So much depends upon
a red wheel barrow
glazed with rain water
beside the white chicks

—william carlos williams

special thanks to therese zielinski
and amelia “wrong” wright

WELCOME TO THE FEBRUARY RED WHEELBARROW, 2009

HOSTED BY:
EMILY PITTINOS
ANN RICHARDSON
LOGAN YURGA-BELL
Q: What's black and white and red all over?

A: The Red Wheelbarrow in February

(and zebra steak)
In August, the possums crawl beneath our house and die there, past the floorboards of my parent's bedroom. My father lugs in the big white fans and lets them run all day. But the rot is raw and comes through everything. Start to taste in it the wheat bread, the yogurt, the iced tea. Gets into the water and the skin, the hair. In the mornings, my father bends down to kiss me and he can smell it, no mistake. The flies burrowing under the nails and filling up the eyes like mugs. The coffee, the cream, the brown sugar. The breakfast dishes are bone and stuck flesh.

At dusk, I find the break in the foundation of the house. I go slow, as though the possums might awake and slither out to claim me. The day is still, rain is near. I cover my mouth and nose and go, kneeling through the dirt to peer into the dark. Face to face with the skull sized hole, the smell is thick and I slide close, stick my hand into the clear, grope around, nothing. In this late purple light, the underbelly of the house is strange and wrong. What have we been living on all these years – come to find the demons not so distant. I stretch my arm and strain, dizzy to touch them.
PRAYERS

shelly whitaker

1. Even if you don’t know how to pray, you do.
You must, or how would the geese form their V’s towards the dark, scrubbed forest, even when you sleep?

2. Last night, I pushed a boat into the lake.
Moonlight stuttered off the ripples and flickered in the eyes of the bank dwellers while the sleepless still wondered if they were truly awake.

3. Headlights sweep across a patch of weeds.
In a sheet of white the moth rises from its working bed, lifts its wings, suspends, and takes flight bathered.

4. Posted sign on my door: "I don’t even remember your name."

5. My wife asked that I not write any more love poems, and Awww, shit, I thought, I’m not ready to get serious.

6. Trying to convince my workshop not to act like my wife. Every time we talk about poetry they want to cuddle afterward.

7. All form and no function, she and I are like a necklace.

8. How will I know where I stand in this world of snow? Where are you? Where are you?

9. If two stars are what we know about anything, there’s love in the spaces between.

10. Rabid squirrels gnawing off his legs.

11. I know he isn’t dead.
12. Show me a man with the wings of an angel and I will get the hair out of my face.
13. What’s your name, and what ever happened to that yellow dress you used to wear in high school while peeling oranges?
14. My mother called tree times last night while I was out feeding my dinner to fish.
15. I never wrote a poem about basketball.
16. Here I am, watching the Chinese ballet run back and forth across the stage for no reason.
POEM FOR ESMERALDA

nick vanheck

1. Time put a gun in the bus driver’s face. Time puts a gun in the bus driver’s face. I sat back in my seat and took off my socks. I sit back in my seat and take off my socks.

2. I am standing with the gray man watching storm fall over latticework. Right now will come eventually, he says.

3. An ascetic saw my beard and winked. I said the difference between you and me is a secret.

4. Legs like spires point north straight to diamonds. Rubies are the color of Hell and no more consequential than all that’s fallen from the line.

5. I watch the moss grow up my body until it covers my eyes and all I can see is North and all I know is that everything will be violently piecemeal.

6. Its needles undulate, perfect ripples in the wind, as good a friend as any.

7. A rabid raccoon pads a painting with his inky paws across the ceiling of my skull. Imagine the mural our earth would be if every person loosed the beast.

8. A beautiful woman wished me a happy birthday and I took a sip of water, loving it, knowing one day I’d drown in it.

ALONE AND PARTIALLY NAKED

jackson rollings

In August 1990 Clara’s mother Marie was in Paris with her aunt when they saw Gianni Agnelli sunbathing naked on his boat. The aunt’s name was Lucrece, the toppled doyenne of an exclusive aircraft company, and she suggested they go down on a cobblestone boulevard by the docks while they shared a small wedge of Laguiole. There was a cloudiness that illuminated the landscape almost to the point of glowing, but left colors oddly unsaturated. They passed by a gate to a ramp just outside the harbor that led down to the main docks, which, upon a test by Lucrece, proved to be unlocked. Their heels creaked as they staggered down the corrugated surface and walked by a few yachts, the sound of bones cracking in their feet over the uneven surface of the wood. Then they saw the old man, skin tawny and leathery, hanging off of his bones like fabric. He was unfurled and open in the white light, wearing nothing but a silver wristwatch. Lucrece pulled Marie back and peeked out to try to get a good look at his face. A thin black-haired lady came out from behind a marble-countered bar, naked save for a blue bikini bottom and a crystal glass balanced between two extended fingertips. Marie thought she recognized the girl, perhaps from a runway. With muffled grunts, the two women rounded back to the ramp as quickly as possible, holding onto their silk hats as the breeze picked up, carrying their stifled laughs back to Agnelli’s boat as they hiked the last step up onto the boulevard.

They told nobody until four years later. They treated good stories like fine wine, they explained, and left it at that.

In the kitchen there was a plain stone bowl next to the oven, and Mallory ate each of the seven pears it contained with a calculated velocity. Her
sister had gotten them more than a week ago for herself (on one of the extremely rare occasions the poor girl left the house—though Mallory couldn’t bring herself to be skeptical of that) and hadn’t touched or laid eyes on them once. The meat of the pears was a little bit less firm than she liked; the bites were glossy, making her teeth feel strangely epidermal and her gums tighten over the bone. Bette Davis was on the Dick Cavett show on the television situated behind her on an orange couch, complaining about ungrateful celebrities. She’d watched the show all the way through before, even though she didn’t like Bette Davis. There was some streak of feigned gratitude in every one of her smiles that reminded Mallory of her own mother, standing above a table neatly arranged with omelettes, artichokes, and crêpe suzette, each abundant on gold-leafed platters. There was always an expectant look on that face, a delicate care under which both of her children’s legs moved with unknowing caution, so that regardless of crumpled rug-ends and slick, mopped linoleum, neither of them would ever know a single fall or injury beneath her glower. Mallory and her sister’s childhoods were airbrushed and airtight, fraught with summer homes and Duvet cocktails. Their mother always said Bette Davis copied her style from the four-page fold outs in magazines.

Mallory went into the bedroom, walking towards the end lined with fold-out closet space. The absolute whiteness of the room struck her for a moment, but she thought it was probably just one of those convenient parting of cloud masses producing a sudden panoramic brilliance that had never ceased to surprise her since childhood, here or out on her junior high soccer field, where the clouds’ movements were recorded in exact tonal difference across the grass. She slid open the closet jalousies and took a cylindrical hat box from a hamper in which a tabby cat was sleeping. The shelves above were lined with pleated skirts and blouses belonging to her sister, who was

"Are you going to drown me?" I ask.
"I’m not going to drown you." Karl says.
He reaches into the backseat and takes out a plaid blanket and tells me to follow him. He lays the blanket out in front of the car and we sit down, and I can see the river in front of us now.

I lie back. We don’t get stars like this back in Tucson. I hear Karl lie down next to me, and the backs of our hands touch, and I don’t really know what to do. I’ve got cousins back at home, but we’re not that close, and I’ve certainly never been in this intimate a situation with any of them. And even though Karl’s not really my cousin, I still move my hand onto my stomach. I have to say something.

"Is this why people think you’re crazy?" I ask. I can feel him looking at me in the dark. "You know, Crazy Karl. Crazy cousin Karl. Because you live up here all alone and don’t get bored with it?"

Karl doesn’t answer me, and I feel brave.

"Well, I do." I say. "I think you’re crazy for living up here all alone. Bat-shit crazy."

My words hit the air and stick, and I’m sorry I said them. Karl still doesn’t say anything.

"Sorry," I say.
"You want to go swimming with me?" Karl asks, suddenly.
"I don’t like water." I say.
"What do you mean you don’t like water? Like, you’re afraid of it?"
"No. I just don’t like it."
"Okay," Karl says, and stands up and walks a little closer to the edge of the river. In the moonlight I see him slip off his clothes and wade into the water. I think that maybe I shouldn’t watch, but I do, because I’ve never seen a forty-year-old man naked before, and after all, he wouldn’t have done it in front of me if he didn’t want me to see it.
three
Karl makes scrambled eggs for dinner. We eat with our heads down and
don’t talk. But the crickets are so loud here that the silence doesn’t feel very
empty at all. When Karl’s finished, he looks at me for a long time.
“Do you have a beau at home?” Karl’s old enough to still say beau.
I shake my head. “Only Cipirino.”
“Who’s Cipirino?”
“Cipirino takes care of me.”
Karl points at my eye. “That’s how he takes care of you?”
I glare at him.
“So you’re trouble.”
“What?”
“You know. Bad news.”
I shake my head. “I don’t mean to be.”
We sit and I push cold eggs around my plate. When the kitchen is
dark Karl gets up and turns on some lamps and takes our dishes to the sink.
I think maybe I should offer to help wash-up, but I don’t.
“Hey Kid.” Karl’s voice. “You wanna go out?”
“What?”
“You know. Out.”
“We’re in fucking Montana. Where are we going to go?”

where we go
We’re ripping down some dirt road in the Ford, and all I can see is what the
headlights shine on in front of us. I ask where we’re going, but Karl won’t
tell me. When we get to here we’re going, Karl stops the car and I can hear
water. Rushing water.

in the bed across the room, her shape pitching up the tucked sheets at equal
angles on either side. Mallory took a ticket and a folded sheet of paper from
the box and replaced it in the hamper, turning around. She noticed a new
sculpture on the bedside table - no, not sculpture, it looked more like coral.
Millepore? She tried to wade back to memories of college Biology study ses-
sions - no such luck. Mallory moved closer and ran a finger along the surface
of it - brittle but sticky, as if filmed with sap. Red motes separated from the
surface her finger dragged across and drifted down to the wood of the table,
dissolving into the grain. Greta Garbo looked suspiciously down at her from
a poster above the table, next to a print of Evelyn Nesbit by Gertrude Kase-
bier. They made her sister uncomfortable - Mallory sometimes thought she
put them there to scare herself.

The sleeping girl rotated and Mallory noticed that the sheets were wet
around her form, the liquid absorbed in the carpet around the bed in slowly
fading footprints, the sheen of the girl’s black hair splashed across the pillow.
She must’ve gone swimming early in the morning. It was only eight o’clock
now, which made the summer sun seem prematurely eager in comparison,
Mallory having just come from seven-hour days. There is sand here, she re-
mined herself. There are no scarves or boots or blackened chimneys except
on Christmas morning. The only similar thing is television. She briefly
mourned the loss of ceremonial layering for daily blizzards, and continued
her thoughts out the front door. The sleeping girl opened her eyes, stared at
the ceiling, and wetted her lips.

She thought, as she always did immediately after waking, that she’d like
to read a book, but this never actually happened. She only read on the porch
on cold days. The corners of all the books in her house were worn and
rounded from the thing that most consoled her while reading (as she was
deathly afraid of paper cuts and grew up being read to) - rubbing the insides
of joints on her fingers on the angle of the hardback. Something about that precise, adjustable pressure between those phalanges warped her skin into a vast pin-array of nerve endings. She'd always imagined her insides like this: consisting entirely of spindles and delicate metals, teetering with the imminent possibility of their own extinction. Beyond that, the only thing she could equate to her idea of human anatomy and internal organs was the rattling noise of the seeds inside an apple when it's being shaken. If she ever had the occasion of being carried in the hands of King Kong or a similar friendly behemoth, she feared she would be crushed to dust. In any case, the corner-rubbing was one of the best anesthetics she'd ever used. She thought it similar to the effects of a rocking chair's comfort to adults and babies alike, those consistent oscillations rooting a sense of inertia. What she hadn't ever realized about rocking chairs was the increased curve on the bottom slats of wood near the back that prevented people from toppling over. She thought it was just for looks.

The girl slipped herself out of the damp sheets and pulled down on a chain of glossy red beads hanging from the ceiling fan to turn it off. She cocked her wrist and let three fingers run on the underside of each passing blade to help slow it down, then went to the closets, looking out the bedroom door to make sure her sister was gone. She slid on a long, buttoned cotton blouse only loose at her knees, and belted it above her navel with a length of navy-blue linen. She went back to the bed and patted the sheets back out, froofed the pillow. On the pillow were small clippings of hair. She paused, disturbed for a second, then remembered after her haircut a week ago, shaking her hair over the white pavement of downtown, the cloud of the blond snippets that drifted out, then some flashes, clicks and shuffled footsteps around her. Just got sleepy again.

She picked up the coral piece. Right. The swimming, too. The porcelain...
and new silence.

Karl nods.
And then I say, “I don’t really know why my parents sent me all the way out here, but I just want you to know, I don’t really need a babysitter.”
“Good,” says Karl, “because I’m not going to babysit you.”
For a while we say nothing over the sound of the engine. Then I sigh out. “Montana. Goddamn it.”
Karl says, “Is there somewhere else you want to be?”
I sit back against the leather seat. I guess Karl’s right. I guess Bozeman Montana is just as shitty a place as anywhere else, so I might as well be here, where no one knows me and at least I can make up a cool story about my black eye. Maybe I was thrown from a horse. Maybe I was in a bar fight, like in those old westerns my dad and I used to watch on weekends. Or maybe it’s a mark of my doing something really extreme, like rock-climbing, or glacier surfing. Who knows, here in Montana?

how i got my name

“So...Kiddy?”
“Yeah. Kiddy.”
“Isn’t that your grandmother’s name?”
“Yep.”
“Ugly name.”
“Ugly name.”
“What should we call you then?”
“I don’t know.”
“How about Kid? Just Kid.”
“Ok.”
“Ok, Kid.”

basin was set by a rickety wooden chair in the bathroom where she’d warmed her feet earlier. She remembered what she’d done, but the memory of swimming didn’t seem entirely intact. She went into the kitchen, saw the empty bowl where she normally put fruits. Did she eat those? The hairs on her legs stood erect though the muscles in her leg felt like they could just fall limp on the kitchen tile. On a napkin she read the words ‘racemic amphetamine’ in her sister’s hand next to her own name, Clara W. Probably just a pharmaceutical she was supposed to pick up for the cat (she wouldn’t be). She recognized Bette Davis’ voice in the room over, but knew this probably to be the remnants of one of her sister’s daily cereal-and-old celebrity talk show binges, and went to inspect it closer.

In the hair salon Clara sat down at the shampooing area, letting the hairdresser put a towel under her neck so the plastic didn’t rub against her neck and the water didn’t run down her t-shirt.

“Look, again,” said the old woman next to her in a gawkish New York accent, pointing at a picture in her magazine. The cover and the back had been laminated.

“What?” she said. It was a picture of a famous couple holding babies. The old woman sighed melodramatically.

“Twins. Ever notice how often celebrities have twins?”
The old woman’s hairdresser laughed as she began pulling folded foil out of a cocoon of white hair. She was getting her hair bleached from gray to white.

“I guess,” said the girl numbly, and turned back to face the open window. Heat wafted in. The old woman’s lipstick crackled as her mouth gaped to speak again.

“All of it’s recessive. They’re a breed, a selective one. But oh, it would
be fantastic to have pictures taken of me constantly. Just for a week.”

The girl felt something wavering around in the hairs in her left nostril and snorted a few times, on the verge of sneezing. The old woman’s speckled, discolored hands paused while flipping a page, then continued after a moment’s consideration.

“Alone and partially naked,” she read. “Evelyn Nesbit said that after she became an alcoholic, after her husband murdered that man, in this article I read once. She said that while she was in the limelight, that was how she felt whenever a person took a picture of her. She never mentioned being uncomfortable about it while she was famous, though. She faked.”

Warm water trickled over the hill of Clara’s scalp, down the bridge of her nose, forked out to her jaw, and she fell asleep.

Clara turned off the television on the couch, crouched down to pick it up and hauled it back over to a small mahogany table across the room. Once, sitting on a chair in a friend-of-a-friend’s living room, she’d explained to her host: “When a hand-upholstered chair like this has been kept this incredibly spotless, it would be logical that another article of furniture in the same house would suffer certain losses - a wine stain from an Easter party, a tiny rip from an angry cat’s claws - it’s only logical (tit for tat was the boring way to explain it).” But everything in the house, of course, was perfect and immaculate, and she made them explain why. This was why she moved the television. She remembered that occasion and the looks on the host’s face every time she put things back the way she’d planned them out two years ago when she purchased this apartment, but it remained a compulsion nonetheless. She knew, for instance, that the portrait of Greta Garbo was four feet but so distantly that no one’s been able to explain it to me yet. I haven’t seen him since I was eleven, the last time we were up in Montana, and even then we didn’t go to see him, we just ran into him at the Bait & Tackle shop. We were really there because my father likes to think of himself as really sporty, a real man’s man, and wanted to show us just how committed he was by taking us to the middle-of-fucking-nowhere to fish the Madison River.

What you have to know about Karl is that he’s the only member of our family who’s ever moved more than ten miles out of Tucson. It’s not that we’re a particularly close-knit bunch, but rather that we’re afraid to try anything new.

When I asked my mother why everyone thought Karl was crazy, she couldn’t really answer me except to say that he wasn’t a very social person, and he never came to family reunions, and I told her that those weren’t really grounds for proclaiming someone mentally ill.

Crazy Karl is waiting for me when I get off the plane in Bozeman. He looks exactly the same as he did when we ran into him at the Bait & Tackle eight years ago. He’s got brown hair and brown eyes and a full brown beard, and he’s tall and must be in his forties. When I reach him he hugs me for a long time. He hugs me like he’s known me his whole life. Then he holds me at an arms length so he can look at me. He touches my bruised eye. It hurts when he does that, but I let him.

We drive to his house in a navy blue Ford convertible. It’s the kind of car that old men collect and leave in their garages, but sometimes take out onto the driveway to hose down and show-off to the neighbors. But this car looks like it has a lot of miles on it.

“Nice ride,” I say, because there’s nothing else to say in this awkward
mother and sister Ida and they’re probably in the kitchen eating breakfast and having a great time and not even thinking about the death penalty. But I don’t say any of this.

before
Four days before I leave for Bozeman Montana, I get the black eye. I come home with the black eye. That goddamned black eye. My mother sees the eye when she’s sitting in the living room, knitting and listening to Vivaldi. She drops her knitting needles and covers her mouth with her thin hands and then she screams Daniel. That’s my father’s name. And he comes running in and he sees the black eye and he holds my face and he keeps shaking me, shaking me, asking what happened, what happened. I tell them what happened and my mother cries, and my father tries not to cry, and before I know it they’re on the phone with god-knows-who, saying, we have to get her out of here, where can she go?, and for goodness sake, Michelle, we’re not sending her there.

Later that night I stand in front of my bedroom mirror and look at my black eye. I’m pretty proud of it. After all, it’s the only black eye I’ve ever had.

flashback
Cipirino needs money. I don’t know what he needs if for. I give him everything I have on me, except for $2.75, which I keep. He says he’s going downtown tonight to make the rest. Dogfighting. I’ve never been to a dogfight. Cipirino doesn’t want me to come. But I do anyway.

us
My crazy cousin Karl is not really my cousin. He’s related to me somehow,
THE ELEPHANT BALLET

amelia wright

I.
1942,
Madison Square Garden,
fifty elephants
and fifty ballerinas
are squeezed into their
pink tutus for the premiere
of Stravinsky’s
Circus Polka—
a satire of a piece,
the composer later admits,
a mere sneeze of notes.

For a while
everyone worried
that the huge beasts
would spook, would go
tearing off into the audience
and leave Ringling
with a lawsuit heavier
on their shoulders
than their three-ton
prima ballerina.

II.
As the first performance ends
and the beasts come
galloping offstage,
the curtains close
and the Ringling Bros.
squeeze their eyes shut
waiting for a break
in the silence.
When it comes, the ballerinas
laugh and pirouette,
hugging the legs of their
huge-eared partners,
and head off
to the dressing rooms
where makeup comes off
and everyone returns
to a normal grade of beauty.

III.
Forty-two applauses later
and the elephants are
out of the frill and fluff
once more, taken back
to the menagerie
where they blush silently,
swinging their trunks
back and forth
like pendulums,
as if this all could only

MORE THAN 10 MILES OUT OF TUSCON (excerpt)
helen spica

now
You are standing in the middle of the river. You and crazy Karl. You have
just slipped maybe miles down the Madison, and you are holding onto each
other as tightly as you can. He says he loves you. And what can you do,
when your cousin tells you that he loves you?

what i know about montana
Here is everything I know about Montana:
Helena is the Capital.
There is nothing to do there.
My crazy cousin Karl lives in Bozeman.
There is nothing to do there.
I am going to Montana today.

one
It is 9:28 AM, and the man sitting next to me in seat 15B is eating trail mix
with as much force and noise as he possibly can. I lean over and tell him I’m
allergic to peanuts, really allergic, if I even smell one my face swells up and I
go blind. He apologizes and closes the bag and puts it under his seat. I’m not
allergic to peanuts.

The man in seat 15B asks me what I’m going to Montana for. He
probably feels sorry for me, the thin little girl in 15A with a severe peanut
allergy and a black eye. Oh, that’s right, I have a black eye.

“My dad. He’s on Death Row out there. He’s being executed on
Thursday. I’m going to say good bye.” That’s what I tell the man.

But really, my dad’s not on Death Row. He’s never even gotten a
parking ticket. And he’s not in Montana at all, he’s back in Tucson with my
his early Sunday suit with syrup.
I eat it all, first stuffing fluffy bread into my mouth,
and then cutting carefully, eating slowly so that more room
could form in my stomach between each piece.

This is the same French toast I have tried to fry over and over,
but it needs the place, the edge, the sense of danger,
the griddle that is only cleaned once a day with a paper
towel to lap up the grease. But that griddle carries the tastes
of seven decades of French toast, pancakes, sausage
and bacon, absorbing each meal into its metal pores,
and giving back all the rust and grease and blackened
bread bits into each meal it cooks.

IV.
At dusk the horses’ mouths
foam in protest
at the smoke that is
creeping into their pens.
No one wakes up
until the fire forces a huge
\textit{crack} out of the wood pole
supporting the canvas
covering of the menagerie.

It was the prima ballerina,
the cow they all turned to
in performances
when they forgot the steps,
the one who slunk off stage
after every curtain,
inconsolable by worried trunks,
who sucked up
the last of a dying cigar
from the trainer’s ashtray
and set the straw to burn.

V.
There were those fourteen
who survived, the ones
later found
in the backyard gardens
of the townsfolk,
pulling up cabbages and beets,
munching nervously
as the trainers herded them
back to where everything
had burned.

Thirty-six others
were strong enough
to pull their stakes
out of the ground and run,
to bellow with hope
that someone would hear
the soothing crackle
of the fire, but none
trumpeted that cry.

Forty-two applauses
after they leave the Garden,
there is one brave enough
to set the tent aflame.
Somehow the others know
that as their eyes
fill with sweat,
it is much easier
to let everything
turn to ash.
A NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE

kiley harrison

The night my car slid into the lake
I was told by my best friend in the passenger seat
that I was laughing.

I'd like to state for the record
that the rumor that your life flashes before your eyes
is false.
What I saw,
as we spun round and round,
was my best friend and I
old and withered,
sitting in a revolving restaurant,
talking to the waitress whose name tag
was pinned over her nipple
as though desperate to not slide down
that steep slope of her breast.
I was wondering why my best friend
was screaming while we were ordering coffee.

Maybe I'm crazy.
I've been told I am many times before,
but I've never looked at near-death experiences
as something bad.
I prefer to look at them as stories to tell later:
How I couldn't turn my neck for days from whiplash.
How I couldn't see more than two feet in front of me

FRENCH TOAST IN CAMDEN

justine jaffe

Across the river from Philly, my uncle and I sit in the murder
capitol of America in an old post office, turned diner.
I'm eight and glad that all the thieves and thugs
with their cocked caps have not yet woken up.

This post box sized post office sits on the river,
almost toppling from the weight of the over-pancake-stuffed plumbers,
truckers, con men, and auto repairmen.

The counter, the same shiny plastic of the floor, hangs
over the edge of the griddle, so close I think
the plastic might melt into my bacon which is
cooked until it curls, the grease trapped
between the folds of the S.

I order French toast and watch it fry on the griddle.
Butter pats melt brown squares into the bread.
When the waitress gives it to me
she carries a plastic bag of
powdered sugar, scooping into a sieve
and sprinkling it onto my French toast
like snow-globe snow, perfectly
patterned and even.

Under the watch of my uncle, who is eating a waffle,
napkin tucked into his collar so as not to destroy
there she was beautiful and young and more than willing. You want to tell yourself that she is only a small part of the reason that you left but you’ve only ever been good at lying to other people.

“I know you’re mad,” you say. “But I still want to stay.” He is still silent, sullen. You pull up to your house, the last one at the end of the curved street, gravel popping underneath your tires and you keep the door locked, hoping to reason with him. He turns to you, a torrent of tears just barely balancing on the outer rim of his eye.

“Go home,” he says and he reaches over you to unlock the door and you do not stop him. He walks away, towards the yellow clapboard house that you grew up in. He dodges past overgrown weeds interspersed amongst empty liquor bottles and worn out lawn furniture that’s never been used for entertaining. In the headlights his skin is so pale and milky that it looks almost unreal. You want to reach out to him, you almost do, even going so far as to place your hand on the door handle but that is when he rolls up the sleeves of his oversized t-shirt, gray from washing. On his arms is a Swiss dot pattern of bruises and swollen pustules, track marks. Holding back a sigh and a sob you reverse the car, zooming out of the driveway faster than you did the day you ran away. In your head your own words mock you over and over again. You don’t know shit.

because of the blizzard.
How we started to slip backwards into the lake slowly, like the earth was giving us up to itself.
How I loved every second of it.

And I’m still feeling that I’m turning in circles round and round,
my best friend sitting across from me,
telling me something urgent,
something that I will only remember when I sink slowly and surely into sleep.
ON THE RIVERBANK

adrien park

I can no longer think of words to say
and the days of writing letters are now gone.
To her, who slowly drifts away
across the lake, across my life,
I take off my affection and send it out
to where the stream of water flows
out from the riverbank of my childhood.
Just by looking at the sunshine breaking apart
and the southern wind kissing the surface of a river,
another day passes by.

A dim light turns on
from the house across the river.
The sunset hangs on the neighborhood,
calling me with her voice.
A wooden boat bounded on the rock,
I get on and row the paddle, following
the dusk, to where she lives.

“I’d hoped that the two of you would be married,” You wince at the
sound of your own uppity tone.
“Yeah well I’d fucking hoped so too,” he says. You are not even mad
that he’s mocking you. You deserve it. You deserve all of this and yet...
“I did the best I could. I stayed in that house for 20 goddamn years,”
you lament.

“I’m 19,” your brother says and it is silent. “I would have never
walked out on us. On you. You think you’ve changed so much. You think
our life here was so bad but you were the part that was dragging us down.
Since you’ve been gone mom’s gotten better. Katie and I will patch things
up, we always do.” Another guitar solo gears up to a crescendo. The sound is
near deafening. You try to toggle the volume control but Brian reaches out a
bony, pasty hand and slaps it away. You grunt low in your chest, some ani-
mal sound that makes your brother sneer.

“So there is still a little of you in there.” You blush, knowing that he
is referring to the hoodlum that you used to be, the boy that he is now. You
take the exit that leads to your house, the concise tick-tick of the turn signal
counting down the minutes until you can be alone in your hotel room, feel-
ing the smooth of the sheets against your skin and thinking of Katie’s propo-
sition. You sent her a letter back two days ago. A single sheet of yellow lined
paper that said “You don’t know shit.”

You wonder now, staring at your brother sitting across from you if
you made the right decision. He is slouching and pouting like a child and
you want to smack him. You wonder if he knows about the letter, if it is yet
another object of contention that the two of you will have to work out. You
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"Why did you come back?" Brian asks and it is obvious that it is something that he has been thinking about a lot.

"Because it was dumb of me to leave."

"How did you know I was going to be at the 7/11?" Here an embarrassed pause where you change the stream of the air conditioning.

"I didn't expect that you would have changed much."

"Right," he says and you can feel the anger building up inside him. Your brother has always been a violent boy, a tendency your mother claims he gets from your absent father. "You don't know me," he spits suddenly, his voice staccato, his hands curling in and out of fists. One time, in the third grade he poked out a kid's eye.

"It's only been five years Brian,"

"Only? Do you know what's happened since you've been gone? Everything's gone to shit!" his vehemence is arresting. It's the way that spittle flies out of his mouth when he hisses his s's, the way his eyes bulge and his eyebrows underscore words. There's something incredibly innocent about his complete lack of embarrassment over showing emotion. You feel yourself once again being compelled, being drawn into him.

"Well, I'm back now," you say. "I can take care of mom." He snorts, a wet prolonged sound that seems to scream frustration.

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**Cul De-Sac**

You walk into the creaking Windex-streaked automatic doors and it is the fluorescent lights that welcome you home. Passing by shelves of hydrogenated, freeze dried products in slick plastic labels you feel a strong pull to revert to your old "husky kid" ways, to reach out and cram your mouth full of soft squishy cake that tastes of sweet sponge and whipped sugar foam. You wink at the girl behind the counter, a dried up blonde of maybe 18 who reminds you of your mother. She giggles and bats her eyes at you, her small breasts encased in a formidable push-up bra and straining to break their way free from a kids sized white t-shirt; You shake your head after you pass her. Her flirting reminds you a little too much of your mother and you know that if she's anything like her she's doomed.

Working the kinks out of your neck you make your way towards the back of the 7/11 where you know you will find him. The glare of the lights gives you a migraine. It is strange but they are so bright they make everything look dim. You imagine it's the light that's on in the morgue when the make-up technician goes to work. In this light a little more blush is necessary, a healthy pinkish glow a deathly pall. You round the corner, the patent leather of your shoe catching the fizzing lights and make your way towards DragonForce 6, a game that used to be your favorite. You shudder at the thought and pick up speed. You don't want to be here too long. Locating the familiar pastel colored game station and the shaggy haired brunette hunched over the controller you are taken aback. You don't remember him being so skinny, so unkempt. You reach out a hand to call his attention. You don't know where to put your hand. You haven't brushed up on your Hey-haven't-seen-you-in-60-months-hand-placement-etiquette. You settle on upper back and as you tap it lightly you can feel the crude slabs of your brother's spine.
"Hold on," says your brother, impatient. His body moves in rhythm with the cloying beeping of the game. A tap again, a little higher this time, at the smooth round of his shoulder. He twitches, annoyed. "I said hold on." There is a little flicker of fire in his voice now, the flame on the faulty gas stove you had in your first apartment that scared you with the speed of its flare and maddened you with its descent.

"Brian," turns, looks at you. He's wearing ratty, khaki pants and a cheap button down shirt over a long sleeved t-shirt, the type of hat you always associated with dropouts and baby daddies.

"Sam," he says. On screen some kind of mutant ape gets shot several times in the chest. Brian looks at the screen. "Shit." He turns back, hands tucked deep in his pockets, his hands jiggling up and down. You know he's counting his change by touch, a skill he perfected at age 12.

"How much do you have?" you ask and he peeks up from beneath his overgrown hair, his eyebrows disappearing into the curlicued nest. It's a look leftover from his days as a painfully shy outcast and it does not match the battle of emotions playing out over his pasty skin; the least of which is not anger.

"75 cents," he says and there is a grin in his voice.

"Slurpies it is," you say and reach into your own pocket for the money. He looks at you in surprise and you wave his hand, jangling with coins, away. Things have changed.

"Hey, Tori," he mumbles to the girl behind the counter and you can tell from the way that he looks at her face and not her underwear enhanced breasts that he must really like her. She giggles, and for a second, even though you are not interested, you feel betrayed by her willingness to share that laugh of hers. You glance up angrily and see her eyes, red and rimmed in chalky kohl and you think of your mother. Your mother who is too skinny and too made-up and whose cheekbones are too pronounced and whose laugh is too thin and who you imagine will die alone in front of a tv dinner like a million bottle blondes before her.

You bang $1.50 down on the pitted Formica and say you want two cups for slurpies and tell your brother you will meet him in the car. They both glance at you, curious and a little afraid as you walk out but you don't care. You sit in the car watching the pair. Your brother is an awkward flirter and it looks as if Tori is shutting him down until he reaches across the counter and takes her hand. She snatchs it away, chuckling and grabs something from under the counter, something small and white, and slips it into Brian's hand. You wait until you see your brother come out looking dopey, but happy to pull your eyes away.

He scans the parking lot twice looking for you even though you are parked at the curb right in front of him. You honk your horn and blink the lights and as he walks over you can tell that he is impressed. The two of you ride in silence for a little bit, he fiddles with the radio, immediately skipping past the smooth jazz and alternative rock stations you have programmed until he gets to a station from some college that seems to play nothing but a strange combination of electronic singer songwriters and death metal.

"I wondered why you were wearing that fancy suit but then I saw your car," he says in between the screeching of whiny nasal voices and synthesizers. It strikes you as sad that he views wealth this way, in terms of suits and cars. It's a view of being rich that only poor people have. You know people who spill seltzer water on $25,000 suits and throw them away. The rich are more concerned with NASDAQ and G-5's than Dolce and Gabanna.

"A lot has changed since I left," you reply and it is such an insubstantial platitude that it is immediately swallowed up by the inky sky. You take a loud swig of your slurpie and choke a little bit. "Aww man, I don't remem-
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adrien park

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sound of your own uppity tone.
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“I did the best I could. I stayed in that house for 20 goddamn years,”
you lament.

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walked out on us. On you. You think you’ve changed so much. You think
our life here was so bad but you were the part that was dragging us down.
Since you’ve been gone mom’s gotten better. Katie and I will patch things
up, we always do.” Another guitar solo gears up to a crescendo. The sound is
near deafening. You try to toggle the volume control but Brian reaches out a
bony, pasty hand and slaps it away. You grunt low in your chest, some ani-
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You wonder now, staring at your brother sitting across from you if
you made the right decision. He is slouching and pouting like a child and
you want to smack him. You wonder if he knows about the letter, if it is yet
another object of contention that the two of you will have to work out. You
wonder if he knows what happened between you and Katie, if he can pin-
point the exact moment where things changed from normal to dangerous.
You yourself are not certain. All you know is that one day you woke up and
there she was beautiful and young and more than willing. You want to tell yourself that she is only a small part of the reason that you left but you've only ever been good at lying to other people.

"I know you're mad," you say. "But I still want to stay." He is still silent, sullen. You pull up to your house, the last one at the end of the curved street, gravel popping underneath your tires and you keep the door locked, hoping to reason with him. He turns to you, a torrent of tears just barely balancing on the outer rim of his eye.

"Go home," he says and he reaches over you to unlock the door and you do not stop him. He walks away, towards the yellow clapboard house that you grew up in. He dodges past overgrown weeds interspersed amongst empty liquor bottles and worn out lawn furniture that's never been used for entertaining. In the headlights his skin is so pale and milky that it looks almost unreal. You want to reach out to him, you almost do, even going so far as to place your hand on the door handle but that is when he rolls up the sleeves of his oversized t-shirt, gray from washing. On his arms is a Swiss dot pattern of bruises and swollen pustules, track marks. Holding back a sigh and a sob you reverse the car, zooming out of the driveway faster than you did the day you ran away. In your head your own words mock you over and over again. You don't know shit.

because of the blizzard.
How we started to slip backwards into the lake slowly, like the earth was giving us up to itself.
How I loved every second of it.

And I'm still feeling that I'm turning in circles round and round,
my best friend sitting across from me,
telling me something urgent,
something that I will only remember when I sink slowly and surely into sleep.
A NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE

kiley harrison

The night my car slid into the lake
I was told by my best friend in the passenger seat
that I was laughing.

I’d like to state for the record
that the rumor that your life flashes before your eyes
is false.
What I saw,
as we spun round and round,
was my best friend and I
old and withered,
sitting in a revolving restaurant,
talking to the waitress whose name tag
was pinned over her nipple
as though desperate to not slide down
that steep slope of her breast.
I was wondering why my best friend
was screaming while we were ordering coffee.

Maybe I’m crazy.
I’ve been told I am many times before,
but I’ve never looked at near-death experiences
as something bad.
I prefer to look at them as stories to tell later:
How I couldn’t turn my neck for days from whiplash.
How I couldn’t see more than two feet in front of me

FRENCH TOAST IN CAMDEN

justine jaffe

Across the river from Philly, my uncle and I sit in the murder
capitol of America in an old post office, turned diner.
I’m eight and glad that all the thieves and thugs
with their cocked caps have not yet woken up.

This post box sized post office sits on the river,
almost toppling from the weight of the over-pancake-stuffed plumbers,
truckers, con men, and auto repairmen.

The counter, the same shiny plastic of the floor, hangs
over the edge of the griddle, so close I think
the plastic might melt into my bacon which is
cooked until it curls, the grease trapped
between the folds of the S.

I order French toast and watch it fry on the griddle.
Butter pats melt brown squares into the bread.
When the waitress gives it to me
she carries a plastic bag of
powdered sugar, scooping into a sieve
and sprinkling it onto my French toast
like snow-globe snow, perfectly
patterned and even.

Under the watch of my uncle, who is eating a waffle,
napkin tucked into his collar so as not to destroy
his early Sunday suit with syrup.
I eat it all, first stuffing fluffy bread into my mouth, and then cutting carefully, eating slowly so that more room could form in my stomach between each piece.

This is the same French toast I have tried to fry over and over, but it needs the place, the edge, the sense of danger, the griddle that is only cleaned once a day with a paper towel to lap up the grease. But that griddle carries the tastes of seven decades of French toast, pancakes, sausage and bacon, absorbing each meal into its metal pores, and giving back all the rust and grease and blackened bread bits into each meal it cooks.

go on for so long.

IV.
At dusk the horses' mouths foam in protest at the smoke that is creeping into their pens. No one wakes up until the fire forces a huge crack out of the wood pole supporting the canvas covering of the menagerie.

It was the prima ballerina, the cow they all turned to in performances when they forgot the steps, the one who slunk off stage after every curtain, inconsolable by worried trunks, who sucked up the last of a dying cigar from the trainer's ashtray and set the straw to burn.

V.
There were those fourteen who survived, the ones later found

in the backyard gardens of the townsfolk, pulling up cabbages and beets, munching nervously as the trainers herded them back to where everything had burned.

Thirty-six others were strong enough to pull their stakes out of the ground and run, to bellow with hope that someone would hear the soothing crackle of the fire, but none trumpeted that cry.

Forty-two applauses after they leave the Garden, there is one brave enough to set the tent aflame. Somehow the others know that as their eyes fill with sweat, it is much easier to let everything turn to ash.
THE ELEPHANT BALLET
amelia wright

I.
1942,
Madison Square Garden,
fifty elephants
and fifty ballerinas
are squeezed into their
pink tutus for the premiere
of Stravinsky's
Circus Polka—
a satire of a piece,
the composer later admits,
a mere sneeze of notes.

For a while
everyone worried
that the huge beasts
would spook, would go
tearing off into the audience
and leave Ringling
with a lawsuit heavier
on their shoulders
than their three-ton
prima ballerina.

II.
As the first performance ends
and the beasts come
galloping offstage,
the curtains close
and the Ringling Bros.
squeeze their eyes shut
waiting for a break
in the silence.
When it comes, the ballerinas
laugh and pirouette,
hugging the legs of their
huge-eared partners,
and head off
to the dressing rooms
where makeup comes off
and everyone returns
to a normal grade of beauty.

III.
Forty-two applauses later
and the elephants are
out of the frill and fluff
once more, taken back
to the menagerie
where they blush silently,
swinging their trunks
back and forth
like pendulums,
as if this all could only

MORE THAN 10 MILES OUT OF TUSCON (excerpt)
helen spica

now
You are standing in the middle of the river. You and crazy Karl. You have
just slipped maybe miles down the Madison, and you are holding onto each
other as tightly as you can. He says he loves you. And what can you do,
when your cousin tells you that he loves you?

what i know about montana
Here is everything I know about Montana:
Helena is the Capital.
There is nothing to do there.
My crazy cousin Karl lives in Bozeman.
There is nothing to do there.
I am going to Montana today.

one
It is 9:28 AM, and the man sitting next to me in seat 15B is eating trail mix
with as much force and noise as he possibly can. I lean over and tell him I'm
allergic to peanuts, really allergic, if I even smell one my face swells up and I
go blind. He apologizes and closes the bag and puts it under his seat. I'm not
allergic to peanuts.

The man in seat 15B asks me what I'm going to Montana for. He
probably feels sorry for me, the thin little girl in 15A with a severe peanut
allergy and a black eye. Oh, that's right, I have a black eye.

"My dad. He's on Death Row out there. He's being executed on
Thursday. I'm going to say good bye." That's what I tell the man.

But really, my dad's not on Death Row. He's never even gotten a
parking ticket. And he's not in Montana at all, he's back in Tucson with my
mother and sister Ida and they're probably in the kitchen eating breakfast and having a great time and not even thinking about the death penalty. But I don't say any of this.

before
Four days before I leave for Bozeman Montana, I get the black eye. I come home with the black eye. That goddamned black eye. My mother sees the eye when she's sitting in the living room, knitting and listening to Vivaldi. She drops her knitting needles and covers her mouth with her thin hands and then she screams Daniel. That's my father's name. And he comes running in and he sees the black eye and he holds my face and he keeps shaking me, shaking me, asking what happened, what happened. I tell them what happened and my mother cries, and my father tries not to cry, and before I know it they're on the phone with god-knows-who, saying, we have to get her out of here, where can she go?, and for goodness sake, Michelle, we're not sending her there.

Later that night I stand in front of my bedroom mirror and look at my black eye. I'm pretty proud of it. After all, it's the only black eye I've ever had.

flashback
Cipirino needs money. I don't know what he needs if for. I give him everything I have on me, except for $2.75, which I keep. He says he's going downtown tonight to make the rest. Dogfighting. I've never been to a dogfight. Cipirino doesn't want me to come. But I do anyway.

us
My crazy cousin Karl is not really my cousin. He's related to me somehow,

around the ankle when she got them insured by Fox in 1943. It was common knowledge, like how she knew the sun was yellow even though she never looked at it.
be fantastic to have pictures taken of me constantly. Just for a week.”

The girl felt something wavering around in the hairs in her left nostril and snorted a few times, on the verge of sneezing. The old woman's speckled, discolored hands paused while flipping a page, then continued after a moment's consideration.

“Alone and partially naked,” she read. “Evelyn Nesbit said that after she became an alcoholic, after her husband murdered that man, in this article I read once. She said that while she was in the limelight, that was how she felt whenever a person took a picture of her. She never mentioned being uncomfortable about it while she was famous, though. She faked.”

Warm water trickled over the hill of Clara's scalp, down the bridge of her nose, forked out to her jaw, and she fell asleep.

Clara turned off the television on the couch, crouched down to pick it up and hauled it back over to a small mahogany table across the room. Once, sitting on a chair in a friend-of-a-friend's living room, she'd explained to her host: “When a hand-upholstered chair like this has been kept this incredibly spotless, it would be logical that another article of furniture in the same house would suffer certain losses - a wine stain from an Easter party, a tiny rip from an angry cat's claws - it's only logical (tit for tat was the boring way to explain it).” But everything in the house, of course, was perfect and immaculate, and she made them explain why. This was why she moved the television. She remembered that occasion and the looks on the host's face every time she put things back the way she'd planned them out two years ago when she purchased this apartment, but it remained a compulsion nonetheless. She knew, for instance, that the portrait of Greta Garbo was four feet and six inches up the wall just like she knew that Betty Grable's legs were eighteen-and-a-half inches around the thigh and seven-and-a-half inches but so distantly that no one's been able to explain it to me yet. I haven't seen him since I was eleven, the last time we were up in Montana, and even then we didn't go to see him, we just ran into him at the Bait & Tackle shop. We were really there because my father likes to think of himself as really sporty, a real man's man, and wanted to show us just how committed he was by taking us to the middle-of-fucking-nowhere to fish the Madison River.

What you have to know about Karl is that he's the only member of our family who's ever moved more than ten miles out of Tucson. It's not that we're a particularly close-knit bunch, but rather that we're afraid to try anything new.

When I asked my mother why everyone thought Karl was crazy, she couldn't really answer me except to say that he wasn't a very social person, and he never came to family reunions, and I told her that those weren't really grounds for proclaiming someone mentally ill.

two

Crazy Karl is waiting for me when I get off the plane in Bozeman. He looks exactly the same as he did when we ran into him at the Bait & Tackle eight years ago. He's got brown hair and brown eyes and a full brown beard, and he's tall and must be in his forties. When I reach him he hugs me for a long time. He hugs me like he's known me his whole life. Then he holds me at an arms length so he can look at me. He touches my bruised eye. It hurts when he does that, but I let him.

We drive to his house in a navy blue Ford convertible. It's the kind of car that old men collect and leave in their garages, but sometimes take out onto the driveway to hose down and show-off to the neighbors. But this car looks like it has a lot of miles on it.

"Nice ride," I say, because there's nothing else to say in this awkward
and new silence.
Karl nods.
And then I say, "I don’t really know why my parents sent me all the
way out here, but I just want you to know, I don’t really need a babysitter."
"Good," says Karl, "because I’m not going to babysit you."
For a while we say nothing over the sound of the engine. Then I
Karl says, "Is there somewhere else you want to be?"
I sit back against the leather seat. I guess Karl’s right. I guess Boze-
man Montana is just as shitty a place as anywhere else, so I might as well be
here, where no one knows me and at least I can make up a cool story about
my black eye. Maybe I was thrown from a horse. Maybe I was in a bar
fight, like in those old westerns my dad and I used to watch on weekends.
Or maybe it’s a mark of my doing something really extreme, like rock-
climbing, or glacier surfing. Who knows, here in Montana?

how i got my name
"So...Kiddy?"
"Yeah. Kiddy."
"Isn’t that your grandmother’s name?"
"Yep."
"Ugly name."
"Ugly name."
"What should we call you then?"
"I don’t know."
"How about Kid? Just Kid."
"Ok."
"Ok, Kid."

basin was set by a rickety wooden chair in the bathroom where she’d
warmed her feet earlier. She remembered what she’d done, but the memory
of swimming didn’t seem entirely intact. She went into the kitchen, saw the
empty bowl where she normally put fruits. Did she eat those? The hairs on
her legs stood erect though the muscles in her leg felt like they could just fall
limp on the kitchen tile. On a napkin she read the words ‘racemic ampheta-
mine’ in her sister’s hand next to her own name, Clara W. Probably just a
pharmaceutical she was supposed to pick up for the cat (she wouldn’t be).
She recognized Bette Davis’ voice in the room over, but knew this probably
to be the remnants of one of her sister’s daily cereal-and-old celebrity talk
show binges, and went to inspect it closer.

In the hair salon Clara sat down at the shampooing area, letting the
hairdresser put a towel under her neck so the plastic didn’t rub against her
neck and the water didn’t run down her t-shirt.
"Look, again," said the old woman next to her in a gawkish New York
accent, pointing at a picture in her magazine. The cover and the back had
been laminated.
"What?" she said. It was a picture of a famous couple holding babies.
The old woman sighed melodramatically.
"Twins. Ever notice how often celebrities have twins?"
The old woman’s hairdresser laughed as she began pulling folded foil
out of a cocoon of white hair. She was getting her hair bleached from gray to
white.
"I guess," said the girl numbly, and turned back to face the open win-
dow. Heat wafted in. The old woman’s lipstick crackled as her mouth gaped
to speak again.
"All of it’s recessive. They’re a breed, a selective one. But oh, it would
of joints on her fingers on the angle of the hardback. Something about that precise, adjustable pressure between those phalanges warped her skin into a vast pin-array of nerve endings. She’d always imagined her insides like this: consisting entirely of spindles and delicate metals, teetering with the imminent possibility of their own extinction. Beyond that, the only thing she could equate to her idea of human anatomy and internal organs was the rattling noise of the seeds inside an apple when it’s being shaken. If she ever had the occasion of being carried in the hands of King Kong or a similar friendly behemoth, she feared she would be crushed to dust. In any case, the corner-rubbing was one of the best anesthetics she’d ever used. She thought it similar to the effects of a rocking chair’s comfort to adults and babies alike, those consistent oscillations rooting a sense of inertia. What she hadn’t ever realized about rocking chairs was the increased curve on the bottom slats of wood near the back that prevented people from toppling over. She thought it was just for looks.

The girl slipped herself out of the damp sheets and pulled down on a chain of glossy red beads hanging from the ceiling fan to turn it off. She cocked her wrist and let three fingers run on the underside of each passing blade to help slow it down, then went to the closets, looking out the bedroom door to make sure her sister was gone. She slid on a long, buttoned cotton blouse only loose at her knees, and belted it above her navel with a length of navy-blue linen. She went back to the bed and patted the sheets back out, froofed the pillow. On the pillow were small clippings of hair. She paused, disturbed for a second, then remembered after her haircut a week ago, shaking her hair over the white pavement of downtown, the cloud of the blond snippets that drifted out, then some flashes, clicks and shuffled footsteps around her. Just got sleepy again.

She picked up the coral piece. Right. The swimming, too. The porcelain home

We’re at home. It’s a normal summer, let’s say, Friday afternoon, and my sister Ida and I have been sitting by the side of the pool all day. Let’s pretend it’s four o’clock and we come in the back door and strip off our bathing suits in the laundry room, even though they’re not even wet because we don’t swim. There’s something lame and smooth playing on the ceiling speakers that are hooked up all throughout the house, because our mother likes to listen to soft jazz in the afternoon. She’s probably in the living room knitting. My mother is, by nature, an incredibly neurotic woman, and while most people have their own personal nervous twitches, my mother knits. But she doesn’t knit anything. She just creates long lines of purple or green stitches, and when the scarf—or whatever it is—reaches about fifteen feet, she takes it off the needles and starts a new one. Once a week when Lucia comes to clean the house she takes them all away and she says she gives them to Goodwill but she’s probably just throwing them in a dumpster somewhere because really, no one needs a twelve-foot scarf in Tucson.

But on this ordinary Friday afternoon neither Ida or I look for our mother, because we’ve both recognized that’s she’s just not that interesting, and Ida goes to her room and I don’t see her for the rest of the night. I don’t see my dad either, because he goes from work to golf and then he comes home for dinner and I won’t be here for that.

Let’s say I then put on a sundress or whatever and go find Cipirino, who lives downtown and is always fun. Cipirino’s short and strong and loves me more than anyone ever has, and he’s not my boyfriend though he fucks me like he is, so I guess he’s just my best friend. So I find Cipirino and who knows what we do, but whatever we’re doing we’re probably having a great time doing it. And even if we’re not, we think we are, so it’s alright.
three
Karl makes scrambled eggs for dinner. We eat with our heads down and don’t talk. But the crickets are so loud here that the silence doesn’t feel very empty at all. When Karl’s finished, he looks at me for a long time.

“You got a beau at home?” Karl’s old enough to still say beau.
I shake my head. “Only Cipirino.”

“Who’s Cipirino?”
“Cipirino takes care of me.”
Karl points at my eye. “That’s how he takes care of you?”
I glare at him.

“So you’re trouble.”
“What?”
“You know. Bad news.”
I shake my head. “I don’t mean to be.”

We sit and I push cold eggs around my plate. When the kitchen is dark Karl gets up and turns on some lamps and takes our dishes to the sink.

Hey Kid.” Karl’s voice.

“What?”

“We’re in fucking Montana. Where are we going to go?”

where we go
We’re ripping down some dirt road in the Ford, and all I can see is what the headlights shine on in front of us. I ask where we’re going, but Karl won’t tell me. When we get to here we’re going, Karl stops the car and I can hear water. Rushing water.
in the bed across the room, her shape pitching up the tucked sheets at equal angles on either side. Mallory took a ticket and a folded sheet of paper from the box and replaced it in the hamper, turning around. She noticed a new sculpture on the bedside table—no, not sculpture, it looked more like coral. Millepore? She tried to wade back to memories of college Biology study sessions—no such luck. Mallory moved closer and ran a finger along the surface of it—brittle but sticky, as if filmed with sap. Red motes separated from the surface her finger dragged across and drifted down to the wood of the table, dissolving into the grain. Greta Garbo looked suspiciously down at her from a poster above the table, next to a print of Evelyn Nesbit by Gertrude Kasebier. They made her sister uncomfortable—Mallory sometimes thought she put them there to scare herself.

The sleeping girl rotated and Mallory noticed that the sheets were wet around her form, the liquid absorbed in the carpet around the bed in slowly fading footprints, the sheen of the girl’s black hair splashed across the pillow. She must’ve gone swimming early in the morning. It was only eight o’clock now, which made the summer sun seem prematurely eager in comparison, Mallory having just come from seven-hour days. There is sand here, she reminded herself. There are no scarves or boots or blackened chimneys except on Christmas morning. The only similar thing is television. She briefly mourned the loss of ceremonial layering for daily blizzards, and continued her thoughts out the front door. The sleeping girl opened her eyes, stared at the ceiling, and wetted her lips.

She thought, as she always did immediately after waking, that she’d like to read a book, but this never actually happened. She only read on the porch on cold days. The corners of all the books in her house were worn and rounded from the thing that most consoled her while reading (as she was deathly afraid of paper cuts and grew up being read to) – rubbing the insides
sister had gotten them more than a week ago for herself (on one of the extremely rare occasions the poor girl left the house—though Mallory couldn’t bring herself to be skeptical of that) and hadn’t touched or laid eyes on them once. The meat of the pears was a little bit less firm than she liked; the bites were glossy, making her teeth feel strangely epidermal and her gums tighten over the bone. Bette Davis was on the Dick Cavett show on the television situated behind her on an orange couch, complaining about ungrateful celebrities. She’d watched the show all the way through before, even though she didn’t like Bette Davis. There was some streak of feigned gratitude in every one of her smiles that reminded Mallory of her own mother, standing above a table neatly arranged with omelettes, artichokes, and crêpe suzette, each abundant on gold-leafed platters. There was always an expectant look on that face, a delicate care under which both of her children’s legs moved with unknowing caution, so that regardless of crumpled rug-ends and slick, mopped linoleum, neither of them would ever know a single fall or injury beneath her glower. Mallory and her sister’s childhoods were airbrushed and airtight, fraught with summer homes and Duvet cocktails. Their mother always said Bette Davis copied her style from the four-page fold outs in magazines.

Mallory went into the bedroom, walking towards the end lined with fold-out closet space. The absolute whiteness of the room struck her for a moment, but she thought it was probably just one of those convenient parting of cloud masses producing a sudden panoramic brilliance that had never ceased to surprise her since childhood, here or out on her junior high soccer field, where the clouds’ movements were recorded in exact tonal difference across the grass. She slid open the closet jalousies and took a cylindrical hat box from a hamper in which a tabby cat was sleeping. The shelves above were lined with pleated skirts and blouses belonging to her sister, who was...
POEM FOR ESMERALDA

nick vaneck

1.
Time put a gun in
the bus driver's face.
Time puts a gun in
the bus driver's face.
I sat back in my seat
and took off my socks.
I sit back in my seat
and take off my socks.

2.
I am standing with the gray man
watching storm fall over
latticework. Right now
will come eventually, he says.

3.
An ascetic saw my beard
and winked. I said
the difference between you and me
is a secret.

4.
Legs like spires point north straight to
diamonds. Rubies are the color
of Hell and no more consequential
than all that's fallen from the line.

5.
I watch the moss grow
up my body
until it covers my eyes
and all I can see is North
and all I know
is that
everything
will be violently piecemeal.

6.
Its needles
undulate,
perfect ripples
in the wind,
as good a friend
as any.

7.
A rabid raccoon pads
a painting with his inky paws
across the ceiling of my skull.
Imagine the mural
our earth would be
if every person loosed the beast.

8.
A beautiful woman wished me
a happy birthday
and I took a sip of water,
knowing one day
I'd drown in it.

ALONE AND PARTIALLY NAKED

jackson rollings

In August 1990 Clara's mother Marie was in Paris with her aunt when they saw Gianni Agnelli sunbathing naked on his boat. The aunt's name was Lucrece, the toppled doyenne of an exclusive aircraft company, and she suggested they go down on a cobblestone boulevard by the docks while they shared a small wedge of Laguiole. There was a cloudiness that illuminated the landscape almost to the point of glowing, but left colors oddly unsaturated. They passed by a gate to a ramp just outside the harbor that led down to the main docks, which, upon a test by Lucrece, proved to be unlocked. Their heels creaked as they staggered down the corrugated surface and walked by a few yachts, the sound of bones cracking in their feet over the uneven surface of the wood. Then they saw the old man, skin tawny and leathery, hanging off of his bones like fabric. He was unfurled and open in the white light, wearing nothing but a silver wristwatch. Lucrece pulled Marie back and peeked out to try to get a good look at his face. A thin black-haired lady came out from behind a marble-countered bar, naked save for a blue bikini bottom and a crystal glass balanced between two extended fingertips. Marie thought she recognized the girl, perhaps from a runway. With muffled grunts, the two women rounded back to the ramp as quickly as possible, holding onto their silk hats as the breeze picked up, carrying their stifled laughs back to Agnelli's boat as they hiked the last step up onto the boulevard.

They told nobody until four years later. They treated good stories like fine wine, they explained, and left it at that.

In the kitchen there was a plain stone bowl next to the oven, and Mallory ate each of the seven pears it contained with a calculated velocity. Her
PRAYERS

1. Even if you don’t know how to pray, you do.

   You must, or how would the geese form their V’s towards the dark, scrubbed forest, even when you sleep?

2. Last night, I pushed a boat into the lake.

   Moonlight stuttered off the ripples and flickered in the eyes of the bank dwellers while the sleepless still wondered if they were truly awake.

3. Headlights sweep across a patch of weeds.

   In a sheet of white the moth rises from its working bed, lifts its wings, suspends, and takes flight - bathed.

4.Posted sign on my door: “I don’t even remember your name.”

5. My wife asked that I not write any more love poems, and Aww, shit, I thought, I’m not ready to get serious.

6. Trying to convince my workshop not to act like my wife. Every time we talk about poetry they want to cuddle afterward.

7. All form and no function, she and I are like a necklace.

8. How will I know where I stand in this world of snow? Where are you? Where are you?

9. If two stars are what we know about anything, there’s love in the spaces between.

10. Rabid squirrels gnawing off his legs. I know he isn’t dead.

11. Show me a man with the wings of an angel and I will get the hair out of my face.

12. What’s your name, and what ever happened to that yellow dress you used to wear in high school while peeling oranges?

13. My mother called tree times last night while I was out feeding my dinner to fish.

14. I never wrote a poem about basketball. Here I am, watching the Chinese ballet run back and forth across the stage for no reason.
In August, the possums crawl beneath our house and die there, past the floorboards of my parent's bedroom. My father lugs in the big white fans and lets them run all day. But the rot is raw and comes through everything. Start to taste in it the wheat bread, the yogurt, the iced tea. Gets into the water and the skin, the hair. In the mornings, my father bends down to kiss me and he can smell it, no mistake. The flies burrowing under the nails and filling up the eyes like mugs. The coffee, the cream, the brown sugar. The breakfast dishes are bone and stuck flesh.

At dusk, I find the break in the foundation of the house. I go slow, as though the possums might awake and slither out to claim me. The day is still, rain is near. I cover my mouth and nose and go, kneeling through the dirt to peer into the dark. Face to face with the skull sized hole, the smell is thick and I slide close, stick my hand into the clear, grope around, nothing. In this late purple light, the underbelly of the house is strange and wrong. What have we been living on all these years – come to find the demons not so distant. I stretch my arm and strain, dizzy to touch them.
Q: What's black and white and red all over?

A: The *Red Wheelbarrow* in February

(and zebra steak)
So much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chicks

—william carlos williams

special thanks to therese zielinski
and amelia “wrong” wright