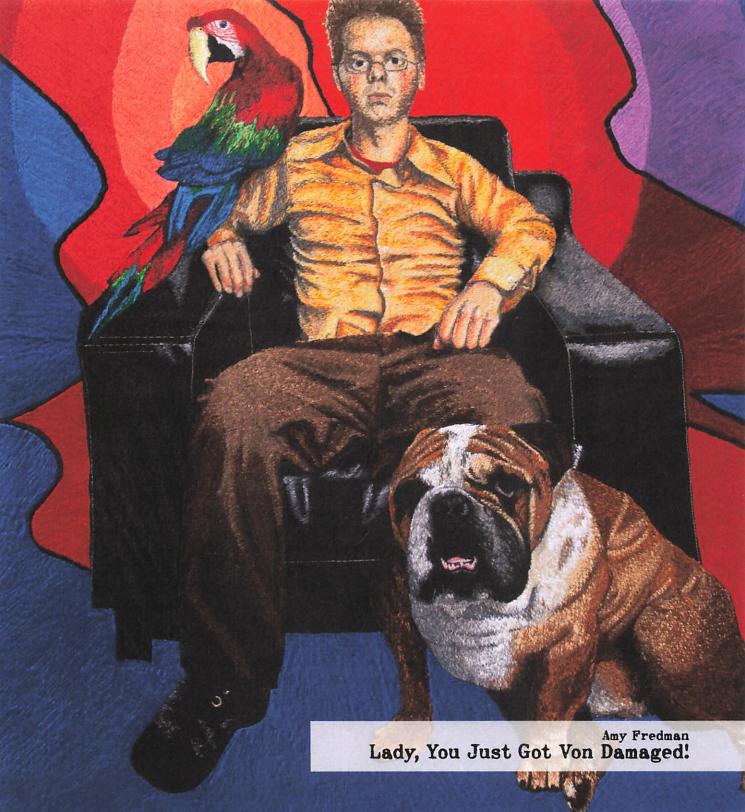
Remember
she was kneading dough,
her tshirt lifting with every deep sigh,
and you, overwhelmed by the flat
measure of her rib cage,
turned her towards the whitecrackle kitchen window
so you could press your love
into her from behind.

Step 3: Remember, angrily.
Remember
She was in the kitchen, kneading,
and you needed to tell her something,
something about baking bread,
but she was angry and sparking,
throwing shards of resentment
to crash against the kitchen window, drowning
your voice with the cacophony of her rage.
Until you were shaking her,
trying to find the sound of silence.

Step 4: Remember, painfully.
Remember
you were the one baking bread, and
she was in the kitchen,
needing something more from you,
kneading, at the microscopic

fissures under your skin.
You reached out to grasp the span of her, turned her toward the kitchen window, fucking her against the cold glass, as hard as you could, trying to quiet the cacophony of her silent rage, with the sound of two hearts racing each other. And, at the end, she said, "It's over."

Step 5: Remember, wisely.
Remember
the one time you
broke up with a crazy baker,
who was too needy.



## Nikolas Drury A Moth to the Flame (an excerpt)

Piles of corpses pocked the valley, the masses writhing with worms, a sea of maggots with waves of rot. The smell wafted over the battlements of Fort Basballa, suffocating the men that stood watch. With bated breath they waited for the waves to crash against their walls. Arrows stood their tips in flesh and earth, fletching pointed towards the sky where birds circled. The Gealach Valley was a mass grave. Our brethren lay with the Confederates where they had fallen. Priests of Avilok were anointing the dead with prayer and sprinklings of seeds and spice. In a couple years time this valley would show no mark from this conflict. The Poacher's road through the Rendon woods was clear of scouts, but not for long. It was a smuggler's trail from the days of kings and war, the kind of days that had recently since dawned again.

I approached the fort that stood at the northern tip of the valley. The walls had crumbled beneath the weight of countless sieges and time. Blood had crashed against these walls for a millennia; blood assailed them and blood protected them. The smoldering remains of the siege towers leered, falling away from the fort.

The garrison bustled about, looking busy for an officer on horseback. These men held against Diego, so they deserved a little reprieve from the military dog and pony show. The dead were wrapped in linens, their wounds soaking through, staining the clean white. The post was undermanned and the old walls held, but for how much longer? The Speaker would fight for peace, but he would settle for less than our absolute freedom. We lived up to our side of the Abenrike Pact, we helped keep the Dominion at bay. With Harrowir dead, our freedom is guaranteed.

They cannot bind us to their rule.

The soldiers looked through me as I strode along the walls lined with nurses tending to the wounded. Their faces were streaked with soot and

bits of burnt flesh. We fight for our freedom, but war has never been about who is right. The Rendons would soon come again and these men were tired. Three straight nights of incursions and three straight victories.

I descended some stairs past two statuesque guards and swung the door open. The stench of death had permeated the inner annals of the fort. Two men were gathered at a table overlooking the map outstretched before them. They paused for a moment, glancing at the momentary intruder, and continued. I recognized one of them: Commander Erich Lann, Post Commander of Fort Basballa. I had yet to make the other's acquaintance. Lann loved his men almost as much as his wife, but then again, he was always partial to fighting and fucking over all else.

"Vanni is gathering for a push on Anstone and Ferrik is holding at Myrdale's crossing," the Commander said. "We know once the Jarns arrive and cross the river, Anstone will burn. Orders from the Mavrosi have been clear. We hold. See what you can do about fixing the southeast wall."

"Understood."

The captain nodded and continued out the door that I had just come through. The Commander gently stroked his graying beard.

"Tauroth, have anything for us?"

I could name who just about every noble in Rendon was fucking, but not the amount of men they'd pledged to Diego. Lords love their gossip.

"Word in Venthavre is that the Ikondians are on the march."

The Commander kicked his head back and cackled, showing his discolored teeth, his beard waving with his jaw.

"Please tell me they're marching south."

"That's the rumor."

"Those robed fools are at least good for something. They'll take Venthavre in a week without Rendon support."

"If true, Roiveux and Rendon must be collectively shitting their pants. Place looks like you've had no luck with reinforcements."

The Commander spat.

"Oh, fuck no. Majority of our men up north are sitting with their thumbs up their asses. They haven't spotted a Confederate crossing in over a month, but they 'Can't spare a single one."

Despite his mocking tone, I knew this to be the truth. The Confederates in the north were far too busy to worry about the Saorifir, but without our men at the border, they might reconsider. Herran Brjotan was the Confederate Commander and his reputation preceded him. Cruel, uncompromisingly, efficient. These men at Basballa weren't supposed to stop the Rendons, they were meant to delay them. I couldn't blame the Confederates with the newly crowned Asla the First of Rignheim sitting upon the throne in a mockery of the line. His ascension followed the black night and all its horrors and yet the Lord's first act was to annul the Treaty of Confederate Kingdoms and declare himself King of All. His chief political ally, Orvar Myraett, is a man so despised that if he were on fire, half the court would not piss it out. His tendrils grew with each passing day and I doubt you could entirely remove his influence even if you took him up to Gibbet Hill.

"You heard from Theresa lately?"

He smiled as if remembering her fondly. Her laugh, her embrace, and the way she talked.

"Nah. She's too busy for letter writing. Never been up to it with the girls and the house."

I nodded as if I knew what he meant. I didn't. I had no wife or children, no house nor holdings. I was a free man, same as any other, but my life belonged to the people.

"I should be on my way. I need to check in with the post- and quartermasters. You should expect a pigeon once a week from the south for the next five weeks. As Post Commander, you are permitted to read them, but ensure that they are passed on appropriately."

"Yeah, yeah. Gavin, you're a rigid little shit, but thanks."

A smirk crawled across my face and a pounding on the door knocked it off of me.

The Commander pulled open the door and before him was a boy who couldn't have been older than fourteen. He wore a green cloak marked with a lapel of our sigil. His clothes were torn and muddy. He had dark rings under his eyes and his face was morose. He must've been in a hurry.

"What is it, boy?" The Commander demanded as he slammed the door.

"I have a message for The Post Commander of Basballa. Is that you?" Lann's jaw bunched tight.

"Look at the uniform, boy," His voice was gravel beneath the irritation.

The boy feigned a salute and withdrew a scroll from his satchel.

"Under the order of Apokaros of Mavros, I deliver this message."

He handed the scroll over to Lann and he unfurled it.

"You are dismissed."

The boy turned and pulled the door open, disappearing behind it.

"I can't read this." He held it, turning it and squinting. "It's not even words, just a bunch of symbols." He held it out to me and said, "It's Mavrosi."

I fumbled over the syntax, but I got the gist of the message.

"Cothram is dying."

The Commander told the truth with his eyes though his lips remained sealed. I, as well as Lann, had met Cothram numerous times. The man's venerable years had been spent fighting for the freedom of his people, his white hair thinning year after year. His nose was bulbous and round, the wrinkles on his face told stories of worrisome years while his smile did not.

"Shit. All those symbols couldn't have only said that," Lann exclaimed.

"You're right. As far as I can make out, it says 'The Speaker sleeps the sleep of the dead, which means he's either dying or trapped in the nightlands."

"Aye. I suppose so. What're you thinking?"

A massive list of suspects ran through my mind. The Confederates. Enemies on the floor of the Glasri. Assassins. Or just plain old age. Induced sleep through poison was not unheard of, but it was the weapon of the detached. A paid assassin. A wife that'd been smacked around one too many times. The theater of politics loves knives. Shedding blood is the ultimate display of power to the highborn, but to us, we do not hide our killings behind cloak and dagger. We stab you in the chest.

"That I've got some thinking to do, that's for sure. I'll be on my way, no reprieve for the righteous."

I smile wide, the sarcasm does a shitty job at hiding my pain. The Commander knows, smiling back, nodding.

"Tell the Mavrosi that we need more men. I doubt he'll listen, but that

doesn't make it not true."

"Godeo saor, Erich."

"Godeo saor."

That phrase was the epitome of all we fought for. We were forever free. It had been our national motto since the days of our revolution and it would endure. The Confederates sought to return us to a place beneath their boot heel and they would fail. I checked in with the post— and quartermasters, carrying letters for the men and the novel length requisition list for the fort. I promised Quartermaster Elevetat that an order of Ammarasian Vin de la Mer would make it down for him. It was a promise that I wasn't sure I could keep.

The morning fog had burnt off. I left out the northern gate. The road climbed out of the valley and I stood there speechless. Pillars of smoke rose far to the south. The Rendon replacements had reached the valley and were marching on the fort. The horns of Basballa bellowed and the men rustled to their stations. The tide of invaders would not reach the fort until tonight. They would crash against the walls again and again. I turned away and knew that Fort Basballa would fall.

# Jessica Graham The Weight of Living

My Father used to dance with me. My small feet perched on his own. We danced to jazz and waltzed to Queen. He'd lead us around the room, my hands in his. I balanced each toe between the laces of his worn work boots. I would giggle when he'd pick me up and twirl me around. I felt weightless being carried by rough hands around our small cramped living room. He carried that weight; he carried me. Until a scrawny 16 year old stood before him. I was scared. I didn't know the right words to use. Eventually the words kind of trickled out between um's and like's. Her name spilled out in a rush of vulnerability and panic. I couldn't look at him. My eyes focused on the stain on the carpet, a coffee spill from years before. The silence was ignitable. His reaction was the spark. He cursed and raged. His words were the shrapnel that buried deep into wounds that haven't healed. Bile rose in my throat and I ran.

But now we're dancing. Our fingers fitting between the laces along the back of our dresses as she twirls me around. I no longer feel weightless but she isn't carrying me; I learned how to carry my own weight when he dropped me.

### Chad Jensen Civilized Intelligence

It is not as if Polar Bears are building ice palaces out of fresh bare rocks, with seal shipped in from the Land where things are good, as they live out their days in the selfish soup of surplus. The Jaguar has yet to build climate controlled jungles from ashes and farmland, with their own hired master rainforest-culturalists propagating life out of poison, as the kings live out their days in the ecology of economies. Instead, they truly live. They subsist with profound sensitivity. They survive in true enchantment, are fascinated and respond; they become their destiny as creativity-though a bit too slow for the popular and paralyzing pace of people. Keystones dreaming from isolation are often the last to feel the wall fall.

