

winter 2013  
**euphony**  
vol. 13, no.1





# EDITORS' FOREWORD

Here it is: the Winter 2013 issue of Euphony. Mirroring the turbulent, temperamental, always changing Chicago winter, this issue reflects a similar variety of content, from a translation of a Faroese poem to a surrealistic journey through the former Soviet Union. While the specifics of each piece may differ, they touch on universal themes – the puzzle of memory, the beauty and inadequacy of language, the transformative power of loss.

With this issue, we also celebrate the creation of our new Facebook page. In addition to updates about our web exclusive content, upcoming issues, and new developments, we hope it will be a place to share your thoughts about our journal and our pieces. Search “Euphony Journal” to like our page or access the link through our website. We look forward to seeing you there.

Without further ado, we invite you to flip through the next few pages. And as always, we send our thanks to our devoted readers for their enthusiasm and support.

THE EDITORS



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# EUPHONY

## VOLUME 13, NUMBER 1

Winter 2013

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*Euphony* is a non-profit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We publish a variety of works including poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and translations. Visit our website for more information.

Founded Spring 2000 by  
Stephen Barbara and Matthew Deming

[euphonyjournal.com](http://euphonyjournal.com)

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# Helen Wickes

## What You Can Hear

The whirl of the planet pulled into dusk—  
if I hold up the phone, can you hear it?  
And did you catch the snapping shut  
of the swallows' wing tip feathers, the plop  
of the spider laying eggs in the nest,  
clouds' resistance to being ripped in two,  
and the moonlight's plink on my windowpane,  
sound that the soul makes—a click or an ooh—  
slipping into, then out of the body it chooses,  
and now serotonin, that bright sizzle,  
cut loose in the synapse, after the purr  
of recognition soothing the amygdala:  
a person, a human face, appears at my door,  
are you still listening?

Are you still listening?  
A person, a human face, appears at my door;  
recognition soothes the amygdala  
with a purr, and now, in the synapse,  
serotonin, that bright sizzle, is cut loose,  
then the click or the ooh, sound the soul makes  
slipping in, then out of the body it chooses,  
the plink of moonlight on my windowpane,  
and clouds' resistance to being torn in two,  
and the plop of the eggs laid by the spider  
in the nest, and did you catch the way  
the swallows' wing tip feathers snap shut?  
And if I hold up this phone, can you hear it,  
the whirl of the planet pulled into dusk?



# Patrick Vincent Welsh

## Selections from *Hard Times Galore*

### Slave Trade

Brooke was going to become a nurse before she became sick. After four months in the hospital she walked out healthy yet deep in debt. She slept on friends' couches until her Uncle Croix invited her to live rent-free in his house. He even found her work at a friend's real estate agency. Brooke fit the job's only requirement; she was attractive.

Uncle Croix had only one rule in his house; don't go into the basement. Several months later, when he was on vacation, Brooke broke the one rule and discovered her Uncle Croix's secret. His basement was a holding cell for Cambodian slaves who were being sold into forced labor upstate.

When Brooke confronted Croix he calmly offered to cut her in on the business, as long as she held her weight, helped with feeding, bathing, and with the cleaning of the cells. Brooke thought it over. She knew it was wrong, but there was all that debt.

She quit the real estate agency and worked for Croix full-time until she met Pacalo, a new prisoner who she instantly fell in love with. He spoke no English, but spoke to her passionately through his glances.

She ran away with Pacalo one summer night. They walked quickly down the hot road, hand in hand, stopping only to kiss in the moonlight. They took the train to New York and eventually moved back to Cambodia, where Pacalo, through connections with his Uncle, sold Brooke as a sex slave.

It was not as bad as Brooke thought it would be. Being so beautiful, she was sent to a brothel that catered to the Cambodian elite. Her lovers were considerate, and as thoughtful as any of the boyfriends she had when she was free. She rose in status until she became a manager of the other women, and she no longer had to have sex, unless she wanted to. Still, she was a slave, and she blamed the current state of the American Health Care system.

### Cobb Ray

After Jasmine Ray nearly died delivering her ninth child, the doctor said, "Enough. Time to end this."

Her husband Cobb Ray kept pushing her and she almost died again on the tenth, and on the eleventh. She saw a white tunnel of light on the twelfth, but she



did not pass away until the nineteenth child, a twelve-pound girl that Cobb named Rontola.

Cobb, now a single father, found it tough to balance his work at the gas station, his nineteen children, and his jazz band The Late Nights, at the same time. They played every Thursday at a rough roadside bar named Roscoe's. Cobb played guitar, Fat Don played upright bass, and Gay Alvin played drums. On any given night you could hear "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," "You Call it Madness I Call it Love," "Embraceable You." You could see a bar fight, a stabbing, a robbery, a whore pick up a lover, and on Thursday night you'd see a round table full of Cobb's children, bobbing their heads to the jazz, drinking an endless supply of ginger ale.

One night, halfway through a stellar performance of "Let's Fall in Love," Fat Don died, falling from the stage onto a table of terrified children. His bass did a pirouette and followed. He died of a massive heart attack, but had hit every note of the song up until that point.

When it was discovered that Fat Don did not have a dime to pay for his own funeral, Cobb Ray gave him his own spot in ground, next to his wife Jasmine. Cobb even paid for a tombstone, which read, *Don, Don't Touch My Wife*.

Cobb gave up music after that. He could never really find the magic after Don's death. The gas station shut down, and one by one, his children disappeared. Some got married, some died, some joined the Army, some offered no word as to where they went.

Rontola, the youngest child, was the most successful. She became a very popular jazz singer, even winning a Grammy and performing at the White House. She bought Cobb a large house in San Jose, and he knew then that it had been a wise decision to push his wife to that nineteenth child.

## Wilkes Booth

Billy Hogan, at forty, had been elected into the Wilkes Booth High Football Hall of Fame. The school took on its unfortunate name when Henry Wilkes Booth left the majority of his fortune to the county with one specification; that they attach his name to nearly everything.

Billy searched the halls of his old school until he found the Wildcats' display case. The photo in the case was of himself at seventeen holding up the state trophy, winking. It was photographic evidence of the last time he was happy. He said, "God I look like such an asshole in that picture. Maybe I was."

He left the display case without looking back. He went home and hung himself from the streetlight outside of his house.

When you've thrown a football into the night sky forty yards down the field and you know from all your boyhood trajectory experience, from all your athletic intuition, that it's going to be caught, you see it in the air, in the lights, and you're happy...



You could swim up to the moon, and dive off into a bottle of golden champagne and you'd never have to come up for air; you'd never drown...

You can see the ball is going to land in the receiver's hands. You can see every face in the crowd, the old men, the shivering mothers, the young pretty girls and the young pimply girls, the envious boys, you can see whole families looking up into the lights and you feel like you're at all of their dinner tables all at once, and you've just made a joke or a statement you're proud of and everyone approves and admires. Steam rises from the potatoes into the light, into the night, up to the stars, the ball falls from the light...

This is what Billy was trying to convey in his departing letter, but he settled with, "Go Wildcats."



# Matthew Landrum

## The Working Girl for J.H.O. Djurhuus

My bed is crowded tonight. So many men  
walk in off the streets to sit down  
in my room and I can't sleep. Sometimes,  
I ask them who they are and why they've come  
but they never answer. And if I lock the door,  
they'll only climb in through the window.  
I've often thought about getting somebody  
to manage them  
but there's no-one to help me.

## Gleðigentan ognað J.H.O. Djurhuus

Tað hava verið so nógv  
Sum hava sitið á songini  
Hjá mær í kvøld  
Fremmandir menn koma inn av gøtuni  
Og seta seg á songina hjá mær  
So eg ikki sleppi at leggja meg fyri teimum  
Eg havi ofta spurt teir, hvat teir gera har  
Og hvat teir í grundini billa sær inn  
Men teir vilja ongantíð svara  
Og læsi eg dyrnar, ja so koma teir  
Bara inn gjøgnum vindeygad  
Eg havi ofta hugsað um at fingið onkran  
At hjálpt mær at sloppið av við teir  
Men líkt er ikki til, at nakar vil hjálpa mær

Agnar Artúvertin

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# Doug Clark

## At Rest

Ever since Stephen's wife of fifty two years, June, had died he had sensed the possibility of rising from his decrepit lounge and resuming life. That isn't to say he didn't mourn her—but he couldn't help noticing that after the ordeal of the disease (now what was its name again? he could never remember) and June's resulting stewardship, his life was improving. For example, his children had just agreed to take the timer off of the TV.

The TV-timer was a slim black box, featureless except for a tiny blinking red light. June and Stephen's children had attached it to the TV when a cable bill revealed he had been staying up until 4 a.m. to watch Pay-Per-View Ultimate Fighting. They were horrified that the former peacenik—who had waved a placard in street protests against the Iraq invasion when he was seventy eight—enjoyed the bloody spectacle. But even more, they were aghast he was tottering around the house without June's supervision.

Every night at 10 p.m. the timer's red light blinked frantically like a bomb about to go off, the TV moaned out a dying *zwwooop*, and nothing Stephen could do would restart the damn thing. But, now that June was gone, he had argued that he needed to take more responsibility and should control his own TV schedule. And miracle of miracles, the timer was finished. He hoped this emancipation was an omen of greater freedom to come. Maybe his children would even let him live alone!

Currently, however, Stephen's oldest grandson, Kevin, squatted in the guest-room. (Why didn't the boy have a job?—he was at least twenty-two.) But Kevin was much better than June. Right now, Kevin was driving him to the Safeway. He hadn't been to Safeway in years; June would never let him get close to so many fatal carbohydrates.

As they bucked along Seattle's hills Stephen itemized the food he would order Kevin to buy. Kevin had to pay because a year ago June had canceled his credit card and substituted an allowance of twenty dollars a week.

First, Stephen would buy ice cream—Breyer's Rocky Road—and Brown Cow chocolate sauce to top it off. June would be rolling in her grave! Probably wishing she could have a lick. Next he'd purchase cashews, at least five pounds of Dungeness crab—why not make it ten?—and then there were Pringles, Special Dark Hershey bars, white jasmine rice (not the brown fraud they kept trying to placate him with)...

Kevin did a remarkably smooth job of crossing bustling Rainer Avenue and slid into the handicap space closest the sliding doors. Everything was going Stephen's way. "Don't forget your walker, Gung," Kevin said as he held open the van door for him. Gung-gung is the Mandarin word for grandfather.

"I'll use the shopping cart. See, if I hold the handles it gives me even better stability," Stephen said, demonstrating on a conveniently at-hand cart.



“Sure, Gung.”

June would never let him go anywhere without his walker!

Stephen pushed the cart towards the Safeway through a spittle-like drizzle. A Salvation Army santa stood on the curb, clattering away with his bell. Stubble rose above the curls of the man’s fake beard and his eyes were bloodshot and blue-rimmed. Stephen could see tattoo snakes squirming out from beneath the faux, white fur cuffs of the Santa-suit. He thought the Salvation Army was very clever to choose the neediest looking people as their Saint Nicks: it let potential benefactors see who the donations would aid.

“Will you give this man a five? I’m sure your Aunt Stephanie will pay you back,” Stephen told Kevin.

Kevin forked over the bill. The santa rang his bell and wished them a happy holiday. Stephen blushed with cheer: Kevin was going to buy him whatever he wanted.

Immediately inside the sliding doors, just past the hairy rubber mats meant to clean customer’s shoes and the slick of rain water that had been tracked in anyway, stood a table stacked with pre-packaged Christmas cookies: “Holiday Special—2/\$1.99!!!” a sign blared. The cookies were glazed with white frosting and freckled with seasonally appropriate green and red sprinkles. “How about some of these Kevin?” he said, reaching for a package.

“Those things are always stale, you know,” Kevin answered.

“I’m sure your cousin Lia will like them.”

“Maybe let’s wait and see if we can find something better. These look sort of old to me. And I’m not sure how good they would be for your diabetes.”

Stephen put the cookies down. It wouldn’t be good strategy to start the trip with a fight. He’d be better off making sure he got something else—like a Fun Bag of assorted Hershey’s chocolates.

They entered Produce. As Kevin jabbered away about how good seedless grapes were for you—they didn’t have any carbohydrates, blah, blah, blah—Stephen covertly observed the other shoppers, especially the geriatrics. Whenever Stephen left the house, he secretly compared himself to other nonagenarians. Now, watching a woman with her mayonnaise-white hair wrapped in a bandana, her back bent like a question mark, a Safeway employee in a green apron pushing her shopping cart, he thought: Doing better than her! There was a geezer sniffing a tomato, skin flaking off a mottled scalp, and Stephen nodded so the baldy could admire his comb-able mane of black hair. Everywhere he looked there were pants-poopers far worse off than he was and they were all without supervision. Couldn’t Kevin, couldn’t his children, see how well he was doing! Sure the house was big, sure it would be lonely, but he could handle it: he’d handled a lot more challenging things in his eighty two years.

Thank God, they were out of the tasteless desert of the produce section—though, it seemed Kevin had gotten quite a few things there, all low-carb Stephen was sure. As they progressed, from the cereals lane, to deli, to seafood counter, then the snack aisle, Stephen lived a rollercoaster of victories and defeats. Kevin forbade Lucky Charms, saying they had coupons for that tasteless Whole Balance glop,

but afterwards he executed a series of coups. First came a half pound of pastrami at the deli; then five pounds of Dungeness crab—five pounds!—at the seafood counter; and finally in a highlight worthy of slow motion replay he snuck a can of Sourcream and Onion Pringles off the shelf and tried to slip it beneath the crab wrapped in butcher paper. Kevin caught him, but after reading the nutrition label, he said, “They’re not too bad. And I suppose what Stephanie doesn’t know won’t hurt her, will it Gung?” And the Pringles stayed in the cart, under the defrosting crab which leaked all over it.

It was in the ice palace of the Frozen Foods Aisle that Stephen realized he probably wasn’t going to get any rice—these Western supermarkets never seemed to stock bulk bags with the name properly written in Chinese, only those single-serving boxes of inedible instant rice with the black man on the cover—but his eye latched on to something almost as good. It was a frost speckled box of Red Baron Mashed Potatoes. On the box, a cartoon of the Red Baron smiled jauntily while a wind twisted his red scarf dashingly over his shoulder. Beneath the emblem rose a mountain, an Everest, of steaming mashed potatoes, crowned with a fat slab of melting butter which poured golden rivers down the mountainsides. Flecks of pepper drifted on the butter-rivers. He opened the ice case. The stubble of frost coating the cardboard melted beneath his fingers.

“I’m not sure about that, Gung,” Kevin said.

Stephen ignored Kevin.

“How about we take a look at the back, see how many carbs are in there?”

“Awww, com’on, I haven’t had a potato in years.” Did he really sound that weasely? Like he had to beg his grandchild to eat mashed potatoes?

“Look, see: 1,232. That’s more carbs than you’re supposed to eat in three days Gung. How about this, what if we went and got some Rocky Road? You could probably have two cartons of ice cream instead of that.”

Stephen put the box of mashed potatoes directly into the cart’s upper basket/child seat.

“Sorry, Gung, you can’t have that.”

If Stephen’s hands weren’t already trembling, if his knees hadn’t already burned from the marathon around the store, he would have socked Kevin, but he had to clutch the shopping cart to preserve from toppling over.

How come they thought they could control his life? How come everyone thought he was so incompetent? In the end, even June had joined his children in jailing him. He’d been a world renowned professor of hydrology, a pioneering Asian rights activist, a sincere father and grandfather. Was it too much to ask?—for a box, one fucking lousy box of frozen mashed potatoes.

He thought he might weep in the Frozen Foods section of the Safeway in front of his unemployed grandchild and the horror of that was worse than when he sometimes realized he wouldn’t make it to the bathroom. But he’d show them, show June he was—.

Then Stephen was on his back. He felt very calm, except that the halogen bulbs of the Safeway shot downwards, painfully, into his eyes. How did I get here? he wondered. The shopping cart was rolling slowly across the aisle; three of the



wheels drove straight, but the back left wheel wobbled, flinging itself left and right. Kevin knelt over him. His grandson's mouth stretched into O's and collapsed into dashes, but he didn't hear any sound; it was as if Kevin was just an image on a muted TV.

Where was June? Oh, if only she were here she would know what to do. She could take him home and cradle him and—.

But ever since they had told Stephen he had the disease (now what was the name? it had so many syllables), June hadn't been all that pleasant. In fact, she'd used his sickness to make him do what she wanted. She'd always told him what to do, but post-illness, whenever there was a dispute, she'd called up Stephanie. Stephanie was their youngest daughter and unofficial caretaker who lived two doors down. Because he had the disease, Stephanie always agreed with June, so he had to do whatever June ordered. As a sort of protest, a surrender after fifty two years of arguing, Stephen had sunk into his lounge.

It was an ancient, decrepit lounge, brought to Seattle from their old home in Connecticut. The lounge dominated the living room. Invariably, the footrest pointed towards the TV. Its back faced expansive bay windows and a million dollar view of the Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains.

Years ago, Stephen had walked into the living room and the realtor had dramatically yanked open the curtains, exposing the panorama. Despite snickering at the theatrics, at that moment Stephen was sold.

When Stephen and June were newlyweds, they had lived in the attic of a Baltimore row-house whose single thin window had overlooked backyards filled with weeds, junked cars balanced on cinder blocks, and roofs shedding shingles. The window opened directly beneath the chimney and during the winter, despite the newspaper they taped around the glass's edges, ash sifted into the room, slowly blackening everything.

Stephen promised June they would move the instant he finished graduate school and found a job.

"It's OK, I don't mind, I promise. I'm happy as long as I'm with you," she said.

Still, one overcast evening he caught her staring forlornly out the window at a plastic bag snared on a barbed wire fence quarantining a boarded-up house.

"What do you want to see?"

"The sea and the mountains—both at once."

When the realtor had jerked back the curtains and unwrapped the Puget Sound and Olympics, the seventy year old Stephen, whose mind was just beginning to fray, had told his wife, "Go on, open it."

June had cranked the window-lever twice and let in startlingly fresh air.

The beige plush slip of Stephen's favorite lounge was polished soft with use and held together by stitching and patches. Every few weeks—after Stephen ate and watched basketball games atop it, even slept whole nights on it, refusing to come to bed—June would mend the ragged cloth. She tried to buy a new slip-on

cover, but that was one of the few arguments he won because he just tore it off every time she put it on.

The lounge was the perfect thing to sink into. The pillows were thick and deep and had permanently molded to the contours of his body. The yellow foam stuffing puffed through holes in the chair and the slip, despite June's efforts to keep the tears mended. If he was in a particularly vicious mood he would pinch off bits of foam and roll them into balls using his thumb and forefinger. Then he would scatter them on the floor and she would have to vacuum.

"Can't you remember how much I hate it when you do that?" she would demand.

"I can't, remember,"—he would always laugh when he said "remember," because that was the whole problem—"I have this disease."

The lounge smelled of all the peanuts he had shelled and eaten there, and the pickle juice he had spilled: it smelled exactly like him. A long handle jutted up from the bottom of the chair. He could reach it while sitting and recline, until he lay flat if he wanted.

Stephen's grandchildren loved the chair almost as much as he did: its lumpiness and totem-like identification with him reminded them of their own teddy bears. On his return from pushing his walker to the bathroom, he would often find his whole brood playing king-of-the-mountain off its battered flanks. If June or his children had invaded his throne he would have unleashed a tantrum, but quietly he would lie on the couch and watch his descendants' antics until an unusually peaceful sleep eased him.

How many years passed floating in that Lethe of a chair, Stephen didn't know. In a vague way he kept track of the seasons by which sports were playing on TV (not the color of the field grass—that was always the same unnaturally vibrant green—but baseball ran from April to October, grid iron opened just as the leaves flared, and the NBA dribbled when you could only play sports inside). Faces popped up and said, "Hello, how are you, Stephen" (always an emphasis on his name, as if he couldn't be expected to remember it), grandchildren came and went, there were fresh wars (or the same battles?) on TV, and things just seemed to happen (like was this a new birthday, or had he just nodded out for a moment in the old one?—maybe he could count the candles to figure out, but no, too many) and he'd have to torture his memory for some hint as to what was happening, what was demanded of him, who these people were, before, thankfully, he'd be allowed back into the uncomplicated bliss of TV.

Sports, yes sports, were the best, because they were so simple and exciting: you could always tell who was winning by the little box with numbers in the corner and it was so elemental, men competing, the metaphor of life, etc. Undoubtedly, boxing was better than pansy games which civilized aggression with balls, lines, and padding. And best of all was this new sport called Ultimate Fighting. No rules, just two hulks going at it with fists, knees, foreheads, anything! June and the children, even his grandchildren, would try to turn the matches off, but sometimes there'd



be a late nighter and damn—you just understood. How could you not, it was all right there: Bam! Pow! Sic him! DON'T LET HIM GET UP!

Stephen would occasionally tune to the news, or even PBS, an old habit he couldn't erase. He vaguely remembered a preoccupation with politics, science, and Asian American civil rights, but now he found his former programs confusing and, consequently, upsetting. Watching bow-tied professors lecturing on PBS, their students' faces bovine with incomprehension, he wondered—hadn't he at once point known more about urban storm water flow than anyone in the world? Weren't almost all of the storm drains from Seattle to Connecticut, based on his model? But the flicker of recognition always faded and he clicked back to ESPN.

When Stephen came up for air from the haze of TV, he usually found June poking him—time for another doctor's appointment or more medicine! Twice a day he had to swallow rubber-tasting pills the color of surgical scrubs and have his sugar levels measured. His second disease, which he could remember the name of, was Type II Diabetes.

Stephen hated his diabetes. In a disengaged way he disliked his memory disease, it was like having the hours of the day shuffled about like cards in a deck, but diabetes: now that affected his life. Everything he wanted to eat, June or Stephanie said he couldn't have. Ice cream, dim sum, white rice—"For God's sake, I'm Chinese," he would yell, "my blood is white rice"—were all forbidden. He was forced to subsist on a diet of peanuts, which he had to shell himself (for exercise they said, as if that wasn't idiotic!), and kosher dill pickles. And every meal became a torture of carbohydrate counting: this many for this and that many for that, and just give me my goddamn food and let me eat what I want in peace! I've earned it, haven't I?

When he was hungry, Stephen could recall in exquisite detail much of the food he had eaten in his life (though the names of his children floated just beyond reach): he remembered the backyard of his boyhood home, the plank tables covered in Baltimore Sun newspapers, tin milk pails filled with steamed crabs red as anger, juggling the blisteringly hot shells from finger to finger while slurping the succulent meat...; the lazy-Susan spinning at dim sum, serving a royal parade of dumplings, don-tot, fried taro...; and his favorite American food, mashed potatoes so hot they melted the butter and cheese heaped on top...

And now he had to make due with bar food! He hurled peanut shells to the carpet and let pickle juice slosh onto the chair.

One reason Stephen loved his grandchildren's visits was that June and Stephanie always let them take him downtown—"Let them baby-sit each other, let's have a nice relaxed lunch." There, he could coax the grandchildren to one of Chinatown's dim sum houses and stuff himself with a week's, a month's worth of carbohydrates, promising his grandchildren that June would reimburse the extravagant bills. Stephen had to have his grandchildren pay because—indignity of indignities—June and Stephanie had confiscated his credit card and only gave him twenty in cash to spend a week!

This had happened because June had surprised him in Dimitri's. Every morning of his retirement, Stephen had ridden his bike to the local Greek coffee

shop, Dimitri's, for breakfast. Even at the onset of the disease he had continued his morning peddles, though June wanted him to remain home. "It's the only exercise he gets, Mom," Stephanie had defended him.

But soon June started to complain about Stephen's blood sugar levels after his trips.

"Well, I'm sure Dad understands that if he eats a lot of carbs the only person he hurts is himself," Stephanie exclaimed extra loud to make sure Stephen overheard (his own child acting as if he were a child!).

"Well, I don't know about that," June said.

"You're not eating pastries at Dimitri's, are you Dad? Because if you did, that would place you in what Doctor Kessler called the 'danger-zone.' Don't you remember, he said that a patient is fine as long as they are cognizant—aware (he wanted to hit her for speaking down to him)—of the wellbeing of their own self and others. But once a patient becomes a danger to himself or others that's when the society or family has to step in. Don't you agree?"

Stephen had sworn he wasn't eating any pastries.

But damn if they thought they could control his life! Like that new TV-timer they had installed on the TV, which he had pried off with a screwdriver only to find the machine didn't work afterwards.

(Was he crazy to think everyone was plotting against him? Wasn't there anyone to take his side, to see how miserable this was for him? The only person who ever seemed to show him warmth anymore was Stephanie's toddler, Lia, who was barely three.)

So there was no way Stephen wasn't going to eat an apple struddle-o with his cup of coffee (with two packs of Sweet-N-Low and creamer in it, God damn!). But then one day, just as he was taking his first bite of crust powdered with white sugar, the pastry hanging between his open jaws but not yet bit into, June materialized like a dove from a magician's sleeve. Because of the uncomfortable positioning of the sweet all he could say was, "Mmmf!"

June had a knack for turning up at exactly the worst moments. Sometimes he was sure she skulked in the wings until just the right second to appear and sledgehammer home a point. It was a skill that had won her a lot of arguments in fifty two years.

"Well, you know I tried and tried to tell Stephenie, but she wouldn't listen. I did my best to make it clear: he's just not able to govern himself anymore. I saw you add those two packets of sugar. Not just a pastry, but you had to add two packets of Sweet-N-Low! No wonder your blood sugar levels are off the charts! Don't you want to live another year? Don't you want to see your great grandchildren? Don't you want to see Lia grow up?"

The fact that June was practically yelling this to everyone in the startled coffee shop, embarrassing him and shaming herself, just proved what a tyrant she really was. Couldn't everyone see what a terrible life he led under her dictatorship? He knew how sympathetic they all were towards him. But he couldn't say a damn thing because the pastry was still wedged, unbitten, between his jaws.



“Unable to determine how your actions affect yourself and others—or you just don’t want to think about it. You’re in the ‘danger zone’ Stephen Choy. You’re just like an animal. I’m hungry, I have to pee, I have to shit, I have to—. You’ve got no idea what anyone else is feeling. Spit that out! We’re going home!”

But even then they’d relented, after he threw a series of tantrums, and let him keep his wallet. “He needs a sense of independence,” Stephanie argued.

They finally unmanned him a few weeks later when he tried to hop on a bus to Chinatown for dim sum and ended up halfway to Tacoma before the police located him. On the plastic seat beside him was a \$400 gourmet Williams and Sonoma ice cream maker which the bus driver insisted he had carried onto the bus, but which he forswore.

That was absolute rock bottom, Stephen was sure, having your wife steal your wallet from your pant pocket while you were showering and handing you the first of your weekly twenties when you got out.

Except, occasionally, Stephen remembered when he and June had returned from Dimitri’s the day she’d discovered him biting into the forbidden apple struddle-o.

Stephen had sunk into his lounge and turned on the TV and June had hustled over with his blood glucose reader and pills all business-like, like she’d forgotten everything already, though he hadn’t.

“Give me your thumb,” she said holding out the blood glucose reader. The instrument looked like a flattened, metal beetle. He knew the insect had a sharp, vampiric tongue.

He continued to stare numbly at the TV.

“Give me your thumb.”

“I don’t want to,” he finally said.

“I don’t care what you want. Give me your thumb.”

“Who gave you the right?” he said. It was just a boring ESPN recap of all of last night’s games, which he had already seen earlier that morning.

“Give me your thumb.”

“Go to hell.”

For a time, Stephen drifted with the TV. He’d forgotten the results of most of the matches and it was good to have the sportscaster remind him—oh, that’s great the Mariners won another one! But then, vaguely, June’s silence began to unsettle him. It wasn’t like her to let him win an argument. He glanced up.

She was standing next to the big bay windows. It was one of those rare Seattle days which make the rest of the dreary year worthwhile: what seemed like a thousand crisp sailboats tacked on the glassy Puget Sound and the air was so clear that despite the distance he could see the individual valleys in the snow-topped Olympic Mountains.

June had braced herself against the table with extended arms. Both of her elbows were disjointed with her weight. Her shoulders quivered. He didn’t remember her being that thin—she looked ancient! Older than he did when he looked in the mirror. And she’d always taken such good care of her appearance, dieting and

skin creams and whatnot! Always, he had thought her beautiful and now he felt vaguely revolted. She looked like a person who would die soon.

And was she crying? Why else would she wipe at her eyes with her wrist? But no, her voice was reinforced as ever.

"Give me your thumb."

"I don't want to."

"Give it to me!"

"You don't love me anymore."

She sat on the edge of the lounge and the pillow made a pfft farting sound as the air squeezed from the yellow foam. "Of course I do. Now give me your thumb."

"If you loved me, you wouldn't do this to me."

She grabbed for his hands. He jerked back and sat on his fingers so she couldn't get his thumbs.

"You idiotic—. Don't you see I don't want to be doing this either? Don't you think I'd rather be with Lia or with Jane or Stephanie? Or in the Mediterranean?—we always planned to spend our seventies there! Do you think I have to be doing this? Stephanie and Yen think we should put you in a home. How would you like that? You could watch all the TV you want and drool on yourself with the other vegetables.

"I'm sorry: I didn't mean to insult you. I thought—I thought it would all be so different. But that's not what happened. And now, I need your help. Oh, what's the point of trying?"

She stared into his pupils, her face right up close to his, noses almost touching. She squeezed her eyes shut and after a moment continued. "I can't fight you every single day on every single little thing. I'm getting worn out and I don't have that much more wear in me. Please. Please. I don't want to send you to a home. I want you here with me.

"Now, give me your thumb and let's get this over with."

He shook his head and kept his hands wedged under his ass and stared at the TV. When he finally looked up, the panorama confronted him, but June was nowhere in sight.

He breathed a sigh of relief. For once he'd won an argument.

Where was June? He needed her now. June.

But only Kevin appeared. From his position on the floor Stephen saw that Kevin had not trimmed his nose hairs in a very long time. A new face appeared, gilded with a white halo from the halogen lamps. It was a Caucasian woman about the age of his oldest daughter. Her long pearl necklace hung until it almost touched his lips.

"Do you need an ambulance, sir? We'll get you an ambulance right away. Can you speak? Do you have pain in your chest? Does it feel like you're having a heart attack? Do you think he's having a heart attack?" the woman asked Kevin. She was already dialing her cellphone.

"He just slipped," Kevin said.



"Where is June? I don't need an ambulance. Where is June?" How typical that she deserted him when he needed her most.

"Help will be right here, sir. You just be still. It'll be OK."

The woman wiped his forehead as if he had a fever. He struggled up. "I don't need an ambulance. It's just like June not to be here."

Kevin helped him to his feet. "We'll go home now and get some rest. It'll be OK, c'mon now."

"I need my walker," Stephen said, pointing at the shopping cart.

The woman drew the cart back to Stephen. Once both his hands were firmly clasped on the push-rail and his body found its balance, his twisting heart began to settle.

"Let's go home," Kevin said.

Stephen pushed the cart towards the cashier visible at the end of the aisle. Behind him he could hear Kevin thanking the woman, but he didn't want to say anything to her. Sometime after he had fallen, he had lost control of his bladder. He couldn't actually feel the wetness on his legs, he had lost most sensation below his waist a long time ago, but he recognized the smell. His children insisted that he wear diapers, but whenever he could he "forgot" them. He focused straight ahead, refusing to glance at the other shoppers who, he was sure, tittered at the sight of the geezer with piss streaks running from fly to ankle. Thankfully, no one queued at the cashier, but when he tried to push past the teller, Kevin stopped him. "We've got to pay, Gung."

As the braces and acne in a green Safeway apron totaled the purchases, Stephen grew more and more conscious of the salty tang of urine infesting the air. He smelled like a New York subway, the freeway overpass near Elliot Bay Square where men slept on unfolded cardboard boxes. Kevin would tell his children, he was sure, and then there would be another lecture on the diapers. Maybe they would even keep their promise to "check" him every time he went out. Why couldn't he keep it together enough not to piss himself? They only used mistakes like this to prove how incompetent he was when really, if they just gave him a chance, he could do anything.

Stephen and Kevin pushed out of the Safeway. A hobo-Santa was ringing his bell. "Could you give this poor man five dollars? I'm sure your Aunt Stephanie would pay you back," Stephen said.

"I'm out of small bills," answered Kevin, but on seeing Stephen's grimace, he dug into his pocket and discovered a few crumpled ones.

A freezing rain whipped sideways across the parking lot.

"It's important always to help the helpless," Stephen said as they reached the van, but Kevin headed him off.

"You're not driving."

True. Why had he walked to the driver's side?

"Here," Kevin said and offered his arm.

Stephen was shivering by the time Kevin settled him inside the van. The van was marginally warmer than the parking lot, but an arctic wind howled inside when Kevin opened the trunk to load the groceries, chilling even the front seat, setting his

teeth clacking. The slushy rain left granular specks of ice on the windshield before deliquescing into water. Kevin slammed the trunk shut hard enough to rock the van—young men always used too much force—and ducked into the driver's seat blowing on his hands.

But Stephen was feeling much better because he had remembered the box of mashed potatoes and the Red Baron smiling slyly on the front, his scarlet aviator's scarf streaming dashingly over the shoulder. "We'll get home and then you can warm up with some nice hot potatoes with melted butter," he told Kevin and patted him on the shoulder.

Kevin inserted the key into the ignition but didn't turn it. He took his wool hat off and used it to wipe the fog off the window. He removed the key from the ignition and trayed it on his lap. "I think we must have forgotten to buy that. But next time."

The memory returned clearly as if Kevin had handed Stephen a photograph of the event. When he was lying on the floor, before his grandson had stooped over him, Kevin had shoved the mashed potatoes back into the ice case.

"We're going back!" Stephen yelled.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm getting those fucking potatoes." He fumbled with his seatbelt.

"No."

"You can't tell me what to do! You can't tell me what to do!"

"I can."

His grandson was bossing him around! He struggled to sit up, but his seatbelt pinned him to the seat. His arms flailed. He couldn't find the release button.

He sank into his seat. The leather was chill and stiff, reminding him of its origin as the hide of a dead animal. But with time his body heat would thaw it. On the drive over he had reclined the seat slightly and if he leaned it fully back, lay the armrests down, and let the leather warm, it would be acceptably comfortable. He could rest.

Through the patch of the window Kevin had wiped clean of fog, he saw rows of expectant shopping carts and, further, through the sliding doors, agape for an exiting customer, the floodlit interior of the Safeway. It was too far—an impossibility to undo his buckle and pry open the van door and stumble through Produce and past Deli Meats to the frozen food aisle. Oh God!

"I'm sorry," Kevin said.

If Stephen did bring the box of potatoes home, June wouldn't cook it for him, of that he was sure. And the new microwave's damn keypad was a hieroglyphic puzzle. And whenever she went to bed, she pulled the knobs off the stove and hid them so that only the stubs, which the knobs clipped onto, poked out of the control panel. And he was crying in front of his grandson, weeping, sobbing with snot leaking out of his nose. And, oh God, he would have rather shit himself, a big messy wet one which would soak through his pants and into the car seat, rather than this. He twisted towards the door, retreating as far as he could far from Kevin.

"Gung—I'm sorry. It would whack your blood sugar. Do you know how my mom would yell at me? And Aunt Steph?" Kevin wiped fog from the window with



grinding strokes of the wool hat. "Fuck. I'm sorry! We can go back. Let's go back and get it right now."

But Stephen trembled with the agony in his knees, like caltrops grinding in the joints, the nerves that ripped like lightning down his side, and a growling pain in the back of his head where it had bashed the floor. A great tiredness sagged in him so that he could not even wipe at the snot dribbling from his nostrils. For a moment he struggled to swim through the weakness as if he was sinking in water, but then it was too much and consciousness was like sunlight glimmering on the surface above him, filtering weaker the farther he sank.

Where is June? he cried to himself. June? June? Get him away from this heartless young man and back to the woman he loved.

And time slid out from under him and when he stood back up he was in his living room, his back to the bay windows. Whether he had already been to the Safeway or was about to leave he was unsure, but as he tottered past the fireplace two things caught his eye: a framed newspaper article and a box decorated with a green Chinese floral print.

The framed article was a half-page from the obituaries section and he knew then what he had been forgetting. And he knew it had been placed there so every time he walked by, every time he forgot, he would be reminded. Inexorably, his eyes were drawn to the small green box, about the size and style to hold a Chinese teapot.

Carefully, he lifted the box off the mantel. It was surprisingly heavy, filled to the brim with dense weight, unlightened by air. He put it down with a thud on the table. A thin, white dust rose from its seams. A golden sticker gleamed on the top. The lid fit snugly so he had to jiggle it for a few moments before it popped off. A dry, sawdust-like smell tickled his nose. Inside the box, filling even the corners and almost overflowing it, was a chalky powder contained in a clear plastic bag. A wire tie, the kind they offer free in grocery stores, locked the sack. He tugged it out and cradled it in his arms. It was surprisingly dense and heavy, almost ten pounds, but at the same time, because of how much it used to weigh, it felt so light. Carefully, he unwound the tie and spilled the dust onto the table. With shaking fingers he raked patterns in it.

## Lyn Lifshin

### I Can Hear You Laugh

in the hall, light  
turning the cherry  
boards guava, wine,  
ruby and peach.  
Your voice a bell  
still, before the IV's  
and Darvocet,  
before commodes  
and those vampires  
pricking you for  
your blood, that's  
what you called them  
even in your last  
days. I think of you  
in the morning, up,  
talking to the cat  
or ready to take on  
the malls as you were  
to dance all night on  
the ferry to Manhattan  
then go sell more  
books in Macy's. I'm  
falling from the last  
10 years, through 15, my  
midriff no longer  
perfect though I still wear  
your 1920's royal blue  
dress. Trying to help  
me sleep that year you  
said my back was  
skinny as a cat. Now,  
it's thinner. "Honey aren't  
you glad you still have me?"  
You crooned when some  
man didn't call or a book  
was rejected. Today the  
geese came early and I  
thought of the home video  
of you scampering to and

then away from a pond  
of them, how you laughed  
in the crackling celluloid,  
facing the camera, not  
sure what to do. I'm not  
sure what to do with the  
image of you laughing in  
dreams where I wake up  
jarred wondering why  
you haven't called, thinking  
it has never been this long  
since I talked to you



## Dustin Junkert

### Trampoline

Her eyes go yellow at the rims.  
You can't miss them, but I miss them.  
She flew over the whole Pacific Ocean  
and when I asked if she saw the water  
she said no, but she did send a postcard  
on arrival, which I did appreciate  
but threw it away after reading it  
not knowing how long is long enough.  
And morning I never quite believe.  
Her eyes are blue again, someone told me over the phone.  
I bought a cheap box of envelopes and all of them were sealed.

## Scott Butterfield

I do not remember the young woman's name, and I don't remember the village, but the wine, ah, it was Gevrey-Chambertin

If a gun's to my head she's Chinese, glowing like Sauternes in sun, and she walks up and says to him "I just wanted to say Hi" and walks out. Half-hour later he says, "Well that ruined my day." Lord Rush whispers near the Rieslings that she was an ancient flame. But The King had never been without a Queen. No time for tasting notes—the Noblemen demand Chablis, the Duke wants Côte-Rôtie, and I, the newest apprentice, flow again into the Great Work. It is here. It is here where the structure of a respectable vintage reveals itself as the flawless expression of an all-too-human terroir, where the nuances of the nose cannot be pinned down and every part is forever balanced with the whole. Not here, exactly. There's a reason Rimbaud wrote *A Season in Hell* at his mother's country cottage house. There's a reason Denis said, "How can you write on drugs? Your hands are too big." There's a reason Duchamp can beat you at chess and a reason you can't correct things at death and a reason passenger pigeons are not even memory. I recall all this to Duchess Evodia. She laughs and rubs her shoulders and says, "Love fucking hurts," which was no small feat, all those vines she has planted in the rolling Languedoc hillsides of my mind, the ones right against the sea, where in shallow coves beneath sheer rock I hope a family is bathing. Signs of a good harvest. Thank you, Duchess, for so gracefully pruning my shoots.

## Ron Darian

### Arrogance on the Last Casual Friday

Summer vacation back on Long Island means parachuting into the middle of my parents' new divorce—so fuck it, I'm staying on campus. Besides, three years after the Bicentennial, Philadelphia's still a happening town.

My mom is getting the house. I'm welcome to stay with her for the summer. We can go to the beach and pick shells. She tells me all this in a phone call that takes way too long to terminate. Despite the fact I keep saying things like, That's great, Ma—I gotta go. Seriously—I gotta go. Whoa, look at the fire I started—I gotta go.

My dad pleads poverty, at the same time recommending the menfolk—him and me, that is—hit the road in some beat-up orange-and-white VW Campmobile he's had his eye on. We should take the whole summer doing it. Driving. Hitting the road. The menfolk. Pick a direction—south, say—and drive until we hit water or Disney World, whichever comes first. He tells me this and I can smell the liquor on his breath through the phone.

I tell him thank you, thank you, I'm not eleven anymore. Also, I don't swim. Also, I'm thinking about living to old age.

And with a week to vacate my dorm room, I'm down to my last twenty bucks. Plus two Subway-Surface tokens and a roll of Cinnamon Life Savers.

And then I see the small print in the Friday Inquirer. Wanted: Data Entry Operator. Small print in a small box on a page separate from the classifieds. So I'm thinking that a lot of people might've missed it. I'm betting. Hoping.

\*.\*.\*

I nail the job. I figure they give it to me for two reasons. First, since my major is Communications, it's likely I'm thrilled with the idea of minimum wage. Also because of what I can do with punch cards. I show Mr. McCurdy how I can feed a foot-and-a-half-tall stack of punch cards into the main hopper at one time. Not a big deal, not exactly recommended procedure—your ass in a bubbling cauldron if you screw up and they go flying—but it shows I'm not intimidated by the big bad IBM 360/70, and McCurdy tells me to report to work the following Monday.

That night, I rent a room in one of the empty frat houses along Spruce. Not much on amenities, but at least I'll never want for old beer stank.

\*.\*.\*

And now it's three weeks later and I'm already a benumbed worker bee for the sparsely populated air-conditioned fluorescent Futureworld that is the RHD



Corporation's Northeast Computer Office—Mrs. Glencoe, Mr. McCurdy, a few others in one biggish room, three more in an adjoining smallish room—and I'm feeding a stack of Market-Segmentation cards into the reader—Punch cards are our specialty!—and I turn to the cart to grab the next job and that's when I hear the first shots.

Bang-bang!

From the hallway, a chorus of screams right out of the beach scene in *Jaws*.

The blood in my brain thwacks to my feet like a stack of textbooks. Thankfully, the main doors are closed. I can see the reception area because I'm standing on an area two feet higher than the rest of the office—the twenty-by-thirty-foot raised floor of the Main Computing Area.

The screaming stops. Now a shouting match from the hallway, two people, maybe three—anyone feel like enunciating out there? One voice booms over the rest. I pick out a word or two, nothing means anything. I catch a few strung together, it sounds like, What royal meaning is this?

Again—bang!

Was it just this morning, over pancakes and coffee, that I read about a post office guy going bonkers, killing a bunch of workers? St. Louis, maybe?

Bang.

No, wait—it was waffles.

Bang-bang.

Amazing how time slows to a constipated snail-crawl when you're not having fun.

Bang.

Witnesses always say they thought it was a car backfiring—or fireworks—but neither is on the menu when you're on the eleventh floor of the Bicentennial Building in Center City Philadelphia, and each bang sounds like the universe coming apart, and each one seems to be getting closer.

But why am I a pessimist? Why is it easier for me to believe there is someone in the hallway who has gone completely insane and is killing people, rather than there is someone in the hallway who has only gone partially insane and is lighting cherry bombs?

Bang-bang-bang.

So I'm a pessimist. Now if only I could unparalyze my legs.

Mrs. Glencoe, the white-bouffant-hair lady at the front desk who hates me because I am young, glib, good-looking, and, OK, maybe a little arrogant, cries, "Ohjesuslord." Fat Mr. McCurdy has come out from behind his corner cubicle and is spreading his arms like a bird, on the verge of making an announcement. Or maybe he's going to fly around the room. Either way, he's got my attention.

"Lock the fucking door, Gladys," he tells old Mrs. Glencoe in a voice I've never heard him use before, a maniacally high-pitched whisper. I had never heard him say fucking before either. The afternoon is shaping up to be a lot of firsts.

"Gladys!" McCurdy says again.

He's already up—why the fuck doesn't he go lock the door?

Ancient Mrs. Glencoe agonizes for a second—has the shooting stopped?—then shambles out of her chair and away from her desk in slow-motion, shuffling across the linoleum to the heavy oak double doors, teeter-tottering over her lopsided hips like a dashboard hula dancer. Painful to watch if I was capable of feeling.

The heavy oak double doors to the Reuben H. Donnelley Corporation—the proud people who make the phone book—are closed. What is more important is that they lock with the simple flip of a small steel lever just under one of the doorknobs. I can't help thinking she'll never make it. She moves with the vigor of a palsied sloth.

At least she can walk—all I can do is pivot my head. I scan the room. Who are these people? My coworkers of the past three weeks are now strangers to me. Because I see them for the first time as they really are.

Roly-poly Joe McCurdy, our sixtyish number one cool-in-command, has peed his trousers. His dark blue dress shirt pinched tight at the neck, he is a red-faced human sausage, weak and terrified like the rest of us.

Bang.

Thanks for hiring me, Joe. Though I reserve the right to get back to you on that.

Charles V. Brown—Charlie Brown, that's his name—the senior computer operator and the man who trained me, has risen from his keyboard, his good-guy placidity replaced with the street-toughness of his South Philly upbringing, his face an awesome look of come-and-get-me-motherfucker-ness.

Mrs. Glencoe is halfway to the door. Mrs. Glencoe with the perpetual sneer. At the moment, in profile, she wears a different kind of ugly: hangdog resignation to an assuredly dismal end, whether it be today or ten years from today. Her face is a death mask. Rigid. If she sneezed, the thing would crack.

Come on, lady—move it!

Loud freakin' pounding—thankfully, not our door. Another burst of gunfire. Loud thwumps and thwanks of who-knows-what-the-hell. Across the hall. Screams. Shots. Silence. Single shot. Silence. Another shot.

There are four other companies on this floor.

And where the fuck is Security?

Do I have time to call home and tell my mother good-bye? Wish my dad good luck on his eventual vehicular manslaughter conviction?

Jim Martarella, our goateed mini-computer operator who likes to spread employment doom by saying that these are the last days of the phone book—Because one day every home will have an IBM 360/70—I see him peeping like a rodent over the cool-blue-steel boxy behemoth that is the Main Frame, the guts of the 360/70, and this excellent hiding place leads me to believe that if any of us survives this, he will.

Better look for my own rock to crawl under.

The desk of the Main Operator's Console? A couple of yards away. Real dark in that knee well. Not easy to see from the reception area.

But that's where Charlie's standing by his chair.

Another shot. Another. A pause. The poppity-pop of a semi-automatic. He's picking up the pace.

In the open door to the Programming Room, the only other possible place to hide, stand the figures of Kerwin, Natalie, and the other programmer—I forget his name—let's call him the balding middle-aged mouth-breather in the Day-Glo orange beach pants. Ooh, look who fucked himself on our very first casual Friday. Tough luck when the last thing you want to catch is some mass murderer's eye. My friend Charles V. Brown refers to these two guys and a girl as The Three Stooges. Which I never quite got, because computer programmers can't exactly be knuckleheads. Though, at the moment, I might make an exception for Mr. Suicide Pants.

Bang!

We are coming up on nineteen seconds elapsed mission time, people. Houston, we have a maniac.

"That's gunshots, right? Real gunshots, right?" Kerwin, the chief programmer, shouts, loud enough to turn heads across the river in Jersey. Kerwin with the permanently combed hair and the erstwhile gentle manner of a kindergarten teacher. Even without a sweater he reminds me of Mr. Rogers.

"That's gunshots, right?"

Right now, he's the kind of guy you'd like to hit over the head with a frying pan.

Mr. Unwise Pants Selection says, "The windows—we can get out the windows, can't we?"

I don't know, I'm thinking, try it. Eleven stories is probably better than a leap from William Penn's shoulders. Though you might have better luck with a fire exit, if you don't mind the shooting gallery that used to be the hallway. Maybe it's his thick neck, maybe it's the pitch of his squawk, but I think I'm ready to crown Suicide Pants the Curly of the bunch.

Mrs. Glencoe has been at the door for a while—though not quite, actually—but it's as far as she's willing to go. She's stopped several feet short, bending, reaching gingerly for the lever-lock. To say that her hands are shaking would be an understatement—she looks like she's playing a theremin. Now she is flipping the damn lever-lock up and down, up and down, working it like an on-off switch, as if she's suddenly senile, goofily expecting something miraculous to happen. The Marines to land. Balloons to drop from the ceiling.

Or maybe she just forgets which way the door locks.

Now the doorknob turns—a horrible sound given that Mrs. Glencoe isn't the one turning it. The door bursts open and is flung powerfully to the side, smacking Mrs. Glencoe's right arm across her body. Harsh noises accompany all of this—one of them might be an old lady's splintering bone. She yips like a dog thrown onto hot coals, pirouettes on one leg, hits the ground hard—her skull cracks like a walnut. It is the last time I see her move. I turn away.

I know Insanity and Death stand inside our doorway, but I refuse to look, I refuse to look.

Baby, baby, I refuse to look.



Do I have time to take cover with Jim behind the mainframe? Will my legs work when I ask them to? If I survive this thing, will I get a big raise?

My knees bend. Hallelujah. I fall into a crouch. I am, at most, forty feet from the door. From him. That is, unless he's begun his march. His Ho Chi Minh Death March.

I am certainly not his first potential shot, nor his second. If the Programming Room grabs his attention, maybe not even his third.

Now shielded by a row of waist-high magnetic tape readers, I've lost the sightline to anyone on the main floor, though I can still see rodent-eyed Jim Martarella peeping to my left. I surmise it is my boss, Joe McCurdy, off in his own far corner of the room, who is mumbling something along the lines of No wait wait wait wait!

Then a burst from the semi-automatic.

It takes me a moment to realize I'm not the one who has been torn to confetti.

I eye the massive Printer Unit just a hop skip and bullet-between-the-eyes away, another boxy blue-steel enclosure, this one smaller than the mainframe, but certainly no smaller than my dad's VW Creamsicle-colored wet dream—is there room to squeeze behind it? Between it and the wall? Should I be spotted there, it seems an awfully cramped place to die.

It suddenly occurs to me that, yes, when I die, I would prefer to be comfortable.

Charlie's Main Operator Console not three yards away—but where is he? This is my chance.

As I scurry over tile into his abandoned workstation's knee well, I see, out of the corner of my eye, Mr. Charles V. Brown, former Philly street tough, former all-Philadelphia running back for the St. Maria Goretti Saints, bounding full-speed toward the reception area.

Go, Charlie, go!

Goddammit, I never realized how much I love black people.

Goddammit, I'll tell the world—I love you Charlie Brown!

But the next burst of gunfire tempers my enthusiasm. I don't want to look. I'll always see him clearly in my mind—running. But don't worry, Charlie. If I make it, I'll tell the story.

“Under what regal authority is THIS?” booms our resonant-voiced visitor with the acute neuronal-wiring problem.

On my hands and knees, I lean forward and raise my head to take a peek. I have to see. What I do see is a surprise. Oh Jesus, is it a surprise.

Our lethal sonic boomer is a bit short, maybe just over five feet. Dark green outdoorsman's jacket, dark green camouflage pants, dark brown boots. White marble bowling ball for a head, no trace of hair, no eyebrows. Blood-red eyes. Like somebody stabbed the Man in the Moon with a pitchfork. Impossible to determine his age.

The other notable detail I might mention is that he'd probably tip the scales, I'm guessing, at close to four hundred pounds.

Move over, Suicide Pants. I think we just found our new Curly.

“By what royal authority has this been **ORDAINED?**” booms easily the funniest Stooge. While meticulously sighting through his weapon—a Kalashnikov maybe?—he pivots counterclockwise. His Roundness reminds me of the gun turret on a mighty battleship.

At least it’s not rotating toward me.

Yet.

He stops his scan with his barrel trained at the open door of the Programming Room, where the Stooges, I presume, have of necessity taken refuge. He spins toward me—abruptly—as if alerted by my thoughts. Then he spins back, having somehow missed the quivering shadow lurking in my coward’s niche, as well as rat-eyed Jim, wherever the hell he must have slunk off to.

From the knee well of the Main Console, I can see none of the bodies of my fallen coworkers. I am thankful for this. For the first time, I hear the distant swell of sirens. Police, fire, and—who knows?—hopefully the entire goddamn Army.

Come on up, boys, the eleventh floor is hoppin’. Bring the tunes, beer if you got, but don’t forget the artillery and try not to trash the place. Take special care not to waste the whimpering heap of flesh curled into a ball. Because if it’s whimpering, it’s alive, and if it’s alive, I hope it’s me.

The Amazing Colossal Cue Ball hasn’t fired a shot for at least five seconds, and that’s an eternity when you’re thumb-wrestling with the Grim Reaper. But now, the Man of the Hour, Mister Let’s-Make-My-Problem-Everyone’s Problem, is double-timing it into the Programming Room, from which I suspect gunfire and other awful noises to be emanating soon.

If ever there was a chance to make a break for it, now’s the time. I crawl several feet from the shadows and note that our double doors are wide open. Just a short dash to the elevators. But a voice captures my attention. From the Programming Room. Mr. Rogers begging for his life. I don’t want to listen to the words—I’m not even sure what I’m hearing are words. In any case, mid-plea, there are three short bursts, and then I figure that that’s all they wrote about Moe, Larry, and Curly Number One.

Suddenly, it is incomprehensible to me why anyone would turn down a summer gathering seashells with a charmingly myopic middle-aged woman. Or a road trip with a whimsical and inebriated podiatrist at the wheel. Right now, both sound better than anything in the world.

And now I’m wondering how long I have before you-know-who becomes intrigued with the big shiny-blue boxes of the IBM 360/70 and decides to take his hunting holiday here. Not long, I presume. The door to the Programming Room is still empty. So are the doors to the hallway.

I make a break for it.

I pop from my hole like a snakebitten weasel. I leap over the steps onto the Main Office floor, and—what the hell was I thinking? Because not ten feet to my right and spilling across the entryway of the Programming Room is the Man with the Plan with the Canal himself—Panama! But before he can order that fat

fucking finger to squeeze off a single spray of steel—I don’t know what makes me do this—I spin to him and shout, in the most resonant voice I can muster, “What regal command of authority and so forth is **THIS!**”

And verily I say, his reaction is as if I had just pulled a polka-dotted rabbit out of my ass. He holds his fire, he relaxes his grip.

No reason to wait for all the reviews to come in. Time for a repeat performance.

“What royal command of authority should heretofore be **AUTHORIZED!**” I say.

No reaction this time. I sense I’m teetering on losing the crowd. The hell with ad-libbing. What was it he said the first time—exactly?

“By what royal authority has this been **ORDAINED?**” I say.

He is studying me. His lips part like the crenellated shell-halves of a Giant Clam. To my amazement, one fat end of his cheek curls into something close to a smile.

Thankfully, this is the opportunity the men in the hallway have been waiting for.

Bang!

His white head blossoms into a shower of pink and red. Whatever’s left from those four hundred pounds—and that’s to say, most of it—flops heavily to the floor like the dead walrus he is.

Still not sure the threat has been entirely eliminated, a voice from the hall shouts, “Get your face down on the floor **NOW!**”

I drop to my stomach. My head turns right, I see my buddy, Charlie, open-eyed and still. I expect him to wink. He doesn’t.

\*.\*.\*

Sitting in an ambulance. Doctors, nurses, police. One hour. Two. A ride to my frat house. I don’t go in—too many empty rooms. I end up at the twenty-four-hour Arby’s on Walnut, pretending to nibble at roast beef, wondering if the next of kin are getting any sleep. Jim Martarella was another one who made it, but in all, fourteen others bought the farm, if you don’t include Moon Face, and I don’t see why anyone should.

Thoughts of the fractured homestead, the phone call to Ma and Pa—which I really should make soon. The story of how I bought the rest of my life by throwing someone’s bullshit back in his own face.

Or does the loving son always give the version where he was never in real danger?



# Elya Braden

## Now

Like the gong of a bell in a Buddhist temple,  
your mother's slap will wake you,  
wake you out of the stumbling stupor  
of your ten-year-old life,  
wake you up to now,  
the now of swallowed tears and weak ankles,  
the now of a ruby handprint rising  
from the dough of your face  
like a starfish reddening on the sand  
under the sun's sightless stare,  
the now of your first glimpse of Seawitch  
skulking in the kelp-beds of the ocean-sharded eyes  
of the dark-haired beauty you once called "Mommy."

Later, you can scatter your mother's ashes  
beyond the rim of tomorrow,  
but her crusted waters will flow in you forever,  
in the curve of your chin,  
the way your smile lists to the right,  
the deliberate loop of your cursive "g,"  
and the memory of her once, long-ago slap  
still ringing, ringing in your ears.  
She would call you a liar,  
say you fabricated this story,  
but the now of you remains.  
Treat yourself to a flute of champagne.  
Sip, don't guzzle, its golden glory.  
Let the bubbles rise up in you,  
rise up in you like joy.

# Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

## The Lily Pond Is Quackless

The air vibrates with the blowsy, sweet-breathed  
petal-cups of the magnolias and sparrows on limbs  
chirping in ringtones. You can hear the ba-bump of the heart  
of the trees, even the creamy paper bark birch  
that peels in arabesques and the heady cherry trees  
that will soon lose their bloom. My heart double paces  
with the startle of an oriole or the flit of the red rucking  
on the hem of my granddaughter's dress as she toddle-runs,  
her dimpled hands opening, closing, her head thrown back,  
calling, "Bird, bird, flower, tree."

## Adam McGee

### The cold makes our bodies lonely

This farce of a winter  
finds me in bed  
thinking of bodies,  
mostly my own: the keyhole  
where the throat starts,  
the slight twist when ribs  
become a cage—that curve,  
my favorite math. And the ninety  
degrees of fascia intersecting like a sheet  
of fiberglass (hold me together  
and hold me together). At last my hip,  
the smooth shovel of bone, an upturned  
plow blade. When I moved over you,  
how it opened a seam of never  
before and never again.

### The Circumstance of Luke Davenport

Yes, he was in love with his doctors, but he wasn't getting electroshock therapy for being a homosexual. He was getting it for other stuff, like seeing UFOs, and seeing aliens in mass graves, and seeing himself starving to death behind a window in a small village outside Kharkov.

He was in love with his doctors. He was sure they were beautiful people, at least the ones who cared for him and touched him reassuringly when they strapped him in. It was the situation they all found themselves in—the institution, the patient linens, the doctor's coats, the sterile environment, the public funding, the research grants, and the electrodes—that was such a bad deal. It ruined the friendship they all could have had together.

He was Luke Davenport, erstwhile proud nephew of renowned American eugenicist Charles B. Davenport. Luke was born in 1890 and only knew about his uncle from his mother and father. When Luke met his future wife in high school, she said she didn't much care for Uncle Charles. Luke was, of course, a homosexual, but first he married a woman and tried to have some kids. They moved to Cape Cod and he got a job selling life insurance. Luke became a Communist when some of his insurance salesman fellows gave him pamphlets and chatted him up about worker's rights and secular Utopia. When Luke Davenport was thirty-one, he accompanied a group of artists and philosophers to Moscow to attend the Fourth World Congress, where Leon Trotsky gave a lot of sweaty speeches. Luke's wife gave birth to a baby girl while Luke was away, but the girl died shortly after birth.

It is in the future when Luke Davenport can't hardly handle reality any more, certain it is all a bad deal and everyone is essentially trapped and neutered by circumstance and electrodes, as circumstance would have it. It is in the future that Luke becomes estranged from his family and is no longer an acknowledged nephew of Charles Davenport. This is after it is clear that Luke falls in love with men and will never get back together with his wife. It is in the fifties.

At the Fourth World Congress, Luke Davenport and a lot of other people were ferried around the USSR to see the wonders of the Communist world. They adored Luke there. The tour guides knew of Luke's esteemed uncle, the eugenicist, and they asked Luke all about him. Is really he two meters tall? What color his eyes? How many wives has he, how many kids? What recommendation has he for post-ethnic, post-racial Communist utopia? What is role of good breeding under socialism?



They were ferried south along the Dnieper to the Black Sea. The orthodox churches they saw along the way had been made into factories and the synagogues had also been made into factories. In a resort town on the Sea of Azov, a chateau had been turned into tenement housing for one hundred. As they wandered around, the inhabitants of the Communist utopia eyed the multiethnic group from the United States with wonder and skepticism. Color didn't matter in the USSR—except the color red, of course. When Langston Hughes stretched out on the beaches of the Crimea, little Cossack girls would run up to him and ask if they could touch his chocolate skin.

Luke Davenport went back home again. He missed the funeral for his baby girl, who got a tiny casket with a bow over it. The eulogy was kind of a joke because she had not accomplished anything. She couldn't even breathe properly. She just wheezed and died. Charles B. Davenport didn't attend the little funeral. Since Luke was a Communist, Uncle Charles couldn't be seen to be involved with Luke or his family. Also, it was a major theme in Uncle Charles's published work that the strong must survive into adulthood to reproduce more strong survivors. The little girl who couldn't even get her breathing together did not fit this picture. She was what one would expect from a cross between a half-Slavic Communist homosexual and a scrawny, blandly-educated Sicilian girl from Lowell. She was a biological disgrace.

Luke met a man in the psych ward where he was being treated. The man was much younger than Luke, probably born about the same time as Luke's son. Luke talked to the man about being a Communist in the 1920s. Try being a Communist right now, the man said, it's the same, only less bull. Now at least real Communists hate Russia, and hate communism. Luke wanted to bugger the man. He loved listening to him talk about being a Communist in the fifties. The man had nice smooth skin like someone who had never had to live through a winter. Luke loved his doctors too. It was just that they were all in such a bad circumstance. It seemed things would never work out. Luke looked at his watch one day, pick any day, and it was 2:45 in the afternoon. Lunch had happened one hour and forty-five minutes ago, and Luke would get electro-zapped in one hour and fifteen minutes. Almost time, the man said. Luke wanted to kiss him.

In tears, a few weeks after the funeral, Luke's wife asked Luke if they could try and have another baby and he said yes although he didn't much feel like it anymore. He had had sex with a man while he was in the USSR, and it had felt right. He was fast becoming an exile of his own family, just as his family was fast become ostracized by the rest of the Davenports. They seemed to have an almost telepathic understanding that Luke was faking heterosexuality; that his marriage was a sham; that Luke's efforts at procreating were just a big cover-up.

Luke and his wife eventually, miraculously had another child, a boy, and then Luke lost his insurance job for being a Communist. He kept leaving every few years to attend World Congresses in Moscow, and his supervisor noticed. The Congress

was such a select group, and Luke, being the erstwhile proud nephew of esteemed eugenicist Charles B. Davenport, stuck out like a sore thumb.

The man waited for Luke with his dinner. Although his dinner grew cold in front of him, on a tray, on a table, in a big cafeteria, the man waited. Luke came through the door smiling. The man knew Luke was in love with him, and although the man didn't actually love Luke back, there is almost nothing to do in a mental institution but dote upon and love and depend on others in the same bilious circumstance. So the man waited while his food got cold. Luke went up to the counter, got his own tray of food, and sat down. How was it, the man asked Luke. He looked Luke in the eyes. Luke was looking at the man, too, but Luke's eyes had the foggy distant look of someone who has just had their nerves massaged by two hundred volts of electricity. There were clouds in Luke's eyes, it seemed. It seemed there was lightning behind the clouds, and a storm behind the lightning.

When Luke was forty-one, he separated from his wife. There hadn't been a World Congress in a couple years, but he needed to get away. Luke used the excuse to search for his grandfather's relatives in Ukraine. Luke wanted to rediscover the side of his family that wasn't interested in neutering the unfit. He flew to Leningrad, and surprisingly, found an entourage waiting to escort him around. They picked him up at the airport and put him in an old limousine. The city was very quiet, very still. The Neva had frozen over. Some barges that had frozen in place were being pulled apart for firewood, carried away by cold-looking Communists. The entourage didn't want Luke to see that. They took him to a cold hotel and gave him a big suite. They sent up Russian hookers for warmth but Luke wasn't interested. For some reason, they were very squirrely about Luke wanting a man sent up to his room instead. They had been very understanding about homosexuality at the Congresses, but now they were suddenly very uptight.

Luke eventually left the hotel. He wanted to catch a flight to Ukraine, but officials would not let him on the plane. He tried to argue with them—he had learned Russian in bits and pieces to supplement his Communist indoctrination—but eventually was forced to take a train. It took six days to get to Kharkov.

Luke stepped off the train in Kharkov. Cossack guards stared, wondering what to make of him. Luke wandered, unmolested, out of the train station and offered to pay a farmer to drive him to the small town where his grandfather's family came from. Grandfather on his mother's side—Luke told the farmer in Russian, though the farmer didn't care. Luke's father, Rowan Davenport, was of pure stock. Anglo-Saxon. Two meters tall, blue eyes, high cheekbones. Cro-Magnon. Strong.

The farmer refused to take Luke's money. What is money, croaked the farmer. Fire starter, worthless shit. Give me bread. Luke gave him a stale half-loaf and the farmer took Luke onboard his tractor. The trip was noisy and freezing cold, and Luke was made woozy by gasoline fumes. Along the way they passed ruined little

villages, some burned to the ground. The farmer told Luke not to look too hard. Luke asked the farmer what he meant, but the farmer didn't respond. After seven hours they arrived at the old man's farm. Luke asked if they were still going to his grandfather's town, and the farmer said the town was abandoned. He pointed when he said this, but when Luke looked, the farmer told him there was nothing there. You mustn't go, you won't find anything, the farmer said. Here, the farmer said, and he looked around conspiratorially then whipped out a small bottle and tipped it back. He passed it to Luke, who sucked down a gulp, burning his throat. He spluttered, and the farmer whacked him on the back, then left. Luke stood alone next to the tractor, spluttering, in the middle of a circle of buildings. Farmland surrounded the buildings, and it was only then that Luke noticed the fields had been razed to the ground. The only field that wasn't burned had rotting cattle strewn about it. Luke Davenport started off in the direction of his grandfather's town.

Who was your famous uncle, the man asked Luke. Luke wanted to kiss the man. They sat together in their patient white linens on the cot in Luke's room. Charles B. Davenport, Luke told the man. Who, asked the man again, and Luke explained about his uncle, about sterilization and abortions, birth control and the like. You have to sterilize all the poor and handicapped people so healthy strong people can replenish the population, Luke said. If we don't do our duty, it's race suicide for the United States. These were all lines. Race suicide, laughed the man. Luke wanted to rub the man until he turned into a happy volcano, a popped-top chimney rock, but on the wall the minute hand of the clock shuddered, then clicked forward, and it was time for bed. They were all stuck in such a circumstance, Luke thought. Bedtime, said the man. He'd heard the clock shudder too. People came to remove the man from Luke's room and take him to his own. Does your uncle know you're here now, the man asked. Luke smiled warmly at the man as he was removed from Luke's room by gentle hands.

Trucks full of men blazed past Luke on the mud road, the mud road to his grandfather's town. The men gripped ancient rifles and stared back at Luke with wide eyes. He looked like a foreigner. He wasn't wearing drab work clothes and moldy furs and he wasn't in Kiev, Leningrad, or Moscow. Or Kharkov, for that matter. Luke looked warm despite the weather, was almost peachy looking. Luke was full in the face, fuller and ruddier looking than the men in the truck, who were gaunt and cold and stern, like their guns. As soon as they appeared, they were gone, swallowed up by their own unfortunate circumstance further down the road. They had no time to draw any real conclusions about Luke. They had no time, and there really was no place for them to draw any real conclusions about anything their lives involved. It was all circumstance. A few moments later a convoy of empty cargo trucks followed the convoy of armed men, roaring towards Luke's grandfather's town. Luke trudged after them.

Aliens, Luke insisted. I saw them again. The doctor smiled. And where were you, asked the doctor politely. He was a doctor assigned to evaluate Luke's progress.

He met with Luke twice a week. I was in Portova, Luke said. That's the town your grandfather was born in, said the doctor. Yes, Luke said. Portova. Where were these aliens you saw, asked the doctor. Grey aliens, breathed Luke, feeling a thrill. Naked, grey aliens. Lithe. Naked. Luke, persisted the doctor, where were these aliens? The same place they always are, said Luke, smiling a distant smile. In a field, face down. In a shed next to the firewood, stacked like firewood and frozen stiff. In a rocking chair facing a window, looking at me with huge dark eyes... How did the aliens get there, asked the doctor. Flying saucer, Luke said. The doctor uncrossed his legs, then re-crossed them. He flattened his white doctor's coat with his hands and resituated himself, ready to continue, to deal with Luke. The man had sweet listening eyes and an attentive, sincere nature. Luke would have kissed him right then but it would have seemed very inappropriate and landed him a more rigorous electroshock schedule. And where was this flying saucer, asked the doctor. Same place it always is, said Luke.

Luke found his grandfather's town after an hour of walking. His feet were sore. The town was indeed abandoned, or nearly so. The trucks of armed men had come and gone. Luke had no idea where the cargo trucks had got to. Luke walked into town and called out for someone, but no one answered. There was a dog skulking around, but it was skittish. It spotted Luke and charged off, never making a sound. Luke watched the condensation of the dog's breaths as it retreated. Luke continued through town. Luke thought he saw movement out of the corner of his eye, and he whirled about, facing a farmhouse. There was a mirror on the outside of the farmhouse, at least it seemed that way to Luke. In the mirror Luke saw himself—but in the future, gaunt and dying. Propped up in a rocking chair, facing a window. That was how he would end. His mouth open, drooling onto himself. The body of Luke at the end of life watched Luke in the midst of life, with huge black eyes. Luke kept walking. When he was another quarter mile down the road, nearly out of town, he heard the sounds of stirring inside the same farmhouse behind him. The sounds of people hauling out that gaunt version of Luke from the future, to be picked up by the cargo trucks, Luke guessed. Luke finally came to some fields at the edge of town. They were wheat fields that looked like they had been planted only a few weeks before. The wheat sprouts were short and weak-looking. It was early winter and they would not survive. In the distance, across the wheat field, the convoy of cargo trucks bounced and bumped down another mud road, heading for the trees. They moved in such a way that Luke knew they were full. It was the way they bounced. It was lively, in a paradoxical sort of way, because the trucks were bleeding. Luke was far away, but he could see the dripping even from a distance. The trucks drip, drip, dripped all the way to the forest. Luke wanted to find his relatives, so he followed the trucks.

How was treatment today? Same as always, said Luke. That's good, said the man Luke was in love with. They were eating dinner together again. That's always the best part, the long rest after the treatment, then dinner, said the man, then dinner. They ask you about the flying saucers again, the man asked. Sure did, said Luke.



Always, said Luke. They love the flying saucers. So in vogue these days. New Mexico, and all those men who've seen white lights tailing their fighter jets. So what'd you tell them, asked the man. I told them what I always tell them, said Luke. The flying saucer's in the forest. Why do you tell them that, the man asked. That makes you sound crazy. Luke smiled at him. Because it's where the aliens are: the forest.

The forest floor was like a carpet with everything swept underneath. It undulated without movement. It seemed to moan alongside the creaking trees as Luke stepped around protruding roots. Hillocks of disturbed soil were everywhere, and the ground was squishy underfoot. The trees were mostly dead, readying themselves for winter. A few staunch evergreens were there to greet Luke, defiantly green, defiantly alive. There were tire tracks between the trees from where the bleeding trucks had unloaded. There was some thunder off in the distance, or maybe rifle fire. A gust of wind blew through the husks of trees all around Luke, and with a groan one large tree cracked and came toppling down. In the depression where the tree's roots had been were the aliens. They were long and thin and grey. Luke went and inspected them. They were in a big messy pile. Luke thought he saw something move in among the aliens but maybe it was his imagination. The forest floor settling perhaps. Then there was definite movement to Luke's left, and a spurt of dirt, and a hand came out of the loose earth. Luke turned. A naked alien boy pulled himself out of the ground. He was shivering and bald, and his stomach was distended from starvation. He looked at Luke with huge dark eyes. There was guck all over the alien boy's face, from crying and filth, like his tear ducts had been working overtime to blot out the ill dream of life that surrounded him. Hello, Luke said, in Russian. The alien boy didn't speak Russian, but said something in Ukrainian. Are you hurt, Luke said. The alien boy started to shiver, then collapsed. Luke went over to him and knelt down. Luke touched the alien boy's bald head. He ran a finger over the alien boy's jutting ribcage. The alien boy had a very small, shriveled penis, almost vestigial in its usefulness, and Luke thought of Uncle Charles. If he had been there, Uncle Charles would have been repulsed by Luke taking a pitying interest in something weak and expiring.

You've seen your own death, asked the doctor. Yes, said Luke. Through a farmhouse window, continued the doctor, repeating what Luke always said, you watch yourself die in a rocking chair. Luke had told the story of seeing his own death over and over. Why do you think you're an alien, asked the doctor. I never said that, said Luke. I'm a Communist, not an alien. The doctor flipped through his notes. You say you've seen yourself dying in this way, and then you say you've seen aliens in the same place, said the doctor. Portova, said Luke. No, said the doctor. Propped up in a rocking chair, in a house, facing a window. In a field, continued the doctor, in the forest—tell me, Luke, did you find the flying saucer? Luke frowned and looked away. He knew the doctor was a nice person and was only acting like this because it was his job, and circumstance insisted that he play the part or else maybe his own kids would go hungry and end up in shallow graves. No, said Luke. No flying saucer, confirmed the doctor. No, repeated Luke. So why are you so sure there

were aliens in Portova, asked the doctor. Luke laughed. They looked like aliens. You know what happened in Ukraine in the winter of 1932, asked the doctor. No, said Luke. Do you want to know, asked the doctor. No, said Luke. Social engineering, answered the doctor anyway. Luke shook his head, looked away. I know what social engineering is, Luke said. They were intentionally starved to death, said the doctor. No, said Luke. I know what happened. I was there.

Luke left the forest, walking back through the fields and into town. There was no sign of trucks or soldiers anywhere. Luke arrived at the house where he had seen himself dying of old age. That specter in the rocking chair had long been exchanged for two hundred grams of bread by the rest of the starving family. Luke expected now to see what he knew was there in reality: just an empty rocking chair on the other side of the window. Instead, Luke saw himself, as if in a mirror again. But this time he wasn't old or dying. This time he had a baby girl in his arms. The girl was not an alien or a Communist. She looked healthy. She was healthy. She breathed wonderfully. It is said that Charles B. Davenport, esteemed uncle of Luke Davenport, hid his asthma from the public throughout his important career. Luke's baby girl breathed like an expert, would have put Uncle Charles to shame, hiding in corners, wheezing into a handkerchief in secret.

You have children, said the doctor. No, said Luke. A boy, asked the doctor. Killed in combat, France, 1944, said Luke. He died honorably. A girl, asked the doctor. No, never, said Luke. Never. The doctor flipped through his notes. You said she was in Portova with you, said the doctor. Luke closed his eyes, even laughed a little. It was a laugh with a sweet taste, and a shudder like two-hundred volts ran through Luke's body. He had never seen his daughter except for that time in Portova, and even then she wasn't really there. Luke swallowed and some tears came out. He wanted to grab the doctor and kiss him. No, Luke said.

## Lily Diamond

### The bike, again.

The day I learned to ride the bike again  
was green and full, summer in San  
Francisco, an open palm, a petal dropped  
into the pool of possibility, the sun hot and  
inquiring burned my legs so that later  
skin peeled off in long thin strips,  
transparent shreds of canvas on which I  
could write myself, type out  
the slim tragedy of the days and their  
dawning and their passing, the snake-  
skin metamorphosis of pale to red to  
disengaged from body, cellular death of  
the one who before could not ride, could not  
steer straight even on the straightest path,  
but was stalled, worried, selfish in her  
uncertainty, until she is up and determined,  
full of champagne and strawberries and  
the sun that kissed both thighs with such  
intensity that later they blistered in remembrance,  
and she will ride towards the dark trees over there,  
and the picnickers and the babies and the marigolds,  
on the roughshod asphalt surrounded by green,  
will ride not going anywhere at all,  
under the blue palm of the day that  
eats up everything she can no longer be,  
her skin, her sobriety, the voluble safety of  
limitation, incinerates it, mounts it,  
and rides it straight on out of town.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Elya Braden** took a long detour from her creative endeavors to pursue an eighteen-year career as a corporate lawyer and entrepreneur. Elya is now a writer, performer, and artist living in Santa Monica. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Amarillo Bay*, *Dogwood*, *Echoes Poetry Journal*, *Euphony*, *Jewish Women's Literary Annual* and *Scratch Anthology (Volume 3)*.

**Scott Butterfield** was born in Wisconsin. He attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His poems and stories have appeared in *Tarpaulin Sky*, *Broome Street Review*, *Menacing Hedge*, *DIAGRAM*, and *The Iowa Review*. He's got a novel, a collection of short stories, and a book of poems if anyone's interested. Just saying. Reach him at [sjbutterfields@gmail.com](mailto:sjbutterfields@gmail.com)

**Doug Clark** is a Fulbright Fellow in Indonesia. He has worked as correspondent for Glimpse.com, and his non-fiction writing has been published in several nationally distributed magazines. His fiction most recently appeared in *The Literary Bohemian*.

**Ron Darian**, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, has spent the bulk of his professional career in the entertainment industry. He began his stage career in the original Broadway production run of *Grease* and then moved on to stand-up comedy, performing at colleges and clubs across North America. He has since shifted to off-screen work, having written and produced such classic television shows as *7th Heaven*, *Frasier*, *The Gregory Hines Show*, *Mad About You*, and *The Master of Horror and Suspense*. His fiction work has recently been nominated for both Pushcart and Kirkwood Prizes.

**Lily Diamond** is a writer, editor, and food blogger living in San Francisco. She is co-founder of Write to Wellbeing™ ([writetowellbeing.com](http://writetowellbeing.com)), a start-up that helps people rewrite the stories of their lives, and kitchen queen at Kale & Caramel ([kaleandcaramel.tumblr.com](http://kaleandcaramel.tumblr.com)). Lily is the author of the forthcoming memoir *The End: A Mother-Daughter Love Story*; her work has been published in the *Huffington Post*, *580 Split*, and *Construction Literary Magazine*, among others.

**Alice Jo** is a third-year undergraduate at the University of Chicago, where she studies Biological Sciences with specialization in cancer and Visual Arts. She is interested in how science and visual art -- both of which concern the physical and material world -- converge, as the the quantifiable spills over into the emotional. Her work mostly concerns pencil sketches, but she has recently been exploring oil painting and photography.



**Dustin Junkert** started writing in order to impress girls. Most girls aren't all that impressed by writing, he has found. But here's hoping. Dustin lives in Portland, OR. He recently had an essay published in the *New York Times*, and poems in *The Journal*, *South Carolina Review*, *the minnesota review*, *Weber*, *Georgetown Review*, *GW Review* and *New Delta Review*.

**Matthew Landrum's** translations have appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Asymptote*, and *Rowboat: Poetry in Translation*. In 2012, he was a summer fellow at Fróðskaparsetur Føroya.

**Lyn Lifshin** has published over 130 books. The Texas Review Press published *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness* and *The Licorice Daughter: My Year with Ruffian*. Other recent books are *Ballroom*, *All the Poets (Mostly) Who Have Touched Me*, *Living and Dead*, *All True*, *Especially the Lies*, *Knife Edge & Absinthe: The Tango Poems*, and *For the Roses*. *A Girl Goes into The Woods* is forthcoming from NYQ Books. Visit her website at [www.lynlifshin.com](http://www.lynlifshin.com).

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**Caleb True** lives in New England. He holds a masters degree in History from the University of Massachusetts. His favorite food is Pad Kee Mao. His fiction can be found now or in the future in *The Portland Review*, *Moon City Review*, *Trachodon*, *Yemassee* and elsewhere. He is hard at work revising a novel, and he exists online at [calebtrue.tumblr.com](http://calebtrue.tumblr.com).

**Patrick Vincent Welsh** was born in working class Philadelphia. He spent most of his life there in the library studying the craft of writing. He now lives in Chicago where he spends most of his time in Mexican bars. He is the author of *Hard Times Galore*, a collection of a hundred dark humor short stories about the modern American. He is also finishing a novel, entitled *Before Horses Were Extinct*.

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