



SASSAFRAS
LITERARY
MAGAZINE
ISSUE 6





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Jon Bennett

AHM #2

If I'm going
to be a prisoner
and I am
let me build
my prison
on the ivory plain
of your stomach
in view
of the forest
of your long
brown
hair.

Jon Bennett is a musician and Pushcart Award nominated writer living in San Francisco's Chinatown. His first novel, "The Unfat," a speculative sci-fi story about autism, is due to be published through Chupa Cabra House in March of 2014. You can see more of his poetry by visiting him on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/jon.bennett.967>.

Michael Corrado

What No One Told Me About Autumn

Why it boils over without apology. Why
lawns lining every home erupt

in the night, fevered by some unnamable sorrow.
Why the sky hides so often, a blister

I've fingered since childhood.
When it uses words like mercy

and regret, I lose myself in the backyard
the way a match loses its grip on the dark.

Here, between two pines, I might hear
what was once the gossip of sheets

my mother snapped against a line,
father's shirts pinned shoulder

to shoulder, collars flared, buttons with nothing
to clutch. I think of the crickets who will later spark

the air with their duplicitous refrain,
how I will follow them, barefoot,

moss dusting my heels. And for what?
Tell me that if I look back now,

I won't see how each grief solders us
to the next: a house clapped shut,

gagged, leaning into its hollowed bones.
Leaves, battered by wind, seized

between the tines of an abandoned rake.
Their ceaseless falling. How they wait

and wait to become tinder, then smoke,
then ash. How I cannot change it.

Fable For Boys Who Chase Tornadoes

Even from birth, it is said that sky bonds
with a certain kind of child. For instance, this one:
his eyes like cellar doors sprung, each iris

a spiraling dervish. Bundled, his hair is the shade
of hysteria beneath a blanket's scalloped hem — erratic, always escaping.
Think ash. Think vellum, or wool

raveling its dense skeins down his collar, curls
that will drag shoulders broadened
by the eve of his thirteenth birthday.

Alone, he'll cross lands flat as patchwork, drifting
east, the sun a spill of whiskey scorching his shadow
against the earth. Over the years he will begin

to forget his mother, father, the debris
of their smiles as they waved goodbye,
both arms buckled around the others' waist.

He is left only to guess at the siblings
who may fill his place—a sister, all elbows
and scraped knees locked around the siren

of a rusted gate, or twins, brothers
dirt-streaked and thundering through thickets
of wisteria. In ritual, he still exists. Charms

strung at their throat, wrist.
For protection: clover bunched above windows,
the splintered lip of a vacant door. Nights,

one small voice reaches for the others,
a leaf wavering across the room, Will the sky ever return
him home? Can he find us on the map of his hand?

They fear the days blotted by clouds,
but know without a photograph this is all
they have of him. Swab of cheek, shadow thick.

Lips a rippled cumulus splitting the horizon.
They hold hands, knuckles steeped, and recite hymns
that tug at their throats like birds wrenching worms

free from an arid and unyielding
world. A world that trades prayers for magic,
logic for spells. They have yet to know

that nothing is holier than the body, the atlas
of its undoing: skin, breath, bone. All of it dust
blown into the pocket of a God they cannot touch.

(* *What No One..* and *Fable For..* was first published at the [Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Memorial Fund](#) among the winning submissions of 2012. The pieces are included in *Sassafras* via a request from the editor.)

'*What No One Told Me About Autumn*' is to be included in the upcoming [Best New Poets 2013](#) (winter).

Michael Boccardo's poems appear or are forthcoming in *Kestrel*, *Border Crossing*, *Weave*, *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, as well as other journals. He is a multiple recipient of the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize, and a three-time Pushcart nominee. Also, he serves as editorial assistant for *Cave Wall*. He resides in High Point, NC, with his partner and three tuxedo cats.

Beth Boylan

THE LIST

“Oh, I’d love to see *The Great Gatsby*,” my mother sighs,
“Well, we’ll just have to put it on the list,” replies my father,

as if taking your wife to the movies has any business
being squeezed onto a decades-old list of To-Do’s--

paint house, trim trees, book a cruise—I need air

so excuse myself and make my way past

the dusty sealed windows, curtains, silk flowers,

and the computer humming upstairs, where he plays office.
Another storm is struggling to show, blowing at the spruce
that has fattened since I sat in the sun here
reading *The Sheltering Sky* all those summers ago—

its branches grasp toward the roof and gutters

as raindrops sputter onto the patio,

which has begun to fade and rust at the edges—

“It’s only in theaters ‘til Monday,” I shudder aloud to no one
before going back in.

Beth Boylan, a poet originally from New York, now lives in the Asbury Park area of New Jersey. She received her M.A. in literature from Hunter College and teaches English and writing at a local high school and college.

Micah Chatterton

Self-Hypnosis

Go back.

Go back one moment, to the first line of this poem.

Go back two moments, past the first line of this poem.

Five moments, breathing in
the smell of smoke, somewhere a fire,
your finger clasped in a book. A breeze
turns like a voice beside you,
about to read this poem
or write it.

Go back one hour.

You had your head in your hands,
or a child's fragile head was in your hands,
his tears pooling salt in your palm.
Or else you were happy, smiling at scraps
of overheard conversation, a bar joke,
a horse and a Rabbi, anything.

Go back one day.

It was raining, mud-grey all around you,
or it was hot, the sun a harsh blur bearing
into your bones as soon as you stepped
outside, sweat in your shoes,
or it was different.

Go back one year.

You were walking through cracked leaves
in a gutter, listening to their knucklebone rattle,
or you were standing behind a girl
in the supermarket, watching the crane
of her neck slip smooth like water
as she thumbed a magazine,
or you were other places.

Go back five. You were sitting
on a rough stone step, wrapping a strand
of hair back around two fingers as you always
do when you want to write, trying to remember
the first time you saw crows, and knew their names,
or you were standing behind a door, watching your wife
pour water on the baby in a white bathroom sink,
or you were other things.

Go back to the first time you saw crows,
and knew them by their burnt metal colors.

Go back to the first dream of falling,
jerking awake, some truth suddenly
clear for a cold long breath.
Go back to the first dream
in which you saw yourself, first
dream of music where it shouldn't be,
in the street, in your chest, your slapped
skin and singing joints, first dream
of wolves, first dream of fire, first
dream screaming, first dream
in which you realized anyone could fit
into anyone else's body.

Go back to the first time you heard crows,
and knew them by their scratched glass voices.

Go back to the first girl you ever loved,
first boy you ever loved.

Go back to the first time you felt naked,
first cigarette, the hot half-breath
of it, first car crash and house-burning,
first bad haircut, first good haircut,
first dirty word or thought, and how
great it was to say or think, first black eye
or broken bone, first time you tasted your own
blood, first time you saw your own blood,
the first time you knew that all animals die.

Go back until you find
the first thing, the first thought, the first bright
plume and flash that became a moment.

First thing:

You're chasing grasshoppers
through tall brown grass, a dust-filled wind
on all sides of you. They clasp the dry stalks,
swaying in sunlight and waiting for you to touch
the green paper of their wings
before they fly.

First thing:

You're held against the pale
moon of a breast, shadows spilling
out behind the curve. A huge finger
dots the tip of your nose
with a poke.

Go back to the brink of the first thing
you remember.

Go back into that last brief firelight
that makes shapes on cave walls,
your cheeks wavering, then crawl,
slither along the broken floor. Find
a place where the darkness hems.
Pull yourself into the black all around you.

Go back until one side of your body is light,
and one side of your body is dark.

Go back until all of you is dark.

Stay there.

(**Self- Hypnosis* was first published in [The Coachella Review](#) and is included in *Sassafras* via a request from the editor.)

Micah Chatterton's poetry and prose has appeared in a number of online and print journals, including *Kindred Magazine*, *Slice*, and *Coachella Review*. His work is also anthologized in *The Cancer Poetry Project 2* (Thasora Books, 2013) and *Best New Poets 2013* (University of Virginia Press, 2013). Micah earned his M.F.A. in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts from the University of California, Riverside. He now works as the jolly librarian of a Visual and Performing Arts Academy in Southern California.

Nancy Correro

Pursuit of the Other Side

Wafers of fur, bone, and skin—

these animals on the road run down.

If forced to drive over them,

the car lifts a whisper.

Sometimes spines are exposed,

chests poured out—

peeled pomegranates.

Some flash a smile—

blowfly cavities—

where lips recede.

Highway signs give warnings—

when to cross and what crosses.

Out there, only the coyote and vulture

do the undertaking.

New Life in the 21st Century

Several new species were discovered
near Antarctica. Marine biologists refer
to the conglomeration as a "riot of life."

Along the seams
of tectonic plates,
chimneys of molten magma
gurgle black smoke.

Hundreds of albino
species ghost about
the vaporous vents—
a photograph negative.

Leagues below, a home that houses
Yeti crabs as white as bones,
octopi with no camouflage,
starfish white as stars
in the night sky.

Such a strange volcanic brew

feeds and enchants

these sea bound specters.

They hover around the fiery abyss--

gluttonous chimeras of the deep.

Nancy Correro calls the Mississippi Delta and Atlanta, GA home as she was raised equal portions both places. Currently, she resides near the Chattahoochee Watershed in Roswell, GA and finds inspiration hiking the Big Creek trails. She has an MFA from McNeese State University.

Megan Kaminski

Dear Sister

This shouldn't be so difficult — your side
of the ocean no colder than mine and
coasts are often rocky and lined with stinking
fish and seaweed. I read your letter again
last night when the colder air rolled over hills.
Each line a new complaint about collapsing cupboards
and sulky cats. The neighbor is painting his house; white
boards sopped of gray and each morning

a different man on a ladder smiling down to sidewalk.
The trees are still today and everything is quieter.
Voices do not carry through closed windows and only
rumbles from old cars remind me that I am not alone

here in the brick house far from the road. The tea
warms me a bit too much and the tray for letters
on the desk still empty, waiting for you to get out
of bed and compose a reply.

(**Dear Sister* was first published in [Two Serious Ladies](#), and is included in *Sassafras* via a request from the editor.)

Megan Kaminski is the author of one book of poetry, *Desiring Map* (Coconut Books, 2012), and six chapbooks of poetry, most recently *This Place* (Dusie, 2013) and *Gemology* (LRL Textile Series, 2012). She teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Kansas and curates the Taproom Poetry Series in downtown Lawrence. You can visit her at: <http://www.megankaminski.com>

Mercedes Lawry

Trends

The secrets came in a variety of colors. A deep russet seemed to be the most popular. Those who couldn't afford them moved about in a bereft fog. There was no telling how long this would go on. A few brave souls mocked the craze with creative phrasing and much guttural noise. But the majority rule rode in like a stampede and nature took its sorry course. Libraries became halls of shame. Letters fell from words like broken bricks. And the words became whispers, the whispers, sour fog.

Observer

Unanchored sky goes blue-gray dizzy, a score of black wings tracing east. An all day shovel of clouds with a smatter of rain, the trees shiny then. How to dissect the hours,

this April day chilled and suspended. The girl at the window waits for nothing she can claim. Gazes at new greens next to moss while the world in its wet shiver is not more or less to her weariness. In a wedge of shadow, she hopes for a squall, a shatter, some wildness that might repair the rips at which she frets, fingers at a wet wound.

Mercedes Lawry has published poetry in such journals as *Poetry*, *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry East*, *The Saint Ann's Review*, and others. Twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize, she's published two chapbooks, most recently "Happy Darkness". She's also published short fiction, essays and stories and poems for children. She lives in Seattle.

Jeremy Nathan Marks

The conversation

The body, in conversation with itself,
is moved by cool, funnelled air

It drifts like the leaves do
disassembling things

To see trees as congeries
to sit beneath them

To imagine that leaves are falling
because they are failing

And then to turn inward
and miss the conversation all the while-

The Moon

I have perfectly measured the contours
of my body by bouncing numbers off of
the moon

Some persons will bounce light, will
turn giddy when it returns to them
as though it were theirs

I used the moon to find out where I
ended, not where I began -

Jeremy Nathan Marks is a Marylander (American) who has been living in Canada since 2006. By moving away from his native land he has somehow become more closely connected with his roots. Poetry, photography and wild nature are his Muses. His poetry and photography have appeared in numerous places including The Blue Hour, Lake: A journal of arts and environment, the Wilderness House Literary Review, The Camel Saloon and Front Porch Review. Three of his poems will appear in the 2014 winter edition of Poetry Pacific. Jeremy lives with his wife Michelle and their animal family in London, Ontario. You can follow him at his blog: www.thesandcounty.wordpress.com

Dawn Schout

Scablands

Airplanes scar the empty
sky, the jet we were on long gone.
He was approaching the runway,
ready to land
when I thought our trip
was just beginning.
I landed somewhere
far away from him.

The uneven, scarred
ground is covered with red,
a burned earth
with holes large enough to swallow me.
No number of stitches could fix
these wounds.
I kick shadows, wander
in ripple marks, hoping to find
a river, a sign of life,
in the midst of these cuts.

At the Royal Palace

Monkeys play with red dirt,
stand by tourists, divert
attention from the pointed,
elaborate Asian architecture
and lush, decorated lawns.
One monkey chases me,
wants my baggy green pants
to be a tree,
my pale arm a giant banana.
I want to pet him
but back away instead.
Later, I see the bite mark
he left on another
tourist's leg, like initials
carved into bark.

Dawn Schout's poetry has appeared in more than 40 publications, including *Gloom Cupboard*, *Main Street Rag*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Red River Review*, and *Tipton Poetry Journal*. She is an assistant editor for *Fogged Clarity* and was nominated for Best of the Net in 2013.

Emily Strauss

After a While Dumbness Strikes

After a while dumbness strikes my voice
as if a forest of damp twigs suddenly went dry
and brittle, old leaves snapping underfoot when
I step, my words become thin as a Chinese
reed flute, a hollow bamboo tube of air
whose notes drop heavily into shallow pools,
the ripple spreading only a little before
fading, even the warblers are quiet on such
a day. I am ashamed of my sudden
reticence, my inability to frame a reply,
like a deer caught in a rose garden can
hardly explain her affinity for thorns.

Night Music

playing night music at dawn
and the sun glances off
the schist at the cliff top
flutes and bells—
it's early for day, the moths
haven't finished their white
floral rounds, slow drums
can't mean a lifting of shadows
from the granite, revealing
its faceted edges, yet the light
arrives, grays fade.

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry (and photography). Over 130 of her poems appear in dozens of online venues and in anthologies, as well as a dozen photos. The natural world is generally her framework; she often focuses on the tension between nature and humanity, using concrete images to illuminate the loss of meaning between them. She is a semi-retired teacher living in California.

Michael Brasier

Like Nothing Ever Happened

Brad had to drop everything to fit her dating schedule. He bandaged his wrist, fought against the needle sharp rain out back, and tossed the first-aid kit in the dumpster. In twenty minutes, Janine would be dropping Sarah off again on a Thursday, a day he normally wouldn't have her, so she could meet Kyle, and the place had to be spotless, like nothing ever happened.

White hairs had begun to sprout in the midst of his scruff. He didn't like the reflection he saw in the bathroom mirror. His eyes were sunken, his hair, unkempt. But it wasn't his appearance that bothered him. He just didn't recognize the man staring back.

He placed a bible next to the lamp, more a decoration than a set of spiritual guidelines. As his old man used to say, "As long as you live under my roof, you abide by God's rules." He sat on his mattress, picked up the razor he cut his wrist with and tossed it in the trash bin. It was the third time in two months, but the scars left behind were barely visible.

His marriage to Janine had given him his only daughter Sarah. His friends and co-workers at St. John's helped her through the birth, and then helped him through the divorce soon after. Unbeknownst to him, Janine never wanted a child, but claimed to have told him countless times. Why she endured the pregnancy for nine long months was beyond him. Brad opened the sock drawer and uncovered his old wedding ring, holding it as if were a clump of dried mud, susceptible to crumbling.

On the headboard he kept a picture of Sarah from her first day of school. According to Janine, she'd be wearing her new Hello Kitty backpack today and really wanted to show it to him. Janine purchased whatever Sarah wanted, but only if it shut her up long enough to give her and her flavor-of-the-week time alone. His daughter loved showing him her toys. Even though he didn't have a lot of money, he looked forward to giving her all the attention she deserved.

Pacing through the house, he was reminded how bare bones it was. One bedroom and bathroom, gray walls, a TV, couch, fold-out lawn chair, and Sarah's duct taped bean bag. Brad worked to survive on his own after Janine won the settlement in the divorce, and she felt such pity for his sudden job loss that she agreed to allow him weekend visits. When Sarah had crawled across his floor for the first time, he realized how rich he actually was. He set out Capri Sun drinks and a bag of cheese curls for her arrival.

Janine's SUV squealed out front, and his phone buzzed. He answered, and she started with, "I promised Sarah you'd take her to the movies this weekend so you know."

He said, "I can barely afford gas for that piece of shit Pontiac out in the driveway."

"You have a job," she said. "You should be saving for these occasions."

He said, "I don't have the job I used to."

He almost blamed her for losing his job at the hospital, and now he'd have to let his daughter down. Janine loved playing him for the bad guy.

"Kyle's taking me to Branson," she said. "We've got reservations at the new bed and breakfast and tickets to the Branson Belle."

He hung up, and moments later, he heard footsteps pitter-patter on the wet sidewalk. Brad quickly slipped into his a long sleeve shirt and went to the living room.

The screen door swung open, and like nothing ever happened, Sarah was there.

Ron Morita

FLIGHT

Homework beckoned, but Janie strolled up the dusty road beside rows of corn that towered over her like adults in a queue. She climbed a split rail fence and gazed across fields resembling swells on a mottled green sea. Flapping her arms, she soared past the Gates' barn, toward a dark line of woods. Crows cawed from a treetop. Swooping down, she emitted the piercing scream that came out at odd times, as if the sound were an unfulfilled wish struggling to escape its imprisonment. Birds scattered in a blizzard of feathers.

A green car speeding along a road reminded her of the painted turtle she found by a pond in the woods. She would follow it over the lawn. The creature never stopped trying to escape, no matter how many times she brought it back to the concrete patio. She loved the dark eyes, the yellow underside, and the slender neck stretching to see the world. But one summer day she took her pet to the pond and let it go.

The road's black line seemed to go on, jogging every once in a while, forever. A smile crept across her face as she recognized Miss Rockwell's face in the windshield. All day she would stare at the teacher's teardrop glasses so that her eyes wouldn't wander to the wall clock. Janie dropped to the treetops and picked a handful of acorns. Using the calculator in her head—the only part of her mind that didn't turn to mush in school--she estimated the car's speed and dropped an acorn. There was a metallic thump. She opened her fist and fled amidst a gratifying clatter.

If Janie flew far enough, perhaps she would find the nursery where clouds grew up or the place—which must be very nice indeed—they were in such a rush to reach. She rose until her fingers touched the clouds' cool wetness. They coalesced into gray walls and a computer monitor with arcane words. Corn tassels became dots on her cubicle's carpet.

A spectacled engineer stood in her doorway, three pens and the spiral wire of a notepad protruding from the breast pocket of his rumpled shirt. “Jane, is there a way to import constraints from modules into a top level design?”

“Go three rows past the cloud. Sorry, I think I need to bring my brain in for a tune-up.

When you save, use import changes only. If you overwrite, you would lose existing constraints...”

Thus Jane’s day went on like any other, except for that brief flight among the clouds.

Ron Morita studied neurophysiology at UCLA’s Brain Research Institute because so much of what we consider ourselves to be is in the brain. Finding himself unsuited to academia, he earned a Masters in biomedical engineering from Case Western and became an electrical engineer. His fiction appeared in *Cigale Literary Magazine* and *Penduline Literary Magazine* and has been accepted by *The Chamber Four Literary Magazine*, *Star 82 Review* and *Empty Sink Publishing*. Ron has four unpublished novels. His website is www.facebook.com/RonMoritaStories

Sherri H. Levine

Footbridge

It was a hot and sticky summer when you called shortly after you left her. You spoke to me as if no time had passed, though it had been years. Over breakfast at the diner, you passed photographs of your son and called her a bitch. She criticized you about your job, your weight, your debt. You told me that she never touched you in the right places, that she just lay there lifeless while you were on top of her. You told her even a prostitute could do better.

As we walked along the footbridge that night, you reached for my hand. You were so large that I barely reached your chest.

“I’m afraid I could jump,” you said gripping the railings.

“I didn’t know you were that depressed,” I said.

“No, it’s my OCD. It’s okay. This is *exposure therapy*,” you said staring blankly at the water.

“But you’re a psychologist,” I said.

I remember when you used to deliver pizzas, how I tagged along with you to porn shops so you could put nickels in machines in the back. You told me you loved me, but I didn’t, not in that way. Besides, I could never give you a child. When I told you I was going to marry, you said it would never work out.

As we continued to walk along the footbridge, I put my arm in yours.

“Just like my mom and I used to do,” you said.

And then, the unthinkable happened: the moon, the Super moon appeared in the horizon. It was big and bright and orange. It was the largest moon I had ever seen. We stood there watching it slowly fade to a pale pink sliver, dropping into the stillness of the river.

Sherri H. Levine is from Albany, New York and has lived in Portland for almost 20 years. She loves Oregon, but she misses the beautiful autumn season. She holds a BA in Poetry and an MA in English Literature. She teaches English-as-a-Second Language at Portland State University and Willamette University. She is enamored with the flash fiction genre because it feels like it is a perfect fit for her as a poet.

Ashleigh Rajala

Coal Dust

Chapter One

Caroline once joked that she got the worst bits of Dad while I got the best. Now I see what I never did when I was alive: Caroline wasn't talking about genetics at all. She was sitting beside me on the beach then; we were having a holiday up in Whitby, as we always used to. The grains slid through her fingers as she dug through the loose sand hot from the sun to get to the dark, wet

Now that I'm dead can I replay those moments like rewinding a tape or skipping through the scenes on a DVD. Time means nothing: I can see past moments fresh like they're happening before me. I was just a kid alive: only eighteen. Now that I'm dead I could be eighty. The loss of flawed and biased eyes brings a careful certainty to everything. My concluded life is a butterfly stuck through with a pin: the wings are never flapping again and all I can do is study them.

I watch Caroline at my funeral. She stands side-by-side with Stuart, facing my horde of mourners. Stuart stands on the left, Caroline on the right. They don't look like family. Which is fine because they're not. Not *really*. The only blood they shared was mine. I was a bit of each of them: half Stuart's mom, half Caroline's dad. Between them sits a picture of me like the overlap on a Venn diagram, a blend of the two of them. I only notice now how awkwardly they both stand with me between them. They both feel like first drafts, I realise now, with me the final copy. It's unbelievable, really: their differences. You wouldn't think you could make a person out of that.

Ashleigh Rajala divides her time between a variety of poverty-inducing ventures: writing for fun and writing for torture; watching far too many movies and reading far too few books. Previous incarnations include bookseller, bureaucrat, filmmaker, zinester, student, and wayward traveller. Her physical home is Vancouver and her internet home is sandpaperblues.wordpress.com.

Riona Judge McCormack

Theme in A Minor

The secret is this: it can only happen when you're not looking. That's why it tastes the way it does, sweet and slightly sharp at once, because even then you're missing it already. It will never happen exactly the same way again.

Perhaps it goes something like this: A plan falls through at exactly the last moment. That is how you find yourself midway up a sunny street on this mild Sunday afternoon with the thrill of having nothing in particular to do.

You stretch your fingertips out as far as you can, to see if the edges of this moment can be touched, and you think maybe they could if you could reach only a little farther. Then with someone else's voice in your ears singing of days much like this, you wander through the first open door.

Second hand books downstairs, the sign says, so you follow it. The ceiling is low down there, and the floor tilts at odd angles. There is a hush among the crowded shelves, the other people moving in slow sleepwalking circles, heads to the side reading spines, one foot out, one finger to their lips in a half-admonishment for silence.

There is a woman on her knees in front of Classics, re-sorting books with featherlight hands. She is humming a tune that you take out your earphones to listen to, something unidentifiable and wonderful.

You don't want anything in particular, except to be here surrounded by these books that somebody loved once. You run your fingers along the shelves not for titles but for their feel, for a thick frayed binding or faded lettering, for a solid weight or an inscription-

To Judith,

I hope this brings you some comfort. I will always be here for you if you need a shoulder.
Christmas '93.

You lose yourself for a while, in the sacred bookshushed silence. You find - after an hour, maybe more - that you have collected an armful of treasures, misfits, stories with their own stories to tell. The humming woman rings them up, handling them like old friends. You think, *purchases*, and roll the word around in your mouth. Things to be tied with a piece of string and wrapped in brown paper, like sausages and hatpins.

There is more to come, though you don't know it yet; a quiet coffee shop overlooking the aimless crowds, the lost hours within the pages of a pocket-sized gem that once belonged to a Peter you will never meet. Knowing and not-knowing, some spent and some still to come.

Outside, a little snatch of the woman's tune escapes you, but it's already fading and you can't remember how the rest of it goes.

Riona Judge McCormack was born and raised in Ireland, but currently lives in Johannesburg with her partner, three cats and an underperforming lemon tree. She works in international development and has only recently made time to write, something she has wanted to do for a very long time. This is her first submission to any magazine or journal.

Kelly Seiz

Pluck

A fire, a separation, and a new house atop a New York mountain occur in that order over the next four years. Kelly is now seven years old.

The eyelashes have grown back. She's constantly engaged by the new surrounding forest and there, she plays, instead of hiding beneath tables like a trapped animal chewing its leg off.

Life is good on the mountain. Kelly hasn't seen a psychologist in two years and feels comfortable, if not beautiful.

The divorce is finalized and her mother wins primary custody. Kelly turns ten and they move off of her beloved mountain and down into the village. Soon after, the edges of Kelly's eyelids grow bare. By now, she's strategized that if she only plucks gradually, the main body of lashes will be enough to keep her secret hidden.

Middle school proves horrendous with her pudgy body and creepy eyes. The other children are starting to become opinionated, but remain unstructured enough to ask inappropriate questions and draw insensitive conclusions.

"Why do you only have some eyelashes?" Kelsey asks in the bathroom, her gaggle of mini-bitches eagerly waiting a response.

"I've always been like this," Kelly responds flatly.

"But in elementary school you had eyelashes," she asks undeterred. Their curiosity radiates like heat. Kelly's cheeks grow hot.

"I know. I don't know," she answers lamely. She stands downcast and silent until one by one, they flock off.

Anxiety, depression, and obsessive compulsive disorder are commonly diagnosed in trichotillomaniacs. Kelly is diagnosed with all three by a new doctor that she drops in a week. Her mother tells her it's a waste of money, that only she can stop plucking.

She swears to herself that she'll get her eyelashes back. By the end of eighth grade, she does.

She stars on the modified soccer team. She wins third in the state with her All-Star softball team. The weight floats away and she's suddenly in the elite.

Still, she doesn't look anyone in the eye despite the mascara she painstakingly brushes on her brittle lashes.

Kelly Seiz is a freelance writer and journalism student at SUNY New Paltz. She has previously written hard news stories for the *Legislative Gazette* and this is her first published creative nonfiction piece. She lives in Cornwall-on-Hudson, N.Y. with her family and a bunch of misfits.



Photo: Covering Fog - © Emily Strauss



Hills and Barn – Emily Strauss



River Morning – E. Strauss © all rights reserved // Below: *A Hare in The Forest* – Hans Hoffman, 1585 - J. Paul Getty Museum





Fig. 1.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 4.

COLOUR OF THE OKAPI.

CARL HENTSCHEL.

*Fig. 1. Sir Harry Johnston's specimen. Fig. 2. Major Powell-Cotton's specimen.
Figs. 3 and 4. Bandoliers sent by Sir Harry Johnston in 1900.*



A Smoke Backstage -William Michael Harnett, 1877 (Honolulu Academy of Arts)



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