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# EDITORS' FOREWORD

With the new year comes our winter issue, featuring erasure poetry, a short play, and images that stay with you long after you've turned the page. Carnivals, crime scenes, and stars abound as well as reflections inspired by a visit to a foreclosed home, a friend's death, and an unusual autopsy.

This year, we would like to announce that Euphony has changed its web address to [www.euphonyjournal.org](http://www.euphonyjournal.org) and can now be found on Twitter. Make sure to update your bookmarks and follow us @euphonyjournal. As always, we love hearing from our readers and writers, so never hesitate to drop us a line. Thank you for flipping through these pages and, most importantly, for giving exceptional voices a chance to flourish in our busy world.

THE EDITORS



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

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## Alex Ledford

### What Happened to Rev. Baxter's Son

Wet boots, size 16  
drag the purple corpse  
without struggle up the hill.

“This your boy?”

The badge sparkles. Annie,  
7, peeks her strawberry  
cheeks and hair,  
is shushed back inside.

*A note: To my father*

*I leave my mangled body,  
a box full of stars.*

# Terrance Gutberlet

## Foreclosed

**I**nfestation threatens my home; pests are gathered in my driveway. They appear poised to take over. I could call my exterminator, the best in the county, to drop everything and come here right away, but I have an outstanding balance.

An Asian couple is creeping in my driveway. The man has long hair and a dark blue shirt, the top two buttons unbuttoned. There's only a light breeze, but his linen pants seem to swirl around like he's standing on the deck of a commandeered Dutch ship off the coast of China. He leans against a sleek, burgundy BMW and a rusty Toyota pick-up – a lot like the one I got in return for my dually – is rattling up the road and into my driveway. A dusty tire runs over a toy bulldozer Nicholas had left outside, spitting the toy backwards into a series of violent bounces that it somehow comes out of in one piece.

The Asians don't flinch. The man looks at the woman, a tight little thing in a pony tail and pearls and a short sleeveless dress, and she walks over to my front door and unlocks it. She steps inside and she carefully takes down the auction sign from my bay window. She picks at a piece of scotch tape that stubbornly sticks to it.

The driver of the pick-up, a second-rate contractor I'd seen before from Dietz and Sons, gets out of the truck, and I can hear the gravel crunch under his CAT steel toe boots. The man extends his hand, they shake, and then they turn their backs on me to look at my house. The man points and the contractor nods.

When the woman comes outside my- the house she tiptoes around the mud puddles and divots in the yard without getting any mud on her shoes, and without even looking. She reaches the driveway and drops the sign in the dumpster that I promised my wife I would take away as soon as I finished the deck out back. The dumpster. My old dumpster.

Why did I decide to stop by here? An hour ago I was interviewing for a management position similar to the one I had at Verizon before I started restoring and remodeling homes with a specialization in the historic ones. I think part of me wanted to check if I had left anything valuable behind, another part of me wanted to make some more alterations, and yet another part came here out of habit.

As soon as I reached the edge of the property, I noticed the pests. I continued driving past the lot, down the narrow and dusty road, which was

decades late in being repaved, and pulled into a small clearing between the brush and trees. I got out in silence, made my way into the soy field on the opposite side of the road, and crept down the field to my current spot in the bushes directly across from the driveway. Some of my former employees would joke that the Asians bought it for the field. It's terrible, but I can't think of a better explanation. The house is in shambles, it's a dump, and I don't possibly see how these...people, these moneyed types, even with all their financial resources, could picture it as a nice home.

And seeing how they bought the house, they must think they know of everything that needs repair. They must think they can make it safe enough, and comfortable enough to live in, but I doubt they know the full extent of the damage. I'm a contractor. I know. I remodeled the place. Then I demodeled it. And I laid the traps.

Even the untrained eye could see how I busted the toilets, sending powdery porcelain shards skidding across the bathroom floor with Croesus, my twenty-pound, double-faced sledgehammer, how I tore out and salvaged the cabinets, the doors, and door frames, the power outlets, the appliances, and the boiler and hot water heater. I went to town on it, but in the end I had to take most of it to the dump. My sister-in-law balked, inexplicably, when I started unloading it in her backyard. It wasn't like my prissy little sister-in-law was hosting any garden parties back there. The yard was empty. And unlandscaped for Christ's sake! I managed a small victory, though, by convincing her to let me keep the boiler and hot water heater in her garage.

As for my old property, I left the entire lot in disarray. I bulldozed part of the barn, and I uprooted the old shed in an unsuccessful bid to convince my wife that I could keep what I salvaged at her sister's without making the place look, as they termed it, trashy.

The less visible renovations are the dangerous ones. I rewired the light switches to short when flipped. I used crumbly, old grout to fill the cracks in the foundation, and I placed strategic cracks in the bathroom piping with the idea that each time one of them flushes their new toilet they will fill their wall up with a little more untreated shit water. And unless they razed the place or paid for a complete overhaul, these hazards would remain undetected without the eye of a very gifted contractor. Like myself.

In short, I turned it into the house from that movie with Tom Hanks, the one where he buys the fixer-upper opportunity and ends up trapped in a hole in the floor. And just like Tom Hanks at the end, these Asian bastards will sell.

The three of them walk to the end of the driveway to get a full view of the house. The woman walks over to my mailbox and picks at

the stick-on letters that spell my last name, Smoot. They won't come off. I used industrial strength epoxy. The man comes over to help, and he quickly sees it's no use. He grabs the post with both hands, pushes and pulls it from side to side, and yanks the whole thing out of the ground; I never got around to cementing it. I could've salvaged it if they weren't here. The man walks toward the dumpster and carefully holds the mailbox away from his body, so he doesn't get any dirt on him. It's no ordinary mailbox. I visited countless Home Depots and hardware stores looking for that thing before ordering it online – its made of carbon fiber, high grade, that I reinforced with a half inch thick layer of wood on the inside; it could withstand any baseball bat a bored teenager might use, or try to use, when driving around, looking to smash mailboxes in the middle of the night. The man hurls it in the dumpster and there's a sound of breaking glass. Senseless businessman. He wastes the last worthwhile, and intact, addition that I gave to this property.

He walks back to the end of the driveway and the three of them talk in a circle. The man points at the “dazzling” bay window (as the realtor described it in the ad I saw for the property) that the original owner installed in the Fifties.

My wife loved that window. I did, too. We had a table there and when we ate breakfast we had so much natural light it was like eating outside. My daughter, Eleanor, always sat in the seat most illuminated by the sun; she was always cold.

The contractor nods his head regretfully without looking at the window and the man cocks his head in surprise and begins to point at it. Then the contractor starts shaking his head and motioning the ‘no’ signal with his arms. The man brings his arm back to his side.

“I thought you asked –” the contractor begins to say before trailing off.

“No. The window,” the man says.

The contractor laughs about the misunderstanding. The Asian man remains silent. This Dietz guy is a goof.

When the man returns to the circle the woman lifts her arm and points at the barn. All three of them nod, and the contractor puts his hands on his hips. The couple turns to the contractor, and he bends his head down in thought. He holds out one hand and then the other, making a tipping-of-the-scale motion. He looks up to find the man with his arms crossed. The woman begins to speak, but the man quickly uncrosses his arms and holds out one arm in front of her. He moves a step closer to the contractor. The man points at the barn with one hand and motions to his wife with the other. She rides. I can tell by the thighs. She must be interested in the small stable I built in the barn for my wife. It's a shame.

This woman has the wrong guy. I've seen Dietz' outbuildings. If they're not textbook examples of shoddy workmanship, or utter pieces of shit, then you'd have to pay out the ass for something decent. I could fix their barn easily, for cheap, and I'd do a much better job than Dietz. I bet she was asking if it could look like it did before – most of the barn was still standing – only to be told by the contractor that his crew couldn't replicate my work.

I can hear the contractor say something about the previous owner. The woman covers her mouth and shakes her head. When she takes her hand away there's an expression of disbelief.

She laughs a little.

That bastard. Previous owner? I know he isn't badmouthing my work. Even Dietz would admit it's superior. And I'll be damned if he wants to give me shit for stripping the place. Everything I salvaged belonged to me.

He's nodding as if he's passing judgment on me and then he reaches for something in his pocket. He pulls out a cell phone, holds up one finger, and answers it. I never did that to my clients.

He leaves the Asians for a moment, and they walk to the front of the house. The woman walks to the porch and looks at her reflection in the bay window. In the front yard, the man picks up an old doorknob; the one I bought, installed, removed, and then discarded because I busted it in the rush to remove it. He pitches it into the dumpster. It misses the glass this time, but it makes a loud reverberating clang. It banged against the dumpster wall. The contractor spins around, looking startled. He says something into his phone, hangs it up, and leads the couple to the barn.

I've seen – though I feel I have not done – enough.

My phone starts buzzing and then it rings. I scramble to silence it before I'm caught. It rings once. It's my wife. I look toward the barn to see if they heard it, but it appears they're too far away by now to notice it. I look at the time on the phone and see that it's getting late and dinner is probably ready by now. She wants to know where I am.

I get up, thinking that this must be what it's like for a drug addict scoping out a house under construction for copper wire, and I've decided to reclaim my mailbox before I go.

The three of them are almost at the barn, about a hundred yards away, and I begin to quietly part the branches in front of me. I walk across the road, keeping an eye on them while glancing down before each step to avoid the crunching sound of stepping on gravel. I step on the grass at the edge of the lawn, and I slip a little, my left foot almost sliding into the hole for the mailbox post. There's no traction in these wingtips. I tiptoe the rest of the way to the dumpster.

I lift myself up, reach down, and grab the mailbox, pulling it up carefully to avoid hitting the dirt-streaked green wall and making that sweetly satisfying thudding noise that I used to love hearing. It was lying on our old and torn and inflatable kiddie pool – my wife’s purchase. I look up and they’re walking around the corner of the barn, out of sight.

I have the mailbox now, but the reflection of the yard – of the mud – in the bay window catches my attention. I walk over to it. I notice how clean it is. With both hands I grip the mailbox near the bottom of the post and rest it at my side. I pull it back, readying myself to hurl it through their damn window. Let Dietz’s guy fix that, too. There’ll be shattered glass splinters all over the breakfast nook. It’ll be loud. They’ll come running, to be sure, but the house will block their view of me, though, giving me enough time to sprint back through the brush and into the field. My reflection and the reflection of the mailbox are in the window. I notice a small clump of dirt from the mailbox fell in my hair.

The clump is stuck, but I don’t mind, and I find myself thinking of the deflated kiddie pool and the orange elephants on it. I couldn’t stand the thing. If the kids didn’t start crying the day I tried to throw it out, it would’ve ended up in that dumpster a long time ago. I hated having it. It was just a holdover until I could build us a real pool. Just like this next job I’m going to have to take. That will also be a holdover until I can get back to doing something I want to do. Maybe restoration. Maybe not. Who knows?

The phone is buzzing again and I’m still holding on to the mailbox like its some kind of Viking battle axe. That damn bay window. The dazzling, beautiful bay window. The phone stops vibrating. Must be a text message.

That window, it’s the last unspoiled thing left on the property... The Asians can keep it. Maybe they earned it. But I’m taking the mailbox.

I walk away from the house without turning back and I am careful not to step in the hole left by the mailbox post this time. I stop right after I pass it. I’m still bothered that the guy just threw it out. They don’t make them like this and if he knew better, he would have kept it. I turn around to look at the hole and back at the barn. The three of them are still on the other side. My conscience continues to get the best of me and I figure I should show these new owners the light, so I give them back the mailbox and guide it into the hole. I use all of my weight to push it in as far as possible, and I crouch down to pack dirt and grass against it. I get up and shake it once. I kick some more dirt on it and pack it with my boot. I shake it again. It’s more than secure.

\*\*\*

When I get home I open the door and blocking the way is Nick who has his arms reaching over his sister's shoulders, trying to get at something she's hunched over and guarding, throwing elbows over. They greet me as I enter, but they are too busy struggling with each other to get up.

"Your dinner's in the microwave," my sister-in-law says from the couch without looking up from her magazine. My wife's recently taken to working out in the evenings.

Eleanor lets out a shriek.

"Nicholas, off of your sister," I command. He releases his grip on Eleanor. I ask what the problem is.

"Eleanor won't let me play."

How many times do I have to tell them? "Wait until she's done or you can go play with one of your toys in the meantime."

"But I don't have anything like that." He points at the shapeless green slime she is now squishing between her hands. "It's not fair."

I walk toward Eleanor and I kiss the top of her head. I touch the slime. It's not sticky.

Then I pick up Nicholas and hold him in my arm. I walk to the kitchen.

"Just because Eleanor has a toy that you don't have doesn't mean it's not fair."

"But Mom just bought it and she gives all the best toys to Eleanor and she only bought one for her."

"I'm sure she had a reason." I open the microwave door. Baked chicken. Broccoli. "How about this: after I eat, I'll take you to get some slime. Sticky slime. Slime that only I can find."

# Carol Everett Adams

## So She Covers Her Lovely Face

240 "HELP THOSE WOMEN"

company in town. His dad smokes, drinks and chews. Moses got it from his mother. He was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, but that didn't give him the swelled head.

When God wants to throw a world out into space, he is not concerned about it. The first mile that world takes settles its course for eternity. When God throws a child out into the world he is mighty anxious that it gets a good start. The Catholics are right when they say: "Give us the children until they are ten years old and we don't care who has them after that." The Catholics are not losing any sleep about losing men and women from their church membership. It is the only church that has ever shown us the only sensible way to reach the masses that is, by getting hold of the children. That's the only way on God's earth that you will ever solve the problem of reaching masses. You get the boys and girls started right, and the devil will hang a crape on his door, bank his fires, and hell will be for rent before the Fourth of July.

A friend of mine has a **little girl** that she was compelled to take to the hospital for an operation. They thought she would be frightened, but she said: "I don't care if mama will be there and hold my hand." They prepared her for the operation, led her into the room, put her on the table, **put the cone over her face** and saturated with ether, and she said: "Now, mama, take me by the hand and hold it **and** I'll not be afraid." And the mother stood there and **held** her hand. The operation was performed, and when she regained consciousness, they said: "Bessie, weren't you afraid when they put you on the table?" She said: "No, mama stood there and held my hand. I wasn't afraid."

**There** is a mighty power in a mother's hand. There's more power in a woman's hand than there is in a king's

scepter.

And there is a **mighty** power in a mother's kiss—  
inspiration, courage, hope, **ambition**, in a mother's kiss.

# Darrell Dela Cruz

## Second-Hand Tang Poem No. 1

How can we position the moon  
for our advantage? Drink enough  
and we'll have multiple moons  
to write about. Our dancing  
partners will be our young shadows  
that will grow distant from us. Our friends  
will partake on the honorable food  
left out for our ancestors: flies praying  
on top a bowl of rice, rats washing themselves  
in the last of our alcohol. We drink  
from the same pond Li Po drowned in.  
We weren't even thirsty.

# Stacey Lane

## The Author's Autopsy

### Cast of Characters

Dr. Owens: Chief forensic pathologist  
Dr. Shifflet: Resident

### Scene

The autopsy suite of a morgue.

### Time

The present.

SETTING: An examination table at a morgue.

AT RISE: DR. OWENS and DR. SHIFFLET  
stand over a corpse, tools at the ready.

DR. OWENS

If you need to vomit in this bucket, I won't think less of you.

DR. SHIFFLET

This may be my first autopsy, Doctor, but I assure you I come highly trained.

DR. OWENS

Nothing you read in books can prepare you for this. Shall we begin with the standard Y incision of the cavity or the coronal incision of the scalp?

DR. SHIFFLET

The brain, if you don't mind.

DR. OWENS

Do the honors.

(DR. SHIFFLET makes the incision to the head.)

DR. SHIFFLET

Hmmmm. Uh...

DR. OWENS

This man was an artist, an author.

DR. SHIFFLET

Awh, that accounts for the abnormalities.

DR. OWENS

Begin your examination.

(DR. SHIFFLET pulls out a post-it note.)

DR. OWENS

What did you find?

DR. SHIFFLET

Some sappy sentiments about a sunset.

DR. OWENS

Pass me the puke pail.

DR. SHIFFLET

Pardon?

DR. OWENS

My apologies. But when you've seen as many of these as I have...

(DR. OWENS pulls out hundreds upon hundreds of colored post-it notes. DR. SHIFFLET follows suit.)

DR. OWENS

Plotlines, premises, possible titles, possible pen names, character descriptions, witty observations about life, rants on religion, questioning of political ideals, unresolved father issues, inkling of genius, overheard conversations at restaurants, clever sayings stolen from friends—

DR. SHIFFLET

(Studying a post-it note.)

Hmmmm...

DR. OWENS

Discover something noteworthy?

DR. SHIFFLET

An idea for a novel.

DR. OWENS

Yes, yes. There are plenty of those in here.

DR. SHIFFLET

But this one's not bad. I mean I'd read that book.

DR. OWENS

Yes. Well, you'll never get the chance now.

(DR. OWENS measures the post-it notes  
on a scale and writes on the chart.)

For this much material, the volume of work is surprisingly low.

DR. SHIFFLET

So that's what killed him then. All those jumbled thoughts wrapped in angst and discontent crashing against each other in a quest for ultimately unattainable fulfillment.

DR. OWENS

No. No. That's the norm for these creative types. When there's nothing up there, that's when there's cause for concern. Shall we move on to the standard Y incision?

DR. SHIFFLET

Yes, Doctor.

(DR. SHIFFLET makes the incision to the body.)

DR. OWENS

My! My! I've never seen bowel blockage of this magnitude.

(Pulling out gobs and gobs of crumbled up notebook paper.)

Discarded drafts, abandoned books, neglected novels, rejected rewrites...

DR. SHIFFLET

What a waste!

DR. OWENS

Aha. There it is. The cause of death.

(Pulls out a nicely bound book.)

DR. SHIFFLET

(Reading title.)

“My Magnum Opus”.

DR. OWENS

It was pressing on his heart.

DR. SHIFFLET

(Opening book.)

It’s blank.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)

# Peter LaBerge

## Field Sermon #3: Coronet

In the house, beside the cupboard where the girl cooks memories in a Betty Crocker cake pan, wants to experience sunlight and wisdom and what the neighbor's radio has to say, watches the words she hears bubble up in the spitting sizzle in front of her, watches them become her memory, finally wishes she had worn an apron today. In front of a lime tree is a window consumed by the sealed promise of condensation, but the girl tears it to fingertip mist: writes the words, *I am what I am*.

# Peter LaBerge

## Hymn for Barry

For as long as I can remember, my mother has kept a Mary Magdalene poster in the cedar closet of my basement. Six years ago, when I still believed in God, the poster was warped by water damage—met from the neck down by a dose of unwelcome hurricane. My mother didn't know how to respond, whether she'd been struck by an omen or not. Quietly, while Hurricane Barry freed the almonds and figs outside from the underbelly of our garden, my mother sat and cried, curled up in the powerless dark of her bed. Mary was with her then, sustained, flattening underneath a stack of brilliant encyclopedias.

# Tim DeJong

## Last Fare at the Carnival

Frosted sunlight like caked glaze  
filters through chainlink haze.  
A bored operator punches

holes in our tickets  
and latches us in. Slow grind  
of gears. We spin,

rise in reverse, till at the apex  
we're lone witnesses of  
the carnival's piecemeal detritus:

drink cartons' cuneiform scatter,  
blown wrappers pinned to a fence.  
Simulacra of the near escape.

Below us a child cries,  
face smeared with cotton  
candy residue. The heat

of an exhausted day drifts up  
from the clearfill parking lot.  
Parents tug kids bleary

with sugar and weary of  
excitement back to twilit  
minivans whose tires scud

on the dusty road, intent  
on some version of home,  
as we are intent

on inhabiting the mirage  
felt on that last descent.  
Why ride a ferris wheel?

To reach, perhaps, the height  
of leaves still unreleased  
by captor trees and blushing

with early autumn's pride,  
nearly spent? Or simply  
to tell ourselves how grand

and gladdening it is to be  
high up and moving,  
swinging strapped to rusty

seats of a scarred machine  
whose paint is peeling.  
Something about the world

seen from no great height,  
seen from the middle distance,  
the part of it we are.

Hard to tell just what I'm feeling  
on that penultimate spin round.  
Easy to see, from here, just how

we are pinned down  
below the filmy latticework  
of clouds, awaiting one last rise.

# Ariel Goodman

## Linda

He saw Linda last when she stood in line for security. Her plane went down two hours later, somewhere in a vacant field in southern Kansas. Mechanical error, they said. Two survivors. Linda was not one of them. He remembers their parting words. She said, Check in on Dad every once in a while, will ya? He responded, Here's five bucks. Buy yourself a sandwich or something. She took the five bucks, her long fingers brushing almost imperceptibly against his hand. As she turned, her scent wafted lazily toward him. The Linda Smell. L'Oreal Paris Kids Orange-Mango Smoothie conditioner swirled in with two sharp sticks of spearmint gum, just barely concealing the sweet perfume of marijuana. Because Linda was never not high.

She introduced him to weed when she was fifteen. He was two years older. They smoked in the alley behind her house, backs nestled against her garage, bare feet sprawled along the gravel. Rocks between their toes. Linda lit the bowl for him, the flame from her overturned lighter reaching upward to lick her fingers. He inhaled, held it, swallowed, exhaled, exactly as she told him to. He coughed. Hacked. But it was a hack he'd earned – savored – an initiation of sorts. He relished the painful clench of his lungs. When I smoke, she said, the world is a good place to be. He nodded absentmindedly, watching the loose O of her lips as she blew a cloud of sweet translucence in his direction.

As children, their mothers put them together all the time, mostly so they could gossip and call it childrearing. Cousin David bought a Porsche – who does he think he is? Grandma's air conditioning broke two weeks ago and she still hasn't fixed it. I've nagged her twice already. George is becoming less and less competent in bed; it's not even a pleasurable experience anymore. We're going to Aunt Marlee's house today, his mother told him. You and Linda can do an art project. You don't want to? Too bad – we're going. Grab your coat.

When they got high, they were not giddy. They did not giggle. They talked about everything they thought but never said. Speculated on how pickles are pickled. Wondered how many kids the average crossing guard helped to cross the street in one day. Doubted whether Jesus could really

bear the weight of all the world's sins. What do you think Van Gogh did with his ear? Linda asked. Slept with it under his pillow and hoped the Tooth Fairy would give him money for it, he replied. What do you think Hitler liked to eat for dinner? Meatloaf, she said decisively. That's a patriotic German food, isn't it?

He was eighteen when they looked through old family photo albums. Her fourth birthday party (Disney-themed), his Little League baseball game, his pimply smile at middle school graduation, Grandpa's retirement celebration downtown, Mellow Yellow, the parakeet, perched on Linda's shoulder. There was one photo. Them, toddlers, together in the bathtub. Linda frowned at the photographer, suds dripping down her face, while he skimmed his toy boat across the water, happy. We were kind of precious, she said. I miss the good old days of taking baths, not showers, he said. So let's take one. What? Let's take a bath, she repeated. He looked her full in the face. Her gray eyes were clear, unblinking. Serious. You want to take a bath together? He was incredulous. She continued to look at him, sizing him up. Okay, he conceded. His stomach curled.

They ran the water for ten minutes, sitting on the ledge talking. They undressed, not looking at each other, but not avoiding. Once in the tub, they were quiet. Her foot brushed lightly against his knee. Leaning backward, she pulled her face underwater. He watched the wet tendrils of her hair as they ebbed toward her shoulders, imagined the muscles around her mouth tensing as she held her breath. They never bathed together again.

Linda was fearless. She ran outside during thunderstorms, citing electrocution as a bad-ass way to die. Bought a motorcycle when she turned twenty-seven and rode it without a helmet, because the thing she loved most was the shadow it made on the ground next to her – a person-shaped blob on a bike-shaped blob, a blob of hair blowing backward in the wind.

She was surrounded by scraps of lace – ordered neatly according to price and preference – rehearsal dinner menus, wine lists, mock flower arrangements, travel books. She was queen and they were her courtiers; she needed only to pick up a lace sample, declare it the trim for her veil, and the matter was settled. For the past four months, her attention had been entirely consumed by wedding plans.

“What about Australia? It's supposed to be incredibly beautiful there.”

“Um, I'd rather not. Too far.” He shifted in his seat, then returned to reading the newspaper. Comics section.

“Alright...how about Paris? Europe is so much closer.”

“Still too far.”

“But Paris is the most romantic city in the world. We could eat crepes and go to the Louvre. I’ve always wanted to eat a Parisian crepe.” She licked her lips in what she perhaps hoped was an alluring gesture.

Resigned to the fact that the conversation had to happen – and he was expected to take an active role in it – he folded the paper slowly. Set it down. “I was thinking,” he said in a quiet but clear voice, “we could go somewhere much closer. Somewhere within the country.”

She frowned. Eyes narrowed. Then she rearranged her features, smiling childishly. Dimple in her left cheek. “I’ve got it. Hawaii.”

“Still too far. I think a road trip would be just great. Bed-and-breakfasts, Abbey Road, open air. The whole shebang.”

“A road trip?” He detected a hint of restrained disgust in her voice. “Honey, that’s not romantic at all. The whole point of a honeymoon is that you get away, adventure somewhere you haven’t been.”

“I thought the whole point of a honeymoon was to adventure with your new spouse, regardless of the vacation spot.” He was distinctly irritated.

“But Sweetie, we’re young and we’ve been almost nowhere – you and me both. We have the money. I see no reason why we can’t listen to Abbey Road and open air or whatever romanticized notion you have of road trips some other time. A time that is not our honeymoon.”

“I just don’t want to fly anywhere.”

“Now why on earth would you say that? You’re eliminating ninety-nine-point-nine percent of the world. That’s absurd.”

He stared at his hands. Picked a cuticle from his left thumb.

“What?” Voice sharp with exasperation.

“My...best friend died in a plane crash six months ago. I’ve told you that before, how can you possibly not remember it? So, in deference to her, and for the safety of our lives, I’d prefer not to set foot on a plane for a while, or maybe ever, if that’s alright with you, Miss Domineering.”

Prickly silence.

She had the decency to look embarrassed.

“Honey, I’m so sorry, it slipped my mind for a sec.” She clasped his hand in what she perhaps hoped was a conciliatory gesture. He shut his eyes. Concentrated on not yanking that hand away. She said, “I think a road trip to Colorado or Virginia could be nice, don’t you?” He watched as her eyes traipsed back over the wine list, probably weighing the merits of Chardonnay versus Pinot Grigio.

Linda was fearful. She never walked beneath bridges. When her

parents yelled at her, she called him and cried into the phone, then hung up to smoke and cry some more. She washed her hands every time she entered a building. Hand sanitizer wasn't good enough. Even at a hole-in-the-wall diner without a public bathroom she'd go into the kitchen and ask to use the chef's sink. She shied away from squirrels, calling them GFFD: God's Fucking Furry Devils.

When they returned home from college on breaks, they got high and drove around. Only then, in the car, protected by the softening haze of weed, did they broach the topic of their childhoods, their parents. Dad was always really controlling, she said. He and Mom slept together up until I reached high school, then she made him move into his own room downstairs. Said it was because he had back problems and couldn't handle their water bed. Later she told me it was because he had bad breath. I guess she was pretty controlling, too.

Ma used to ignore me for days at a time when she was mad, he told her. If I talked back to her, she made me sleep in the basement, no blankets. No wonder you hate spiders, she replied, holding out the joint in her right hand while maneuvering the steering wheel with her left.

At least she favored me over Jackson, he said, inhaling lazily. When he talked back, he had to walk the dog twice a day for two weeks. And it usually happened in the winter. She laughed. No wonder he moved to Florida. And refuses to donate to PETA.

When they got high, they ate. Can you still be a nowhere man if you have friends? he asked, the words seeming to hang in the air long after he remembered saying them, as if he were shouting through a tunnel. Let's make brownies, she replied. Upstairs, in the kitchen, they splashed together a brownie mix with water and eggs. He's a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land, making all his nowhere plans for nobody, they sang, skipping around the kitchen. Food always made them lively. Doesn't have a point of view – they stuck the pan in the oven, slammed it shut – knows not where he's going to – collapsed onto the kitchen chairs – isn't he a bit like you and me? The brownies came out a watery mess, sloshing around in the pan like fresh mud. They'd forgotten the oil. Linda reached right in, dunking her hand. Fingers splayed, she pulled back and turned to him, revealing a chocolate-covered palm. It's chocolate heaven, she declared. He licked her thumb. Chocolatey tongues. They sang, Nowhere man, please listen, you don't know what you're missin...

The day before she graduated from college, she called him. She was high; he was at the office. I need to you to make me a promise, she said.

What? he asked, already knowing he would. If neither of us are married by the time I turn forty, she said slowly, let's get hitched. I'm pretty sure that's illegal, he said, trying to keep his voice down. To hell with it. If it was good enough for Darwin, it's good enough for me. Fine, he said. But promise me I get to be there to see Uncle George and Aunt Marlee's face when we announce.

All the shit I always talked about him doesn't change the fact that I love him and he's my dad and I am not equipped to handle this, she said, in place of a greeting. He flicked off the TV and settled himself anxiously on the couch. Wished he wasn't in his dingy apartment, wished he was back home, visiting Uncle George with her. Wished things were fair. There was a tremble in her voice, a barely suppressed sob. He wanted to comfort, didn't know what to say. Hoped she would fill the silence.

He doesn't even remember how to play piano. Not a single note. Remember high school? Remember how he made me practice an hour a day? Dad loved that stupid goddamn piano.

I remember. It felt insufficient, yet somehow, right. He just needed her to know he was there.

I went downstairs this morning and he called me Marlee. Marlee. I didn't even correct him, it wasn't worth it. But what does that mean? Is he associating me with Mom in his mind? Their relationship was shit. I don't wanna be Marlee, you know? I want him to know I'm Linda, not the woman who could barely stand to be near him.

Completely understandable. He envisioned her sitting in the living room at the piano bench, hands cradling her face, elbows propped on knees. Involuntary tears.

After he called me Marlee and talked all about his upcoming appointment with Dr. Merle – who I took him to see yesterday – he went into the living room and sat down at the piano. And I thought – I'm such an idiot – I thought this was gonna be a breakthrough or something. That he'd play and it would all come rushing back. I thought maybe we'd joke about what a controlling asshole he was when he used to make me practice and patrolled back and forth behind me, criticizing all my off-key notes.

He remembered fleetingly the time in high school they'd smoked and played the piano, her long fingers guiding his over the keys.

He cupped the phone closer to his ear.

And then he just sat at that piano, she continued, just sat there – so helpless, you know? And he had his hands poised above the keys all ready to play, but he couldn't. And his hands are so old. They're all knobby and curled and I just kept wondering what happened to those hands that used to tie my soccer cleats for me, used to carry me as a little girl. When do

our hands get old?

I really don't know, Linda. He'd never paid much attention to his father's hands.

So I said to him, play me something, Dad. Just one little song. And he squinted so hard at that piano like the keys were old friends of his and he knew that he knew them, but not anymore. And his eyes were so blurry and just so confused. And helpless. We both were, you know? And he said, it's no use, Marlee, I'm just no shakes at piano anymore. And that really did me in. I couldn't take it. I got up and left him there at the piano bench, just left him all alone and pathetic because I couldn't handle it. Does that make me selfish? How the hell am I supposed to go through this with him? She sobbed. Choked on her fear. His heart beat wildly, painfully. Wanted, more than anything, to hold her hand.

Linda, shhh, listen to me. We're all a little selfish, on some level. But you love him and he knows it. Maybe piano just wasn't in the cards for either of you. It's gonna be okay.

The night he found out Linda was dead, he smoked two bowls, alone in his apartment. Through the fog and the haze and the stabbing colors and the topsy turvy and the thick and dry and the purple shadows and the purple bruises and the one-legged birds singing the folk music and the slow-motion tears and the wordless curses and the carrot sticks and the goddamn mechanical errors and up and up and up and then down down and Joe and Mark and Marlee and Jude and George and the cotton coming up through the couch and the lightning colors there was only one thing he knew, but he was sure: the world was not a good place to be.

When they fought, they fought bitterly. Stop coming to class high every day, he told her. It's terrible for your lungs and it's gonna destroy your grades. I don't see your grades being much to write home about, she retorted. Mine will get me into college, he said. You're gonna have to grow up and quit at some point. Real people don't live like this forever. Oh, so now I'm not real? she bristled, gray eyes flashing. She could work herself into a rant. Excuse me for not wanting to conform to your notion of real. Why do you have to be so goddamn mainstream? You only care what other people think, what your parents think. You don't take any risks whatsoever. Fuck you, he said. I'm going home.

I can't believe you're selling out, she told him. What the hell is that supposed to mean? An office job? It's unbelievably boring and mundane. You could do so much more. Says the girl who got pregnant and quit grad school. I don't see you doing anything with your career. You know I'm going to go back to it, she said. You're supposed to be happy for me, not

a complete dick. The phone line clicked and deadened.

When they fought in high school, they settled it over a joint, a particularly funny comic strip, a large oatmeal raisin cookie where they spat the raisins in the street. When they fought as adults, they settled it over an interminable silence lasting several days, followed by a long-distance phone call. Eased into the conversation with awkward jokes and hastily-filled pauses. They let the past lie between them, made no excuses or apologies and sought no explanations for their hurtful words. They plowed steadily forward.

Two months after her funeral, he revisited her grave with her father. The old man walked unsteadily with a cane, danced precariously between uprightness and wheelchair confinement. The man who used to play soccer with his daughter, used to carry a briefcase to work so he could feel important, used to sit in his study and pore over the Iliad instead of helping to wash the dinner dishes, used to pontificate on the subtle differences between Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 2 and No. 3 – this man stood hunched and unaware, outliving his daughter only in time and space. They stood at the gravesite, silence stealing the air around them. He felt strangely nervous, felt the need to talk. He looked at the old man. Then he talked.

Uncle George? he asked. Did you know Linda and I made a pact to get married if we both weren't by the time she turned forty? It was her idea, not mine. I think she worried because she never found love in college. Four more years and we'd have gotten hitched, if Jude hadn't entered the picture. I like Jude, he's just a bit pompous for my taste. And straight-laced for hers, I always thought. I guess, when you get down to it, I never fully forgave him for not making me a groomsman at the wedding. Maybe he felt threatened by me...Did you know she liked carrots more than anything else? She was a regular Bugs Bunny. When we got high she could go through two bags of carrots. She'd chew them up all orange and mushy in her mouth, then stick her tongue out at me just to be obnoxious. We usually bought them in advance, so you and Aunt Marlee wouldn't get too suspicious.

That sounds nice, the old man mumbled.

She was never any good at piano, he continued. It was as if he were talking to a table, or his foot, or a newborn baby – for the amount of response he elicited – but instead, it was her father. You always forced her to play that piano and she resented it so much. You probably could have had a better relationship if you'd just chucked it like she asked you to so many times...I thought Aunt Marlee was too harsh on you. Your breath wasn't so bad, a few sticks of spearmint gum would've cleared the problem

right up.

Well thank you, the old man said politely, Means a lot.

He pulled a joint out of his pocket, lit, and inhaled deeply. Glancing down at her gravestone, arbitrary words and numbers – crucial names and dates – swam before his eyes and a deep nausea overtook him. He exhaled, looked up, and saw the old man staring at him with cloudy gray eyes. What on earth's that? he asked. Good old-fashioned weed, he responded. My fiancée told me I need to quit, but what the hell. Here, take a puff. He placed the joint gently at the old man's lips, instructed him to inhale. When he exhaled, a tiny wisp of smoke left his mouth, disbanded in the direction of Linda's grave. She always said that smoking made the world seem like a good place to be, he told the old man.

That sounds nice, the old man said.

One night she called him.

Hello?

You're going to have a first cousin once-removed.

Really? Congratulations. He was happy for her; a pregnancy was inevitable.

Thanks. She laughed, a giggle at first, then rolling peals that reverberated through their phone connection. He loved Linda's laughter. It was so real. Unedited. Can you believe I'm gonna be a mom?

How far along?

Four-and-a-half months.

You must be fat.

Ha. Not as much as you'd expect, given that I've eliminated the munchies.

No smokes for you?

No school or motorcycle either. This damn baby has forced me to sacrifice my weed, my career aspirations, and my bad-ass factor.

You'll go back to school though?

Hopefully.

The world of journalism can't survive another day without you.

Neither can the baby. Or my dealer, for that matter.

Don't flatter yourself, I'm sure he has other customers. But seriously, Linda. Congratulations. I'm excited to become a first-cousin-once-removed.

I expect you to fly out here when he's born.

He?

He's a boy, I've never been more sure of anything in my life.

Hopefully I can make it...if it doesn't conflict too much with work...

You're an ass.

I aim to please.

I have to go tell Dad the news.

Just make sure you keep Uncle George and your kid away from the piano.

You know I will.

The day after her funeral, he attended a lecture. The Jewish Position on the Afterlife. If it had been Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Hindu, Baptist, he wouldn't have cared. It was all the same. He figured there would be plenty of old widows there. Instead, he met an attractive single woman. Her father had died last month.

They went out for coffee. They went to the zoo. They went to bed. They went to the store to buy an engagement ring. When they had sex, he sometimes closed his eyes and saw Linda's face. Exactly as it had been that day they bathed together in high school, around-the-mouth muscles tensed and tendrils of dark hair ebbing in the water.

When they got high, they argued over which quesadilla toppings tasted best in which combinations. They twisted the faucet ever so slightly and sat for forty-five minutes, counting each drip of water. They wondered aloud if they had already met the person they'd marry, tried to guess the ways they'd die. She ate carrots. He laid on his back and listened – to the crunch of her carrots, the rasp of her voice, the rushing water that filled his head.

Joey, buddy, you gotta put your hands together. Choke up a little. There ya go. Now, feet apart, elbow up, and swing – hard. Joey swung gallantly, missed. A dark tuft of hair fell over his eye. That's alright, little man, you'll get it next time.

He hadn't heard her approaching, but her laughter was unmistakable. He's gonna turn you into a pro ball-player, Joey, she said, bending down to kiss the boy's head. Joey looked up at them and beamed, the stubs of his two front teeth poking like hidden treasure from his gums. He swung again at the tee. Missed.

Come on, let's sit. I brought you some lemonade. Even spiked it a little. Wrapping her fingers gently around his arm, she led him to the front stoop, the cottony folds of her long sundress grazing his leg. They sat facing Joey, watched as he tossed the ball miscellaneously upward, spun around and collapsed in the grass. Toss, spin, collapse, giggle, repeat.

He's a great kid. Really. Laughs like you.

She looked at Joey, a smile playing around her lips and eyes. I guess he does, doesn't he?

And I like what you did to this place. You know, with the carpeting and that greenish color in the hallway.

The paint-job was all Jude.

I guess Jude has pretty decent taste.

Good to hear you finally admit it. But we painted the house about three years ago.

I guess I really haven't been out here since Joey was born.

She turned to him. Soft gray eyes. No, you haven't. But I want you to feel comfortable here, you know? Nothing about this place feels like you. Not yet, at least. She looked back at Joey as he writhed in the grass. Laughed lightly to herself.

What're you laughing at?

I was just thinking, I can't wait 'til the first time I catch my little Joe smoking up.

He was taken aback. Jeez, Linda. What're you gonna say to him?

I think I'll act all stern at first, and then I'll ask him if I raised him as generous enough to share some devil's herb with Mommy.

I don't think Jude dearest would be too pleased with that response.

She reached into her purse, sifted past the three packages of spearmint gum and her rolled-up copy of the Chicago Tribune. Pulled out a joint.

Aw, come on, Linda. Give it a rest. You're about to get on a plane. He gripped the steering wheel tighter.

Exactly. This is the only way to fly. And you're taking the first hit. In one fluid motion, she flicked the lighter, dangled the joint tantalizingly before his lips. And in spite of himself, he smiled.

Two years into their marriage, he asked her to take a little trip with him. "I'm going to introduce you to someone important. I promised her I'd check in on him," he said. "Should I dress up?" she asked. "Don't bother. It won't make a difference."

At the nursing home, they walked without knocking into Room 208. The old man snoozed softly in bed, hands limp, jowls sagging. A small geranium plant sat on the window sill. Yellow. He recognized Jude's handwriting on the card. Jude was always a good guy. He squeezed the old man's hand gently, taking a seat beside the bed. She followed suit. The old man's gray eyes fluttered open briefly, settled on his face. No recognition, no enlightenment. But a little emotion. A little joy.

"Hey, Uncle George."

"Well, hello."

"I brought my wife to see you."

"Well, hello."

“Hello, George. It’s so nice to finally meet you.”

“This is Linda’s father.”

“Sounds like you had a pretty great daughter.”

“Why yes, thank you.”

“How’ve you been, Uncle George?”

“You know, I’m just pulling through. Sun’s out today, maybe I’ll go for a run.”

“That sounds nice. You take care now, alright Uncle George?”

“Here comes the sun, doo doo doo doo.”

“And I say, it’s alright. Pardon my singing voice. Goodbye now, Uncle George.”

“Goodbye, son. Goodbye, Linda. Nice meeting you. Goodbye, Linda.”

# Shaun Fletcher

## Dark Matter Galaxies

Dark dwarf galaxies orbit us, spheres so strange  
light can't touch them and we can only tell they are waiting  
by the pull they have on our bright arms  
from our dark halo. If they move too close to the core  
tidal waves scatter them, take the majority of mass and cut  
drifting ribbons. This is all on paper,  
black ink on solid white  
wood and glue, and no more a satellite of star clusters than words  
around the scar on my left thumb.  
Raised, it has sheen in direct sun. I can touch it and know the knife  
stroked skin – how a thumb flowed  
without rapids – how it opened like evening  
primrose. When the needles damned  
my tides I saw puffed the fat and bone  
fingers are made of. Tell me  
there are galaxies in the black,  
substance in the void,  
even dark matters bleed.

# Ephraim Scott Sommers

## Water Body

I can't remember America.  
Even my brother Jonah is a city

I invented, a city whose shores are caving under the weight  
of so much water, a sinking black island in a blue eye.

Jonah is a city I've never seen. I've never seen Jonah of the neighborhood  
toilets and sinks and bathtubs exploding, the fire-hydrants overflowing.

Jonah was never born, was a miscarriage, a warning, and with water  
everywhere,  
    the brother I unbury and heroin apart so I don't heroin apart,

and with my brother swimming in a city that never was, and with water made  
from cities everywhere...

—Your houses are made of rainclouds,  
Jonah, your beard, of fog, your roads, rivers,

your gondolas, rain, memory, water, my water. It is spring.  
The eaves above the hummingbirds are dissolving,

and paper cranes are storming the sky's borderlines.  
You are evaporating, brother. I imagine you. I smile.

**J. M. Hall**

Birds on Triplicate Power Lines

pianist's furious  
nightmare sheet music – how  
to play their rearranging  
flight, flocking  
claustrophobia  
against open  
pale blue



# CONTRIBUTORS

**Carol Everett Adams** works as a technical writer at a software company. She's earning an MFA in Writing from the University of Nebraska. When she and her husband are not spoiling their dog or scolding their children, they're visiting a Disney theme park.

**Tim DeJong** currently lives in London, Ontario, where he recently completed a PhD in English at Western University. His dissertation explored the political potential of sympathy in postwar American poetry. Outside of writing, his hobbies include watching films and playing golf and soccer. His poems have been published in the journals *Booth* and *Forge*.

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**J. M. Hall** earned his PhD in Philosophy from Vanderbilt University in 2012, but has already published ten journal articles (including in *The South African Journal of Philosophy*, *Southern Literary Journal*, and *Dance Chronicle*) and a chapter in *Ender's Game and Philosophy*, as well as thirty-eight poems in literary journals internationally, recently including *Lilliput Review*, *Poetry Porch*, and *The Montucky Review*. He also has twenty years' experience as a dancer and choreographer.

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**Alex Ledford** is an MFA poetry student, teaching assistant, and co-poetry editor at *Barnstorm Online Journal* at the University of New Hampshire. She received her Bachelor's in English from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and has additionally been published in UNCG's undergraduate literary magazine, *The Coraddi*, and in the July 2011 issue of the online journal *MouseTales Press*.

**Ephraim Scott Sommers** was born in Atascadero, California and received an MFA from San Diego State University. A singer and guitar player, Ephraim has produced three full-length albums of music and toured both nationally with the band Siko and internationally as a solo artist. Recent poetry has appeared in *The Adirondack Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Columbia Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Harpur Palate*, *New Madrid*, *RATTLE*, *RHINO Poetry*, *TriQuarterly*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. His work is also forthcoming in *The Journal and Weave Magazine*. The managing editor of *Flashpoint: A Journal of Literature and Music*, Ephraim is currently teaching creative writing while a doctoral fellow at Western Michigan University. Visit him at [www.reverbnation.com/ephraimscottsommers](http://www.reverbnation.com/ephraimscottsommers).

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