

Issue #38

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Image by Hector Landaeta

S T E V E S U B R I Z I

DISINTEGRATE IN AMBERGRIS

After Cassandra de Alba

In this future, each and every human has been swallowed by a whale, or that's what you can tell yourself while you pace your new cathedral's tongue. The entire rest of your family got their own whale, and they are spending the sequestered time finally hashing out their issues over forkfuls of burnt kelp. Your coworkers from that awful bar got swallowed together too, and when they run out of booze, they are bound to map out who all has been fucking whom, and the baleen will stain henna red from busted ears. You are alone in your whale. And maybe, let's just say, sure, your secret and corrosive loves are alone in theirs too. She kissed you into dawn one fifth of July, and now soon enough she too will notice how some clumps of algae look like fireworks. He tided orphaned undergarments into your knotted sheets, and now his own cruddy boxer-briefs will disintegrate in ambergris, and his lesser lovers' homes must gnash their teeth. Meanwhile, you are still naked and inside a whale. Eventually, you should give the whale a name. Name your whale after a famous crooner, some great lugubrious diva. It will never know you apart from fish. It will always shake your puny body when it sings.

BY THE TIDE, WITH MAYONNAISE

The metal detector costs a merciful fifteen dollars at a yard sale in Marblehead. You can always find much more abandoned food on the beach than anything that glitters, but in detecting at least there is something like dignity. In the long hours it takes to earn a keep, the act becomes many things: golfing in reverse; pacing an evil king's maze; a dizzy parade through the wrong state. On a boon day, you can spare enough to buy a steak wrap and a bottle of lemonade, and you can sit on the rock wall by the tide, your mouth rich with mayonnaise, and stare at the seagulls, who stare wildly at nothing and then fly out to nowhere.

DIVING DAY

The rules for the diving competition were never made clear. Whether diving off of a twenty-story building should be worth more points than diving off of a ten-story building with greater speed or grace. Whether a running start across two rooftops should be encouraged or penalized. Whether one's landing, so inevitable the outcome, should be evaluated at all. Who should keep score in the first place. But dive we all did, through the even handicap rain, down whatever ledges we could access, after whatever running starts we had room to make, with all the speed and grace of whatever bodies we had as of yet. And here was all those bodies meant. Here, like that, in the sky.



Image by "pabbster"

P E T E R B R A N S O N

DEATH OF THE NATURALIST

*"Now bless thyself: thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born."
(The Winter's Tale, Act 111, Scene 111, lines 112 – 113)*

For Sharon Brennan

You're sitting on your own, the stalking horse.
"Jim's mate from Trinity," we're told, "the poet."
I'm curious these days – *North* sealed your fame –
so sneak a closer look; stacked hair, barn chest,
a slow deliberate way of seeing things.
John's farming dad was perfect fit, before
Death of a Naturalist, fence posts for arms,
bear paws, this private hope and public grief.
Just as that text arrives, like Lazarus,
CF, the sponge rung dry, your death spills from
the radio. "Good match, as far as they
can tell" – an accidental sacrifice –
"It's go!" Someone has passed, unheralded,
so not like you. Your footprint's fixed and deep.

Seamus Heaney, poet, 13th April, 1939 – 30th August, 2013

FAMILY SNAP

A photograph, rewinding, re-invents.

Through shadow, highlight, myths develop, fix,
with memory, the willing host, enthralled,
reality revised, enhanced, suborned.

We're west face, high as angels, slings and flaws,
what's human, cast, bird shit removed, black dog
snuffed out, by flash-eyed genie, jack-in-box,
erased as readily as fake tattoos.

It's me at nine, immortalised, before
some chance aside wipes off that smile for good.

This man's the grandfather I never meet,
straight-edge, misunderstood, cute as a bear.

That one's my wedding mum-to-be, blue home-
made frock and borrowed shoes, b-movie stare.

THE TIME THE LIGHT WENT OUT

How did the Dark Age come?

The power wound down.

There'd been some temporary rations
but this time they'd been warned it was for good.
Cookers lay barren, central heating stalled
and kettles lacked the will to mash the tea;
no candles left to burn, light chased the sun.
Lids flipped, big-time; weird portents, false sunsets.
The web and mobile culled, churches swelled up –
"All day confessionals." They soon got used
to life without TV; had radio,
just BBC and certain hours per day:
"Don't panic. It will do more harm than good."

Then what?

Home freezers stank. Cards idle, cash
points blunt – rioting: *"All looters will be shot!"*
Shops glass-eyed blanks and supermarket shelves
exposed, how people change... They hid what food
they'd got. Pet cats and dogs soon disappeared.
Gunfire was circumspect, mostly at night:
can't live on love. Tap water was unsound;
rubbish and sewage stacked. With pharmacies
racked dry, they dropped like pins: Death rock 'n' rolled.
The mood turned desperate: a boy was birched
for stealing cabbage leaves; black marketeers
and deviants were scourged and strung from trees.

Who lived and died?

Folk tried to flee the towns
and cities. All known exits batten-downed
and booby-trapped, a few got out on foot
before the walls of razor wire went up.
From then escape well nigh impossible,

Badlands we shun today, rank with hindsight,
became death camps. Nine out of ten expired:
many gave up the ghost. But where we are,
farm stuff long commandeered, some held their breath:
with notice of old ways you kept alive.
Gamekeeper, poacher, new age traveller
survived The Cleansings; gypsies dined like kings.



Image by Naomi Austin

I A N M U L L I N S

UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Left on London Road
the camera turns with you,
inhaling a snapshot of your scent
from the dirty eye over
the all-night chemist,
then passes you like a baton in a relay
to the twitchy lens over the adult store.
You cross at the lights
but the eyes that never blink
are watching you again:

not the lens of a hand-held camera
ticking you off the celebrity face-list,
more the mechanical slab
of a mortuary mug-shot, the picture
they paste on your security pass
or paper-clip to Personnel;
not to name you somebody
but to file you a nobody,
fit for footnotes or an e-mail cc

So you sniff out camera-dry corners
to re-brand yourself one,
alone, not a face in the line-up
lined up to be erased. Until a cop
taps your shoulder and
there are cameras in his eyes.

STRAY DOG

The bravest man I never knew
lived alone in a small house
where the curtains were always closed
and the chimney pumped smoke
day and night.

When he walked the street
he carried his head as though
it was a vase
brought with much dignity
into the auction room
to be sold with a dozen more
of its kind.

What silenced him
I'll never know:
but after leaving school
he stopped setting stray dogs on fire
and took work by the docks. Sometimes
I'd see his shadow
moving along the street;
as thin as the sun lighting up
an empty bottle. He grew older
and strangely smaller, a dead dog
slowly vacating his skin until only
scraps remained. So it appeared
quite natural to me
that he never left a note,
was simply found hanging
in a lit room with the curtain un-drawn
and the streetlamp stealing in.

Imagine caring so little for life
that you might end it so casually,

with such gentle contempt, as though
failing to close the curtain
said all that needed to be said.

Nothing greater than the need
to put yourself down like a dog
grown weary of walking four legs
when his master gets by on two.

THE DEVIL'S WHISPER

The first shot, I understand:
the man needed killing
so someone fired a bullet
like a fist between the eyes,
and it was almost an afterthought
for the man who pulled the trigger;
nothing but blood and brain
splattered like vomit on the street.

But the mob who poured bullets
into the dead man's mouth
like beer down a drunk's throat,
what was their aim? Were they
desperate for an atrocity of their own,
frightened of being the only ones
who didn't burn a kiss
on his cheek? Scared that they were
one of the little men
who gather outside the courthouse
to pound on the prisoner's van,
who scream across the courtroom
to ram poison down his ears?

Needing to say Yes, I was there,
I breathed breath on the accused man's face,
was bold enough to pump one shot
in the devil's head

then live out my days in memory, sitting quietly
in the corner of the cell
where only the best men – the dreamers,
the murderers, the poets and paedophiles –
find the devil's whisper
still needful in the hovels of their hearts.



Image by "fcl1971"

H O L L Y D A Y

BRONTOMANCY

I tell them that this is not the time for a barbecue, that the rain is going to ruin everything, but they tell me that the noises I keep hearing are just jets moving through the clouds. They laugh when I tell them that they'd better call their brokers as soon as possible because those noisy jets are telling me that they'd better hold their money close for a while.

I go home and wait for the storm, count the cans of food I've stored in my cupboards prepare for the worst, because I know, I know it's coming. The rumble of passing clouds tells me that the schools in my district are going to be closed tomorrow, that I need to check the brakes on my car, that this isn't a good year for Geminis. The television screen flickers briefly as the rain starts up heavy outside, and I know, I know everything the thunder tells me is true.

PASSACAGLIA

I trudge from the bedroom to the kitchen every morning, hands ready to make food, fix clothing, brush hair. There is no questioning my role in this dance, which steps I must take – the required pirouettes are worn into the carpet as visibly as if someone had outlined my feet in chalk.

The school bus leaves and I turn once, twice, fetch the newspaper from the stoop, go inside, make coffee. The birds outside the kitchen window watch me move imitate my pathetic shuffle on the lip of the bird feeder, mock me with their fluttering wings, their tiny, sure feet, their perfectly coiffed feathers.

I long to find the recordings that dictate my moves
the slow-paced funereal march that decides my day.
I don't know what I'd do with them
except make them stop.

PERCALE

I can almost see you through the fabric between us, can almost feel your warm skin through the cloth. I can feel the wet spot where your mouth is trying to reach my lips, I can taste your saliva mingling with with the residue of scented detergent and bleach.

You thrust and I come and it's almost too quick, I grab your hands wrap fingers in rough cotton, wrap hands around your body, strain against you in brief claustrophobia, then I'm done. You're still moving, and I wonder if it's because I can't see you, can't really touch you

that I want you so much, if I want you so much because the only place we can reach each other is through a single hole in a sheet, this one place we can always connect.

LECTION

Beyond the curve at the edge of the world, there is a monster that knows who you are, an awful thing with claws and teeth and too many eyes to miss all the bad things you do. It is watching you now. It has an eye dedicated entirely to watching you.

There is a book that your parents are writing and it's all about you, a list of all the terrible things you've done since you were born, a laundry list of evils. When you are old enough they will present this book to the monster, and it will decide if you're worthy of passing on to adulthood. Your parents may intervene on your behalf, but they probably won't. They know that the monster only takes bad children, and they can always have another one, they can try for a good, well-behaved child next time.

Just a few children, bad children, never get to grow up, disappear into the night from their bedrooms, dragged out the window and presumably, all the way to the very edge of the world, where the monster lives. Who knows what the monster does with all the children it drags back to its lair? That's not really the question here. That is the wrong question. This, *this* is what you must take back with you today: Try to be good. Sit still and don't fidget. Pay attention when I'm talking. Don't lie.



Image by Lillian Nelson

UNDER THE APPLE TREE

Every night she walks up to the woods behind her house to gather all the things she needs. She takes her tights off and leaves them balled up in the toe of one shoe. She likes the feel of damp earth under her feet.

During the day she works at the charity shop next door to Tesco. I don't know if she gets paid. She likes writing out the tiny price labels by hand. She told me that once. You've got lovely hand-writing, I said.

She does magic on me; strange spells and voodoo, just like in that Roger Moore film. She goes through the charity collection bags when people drop them off and takes all the best glass bowls home. She uses them to make her mix.

We drive a bit further every Sunday.

Sometimes, at night, I can feel it when she starts her mojo on me – it's like a burning in the pit of my stomach, right down deep in my gut. My skin breaks out in prickly heat: strange red bumps and wheals all over my forearms and chest. She leaves me signs too, subtle ones, but I've learnt how to decode them. When the china dog in the shop window faces north stay away. South means come in and browse. West, buy something. It's never faced east, not yet.

When I meet her from work she smiles and gets me to carry her bags as far as the traffic lights. She wears her hair long and wild.

You should let me take you out one Sunday, somewhere nice, I say.

She laughs and touches my hand as she takes the bags and hangs them on the handles of her bike. I think about her often, up there in her small house on the hill. On summer evenings she stretches out her white legs in the back garden.

We drive a bit further every Sunday, every Sunday a little bit further, past the blackberry bushes and down to the lake. Her skin is cold under the shade of the apple tree.

It's only after midnight that she weaves her spells. She sits all evening in her garden, inhaling the jasmine and watching the stars. Then she walks barefoot across the grass and into her house and upstairs to the bedroom. She lights all the candles and prepares the ingredients. Her power is growing every night – I can feel her across the city, over the roofs of the small houses. It's like we're connected by a thin invisible cord.

When she fills up with it all her hair lifts from her head. Her eyes are dark and bruised. She lies down on the bed and lets it all fill her up. Her nails are bright red against her thighs. I can feel her then, her heart beating faster and faster with mine, across the city, over the roofs of the small houses, our blood crashing against our brains.

In the car she looks so surprised. We drive a bit further, past the blackberry bushes and down to the lake. The heat is intense and the sky, deep blue. Under the apple tree the light is dappled and the grass scratches against our legs.

STAR GAZING

All throughout that last summer we watched the skies every night. At first we went after school or bunked off when the afternoon grew heavy and still, but once the holidays came we could go whenever we wanted. We had to go far, past the quarry and deep into the woods, where the sunlight slanted and the shadows pooled.

The flower scent was everywhere but underneath the air stank, like something was rotting, maybe a dead fox or badger like we saw on the roads sometimes. In spite of the August heat we shivered and pulled our cardigans tighter.

Sometimes we saw rabbits and deer, and what we thought was a snake turned out to be a slow-worm. One time when the air was stagnant and so thick it folded around us, we heard voices. We hid in a ditch, shielded by bushes with dark shiny leaves. Two men from out of town – not anyone we knew. Probably looking for that Whiteley kid.

It was important to know where to go. We chose the highest vantage points to set it all up. The higher the better; the old water tower was the best. We could spread all our equipment out on the flat surface and wait for the night. The metal was rusted and scraped our knees and elbows. In the morning our hands were always stained red.

We lay on our backs and watched the skies, passing the binoculars round. We knew a lot of the star systems and planets by name: the Pleiades, Jupiter, Orion, the Big Dipper. But sometimes we had to read the charts and maps by torchlight. Once a meteor shower fell. We watched it for the next four nights.

We waited as long as we could. We waited till the night began to lighten and the birds started their chatter and the stars faded into day. And then we walked home, along by the quarry, back through the woods, our eyes on the ground.

There would be a sign soon, there had to be.

We knew it was just a matter of time.

CORRESPONDENCE

We shared the same birthday, you and I. It seemed like it was fate. I saw you that first time in the newspaper; one of the older girls had left it stuffed down the side of the sofa and I was flicking through it, waiting for the next lesson. Sat around the common room arguing over which tape to stick on. Smell of cheap body spray and sweat. I wore my hair centre-parted and refused to have it cut, not even trimmed. You looked at me – a matrix of dots printed into a pattern. Your eyes were so black. It's funny how it can all start like that sometimes. I ripped your picture out and shoved it into my bag, flattened in between the pages of *Tricolore*.

Janice thought it was weird when I stuck you up in front of my desk in my bedroom.

"Don't you think it's a bit freaky?" she said. "I mean, you've got him right by Glenn Medeiros and Corey." She meant Haim. They were on first name terms now.

I shrugged. "It's just a picture."

1988: nearly the end of a decade. We wore Bermuda shorts and decorated our roller-skates with day-glow laces. I came to an agreement with Mum that I'd get my hair cut if I could have a perm. It stuck out in a magnificent triangle from my neck. The '90s loomed: unknowable, unformulated, nebulous. We were poised, on the cusp. We wanted it and we didn't. But we knew we couldn't turn back.

I would have put your photo up on the mantelpiece if I'd been allowed, with all the family portraits and pictures of rabbits and cats. Instead I stuck you up on the inside door of my wardrobe. I thought about writing to you but I wasn't sure what to say. Janice and I sat on the bobbly rug Mum had brought back from Tenerife and plotted our futures with pink pens on large sheets of paper. We drew houses and cars and money and clothes. We wrote a list of potential husbands and back-ups if Donnie Wahlberg wasn't interested (Janice was fickle in her affections). We had it all mapped out.

Life without the possibility of parole. That's how long they gave you. In a way it was reassuring, knowing that wherever I went, no matter how far, you'd always be in the same place, charting your time by the angle of the sun and the turn of the seasons. You were there when I left school and we all signed

each other's shirts with fat marker pens, writing good luck. And again when I dropped out of university after six months. You stood in the shadows. When the photo turned yellow and brittle I took it down and kept it in a box full of old cards and gig tickets. I felt relieved somehow. Instead I run this letter to you, that I'll never send, over in my head. Trying to work out exactly what I mean to say.

One day soon we'll meet under a harsh Texan sun. The dust rises in a gritty haze, in whirlpools and sudden drifts. A warm wind blows. Some say coyotes roam here and steal babies, pulling them into the night. They gather in circles and drink their blood. We'll sit on wooden benches bleached almost white in the penitentiary yard. Your face so lined, your feet and hands shackled. And you'll say, "What took you so long?"



Image by Allen Pope

J O N A T H A N G R E E N H A U S E

NOWHERE PEOPLE

"Nowhere People" previously appeared in Crannóg

It may have been the rumors of a war or all the bankrupt stores.

Maybe people were tired or sleeping.

Maybe they were dreaming of bustling streets, of sales
& shops selling out their merchandise.

Maybe they moved to other cities & towns.

Maybe the sun grew too close or maybe too far.

Maybe the tides grew too high & swept them all away.

It may have been an odd hour for crowds,
a time when everyone's inside,

a day when people stay in bed & read & talk
& make love while dreaming of the future's past.

Maybe we were wrong thinking this could last.

It may have been the dirt, or perhaps it was too clean,

but yesterday people were everywhere
& we didn't think twice nor wonder if.

We didn't imagine what the streets could do without us.

Now the sun shines down on nothing,
& signs announce sales for no one.

NOT A HOLOCAUST POEM

"Not A Holocaust Poem" previously appeared in Sugar House Review

This is about happy thoughts & puppy dogs & golden fields of wheat,
& nothing's lurking in those fields,
no hidden message threatening to break the peace & quiet,
no murderers stalking in the shadows,

& even the shadows are comforting, their darkness offering
forgetfulness & sleep.

No unexpected illnesses hide here,
no rising fevers incapable of being broken by antibiotics
or by buckets of ice,

& even these buckets of ice
are only used to keep the champagne chilled
or to engage the curiosity
of the previously-mentioned puppy dogs.

No fiancées will disappear, inexplicably taken from us
in the confusion of smoke & fire,
leaving us
to make sense of lives we must now live alone,

since this isn't that kind of poem,
& in these pages, you'll meet the love of your life & live happily ever after

because this is not a Holocaust poem,
no matter how much you fear it'll become one, paranoid the next line
will bring
an unexpected twist,

because around the corner,
there's just a simple box of puppies, & you smile as you lift each one
& pretend
this is really happening
just as you wish it to.

LESSER WARS

"Lesser Wars" previously appeared in Arroyo Literary Review

I.

The War of Blankets:

Battles waged with cotton & wool. No blood or fatal injuries:
just a few near-suffocations.

A few entanglements
& a few MIAs under the covers.

II.

The War of Tin-Cans: Cans of beans & cans of corn.
Cans of sausage & cauliflower.
Cans launched at high-velocity.

Exploding cans & botulism & cans with can-openers still attached.

More casualties than *The War of Blankets*, but mostly cuts & abrasions,
& never a shortage of food.

III.

The War of Snide Comments, many regarding weight & height
& relative physical attractiveness.

Some relating
to fashion sense or the lack of it. Many made just within earshot,
just loud & soft enough to dig deep inside.

Many close friends lost.
Many grudges held for decades.

IV.

The War of Peace: Agreements on every front, to the point of boredom.
Hands shaken
& flags waved & flags burned
& new unified flags established.

Marches without marching boots: Just sneakers, flip-flops, & dress shoes.
A world where we forget what it was like to attack each other with blankets.



Image by Zlyoga

SURVIVAL

Shipwrecked and starving
an immeasurable distance
from home

you study the stars for direction

calculate the slow movement
of our shadows
for time

You are Ruth England
I am Barney Rubble

You construct hammocks
from soft
strawberry hair

I lay naked and burnt in the sun

you speak of smoke signals
and snares

I wonder how your flesh
will taste

when the time
inevitably comes.

THE FLOOD

The floods came
and some
were hauled up in
their cars
and some sang
from rooftops
and some
drowned in gutters
like rats.

Some built boats
like Noah
and sailed
through the city
streets,
as grandiose
admirals of no-
hope.

I sat in my garden
with the hose-
pipe
turned on
water rising
up to my waist.

This was the life,
I said to myself
they wouldn't
beat me this year
those cunts in
government,
those suit
and tie
fuck-jobs.

the hosepipe ban
had been lifted,
and I wasn't
going
to miss a drop.



Image by Chris Denman

GLORIOUS PLAGUE

An extract from the novel Glorious Plague

Hallie was on her way to work but she stopped and stared, along with a growing crowd, at the church across the street. Fire engines, police cars, and an ambulance all flashed their lights and threw out sounds. She thought someone had a radio on, because there was music, but when she looked for it, she saw a man standing on the corner, his hands clasped in front of him, singing gospel. Behind her, a woman was softly humming along.

“Do you hear that?” the woman whispered. “Do you hear that glory?”

Hallie turned back to the church and finally saw a man standing absolutely still on the top of the bell tower. At first, she thought he was some kind of statue because he seemed frozen in place, but then there was a slight wind and she saw his tie lift up slightly and fall back.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Suicide,” a man said decisively.

“He’s not threatening to jump,” someone else said. “Been there all morning. Someone called it in and he hasn’t moved at all.”

The ladder was extended all the way up, and the little cage at the top of it was next to the man. There were people on the ground with a net to catch him if he jumped.

The firefighter on the platform was talking to the man. He held out his hand and touched him: his arm, then his face. He paused, and said something on his radio.

“He’s not coming down,” a man with a cap said. “And he’s not threatening to jump. Probably one of them cults. It was on the news last night. People on top of the Supreme Court building downtown. Singing ‘Age of Aquarius.’ Do you remember that?” He laughed to himself. “It’s been a while. Anyway, the news was saying it might be a cult, or a new religion.”

“It’s time for a new religion, maybe,” the humming woman said. “Don’t you just feel that?” She looked up at the man on the church. “It’s time for a whole new vision.”

The jumper was tied up and lowered down. He didn’t move at all. Once again, Hallie thought it might be a statue or a mannequin because it was so unnatural. People moved, after all; they moved all the time.

A murmur spread through the crowd.

"Why, he's dead!" Hallie heard, and she felt the same sudden shock that made everyone take a little step, left or right, as if avoiding the impact.

With that, Hallie left. She started to speculate on how the dead man came to be where he was, but then she gave it up. The world was full of strange.

She got to the apartment a good ten minutes before her first set of clients arrived. She had picked up lilies and coffee on her way, and opened the coffee in the kitchen and put the lilies in the living room. It always helped to have some homely odors when she was showing real estate.

Hallie led the clients into the bedroom. "As you can see, you have an unobstructed view to the river." It was a bright day. She thought the windows were a little too small, but there was, indeed, a view.

They were middle-aged, following her with polite but greedy faces. "Too bad the view isn't from the living room," the husband said.

"Well, the view from the living room isn't bad," Hallie said evenly. "You have good sightlines."

"There is that one building that gets in the way," the wife said. "I mean, it's a little too close to be in the background." She frowned, not sure she'd said it right. "It interrupts the sky." Her voice got a little peevish. "Who would want to interrupt the sky?"

Hallie could tell that they wouldn't take it, but she continued showing the apartment. They nodded patiently, accepting everything they saw without much enthusiasm. She let them go easily.

It really was a nice place, Hallie thought, looking out all the windows while she waited for her next appointment. Yes, the river view was lovely. There were two boats cutting a wake through the river right now, one large, one small.

There was, indeed, one building across the way that ended only a story below this floor, so that too much of the flat, tar-paper roof was visible. Unbeautiful, yes, and her second appointment felt the same way. They were a little sad about the good view being in the bedroom and they, too, were obviously not going to bite.

"We were going to move back to Ohio," the husband said. "But you know - with all the things they're saying now, that new Mad Cow outbreak in the Midwest - maybe now is not the time. The news says they think it might be contagious."

“Oh look,” the wife said in the living room. “Someone’s on the roof. Can they see us, do you think?” She pointed down to the problematic building and indeed, there was a man down there. Hallie had seen workmen once, but this man was in a suit. He was walking around slowly, looking out in all directions. The couple watched him for a moment, then turned and walked to the door, Hallie following. She, too, knew the view was everything.

Back at the office, she looked through listings and marked the ones with good sightlines. She couldn’t blame them; she wanted to look out at the sky just as they did. She confirmed a few meetings for the next day and left work early. It was a relief to be outside.

A front had moved in overnight, pushing in some cool air that puffed lightly against Hallie’s face. She passed a few people who were complimenting the sky. “Such gorgeous weather,” one woman was saying. “And the sky is so clear.”

“We don’t look at the sky enough,” a man agreed with her. “The color today is extraordinary.”

Hallie glanced upwards. It *was* nice, she thought. Clear, clean, the kind of weather where you thought you could go on forever.

Her boyfriend was out of town, so she treated herself to a movie, a stop at the Barnes and Noble café for coffee and a browse through some magazines. She was a little restless. She missed Bruno, of course, but she was fairly used to his travel schedule. It was just one of those days when you longed for something. Hard to say what, exactly; something sharp and extraordinary.

She found a message from her mother on her phone when she got home and called her back. “What are you up to?” she asked as she opened the shades and looked up at the sky. “Are you still doing those livestock samples?”

“Not livestock samples,” Dale corrected her. “Forage samples. We’re checking the feed for the cows, for mold and fungus. I don’t go near the cows. Not that I would mind. I’m not afraid of cows,” she said and laughed.

“Is anyone, really?”

“They’re talking about culling in the Midwest. That’s what I mean. They kill them and don’t even use them, it goes against the grain with me. I think I might become a vegetarian. The cows I’ve met are nice enough. And maybe I could learn to like, what is it – tofu?”

Hallie laughed. “Tofu’s not so bad, Mom. But what’s happening with your cows?”

She could almost hear the shrug in her mother's voice. "They think it's just a variation of something that happens every so often. Something in the feed. I really like what I'm doing, Hallie," Dale said. "I like being out and driving way back in the hills. There's one road in particular that cheers me up whenever I get on it. It goes up a hill and then it slides right down into a valley that's like a big green cup. And I like it anytime I get a new farm to check, because it's a great excuse for me to drive down a lot of roads marked 'Private.'"

Hallie smiled. It was the way she felt showing apartments: sneaking into other people's lives. "Are the farmers nice to you?"

"Very nice. Very friendly, although they don't talk much. I don't know if they're suspicious for some reason or just don't like all the snooping."

"You're not snooping. You're trying to help."

"We're checking the feed for mycotoxins – that's a mold that can grow on the feed. It's a common mold, but when it reaches a high concentration it's poisonous and it can cause infertility. The cows get sick, they don't conceive, they can even die. We did one round of testing, and there was just a normal amount of mold. That's why we're testing again, to see if there's a variation. A lot of the farmers think we're trying to blame it on them."

"Who are *they* blaming it on?"

"They think it's the feed. Most of them have been relying on government feed because of the drought. Usually they grow their own, but they lost the crops last year."

"Could it be the feed?"

"It could be anything, Hallie. I'd be the last one to know."

Dale filled in her report sheet with the name of the farm and got out of her car. She had learned that the best time to find the farmers was before noon. Some of them did construction or some other job in the afternoon, since farming barely paid a living wage. They farmed because that's what they knew and they hoped, against all reason, that they could make it work. They were a little idealistic, a little bit out of their time, but she was glad they were still there, still keeping some land free of mansions and malls and used-auto lots. She sometimes felt a little guilty that she could get so much pleasure from her job, since it depended on the farmers' bad luck. She loved the back roads and the mud and the lowing of the cattle, she loved the farm dogs and the fences and the feed.

There was no one in the milk barn, but she'd been at the farm before and besides, she now knew how to distinguish the bins, cribs and silos. She went to the storage trenches and put samples into the brown paper bags she carried, labeling them and sticking them in her sack. She always gave the farmer time to see her out in the open, before she went to find him or her. They had received their notices, they knew she was coming, but still it always felt a little sneaky when she didn't see anyone.

Dale left the troughs and went to the other side of the house, where the barns and silos were. She had just rounded the corner when her eye caught something out of whack, and she looked up. There was a man standing on the very top of the silo, his hands by his sides and his chin in the air. She thought she could see his mouth moving, but she couldn't hear anything.

She stopped, stared, and then slowly consulted her sheets to make sure she had the name of the owner right. "Fred?" she said in a soothing voice, as loud as she could make it without shouting. She didn't want to startle him. "Mr. Lafayette?" she said again, coming up closer. She stood below, staring up at him, trying to see what was happening. She looked where he was looking, and saw nothing in the sky. She looked at the ground, and saw nothing to be loaded, unloaded, hiked up or down – nothing at all that would give her the start of an explanation. His dog was there, staring up. Fred didn't look like he would fall; he didn't look like he was in danger, but his stillness was unsettling. After calling him a few more times, she turned around, went back to the barn and picked up the phone that was there, and dialed 911. Her hands shook terribly.

Hallie was having a good morning; she showered, made her coffee, dressed and went to work with a feeling of heightened satisfaction. When she got to the street, she even skipped a little. It was something in the air, it was a beautiful day. She filled her lungs with the glorious day, closing her eyes to breathe in, raising her head and opening her eyes to breathe out. The sky! The sky was incredible! It was glowing with blueness, a saturated blue.

She felt a little restless when she took the subway. She wanted to look at the sky, so she got off the train a stop early.

The streets didn't seem to be bustling in their usual way. Sure, some people still rushed past her, but she had to wonder at their lack of sanity – to rush on such a day! With such a sky! She felt like singing, like joining those two people on the other corner who were gently leaning together in a hymn

she hadn't heard since childhood. It had been years since she'd heard a hymn. It was a shame, because it was a beauty denied.

At the stoplight she overheard a nearby conversation. "Do you smell that?" a young woman asked. "I think I smell vanilla." Hallie took a deep breath. The day was bright and specific. In contrast to all those other days that ran together, this one stood out. She would walk the rest of the way to her first appointment; she was glad she had left the subway. She walked rapidly, happily. She would get there and take the elevator up to the apartment she was showing, and she would see the sky from out each window. Radiant pieces of sky.

Dale stayed the whole time it took to bring Fred down from the silo. He was alive, but barely. Dehydration. When he was down on the stretcher, she could see that his mouth was moving, and she heard faint sounds of singing. He was losing his voice, though; she couldn't tell *what* he was singing. They thought he'd been up there for less than a day. Dale called the nearest neighbors, who came to take care of the cows while Fred was hospitalized. Fred's dog stayed near the silo.

"It's the feed," the neighbor, Ken Tuttle, said. "Something's been wrong with the cows since we started the new feed the government gave us. I'm sure of it. We were getting together for a meeting. You from Ag?"

She explained how she was redoing the testing for mycotoxins.

The man tsked to Fred's dog, who didn't move. His hands were in his pockets and his body was stiff. He had trouble looking at Dale, as if she was forcing him into something. "You know, there's others," he said abruptly.

"No, I don't know. What do you mean?" She felt drained and not up to the conversation.

"Two people fell off their roofs last week," he said. "Supposedly repairing it. Someone was found electrocuted, at the bottom of a telephone pole. That was over in Pennsylvania, not here. But he must have been up in the wires and no one knows why. Mike at Boonton Acres went hiking a few days ago and didn't come back. We're told he's camping. His wife had to hire some kids to do the milking."

"What do you think it is?" Dale whispered.

He shifted on his feet and his eyes darted away and then back. "I think it's aliens," he said. "Slurping our souls out like soup."

Dale took samples from the old feed and samples from the bags of

new feed, and then brought them to the Extension office. Danny Beemer was her boss and she trusted his opinion.

"I don't know what's up," he said, shrugging. "It's something, obviously. That feed they're talking about – well, there's a lot of speculation that there was bioengineered corn in it. Nothing's supposed to have it in unless it's labeled that way. Problem is, even if the corn is bioengineered, the mycotoxins are the same old, same old. We've seen it before, we'll see it again. So what's different? Does that corn do something new to the cow's immune system? I mean, we keep testing for the toxin that we know, but what if it's one we don't know?"

"For instance," he said. He sat back in his swivel chair and put his hands behind his head, a typical gesture when he was going off on a tangent. "The Salem witch hunts. You know what the current theory is? Ergot. It's a mold on rye that can cause hallucinations. Let's say a whole harvest of rye gets infested with ergot. The rye gets ground, the people eat the bread, and one by one they see devils, they see witches, they see fornication and trickery. Not just one person, but everyone who eats the bread. Now, if you were there, how would you think to check the rye? You're hallucinating too, and you see what they see. And once that store of rye is gone, then the witches are gone too. It took hundreds of years for people to even start thinking that there may have been an actual physical reason for the witch hunts.

"So I wouldn't rule anything out. It could be something usual, it could be something unusual. Where do you start looking?" He shook his head.

"This can't be Mad Cow, can it?" she asked cautiously. "Someone brought that up."

"We did some tests for that," he said. "That was automatic. I don't exactly know what's going on in Iowa, but I don't think that's spongiform either. They're just saying 'neurological symptoms of uncertain origin.' That isn't helpful. I think they just needed a name, and everyone knows about Mad Cow."

"Maybe it's a combination of things?" Dale asked helpfully.

"Sure. Which combination?"

She shut up.

The next morning, Hallie found that the day was glowing. The sky was luminous; it even pulsed sometimes with a kind of flash, like a sun flare, only it was a sky flare and you didn't have to blink, you could look right at it. In

fact, if you didn't look right at it, you became a little disoriented, as if your air wasn't quite right and your lungs skipped a beat.

There was an undercurrent, a real current, a little buzz of electricity that ran along the ground and started seeping upwards. You wanted to lift along with it. It was the merest wind, the spirit of uplift.

She could tell who felt it and who didn't. There, across the street, was a woman leaning out the window, her face upraised. She felt it. There, on the corner, waiting for a light, three people were singing; one of them even had a good voice. There was a child climbing up a lamppost, he felt it. There was a mother wheeling her child; she did not. There was a policeman in the middle of the street, waving the traffic forward. He was beginning to feel it; his arms were raising up too often and confusing the flow.

There were groups emerging from the crowds on the street. These groups felt the sun on the right side of their faces and they moved to the right. They saw a stairway and they took it. They came out of the subways as if they had reached heaven.

Over in the park they were climbing on the rocks. A group was singing "Your Love is Lifting Me Higher." On each repeated phrase of "higher", another person joined in, pushing the group a step up the rock, compressing them. She watched their mouths move, saw their eyes raised.

She could see people on the tops of the low buildings now, they were lined up with more lines behind them. On top of one building they were singing the Ave Maria. They brought a terrible passion to it, raising their arms on the most splendid notes. There was a camera van and a reporter, but the reporter was starting to sing.

Hallie's heart was amazed at the sounds. She would love to sing; each song appealed to her until she heard another song. She wavered at each group, wanting to blend with the sounds, to feel her heart ache upwards into joy. It wasn't overwhelming, it was pleasant and euphoric, a yearning mixed with anticipation. Like a woman on her way to her lover.

She listened to the songs with her head tilted, her eyes half-closed. She had never felt such pleasure before, such good will; but the upshot was that she was late. She didn't really care about that. She went to the window to see the rooftops and there, right across from her, were people standing together, faces up and singing. She could hear them through the closed windows. There were men and women and a few children. The children were raised in their parents' arms, looking upward. They were singing "O Happy

Day.” As soon as they finished they began again. Hallie looked and listened and thought that never, never had there been anything so mystical, so supreme, so complex and spiritual. How had the world gotten so good so suddenly? How had the spirit risen so high? How had God graced them, so generously and exquisitely?

She ignored the buzzer and the knock on the door, but someone came in anyway, came up behind her and started speaking.

“I was here earlier,” the woman said. “I waited. Henry was supposed to meet me, but he didn’t show up. I tried his cell phone. No answer. I tried his office and it took so many rings before anyone answered.” The woman’s voice was sad. “They said half the people didn’t show up, and Henry was one of the ones who didn’t. *Why doesn’t anyone know what’s happening?*”

She stood beside Hallie, looking out the window. “I heard it on the news,” the woman said. “They’re saying it’s all over the city. People are lining the rooftops, they’re climbing the bridges. But I don’t know why.” Her voice trembled. Hallie could see no reason for a voice to tremble, except in exaltation. The world was filled with exaltation; it came floating everywhere as motes in the air, motes made golden by the sun, motes swept up again to rise, to rise splendidly, ornately, making delicate kaleidoscope-like patterns, like tiny jewels in the air.



Image by Pedro Sostre

A L I N A R I O S

DÉFLORER

*If you touch me once more,
I will scream, mister.
You know it's not right.*

Hush.

Your hand travels
crisp sheets of my camp bed,
finds my girly heart.
Then down, pulls aside
the elastic and finds another heart
beneath a barely grown garden.

Your hand rests there,
as if exhausted by the journey.

I open my legs to fit
all of your hand,
let it cradle me,
let its warmth warm
the other heart.

No. Please.
I spread myself wider.

Your weight is tipping my bed
into a steady downfall. In the morning,
I miss the warmth.

At a bonfire on the beach
in the crowd of
kids like me, adults like you,
I find your lap.

I cannot stop myself.

Your hand snakes
my faded swimsuit bottom,
finds its cradle.

I will scream.

No one will see.

Hush.

I spread my legs
and the world falls away.
With it, my innocence,
my hope for normalcy.

When I think of firsts,
it is you I think of,
how you picked my fruit
before ripe, sucking
the essence out of the pit.

*Oh mister, touch me once more
and I will scream.*

Please.

CROW'S FEAST

If I were a crow,
I'd look for the succulent shine
of your grape eyes
and pluck them.

Then I'd look for your dreams
glimmering in a bird-nest halo,
and snatch them,
taking each strand to a remote country
each with a different name.

CALLING

In the darkness,
I feel for you,
smell for you.

But your shape shifted
so much over the years,
I don't know what I'm looking for.

Bones and softness. Tall,
my neck aches from looking up. Our
eyes even, but not if I wear heels.
Your collarbone pressing into my throat,
nearly strangles as we embrace.
Pillowy stomach against my clitoris.
Long narrow cock, short and thick,
sheathed and bare.

I can build an exotic perfume store
out of your scents. It would be popular
in Japan. I'll label each bottle
in careful black ink: fresh laundry,
too much cologne, sour armpits,
wet wool, after sex, after sun,
after ocean and sex and sun.

Today, I feel for you,
and find my shoulders,
breasts, mouth – it's open
in a silent call.

TOTEMS

You rescue beached wood,
clean its wounds,
polish its skin
removing layers of memory.

Paintbrush in hand,
you sit cross-legged
before your new God,
a maker to a Maker,
a blasphemy.

Rusted nails, torn cloth,
string and wire
found in packed dirt
of old houses and
life-washed sidewalks –
the offerings.

What would this God want?
You pause, listen.

A splash of color across her brow?
Waves moving in pattern on his torso?
A wire crown so thin it cuts?

I live in the cold
among your totem Gods,
unseen.

What else have you promised
them? I ask.

Your breath comes
in cloud puffs

your mouth shaping words
I cannot hear.

I nod and walk once more
through your temple
before I'm gone.



Image by Teresa Howes

S A M P R E M I N G E R

POEM IN WHICH YOU UNFRIEND THE DEAD GIRL

because what else were you supposed to do
wait for her to check-in at the pearly gates

just because she was your one
cigarette per day that summer

because she grinned like a slinky
could unbutton your jeans without breaking eye

contact you're supposed to wait – some sailor's
ghost in your desk chair – the distant creeping of

a newsfeed the crinkled
firmament beneath your skull

HESITATION WOUND

fathers are certain / there's going to be time
enough for carousels and piggybacks, / one
more family cruise / more handheld footage
/ of miniature golf.
/ of a homesewn Peter Pan production.
time / his dry lips on the crest of her /
cheek after / the long night

at his office, but high school comes on like
/ leukemia (a way of saying we didn't
remember / how bad, how quick), blood
suddenly / so eager to leave and many
decades / before it does. how boys like fingers
all/ wrapped up around her, all stealing
parents' liquor; all coffee / and
aftershave.

between periods, briefly she pauses to
reflect / on the glaciers – what bony beaches
they left, grasping deep and
slowly, dragged away.

ILAN WHO WORKS IN THE BAGEL SHOP

opens a tab to facebook and
stares at his wall. Ilan who works
in the bagel shop opens
a tab to facebook, reads
his likes, favorite movies, and
tv shows, can't remember
plots,
Ilan opens a tab to facebook, but
doesn't
know why, x's it out, googles his
name, searching for any trace
he might exist.

REMEMBRANCE OF FLINGS PAST

teenage hours how they'd
kissed like burglars, sparked all
cigarettes against the expressway.
rain trapped by streetlamps,
moon in its steady, suspended
decline. when we turn back; his
dimensions collapse, she lifts herself up
by the hair and is gone.



Image by Shannon Pifko

THE DEATH OF THE MOTHERLESS KITTEN

I saw it from across the road, while waiting for the green man. It was mewling for its mother. Lost, I thought.

Everybody, in their suits and ties and pencil skirts, turned to look, but they never slowed their strides.

A mother and child might have stopped for a few seconds, passingly interested.

I probably should have picked it up there and then and brought it to a vet, but I was on my way to work and late. That morning's meeting was too important to miss.

What was I supposed to say to the boss? That I stopped to save a motherless kitten?

Next I saw it, it was lunch hour. A patch of bloodied fur on afternoon tar. It might have been moving.

It might have been the wind.

I walked away and I let it die.

I carried the kitten in one hand. It struggled, but it was so small, with such threadbare flesh, I could almost loop thumb to ring finger around its chest. I brought it to a vet my colleague recommended. She'd laughed when I said I was saving a kitten.

The vet's office hadn't been cleaned in ages. The vet was smoking and he used the sink as an ash tray. When I said it wasn't mine, he paused just long enough to make his point. He gave me a price I wasn't willing to pay. Then he suggested we put it down. "It'll feel better," he said.

I felt better that way too, so I said yes. But there wasn't any more morphine on the shelf. He'd forgotten to re-stock. So I had to use my hands.

Its neck was tiny. Thumb to forefinger.

I brought it home. My wife and I named it Bobby, after the child we'd lost.

My wife loved it so much. She became one of those cat crazy people who would dress their pet up in human clothes and take pictures.

One day, I forgot to make sure Bobby was still inside before I left the

house. As I backed out of the driveway, I heard a small yelp. So I knew what had happened before I even got out of the car. I had the lie already composed in my head by the time I got to the hood; Bobby had escaped and got knocked down.

But when I looked under the car, Bobby was still alive. I'd only crushed its legs. But I couldn't imagine how my wife would be able to bear the burden of a crippled animal, no matter how much love she thought she had for it. So I backed up a little more.

My wife was always the first one up whenever Bobby cried.

Bobby was smart. Bobby knew he could get anything he wanted, with the mere suggestion of possible discontentment from a downturned mouth. Bobby was filled with my wife's love. He didn't have any room left for mine.

One night, my wife finally got so exhausted from waiting on his every whim that for the first time, she slept through Bobby's crying.

How he cried and cried. You could hear his demands escalating in the tone of his wail. The rising urgency, from the diva's siren call to a full-blown teenage tantrum: Why aren't you here yet? Now I'm annoyed. Now I'm outraged. Now I really mean it.

I lay in bed and I listened. I let it go on for a while, and then I got out of bed and I took it out with me in a stroller to a park. In the playground, I sat down on the swing opposite the stroller and I just let the thing whine.

With each fresh wail, I could hear its panic rising.

Why aren't you comforting me? Why aren't you smothering me in your frantic love, your sobbing contrition? Why? Why? I thought you loved me! Didn't you say you loved me?

I let it cry and cry and cry until it wouldn't cry anymore.

Bobby was holding my hand. Small, tiny prehensile pads closing around one hairy thumb.

Wait here, I said, and I went in and I got a drink. Two drinks. Maybe three.

When I came out, he was gone.

It was less than a minute, I said to the police officer. I just turned around for a second and he was gone. My breath tasted sour as I said it.

We searched high and low for Bobby. Everybody helped. And sooner or later, one by one, they each came to me personally to offer words of comfort.

They knew. They all knew.

I could sense it from their replies. That half beat of hesitation between the moment I told them this is my fault – and the moment they told me, of course it isn't. Their mouths moved out of sync with their eyes, like goldfish.

Less than a minute, I told them. He might have been taken, I said. It's hard to tell. It could have been anybody. Anybody but me.

My wife wouldn't speak to me. She couldn't even stand to look at me. Neither of us had slept in two days.

I felt constantly nauseated.

When they found the body, they didn't let me see it at first. I didn't understand why, until I did see it. It was a splat on the road, a Looney Tunes character rolled down to an inch and flattened against tar. There was a comic explosion of violent colour all around the frame of its body, like a sound effect on a page.

I said what is this?

"It's your son", the police officer said.

Isn't it road kill?

"No, it's your son," he said. "It's not your fault."

But he was lying, of course, because he knew as much as anyone that I'd killed him.

My wife knew it too, but she didn't say it. She let the lawyer say it.

I was an alcoholic and an irresponsible father who couldn't even love his own son. And I'd walked away and I'd let him die.

Sometimes, at night, I have this funny dream.

I'm in a car with my wife. My wife is asleep. We've just had a long night out and it's been great. It's been very romantic and now I'm driving home and feeling full of love for the world. I'm listening to The Strokes on the radio – that's how you know it's a dream; they don't play their songs anymore.

And as I'm cruising down the road, something shoots out of the bushes behind the crash barriers and barrels into my path. There's a terrible

huroomph sound as it goes under my wheel. I slam the brake, but because this is a dream, the car goes into a spin, like in a Hollywood movie, until it stops with the windshield facing whatever it is I've hit. My wife doesn't even stir.

I peer over the dashboard. And there – right in the middle of the road, in the yellow glare of my headlights, squashed flat beneath black tyre tracks – is a small kitten.

And in my dream, I feel so unspeakably relieved.

Phew, I think.

It's only a cat.

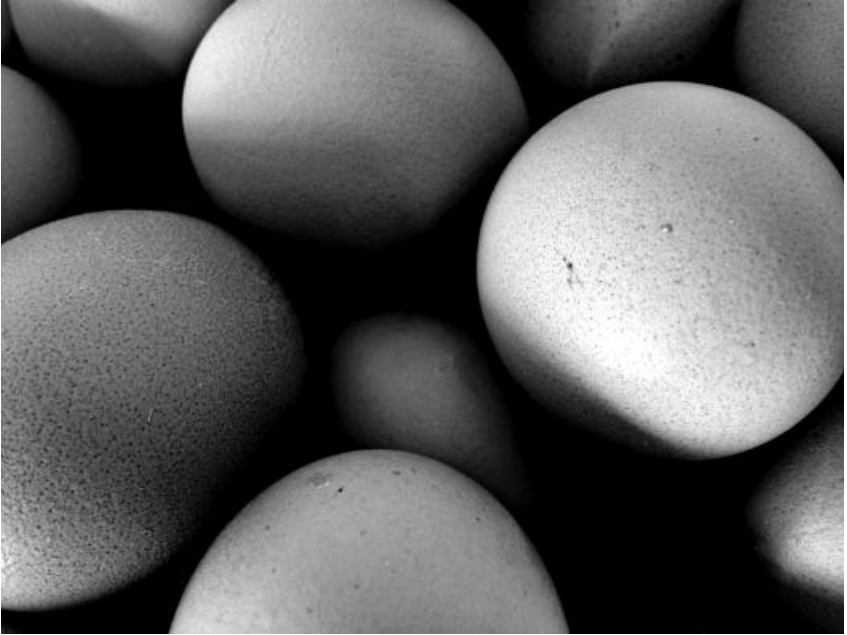


Image by Matt Guddat

C O N T R I B U T O R S

Steve Subrizi is a poet and singer-songwriter who lives in Massachusetts and has performed his work in lecture halls and dive bars across America. He is the author of one e-chapbook, *Newly Wild Hedgehog* (NAP 2011), and his poems have appeared in such other places as *Neon*, *Muzzle*, *PANK*, and *OVS*. His first studio album, *Home Alone Forever*, came out in June 2013. For further reading and listening, visit www.stevesubrizi.com.

Peter Branson's poetry has been published in Britain, USA, Canada, Ireland, Australasia and South Africa, including *Acumen*, *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *Anon*, *Envoi*, *The London Magazine*, *North*, *The Warwick Review*, *Iota*, *Frogmore Papers*, *Prole*, *South*, *Crannog*, *The SHOP*, *Rattle*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Columbia Review*, *Huston Poetry Review*, *Barnwood*, *The Able Muse*, *The New Writer* and *Other Poetry*. His latest book, *Red Hill, Selected poems, 2000-2012* (Lapwing, Ireland), came out May 2013.

Ian Mullins is still firmly anchored to the rotting hull of Liverpool, England. He has recently had poetry published by *The Journal*, *Message In A Bottle*, *Mastodon Dentist*, *Mad Swirl* and *My Favorite Bullet*, amongst others. He has also had stories published by *Hellfire Crossroads* and *Black Petals*. He is still nowhere near getting a book published.

Holly Day was born in Hereford, Texas, also known as “The Town Without a Toothache.” She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches at the Loft Literary Center. Her published books include *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, and *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*.

Claire Joanne Huxham is from the UK and when she grows up she wants to join Starfleet. Her fiction and poetry can be found in places like *Metazen*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Jersey Devil Press* and *Danse Macabre*, while she writes about all things film for *The Hollywood News*.

Jonathan Greenhouse is the recipient of a 2014 *Willow Review* Award, won *Prism Review's* 2012-2013 Poetry Prize, and was a finalist in *The Southeast Review's* 2013 Gearhart Poetry Contest. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Brittle Star*, *The Dark Horse*, *Literal Latté*, *The Malahat Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, and *The Next Review*. He and his wife live with their ridiculously-cute infant son in New Jersey.

Mark Vanner was born in Nottingham, UK. His poetry and short stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies worldwide including *Pearl Magazine*, *Poetry Nottingham*, *PN Review*, *Poetry Monthly*, *Swill Magazine*, *Skive*, *3AM*, *Remark Magazine*, *Zygote In My Coffee*, Laura Hird's *Showcase*, *The Paris Bitter Hearts Pit*, *Dogmatika* and many more. Visit him at www.markvanner.com.

Karen Heuler's stories have appeared in over seventy literary and speculative magazines and anthologies. She has published four novels and two story collections, and her last collection was chosen for *Publishers Weekly's* Best Books of 2013 list. She has received an O Henry award, been shortlisted for a Pushcart prize, the Bellwether award and the Shirley Jackson award for short fiction. Permuted Press just published her novel, *Glorious Plague*, about a beautiful apocalypse. Visit her at www.karenheuler.com.

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Sam Preminger would rather have been born a moth, even if it meant drowning in your kitchen sink. He lives in Albany, NY, is afraid of his basement, and often imagines himself lost at sea. His writing can be found in *The Blue Route*, *Gandy Dancer*, *Perspective Magazine*, and scribbled on napkins throughout New York State.

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Farkas Diána Fruzsina was born in Hungary, Budapest, in 1997. Her first goal in photography was a small exhibition in her district, where the famous photographer, Martin Szipál said: "Yes, she's got eyes!" Diána is also writing novels and poems; six of her poems will be displayed in an anthology at the end of the summer. Visit her at dianavolf.deviantart.com.

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