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THIN
AIR
MAGAZINE

vol 23

ing an interview with Ross Gay, winner of the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award.

THIN AIR MAGAZINE

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NORTHERN ARIZONA  UNIVERSITY

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

The staff here in Flagstaff, Arizona is excited to share with you the work we chose for our 23rd issue of *Thin Air Magazine*. Our fiction, poetry, and nonfiction pieces include the deadly encounters of a boy and his father out ice fishing, the hopeful observations of yellow city lights on an overcast day, and the summertime memories of a census taker in Harlem. Many of these pieces are accompanied by visual art in multiple mediums. We are also proud to include an interview with poet Ross Gay. His works include *Against Which*, *Bringing the Shovel Down*, and *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* which won the 2015 National Book Critics Circle Award and the 2016 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award.

This issue of the magazine would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our staff—editors, assistant editors, and readers. We are also indebted to Lawrence Lenhart, our faculty advisor, and Nicole Walker, Director of our MFA Program in Creative Writing, for their indispensable guidance. We thank, in addition, Jesse Sensibar and James Jay for providing venues like the Northern Arizona Book Festival and the Narrow Chimney Reading Series to share our work, and Diana Gabaldon for her consistent assistance printing the magazine. For fundraising and financial support, we'd like to acknowledge Karma Sushi, MartAnne's, the Flagstaff Arts Council, NAU's Graduate Student Government, and the Department of English. Finally, we are grateful to Ross Gay for sharing his wisdom with us.

On behalf of the editorial staff, thank you for reading, and we hope you enjoy this year's *Thin Air Magazine*.

Camille Sinaguinan
Editor-in-Chief

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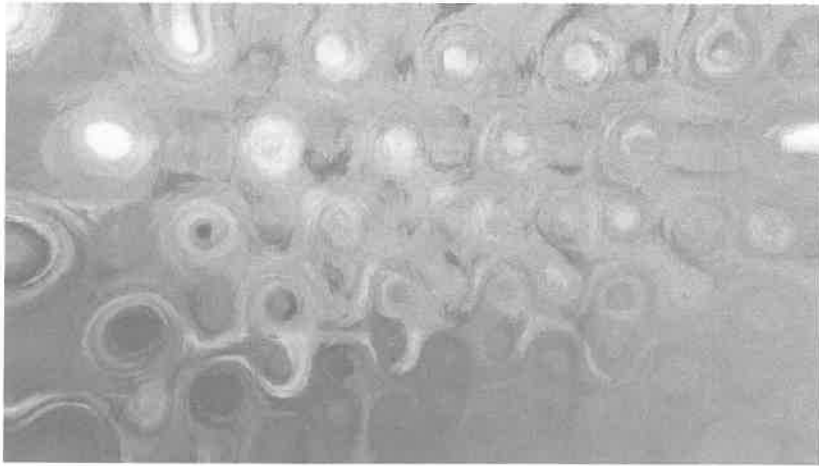
FURTHER INTONATIONS OF THE FEVER

Nate Maxson

I had always wanted something to burn
Something to catch fire
And when you are close
I taste,
Like a silent fawn lifting her head from the pool to the vibration

A distant and wild
Smoke

HENRY HU



Storm Field

WREN

Perry Davidson

I remember it.

A night
dipping my hands in oil and gas and lighting them on fire,
smothering them in my sweatshirt before my skin could burn,
never too late.
It was only on the outside.

We stood on an ant hill,
My brother and I did.
In a cold bath later, while the stings went away, we talked
excitedly of our adventure among the blood red ants.

I made Debbie Costello laugh when I told her these things.

None of it hurts anymore, but I remember it.

I could walk out into the desert to look down at the ground.
I remember how my skin gathered some sun,
but birds,
they didn't have shadows the way my birds do now.
The light passed through them.
Now all birds, I think, drag their shadows over mine.

They will not say what they are to me,
but they are ravenous,
even when I am moving.

Before, a Cactus Wren could fly through the aura of spines in a cholla
and live a fingerprint away from all the world's harm,
shining like La Virgen de Guadalupe.

It is all a smudgy old tattoo that stung.
It doesn't hurt anymore, but I remember getting it.

I wanted the fire to keep whispering in my hands.
I want to remember what Debbie Costello sounded like.
I know ant stings are god's love.
Whatever has happened, the Wren will still
fly through her needles without moving
a tendon,
having no need for caution in the skin of her own house.

THE SPUD

Darryl Jewett

But for a glow above the horizon anticipating sunrise, the cold sky was otherwise dark when a boy had woken to fish with his father through holes in the ice. He warmed himself by a fire which crackled in a pit before a rickety shack and his father was inside packing their tackle. When the fire spat a fountain of blistering sparks, the boy jumped away from the pit and his father emerged from the shack with a rucksack and a pail of water in which swam minnows.

Did you remember the spud? the father asked.

Where is it?

His father led the boy behind the shack. Beneath an eaves and its icicles was a spud. It had been the axle of a tractor many decades before but now leaned idly against a wall. The tarnished surface of its dark shaft was pocked and rust-mottled but one end had been ground shiny and smooth to a sharp point and the other end was dressed with a tether of golden-colored bailing twine.

What's that for? the boy asked.

So we don't lose it through the ice.

The spud was taller than the boy but he gripped it with both hands and used the pointed end as a fulcrum against the frozen ground about which he pulled it away from the wall and into his arms. It tilted one way and then the other but he tried to hold it still. After one end tilted and rested upon the ground, he walked the spud up until it balanced precariously in his arms. Then his father led him into a forest.

The boy struggled with the spud through the deep snow which had accumulated during the night. He could not keep up with his father, glanced back occasionally at their footprints and despaired at his slow progress. When he tried once to maneuver between two spruces, an end of the spud struck one and snow from its boughs fell in a loud cascade upon him. His father stopped and waited for him to catch up and then they continued on together. They walked through the snow and among the

trees for a long time before the boy's father stopped again. The boy stopped too and looked in the direction to which his father pointed.

What's that? asked the boy.

A vulture.

I know but what's in its beak?

An eyeball.

What's dangling from it?

The optic nerve.

The carcass of a deer lay beneath the gnarled branch of an old oak on which was perched the vulture. The boy and his father went to investigate and found it in two parts. From one spilled a macabre cornucopia of entrails and connected to them by a scarlet trail of blood across the white snow were the hindquarters. The boy examined an empty socket in which had been the eyeball and his father counted the points on an antler.

Sixteen.

Whatever killed it must have been big.

It still is.

Did you hear that?

The boy's father put a hand to an ear. You mean the wind?

The boy shook his head and then something howled. That.

His father surveyed the forest around them but could not see through the trees. It's a wolf.

The boy stepped closer to his father and looked about. I'm scared.

It's almost daybreak. They only hunt at night.

The boy and his father continued through the deep snow with more haste than before. The boy did not look back again to measure their progress but when they emerged from the forest, the sun had already risen. They proceeded to the shore and began crossing the ice which was hard and slippery underfoot. A cold and relentless wind kept knocking them backward but they leaned into it and made their way slowly to the center of the bay.

When the shore was barely visible, they stopped. The boy dropped the heavy spud, wrung his hands and shook stiffness from his arms. His father removed the sack from his back, picked up the spud and wrapped its tether around his wrist. Then he proceeded to pound a hole through the ice.

He inhaled deeply as he lifted the spud and exhaled abruptly when he pushed its point down. He continued breaking off chunks of ice that way and stopped only to bend occasionally and check the depth of the hole. When he was almost through, he wrapped the tether around his wrist an extra time and gripped the spud tighter. His thrusts became shorter and more deliberate and when the hole bottomed out, he caught the tether before the spud fell in. Then he gave it to the boy who received it with both hands and groaned.

It's heavy, the boy said.

Make another hole but mind your depth and don't lose it through the ice.

As his father emptied the sack of their tackle and started to dress a line, the boy dropped the spud on the ice and dragged it by its tether to the spot at which his father had pointed. Then he used the sharp end as a fulcrum again and raised it hand over hand. Once erect, he held it with one hand and wrapped its tether around the wrist of the other as his father had.

He was shorter and could not lift the spud as high as his father but he lifted it as high as he could and let gravity pull it down. When its point struck the ice, nothing happened. He did it again but pushed the spud down with more force than gravity and this time a chunk of ice broke free. He continued pounding the ice that way but did not check the depth of the hole as his father had.

When it bottomed out, the spud slipped from his hands, pulled him by his wrist onto the ice and his arm into the hole with such force that his shoulder dislocated and he screamed. His father abandoned the line he was dressing, ran to the boy and reached into the hole to lift the spud and relieve traction on the lame arm. Then he unwrapped the tether from around the boy's wrist, lifted the spud out and dropped it on the ice.

The boy pulled his arm from the hole, rolled onto his back and clutched his shoulder. His father crouched over him, held him down and began rotating the lame arm. The boy writhed, sucked loudly at the cold air and resisted but his father continued until the arm popped back into its socket. Then the boy exhaled with relief, sat up and rubbed his injured shoulder.

I guess you can't make any more holes, huh?

The boy grimaced.

You can help me then.

After they dressed and baited the lines, they angled through the holes, jiggling the minnows occasionally. When a float through which the line had been thread vanished beneath the surface of the water, they set the hook and landed a fish. When they had caught enough for dinner, the boy's father put a hand over his brow and studied the sky. The sun was near the horizon and clouds had begun to gather.

We should hurry, the father said.

Why?

A storm's coming.

He packed their tackle and slung the sack over his shoulder. Then he picked up the pail of minnows, collected the fish they had caught and led the boy to shore and into the forest. He followed the tracks they had left before and passed the carcass and the old oak but when he reached the spruces between which the boy had tried before to maneuver, he stopped walking. The boy stopped too and they looked at one another.

We forgot the spud, the boy said.

I'll go back and get it. You hurry on ahead to the shack.

I want to go with you.

A storm's coming.

That doesn't scare me.

And it's almost night. Remember what I told you about night?

The boy nodded and then started out but after a few steps he stopped and turned to look back at his father who pointed in the direction of the shack.

Hurry and don't stop or stray from our path.

The boy started out again and followed their tracks in the snow through the forest. He hurried as his father had instructed but before long the sky darkened and snow began falling. Only a few small flakes danced around at first but then many big ones until he could no longer see past the blur of their trajectories. When the new snow had erased the path, the boy began wandering aimlessly and searched for it.

He searched for a long time but when the vulture appeared in a tree before him, he stopped to watch. After steadying itself awkwardly upon a branch, it folded its wings meticulously across its

back and returned the boy's attention. As they watched one another, the boy realized that the vulture was waiting but for what he did not know. He resumed searching anxiously and tried to ignore it but the vulture followed him, gliding silently from tree to tree. Every time the boy was certain that he had left it behind, it appeared in a branch before him.

Then a wolf howled and the vulture directed its attention from the boy and into the forest around them. When the boy realized that for which it waited, his anxiety graduated to terror and he began running from the vulture but it pursued him. The boy kept running through the snow and among the trees until he stumbled upon and fell over the carcass that he and his father had encountered. The entrails which had spilled from it before were gone and when he thought it moved inexplicably, he rubbed his eyes and looked again. The carcass shifted and the blanket of new snow which had accumulated on it fell off.

From the cavity in which had been the entrails emerged a large wolf but the boy was behind her and she did not see him stand. Her hackles were as high as he was tall and when she shook off her sleep, steam rolled from her heavy coat and condensed thick and white in the freezing air. The boy was about to run and stepped backward but the wolf pricked up her ears, snorted at the cold air and spun around to confront him. He dared not move and when her eyes reflected back at his horrified gaze the little light around them, he pissed himself.

It was not until she wrinkled up the end of her nose and snarled that her spell was broken and he turned and ran. His feet stayed down barely long enough to penetrate the new snow but the wolf was still so close behind that one of his heels struck her muzzle. As she was about to apprehend him, he unbuttoned and threw off his parka to distract her but ran into a tree and fell backward. When he opened his eyes, his parka was on the snow behind him, the wolf was investigating it and the vulture was waiting in a branch above them.

It craned its neck when the wolf abandoned the parka and the boy rolled over onto his hands and knees. He was so close again that he could see glistening in the dark the saliva which lubricated her long sharp teeth. As she raised her hackles, flattened back her ears and prepared to strike, the boy's father leaped from the dark

forest and drove the spud through her and into the snow and frozen ground beneath. She pivoted about the spud which impaled her and stretched out her neck but could not reach to bite him and instead disgorged a fount of blood. Then her trembling legs buckled and she slid down the length of the spud's shaft and onto the snow.

The boy rose and studied her from a safe distance. Her soulless eyes reflected no light and her blood-smeared teeth glistened no more. When he was certain that she was dead, he approached her carcass, held it down with a foot and pulled from it the spud. Then he wiped from its shaft her blood, examined its end and tested with the tip of his finger the sharp point. His father put a hand on his injured shoulder but he shrugged it off and the vulture spread its black wings, rose in defiance of the white and falling snow and melted into the dark sky.

MY FATHER'S JACKET

Stanley McCormick

Though dead twenty-eight years,
my father looks the same
as he comes through the back door
with the morning milk, cold cloaked
round his shoulders, dun red
on his face.

I knew it was him by the jacket: solitary ways
fleshed out in fabric and folds, collar frayed surly.
And blue denim, faded to smoke and sheen.

'Still blowin and goin,' he says,
touching his hat, and for a moment
the silence of twenty-eight years
shatters. We both smile, wondering how
we ever came to be the same age.

Last night I rummaged my dead father's trunk
for his old jean jacket, shook it out and hung it back
on the porch like it was 1959 all over.

It must've been just my quirky brain (or longing –
the way it quickens the dead) making him real
as I held his coat to my face, trying to inhale
the smell of his skin. Or maybe

The scent of milk mist rising
from the porch where he stoops and lifts
the pail to the lip of the separator, pours it full
and frothy. Now he works the handle with dawn light
silvering his hair, lips pursed, and little blue spiders
of emphysema, scrimshawed on his cheeks.

In a high whine the separator's metal discs spin

out a milk music that clambers the floorboards
of the house – mere prelude to heavy cream
we'll spout and jar for the icebox, the skim
we'll clabber or bucket for the hogs.

When the door hinge groans I look up,
but his afterimage splays out somewhere
between a beacon and a blink and the nights
he'd come in from the fields, shirtless and brown,

Wash up at the kitchen sink, and shave
in the mirror of the window, oblivious to our eyes, adorn
his body in Old Spice and alligator skin boots, a fresh shirt,
and go out to a place

He called overtime: new overalls for us boys,
tap dancing shoes for my sister. But we knew

It was the vast and reckless night. Night of heaving
mania, chaos and kitsch. Night of Uncle Shorty's suped up cars.
Night of the Chief Diner and Diamond Belle Bar, waitresses
with eyes painted bombshell blue. Night of the murdered president,
H-bombs, Lucky Strikes, uranium mines scarring the face
of the desert. Night of the long-haul ore trucks running all night
out to Las Cruces, Mexican Hat, Jackpile, and other towns
with names we feared.

What are
love's loudest apparitions?
And how
do they find their way, bodiless,
back to us?

Everyone gets nostalgic over old clothes. My sister remembers
her tenth birthday by the dress she got that made her feel mod.

But my father's jacket would have looked a bluff
on me. I never could've looked so 1959. Or scuffed

my boots in the dirt the way he would walking out
to the milking shed at dawn, blue denim
silvered against the light.

CEASEFIRE

Carly Mastroni

I sit cross-legged on the mustard yellow couch, a decorative pillow between my legs and a seventh grade reading assignment in my hands. The sun sets outside the glass door behind my frame and creates a masterpiece of warm colors that peeks through the aluminum blinds and stripes my book's pages. I pause and breathe in the rare moment of peace, knowing it will soon be lost.

Alex is plopped across the living room, too zoned into Myspace and illegally downloaded punk music to notice my existence. I don't take offence to being ignored. My sister and I fight a war together, which forces small talk to feel irrelevant. Our responsibilities as allies determines our survival, and we both know the consequence of a single mistake. With the precision of a skilled professional, I defuse each of our alcoholic father's ignited bombs, and Alex protects our family's reputation by camouflaging us in heavy makeup, fake smiles, and rehearsed lies whenever I fail to deactivate his explosives. The fate of the house weighs on slight shoulders that were never toned in basic training, so our tensed muscles ache from the constant strain. We are child soldiers, prisoners of war, and corrupt politicians that hide the truth from the mainstream media.

My homework is nowhere near finished, but the sound of a slammed car door stops me mid-sentence. Our father's approaching footsteps beat against the porch steps and grow louder with each second. My head spins to the door and then to the clock, and I wonder how the time so quickly slipped away from us. Alex's spine straightens and her hand yanks forward to shut off her music. Our eyes shift about the room, searching for anything out of place, anything that can be used against us. My head sinks to my shoulders, a defense mechanism Alex will later entitle "turtle-ing" in our future years of therapy. The back door bursts open and causes a gust of wind to slap against my face as our father bursts into the living room. My chin tucks to my collar bone and a mess of frizzy curls cover my face. I cower in

anticipation.

There is deafening silence.

But no bombs go off. No ammunition is fired.

I look up to see my father planted in front of us with a brilliant smile turning up his lips. His teeth are straight and stained from decades of cigarette smoke. Wavy, peppered black hair falls over his tanned ears and outlines his five o'clock shadow. His eyes, black and round and so similar to my own, show no sign of danger and no sign that he's been drinking. A bag of shiny new golf clubs hangs from his shoulder with the price tags still dangling from the metal. His hands do not shake, his words do not slur, and, for once, he does not appear to be a threat.

"You girls wanna go golfin'?" He asks. His deep, rough Texan accent peeks through, and I'm almost able to see the charismatic, southern gentleman that followed my sophisticated, work obsessed mom all the way from Dallas to Chicago.

Alex and I peer at each other as our dark eyebrows raise to the ceiling. This is not the enemy we know. This is our dad. I see hope burn in my older sister's eyes like a raging fire too dangerous to extinguish, and I want to shake her and tell her not to trust the enemy, but I know it's no use. Alex will always be the optimistic one praying for peace, and I'll always be the realist struggling to protect her neck while her head is up in the clouds.

"But Daddy, you don't golf," I question in my well-practiced, polite voice. It feels wrong on my tongue. Too high-pitched and immature, but it can't set him off, because he can't be angry at his little girl.

"Well now I do, sweetie. Ya'll want to come with me or not?"

At the moment, I'm unaware of his true intentions. He's doesn't want a family outing; he wants a distraction from his sole attempt at sobriety. One day my mom will explain that she had given him an ultimatum: Alcoholics Anonymous or divorce. His short-lived sobriety will last a total of two and a half weeks, and we will realize that there is no hope left in a lost war. Six months later, she'll move us out, wave the white flag, and he'll sign away his custody rights in trade for ransom covered by alimony checks.

My ignorance—mixed with undeniable naivety and curiosity—cause me to hop off the couch and throw the pillow back in its place. Alex hesitates, but raises from her computer chair slowly

and without a sound. We follow the enemy as if we are his own soldiers, and I feel like a traitor because I'm happy about it. We're both desperate to get to know this strange, sober version of our father, so we tread carefully, prepared for any misstep that could set him off.

He leads us out the back door, off of the wooden porch he built himself, and into his green Suburban. The air in his car smells of cinnamon and saw dust. He plucks another Altoid into his mouth to cover the smell of cigarette smoke, and I inhale the scent as it blankets me in familiarity. My friend will offer me a piece of cinnamon gum on my fifteenth birthday, and I'll take it, unaware of the trigger it will set off. The spice will burn my taste buds and force my eyes to fill with water and my throat to tighten. The brick walls will close in around me and crush my shrinking lungs. I'll gasp for air that seems so suddenly hard to find and break into feverish sweat that burns every inch of skin as it seeps from my pores. My vision will blur into a mix of worried faces as I drown or suffocate or hyperventilate or forget how to breathe. It will be the first panic attack of many, and I'll learn that even the comforting memories will later bring me pain.

As he drives, my dad whistles the tune along with the radio, pausing to sing the catchy '90s chorus. I eye him, worried this excessive happiness might just be a good buzz, but there's no beer can in his cup holder and his driving is steady. I won't realize until I take my own driving lessons that an open container of alcohol in a moving vehicle is illegal, and I'll try to forget how often he drank it while swerving from the right to left lane in a dramatic game he compared to Mario Kart. For now, I smile and let hope fill my mind against my better judgement. It won't be much longer before he'll be the enemy again, and I'll discover that hope is the most dangerous weapon of war.

He takes us to Sugar Creek. The golf course is a block away from my middle school, and in the northern suburbs of Chicago, its presence here is almost more important. He parks his giant suburban in between a Lexus and an Audi, and it's clear that children and carpenters do not make up the majority of this golf course's clientele. My dad knows this, but doesn't give a damn and tells us just the same. So Alex and I follow our confident father as he pays for three buckets of golf balls and walks over to the driving

range. I watch as balding, white men dressed in the standard uniform of designer khakis and polo shirts swing with precision and celebrate in silence.

My dad is not a quiet man. A mixture of southern charm, handsome features, and outlandish humor make people flock to him. He strides over to an empty spot and tells us a story about golfing with his buddy Dave back in Texas. Every golfer turns their heads towards the loud man in annoyance, but as his story continues and his humor shines through, their angry faces soften. A few even chuckle. I don't bother listening to the story. I've heard them all before in different stages of exaggeration based on his blood alcohol level. They're all a hoot at a few beers in, but they get weepy and bitter as the bottle of liquor drains. By the bottom of the Grey Goose, there are no stories – there is only a shell of a man that fights for nothing and no one.

Before he sets up the tee and pulls out a club, he turns to the men next to him to introduce himself and his girls, and the charm works its magical power. It takes him a total of three minutes to win over a group of wealthy, stuck up businessmen, and the pride I used to take in being his daughter flows through me for the first time in years. The power he wields will one day turn into a weapon against me, and I'll have no defense prepared for the charm that manages to make me the enemy. It'll take him less than an hour to convince a family therapist that he's the victim that has done nothing wrong despite his two shaken daughters cowering away from him on a too small couch. The therapist we'd never go back to will flirt with him and scold us for making up such cruel stories about our father. That's when the charm will stop being magic.

The sun sets over the horizon and huge, artificial lights illuminate the fake grass decorated by hundreds of abandoned golf balls. Bloodthirsty mosquitoes swarm towards the light before preying on the sweaty golfers and the overworked employees driving the golf carts. Dad swings for a few minutes while Alex and I fight off bugs and study him, cringing each time the club whacks the tee. The need to flinch at any loud noise or quick movement will fade, but "jumpy" will be a distinctive characteristic that many will take note of, but no one will ask about. I take a deep breath to calm my nerves, but the air that fills my lungs is thick and offers little comfort.

He turns around once he's bored of the game and calls to me, "Come on, I'm gonna teach you how to golf."

I step forward and leave Alex alone behind me. She drops her head and a protective pang hits my chest, but I know better than to say anything. I'm desperate for the attention because it's real and not a drunken characteristic, but I don't want it without her. My teeth bite into my bottom lip to stop me from screaming at him to pay just a little attention to his other daughter. He stares at her, and a confused look distorts his face. His eyebrows crease together and my breath hitches, hoping that we didn't set him off in public.

He smiles and calls to her, "You too, honey, get up here."

Her face brightens and the harsh lighting shines into every crevice of her enormous smile. She jumps at the invitation, afraid he'll revoke it, and sprints towards us. He tells us to stand back as he swings his driver and sends the ball flying. He spouts off tips and important knowledge, but I pay no attention. It looks easy enough, and it's not like I'm here to learn how to golf. He lets Alex go first and her eyes light up with an ease I forgot once existed. Her hands grasp the club and she takes her stance. Her light brown hair sticks to her face. Like Mom, she's blessed with an exotic beauty and an effortless grace. I'm nearly identical to my father and our personalities are so similar that I'll study my mom and sister relentlessly to figure out how to squash any characteristics he gave me until I clone myself into one of them. The memory of war is hard to erase when the mirror's reflection is the spitting image of the dictator. Alex whacks her ball, and I gaze in amazement as it soars away from us.

Far off on the green, a golf cart collects stray balls. It crawls across the driving range, and I notice the majority of the golfers either take breaks or aim away from him. Alex calls my attention back and hands the driver to me. I take my stance as the club hangs in my hands, my fingers too unsure of themselves to make any solid movement. As I gear up for my attempt at a hit, my dad taps me on the shoulder.

"I'll bet you twenty bucks you can't hit that golf cart," he challenges.

"You're on."

With all of the energy and focus I have, I stare at the golf ball set on the tee. I have no idea what I'm supposed to be doing

here. I think he mentioned something about aim and concentration, but I decide my best chance is to just whack it as hard as I can. I pull the club behind my right shoulder and swing. The club clinks against the ball and my eyes follow it up into the sky. We all watch as the little white ball soars higher and higher into the air, collectively awestruck to see it shoot right at the man in the golf cart. The ball gains momentum like a bullet heading for its target and I become a sniper waiting to see if I have a hit. The ball crashes onto the glass shield and the caddy jumps out of his seat. I let out a shriek, terrified that I may have hurt him.

"Sorry!" I yelp as loud as I can muster before I jump into the air and raise my arms in victory.

A high pitched, breathy screech fills every inch of open space. Like an alarm that alerts me of danger, I whip my head around and search for Alex. My lungs constrict with a pressure so overwhelming that it crushes them. My eyes zero in on her, and every nerve on my rigid body relaxes when I realize she's laughing. For years to come, her laugh, which sounds far too similar to the sounds that choke out of her when she sobs, will set off a trigger in my head.

I'm pulled back to reality when my dad tugs me into a hug and lifts my feet off the ground. He laughs harder than I've ever heard him. It's deep and throaty, the complete opposite of my sister's. He spins me once and exclaims, "You've got to be shitting me!" before he gently sets me back on the ground. We're all doubled over in laughter, unable to catch our breath. I can't remember the last time I was this happy.

I don't realize that this night will be the last good memory I'll have of him. In less than a year, this man will be dead to me. There will be no funeral, no flowers at our doorstep, and no casseroles in our fridge. No one will offer their condolences, because the alcohol fueled, zombie version of my father will still walk the earth. To save ourselves, we'll leave him and he'll use his southern charm and manipulation to convince our suburb that he's the victim. He'll get a purple heart; we'll get dirty looks and inappropriate questions. I'll have no father, but besides a few rare moments, I'll look back and realize I never had one in the first place. I only ever had a war.

I jump around and gloat in my victory, "I did it! I did it!"

"Well I'll be damned, you really did."

We pack up our stuff and figure that we've pushed an uptight golf club just about as far as they can go tonight. It was fun while it lasted. My dad says goodbye to the strangers he befriended, and slings his bag over his shoulder.

"Come on girls, let's go apologize," he states, a chuckle still on his lips.

"You owe me twenty bucks," I joke.

He hooks his arm around my shoulder and pats Alex on the back. The three of us walk together, and for the first time, I feel safe in my dad's embrace. Years from this moment, an expensive therapist will diagnose me with post-traumatic stress disorder and I'll laugh, unable to ignore the absurdity of a suburban princess suffering from the same disorder as a war veteran. Later that night I'll wake up with a scream clawing up my throat and a cold sweat clinging to my skin, and I'll accept that my childhood was a warzone of my very own, filled with manipulative guerrilla tactics and a mental minefield of fatal explosives. But there's no war tonight, no battles to be fought, and no bombs to defuse. I know we'll never be back here, and I know that a peace treaty will never be signed, but that doesn't matter to me right now. Right now, I'm deliriously happy in my temporary world of peace.

DARRYL JEWETT



Cups

THE YELLOW BELLS

Benjamin Nash

The light is in
little yellow
flowers, in the
bells, and we
electrify,
city, in the
bumblebees,
as if tiny power
plants, ring
all the bells,
no other light
on this dark
day, only in
the bees, the
yellow flowers,
a few yellow
M&Ms in my
pocket, a few
car lights,
in our hope
that it doesn't
rain today.

THE WEST IS

Sara Wolfe Vaughan

I'm going to break now.

Those were the words that went through my head in the black space between the saddle and the ground. Gypsy's canter became bucking. Push against the saddle horn, push against the saddle horn, hold on, hold on, hold on. The calm voice of my trainer, Jerry. He saw everything before I could feel the change.

I tell people that I grew up on a cattle ranch. This is partially true. My great aunt lived on the Bensch Ten Ranch in the Bradshaw Mountains of northern Arizona, and I spent as much time there as I could between the ages of one and eight. It has always been easy for me to fall head over heels in loyalty to a place and its people, and my sense of ownership over the ranch was absolute.

For the last two years I have held onto a torn piece of menu with a phone number and "Jerry the Horse Guy" written on it in Sharpie. A customer at the bakery where I used to work gave me the recommendation, but money and time had, as usual, prevented me from calling until the summer of 2014 when I fell back into a lifelong cycle of anxiety attacks. Deciding that it was time to pull out all the stops, I made appointments with acupuncturists, massage therapists, and a horsemanship trainer.

Easter on the ranch in the early '90s. I wore a flowery dress with lace trim scratching my knees. Apricots and pecans littered the ground. My great aunt and my grandmother plunked them into shimmering galvanized buckets. The other children picked through the tall grass and around rocks to find the eggs we had all colored the day before. There's a long wooden table and several card tables made out with a spring feast of cabbage rolls, spiral ham glazed with brown sugar, surrounded by mountains of potato and macaroni salad. Thermoses of coffee and tall pitchers of lemonade stood sentinel facing the mountains and the old windmill. Some horses grazed farther off in the field, mostly roans and bays.

Victor—the oldest son of Ernie Bensch the ranch's owner, the one who once tried to run away down the highway, the one I stole a horse for to stop his leaving—brought me Sylvia on a lead rope. She was a white Arabian mare with the slightest shade of grey bleeding into the top of her mane and tail. She was a princesses' horse, in fact she looked just like Barbie's plastic Cinderella horse I had at home. All I wanted to do when I was at the ranch was ride horses. I would hang on to Ernie or Victor's legs all around the yard, the house, everywhere, until they would give me a horse to ride.

Victor lifted me onto Sylvia's back. My little bare legs, round as my wrists are now at 27, clung to her smooth warm back. Riding bareback was not something new to me. Victor unclipped the lead rope and I was off, away from the party, the adults, the other children—it was just me and Sylvia and the mountains and the old windmill. I rode under the windmill and the big trees, my fists braided into the base of her mane.

The worst thing about anxiety attacks is the feeling of losing control. My heart pounds, I shake uncontrollably, my palms sweat, my arms and legs tingle, breath shortens, panic, an ocean of adrenaline crashes through my brain in continual waves full of unnamable, intractable fear. I don't need to experience the apocalypse; my brain triggers my own often enough. Each attack leaves my world a little less whole, a little more uncertain.

The day was blue skies with clouds like pulled white taffy, clear and full of bird song and pollen. I clicked my tongue and dug my heels into Sylvia's sides. She did a little lunge forward, kicking out with her back legs to jump from our trot into an excited run. The tables of food, the laughter of children, the plunk, plunk of apricots in buckets faded quickly. This was the first time I had galloped on a horse. Innumerable viewings of *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*, a movie from 1991 about a misfit tomboy of a girl who rides horses off a high-dive and into a pool of water, had left such things looking easy. I think that my heart had taken off running the same time that Sylvia took her leap forward. We were coming to the end of the field, to the arm of a mountain base and before that, the moat of Big Bug Creek.

Completely out of control, bouncing along on Sylvia's back, my heart skipped beats in the rhythm of her hooves leaving the earth. I was a feather on her back, but she was solid beneath me, and I loved her, and that had to have had something to do with me

managing to unclamp one of my hands from the base of her mane. My child fingers clawed for a chunk of her mane farther up her neck. I managed to grab a fistful and with all my might I pulled her head to the side with a hearty whoa. She turned to the right and wound down from her gallop in tight circles, my hand still pulling her head around. And then it was over. I sat on her back, heart thundering, her tail swishing flies as she lowered her head to pick at scrub grass. I never told anyone that story—as far as anyone knew I had had everything under control the entire time. I smiled.

I remember my first anxiety attack. At the time I was an evangelical Christian. I was twelve years old, and sat under the bar in the kitchen of my parents' home, in the dark, talking to my boyfriend on the cordless about the spiritual warfare inside of me. It wasn't until a year or so later that I diagnosed myself using the internet and realized that what I was experiencing was chemical warfare, inside my brain.

Close to eighteen years after leaving the ranch for the last time, I started riding horses again. The trail rides that speckled that gap do not count, because there was neither freedom nor bond there. No risk, no lack of control, no time for trust or forgiveness between me and the animal. Jerry the Horse Guy, a man in his 60s, who has been working with horses his entire life, tells me on the phone that he loves my last name, that he should change his to Jerry Horse. I go to my first lesson like a wide-eyed little girl. I feel paralyzed by anxiety and end up thankful that for the first lesson I don't even get on the horse. Jerry teaches natural horsemanship, a training technique that uses gentler modes of communication with the animal than traditional training. I stand in a round pen with a whip in my hand and Gypsy, a 19 year old bay mare canters around me. She follows my pointed finger, and obeys the clicks of my tongue. I turn from her and she follows me at the shoulder.

When I was nine years old the ranch was sold to Jenny B Development Company and it became Daybreak at Bensch Ranch, a 577 acre space in which people can purchase homes that, according to their website, "reclaim the true West." I'm not sure if I ever thought of the ranch as "the true West," though it was certainly *my* true West. They claim to "offer a genuine experience of Southwestern living," and I wonder what someone living on the ranch today would write about in this essay, what their "genuine

experience," of my fields, streams, and mountains would be. I've visited the ranch once since its opening. Lack of water and then a down-sliding economy slowed the rate of development so that there are only a few occupied houses with mini-vans, on top of mountains where we rode to find our missing cattle—and once our missing horse.

Most of my lessons with Jerry consisted of riding through Tucson washes and practicing rounded stops—the kind that instinctually saved me on Easter. We have long talks about race and mothers and how important they are. We talk about the horses and dogs we have known. We talk about the nature of the Arabian horse, and the Chinese Shar Pei. He smokes from an electronic cigarette, and we laugh a lot. There's so much of the ranch in him, or maybe it's me projecting this place from my childhood onto him and his sun-stained cowboy hat, his worn boots, jeans with a belt buckle that hides just under the cliff of his stomach. The crow's feet and smile lines on his face are lighter than the rest of his tan and when he smiles with his ears he looks like a contented barn cat. I told my parents "he's the one," the trainer that I've been looking for, or at least the feeling.

At the beginning of my lesson I have to run back up to the barn to get my helmet. It's actually a borrowed one, and it's a little too tight but I wear it anyway. This is the first lesson in which I've done anything more than a walk with Gypsy. We begin with a trot, and Jerry gives excellent illustrations of how I'm to post, how I'm to get into Gypsy's rhythm. We are in the round pen with Gypsy on a lunge lead. I have no reigns, only my hands on the saddle horn. The first few circles I do wonderfully. I lift with my toes, I stand in the saddle once without holding the horn, I am meant to do this.

The next time around I can't get into her rhythm, my rear slaps the saddle with an embarrassing sound, and I think about how overweight I am now. I think about how I should know how to do this, I should have a communion with this animal, but I can't reach it. We slow, stop, change directions. I fail at posting the trot again. Jerry says that he thinks we've done enough today. I know that I'm foggy, unfocused, and full of anxiety about everything in my life. All of these things stand between me and the present moment and the 1000-pound mare underneath me. Jerry says we'll try a canter. He says it will be easier, or a reward, or something to

that effect. I complete one circle in the canter and it feels faster than flying downhill on a bicycle. I am not used to this. My heart starts to pound and I feel the first seeping in of my adrenaline ocean. At the beginning of the second circle things don't feel right at all. I'm holding onto the saddle horn and all I can hear is Jerry saying *push against the saddle horn, push against the saddle horn*. I try to, but the world turns under me and my balance is gone. *Hold on, hold on, hold on*. Gypsy starts to buck, but long before that my eyes are closed, and they don't open again until after I hit the ground.

I can't breathe, can't breathe, help...

I'm on the ground; I took off my helmet without remembering that I'd done so. Later Jerry said that it was the first thing I'd done. I remember feeling the back of the helmet hitting the ground, saving my skull and its chemical warfare. I have never felt more in my body than during the moments of flight and landing. Jerry tells me that I've just knocked the wind out of myself. I didn't know that was a real thing until that moment. I try to roll over, to push myself up, but I'm dizzy and I feel like I weigh a million pounds. Jerry tells me to stay down and tell him how I feel. I can hear Gypsy's shaky breathing, and I feel bad for upsetting her. Jerry has her on the end of the lead and he's looking down at me. I want to hold someone's hand, but when I reach up he doesn't take it.

My lower back hurts. There's sand under my skin.

I turn my head and see the toe of Jerry's dark brown cowboy boot. It's scarred and frayed. I lay my palm on it and breathe, breathe, breathe.

The website of Daybreak at Bensch Ranch says the following: "The West is a place. It's also a place in your heart. The exact location can't always be charted; it's a world where adventure resides, where legends live again, where your spirit feels at peace." I've found my adventure, my living legend, but I haven't yet found a place of spiritual peace. I don't know that I will ever find it. Medications, acupuncture, massage—all of these things help peel back the curtain on my West, my ranch, but even horseback riding feels strange to me now. I'm older, and I'm sad. I know I can break, and that the world often does break you.

RÖYKKIÖHAUTA

Kirby Wright

A mound of coastal tombs, the sun burning stone markers red. Tree shadows broaden to take human form. 400 years before Christ. The Iron Age. Steel swords forged over open fires in forests of birch, trunks as white as bone. The Vikings? 1,000 years away. Bodies placed east to west in the extended position, eyes and mouths closed. Hands cross over chests. Heads on the side of the sunset. Listen. Hear whispers? Those below ground speak through the lichen clinging to their granite.

MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE

Mark Gunther

My twenty-five year obsession with ultra-distance cycling has long defied my capacity to satisfactorily explain it. When asked, I've often said, "Because I can." Besides the arrogance, this is way too agnostic a statement for the way I actually feel. I'll admit there must be deep psychological reasons—cycling, after all, isn't my only obsession—but these are deeply ingrained and likely immutable. For who I am, cycling is an awesome match. On the bike I am always becoming. Resilience and persistence and generosity engage dynamically with effort and exhaustion and pain, constantly negotiating my place on an emotional continuum stretching from glory to failure. And the bike is there, always: faithful, obedient, objective, constant collaborator and implacable opponent, indifferent to my ferment, complicit in my suffering, the same at the beginning and end of each ride.

* * *

October 2005. Charleston, South Carolina. Anny Beck and I leaned her beautiful carbon-fiber tandem into the final corner of the Central Transcontinental Pac Tour, twenty-six days and 3,123 miles from the start in San Diego, California. There were no arches to ride through, no cheering crowds, parades, or fireworks, no officials on hand to celebrate our accomplishment, only a beat-up asphalt parking lot lined in faded paint and marred by potholes. Beyond a bent, rusted steel rail, the gray-green waves of the Atlantic roiled under the gray and angry sky of Tropical Storm Tammy. I squeezed the brake and we came silently to a stop; silence is abundant on the bike. I leaned the bike against the railing. We abandoned our rigid-soled cycling shoes and socks and ran down to the beach, wet sand squeaking against pale feet sharply demarcated from the leg by the coal-dark tan above the sock line. I held her hand; the tide washed our feet. We raised our arms high into the air, then joyously hugged. Done! We didn't have to get on the bike tomorrow!

I would have, though. Instead I had to spend the next day on a plane. But I rode the day after. And the day after that. That year I rode 11,500 miles—765 hours in the saddle. On fifty-two days I rode one hundred miles or more. I was fifty-four years old.

In his book *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, the psychiatrist Daniel Stern wrote, “Because the present moment is mentally grasped as it is still unfolding, knowing about it cannot be verbal, symbolic and explicit. These attributes are only attached after the moment has passed.” As a young man the present moment consumed me; what I felt and saw simply was true, and any contraindication was false. Some of these truths were illusory; others survived the test of time. But youth brought me a handful of devastatingly fulfilling peak experiences, immanent moments when I found myself balanced at the fulcrum of the world. These moments of transcendence are imprinted deep in my body; my breath and muscle and heart remain urgent to again experience such unity. Sometimes cycling feels like a consequence of these moments. The ride simply is my turn to drive the cosmic flywheel; presence and cadence and effort followed forward, into gravity, down the road.

Each ride is a quilting of many stories, the dynamic interplay of road and machine and body and brain set in the space of the world, moment to moment from the beginning of the ride to its end. In each moment the rider hears all these stories at once. He collates, edits, chooses. The rider holds on to the past moment at his peril. The next moment is the challenge; the last a forgotten victory, left behind on the road with discarded calories and sweat. On the bike, only the rider is accountable. The only deliverable is the ride.

* * *

The nineteenth day of the Tour wound through the northern Ozarks, from Vienna (that’s VY-anna to the locals), IL, to Madisonville, KY. The day included a ferry crossing of the Ohio River. It was an easier day for this tour, 105 miles and five thousand feet of climbing, six or seven hours on the bike. It was a day of tiny backroads with names like Cotton Patch Ridge and Roe Walford. Towns like Elizabethtown and Mattoon and Shady Grove emerged from the forest every so often, where storefronts like Pilot House Gas and the Dutch Way Store abutted small, simple, wood-frame houses, beat-up cars, and abandoned fields and orchards. Poverty

oozed from the road, so far from the interstate, town after town the same; two bars, five churches, and a Head Start center surrounded by the boarded-up and falling-down remnants of the rural life once held together by family and farming. The children have gone to the city, but their absence looms over the towns, shadows visible only in a moment slow enough to reveal them.

I was just punching the clock that day, legs tired and heavy. As I slowly ground up another of the innumerable small hills, I locked eyes with a young man standing in his driveway.

“How do you do this?” he asked me.

My cadence slowed. I’d never been asked how. I remembered the Passover story of four children, each of differing character. This young man was the kind, lovely one who doesn’t understand the meaning of the ritual surrounding him. Between heavy breaths I said, “Well, you get a bike, and you practice riding it, and if you like it you ride really a lot, and then you become able to do this.”

“Oh,” he said. “Thanks.”

He vanished behind me as I ground up the road. He meant it. It was an authentic conversation, but my face flushed redder than the uphill effort, ashamed at my coastal smugness. “How,” I thought, is the way people survive here in the abandoned Northern Ozarks, doing for themselves, relying on their neighbors, a pool of precious knowledge freely shared.

He wouldn’t have asked me “How” if I was driving a car. I wouldn’t have even seen him.

* * *

“There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in and of itself—ardent, alert, and mindful—putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in and of themselves...the mind in and of itself...mental qualities in and of themselves. This is called right mindfulness.”

—Jayaram V quoting the Digha Nikaya (22) on hinduwebsite.com

Cycling is a practice. As carpenters say: Measure twice, cut once. The self-actualized rider is ardent, alert, and mindful. The bicycle is clean, appropriately equipped, and well maintained. Correct clothing is on hand, as there is no bad weather, only bad

clothing. The body is fed, rested, and trained through a disciplined, cyclic program. Yet this is only the preparation. One becomes a rider through the accrual of tens of thousands of miles in heat and cold and rain and day and night, feeling good and feeling terrible and feeling powerful and feeling exhausted, the body teaching its possibilities and its limits. The ultra-distance rider attends to a constant set of ever-changing demands in a world in which his cognitive capacity shrinks steadily as the hours mount. Against the impedance of time, gravity, and wind resistance, the rider balances, breathes, and pedals; eats and drinks; manages weather and road conditions; navigates with route sheet and cycle computer, and assesses and responds to the sounds and sights of wind, traffic, pavement, and bike. Some response is intentional. Some is autonomic. Some is trained. Some of these things happen to the rider.

Some of them are the rider.

* * *

The morning had been a hammer-fest, but in the middle of this 125-mile Pac Tour day, we came upon a section of the road under construction. For well over a mile, the comfortable, wide-shouldered highway vanished, leaving a single lane graded down to a rocky, washboard surface. This surface was covered with fine-grained, slippery sand, the kind of sand that when wet makes mud so sticky it can pull your shoes off. This day, though, it was dry as Texas pavement on a summer afternoon. Passage through the construction zone was controlled by signals, and vehicles collected in a long line on the pavement at either end, waiting their turn. There was no alternate route. At the green light I started off, accelerating as the endless row of cars and semi-trucks going in my direction roared past, throwing plumes of dust into the air that settled on glasses and clothes, the backwash of the big rigs swirling riders and sand together. After the last car a silence descended, ethereal in contrast to the clamor just passed. I hammered along. The bike was jumping around, bounding off the uneven surface, sliding on the dust, fishtailing in the softer spots, tires squealing as sand slipped away under rubber, balance and speed battling for priority in the microeconomy of my attention. I kept looking ahead for what I knew was coming, and then it was there; the plume of

dust from the oncoming traffic. I made myself big and small as they sped past in the opposite direction, my life held by this group of strangers until a fortunate wide spot allowed escape from the dust of their passage. The tension melted from my shoulders. They passed; once again it was quiet, and the road was mine alone.

Prepare the body, prepare the bike, prepare the mind, have a plan. Trust the preparation, trust the plan, and the ride completes itself.

* * *

California Highway 70 through the Feather River Canyon is two lanes, narrow and shoulderless, a brief imposition by man into a landscape otherwise moving in geological rhythms. At the canyon's mouth by Oroville are tall moraines of mine tailings, detritus of the rapacious hydraulic mining of centuries past. Second-growth Northern Sierra forests sweep down steep mountainsides until they can't find purchase on the vertical granite walls deep in the canyon. The highway is a monument to early twentieth-century engineering. The road moves back and forth across the river, more or less trading sides with the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad; at Tobin road and rail cross each other on intersecting bridges over a loud set of rapids, the rail's trusses flying high over the road's. The canyon leads to the lowest pass crossing the Sierra Nevada and train traffic is constant, but as a single-track line, there are long, trainless breaks. Once each day in each direction, the California Zephyr Express makes its way through the canyon, a last remnant of our most civilized mode of communal travel. There is a string of small hydropower plants about every ten miles all the way up, turning the river's motion into electricity. Flat space is at such a premium that several of the plants bridge the road and traffic moves underneath, the road's edge right up against the rushing spillway.

In daytime, this California Scenic Highway is populated by cars and RVs, big rigs and logging trucks operated by drivers who, perhaps unintentionally, can drive terror into the little dots of Spandex coming up in their windshields. Earlier in the day each of the one hundred riders on this six hundred-kilometer event had labored up the gentle but relentlessly rising road in ninety-degree heat. I rode from one tree to the next, where a paltry pool of shade allowed two seconds of sun-free coasting. There was no respite,

BRECKENRIDGE

Leisha Douglas

If you weren't used to the thin air, it could hurt to breathe. Jagged mountains extended above the tree line. Old avalanche scars fissured through clusters of blue spruce and balsams. Clear cold streams wound through willows. Gentian and paintbrush nodded in the constant breeze.

Maggie rode alone on her muscled sorrel horse that picked its way along elk and deer trails. She sang to soothe the horse or so she thought: show tunes her actress-grandmother taught her from her days on Broadway: "My funny Valentine, sweet comic Valentine" or "They're writing songs of love but not for me."

She spent most summer days singing, wandering on horseback, and avoiding family. In early August, Basque shepherds drove sheep down from alpine pastures toward the valley floor, camping in their greasy discolored tents along the way. They invited her to lunch on lamb chops and potatoes blackened and crusty from the open fire; wiry men with faces creased from so much time in the elements, she couldn't tell their ages. They spoke little English, so lunch was mostly silent except when she expressed how delicious the food was in stumbling schoolgirl French. They hesitatingly smiled, revealing broken, misshapen teeth.

Maggie trusted them more than other men spotted during her rides. She steered clear of them as much as possible, though it wasn't difficult given the territory. Back then, the Tenmile Range hadn't been developed back then. Only small tracts of Peak 8 and 9 sported ski trails and empty chairlifts. Main Street was a dirt road.

Route 9, the only asphalt, ran from the main highway in Frisco past the tailing piles left by 19th century placer mining past the Gold Pan Saloon to the rodeo grounds on the town's edge. Joe Schneider used to stable horses including hers behind his gas station in town, but the newly elected mayor, Allen Stone, an Eastern transplant, had big plans for development. Horses

however, from this eternity in the small chain ring, and my legs felt like spaghetti when the canyon finally topped out in the Genesee Valley. I pedaled slowly to Greenville, the turnaround point, where volunteers at the check-in station welcomed riders with chili, home-baked cookies, freezing cold sodas and ice. Blessed ice!

Nighttime in the canyon is a different story. Traffic is minimal, and it's often silent but for the rushing of the river and the surprisingly natural squealing and clacking of the long trains as they move slowly up and down the tracks. By the time I recovered, ate, prepared myself for nighttime riding and left Greenville, dusk had set in. I was decked out in reflective gear, my taillights shining brightly, the hub generator putting out a steady three watts to the headlight whose beam brightened as twilight turned to night. I spun downhill gently with the river, sixty miles past Tobin to the foot of the Jarbo Gap, the last climb before the final drop into Oroville and the flat Central Valley run back to Davis. After the difficult labor of the day, spinning the pedals down this gentle but consistent grade was effortless. There was even a tailwind. Deep in the canyon the railroad continued through the narrow section as the road leaves the river to climb the gap. I expected the climb to hurt but was amazed when the painlessness continued. My legs flew around at a high cadence. I felt the ball of my hip joint rolling smoothly in its socket, pelvis stable, my body's weight settled calmly on the saddle. I was in an altered state, humbled by the ease of my passage, graced by the perfection of my effort. The hills turned to meadows as I climbed toward the summit. The moon appeared, round and full. On an impulse I turned off my headlight; the bright moonlight suffused the night. A rabbit ran across the road and the moon guided my wheel away from it. The tall grasses glowed silver, waving in the gentle breeze. Moonlight sparkled on the upturned leaves of the California oaks. Were they following the moon's light? A coyote barked and the world dropped away; I rode into the heavens, lit from the outside by the moon and from the inside by a numinous explosion of gratitude. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever."

When I rolled over the top, around 2 a.m., the moon was approaching the horizon. Shadows were lengthening. I turned my headlight back on, shifted to my biggest gear, and attacked the smooth, wide, high-speed descent of the Jarbo Gap.

had to go. One day as she picked up the family mail, he confronted her at the one room post office, warning that Main Street would soon be paved and tickets would be issued for manure on the street.

Joe's relocated stable, several miles away from town on the road to Fairplay, backed onto National Forest land. She couldn't walk there like she could when it was in town. She had to ask one of her parents to drive her. To ask them for anything made her a target for her mother's irritability and her father's sarcasm.

The geography was unfamiliar as well. Quandary Peak and Peak were too far south for her to explore previously. The valley floor narrowed at its western end, so the stable with its open stalls and green tack room door were often shadowed by steep peaks rising on both sides of the road. The turbulent Blue River ran close to the highway here, percolating silence with the rush and clash of water against boulders. Other than the occasional car that descended off Hoosier Pass, people did not frequent this end of the valley. Joe's nephew, Sam, manned the stable during the day, grooming the horses, maintaining tack, or lassoing fence posts to practice for the annual August rodeo. A tall, taciturn 18-year-old, he'd nod and grumble, "Morning, Maggie," upon her arrival but left her alone to get Rapscaillon ready. For the first few weeks, she explored the scrubby sagebrush flats along the river and the other side of highway learning landmarks like a solitary lightning-tinged balsam at the far end of the pasture or the circle of three aspens beyond which a faint trail ascended.

She couldn't pinpoint what prompted her to follow what looked like an old, unused mining road upward. It was more a pull than a conscious thought. Initially, the trail was bounded on each side with scraggly lodge pole pines and bushy firs. She dodged overhanging branches clinging closely to Rapscaillon's neck. As they climbed higher, rivulets of stone and shale left from the spring runoff made for precarious footing. She caught herself holding her breath and praying that Rapscaillon didn't stumble or falter. It wasn't as if anyone knew where she was if an accident occurred. No one ever asked and she didn't volunteer much other than "I'll be out riding."

After several miles, the trail emerged into an alpine meadow. A stream bubbled somewhere to her left where Quandary's barren shoulder rose abruptly above the tree line. Far up the

mountainside, there were skeletal outlines of mining cabins and the telltale scars of crude mines. Who were the men who weathered such extremes of altitude and isolation? Maggie couldn't imagine being dogged enough to live as they had for the uncertain promise of gold. Both she and Rapscaillon were sweating from the exertion of their steady climb. *A drink for both of us*, she thought, patting his neck and reining him toward the hidden stream. As they crossed over a dusty rise, she was astonished to see a well-kempt log cabin perched streamside in a small clearing. The cabin even had glass windows, incongruous for this remote location. A chunk of a log by the door had an axe driven into it. What looked like a rudimentary clothesline ran from the cabin to the branch of a big aspen.

She thought of turning away, but a glance at the willow-enclosed stream indicated this was easiest access. Rapscaillon pulled toward the water, so she let him go. She slid off when they reached the stream, holding the reins so he could drink. She was just about to move upstream and take a drink herself when the cabin door opened, revealing a tousled brown-haired man in jeans and a blue flannel shirt. "I can see you're both thirsty. Help yourselves," He said as she froze. "Good-looking horse you got there," he leaned against the doorway.

Maggie sputtered a thank-you and began to kneel to cup water in her hand.

"Wait a minute, I'll get you a cup," he said and went back inside.

She stood poised, ready to leap into the saddle though her mouth was dry. He reappeared and ambled over to hand her a battered tin mug. He backed off and seated himself on a log next to what seemed to be a fire pit. She discreetly studied him over the cup's rim. He rested his big hands on his knees and looked toward the stream for a few moments before turning his gaze to her. "Name's Alex, by the way. What's yours?"

"Maggie," she hesitated, "and this is Rapscaillon."

His eyes wrinkled as he slowly smiled, "I'm honored."

How old was he? She wondered. *Did he live up here?*

"This is my father's hunting cabin," he said, as if reading her mind, "we had it in the family long before they made this national forest so we were able to retain it. My dad can't handle this altitude anymore so I come up alone whenever I need a break." Then almost

apologetically, he added, "I'm not much of a hunter."

Maggie felt relieved by his revelation. Although she rationalized that hunting animals was acceptable if one ate them, she couldn't imagine killing an animal for food herself.

"I figure I'd eat grass, bushes, and probably starve to death before I could kill an animal," she volunteered.

"Well, it doesn't look like you packed much of a lunch," he said, pointing at her saddle which lacked saddle bags. She flushed and toed the ground with her boot. She had taken the first opportunity for a ride to the stable that morning and forgotten to make herself a sandwich. He stood up and stretched. "What do you say I go see what I can rustle up? I packed a fair amount of food in here a few days ago, and I'm sure I can come up with something. I'll give you a rope so you can tie Rapscaillon and let him graze."

As he walked around back of the cabin, she noticed he was well-built without being overly muscular and comfortable in his body unlike the high school boys she knew. *Of course*, she thought, *he's older. How much older?* She scoffed at herself, telling herself that his age was irrelevant. The more important issue was her safety since she knew nothing about this man. She was hungry though.

"Here," he returned, handing her a long, thick rope before heading for the door, "come on in whenever you're ready."

She dawdled to give herself time to access the situation as she located a good spot to secure Rap. Alex didn't seem threatening and she was curious about this valley, how and when he came here. "Wait here for me," she said, stroking Rap in his sweet spot right behind his ear. He lowered his head to her as if listening to every word. Her rationale part scoffed at the thought but still, some part of her always felt she and Rap were specially connected. For one thing, if anyone except Maggie tried to ride him, he misbehaved and often bucked. Joe sold him cheaply to her father because Rap was unsuitable for tourists. Joe surmised that whoever first saddled Rap broke him badly. Their first year together Maggie rode him with a hackamore because he refused to get anywhere near a bit. Back then, whenever he decided to take off, her only control was to stay on until he ran himself out. "What we've been through together," she said as she easily slipped the bit out of his mouth and the bridle off, remembering many days she couldn't get close to his head. He softly blew through his nostrils as if acknowledging her before

dropping his head to graze.

The cabin was one large room with two small windows opposite each other and a loft with a ladder. A blackened potbellied stove stood in the middle. Alex hovered over the sink and flashed her a smile when she entered. "Here, help yourself." He plunked some cracked plates and a bowl of green grapes and apples on a small table with two chairs set next to a front window. A chunk of what looked like cheddar rested on a wooden chopping block along with saltines. "Leek potato soup coming up." He stirred the contents on a gas burner. "I keep a stash of those freeze-dried Knorr soups here."

"This place is outfitted well," Maggie observed. "How did you get all this up here?"

Alex chuckled, "It took years actually. This place has been in my family for thirty years. You could say I am the third generation since my grandfather bought and logged the claim for lumber to build the cabin."

He poured the soup and brought two steaming mugs to the table, then settled in the chair opposite her. "My dad and I put in the glass windows, the cistern, and outdoor shower. We hauled them up here on an all-terrain vehicle. There's another old mining road that runs over the ridge and eventually into the parking lot at the ranger station on Hoosier Pass. That was our entry point whenever we had to bring anything heavy up here. Mostly we hike..." He corrected himself, "I should I say, I hike in with a pack."

For a minute, he looked away out the window. Maggie felt as if she had inadvertently intruded into a private conversation. She sipped her soup, waiting. She was good at waiting, organizing herself around another. Alex cleared his throat and turned back to her, "What is a young lady such as yourself doing alone in these mountains?"

Something old-fashioned about him, gentlemanly, like he was older than his age, she thought. She didn't realize until this moment that she liked this quality, that somehow it increased her trust. "My folks have a vacation house in Breckenridge. We spend summers and school vacations here."

"So you're not a local."

"Well," she hesitated, then said defensively, "I'm not a tourist. We've been coming here for years. Besides, I will be a local."

"You will be?"

"Yes, I'm applying to Colorado College and CU. They're my first choices. I'll use the Breckenridge house on weekends." She actually wasn't certain if her parents would give her the key in their absence, but she was eager to demonstrate her autonomy to this man. "I am sure I'll get into one of them, if not both." It was more to reassure herself than inform him. Until now, she hadn't considered another possibility.

"Sounds like a plan," he said, smiling. She was unsure whether he was mocking her or not. Confused, she munched on cheese and a cracker, deciding to risk a question of her own.

"What do you do?"

"Livelihood, you mean?" He clarified. She nodded affirmatively, studying his well-proportioned hands and tan forearms. She met his gaze for a minute as he answered but was too uncomfortable to maintain it.

"I'm doing research...Colorado School of Mines...one of my profs hired me right after graduation two years ago now. The project may be finished in another year, or we'll run out of funding but right now it is good gig."

So he was at least six or seven years older, Maggie calculated, then scoffed at herself for doing so. It wasn't like this was anything but a random encounter. "Are you a geologist?"

"Not officially yet. I will be soon as soon as I finish my thesis sometime this fall. I guess I'm a chip off the old proverbial block so to speak." He gave a little laugh, "I mean my grandfather was a miner. The funny thing is though, I am trying to find ways to reverse some of the damage former mining sites did to the environment."

His self-deprecating humor was appealing. Though decidedly good-looking, he wasn't arrogant. She was beginning to relax in his company. "My dad wanted to be a geologist before the war," she offered.

"What happened?"

She studied his face for a minute, trying to assess if he was really interested or merely polite. His gaze was quizzical.

"I'm not exactly sure. I know the war interrupted his college years." She thought her father seemed so alive when they were in the mountains but became stiff and remote when he returned to his job in Chicago. "I think my grandfather talked him into becoming

a businessman when he returned from Italy. Dad was in the tenth mountain division," she added as an afterthought, as if that would be some sort of explanation.

"Those guys had it rough from what I've heard. They trained not too far from here."

"Yeah...he was on the Italian front, but that's about all I know cuz he doesn't talk about it." She wanted to add that her father didn't talk to her much about anything but stopped herself. For years she tried to secure her father's affection and admiration by skiing, hiking, and fishing with him, just like her brother Dan did, but it never brought them any closer. Horseback riding had become her solace and her means of avoiding what felt like her father's obvious preference for Dan.

"Those guys only talk to each other about the war. I guess they think that no one else could understand," Alex said as if to comfort her, then added, "My uncle was a vet too, but in the Pacific. In my opinion, what they went through to defend this country makes it important for us to choose paths we enjoy and contribute to the overall well-being." He sat back and ran a hand through his thick tawny hair. "Oh, sorry...I didn't mean to lecture... It's just that I find the complaints of these anti-war hippy types superficial."

Maggie didn't know what she believed about war and the current Vietnam problem. It just seemed wrong for people to maim and kill each other, though she knew that there was always much more to it...political, economic, historic roots that she had little knowledge of nor desire to understand. It was a topic her brother and father liked to discuss, both of them spouting facts to substantiate their opinion...the number of ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, the merits of a ground versus air war, what President Nixon said what he said and why. She squirmed in her chair fearing exposure of her lack of knowledge and interest. Current affairs were a subject by which she felt defeated because she couldn't retain nor recall facts to argue effectively.

"Hey, what do you say we toast?" Alex grinned, got up from the table, and began to rummage on a shelf, coming back with a bottle and two glasses. "You ever had port?"

She shook her head, then asked, "Toast what?"

"The fact that we are both going after what has meaning for us. You're applying to the schools you want to go to, and I like what I

am doing. We're lucky, you know."

His jubilation was catching. She hadn't considered her college choices from this perspective.

"Besides, you're going to be a local soon," he added, pouring a small amount for each of them.

Deep burgundy liquid blackened the glass. Red wine with dinner was a ritual at home. Her father believed in the European method of introducing children to wine at home so they learn their limits in a safe place. This, however, was something new. She sniffed the fragrant muskiness of the port before sipping. Rich, syrupy taste descended all the way to her stomach.

"You like?" Alex studied her quizzically.

"It's delicious!" The port warmed her core. She thought of winter and curling up on the orange couch in front of a fire in the fireplace while snow fell softly. Rap's whinny interrupted her reverie. "This is so pleasant but I need to get going." Time had escaped her. Alex took another swig and shrugged.

"Too bad... It was nice having some company up here. Doesn't happen much anymore." His face was frank not insincere like she had expected. She stopped herself from putting a comforting hand on his.

"Rap and I will stop in again now that we know the way," She volunteered, inwardly scoffing at the idea he would like a visit from an insecure high school girl who didn't have much to say.

"I never know when I'm coming up...depends on my schedule and the weather. I can't get in here if it is stormy."

She nodded in understanding as she pushed back her chair. Part of her wanted to stay.

"Anyway," he continued, "you're welcome to use the place, even if I'm not here if you're up this way. There's a key under the outdoor thermometer. Just replace whatever you eat...or drink." He waved the port bottle merrily, his apparent loneliness now gone. "Actually, I'd appreciate if you'd look in once and a while. I've heard that some of those so-called hippies have been squatting in mining cabins around here."

"S-s-sure," she stammered, disarmed by his generosity and trust. "Thank you so much...for everything!" She leaned toward him and swiftly kissed his cheek. Embarrassed by her sudden effusiveness, she propelled herself out the door while planting her

Stetson back on her thick, long hair. Rap was no longer grazed but stood head up as if ready to go. She untied him, slipped on his bridle, coiled the rope, and lead him around front. Alex stood on the porch with his hands in his pockets.

"Hey...it's been my pleasure," he came over, took the rope, and handed her a piece of paper with a phone number. "I hope to see more of you when you're local."

Was he flirting or just being friendly? She couldn't tell. Confused, she swung up onto the saddle. Rap pranced, ready to move out. She wheeled around and waved at Alex before trotting out of the clearing. Puffy clouds were beginning to scud across the sky, signs that the usual summer afternoon rain was on its way. The rich port taste lingered in her mouth. What did it mean...being local? She and her family had been coming here for summers and winter vacations as long as she could remember. Her father knew these mountains like the back of his hand. As a family, they had hiked and/or camped all over this territory. Alex, whose land ownership dated to Gold Rush, was he more local? How about Joe and his son, Jimmy Joe, born in the valley? What about hippies who moved here to live off the land or the new mayor itching to turn Breckenridge into a skiing mecca?

As they descended, the fragrance of sage began to mingle with pine. Rocking in the saddle as Rap carefully picked his way downhill, she hummed. If being local meant feeling like one belonged, she had never felt so at home any other time or place.

FABRICE POUSSIN



Double Take

LOVINGLY GRATEFUL: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSS GAY

Laine Derr

Recipient of the 2016 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award for *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* (2015), Ross Gay shapes language, roots fused with variegated ash, to chronicle experiences, the profane crafted sacred through simple gestures of doing and undoing, buttoning and unbuttoning, while resisting the need to dissect his artistry with “an X-Acto knife.” When asked what role literary technique plays in his poems, Gay responded, “Oh, that’s not for me to answer. That’s the reader’s thing.” As an admirer of Ross Gay’s essays and collections of poetry, I find a joyful strength in his words and was honored when he agreed to the following interview.

Laine Derr: In your essay “Some Thoughts on Mercy,” you write of an imagination corrupted by how we negatively perceive others and, ultimately, ourselves. Has your writing, an act of lyric beauty, allowed you to build community by breaking free from “fear, anger, paralysis, disappointment, despair”?

Ross Gay: Well, it’s probably helped me to know myself better, I hope anyway. And I suspect knowing oneself is a way of knowing other people. I haven’t broken free of fear etc, but I have hopefully changed my relationship to them. And, yes, I hope my writing in this way—this self-exploration way, self-exploration as people exploration way—does help me grow community.

LD: In the poems “The Cleave” and “Thank You,” as with a number of others, you touch upon themes of grief and rapture; through your use of thematic repetition, infused with textures and tonal variations, are you creating a balance between sadness and a sense of joy?

RG: I think I am trying to explore and investigate joy, which contains sadness, as I am understanding it today.

LD: As you write in *Lace & Pyrite*, "I want to know. Yes, today I am on my belly / for that scant perfume, this invisible parade / of dying and blooming." Is this your ideal inspiration as a writer, to release beauty, its fragrance, into the world?

RG: That's one of my hopes. To attend to what I love.

LD: In "The Cleave," you open the poem, "The ache you speak of feeling / when you leave your sleeping child, let / it swell into a wail ageless as the wind"; does your poetic voice give thought to this expression of life, the wail?

RG: Probably. Yeah, my poems are probably exploring that all the time. I've been writing versions of the same poem for three books, it seems. Oh well!

LD: What is your process of putting together a collection? How has it changed, if it has, from *Against Which* to *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*?

RG: *Against Which* was the best poems I had organized with help from Ruth Ellen Kocher and Patrick Rosal and Curtis Bauer and a few others. I had no clue, so thank god they helped me. The second book was as I said above. A very built book. Everything is organized and has a kind of symmetry that actually surprises me when I go back and look at it (I tend not to be as organized or symmetrical as that book is, unless I'm swinging kettlebells or doing a basketball workout). The recent book, *Catalog*, was somewhere in the middle. I had an idea of how I might organize a book, but I didn't want to make a perfect thing like I think I kind of wanted to for my second book. You know, sort of.

LD: Regarding "Bringing the Shovel Down" and "Again," from your collection *Bringing the Shovel Down* (2011), what makes you decide upon a poem's structure, its potential need for reinterpretation, transformation?

RG: I try to listen to it. I try to listen to what the poem is asking to be. I mean there is a story with those. I wrote the first one, in which an act of violence occurs, and thought it was a good poem, and read it aloud in Pittsburgh, and realized that it was an act of violence. The poem was an act, and maybe that was the first time I realized

this in a true and abiding way. Someone was really devastated by the poem, which was fine, but in this particular case I didn't want to have this act of violence, this poem, in the world without a counterpoint, or a correction. So I wrote a poem in which the act of violence doesn't occur because the protagonist sees something differently. Which feels to me true. Having both of those poems gave me the problem of having to decide which one to put in the book, and then my friends Pat and Elaine said maybe both of them belong, which I never would've considered had they not said it. That then became the ethical structure and need of the book. It had to get from blindness to sight in the course of a book.

LD: If we can venerate the ground from which many of your poems originate, speaking of your involvement with the Bloomington Community Orchard, are you hopeful that we may all blush with gratitude and love?

RG: If anything I do ever makes someone feel gratitude or love I am glad. I am lovingly grateful I mean!

As for advice for future writers, Ross Gay left me with the following words: "Let love, what you love, be your real engine."

FERTILE GROUND

Wyatt Bond

I learned about shadows from NUCLEAR VAPORIZATION
photons smashing through flesh
leaving atomic carbon burns on brick walls

shadows holding hands
shadows weeping
shadows looking skyward at the ghosts of reflective birds

I thought about touching the walls,
hugging the scores of phantoms
blackened carelessly in time – surely the soul must reside there as well

But what of the shadows under my feet?
Could I not love the ground? How far down
would I need to dig before the haunting
gave way to soil? Clean dirt from which grotesqueries
would be cast out or aborted by a forgiving earth.

Green is not the color of forgiveness. It is the color of forgetting.

DEVIL MACHINES

Robert Joe Stout

Glimmers of pre-dawn sunlight plaited the tile and lamina rooftops of Santa Cruz Guuze Benda as the explosions of homemade skyrockets burst above them. Trumpets blared, shouts of greeting, clarinets and timpani evoked the first notes of traditional Oaxaca calenda music. Rebozos tight around their faces, village grandmothers clung to sons' and nephews' arms as they stumbled along unpaved streets to join the throng. Rambunctious eight-year-olds yanked girl companions' braids, young mothers swung blanket-wrapped babies in shawls tied around their shoulders, corpulent amas de casa waved wreaths of flowers on long poles. Six a.m. in the morning and the 2013 version of the annual peregrination of the fourteenth of December from Santa Cruz Guuze Benda—Santa Cruz de las Pescadores—had begun.

A celebration that originated long before the Spain subdued southern Mexico—but in 2013, also an act of defiance. Santa Cruz had become a divided community since I'd first witnessed the calendas and processions several years earlier—a division that had triggered violence, denunciations, lawsuits and discrimination. For centuries virtually forgotten not only by public officials but by the cultural and commercial activity in the southernmost Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the "People of the Clouds," the Binnizà of area surrounding Santa Cruz, had maintained their communal way of life on the shores of the Pacific Ocean's Laguna Superior a few kilometers from the city of Juchitàn de Zaragoza, a lifestyle centered on fishing the lagoon's fecund waters and cultivating small plots of corn, melons and fruit.

That changed when the air that the Binnizà breathed became their enemy. The bii bioxo—the wind blowing off the Pacific—was harnessable, twenty-first century technicians and engineers insisted, technicians, engineers and investors not from Juchitàn, not from Oaxaca, but from Europe. They came with money—money paid to Mexico's federal government for

the right to construct wind generators, power lines, electric cables, chain-link fences, waste depositories. Their investments, they predicted, would generate enormous profits, profits from electricity that would be transmitted to other foreign investors establishing manufacturing and commercial enterprises in Salina Cruz, Juchitàn and other parts of the Isthmus.

The Binnizà objected. Theirs was communal land without private-plot ownership, land shared by all. Lacking the money that the Spanish developer Gas Fenosa brought to the Isthmus, the Binniza sought support from the laws governing Oaxaca and Mexico. The laws, they discovered, applied unequally to those with money and those without.

The state government sent armed police, not to force Gas Fenosa to obey laws governing ecological damage and public consultations but to intimidate and arrest Binnizà protesters. The Binnizà responded by blockading roads leading to the laguna and refusing to let Fenosa workmen cross their property.

The loyal Binnizà, that is. Some succumbed to Gas Fenosa and government bribes. They'd become "moderns" who'd turned away from the Binnizà's traditional lifestyle and did not join the December 14 pilgrimage wending its way from Santa Cruz to the shores of the laguna, although representatives of other indigena groups and a contingent of European and Mexico City ecology proponents accompanied the faithful followers of Binnizà laws and customs.

Crosses bearing the traditional Catholic INRI above huge wreaths of pink and white flowers, music playing, children darting in and out among their parents and grandparents, over one thousand Santacruzanos and supporters, neighbors and friends from affiliated villages surged towards Rancho Chicu Chente, the first posada on the route to the Laguna Mayor. For the first time, the majority of the peregrinos refused to enter Francisco Lòpez's property even though he and his family were ready to receive them. Lòpez was one of the moderns: He'd rented his land and supported the wind energy developers. Many among Binnizà that opposed the foreign intrusion insisted that Lòpez was involved in the recruitment and financing of a band of young hoodlums who were harassing Binnizà defenders of communal property.

Along the carretera Juchitàn-Union Hidalgo towards Parada

Guadalupe, the next stop, Binnizà leaders cautioned everyone to stay together and not respond to intimidations as they passed Gas Fenosa installations. The peregrinos moved slowly along the once well-paved road that now was pitted with huge potholes, washouts and sections of missing asphalt. Trucks carrying tons of cement, of gravel and heavy machinery to Gas Fenosa's holdings had almost destroyed the rural thoroughfare a priest who sympathized with the anti-Fenosa project explained.

"It's that way with these foreign firms. They use facilities they don't pay to maintain—roads, water, agricultural land. Their only interest is making money."

He gestured towards property fenced by Gas Fenosa that once had hosted cornfields. Machinations by local political caciques had effected land use changes that permitted industrial development without consulting residents, he explained. Through contacts with state officials in the capital city of Oaxaca, Gas Fenosa representatives maintained a propaganda barrage about how the wind energy project would stimulate employment and the economy, benefits that in no way were visible to the Binnizà who experienced only agricultural loss, ruined roads and a contaminated lagoon.

During the procession Binnizà marchers pointed out growth deadened by discarded lubricating oil, thousands of liters of which were used to keep the wind generators operating. Used oil discharged into the lagoon had fouled its waters, killing fish and sea life and depriving Binnizà pescadores of their most accessible fishing grounds. What had been agricultural land had become islands of concrete on which the generators were built separated by corridors of dust-blown land eroded by vehicle traffic and waste deposits.

The procession again divided as it reached Parada Guadalupe, one of the principal entrance points to Gas Fenosa's wind generation project. Cyclone fencing stretched across what once had been communal land; armed police stood on each side of the grated entrance. (The police, explained a local journalist, were PABIC—auxiliary bank, industrial and commercial police contracted by private corporations from local law enforcement agencies.) Although they would not let the procession pass through Gas Fenosa's "private" property, several policia snapped photos of the procession. Others offered styrofoam cups filled with water to

the marchers.

A woman with a bright yellow flower pinned to her glistening black hair spat, "Don't drink it! Who knows what they've dumped in that water!" Others, more acquiescent, cautioned "They're locals, they're only doing their job," to which the woman with the yellow flower and several others denounced, "Dirty work! They're traitors out to destroy us!"

On a rise overlooking newly constructed administrative buildings a Fenosa employee stopped one of the participants, a young member of the International Peace Brigade, and demanded to know who he was and why he was photographing company property. Unintimidated the brigadista snapped, "Take your hands off me! I have a right to take pictures!" The employee cursed him for being a "meddling foreigner." A matronly, sharp-voice marcher scoffed, "the Spanish owners are locals and the Binnizà and their guests invaders from outer space!" The employee backed off to watch the procession reassemble and wend its way past Gas Fenosa's forest of newly constructed white towers with their three-bladed propellers that protruded above the tangled growth of the approaches to the lagoon.

As they had at Chicú Chente and Parada Guadalupe the thousand-plus marchers separated into those-who-entered and those-who-didn't when they arrived at Mariano Santana's ranch. Like Francisco Lòpez, former municipal president Santana was considered a "modern," a "vende patria" (one who's sold out the nation) because he authorized land use changes without consulting the owners of the properties and presumably profited financially from doing so. Santana and his associates acquired and rented what had been communal land to Gas Fenosa, insisted university investigator Justo Bermudez. Santana's ranch included a private zoo and recently constructed modern buildings which detractors considered proof of his enrichment while holding public office.

Both those who took the floral-decorated INRI cross into Santana's ranch and those who didn't paused to rest before initiating the last leg of their pilgrimage to the Ermita de Santa Cruz on the shore of the lagoon, a trek made difficult because Gas Fenosa had closed the road marchers traditionally used to reach the holy site. When they finally arrived, the peregrinos realized that no longer was the Ermita an isolated sanctuary where Mother Earth

and Father Sea merged tranquilly beneath a cloud-swept sky. Gas Fenosa wind generators peered down at the congregation like huge Cyclops' eyes.

"Invaders!" "Devil-machines!" various participants called them. They had witnessed Gas Fenosa's moving onto their communal land, had seen them erect the huge wind machines, and had decided to hold their celebration in spite of them. "There was nothing we could do," the woman with the yellow flower in her hair sighed. For hundreds of years, long since the Spanish first set foot on Oaxaca's southern coast in the sixteenth century, the processions to the Guela Be'ne' had proceeded without interruption despite wars, conquests, hurricanes and territorial changes. The celebration that had begun as an indigenous peoples rite and been incorporated as a Catholic ceremony after the Spanish invasion "is more important to our lives and souls" than invader towers that pitted the people one against another. "I think they want us to disappear the way the fish have done," a participant shrugged. Oil seeping into the lagoon had made the once fecund fishing grounds a Dead Sea. A Binnizà spokesman called Gas Fenosa's accumulation of over 2,000 hectares "an ecocidio -- ecological murder -- protected by the Mexican government." He claimed that seventy of the company's more than 250 wind generators had been installed illegally on communal land. State officials had promised to investigate, but the investigation had taken place with Gas Fenosa representatives and the findings fluttered into oblivion.

Despite the cyclops towers, the police-guarded land, the rich ranchos of the traitors who cared only about money, the peregrinos arrival at the lagoon meant time to relax, share food, talk, take naps. For the children time to run, tease, splash into the shallow waters. Many of the participants spread blankets and petates on the sand in preparation for the two days that they and their supporters would spend in adoration of the Padre Mar and the Madre Tierra. Forget Gas Fenosa, forget the traitor caciques, the police, the bureaucrats in the capital city of Oaxaca, it was a holy occasion. There was music, there was food, there was laughter.

During the celebrations, a precocious ten-year-old, barefooted and shirtless, thrust his hands through his wet hair and gestured towards the windmill towers visible a few hundred meters away.

"This is the last year of the peregrination Santa Cruz Guuze Benda!" he proclaimed. "Next year we'll call it the 'Santa Cruz Eòlica!' (Santa Cruz wind power). Not everyone joined his laughter and many who did gritted their teeth. The wind generators, the transmission towers, the power lines, the electrical cables were the new gods their faces seemed to say.

The December 14 peregrinations became increasingly difficult after 2012 and altercations with Gas Fenosa hirelings increased. Truckloads of armed PABIC responding to Gas Fenosa and government of Oaxaca orders harassed the marchers, escorting them "for their own safety!" a PABIC sergeant jeered. Heavily loaded Gas Fenosa trucks roared up behind the marchers, forcing them off the rutted roadway; the gates of many of the ranchos were barred and locked.

The Binnizà openly called Gas Fenosa operatives and their hired police "the enemy" and refused to submit. Aided by pro-ecology professionals the resisters documented illegal procedures by which the Spanish corporation had acquired the land on which the wind generators were operating. In January 2013, the courts ordered suspension of the project. Gas Fenosa and state government attorneys appealed.

According to residents Gas Fenosa operatives refused to comply with the suspension. Trucks carrying material and workers continued to roll onto the communal land bordering the lagoon. Santa Cruz residents and Binnizà and Ikoojts neighbors banded together to form the Popular Assembly of the Juchiteco People to formally oppose construction of megaprojects on communal lands. They insisted that the contracts signed by Santana and his vende patria associates were illegal and they barricaded the shambles of a road leading to Gas Fenosa's holdings, triggering violent reprisals from state-paid golpeadores (literally "those who beat").

In late March of the same year, attackers identified as non-uniformed police broke into and destroyed a community radio station in Juchitàn whose broadcasts were supporting the anti—Gas Fenosa advocates. A few days later state police attempted to dislodge the barricaders and on April third arrested Mariano Lòpez, one of those instrumental in organizing resistance to the foreign corporation's takeover of communal land. Public protest forced authorities to release Lòpez but apprehension orders for other

Assembly members remained in force.

In July, Assembly activist Hèctor Regalado reported that after men he recognized as Fenosa-paid pistoleros threatened him with death, company representatives tried to bribe him away from Assembly participation. He refused and on July 21 was attacked and murdered. The Popular Assembly identified the assailants as Gas Fenosa hit men accompanied by PABIC police. The Assembly denounced the attacks and announced that it held "the state government of Oaxaca and the state attorney general's office responsible for the wave of death threats and aggressions."

A visiting human rights advocate described the confrontations as a "David versus Goliath scenario." It is one that's being repeated throughout Mexico as citizens organize to defend laws that the national and state governments sidestep or refuse to enforce. Few argue that clean energy development such as wind-generated electrical power shouldn't be encouraged but when projects like that of Gas Fenosa transgress local and national laws and violently disrupt community life, the processes need to be questioned. Bribes, forgeries, forced displacement and assassinations do not make for "clean energy."

By victimizing important segments of the population they pit "progress" against human rights and force those who refuse to succumb to respond by forming defense committees and taking the law into their own hands. In Mexico to protest has become a crime and more and more people, like the Binnizà, perceive that the government, that foreign intruder operatives like Gas Fenosa, are the enemy.

As Justo Bermudez told me, "They [the government] have the badges, the guns, but they are few. The more victims they create, the more opposition they engender. The tide could turn and the many overwhelm the few despite their guns."

The return to Santa Cruz de los Pescadores and the other Binnizà and Muxe and Ikoojt communities near the city of Juchitan on the sixteenth of December was more muted. Fulfillment, a happy time, but "regrets, many regrets," the matronly woman who'd criticized the Fenosa employee admitted. "We all are so aware of our losses": land, customs, community. To a commentary that the Gas Fenosa invasion was economic and not military the priest picked at loose stands of gray hair and responded, "There has been violence—

too much violence. And I'm afraid there will be more."

Words not spoken without reason. Not only in Santa Cruz Guuze Benda but throughout Oaxaca and southern Mexico indigenous peoples are contesting invasions of their land and traditions by eolic, mining and hydroelectric projects that threaten their rights to live as they choose on land that belongs to them.

SAYORNIS PHOEBE AS MISTRANSLATION

Becka McKay

Age has led my ears
to slaughter. Each bird,

singing, thinks only of its own song.

In a dozen dreams
I could not look at your hands,

as though they were forged of sudden metal,

sharp and unexpected
as the thorn in the throat

of a shrike too eager to impale its prey.

The phoebe's monologue
to the sky's machinery

carries on: two notes up and two notes back,

a searchlight tracing arcs
along night-gutted clouds,

blue lights on the mind's water.

DUANE LOCKE



Sur-Objects 618

BEFORE THE MOMENT WHEN

Noel Sloboda

As a swallowtail, unready
to fold, thrashes in the grip

of a wren, swirls of sunshine
shimmer all along the cinched beak.

The butterfly slows yet struggles still
against the black vice

and the avid hunter cocks his head
as if confused by this denial

of the inevitable—
avian eyes shining like father's

when he nightly pitched
the same question

over his steaming plate, back
into the kitchen, where rough music

of pots and plates paused
long enough for mother

to promise, once again, nothing
was wrong, swearing she

would be finished soon enough
and settle down to join us.

UJASIRI

Michael Keefe

Last night, Chloe dreamed of Ujasiri—the escaped Katanga lioness from the Oregon Zoo. In Chloe’s dream, they’d encountered one another on a dusty savanna sprung forth from the concrete city. Young woman and stray beast had shared a telepathic exchange—wisdom that might guide Chloe through the labyrinth of her displacement. If only she could remember the wise words of that dream.

A stubborn drizzle coated the windows of her Aunt Isidore’s ramshackle Victorian in Southeast Portland. Chloe sat at the lusterless kitchen table, hunched over her laptop and searching for news of Ujasiri. She coughed into the crook of her elbow—rumbling hacks muffled by a thick wool sweater. She felt trapped in the slipstream of time—caught between late night and early morning, between late winter and early spring, between old life and new. She had set herself drift in the marine zone—quiet, cold, and wet. She pressed her mug of hot black coffee to her cheeks.

The previous autumn, Chloe had fled Los Angeles, the land of her birth. Since her arrival in the Pacific Northwest, the muddle of days had collapsed into dense splotches in her lungs. *How could I have abandoned the sun?* Now she’d contracted a cold, or worse. *How could I leave my gig at the ad agency?* Last week, she’d started her third menial job in six months—cashier at a cupcake shop. *How could I...* No, she’d been right to dump her fiancée—that gorgeous liar. She’d discovered his affair with that vapid actress from the tampon commercial, the girl with the broad smile and carefree white apparel. The betrayal had metastasized inside Chloe, leaving dark stains in every corner of her life. She’d considered retreating to the sanctuary of her childhood bedroom, with meals prepared by Mom. But she needed change, she yearned to grow. So, Chloe scissored herself from the map of California and drove to the City of Roses, where life bloomed anew.

Now she paid three hundred dollars a month to live in

her cranky aunt’s sewing room. Izzy the herbalist, Izzy the spinster. Izzy the family weirdo.

Chloe pushed a damp shank of hair across her forehead. She sipped her coffee and browsed local news sites for updates on Ujasiri’s whereabouts. The animal’s means of escape continued to baffle the zookeepers. At the start, they’d suspected abduction. Then a hiker came across the great cat’s prints in the soft, wet earth of Forest Park. The following night, a homeless teenager claimed to have seen a lion near the railroad tracks that fed into Union Station. The next day, a woman discovered the eviscerated body of her pet goat. It hung limp from a nearby oak, like a coat draped on a hook.

Chloe had visited the Zoo the previous month, on a rare sun-break day. In the heart of the lion enclosure, Ujasiri had stood on the lip of a large gray boulder, certain and strong. The lioness, with her sharp bronze eyes, had stripped Chloe bare of all her self-deceptions. She’d found herself reduced to a single thought: *How did I screw up my life so badly?* Held there in the gaze of Ujasiri, a calm new voice had sounded in her mind: *Girl, you chose well to escape the cage of your old life. Why do you now turn your new home into yet another cage?* On that afternoon, Chloe took the lioness for her spirit guide. Ujasiri, a Swahili word, meant courage. An elusive quality, Chloe’s own courage had disappeared somewhere near the Oregon state line.

Across the coffee’s steaming surface, she breathed a thin stream of air, and a new volley of coughs heaved from her chest. From the second floor, old wooden planks creaked. Aunt Izzy: awoken.

In Chloe’s remaining moments of solitude, she clicked and scrolled through one final newsfeed. All the media outlets ran the same video clip of Ujasiri—the golden lioness at prowl, stalking the confines of her pen, amber eyes burning bright. But the website offered no new updates. Nothing since yesterday’s gored goat.

A thicket of gray-brown hair appeared in the doorframe. Izzy shuffled into the kitchen, bundled in her faded purple bathrobe, deep frown-lines scraped into her face. Below the rough surface, the gentle features of Chloe’s mother—Izzy’s younger sister—shone through. Eyes that might turn soft like Mom’s, arms that might embrace.

“Aw, damn. Sorry I woke you up, Iz.”

Her aunt sighed. She lit the burner underneath the tarnished silver kettle, then leaned over Chloe's laptop. "Stick out your tongue."

"Why do you want—?"

The wrinkles around Izzy's eyes tightened. "Tongue."

Chloe threw back her head, dropped her jaw, and thrust out her tongue. She knew she was being petulant, and a new level of shame seeped into her heart. She felt reduced, distanced from the womanhood she'd begun to forge for herself back in Los Angeles. Her spirit spun in retrograde.

Izzy grumbled, then swung open the pantry—her cabinet of mysterious remedies. She retrieved mason jars crammed with dry, brown vegetative things. Her fingers pinched and plucked, depositing the ingredients into a metal tea infuser. Soon, the kitchen smelled like the moldering of a felled tree. Then the kettle whistled—an urgent and lonely sound. Her aunt poured steaming water into the sad ochre mug that Chloe always pushed to the back of the cupboard. From its brim, the infuser's thin silver chain hung like the tail of a drowned rat.

"Hey, Iz, did you hear about that escaped lion?"

"Hmph." Izzy plunked down the steeping tea in front of Chloe. "That cat had it good back in the zoo, where she belonged. And now she's gotten herself into a real mess."

Chloe frowned into the brown liquid. "Yeah, I guess."

"Now, drink up. My tea'll heal you faster than any of that Western medicine crap." And then her aunt was gone—the warped wooden stairs complaining as Izzy retreated back to bed.

Chloe stirred the tea. A sharp and bitter vapor wisped inside her. She sipped from the chipped mug, and felt her face pucker tight. The brew tasted of land, of moss, of bark. It left a tingle, or maybe a sizzle, on her tongue. In three hard swallows, she gulped it down. But the bitterness lingered in her mouth, and the mucous continued to flow. If she appeared at the bakery oozing snot, they would send her home. And, if the illness lingered, her boss might let her go entirely. But Chloe needed that job—for the money, for her pride. *I'm gonna sell some cupcakes today, goddamn it.* Chloe rummaged a bottle of NyQuil from her backpack. With a quick chug of green syrup, she chased away the tea's boggy residue. Her whole body shuddered, like the aftershock of gulping tequila.

Chloe made her way to the mudroom. The brief trek brought a muzzy warmth to her head. Her chest burned, and she leaned against a doorjamb until her breathing eased. In her aunt's filigreed antique mirror, webs of red lines crackled across Chloe's eyes—eyes so wide and bright last summer, now turned weary and dull.

She tugged on her pink rain jacket, its neon floral print chosen as a cheerful talisman against the gray pallor of Portland in wintertime. But the jacket failed to bolster her mood. Her beloved car—a vintage baby blue Volkswagen Beetle—sat idle in Izzy's garage, its engine dead. So, Chloe wrangled her bicycle out the back door, her headlamp illuminating the infinitude of raindrops that fell through the pre-dawn sky. It was a three-block trek to the city bus that would carry her downtown, then another eight blocks to the bakery. That much, she could do.

Chloe pedaled down the empty street, the bike wobbling beneath the unsteady pumping of her legs. From a hundred feet away, she heard the hydraulic cough and groan of the bus as it pulled away from her stop and revved down the street. At that time of the morning, the next bus wouldn't come for half an hour. If she waited, she'd be late. Chloe blinked away the swell of stupid, useless tears. Crying was for California. Chloe snorted hard and spat a thick glob of phlegm onto the gleaming asphalt. Then she pedaled on.

Under dripping trees, she rode past darkened homes. Brave rose bushes bloomed, despite late winter's miserly chill. The city blocks melted away, and she glided riverward. Inside the wells of her skull, dammed-up cavities loosened. A vaporous rush filled her head, and a fragment of Ujasiri's dream message shook free. *I descend from those who roam the Namib Desert, from those who journey to the banks of Lake Upemba to lap its cool blue waters. That great domain is my birthright. Instead, my mother bore me inside the confines of a cage. But now this city of forest and rain is my home. I will adapt to its patterns and laws. I will thrive.*

Thrive. As Chloe swept across the Hawthorne Bridge, she felt so far away from that state of power and grace.

Downtown Portland lay before her, with its ghost of a skyline—yellow windows that hovered against the dark curves of the West Hills. Her body warmed itself against the cold air, and a good sweat gathered along her forearms and scalp. Or maybe a bad sweat. She felt light, and lightheaded. Cars rattled by, their

headlights dancing off the bridge's latticed girders. Glare, glare, glare. Chloe angled away her gaze, toward the Willamette River below. From beneath the bridge, the prow of a Dragon Boat emerged, oars slicing through the blue-black waters. And did the dragon release that roar? No, that must've been the shout of the coxswain.

Down the offramp, Chloe coasted into Waterfront Park. Through the green pitch of dewy grass, she weaved onto the esplanade. The cold rain clung to her face, and her head swooned. A rush of blood, a tilted whirl. She squinted, gripping the handlebars tight, and swung below the western span of the Morrison Bridge. There, in the darkest shadows of the concrete buttresses, her headlamp caught a shank of tawny fur. She broke into a hard skid. Her lungs clamped tight against the frantic hammering of her heart. *Turn around and pedal away. No, make no sudden movements!* Chloe held still, locked in an awkward stance astride her bike.

Ujasiri stood before her. The lioness glared, fierce in the glow. She swished her tail along the ground in a mighty sweep, crisp as the whisking of a broom. And Chloe saw that her hide wasn't so much golden as yellow-brown—like dead grass and parched land. From Ujasiri's throat, a low and rattling growl reverberated.

Chloe willed herself to breathe—the only action she could muster. She measured the distance between bodies: two bounds and one fatal leap. Near enough that the scent of the animal—a musk of dirt, blood, pheromone, and dampened hide—caught in Chloe's throat. She swayed.

But Ujasiri didn't pounce. Instead she bent her head to a lumpen thing wedged between her massive paws. An animal of some kind, belly up and splayed. Ujasiri crunched her jaws into the belly of her prey.

From the embankment behind Chloe, someone shouted. "Oh, no, no!"

Chloe risked a glance over her shoulder.

A hooded man skidded down the slick grass slope. He was bearded and bundled in coats.

Chloe shook her head and raised her hand at the man's approach. This crazed stranger would rile Ujasiri. He'd get them killed.

"Oh, no, no, no, no, no." He stopped at Chloe's side. His odor

of old cigarettes and sweated-out booze commingled with the musk and offal that Ujasiri stirred into the air.

Chloe breathed through her mouth, trying not to retch.

"That's my dog." The homeless man pulled his arms into an X, tight across his chest. His body rocked, heel-to-toe, urgent as a firehouse bell. A system of vibrations, his voice shook, too. "Fucking lion got my Daisy. Oh man, oh man. Oh, Daisy, Daisy, Daisy."

Ujasiri ignored her human observers. She settled down on the concrete, in the dry patch beneath the underpass. She was probably accustomed to people gawking while she ate. Ujasiri dipped her snout into her quarry, and blood dripped from her muzzle.

Chloe unclenched her fingers from the bicycle's hand brakes. In slow and careful steps, she scooted backward, away from the lioness. Away from death.

But the homeless man remained, rocking and transfixed.

Chloe tugged the sleeve of his sweatshirt. "Come on," she whispered. "Your dog ..." She tugged harder. "Sorry, but you gotta come on."

The vibrating man grew still, then shuffled in backpedal alongside Chloe. They retreated up the path until they'd reached the street above. All the way, he muttered his chant: "Daisy, Daisy, Daisy, Daisy, Daisy."

What else did he have in this world? Nothing, as far as Chloe could see. She pulled her wallet from her backpack. She had eleven dollars. If she didn't get fired, she could take an advance against her paycheck. "Here," she said, and held the bills out to the homeless man.

His gaze stayed locked on the underpass. The soft light of the new day lit the esplanade, but the lioness and her carnage remained in shadow. He took the money. "Won't buy me a new dog."

Chloe shook her head, but he wouldn't have noticed. She hoped he'd spend the money on cheap booze. Get loaded and drink a toast to Daisy. Do whatever it took to survive the day.

And that's all that mattered to Ujasiri, too. Survival. Chloe's dream of the wise, ennobled beast? Total bullshit.

She mounted her bicycle seat. The rain had stopped, and the eastern sky lightened, from deep indigo to lavender, like the healing

of a bruise. Chloe pushed her feet against the pedals, feeling stronger as the city blocks blurred with speed. She might still make it to the bakery on time. She could call animal control, or whoever, while counting out the till. Then she'd light up the display cases and open shop. Chloe would gladly sate all comers—anyone whose entrance caused the door to chime. Did such a day count as thriving? Or just surviving? She no longer cared. She was alive. Alive, and ready to sell some goddamn cupcakes.

EYES

Jonathan Duckworth

when my eyes fell from their sockets
I chased them down a hill

crawled through nettles after them
groped through cobwebs in a barn

of splintering wood
& rough, rusted iron sheets

then tumbled off a chalk cliff
into a wishing well where I almost drowned

but found in the sand at the bottom
among smooth stones & salamander eggs

two silver wishing coins
that fit right into the tissue of my orbits

& let me see my world
as if everything was a wish come true



The Stolen Veil

IT'S RAINING AGAIN

Lynn White

The weather god doesn't speak Welsh.
She's tried.
She's really tried.
She's wept tears
of frustration.
She's wept tears
of anger.
She's wept tears
of sadness
that flow from the mountains
to the sea.
It's the vowels
she finds hard.
And the consonants.
And the mutations.
And the way it's spoken form
changes
over the distance traveled
in the time it takes her
to make a small cloud
and a tiny puff of wind.
A tiny puff,
not enough to raise the cloud
above the mountains.
So it hangs in a sad, sullen mist.
Or blows in angry swirls.
And still
she tries.
She really tries.
She weeps tears
of frustration.
She weeps tears
of anger.
She weeps tears

of sadness.
Floods of tears.
Lakes.
Tears which fall
in cascades
from the mountains
to the sea

BLIND

Martin Thompson

sidewalks
and skyline,

where unlovely
voices, florid

with wine
rise over

the empty dark
like heat lightning.

flushed with
blood, our

bodies
pushed over

the precipice
of the night

fall in stride.
we swim

through blithe
air, turning

bruised
and rosy.



Still Marching for Civil Rights Fifty Years On

HARLEM SUMMER LONG

Jim Ross

When I knocked on door after Harlem door, brownstones and tenements alike, a voice on the opposite side routinely demanded, “What you want?” When I replied, “I come to take your Census” the occupants almost uniformly opened the door—often triple and quadruple locked—and civilly invited me in. We, temporary Census takers, had been trained to anticipate anger, fear, even mortal danger. We’d been warned: the people of Harlem don’t trust government. Four years ago, Malcolm X had been assassinated at a Harlem nightclub. Two years ago, after MLK’s assassination, shops throughout Harlem had been torched in the Holy Week Uprising. Each young black man shipped as fodder to Vietnam confirmed the pervasive belief that draft boards conspired to exterminate black men. Many Census takers never returned after accepting their first assignment or they curbstoned (literally, sat on the curb and faked the answers) rather than placing themselves unduly in harm’s way.

I’d experienced deep, gut-wrenching fear while demonstrating against the same Vietnam War that alarmed Harlemites. At the March on the Pentagon, hippy chicks placed limp daisies in the barrels of military police officers bayonets while Allen Ginsberg attempted to levitate the Pentagon using meditation. Meanwhile, I innocently wandered far from the line of confrontation. An army battalion blindsided me by hoisting me in the air and heaving me down a long hill, a drop of fifteen to twenty feet. I’ve always wondered whether my coonskin cap set them off—perhaps just the wrong place at the wrong time. I limped home, missing the mass arrests performed throughout the night by deputized civilian marshalls.

I came to fear violence from military, police, and even anti-war leadership, whose *modus operandi*, far too often, was egging on enforcers to initiate violence to solidify anti-war commitment. At an anti-war march in Boston—alone in an unfamiliar city, wearing new running shoes, carrying a map—I

heard Jerry Rubin of the Chicago Eight tell the crowd to finger anyone they saw alone because only a cop would be fool enough to show up there solo. As I buried my face in my upside-down map, a four-year-old girl danced over to me at her mother's direction and repeatedly waved the Viet-Cong flag over my head. I froze.

Only weeks before I started working in Harlem, National Guardsmen had unloaded on students demonstrating peacefully against the Vietnam War in what came to be called the Kent State Massacre. College campuses nationwide shut down in sympathy and fear. After the massacre and U.S. incursions into Cambodia, protesters journeyed to Washington. After being trained by Quakers on applying the techniques of non-violent confrontation, I attended the demonstration wearing a black armband to signify I was a marshal on the demonstrators' side. The protestors stayed safe and, at the end, stripped, and jumped into the reflecting pool chanting, "If you're not in the pool, you're part of the problem." Still, I kept my armband on.

I felt far less fear working as a Census taker than I did attending anti-war demonstrations, where there was always a strong risk that someone might lose control, throw a tear gas canister, or start a stampede. My Harlem hosts offered sweet tea with cookies, or ginger beer with sardines. We'd been trained to refuse offers of food, but doing so would have made me a rude and ungrateful visitor. Some hosts spontaneously showed me their family photos, artifacts from back home, or momma's feather boas from another era. Some toured me through original crown moldings, held court in iris gardens or serenaded me with gospel, blues, Motown, even opera.

Even as I sang my way through Harlem's streets, occasionally something went awry. For example, now and then, a man threw open the door—naked or wrapped in a towel—and said, "We're having sex. You have to do this *right now*?" while a voice from another room summoned, "You come back here *right now* and finish what you've started!" Once, two men, around my age, answered the door naked and asked if I wanted to join them. Whenever it became apparent my timing was poor, I simply said, "I'll come again."

An older man once warned me in a dimly lit hallway, "You got no business here. This place's full of drug dealers. I'm not threatening you. I'm just tellin' you the way it is for your own good."

I thanked him, departed pronto, and returned later without incident.

Another time, after opening his apartment door, a drunken man began waving a yard-long barbecue spear at me as if I were a rabid dog. I reared back, took a breath, held my ground. I don't think I sang. I tried but couldn't capture his attention long enough to penetrate his rage. His wife came to the door, coaxed him back into the safety of their apartment, stepped out into the hallway, and answered my questions.

One perfect day, after I knocked on the door of a third story walk-up, the occupant—a single male—threw open the door and pressed a machete blade against my throat. I smelled fear, acrid yet sulfurous. I'd never learned how to defend myself against physical attack, but it probably wouldn't have helped me anyway. By placing that blade against my throat he created a predicament for both of us. It wasn't easy for him to remove it once he'd already committed himself. I reached deep inside to discern how he and I might extricate *ourselves* from this untoward predicament intact, while retaining dignity. Not knowing why, I screamed, "Banzai," once, ear-splitting loud, like Japanese suicide pilots did in World War II. My assailant released a single burst of laughter. Still holding the machete's blade firmly against my throat, laughter began to roll through him in waves. He removed the blade, placed the machete at his side in a neutral position, stood at attention, bowed, and invited me in.

With due caution, I entered and surveyed my surroundings. A faded family photo hung over the sink. On the opposite wall hung a black-and-white photo of my host in army fatigues. MLK's photo held a place of honor high above the kitchen table. He directed me to sit in the corner seat. I complied. Without asking, he boiled water for tea. He slit open a box of Social Tea crackers with a paring knife and placed two stacks of three crackers on a small plate. He sat, held his back erect, offered me a Social Tea. We drank oolong—strong, clarifying—and ate three Social Teas each. He answered questions clearly, without hesitation. When he'd answered all my questions, I stood, said "Thank you," and moved toward the door. He said, "It's like that." I asked, "What's like that?" He said, "Fear. You can make yourself fear anything and everyone. It's hard to stop. I don't know how." I said, "We just did." I reached out to shake his hand. He held

our right hands with his left.

My last day taking the Census, a man around 20 whom I'd never met dropped out of a window 15 feet up. He landed on his feet, almost right on me. His falling alerted me that I'd stayed out past the witching hour. Counter-logically, I asked him to escort me to the subway. After searching within for the appropriate obscenity, he replied, "Escort yourself."

Maybe I lucked out the whole Harlem summer long. I've reflected for 46 years on lessons I learned that summer: Some possibilities: (1) The scariest people rarely answer their doors; (2) Most sane people choose peaceful connectivity rather than perpetuation of fear; (3) When we project fear onto the environment, it usually cooperates by mirroring our fear back at us. When we give off cues we're afraid, we invite others to justify our fear; (4) Acting oblivious to danger yields huge rewards; (5) We can discern answers to vexing questions by opening ourselves and looking within; (6) Never underestimate the power of humor and the element of surprise; (7) Always have Plan B, just in case. It helps to know how to dance.

I still wonder why my experience that summer fell short of the fearmongering hype and, instead, felt welcoming, joyful, nurturing, compassionate. Perhaps the Census staffers who trained us Census takers didn't really know Harlemites very well and projected their own fears onto them. Maybe Harlemites enjoyed hosting visitors who weren't blood relatives. I like to believe they grooved on my sorry rendition of Richie Haven's "Fatherless Child."

More than fear, I experienced many moments of exquisite connection my Harlem summer long. When I told one wiry old woman, "I come to take your Census" she yelled through her grey steel door, "Well, I ain't got much left, but what I got, you can have." After we drank lemonade together, I started to leave when she grabbed my wrist with her seamstress's fingers and said, "The days, they go slow. The years, they fly by." I didn't understand then what she meant; now I do.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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KADENCE CLARK was raised by wolves in Phoenix, Arizona. Thanks to the Provost's Scholarship she graduated from Arizona State University with a BFA in Fine Art, concentrated in Fiber Arts. Kadence uses a variety of mediums to weave folklore and history into two- and three-dimensional fantastic realities.

PERRY DAVIDSON lives in Flagstaff, Arizona, where he teaches English at Coconino Community College and owns a small custom woodworking shop.

LEISHA DOUGLAS is a psychotherapist and part-time yoga teacher. Leisha feels blessed to have satisfying work and time to write. Her poetry has appeared in many journals including *The Alembic*, *Corium Magazine*, *The Cortland Review*, and *Forge*. A collaborative book of hers is currently showcased at Marin County's Desta Gallery.

JONATHAN LOUIS DUCKWORTH is an MFA student at Florida International University and a reader for *Gulf Stream Magazine*. His fiction, poetry, and non-fiction appears in or is forthcoming in *New Ohio Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *PANK Magazine*, *Thrice Fiction*, *Cha*, *Superstition Review*, and elsewhere.

Since 1988, MARK GUNTHER has ridden his bike more than three-quarters of the way to the moon. At age sixty-four he traded a long career in business and nonprofit management for a Creative Writing MFA from the University of San Francisco. He is seeking a publisher for his novel, *Living With Jenny*, and is working on new novel and a cycling memoir.

Hong Kong bred, Sydney based artist, HENRY HU's artworks are personal and intentional with a focus on storytelling. He strives to assemble a full body of work, forming a collection piece by piece. Each individual art collection usually consists of multiple pieces and is often in the same style, grouped by specific concepts or stories.

DARRYL JEWETT is an ecologist by profession. He is also is an amateur writer and visual artist, residing among forested drumlins of the Southern Tier in upstate New York.

MICHAEL KEEFE is the Events Coordinator and Publicist at Annie Bloom's Books, an independent bookstore in Portland, Oregon. He has studied short fiction at the *Attic Writer's Workshop*. His essays and reviews have appeared in *PopMatters*, *Sound on Sound's Performing Musician Magazine*, *MadeLoud*, and other publications.

DUANE LOCKE lives hermetically in a city that is unknown to him. He dwells near friendly alligators, gallinules, herons, ibises, egrets, etc. As a visual artist, he invented *Sur-Objects* and became seriously involved in June 2016 with already 107 pieces published. Duane is also a writer with 7,066 poems published and 34 books. The latest, *VISIONS*, was released July 2016. All at 95 years old.

CARLY MASTRONI is a writer living in Lincolnshire, Illinois. She recently graduated from Northern Michigan University with a bachelor's degree in English. She worked as an intern at *Passages North* and her recent publications include *The Odyssey Online* and *Ore Ink Review*.

NATE MAXSON is a writer and performance artist. The author of several collections of poetry, he lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

STAN MCCORMICK grew up on a cattle ranch in Colorado. He draws inspiration from his childhood spent tagging along with his father, a cowboy and truck driver, who introduced him to the honky tonk world of the West in the late 1950s. He now works as a physician in St. Paul, Minnesota. His poetry has appeared in *Minnesota Medicine*.

BECKA MARA MCKAY directs the Creative Writing MFA at Florida Atlantic University, writes poetry, and translates Hebrew literature. Publications include a book of poems: *A Meteorologist in the Promised Land* (Shearsman, 2010), a chapbook of prose poems: *Happiness Is the New Bedtime* (Slash Pine Press, 2016) and three translations of Israeli fiction: *Laundry* (Autumn Hill, 2008), *Blue Has No South* (Clockroot, 2010), and *Lunar Savings Time* (Clockroot, 2011).

BENJAMIN NASH has had poems published in *The Cape Rock*, *Red River Review*, *Pilgrimage*, and other publications.

FABRICE POUSSIN teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *the San Pedro River Review*, and more than one hundred other publications.

After retiring in early 2015, JIM ROSS jumped back into creative pursuits to resuscitate his long-neglected right brain. Since then, he's published 7 poems, 25 pieces of nonfiction and over 100 photos in 35 journals, including 1966, *Change Seven*, *Entropy*, *Friends Journal*, *Gravel*, *Lunch Ticket*, *MAKE*, *Meat for Tea*, and *Pif*. Forthcoming: *Palooka*, *Papercuts*, *Souvenir Lit*. Jim and his wife split their time between Maryland and West Virginia.

NOEL SLOBODA is the author of the poetry collections *Our Rarer Monsters* (sunnyoutside, 2013) and *Shell Games* (sunnyoutside, 2008) as well as several chapbooks, most recently *Risk Management Studies* (Kattywompus Press, 2015). He has also published a book about Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein. Sloboda teaches at Penn State York.

ROBERT JOE STOUT's books about Mexico include *Hidden Dangers*, *Why Immigrants Come to America*, and *The Blood of the Serpent: Mexican Lives*. He also has published three novels and numerous articles and essays about Mexico, most recently for *Open Democracy*, *Connotation Press*, *Conscience*, and *America*. He lives in Oaxaca, Mexico.

MARTIN COLLINS THOMPSON is a writer based out of Annapolis, MD. He authored the stage play *Fishbowl*, the one-act *Spatial Relations*, and the screenplay for the award-winning short film *Catherine King*. His poetry has appeared in the *Olentangy Review* and his short story "The House at Porter Square" will be published in an upcoming horror anthology.

SARA WOLFE VAUGHAN is a hybrid writer exploring the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. Her MFA is from the University of Arizona where she worked as fiction editor of *Sonora Review*. She serves as President of the Board of Directors at Casa Libre. Her fiction can be found in *Grimoire*.

LYNN WHITE lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places, and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy, and reality.

KIRBY WRIGHT'S second play, *Asylum Uncle*, opened at the Secret Theatre's LIC Festival in New York on November 4, 2016. Wright was the 2016 Artist in Residence at the Eckerö Mail and Customs House in the Åland Islands, Finland. He is working on a poetry and flash manuscript set in Helsinki and Stockholm.

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Featuring an interview with Ross Gay, winner of the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award.