

EL PORTAL

Volume 74. Number 1. Spring 2016



EL PORTAL

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**Eastern New Mexico University's
Literature and Arts Journal**

About El Portal

Since its inception in 1939, Eastern New Mexico University's literary magazine *El Portal* has offered a unique venue for the work of writers, artists, and photographers both on campus and off. It is published each fall and spring semester thanks to a grant courtesy of Dr. Jack Williamson, a world-renowned science fiction writer and professor emeritus at ENMU who underwrote the publication during his time on campus.

Each semester *El Portal* encourages previously unpublished short story, poetry, non-fiction, flash fiction, and photography submissions from ENMU students and faculty as well as national and international writers and artists. *El Portal* does not charge a submission fee. Submissions from ENMU students receive the special opportunity to win a first-, second-, or third-place cash prize in their respective categories.

For additional information about El Portal, please visit our website:
<http://elportaljournal.com>

Submissions

El Portal is open to submissions from all artists and writers; however, its awards are intended solely for the benefit of ENMU students. Submissions are published on the basis of talent, content, and editorial needs.

El Portal serves as a creative forum for the students, faculty, and staff of Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) as well as artists, writers, and photographers worldwide. Consequently, the views expressed in El Portal do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints and opinions of ENMU as a whole.

Guidelines

- Flash Fiction (up to 500 words)
- Short Stories (up to 4,000 words)
- Creative Nonfiction (up to 4,000 words)
- Poetry (up to 5 poems)
- Art & Photography (up to 5 pieces)

Please submit all written work in .doc, .docx, or .rtf formats. With the exception of poetry and art/photography, please limit entries to one story or essay. Prizes will be awarded to ENMU students only. Prizes are awarded only in the Short Story, Poetry, and Art/Photography categories. When entering a submission, please include a 20-50 word biography to be printed alongside your piece in the event that it is accepted for publication.

Deadlines

Fall 2016: Please submit by March 31st, 2016.

Spring 2017: Please submit by October 31st, 2016.

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Antiquarian Mishaps

Phillip Parotti

To the distress of the members of the Nob Hill Antiquarian Society, Albuquerque, New Mexico, we must report the passing of Miss Henrietta Forbes, founding member and long time recording secretary of the Society. Unbeknownst to the members, Miss Forbes had apparently been gathering notes for a paper that she planned to present to the Society concerning little-known settlements which once graced the landscape in northern New Mexico. Upon discovering Miss Forbes' notes and after a thorough examination by the membership, we, the members, find them so important that we hereby publish them as the leading article in this year's Proceedings of the Nob Hill Antiquarian Society.

FINSTERVILLE

PRESENT COUNTY: Socorro

LOCATION: On the Rio Grande, approximately fifteen miles north of Socorro and one mile northeast of the present village of San Acacia, on the east slope of Black Butte

According to documents pertaining to Confederate Military Affairs in Texas during the Civil War (Texas State Library, Archives Division), Private Lester Finster—Company B (“Davis Rifles”), Fourth Regiment, First Texas Cavalry Brigade, Brigadier Henry Hopkins Sibley, Commanding—received a serious wound to his right thigh during the Battle of Valverde, the engagement conducted between Union and Confederate troops on 21 February 1862 in the vicinity of Fort Craig, Department of New Mexico. Subsequently, Private Finster was conveyed to a hastily organized Confederate hospital established in a Socorro stable and left there to recover while the Brigade campaigned to the north. Following the Confederate defeat in the Battle of Glorieta Pass, 26-28 March 1862, Sibley's brigade found itself forced to retreat from New Mexico, but owing to Private Finster's medical condition—an infection having set in—Private Finster, along with several other seriously wounded men,

had to be left behind. At this point, all mention of Private Finster disappears from Confederate records, and he is not recorded among those granted pensions for war wounds following the conflict.

According to a diary written in Spanish, in the hand of one Felicita Maria Hernandez of Socorro, a diary which records events in the village between 1861-1866, one Leester [sic.] Feenster [sic.] recovered from his infection and his wound during the winter of 1863, the patient having been nursed back to health by one of Felicita's elderly aunts. At that point, according to the diary, "Leester Feenster" seems to have given up all thought of rejoining the Texas Cavalry Brigade and gone forward on parole with the intention of settling in New Mexico Territory. In fact, Lester Finster seems to have adroitly concluded that water was the only refreshment to be found on the 45-mile journey between Socorro and the village of Belen to the north.. Sensing a business opportunity and with the help of borrowed money, Finster invested in two barrels of locally produced *aguardiente*, moved them by mule to the north slope of Black Butte, threw up a lean-to, and went into business charging a premium price to travelers who wished to quench their thirst.

From all appearances, Finster prospered, so much so that within three months, he returned to Socorro, paid off his debt, invested in three new barrels of *aguardiente* as well as several flasks of mescal, and returned to Black Butte, taking with him two assistants, a female person known as *La Bomba Verde* and another female known locally as *La Zorra Roja*. Felicita does not mention whether the women joined Finster to cook, tend bar, or do his washing, but it is surprising to notice that thereafter all further mention of Lester Finster and his associates disappears entirely from Felicita's diary.

The next facts to be found about Lester Finster appear in a letter written in May 1865 by Lt. Ambrose Davenport to his elder brother, Horace, a resident of Syracuse, New York:

Dear Horace:

Riding north to Fort Union from Fort Craig in company with Corporal Ryan and two privates. Stopped at Finsterville, north of Socorro, to ease the ride up to Belen. Regular den of iniquity, that place, run by Confederate parolee: spirits, two

women of easy virtue, one gambler, three Mexican shepherders, and cooked rattlesnake stew for the meal. Had a devil of a time getting the privates back in the saddle. Henceforth, I will avoid the place. Regarding my transfer, I...

In subsequent remarks, Lt. Davenport attends to matters of family business, never again mentioning Finsterville nor its inhabitants.

The last information that I am able to find regarding Finsterville comes in an article published in the Albuquerque *Banner* and dated 13 September 1866:

On Saturday last, a band of marauding Navajo or Apaches, thought to number in excess of 14 braves struck the Hacienda Carmen south of Belen before moving on to kill one vaquero and two women in the neighborhood of Hacienda Galvan. Later in the day, the warriors raided the tiny settlement of Finsterville, located north of Socorro, killing a shepherd, burning three structures, and carrying off two women. The proprietor of the lone business in the settlement, one Lester Finster, fled to Socorro in the aftermath where he declared his business establishment to be a total loss. A United States cavalry patrol is at present searching for the abducted maidens. A gambler known to frequent the premises and two shepherders are thought to be hiding out in the desert.

Lester Finster seems to disappear from the records of Socorro County at this point in history, but in 1906, a burial record for one Lester Monroe Finster, “thought to be a former Confederate veteran,” appears in the Santa Fe *Ledger*. At the time of his death, Lester Monroe Finster appears to have been employed in mucking out stables for the Herrera Brothers Livery and Wagon Barn. Hikers who have studied the slopes of Black Butte have thus far been unable to find the slightest trace of Finsterville.

BARTEE'S STRIKE

PRESENT COUNTY: Santa Fe

LOCATION: approximately six miles south of the Plaza and the

Santa Fe cathedral and about one mile west of modern De Vargas and Seton Village along the banks of Bonanza Creek.

According to records on file at the Santa Fe County courthouse, on 18 December 1866, following his discharge from the United States Army at Fort Marcy, Sgt. Willard Bartee, late of the California Column, purchased a parcel of land totaling nine acres. Bartee seems to have been an enterprising individual: in the same week that he purchased the land, he staked a claim, announced a silver strike, moved four Mexican miners onto the property, and set the miners to sinking a shaft and building a head frame. Thereafter, armed with samples of silver ore, Bartee began to make the rounds, showing his ore samples and inviting business proprietors to invest in the mine which he had named "Bartee's Strike."

Surviving ledgers from the old Alvarez Mercantile establishment in Albuquerque show that both Don Gaspar and his sister, Doña Serefina, invested as much as five hundred dollars each in the mine. If an 1877 letter in the possession of Mrs. Miranda Fleet of St. Louis is credible, her great grandfather, Julian McKnight, and a consortium of other investors including the Hammond brothers, also of Albuquerque, poured as much as four thousand dollars into the mine, and in Santa Fe, at least three men of prominence underwrote the venture to the tune of \$2500 each, the President of the First Bank of Santa Fe making Bartee a personal loan totaling more than \$2800 in gold. Smaller sums seem to have been assembled from some of the ranching haciendas: the owners of *Hacienda Jacquez* near Belen were known to have bought in for \$300 while Russel Gibbon, ranching on the West Mesa beyond Albuquerque dropped \$125 into Bartee's poke.

Four months later, the Santa Fe *Ledger* carried the following advertisement:

NOTICE: anyone knowing the whereabouts of Willard Bartee, proprietor of the mine known as Bartee's Strike is asked to contact Harrison J. Coombs, President of the First Bank of Santa Fe. Since his sudden and unexplained disappearance during his reported journey to Taos, his friends have become greatly concerned about his welfare.

Bartee's sudden disappearance from Santa Fe proved to be final, and when the Mexican miners that he had hired were informed that the man had decamped, they were crestfallen because none of them had been paid their promised wages. In 1889, however, Morton Wiley, a Santa Fe lawyer, returned from an extended business trip to Chihuahua and swore on affidavit that he had seen Willard Bartee, that the man was living in style in *Ciudad* Chihuahua, and that he owned a rich vein of silver and prosperous mine known locally (and in translation) as "Bartee's Takings."

Today, the hole left at Bartee's Strike is only partially filled in; the huts that once housed the Mexican miners have disappeared, and the head frame has rotted away. In 1985, concerned citizens surrounded the abandoned shaft with a length of hog wire fencing so as to prevent the unsuspecting from falling into the remains of the pit.

SNOOK'S CORNER

PRESENT COUNTY: Colfax

LOCATION: about 9 miles south of the village of Springer, NM and one mile north of the Colfax county/Mora county line adjacent to the point where the Santa Fe railroad track bends four or five more degrees toward the southwest as the line advances toward the village of Wagon Mound (old Santa Clara) and Las Vegas, NM

In 1879, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway purchased an old toll road that ran through Willow Springs in Raton, New Mexico and quickly began development of a railroad that would service the towns of Las Vegas, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque before moving south through Belen and Socorro toward Mesilla and El Paso. At about the same time, one Leviticus Snook, Las Vegas handyman and father of five, drew an ace in the back of the Ortiz Brothers Saloon and acquired, by pure luck, five acres adjacent to the proposed rail line, acres that had somehow been left out of the official right-of-way belonging to the railroad. By another stroke of fortune, the property Snook acquired also bordered Ocate Creek which, at the time, offered an abundant supply of fresh water, something much needed by the railroad for feeding the boilers in its engines.

According to a letter still retained in the archives of the railroad, the railroad employee responsible for this oversight—an oversight which gave Snook the rights to the water at the Ocate crossing—was fired and threatened with damages for his lapse.

Snook, a man who could apparently catch a penny from Heaven when it dropped, made haste to establish himself on his land by moving his wife and five boys into a tent on the premises before riding in person to Raton where he negotiated with the railroad to provide the needed water for their locomotives. Thereafter, hiring Snook to manage the facility, the railroad undertook to build an upright water tank on the site with a pump to keep the tank filled. Snook, after finding ready investors in Las Vegas, hauled lumber to the site and erected, at his own expense, a station of sorts, a modest two room structure, the rear room of which housed the Snook family, the front room being used for serving coffee, tea, sarsaparilla, cold water, and victuals to weary travelers during the trains' brief watering stops. A diary entry later left by one of Snook's grown sons, on a page dated 14 September 1913, reads as follows:

Pa wanted to sell red-eye to the folks. Ma wouldn't have it. She were a tee-total and a Teprance [sic.] woman like Aunt Nell and made us wash up on Sunday, even with no church around. So, no red-eye nohow 'till Uncle Nehemiah come.

According to a brief announcement in the Las Vegas *Globe* (22 April 1880), Nehemiah Snook joined his brother after a journey made from Chicago to Snook's Corner, and once arrived, also with money borrowed from investors in Las Vegas, "Uncle Nehemiah" built a small three room hotel, the rooms apparently being just large enough to contain single, narrow beds with corn shuck mattresses. And if the grown son's diary is to be believed, Uncle Nehemiah also kept several bottles of untaxed red-eye near to hand with which weary traveling gentlemen might refresh themselves after Leviticus directed their attentions to the right establishment.

Working on the basis of the unnamed Snook boy's diary, previously quoted, it is just possible to determine the ages of three of Snook's sons in 1881. Hosea, the oldest, was twelve years old

in October; Amos, the second son, was eleven at that time while Zechariah appears to have been ten. The two unnamed younger boys, including the diarist, probably continue the downward stair-step in age, factors which help explain what subsequently happened to Snook's Corner. The brief details are contained in a letter written to Mrs. Nell Markham by Mrs. Lavinia Snook, the letter being dated 14 November 1881:

Dear Nell,

I regret to ask, dear sister, but Providence has not all together smiled upon us during the past month, so we will be in Cleveland by November 28th and beg shelter for no more than two weeks. Briefly what has happened is this: on the 17th of October, the boys were out by the track, playing at Civil War games, Amos pretending to be General Lee, Zechariah pretending to be General Grant, Hosea pretending to be the President while the younger boys pretended to be infantry. At some point, Leviticus called us all, including Nehemiah, to help him unclog the feed to the pump down at the creek, so all of us trooped down together. Unfortunately, the boys left their cannon, a six foot length of thick steel pipe, on the rails, and while we were removing moss and weeds from the feed, the train arrived, derailed, and slid forward down the east side of the track, wrecking forever and beyond redemption the water tank, the station, and the hotel. Cinders then ignited the whole, including the engine, which eventually exploded, and one of the cars. The man from the railroad threw a terrible fit with the result that we were required to sell our land to pay damages with just enough left over to satisfy Leviticus and Nehemiah's creditors in Las Vegas. Leviticus says that he has had enough of the West for the time being and is determined to find work in Pittsburgh, so we decamp tomorrow, riding east on the slow train. Hugs and love to you all,

*Your loving sister,
Lavinia*

As the unnamed son's diary shows, the Snook family made it no farther than Kansas City where Leviticus found employment

in the stock yards, rising eventually to the level of foreman. There, the boys appear to have grown to manhood before departing on their individual ways at which point history loses track of them. Leviticus appears to have died shortly after the commencement of the First World War. Lavinia died in 1934, and both Lavinia and Leviticus are buried in Kansas City's Oak Hill Cemetery.

Snook's Corner was never rebuilt. The Railway, after its bitter experience there, moved its watering operation to the village that is now Springer. Bits of charcoal, however, remain to mark the spot where Leviticus Snook once operated his business enterprise and where his sons reenacted the Civil War.

VICENTE'S RETREAT

PRESENT COUNTY: Bernalillo

LOCATION: about 11 miles west of Albuquerque's "Old Town Plaza," on the west slope of the hillock known as *Cerro Colorado*. Two miles farther to the west, one finds the border of the Laguna Indian Reservation

According to records still retained by his granddaughter, Mrs. Teresa Martinez of Los Cerrillos, NM, Vicente Jorge Carbajal was born in the year 1872, in Parajito (now included in the settlement known as Albuquerque's "South Valley"), the only son of Francisco, a farmer, and his wife, Lupita. After leaving school at the age of ten years, Vicente, a sturdy boy, went to work for a blacksmith and, in a matter of years, learned the trade so well that he began to prosper by shoeing horses, fashioning and repairing farm implements, and working as a wheelwright for farmers and citizens along the Rio Grande all the way down to Belen. In addition to his skills as a blacksmith, Vicente apparently had a good head for figures and business: by the time he reached the age of twenty-three, he was part owner of a local grocery, farmed five acres of his own on land adjacent to his father's holding, and was sole owner of a small dry goods store which sold work boots and work clothing to the neighborhood.

Combining frugality of lifestyle with prudent investment, Vicente continued to prosper. By 1904 when he married and

inherited through his wife a small parcel of land west of Albuquerque, he owned interests in several Albuquerque mercantile firms as well as two farming properties in Corrales and a small slaughter house in Golden, managed by one of his cousins. Upon acquiring the property on the West Mesa, Vicente visited the site and discovered that it surrounded a spring of mineral water sweet to the taste. Immediately, Vicente saw the spring might be developed into the centerpiece for a small spa or resort, something that might offer both leisure and improved possibilities for good health to patrons who could afford such amenities. Vicente then consulted with his many business associates and enlisted partners. In no time, construction workers on the West Mesa began erecting a small hotel, an assembly room for social gatherings, a building for mineral baths, and two tennis courts.

“We start small,” Vicente is supposed to have told his wife. “If the venture succeeds, we expand. If not, we close and sell our share of the property without loss.”

Construction work on what became known in Albuquerque as “Vicente's Retreat” proceeded without hindrance or delay, so by April of 1906, the establishment was ready to open.

Modest advertising in Denver, Amarillo, Phoenix, Tucson, and El Paso guaranteed that the resort's thirty rooms would be filled on opening day, and inquires by letter had been so abundant that the manager of the establishment found it necessary to schedule reservations both for the dining room and for the tennis courts. In the meantime, seeking a unique attraction that might bring public attention to the establishment, Vicente, following a business trip to Denver where he made contact with the owner and witnessed an exhibition of his skills, had hired a man to fly his colorful hot air balloon directly over the resort on the day of its grand opening, an event to which the newspapers paid careful attention and to which they also gave considerable space in print.

Eventually the grand day arrived, the resort was opened with music, food, drink, and colorful bunting, and at three o'clock that afternoon, William Anderson of Denver and his son, Todd, starting one mile to the east of the spa, took flight in their hot air balloon. The following transcript records Mrs. Teresa Martinez's description of the event:

I was not present, you will understand; I was not yet born, but Tío Vicente's sister, my great aunt Esmeralda, was present to see the demonstration, so all that I know about it came from her.

The balloon, bright orange and very beautiful, took flight between the resort and downtown Albuquerque. Possibly, Señor Anderson should have flown that balloon in the morning because, on the West Mesa, the afternoon breezes can be very strong. Immediately, the balloon went high up, too high, if my Aunt Esmeralda is to be believed, so that Señor Anderson threw out the anchor and told his son to let out some of the air, and his son—his name, I think, was Todd—let out too much air. So as all of the gathered crowd, people from both the resort and from Albuquerque witnessed the event, here came that balloon rushing like a buffalo, losing altitude all the while, and then, my auntie said, they realized that it was too low, that the anchor was going to catch, and it did, dragging off part of the hotel's roof, crashing into the windows of the mineral baths, and catching on the tennis net, uprooting it right in the middle of a match of doubles and dragging it across the ground, the tennis players and the crowd scattering in all directions. And in the next second, apparently, one of the posts attached to the tennis net snagged on a part of a rock wall, a wall which did not give way, and this in turn, working like a lasso, threw the balloon straight onto the food tables, everything smashing to the ground at once. The balloon was ripped all the way up one of its sides but did not catch fire. The Andersons were somewhat bruised but otherwise unhurt; nevertheless, the son said that he would never get into a hot air balloon again. Considerable damage was done to both the hotel and to the mineral baths, and owing to the crash, the party was completely overturned on the instant, the crowd departing in haste. And three months later, having found investors from the East Coast, my Tío Vicente and his partners sold Vicente's Retreat to a consortium which, knowing nothing about New Mexico and apparently less about running a spa, eventually went broke whereupon the buildings fell into decline and were eventually dismantled. I think all of the materials that could be salvaged were sold at auction.

Today, one may search in vain for the remains of Vicente's Retreat. The spring around which the resort was originally constructed seems to have dried up or gone fully underground.

But Vicente Carbajal, on the other hand, continued to prosper by investing in real estate. During the First World War, for example, some of his holdings were sold to the government for national defense purposes, a process he repeated during World War II. By that time, Vicente was sole owner of a firm called Carbajal Pipes and Pumps which, with its main office in Albuquerque and with warehouses and field installations in Hobbs, helped to supply the eastern New Mexico oil fields. In late 1944, Vicente was honored by the Governor's office for additional contributions to the war effort, and thereafter, selling his business to three of his grandsons, he retired and died peacefully at his home in February 1953.

***NOTICE:** Members are hereby notified that on Thursday, 27 November 20__ , a memorial plaque in honor of Miss Henrietta Forbes will be installed on the West Wall of the Nob Hill Antiquarian Society's headquarters. All members in good standing are invited to attend.*

Pop Runs Out of Gas, and Mom Says I Told You So

Stephen Cloud

As usual we're cruising right along.
Pop fools with the radio dial
while mom reads the signs:
Almost There! Ten Miles Ahead!
Whether ten or a hundred pop doesn't care.
We're in it for the long haul, he says,
moving out and moving on.
The road goes on forever and it's a free ride.

Rest Area. Scenic View.

Pop scoffs: Who needs rest? What's to see?

Inertia has us in its thrall, no stopping now.

A change of time zones, a change of stations,
"Today's Top Hits" fading
to "Golden Oldies Magic 99."
Rambling man, king of the road, born to run;
Come on now, sing along, you know
the words to this one, don't you, boys?

Here It Is! Don't Miss It!

No Services Next 100 Miles.

Keep on trucking—that's pop's motto.
What are you talking about, there's half a tank.
We'll fill'er up when we cross the line.
Pop's got a hunch it's cheaper over there.

Last Chance Gas.

This is it. Exit Now.

In a blink we've passed it,
certain there's no need;
and the road ahead vanishes

into a shimmering mirage—
pop's boundless dreamland
where nothing can ever go wrong.

Photograph, Chavez Ravine: 1948: Girl Brushing Sister's Hair

Paula Friedman

Bending over the raven tangles,
her strokes, languorously long,
a pensiveness hinted at in their twin
solemn expressions. The day
seems fire-lit, flaming paleness
off a slatted house side, fragmentary
wall behind which the girls might've
wakened an hour before, drowsy
with late August heat.

No rush to school; they might
have lingered over toast before
stepping out the door. Mother
and father off in the fields—

Soon the city will rule the village
blighted, raze the whole Ravine
and build Dodger Stadium.
Cows and goats will be marched
down to trucks ready to haul them
to other, farther pastures.

But this summer morning
the girls go on brushing, while
nearby, smaller boys are tussling
under an open cloudless sky.

Little Mexico

Paula Friedman

A little wilderness so close to the city!
Sprawl and bramble, wildflowers almost
the whole year round. When I first found
the Ravine in 1935, there were exactly
three houses on the entire hill. Before long,
the number jumped to five hundred. Still
I knew most everyone. We called the village
Little Mexico.” Though I happily gathered
in the sky’s velvet blackness at night, bursts
of stars poking through, I knew we needed
streetlights. Some of us organized the Lilac
Terrace Improvement Association. We built
churches, a beauty shop, grocery stores--
and Palo Verde School, one of the newest
in all Los Angeles. Playing baseball was big.
The boys were always choosing up teams
in the open field, putting games together
during recess, after school, on weekends too:
Homerun! Strike! Foul! Steal! Out! He’s OUT!
The whole ravine heard them hollering—

During the War, right after Pearl Harbor,
I worked for the city, took the Air Raid
Precaution Count. I visited some fine homes
in the Ravine, but some owned by landlords
were built rickety, left unfixed. Once I found
ten people living in two rooms, no plumbing
not even furniture! I admit when the Housing
Authority told us its plan, it made sense. They
would buy up all the homes and stores, raze
the houses, gardens, all the untrimmed greenery,
build low cost housing instead. Landlords sold
out right away, but a lot of Ravine residents stuck,
fought the order until the last family was dragged

out by police, while crowds scoffed at their stubbornness. When the city announced it had run out of funds, selling the land to build the Stadium, then I understood what the politicians had done, and that I helped them accomplish it. It took more than two years to haul our hills away.

on the train the people wave at you

Kristin Kaz

the amtrak coast starlight superliner makes regular trips from the southernmost tip of southern california to the not quite southernmost tip of british columbia, rounding itself off in vancouver before making its way back down the coast.

it is a bilevel train, with sleeper cars, a panoramic lounge car, diner and cafe cars for dining and dining light, respectively, and coach seats on both upper and lower levels (restrooms are located on the lower levels only).

the superliner cars measure 85 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 16 feet high, and have been modified at least five times since their introduction into service in 1979. weighing in at 148,000 pounds and with a maximum per-car capacity of 96 bodies, the superliner is capable of reaching speeds of up to 100 miles per hour.

it's dark and quiet in oakland at midnight, and colder than he'd expected it to be, for june. here and there a warehouse casts light into his path, but it isn't even really enough to see by. he listens to the sound of gravel as he walks over it, treading as lightly as he can for a while, seeing how little pressure he can apply to his footprints. mostly he is avoiding the inevitable—small chips of gravel that stick themselves between the ridges of his sneakers' soles, lying in wait to scrape against the sidewalk he will likely encounter, altering his footfall just enough to put him on edge. it's happened already, happening now, he can tell, but still he tries to keep his steps light. he is as silent as a man walking over gravel at midnight in the relatively-middle-of-nowhere can be.

he hasn't been in oakland long. he hasn't been anywhere long, but he's lived enough to know that whatever life had to offer him has long since been reneged, so he chases booze instead of tail because booze has about the same to offer him as he has to

offer it, which is nothing, really, and booze is fine with that, which is more than can be said of tail.

there is no cloud cover that night, which likely explains the chill in the air. he walks up the mounding gravel to its center, where wide railroad tracks span for miles behind him and farther off into the distance than he can imagine. he stops in the middle of the tracks, testing for gravel chips on the solid plank of wood beneath him. it fucking happened, his right side is misaligned with his left, and he tries to pick the chips out of the sole of his left shoe but his nails are too short to do a damn thing about it so he takes off his shoes instead and lobs them off into the distance where they clang against something dark and probably rusty—he can't tell what it is because it's too dark to see and there are no warehouses here to cast a shadow of light onto the object in question.

someone told him once that trains travel so quickly you can't hear them until they're right upon you, but he doesn't think he believes that. they have bells and whistles and the works for a reason, and the clamor of steel against steel is anything but silent. still, the idea of stealth gives the train a villainous quality he finds relatable and oddly comforting, so he stands still on the tracks and waits until he can feel vibrations transferring from steel to wood, pressing his feet against the planks and staring into the sky with his arms at his sides until he can hear a slight whistle and in the darkness imagines that a faint light is growing behind him. he stands and stares at the sky and feels the chill against his palms and the tops of his feet and the whistle grows louder and the light surrounds him and the planks vibrate beneath his feet until the sound of gnashing steel is right behind him.

She hurled you to a land where

Gabriella Garofalo

She hurled you to a land where
Green sweets on the pavement are hope in disguise,
Where wolves keep clear from your door
If you're all smiles and bluegrass songs,
Where lovers will come out of the blue
If a boy croons "Please kiss me again"
At the household shop -
Look, the traffic lights go green,
Let's cross the street at once,
Worn beggars, starving women, soul?
So sorry, an overdose of trust, she died -
Sure, grass and mind are places
You can sail full steam into,
But not the sky, not the sky -
That fake and livid she looks
When hurling flashes and bolts
The bastard light of storms,
When hurling thoughts at you:
Even the writhed branches do give birth
To leaves, yes, and love them,
Motherhood perhaps?
Is your mother that gnarled writhed branch?
Please stop wondering why do they blaze,
Stop asking how, stop saying don't they look harmless
Cobalt blue lighters -
Sorry, they got the same blue as the sky
And the sky's blazing,
Same old games with fire, he throws away the last sparks -
Nope, not his fault if she gets hurt,
Hazardous blaze and dangers in disguise
She loves that much -
Honestly now, soul feels safe with the blue,
Yet she'd better not.

Orange County, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 2002 A.D.

Lucas Smith

In childhood there were baroque orange groves,
silent and ticking along the planned road.
The lessons paid for, and those ignored
about girls mostly. Architecture, the housing market,
(the housing market or those who follow it,
are not belittled by appearing in a poem),
paint colour infractions, overflowing trash cans
neighbourhood noise restrictions
interrupted *High Noon*
on the greenbelt in dewy June.
Tex Ritter's voice clung to me,
my private version, calving and melting
for twelve odd years
until the analgesic screen
drew him back like megafauna,
extinct and unabridged.

In adolescence, cows on the hill by the on-ramp.
At the summit we wedged a stick with a red towel,
stolen from the garage,
attached to it and fled the bees
and dodged the cows to the golf course.
It flew a lost flag over this lost estancia.

Over haciendas ruled from Mexico City,
merely halfway to the top of the empire,
Which empire?
Empire is always
whole rooms lost, estates and fiestas wound up

and next to technology companies, who imprint worlds
 onto flat ones, our red flag flies
in sight of the mountains, in sight of the theatres and galleries
their descendants bend down to pick strawberries.

It's not that you cannot know their hardships,
 it's that you will never know their pleasures.

In drought, storm drains.
We walked in them until light and graffiti ended
and the circular tunnel hardened to square.
Cars drummed on manholes overhead
and we sprayed our ten initials in blue paint,
the date and our band's stencils under estancia.

Behind the House

Gloria Keeley

there's a belief that if
a bird knew mathematics
she'd be unable to fly
her inner compass bearing west
into the pocket of space
below the sky cul-de-sac
where existentialists factor climate
kite tails paint the sky
in their yearly regatta
stars in the yard mix
with fireflies
a dead bird
wings still flapping in the wind
as if airborne, poised to fly
the black hole of its nest
behind the house
near the rumpus room
where the deceased respond
with their usual silence

Shattered Dishes, Broken Lives

Tracie Campbell

Lightning flashed and flared in the distance, pulling at my attention. I watched it only for a moment. The sound it made was not sharp but more like the inhale of a breath over and over again. It was still too far out over the water to hear the crack and rumble or to know if it would bring relief from the heat. For now it raged near silent in the dark, far away sky. Maybe I should have been afraid of it, but there were bigger storms in my future and it was too early to start feeling afraid. A voice from behind the door made me turn around.

“Who is it?” she asked from the other side.

“Ellie,” I said, “it’s Emma.”

A pause.

Then the clicking metal of a deadbolt sliding out of place. My sister’s face staring out from the narrow space she allowed between the door and the frame. I almost didn’t recognize her.

“What are you doing here?” I saw her lip was swollen.

“I’m here to take you home,” I said, looking around at the darkened street to make sure that we were still alone.

“You shouldn’t have,” she said. “You can’t be here.”

“No, Ellie, you and the baby can’t be here,” I said. “You have to come with me now.”

“Are you going to let me in?” I asked, sweat rolling down my back.

I could see her mind working behind those big blue eyes.

The door opened just enough for me to slide inside. Heat blanketed everything, but her place was neat as always. The living room furniture matched, with the day’s newspaper resting on the coffee table, waiting for Ralph to come home. I had already seen the headline about a peace treaty recently signed with Japan while waiting at the bus station early that morning. I still wasn’t quite sure how I felt about it.

The wallpaper was the same throughout the foursquare home, white with vertical lines of tiny roses. To the right of the living room was their bedroom; ahead was the kitchen. In the opposite corner of the home was Nicholas’ room. It was late and he must have been

asleep because I didn't see him with Ellie. In her last letter, she had written that she enjoyed the quiet evenings while Nicholas slept and Ralph was out. There was a new television show starring Lucille Ball that made her believe maybe her ideas of marriage weren't so far out of reach. I would have to take her word for it, though, as we didn't have a television in our little Arkansas farmhouse.

"Pack a bag and I'll get Nicholas," I said with the type of conviction our father used when he was ready to go to the bar. We knew there would be no arguing with him, that we would go, that he would have a drink, then another, and another. We would find a booth in the back to make our beds until he was ready to stumble home.

I'd tried to protect my sister as much as I could when we were young. I told her that it was okay for us to be there because we were with our father. In reality I knew that we should be home with a father and a mother. Tuberculosis, probably picked up at the clinic where she worked, was the diagnosis that took our mother away to the state hospital when we were still young. But there was a time when she was better, when she could have come home. If only our father had gone to sign for her. If only he had put down his drink long enough.

A flash of lightning through the front window told me the storm was coming closer. It lit up the dim room like day for only an instant. In that flash I could see the fear on Ellie's face. She said so many things with silent lips. Ralph would be home soon. He would find me there and make assumptions. He would know that I had seen the bruises on her face and that I intended on taking her away from him, taking his son away.

Thunder rumbled in off the water. The wind picked up and rattled the shingles like old bones. The humid air sizzled with electricity and emotion.

"You have to go, Emma," Ellie said desperately, taking me by the arm and pushing me toward the front door. "You have to go before he gets home."

"Where is he?" I yanked my arm away.

"Where every man goes after a long day at work," she said, her eyes dropping to the floor.

She meant the bar, of course. Something she learned from our father. I had hoped my little sister would have ended up with someone better.

"A good man spends his evenings at home with his family," I said.

Her face changed for just a moment, the length of a flash of lightning. My words had hurt her. She knew she'd married a monster. I didn't have to tell her that. What she didn't know, though, was that she could leave. She could have a life—a good life—somewhere other than Corpus Christi and with someone other than Ralph Thomas.

"Please Ellie," I pleaded. "Come with me. He won't hurt you anymore if you just come with me."

She shook her head. "He'll just come find me and it'll be worse."

"We can protect you," I said.

My Henry was strong once upon a time when he fought in the second Great War. Now he was at home with our babies after being injured at the factory nearly two months ago. He would still fight for us both, though. I knew he would, once I explained why I snuck off in the night...something better explained in person than in the letter I left for him.

Still she shook her head. I changed my approach.

"What about Nicholas?" I asked. "What will you do when Ralph gets tired of hitting you and starts after him?"

"What?" A new kind of fear crept across her face in the small, dim living room. "He wouldn't."

"You know he would," I said.

She turned and went to the baby's room. I followed her. A dim night light in the shape of a shoe cast shadows across the walls. The wind was louder here with the window open just a crack to air out the room. My sister stood by his bed and I stepped up next to her. An angel with soft, curly brown hair, a face like a porcelain doll, slept softly in the blue and white bassinet. Each breath was the sweetest blessing.

Ellie began to cry quietly. Her shoulders heaved and the tears rolled down her cheeks. It seemed this realization was finally enough to pull her away from her destructive marriage.

"Sometimes you have to break before you can take a new path," I whispered, my arm wrapping around her waist.

"I'll pack a bag." She stepped away from me and into the other bedroom.

"I'll make a snack for Nicholas," I said.

I went to the small, clean kitchen. A row of Pyrex bowls, green, red, blue, and yellow, lined the top of a shelf just higher than my head along one wall and over the small kitchen table. Countertops free of crumbs lined the other. Dishes put away neatly. Floor swept and mopped. It was immaculate and at the same time an indicator of the hold that Ralph had on my sister. Yes, she was an excellent homemaker, but I knew the truth ever since reading it in a letter months ago. The secrets of this house were hidden in the cleaned and pressed laundry, the vacuumed floors, the walls hung with portraits of an imitation family.

Another rumble of thunder. Another flash of lightning.

Ellie wasn't the only person that I knew who had a refrigerator, but hers was certainly the most immaculate. It was large and red and a space had been cut for it in the counter. I opened the door and felt a small, cool breeze wash over me. She had told me in her letters of how sometimes she would stand in front of the open door and take in the coolness of the icebox. Corpus seemed to be hot and humid eleven months out of the year, she wrote. At that moment I was glad Ralph had seen reason to buy it. But looking between the shelves, I saw nothing that would likely survive the bus ride back to Little Rock.

Our mother taught us about gardening and canning before she moved to the hospital. Here, Ellie had a small garden in the backyard and I was pretty sure that she would have canned food for Nicholas. He was still small but growing and his mother's milk was no longer enough to satisfy him. I turned to open a cabinet and found a row of jars filled with carrots, peas, squash. Pulling them from the shelf two at a time I placed them in my bag along with a spoon from the drawer.

A noise from the living room made me freeze in place. It was the clicking metal of a deadbolt sliding out of place, the doorknob turning, the door opening. The sound of heavy footsteps crossed the front threshold and danger entered the house.

"Eleanor!" Ralph yelled from the living room.

My heart began to throb throughout my body. How had I not heard him drive up? The flash of lightning and rumble of thunder must have been his Hudson. What a stupid mistake!

"Darling, you look tired," I heard Ellie reply. "Why don't you come lie down on the couch?"

"I don't wanna lay down." He grumbled like an old ox. "I want another drink. Damn barman cut me off again."

His heavy footsteps stomped toward the kitchen and I shrunk back into Nicholas' room. I checked on the child who was still dozing in his bed. I had two little ones of my own at home: I knew that it would take a lot of noise to wake him but he wouldn't sleep through everything. We needed to get out.

"I'll get it for you darling," I heard Ellie trying to mask the tension in her voice.

But it didn't work. The bottle had always made Ralph suspicious, paranoid.

"Get out of my way woman!" He must have shoved her because there was a thud on the other side of the wall. I had two options. I could dance around the four rooms of the house all evening until he fell asleep, or I could face him, tell him that I was taking his wife—my sister—and her child away to a better life. Tell him that if he thought they were his property then he should have treated them better.

It was time to make a decision.

"What are you doing here?" Ralph asked as I stepped out of the baby's room. He was surprised to see me. Surprised, but never intimidated.

"I'm taking Ellie and Nicholas home," I said, my heart still pounding. For a moment, just after I said it, I thought my legs might go numb.

He snickered a bit. "They are home."

"No," I said immediately. "They aren't. Home is a safe place, a happy place."

"What are you talking about? I bought her a house and let her fill it with all this crap." He waved his arms at the cabinets full of dishes. "You think they'd be better off in that shack the old buzzard

left you?"

"You need to let them go," I said. "You're a drunk and you're mean."

"You get out." He waved his fist in the air. When I didn't move he slammed his fist against the wall and yelled, "Get out of my house!"

Now a storm was growing inside the house, as well. The wind howled louder and something big enough to be heard in the kitchen fell over in the backyard. A cry from Nicholas's room increased the tightness in the already hot, electric atmosphere. Instinctively, I turned my head toward my nephew and away from the monster ahead of me. Another stupid mistake.

I didn't see his hand but I felt it strike the side of my face, saw another bright flash that I knew wasn't lightning. I hadn't been hit like that since I was young, when daddy used to drink the nights away and I would climb out of the booth at the bar and tell him it was time to go home, that Ellie and I had school in the morning. I always took the hits so she didn't have to. She was always so soft and sweet that she didn't have it in her to stand up to him.

Then one day I was big enough, strong enough from sacking grain to pay for food and scraps of clothing, that it was my turn to hit him back. I'll never forget his shocked face as he looked up at me from the ground. Ralph was strong, much stronger than me.

I held my hand to my face as my head throbbed and groped around on the floor trying to get my bearings. Where was I? By the back door? Near Nicholas' room? The small red roses on the wallpaper swam around my head so that I couldn't focus and my heart beat so hard and loud that it was all I could hear. An instant felt like hours as I struggled to my knees.

Ellie had a hold of Ralph's arm and was begging him to just let me go. Nicholas cried even louder than before. Thunder crashed outside the house and rain began to pound against the windows so hard it must have it had hail in it. The temperature inside the little house dropped suddenly.

I looked up from the floor to see Ralph shove my sister against the counter. He stomped toward me, fists clenched, fire in his eyes. As he reached me, as he grabbed me by the neck and pulled me off the

ground, raising his right hand with fingers squeezed tight, I thought of my girls and Henry. Our life together was simple, full of hard work and a lot of love. Little joyful moments like sitting on the front porch in the evening or a Sunday dinner with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Most everyone in our family lived within ten miles of each other except Ellie and Nicholas. It wasn't right for them to be here with Ralph. They needed to come home and it was up to me to take them there, even if it meant that I might not walk out of this room.

I was preparing myself for the pain of his hand, closing my eyes and turning my head away, at the same time clawing at his fingers to loosen them, to let in the air. My chest began to burn and the room dimmed even more. A new kind of darkness, one that I had never seen before, was settling over me. It was at that moment, as I struggled for breath, that I thought the strength of his hand might break my neck. But all of the Pyrex containers on the shelf above me exploded at once. The crash took us all by surprise as glass shards and dust erupted into the air and rained down on us.

Ralph let go and stumbled backward. I covered my face and huddled down, partially protected by the ledge of the shelf, my chest heaving as my lungs tried to fill up again as quickly as possible. The storm continued to rage outside but once the noise of the shattered dishes had subsided I looked up to see something I never would have expected: Ralph lay in the opposite corner of the room, his face and the front of his buttoned down shirt splattered with blood. I could see a few small shards of glass sticking out of his arms where his sleeves were rolled up. He had been almost at eye level with the shelf and had met the explosion head on. What really surprised me was seeing Ellie standing over him and holding a large piece of broken glass to his neck. Everything had happened so fast that I was still trying to put it together when I heard her speak.

"You listen to me, Ralph Thomas," she said in a tone that I didn't recognize, "you may have hurt me and made me bleed but I'll be damned if I'm going to let you hurt my family."

He whimpered a little as he tried to reach for his face. Ellie slapped his hands away.

"I'm leaving you and you'd better not try to follow because if you ever drag me back to this place I'll put poison in your coffee and

a knife in your back the first time you turn it to me," she said in one solid breath.

He moaned, groping at his face. When Ellie shifted to the side I could see glass must have gotten into his eyes. Blood trickled down his face. I doubted he would be able to look for her at all.

"Emma, get my baby," she said.

I stumbled up off the floor, shaking glass from my clothes and hair, and went to Nicholas' room, where he was still crying. My neck ached, but to have him in my arms made everything feel better. The bag from Ellie's room might not have been complete but it would get her to Little Rock. I stopped one more time in the nursery and pulled a handful of cloth diapers and pajamas from the drawer.

Broken glass covered the kitchen floor like multicolored diamonds. Holding the baby in one arm and the bag in the other I stood with eyes wide, in awe of my baby sister. We would never really know why all the dishes broke at once. Maybe Ralph had purchased cheap knockoffs that couldn't handle the temperature change that the storm brought after the heat wave. Maybe a greater power was tired of Ralph taking out his disappointments on the women in his life.

"Let's go," I said to Ellie.

She backed away from her husband slowly. He continued to lay on the floor with his hands over his face, moaning in pain. In that moment I think Ellie expected him to cry out for her, to ask her to stay. He didn't, though, and I think it made it that much easier for her to back all the way to the door and out of that life.

I covered Nicholas with a blanket that Ellie had packed in the bag and handed him to her where he found contentment. The storm had died down and now it was just barely sprinkling. It continued inland and away from us as we walked the street together, then the next and the next, our heels clicking on the pavement. We walked all the way into town, just like we had on our way to school as children, only this time we were walking to the bus station.

The storm had passed, the bar closed, and we were going home.

Late April Song

Steve Bellin-Oka

If someone's missing you,
it's not me.

The box of old letters
mildews in the garage.

Nothing's wrong here—
buttons find their way

back onto shirts.
The tight knot of muscle

in my back unwinds itself.
Mornings though, before

it starts to rain, the bones
in my hand creak. Half-bloomed

trees hover over the lawn
like giant umbrellas. Mine

got lost weeks ago,
some rain-soaked day when

the hum of tires
on the street all had

the pitch of your voice
calling me from the shower.

San Francisco, June 1999

Steve Bellin-Oka

It was the evening before we left the city
in which first I loved you forever. We sat
drinking on the concrete barrier between
Ocean Beach and the Great Highway,
watching the tide go out, the fog gather
like white funnels on the horizon.
The wind licked our hands like a dog
unsure of scent. Gulls pecked the sand
a few yards away but would not approach:
already we were ghosts only half able
to materialize. As the sun floated
behind the northern cliffs, a hieroglyph
with no cipher, you spilled your wine
on the ground—an offering to the gods
of regret. We stumbled toward the N Judah
that would take us for the last time home
to the Mission. When a seabird's screech
detonated behind us, we paused but
did not look back for fear we'd turn to salt.

Where Tumbleweed Go to Die

Ann Howells

Like mustached grandpas that sky dive
or twinkle-eyed tap-dancing grannies,
when season ends Russian thistles
draw knees to chin,
give a rousing *GERONIMO*
and cannonball into the wind.
They summersault across Texas—
17 counties in 17 days—
all transfer fees included. No map,
no baggage, no reservations
as they cross off the final item
on their bucket lists.

They pause, briefly, for fences,
alley-oop up and over,
miraculously avoid impalement.
They race speeding pick-ups, careen
90-to-nothing on a perpendicular course.
It's run, run, run fast as you can,
far as you can, long as you can.
Sure beats sitting in a honky-tonk
providing ambiance for two-steppers.
A tumbleweed's worst nightmare
is to die with its roots on.

Dauber

Ann Howells

There is something admirable about
this narrow-waisted wasp
buffed to a black coffee gleam,

her solitary pursuit
through cracked door, beeline
to the evaporating puddle

as July heat steals moisture,
leaves us feeling straw effigies,
empty husks.

She hums as she works; performs
her little relay—like filling a glass
tablespoon by tablespoon.

Then, location, location, location:
a small adobe, high and dry
among rafters or under eaves—

one narrow tube, then another.
Singing as she builds
with single-minded industry,

pan flutes or organ pipes,
mandible-molded, elegant,
Pueblo style apartments.

In each tube: a single egg,
numbed spider or two; she's
a connoisseur of size and species.

She's packs a macabre lunch,
this carved-jet insect, diligent
and disinclined to sting.

Untitled 1

Carla Ruiz



Untitled 2

Carla Ruiz



Flake

Fawn Hon-Hinton



Puddles on the Plains

Tasha Vice



South Florida Mill

Tasha Vice



An Idle Mind

Samantha Pilecki

She tried to live without imagination. It was better that way. She stayed away from books unless they were biographies of the dead or histories. Clara reasoned if it had already happened, it wasn't her fault.

Not long ago, she realized even magazines weren't safe. The tabloid updates would chronicle the decline of the shooting stardom of some besieged, young celebrity. Inevitably, the article would pose the question to the reader: "What Crazy Stunt Will Kat Crenshaw Pull Next!?" Prompted in this way, it was automatic to imagine the singer and her future public embarrassments, the head shaving and eating disorders, the rough parties ending in car crashes. Clara was horrified when the next magazine issue arrived and Kat had suffered through it, all of it, exactly how Clara herself had pictured.

She canceled her subscription.

She couldn't call herself a psychic, or say that she saw the future. She...invented things. Imagined them. And once imagined, it was too late to take them back.

Cooking magazines were safe. There wasn't much you could imagine from a cooking magazine, except a tasty meal. Clara stirred the blueberry mixture on the stovetop one last time, and then turned the heat off. It wasn't a surprise everything she made was scrumptious. She gained an ample twenty pounds after her *Delicious* subscription began, but it was worth it. Her husband Lance said she looked "perfectly domestic," which was exactly how she saw herself anyways. And he still loved her.

Did he have a choice?

Clara took the empty mixing bowl to the sink and scrubbed the gray-blue sugar sticking to its sides, smelling the blueberries' sweetness. The pie would be perfect. She set the sponge aside and turned the bowl over in her hands, rinsing it. Soap suds fell away and she fancied herself a raccoon busily rubbing and rolling its food. Only when she put the bowl in the dish drain did she notice her arms had grown noticeably darker, coarser hair. Like a raccoon. Clara scolded herself, shook off her foolishness, and the hair on her arms reverted to normal.

The fur happened once before, when she was young, during

Mr. Hendricks' seventh grade science class. It was when she invented—imagined—her first thing.

Hendricks explained how to turn on the Bunsen burner and how to measure the powder. The next step was to add it to the golden fluid bubbling and churning in their identical beakers. That was the word Mr. Hendricks used: 'fluid.'

That word was cause enough for mild uproar. They were at the age where certain words caused disruptive giggles. Francis, the class idjit, snickered under his breath. "Fluid," he repeated. Clara couldn't wait to leave them all behind, she remembered thinking, and go vacationing. Maybe she'd be lucky that year; there was talk of going fishing on her uncle's sailboat.

"Yes, fluid, Mr. Zimbicki," Hendricks raised his voice, acknowledging Francis's immaturity. "Please add your powder to the fluid." Hendricks would do that, would take control and desensitize the word by saying it so much no one would want to snicker at the word fluid again.

Clara added the powder and watched, unbelieving, as a miniature sailboat appeared. It swirled and buckled before disappearing, as if down a drain, into the minute eddies. Clara held her breath, entranced; she had become convinced that magic, fairytales, and worlds like Narnia didn't exist. When she was nine, she searched the forests for fairies, half hoping to find one. But that was a third of a life time ago and things changed.

Hurriedly, without bothering to measure, Clara tapped out a few more tickles of powder, hoping to see the sailboat again. Right on cue, it rolled up from the fluid and sailed around the edge of the beaker. Aside from her gut reaction, the first, unavoidable jump, Clara carefully kept the sailboat a secret. She glanced up, uneasily, to see if anyone else's expression matched hers and then went back to the experiment and Hendricks' droning instructions. But she felt electric. She turned the happening over in her mind, like a raccoon might, but stopped when she saw the fur growing on her arms. It was so frightening she forgot about raccoons and sailboats entirely.

They called her a witch, in school.

Clara blinked up from her reminiscing and dried her hands on the dish rag. It was better now. She had her inventing under control

and her life was so much simpler here on the ranch.

She turned to check in on her sons. She knew they would be sleeping, but she wanted to peek in at them anyway. They calmed her, made her less agitated, when they slept. Nothing was more at peace than a sleeping baby and with Lance away on business and the shadows growing longer outside, Clara needed some reassurance of her quiet, orderly reality. Otherwise, horrible things could happen.

They had happened before.

But, yes. Lance Junior and Scott were sleeping. She imagined them dreaming the sweet, simple, uncomplicated dreams of babies, and thus it was so. Because of her, they usually slept well. She tried not to imagine too far into their futures. She tried not to think about what they would become. Once, she fancied Scott becoming a movie star. He was so photogenic. But she quickly smothered these thoughts. Movie stars were seldom happy; they never seemed to have a good life. It was too easy to teeter, to imagine the drug abuse and the drama, the volatile marriages and the judgment of a fickle public. No, the best thing to imagine for her sons was simple: two young men, with dark auburn hair like her own, laughing in a field or playing Frisbee. Something prosaic and safe.

Watching their small chests, chubby arms, and smooth faces, Clara exhaled. She was being silly, being jumpy like this. She needed to keep her mind occupied. Back to the pie. The dough would be sufficiently cold, ready for rolling.

She was walking back to the kitchen when the wind began shrieking. She jumped, the breath catching in her throat. Blood pounding, she paused and scolded herself for being silly as the scream died. The noises the wind could make! There was nothing to snag or tame the wind with all that flat open-ness out there.. She congratulated herself: it was a good thing she was as sensible as she was. A lesser, more excitable version of herself would be screaming along with that noise, and then where would she be?

She shuddered as she opened the icebox and removed the bowl of dough. As much as she trained and controlled her life, there were still (*still*) flare-ups like this, wild, like a tempest in her mind. Lance was typically the one who could calm her most. But he wasn't here now and she'd have to deal with this by herself.

Poor Lance. She was blessed, really, that he still loved her. After those harsh, horrible flare-ups directed at him—well, it was a miracle he still wanted to be with her.

But... did he have a choice? That traitor voice inside her spoke up again. She imagined them living their lives together and thus it was so. Could he really love her after everything?

Lance was, pathetically, the target of her worst imaginings. He would be punished in the heat of an argument, her vengeful mind stabbing him as real as any knife. And yes, there were an admitted handful of scary times when her imagination ran away and trampled him. The most notable time was in the first two years of their relationship when he wanted to break up. Oh, the words and the tears. She had imagined such horrible things happening to him. It shouldn't have surprised her when they *did* happen. She remembered him swaddled like a mummy in the hospital bed. The way his eyes rolled fearfully towards her, like a crippled horse or a snared animal.

Him asking, piteous, "What are you *doing* to me, Clara?"

He knew by then. He knew the accident was her fault and not the old man's who had been driving the other vehicle.

Clara was mortified with herself. She loved Lance, after all. She needed him back and so she trained herself to stop those spiteful, stupid emotions before they could whirl into thought and consequence.

Why was she thinking about those silly, long ago times? Clara sprinkled flour over the counter and lifted the first of the twin, clay-like lumps of dough from the bowl. She patted the counter with more flour, rolled the dough out, and spread it into the pie dish, as neatly and particularly as she made her bed. The stickiness of it, the moldable texture, absorbed the imprint of her fingers. The filling was the next thing. It had cooled on the stove, heated (like that Bunsen burner from school, the fire required to make magic) until it was a slurry jam. It clung to the pot as she spooned it out, making her concentrate. When she was done she set the pie in the oven, checked the time, and was sadly reminded that she'd have to find something to occupy her mind for the next twenty minutes. Being away from it all really meant just that.

But it *was* better here on the ranch; there were miles of open

ground between her and the next neighbor. She was relieved that, because her ancestors had not grown up in this rugged, clannish stretch of land, she would be forever seen as apart, as the city-girl. The only other living things that surrounded her were the cows and Clara couldn't imagine them doing anything else aside from chewing the grass, flicking their tails, and bellowing lazily to one another.

No people to know meant no people to harm.

Clara settled on continuing her knitting. Knitting had been the trick these past few months. Something to count and measure and remember. Thank goodness there were always new stitches to learn and patterns to follow, because she *had* to learn new things. They became dangerous once they became routine, they became something nightmarish.

Poor Lance.

Thank goodness she didn't have this inventing trick while she was growing up as a young child. Clara could only imagine—

Scraping against the wall.

Clara jumped, the knitting needles clacking together in her hands. It was something big. Too big to be branches. Or maybe not. There was the wind again. Such little things could undo her at the right time.

She counted the minutes until the pie would be done and then resumed the knitting, counting stitches again. Counting worked; it focused her. The alphabet and other recitations of sequence helped block horrible thoughts (dark furred, sharp clawed *things*) from happening. They always—

Rattling against the window frame.

The yarn skipped again, like a record needle from its groove. Clara strained, listening, her knitting needles slowing, the time between their clacks timid. What could it be? It sounded big. Big, rodent-like, primitive. What Will Kat Crenshaw Pull Next?

A cow? Maybe a cow?

Clara swallowed nervously, breathed deeply, and tried to steady her heartbeat. She went back to counting stitches. Where had she left off? Fifty? Yes, fifty. Fifty-one. Fifty-two. The few last stitches of the row fell off easily, thoughtlessly, onto the other needle. She glanced at the clock. Eight more minutes until pie.

Anything could happen in eight minutes.

Oh, that traitor voice. Heaving out a sigh, Clara stopped, set aside her knitting, and got up to check on Lance Junior and Scott again. *They* would be unbothered. *They* would be part of a sane, sleeping world.

She cracked the door. They were still napping, still perfect and untroubled in sleep. Perhaps she should try sleeping, herself. Anything to stop the storm of her anxiety. Worrying about the noise (the intruder, the monster) outside would only give it more power.

What *was* it? A person? An animal?

No, going to be bed when she was spooked couldn't help. She knew from past experience.

Clara checked the pie again and decided to start reading, to maybe finish that book about the 1920s. She couldn't believe how much had happened in the 1920s: the lavish abandon, aviation in its infancy, the start of Hollywood and its fledgling glamour. Floods and gangsters and the roots history had since built itself on.

But she couldn't concentrate. A creeping unease, the awareness of the wind—and that noise, again, the rattling thump—picked at her brain like a fretful nail-biter. She knew once she settled into bed and deprived herself of sight, once she was indoctrinated into darkness, the noises would become even more real.

She should check outside, right now, and put this silliness to an end. But there was something implicitly dangerous (*monstrous*) about having to check on the sound in the first place.

She held her breath, listening, aware of how isolated she was, how probable it was for *anything* to go unnoticed out here. The steady thumping of the clock (the clock, just the clock) was audible, heart-altering.

She saw movement through the window: a flashing, furred body accompanied by the whispering flick of steel on wood like sharp nails. Clara stood, wary and large-eyed. It wouldn't hurt (or *help*) to get something to protect herself with.

God, something was out there circling the house.

She took up a knife, hearing the unmistakable chitter of some kind of vermin. *It wasn't* the wind. Clara put her hand on the doorknob and took a moment to breathe. She closed her eyes

tight and concentrated. She pictured a cow: the docile, wet eyes, the spindly legs holding up its heavy body. It could still be just one of the cows on a windy night.

She opened the door.

Please let it be a cow. Please let it be a cow.

It's a cow.

It's a cow.

It's a cow.

It's a cow—

Pain

Lowell Jaeger

You woke most mornings miserable
back then, raw-boned, bereaved
to have shed your worn-out cocoon.
Until the remorse subsided
and another regret subdued you
in parting with that mysterious transformative
voltage —

the jolt of the liquor store clerk's touch
as she pat your hand after you'd bumbled
counting your fistful of change,
the outlines of wildflowers you'd inked
in a notebook, lost hours
of details on each succeeding page.

Or pedaling a dirt lane downhill
to the lake one late Indian summer
afternoon, raising your chin into the chill,
savoring smells of wet green and pond muck,
your shirtsleeves hungry for the sun.

And perching like a sparrow
on a granite outcrop. To listen,
just listen. The waves
lapping the pebbled shore.

While some lightning-charged loneliness,
some seemingly unquenchable pain,
coursed through you, split you open
like a bud longs to bloom.
The aspen leaves' static
telegraphing almost decipherable codes
in the blank periphery of your gaping stare.

At the County Library Used Book Sale Fund-Raiser

Lowell Jaeger

I chanced upon — inside a tattered box
of moldering naked (or nearly so) South Pacific islanders
on the pages of National Geographic, beside
lawn mower fix-it manuals and a YOU CAN DO IT!
pamphlet series about how to make your own baloney
at home — a book of poems:
Golden Apples from the Orchards of My Heart.

The book stood out, looking so brand new,
except for its inside cover
which had been personalized in a shaky
handwritten script: My Dearest Yvonne —
wish I had words for how much I love you.

He'd signed it . . . Simply, Earl. And the poet,
a pipe-smoking wizened Illinois beekeeper, rhymed
love with dove and wife with life and in general
honey-coated the complexities of mating and marriage
to seem like a Sunday afternoon game of checkers.

And what does the “simply” in Earl’s signature mean?
Is he simply duped by the poet’s prettified sentiments,
willing to believe his inscription attached to this love-token
might easily subdue the reluctant Yvonne?

So . . . he musters nerve enough to one day ring her bell,
hands the book over and stands there expecting her to blush and
swoon.

But romance ravel easily and seldom rhymes. She’s perplexed,
and Earl has to lower himself now to open the cover for her,
unveiling his bumbled confession of esteem. Or . . .
maybe Earl walks over to her address, but she’s not answering the bell,

for which he's peeved, though he deposits the gift inside her screen door,
kicking himself all the way back home for fear he'd looked a fool.

For long weeks afterwards, Yvonne maneuvers to avoid Earl in the chips and soft-drink aisle. Pretends she doesn't hear him whistle or see him wave when he drives by. She's in love with a burly twenty-first century caveman rumbling the neighborhood on his Harley. Well . . . at least an imagined suitor in a sexy leather jacket who'd never hand her a book of poems. Someone who'd let her hula like a nearly naked South Pacific islander. Someone who can fix a mower and trim her lawn. Someone practiced in making his own baloney at home.

if you are walking in the garden

Elena Botts

if you are walking in the garden, you are waiting for a man with cosmic eyes who will come closer than a shadow and never or ever leave you be to come into being,

while you're just a fine young thing like a turtledove or maybe a doe speckled in new life, whitely in the moonlight and the awe cicada orchestra just begun under the violets, the clinging vine yearning for the sky and a pause of bay that holds you momentarily breathless, see if we cross this we'll be in the next world! a brighter! land of ghosts than this one.

and in that river of ghosts, i saw your apparition like a found picture of your dumb body floating through hyperspace it was talking louder than you talk but the only thing that comes out of your mouth: "help, i'm lost" so i call you all through the dead hours, i dialtone out of life into

"miss you.

that's all.

heard your music. heart hurts.

hope you're doing ok."

(the story would have been better for me if you had killed me, the story would have been better for you if i had never existed.)

but no this is something about how you used to murmur sweetest things in your sleep but no one could pick them off the trees, no one leaning against the garden wall, biting quick into his gold apple, smiling nothing, just transfixed, held up against something and staring hard as afternoon, casual as a slurred vowel but the teeth into the crisp, it's

autumn, it's a wild rage of a being being just what a being is, the soul
knows itself
and doesn't forget anything,

not you,
your fixed lips, the way
you held onto the wrong universes with your dark
as you slept into something like how i crossed the bay that day
believing that there was a new world outside of my head. still,
there was nothing more than ourselves and a cruel universe breathing
to a quick all down our spines, like here i am, here i'm rotted alive
and a lot of things but still, the universe breathing harsh kisses, him
like oblivion at the lip of it and I'm just
staring into a greater than ever before, your cosmic eyes, feeling
indefinite.

The History of Furniture and Wood Flooring in East Texas

Jack Buck

The woods in Texas are in large part because of James Stephen Hogg. James Hogg was a great statesman in his day. When Governor Hogg asked back in 1906 that a pecan tree be planted at his place of burial, instead of the traditional cemetery headstone, it not only altered the perception and belief of what Texas is like, but also ramped up the state's opportunity to rival just about any state in furniture making.

For those who haven't visited Texas, people don't think of Texas as a place with a lot of trees. However, if one is to make their way through East Texas you are likely to have the thought or overhear a conversation about the abundance of the state's pecan trees. Texans talk about their land of trees in the way they talk about a local high school football star. Who would've thought?

The wood industry has its stake in the housing market too, well, with just about every house you come across electing for wood flooring. It's good for the economy, keeping the flooring local and all. Provides steady work, one doesn't have to have a college degree to lay wood. My Uncle Stephen does contract work, mostly home improvements, so he handles wood all day.

Aunt Carey used to drink a ton. It's part of the reason why she moved down to Texas, to get away from the influence of drinking buddies up in Michigan. Michigan is a great place for half the year until it gets bitterly cold; then there isn't a whole lot to do besides hole up at a local bar down the street. The long winters bring about a proud we-are-in-this-together enduring feeling. People need human contact. Aunt Carey would have died the way she was drinking. We all die, I say.

Uncle Stephen never went to college, or maybe he did, but called it quits after a class or two. Really I don't see why anyone would ever want that carpet stuff, that's what Uncle Stephen says. He has a point.

Uncle Stephen and my Aunt Carey are my godparents. Aunt

Carey is my mother's sister and closest sister of nine. As a teenager I wasn't bad-bad, but I did find some trouble with enough idle time and no parental supervision, so I spent three consecutive summers down in Texas with Stephen and Carey. It did me good getting away. Uncle Stephen put me to work and demanded I attend church. The church services were a bit odd; they had a feeling of everyone actively recovering from some sort of lifelong ailment. They had converted from Catholicism to non-denominational. That was fine. I just wasn't used to their constant smiling and hugging of each other.

Good on them and good on the governor centralizing all of this happiness and prosperity. With the governor's handling with always the state of Texas in mind, the pecan seed's worth came to be beyond pie and aesthetic pleasure. By way of using the wood from the trees, Texas entrepreneurs met opportunities over the years—like I said—in furniture and flooring, but that wasn't all. Others capitalized by other ends, like in paraphernalia by way of their once governor's legacy. In present day subcultures of East Texas, the woods people wear Hogg hats and t-shirts with Hogg's face printed on them, upholding his prominence in the Texas history books. Some even burn prayer candles like the 8" Virgin Mary of Guadalupe you can buy at a grocery store, but with Hogg's stately face wrapped around the glass instead of Mary's.

Big Jim, as his friends and admirers like to call him, consider their twentieth governor a hero of Texas. Out near Tyler, TX, heading east on Interstate 20, they even named an exit "Jim Hogg Rd." And if you miss the exit, just 12 miles east there is a state park named after Hogg where you can camp on a first come, first served basis. Aunt Carey and Uncle Steve were married at the park. I was in the 6th or 7th grade when they had their wedding. It was a big deal when Aunt Carey married a direct descendent of the governor's bloodline. Aunt Carey at the time was 43-years-old when she met Uncle Stephen. Stephen and Carey met at a sober singles church bingo night. They hit it off right away by talking about their mutual deliverance from the world of sex, light drugs, and alcohol. During their vows Uncle Steve told everyone in attendance of their wedding how he knew Carey was the real prize of church sober bingo night and not the gift card to the church's bookstore they gave out to the other winner.

People go to the bars in Tyler to play Hogg Trivia and drink beer named after Hogg, which explains the lack of non-Hogg related framed photos covering the walls of the bar. The bar has created quite the moral dilemma for Uncle Steve and Aunt Carey. Their church does other things besides hosting bingo, they also put on charity events, community potlucks, and anonymously burn down local bars in hopes of ridding sin and temptation. Uncle Steve is really having a good time with it all; he has always proudly stated he never cared for alcohol one bit. My mother told me about the recent bar burnings. She forwards the weekly church bulletins to me by way of Aunt Carey. Aunt Carey confides in my mother, telling her she isn't quite sure how to react to it all. In the meantime, she asks for our prayers.

Directions

Mark Trechock

Go out past the old Hardee's
and what used to be the Farmers Elevator,
follow the two-lane, watch out for deer.

About 12 miles out you'll come to a yard
full of old oil trucks and other junk
by a good gravel road—that's not it.

A few miles more, past the old Hagen place,
the one with the three grain bins and one falling over,
turn east where they're tearing the school down.

It used to be County Road 14,
now I think it's 115th Street Southwest
like we lived in Chicago or somewhere.

Four miles east, two north, three east, one south, two east.
You can't miss it.
We're the only ones out here.

Hash Browns

Mark Trechock

Having disturbed the distracted clerk,
perhaps interrupting his late night porn,
I spread-eagle the Super 8 bed,
arms and legs superimposed on it
like highways on a road atlas.

I fall asleep, then wake, then sleep
to a slippery sound,
tires on pavement,
one semi after another going down
the same highway that brought me here.

I try to recall which big square state
surrounds me, then drift back
into the passing lane without an answer,
yielding to the pull of my destination,
letting the wheel do the steering.

Sunlight slices through the blinds
like a paring knife—I want to eat,
not with a plastic fork, not
something wrapped up
in a see-through container.

It's a small town outside, but stretched
out over miles of prairie,
little houses, big yards,
everyone wanting to take up
as much space as possible.

Burger King? No thanks.
McDonald's? No. Drive-up espresso?
No, but here's a greasy spoon
with a ski chalet exterior

and three local calendars.

Eggs scrambled, coffee with cream,
bacon, and after some dithering,
hash browns, figuring on pre-made,
hoping at least they're burnt on one side
so they taste like something.

From the counter spin seat I can see
straight into the kitchen, as a gray-
haired man takes a potato gently
into his hands, washes off the dirt, then
reaches reverently for a knife.

A Love Supreme

John Walser

“I want more of the sense of the expansion of time.” John Coltrane

Coltrane speaks in a flurry
of summer storm praising
that horizon pushes toward me
charcoal rain erasures
that slow obscure farms, silos, grove trees
the just across the expressway watertower.

Notice how the grass and reeds bend toward me
before the first distant raindrop tack
hits like a beat played on a drum frame.

I've never believed in his liner note
ELATION-ELEGANCE-EXALTATION

but I have in the bass wind
in open garage standing
in smelling how the rain removes
high fidelity from the world
how the water storm gutter gulleys
grey as belief, grey as salvation
into a clogging drain.

How can I describe the passing car sound
its rooster tail spray
until it slightly lower pavement hits?
Is that water or air or movement and contact
that bottom falling out
like the first moment of heartbreak?

And Coltrane now praises
how the mourning doves prefer the tiny flies
the larvae that cedar chip live

to the cracked seeds, to the popcorn
my elderly neighbors summer spread
below a feeder.

And last night after two illness years
I slept without shock tremor stabbing
for the first time in months
(no post-shingles neuralgia)

for the first time without sweat
(no fevers)

for the first time without worry
(no post-viral fatigue).

Spiders have moved inside now
looking for where to lay egg sacks silks.
Coltrane plays this too

and is writhing on his church floor
handling note runs like poisonous snakes.
Faith, faith, holy, holy, they hiss.

And the tin ceiling sky opens
into a broth dark downpour

and the trees and bushes shrug
like howling construction paper beasts

and the power flickers for just a second
a hesitation of notes, like a lewd moon
hidden for an instant behind clouds.

And I stand watch listen

and just want to lie
driveway asphalt

cotton white shirt soaked
on my back

each rain pellet
death valley desert spore seed opening
for the shortest moment
on my chest

the cracked color blossoms
of my doubt, my love
my need.

Telemachus

John Walser

Fractured limb, kerosene drenched, rotten, stripped smooth as
unscabbed skin, driftwood,
fumbled, clacked downhill like a flaming jumping jack,
like an emblazoned zealot, an auto-da-fe into a brush pile;
flames like the overexposed flashspot in the corner
of a black-and-white photograph; like Clytemnestra's blazes,
seen from this sailor's ship, dotting the bluffs;
like the lights from Telemachus's windows
as he waits for the father he does not remember.

Across the road, behind my neighbor's house,
all day until past dusk, a distant chainsaw churred:
live, ringed core wood, apple and birch, cracked,
gravity pulled the last splinters clean,
termite-infested limbs, pomace, hit the ground,
bark and meat turned to confetti.

Does his hair still curl?

When he was five,
did he stand on a chair at his own birthday
and pretend to be Caruso?

Who is his best friend?

At fifteen, will the fall scud sweep him along
until he drops in a field, mudcrusted?

(I won't be there to prevent it.)

Does he love the colors of autumn sumac?

At thirty, will he sit so close to the stage
at a small jazz club that he'll hear the process:
skin on brass, tongue and keys clicking,
air escaping in a husk around the mouthpiece, over the reed?

Will he see the saxophonist who steps off center,
who checks his watch, winds it even,
and then start slapping time on his thigh?

A new rising moon, a peach pit sucked pulp bare.
Now they scramble: drainage ditch smoulder,
flames wrapped around a telephone pole,
a blanch of kaleidoscope burning water reflections,
soot like black stars flung like bats into the night sky.

And the Clay Was Not Redder

Jason Namey

His name was August and he stood in a musty saloon, motioning to the bartender with an empty tin cup. In front of him lay a wooden pipe, packed with dry tobacco. It was a gift from his inamorata, a milk-skinned redhead, a passenger from a recent trip out West.

August was employed by Wells, Fargo and Company as a shotgun messenger, serviced to protect strongboxes of gold, mail, and extra space sold to passengers as they traveled by stagecoach to the banks in California. His next run left in the morning.

The bartender refilled his worn cup and the bourbon was warm and thick from stray sediment. Only one other man was there; he was blind and sat on the far end. Faintly parallel pieces of wood lined the walls and they stuck out at the edges around the nails, warped from weather and ravenous termites. August lit his pipe with a candle. As he did, the blind man tilted his snout to the air and, like a maggot to rot, was drawn over.

Got a quid for an old, blind man? He asked. August ruffled his open pouch so the man could locate it. He reached with unexpected confidence and deliberation and took a thumb-sized chunk, putting it in between his molars.

Kindly thanks, he said.

August emptied his cup and motioned again to the bartender. He pulled at his pipe, letting a large, opaque cloud of smoke glide and flit up to the ceiling where it roosted between the planks. The blind man was still standing there, chewing and watching with pale eyes.

You headed west? He asked with a spit-dampened voice.

What?

You headed west, ain't ya?

Fuck if I am, fuck if I ain't.

You takin' a train? The blind man asked, saliva bubbling and pooling under his tongue, dripping over his cracked lips.

Concord, August said, turning away.

Workin'?

Ye.

Been runnin' that route awhile?

Ye.

Won't stop 'til they got buildin's as tall as New Yark City out there, aye?

I'm just doin' a job and gettin' paid.

Maybe not much longer.

You're drunk, old man.

The drunk old man exposed his rotted teeth, flakes of tobacco stuck in the gaps, and took another plug out of the still exposed bag. He mushed it with the half-chewed pits already in. Still smiling, the juice crawled past his chin and dripped off the stubbly edge. The drunk old man had been shifting as he stood and now stumbled back, then forward, using caricatured steps to regain his balance. He tried to spit to the left of August, but missed and wet his cheek. Tobacco and saliva burst from the drunk old man's mouth like a broken vessel of pus as August punched him. The old man fell back a step, then intentionally sat on the floor and laughed, the air gurgling his spit like an oriental water pipe. August put his hand on the pistol that was stuck in his britches, but stopped when he saw a long-barreled revolver in the bartender's grip. August put his hands up in concession, laid money down, and left.

When he got outside, he felt a familiar pain beneath his lower right ribs. He sat down and, with his hand, tried to tear it out from beneath his flesh.



The stagecoach was garnet and the top was now loaded with passenger's luggage. The strongbox would rest beneath August's feet, the family of four in the back. The children were a boy and girl, near in age and not older than twelve. The father was a Baptist preacher who went by Jack, his wife named Annie. They were moving west to start a congregation. When the preacher told them this he paused for a moment as though he were expecting recognition or praise.

The coach was driven by Charlie. He was aged in his late 30's, some decade older than August and missing his top and bottom four front teeth. He was currently rolling cigarettes in his seat.

The concord used six horses (although two were mostly for

show) and they would have to stop about four times daily to change them out as they traveled from El Paso to San Francisco.

The concord had started in St. Louis, stopping here to switch out personnel.

The family climbed into the back and August took his place next to Charlie, his cut off shotgun across his lap. He had a pistol tucked in his britches and a long knife sheathed in his boot. Two extra rifles were in the coach and he knew Charlie had a pistol on him, too.

Folks are you ready, Charlie said, like a question even though it wasn't one, and they began. Six leather reins were neatly organized in his dirty palms, chalky from calloused and scaly dead skin, which he began working intricately, like a maestro, as the concord started up and out of town. The skill of a driver was none more evident than when he bent corners, synchronizing the horses, varying speed through the brake and individual attention, keeping a keen eye on rocks or pits that neighbored the road, talking a private language of commands and pressure, a language that pistons would never know.

The horizon was verdant, speckled with clay and the brown of dying wheatgrass. The sky was a virginal blue, pocked only by the sun.

After a few minutes, August and Charlie lit their tobacco. August took a swig from his flask and offered it to Charlie, who declined with a grin.

They rode in silence the first three hours, enamored by the landscape and, in the case of the passengers, the impending reality of a new life in a strange land.



Charlie blew the stage-horn as they approached the first swing station. A tall attendant walked out of the jacal, ducking his head to get through the door. A small corral was off to the side.

Hey now, the attendant said in astringent breath. He fondled the lead horses with the back of his hand, then detached and led them to the corral. August and Charlie both walked a couple steps away and wet the prairie grass. The family was behind them, kids wrestling.

A girl came out of the jacal, young and robust. Her left ear appeared to have been sliced clean off, only bubbling scar tissue left behind. She offered to sell them johnnycake with honey and dried cattle meat, and the father bought a couple pieces of each. The girl then skipped over and rubbed the attendant's cock over the outer-material of his pants and went back inside the jacal. August and Charlie walked over to him as he was closing the pin, already finished attaching a new team.

You boys 'been running a lot, the attendant said. He spat and it ran brown even though he wasn't chewing.

I'm trying to get out to San Francisco myself, August said, Shit ain't cheap.

Shit ain't. Whachu wan' in San Francisco you ain' getting in El Paso?

Ain't it a woman? Charlie said.

Ain't it always, the attendant said.

That it be, boys, August said.

How's an El Paso boy know a woman out in got-damn California? the attendant asked Charlie as if August wasn't there to speak for himself.

She was a passenger with us, wain't she? Charlie asked.

Wai'nt they always.

That she be, August said.

How you gon' earn a livin' without a shotgun on your lap? the attendant asked, picking dirt from his ear.

Stablin'

Could've reckoned. What's your excuse for driving them bones raw, jehu?

Ain' got one, Charlie spat.

He say he ain' got one, we ain' believe that, the attendant pushed his forearm against

August and cackled, receiving a forced smile in return.

I get trapped feelin' if I stay in town fo' too long. The buildin's around me seem to keep gettin' taller 'n the streets narrower and it ain' long 'fore I feel suffocated, drowneded, noosed. Truth is, I reckon I just like it more out there than not, Charlie said. Who knows how

much longer we're even gon' have this line. With the trains 'n all.

You don' reckon every trip you is creatin' more of what sickens ye? Personally, I can't wait 'til we got every acre of this land lined with banks and saloons, brothels and churches.

I'm just a man drivin' a coach.

Ye worried? The attendant said.

Bout what?

The attendant didn't say anything and pointed his eyes at the sky, although he wasn't looking at it.

I reckon as much as the next, I've gotten out alright so far.

It ain't like it used to be, the attendant said. It ain't about horses and gold anymore. They been doin' it for sport. I heard of a wagon that got blown up with explosives, everything on board was destroyed, nothing taken. Some wagons that ain't got shit on 'em but poor immigrants been getting gunned down, horses shot and all, luggage ain't even touched. Not that there was anythin' worth touching.

You been believin' a little too much of what you been hearin', August said.

I hope so, I hope so.

We ought to move on. Home station ain't for a ways, 'n I'm hopin' to get there 'fore dark, Charlie said.

Take care, now, the attendant said.

What a bastard, Charlie said to August as they climbed back in.

The girl opened up the door of the jacal and took a hearty gulp from an open bottle. Her blouse was half-fallen off and the father tried to cover the eyes of his children. She went back inside, lingering a hand at the entryway as long as she could while the attendant walked over.

The sun turned from hot to hottest as they moved in ten to fifteen mile increments from swing station to swing station, spending less time at each as the day matured.



They pulled into the home station near nightfall. They would

spend the first night there. There wasn't much difference between this particular home station and the swing stations, but it had a cabin for them all to sleep in and a small kitchen where they could eat meat that hadn't been dried. They were served seared horse-steaks, corn bread and beans for supper, everything salted heavily. Charlie and August bought more tobacco from a small shop run by the proprietor. The family went immediately to the lodging cabin after eating. Charlie and August leaned against its outside, staring off into the grey and open wilderness, and smoked. They were silent. After Charlie retired, patting August on the shoulder as he stood--the first indication from either that he noticed the other's presence--August fell asleep against the cabin wall. He woke before dawn and walked into the small kitchen where raw eggs, ham, and biscuit batter were being cooked on the stove by a short and stout Mexican woman in an apron.

Mornin,' August said, lighting his pipe and sitting down. She didn't acknowledge him and he assumed she didn't understand much English. They hadn't seen her the night before, but he took her to be the station keeper's wife. Seeing her race, he understood now why she wasn't out when folks passed through. August took a couple deep pulls and closed his eyes. She brought him a tin cup full of coffee.

He was starting his second bowl of tobacco when she heaped the cooked food onto large plates and left the room. The station keeper walked in shortly after with a book in hand and poured himself a cup of coffee. When he turned and saw August sitting there he looked back to the door that his wife had just exited from and chuckled uncomfortably.

I ain' give a shit, August said.

You can never be sure, the station keeper said with clear enunciation. He put food on two smaller plates, handed one to August, and sat down with the other for himself. The family came in and got food as well, with Charlie trailing in last. He didn't make a plate. Instead he poured a cup of coffee and walked back outside while smoking a cigarette. August had never seen him eat before noon, a habit from his drinking days. The table, plates, and cups were dusty from night winds and open cracks, lending a crunch to every bite and graininess to every sip. August smoked as he ate. The

little girl coughed and the mother asked if he would please hold off but he pretended like he didn't hear. Then the father asked and he kept pretending and they dropped it. When the family finished and walked outside to relieve themselves August asked the man for a flask of whiskey. They went into the store and he sold it to him. August drank half of it right there and bought another half then went outside and they left.

They weren't far out from the home station when the road led them through the disparately wooded terrain off the Trans-Pecos region. The road was paved smooth and neighbored by a myriad of large mountains that were veined with weeds and shadowed by the sun. They were angled smooth at the bottom, steepening as they heightened.

August thumbed the stock of his gun and ran his finger over and around the trigger. They could hear the sound of golden-cheeked warblers singing that distinct 5-note scale, jaunty and yellow-faced. It sounded like trumpets.

A honey-mesquite tree lay felled in the road forty yards ahead. Charlie looked over at August through the corner of a squinted and jaundiced eye. He brought up the shotgun from across his lap and pointed outwards, butt against the shoulder. Charlie pulled out his pistol and braked the wagon. The preacher made the sign of the cross and held hands with his family as they bowed their heads.

August climbed off his perch and walked tight against the stagecoach to the back, where he looked over the cut-off double-barrels at the surrounding area and worked around to the front.

You there, he said to the father.

Ye-yessir, he stuttered.

Come on out and bring one of them rifles lying back there.

O-okay.

I want you to go lean over on that side right there and have your gun pointed up at the woods facin' ye. Charlie is goin' to sit on the opposite side and watch to your back. I'm goin' to do somethin' bout this tree.

August grabbed a saw from the coach, took a swig from his flask, and went to work. He started by breaking off the small, nagging branches and tossing them aside. Inside the concord, the children

huddled around their mother, hiding their faces in her spare bosom, crowded in by her wiry arms. The oldest was crying and the youngest didn't understand the circumstances. August began to work at the trunk, sweat licking salt on his face, tender from the sun.

A gun discharged.

The horses all settled back on their hind legs, not quite elevating. They rose and shook their heads, shuffling their feet.

August knocked the leaning shotgun over as he lurched, diving to the ground on top of it, rolling over, getting on one knee, and aiming around. Charlie was waving dismissively. The preacher's face had turned pink and his lips were pressed tightly together.

Fucker saw a squirrel and panicked, Charlie said, lighting a cigarette for his nerves.

I'm sorry, I'm, I'm very nervous.

Right now I'm more worried 'bout you spookin' the horses, so keep calm. I'll be done soon, August said as he returned to his duties.

The arrow skimmed August's hamstring, lacerating the skin, and he grabbed the shotgun once again and pointed it at the woods. He heard Charlie and the father firing, both facing the same direction now, and aimed that way. A painted face moved from one tree to the next. He waited a second and, when the bow appeared around the trunk, he fired. Most of the shot scattered bark, but the Indian put a hand over his eye and fell back. He saw two more retreating and fired the other barrel low, hitting one in the legs. The other was tagged by Charlie. There were five on the ground, two dead, and the rest handicapped from wounds. The preacher was shaking and Charlie gave him a stern pat on the shoulder.

August had reloaded both barrels and limped closer. One reached for his bow and August fired once into his midsection, turning it into a crater. The preacher was sitting with his face in his hands and no one asked him to do otherwise. August methodically approached the wounded Indians with his cut-off up against his shoulder. The remaining survivors were too incapacitated to resist as August took four arrows off each and stabbed their hands and feet, leaving the sharp end embedded in the ground with a single, weighted thrust, a horizontal crucifixion that pinned them where they lay.

The family was crying inside the wagon and the father still sat cross-legged, mumbling in prayer. August returned to the tree and cut it into three large pieces. He and Charlie took turns hoisting each one out of the road. August's pants were becoming sticky and wet around his wound and Charlie got cloth off a dead Indian for him to use as a bandage.

They continued on toward the ashen and viscous clouds that began to gather in the far desert sky. The clouds smelled of moisture and whispered of chaos and electricity. The concord made it to the home station before it erupted. August stayed in the kitchen all night while the others slept, drinking and smoking tobacco while listening to the dance of nature, hearing the thunder growl and bark.

They departed after eating in the morning. August sat hunched from exhaustion in the box, itching his yolk skin, bruising and tearing the flesh with grime-housed fingernails. At the home station he bought a bottle that contained raw alcohol, chew, and burnt sugar.

The wheels made a damp crunching sound as they rolled across the moistened landscape. The rag August used as a handkerchief, once tan from dust, became a bolder red with every cough. He could hardly sit straight for the pain in his insides, so he stayed almost completely bent over. This position made it more difficult to sip and occasionally he could feel the cool evaporation on his skin as the liquid escaped his lips. Charlie supplied him rolled cigarettes.

The air was still muggy and the sky full of clouds, young sunlight bounding across their underside as the star rose at their backs. Faint shadows were cast to the front. The patches of prairie grass became increasingly spare. Large rock formations, plateaued at the top, punctuated the horizon and were moated by billowing flats of dust.

August's eyes were closed as much as they were opened, and his skin was paling, discolored, and blotchy. His nods into sleep were interrupted only by abrupt noises or sharpening pain.

When the five bandits appeared from beneath a trench in the clay ground, they moved slowly and deliberately. They moved as if expecting no resistance, as if they were the winners of some game, as if nothing were at stake. All were dressed the same, in fully buttoned vanilla shirts beneath clean and pressed overalls with round-brimmed

hats and boots. Their mouths housed full sets of teeth. One bandit was shorter than the others. His armament, juxtaposed against their full-barrel shotguns, was a revolver that rested at his side in an exposed holster. Two rifles were crossed behind his back. His skin was dark brown and smooth, evenly colored, deep white surrounding his irises. August and Charlie sat motionless, August's shotgun pointed to the ground in his weakened hands.

The short one walked up to the side of the stagecoach and looked in at the huddled and praying family. He wiped his hands on the front of his overalls and took out his pistol. He then reloaded his smoking revolver and walked to the front.

Drop the gun, the short man said and August did. He vaulted himself onto one of the horses, sitting on it backwards so that he was facing them. The four with shotguns split up and surrounded them, two on each side. The short man held his pistol near his lap, pointing it at August.

You ever been raided before? the short man asked.

Charlie and August stared at him.

You can answer, he said. They both nodded. Injuns?

They both nodded and he threw his head back and laughed like a coyote.

Then you have not been robbed, he said, no more than you've been robbed every time a canine gently nips at your ankles. He cocked his pistol. What the injun is doing is not what I'm doing. What the injun is doing is fighting with his posterior pressed against the wall; he's a cornered rat. He's closed in on and wants to do some damage while he's still got a soul in his skin, but surely knows good god it won't be awhile. What the injun is doing is dying. The injun is savagery rendered extinct. That is not what I'm doing.

They both looked at him.

Go ahead and ask it, he said.

We know what yer doin,' August said.

Just ask it, the bandit said in an exasperated voice, tilting his head.

What are ye doin'?

I am not dying, the short man said, pausing after he said 'I'. I am coming to life. I am forging something on this clay gate to hell.

The injun is one his way out. *I* am on my way in. *I* am the same as people like me and they are my children, created in my own image. *I* am forging a new America, a true America. Unlike the European east. Out here is where America blossoms. The West with a capital 'W.' Uninhibited with a violent nature, a lust for gold and a thirst for whiskey, these are my commandments. What you are doing isn't settling an uncivilized land. That was done when the injuns were run out. You are taking a land that isn't yours. A land that belongs to my people. This is not savagery, this is not banditry, this is war, son, and you're the vein of my persecutor.

He raised the revolver up to eye-level and moved it back and forth with every syllable. *You* are no kin of mine. *You* are raping the new land, the authentic America. *You* are taking the fucking east out here. *You* are making it like every other damn place, too ignorant to see that this comes at a price of true freedom. *You* are arresting men like me, soldiers and survivors, as crooks. Crooks under laws that you have no right enforcing. *You* are taking not just the gold from nature's bosom, but the bosom herself away from where every man's got a fair claim and putting it in the hands of private developers. This is not evolution, it is suffocation.

You are at my fucking front door, he said, and *you* are trying to break it down.

And with that, they fired.

Immature

Atri Majumder

The mirrors spill veiled innocence,
The creases of time are untimely.

A warning of colors changing shades,
A question still hanging to the mark.

Frozen Whirl

Atri Majumder

Somewhere below the ice
A fish in the cold tries,
To see the sparks again,
And a face in the rain.
Warmth dissolved in the blue,
The white darkness lets nothing through.

Somewhere in a shivering thought,
He left the pearls he sought;
And, somewhere in there he lost:
All the thoughts that crossed.

One would think a fountain would have

Starlin Waters

One would think a fountain would have

A little bit of life, but this one has

A stale sense of dullness.

Even when I see life between the cracks

Thriving to break free of the lifeless water fountain;

I still seem to look around for something, anything,

That isn't dead, dry, or tan.

The slight breeze that lets the leaves flutter around

Makes the dullness almost bearable.

The fountain for a moment becomes

Almost a serene place, one of solitude

And peace. That only last a second when the

Breeze dies down, and again I see the lifeless

Fountain withering in its own dullness.

Drought

Chelsea Morse

It was late June and there was no rain. There was only a blistering wind that split my skin with sand and left my mouth dry, waiting.



Rosa comes tottering through the back door, wheezing and reeking of cheap tobacco. I mark another mental tally: Rosa's eighth smoke break in two hours. The only reason Boss Man puts up with Rosa's work behavior is her strange relation to him – his wife's cousin's ex-wife. That's the only way to find a job around here. Well, besides me: I'm an exception. I was just in the right place at the right time.

Two months ago, I was an innocent traveler on I-40 with no way forward and no way back. My car had failed me, again—cracked exhaust manifold—and I had been staying in the same run-down motel for two weeks. I was running low on money and determined to reach the Pacific so I decided to look for a job in the empty town.

Not sure where to start, I walked to the gas station across the street, one of the only businesses in town. I had a couple bucks left in my pocket so I thought I'd splurge on a snack. As I was walking up to the front with my bag of potato chips, a towering man walked out of a door behind the counter. Though he appeared to be in his mid-sixties, the man was solid in his stance. He took off his black Stetson, set it on the counter and ran his massive hand through his thinning, tawny hair. He turned to the clerk with a sigh.

"Well, he ain't comin' in today Rosa."

"What'd he do now?" she asked, not looking up from her magazine.

"Ricky got himself thrown in a cell again, somethin' 'bout not showin' up for his piss test and his probation officer about had a fit. Said he was tired of Ricky's bullshitin'. Knew he was on that stuff and locked him up, quick. Don't know how long he'll be in there, but I do know he ain't makin' it to work tomorrow." The man gave the clerk a sideways glance.

The clerk jerked her head up from her magazine. “I’m already working every other day this week! I sure as hell ain’t coming in here on my only day off. I can’t keep—s” But the woman was caught with a cough that I assume could only have come from years of smoking hand rolled cigarettes.

Seeing my opportunity, I placed my chips on the counter.

“Do you guys need someone?” I casually asked as the clerk caught her breath and thrust the scanner at my third party potato chips.

The man crossed his arms, leaned back and squinted his eyes. “You Sandra’s kid?”

“No, I actually just moved here.” I was not about to tell him that I was stuck in his hometown against my will.

“Well, as long as you stay outta’ trouble, I s’pose you can have Ricky’s job.” He handed me some papers from the office behind him. “Here. Fill ‘em out and be here tomorrow at five when we open. They call me Boss Man,” he said as he reached over the counter to shake my hand.

“I’m going out back, my knees are hurting. Watch the pumps,” Rosa instructs, as if smoking was what the doctor had recommended for her arthritis.

“Enjoy,” I quip, continuing to stare out the front store window. I’m more interested in watching a middle aged couple arguing in the front seat of their sooty, silver minivan. The husband climbs out of the driver’s side with a map in one hand and a Diet Coke in the other. His polo is tucked into his khaki shorts and he looks like the man on the cover of this month’s issue of *Travel+Leisure*, modeling whatever “travel casual” means. As he looks at the map, sweat begins to roll down his pink, sun scorched face. I’m thankful for the cool steel of my folding chair and the feeble breeze from the fan on the counter.

Behind them, heavy gray clouds swell. The wall of rain moves steadily, but briskly, across the horizon, moving on before the water has a chance to soak the dusty ground. This week marks the longest the county has gone into the summer without an inch of rain, so I’m told. But it doesn’t take a local to know just how dry the air is; my altitude headaches and nosebleeds lasted an entire month.

I give up watching the couple and the clouds and lean my

elbow onto the counter, my head in my hand. Not many people passing through today. The slow, twangy country music playing over the speakers makes me drowsy. I start to nod off, picturing a young cowboy beckoning to a shy, southern belle. He tips his hat and smiles with a charm reserved for her alone. The cowboy is successful in his courting attempt and the couple begins to two-step around the dance hall's hardwood floor. Time slows as the country singer drawls about love, the young cowboy looks into the southern belle's twinkling eyes and knows that she's the one.

The tinkling of the bell over the door breaks my reverie. The minivan couple walks inside, dragging their sleepy eyed toddler behind them, and I get hit with a wall of hot, dry air. I lazily reach to turn my fan up. It's already on high.

The wife is a plump sort of woman, the motherly type who always volunteers to be classroom aid or offers to carpool for soccer games. But from the fierceness in her eyes, she's also the type of woman to call the cops when she finds the neighbor kid smoking pot. Her husband, still pink-faced, is quiet.

The toddler squirms, reaching for the candy on the bottom shelf in front of the counter. She yanks on his arm, trying to keep his sweaty hand from slipping out of her grasp. You don't want that candy, kid, I thought. Boss Man has never had to order more bags of taffy because they've been here since his father owned the store, fifteen years ago.

The wife clears her throat and approaches me.

"Hi, we were on our way to Albuquerque and I don't think we're going the right way. Could you tell us which road we should be on?"

Having a good idea of what the argument outside was about, I look from the plump wife to her husband, wondering how often this poor man's judgement is questioned by his sweetheart.

"Well," I said, "if you just continue on this road for a little over one hundred miles, you'll drive right into it." But instead of looking at me while I'm talking, the wife watches her husband grab a candy bar and continues to glare at him until he sheepishly puts it back.

"Really? There aren't any roads we have to turn on that we might miss?" the wife insists, continuing to look at her husband as

if she wants to get back in her minivan and gloat about how she was right and he was stupid.

“Nope, it’s all one road, you know, Route 66?” I gesture at my black work t-shirt that reads “HISTORIC ROUTE 66” in large, square letters on the front.

“Mmm,” she hums, and proceeds to snatch her toddler’s thumb out of his mouth while simultaneously struggling to pull him toward the bathrooms. The husband begins aimlessly looking through our postcard tower, probably trying to have some quiet time before the next hour and a half of his life. I debate whether I should suggest sunscreen or earplugs. Neither would really help him at this point, so I decide to keep my thoughts to myself.

The wife comes out of the bathroom after a few minutes, carrying the now crying toddler around the waist like a piece of luggage. She yaps at her husband to hurry up and he silently obeys, abandoning images of ski resorts in Taos and alien museums in Roswell. The clouds were getting closer now, the wind shifting and the sky growing steadily darker. The couple clammers back into their minivan and drive off toward the storm.

Rosa walks back inside, banging the door behind her. Nine smoke breaks. She must be going for the record. The phone rang, its shrill tone disrupting the quiet country music and the rhythm of the fan. Rosa looks at me, then turns and pretends to straighten the shelves. I sigh and pick it up.

It was the mechanic. I had saved up enough money for him to order the part for my car and told him that I would pay for the labor after some labor was actually done.

“You want the good news or the bad news?”

“Just tell me.”

“Your exhaust manifold came in and I installed it, no problem. But while I was down there, I noticed you’ve got yourself a pretty bad leak coming from your oil pan. I’d give it less than two hours of driving before you completely run out of oil.”

Great, I thought. It doesn’t sound like he even took a good look at the car before installing the exhaust manifold. Now I have to funnel more money into this lousy car only to stay in this lousy town another few weeks.

“Hello?” the mechanic asks. I realize that I haven’t said anything yet.

“Yeah, I’m still here. How long will it take to fix?”

“Well, I don’t have an oil pan for your car in stock so I’ll have to order it, and it’ll probably take a week, week and a half to get here. Want me to go ahead and order it?”

“Yeah, go ahead. Thanks.” I could walk to Albuquerque and back in that amount of time. Maybe instead of sending his teenage nephew up there to pick up parts from the automotive store, he should pay an actual service to deliver.

I carefully hang up the receiver on the wall, instead of letting it slide out of my hand to dangle by the cord, to hang hopelessly by my side. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. When I left Chicago in the spring, I never thought that I’d get stuck out here, alone. I drove West hoping to find more than a job at a gas station owned by a cowboy.

“Clock out and get out of here before that storm shows up,” Rosa had noticed my distress.

“Yeah, okay. I’ve been here for months and it hasn’t rained a single day. I’ll believe it when I see it.”

Rosa shrugs her shoulders. “It’s gotta’ rain sometime, *mija*.”

I clock out, shove my nametag into my pocket and start legging it to my motel room. The West is peculiar; I look up to find blissful blue skies direction and gloomy gray the other. As I’m looking up, a single drop of water falls onto my cheek. Then another. I blink in disbelief, and the drops of water speed up, quickly turning into sheets of cold, heavy rain. I stop moving and stand in the middle of the parking lot with my head tilted back, letting the water fall into place around me. The ground becomes a dark red and the air fills with a deep, earthy scent that I still can’t place. My taut, dry skin relaxes and the sweat from my brow washes away. Peace, like a river, washes over me and for the first time since leaving home, I feel alive.

Contributor Biographies

In Alphabetical Order

Steve Bellin-Oka grew up in Baltimore and is an Assistant Professor of English at Eastern New Mexico University. He has previously taught poetry writing and literature at the University of Southern Mississippi, the University of Virginia, and the University of Mississippi. His poems have appeared in *William and Mary Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Yalobusha Review*, and *Mississippi Review*, among other journals. He is the author of a chapbook, *Frankenstein Poems* (Broadside Press, 2015), and is the recipient of an Academy of American Poets award. He is currently working on a full-length volume of poetry.

Elena Botts grew up in the DC area, lived briefly in Berlin and Johannesburg, and now attends college in upstate New York. She's been published in fifty literary magazines over the past few years. She is the winner of four poetry contests, including Word Works Young Poets'. Her poetry has been exhibited at the Greater Reston Art Center and at Arterie Fine Art Gallery. Check out her poetry books, "we'll beachcomb for their broken bones" (Red Ochre Press, 2014), "a little luminescence" (Allbook-Books, 2011) and "the reason for rain" (Coffeetown Press, expected publication in fall 2015). Her visual art has won her several awards. Go to elenabotts.com and o-mourning-dove.tumblr.com to see her latest work.

Jack C. Buck, originally from Michigan, now lives in Denver, Colorado, where he is middle school teacher. His most recent short fiction can be read in recent issues of Connotation Press, Beechwood Review, Foliate Oak, Jellyfish Review, Ginosko Literary Journal, and Yellow Chair Review. He thanks you for reading his work.

Tracie Campbell writes short stories and poetry from the misty hills of middle Tennessee. Her writing interests include fantasy, middle grade, and Christian contemporary. She is a member of several writer's groups and is always interested in connecting with other writers.

Stephen Cloud, after kicking around the West for a while (with stops in Spokane, Flagstaff, and Sedona), has settled in Albuquerque, where he's fixing up an old adobe, working on poems, and pondering the official New Mexico state question: "Red or green?" Recent publications include work in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *High Desert Journal*, *New Madrid*, *Shenandoah*, and *Tar River Poetry*.

Paula Friedman's work has appeared in "Prairie Schooner," "The Michigan Quarterly Review," "The Berkeley Poetry Review," "The Southern Poetry Review," and many others journals. She has also reviewed books for a variety of national newspapers including *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* as well as in literary and cultural reviews including *The New Criterion* and has two upcoming pieces in *The Georgia Review*. She lives in Oakland, California and teaches writing, literature and critical thought at California College of the Arts and at St. Mary's College of Moraga.

Gabriella Garofalo, born in Italy some decades ago, fell in love with the English language at six, started writing poems (in Italian) at six, and is the author of "Lo sguardo di Orfeo," "L'inverno di vetro," "Di altre stelle polari," and "Blue branches".

Fawn Hon-Hinton graduated from ENMU in 2010 with a Bachelor's of University Studies. Fawn has a wide array of interests; her most notable ones are photography, writing, and creating jewelry. Her family moved to Portales, New Mexico in 1984 and she has called it home since.

Ann Howells has edited Illyas's Honey for fifteen years, recently taking it digital: www.IllyasHoney.com. Her chapbooks are: *Black Crow in Flight* (Main Street Rag, 2007) & *The Rosebud Diaries* (Willet, 2012). A book of Texas poems, *Under a Lone Star*, illustrated by Dallas artist, J. Darrell Kirkley, is forthcoming from Village Books Press early in 2016.

Lowell Jaeger is founding editor of Many Voices Press and edited *New Poets of the American West*, an anthology of poets from 11 Western states. He author of six collections of poems and was

awarded the Montana Governor's Humanities Award for his work in promoting civil civic discourse.

Kristin Kaz is a crafter, writer, teacher, and gal about town. She lives in the San Fernando Valley with her partner and a velvet wiener dog named Chicky.

Gloria Keeley is a graduate of San Francisco State University with a BA and MA in Creative Writing. She is currently volunteering at the grammar school she attended, teaching poetry writing to third graders. Her work has appeared in *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Midnight Circus*, *Orbis*, *Stillwater*, *Straylight*, *El Portal* and *others*.

Atri Majumder is currently pursuing a Masters' Degree in English from Benaras Hindu University, India. He has two published anthologies: *Shadow of Light* (2012) and *Visible Infinity* (2014). His poems have appeared in several journals like *The Indiana Voice Journal*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Mad Swirl*, *Coffee Shop Poems*, *The Brown Critique*, *Tree House Arts*, *The Literary Jewels* and elsewhere.

Chelsea Morse is a senior at Eastern New Mexico University currently pursuing her BA in English. Originally from Indiana, New Mexico has been her home since 2008. She hopes to one day teach English Literature at the University level and have many more life adventures with her fiancé.

Jason Namey is an MFA student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. He is from Jacksonville, Florida.

Phillip Parotti, following a long teaching career spent at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, TX, has retired to his hometown of Silver City, NM where he continues to write and work as a print maker.

Samantha Pilecki is your typical librarian who enjoys reading, knitting, and drinking tea. This is her first published piece of fiction.

Carla Lenette Ruiz is a recent ENMU graduate who is passionate about photography. She enjoys spending her free time with family and friends. She is a loving, kindhearted individual who loves capturing priceless moments in her everyday life.

Lucas Smith's poetry has been published in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *American Aesthetic* and is forthcoming in *Curator*. He lives in Melbourne, Australia.

Mark Trechock has lived in North Dakota since 1993 and writes poems mostly about the Great Plains. His work has recently appeared in *Off the Coast*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Wilderness House Literary Review* and *Limestone*, which nominated his poem, "Grass and Black Baldies," for the Pushcart Prize.

Tasha Vice studied at Eastern New Mexico University (2006 & 2008) and Texas Tech (2013). Currently, she is an Associate Professor of Reading and Education in Texas. She enjoys writing and capturing images of nature.

John Walser, a professor at Marian University (WI), holds a doctorate in English-Creative Writing from UW-Milwaukee. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in numerous journals, including *Nimrod*, *Spillway*, *The Pinch*, *december* and *Fourth River*. A Pushcart nominee as well as a semi-finalist for the 2013 Neruda Prize, John is currently submitting three manuscripts for publication.

Starlin Waters is an English Major with an emphasis in Education. She has always loved writing and she hopes she can get her future students to love it as much as she does.

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