



# NEAT.

Issue 7

Winter 2014 - 2015

Edited By  
Elizabeth Jenike  
&  
TM Keesling



StuckInTheMiddlePress

Published and edited by

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**LETTER FROM THE EDITORS**

Dear Readers,

We continue our musical escapades with our winter issue, which had the theme of *dirge*. The very word probably puts melancholic, heavy feelings in your chest, and our submissions reflected that sentiment. Here in the Midwest, winter is in our bones, our blood. We know what snow looks like. We know how the cold creeps in and takes root in the soles of our feet.

Some of our submissions also stepped outside the idea of human death and moved into other kinds of sorrow: death of nature, death of self. We're confident these cathartic pieces will dig deep to dredge up memories in our readers, just as they did in us.

Our two highlighted writers this time around are **Emma Clark** and **Anna Stokely**. Head over to [neatmag.net](http://neatmag.net) to see what they're up to and read our interviews with them.

As always, keep it NEAT.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Jenike  
TM Keesling  
NEAT. Editors

## **Beginning**

*Jennifer Burd*

Times in life  
beloved leaves –  
death, divorce,  
or time's fold –

a cleaving –  
grieving  
what we held –  
threshold



## **Finitudes**

*Anne Whitehouse*

### I

Leaves fall like confetti. In gusts,  
they twist and turn. The hawkbill geranium  
we planted in July is still blooming in October,  
each tendril ending in a violet flower.  
Low to the ground, nodding softly  
in the wind, it never seems to struggle.

### II

Under a weightless rain,  
in dress uniforms of dark blue,  
the firemen marched in solemn step  
to the mournful accompaniment  
of the “Emerald Society Pipes and Drums.”  
Wreaths were laid at the monument,  
and a bell struck for every man lost  
in the last year.

Our dead are always with us,  
not only at anniversaries.  
They keep watch over us,  
they chide and encourage us,  
if we let them.

### III

It was a day like any other day,  
the mist hung low to the ground  
and hid the hills.  
The wind blew and the rain spilled,  
and the sun broke through.  
And the wet grass waved,  
as majestic clouds floated past,  
like time, hurrying  
in one direction.

### IV

The migrating bird that can't keep up  
gets left behind.

Bathe me in golden light,  
heal my shattered bones.

## Helium Dreams

*James Croal Jackson*

think of floating. of the autumn  
strangers crunching popcorn leaves,  
dead things still stuck to twig strings.

think of parties. of pinatas  
shaped in scythe mustaches,  
beaten with rusted shovels

think of a graveyard, its candy  
mouth sifting the shreds of latex  
balloons, the soda pop colorwheel  
spun, think of the fortune!

and the flaccid

d

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e

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t

to the cake-batter dirt,  
the wheeze and the whistle.  
those drained lungs.

## Undiscovered Country

*Fred Zirm*

One-by-one, my dogs have run ahead  
as scouts to sniff out our mortality.  
They've shown me how to grow  
grey and stiff and deaf - and doze all day.  
As pups, they took pride in giving me  
the sticks they scampered to retrieve,  
while I took joy in their returning,  
but once they staggered into a deeper sleep,  
they could bring nothing back to save me  
the twitch and whimper of my own dreams  
or the darkness of that final fetching.

**Corona***Kayla Krut**Es ist Zeit, daß es Zeit wird.*

We should test it again, see  
if we're real. By it  
I mean not what we did  
but how. There's no purity

to this: anybody's bony arms  
can sheet beds, reheat coffee or save  
in the last moments.  
It's one thing after another

this year: rock candy dyed bright  
glistering on skewers. *Like if  
I were to see a halo, it  
would be blinding, right?*

More work lies in arriving  
like a Valley Center postman  
at his boxes: a row of silver  
plantings painted white

whose interiors he never sees  
for himself. Come first.

## Catcher

*Elizabeth Kerper*

In January, halfway down the steps to the subway,  
neither of us could remember the exact words of the last  
line of *Catcher in the Rye*. We knew you should never  
tell anyone anything but I said if you do, you start

regretting everything and you said if you do, you start  
remembering everyone, then walked away to a train  
going the opposite direction of mine. I stood in the slush  
of your footprints and thought that I should have built a library

under the city of Chicago three years ago, just to prepare  
for today: nonfiction stacked in closed-down stations, poetry  
hanging in crates like ripe fruit from the underbelly  
of the elevated tracks, novels crammed down the Red Line

subway tunnels, their spines pressed to the windows of the trains.  
I would tell you where to watch for *Salinger, J. D.* at the exact  
spot where the track bends before North and Clybourne,  
to pry open the emergency exit and step into the swinging

space between cars, stretch out your fishing line arms  
and snag a copy from the shelf. We would not just flip  
to the last page, we would stage a marathon reading, pass  
the book around the car, invite business men in navy suits

and nail-bitten single mothers of too many children to read  
a chapter for themselves. We would stay on the train all the way  
to the end of the line, then ride it south again until our answer  
bloomed on the page like headlights on a tunnel wall. Now

I still wonder if you looked up the line, don't tell you that  
I haven't. Holden said never to tell anyone anything and I don't  
remember what will happen if I do, but I won't tell you that last night  
in my dreams my mother and her sisters became shrewd

elegant birds with calls like family secrets circling sparse clouds

above me, won't tell you that I have never outgrown my fear  
of water too deep to see the bottom, won't tell you anything at all,  
just in case.

## **The lark ascending**

*Ellen Stone*

On the hill  
in Pennsylvania  
steeple bells  
mean death or birth  
has come to pass.  
The western meadowlark  
sat on a fence post  
outside Topeka, sang  
yellow rusted vowels,  
dirty green eye glinting,  
then flew to the fluff  
of the cottonwood tree,  
and I knew Grandpa  
died in the night.



## **Mourning the Robin**

*Katie Kalisz*

Day breaks over four blue eggs  
left in the nest, a life tied up  
in found yarn and stray sticks.

The mate stands only there, six inches high,  
casts a vacant stare over  
the body.

Well past dawn, and battering stillness; no  
other song.

The silent glass still allures, tricky  
as ice, taunting.

My own mate watches  
through a sliding door  
missing me earlier than need be.

We play matchmaker while  
single robins fly by our other windows, glancing  
at what must seem like love.

## **Grounded**

*Kristin LaFollette*

Sometimes a piano plays  
songs in my head from  
a time when I was younger

I saw you and it looked  
as if you had one thousand  
little origami animals under

your skin

It just  
wasn't  
you

Not that day, not for three  
weeks after

Me, your daughter, nearly  
a grown woman  
You wouldn't listen to  
me, a danger to your own body,

your brain no longer tranquil,  
no longer a tourniquet to  
inhibitions

Fissures filled to the brim  
like the ocean, pink fish  
swimming in it, split open

like a half moon,

Your life, taking on such  
different meaning

## **Peshtigo, October 1871**

*Laura Winkelspecht*

hide your head  
shake in fright  
sky is red  
fear the night

wind and ash  
buildings fall  
howl and crash  
mothers call

breathe and shiver  
pain entire  
find the river  
world's on fire

howl and crash  
shake in fright  
wind and ash  
fill the night

down the well  
escape the heat  
live to tell  
sorrow complete

sky is red  
Peshtigo  
hide your head  
inferno

buildings fall  
find the river  
mothers call  
breathe and shiver

wind and ash

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down the well  
howl and crash  
straight to hell

world's on fire  
inferno  
grief entire  
Peshtigo

## How to Conjure

*Paul Mangus*

Stand on the beach just to watch  
the sun set. Put your palms  
together as if you're grasping an  
apple. Hold them up to your  
chest, and catch the glimpse of a  
single shot arrow pierce straight  
through. Flint penetrates apple,  
shreds your precious cords,  
separates spine, then lies buried  
erect in the sand behind you. An  
evening breeze filled with the last  
ray of loving sunshine you'll ever  
see, grabs your soul as it sweeps  
past. Your empty shell falls over,  
but right before your eyes roll  
completely into the back of your  
head, time rewinds. Your body  
rises faster than a grave. The sun  
climbs from the depths of the  
ocean. The same bright but  
deadly breeze relinquishes your  
soul. Then that single arrow is  
shot out of your body, back into  
our infinite universe, repairing its  
torn collision along the way. Now  
take a bite out of the apple so  
freely given to you, as you watch  
the sun slide past the horizon  
once again. Don't be surprised to  
taste the blood of your own heart  
in its pale red skinned flesh.

**EMMA CLARK**

## Claymation

They remade him out of honey and sulfuric acid,  
a posthumous wad of trembling wax  
suspended in time,  
lying in a bed of burnt satin  
coming back to life.

Funeral science is pageantry  
pomp paganism and recess necromancy,  
*light as a feather stiff as a board.*

Maybe he's born with it  
Maybe it's Maybelline  
Maybe he should have worn  
a turtleneck.

We drove three hours for this,  
The séance of a polymer noodle  
The resurrection of a mannequin  
The elderly weeping moth balls  
into their funeral salad.

I get high in back  
with clairvoyants, caterers,  
and something something savants  
singing

Swing low sweet charred remains,  
no one told me death looked this good.

## Only douchebags write about death

My Grandmother taught me to sew  
so I took out her eyelashes  
and made boy scout knots of them,  
because hot dogs remind me of sleeping bags  
and sleeping bags remind me of you.

Remind me that it was cold in your attic  
that I heard a fly buzz when I-

when you died.

Gran doesn't look me in the eye anymore,  
not since Carl lost his face  
not since my hair grew a new color  
that doesn't resemble the place  
you remember me in.

A polaroid photograph.  
raspberry walking stick  
house of diseased DNA  
from the 'Other' side of the family.

And I think  
if she met Arlis  
it would have to be  
on the inside of a constellation  
behind a mound of target bags  
never opened, only mulled over--  
with a plate of swedish meatballs.

And there they'd sit,

Marge, with her knitting needles  
Arlis, with the Irish mob  
Me, with a bag over my head,  
burlap dunce cap  
voted 'best dressed at work.'



No one talks of the present,  
just  
pleasantries  
the weather channel  
antiques roadshow.

And on holidays we draw turkeys.  
like our fingers were feathers  
    like the New York Times actually cares,  
    like art school paid off.

And we eat chili you thought came from a cheerleader  
    that I made with my dad  
    who thinks I'm his little surfer girl  
    because he died listening to the beach boys.

Because holidays suck

    and sponge baths remind me of you.  
    Your chapped lips,  
    elderly creases,  
pinching time  
as they do flesh  
    hurting all the same.

Somewhere you're out there  
talking to yourself, before it scared us  
booming through the house from the basement  
escaping the many minds of your mother.  
your mother  
your mother  
looks a lot  
like  
me.

I'm finally driving for once  
a red clown car of disorder  
that loves you shamelessly.

    But all this is a lie,  
because death is the privilege to exaggerate.

And Dad,  
you are not dead  
you are the only god I know.

## The Universe

It was summer when the blood filled my room.  
the Universe, drunk again,  
on the ruddy smell of iron and pennies  
that poured from me,  
a tempest of red.

That mournful rage of rain  
forges puncture wounds  
into a full moon of pallid meat  
like a hound might,  
biting down,  
as though I were a red balloon  
filled and popped 99 times  
by broken teeth  
sharp as mine.

And The Universe climbed down bags of meat,  
my uncovered manhole  
flooded with helium,  
sanguine and sobering,  
more like toxic shock than getting high

His voices live inside me,  
thrusting malice with something to prove,  
all of them screaming *FEEL THAT ?*

*i do.*

I feel my fibers mashed  
into carpets and car seats.

Hollow body full of waste,  
a sewer system for two  
that left me playing dead,  
a black hole drunk at night,  
singing in memory of a scab.

The crust on his mattress that won't leave  
any trace of itself  
but the color  
red.

## **Before and After**

*Jennifer Burd*

A crumpled tissue lay  
in the cemetery – whether  
for tears, illness, or  
carelessness I couldn't  
say – but in any case,  
memory.

## **Dream Sequence**

*Victor Clevenger*

The soles of my feet had blistered in the morning sun from chasing you and chasing your love; you kept running and I begged you, "Don't you dare stop until the moon has risen and set the spotlight on the stage."

scene 1 — I kissed you.

scene 2 — you kissed me.

scenes 3 through 6 — we made love.

scenes 7 through 9 — we made love.

scene 10 — I woke from a deep sleep and you were gone; the first snowfall of the season had covered my cold deprived bones.

## The Poem about the Poem

*Jennifer Finstrom*

After the poem that mentioned the boy you had a crush on twenty-five years ago and who seems, now, to have a crush on you was published, he disappeared from the Internet. So you think you should explain to him that poem-world is not world-world, though that seems as if it needs no explanation.

A poem is a world of chosen details, you want to tell him, that may or may not be real. The world called real gives those who live in it no choice. But he isn't in any of the usual places online, and you wonder if you miss him. But, after a while, you realize that what you miss is seeing twenty-year-old you again.

And it's not that you miss being her, and if you could talk to her now, you wouldn't even try to give her advice. What you would really like is to sit down with her on that single bed your shared parents drove on the top of their car from Milwaukee to Green Bay and go through her collection of jewelry: the tangled thrift store necklaces, the bracelet made from broken glass, its edges mostly smooth, sorting out what pieces she should keep, what bits of yourself you'd still like to wear.

**xviii.**

*Tracy Youngblom*

from a longer series of poems titled *Boy*

silence of aftermath:  
emptiness: chair  
with no boy, undented  
pillow on the made bed,  
that bear i found  
in the closet, sealed  
in a plastic bag, its  
round dark puddle  
eyes, red felt mouth  
curdled by words--  
as we all. when  
we try to speak  
of it--what was.



## Chimera

*Brenna Womer*

It's him in the cab. Someplace deep down, a place that's usually quiet, is telling me it's him. I turned my car around to follow because it's been six months since I've seen his face outside of pictures online or in dreams, so many goddamned dreams. The windows are tinted, but I can feel it in the warm spread up the nape of my neck—it's him. And probably her too.

I used to have this dream where we weren't together anymore. I'd see him out in public, somewhere we usually went together, and try to hug him or hold his hand. He'd ask, *What are you doing?* He'd say, *No. Not anymore.* And I'd wake up crying and look over and see his long, pale back spattered with freckles and light patches of hair. I'd scoot close and press my fists and forehead against his spine, between his shoulder blades, trying to fuse our sleep-sweaty skins. *It's not over and it never has to be. Just a dream. Just a dream.* Now some fucked up, self-fulfilled prophecy.

I was fine for few months. Shit, I mean, I was the one who ended it. Afterward, I made new friends and spent more time with my old ones, and without someone hassling me about bringing my work home, I had more time to devote to my job. I got my own apartment, alone, just me. And then a dog because that's a lot of time to yourself. I went on a few dates, let them take me to their beds, and if I faked it real fast, they'd finish and drift off to sleep. I'd huddle close, but their skin was wrong, always all wrong, and everything smelled different.

I don't know how he's managed it, but I haven't seen him once since I ended it. Years of the same friends and the same haunts, and I don't see him once drinking a beer downtown on a Friday night? Did he stop taking his usual route to the sandwich shop on his lunch break? Not once have I seen him getting coffee from the place he's been going every morning since before we knew each other's names. He has a new girlfriend and she walks his dog sometimes. I saw a picture.

I started to look for him in the heads floating above the aisles at the liquor store and at concerts of bands he liked that I didn't, then through the storefront of every bar downtown as I walked home. I'd see a Jeep and squint to make out the driver, even if the

car was the wrong color or didn't have his stickers on the back. *Maybe he took them off. It could still be him.*

I saw a picture of him standing by the door of a house, holding a key and wearing a proud smile—a homeowner now. There was a porch swing in the background and each night I walk the dog we go through a different neighborhood and try to guess which house it could be. Sometimes I sit a minute on each swing we pass and I imagine him peeking out from the doorframe and, seeing me, taking a seat too and stretching his arm along the back. I could rest my head against the soft cotton of his shirt and breathe in deep his right-skin smell. I could rest.

I started seeing him in the shadows on the walls of my apartment. He's the coat rack or a hanging towel or headlights through the blinds. Some days I see him riding past my complex on a bike that isn't his, or in the park holding the hand of a girl who isn't her. I hear songs and it's him.

I was fine for a few months until I realized he knew me. He knew me like a song you don't have to try to remember the words of, like a measuring cup you use even after all the numbers are rubbed off. And now I think to be known might be the very best in life, and to be known and then forgotten, the very worst.

I've pulled over a short distance from the cab that's stopped in front of an Italian restaurant, and I know it can't be anyone else inside. I turn off the headlights. The cab door swings open and his perfect head leans out and up. He helps her out and it's them just as I knew it would be, after all these months. And I reach for the door handle, but what is there to do? I could go up to him and look into his face and say, *Remember me?* I could try to hug him, take the sides of his old winter coat in my hands, but I know what he'd say. *What are you doing? No. Not anymore.*

## The Ruined Forest

*Myles Buchanan*

They say that a blight  
has fallen on the ash trees,  
blackened the lichen  
and peeled the bark,

how the branches look strong  
until stepped on  
and the leaves dissolve when plucked.

I know a mother whose  
son came back from the  
woods all wrong,  
a pale unhappy thing—  
and her daughter sprouted  
black and gauzy fairy-tale wings.

I walked the woods myself  
and saw—a pale hand?  
a flaming brand?  
Or maybe just a corner,  
the trail hitching left toward  
something out of sight.

It's understandable:  
they plan to burn the forest down,  
and cinders will fall for miles around.

It will be like snow in high summer.

## Pigeons

*Laura Winkelspecht*

*As of September 2014, passenger pigeons  
have been extinct for one hundred years.*

They flew across  
swatches of green forest  
that spread across the land  
like a living blanket.  
A continent of birds  
for birds—  
Enough to make flocks  
that blocked out the sun.  
ribbons of plenty painted  
across the earth and sky.  
Then farmland replaced forest,  
and pigeons were sold  
in barrels  
a penny a bird.  
Millions became  
thousands,  
and thousands became  
hundreds,  
and hundreds became  
one.  
And then none.

Passenger pigeon flocks  
no longer  
turn the sky black.  
Now their silent message drifts  
into the blank, blue sky.

## Bones

*Janna Knittel*

When N'Chi Wana's waters rose  
     they swallowed so much,  
 even our land of the dead,  
     the islands where we left the bodies to the air and earth.

*passed three large rocks in The river  
     the middle rock is large long and has Several Squar vaults on it.  
 we call this rocky Island the Sepulchar*

That's what the white invaders called our Memaloose Ilahee.

Floods threatened in some years,  
     but we kept our people near the river  
 because the river was life.

We only began to bury remains to defend them from marauders.  
 Then came the dams, rising waters, the dead uprooted.

The Corps may rebuild villages,  
     fishing sites:  
 How can you undisturb  
     the dead, once their final  
 —they thought—  
     home dissolves?

Some remains were saved  
     only to be shipped to museums,  
 stored in drawers or cellars,  
     who knows where?

51 sets of remains recovered in 1934 from Lower Memaloose Island  
 A lone skull collected 65 years before  
 14 crania from Upper Memaloose Island, sold to the National Museum in  
 1903

Remains acquired by the River Basin Survey project in 1948

5 crania collected in the 19th century from the Middle Columbia River basin

As per Public Law 101-185, remains evaluated for probable cultural affiliation

*Though lacking associated funerary offerings, the remains from Upper Memaloose Island*

*are assumed to date to the same general proto- historic/early historic time*

*period based on the fortuitous association of a few historic objects and the taphonomic condition of the crania.*

If you knew those gunnysacks full of bones  
were your great-great-great-great-grandparents  
wouldn't you want to scream?

Who, besides us, knows the purpose  
of stone and antler tools,  
bits of fur and leather,  
shell beads and charcoal fragments  
buried with the bodies  
that once used and wore them?

Not until 1994 were some remains  
liberated from the Smithsonian,  
returned to the river,  
prayed over by their Wasco lineage.

Now the only grave on Memaloose is the concrete home of a white man

but our bones are no one's trophies.

## A Comedy

*Andrew Hofmann*

### I.

Note the Body Funereal—mark it; mark it with a sharpie,  
a false mustache & goatee combo as it lieth there, coffin-bound.  
Snapchat it—it'll last longer, all things considered.

Anon I'm at the podium; a glass-stained light hits  
my back, my blond locks spectral are. I say,  
“One Weird Tip Morticians Don't Want YOU To Know About!”  
before I'm sedated by a Presbyterian minister.

Anyway, thou sittest in the third pew. You cough a bit b4  
an appropriate dosage of opiates are injected into my bloodstream.  
“*WHORE*,” someone shouts at me. Thou feel'st a kind of terror  
re: th'epithet, and you look at me, the Body Anesthetical, lying strewn  
in the chapel, facedown. You pull out your smartphone, tweet'st:

man, some girl just shouted some nonsense at my grandpas funeral  
and got sedated, then someone shouted “whore” at her and I can't tell  
what's worse #crazy

but it's too many characters and you feel like maybe  
you can't fit the world into tiny boxes, like phones, or coffins  
or One Weird Tips or chapels or misogynistic epithets  
or smart phrases like “the body funereal,” “the body anesthetical”  
so instead you tweet the phrase “the body antithetical.”

resultingly: zero retweets and zero faves and zero comments on your tweet.

### II.

And anyway, after the ceremony was a reception, and thou creepest back  
into th' sanctuary. You doth, in fact, pull out a sharpie marker and markest  
th' ol' dead human male with a Mona Lisa Mustache, doth, in fact  
take a snapchat of his defacéd corpse. That's life. You don't have time  
t' consider none of that ethical shit. This is life. Fitfully,

I am still doped up in the church corner, writhing disgracefully like a lamb offer'd up to a lamb. I am in my church clothes.

Thou decidest, *It's time for a wedding*. Thou pickest my limp body off from the hardwood, drag'st me to panels of oak-tree hexagonal, & lay'st me onto him diagonal. He and me, both asleep. Our lips touch. You officiate in a rambling way, in the echoing halls, and the vaulted stones say, call after call, "*I do, I do, I do,*"

and you snapchat again; maybe you'll go viral. You receive a snapchat into your heart. The image of god is everywhere. You consider again, and brush back my pretty hair, a motion you find, suddenly—vital.



**dream house***Mark Patrick Spencer*

Trannies overran the front yard bitching about Christmas lights.  
I told my dad, but he disappeared years ago so,  
the words fell into a yellow puddle that created an ocean of doubt.  
I blamed my best friend, but he threw his paws up in the air,  
and walked like an Egyptian, out of the kitchen,  
and vanished into this winter, which is much like that one day.  
Days pass reading the newspaper, which turns into a plane,  
but I still see the headlines as it flies away.  
New York is fucked, and no one can wake Superman up.  
He couldn't help anyway, I tell my rotten apples.  
He's depressed, and is really getting into this unemployment thing.  
I shower for months, until my skin starts to melt.  
Grateful for the window that looks out onto the real world,  
while exposing myself inside this fantasy. Winter's coming again.  
With renewed vigor, I jump further, into this dream.  
I can think of anything.  
The trees sprout long, purple fingernails. The grass grows knives.  
The pale sun hates me for having no skin to burn, vows to turn my blood into jelly.  
So, I stay inside.  
A snack sounds wonderful, as I bleed onto the bickering forks and spoons.  
Snowflakes fall like hand grenades, shattering the windows and fracturing the lies.  
I feel faint. So, I turn on the television. Now I don't have to think.  
I can just sit and soil this cell with my bloody thoughts. My DNA controls the remote.  
The channels don't change, and with every click, I realize that I am becoming different.  
Not what I once was, but turning into something familiar. If only I had been smarter.  
The seven foot transvestite climbs out of the television, knocking over  
my racks of albums, and stacks of comic books.  
She holds my hand, and we eat fruit, and talk about the weather.  
She tells me I have great hair, but I should clean myself up.  
I tell her she has beautiful eyes, and that I miss her laughter.  
I apologize for not having thick skin, and that I'm sorry I failed her.  
She tells me there's nothing wrong with being fragile, and that everyone can't save the  
world.  
She tells me to get a job, or at least go outside and get some sun.  
I tell her these doors don't open, and no one knows I'm trapped inside.  
I tell her I'm confused, and somehow I've become someone else.

She tells me I'm not my father.

She offers me drugs that will make me see strange things and pretty colors.

I tell her I'll do anything, as long as I don't think about you.

## Sorry

*Darrell Petska*

The mother and her five ducklings entered the eastbound lane of University Avenue. I tapped the brakes, rolling to a stop for the waddling cortège just beyond my bumper. Cars lined up behind. Mr. Jensen, my car pool passenger, exited to wave off traffic approaching in the westbound lane. Later, from his hospital bed, he recounted with disbelief how the car, a bright red Corvette, didn't slow, didn't veer, but passed directly over the mother and her young. Two ducklings survived, some good Samaritan claiming them. The Corvette didn't touch Mr. Jensen; he collapsed at the sight of the carnage, suffering a mild heart attack.

Shortly after 8:00 the next morning—the tragic event had occurred at 8:30—I positioned my car at Randall Street and University Avenue, just west of the collision point. I had resolved to wait awhile, watching westbound commuters. And do what if I spotted the car? As any loving parent would, trying to shepherd one's young through life: I felt like strangling the culprit.

My thoughts wandered to the apparition of ducks braving the roadway, the red Corvette rushing past, the terrible aftermath. Still saddened but increasingly angry, I considered all sorts of retribution for such wanton disregard of life: the decimated family of ducks deserved some justice, and Mr. Jensen's headlong attempt to caution traffic could have been his demise.

Thus preoccupied, I almost missed a red Corvette streaking by. I pulled into traffic, speeding to close the distance. A stop light at Capital and University allowed me to draw near. The vehicle's license plate: REDZONE.

I tailed the Corvette through greens at Hudson and Decatur, followed it left at Jefferson and left again into the parking lot of a rambling office complex. I claimed a stall several down from the Corvette.

Male. Thirties. White-collar. Sauntering into the building as if he knew no shame.

Determined to make him face his guilt, I took pen and paper from my glove compartment and dashed off the screams I'd held inside:

*"Heartless . . . cowardly . . . despicable—words you've earned by running down that family of ducks! Grow a conscience and join the human race!"*

I signed the note with a "D", my skin prickling. Leaving my car, I walked to his and slipped the note beneath a windshield wiper—then hurried back to safety, breathless but cheered somewhat for having taken action.

The feeling waned as I re-drove the route toward work. Would a terse, angry note make any difference? At Randall and University, traffic rolled by as if death had never marred the spot.

A solicitous mother and her young, going about their day—for the ducks, and the world's indifference to innocence, I lapsed back into gloom.

The ducks had been dead a month when an envelope arrived, my note inside, with an addition penned in red marker.

*"We have cameras. Got your plate #. Not heartless. Going too fast."*

He signed it "Red"—his P.S. of "Sorry . . . . ." trailing off like a red Corvette.

## **On Selling My Dining Room Table**

*Adam Hughes*

Jacob wrestled with God.  
God cheated.  
Jacob won.

Out the back door today I saw  
lintels of spring lifted above  
the driftwood of winter.

Jacob became Israel.  
He limped his way to Esau.  
He bowed before his hair-bound brother.

Looking out to the south,  
whispers of misplaced parousia,  
this damn ephod is too big.

Peniel.  
Embracing God and Esau.

I've lost thirty pounds since last spring.  
I've lost two jobs since last spring.

He couldn't find Joseph.

My ribs are tattooed  
with lines by Pound.

*"And life slips by like a field mouse not shaking the grass."*

**Cf. Luke 19.40***Andrew Hofmann*

Lord, thou art th' homophobic .jpg shared onto facebook-wall mine;  
 thou art the heav'ns & the earth. All 83 likes are your likes,  
 ev'ry "amen," position'd under graphic images of a murdered gay  
 man are yours—and the stars proclaim your name.

Thou art the heav'ns & the earth. Your Book is Law, and 'tis clear,  
*we* are the sacred ones, set upon our church-hills—so fear The Lord, haha.  
 Leaden stones crawling up to th' firmament are yours, as  
 they cry out and devour every human thing incumbent. With our

hands, we dig them up, mold them into irregular hexagons; they sing  
 something unknown, a feeling long gone. Us, repeating our dirges:  
 "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus." Us climbing—  
 why do they intone so? Oh, oh, oh, a terrible sound, it resurges

while we complacent stand in power's dark seat, and retweet  
 sermon ramblings, unsweet to th' ear, unneat, unmagificent—  
 us climbing into them. They enclose us. *Where is God?* we ask, as these rocks  
 coffinize us, us engulf in sod, *The musick of the spheres?*

The musick of the spheres—even th' sediment cries out—fills all  
 in our church-hills—and two men are fucking each other 'gainst  
 a grave-stone, rock hard. We are beneath them, in the soil, and we sense  
 that God is in their interlocked lips, is in

the heav'ns & the earth. And their image shared on Tumblr,  
 thrumming with computerized gold- and copper-song, gets  
 seven-thousand notes; I print it out on wood, paper yours,  
 tape it to my actual wall—yours also—and this, indeed, signifies  
 in tongue quiet, sweet, you, the heav'ns, & the earth.

## **An Elegy for Analog**

*Fred Zirm*

*On June 12, 2009, all analog broadcasts ceased*

On this day, analog TV gave up  
the ghosts – and the snow and the tin foil  
on the antenna and the test pattern  
and the national anthem at dawn  
and “this is a test” and horizontal hold  
and the slap on the side before you phoned  
the repairman who wore a uniform  
and tube testers at the local hardware  
and the Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show  
and Elvis on The Ed Sullivan Show  
and opera singers and jugglers on The Ed Sullivan Show  
and families huddled around that black and white  
campfire, eating Swanson’s TV dinners  
before the sets became behemoths  
carted off on gurneys  
to make way for the flat screens, as slim as  
trophy wives, to be put on a pedestal  
and admired, picture perfect as only  
a paint-by-number picture can be.  
*YesNoYesNo. OnOffOnOff. 0101*  
the supermodels say.  
Digital is so decisive,  
but sometimes I miss maybe.

## **On the Internet, Retrieving Weather Data for the Day my Father Died**

*James Silas Rogers*

He died in nineteen-seventy-four,  
when winter tightened its grip,  
during a bad decade for cold snaps,

The Weather Service's records show  
seven below outside that morning,  
hardly got above zero all day.

Two days before, his doctor advised  
*You'd better start wearing a face mask:  
don't let the cold wind hit you full on.*

As it happens, he collapsed indoors,  
but who know? Maybe it was the wind  
that stopped his heart like a slammed stormdoor.

Now these numbers: high temp, low temp, mean,  
precip. in the hundredths of an inch:  
so much data at our disposal.

No one will forget the arctic air.



## Plum Jelly

*Kalyn LP Gensic*

Ice-coated bluebonnets lined the path  
leading to your grave  
on that Easter-eggless Easter morning.  
Death chose a curious time to take  
you, but Nature, being kind,  
froze over, postponing spring  
pausing for a respectful moment  
of silence.

Sheltered under a forest green tent  
we shivered in velvet folding chairs,  
Morris & Sons Funeral Home monogrammed on each seat.  
Finally, dust descended from Reverend Riley's hand  
and hushed the shine of your powder pink coffin.

Months later, on a smoldering summer day  
I embarked on the menial task of cleaning  
the fridge. Hidden behind  
the ketchup and cocktail sauce  
I found a jar of plum jelly  
whose lid had been neglected one busy breakfast  
allowing air to bury vibrant fuchsia beneath black mold.  
I reached to throw it away, hesitating at the sight of  
a sticky label, candy cane and holly in one corner-  
"Merry Christmas. Love, Grandma" written  
in your slanted, shaky, decaying cursive.  
The chill of the glass jar, of the frozen bluebonnets,  
ran through my fingers, ran up my arm.

## Listening to the Dark

*P. L. McMillan*

Two cans of soup left. One beef and barley, the other; cream of mushroom. The Company hasn't come this week. They haven't come in a month, I will say, if I haven't forgotten to mark off any days. My clock has finally stopped, it is impossible to tell whether it was night or day without it. There is only the dark outside.

I suppose it's time to accept that the Company isn't coming. Maybe even they can't make it through the dark. I take my time, reading the soup descriptions on the back of each can, as though it matters. It is something I have control over, one of the only things. What flavour of soup will I be eating this day? So, I squint in the light of my single candle and read over each description twice. It's a beef day, I decide. Beef sounds good for today.

After eating, I go out onto my covered porch. All around my house, the dark stands like a stiff curtain. I can never see it moving closer but every time I check, it has tightened its grip. It is only a few feet from my door now.

To my left, I can see the faint outline of two of the Evansons' windows. Frank and Larissa live there with their baby. I can see their candles burning. I wonder how much food they have. Larissa is a general manager for the Company, maybe they got bigger shipments than someone like me, who is just an accountant. Preferential treatment for families, maybe? It doesn't matter now, the Company isn't coming for any of us.

I open the screen door and sit on the steps. There is nothing I can do now but wait. I still have plenty of cigarettes, so I light one and listen to the dark.

Wait and listen because the dark brought something else with it. It brought its own noise. At first, I hated it. It sounds, at times, like the deep screaming of men then rises to the sorrowful high pitched cries of women. It falls from that point to the ululating call of hungry babies, then to hungry groans and moans before rising up again. Like a wave, it goes through the whole cacophony over and over and never stops. Underneath it all is an incessant rustling, deep and powerful. It makes me think of huge dark wings beating the air slowly. It's a waiting noise.

I say I used to hate it because now, well, now it keeps me from feeling lonely. It sounds like everyone who might still be alive in the dark, people like me. So, I smoke my cigarette and listen to the dark, trying to separate the different sounds.

I think that's the worst part of the dark for me. Not being able to see or talk to anyone. There's nothing to do, nothing to distract me. The loneliness gets to me.

---

I wake. Still dark, of course, besides the candle I left burning by my bed. I use it to light a cigarette. I take the candle out with me and leave the house. The dark is closer. Only two more flagstones left before it reaches my front step. I do my business beside the skeleton of my honeysuckle bush. While I squat, I look out to my neighbours. The Evansons only have one candle burning now. I see shapes moving frantically in front of the light.

I turn away, pulling up my pants, and hear a sharp crack through the dark's wail. I spin. It came from the Evansons. I hear another two cracks in quick succession. I can't see the Evansons' light anymore. I stand and stare at where it had been, my heart pounding. I know what has happened but I don't want to think it. I don't want to imagine what it might be to be the only one left so I turn and hide in my house.

---

No decision to make tonight. It is cream of mushroom or nothing. I drink the last of my water and eat the last of my food, sitting on my porch's steps and faced away from the Evansons' house.

Months ago, the dark boiled up as a thick cloud above one of the Company's many R&D facilities and spread. It filled the sky first. We were plunged into twilight. The Company had assured everyone that it was not a chemical explosion, it wasn't any kind of environmental disaster, and it was most definitely not their fault. Their experts went in circles on TV, arguing over the cause.

They pledged their resources to providing for the families of the Company employees while they researched the cause of the rapidly spreading dark. For a while, Company trucks delivered goods every week and encouraged me and the others to carry on as usual. We did. Why not? The Company had never been wrong before.

Then the electricity stopped, the water stopped, the internet stopped, phone lines stopped, and the Company vans stopped coming.

I taste a deep lungful of tar. The cigarettes are beginning to go stale. I glance back at the dark that covers the Evansons' house. Maybe the world has gone the same way. Maybe I am the crazy one for trying to last, waiting for the Company when they will never come.

I cry.

—

A new day with nothing to eat. I search the cupboards. Maybe I forgot about something in the back. It doesn't take long to prove myself wrong though. I take my usual spot on the porch. The dark is only half a foot from where my feet rest on the ground. My candle, my last candle, is down to an half an inch. I light a cigarette. I stare at the ember tip until a spot is burned into my vision.

The dark sounds louder. The sound weighs heavily on me. I feel sluggish. I slump against my porch railing. I wonder what must be inside the dark that causes such human-like voices, what causes the rustling. It's not the wind, the wind stopped when the dark started and I haven't felt it since. It's something else, something inside the dark.

I rest my head on my hand. My cigarette hangs from my lips and I let the acrid smoke sting my eyes. I don't want to be the only one left. Still, I have the dark cacophony. I try to listen for individual voices. I strain my ears. I hear my mother. Yes, just then. It sounds like my mother, when she would sing me to sleep as a child. Her voice was soft and tired, like on the nights she'd just finished a double shift at the hospital. The same way she sang to my father when he lay dying on the hospital bed. Soft, sad, resigned. She sang for the other patients too, during her shifts. As a child, I used to get jealous that she'd sing for anyone else besides me. I was such a silly, selfish child.

I flick my cigarette into the darkness at my feet and see its ember tip flare for a moment before disappearing. The dark rests mere inches from my feet but it's alright.

I listen to the dark. I listen to my mother's voice inside it.

It's probably warm out there in the dark. It probably feels like going to sleep in a nice soft bed, surrounded by the voices of everyone I have ever known.

I close my eyes.

I don't feel so alone anymore; listening to the dark. I might be the last one left but I have the dark to keep me company. I light another cigarette.

Still, I guess I do have control over one last thing. The very last thing.

I stand, cigarette between my lips. I stand and walk into the dark.

No one is coming for me, no one but the dark.

## Colder

*Mark Patrick Spencer*

It was 5AM  
and the bourbon had  
sufficiently loosened the shackles  
and I was adrift again  
inside this 40 year  
nightmare or dream.

I stepped outside  
The porch light blown out long ago  
The last cigarette  
the flame and orange glow  
blinded me to the fact  
that I was not alone.

He was standing 5 feet away  
with his back to me  
he was dressed like me  
but it couldn't have been me

He turned and I saw myself  
but my eyes were gone  
just two black pits. Staring.  
Then he, or maybe me, grew  
now standing over 6 feet  
now losing his hair  
his forehead becoming more  
pronounced and wrinkled  
His hands aging. Brown spots.  
Which I couldn't see.

He smiled, but we never speak  
anymore.  
He blew me a kiss  
and drifted into the sky  
but I was stumble drunk  
and falling.

So, maybe he went the other way.

My neighbors found me in the morning  
shivering  
they held me in their arms  
crying like a lost child

## Labor Lost Lives

*David Boeving*

inhaling sums shaping surplus pavements particles smash tobacco payments staining  
residual fibers torn dried leaves and littered filters broken phonemes tossed like factory  
labor doing some kind of manual work the outsourced cash crops migrating

absences that my lungs can't form—what my body can't eject—the conditions of an FTZ  
littered pavements trash piles abandoned cigarettes their snow mounds bombarding  
phonemes the present filters the past waiting to be swept away

inequitable absences speakers that can't speak except payments micro-wages dissent we  
bum on pavements voices speaking global exchange our non-site waste littered in  
receptacles a series of late coming phonemes boxed in and suffocating

absences ghosts supermassive smogs of my oral fixation bent fingers on traveled  
pavements good for the economy stretching across borders well-armed protectors not  
far from litters beneath a sky entrapping vapors fossil fuels my fingers stuffing tar in my  
lungs phonemes present absences of asphalt bodies and the means of abduction near  
municipal streaks of yellow bent fingers yellow filters—those consumable cylinders—  
that I try to recall

absences I forget and fling particles toward a pavement not near the maquiladora  
littered with female bodies that phonemes fail to account for that police absences can't  
dream of without the good for the soul bodiless graves the crosses that litter the  
memories of their bodies like illegal phonemes in the sand packaged and convenient

absences I inhale my death on pavements in the boonies littered with cans and nicotine  
phonemes and on the boulevards in supermarkets expressing all those death absences I  
can and cannot see in an Indian caricature duplicated and displayed across pavements



stretching toward oceans where littered flags stretched barbwire phonemes where  
transports write disappearances

absences beyond the desert where pavements dance on littered corpses ashes I speak of  
when I phoneme occult consequences like what I can't know and smoke plumes snaking  
up pavements like smoke plumes fishing up littered skies above camel caricatures far  
from rich soils where gold phonemes dangle above cartons

absences and even in lung cancer afterlives pavements boil with at least the names we're  
allowed to mourn—I mean speak—and the littered crosses of unmarked border graves

## **Almost Sonnet Written while Considering Annotations I've Made in an Old Copy of Euripides' *Medea***

*Jennifer Finstrom*

“The mind of a queen is a thing to fear.”—Euripides, *Medea*

I still have the paperback copy of *Medea* that I carried everywhere my sophomore year of college. On the margins of an early page, well before she vanishes in a chariot drawn by dragons, before banishment, before the gift of a poisoned robe for her husband's new bride, I have written in neat cursive that “magic set Medea apart” and “she is both witch and queen.” And later, that “she understands what she does, even as she does it.” My cursive now is never so precise, and I wonder where the girl who wrote those words has gone. A woman sleeps in my bed, and I have given her nothing.

## In the Days of Tra-La-ing

*Lanette Cadle*

I remember the day when happiness  
snuck up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder,  
not knowing what it was at first  
but it made me very uneasy, a feeling of impending...

happiness. It was a stranger to me.  
There I was walking down the familiar hallway at work  
thinking about my next class  
or spinning out some sentences in my head and

poof! There it was, a rabbit's paw  
sliding across the back of my neck. It was not a good feeling.  
I'd be walking my sadness, comfortable  
about what would go wrong

and listing the ways and the list would turn empty, goading me  
to tra-la, just a little. I waited until no one was around  
and gave it a shot—not a tra-la precisely,  
but a few bars of "Jolene." My voice

rasped at first, but by the fourth Jolene  
the tones rang truer until part of me wished for another voice  
so I could sing harmony  
and I stopped. What if someone had heard me?

Look at the crazy lady—she sings to herself—  
what a loon, what a maroon—but then, other voices silently join.  
and they too sing of desire  
--and the will to go on without it. The chorus soars.

**elegy for my future***Alyssa Froehling*

I.

mr. hall's voice sounds like jesse eisenberg.  
"are you okay?" after physics class.  
mark zuckerburg asking me if  
pictures i can't unsee are okay to put on  
facebook. my therapist is a little known  
singer. she imagines singing. she imagines  
slicing her new baby's finger's like carrots as  
she softly recites melodies. i tell her i'd give  
anything to grow underground.

II.

the only lightening on a stormy day of camping  
is our backs arching up from the ground. spines  
ripped out like swords. antlers interlocking into  
a sea of dirt. i bury my hands in the soil and think  
about what is not there and what will be. the camera  
angle of my movies begins at the center of the earth.  
i'll keep what never was.  
that title is better than the ending.

III.

the hum of the buildings. the renovation.  
the progress. me underneath.  
the hush.

## Dirge Or Anti-Dirge

*Jane Hoogestraat*

I.

For days I've thought about stone bridges  
and of Albinoni's lighter adagios,  
Concerto One not announcing the soul  
has closed a door, life reduced the heart  
to stone, more like taking the long way  
home over the beautiful repaired bridges.

II.

An interior lit by red carnations in winter  
welcoming conversation or music,  
neither bright nor dark, all the seasons ask of us  
action deliberate, responsible. Not a world  
without pain, but one where something shines  
around the edges, a room where one listens.

III.

For years I misread Dickinson's "After Great Pain"  
as grief, not pain. Also, winter in the room  
mid-November, the cold setting in. I've built a fire,  
cleaned out the attic, shoveled the ice on the walks,  
caught a cold, canceled lunch for next year,  
sent off a package of family pictures.

IV.

There are more stone bridges than I realized,  
WPA projects rerouting creeks around  
urban green trails, winding a magical kingdom,  
a newer world there for the discovering.  
Later, other parks with stones built by caves  
one might explore, a world made of limestone.

V.

A muted obsession with stone work. Pretending not to participate in grief, until you open the door and find yourself in an empty hall, finally present. Today I bought a lamp for the upstairs room, thought of how once my sister said of a shooter he must have been collecting slights, but I heard collecting lights.

VI.

Keep the dangerous moods temporary, a short spin on ice, a trip into a ditch with the car turned around. Knives that flash will flash quickly and bright. Notice without dwelling. Hold no liens, only your own failures as antidote against bitterness in winter, knowing how many years the world tipped its mercy toward you.

**December: Detroit**

*Sylvia Ashby*

Night descends suddenly—  
in the darkness  
a loose jacket pressed  
tightly against my chest  
I walk, still shivering

to the river  
and the bridge  
that crosses countries:  
Canada, do you know  
there is no Santa Claus?

## **Harvest Dust**

*Jane Hoogestraat*

Rising from gardens of grief,  
harvest dust clouds the horizon.

If you turned, you would see motes  
as in front of an old projector.

Turn again, and the film is still gray,  
eye-cream for the dark, false choices.

The ceilings of the old theater have been restored  
in period green and gold, 1919 lamps.

It is all beautiful and grand.  
Aesthetic estrangement often is.



## **Master's Touch**

*Kristin LaFollette*

I can remember you, a  
person who was once  
one way but now is  
another. I grasp for  
a vision of you

like a spider crawling the  
insides of a glass jar.

Sometimes your favorite  
color is black, sometimes  
your muscles give in and  
your bones bend and flake—

I could use the dust of your  
bones like paint to make  
a new picture of you, one  
that will be untouched by  
the yellowing of time or

the changes in the atmosphere.  
Human anatomy is so fragile:

You really can't trust  
something that can  
die so easily.

## **Dear Sons and Daughters of Hungry Ghosts**

*Ellen Stone*

My best advice  
is learn to cook.  
That way you can feed  
whoever wanders  
into the kitchen.

I started with ground venison  
when mom got sick—  
oil in cast iron, onion, chopped.  
Clipped recipes from the paper.

A useful child is one who works,  
or so my father taught me.  
I suppose it is the same  
with ghosts –not knowing  
what their world is like.

**ANNA STOKELY**

## Startling Kindness

Freddie reclined against Peter's tombstone, her black-and-green striped legs stretched over the raised ground. They had accidentally put him in the ground facing the wrong way, so she knew she wasn't sitting on his face or anything and didn't feel bad about it. She liked to imagine they were sitting on either side of a sofa, facing each other with their legs all tangled in the middle. They had never sat this way, but she liked to imagine it anyway. Liked to imagine what it'd be like with him as a father, and not the happy uncle he had claimed to be.

She tipped her head back. Hazy blue light lingered over the world after sunset, and the monsters were out in it. The sidewalk across the street roiled with capes and fangs and glitter. Freddie adjusted the torn skirt of her witch costume and considered joining them—what better way to grieve than with more chocolate? She'd eaten nearly all the candy in the little cauldron she'd bought at the Dollar Store. Refilling it would be easy, just a few doorbell rings. But she hadn't gone trick-or-treating in years, and never without Peter. It wouldn't be the same.

Besides, she had another Halloween tradition to uphold. She reached out and touched the plastic bag of goodies she'd prepared, the stiff crinkling a quiet assurance that the wind hadn't blown it all away. The Dollar Store had been their go-to place for stupid Halloween things since Peter took her in, a refugee from Mom's failed fight with breast cancer with nowhere else to go. Peter would get shopping carts full of colorful bags and candy and little toys and gift cards for the parents, and she'd help him make little presents and leave them outside every front door on their street. He called it *booing*. "Startle them with kindness," he'd said. Booing alone would be odd, but it was the one good thing Peter had left her with.

"Couldn't you have waited?" Freddie asked him, glancing at the dirt. "You didn't even stick around to carve the pumpkins."

That had only been ten days ago, the trip to the pumpkin patch. Freddie was amazed at how quickly the family got him into the ground—but then, the usual things had already been arranged. Apparently Grandmère went through a morbid stage the year Peter's brother Jeffery choked on the stuffing at Thanksgiving, and she'd bought

her remaining children plots and headstones for Christmas. Peter Milne's final resting place had been reserved like a seat at one of Grandmère's stuffy New England parties long before Freddie knew him.

They were supposed to carve the four pumpkins for the festivities today. She'd carved three in her room throughout the past week, intricate things that left her hands sore from working the tiny saw blade. The cathedral one took her an entire day.

She saved the last one for today, and carved it with Peter, like they planned. She'd received several confused glances from the landscaper making the rounds earlier, though he never commented. Freddie had waved at him with the ice cream scoop she'd been using to clean out the pulp and wondered how many different ways he had seen people grieve. His eyes held so many stories. Maybe Peter would have put him in his next book. He wrote a lot of weird thrillers and mysteries, those little paperbacks they sell at gas stations and airports.

She hadn't seen the landscaper in over an hour. The finished jack-o-lantern sat beside her, on Jeffrey's grave. She'd placed one of those battery-powered candles inside. It stared at her with its sad, flickering eyes.

The smell of raw pumpkin hung heavy in the cool air, refusing to dissipate. Two metal popcorn bowls sat by her feet—one brimming with pulp, the other empty. There was still enough light that she could see the seeds, like a hundred eyeballs, in the pulp. She reached her hand into the bowl and started plucking them out.

“What are those?”

She whirled, half expecting to see her sister, sent to summon her home. Instead, behind Peter's tombstone stood a short pirate, fake parrot and all. She hadn't heard him approach. His freckled cheeks were still round with childhood, but his face puckered thoughtfully. He looked much older than he should have been.

“Memories,” she told him.

Clearly, this was not the answer he'd been expecting. A gap-toothed smile replaced the serious look. “Where did you get them?”

She lifted the popcorn bowl and thrust it at him. “These are the brains I scooped out of Ichabod here. I'm plucking out his memories and when I go home I'll roast them and eat them.”

“Why?”

Because that had been Peter’s favorite part. “I want to remember what it’s like to be a pumpkin.”

The boy frowned. “But why would you eat memories when you have candy right here?”

“Excellent point, good sir.” She reached into the little cauldron for a candy bar for the kid and handed it to him. “Where are your parents?”

The kid nodded a polite thank-you. “He’s visiting Mom. We always bring her flowers on Halloween instead of trick-or-treating because that’s when she died. Always marigolds. They were her favorite.”

“Next time, you should bring her some candy, too. I bet she’d like that.”

He unwrapped his candy, considering. “Maybe we will. But then someone else might come eat it all. The flowers are just for her. No one else.”

Freddie glanced at the pumpkin. Its grin was enormous and forced the left eye to squint, just like Peter’s. “No one else,” she repeated.

“M Ben,” the boy said around the chocolate. “You’re not a real witch, are you?”

“Of course I am.” Freddie watched Ben reach for the cauldron, then pointed to the pumpkin guts again. “Ichabod was a nice little boy like you, but I turned him into a pumpkin after he tried to take my candy without asking.”

Ben hesitated with his hands over the silver wrappings, then turned to her, his eyes as wide as his smile. Freddie laughed, then hitched it into her best cackle, and Ben squealed that little kid squeal of amusement.

“Why are you here?” he asked, calming down. “Are you visiting your mom, too?”

“I’m visiting my . . . visiting Peter.”

“Did he take your candy?” Ben asked eagerly.

“No, he shot himself. Right in the eye. Like he wanted to watch it bust open his head.”

Ben’s smile stayed, but now it looked like a mask, like he wasn’t sure why he should be smiling. Freddie turned to sort her pumpkin seeds again.

“What was your mother like?” she asked.

He answered quickly, like he had rehearsed it. “She sang the alphabet while she brushed her teeth and she hated the word *dank* and when she’d make a pumpkin pie for Dad she’d dance around the kitchen with the evaporated milk because it said ‘shake well’ right there on the top of the can.”

Freddie blinked. “How old were you when she died?”

“Four. Old enough to miss her, Dad says.”

“And you remember all that?”

He pushed his wrappers into a pile between them. “I remember all the stories.”

She looked away, the image of the scrawled and bloodstained note filling her vision: “*I can no longer remember which story I am living.*” The little metal ring on the side of the popcorn bowl jingled faintly with every pumpkin seed she dropped inside.

After a moment, Ben scooted beside her to help her sort through the pulp. He made a face. “They’re so cold and slimy. You sure you want to eat these?”

Freddie smirked. “I told you, I’ll warm them up first, roast them with garlic and parmesan cheese.”

“Like a pizza?”

“Yeah. Just without the tomatoes.”

“Pizza is good,” he said, looking pleased. “I hope when you eat these memories later, they remind you of something good.”

“Ben?” a deep voice called.

“That’s my dad.” Ben scrambled up, nearly losing the fake parrot on his shoulder. “Thank you for the candy, Witch-lady.” He turned to leave, then looked back and pointed. “Mom is a few rows over, next to the crabapple tree. I bet she’d like you.”

Freddie looked at him a moment, then smiled. “I’d like to meet her, too.”

Ben grinned before running off. Freddie watched him go. So she wasn’t the only one missing someone who existed only in stories.

The quiet voices of Ben and his father drifted up from behind her. She put her own meaning to the indistinct words. Ben would explain he’d met a witch, and his father would make some crack about Harry Potter or Oz before relaying the conversation he’d just had with the mother’s tombstone. The little chocolate-smearred hand would reach for the one still damp with tears as they walked through the rows of the dead. And Ben

would ask if they could leave this graveyard and actually go trick-or-treating this year, and his father would look out over the tombstones and explain how much easier it is just to go buy a bag of candy at the Dollar Store.

Freddie settled back against Peter's tombstone, listening for as long as she could. "Something good," she repeated. The past two weeks had changed so much, but there were good things Peter's death hadn't touched. Like pumpkin carving and pizza and booing.

Eventually, she got to her feet, groaning, and turned to the pumpkin. "I'll come back in an hour for your guts." To Peter, she said, "Keep him entertained while I'm gone, won't you? He likes Batman jokes."

She stooped for the plastic bag and made a quick count of the orange and black packages inside. She frowned, counted them again. Counted the houses on the street. After a moment, she waved to Peter, then headed back to the main aisle.

Tall tombstones rolled past like shadowy waves in the evening light. They shrank considerably as she walked down the hill, dwindling to little more than concrete tiles floating on the surface of the grass. The crabapple tree Ben had mentioned grew at the bottom of the hill, a spindly little thing with glossy red leaves and thick lichen. In the dim light, she could barely make out the little bouquet of orange flowers on the ground about two feet left of the trunk of the tree. Freddie went to it.

Other stones nearby were obscured by fallen leaves and fruit, but Ben's mother's name and dates had been swept clear. Freddie squinted at them, trying to imagine the woman Ben described dancing through her kitchen.

She knelt down and placed an orange package on top of her death date. Then she rose and continued toward the wrought-iron gates, ready to go booing.



## **Arm Hair on End**

*Tammy Jolene Atha*

Little strands stand &  
I find myself edged in your hands.

I wondered—  
what air becomes me?

after I have left  
what fills my space?

**3:00 am**

*Jon Naskrent*

why does everyone  
die  
at night  
then come back to life

why do i feel alive  
when everyone is dead

## **My Father at 80**

*Janne Knittel*

It makes him look like he's been beaten with a pipe,  
the Coumadin: blooms of purple garland  
each arm, the back of his hands,  
so he no longer looks invincible,  
the Teutonic-Celtic hero in letterman sweater,  
army uniform, denim jacket painted with tree seal.  
I called him Rasputin behind his back  
because he kept outsmarting death (cancer,  
ribspreader, titanium, diabetes, leukemia)  
to the point I thought he'd outlive me,  
but lately he stoops, has lost  
interest in working at the lathe,  
mostly watches t.v. with his Jack Russell  
on his lap. Some day, I will have to give up  
this illusion of his immortality.  
Today, he is still casting his line  
into the Metolius and Siuslaw rivers,  
tending beehives, pruning trees,  
turning myrtlewood into bowls,  
swimming faster than anyone.

## **Pammy Buchanan Rides Again**

*Elizabeth Kerper*

When you were born, your own mother gave you the gifts  
of foolishness and of beauty, good fairy and evil both.  
When you are fourteen, you decide you cannot have one  
without the other. When you are sixteen, you discover  
you do not want either. Without a mirror, you cut  
your old yellowy hair short, gather the loose strands in your fists,  
sneak down after dark to the stable where your father's polo ponies  
are drowsing in their stalls. You pat each warm nose, saddle  
the one you know is wildest, ride to the edge of the family  
estate where the trees are stilled pistons punching  
the sky, keep riding. You weave your hair through bushes  
and forked limbs, trail markers no one will follow.  
Or maybe you don't. Maybe you scatter your hair  
across the straw-packed stable floor, watch it disappear  
like snow melting into a lake, maybe you wear a hat  
to dinner every night until the holiday ends, tell the girls  
at boarding school you and your momma decided  
you are too old for braids. Summer is just past its tipping point.  
You always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it.

**Because I Never Listened to Your Stories***James Croal Jackson*

Thirty-five years and fingernails  
darken, blacken from walnuts  
and the cracks of hammers, the coming  
of dawn, clouds wrapped in thunder–

the fruiting spire, the pear-toned  
light, the front lawn fire, charcoal  
grass, green peels ripening– ripe–  
soft--red Helix stagnant, lonesome, remembering  
the wet-leather thunderstorm days cruisin' seventy,  
the human box of organs and history holding rubber handles  
treaded like hieroglyphics–

interpret me. Listen.

These are the words on the bathroom stall  
fingernail-scratched and ignored

*What Will You Remember?*

Not the stories told in tones softer than television

**REVIEW**

## Review of *Border States* by Jane Hoogestraat

Emily Corwin

“I’ve mowed the gladiola down, trimmed the barberry,  
watered the yew. The walls of my house  
are white, the wood polished, the glass dusted.  
The season waits, still warm, though turning toward mild winter”

—Jane Hoogestraat, *Border States*

The poems collected in *Border States*—Jane Hoogestraat’s latest book and the winner of the 2014 John Ciardi Prize for Poetry—rely on a quiet, compelling energy. These are poems of patience, waiting, and reflection—poems that sit watchful at the window and drive empty roads across country (much like the cover image of the book). Wistful and contemplative, Hoogestraat’s writing takes us to the solitary edges—of border towns, time zones, seasons, and memory, where “the mind walks the edge of a cold field”, where people “who know the land well prefer to walk the edges alone”. Hoogestraat’s poems occupy the spaces that are liminal, where the edges meet and where the self intersects with geographical and cultural landscapes.

In her depictions of Missouri and the Ozarks—where she currently lives and works as a professor at Missouri State University in Springfield—as well as the span of the Midwest, particularly Kansas, South Dakota, and Kentucky, Hoogestraat maps out the histories, rituals, and ancestry of this region. These are landscapes that she knows intimately, conveying their moods and shapes, their people with such precise, haunting detail. However, these are not spaces that are easy to travel—Hoogestraat reminds us that places of intersection can often be dangerous or uneasy. In “Among the Cistercians”, she reflects on the nature of being a woman trekking alone across this region:

So I carry a camo shirt in the car, have been called  
(with affection) a good old girl for wearing it,  
also in a size too large an orange hunting vest  
implying a round of ammo, a shotgun in the trunk

and find, for the most part, a gentle people  
cautious with strangers, my accent shielding me,  
not suggesting I have spent half a lifetime here  
haunted by how much can be hidden.

The terrain of *Border States* is stark, lovely, and troubling, the kind where “you may pass a stone house, long deserted, a star carved over the door, a small pond, wind stirring over it even now, forming a second thought, a space you will you carry within your speech”, a space “of strip towns and gaps and hollows, of sulfur burning at night, of people [you] have feared and despaired of”.

Hoogestraat’s writing, though, is as much about the geography of the Midwest as it is about the geography of an inner self, where the speaker absorbs these tangible spaces but always locates itself within a personal history. The poems like to visit the past, the speaker often recalling and re-imagining “the balconies we stood on”, “those late green thunderstorms we’ve watched nights from the living room”, or people long gone and what of their emblems—her father’s land, her mother’s wedding vase, the music of famed composers—were left behind. The poems keep one eye glancing over their shoulders, while the other looks forward, expectantly. In “To See Beyond Our Bourn”—one of the most striking pieces in the collection—the speaker considers her own mortality and the passing of seasons:

Planting the fall bulbs yesterday, I thought as I often do  
of what it means to settle here, to plan ahead for spring  
hyacinths, worry whether autumn crocuses will appear  
...I wondered which flowers would stay for extra seasons  
when I’m no longer here to tend them, afraid planting  
was some marker of the solitary.

*Border States* is full of solitude and private contemplation, but never without gratitude and a fondness for the details that make up a life—blossoming trees, a clean home, a piece of music, a beautiful storm. The precision of Hoogestraat’s lines and images always return to the simple but indelible beauty of a Midwestern life. As poet Luis J. Rodriguez (the judge of the John Ciardi Prize) writes: “These are poems with the spell



binding power of the American Midwestern landscape, tapping into its emotional well, not just the physical beauty and expanse.” This “emotional well” runs deep, drawing power from the personal and its edges, the intersections of self with the material landscape. Hoogestraat appeals to us, ultimately, to explore the edges of place and personhood, while driving small town streets at night or walking in our own backyards.

## Artist Biographies

### **Sylvia Ashby:** “December: Detroit” (poetry)

Sylvia’s background is in theatre, acting and writing. She’s published 15 plays for family audiences. Since starting to send out poetry over a year ago, she now has several dozen pieces out or forthcoming: *Rhino '15*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Silver Birch: I am waiting*, *Muddy River*, *Our World of Horror Anthology*, etc. Sylvia grew up in Detroit, went to college in Iowa, and lived in Lincoln, Nebraska.

### **Tammy Jolene Atha:** “Arm Hair on End” (poetry)

Tammy is a toaster enthusiast, an avid bath taker, and friend to many felines. Hailing from Springfield, Ohio, she attended Miami University in Oxford and graduated in Spring 2013 with a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing.

### **David Boeving:** “Labor Lost Lives” (poetry)

David is a poet & photographer currently living in Ypsilanti, Michigan. He is Eastern Michigan University’s BathHouse Reading Series Coordinator and is the Secretary for EMU’s Creative Writing Graduate Student Organization. While pursuing an MA degree in Creative Writing he has published poems in *Body Electric* (Ann Arbor), & has published poems & photos in *NEAT* & the now-defunct *Tongue Mag*. He was a member of the Ypsilanti-based Temporal Arts Collective, & continues to organize readings and other events in Ypsilanti. He teaches rhetoric & composition at Eastern Michigan University & has taught poetry in the Huron Valley Women’s Correctional Facility.

### **Myles Buchanan:** “The Ruined Forest” (poetry)

Myles has studied English and mythology at Kenyon College and Oxford University. His fantasy short stories have appeared on *YesteryearFiction* and *Bewildering Stories*. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

### **Jennifer Burd:** “Before and After” and “Beginning” (poetry)

Jennifer has had poetry published in a variety of print and online journals, and she is the author of a book of poems, *Body and Echo*, and a book of creative nonfiction, *Daily Bread: A Portrait of Homeless Men & Women of Lenawee County, Michigan*. She works as an editor and writer for HighScope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

**Lanette Cadle:** “In the Days of Tra-La-ing” (poetry)

Lanette is an associate professor of English at Missouri State University. She has previously published poetry in *Connecticut Review*, *NEAT*, *Menacing Hedge*, *TAB: The Journal of Poetry and Poetics*, and *Weave Magazine*. She is a past recipient of the Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred.

**Highlighted: Emma Clark:** “Only douchbags write about death,” “Claymation,” and “The Universe” (poetry)

Emma is a twenty-four year-old student at Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin, but resides in Minneapolis MN. Her poetry received the White-Howells Prize (2014) and can be found collecting dust in her dorm room.

**Victor Clevenger:** “Dream Sequence” (poetry)

With guts full of grit, Victor spends his days in a Madhouse and his nights writing poetry and short stories from the kitchen table of his ex-wife's home. He has self-published three collections of work, *Broken Bottles and Bus Fare*, *Pill Bugs In The Bathtub*, and *Building Bird Nests*. Selected pieces of his work have been accepted for publication with the *Chiron Review*, as well as in the upcoming first edition of the online magazine, *Eleventh Transmission*. Victor's work can also be seen in anthology collections published by Lady Chaos Press.

**Jennifer Finstrom:** “Almost Sonnet Written while Considering Annotations I've Made in an Old Copy of Euripides' Medea” and “The Poem about the Poem” (poetry)

Jennifer teaches in the First-Year Writing Program, tutors in writing, and facilitates a writing group, Writers Guild, at DePaul University. She has been the poetry editor of *Eclectica Magazine* since October of 2005, and recent publications include *After Hours*, *NEAT*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *One Sentence Poems*, among others. She also has work forthcoming in *YEW Journal* and the Silver Birch Press' *The Great Gatsby Anthology*.

**Alyssa Froehling:** “elegy for my future” (poetry)

Alyssa is a sophomore in college studying English, creative writing, and women & gender studies at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois.

**Kalyn LP Gensic:** “Plum Jelly” (poetry)

Kalyn is a mother of three children and works as a visual artist in Ardmore, OK. Formerly, she was the art and poetry editor for *The Shinnery Review*. Some of her recent work has appeared in *Ilya’s Honey* and *NEAT*.

**Andrew Hofmann:** “A Comedy” and “Cf. Luke 19.40” (poetry)

Andrew is a poet/writer currently living and studying English Literature in Oxford, Ohio. Life is tedious and excruciating, so he writes things. Whether this helps anything is still open to debate.

**Jane Hoogstraat:** “Harvest Dust” and “Dirge or Anti-Dirge” (poetry)

Jane's book of poems *Border States* won the John Ciardi Prize and was published by BkMk Press in 2014. In addition, she has published in such journals *Crab Orchard Review*, *Elder Mountain*, *Fourth River*, *Image*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Poetry*, *Potomac Review*, and *Southern Review*. She teaches at Missouri State.

**Adam Hughes:** “On Selling My Dining Room Table” (poetry)

Adam is the author of *Petrichor* (NYQ Books, 2010), *Uttering the Holy* (NYQ Books, 2012) and the forthcoming *Allow the Stars to Catch Me When I Rise* (Salmon Poetry, 2017). He was born in 1982 in Lancaster, Ohio. He still resides near there on a farm with his wife and daughter, two dogs, four cats, and five horses. He works as a drug prevention specialist with high school students.

**James Croal Jackson:** “Helium Dreams” and “Because I Never Listened to Your Stories” (poetry)

James dips his feet in many artistic waters. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Glassworks*, and *Lines + Stars*. He was born in Northeast Ohio but currently lives in Los Angeles. Find more of his writing at [jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com).

**Katie Kalisz:** “Mourning the Robin” (poetry)

Katie has an MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She teaches writing at Grand Rapids Community College, and her poems have appeared in *Plainsongs*, *Dappled Things*, *The Dunes Review*, *Old Northwest Review* and *Big Scream*, among others. She lives in Belmont, MI with her husband and their three children.

**Elizabeth Kerper:** “Catcher” and “Pammy Buchanan Rides Again” (poetry)

Elizabeth lives in Chicago and recently graduated from DePaul University with a BA in English literature. Her work has appeared in *Eclectica*, *Silverbirch Press*, and *N/A Literary Magazine*, where she is a contributing editor. She can generally be found sitting quietly in the corner with her nose stuck in a book.

**Janna Knittel:** “My Father at 80” and “Bones” (poetry)

Janna is a writer from the Pacific Northwest. She earned a PhD in English from the University of Oregon and is currently completing an MFA at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. She has published poems and scholarly articles in several journals and recently had her interview with Native American poet Gerald Vizenor published in *The Great River Review*.

**Kayla Krut:** “Corona” (poetry)

Kayla Krut is a first year in the MFA at the University of Michigan. Read more of her work at [www.kaylakrut.blogspot.com](http://www.kaylakrut.blogspot.com).

**Kristin LaFollette:** “Grounded” and “Master’s Touch” (poetry)

Kristin received her BA and MA in English and creative writing from Indiana University. Her poems have been featured in or are forthcoming from *Crack the Spine Magazine*, *Dead Flowers: A Poetry Rag*, *2River View*, *FIVE2ONE Magazine*, *LEVELER Poetry Mag*, *Lost Coast Review*, and *The Main Street Rag*, among others. She lives with her husband in northwestern Ohio.

**Paul Mangus:** “How to Conjure” (poetry)

Paul is currently a senior at The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. He’s majoring in English while also working on a minor in Creative Writing with a focus in poetry. He’s lived in Akron for his entire life, which has only been a measly 19 years. The Midwestern lifestyle isn't exactly the most entertaining, so why not write some poetry?

**P.L. McMillan:** “Listening to the Dark” (fiction)

P.L. has always enjoyed the scarier side of life. A huge fan of H.P Lovecraft, Algernon Blackwood, and Stephen King, she hopes to bring more strange and weird tales into the world for fellow fans to enjoy

**Jon Naskrent:** “3:00am” (poetry)

Jon is an English Education major with a focus in Creative Writing at Western Illinois University, located in Macomb, Illinois. His poems have before appeared in *NEAT*. When he's not reading or writing, you will find him reading about the Chicago Bears or making coffee.

**Darrell Petska:** “Sorry” (fiction)

Darrell’s work appears in *Lummox*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Blast Furnace*, *Apocrypha and Abstractions*, *About Place Journal* and other electronic and print journals. Day jobs have included psychiatric casework, nursing home evaluation, and engineering communications.

**James Silas Rogers:** “On the Internet, Retrieving Weather Data for the Day my Father Died” (poetry)

James is an essayist and poet in St Paul, Minnesota. He is the author of the mixed-genre collection *Northern Orchards: Places Near the Dead* (2014), a book of essays and poems on cemeteries, and of a chapbook, *Sundogs* (2006).

**Mark Patrick Spencer:** “Colder” and “Dreamhouse” (poetry)

Mark was raised in northern Kentucky and now writes fiction and poetry in New Orleans. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Midwestern Gothic*, *[untitled] Publications*, *Punchnel's*, *Neutron Protons* and others.

**Highlighted: Anna Stokely:** “Startling Kindness” (fiction)

Anna is an English major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and writes for the *Daily Nebraskan*. She also makes a mean pumpkin pie.

**Ellen Stone:** “The lark ascending” and “Dear Sons and Daughters of Hungry Ghosts” (poetry)

Ellen teaches at Community High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Her poetry collection, *The Solid Living World*, won the 2013 Michigan Writers Cooperative Press chapbook contest. Ellen’s poems have appeared in *Cottonwood Magazine*, *Dunes Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Melancholy Hyperbole*, and in the anthology, *Uncommon Core*.

**Anne Whitehouse:** “Finitudes” (poetry)

Anne is pleased to be appearing once more in *NEAT*. She is a poet, fiction, and non-fiction writer who was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, and lives in New York City. She is the author of five collections of poetry—*The Surveyor’s Hand*, *Blessings and Curses*, *Bear in Mind*, *One Sunday Morning*, and *The Refrain*, as well as a novel, *Fall Love*. [www.annewhitehouse.com](http://www.annewhitehouse.com)

**Laura Winkelspecht:** “Pigeons” and “Peshtigo, October 1871” (poetry)

Laura is a poet and writer from Wisconsin. She has been published in *Flyover Country Review*, *American Tanka*, and is a contributor to the *Wisconsin Poet’s Calendar*.

**Brenna Womer:** “Chimera” (fiction)

Brenna is a graduate student of Creative Writing at Missouri State University. She also work as an assistant editor for *Moon City Review* and teaches an introductory writing course for the university.

**Tracy Youngblom:** “xviii” as part of the series *Boy* (poetry)

Tracy’s first full-length poetry collection was published in 2013. Individual poems and stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *New York Quarterly*, *Dogwood*, *Great River Review*, *Potomac Review*, and other places. Besides being a poet and essayist, she teaches English full-time at a community college and keeps a blog at [www.writerunplay.blogspot.com](http://www.writerunplay.blogspot.com)

**Fred Zirm:** “Undiscovered Country” and “An Elegy for Analog” (poetry)

Fred is a recently retired English and drama teacher with a B.A. and M.A. in English from Michigan State and an M.F.A. in playwriting from the University of Iowa. His poetry and flash fiction have been published in *Voices de la Luna*, *Still Crazy*, *The Rejected Quarterly*, *Red Wolf Journal*, *Silver Birch Press*, and *NEAT*. He lives in Rockville, MD and is also an avid cyclist who has scaled many of the major climbs of the Tour de France. More of his writing can be found at [www.poetry181.blogspot.com](http://www.poetry181.blogspot.com).

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