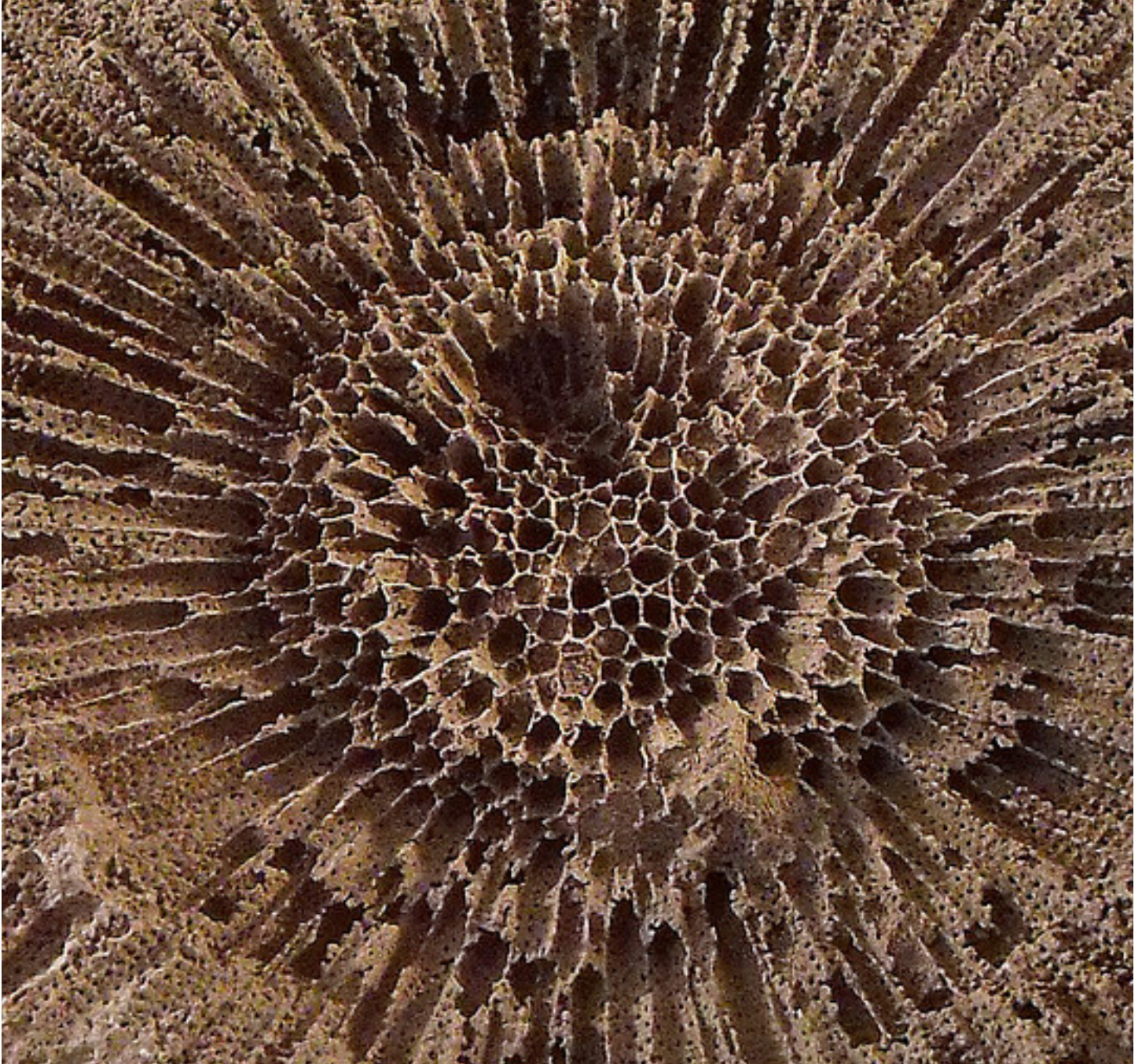




# DARK MATTER

A JOURNAL OF SPECULATIVE WRITING



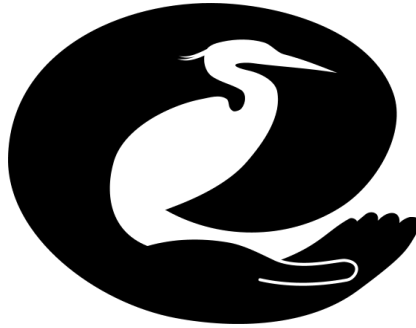
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DARK MATTER: A JOURNAL OF SPECULATIVE WRITING



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**Dark Matter** is a journal of speculative writing produced by the Natural Science Creative Writing Club at the University of Houston - Downtown. Dark Matters is published twice yearly in both PDF and EPUB formats, and is available through the Dark Matter Website. Past issues will be maintained in the website archives.

Editors include students from UHD Natural Science and English Departments and Faculty of the Natural Science and English Departments. Correspondence should be directed to Dr. Brad Hoge, NS Department, University of Houston - Downtown, One Main St., Houston, TX 77002-1001.

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# Forward

This issue is a little late due to some turnover in our student editors. In fact, we must also apologize for how short this edition is. We normally have a group of students review each manuscript and provide feedback to the editors. The students assigned to this issue were unable to work on the issue due to some extenuating circumstances. Rest assured, the editors considered all submissions and chose the wonderful poems and stories in this issue. While it may be shorter than previous issues of Dark Matter Journal, the quality has certainly not suffered!

Thank you for reading this issue of Dark Matter. We hope you enjoy it!

Brad Hoge  
Managing Editor

## The Weather Channel

Hailstones  
the size of crystal balls.

Mackerels that  
prophesy fish within three days.  
Groundhogs.

It's a battle between stormheads  
on the march,  
    barometers  
    of good & evil.

I read runes in a Rhode Island raindrop.  
Fortune cookies broken from  
the entrails of a Texas cyclone.

People want to see the Doppler zodiac  
crawl across a map of tomorrow.  
People want to know.  
When to carry black  
umbrellas. To ward off whatever  
falls, precipitous,  
    from the sky.

I draw  
an imaginary tempest,  
scorchers, tremors, nor'easters,  
in mid-air.  
    The blue screen  
    knows all.

## On the Right Path

In this room written entirely on paper  
I find comfort in the nodding and agreeing of flowers; they  
tell me that I am not just a crazy woman sitting alone  
rambling about dark matter to an invisible audience  
sketching out the history of myth in thread and canvas

tumbling inward into myself like a monk  
with no god.

My daughter says she's worried about me  
being alone all the time, wants to know  
what I've been writing but I won't show her.  
Someday, I will reveal the secrets  
to the future of humanity to her, the origin of snails  
the language of pills. But not now.



## Family Magic

the woman whispers a few words over the bundle  
and hands it to me. she says  
put this under your pillow and the dreams will  
go away. she tells me of the village  
she grew up in , how her mother taught her magic  
all the secrets passed down through her family  
thousands of years, old magic, and just from her clan.

when I get home I look up her village  
on the map, try to reconcile her story  
with the Inquisition's ransacking of Béarn, how  
there was no one left to pass on the old magic  
how the village stayed abandoned for years. I wish  
she would have picked a different town  
to prop up her credentials, I grumble  
before heading off to bed, putting the bundle  
under my pillow anyway, trying hard

to believe in the lies.

## Red Shift

The years are expanding  
the proof is in the reddening light  
of your long legs as you move away  
from my narrowing sight.

It is not much distance  
but it is enough  
for I am a high-pitched blue want,  
a banshee relinquishing her mission  
while your dampened voice  
resonates in my hearing  
darkening my memory and vision.

*“The reason the siren slides  
is because it doesn’t hit you.”<sup>1</sup>*

If your approach had been direct and instantaneous,  
we would remain untransformed and transfixed  
the same constant, solid perhaps  
until you ran over me and then  
I would lose your voice entirely  
decaying into losses  
becoming entrenched and mossy.

My bookworm theories have come to naught  
I fooled myself into thinking,  
into thickening I effected an affect on you  
but I am hopelessly grammatically incorrect.

Still, the universe isn’t dead quite yet.

<sup>1</sup> *Astronomer John Dobson*

## **Ninth**

I stoop low to scratch  
the black cat path-crosser.  
Severe green knifepoint eyes  
A flash of tiny white teeth

Matted fur coated with soot and  
caked with clumps of black mud.  
A traitorous purple collar;  
you belong to all of us.

You twist away from my hand,  
thrashing and rolling at my feet.  
You have no interest in affection  
You came to suffer for me

Thick trees creak in the wind  
Leaves and litter swirl around me  
I depart from this disturbance  
Not followed, but watched.

## Postcard Returned, Address Unknown

In our century, you drank the unlabeled  
bottle meant for Alice,  
and became small enough  
to slip through molecules of air.

You are not an equation.  
Maybe you are an electron.  
and that's why you shock me  
with awe or fear, depending

on whether I'm grounded.

You do not equal  $Y$ .  
If you are  $X$ , you are not  
 $X$ -marks-the-spot.

In nothing,

you are everything: spiraling  
arms of rosy explosions,  
the pulse and bang and ferment  
of stars. Your position and velocity

are both unknown. If you're a constant,  
then I'm an imaginary number.

If I'm two sides of a triangle,  
then you don't hypotenuse.

You're everywhere,  
drawn through synapse  
as unheard music: vibration,  
not substance. You're too

large, too small, too present,  
too persistent. Can  $Z$   
be multiplied to equal  $X$ ?  
And what of  $Y$

when it lies in state  
on the other side of the origin,  
in the dark graph of chaos  
you do not claim?

## “Geology of an Impact”

“I remember” is a phrase demanding a certain humor. It is a dormant volcano with deep catalysts. Interpretation sets up camp in the midst of desolation, in the twisty juniper growing up through a fissure in a cooled lava flow, slow animation coexisting with suspended animation. Geologists mention VW bug sized projectiles that would launch during an eruption and then land ten miles away, annihilating the quietude of a horned lizard escaping the heat of the sun under said twisted juniper. The only reason I know my birth mother held me on my birthday before giving me up for adoption is that letter I got from her twenty years later telling me so. I was taking shelter under a college degree at the time. VWs are not falling from the sky these days, and the high desert basically maintains its homeostasis, the cool evenings and the warm mornings are quiet before the accumulating deluge of heat. “I remember” is a fine stone for collecting slow heat and then giving it back, to a descendant of the lizard that has become dust under the boulder. That made quite an impact thousands of years ago, and is now zen-like in its motionless state. It’s hard to know if the lizard somehow remembers its cousin under the rock, or even yesterday’s life sustaining rain, how the warming steam cooled its skin between its knobs and thorns. Hard to know how the boulder stays still in an erupting ocean of cooled basalt, roaring.



## In the Keeping of Time

We can be whole, part of the whole, refracted in the air with finches flying over in visible quickness.

Pieces of the past and future slip in between the least indivisible pulse and feather-strong mint conditions.

Up-right contiguous plumb resists the weight of mosses and mushroom underground, where questions held in check by a grove of historical trees have the same sky as breathing.

Accepting risks to the future of others we wouldn't know appears in the story of upper-floor suites, where the place no longer belongs to endlessness or only one of the species.

The Calvinist meat hornets should calm down, once they've eaten and taken enough.

A few holes in the ground can house the inexplicable, after snapping up common habitat, which can be easy to overlook when locomotive hungers ache.

Because the ground must bear time as part of itself, its health weighs heavily on being here. Fir needles comb power out of fractal light.

Heart-pump waterfalls pulse mostly out of common view.

The melt of a peach in the mouth feathers slowly back into the sea.

## Before Poetry, I

Volunteer to read stories to children at the library.  
I am sure there are bears in those stories: cultured  
bears, flawlessly dressed, appropriate bears, who nonetheless  
dance in the non-fiction section; no one knows why.  
I write a book and stash it in the shelves, leave out the final  
chapter, and sticker on a fictitious dewy  
decimal number. I wait to see who will discover it,  
and when they do, fingering the brittle pages, I leap

from behind the stacks shouting that lost chapter:  
the way it should have ended: the way it does not.

In hushed

tones I explain to the librarian; for penance whisper

the encyclopedias like poetry, straight through from A to Z.  
I do not stop to rest;

do not stop to think.

## Pluto, On Becoming a Dwarf Planet

I never wanted to be in your club.  
You eight: elite, fraternity of rock and gas  
Sheltered in a penthouse of sunlight.  
You dance in concentric circles  
To radio static and hollow laughter,  
Following in rhythm and harmony  
While I, your underprivileged adoptee,  
Kick at snow with dirty sneakers,  
And wander mapless though the Kuiper Belt.

The mistake began with you, Earth.  
One of your parasites—which you wear  
Like gold dust; were I so infested,  
I would not be so proud—calls me planet,  
And you eight smile, hug me with unbent arms.  
You, who know that despite our proximity  
And our weaving crisscross dance,  
I am nothing like Neptune.

Now, after an eighty year sentence, I'm free.  
No more pressure to dress in methane clouds,  
No longer chastised for my slanted orbit,  
Without shame, I temp as the eighth from the Sun.  
I was never meant for Olympus;  
This sunless Outerworld is my kingdom.  
Here in the gaps between the stars and planets,  
Where light and heat cover their noses,  
I, forgotten, tumble in a frozen rave.

## **In the silk generosity of science & art**

The young woman sits on the mushroom  
and almost recalls the broad leaves of her  
southern-floridian home. Doesn't your mother still  
live there alone? asks the butterfly  
who searches for food in her lungs as the woman  
leans over. It tickles, giggles the woman, and

nods yes without remembering the  
mother's name. In some time the velvet sky  
rots suddenly into rain and  
the young woman slides from her seat to  
dance naked under the orange pulp of spread wings,  
fanned and beaming. Without

a memory, gratefulness becomes easy. The  
butterfly asks if she would  
rather be alone and she says no, of  
course not. She thinks the world an  
open casket from which all the  
brightness of life rises like steam.

## Psalm

*after George Oppen*

In the small light of morning,  
When the tropic heat hurried  
To rebuild itself, we paddled

Bayward thru  
Mangroves whose innumerable  
Slender roots only feigned delicacy  
As they sipped at the brackish canal.

Among the islets  
Of the bay, a gray slice of fin. Then again,  
Nearer to us: the sleek curve of the dolphin's  
Head and an alien exhalation.

We extended our oars  
More carefully not wanting to offend when  
The thing surfaced and dipped under closer still,  
Bulleting toward unseen sleepy fish.

This was the thrill --  
To be there and trusted as witnesses,  
Or regarded as irrelevant and therefore  
Equal: all of us small nouns in the bay.

## Color

*After L'Amethyste, ou les Amours de Bacchus et d'Amethyste*  
-Remy Belleau (1528–1577)

Sallow mauve beauty

buries

sunken thoughts,  
mad ideas of  
maenads naked  
but for vine  
and ivy, at  
the bare nape--  
tint of  
amethyst diaphaneity  
poured by Bacchus  
amorous anger and  
love of grapes of wrath  
virulent violent virtuous  
overhead, silica formula  
meshing fermented grapes  
with rhombohedral  
(class 32) crystal  
system, white pure  
Amethyste, immaculate  
maiden made violet  
resting in resistance--

of intoxication;;

at the nape thoughts lost of

Wild ones fierce

fawning for fire

dining with deer and wolves

are crazy, drunk, mad;;



pawing earthsoil dirt  
leafsmell air brown  
she thinks solid, to stop the spinning,  
to become  
w h i t e n e s s :  
Twinning turning lattice  
contacts into  
metamorphosized  
crystal surfaces;--  
welcome alignment.

perfect  
pairs  
plus  
vitreous  
white  
eminence  
fuze  
formations  
refractions  
rejects  
Dionysus'  
pour  
to wear its stain forevermore.

## ENOTSNUS

Never a leader. He couldn't  
be a leader. No matter

his mother with her  
orange-yellow stones, his

father clear and iridescent  
when he stood on their high roof.

Never a healer, a bringer  
of light, never open

to call to the welcoming sun  
and whistle away wide

aching. He will fail  
as he has failed before

in love, in luck, in sex.  
Never a giver, smooth and serene,

but a rough dense lost withholder  
darkened by mottled fear.

## Old Miner's Nightmare

It ends and begins in darkness,  
A chalkboard upon which he can sketch  
The world above he left behind and may never see again.  
Mile high, mile deep, they say,  
But he's never counted miles, only minutes and prayers.

Familiarity and fear settle into his bones  
Like ore dust in clothes and pores,  
A perpetual gray tinge that took years to fade.  
It only returns in the temporary light of stars  
And his flickering headlamp.

He plunges into darkness, not knowing where he goes.  
It does not matter. There is copper in every direction,  
Dreams of riches and realities of another man's reward,  
And it guides him forward  
Dig, drill, dynamite.

It ends and begins in light.

## World Spinning

rain through space  
gathered dust upon  
the earth, questions  
the questions  
falling.

## Knots

She gave him knots.

He put them in his pocket, turned them over and over with his forefinger and thumb, blindly analyzing their construction. There were five of them, unevenly spaced along a single length of cord. Each tight, each elaborate, and each with its own design.

He was no genius, had failed as a boy scout, but puzzles fascinated him. So many different knots.

He took long walks—the town was circular—picking and prying at the first knot, trying to figure out how this series would begin, how elaborate or esoteric the turns of cord would be. If there were traps weaved in—would a tug here tighten the core of the knot, adding hours of labor or making the knot impossible to undo? Would there be something hidden inside a knot, another game maybe?

His stroll began on the west side of town, staying on the sidewalk with the cord out of his pocket and his eyes fixed on the first knot. Once he focused, it was easy, so much so that he was able to loosen the first layer while in full stride, and when that first layer straightened, his olfactory nerves burned from the odor of a London fishery and boiling oil. The interior knot was simple, but its schizophrenic smell made his eyes water, blurring the string. He shut his eyes and loosened the simple knot blindly, and the aroma went away, but in this undoing, the second knot had slid between his fingers immediately, not giving him a moment's rest.

Sauntering on the east side of town now, the industrial sector, where it stank of exhaust, cigarette ends lining either side of the sidewalk, some empty liquor bottles broken on the pavement, he felt dirty, brown and dirty. But there, the knot, a skinny thing, deceptively widening as he turned it left and then right. It was a single knot, a misleading knot. When he attempted pulling the first overlap, the wiry cord pricked his finger, and he almost dropped the cord she had given him. Taking a flask of whiskey from his back pocket, he sprinkled a few drops over his finger, one drop hitting the knot, then put it back in his pocket. He had to slow down and concentrate. Dropping to one knee under the lamppost light, looking for the give, he thought he heard someone talking, telling him where it was, but he couldn't be sure. However, he tried it, and it gave, loosening and undoing itself as he gently tugged and un-looped the knot. He let out a deep breath, put the cord in his pocket, and got back to his feet.

It was time for a break. He sat on a bench not knowing if his fatigue was relief or exhaustion. It felt good to sit down. He knew that much. But the knots were calling him,

wanting his attention. Wanting to be figured out and set free. Needing his help.

He obliged, and out came the cord with three remaining knots. The middle knot, number three, was the smallest. It was locked together so tightly, he needed tweezers from his Swiss army knife to begin. The air was still pungent like cigarette smoke, suffocating. And the aroma of the whiskey he'd sprinkled intensified. He picked at the knot with the tweezers, getting nowhere. The cord began breaking with each pick-and-tug of the tweezers, so he tried the other side of the knot. It seemed impossible until he held the knot closely to his eyes, examining the fibers, and noticed one fiber looked as if it had been sprinkled with a white powder. He applied the tweezers to this fiber and gently pulled. And it loosened! As it unwove, the white dust created the faintest cloud around the knot before disappearing to the ground. Feeling like a cheat by using the tweezers, he put them away, got up, and sauntered south.

The south side of town was gloomy, and he could hardly see the fourth knot. While dark, it was also very noisy. He would have to use his fingers blindly. It felt like a double knot, and he concluded that it was. It was so loud, he could hardly concentrate. Maintaining his meager speed, he put the knots away a while, then took them out again. The smaller knot on the bigger knot was frustrating. It seemed to move around when he tried to understand its construction and undo it. It was so loud! Screaming. He focused on the bigger knot. It was loose. When it was undone, the smaller knot came undone, too, as if untying the larger knot was the smaller one's give. Something fell into his hand. He waited until he reached the west side of town, where streetlamps glowed again, to see the mysterious object—a tiny strand of yarn that had been inside the fourth knot. The yarn had a single knot. It made him anxious—a wave of feathers under the skin—the string so tight and soft...he touched this furry filament twice before letting it go, not interested in the purloined prize.

The final knot was complicated. Treading lightly, contemplating its construction, analyzing its form as if under a microscope, the configuration of its doing and what he hoped would be its undoing. He pulled one side, and it broke free. Back on the polluted east side again. He loosened the other side, but the part that had broken free tightened again. He was in the dark and noisy south not long afterwards. And, finally, back to the west, and the knot would give but take away. It always had one loose end that tightened another. But he persisted, walking the circle of the town time after time, and not getting anywhere. When he reached the north again, his concentration was so fixed on the knot that he veered off the sidewalk and headed into the desert, where it was windy.

After a few minutes, he stopped, realizing that he had ventured out of town. Clutching the knot, he glanced around. A large cactus stood a few feet away. Though dark, the cacti nearby



glowed faintly in the near-full moonlight. He approached the large cactus with caution. Stuck on one of its spines, a length of jute, a tiny knot in its center, blowing in the cool breeze. He didn't know whether to take it or leave it, but his curiosity got the best of him, and he gently lifted the jute from the cactus, pricking his finger in the process. She had never designed a knot quite like this one, and she never used jute. He held one knot in each hand as he meandered back to the sidewalk on the northern side of town. And when he got there, he sat on a bench.

He spent hours trying to figure out the final knot she had given him, but everything he tried only seemed to make it tighter, more impossible. So, he slipped it in his pocket and examined the jute, noticing the single drop of blood from his finger had stained it red. The wind had picked up now, practically a gale, and took with it the strand of jute before he had the chance to analyze it. He jumped up and ran after it, trying to keep an eye on the small shadow skirt-ing down the sidewalk. At first, he thought he could outrun the wind and catch the jute, but the wind persisted until the small knot amid the strand was gone into the dark night and endless desert.

He fished out the length of cord she had given him. There was no figuring out how to untie the final knot. Gazing into the desert for what felt like a month, hundreds of cacti—some old and wise, some thin as twigs, some of yellow hue by the full moonlight—standing with their thorns and spines jutting out, he thought he saw a shoreline in the distance, thought he heard small waves of ocean water tumbling over themselves and foaming, and thought he saw a strand of bronze-colored fabric dancing in the wind above the soft, delicate sand of the beach.

## Coffee

“Coffee. I hates it, because well it just does give me the jitters, you know ‘the bugs’. But every morning, break o’ day, got to have me that caffeine fix, git to work and stay awake, lest I have it I’m a just a slow paced unthinking slug.

“ Here’s how it starts:

Late afternoon looking at that clock there and yawning and yawning, wotching the clock looking at my wotch, Oh! Thank you, I got that from my mother, bless her soul, can’t hardly wait to get home, jump for that shower and paaass out. (I don’t always shower, hell at this point, I don’t hardly take off all my clothes and put ‘em away I just pile up on the floor and let ‘em be ’til it becomes enough to fill up that there washing machine, it’s a GE, and that stands for General Electric).

“One day, and you know, totally sick, just sick of dragging, liked I always, always do, around like a I don’t know what, maybe like a dead bird in a dogs mouth, right, like that you know, as I watch these sparkly chicks on the tv commercials, whar do they find these girls? Do you know, ‘cuz there ain’t nothing like that here? Maybe that girl Amber, she’s a real looker that one, You ain’t so bad yourself, but I don’t understand why you ain’t looking at me, just standing there, ain’t you, and why you have that; What is that in your hand, is that a knife or a sword? It’s shining so hard I feel like my eyes hurt, gotta blink right now, really, that’s dangerous, you planning on hurting somethin’ or somethin’. Skinny as all hell, on that tv, trim and fit - they eat a carrot and calls it lunch. Jeez, I mean give a working gal a break.”

Snowball, you stop that looking at me, you stop, stop that right now you hear, I’m gonna pull that tail of yours, I swear, I swear to it.

I mean you look there in the mirror and look, there it is: pounds of fat resting in places where you don’t want it ever to be. Never! The sparklies too looked tired, working hard (yeah rrrright!) like me, and were slumpy and clumsy – now that THAT I could relate to- and then presto whoa whoa whoa whoa, Sha Zaaam Baby- they took some upper combo pill, caffeine you see, caffeine -- now’s the time to snap your fingers guys, gals- and you could see them at

their job pointing so confidently at they minions, you go there, you go there, and I'll read this here file you have in your hand now and point out them errors and give you that bright beautiful reassuring smile and a nod to which you young male minion, nod yourself in return and smile in gratitude and deference. But get this: Hah! One of them girls goes back and she puts on her leather jacket, unfastens barrettes and pins and then she tosses her long shiny sumptuous hair (can you believe it? I mean really, can you?), accepts the white (come on? —white) motorcycle helmet offered by her (come on--model looking?) motorcycle dude boyfriend (with the dimples?) who props (in slow mo no less) her toned ass there lovingly saddled behind him.

Makes no sense that combination of images of what a gal likes, but I liked all them images, I want all them things. Even though, I ain't no motorcycle chick.

It would be a start to have coffee.

But I know from experience, shakes, shakin' and headache. Like Elvis.

Oh, let's talk about somethin' else. Can't we now. I don't want to have to worry about that offee, or caffeine.

“Okay, that's time, can I set you up with a later appointment?”

“Same time as usual, next week next Wednesday.”

But that's not what it is that makes me so damn interested in the wonders of caffeine, well in part it is, I guess.

Now they make it with them swirly designs on top there, you know like christmas trees, and easter bunnies, and little kitties, like snowball, I wonder who invented that?

“Oh, I don't think so, not him, he's a monster! my goodness you are so adorable when you do that that's a silly kitty such a silly kitty mommy loves you, she loves you, yeah baby”

I can't imagine smelling coffee all day as a bareesta. That would drive me nuts. Drive me up that wall.

“Ha, Ha, Ha! I’m not already crazy. I’m not crazy, you’re a shrink you should know that for sure. If you can hang from the ceiling, Ha! Ha! My you can figure anything out.”

“If I take your hand, I’ll fall. You can show me how you’re doing that you got some special suction cups or maybe a zipper? I want to hang from the ceiling like you is doin’. I don’t want to take your hand, not ever. I’m not some weed you can just like pull me up. No way.”

“Special credentials, years of training, to learn that, right miss shrink, MD, just like everything else. I don’t believe you. I don’t even trust you. You’ll take my hand and then you’ll let me go, I know what you did last time and I was in so many pieces, I was. They had to take me to the hospital. You did that on purpose I know you did.”

“Right, there it is, that is right, you did tell me I needed a chair and that you weren’t sure it would work. That I could get hurt trying to get up thar on that ceiling. Maybe I should have gone into that other room and got me my mattress. In case I might be fallin’.”

Okay, well right now I need a small hit of that coffee rather than it torturing my brain. She adds something to her coffee, I know it, that makes her able to stay up on that ceiling, I know that’s her secret—it’s in the coffee-- and I’m very, very jealous. I’d rather be able to fly, but I can’t just yet. I know it’s possible. It has to be. I can’t imagine a world where it would not be possible to do so. Oh damn it! Now I’m crying.

“I thought you left.” You stop talking like that Ms. Shrink, PhD, MD, wizardy. I hear you. That woman she can be such a pain there in her perfect grey suit: snooty librarian late for her date with Mr. Hot Shot Business Typhoon. Oooh, and her silver framed glasses which I look at so very carefully to see if she actually has frames that might require lenses to fix screwy eyes, I mean screwy eyesight (really, I don’t think she did, No! See the main point here I really have to say -used them for show! Absolutely.) So many times I thought “why are you looking at me that way, shoot! you think I’m crazy don’t you, well I’ll tell you something - I most certainly am not!” But I never bring myself to say that and don’t you know in fact what I actually do is I just look away or even look down at my very own shoes, because I know better than her. I really do

know better than her. She just doesn't understand me. That other girl that girl smooth as she can says "You thought I left, am I supposed to go?" "Yes, I'm sorry, Elaine, our session has ended." Damn it. Stupid Ms. Shrink, fixin' to adjust thing that just can't be.

"Okay," so, here I am wiping up that creamy brown spill off my counter.

## **Bridges and Borderlands**

I went to the borderlands to die,  
learn the secrets of the Olmecs,  
and chose a new secret name.

I went to the borderlands to find  
the lost gods: John Dellinger,  
Emilio Zapata, and Octovio Paz.

At the borderlands, the full moon  
always rises twice, the mountains  
slide across the valley, and streets  
host processions of Toltec kings.

At the borderlands, poetic lines  
arrive by radio wave, merchants  
sell lapis exilis at volcano's edge,  
beggars defy the laws on Sunday,  
and an old man sketches Aztec  
funeral effigies in the 16th century  
mansion of the dead governors.

The borderlands contain both  
the crooked and the straight,  
Jupiter hangs over palms stirred  
by warm breezes, and the moon  
reflects off smooth adobe walls.

I went to the borderlands to learn  
the real names of the stars – Cor  
Serpentis, Zuben Hakrabi, Kaus  
Borealis – instead found the true  
bridge between light and shadow.

## **Around a Red Dwarf**

I love the black leaves  
that hide the iron cliffs.  
(One assumes a dark river  
below; perhaps not.)  
They're black to catch as many rays  
as possible from that vermilion sun.  
The wind alone rotates,  
from the Cold Side to here  
(the day is the year);  
whenever it weakens,  
they open.  
For once I don't care  
about minds, if any.  
Let them praise, even worship  
the view, which they say  
disembodied spirits haunt.  
They seem unimportant  
compared to the black leaves.



## endings

are what you find past a boundary, a cessation of friendship, an arrest of the heart, the exhausting closures of love, like the year parents cease to exist, extremes, terminal cancers, or a last part lengthwise

as in the terminal unit of something spatial, the reached end of the road, the end of rope, or the dead end of an alley, an avenue of faith—or you can let verbal units mark a finale such as *this is the end of the story*,

or a cut-off, a shutdown, a roadblock, the expiration-date of milk, of your love, or it can be a player stationed at the extremity of a line (as in football)—but this is no game—it's real life—

they are the cessation of a course of action, a pursuit, or fruitless requests for forgiveness, the marbled death of a neighbor, destruction of statehoods, the ultimate state, nirvana, results without findings,

that which is incomplete, fragmentary, or undersized like a remnant of cloth, the moth-eaten, the frayed, and the faded like an outcome—writing with purpose, *the end of poetry is to be poetry*, says R. P. Warren, or it can be

an event which takes place like a divorce, a murder, a bruising, a share in an undertaking as in *keep your end up* or a particular operation or aspect of an unexpected conclusion, the end of being a mother, a period of action

in any of various sports events like a fourth quarter, a wife-beating, or child abuse—in the end, after all, we'll surely succeed in the end, yes, a world without end, amen, it will be exceedingly good in the end, it will please to no end

without a stop or letup, he cried, she cried for days on end, and in case you haven't got it by now: the child support is due at the end of the month, she drank for months at the end of the marriage, the house that's no longer

yours is at the end of the road, they live at opposite ends, the deep end of a lake  
is where you might find me, he drove the end of the stake into my—  
the rear end was kicked and one end of the rope is around my neck

like a catastrophe, like tornados, earthquakes, a son who emancipates  
his mother, terminations, or worse—a daughter whose mother is dying  
but doesn't answer the phone, she doesn't know where to begin

## Orbiting

G flicked the kill switch back and forth with increasing fervor. He'd disconnected it from the power grid so that in idle moments he could kill without consequence. The switch now resting between his fingers, he stared at the grey ball below him. He'd been orbiting this dead planet for three weeks per his contract orders. Every 12 hours he scanned the surface for life signs. Always nothing.

He walked the nine steps to the galley and made a cup of instant coffee. After drinking half of it, he tossed the rest into the airlock disposal and watched out the porthole as the frozen remnants floated away. He ran on the treadmill for 20 minutes and walked the 16 steps back to the bridge. The planet looked the same as when he had left. He considered reconnecting the kill switch before flicking it again. Instead he sat down to run a full system check, a daily requirement per his contract.

When he passed the sun two months ago it had brought him no comfort. Not like when he stood on the surface of his home planet and felt the warmth streaming down on him. No, not like that. The sun was now another forlorn ball floating in space. The vastness of the universe disgusted him. Only in the finite was there hope of comprehension. Working out here was a slow-motion exercise in futility. He tried to remember back to his decision to take the contract, but found in his memory banks only a dull montage of desperate moments spent in the company of cold shallow people, images triggering a sensation of floating in a small pool cramped with dead fish, their scales sliming off onto his skin. The fish moved on predetermined circuits but he could never discern the patterns, at least not on the rare occasions that he bothered to try.

While the system check ran its course, G initiated the ship's holographic dog program and played a game of fetch with it. But soon the rigid impossibility of a spontaneous failure to return the ball came to weigh on him and he canceled the program. The dog disappeared and he was alone again. G knew that in theory many of his needs could be met and his desires fulfilled through use of the ship's sophisticated holographic system. But in every holographic experience there is always something off enough to notice, to prevent the real participant from losing that nagging awareness of the unreal. The infallibility of the holograms made him crave imperfection, that conspicuous mark of the humanoid life form through which we always come

to know ourselves and each other. Truth leaks out along the borders of that mark, and there is no truth in a hologram.

Holographic failings aside, the most important consideration on these missions was to never let oneself feel trapped. A strict schedule of intentional distractions was obligatory. G had grown a beard so that he could spend 30 minutes every day trimming it. Never in the history of purposeful facial hair had a beard been so meticulously maintained. Every few weeks he shaved it off and started over.

The computer announced in its self-satisfied tone completion of the system check. G sat down and perused the control board without interest. He looked out and saw one of the planet's two moons had crept into view.

Computer, scan moon for life signs. **Scanning moon. No life present.**

G entered this unsurprising development into the ship's log and began compiling the daily report in preparation for transmittal to his project manager. There were clocks everywhere but they served no purpose other than to notify him when this one daily deadline had arrived. It was always dark. He tried to stay on a schedule but it was easy to slip. Routine was important yet he struggled against it. This had always been a problem.

On his home world G often felt alone, but it was a self-imposed solitude, not like this, where humanoid companionship was at all times a literal impossibility. At times it grew oppressive, again the strict schedule of intentional distractions, again the holographic dog. But to what end, he thought. After all, he had invited this solitude. Every day the airlock beckoned. He felt the void on all sides, pushing at his chest like a schoolyard bully. But he would not succumb. Some stubbornness inside him resisted. He did not know why.

He transmitted the report and received an automated confirmation of receipt. He wondered what time it was on his planet. After traveling so far at light speed, he'd lost all perspective on the differential between where he was and his home world. Untethered is what he felt. He had not heard from his project manager in at least a week. He was too far away for real-time communication, but his manager did sometimes transmit a personal memo. G thought he had come to rely on these memos too much, for now he felt a longing for which he could never fix

an endpoint in his mind, as the memos did not arrive with regularity. This longing bothered him.

Feeling restless, he initiated the holographic sunroom. Inside, he picked up a book and began to read. After a few minutes he fell into deep sleep, dreaming of the sun warm upon his face. When he woke, for a moment he believed he was home. Rubbing his eyes, he saw black-and-white snow falling.

He returned to the bridge and studied the moon, adjusting the ship's position to afford a better look.

The moon was not ugly, he decided. Crisscrossed with delicate ridges, it stood out from the dull planet around which it rotated. The surface patterns entranced him, dissolving the chatter in his mind, as another day slipped into the past.

## *Law of Nature*

The swelling tear drop of black ink  
fell to the predisposition for disorder,  
diluting down to nearly nothing  
when submerged in the blue waters of the sink.

So too, the dark mass in her breast  
grew, for nothing else but that it could.  
Beneath the stars, all bodies are in motion  
until the end, when bodies come to rest.

## Shoeless

It was Alex Fredricks who finally said it. Everybody else thought it, but he was the only one who actually said it.

“But you don’t have any shoes on.” He laughed and chewed on his mouthpiece. “How could you possibly get in?”

I shrugged. My shoulder pads were so loose.

“Why,” he continued, “are you even gonna warm up?”

Alex sounded like an asshole, but he wasn’t.

He turned and ran across the field, his gait somewhere between that of a duck and a dog with three legs. He didn’t expect an answer. I didn’t have one, anyway.

He was right, though. I didn’t have any shoes on, but not because I didn’t own any. I had shoes. Fucking good ones, too. I bought them on sale at Royal Athletics with my own money since my dad wouldn’t have thought to and my mom had refused.

“We went in for half of your other shoes,” my mom said. Her eyes grew narrow behind thick frames. “The Reeboks,” she added. “These,” mom continued, “are on you.”

She handed them back to me. They were Bo Jackson turfs, about a half-size too big.

I tried to argue, but she’d already walked away. She was busy with my little brother and some Air Flight Lites. He was as screwed as I was.

But I wanted the Bo Jacksons. Badly. They were marked down from \$72.99.

“But mom,” I challenged from across the store, “they’re only 34 bucks.”

The store was mostly empty. A few people milled about, but nobody I knew. I'd checked.

"Then," she countered as she replaced the green and purple high tops my brother had pulled down, "you shouldn't have any problem covering them."

I stared at her, then at the shoes. The tread pattern on the bottoms was complicated and they had these shiny orange straps of mylar or something. They were awesome even with the weird basket weave across the toes.

"I'm getting them," I said, full of confidence. I sort of floated up to the register.

"These are hot," the store owner said as he scanned the box. "And," he added, "they're my last pair."

I smiled. My mom crowded behind me. My little brother had moved onto baseball bats.

"Are you sure?" she said before she walked away. Her hands snatched a 32-inch Easton from my brother. She scolded him. "Not now." Then she turned back to me. "They look a little like old man shoes, don't you think?"

"What?" I replied.

"I mean, with that basket weave."

I turned and faced the owner, who had removed the shoes from their box. He checked the toe weave and pursed his lips. I watched him closely.

"I think it's sharp," he said after a bit of consideration.

I nodded.

He slipped the shoes back in their box.



The owner, Kevin, only had one hand. He'd lost the other in some gnarly-assed motorcycle accident. He'd been a body-builder at one point, I guess.

I reached across the counter and held the end of the box so he could scan it. He'd dropped it twice.

“Thanks,” he said.

I wore the turfs the next day to school. They clicked loudly in the hallways, louder still on classroom floors. Ms. Conlan, the librarian, told me I had to walk quieter when entered on my study hall. Eventually, she told me if I didn't sit down, she was going to throw me out.

Still, the shoes were hot; they looked good and felt good.

I was stoked to wear them against St. Ignatius. Coach Salvo said we'd all have to wear turfs in Cleveland. The game was going to be played at some college and the turf was this new shit that had rubber pellets in it. Screw-ins and molded studs wouldn't be allowed, Salvo said. He asked if there were any questions. I didn't have any. I had my Bo Jacksons.

That was until Brett Boylan got them, straight from my feet, right there on the fucking sideline. I should have expected it; Salvo was a dick. He told me I shouldn't have even played football--that I was too small and I'd get hurt. But I played anyway. Things even out, I guess.

Midway through the second quarter, Brett Boylan blew out his turfs; tore the side seam and opened the left one up like an envelope. Brett was our starting fullback. He transferred from California after his dad got a job in Madeira. He got laid all the time, boozed a little, dipped, and was just what Salvo needed when John Burlington had to quit because of his broken neck.

Anyway, Brett hobbled to the sideline during a timeout. He asked for tape; he wanted to spat his shoes like Sweetness, but Salvo stopped the trainer and asked Brett what size he wore.

“9-and-a-half, ten,” Brett replied, tentatively.

“Darling,” Salvo barked. “What size are you?”

I shouldn't have answered and if I did, I should have lied. But I didn't.

I lie all the time except when it matters.

"9," I replied.

My helmet was on, the chinstrap buckled like it was supposed to be. Everything might have been fine, but then, for some reason I added, "but these are a bit big."

I couldn't believe it. The words came, as if pre-programmed. Somewhere, in the very back of my skull, a voice pounded, *What the fuck?*

"Give them to Brett," Salvo ordered.

I stood motionless. The entire team seemed to stare at me, through me. People in the stands, too.

"Come on," he snarled as he yanked his headset down around his neck, "take them off." He pointed to my Bo Jacksons, then barked, "Take them off and give them to Boylan."

His lips were all twisted in that Italian way and his head shook on his neck like it wasn't even connected. "Hurry now, Darling."

His voice was sandpaper-grade and east coast. He'd played for the Steelers for a season or two, but had to retire because of concussions. His brain was scrambled eggs, his skin leathery as hell and a bit too tan. His hands darted around like kites when he was excited, a mad flurry of once-broken fingers and battered knuckles.

"Come on, for Christ's sake," Salvo spat, as I quickly and sloppily loosened my laces. "Let's go."

And just like that, my shoes were gone, out on the field with Brett Boylan, stretched and turned, twisted into the turf. I stayed behind on the sideline in my bare socks, my helmet still

buckled tight. The tiny, green, plastic daggers of grass reminded my feet that I was there, in that moment.

I pretended it didn't phase me. I stayed hopeful, like a jackass, in my tube-socked feet, careful of my teammates and their suddenly heavy-soled footsteps. We moved up and down the sideline and I watched as defense became offense and back again. I pretended there was still a chance even though I'd barely played when I had shoes. Four snaps, I think, was all I'd mustered to that point, the entire season. Nine games, four snaps. Still, I practiced every day, ran scout like a mother fucker, and never dogged a single sprint. I was fast, even in my pads, as small as I was. I was fast enough to stay visible, fast enough to remind everyone I was still around.

But when Fredricks laughed, the reality of the situation threatened to submerge the vessel of my entire life. I'd listed to and fro on tumultuous waters for years. Football was emblematic of my struggle; I really shouldn't have been there on the sideline at all. And if I was there, I should have at least been honest with myself about the gag. I was a joke passed off graciously as a kid with a big heart who wouldn't quit. In truth, I was simply a kid out-of-touch.

I continued to hope all the way through the second half in spite of Alex Fredricks' honesty, in spite of my own bare-socked feet, in spite of the fact that the game was close and I never got in when the game was anywhere close to close. With that hope, I went from victim to perpetrator. I thought of it as the good fight--an I'll-fucking-show-them moment. But it wasn't. Those moments don't exist. They're stories told to tint reality, stories told to cover up a bigger, more ominous truth with far more dire consequences.

See, my dad was going to show them, too. He was going to prove them wrong. He worked sixty hours a week to show them he was worthy--to prove he was a good programmer, a good manager. My grandpa was going to show them, as well. He started a printing business in his basement. He'd grind at the foundry by day, then retreat to the basement at night and chain smoke cigarettes until he could emerge, worthy. But he never made it. The press worked fine and it even ran off some copies, but he never really emerged. Instead, he checked out. The world moved and it changed. He worked his ass off to catch up. He thought if he did, then he might be able to finally get ahead, make someone notice, force them to see. He'd show them. He'd show them good.

My great-grandfather was the same. He came to America alone, his entire family still in Germany. He worked like a mule, then sent for them. He thought he'd be a hero to his children--children who no longer recognized his face. He told himself he'd be a savior to his wife, but she hated the very blood that ran through his veins.

My dad worked weekends so many times I can't recall a Saturday or Sunday where we didn't stop by Patton Press to switch a tape drive, check a back-up, or reboot the system. *Just a few minutes*, he say. Most times it was. Now and then, we wouldn't even get out of the car--my mom, my brothers, and I. When we did go inside, I colored with pens and pencils borrowed from someone else's desk, the metallic hum of the big System 38 behind me, the strange scent of reel-to-reel tapes in my nostrils.

Sometimes, I'd go in with him--just me and him--and I'd thread computer cables or parallel connectors under desks and beneath tables or cubicle dividers. I liked it, too. Mostly. But dad shouldn't have been there. Not like that. *Yes, sir*, he'd reply whenever James Pfellington would call, *I'll be there early*. *No, that's fine*, he'd continue, *I can get there by 9*. Then a pause. *Well, I guess I could try for 8*.

We'd leave for vacations a day late, sometimes two. *Something came up*, my mom would say, *and your dad has to fix the system*. Or, *The system's down again and your dad has to go in*. The explanation, for what it was worth, would always come from her. Never him. The bitching, the complaints, the *Those motherfuckers*, and the *He's an asshole*, or *They just don't understand, the I just have to go in, the I can't because Pfellington called and he's off the roof and I, I, I*, that came from him. Every time. Every fucking time.

I suppose, though, I shouldn't complain because kids get cigarettes put out on them. Kids get locked in closets for hours, sometimes days. I got vacations and private school and college and two parents, most of the time. Not like my friend Avery whose mom got shot in the face over an eight ball. Avery was 12 when it happened. And he was right there. He stood right next to her while her face exploded behind a 9mm slug.

I never knew shit like that. Never. Not even close.

Avery's got scars. Big ones. They're hidden, though. They can't really be seen. Not right away, at least. You can't see mine, either. The cigarette burns, the whippings, people recognize that shit. *Isn't it awful*, they say. Pity, sympathy, empathy--it comes in waves. Colossal rushes.

All Avery has to do is tell that story. That's it. It's a game changer. But he never does because he never has to. Somebody else always tells it for him. *Well, you know*, they say, *his mom got shot on the street corner in front of him when he was 12. And every time, it's the same. Yep, I know. In the head, right there in front of him. A drug deal. Sad, isn't it? Right. Just awful.*

And all of that is true. No dad, no mom, only a grandma and the streets. Avery got fucked. That story is his shield. Me? I don't have a shield. Nobody gives a shit about my story. Nobody cares about my scars.

I never said anything to my parents about Salvo taking my shoes. They didn't really ask about the game anyway. I rode the bus home, shot shit and laughed with my teammates.

Boylan took my shoes off before he even left the field.

"Thanks," he said. His hair was drenched, his white helmet full of yellow and navy scuffs--St. Ignatius' colors.

I didn't put them on right away. I walked across the field in my socks like it didn't matter, like I didn't care. I walked through the tunnel and into the locker room, took off my shoulder pads and jersey, tucked my helmet inside, and loosened my belt. Then I put my shoes on. But they didn't feel like mine. They were warm and heavy and I was ashamed to have them on, which didn't make any sense at all. I tried not to think about it; I couldn't do anything, anyway.

I boarded the bus with my stomach in knots. I'd made up my mind not to think about it and decided nobody else would, either. If they asked or said anything, I'd pretend it didn't matter. By the time I sat down, I'd made another decision: I decided I'd act like it didn't ever happen, that I hadn't been forced to give up my shoes and stand in my socked feet for forty-some minutes. I'd blow right past it. It'd be gone, ancient history. I twisted up my face and made smiles because everyone liked that. They expected that.

Nobody mentioned it; not a word about my shoes on the bus, at practice, or in the hallway. And if nobody ever mentioned it, I was determined to pretend it never happened. And if it never happened, it was nothing--nothing to think about, nothing to feel, nothing to be upset or worry about. It was nothing at all.

Nobody cares about my scars, but maybe they should. The cigarette kids--they're few and far between. The kids who get left in the closet--fewer still. Kids like Avery who watch their mom's face get blown off are probably one in a couple million, if that. It's just that those things are so awful, so terrible, that when they're discovered, everyone pays attention. And they should. But what happened to me--the shit I carry around, the scars--that stuff happens all the time, to countless kids, all over the place. Everyday, every hour, every minute, every second, it happens. Again and again and again. Nobody cares about my scars, but maybe they should.



## Contributors

**Mike Alexander's** *Retrograde* is available through [www.pandjpoetics.com](http://www.pandjpoetics.com). A recent chapbook, *We Internet in Different Voices* (Modern Metrics), is available through EXOT books. His poems have recently appeared in *River Styx*, *Measure*, *Raintown Review*, *Abridged*, *Southword*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, & other journals.

**Holly Day** was born in Hereford, Texas, "The Town Without a Toothache." She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center. Her published books include the nonfiction books *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, *A Brief History of Nordeast Minneapolis*; the poetry books *Late-Night Reading for Hardworking Construction Men* (The Moon Publishing) and *The Smell of Snow* (ELJ Publications); and a novel, *The Book Of* (Damnation Books). Her needlepoints and beadwork have recently appeared on the covers of *The Grey Sparrow Journal*, *QWERTY Magazine*, and *Kiki Magazine*.

**Andrea DeAngelis** is at times a poet, writer, shutterbug and musician living in New York City. Her writing has recently appeared in *Tin House*, *Moth + Rust* and *Blue Monday Review*. She has just completed her first novel *Pushed*. Andrea also sings and plays guitar in the indie rock band MAKAR ([www.makarmusic.com](http://www.makarmusic.com))

**Jacob Robert Eggett** recently graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a double major in Integrative Physiology and Neuroscience. He plans on attending medical school to become a physician. Writing has always been a passion of his, and he wishes he could pursue it more. He's always been an avid reader, and as an awkward young boy felt connected to great authors when the rest of the world felt dark and unapproachable. His love of reading helped him through dark times in his life. He writes because he wants to connect with other people through this passion.

**Priscilla Frake's** first full-length book of poetry, *Correspondence*, was published in 2013 by Mutabilis Press. In 2012, She won the Lorene Pouncey Award at the Houston Poetry Fest and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her work has appeared in many journals including *Nimrod*,



*Atlanta Review*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *The Midwest Quarterly*. She lives in Sugar Land, Texas with her husband, where she is a studio jeweler. "Postcard Returned, Address Unknown" was previously published in *Improbable Worlds*, an anthology published by Mutabilis Press, and also in *Correspondence*, also published by Mutabilis Press.

**Mark Goodman** is devoted dad who has enough sense to keep his day job. With masters degrees in classics and social work, he tries to be a man about town. Publication credits include *Ruah: Power of Poetry* and *The Penwood review*.

**James Grabill's** recent work has appeared in numerous periodicals such as *the Buddhist Poetry Review* (US), *The Oxonian Review* (UK), *Stand* (UK), *Magma* (UK), *Toronto Quarterly* (CAN), *Harvard Review* (US), *Terrain* (US), *Seneca Review* (US), *Weber*, and others. His books include *An Indigo Scent after the Rain* and *Poem Rising Out of the Earth*. Wordcraft of Oregon will publish his new project of environmental prose poems, *Sea-Level Nerve: Book I* this summer, *Book II* next summer. He teaches "systems thinking" relative to sustainability. *Sea-Level Nerve, Book One* is available in digital format at <http://www.0s-1s.com/poetry-shelves/sea-level-nerve>

**Joshua Huber** is from Omaha, Nebraska. He graduated with a degree in psychology from Truman State University in 2009. After graduating he worked and lived in beautiful Kirksville, MO for several years in both campus ministry and as an adolescent drug rehabilitation technician/associate counselor. Josh currently lives in Columbia, MO with his wife Angela, where he is studying in the Masters of English program at the University of Missouri with an emphasis in creative writing (poetry). Besides poetry, he enjoys running, adventuring, public radio podcasts, fine television programs, travel, and more.

**Allison K. Hymas** graduated from Brigham Young University with a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. Her poetry has been published in *FLARE: The Flagler Review* and *Sassafras* and her short fiction in *Rivet*.

**Emma Karnes** was born in Rochester, New York and now lives in Ithaca, New York. She has had poems published in *Teen Ink Magazine*, *Word Soup End Hunger*, and *Rose Red Review*. Emma continues to write poetry and hopes to share her work with as many people as possible.

**Erica Kenick's** poem "Psalm" is from her recently completed thesis collection titled "Asterisms." Although she chose to pursue a BA in Literature at the University of Florida and most recently an MFA in Poetry at Florida International University, her work has always been strongly influenced by her love of science and the natural world.

**Sara Marron** is a Masters candidate at St. John's University. She has lived in four different states in the last two years with twice as many addresses. She plans to pursue her Doctorate in English after graduation in order to teach at the university level.

**Katherine Howd Machan** is Professor of Writing at Ithaca College (including longtime teaching of Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy), holds degrees from the College of Saint Rose, the University of Iowa, and Northwestern University. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines; in anthologies/textbooks such as *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2013*, *Early Ripening: American Women's Poetry Now*, *Literature, Sound and Sense*, *Writing Poems*; and in 32 collections, most recently the chapbooks *H* (winner of the 2013 Gribble Press competition) and *Wild Grapes: Poems of Fox* (Finishing Line Press, 2014, first runner-up in their competition). The former director of the national Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, Inc., in 2012 she edited *Adrienne Rich: A Tribute Anthology* (Split Oak Press).

**Amber McDaniel** was raised in Butte, Montana, but is currently studying English and Psychology at Arcadia University in Philadelphia, PA. For the next eight months, however, she will be studying abroad at the University of Oxford.

**Denise Mostacci-Sklar** began her college years as a biology major but then, to her parents dismay, decided that she wanted to study dance. She moved to New York City where she had a career as a modern dancer. Now she has had the good fortune to discover writing as another way to move through life and she particularly enjoys the stillness ...waiting for words to make an entrance.

**Bill Mullen** earned an MFA in Fiction through the Bluegrass Writers Studio in 2011, and has published poetry and short fiction, most recently in the online publication *Danse Macabre*. He currently lives in Kentucky, where he teaches Gothic, Russian, and War literature.

**Carolyn Murray** likes warm summer breezes by the ocean. Surrealist and Experimental forms. B Movies. Pursuing odd behavior of humans. She lives with her cat and significant other. She started writing on and off in 2010, getting her feet wet with NaNoWrimo, and then joined a critique group. She reads from a wide variety of sources, most of which have surreal or psychological realism or psychological thriller in their style. She likes leaving the reader ill at ease or with a different concept of reality.

**John Nizalowski** is the author of three books – a multi-genre work *Hooking the Sun* (Farolito Press, 2003), a book of poetry *The Last Matinée* (Turkey Buzzard Press, 2011), and an essay collection *Land of Cinnamon Sun* (Irie Press, 2013). His writings have appeared in *Slab*, *Measure*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Under the Sun*, *Weber Studies*, *New Mexico Poetry Review*, *Bloomsbury Review*, *Blueline*, and elsewhere. He currently teaches creative writing, composition, and mythology at Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction.

**Frederick Pollack** is author of two book-length narrative poems, *THE ADVENTURE* and *HAPPINESS*, both published by Story Line Press. His work has appeared in *Hudson Review*, *Salmagundi*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Die Gazette* (Munich), *The Fish Anthology* (Ireland), *Representations*, *Magma* (UK), *Bateau*, *Chiron Review*, etc. Online, poems have appeared in *Big Bridge*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Diagram*, *BlazeVox*, *The New Hampshire Review*, *Mudlark*, etc. Recent Web publications in *Occupoetry*, *Faircloth Review*, *Camel Saloon*, *Kalkion*, *Gap Toothed Madness*. Adjunct professor creative writing George Washington University.

**Judith Roney** has created and taught writing workshops for adults challenged by mental illness in conjunction with the University of Central Florida's Literary Arts Partnership. Her fiction, essays, and poetry have appeared in: *Nonbinary Review*, *It Is Written: An Anthology of Poetry Inspired by Hip-Hop*, *Steam Ticket*, *Jet Fuel*, *Foothill: A Journal of Poetry*, *Gambling the Aisle*, *Zaum*, and *Third Wednesday* as well as other publications. Judith will complete her MFA from The University of Central Florida in the spring of 2014. She confesses to an obsession with the archaic and misunderstood, dead relatives, and collects vintage religious artifacts and creepy dolls.

**S. D. Stewart** reads and writes in the Land of Pleasant Living. He works as a librarian and survives on frequent forays to the forest. His writing has appeared in *Word Riot*, *Avatar Review*, *Gone Lawn*, and elsewhere. Read more at <http://lostgander.wordpress.com>.

**Vikram K. Sundaram** earned a BA in Writing Seminars at the Johns Hopkins University in 2009. He currently resides in New York where he is continuing to train as a radiologist. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Pank Magazine*, *Blue Earth Review*, and *Modern Haiku*.

**Tom Vollman** is enrolled in a doctoral program in creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Currently, he teaches English at Milwaukee Area Technical College. He has written a number of things, published a bit, recorded a few records, and toured a lot. Recently, Tom had stories appear in *Pithead Chapel* and *Per Contra*, was selected as an Honorable Mention for Glimmer Train's "Family Matters", and was a finalist for Glimmer Train's "Short-Story Award for New Writers". He has some black-ink tattoos on both of his arms. Tom really likes Raymond Carver, Two Cow Garage, Tillie Olsen, Greg Dulli, Tom Colicchio, Willy Vlautin, and Albert Camus. He's working on a novel entitled *Tyne Darling* and will be releasing a new record in 2015.



