

805

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Lit + Art

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The editors seek short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art that is unexpected, striking, and moving. 805 accepts submissions from residents of Manatee County as well as the rest of the universe. Unsolicited and simultaneous submissions accepted. Submissions are free.

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Lit + Art

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From the Editor

An unexpected theme stringing the pieces of this issue together is forgiveness. Merriam-Webster defines “forgive” as “to give up resentment of claim to requital; to grant relief from payment of.” Some of the characters in this issue are able to “give up” their feelings of hurt towards the hometown that poisons them and the children who take from them. Some find relief from their own flaws when they accept that the love they pined for just isn’t working or when they see those flaws reflected back at them from a misunderstood child.

Other characters aren’t able to give up the silent debt they hold over the boss who wronged them or family members who have disappointed them. These characters remind us that we carry our forgiveness with us, either as a weight we refuse to offer or a lightness we choose to give.

Stephanie Katz
Editor-In-Chief

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Zuhanden 05
Laine Nixon

Let Me Tell You About White

Milena Petrovic

Naked and strong
always alert

You can use her
any way you want

White has it all
yet she has no home

White when dirty
the color of bones

Unforgiving

Some see white as pure

I find her motivated and ready
coming toward me
like a revelation

White wakes me when I dream
I am falling

I last saw my mother
on a white mattress pad

My fingers cried
to touch white teeth
the whites of eyes

Her white pills
in my hands
like tiny gods



Zuhanden 12
Laine Nixon

Overboard

Julianne Carew

The girl put the goggles over her eyes. The man pulled the strap as tight as it would go. He readjusted the frames so that they were straight from his angle, but crooked from hers. They both stood on the deck of the boat, weighted down with scuba gear. Half-human. Half-fish. They were in the middle of the ocean.

The girl felt like she couldn't move. The oxygen tank bore into her shoulders like a rock that had somehow found itself at sea. The man closed his eyes and put his face towards the salt-speckled wind—smiling. The girl watched the man watch nothing and wished that he were looking at her. She tried to walk over to him, to get his attention somehow, but her flippers caught on a ridge in the boat and she fell, the weight of all her insecurities landing on top of her.

The man didn't realize what had happened until the clang of metal hitting metal rocked the no-ground on which he stood.

"My love." He rushed over and took the girl into his arms one second too late. She was already crying.

"Please do not cry," the man said. "There are enough tears in the ocean."

The girl didn't know why she was crying. It could have been the fall she didn't see coming. It could have been the fact that it was the last day of her and the man's vacation, and tomorrow they would leave Florida and go back to their separate corners of the earth. It was probably because on the last day before the man from Greece took the girl from California to the airport and then got on a ship for six months, he decided to book the one excursion where they literally couldn't talk. It could have been because she thought she'd met the love of her life but he kept breaking her heart slowly. It was probably all of the above.

The girl looked up at the man and, for an instant, she was able to see a crack in their perfect story. The story where they met on a plane and he left new love notes in old cities that she was somehow destined to find. The story where they stayed in touch and he sent her such long, eloquent emails that it almost made up for the lack of time they actually spent together. Almost. And within this window of absolute clarity, the girl realized that the big, sophisticated, sailor-man did not know what to say to comfort her.

But then the girl blinked and they were moving, moving across

the boat just how they had moved across Europe; quickly, passionately, without forethought or question. The girl's fingers suddenly enshrouded by those of the man's without her really knowing how they had gotten there in the first place.

And then there were hands. Hands on the plane, hands on the beach, hands exploring her body that one night in Greece where she thought she fell in love. Hands that were strapping her goggles back on, checking her tank to make sure there was enough oxygen even though she couldn't breathe. There were hands bending her over, pointing to choppy water, and giving the thumbs up even though she thought they should be pointing down.

Then there were voices, words, opinions, people speaking who had no business echoing her fears. Are you sure you really know him? Who is this guy? How convenient he has a job that allows him to be gone all the time...is he married? Thirty-five? Does he ever make plans beyond your next plane ride?

Yes, no, no, yes; the man asked the girl if she was ready. She wanted to ask, for what. She wanted to say, just give me a second, a day, a month, a year, a moment where my choices aren't colored by you. But all the girl could manage was a nod that she meant to serve as a no, but that the man must have taken as a yes. And with one push she was overboard. Overboard, overwhelmed, in way over her head. She was thrashing against water that wanted nothing more than to consume her.

Scuba diving is all about control. Or at least, that's what the instructor had said in the mandated one hour of classroom instruction. It was about taking deep breaths and staying calm, and convincing your body that it was in an environment it could survive in. But the girl had already put her life on hold and made excuses and convinced everyone, including herself, that she was doing the right thing by staying with a man who claimed to love her.

Underwater, amidst the waves of quiet, in a world so different from her own, she decided to let everything go. She ripped off her goggles, unstrapped her equipment and let it sink to the ocean floor. She let her body pull itself to the surface. And when she got there, she was gasping for more than air.



Palette Monster
Csilla Petofi

Midnight in San Mateo's Hospice

Lana Bella

the rustlings of night moved
in her stiff snoring, the man
lay beside as San Mateo's
sky fell from old solder roofs,
nostrils flared sniffing faded
spices of her wild rose and
tangerine water—
his fingers forever held satin
wisps of lattices of moonlight
tumbling through the window,
folding gold wings in ringlets,
tucking the ghosts of home-
spun decades under her pillow,
until she was ready to spiral
off into the stars—

Down-Winders

Megan Chambers

It was a prompt for a poetry class that asked me to write a “poem of witness,” the first time I’d ever had to do research to write a poem. After looking up some articles about the history of my hometown, I sat for hours on the porch of the duplex in Spokane that I shared with four other students, notebook in my lap, and scribbled pages of memories in an effort to find a few lines that I could use. I wrote about the desert valley of Emmett, a small agricultural town in Idaho. It was a town of cherry orchards and alfalfa fields, a place full of horses and quail and wildlife. The two main streets of the town cut between old, brick buildings where almost every second business was owned by someone that I knew or my parents knew. The town held an annual harvest festival with pig races, the Cherry Festival with a tiny rollercoaster that drifted in a circle, and Cruise Night, when people from all around the nearby cities showed off their old sports cars and danced to the Beach Boys at Roe-Ann Drive Inn. It was a town of moldy trailer houses and chained-up dogs, and high, swift canals in which people drowned almost every year. Emmett was afflicted by meth addiction, and at one point, the local high school had the highest teen-pregnancy rate in the country. But beyond all of this, the town of Emmett was sick.

When I finished the poem, it was about this sickness.

In the fifties and sixties, school teachers took their students to the top of Freezout Hill to watch sunsets when the sky would glow dramatic shades of red and orange, and watch the almost-pink snow fall in the summer. People said it looked like frost coating the grass and the crops and windows, but it wasn’t cold. Everyone was breathing it in. Grocery stores sold produce tainted by it, at the time not knowing what it was or what it would cause. The animals ate it, too. Almost nothing was left untouched.

People still suffer the consequences. Emmett was one of many towns caught in a nuclear fallout, although unlike most of the other towns, no one in Emmett ever received any sort of compensation to help pay for medical bills. The winds carried the radioactive dust from Nevada, and since Emmett wasn’t close to the location of the bomb testing, it escaped notice. Maybe that was a mistake on the government’s part. Emmett was not the only town that was ignored.

The fallout first became a factor of my life around the age of eight, when the man down the road, a friend of my parents, died of cancer. Everyone brought food to his wife. At the time, I was too young to have known anything about radiation. I didn’t know about the bomb tests, or wind patterns, or pink snow. I didn’t know why the cherry orchards were disappearing, or why all five of my pet rats died with huge, swollen tumors. It’s common for rats, but it hurt, watching the last of them die in my hands; the tumor protruding from her temple was nearly the size of her head. My hope surged when her body finally excreted a single dropping, but my mother had to explain to me that that’s what a dead body does.

At the age of thirteen, I didn’t understand why my family had to move out of the valley. The housing market had crashed, and selling would

be difficult. My father's cancer had returned. He left our family for a year to get treatment in California.

California is where the winds often came from. In the summers, we got their wildfire smoke, settling into the bowl of our valley and graying the skies. He was going to the source.

He came back over-radiated. It was a result of a malpractice case. Lymphedema. Teeth rotting and falling out. Couldn't use his throat anymore. They installed a feeding tube, and a tracheotomy, which he wore for years. They removed his lower mandible, grafted skin onto his neck when the growing holes got too close to the carotid artery. He used to smell of teatree oil and lemon, but after that he always smelled like decay.

My cousin, the same age as me, began to feel a swelling on her tongue. The tumor had to be removed a few months before her wedding, when we were both twenty. Her mother, my aunt, had died when we were in high school. It was a rare disease, something to do with bone marrow, and none of the doctors could help her. Their family had lived next door to us in Emmett for most of my childhood.

When we finally moved, I was sixteen. We got out of the valley, leaving behind the beautiful house that we had built, the fields of alfalfa and horses, the neighbor's private bird sanctuary where we often played, and the long walks on the dirt canal-bank. The house was foreclosed. It wasn't just a nuclear problem now—it was a money problem, too.

Moving out of the valley didn't stop the sicknesses. People I knew and loved continued to get cancer and other diseases. Many of them died. Statistics show that because my father had cancer, either my sister, my mom or I are likely to also have it at some point in our lives. Where we lived probably doesn't help our chances.

At the end of the semester and the end of the poetry class, I shared my poem at a small reading in a church near downtown Spokane. After the reading, a tall and graying man approached me. He complimented me on the poem, told me how he felt moved by it.

"Where was this town?"

"Emmett. It's a little town north of Boise."

"Oh, yeah. I've been around there. I think I might have driven through. But that stuff, like your aunt dying—it wasn't all real, was it? I mean, you made some of it up for dramatic effect."

"No, that's the story of my hometown. It was all real."

The man apologized for presuming, and asked for my email, saying he'd like to read the poem again. I never did receive an email from him, and I have yet to send the poem out or do anything significant with it. I think the reason for that is partially because the poem is about the sickness of my hometown, and I still love Emmett. I go back there several times a year, for Cruise Night or the Cherry Festival, to swim in the river or walk along the canal. My friends still live there. Someone else now lives in the home that my family built. They've added another fence that doesn't match with

the first one. When we first moved, I used to dream of buying that house back and living in it again as an adult. Now, I know that I will never live in Emmett again, even though I often wish I could. Despite everything, or perhaps because of it—as I've lived around sickness for as long as I can remember—I still call Emmett my hometown.





Catherine Cates
Vacancy

Ribbon 1

Susan Bruce

It seemed I would go mad.
But before that happened
I was so tired
I couldn't get out of bed
But before that,
the house was filled
with the voice of prowlers
who lived with me
who came in drunk late at night
and complained of having
not enough freedom
or food in the refrigerator.
I did laundry and cooked
to keep them happy.
But before that we watched TV together.
We went to the movies.
We held hands walking
down the streets. But before that,
I was on the floor
on all fours chasing them,
playing shooting games
with tin foil guns.
But before that, the days
were inexorably long.
Weekends creaked by
In the slow motion of
shallow water.
And before that I hardly
left the house. I sang to them
and smelled the top of their heads
I held little feet
in the palm of my hand.
I knew that I would die for them.

Uke

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

1.

My high school friend gave my son a ukulele he made by hand from rosewood and redwood and an exotic black wood whose name I cannot pronounce.

2.

Linked staircases climb the neck of the stone crocodile. He is a possession of aborigines who lease views to the government.

Heat-struck, my wife is convulsing on the trail, throwing ancient white dust into the air. I can water her, but don't, my way of saying: *Stay silent*. I show more compassion to the poor, dead Tasmanian Devils than I do her.

We have been married, off and on, for millennia. We are twinned in reincarnation. It is one of God's jokes. He's got trillions of them. He's got more jokes than the number of dollars we've spent in all the useless and obscene for-profit wars engineered by Dick Cheney.

3.

The uke was beautiful, but my son dropped it on the floor and its face shattered.

4.

A contagious cancer threatens the existence of the Tasmanian Devils. It's only the second contagious cancer in history. I don't know the first. Warner Brothers contributed money to save the Devils, because of the cartoon we all love. I feel sorry for the Devils. I puke, thinking of their contagious cancer.

5.

He had learned only one song on it, "Creep" by Radiohead.

But I'm a creep, I'm a weirdo.

What the hell am I doing here?

I don't belong here.

6.

My son watches *The Walking Dead*, cradling his one-year-old daughter in his arms. His arms are swollen from African drumming. He's Bed-Sty's only honky djembe virtuoso. His daughter doesn't know what's going on, but she hears the sounds, the zombie snarls, the victims' screams. Other than that, he's a good dad. I gave him my commercial-industrial lawnmower, and kept the one I got in a garage sale, which blew up one day. Now I let my lawn grow long.

7.

My son strummed "Creep" over and over while his two-year-old daughter sat on the floor and played with her toys.

I Am The Real Gecko

Abigail Wotton

“Why are you so fat?” was the first thing he ever said to me. And I’m not fat, so I think that says something about him and maybe even about me. The teacher whose job I am taking tells me that he gets stars for “keeping his body in control” and shows me where the “calm down box” is. She hands me a folder full of data sheets. They display four columns. The first is the social setting and activity, the second is what’s being asked of him, the third is his behavior—is he yelling, bolting from the area, refusing?—and the fourth is what action is taken. If he is taken out of the class, I have to record how long we were out of the classroom. At the end of the day I am told to put these sheets in a separate folder for the behavior specialist to collect.

“Then she can decide what to do,” she tells me.

“What to do about what?” I ask.

“What to do about him.”

All day we move the laminated and Velcro pieces that say what activity is now and what activity is next. What is now and what is next. Every moment accounted for. In class we talk about theories that say in every moment we are thinking about the future and we are recounting the past. And it is always changing, because we never stop accessing new information. Our perception of past events can change completely within one conversation. She says if that is true, then there is nothing that exists but the present. I think if that is true, then the present doesn’t exist at all. Think of what was last and what is next. What is next. “What are we doing next?”

He needs the calm down box. We set the timer for two minutes, and I watch him stretch out the rubber tail of the gecko across the floor. I pull out the folder. Large group. Academic expectation. Threw crayon box. Sensory offered. Calm Down Box. The timer goes off and he packs up. I have to carry a walkie-talkie now because he is a “bolter,” and I can sympathize with that impulse. If he runs away, I don’t chase after him; I follow him and call for help. Remain calm. Remain calm. Unless he runs outside. I tell them all not to run in the hall and to keep their hands off the walls, but when I am at school I punch the button on every water fountain I pass.

He just started sitting with the other kids at lunch. Although, sometimes he still hides in his shirt or jacket. They say this isn’t acceptable behavior; he needs to be okay with being around other kids. But it’s too loud and I don’t see the problem with feeding him French fries through the short sleeve of his arm, where he’s sticking out his nose. Just this once at least. Social interaction. Refusal. Plan ignored.

“Evan’s eyes are funny looking,” he tells me during music class. Evan’s eyes are very close together and I think they’re funny looking too.

* * *

Is he yelling? Not really. He is just saying “this is no good.” Over

and over again. Why is he yelling? What is the class doing? What was he doing before? Is this a transition period? Is he hitting? Kicking? No, just hiding under the table. Transition period for sure then. What action was taken? Verbal redirection? Visual prompt? Sensory offered?

We take a walk. We both run our hands along the brick wall.

He punched another kid at recess yesterday. For kindergartners they're empathetic towards him, they all immediately excused what happened.

"What happened to Leo?"

"I punched him in the face. Is he okay?"

"Yes, he is at the nurse."

"Was that a good choice?"

"No, not a good choice. Not a good choice."

He does worse with change than the rest of us. He called me by the old teachers name for the first two weeks I was here. The other kids would try to correct him. "That's not her name." I know, he would say, but that's what I'm going to call her. She's the new Ms. McMillan, he would say. It seemed to help. I start to water plants before I realize they're dying and it's really no small thing. This is living. You are living. I sit next to him on the carpet, just in case, and I hear him whispering, "I am the real gecko. I am the real gecko."

* * *

His tell is easy. He crinkles his eyebrows together and looks out of the corners of his eyes. He did it before he slapped and then scratched my face for the first time. I had been waiting for it, so I almost felt relieved once it had happened. *Okay*, I thought, *that wasn't so bad. We can do this.* That day he calls me by my real name.

This morning we have a lockdown drill. My job is to close the blinds, if this ever happens. The lights go out and the teacher tells the students that their eyes will adjust to the dark. They squeeze themselves into the cubbies. I don't realize he is right next to me. "I am scared of the dark," he whispers to me and grabs my hand, "please come closer." I squeeze in next to him and he audibly sighs. Even with the funny eyes is across from him. "I am afraid of the dark, Evan."

"What are you doing there, Evan?"

"What am I doing here, Evan?"

He leans into me and whispers, "I think we are hiding from tigers and bears."

He asks me to help zip up his snow jacket before he gets on the bus. I can hear him whispering as I am zipping. Button zip snap. Button zip snap. Button zip snap. I am supposed to record this too. The whispering. So they can try to see why he whispers when he does. I am not sure they'll figure that out. Because he always whispers. He whispers like I count my

steps. My steps out the door. My steps to my car. And then count again once I'm in my car. Just to a number that I feel good about. I am the real gecko.

He throws a crayon box off the table and across the floor. He throws a chair. Was this in a large group? Yes. Academic demand? Yes. What was offered for redirection? Sensory was offered. We take the timer out of the calm down box and bring it over to the beanbag. He lies down and I pull the sides up around him and over him. I start calling this "taco time". His sneakers poke out of one end and his closed eyes and smile peek out of the other end. Is this good? Yes, this is good. I smile too. I let go of the beanbag when taco time is up, and he puts the timer back in the calm down box.

At the art table they are making puppets. I climb under the table and start an impromptu puppet show. When I sit back down at the table, he looks at me and puts his warm hand on my cheek and leaves it there for a few seconds.





Broken Sky
Kyle Hemmings

Fish Hooked

Brontë Pearson

He was wet paint,
not yet dry, but striving
to be permanent like all the rest.
I despised uniformity,
usually,
but he tried to save Hemingway,
and that meant everything.

Books pelted down
from the shelf,
splashes of hot grease at my feet.
He said something like sorry,
he shouldn't have shown his affection that way,
and I said something like it was okay.
It was a happy accident.

We went to discard the books
because our occupational dictators place
no value in tattered antiquities,
but when Steinbeck, Faulkner, and Hemingway
were scribed across the covers,
he stowed them beneath his jacket
and exclaimed he couldn't mutilate such legends.

It was obvious that he
was a font I found distasteful,
usually,
but he had a curve that swayed
from the others of such kind,
which kept me captivated
because words were my favorite,

and I was washed up in him,
wanting nothing more than to hear
his voice tirelessly echoing
The Old Man and the Sea
whilst writing a memoir
of our stranger love.

He tried to save Hemingway,
and that meant everything,
but then I remembered the gold
snaked around my fourth finger
that embossed a tonal lowlight of commitment,
and I was reminded of how
unfortunate it was
to be human.

Mouth-Breather

Rebecca Pincolini

Kim looked at him that day like she had no idea what the hell he was talking about, but she knew. He had used his hands to exaggerate his words, and when he opened his mouth wide to divulge details, we saw the gap in between his two front teeth.

“That’s unbelievable,” she said. Her voice calm but concerned. She looked to her left toward me, and her eyelids expanded and contracted. “Listen to this, Sonia.”

We lived and worked in the suburbs of Los Angeles—the Valley. Kim and I met one year ago when we were both hired as receptionists at an optometric practice two months apart. We were twenty-four, and our shared love for dicking around bonded us quickly. We didn’t dick around constantly, but we knew how to make the most out of our days. Our boss, Dr. Larry Short, had been on our shit list for some time. We struggled to figure out what would be the best way to get back at him—somehow eating his BLT sub sandwich out of the office’s mini fridge never felt like enough after the last swallow.

“I just can’t believe it,” he said. He shook his head in disbelief. “They even got my wife’s roses!”

Dr. Short never stood up for his staff. Kim accepted it, but it lingered with me. The first few instances were trivial occurrences. Things like patients getting upset since they had to wait because Dr. Short moved at a glacial pace, not being open on Sundays, and the fact that all payment for services had to be rendered by the end of their appointment. But when his patient, Tom Samer, threw his Visa card at me because the fees were too high, something unhinged within. His sharp flick of the wrist caused the credit card to hit my chest, ricochet off, and land on the carpeted floor. I marched my ass back into Dr. Short’s office. His desk was nothing more than a collapsible table with a walnut melamine finish that had steel legs. The majority of papers on his desk had coffee ring accents, and patient charts fell lopsided on its edge. He sat there and stared as I spoke, and brought his coffee mug up to his thin lips. The steam from his Nescafé fogged the lenses in his metal glasses.

“Give him twenty percent off,” he said. He placed his mug down and shuffled papers around his desk. “Don’t keep him waiting.”

Kim and I sat on the stairs inside the parking structure adjacent to the office after work that day. In between chewing her gum, she rationalized the whole situation.

“His focus is on customer service, Sonia.” She blew a small orange bubble and popped it with her lips. “All he cares about is keeping paying customers.”

“It’s not right,” I said.

“There isn’t anything we can do about it,” she said.

I looked through the concrete cutout behind Kim, and at the graffiti on the wall next door. “What does that say?”

She turned her head and gave the stucco wall outside the parking

structure's window a double look. "I don't know. I don't speak gang."

We both laughed and got up to look closer.

"That must be a bitch to clean," she said. She put her hand against the structure's wall and cocked her head to the left. "It'll probably still show after a few paint jobs."

I watched Kim try to figure out what it said, and I waited until she caught my gaze.

"That's it," I said.

"What's it?" she asked.

"Tonight, we're hitting his house."

"Like hell we're hitting his house." She chewed harder and took turns looking into both of my eyes. "Sonia if we get caught, we're going to jail. And neither of us would flourish there either."

"Relax," I said. I put my palms on her shoulders and looked at her. "We won't get caught."

We got into my silver Volkswagen Jetta and headed toward Sears. I rolled my window down and looked at the sunset; the sun was sinking slowly, and there was red in the sky. I pushed side one of Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillows* into my cassette player, and turned the volume up. "She Has Funny Cars" blared through the stock speakers, and rattled the cloth seats at red lights.

"Why Sears? Why can't we go to Robinsons-May or something?" Kim asked. Her hands rubbed up and down her slacks slowly.

"We need masks, and we need to buy them at a place we normally don't shop at."

"I don't know about this, Sonia," she said.

"Will you just trust me?"

I pulled into Sears's parking lot so fast that the underside of the car scraped against its concrete driveway. "Okay, let's go."

We walked through the revolving door, and a young man greeted us, catching us off guard. He was doughy, and his blue polo shirt had a nametag on it that was crooked.

"Where are your nylons?" I asked.

He turned around and used his hands to motion that they were housed at the end of the row, and then to the left.

I gave him a double pat on his chest. "Thanks."

The nylons were stacked on shelves. Some had been opened, and their contents spilling out. Others were placed neatly in rows, but out of order in color.

"Why can't we just get one of those ski masks with its eyes and mouth cut out?" Kim asked.

"Because we're not murdering anyone."

She let out a laugh. "Well, which nylons should we get?"

I stood looking at all of them. "Let's try control-top, black."

We walked into the door-less room that had FITTING ROOM

spelled out in pink neon lights above its frame. The space was cold, but deserted, and we piled into the handicap room.

"Here," Kim said. She opened the package and handed the nylon to me as if it were a ball.

I shook it out and stretched the waistband as far as I could and placed it over my head. The nylon smashed my nose to the side, and made my two eyebrows into one.

Kim threw her head back and laughed uncontrollably. "You look like Nicolas Cage in *Raising Arizona*! 'Son, you've got a panty on your head!'"

I fell against the wall and let out a roar of laughter. Kim's face turned pink and she clutched her chest.

"Can you even breathe in that thing?" Kim asked. She walked toward me and touched my face. "It's so glossy, too."

"I can breathe, but it feels strange."

A woman knocked, and her pointy black shoes were visible through the open space under the door. "How's everything going in there?"

"We're fine!" we blurted out in unison.

She walked away, and I took off the nylon and we grabbed two unopened packages, leaving the rest behind on the floor.

We found spray paint near the entrance of the store, and Kim shook three colors of Krylon before settling on Italian Olive and Summer Periwinkle shades with a satin finish.

"What time is this all going down?" she asked.

I looked at the store's giant clock by the registers. "It's almost nine now, so we can drive over and watch the house for movement."

The cashier was an older woman, and she wore a blue vest. Her gray hair was pulled up in a banana clip, and she had red Lee Press-On nails on every finger except her left index.

"Cash or charge, hon?"

I gave her a twenty, but she had to go to another register to make change.

"Hey, if you wear these everyday for a month, I'll give you a hundred bucks."

Kim stood by a rotating rack of sunglasses and held up what looked like men's white ski shades that had two-tone orange lenses. "Come on, do it!"

I waved her off and turned around to laugh.

The cashier walked back and handed me change. "Here you go, hon."

I followed Kim out to the car, but she stared at the stars before getting in.

"How do you even know where he lives anyway?" she asked.

"Remember that time when I had to take him to the airport? I had to pick him up at his house." I opened the car door and hung my arm over

its frame. “I remember making a wish on an eyelash that the airline lose his luggage while I waited for him to come out.”

Kim laughed and climbed onto the front seat. “I’m only doing this for you.”

I adjusted my rearview mirror and looked into it. “No, we’re doing this for us.”

We drove to Studio City and took a left onto Colfax. I cut the lights when I turned onto Sycamore – Dr. Short’s street, but the street lamplights entered the car as jaundiced square rectangles, and they rose from our knees up to our laps as we drove forward. The car cruised passed his house slowly, and we saw the lights were off. He had a long driveway that stretched up to two glass windows, and his lawn was vibrant green.

“Look at that lawn,” Kim said.

I hung my left arm over the steering wheel and looked. “Asshole. He probably waters everyday. Everyone else has drought tolerant landscaping on this block.”

I pulled the car around and parked it beneath a leafy elm tree.

“What if he can tell it’s us by our clothes?” Kim asked.

“We wear all black at the office. We’re fine.”

We pulled our blonde hair back into low buns and opened the nylon packages. I grabbed two pairs of sunglasses from the glove compartment and a mini switchblade that had a keychain ring.

“What’s the knife for?” Kim shrieked.

“Keep your voice down,” I said. “Relax, I’m just going to cut his hose.”

“And the sunglasses?” She reached for the cat eye pair. “Are these the Dior’s from the office display case?”

“Yes, I stole them a few days ago. Put them on first, then your nylon.”

I unlocked the door and grabbed for the Krylon in Summer Periwinkle. I shook it and it sounded like marbles moving around in a jar. “I’m going to spray paint his driveway, and you get his plants.”

I left the car door cracked, and ran to the base of his driveway and dropped to my knees. I pressed the white tip of the can, and it hissed as I wrote *FUCK YOU, MOUTH-BREATH* in soft purple. The color looked faded in the streetlamp light, but I knew the Los Angeles sun would showcase its neon-pastel undertones in a few hours.

I ran with my torso hunched over my knees to the green, coiled hose that rested at the top of the lawn. I flung the switchblade open, and ran it back and forth against the thick plastic. A burst of water shot out, knocking me off my knees, and water droplets beaded on the nylon’s spandex fabric.

“Get the roses!” I whisper-yelled. I saw Kim a few feet beside me. “Get the roses!”

Kim layered coat after coat of Italian Olive Krylon over the white,

lush roses that lined the start of the house to the base of the driveway. The color looked shit-brown in the light.

“Let’s go! Let’s go!” I whisper-yelled again.

We ran back to the car, elbow to elbow, laughing. I threw the nylon halfway over my head, and hit the gas.

“I can’t believe we just did that!” Kim yelled. She ripped the nylon off, but kept the sunglasses on. “What a rush.”

“Fuck him,” I said. I pulled off the nylon and undid my hair. I rolled down the window and let the breeze fly through my strands.

I picked Kim up the next day, and we threw away our cans and nylons in the alley dumpster behind the office.

“Remember, act normal.” I said.

We walked in and sat down at our desks. Dr. Short walked up from his back office. His cheap wingtip knock-offs barreled up the hallway.

He dropped one wrist on the counter in front of Kim, and moved the other frantically. “I was vandalized last night,” he said. His tone was hyper. “Someone came to my home and vandalized it by cutting my hose and spray painting the property!”

Kim scrunched her eyebrows together and then raised them. “What?”

“I woke up this morning to water my lawn, and I found my hose severed and our roses defaced by spray paint!”

I got up and placed my palms on the counter. “Severed?”

He shook his head up and down quickly. “Yes! Severed! And our roses!”

Kim stood up and propped her arm on her hip. “And spray paint? Well, at least they didn’t write anything. That’d be far worse than the roses.”

I locked eyes with Kim. “She’s right.”

His eyes shifted down and he got quiet, but his lips didn’t close. They stayed slightly ajar, and his breath escaped through them every time he exhaled.





Midtown
Kyle Hemmings

Other People's Weddings

Mina Le

Around and around it turned, its ceramic steeds rising and falling with the music, an old-fashioned merry-go-round in all its nostalgic pageantry. I wandered closer, abandoning the flow of guests out of the botanical conservatory after Melanie's wedding. The carousel had been built in 1914, I read, just up the street on the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. I watched it revolve theatrically and thought of Holden and Phoebe from *Catcher in the Rye*.

Avinash said hello and came up beside me then. He'd caught me in a private moment, the sentiment on my face illuminated by the carousel, but I found it gave me as much thrill as embarrassment. It was ten years since we and the others had graduated college, but when we all met up at these weddings, the intervening decade had a way of melting away. I had met Avinash in freshman year, at a guest lecture by the neuroscientist Eric Kandel. Normally I'm not the most outgoing, but I couldn't resist opening conversation with him when I saw that he was wearing a tie festooned with neurons. "It takes nerve to be that fashion-forward," I'd said. "That, or just following an impulse," he'd replied.

Now, he followed my gaze to the merry-go-round, and remarked, "Don't you suppose these horses ever get bored?"

I smiled. "How's the doctoring life? You must be almost done with fellowship?" He was at Emory training to be a hematologist-oncologist.

"Well, I'll be done in June. Then I can have a life. Are you still at that one start-up?"

"Yeah, it's a good gig. Can't complain about living in the Bay Area either." My company worked on user analytics. It was starting to get chilly around the carousel, so we made our way back indoors to the wedding reception. We ran into other people as we picked up a couple of glasses of wine, but I was glad that I got assigned to sit next to him at dinner. Ms. Caroline Vu, read my eggshell-hued place card in letterpress script. Dr. Avinash Malhotra. Over chrysanthemums and asters, root vegetables and cloth napkins, we got to discussing—as though Kandel were in the room all over again—what is the neurobiology behind perfect pitch?

"It's fascinating to me that humans are finite and corporeal," I said, "and yet a few of us can commune with something as infinite and abstract as the musical scale. Not just to access it, but to reproduce it out of thin air. What makes that possible?"

Avinash said, "I was reading about it. The inner ear of someone with perfect pitch isn't any different. It's all in the higher-level cortical processing. People who are educated in music early in childhood are more likely to have perfect pitch. And people who speak an East Asian tonal language are more likely to have it, because that's how their brains are already geared."

"So people with perfect pitch aren't actually *made* to be more in tune with the cosmos?"

"Right," he said, "it's not about having a better ear; it's about

having a better understanding of what you're hearing. It's not about identifying, say, a signal of 2000 Hertz at the level of the cochlea. It's about identifying a C-sharp, so you need the cortical associations to make sense of a C-sharp."

"Oh! It's like the difference between taking in wavelengths of light in your retina, and actually naming the colors you see as red or green. You can have a disconnect between your sense and your perception of that sense. That's how those optical illusions are able to work, where two shapes are the same shade of gray, but one of them looks darker because it's surrounded by lighter shapes."

"That's a good way to put it," he said, and I glowed. He continued, "We're all capturing the same information as to how things sound, or how they look, but our brains add different overlays to that information."

As the evening rolled on, we talked about language; we discussed science fiction shows; we traded logic puzzles. I enjoyed his mind, and I relished the way that I bloomed in his company.

The protracted clinking of a fork on a water glass reminded me where I was. A warmth prickled the back of my neck, rising to the helices of my ears, as I mentally resurfaced in the roomful of wedding guests, and became conscious of my poor posture. My hand automatically went to my necklace, as though to make sure it were centered properly, as I sat up straighter.

Melanie's sister, at the microphone in her fawn-colored bridesmaid's dress and sculpted curls, was telling the crowd about Melanie's charity work in Haiti.

"Compassion and altruism are such a big part of who Melanie is," she said, "that it's so fitting she met her life partner while volunteering." I looked over at my friend the bride, and recalled how joyful she'd looked earlier, coronated by petals inside the greenhouse with its flower-framed reflecting pool. Marriage seemed like an achievement which I didn't know if I would ever earn enough karma points to reach.

~

I'd been seeing a guy whom I'd met at a tech party and who worked on artificial intelligence. What we had was companionable, but didn't compel me at a deeper level. When I got the invitation to my college friend Jon's wedding in New Hampshire, I was relieved that my boyfriend had a conflicting family obligation that weekend. It freed me from feeling guilty about not wanting to bring him. It had been the better part of a year since Melanie's wedding, and I looked forward to a carefree regression into the comfort of my old college crowd. Avinash, Pradeep, Pradeep's wife Rupa, and I rented a car from Boston Logan Airport, and together we struck out into the pine forests and toward the apple farm where Jon's ceremony would be held the following day. From the front passenger seat, Pradeep

looked up dinner options and found us a well-reviewed tapas place in downtown Nashua.

The restaurant's interior was artfully decked out in bronze and stone and tile, with a long brick wall bearing sconces and a live band setting up to play in the corner. Rupa and I sat down on one side of the table, facing Pradeep and Avinash respectively. Was it my imagination, or was Avinash's gaze more lingering than before? I found myself grateful that I'd touched up my makeup in the restroom at the airport, and that I was wearing a flattering top.

Pradeep said, "So Avi, you're finally done with fellowship this month."

"Yeah, in a couple of weeks. And then from Hotlanta to Pittsburgh. Never thought I'd end up in a place like Pittsburgh, but it's a really strong cancer center."

Rupa raised her eyebrows. "I don't know how you do it. I'm happy just doing my little LASIK procedures and not having to worry about whether they'll make it."

"I'm happy just referring out anything I don't want to deal with," Pradeep said. He was being self-deprecating. On top of his residency in primary care, he'd earned a master's in health policy and had lately been expanding a city program for the homeless; his work was the farthest thing from simple triage. "Caroline, you can't refer out either, right? Yours is the go-to company?"

"Right," I said. "Our expertise is pretty specific, which is great because we'll stay in demand, but we're also mostly useless outside of Silicon Valley." The tapas plates started arriving: tuna tartare and grilled octopus. I was buzzed after just a couple of sips of my martini. "Strong drinks here."

Rupa wasn't drinking. "We've started trying for a baby," she said.

"Wow, really?" said Avinash. Pradeep had been the goofball of our group in undergrad, and here he was on the threshold of parental duty. I felt humbled. I'd been an adult for over a decade, but I was still only responsible for myself, while those in my shoes became fewer by the year. *It's all right*, I murmured internally, *this isn't the 1950s*. But we'd gone to a high-powered school and ran in circles of type A overachievers, and I couldn't help seeing the barren boxes on my checklist, couldn't help seeing it as a checklist even though I knew this wasn't a helpful construct.

That night as the four of us were leaving the restaurant, Avinash stepped to the side and put his hand on my back as though ushering me out. He walked with me a few steps, then let his hand fall. I glanced up at him but he was shyly looking ahead at the others. I could feel the cessation of his touch, like a dull ache.

The stakes felt raised the next evening, though for what I couldn't say. At 4:30pm I sat one row back from him in white chairs arrayed on gilded grass, steeped in the late afternoon light as it opened like a blessing

on that apple farm, imbuing the ceremony with a glow. Jon's brother recited from Shakespeare, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments." Jon and his bride sealed a time capsule containing items from their separate pasts as well as souvenirs of the wedding day. Henceforth, their histories would become one. Two rivers joined on one path to the sea. I fidgeted, feeling melancholy, feeling indecisive, feeling as though I should hold out and dream bigger, the way I had as a little girl. Dinner and dancing followed in the barn. We found each other outside its short wall, after dark had fallen, everyone else suitably occupied on the other side of that wall in their merriment.

"I hate that tomorrow is goodbye already," I said.

"Your dress is beautiful," he said. "I don't think I've seen that kind of fabric before."

"It feels nice to wear," I said. I hesitated. I wanted to invite him to touch it. I wanted not to sound crass. I couldn't find the words. I put my hands on his shoulders. "Kiss me," I said, and he did.

Thinking back, I marveled at where those two words came from. Normally words got concatenated in my brain in a logical pattern before emerging as speech, but that night in New Hampshire the words *kiss me* spilled out of my very soul. Normally there was a well-defined space between me and the world. Now, he was well within my space: his mouth, his shoulders, his hands on the back of my dress. As the kiss progressed, even the rough barn wall at my back felt like part of his embrace.

"I wish you could come back with me," I said, tightly, quietly.

He gave me a look I wished I could bottle, and said, "I know."

It was hours before I could fall asleep, alone in my Nashua hotel room after that. I flew back home the next day and broke it off with my boyfriend within the week. When Avinash messaged me on Gchat, I was nervous about what comment he would make, but he told me I had always meant so much to him, and I held on to that as we reluctantly got down to reality: that we held immovable jobs on opposite coasts, and that we weren't sure enough of anything between us to "dare disturb the universe."

~

A year and a month later, our group of friends met up again at Andrea's wedding, this time in my neck of the woods, at a winery on the Peninsula. The venue was a little ways south of Palo Alto, in the Santa Cruz Mountains, with a stunning view into the green valleys and vineyards below. I had advance notice that Avinash had brought a date, from an e-mail thread about carpooling from the airport, and I felt a twinge when I read that. For my own part, I wouldn't bring anyone to a wedding unless the relationship was pretty serious, though I know that not everyone applies the same standard. I didn't know what his own rules were.

Her name was Lauren. Dark brown hair, white skin, big eyes, a

decent and kind look to her, and a bit of a pragmatic air; she worked as a prosecutor in Pittsburgh, where Avinash was now settled in as an assistant professor at the medical school. I compared her dark plum dress with my royal blue one: we both looked pretty good in our own ways. She moved with remarkable self-assurance, given that this was not historically her crowd.

"We have a membership at the Carnegie Museums," she said, "and my dog gets us out and around the parks."

"It's actually a really nice city," said Avinash. "I don't know why I was worried otherwise. It's not like we want to be up all night at raves or something."

"And you can always travel if you want to visit somewhere more interesting," said Lauren. "Like New York..."

"Or California," I said. Something shifted in Avinash's expression, and I hoped I hadn't been inappropriate. He looked apologetic. No, wistful was more like it.

Part of me wished Lauren wasn't there, and the other part of me realized it wouldn't have changed anything if she weren't. The problem was still too many miles, not enough time, and the added nuance and seriousness of everything when you're in your thirties as compared to your twenties.

I heard Melanie call, "Hey, Caroline!" We hugged. "So good to see you, what's new with you these days?"

I thought about it. "Well, my start-up got bought," I said, "so we're adjusting to new management, but my day-to-day job is still about the same. I've started writing some online food reviews, which is fun."

"I'm glad you're doing that," Avinash cut in. "I remember how good your newspaper articles were in college." I felt a surge of excitement that he was still paying attention to me even after Melanie had taken me aside, and I thrilled inside at the compliment. How many men are you ever going to meet who have known you for so long, from way back when, and who carry your own memories with them?

That night, the dancefloor felt like an enchanted forest, both permissive and willing to keep secrets. I sang along because I knew I couldn't be heard. *AIN'T nothing but a heart...ache. AIN'T nothing but a mis...take.* In my heart I didn't believe there had been any mistake, but the song felt right, and dancing in a group with so many beautiful friends felt right.



K.W.

Anja Schatz

While watching that lizard over there, sitting on a pole of the wooden, whitewashed fence, I think, what is it that captures me every time I am on this island? It is best described as a state of a lazy mind. A state where you let your thoughts go, don't think about anything, and suddenly something falls into your mind. You get this funny stare or stupid smile, and if someone asks you if you are alright ('cause some people worry, when they are excluded, don't they), you wouldn't even understand that question. Yes, yes, nothing special, you would say. Just dreaming. Though it is more drifting, or better yet, getting drifted. Nobody is around this early in the morning, nobody asks me anything today, so I am fine with my stupid smirking face. The lizard doesn't care, either.

The first two nights on the island made me drunk, as they always do. The flavor of music, freedom, and frivolity made me drink too many Cuba Libres, as I call my rum and coke. Two nights, too much, and there came Sunday. Tired and hung over, I paid the toll. The weekend laid almost behind me and Duval County costs me a couple of aspirin. My excuse is I am just a tourist here, that kind of person locals live from, laugh about, swear upon, or all of the above.

This third morning is different. There comes the relief, the remedy for me and the island. It's Monday and the party people are gone. I felt good when I woke up this morning, earlier than the last two mornings, and the light doesn't bother me. The dim sunshine in my room starts my transformation. Better now, I get up early and sit here in this lush garden, drunk from the flowers' perfume and the trees red and pink burning blossoms. I'm prepared for my maybe-not-so-day-filling lazy-time program:

After my two-hour-long morning coffee—moving from hammock to deckchair and back, getting eaten up by no-see-ums as well as by see-ums—I'll take the bike and drive it like a child. With my feet slanting left and right on the pedals when I have enough speed, the wind cooling off the sweat from the hot day. I'll make a turn towards the beach, just to walk up the pier and back again. I love those bike rides on the island, and sometimes I think it's a greater freedom than riding a Harley, as a sense of childhood comes alive. Unfortunately, there are no puddles of mud to drive through—a very small flaw in paradise.

Today:

Have a break.

Have some lunch.

Sleep in the hammock.

Start all over again.

Sleep at ten, or so.

I'm watching that lizard over there and thinking about my rebirth. My personal Key Westish Monday morning feeling of freedom, of leaving things behind. Today's different from my first nights on the island, arriving with a need to party and drink things away. Now I smile them away. My mind is at rest. I compare my Monday morning with the shedding of a lizard's skin. Maybe I am right.

Next time I will arrive in Key West late Sunday night, maybe... maybe I need to stay on the Island until a storm comes up. Only for the puddles. Stay longer. Stay. Yes, maybe stay.



Artist + Author Bios

A three-time Pushcart Prize & Bettering American Poetry nominee, **Lana Bella** is an author of three chapbooks, *Under My Dark* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2016), *Adagio* (Finishing Line Press, 2016), and *Dear Suki: Letters* (Platypus 2412 Mini Chapbook Series, 2016). She has had poetry and fiction featured in over 380 journals, including *The Acentos Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Expound*, *Grey Sparrow*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Otoliths*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Vayanya*, *Waccamaw*, and *Westwind*. She resides in the US and the coastal town of Nha Trang, Vietnam, where she is a mom of two far-too-clever-frolicsome imps. Follow her at www.facebook.com/Lana-Bella-789916711141831/

Susan Bruce's chapbook *Body of Water* (Finishing Line Press) was published fall of 2015. She has poems in *Barrow Street*, *december magazine*, *34th Parallel*, *Dirty Chai*, *Luna Luna*, and *Inquisitive Eater*. She has an MFA in theatre and studies poetry at The New School.

Julianne Carew writes new adult and literary fiction. She is currently trying to find a home for her first novel, *Why Paintings Fall*. She lives in the Los Angeles area but travels all over the world collecting stories.

Catherine Cates currently lives in Las Vegas, Nevada. She first started creating art, taking photographs, and writing poetry while growing up in Salt Lake City, Utah. She believes that art is a narrative of the human condition. It tells the stories of who we were, who we are, who we are becoming, and who we'd like to be.

Megan Chambers hails from Boise, Idaho and is currently an English writing and editing student at Whitworth University. She has been published in a number of small anthologies and writes a variety of work from poetry to computer games and anything in-between.

Kyle Hemmings has art work in *The Stray Branch*, *Euphenism*, *Uppagus*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Black Market Lit*, *Red Bird Press*, *Snapping Twigs*, *Convergence* and elsewhere. He loves pre-punk garage bands of the 60s, manga comics, and urban photography/art.

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois has had over a thousand of his poems and fictions appear in literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He has been nominated for numerous prizes. His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available for Kindle and Nook, or as a print edition. He lives in Denver.

Mina Le is a head and neck surgeon at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center in South Florida. Her poetry has appeared in *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Minnesota Medicine*, *The Road Not Taken: The Journal of Formal Poetry*, and *Mezzo Cammin: An*

Online Journal of Formalist Poetry by Women, among other publications. This is her debut fiction publication. Read more at writingbyminale.com.

Laine Nixon is a visual artist based in Sarasota, FL. She holds a BS in Mathematics from The University of Tennessee and a BFA in Painting from The University of South Florida. Her work has been shown at Ringling Underground, Selby Gallery, and State of the Arts Gallery, among other spaces. In 2015, Nixon's work was selected for *Studio Visit Magazine*, Vol 29, and was acquired by RBC Wealth Management. Development of her work has been supported by a residency at The Longboat Key Center for the Arts and a Creative Capital Foundation Professional Development Program funded by the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs. Currently she is making work for an upcoming solo exhibition at Gallery 221 in Tampa. She is represented by [blank] slate gallery in Sarasota.

Brontë Pearson is a senior at the University of Arkansas at Monticello, where she studies creative writing, biology, and professional writing. She is a fourth year consultant in the university's Center for Writing and Communication and serves as the student editor for the scholarly journal *The Philological Review*. Brontë has previous and upcoming publications in journals such as *Black Mirror Magazine*, *River and South Review*, and *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*.

Csilla Petofi enjoys music, painting, making videos, and writing. Her series of photographs are of a palette, and the monsters that arise on occasion. This is her debut publication.

Milena Petrovic is a poet living in Portland, Oregon. Her parents were Serbian immigrants, and she was born and raised in the greater Cleveland, Ohio area. She received her graduate degree in sociology from Portland State University, and is currently working on publishing her first book of poems. When not writing poetry, she works as a project manager at a non-profit organization where she specializes in culturally tailored research and reducing health and income disparities among underserved populations.

Rebecca Pincolini is a Los Angeles based fiction writer who is currently enrolled in the MFA program at Long Beach State.

After moving to Florida from Germany 7 years ago, **Anja Schatz** started new in many ways. She has a family now, met new friends, and learned about living in the US. While focusing on family and raising two wonderful daughters, she is very excited to integrate artwork in her life again through her paintings and her written art. This is her debut nonfiction publication.

Abigail Wotton is a recent MA graduate from Bridgewater State

University. She is from Boston and currently resides in South Dakota where she spends time reading with and learning from her students at Red Cloud Indian School. This is her debut publication.





Lit + Art

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