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After

Elyse Wanzenried

Sometime as rain throbbed turbulent rooftop
tunes during the night, the power went out.
The sun rose behind cold clouds that dropped
sporadic showers. The end of drought.
I still feel it somehow, an aching dry,
one that deepens the cracks of my hand.
The stove blinks dumbly and time feels awry.
In the early light I watch the marshland.
Here, the reeds roll freely with the firm wind
as it paces around the stalks. I yearn
to know how to soften, to bend, to find
that murmuring part of myself, to unlearn
self-doubt. For now, I have this slow ballet
of cattails, this kitchen table, this day.

The Shape of Arizona

Aaron Banks

I spent the night trying to remember the shape
of James Harden's chin, and I drew Arizona instead.
My throat sealed and I thought of drowning
in peanut butter again, and this time, I would be
more awake for all of it. This time, I would use
my fingers to cover my teeth and imagine
what it's like to have an asthma attack
while singing happy birthday to my grandma.
She thinks I do no wrong. She thinks I would dance
for her because she turned eighty-six. I haven't danced
for anyone since my wedding. I love my wife
more than my grandma, and this is the first time
for such a thought. If my mother heard this,
she would feel more like my mother than ever.
She would say *why do you hate my mommy*.
She would say *she is the reason you can say such a thing*.
I bet my mother is crying on behalf of her mother.
I bet my grandma would only want some sugar and a squeeze.

Roger

Danny Landers

The qualities that Roger embodied made fifty percent of the town hate him, and for those same exact qualities, the remaining fifty loved him. The way in which he would sit in the church's gazebo, legs always crossed and lacking sunlight, tended to border on two hours. The look permanently engrained on his spotted face, which gave one the impression that he was only aware of his surroundings until they inspired him enough to turn his attention inward. And also his tendency to ride his root beer-colored cruiser bike along the side of the road without a shirt.

There was a modesty to everything that Roger did. From the microwave French bread pizzas, he ate for dinner each night at six, to the way in which each conversation he ever held revolved completely around the person with whom he spoke. Roger prided himself on the value that he placed upon talking with people. But in rare cases, Roger found the company of people a bit overwhelming.

It was in the early weeks of summer when Roger found himself at the town's recycling center. The abundance of brand new sport utility vehicles that filled the parking lot conflicted with the numerous garbage trucks and dumpsters in the yard, each of which Roger estimated to be within the ballpark of his age. The sun shone down from the sky more aggressively than usual today, and it seemed to pay extra attention to Roger's sensitive bald head and his white mustache. Upon emptying what little recyclables he had into their respective garbage trucks, Roger noticed what he thought to be a circular structure, lined with a pale blue tarp, half-visible out of the top of the "miscellaneous" dumpster. He approached the yard attendant, Mike, who he spoke to each time he dropped off his Pepsi bottles, each time for much longer than Mike would have liked to. Roger's habitual attendance at the town's weekly council meetings was made aware to Mike, as Roger always spoke to him of the latest ordinance under review or the current list of street lamps that needed new bulbs.

"Hey Mikey, whaddya got in there?!" Roger exclaimed.

"What do I have in where Roger?"

"That big blue thing in the dumpster?"

"Oh that's an above ground pool some jackass got rid of this morning"

"Must have holes in it then...?"

"Nah, not even close, the guy said he had it in his yard for two weeks before his kid said she wanted an in-ground pool, unbelievable."

"So you mean to tell me that that pool is only two weeks old?"

"You want it, it's yours."

"Yeah! I think I'll take it off your hands. I'll just need another favor before I take it... Think we can stick it in the hopper of a truck and drive it over to my house?"

"Sure thing Rog, I'll have Miley drive it over your place when he finishes his route."

"Aw Mikey that's really somethin', you're a good guy you know that."

"Yeah, Rog." Roger took note of the abrupt conclusion of their conversation imparted by Mikey. Never one to take things personally, Roger wrote it off as a tendency of most of the people in town.

So Roger drove his white Kia Soul back home, a car which only saw blue skies and black asphalt when Roger had an errand to run. He did not travel far from the garage after parking his car, as his favorite rocking chair was situated right next to where the car lay parked. He watched the stillness of his backyard, with its long gravel driveway, infrequent patches of overgrown

grass and weeds scattered about, and canopied in maple trees, which clogged the gutters but flooded his eyes with wonderment. As he monitored the trees he would marvel at the occasional blue jay gliding in and out of the trees' branches and bases. He referred to the jays as 'traffic cops'; they were noticeably more aggressive than the rest of the birds, and they had a propensity for causing trouble. As he surveyed the gravel, he sat in silent excitement at each passing squirrel and each fleeting chipmunk. These wingless critters were entirely more skittish than the birds, seeming to scamper off only during moments of calamity in Roger's silent ecosystem. His union with nature was abruptly severed when his ears perked up to the sound of the hissing air brakes of Miley's truck. Roger eased himself up out of his rocking chair and meditatively made his way down the driveway, but before he got even halfway to the curb, Miley noisily jogged through the gravel and met Roger.

"Where you want this thing man?!" Miley explosively let out, Miley always seemed to be in a hurry, especially at the end of his route, as he had a second job he had to get to, driving a tractor trailer... Roger thought to himself.

"Hey whaddya say there Miley?"

"You want this pool or not?"

"Yeah, yeah, let's get to it!"

Roger and Miley made their way over to the truck, Miley arriving at the hopper much sooner than Roger. The two dragged the pool across the rocks of the drive, any of which could have easily punctured the tarp lining. Miley dragged from the front, and Roger guided the rear. Once the pool had been placed in the first location which appeared remotely appropriate to Miley, he was on his way; Roger's "Hey I gotta thank ya there Miley" heard only by the birds in the trees, and Roger had an inkling that they would not be saying, "You're welcome".

Roger took the next phase of pool installation into his own hands. He wiped the medley of fallen leaves and pollen off of his garden hose, placed its spout into the pool, and turned the rusted spigot until he heard the water making its way through the hose and into the pool. The thought crossed Roger's mind of going to a pool supply store, and purchasing chlorine tablets and other potential necessities for his new pool, but that notion was quickly dismissed, as it was an idea, if put into action, that would require spending money and driving on the highway. He opted to have another sit down in his rocking chair until the pool was ready for him. As he examined the pool in its new home, Roger couldn't help but imagine all the people who might like to join him in enjoying it. He thought about his cop friend Larry, and how he might like to have a swim and a chat. After enough sitting and thinking to relax an old man, and enough water running to fill a pool, Roger turned the spigot to the off position, ran his fingertips through the pool's chill water, and decided he was ready to fetch his bathing suit. Once in appropriate swim attire, Roger wasted no time in cooling off on this hot day. He could stand on the bottom of the pool, feeling the gravel of the driveway beneath the tarp, with his head completely above water. So there he stood, waving his arms to and fro in the water, scanning his surroundings from this new perspective. He was not scanning for long until his eyes happened upon Larry. Larry always found time to pop in at Roger's during his shift, always knowing that more often than not, Roger would be found in the backyard.

"What the hell's this Rog?!"

"What's it look like Larry?"

"Ya got a pool, whattya need a pool for? You're always complaining about cleanin' your gutters, paintin' the house... Whattya need another headache for?"

“Well when someone offers ya a free pool, I suppose ya don’t really think about the headache right away, Lar. I’m gunna go inside and get a Pepsi...ya want one too?”

“Yeah sure, I’ll take a Pepsi.” Roger used his new pool ladder to emerge from the water, not expecting to get any kind of reaction out of Larry.

“Whoah! Whoah! Rog! You’re blindin’ me!” exclaimed Larry, half laughing and fully shielding his eyes.

“What’re ya talking about?” said Roger, at this point wondering what he could possibly be displaying to a set of eyes that he figured had caught sight of some disturbing images on the police job.

“You’re bordering on naked in front of another man!” Roger looked down at his dripping, bare body, seeing nothing wrong with wearing a Speedo during swim time.

“Ah, you got body image issues!” shot Roger back at Larry. “You want that Pepsi or not?”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to enjoy it until you put some clothes on.”

“Ah you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You know what Rog, I’ll just come by and talk to ya another time, hopefully, one where you’re not showin’ quite as much skin,” Larry said, turning his back to his friend and making his way down the driveway to his patrol car.

Afternoons came and went for Roger, each one providing adequate relaxation time in his newfound creature comfort. He concocted a buoyant sitting device by super-gluing empty milk gallons to a lawn chair, and he would sit in it atop the stagnant water, which he noted was collecting debris from the trees with each passing day. Every now and then Roger would look out through his trees and see a patrol car pass by. On each of these occasions, he would hope that it would slow down, and make the turn into his driveway, but Larry had not paid a visit in quite some time. Larry was different from other people in town, Roger thought to himself. Everybody was always in such a rush, never having the time to have a good talk. He figured that maybe it was because most of the people who lived in town were a good deal younger than himself. Having to work from nine to five, running children around to soccer practice or scout meetings, people were busy; they always looked busy. Roger thought about his days as a teacher, he always seemed to find the time to set aside for a good heart to heart, or an in-depth analysis of a friend’s problems. He thought for a moment how most of his friends his age were either dead, or had retired and moved out of the state because of New Jersey’s high taxes. Would they talk to him? But Larry would talk to him. Just not lately. Where was that son of a gun?

After a solid month of floating, and the occasional moment of treading water, which Roger assumed was good for his joints, Roger decided enough time had gone by. He was going to pay Larry a visit. He knew when Larry took his lunch, and since he wasn’t stopping by Roger’s at that time lately, Roger figured he would try him at the station. Looking through the cracked door of Larry’s office, Roger saw that Larry was very much there, and very much alone, good.

Roger gently knocked on the door as he entered, “Hey Lar, ya been hidin’ out in here?” Larry cleared his throat as he looked up from the overtime card he was filling in.

“Been busy Rog, what’re ya doin here?”

“Well, I figured you haven’t been comin’ by me, so I’d come by you.”

“Yeah, about that Roger. To be honest it was a little much to see ya prancin’ around in a Speedo last time I saw ya.” Larry looked back down at his overtime card and started scribbling.

“Ya want me wearin’ a wetsuit instead?” Roger joked.

“Just a pair of shorts that reach the knees, and we’re in business.”

“It’s a shame ya never come enjoy the new pool with me Lar, I figured you’d really get a kick out of it.”

“What about this Rog... My wife’s been tryin’ to arrange a family reunion for us for some time now, but she hasn’t decided on a venue yet. What if we had it in your backyard, I’m sure the kids would love your pool.”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s a fine idea. When you wanna do it?”

“Ya got time this weekend?”

“I always got time. Bring the whole gang by this Sunday morning, I’m up early so whenever you’re ready, I’ll be too.” The two exchanged a smile and a handshake, and Roger left the station with a lightness to his step.

The Sunday morning of the party finally came, and Roger spent his first waking hours laying out the six-foot sub he ordered from his favorite deli, filling bowls with potato chips, and filling old dusty coolers with ice and Pepsi bottles. He skimmed the pool water with his homemade screen, which he constructed out of a square of window screen and a broom handle. The idea of bringing his radio outside passed his mind, but he negated it, as a party with such a fine family should be free of distraction from the conversation. As Roger stood there stroking his mustache, he heard the closing of a car door. He smiled as he watched Larry, his wife Anne, and their two young daughters, June and July, walk up the drive. Anne went right for the sandwich without even a nod to Roger. The girls, already adorned in swimwear and snorkels, quickly got into the pool. Just as Roger opened his mouth to exchange his first words with Larry, Larry beat him to it. “I think my family is here.”

Roger spent the next hour greeting guests at the foot of his driveway. With each approaching child, Roger grew more nervous, wondering what exactly the pool’s maximum capacity was. Each handshake and kiss on the cheek grew more and more unsettling to the host, as he began to wonder how much time he would actually get to spend with his favorite guest. When fifteen minutes went by, void of another guest’s arrival, Roger slowly made his way up the drive and began integrating himself among the party guests. Roger meandered aimlessly throughout the sea of people, taking short, conscious breaks to exchange pleasantries with each of Larry’s family members. But upon the conclusion of each exchange, Roger came away feeling more anxious, and more convinced that there was no way Larry could be of the same bloodline as any of these horrid people. If Roger had to hear one more complaint about jeans not fitting right, or one more comment about Will Smith’s marriage, he would surely snap. Roger figured he would take a break from social interaction, by means of a piece of the submarine sandwich, there was one slice left, the end piece...his favorite. This stroke of luck eased Roger’s mind for a moment, as well as settled the pace of his heartbeat. The sandwich’s journey from table to mouth was harshly cut off by a violent splash of water from the pool. The sandwich was now saturated with pool water and laying in the gravel of the driveway. Roger glared at the overweight red-haired kid who created this grave injustice. The boy did not realize he was under scrutiny, so Roger moved on. Roger spotted Larry, and he felt hopeful that he would save him from what was turning out to be a most dissatisfying social gathering. Roger listened intently to the conversation Larry was having with his cousin Eddie, a cop in a neighboring town. Eddie had a kind face, like Larry, but he did not speak kind words. He was telling his cousin a story from the job, about helping a divorced housewife cross the street, and looking up her skirt after she turned her back. Larry and Eddie laughed heartily and elbowed each other in the ribs. Roger was not amused, by

the story, nor by his dear friend's reaction to it. Roger found his favorite rocking chair unoccupied and had a seat to see if he could overcome the pain in his chest that was now developing. He closed his eyes for a moment, and only a moment, as the splasher had now shifted his mischief from inadvertent to very much purposeful. The chubby boy tip-toed behind Roger's chair, with Roger's car washing bucket filled to the brim with pool water. Careful not to spill a drop until he was ready, the boy unleashed fury upon the resting man. Roger sprang up from his chair and shook himself dry, noting the splasher's body jiggling as he ran back to the safety of the pool. Roger had reached a threshold, there was no possible way that he could get any more worked up, so he did what had to be done. He walked into his kitchen, dripping wet, drank a couple of cap-fulls of cough syrup, and made his way back to his rocking chair, this time sure he would get some rest.

Roger awoke the next morning to find his backyard in worse shape than it had ever been in all his years living there. Soda bottles and little bits of lettuce and tomato littered the grass and gravel. The perimeter of the pool was lined with crushed up potato chips, puffed up with pool water. Roger rubbed his sleep-heavy eyes and began to ready himself for the big clean-up. When he opened his eyes, he saw Larry walking towards him in his uniform.

"Some party, eh Rog?!"

"You certainly got that right, my friend."

"Everyone had a blast, and the kids really loved the pool, it was all really nice of ya buddy. How can I get ya back?"

Roger stared into Larry's eyes intently and paused before saying anything. "I'll tell ya what you can do...got your pistol handy?"

Larry put his right hand on his belt, right above the handle of the gun. "Give it to me," Roger said with a tone of strength and calm.

Larry, perplexed by his friend's questionable request, unhooked his gun from his belt and hesitantly handed it over to Roger.

Roger studied the gun in his hands, then proceeded to take the safety off.

"Rog, what're you doin'...?"

"It's about time this all came to an end." Before Larry could say anything else, Roger began firing away at the walls of the pool. He had only shot a gun once before in his life, but there was a degree of authority to his stance and his shot which could have only been achieved through taking out a deserved victim. Roger gently placed the pistol back into his friend's hand, as water steadily drained out of the pool, and trickled into the earth.

Roger never humored the idea of getting another pool. It was gone and gone for good. The bed of grass which once supported it remained dead for the rest of Roger's life. His friendship with Larry remained fulfilling for the same amount of time.

Slugs

Anna Mack



Resisting Female Contingency

Joanna Omestad

after Adrienne Rich

Everything wanted and hated is called *she*—
earth, ocean, ship, vessel all *she* can be
is a vessel
for children for men for problems for the world

Calendars etched on ancient bones
counted 28 days
in a month because only women are
betroted to their own blood

Relying for too long on gaslit heat that
wilts canopies of leaves and boils
oceans of saltwater, it scorches
instead of warms, shatters
 instead of welds, welts instead of welds

The glass we have to learn how to walk on—
bottling feelings that leave with the tide
and wash up on other continents, shrapnel
from internal battles that can never be won

I'm so heavy in this body in this cloud
of smoke
so heavy in the light
I am like a moth to you, a bad butterfly
with tattered wings that no longer levitate

 I bleed bleach
and my pores
leak silicone but not of my own design
and I am
an instrument in the shape of a woman
slowly bending into my own form
and I am tired of marble being heavier
than wood, when wood
 can ignite flame

What I want when I confess my life is unmanageable

Derek Ellis

is for alcohol to seem less appealing, less like a key
into the world I can't see anymore, less like a dog
curled at my feet waiting for its feeding, the teeth
less menacing, my life less uninteresting, my life less
like a constant confession where the morning stars
sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.

I can no longer believe in a power greater
than myself. What happens when the earth's seasons
pass before you without interest?

In the room where paint sings psalms, where
the television is praying and asks me to join, where
the armored doorjamb is rusting through,

I'm constructing my own echo.

I command the air: Hello, lovely and tender friend.

I pat the air as if it were a head; I open the mirror
on the wall for all my pain—here. Come and tell
of the hard path beneath your feet, the aftermath
in the after-speech, speak that graffitied language of
youth, how you didn't want to understand. Now you do.

Storm

Chika Onyenezi

The weather forecast said a storm was coming— I turned off the television and went to work anyway. When you work for these retail cheats, every day of the year is a workday. There isn't any escaping. You are paid enough to only come back the next day and waste youth and spontaneity on the desirous whims of a rich capitalist dude you would never meet, always work for, bleed for, even die for, and probably go to your grave with little or nothing, and yet at the end of it all, you mean nothing to him, you only exist as a number – number of employees. When they need you to lift thirty pounds, there is no corporate policy, but when you break your hand or need help or something, these guys will find a way to get rid of you and declare you a liability. They hate liabilities, and I tried not to be one. I stood outside the store smoking and thinking about the difference between medieval and today's labor. The day-in-day-out routine constantly burned me away.

The sliding door automatically pushed open, and I walked in. Right by the door was glass cases protecting expensive cosmetics, perfumes, key chains, battery chargers, phone chargers, umbrellas, and sunshades. We left sales items in a big basket right before the counter so that customers could pick one or two before leaving. The manager's door was open. I saw her head bent over papers and files. I hated working with Iren, she screamed all the time if the lines weren't going fast enough. James was fun to work with. He was a great boss, and constantly found a way to make that shit easy on me. He always came down to help me out with long lines instead of trying to teach me from a telephone. Iren saw me. I waved at her and she waved back at me.

Few people were working in the store today. Mary was on the counter. She asked me out last month, but I was already going out with someone else, and then, the someone I was going out with was very unstable, but I liked her anyway. Loved her I mean, and that was why I stayed longer in the relationship than I should have. I saw Mary talking to John recently; the Spanish boy that worked night. His hair was always heavy with pomade and had a lot of coils. He smelled like cherry all the time. I guess it would be nice for both of them to get along fine, even though I was now considering dating her because I recently broke up with my girlfriend a few days ago. My girlfriend's demons or my demons had decided to wake in the early morning of our relationship and box everything to pieces like Wreck-it-Ralph. I mean, I tried to apologize to her, but it didn't work. I bought her flowers and cards and sent them to her house, but none of these could even get her to reply to my text messages. She accused me of dating an African student somewhere in Asia, but that wasn't the case. The person in question was a long-time acquaintance of mine who decided to call in the middle of the night because she couldn't tell the time difference. She also saw a message she sent and said they were outrageous. Outrageous!

"How are you brother? I miss our good old days." = Outrageous!

I checked "outrageous" twice in the dictionary and googled: "What does it mean when your girlfriend says you are outrageous" twice, just to get a hint of other people's view on it. Everything that comes out of a girl's mouth is a kind of code, a code that must be interpreted with artificial intelligence. When I got tired of trying to figure out why she wasn't picking my call, I took it as fate. I guess that was the third stage of my realization, right after denying, googling, then you get fate. Fate means time to fade away, time to look beyond your Ex. You can

now comfortably address her as Ex. Fate could also mean eating ice-cream every day and going to parks just to help you purge the thoughts of her like a food the body deemed unwanted. It could mean driving fast on the highway for those that have felt that rush of lingering between death and life.

The fluorescent tubes focused on my eyes and momentarily blinded me as I walked towards the computer in the pharmacy area at the back of the store, to sign in for the day. The pharmacist waved at me. A good man. I heard he earned the biggest salary around here. No wonder every Nigerian I knew was in the medical field. I could have gone into the medical field a long time ago like my fellow compatriots and have a chance at a good life, but I choose to focus on my dream of becoming a painter. Assuming I could put food on the table with painting. Some dreams fester and rot in the night and stand in my living room like a Calabar masquerade, and reminded me of the horrors of my own choices. The computer turned on, and I began to punch away. My good man, whom I always shared books with whispered my name from the counter. I turned and saw him. Rodriguez. He was a student at Houston University completing his internship at the pharmaceutical store. We often talked in between breaks or anytime we could, and it was mostly about books. He had a smarter plan for himself than I. He loves to write and still went for a pharmacy degree, while all my life has been one attempt or another to paint something worthy of display. Shame on me, somehow. Shame on these festering dreams. Rodriguez quickly ate a slice of apple while attending to the next customer.

“Did you finish the book yet?” he asked me while punching the keyboard and scanning a customer’s items.

“Almost there, thank you for that book. I have new ones coming in this week, I will share them with you too.”

“Me too, I have some more coming in this week. All Salman Rushdie’s. I have long heard about that man, and I think it’s time to put that feeling to bed. Hey, I will send it your way after I am done.”

“No problem, I will do the same too,” I said and waved at him and walked to the front counter to take my position.

Mary smiled at me and cuddled the strand of hair in front of her face and gently brushed it back. Then she beat the back of her head twice as if something was biting her. She smiled and asked me if I was ready to take over, and I said yes, and smiled back. I wanted to ask her what she was doing for the weekend, then I saw a customer coming and quickly logged in and began to check him out. Pepperoni, chips, wine, beer, and table tennis balls.

“Looks like it’s going to be a beautiful day for you,” I said.

“The storm is coming down brother. There is nothing to do other than drink and play games. I hope you guys are closing early?” he asked.

“Yea, even if they don’t close early, I will be out before it starts,” I said.

He put his credit card in the slit and paid for his items.

“Alright man, have a good day. Stay warm,” he said and walked out of the door.

“Thanks, man,” I replied.

Time passed me by as people came up to my counter and walked in and out of the door. When I got tired of scanning, I leaned on the shelf beside me and watched the streets. I always kept a book underneath the counter so that when the store was less busy, I would read a couple of pages, but today I just wasn’t feeling like it. I preferred to watch the wind fluttering Margret restaurant’s awning and about to reap it apart. A raggedy man wearing a thick winter jacket walk into the store. His hat and pants were both reaped and dirty. He walked with urgency and

couldn't keep his eyes on me for a second. I thought he was going to the pharmacy, but I noticed he didn't even go close to the area, rather he went to the aisle with electronics and pocketed something quickly. I had seen this scene play out many times and understood exactly what it meant. I walked to the door and waited for him while pretending to be stocking phone chargers. A few seconds later, he walked close to the far end of the wall and tried to sneak out, but I was ready for him.

"Stop right there," I said and blocked his way.

"What do you mean? Why are you embarrassing me?" he asked.

"Let me have it," I said in a quiet voice, my eyes unwavering, my body stiff, soldier like. He brought out a radio, yogurt, perfumes, from his jacket and laid down on the floor.

"Please let me go, I won't do it again," he said.

"Do you know I can call the police for you? Do you know that if my manager sees you right now you are going to jail?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," he said, his voice broken and words almost meant nothing to me.

"Go," I said and looked at the counter. I saw two customers already waiting for me. I knew the second person and hadn't seen him in a long time. I called him Big Brother. He was my schoolmate in secondary school, a couple of classes ahead of me back then, and also a lawyer for an oil firm in downtown Houston. One of the best in what he does. He owned a house in downtown Houston and always invited me over.

"Brother," I said and we shook hands. I rushed to counter and checked the first customer out, before shaking hands with him again, like sealing our comradeship and embracing our common struggle.

"Men, when do you get off today?" he asked and dropped a bottle of Vodka for me to scan.

"Soon, brother. Like in an hour. What the time now?" I asked and looked at the clock while scanning his item too. It was almost six-thirty in the evening, and yes, I would be getting off in an hour's time.

"Correct, come to my end after this," he said.

"No problem brother, I am right behind you," I said.

I totally forgot about the storm and focused on hanging out with him. Well, I did think about the storm in-between scanning a few items, but what good would it do me to miss a chance at hanging out with Big Brother. Moreover, I could sleep over if I wanted. I scanned a few more and talked to a few faces whom I knew visited the store often. At six on the dot, I called my manager, clocked out and left. Like always, I saw John hunched like chimp by the electric pole at the back exit. I took out a cigarette and smoked with him.

"I knew you would be here, John," I said. We shook hands while the cigarette burned on my lips.

"Yea, I am late today. I don't even feel like coming in today. I have to stay through the storm in this place," John said.

"Well, at least it will be just you and people won't come in that much, so all you have to do is sleep," I said and tapped his shoulder and he laughed.

"Yes, you are right. So right. I know what to do once I clock in, lock the door and sleep. Sleep through the storm," John said and laughed. His left hand made an O sign across his mouth as he tried to suppress staccato of laughter wailing deep inside.

"Alright, man. I will see you tomorrow," I said, laughing, and walked towards the parking lot. I walked on the sidewalk and stopped. When the light turned green, I crossed the

walkway. Someone walked past me, and I could tell it was Vera, Maria's white friend. We all hung out all the time and I wondered why she didn't recognize me. Maybe I was too dark to be seen in the dark. Vera. The girl that called me her friend many times and we laughed and drank bourbon shots in upscale bars downtown Houston. We mostly barhopped and I tried to carry everyone along, and whenever I invited Mary, she always came with Vera. If she knew it was me, she would have stopped though, but that's the problem, not recognizing your friend in the dark is the problem. I sighed and continued walking. The sky squeezed its face like a child that was about to cry, and heavy dark clouds rolled past the starless sky. The wind was getting stronger and stronger, and if I wasn't up a hundred and eighty pounds, it would have dragged me north against my intention of going south. I got in my car and drove over to Big Brother's place. I pulled in by the trees and parked right in-between them. I ran across the tarmac and moved quickly, I ran up the little staircase leading inside the house, stopped at his doorstep, and knocked. If I was to be rich, I would buy a place like this. Cozy looking townhouse with beautiful facades and polished wood in the interior. Everything about it gives this air of something natural, utterly peaceful. I could feel the raw energy around the house, it felt like a place I wanted to be in. I waited and gazed at the roundedness of the light above me and watch tailed insects flutter around. Margret opened the door and hugged me. She was his wife, an African-American woman from Nebraska, and they had a child together. The smell of cashew nuts filled the air and something was boiling in the kitchen.

"You will eat my egusi today," Margret said as I settled in a chair.

"Jesus who taught you how to cook egusi?" I asked, "I wouldn't want to miss it at all."

"I learned it in Nigeria last year when we were there," Margret said and her pretty face beamed with a smile. She stood almost my height, five foot nine and I guess Big Brother was shorter than her but their love was so strong that none of it mattered. He strolled casually into the living room with Ayo by his side, barely talking, playing with his toy like he always did. I had never seen that boy cry. He was always alright and eager to start school. Ayo walked up to me and embraced my wet pants.

"Men, welcome. Ayo hasn't seen you in a long while, na why him dey gum your body," he said and sat down on the opposite chair.

"Hello Ayo," I said, and the little boy smiled and ran away almost immediately.

"O boy, you teach our wife how to make Egusi already?" I asked.

"My man, na my mother teach her oh. Me, I get the time? The only time wey I get na to make money, everything else na las las," he said.

Naturally, we switched to pidgin English, the language of our struggles, spoken by our grandfathers in an attempt to mimic the white man, but rich in our sounds and manners.

"Make I hail madam finish, I will be back," I said following Ayo behind, knowing that he was rushing to be with his mother.

"How is work?" I asked Margret.

"Thank you for asking, good so far. I got promoted last week to Attorney general's office," Margret said. She was also a lawyer, and they met during law school and had been together ever since. She carried Ayo in one arm and stirred the pot with another.

"Congratulations, I need to come on a different day for the celebration. Today, I just came by chance. I will need a proper invitation to the promotion party. Your husband is Yoruba and you understand what that means. Plenty Party," I said and we started laughing.

“Chukwu, I can almost recall, the last time I went there, we had a party almost every day. I used to think Americans knew how to party, but I thought wrong. Partying belongs to the Yoruba’s, indeed,” she said.

“Now you know better,” I said.

“How is your work going?”

“So far so good.”

“Hey beautiful, can we go to the garage?” Big Brother said.

“You don’t need permission to be there! Unless you guys plan on doing something I don’t know,” Margret said and laughed.

“A little of it,” Big Brother said and kissed Margret on the lips, and pecked Ayo on the cheek. I followed him to the garage. He decorated it far more than his living room with fancy cushions, painting of Fela, and Arabian lush rug with tiny blue materials fluttering in the air-conditioned garage. His car was parked on the other side. He sat down and laughed while staring at nothing, then stopped and laughed again, and looked at me and said “I remember when you dey Junior Secondary One, men. I was in Senior Secondary two, your brother asked me to take care of you.”

Memories filled my head and flashed around my mind like shooting stars.

“Men, if not for you those days, they would have eaten me raw,” I said.

“That’s the language of Thomas College,” he said and this time stared at a clock and said: “eat you raw,” in a very dreamy manner.

“Senior Ochonglakwu, Aka Ekwensu. Oji Ukwu Aga Aba, men them. They would have eaten me raw indeed. I remember the day Ochonglakwu shut down the school because the principal suspended him,” I said.

“I remember that day, clearly. One man Squad. He stood on that front gate and declared school closed, shot two bullets in the air, and everyone ran away,” he said.

“Why didn’t you guys do anything?” I asked.

“The game was the game, my brother. It didn’t make any sense declaring war on him at the time. Even though we were already having problems with him,” he said.

“I remember the day you slapped the physics teacher right by the hibiscus flowers,” I said and we started laughing.

“That was the last straw man and I later apologized. My parents heard about it, and my dad didn’t take it lightly,” he started rolling weed, “that man beat me and I had to go apologies to my teacher in his house. I give problem then now, no be now. Man don calm down,” he put the weed in his mouth, light it and took two puffs before giving it to me, “men, that school was rough. Men were coming to school with a machete. Who are you? Any day that blood didn’t flow wasn’t a good school day. A good school day na fight all through.”

“True. Very true. I still wonder how I survived that amount of violence. It changes you inside you know?” I said.

“Yes now. You know you will never be the same. That’s for sure, but you do better,” he said.

We smoked for sometimes in silence and the heavy fumes circulated around the room and we coughed briefly. The room constantly changed colors in my eyes. We were high.

“My father called me after secondary school and told me that he was sending me abroad. I was happy when I heard that. I got admitted to the University of Illinois to study Law. When I got there, the kind of winter that I met eh, my eyes opened. My father only paid for one semester, he called me and said ‘you are on your own, and if you can’t survive on your own, then fail.’

After that call, he never sent me a dime, again. I got a job on campus, and also a part-time job outside of campus. That was how I survived. That was how I was able to pay my own school fees. I struggled from month to month. I started putting much effort into my studies and after, I decided to go to Law School. I applied and got a scholarship. Somehow, coming to America changed me. I don't know what my fate would have been if I stayed back in Nigeria, because I was already gone then. If I had gone to a Nigerian college, I probably would have been deadlier than college times. Most of my friends joined a cult in University. Shaba was shot dead at Ekpoma University, Costa Rica met his waterloo at UNILAG. These where the men I used to play with, eat with, drink with, laugh with, you know that kind of level?" he said and hissed.

"I know exactly what you are talking about," I said and hissed.

"Now the worst of all Buhari won the election," he said, and sighed.

"Let's see how it will go," I said.

"What can you expect from a military dictator? My people will never learn."

"He might turn out be person Nigeria needs at this time."

"We've heard that before, watch and see."

For a couple of minutes, we smoked in silence. I looked at my phone, almost 11 p.m.

"Brother, I have to start going," I said.

"Men, what are going home for, at this time of the night, this is your house too."

"I have to prepare for an interview tomorrow."

"In this storm?" he said and pulled up the garage door, and indeed it happened that the rain had receded greatly, "alright it seems better now."

"I promise I will come this weekend for a sleepover."

He walked towards the living room, and I followed him. Ayo and Margret were already sleeping. I saw my food on the table, packaged for me already.

"Ah, she even packaged the food for you."

"Men, thank you, you guys are amazing," I said and walked into the rainy night.

Water poured down lightly on the tarmac and rays from the street light made the wet leaves shiny. I got to my car and drove away. I ran down Travis street and pulled into Main street and drove all the way to Richmond Avenue and made a left. The water kept growing as I drove towards my house. The storm suddenly picked up again and came with a roaring wind and rain. I felt drops of water on my feet and I could tell my car engine was getting water too. I kept on driving, high as fuck and eager to get home. Soon I noticed that my car was floating on the water. It glided towards a wall. I came down, and with the water around my chest, I pushed the car forward until it touched the ground again and pulled onto the tarmac. I got in and started the engine again, and lucky for me, it heaved in. I felt the blistering cold on my wet skin as I drove down the road. I began to shiver. I turned the heater and drove towards my house. The road was still flooded and I couldn't see a thing in the distance. I pulled into a gas station where other cars parked waiting with their blinkers on. I put on my blinkers and shivered inside while the car tried to warm me. I took almost an hour before the rain receded.

When I got home later, I soaked myself in a hot bath and stayed there for nearly an hour in an attempt to defrost my own soul. I knew my car was damaged when I pulled into the parking lot. I turned on the television and listened to the news on CNN, and the reporter was talking about Houston's death toll being around fourteen already. People drowned in the storm, two on one the routes I took. I sighed. I looked at myself in the mirror and wondered if I was just a ghost of myself. Maybe I died out there in the storm. I blinked, and wiped the mirror with the back of my hand.

Tbilisi
Rana Yalçın



An Excerpt for Staying

translated from Turgut Uyar's Turkish by Selda Suer and Deniz Suer

an ancient remark: horses, kittens, sparrows,
 dogs dozed off in nooks and throughout the years
the third sibling of sorrow and joy, herself in every street
 taken in as a greeting
and the pressure of the sea's roots compressing green and some clouds
 in a flux, in a thickening from east to north

an ancient remark: a heated exchange in September
 leads to the longest days on a bandit's bed,
love's other name is now the lost war in cities
 it is taught historically
as is the shame old jackets feel when not hung
 beside brilliant fur hats on engraved hangers

an ancient remark: blood, vomits the sun livid and remembers
 her in tallgrass near a neglected rocky waterfront
remembers the way a hand holds the neck
 of a decanter as its filled—regardless of all this
what am I saying: if streams and creeks are this calm and clean
 and so determined in meadows, if its beds are protected,
if the shroud that the sun has sheared fits the milked night's
 obediently dried out and shadowed body
here is the ache, here, the neigh of horses like rebels
 in lightened night
I say *let me stay, let me stay*, but it doesn't work
I am leaving.

Vaccines

Nelson Potter

At one point
my parents must've looked me in the eye

and told me that even though
I am the best of both of them

even though
my life had to sift through centuries
of magic
science
hate

and thrust itself from tranquil ether
into the cold
naked threshold of zero
in an Applebee's bathroom

where
against all odds
my cells persisted
and let me leech
just enough
to be evicted

culminating

in a final trick
where I convinced my host
to keep and feed me

that ultimately
I was still too weak

Respingada

Alexandra Davies

When I walked in, nothing was ready. The painters were still stretching the canvas: several twig limbs grasping at the white sheet, pouring old paint water in buckets to help the material over the edges. No one asks me for help. All eyes stay glued on the frame.

My body went to the stage slowly dropping each article of clothing to my feet. Sometimes it is a dress that I unzip like a showgirl and let it fall to the floor. Today I am tired and moving my body through the motions. My hair is short. My pants hang around my ankles. I left my bra on a chair at home. It didn't matter. No one is watching. They never look at me.

There are three painters: one round, one thin, and one bald, all staring at the sun through the dusty window. I put on my pinkish skin and smooth my hair. I don't mind being nude, it pays enough. Muse isn't a job title. I won't have this face and body forever. I learned to undress quickly. The ball of clothing rolls between the stacks of art books at the edge of the stage.

The painters leave art books sprawled across the studio floors. I know how to avoid stepping on most of them, but some old masters are harder to dodge. Goya tends to be the most aggressive, reaching from his pages and bruising my legs with his deep red paints. The painters told me that mess is for inspiration. How else would they get ideas if not for other's art?

The books of Caravaggio and El Greco grab at my thighs. They tell me they like me in unison. Their fingers feel like cold, hard facts and old ink. I am not their model, I could never be their model.

"Do you mind?" I ask. The pages of their books curling from embarrassment. I want to kick their books over. They hide my clothes and fold them, taking great care of my underwear.

My feet balance on the stage of uneven plywood. Velázquez slips out of a page and motions me to lay prostrate. A proper Rokeby. His hands try to guide mine across my waist. I'm not his model either, so I ask him to go as politely as I can.

The position is taped out like a clean crime scene. I am to pose knees curled and arms hung like a star. The directions ask me to be a piece of art. I oblige, folding my body into what I think is art for the painters who are still not ready. They mix their paints, sloshing color after color onto an endless sleeve of thin plastic. I lack the courage to ask for time or what art is.

Surrounding me are girls made of paint. They are nameless, unacknowledged portraits faded with age. Some sit soft and glow with a candlelight technique, while others hide their beauty at their portrait's edge once I enter the room. They were once me and one day I'll join them on the wall. Maybe they know what art is.

One painter turns on music. Some days it is Bossa Nova, other days it is operas and classical pieces. Once, they played me their favorite radio station from Mexico and spat Patti Smith. I hung onto the sonic speed voice of the disc jockey as he threw record upon record through the speaker. They changed it before things got too hectic. Today it is *La Bohème*.

My face is still and full of roses as the music washes over my skin. A painter comes up to my body and holds his paint like an antique gun. He takes a brush and dips it into a freshly mixed pink, twisting and mashing the bristles until saturated, and brushing it across my nipples to see if the color matches. For several minutes he continues to mix and wipe without so much as a word. Appeased, he moves onto my cheeks and repeats the process. Artists are so serious sometimes.

I lost track of the clock while waiting to start. So much dust had settled in the room since we started. I reach to clean the girls' portraits with my fingers. Soon I changed into something

new. My hair grew long and dark, covering my body like a safety blanket. I broke my pose to move the hair from my mouth.

“I am the warmest I’ve ever been!” I announce to the trio of men hunched over their oils. They do not notice my words or the way my mouth shapes each vowel. The round painter comes to capture the color of the hair between my legs. My eyes try to follow his but they never meet.

The trio begins without notice. No one asks me to tie back my hair, but I assume it would help. Their brushstrokes act erratically. I knot my hair into a manageable shape to show all of my beauty marks and moles. Their brushstrokes slow to a reasonable pace. I wonder if they will connect the dots on my beauty-marked body. They ignore my marks. They do not include moles in their art.

When the painters speak, flags unfurl from their mouths. Everything is Spanish. Their foreign language makes up my naked body. It adds a new layer and traces the edges of the definition I’ve grown into over the years. Even my shadow has a new word. If I am brave enough to ask, they will explain, but I learned to settle with what is mine. It’s exhausting to watch the words float around my face, tiny dark clouds that made me sneeze and squint. So, I swallow them and save the words underneath my tongue. I am my own new word. It tastes like cold copper and tar coating my throat. If spoken, it would sound like a gravel road.

They are talking about me now.

It is their usual comments: small eyes and big lips. No one can paint my eyes. They are chameleons that change colors too quick to capture. It is not my fault I came like this. I remind myself that flowers never have to explain anything. Neither does basil or rosemary. My face does not move until I see a new word slip out of a painter’s lips. *Respingada*.

“*Respingada*,” notes the round painter, glancing at the other two for approval. The portrait he is painting of me is quite ugly. The body on the canvas is twisted. Parts of her are bone, and others are ripping at the seams. How can art look well-fed and malnourished at the same time? Her face is sick and full of terrible ideas. The skin is pale and purple like an early corpse. I remember when the round painter told me that most realistic paintings are the most abstract ones.

I check my arms for color. They are still pink and bright.

Do I look like this? I want to take off each of my limbs and reshape them like clay. The painters never notice my horror from peeking at their canvas. I struggle to recognize the image on the canvas. Her mouth is non-existent. I want to wash her far away from this canvas. A mercy killing. I wish the best for their creation of an ideal woman. She’s not for sale, but for viewing pleasure. They plan to hang her above a fireplace.

I do not think I am their model anymore. They do not ask me for my opinion, only for the idea of my outline.

He wants to paint me like a Rubens, showing me examples from his book. I try to explain that I am nothing like a Rubens: I lack his model’s grace and structure; I hold no curve except in my spine and chest. Even Rubens agrees, he specifically told the painters not to use me. Braver than ever, the round painter argues with Rubens. While they fight, the girls on the wall whisper that I moved out of my pose and help me back into it. The girls tell me to consider lengthening my body to look better. I trust them, they are art after all. The painter snaps the Rubens book shut in defeat.

“*Respingada*,” the thin and bald painters grunt in agreement. The word makes me sneeze. The painters crawl onto the stage and crowd around me, leaning on my chest and legs for comfort. The bald painter takes out a steel caliper and rests it on my nose. He paints the results

on my jawline in gray. The round painter traces his dirty pointer finger along my nose's shadow. I say nothing and try to hold in my sneezes. Is it the word, or is it the dust that's making me sneeze? The painters mount their easels like drunk men on donkeys.

Early on, I learned that the painters are made of money. On Saturday mornings they dress up in rags and stains for their art. Their pockets are full of tiny green leaves sticking through the holes. I pretend not to notice my payment like any good model does. I am here for art. For three hours I am paid to be art, once I leave everyone uses me for free.

The painters grow older each session and I must speak with color to get their attention. My words are hued with the brightest red I know.

"Untangle that word," I say "if you don't mind." I am weak when it comes to color. The red is bright enough to catch the attention of the thin painter. He does not look up but points and props up his nose with his finger. Upturned. I swallow my new word with my pride. It tastes of slate and navy.

Reaching out from another open book, Giorgione is tapping my foot. He wants to know if I am free after this session. Watteau and Fragonard are eagerly peering out of the pages for their turn. I explain that I am not their model. I am not these painters' model either. I do not know who I am sitting for. They do not accept my answer and continue to wait. The painters continue to butcher my image on the canvas. I consider learning what art really is.

My skin turns vague as the time passes. The painters are adamant about their skill and boast to each other their visions of my body. I dream of my nakedness elsewhere and look up to the portraits of girls-past on the walls. They shine in gilded frames: soft and fair, the girls stare back down at me. I want to take each face off the wall and kiss it. Tender and slow. I want to help them out of their frames. I want to ask them their names and favorite colors. I want to braid their hair. I want to know how much they were paid. I want to taste the salt on their necks. I want to dance around the room with their bodies close to mine. Our nakedness drifting across the suburban streets and highways into the fields, free amongst the flowers and the wind on our bare skin.

The painters interrupt my dream. They are packing up and putting their suits back on. The rags go into the corner of the studio to collect dust. My portrait is unfinished. I see no end point for my pose. The painters still cannot recreate my face. Sometimes I think they do not want to finish this painting.

I don't enjoy how they handle today's work. They are shuffling the blotchy canvases behind a dusty velvet curtain. The round one slashed my torso with a razorblade. The purple paint is still wet and seeps into the tears. I check my chest for cuts and search for my clothes. Goya has kept my underwear and I am too tired from posing to wrestle them back.

They leave the money on the edge of the stage. Today's payments are folded into a rigid origami crane.

"It is honest work." I tell myself as I place my crane in my wallet. I tell myself that cranes are good luck. I tell myself that these dollars can be unfolded if I believe hard enough. It wants to fly away, but I need to pay my bills. The bird does not understand. It never will.

I look for the painters to say goodbye but they have already left. I owe the old masters nothing and close their books before leaving. Appeasement is tiring. I take one of the paintings off of the wall and walk out into the streets. The painters never note their disappearances. I save a girl a week. I promise to cut her out of her frame and repaint where the painters have wronged her.

We recite love poems to each other in the crosswalk.

I unlock my car and drive us home.

But

Anna Mack



AS I WAS SAYING

Ashley D. Escobar

yeah, it's sensational vaguely intentional they're overthrowing the humble king
(what a pig
what a pig)

an end to all ends onslaught, slaughtered
le comédie, le tragédie
all of this, this is me a windmill without arms

nothing is yet enough
was crawling through the sewer
of the bygone hotel in
memphis, tennessee no one knows what i call graceland anymore

i cover your smile, i cover
the touch, i am two lovers,
cut from the same cloth
we use in unison
we are smoking gauloises in
bed, a cigarette for all your
problems (you cannot afford such a thing)

aha! kevin's at it, he's
cutting barbed wire in his
tiny flat, chinchilla fear of salmonella over and lush.

Light Slides a Window Slowly Shut

Eric Christiansen

you enter a room a window
a door you only see
where light isn't the light
is peach you taste peach

you enter a room a window
razor-blades white lines
on black glass

two doors you
make a choice
you enter

a room a window
waits and cultivates oranges on
the wall the wall

becomes

a window a window

becomes

a door a door

a grove of orange trees

you make a choice

you

enter

a room a window

is a threshold a door

is a room

you can't remember how

you enter you enter

a room a window

melts

back

into white sand a door

into a field of wildflowers

you

enter

a room a door

opens a door opens light

slides

a window

slowly

shut

you

enter

a room

you make a choice

We Left School

Glorious Piner

after Gwendolyn Brooks

I missed my bus. It hissed at me.
The wheels spat up the rain.
So, I laid there through the night
as sewage filled the drain.

I felt a murder, glossed in black
aweigh above my head,
but it was just a plastic bag
from the Poppy store, instead.

A Septa driver leisured by.
I thought to beat him dumb.
God, damn this lawless, rigid world
that dulls *hymn* out to *hum*.

Day Trip to the City

Rana Yalçın



Afterword

Zuleyha Ozturk & Max Lasky

Elyse Wanzenried opens our inaugural issue with a postscript, similar to the way Rimbaud's *Illuminations* begins with "After the Flood." In terms of rhyme scheme and stanza structure, the poem is an English sonnet, as well as a song to the self: "I yearn / to know how to soften, to bend, to find / that murmuring part of myself, to unlearn / self-doubt." This first poem is followed by a barrage of free verse, fiction, and photography. It is not until the final poem in the issue, Glorious Piner's "We Left School," that we encounter another fixed form in the common meter, or ballad meter; that is, quatrains where the lines alternate between iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, strengthened by the rhyme scheme *abcb*. Elyse's "After" and Glorious's "We Left School" do well to bookend our first issue, and to frame everything within.

In between these two poems, we encounter lyrics about the complexities of love and familial relations, as is the case in Aaron Banks's "The Shape of Arizona." Derek Ellis, in his poem "What I want when I confess my life is unmanageable," offers an intense and intimate investigation of the self and the difficulties of desire. Danny Landers's "Roger" is, at times, hilarious, and at other times, heartbreakingly lonely. In "Storm," Chika Onyenezi explores capitalism, friendship, Nigerian politics, and the mysteries of luck and coincidence. Joanna Omestad's "Resisting Female Contingency" and Alexandra Davies's "Respingada" stand equally strong as pillars of feminist thought as it relates to both art and daily life. On every page of this issue, quality is the distinguishing feature. And yes, the writers and photographers featured here are emerging, in the sense that their careers are just beginning; but in terms of craft, in terms of technique, these artists have *emerged*.

At *Leavings*, we believe in the autonomy and power of art; that is to say, we value writing that does not subordinate itself to a social situation, but rather stands as its own entity. We take influence from an art group of the late 1960's, Black Mask, whose name later changed to Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, a phrase taken from a poem by Amiri Baraka. We likewise take influence from publications ranging from *Lana Turner* to *American Poetry Review*, and many in between. Our goal, however, is to stand as a unique and original magazine, similar but different from the aforementioned platforms, and appealing to both art aficionados and communities more removed from academia and literary publications. We have a vision of this magazine becoming a kind of collective, a nonhierarchical group of artists where each member works together with equal say to make decisions concerning the magazine. We have been in touch with a handful of the contributors featured here in this first issue, and we look forward to announcing the additions to our team in the near future.

The following appended poem is by Mack Magers. Mack was so much more than a friend to the editors; he was like a brother. He passed away at the age of 24 on December 5, 2019. Mack had an intense love for both philosophy and poetry, and one of his many ambitious goals was to publish his writings. Sadly, this is the first time his work will appear in any publication, but we are happy to serve that honor. It is our belief that this poem is one of the last he had written, and while the speaker is clearly in a low spot, the poem is marked by an emotional intensity and a strong will to live. The poem values solidarity in friendship during these times of assassins. Following Mack's poem, "Midsummer Midnight," is a piece of art created by Jake Weightman, another close friend of Mack's, which he created specifically for this magazine, *Leavings*. Jake brings into clear vision an image from Stan Plumly's poem of the same title: "To be totally absent from yourself, / from thought of yourself, to forget yourself entirely. / To go out

only at night, naked to the soles, / perpetually catching cold, and in fear of footprints / walk on
your hands. They'd think *five-toed bird*, / and at the edge of water imagine flight.”

Midsummer Midnight

Mack Magers

“I don’t really know what’s left for me,” he said bitterly.

“Yeah you do, you’re going to go home, you’re going to get some sleep, you’re going to make it through this,” I said putting my arm around him.

He fell to his knees. He always seemed tense, like he was walking under more pressure than the rest of us. This collapse wasn’t drug induced, though he was on drugs. It was too much, his mind and his body and his legs couldn’t hold the pressure. We were in a dark alley, a shortcut to my house. He was leaning against a building.

“Adam, get up.” I put my hand underneath his armpit and tried to encourage him to his feet. He tried to get his placement but fell onto the sidewalk sobbing. I could feel it starting to eat away at me.

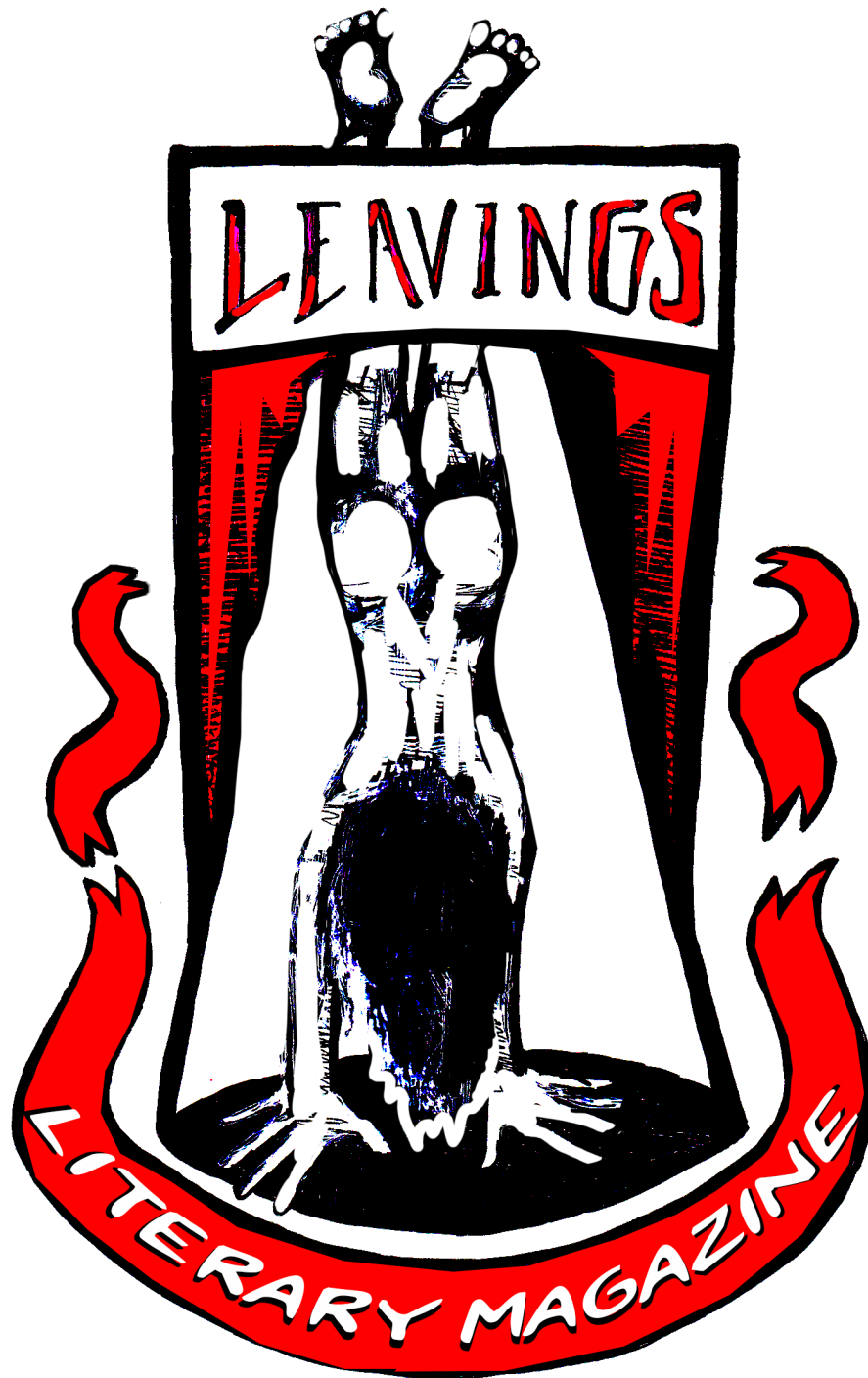
These lives we lived, is this what our parents did? Spiral in multiple directions, basking up other people’s lives? It was like we were all put on this hill to keep falling down.

Start taking more and more,
wounds trying to keep the wounds
from bleeding out.

His hands were shaking in front of his face. I sat him up so he was sitting on the curb, his back against the building. He kept his hands to his chin for a minute as if he forgot who he was with then slowly pulled his hands away, putting down the barrier men like us tried to put up to block out the rest of the world. As if we weren’t real people, we tried to block the hurt like we were never really hurt but everything we did was to block the hurt we felt.

I sat there with him
taking the flask from my jacket
and chugging the rest
of the whiskey down. I lit a boge
and passed it to him, lighting another for myself.
 “Fuck ‘em,” I said bitterly.
 “Huh?” he asked.
 “Fuck them all,” I said with hatred.
For he understood what I meant
and we sat there in silence isolation and hate
but we sat together which is what
kept us swinging from our feet
gasping struggling and fighting for our next breath.

Naked to the Soles
Jake Weightman



Contributors' Bios

Elyse Wanzenried dove into creative writing from an early age, taking classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis for a number of years. She is a 2019 graduate of Carleton College with an English and International Relations double major, where she continued to build community through writing in academic and non-academic spaces. Following her time as an undergraduate, she worked as an English teacher in Kyrgyzstan with the Peace Corps before being evacuated with all other volunteers globally in March at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now back in Minnesota, she greets her transformed but familiar space with excitement for the possibilities of the future—literary and otherwise.

Aaron Banks was born and lives, with his wife and two daughters, in Rochester, NY. He is a Candidate at The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and an educator at a local Rochester high school.

Danny Landers is a skateboarder and fiction writer, residing in Ridgewood, NJ. A graduate of Ramapo College of New Jersey, he majored in Literature, with a concentration in Creative Writing. In his spare time he enjoys creating illustrations, filming skateboarding with friends, and spending time with family. His stories have appeared in *Trillium* and *Entropy Mag*

Anna Mack is an artist and educator living and working in Rochester, NY. Her work is interested in the relationship between people and the places they inhabit: how we mark the landscape, and how the landscape marks us. She is glad to be a part of the beginning of something new.

Joanna Omestad is a senior undergraduate at the University of Maryland from Bethesda, Maryland. She is obtaining a B.A. in psychology, a certificate in women's studies, and a creative writing minor.

Derek Ellis is a writer from the small town of Owenton, Kentucky. He earned an MFA in poetry from the University of Maryland, where he also taught courses in introductory composition and creative writing. His poems have been published in "Hot Rocks," a feature in *Five Points: A Journal of Literature and Art*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *The Ninth Zine*. He currently resides on a rural farm in Kentucky, where he thinks on clouds and endings.

Chika Onyenezi is a Nigerian-born fiction candidate enrolled in the University of Maryland's MFA program. His work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Evergreen Review*, and elsewhere. He is working on a collection of short stories and a novel.

Rana Yalçın is an Istanbul born, Baltimore based visual artist. She mainly works as a graphic designer, but she also does photography and video on the side. She is currently getting her BFA degree at Maryland Institute College of Art.

Selda & Deniz Suer are a young married couple living in Izmir, Turkey, where they tend to olive groves, language, and their one daughter. They begin their days with tea and simit, and they are currently working on a project to translate Turkish poems of the 20th century into English.

Turgut Uyar was a Turkish poet born in Ankara. His work is associated with the movement known as the “Second New,” a group of poets writing, largely, in response to Nazim Hikmet and the Strange poets. During his life, Turgut published over ten books of poetry. His poem, “An Excerpt for Staying,” published originally under the title “Kalmak İçin Bir Yazı,” appeared in his book *Toplandılar*.

Nelson Potter graduated from Ramapo College in 2018 with a Literature degree and a Concentration in Creative Writing. He has pursued further education at the Second City school in Chicago as well as the Upright Citizen’s Brigade in NYC. Currently living in New Jersey, Nelson maintains his interests and craftwork in poetry, comedy writing, voice acting, and analytical theory.

Alexandra Davies is a writer from New Jersey. She graduated from Ramapo College in 2019 with a degree in Literature and Creative Writing. At the moment, Alexandra works a variety of odd jobs which include: zoom tutor, fine arts model, and coffee roaster. She writes essays, poems, and short stories. Alexandra enjoys her dog, surrealism, music from around the world, art history, and any book she can get her hands on.

Ashley D. Escobar studies human connection and solitude through the lenses of literature, philosophy, and art at Bennington College. She was selected for the 2020 Catherine Morrison Golden '55 P'80 Undergraduate Writing Fellowship in Fiction. Her work can be found in MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture, Die Bärliner, and forthcoming in BlueHouse Journal. People watching is her favorite hobby, along with taking trains without any particular destination in mind.

Eric Christiansen is a poet from Waldwick, New Jersey, where he has lived for more than twenty years before moving to California. After transferring from Grinnell College in Iowa, he received his B.A. in literature and creative writing from Ramapo College of New Jersey. Eric has been featured in such events as the Brick City Speaks reading series in Newark and attended the 2017 New York Writers Institute at Skidmore College. His poems have appeared in *Small Orange Literary Journal*. He is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at St. Mary’s College of California.

Glorious Piner BFA '19 is currently in the MFA program at the University of Maryland focusing on poetry. She teaches Poetry at the University of Maryland and at the University of the Arts.

Glorious’ top five books of the month are *Cane* by Jean Toomer, *Calamities* by Renee Gladman, *Wicked Enchantment: Selected Poems* by Wanda Coleman Edited and Introduced by Terrance Hayes, *Cathay* by Ezra Pound and *Translation: A Short Introduction* by Matthew Reynolds.

She has two works published in *Queerbook*, the first-ever anthology released by the first LGBTQ+ bookstore in the country, Giovanni's Room Bookstore's attendant press. You can find more of Glorious’ work in Prolit Magazine and Toho Journal. Soon, you'll also be able to read

her work in forthcoming issues of Conduit Magazine, the Florida Review and the American Poetry Review.

Glorious is finishing up the first season of a poetry podcast, co-hosting another poetry podcast, curating an anthology of American sonnets, and resurrecting, reshaping and reimagining Paperback Literary Journal.

You can follow @gloriouspiner on every relevant social media platform for updates on the release of projects and forthcoming published works.

Mack Magers was the co-founder and co-owner, along with Jake Weightman, of the clothing company Grim Garden LLC. He also worked as a barista and a private investigator. In his free time, he enjoyed skateboarding and reading, especially the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sean Bonney. He passed away at the age of 24 on December 5, 2019.

Jake Weightman is an illustrator from Tom River, NJ (25, come November.) He studied at Massart in Boston and specializes in dark psychedelic surrealism using mixed media, usually acrylic and inks. He runs Grim Garden LLC, a dark psychedelic streetwear brand, and along with illustrating the graphics to be printed on the clothing, he tailors the handcrafted apparel as well as completing a large portion of the screenprinting by hand. His work has appeared in *Small Orange Literary Journal*.