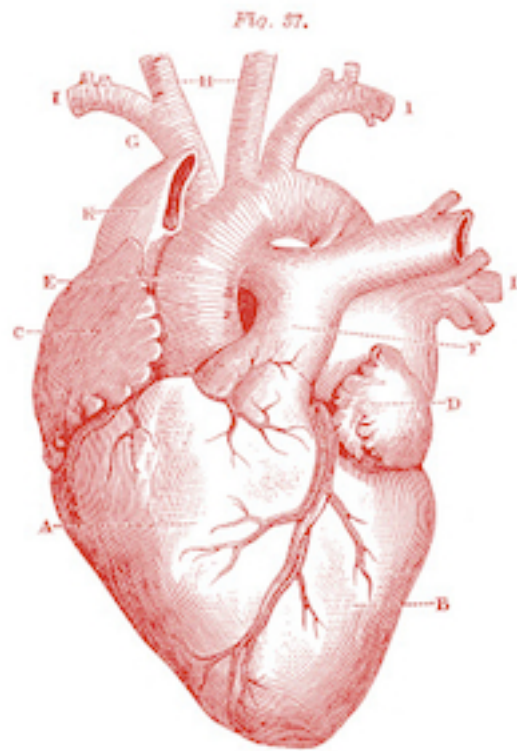


SASSAFRAS

LITERARY MAGAZINE



ISSUE 4 2013

SASSAFRAS LITERARY MAGAZINE ISSUE 4

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Paul Beckman

THIS IS NOT SELF SERVICE

The Fruit Corner, a greengrocer's store, occupies the same spot in New Haven since the Amato family first opened it some forty years ago. The current proprietors are third generation Amato greengrocers. However, unlike greengrocer stores throughout the world, and especially the east coast, The Fruit Corner does not put their wares on display outside the store. They are also not given to window displays.

Inside, signs are posted around the store: This is not self-service!
Ask for help!

Do not touch the
produce!

To make a purchase, the customer stands in front of the desired fruit or vegetable and the Amato on duty asks questions in a tone more suited to a clinic than a grocery- "What day do you plan to eat this?" - "Do you like your plums soft or hard?" - "Is this going into a salad or will it be served whole?" The Amato then makes the selection accordingly. Time could be saved if each customer were given a clipboard and form to fill out upon entering the store-perhaps the next generation.

Many people over the years have reached to pick up an apple or peach only to be yelled at from across the store. "The signs! Don't touch! Read the signs!"

When I was in high school I worked at The Fruit Corner but I was not allowed to touch any unwrapped food. I moved boxes into coolers, out of coolers, carried bags to cars, swept up, made deliveries, and touched young Mrs. Amato-and she me, in the back room, while the rest of the Amato family was busy keeping watch on their precious produce.

Paul Beckman writes everywhere and sells real estate in Connecticut. He's been published in The Raleigh Review, Boston Literary Review, The Brooklynner, Web Del Sol, Pure Slush, Connotation Press, Playboy, Soundzine, 5 Trope, Word Riot and other wonderful venues in print, online & via audio. Stories upcoming in Ascent Aspirations, Yellow Mama, Pure Slush, Full of Crow Quarterly, Metazen, The Story Shack, Connotation Press and My Audio Universe.

Gloria Garfunkel

Thunderstorms in South Dakota

The summer of our cross-country trip, west from Massachusetts to Yellowstone down Utah to Arizona, New Mexico and a quick drive home. Elder was six, younger was four, Mr. Brave and Mr. Misery. We camped in the Badlands of South Dakota and noticed some flashes of light in the early evening. More and more intense, and then rain so hard it flooded our tent. Our sleeping bags were floating and we had to sleep in the car. Bolts of lightening. Booms of thunder.

“The rubber tires will keep our car from getting hit by lightening,” Dad reassured.

Mr. Misery said he nearly peed in his pants. He had always been terrified of thunder and lightening. The next morning was gorgeous. Birds so much more brightly colored than in the east. As we drove around the next day, people told us that was the nature of South Dakota weather in the summer: thunderstorms every twenty-four hours. Poor Mr. Misery. We thought the exposure would make him less scared. It only made him worse during the tornado warnings in the Black Hills where Rangers made us abandon our car for the cinderblock lady's room. Mr. Brave told Mr. Misery Star Wars stories in the shower stall until the storm was over. Such a lucky boy to have such a good big brother to know exactly what he needed in a shelter in a storm.

Gloria Garfunkel has a Ph.D. in Psychology from Harvard University and was a psychotherapist for thirty years. She has published almost forty stories in literary journals. She blogs at Querulous Squirrel Microfiction Daily.

Matthew Laffrade

Choked City

Glum smokestacks, the observers of a choked city, called to the men from their observatory. The men, denimed and bearded, made their way through silent urban mornings on city buses or three to a seat in a battered pick-up. The workday called nigh. Jake, the pointed face foreman with greying stubble, drove to static country to pick up Mark, his nephew and the factory's newest apprentice. With dawn's approaching break still forming, he arrived at his sister's small home. Mark got in silently, a piece of dry toast in his hand, lunch pail in the other, cigarette hanging from the centre of his mouth. Hungover, he swayed like a man fresh in the gallows.

"Where's Chip?" Mark asked.

"I don't know. He wasn't out front when I went by his place."

"Did you get out and knock?" Mark looked at Jake.

"I don't run a goddamn car service."

The gates to the parking lot were parted for the morning rush of trucks, beaters, and pedestrians fresh from public transportation. There were no names on them but everyone had their own parking spot. A privileged right, where you only got one spot closer to the door when someone retired or died. This was a man's man's place of work but some things had to remain gentlemanly. Through a steel door with steel shoes, Mark followed Jake inside. The air was different in the factory. It tasted of metal, a dry indifference to the humid hang of smoke clouds aplomb outside.

"Alright Mark, today is your first day by yourself on the stamper. Do you think you can handle it?" Jake asked, placing his lunchbox in the communal refrigerator.

"Chip taught me pretty thoroughly. I'll be fine."

"You better be. You're only shot to move on to another station is death or retirement. Even then it's all based on seniority. You prepared to do ten years of stamping?"

"What choice do I have?"

"You can fucking leave and give the spot to the poor mook standing in the welfare office because he ain't lucky enough to have family who can get him in here."

"I'm ready, Jake."

"I thought so."

Out on the floor Mark started up his machine. Was a time when a man would just take over from the last shift. Now, there was only one shift left. There were three stampers in close proximity. His was for small pieces and the only one that could be run by one man. It started with an abrupt, deafening whir, and only sallys wore earplugs. He moved the flat metal from a bin to the stamper and pulled a lever. He retrieved the stamped piece and put it in another bin. As his bin was almost emptied another would replace it. Steam whistle relief told him when to piss. The end of the job just a mirage, an oasis just out of reach.

Matthew's work has been seen in various publications including Hitherto, Requiem Magazine, Wilderness House Literary Review, The Coe Review, and Ditch Poetry. He is also the recipient of the University of Toronto's Harold Sonny Ladoo Book Prize for his novella 'Past Present'. He lives outside of Toronto and has recently begun to archive previously published pieces at www.matthewlaffrade.wordpress.com

Gary Beck

Night Thought

I sit in my dark room quietly absorbing the night. The wind rustles the undergarments of the trees, making them sway in solemn dance. Obscure voices drift through the open windows, penetrating my semi-consciousness. "But her teacher said she couldn't. I got angry and sent a letter...."

"Aw. They never care what you say." "And she sent me a very nice answer, telling me how good she is in" "In what?" I asked silently. I pushed them away, into the domain of night which holds so much of empty conversation in its tired bowels.

My upstairs neighbor, giving vent to his incompetence, repeatedly screams at his wife: "You're a dog. You're a dog." On and on, until the night becomes aware of his emptiness, his obsession. I picture him grotesquely lumbering around a fire, chanting strange monosyllables to whatever gods he feared, until daylight found him sprawled across the remnants of his fire, oblivious to everything but his primitive dreams.

Remote Father

In unreachable distances

anesthetically removed

by a hollow heart

I sit alone

and listen to my daughter

crying in darkness.

Gary Beck has spent most of his life as a theater director. His chapbook 'Remembrance' was published by Origami Condom Press, 'The Conquest of Somalia' was published by Cervena Barva Press, 'The Dance of Hate' was published by Calliope Nerve Media, 'Material Questions' was published by Silkworms Ink, 'Dispossessed' was published by Medulla Press, 'Mutilated Girls' was published by Heavy Hands Ink, 'Pavan and other poems' was published by Indigo Mosaic, 'Once in the Bronx' and 'Iraq Monologues' were published by Atlantean Press and 'Escape to Cyberspace' is being published by Writing Knights Press. A collection of his poetry 'Days of Destruction' was published by Marie Celeste Press. His novel 'Extreme Change' was published by Cogwheel Press and 'Acts of Defiance' is being published by Arterna Press. His story collection 'A Glimpse of Youth' was published by Sweatshoppe Publications. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry and fiction has appeared in hundreds of literary magazines.

Tina Egnoski

Electroconvulsive Therapy:
Dinner Guests at the Country House

Bear in my kitchen consumes porridge and Chianti. Season of drought drove him inside. Yes,
he breaks a chair, naps. Drunk fat-bellied guest like so many table companions.

Nature lover, I've supped with spiders, ticks, squirrels, coyotes, boys with firearms. One I met at a
church

bazaar and he arrived empty-handed and ate with his hands: weasel. Trash-mongers like the
raccoon

are best for Holiday Leftover Surprise. Daily I serve fresh delicacies from the garden to buck and
doe.

Girlfriend, you beheaded my annuals.

This new beast with paw between my legs requires very morsel. He tosses rice from cupboard,
flour

from canister and dried peas from my cellar. A National Park Service ranger arrives with stun gun.

In the hot seat, I offer a canapé for the road. He says, In the proper

dosage—ohm or ampere—electricity is tonic, bread-and-butter.

Apolitical Apothegm

Each time I've been to Joy it rains.

One day while riding her bicycle the girl hit a curb and rear-ended Compassion. He brushed off her knees and rethreaded chain to cog.

In the language of Commonsense, she will seize the hand of the stranger as they meet Derision head-on.

If I ever appear before Recognition, I hope I have the grace to introduce myself. Social skills at times befuddle me.

On the train to Acceptance, a couple sat opposite us: young man with no hands and his companion. She opened soda, candy bar, wallet for money. With two stubby pinschers, he fed Ebullience.

Lost in the woods after sunset, she panics and steps from the path. Chance screeches from a black gum to reveal necessary foothold.

He goes to a New Year's Eve party and Anguish greets him with a paté kiss.

Evil, I'm afraid, will one day appear at my door, twenty-one years later.

In a state of Transcendence, she takes the escalator down to parking level C and finds Dissolution in her two-door hatchback.

My six-month-old discovers his feet and promptly puts Sorrow dirty from the sandbox into in his mouth.

There are words I don't repeat in public: Adam's Apple, NATO, Cimson, Empathy.

Tina Egnoski's work of poetry and fiction has appeared in a number of literary journals, including *Backwards City Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Folio* and *Louisville Review*. She is the author of two books, *In the Time of the Feast of Flowers* (Texas Review Press, 2012) and *Perishables* (Black Lawrence Press, 2010).

Bruce Hinrichs

What seems now, well, only too ordinary

Small electric appliances prance, steam,
march grandly, effortlessly, atop
smooth straight granite countertops,
then fling themselves high, extending,
grasping heaven's red velvet trapezes,
swinging freely, tenaciously through
majestic white/gray/silver clouds of silky,
murky, nebulous water vapor,
flipping, curling, twisting,
finally releasing their grips,
sailing like whispers, float, fall,
stretch, stick their landings.
Later standing rigid, heads high,
noble, stately, august
whilst the small electric appliance
anthem is played by well-worn,
straining, determined musical instruments.
The victorious again are
the toaster, the blender,
and the coffee maker;
bread is transformed to toast,
solid to liquid,
bean to black java,
and you and me to
what seems now, well,
only too ordinary.

Bruce H. Hinrichs is a professor, artist, musician, and author of both nonfiction and fiction in Minneapolis. Bruce teaches the biopsychology of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

Seth Howard

Stepping Through The Door

Moments before I found myself stepping
Through the door, I find myself, moments before
I'm stepping through, and time holds its breath
I'm holding time, the sound of my breath

Before I step through, holds itself for a moment
Before rewinding time, the motion captured
In the passing through, I'm stepping, while
The captured motion passes for something else
I know, the sound of my steps, as I'm letting go
That vicious circle, follows through, comes
Back around, while something else in passing
Speaks of going where we let ourselves

Let go, when in passing, cease the constant

Motion of the vicious cycle, else we find
In passing something back just moments before
I find myself stepping silent through the door

Seth Howard is a poet out of New London CT. His new chapbook *OUT OF THE EAST* focuses on his time spent abroad in Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan where he traveled extensively. His work has appeared in *Big Hammer*, *Burp*, *The Scope*, *Elephant*, and is soon to appear in *Unarmed Journal*. Whereas his last chapbook centered on the powers of reminiscence, much of his newer work is concerned with the concept of "disruptive language," and is more experimental.

Kathie Jacobson

NEWTOWN

Hearing sirens, they do not listen until the sounds persist so long that someone asks: what is it? And the receptionist who spends her idle hours googling one distraction or another says: something at the school. Movement in the corridor stops. Air does not filter through lungs. Which school?

Because it is the middle of a morning and a week, they come in business suits or overalls, the women's legs encased in nylons which stretch over perfect ankles into shoes not meant for walking.

Police and fire (volunteer) crackle with their fear and caring, sound their tenor mutters confidential over hip-belt static; gather in blue hubs. They hurl spokes of yellow ribbon, filament barricade, to hold worried brows and empty arms apart from Dick-Jane-and-Spot who run. See them. Run.

Four square and hopscotch idle behind chain link in the glaring sun. An empty wrapper wends across the pavement. Inside, children cry or dreamless sleep.

Mothers press their hope against the gate, hold breath against the pop-pop-pop. Overhead the news collects in helicopters.

Hand on hand on shoulder, children move behind their teacher who whispers rhythms that keep their fears from wandering as they cross the asphalt yard, jetsam floating, no more hurried than the stream allows, while the sun blisters unscreened noses. Far away, in California, a mother slides her finger down the slope of her son's nose, tsks at his dry skin. Red nose, a worry she can tolerate. She whispers guilty gratitude, holds his hand too tight and he looks question at her tearing eyes.

Beside a car, its chrome trim burning, a mother leans into her cell, her knees surrender to a wrenching gravity. Her fury would pull skin from limb of those who did not act on promises made after Littleton, after Blacksburg, after Buskerud, after Aurora, or after the times between and the times before that. Heavy like stones, grief mutes her tongue, cripples her feet, fells her spine.

A girl rushes to her mother standing at the yellow tape who sobs relieved, who weeps for those without relief, who wails for those whose cries open a narrow rift into which they descend, holding hero capes and fireman hats and plastic stethoscopes to Haedes welcome.

A mother wraps her arms around a boy who has escaped the hand and shoulder line; he presses himself against her as if he might retreat through her skin. A father circles both, leans his head back between his shoulder blades, sprays prayer directly to a heaven he does not believe is there, then swallows.

Two girls in pale yellow sweaters flee under the arm of a man in blue who says that he will take them out of here. He will weep at lunch, when a week has gone and come again, and a neighbor, usually silent, says he is a hero; and he feels good, then bad for feeling good.

A girl pulls her arms inside, leaves the orange sleeves of a sweatshirt to dangle helplessly as she walks. Her mother's hand rests on her head, an anchoring cap: each ship and moor to the other. She walks as if the passing blues with rifles drawn and boots that thunder without lightning have been there always. She shivers underneath. Her small frame threatens to shake apart despite the burn of noon across the humid air. She whispers to her mother that she lost her tooth, somewhere underneath the desks, or in the closet, or across the parking lot.

A corner fills with ragged stuffed bears, with candles and bloom, with seashells gathered from a shore. A child adds a princess crown. A sister lays her blanket, carried since she could crawl, on a pile where her brother will not walk again. A mother sits long hours at the table, makes no dinner, sleeps no dreams, toasts no bread.

When there is nothing left but paper angels pinned with sticks to hillside, feet shuffle through not-built-Legos, through plastic pirates that gather dust, and the senate votes in weekend shame to leave in easy reach: a gun. (Mothers twine their waists with serpents; pour blood from their eyes.) Senators drink cappuccinos at tables beside day-off reporters.

In basement apartments where there is no breakfast, and in brick row houses where coffee fills bellies that rush early to work, and in ranch homes sprawled behind lawns with purple, red and yellow blooms and breakfast balanced (fruit, dairy, meat, & mostly grain) homework gathers into backpacks larger than the walking children's spines and travels out the mourning door.

K Jacobson lives and writes in Oakland, California.

Don Kingfisher Campbell

BROTHERS

thousands of blades

of grass stopped by

brick wall before sidewalk

are these thousands content

to grow upward four inches

toward the distant sun

do they secretly wish

they could uproot

walk over bricks

jump down onto sidewalk

enchanted as fantasia

march off into trouble

or have they been made wisely

weak in their wild rows

to touch each other's shadows

they make me believe

they enjoy their evolutionary push

their struggle to become me

Don Kingfisher Campbell is published in New Verse News, Statement, Poetry Super Highway, Subtopian, and The Bicycle Review. He is an MFA candidate at Antioch University Los Angeles.

Maureen Kingston

The Threshold Dream

It can't be conjured, drops in
on the wings of whim, swims

in the euphony of amnion-falls.

The setting? Always the same:

October, a red cottage on an oxbow,
the surprise cleft of summer heat.

I awaken naked, wound in sweaty
sheets, besotted with expectancy,

eager for escape, to be out-of-doors.

But I hesitate. My infant feet

are thin-skinned, unblemished.

A few steps past the threshold

are all I ever manage, before my

tender soles succumb, split open

like new potatoes, greedily absorb

the slate's buttery warm face.

Dementia aspic

I pour her
powdered
white matter
into a chilled
glass bowl,
dissolve it
with boiling
water, add
ice cubes
to thicken.
The savory
brain jelly
macerates
her dried
recollections,
her dormant
memory seeds,
until they burst
forth in desert
bloom, fleeting
ghost flowers
clinging to
gully walls.

(Dementia Aspic was first published in *Triggerfish Critical Review*, 2010)

Maureen Kingston is an assistant editor at *The Centrifugal Eye*. Her poems and prose have appeared or are forthcoming in *Big River Poetry Review*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Gutter Eloquence Magazine*, *Stone Highway Review*, *Tattoo Highway*, and *Terrain.org*.

Steve Klepetar

A Silence

It began with a lost
word, syllable swallowed
in sea spray
or wind. Someone cut it
loose from the walls
of my tongue, a hopeless gasp.

Someone let it drop, penny
from the sixtieth
floor, physics of weight
buried in a forehead of rock.

Remember that absence
of sound (someone cut it loose...)

less a sigh
than a croak stranded
in the throat's
raw flesh, less a wash
of new light than a terrible
blink, bright rip in the fabric of sky.

Laughing at the Leaves

He stands at the base

of an old oak, armor-tough

bark broken in three

places, yellow leaves raining

down, covering his stained

blue jacket with their bright

palms. His mouth hangs

open and he snorts, laughing

in mist at this wet, golden fall –

quite happy, quite merrily

mad as afternoon drizzles

slowly into muddy night.

Steve Klepetar's latest collections are Speaking to the Field Mice from Sweatshoppe Publications and Blue Season, a chapbook collaboration with Joseph Lisowski from mgv2>publishing.

Justin Millions

Convent

Rolling boulders through

a silk screen.

The Fourth Act

If there was a movie,
Half would be looking out the window.

She walked out a while back. Somehow
In these cracked places people are supposed to grow;
I'm all crawled in, undisturbed,
A simple hole (no such thing)-

Been without work
A few weeks, starting to feel this
Central Ontario pinch; no rich relatives,

No one to just give up and wait for,
So my world is
A tall can
Of mirrors.

A hard year. Had to watch
Her pull away, move into him. Okay.
I'll take my eternity out on his,

I think, walking home just after New Year's,
Waiting for a change,

A snowy note I find
On the sidewalk out front of the new place:

P.S. Your dog is gone -

I should call someone...

(The Fourth Act was first published in [CONDUITCANADA](#), Jan 2013)

Justin Million is from Peterborough, Ontario, now living and writing in Ottawa. His work has appeared in Ottawa, The Steel Chisel, In/Words, and The Moose and Pussy. Justin has had two books published by Ottawa's Apt. 9 press and a variety of chapbooks published by In/Words.

Gaetan Sgro

Every Night We Talk About The Same Thing

the lines of miscommunication.

ragged fibers of daylight, fraying.

some nights you simply can't imagine.

anything so disappointing as a cul-de-sac.

even obvious endings occur suddenly.

memories wring their hands.

take a deep breath and then.

blow everything out of proportion.

let silence linger and it will.

we have so many names for distance.

Afternoon, June

chasing Rappahannock.

anything to shed her skin.

below, a rush imitating death.

clouds of silt blossom and pass.

impossible to sleep without.

always, air rushes in.

stones throw their voices.

and everything is leaving.

the sun on the backs of glacial rocks.

and sirens in the distance.

The Coast

here, shrouded in pine. days go

into hiding. obscure cafés in North Beach.

muddied glass, and mandolins. every morning,

the trail of pine. and the rise with the thousand steps.

the lean candle in the vast cathedral, leaving nothing.

and in the evening, only silence.

below, in the distance—

white sails.

light tracks at the edge of the world.

Gaetan Sgro is a homesick poet drawn to landscapes and negative space. When he's not writing, he practices medicine in Pittsburgh, where he lives with his wife and daughter. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in APIARY Magazine and The Healing Muse.

John Sibley Williams

Beirut

And in another city I'll never know
someone is razing the house
where I was born
with his left hand
while the right
builds from my absence
the house where I'll die.

I'm Reading Sunday's Headlines That Call for Things Like Justice

I want stone
or a word for stone-
you can't have both.

And though my childhood
spent chucking stones at
lakes, factories, friends

bled many mouths,
they have forgiven
or forgotten me

and in forever recounting to new
lovers, bartenders, friends
the sins acquired these first thirty years,

the repetition- stone stone stone-
has regressed to word
the smooth reality of stone

and the weighty joy in singing
silently my hands' actions-
whatever their consequence.

(I'm Reading Sunday's Headlines..' was first published by *The New Verse News*)

John Sibley Williams is the author of Controlled Hallucinations (FutureCycle Press, 2013) and six poetry chapbooks. He is the winner of the HEART Poetry Award, and finalist for the Pushcart, Rumi, and The Pinch Poetry Prizes. John serves as editor of The Inflectionist Review, co-director of the Walt Whitman 150 project, and Marketing Director of Inkwater Press. A few previous publishing credits include: Third Coast, Nimrod International Journal, Inkwell, Cider Press Review, Bryant Literary Review, Cream City Review, The Chaffin Journal, The Evansville Review, RHINO, and various anthologies. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

Jeremiah Walton

Road Trips Seen Thru Motel Rooms

Why are you scared all the time?
she ask
Stroking my yellow knuckles,

smiling with eyes
wet,
red,

electric
blue,

spider web wrapped.

We we're young.
Not scared.

Just too willing

to store our cigarettes
books and change

all in the same
shopping bag.

"We're making money
solely
to get drunk
in motel rooms
& buy \$1 coffee. Our
grocery stores are
7/11 & Exxon"

"We're making money to go no where,"
she said.

"That's where I don't want to go," I said.

Our bodies roll
in tangles
of sheets

stained by 1000s of
piss drunk fucks

where neither participating

left satisfied.

"We're not doing anything with our lives" I say thick mouthed

"Where did this drunken optimism come from?"

She slurps laughter, coughs, laughs, coughs smiling

She's always smiling

I laugh,

smell of booze
calms red nostrils
flaring
like irritated

innie belly buttons.

Pupils shutter

like skin of a snare drum,

skittering like peddles

in an earthquake.

She was a seismograph
that could register me
1000s of miles away.

Empty orange bottles
snagged from her parents'
medicine cabinet

are catching Zs
before further ingestion
in
our jackets and shopping bags and clothes
piled
room's corner.

We lay naked in more than one way

Outside sleeps like dogs

muggy warm dreams

bout Las Vegas
desert road trips

& California
road side oases,
hidden beaches
& margaritas.

We all want to get outta here.

The motel windows are oily,
smudged with age, lit by
neon lights,

the glare of people waking,
driving cars full of Lack Of.

We're all lacking something someone has,

and

I don't want it all.

The road cracked

sand tumbling
Earth shaking

like corner lip
of an angry bullet
her smile tastes metal

Their business calling

waiting to ring

with every cellphone charge,

every empty payphone

on the street.

Wives,
children,
mortgages,
unpaid bills & landlords,

old washing machines

sputtering, church meetings,
therapy, jobs
and the absence of jobs,
low monthly incomes. There's
a lot on our chests
and even more
beating
inside of them.

I'll drink more
to feel healthy again.
Healthy in the way
only a doctor prescribes.

"I want you to enjoy life. Smile and mean it.
Because you haven't in so long." she said rolling

into my side,
her head
resting
like wisdom.
My gut

rises and falls

as ocean swells.

I love her. I love our
freedom.

"Your feet are freezing" I say
Looking at red spider
webs
dripping sludge
from electric blue
punctured deep

with black hole
goodness.

"Smile!"
She laughs again,
smiles,
laughs,

slurs,

laughs.

I love her.

Jeremiah Walton is 18 and backpacking the East Coast. He manages Nostrovial! Poetry, WISH Publishing, The Traveling Poet, and is an editor at Underground Books. He blogs at Gatsby's Abandoned Children.

Jeffrey Zable

Natural Born Killer

You eat what you kill, was his favorite saying and when he wasn't on the phone trying to take someone away from one job and get a commission by placing them in another, he would chomp on this rubber bit that he said kept him from biting his tongue, and the short time I was there I learned a lot about what kind of person I didn't want to become and eventually went back to school to become a teacher so I wouldn't have to compete for money and work around guys like him who were natural born killers in the war for the dollar.

Dear Editor/s

After careful thought I want to thank you for rejecting my poems for your magazine. At first I was a bit disappointed, but soon I realized it was probably the best thing that could have happened to me. If you had accepted some of my poems— even one—and published it/them in your magazine, I could have become famous. Famous in the sense that women might want me for more than just friendship, and given that I'm no different than any other guy, the temptation to take advantage of a given situation might have overwhelmed me. What I'm saying is that I could have easily succumbed to the pressure and done something that I would surely regret. You see, I'm a happily married man who's never been unfaithful to his wife. If for some reason I strayed from the path and got caught... well, the consequences would be disastrous. I've gotten so used to my wife being around that I doubt I would be able to make it without her. Also, if you had published me and I made a lot of money, I'm not so sure that I would have spent it wisely. It's likely that I would have bought a new, and larger house, and certainly a new car. I've always wanted to own a Jaguar convertible and, again, that would have proved disastrous. You see, there are a lot of crazy drivers here in San Francisco and some who even challenge others to race them. If someone had driven up along side of me, rolled down their window, and said, "Hey buddy, you wanna race?" I don't know that I would have been able to resist. If I were driving my Jaguar convertible what probably would have happened was that I would have accepted the guy's challenge and in an attempt to beat him, I would have spun out of control and hit a telephone pole. This would have happened because I am not a seasoned race car driver. Most of my life I've driven ordinary cars like Chevrolet Corollas and Dodge Darts. I would have been killed instantly in my Jaguar convertible and then my loving wife would be a widow. Yes, I must sincerely thank you for not accepting any of my poems for your magazine. Of course, there are other reasons to be thankful that you didn't accept any of my poems, but I'll save those for another letter. Here's wishing you the best in your publishing endeavors and please pass along any of the above information to anyone who might be in a similar situation. That's all for now.

Sincerely,
Jeffrey Zable

(Dear Editor/s was first published in [SKIVE Magazine](#), April 2013)

Jeffrey Zable has been publishing poetry and prose in magazines and anthologies for many moons. He's published five chapbooks including Zable's Fables with an introduction by the late great Beat poet Harold Norse. Present or upcoming work in Mas Tequila, Subliminal Interiors, Literary Juice, Yellow Fox Quarterly, Boston Literary Magazine, Epigraph, Owen Wister Review, and others.

Thomas Zimmerman

Forget to Die

So I forget to die each darkened fall
when leaves are yellowing and frost about
to root out greenery. My corpse hangs on,
miasma haloing my soul, or what
I call that part of me that doesn't age,
that hasn't decomposed, remains composed
despite the sharp vicissitudes of mood
and feeling, rippled river undertowed
with warring streams of joy and pain. I drown
there many days each year, or think I do,
but always some friend's boathook stabs my flank
or scoops beneath my shoulder blade, around
the heart, to bring me back, a sodden wreck
that reassembles, and resembles, me.

Thomas Zimmerman teaches English, directs the Writing Center, and edits two literary magazines at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His chapbook *In Stereo: Thirteen Sonnets and Some Fire Music* appeared from The Camel Saloon Books on Blog in 2012. Tom's website:
<http://thomaszimmerman.wordpress.com/>

Ali Znaidi

Counter Replica

Inside a page
there is always
a phage replicating
itself & when it is
destroyed,
creativity,
dreams, &
transgression
bloom—
antiphons to a lingering
restless want for flying
beyond.

Australian Horoscope

The Magpie, March 21-April 20

The sun will return and engulf your realm with sublime lights. You have to seize the opportunity and capture the cherry blossom before the return of the owl. The sun will make you amaze people with enigma and light.

The Kookaburras, April 21-May 21

The leaves of the tree woman begin to fall. That is a bad omen. But if you are brave enough, you can bring luck through chasing the sunrise in Antarctica.

The Bowerbird, May 22-June 21

You can't imagine how mysterious your life would be if you dwell in the cave for a period of time just to ponder. And if you like to cast a spell on the opposite sex, just forget about decorating your bower because simplicity has its enigma, too.

The Rainbow Lorikeet, June 22-July 22

Just keep looking at the horizons because your luck is buried in a little cloud that is hiding behind the rainbow. The day you will shoot that cloud with your arrow, the rain will fall and fill in your empty buckets with water of luck.

The Kangaroo, July 23-August 23

Your heart is telling you to stand just in the middle and watch. But your fate is going to be hit by a beefy brawny buffalo if you don't move. If you find it difficult to move, just begin with trivial things. Try to change your pillow. Maybe, a new pillow can make your life start afresh.

The Rabbit, August 24-September 22

Don't drink water all day not just to experience thirst, but also to remember that your life is inundated with water. So if you like your life to be always fertile just don't deny the water and grow a rose in the desert to poison any daring snake.

The Koala, September 23-October 23

The crow is coming again cawing to encumber your weary soul. So just follow that flock of sparrows and listen to their songs— a panacea for all your aches. Music will fill your termite-infested room with fresh air.

The Emu, October 24- November 22

Never lock your horse in the stable. Just saddle it and start out trying to surpass the howling wind. When rekindled, your innate power can grow olive trees in the North Pole.

The Crocodile, November 23-December 21

If you start eating a pizza, just finish it all.
Nothing can infest your life but those crocodile tears.
Don't play the role of the victim.
You shall overcome all obstacles, if you don't throw half of your pizza in the dustbin.

The Turtle, December 22-January 20

Some people with prosthetic limbs did cage the dragon.
So just uncage fear from your heart,
and don't forget that Venus is watching over you
on top of your shell.

The Eucalyptus, January 21-February 18

Welcome to the wilderness!
Finally, you are going to learn how to sleep
without blankets next to thousands of scorpions.

The Redback Spider, February 19-March 20

If you don't know the goat's monologues in the
haunted cave, you are missing out like a crazy.
What you need is some strangeness to spice up
the emptiness of your life.

(Australian Horoscope was first published in *Phantom Kangaroo* on 13/04/2012)

Ali Znaidi (b.1977) lives in Redeyef, Tunisia where he teaches English. His work has appeared in *The Rusty Nail*, *The Tower Journal*, *Mad Swirl*, *Stride Magazine*, *Red Fez*, & other ezines. His debut poetry chapbook *Experimental Ruminations* was published in September 2012 by Fowlpox Press (Canada). From time to time he blogs at aliznaidi.blogspot.com.

Rebecca Andem

Fumes

“Please keep going. Please keep going.”

A mantra, a prayer, it didn't matter as long as it worked. The road ahead disappeared, a straight line evaporating into a haze of heat. Rice fields, spiky green with new shoots, flanked my peripheral vision and curved off into the horizon. They seemed to circle in behind me. I passed a *wat* and the occasional warehouse. Nothing else. Trucks sped past. Their hot wind pushed me further onto the breakdown lane. I held my breath through clouds of diesel fumes that gathered grit. Pebbles spun off their wheels and pelted my visor. Again, I glanced down. I wasn't going to make it.

“Please be around the bend. Please be around the bend.”

I changed my plea, anything to get me there. But there were no bends in this road. I slowed down. I remembered a moment from childhood, my mother coaxing an enormous black sedan down a country road. She drove slowly, and my sister and I practically squirmed out of our skin we were so anxious. We wanted her to hurry up and get to the station before the tank was empty, but she said driving slowly would save gas. I was willing to try it, but I didn't have a chance. Was it my imagination, or was the moped slowing down of its own accord?

I began to picture the possibilities. How far could I push a moped? How much did a moped weigh? The temperature had been well over 100 degrees for days. I had one inch of melted Yogurt Fruit Tea hanging in a little plastic bag from my helmet hook. When I looked down to check that it was still there, I couldn't resist another obsessive glance at the gas gauge. The needle hovered near the bottom of the red zone.

But then there was a town. It rose out of the heat. There must have been a bend in the road. I scanned the cluttered sidewalks, the greasy little shops, the side alleys. I looked up through clusters of wires and signs, holding my breath for that giant yellow shell or a simple *Esso*, a bold *Caltex* star. Cars and motorcycles passed me from behind while several others came toward me, shortcutting through opposing traffic to get where they wanted to go. I dodged them and kept looking. They were all running on gas. Where did they get the gas?

But then the town was gone. I contemplated turning back. Perhaps I could take my own little wrong-way shortcut, but my u-turns were still a point of embarrassment – and danger – although in comparison, a *farang* woman pushing a moped down the highway was bound to draw some stares.

While I tried to make up my mind, I covered ground. Somehow the moped continued to run. I saw a sign up ahead, one of the official ones, black script on white, and I willed the moped forward. *Suphan Buri 15*. The needle rested at the bottom of the gauge. I couldn't see even the tiniest sliver of red beneath it. How far could I go on fumes?

Up ahead tall trees bordered the road. They cast a shadow, a long, cool shadow, and I let off the accelerator, yearning to drift into it like a leaf into an eddy. But heat rose off the pavement, and another truck bullied past. I squinted against the grit and almost slowed to a stop. When I opened my eyes again, I saw it. Just past the trees, an entrance, a slight rise of tar off to the left. And there at eye level sat an old-fashioned sign with large removable numbers, white on navy blue. I didn't need a logo to know what those numbers stood for. Gas.

Two old women sat on a concrete hump between the pumps. When I braked in front of them and turned the engine off, one of the women climbed to her feet. She wore oversized shorts and a polo shirt, and the bagginess made her thin arms and legs appear birdlike. Her hair was slicked back, and her smile was missing every other tooth.

She spoke, and I shook my head. I took the key from the ignition and unlocked the seat latch. I pointed toward the tank and mimed filling it up. She smiled again.

"How much?" she asked in English.

"Full," I said.

"*Hòk*," she said. "Six."

I didn't think six gallons would fit, but I figured she'd realize that soon enough. And then I remembered the concept of liters. Perhaps six would fit, but if they didn't, would I have to pay for them? Why did I have to decide up front? Once again I mimed filling up the tank.

"Full," I said.

She counted off on her fingers for me in English. "One, two, three, four, five, six."

"Okay." I was too tired, too hot, and too grateful to care about particulars, but just to be sure, I put the seat down and pointed at the gauge. "Empty."

When she saw the gauge, her mouth dropped open. She flipped up the seat again and removed the cap to the gas tank. Bending over, she pressed her eye close to the opening to survey the inside, and when she stood up, it was with a gush of wonder. She gestured to the other old woman, who hurried over and repeated the motion, staring in close, standing with amazement. They chattered rapidly with each other, and then the first woman turned back to me.

"One hundred," she said.

I shook my head, confused. Did the price go up when the customer was quite obviously stupid? The woman pointed at the last sale on the pump. The numbers were the old-fashioned kind that flipped. Either they were stuck on one hundred, or the customer before me had bought the same amount. Perhaps it was a standard amount to buy. I didn't care. I didn't even calculate how many liters that

might be or what the price would be in US dollars. She could have said five hundred baht.

“Okay,” I said.

She pointed again to make sure and repeated the number. We agreed, and she picked up the nozzle. Within a second, the numbers on the pump had flipped around to one hundred again. I looked down. I could see the rainbow sheen of gas in my tank, right up to the brim, the perfect amount. Perhaps I wasn't the only customer who took a chance with fate now and then.

The woman replaced the cap, and I paid her. She laughed and pointed at me.

“You good,” she said.

I laughed. I pointed at her. “No, you good.”

I straddled the seat and started the engine. I smiled my thanks one last time, and then with a little rush of power, I maneuvered down the sloped entrance and accelerated into traffic. The heat and haze encompassed me again, but I felt free. I glanced in my wing mirror. The station was already gone.

Rebecca Andem earned an MFA through the Stonecoast Program at the University of Southern Maine. Her short fiction has appeared in journals such as *Petrichor Review*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, and *Upstreet*. She also has three novels. Currently, she lives in Chengdu, China, where she teaches writing at an international high school.

Terry Barr

Andy, It's 'Therapeutic'

I'm standing in the early spring darkness: a day-for-night scene in the vein of those "Andy Griffith" episodes when they wanted to portray Mayberry by night but you could see the sun shining through the dark filters.

Our hosts have provided a keg of Busch and are keeping the late New Wave tunes cranking. Men Without Hats' "Safety Dance" has segued into Wang Chung's "Everybody Wang Chung Tonight" into Men At Work's "Who Can It Be Now?"

I don't know a lot of these people even though they're members of the English Department, like me. But then, I'm beginning my dissertation, and so many of them are thinking only of whether they'll take Master's comps or write a thesis. I see my friend Steve talking to the woman he loves and who maybe loves him back, but then, she's married so "who can it be now" indeed?

Like usual, I invited my roommate, Sean, a wild and worldly guy from Pittsburgh who spent the previous two years in Senegal under Peace Corps auspices. I didn't know him before last fall, but I needed a roommate, and he seemed harmless. But he's caused trouble at other parties, hitting on already-taken girls and causing one boyfriend to confront me:

"You better tell that roommate of yours to leave Joanna alone. She's mine."

As if Sean were "mine."

Still, I like Sean; he's a good late-night companion, and I don't care whom he hits on as long as he leaves my face out of it. So I invited him again, for in another month I'll be moving to a basement apartment across town and never see him for the rest of my life.

So as I'm observing Steve and listening to Van Halen's "Jump" and wondering just who has taken over this time in my life, I see Sean coming, followed by a guy I've encountered before. A short guy with a combo peach-fuzz beard and upper-lip sneer. An obnoxious jerk even when he's not drunk.

I give Sean a look.

He shrugs, half-grins, and whispers, "He followed me."

Terry Barr writes about music and memory for culturemass.com, and his essays have appeared in Red Fez, Steel Toe Review, Bookends Review, and Hirschworth. He teaches Creative Nonfiction at Presbyterian College and live in Greenville, SC, with his wife and two daughters.

Cover artist: Ece Zeber

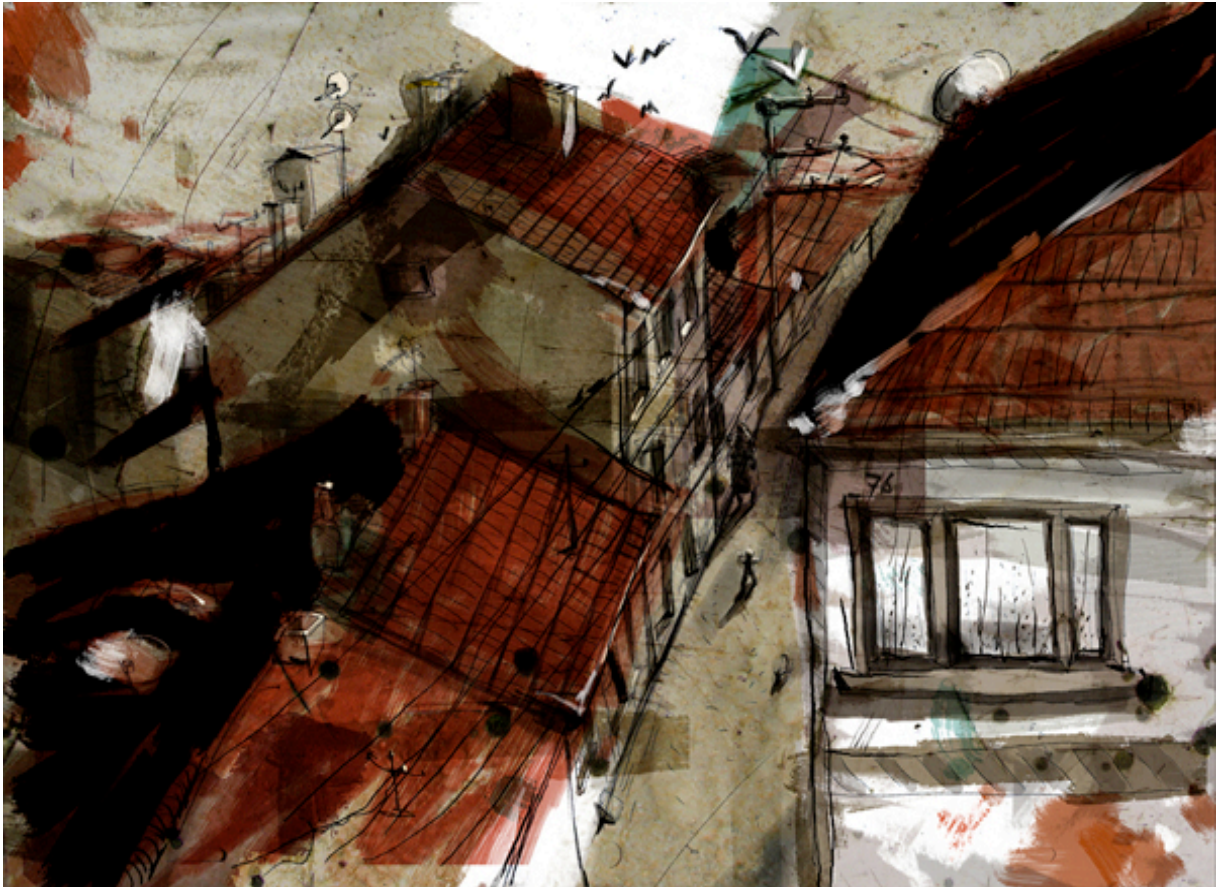


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Ece Zeber resides in Eskisehir, Turkey. She graduated from Anadolu Fine Arts with a focus in the animation department. She works at Resimlifilm Animation Studio as an animator and background artist. Find her work at behance.net/ecezeber, over at <http://vimeo.com/ecezeber> and in Juxtapoz.









Contributors issue 4

Ece Zeber
Rebecca Andem
Terry Barr
Gary Beck
Paul Beckman
Tina Egnoski

Gloria Garfunkel
Bruce Hinrichs
Seth Howard
Kathie Jacobson

Don Kingfisher Campbell
Maureen Kingston
Steve Klepetar
Matthew Laffrade

Justin Million
Gaetan Sgro
John Sibley Williams
Jeremiah Walton
Jeffrey Zable
Thomas Zimmerman
Ali Znaidi