RED WHEELBARROW
Fall 2011

FACULTY ADVISORS
Chris Dombrowski
Aimé Merizon

EDITORS
Nicole Acton
Kelly Clare
Margaret Abigail Flowers

COVER ART
“Like Moonlight on a Window Seat” by Jami Shimon
CHUPACABRA

Shae Gibbs
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NORTHERN DIVERSITY

Kelly Conger

Thirteen Kenyan dancers steal the hearts of an audience on a talent show. Following their performance is a pair of African American comedians, twins. My brother, being only 13 and having only grown up in Northern Michigan asked me, “Are they from Kenya too?” to which I directly stated, “No, those are just regular black people.” At that moment we both thought the same thing. There are no regular black people in Northern Michigan. There are normal Caucasians and not so normal ones. Michigan has the highest unemployment rate in the country. So there happen to be more trailer parks and mobile homes than you would find in other vacation destinations around the world. The shops open up four months out of the year when the wealthy families from Ohio drive up, along with their nannies and assistants for the summer. They live in a separate part of town, a gated neighborhood that honestly, isn’t all that special. The heiress to the Bunn Coffee Company lives out there and one day decided to build a house (an entire, full-sized house) for fairies. After surviving cancer on three occasions she became convinced that it was the fairies who cured her and helped her through her struggle. The house is pink with little rooms filled with fairy dolls and a grand table set up with all the candles and ribbons of a celebrity wedding. The wallpaper has fairies flying up and up the spiral staircase, waving their wands and batting their eyelashes. Not all of the few to live in the gated neighborhood are snotty families. The fairy lady is sweet, middle-aged, and her past shows in her deep-set eyes behind the glitter and ivy crown she wears. Some mock her, others marvel at her. Who honestly builds a house for fairies? It sounds crazy and so the people think she’s crazy. If it looks like it could be then it is. There is no question. If the deer
looks dead then it is and you keep driving. You can call the road kill
guy on your way back and pretend like you weren't the jackass to
hit a deer. No one who actually lives in Northern Michigan will cry
over something like this.

Skinny white girls will think all boys are gross and say that they
would never in a million years date "a fat boy." Once they're half way
through high school they'll see the light and date anyone who looks
at them twice. However, some will stick with their old ways, calling
boys Neanderthals or Sasquatches. Neanderthals fall just above
Sasquatches for a number of reasons, though both are unflattering.
Don't worry, boys, your affection is not expendable to all of us.

When a new family bought the gas station in town we all
wondered who the hell would invest in something like that. "It's an
Indian family." Said my mother who heard it from the town gossip,
the woman who runs the gift shop on the corner with all of the Ugly
Dolls in the window. The word/title/name Indian could mean two
things; the first being an Indian family from the reservation who
somehow managed to trick the previous owners into giving it to
them for a free night at the casino. This seemed unlikely. "No, like
a real Indian family from India." My brother's first response: "Why
are they in Michigan?" And that's what everyone asks. Every local is
wondering what the hell a family from India is doing in Michigan
where it snows and people hunt and use improper grammar and
racial slurs.
Anne Malin Ringwalt

This is how you fall sideways into the Earth, feel eyes drift closed, dirt caressing tired bones.

Let the myriad of lights run around your body, gently pull your shoulders down, the recline of a face, the tilt of a jawline, the deep inhale, body limp, floating Chopin. Suddenly graceful.

Dipped long coils in holy water feed the lake your drooling Earth, baptism a prayer, massive wolf howl.

This is how you give yourself over to the elements.

Teach your eyes to echo the outturned palms of intimacy, your toes the teamwork of pointed feet leap

fingers on piano keys and adolescent adoration.

Rave on go limp go wild.

Noiselessly a downpour of chilling childhood rolling off your skin one day we too shall forget this on the surface of new. Feel the syllables of temper tantrums, confessions.
sin and redemption
sustain your revolutionized head
release
when you sleep
taste pine
and pining
eyelashes descend like a curtain of prancing deer that veil skin.

Unclenched jaw.
The hold of a lovely body.

You are the listener, eye-opener, guardian of tended and untended spirits
limb and soul stretcher.

Tongue twister.

They say in church to light your hearts on fire and you agree with
everything but that
so nestled in arms you might start other fires
maybe love, maybe burnt clothes
ashes on moss.
OF ARCHITECTURE,
AND THE DECK OF THE BODEGA
FOR KEVIN CARLOS

Sophia Fisher

The Colombian who joins my table
suffocates his cigarette in the stale-brewed mug of a tequila coffee
drinks the ashes down and with his homesick sad eyes he says
I do not know you, you are new here

On the street front deck of the Bodega
fifty brands of beer are served to slim-hipped hipsters
chest hair guitar wanderers and
fixie bike boys who chain, lock-armed
from iron post to iron post across the sidewalk line

The Colombian, I tell him I am out after dark only to familiarize
befriend the inkblot haze of night
catch the windblown scent of steel fried cart kielbasa,
study all the dark women who cling half-heartedly to crooked brick
waiting for the night men, who love to pick them clean

I tell him I have been released, with warnings from my mother:
stay away from boys who blink too slowly or
strangers who run their fingers across their sleeves
as if they were the blind

The Colombian smiles, makes tabletop small shanties with envelopes of sugar
says he has no intention to make of us, agenda
I've never met a man, I say
with the conviction he could live without one

I tell him when I walk, or sit on street-side decks like these
I am just waiting to find someone
who holds no sense of what time
is the right time
to make time
I entertain how easily we could slip down Second Avenue
in his home, soap shop candles, a persian rug,
where we would sit and play tiled board games or
burn to brown some rice and beans over a rudimentary stovetop flame

Then, a grasp across the boundaries of first-night friendship
the Columbian tracing the blemishes of my bare skin and
making of my body, all the constellations
he says, these are the only stars you will ever see here
they are not the lights of the country I know best

We would fall asleep here
waking only for sips of water held in misty mason jars
mouths tainted sour with thick lime pulp
only conscious for the half-awake words
which flutter from our tongues like lamplight moths
cocoon upon the other's draught dry lips

But we are not on Second Avenue. We are on the deck of the Bodega and
this Colombian, he tells me of his life in the College
an architect, a boy with busy hands
who as he sits, runs his fingers nervously across his sleeves

Sometimes think I know who says this

there are no sunsets in this city
only the approach of dusk
and what comes after
FAN

Jami Shimon
YEARNING

Allie Rennie

My nephew and I sit with our feet kicking in the lake, he giggles and squeals with every splash. He hasn’t learned the word for this thing engulfing his toes, and so it holds the mystery of an individual. He doesn’t know, that there are millions like it and so he doesn’t know, like I do, that this lake is mundane.

The flash of a lake trout’s tail flits past, like the fleeting glance of a future lover. I think of the first time I met that girl from the park, surrounded by seagulls, laughing with her light blue eyes. My nephew certainly doesn’t know the word for that but neither did I when, days later I lay with the girl, tracing the gentle curve of her back with a finger.

My nephew sees the trout as well and waddles naked through the water after it. His yearning for the fish hasn’t yet learned the word for drowning the way the baby giraffe reaching after the upper branches of a Boab will never learn the word for patience.
I grab him around the waist
and hoist him through the air.
He shrieks and holds his arms out,
doing only what he sees the seagulls do.
His stomach that jumped to his throat during liftoff
hasn't learned the word for flying,
though it clearly doesn't matter.
The neighbors were moving in across the street. They were unloading boxes out of the U-Haul, walking back and forth, down the path, to the driveway, back up the path, through the door. I had counted three of them so far but I wouldn’t be surprised if there were more. They looked like the type of people who breed more than necessary. I had spotted a mother, father, and child so far. The child was a boy, but I couldn’t guess an age. I don’t know the difference between six and ten, or ten and sixteen. The three of them first appeared four days ago, driving around the neighborhood. They would slow down and stare through windows, trying to see what kind of people lived there, I expect. We must have lived up to their standards, because here they were, four days later, with a U-Haul.

“Thay’re back,” Flanny said. She pursed her lips. Flanny always purses her lips.

“I bet there’s more of them,” I replied. Flanny nodded her head in agreement.

“They look too homely for this neighborhood. Homely people always have too many kids,” Flanny was the girl I lived with. Her full name was Flannery, even though she wasn’t Irish. She had bushy hair that looked shorter than it really was, and when she tried to grow it out, it would never get past her shoulders. After that, it would refuse to grow. “Look at that,” Flanny pointed at the neighbor’s car. A girl stuck her head out the door, followed by another. The heads were identical. Same hairstyle. Same eye color, same bored, vacant expression. They emerged from the car. Neither of them carried anything. They walked into the house. Flanny looked at me. “Is
there something wrong with them?” Flanny demanded. She wasn’t concerned, she just wanted to know. “Maybe they have autism. Is that what people with autism look like?” Flanny thought I knew about every disease there was because I was a doctor. I gave her a face.

“I’m a cardiac surgeon, Flanny. I don’t deal with autistic patients.”

“So you don’t know?” She asked again.

“No. But I don’t think so. I think that’s just how teenagers look.” We looked at the family again. The twins did not emerge from the house.

“We need to get dinner going. What should we eat?” Flanny said.

“What do you want to make?”

“Nothing. But we need to eat.” We made baked potatoes and a salad.

It was after dinner when we heard the knock at the door. Flanny looked at me sharply when we heard it. She mouthed the word “don’t.” I had to get it. The lights had been on all evening. I opened the door, and there they were.

Their names were Marion and Johnny and their boy’s name was John, after his father. The twins were Morgan and Mariah, and they had baked a spice cake, which they presented to me. I said thanks, and smiled. Marion smiled back, but Morgan and Mariah still looked bored.

“Well, would you like to come in, then? I could introduce you to my girlfriend, Flanny.” Up close they looked even more homely, all except the twins who could have been pretty if they smiled.

“You have a beautiful house! Look at this table—it must have cost a fortune. I bet there is a story behind this table. All great furniture has a story behind it, right?” The table did cost a fortune. But there was no story. Flanny had picked it out from Horchow last year, and I had paid for it.
SNAKE HEAD

Shae Gibbs
MEDUSA

Emily Hittner-Cunningham

I.

My love lives in my head.
She came to my room on a quiet October morning
when I was dozing in bed and listening to the blues.
I saw that she was a miraculous creature.
Her curly green hair rustled even indoors.
She told me her name was Medusa.
I asked her what had happened to her snakes,
and she told me 'That was thousands of years ago. Things change.'

That night she slept curled on my pillow like a cat.
She filled the room with the scent of dirt and grass
and when I woke, I thought I had slept outdoors.

Every morning she walked with me,
sat across the kitchen table at breakfast
to fill up the empty space
and told me her story between then and now
to fill up empty time.
'They buried me in the ground
because they knew my home was in the water.
It was a punishment. They musn't find me here.'
I told her the Greek gods had vanished long ago.
I imagined her forcing her way out of the ground
rubbing the dirt off her skin, shaking it out of her hair.

She disappeared when there were other people around.
'I don't want to be a danger to them,' she explained.
I asked her why she didn't hurt me.
She said that looking at me
was like looking at her reflection
in a cracked mirror, harming neither herself nor me.
'We're the same, really, you and I.'
Here the ordinary and extraordinary meet,
made equals by years of isolation, years spent underground,
dangerous power buried under from fear
and a keen sense of our own ugliness.
This is what comes from too loose an imagination —
a love just like yourself, who knows you a little too well.

Once, she left for days and would not return.
Alone, I smashed a little hand mirror on the floor
and started sobbing as I swept up the shards.
Medusa appeared at the doorway and ran
to sit by me on the floor, put her arms around me
pull me to her, and so we sat until I couldn't cry any longer.
'I had to know you needed me,' she told me.
'Or if you could make it on your own again.'
'Not anymore. You can't return to that kind of loneliness.'
She didn't leave my side for days.

II.

She took me out into a field behind the house
but it was too cloudy to see any stars, as we had hoped.
We stood together in silence.
Then she began to laugh and to laugh,
spinning away from me.
She stood on the tip of one toe
arched back so that her hair hung down
and for just a moment
I didn't know which way was up,
which way down
whether it was her hair hanging toward the grass
or the earth's hair hanging toward her
and I lived for a moment in a world
where there was no direction.

She straightened and came to me, pulled me down into the grass.
'Look,' she said, 'the sky's been painted.'
And she was right, because a painter's palette had been
splashed against the sky. At one horizon it was black
that faded to blue, stained by the streetlamps below
that swirled into purple, twisted by the long streaks of red
from the radio beacon that colored the other horizon.
I didn't know if it was beautiful or terrible.

'Come, we have to go now.'
She pulled me up and we walked toward home then,
and we looked up at the sky all the way.
She leaned against me, whispering.
'Someday all the lights will burn out
and it'll just be the two of us and black, black sky.'
Light means reflections. Light means a world
where Medusa has tamed her only power
to keep herself a little safer around mirrors.

'Come, we have to go,' and she sounded frightened
as she tugged at my hand, walking faster, faster, running.
Her hand slipped from mine and she began again
to twirl and twirl, and to crumble into dirt and dust and grass.
I watched her, delight and regret pounding through my veins
because she had shattered, but shattered so beautifully.

Such is the cracked and breaking world.
Isabelle Rose
My sister’s first name and mine are from the Greek mythology, but our middle names carry the burden of our past. I carry my grandmother’s sister’s name, and my sister carries the name of the woman who held us in her womb. I carry the burden of my mother’s gaze, because I am the daughter of the daughter of the Holocaust, and my heart isn’t large enough to hold the weight of death. She wanted a daughter who would love her, listen to her advice and eat her food. When I leave her home, I carry the burden of what I leave behind – a mother who won’t forget.

My grandmother is named, like most Jews, after a biblical character. Ruth was not part of the Hebrew people, but remained loyal to her Hebrew mother-in-law nonetheless. My grandmother was a Jew from the very beginning; her Judaism could have become her downfall.

Ruth survived the Holocaust because of her sister’s pregnancy. After they were forced to leave their home, her sister got pregnant. In the ghetto, the Gestapo created lists of people to be sent away on trains meant for cattle. The sister’s name appeared one month on the list, but with her unwanted pregnancy, she could never work, and they knew the Germans would kill her.

Ruth’s mother said to her, “Take your sister’s place.” Ruth, because she was filled with love or fear or intuition, obeyed. She was sent to a labor camp, where she worked in the cold, in the hunger; she came near to death but didn’t die. While her sisters were murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, she dug holes in the ground and in her heart.
My grandmother survived because of a pregnancy that was not meant to be. At the age of eighteen, my mother found out that she would never be able to bear a child. I cannot carry the burden of my upbringing, the same way my mother’s body could not carry the burden of children.

Before my grandmother began to suffer from Alzheimer’s, she loved serving us food. She’d say that eating was good and we never refused. I look like her, everyone says so, and sometimes I’d rather look like someone else, a little less Polish, a little more Aryan. Israeli culture has created people who are self-important, but look up to everything that is different from themselves. Being Jewish is a blessing, but looking Jewish is not. When I travel the foreign countries, when I speak English to my American family, I hope to assimilate myself, to lose the very identity which is at the root of my existence.

When I visited Auschwitz, during the beginning of my senior year in high school, all I could think, in loops, was that my family had been ruined here, long before it was created. I saw the red brick walls and the flowing waves of grass behind them. My grandmother had died the week before in a nursing home, and I remember her tiny body, blue eyes no longer piercing.

I didn’t know the names of more than half the people who came with me to Auschwitz. Students of life and of vodka, they seemed careless, taking pictures as though this weren’t their tragedy, as though this belonged to someone else. Even though she came out of here alive, lived many happy years after this, I thought that this place had changed her, and in turn, changed my mother, who’d never dared to come here. This is where our worlds might have ended, entirely out of our hands.
It seems as though we remember our history until the time when it counts: now. Our group is huddled in their coats and complaints. They miss the heat of the Promised Land, so different from the wind which blisters at their skin. All I could see were rows upon rows of barracks, bricks and wood. Some burnt down, some looking just as they had fifty-five years earlier.

Once, I asked my mother what she thought about when she found out that she wouldn't be able to have babies. She said that the pain of in-vitro fertilization was nothing in comparison to the pain I could cause her by telling her that she'd failed as a mother. I told her that her pain was nothing in comparison to the pain of others, to the pain of starvation and grief. She said that when I left her house, she grieved over my death. I told that I was alive, and said that I had gone too far away.

In Auschwitz, the best I could do was hope for answers, but there are none. There are no solutions to problems of love and hate. I walked into one of the barracks, simply to escape the cold, and suddenly the bite of guilt was that much more chilling: in my down coat and fur-hat, how dare I complain? We talked about faith, how there is nothing to believe in, and the guide told us that this is meaningless, unless we take it home with us, unless we remember it for the rest of our lives.

I walked towards the Gas Chambers in silence, and every step was like a little apology. I said, I'm sorry that my grandparents survived, but you didn't. I held hands with someone, anyone, and spoke only in whispers, as though the dead might hear. When I sat on the large raised platform which had been turned into a monument for the hundreds of thousands, the sun came out and I saw the sheer beauty of our surrounding — the way the trees encircle the place, and green touches blue with the lightness of nature, one could mistake hell for heaven.
I wasn’t very close to my grandmother before she died. All I can remember of her from the years preceding the onset of Alzheimer’s is the way she used to feed me incessantly, as though the need to eat was a never-ending desire, insatiable, regardless of the amount of chicken-soup bowls and strawberries I had already consumed. Here, the mere thought about food is practically punishable by law.

I wonder, like many before me, why I came here. I was told to come in remembrance, to seek questions and fill my mind with the knowledge that humans are monsters and that our past is stained. But, returning to the bus, I was grateful simply for the sheer heat, and for the fact that in a grave this big, my tears are nothing but an erasable stain. I can cry over my problems, which are so small, and my grief can disappear in this endless grave, mingle with the tears shed by others.
SELF-PORTRAIT

Isabelle Rose

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