

# The Muse

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# The Muse

*The Literary & Arts Magazine of Howard Community College*

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# Our Tenth Anniversary Issue

Ten is an important number. Decades are defining. We think of ourselves as in our twenties, thirties, forties, or beyond, sliding over the dozens and other numbers in between.

*The Muse* is no longer in its infancy, but a vibrant, articulate literary and artistic celebration of spring that annually invites submissions from students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community; brings the editors and designers together to read, discuss, marvel, compare, distinguish, and choose; and culminates in an increasingly festive reading of the works published (beautifully, may I say) within its lovingly wrought pages.

The first *Muse* fittingly featured an image of “Eve” on the cover, by Professor of Art Yifei Gan, looking outward, offering the viewer a bite of her apple. Ten fruitful years later, we look out into the world with another *Muse*, celebrating what we are in the midst of and arms open to what lies ahead.

*The Muse* continues a fine tradition begun by the earliest HCC publications, *Ink on Paper* and *The Iron Horse*. As

promised years ago, Duncan Hall has become an open book itself, its hallways and classrooms lined with some of the best student poetry published here, inviting our responses and conversations.

Even in this digital age, or perhaps more so, we treasure beautiful things we can hold in our hands, dip into, come across, hand to someone and say, “Look at this.” Seeing a copy of the *Muse* somewhere on campus, at home, or in the community always brings a jolt of pleasure, especially as the art on the covers is chosen with such care, so that even a glimpse is a gift.

You are holding something that represents the whole spectrum of the human creative process, including experiences, ideas, skills, inspiration, discernment, discipline, design, coherence, harmony, and hard work. Please continue to contribute, and to take us with you.

Tara Hart

*Professor of English; Chair, English/World Languages Division*

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Ben Tarr

## Nine Ways to Look at Language

The idle chatter of friends at ease  
Brings laughter and insight  
And slowly slurs as the night blurs on

Soft feet patter eagerly along,  
Bearing aloft an apprentice of the art.  
Childish lips leave words flop-flipped,  
But, still learning, are excused and understood.

A brick wall between two nations  
Obscures both sound and meaning.  
But, through man-made cracks, sweet ideas may slip  
Beautiful and foreign to the other side.

Cold crushed chalk grinds equations on the board,  
In search of mastery and order.  
Is it hubris to believe  
All can be perceived  
Via manipulation of S and P?

Arduous catalogues of text  
Painstakingly define and cement  
They try in vain to hold common ground  
And futilely restrain  
The flood of change, connotation and innovation

Bask in the novelty of the horizon!  
Vast new frontiers beckon us to explore,  
And new words must be created,  
To discuss what was,  
Until now, indescribable.

All which is sublime and mysterious,  
Buried like some long forbidden treasure,  
Shrouded behind the vagaries of unchecked emotion,  
And victims of the worst spectacles of speculation,  
Built poorly and hurriedly on cracked foundations.

Music tinkles through the cloudy atmosphere,  
Lifting idle minds above the banal.  
It thuds through brass, wires, and vocal chords  
To share some secret, sincere though still profound.

In the end it is a game you see, one need only know the rules.  
Each piece's meaning determined, not by sophistry or codex,  
But by how and where it is used.  
And, as with every game of man,  
It must inevitably be played.

K. J. Kovacs

## Son of the Sea-wave

Here on the leese of your winding sheet  
my blood pounds through your sandy skull  
My heart fills in the beats of your heart's stolen beats  
In the eyelid-rustling wake of tumbled thunder,  
I feel the steady pulse inside your wrist—  
a cruel trick that convinces me your heartbeat still exists.

What I'm wondering tick tick tick  
is this:

If moth and mouse, if periwinkle and if grouse  
burst forth from fuses too minute to measure,  
If firefly and goldeneye, why  
not your bones, old son of the Swansea'd sea wave?  
Why, when turtle wakes in carapace to shelter under Queen Anne's Lace  
and even the slightest slug can rise to drink the saltless dew,

why why why why why  
not your bones, too?



Liam Casey

## One Good Cigarette

A smile cracked on Dom's lips as he exhaled smoke into the cold night air. It had been months since his last cigarette and he missed it. Shelly had quit a few years before and decreed back in June that as long as they were married neither of them would smoke. He hadn't so much agreed as obeyed. Dom scratched the side of his nose with his thumb, the Marlboro fixed between his fingers. He always liked to smoke on nights like this when he was really thinking about things. *Well*, he thought, *never nights quite like this*. The wind picked up and Dom pulled his coat tighter around his chest. It was really too small for him, a gift from Shelly's mother who had never bothered to ask for his measurements. *Thanks Betty*, he had said. *It's perfect*. Dom laughed aloud and took another drag on his cigarette. What a crock of shit.

Like most things in Dom's life, his relationship with his mother-in-law was superficial. Before they moved to New York last year, he'd only see her on the holidays—Christmas, Thanksgiving, sometimes Easter if his parents weren't up to it. Now he saw her every other day, and Dom knew well that it got harder pretending to like someone the more often you saw her. Of course Shelly loved

having her mother over, especially now that they'd had the kitchen redone and the couches reupholstered. Dom shook his head and clapped his boots together over the ledge like he'd done since he was little and agitated, sitting on the kitchen counter in time-out. The echo bounced off the silent faces of the nearby buildings and dissipated into the night.

He'd asked her, *Who the hell reupholsters couches?*

*We do.*

*Why not buy new ones?*

*Because I like these couches and I have the money.*

Argument settled. Most of their arguments ended that way. *Not for much longer*, Dom thought. The cigarette was beginning to slouch and Dom wished he'd splurged on the \$10.50 for a whole pack instead of bumming one off Eddie at work. He reached for his collar and carefully undid his tie, placing it gently on the ground beside his wallet and subway pass. It was his father's tie and he didn't want it to be ruined. Dom took one last pull on the cigarette and found himself hoping that Shelly would discover he'd smoked tonight, that she'd realize he'd disobeyed her before the end. He imagined the look on her face and laughed, his crooked teeth shining in police spotlight. Dom stood, tossed his cigarette into the air and jumped.

Rachel Staub

## **The Old House**

The green grass grows  
where the old house  
once stood.

The meadow unfolds  
and the house, broken,  
fell down.

Barefeet stand in the kitchen  
crinkling toes in  
the dandelions.

Those who stood before me  
swept dust and dirt off  
hard-wood.

I take in the present ghosts  
standing where they stood  
in the meadow where the  
old house once stood.

Lenett Partlow-Myrick

## The Monochrome View

*"Black butterfly set the skies on fire / rise up even higher  
so the ageless winds of time can catch your wings."*

—Barry Mann & Cynthia Weil

Tell him it's a lie.  
The ashen hue for sun,  
the gunmetal ground for soil,  
the pewter pole for fruit-bearing tree,  
the cinereous mural wall for fresh field  
with its marbleized animalia—

all fallacies.

Show him how to see.  
Beyond appearances,  
azura days of clarity,  
Kelly green gardens of hope,  
vermillion walls of a happy home,  
kaleidoscope ways of being impervious to  
circumstances and unnatural playgrounds—

all possibilities.

Tell him and tell him again and again,  
the truth about little black boys and Monarchs,  
then pray he flies.

Lauren Visnic

## **Beneath the Surface**

I often sit here gazing out to sea  
And listen to the whispers of the tide  
And as they soothe me with their melody  
I wonder at the secrets they might hide

Beneath the rolling waves that sweep the shore  
An underwater labyrinth awaits  
A brilliant palace glistens at its core  
And coral gardens line its rocky gates

I'm sure that down there somewhere sits a king  
The high and mighty Neptune on his throne  
He rules a realm where mermaids dance and sing  
And holds his court in halls of polished stone

But stories told by shells upon the sand  
Can only leave me dreaming here on land

Jarred Mitchell  
**Skyscraper**

Hot steam billows out of the rumbling dishwasher, as the condensation begins to cloud my glasses. The nerves in my fingertips are burning with every hot plate I pick up. My knees are starting to give out with every increasing minute I stand. I have been on my feet for 12 hours straight, without a single break. Tonight is the fourth double in a row, I think to myself as I sort and stack more plates. My brother Rafael is screaming “más rápido! más rápido!,” as mounds of silverware are dumped on my station. “Lo siento, Hermano. Estoy tratando.” Only a few more hours until we can go home. I begin to catch my second wind while trying to bear the immense heat radiating from the dishwasher. Finally, things start to wind down as the last few dirty dishes trickle into the dish room. After 16 hours of backbreaking work I finally finish. I walk up the stairs to the employee locker room, and change out of my water logged clothes.

I sit there for a while, waiting for my brothers to finish up and to change as well. Work. That is all my brothers and I do these days. My family back home is relying on us to financially support them. My mother, sister, aunt, and uncle. They don't eat unless we send money back to

Mexico. I have been blessed to have this opportunity to come to America. Needless to say, working as dishwasher did not factor in to my “dreams”.

Once everything is swept, mopped, and wiped down, we clock out and leave the restaurant. I reach into my pocket, and pull out my pack of cigs. I never smoked when I lived in Mexico, but the stress of the American ways got to me. The swirling wind makes it hard to light the cigarette, so I have to duck into an alley to light it. With the first drag, I can feel a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. The cool menthol smoke coats my lungs as I blow it out my nose. Our apartment is only a few blocks away, so the walk seems to go by quickly. We live on the top floor of the old run down building off of Presidents Street. The only way to get to it is by climbing up an old rusty fire escape. I take the last few hits off of my cigarette, and climb up the escape.

I share this small one room apartment my two brothers. Rafael, the oldest, is the hardest worker out of all of us. He taught us how to put in a hard days work. His hands are covered in rock hard calluses from years of wear and tear. My other hermano is Arturo. He too is a hard worker, but tends to be easily distracted when it comes to females. Everyday he wears a green hat that my

father gave him when he was a kid. That is all he really has to remember him by, other than the scars on his ass from all the whippings. The first thing we do when we get home is put all of our money earned that day on the coffee table. As I count each bill, my brothers' faces grow eager to hear the final amount. "250 dineros!" My smile quickly diminishes when Rafael counts out 100 dollars and puts it in a jar hidden underneath the couch. We only keep what we need to pay the bills and to survive, and the rest is sent home.

I look at the clock to see that is two in the morning, realizing I have to be up in five hours only to work another double shift. When it is my turn to use the bathroom, I can't even muster the energy to take a shower. The least I could do is shave I tell myself. While lathering the shaving cream onto my face, I begin to really examine myself in the mirror. I don't even recognize myself anymore. I look beat up. Heavy bags have started to form under my eyes. Wrinkles run all over my face. This lifestyle has really caught up to me. After dragging the razor across my face a couple of times, I flip the light switch and walk to the bedroom. My brothers have all ready passed out.

As I lay my head on the pillow, loud sirens echo through the empty streets making it impossible to sleep.

The noise outside does not even compare to the noise inside my head. Life has not always been this hard. A couple of years ago, I was a college student living in Mexico studying to be an architect. I had hopes of one day coming to America to build skyscrapers. But after my father left us, my family could no longer afford to keep me in school. I was crushed, but I had no choice but to drop out to work. At the time, jobs were extremely hard to find in my hometown. The only sensible option was to venture to America in hopes of finding a job. Rafael was already here in the states, and the place he was working at had an open position. Needless to say, I crossed the border within a couple of days.

After a few failing attempts to fall asleep, I get up to smoke another cigarette to ease my mind. I fling on a jacket, and climb through the window onto the fire escape. Even though our apartment is extremely cramped and run down, it has one of the best views in the city. I spend a lot of nights out here admiring it. I am fascinated at how the buildings carve out a perfect skyline. My dream of coming to America was to make my own mark on a skyline like this. To create a masterpiece from the ground up. For now, my skyline is shaped by a pile of dirty dishes, but one day it will be formed with buildings of my own.

Erin Kline

## Arch



Tim Singleton

## **Bone Scatter**

Bone scatter. A crime scene  
Where the only wrong is  
Living by design: eating,  
Moving on. This must

Be the dining room  
Under a canopy of trees  
Amid a shelter of rock. Cats  
Would have worked carcass,

Left the ground stained, bones  
No longer structure shaping  
Being, but scatter,  
A disarray. Jackstraws.

The bones would move again:  
Shape settling into ground,  
Now the wagging tongue  
Of fossil memory.



Mallory Smith

## **Portrait of Mother in September**

The late summer sunflowers turn to face  
My mother's arrival in the garden. The sky  
Has already faded into the exact shade of  
Her cerulean eyes, but the soil is patient.

I watch from the attic window as she picks  
Tomatoes, humming off key to some song  
In her head. She smiles at the vines sagging  
With the polished fruits of my father's labor.

The snap of the stalk seems to satisfy my mother.  
Another falls into her open bag. On the windowsill  
They will sit, lambent as rubies, until she eats them  
Like apples, quietly pulling the seeds from her teeth.

Alysha S. Brown

## Daughter of Eve

I couldn't stop the bleeding. There was just too much blood. I clinched my stomach as I lay on the scarlet stained bed sheets. I got up from my bed and made my way to the bathroom, leaving a trail of deep red breadcrumbs behind me. I began womanhood that day. I could barely stand tall to look at myself in the bathroom mirror. This was the curse of Eve: a monthly reminder of the command to submit to a force greater than I—cramps. My grandmother always warned me of this day. She warned me of the threat to my purity and the death of my innocence. I never wanted to become a woman. I wanted to stay a girl. We girls could play in the dirt with the boys and run into the ocean in just our underclothes. We girls could be free because we were protected by our fathers and brothers. We were pure. We were innocent. Women weren't protected by their fathers because their fathers were now too old. And their brothers now looked on them with lustful eyes. Women were left to protect themselves.

Still hunched over, I reached out to turn on the showerhead. The warm water felt good against my stomach, easing the pain a bit. I watched as my womanhood was rinsed away. If only it was that easy. I

wish I could stay in this shower forever.

"Talía!" I heard my grandmother yell upstairs, interrupting my nostalgia. "Talía! Come down here quickly!"

My grandmother was unlike the other grandmothers I knew. She was brave and straightforward. She spoke with me very candidly about topics not typically discussed in Jamaican households: sexuality, menstruation, sex, reproduction. Her teachings of these things were drastically different than how I learned of them in grade school. Her teachings were more real, more frightening.

I stepped out of the shower, wrapped my favorite Tinkerbell towel around my body, cracked the bathroom door open, and yelled back down the stairs, "I'll be there in a moment Granny!" I searched around in the sink cabinet for a napkin. Granny bought them long before my thirteenth birthday. They were huge padded panty liners and had Kotex written on the box. I found the box, pulled one out and hurried into my bedroom, shutting the door behind me. I stood at the foot of my bed and stared at my stained sheets. My mother gave me those sheets for my 10th birthday. They were decorated with all my favorite Disney characters. I felt another sharp pain in my stomach forcing me to, again, crouch over in submission. After the

pain subsided, I dressed myself and ripped the sheets off my bed. The blood seeped through to my mattress, only slightly though, a permanent reminder of some sort. I stuffed the sheets under my bed until I could get a trash bag to put them in. I pulled new sheets from the hall closet, boring blue solid colored sheets embroidered only around the border with white flowers. I quickly dressed my bed with them and hurried downstairs to meet my grandmother.

She sat at the kitchen table, drinking bush tea and reading the Jamaican Observer. Her thin framed glasses sat astutely on her face. She peered at me over her glasses as she saw me enter the kitchen. "Talía, why ye shower so early in the day eh?" She stared at me, waiting for me to tell her what she already knew. Granny had a way of asking leading questions. "I bled, Granny," I told her frankly. She put her paper down and looked at me intently. "Ye bled, eh?" I nodded. "Whea ye sheets?" I told her I stuffed them under my bed. "Get a bag from under the sink. Throw them out."

"I was thinking I could wash them and keep them. Mommy gave them to me."

She didn't respond. When she doesn't respond, it often means the choice is up to me.

"Granny, you have anything to stop the pain?" I asked her.

"Pain?" She got up from her seat at the table and reached for a tea cup. She put some herbs in a tea bag filter and dropped it in the cup. She then reached for the pot of boiling water on the stove top and poured it in the cup.

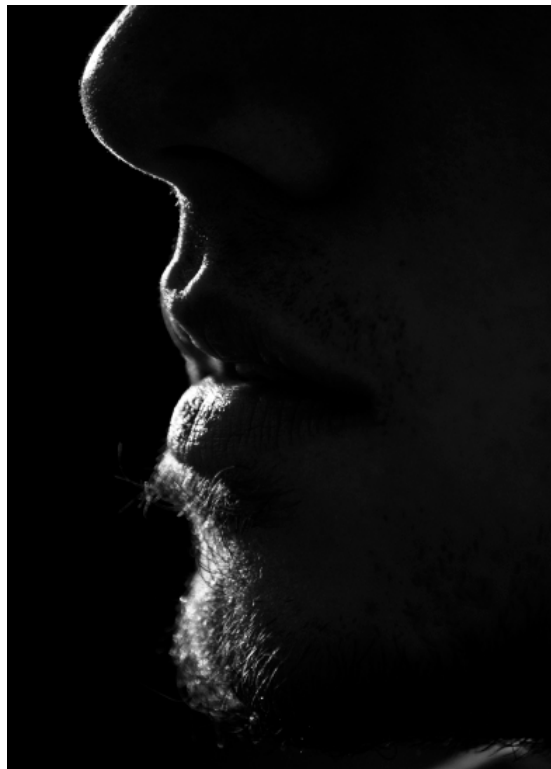
"Drink," she commanded. I took the cup from the counter top and began to sip on the tea. "Now ye gon into womanhood. Right overnight. It come so soon. Like a thief in the night it come an' take ye innocence away." She sat back down, sipped her tea, and resumed reading her paper. I looked at her, hoping she'd peer up and see the despair on my face. I'd hoped she would say something encouraging about womanhood. But she didn't. I finished my tea, searched for a trash bag, and left the kitchen.

Carl A. Merritt

## Smile



David Johnson  
**Kiss of Dawn**



Torsten Schulz

## Hail to the Poem

Hail to the poem,  
When songs played so near,  
Of the Greek nymph Gaia,  
As mother, she gave us Auria,  
Who in Gale authors ill-tempered sounds,  
Bending trees, and wildflowers through the vale—  
Unhoned reeds with irreverent tunes.  
Or try the brash crash of giant ocean waves,  
Once fueled to fly like an unruly kite through the firmament,  
Deposed by titans of impenetrable gray granite,  
Bruised and lost in foamy pools,  
Returning as white rivulets like strings of opalescent jewels to  
its source.  
Renews its ominous force,  
For a new round of assonance and alliteration.  
Finally, try the whirly squirrel,  
In haste to make waste of the pouncing predator,  
Jumping to the bosom of Gaia's dryads for safe haven,  
Going around tree—in town—finally uptown.

There he chatters a bark,  
Telling others his portentous song of possible pending peril.  
From the imagery I see,  
And sounds that soothe me—  
The song in harmonious play with visceral emotions;  
Becomes the poem with soul.  
It's the poem I hail!

Rai Podorski

## Fiesta

Spend this night in dance  
Tap your little feet  
Take this drink  
Feel the rhythm  
Don't be afraid to be bold  
You are so full of life

Your weight upon your feet  
Move as you sip your drink  
Feel as you dance  
The music is so bold  
This night is your life  
Move to the rhythm

So this is your life  
You define the word bold  
You share love as you dance  
You have your own rhythm  
You're light on your feet  
Supported and protected by your drink

Live your life  
Create the rhythm  
Of the dance  
Be bold  
Drink  
Move your feet

When you move to the rhythm  
While the melody is bold  
The music is your drink  
It controls your feet  
As you effortlessly dance  
And forget about your life

The rules of your life  
Are determined by the rhythm  
Guided by your feet  
Paced by the drink  
Your movement is bold  
As you continue through this dance

Kim Osterhout  
**Tiny Beauty**





Robert Hamill

## **Rainbows, Science, and People**

There's a teacher who's sure  
Science killed all rainbows.  
People learned pure logic's power when  
Newton's apple plumbed the heaven's orbs.  
Deduction limned a limitless future  
Lifting hopes and dreams, but  
Uncertain notions, not physics' hard numbers  
Entered the reasoning machine.  
Explanations and projections diverged so far that  
Creativity is demanded to complete the mental matrix.  
Finches in Galapagos evolved in homo sapiens' fate, yet  
People's actions defy single understanding.

Liz Femiano

## In the Downpour

The daily afternoon Florida downpour, normally only an hour at most, lasts into the evening. Probably it thinks if it lingers, maybe it can transcend its status of minor daily nuisance to reach the status of full-on annoyance.

T and I wait it out under the awning of our favorite cafe. The whole time T mutters that it'll go away at any minute. Afternoon storms never last that long. Meanwhile the cafe's already closed up. The cashier, a kid with a sweaty neck, locked the door fifteen minutes ago. When he saw us sitting at a table, staring at the rain, he asked if we needed him to call us a cab or a tow truck.

"No," T said for the both of us, "we're just waiting out the rain." he pointed at his car twenty feet away. It seemed farther away in the downpour.

"I can give you something to use as an umbrella, like a serving tray or something," the kid said.

"Thanks man, but we'll wait," T said. "It'll end soon." The kid gave us a sour look, like we were members of a cultish religion so ridiculous he couldn't even stand to keep a straight face.

After he drove away I thought it might be a good time to mention to T that I was thinking of moving out,

that I had already started searching apartments. But it seemed cruel to bring all this up when T couldn't escape, so I didn't say anything.

T says, "I don't mind storms so much. If I had to wait with anyone else, I don't know I could stand it." He smiles but he continues to look out at the rain. As if he might miss it stopping if he looks away for even an instant—even to smile at me.

I realize I won't be able to mention my moving out for a few months. I don't see a good opportunity, even that far down the road. He is happy with me now. I will wait. I hate so much about him but I agree with him on this: There's no use senselessly darting out into the rain. After all, why get a little wet when you can stay completely dry, if you just hang on for a little longer?

Strangely enough, one of my favorite things is being caught in the rain with someone. Running through a parking lot feels like surviving a war. Afterwards, you both show up at a movie theater, or a restaurant, and you can feel all the dry people looking at you, thinking, "What on earth have those two been through?"

You give up trying to cover yourself and let the water take you. You give it the full access pass—the one normally reserved for lovers or surgeons or god. And

when you've resigned and felt firsthand the worst possible outcome for that afternoon, who can deny how perfect it feels to look at him and see he's soaked down to the bone, too?

Lisa A. Wilde

## ***De Rerum Natura***

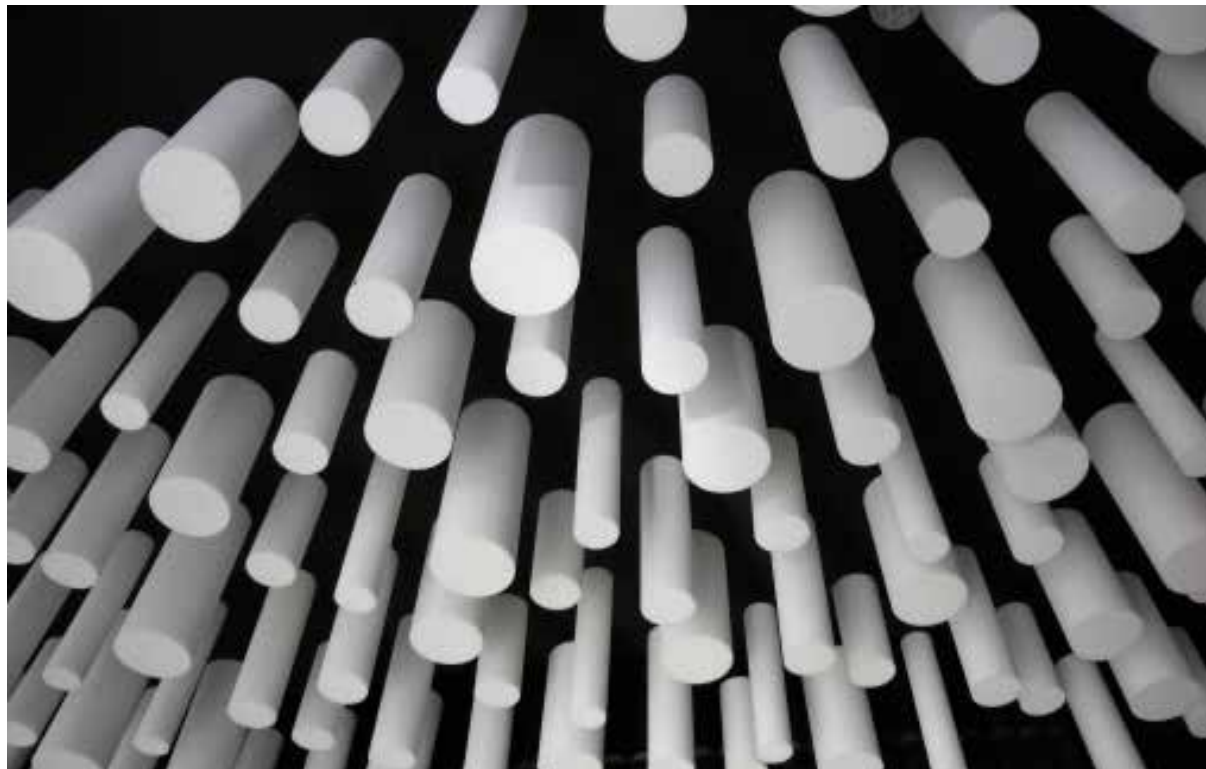
Where does thought go  
Sent like a missile, a comet  
Carooming through the nerves, the blood  
Memories  
Knowledge  
What stocks to invest in  
How to waltz your wife around the dance floor at  
weddings  
What banks need to know about selling insurance in  
South American countries  
An appreciation of “gams” and “stems”  
Successful negotiations with Atlantic waves

(even sitting you were never still;  
I have a packet of light blue air mail envelopes as proof)

Lucretius (o loquacious Epicurean) writes that all this  
evaporates like wine  
When the vessel is broken

If one had stepped into the room at that moment  
He would have fallen down drunk

Floria Volynskaya  
**Ceiling**



Lisa Arbareri

## Reflections

I knew you'd be watching me  
I look up  
and so you are.

You drop your shocked, curious stare;  
embarrassed,  
just as I do.

You must have thought you looked better  
this morning,  
when you left home

but the wind, capriciously  
spitefully,  
undid your work.

I wish you'd stop following me,  
stalking me,  
wanting to be me.

Go away. You deflate me  
depress me  
bring me no joy.

Without you I'm perfect,  
immortal,  
Superwoman.

Don't look at me.

Katherine Farrell

## Ellipses

I love your ellipses, as tasty as chipses  
And when you draw yours next to mine  
Mines just a football or only a scrawl  
But yours look incredibly fine

At home or on tripses I practice ellipses  
The phone book is ruined in vain  
I can't get to gripses with drawing ellipses  
Though I draw them again and again

I'm straining my wrists from too many ellipses  
I practice by night and by day  
Oh give me some tipses on drawing ellipses  
Or I'll throw all my pencils away

Tim Powling  
**Letters**

*Room 4*  
*Barzakh*  
*Calming Spirit Residential Home*

My Dearest Wife,

As you're aware, it's been 4 days since I passed over, so I thought it prudent to drop you a line. Things have settled down here into, I suppose, normality. I have got a lovely room on the bottom floor and am hardly bothered by the noise of the screams. Oh, and I met old Mr. Benson yesterday at the bingo, he is asking after you of course, but looks terrible, (like death warmed up). Ha-ha. Sorry for the pun.

I had a young Angel look at my credit score yesterday and she seemed to think I was in line for upstairs but He is causing a fuss after all those religious zealots (remember, them from the news) blew themselves up in Pakistan, so I may be waiting a while longer. Which to be fair is not too bad, along with the bingo, a guy comes down with an accordion on Friday nights to play us some classics and the food is pretty good, at least considering the logistical problems in getting good ingredients.

Remember, the savings book is under the spare bed

my love, and watch out for Mr. Gray, he has always had a thing for you, the dirty old trickster. Apart from that, I think everything is pretty clear in the will. Give my wishes to the kids and grandkids.

I am not sure when or where my next letter will be but if you reply to this address, I am certain they will forward it on. Keep your spirits up and hopefully I will see you soon. Joke!

Your Lovingly Deceased Husband,  
Robert

-----  
*Number 616*  
*St. Dunstan*  
*Naraka*

Bloody Hell Bert,

You gave me the fright of my life, what with that letter, and I am not going to think about the postage! I am pleased to see that you seem to be enjoying yourself, while I have been mourning, and I absolutely refuse to tell the neighbors or family that you have haven't gone on up yet. The shame, to think that you are on the same level as 'Big



nose Benson'—he has never spent a Sunday at church in his whole life. It makes one wonder if all my years of humility and piety have been worth it.

I found the savings book, thank you very much, and will be enjoying spending it on that cruise we have always talked about. I also happened to bump into Mr. Gray in the travel agency and could you believe it, he too is going cruising. Who'd have thought, eh? It's a shame you never liked him, as I think maybe you were just jealous of his nice cars. Maybe that's why you're still waiting in limbo, did you think of that?

Well, all the kids have fallen out with me over your will, and the grandkids have stopped visiting too, not that I miss them of course. You will be happy to know that I have joined some clubs and even a dance class, and as soon as I whip the other members into shape, I will enjoy it nicely. I am also considering selling up here, as the crime is getting terrible. Kids in gangs running wild, drunks and addicts on every corner, and the Government is doing nothing to help.

Oh, and do stop with the jokes; you were never good at them, and you may get into trouble. Tell Him I am

asking for Him and let Him know my travel dates, so as He knows to give me the right weather.

Happily,  
Your Widow

-----  
*Nirvana*  
*Heaven*

My Dearest Robert,

Congratulations on achieving an outstanding grade score average for your life. Your name will be included on the Archangel's list of morally superior, yet suitably humble, members of the human race, and in recognition of your achievement, heaven will be holding an awards ceremony in your honor on the last Sabbath of the month. You may invite 3 guests (from Heaven). Upon arrival at the ceremony, please stop at the table inside the main entrance to pick up an index card with your name on it. Archangel's list humans will receive an honors pin in recognition of their service.

On a more personal note, it gives me the greatest

pleasure, my child, to finally welcome you to Heaven. Your purgatory has been paid in full. I have only the greatest admiration for the way you dealt with that devil's minion that you had the misfortune to call a wife, and as you are aware, she is bound for warmer climes, as is her due.

If you are interested, I play accordion on Thursday, and I know you have appreciated my music previously, I look forward to your everlasting support because, as you know my Son, whoever believes in me should not perish but have everlasting life.

Your Father,  
Eli

Patricia Parra Garcia

## **It is All in a Grain of Coffee**

Coffee is one of the riches of the new world. The grain is on the Venezuelan tress, the cups and the wealthy pockets of the white Spanish mantuanos.

Coffee is the lives of the slaves that sow, collect, dry and prepare the grain to send it to Europe.

Coffee is my people's eyes, or hair, or skin.

Coffee is breakfast, lunch and dinner, it closes every social event. It is the blood of a nation.

Coffee is three generations of women with their porcelain cups, porcelain plates, playing Spanish Barajas and talking about the lost freedom.

Coffee is the breath in my mouth, all day long.

Coffee is my mother, standing in the kitchen and looking out the window to El Avila Mountain, talking about the future.

Coffee is the old espresso machine sitting in my kitchen counter or the fancy brand new Keuric cups.

Coffee is my boss's cup, sitting on the counter, always dirty, never washed.

Coffee is the 3:00 in the afternoon headache because you didn't have it in the morning.

Coffee is late hours of studying, and watching the sun go up.

Coffee is the companion of the eternal waiting, the late nights, and the anxiety the time that goes backwards.

Coffee is the past and the future, coffee is home.

Claudia Martucci

## **Mother and Son**



Torsten Schulz

## **My Father Saw a Childhood Memory Framed**

My father saw a childhood memory framed.  
Not exactly the same.  
Oh! How he cherished her.  
He bought her  
Exalted atop a mount,  
Against the Carpathian sky.  
He remembered her nomadic ways,  
As seen from her colorful clothing,  
Her open billowy blouse from neck to navel,  
Her breast holds perfectly,  
Unlike her jade necklace that trails deeply.  
He remembered she is her culture,  
Her culture is in her—free,  
Her traveling show.  
At fourteen he left home early,  
Adopting the gypsy way.  
Despite his war, injury, and capture,  
Events in time passing,  
Continuing his nomadic fray,  
Finally reaching a land of promise,  
No longer the itinerant destitute,  
His hand rising.

Now unbound and wealthy,  
He bought her image framed.  
My father now forever gone,  
From Him—reminded,  
I See into His Memories,  
There framed, mounted high with nail and wire,  
She sits exalted against the Carpathian sky.

Devin Trim

## **The Maternity Ward**

A fresh generation  
of bloody machinery  
sucks in death's green oil—

Twenty years from now,  
they will conclude that  
the stars are fossilized gods.

Forty years from now,  
they will cower in cages,  
pierced by the razor fangs of clocks.

Sixty years from now,  
when writing their memoirs,  
they will begin with “The End.”

But for now—blest ones!—  
they latch to a metal breast  
and ask no questions.

Stacy Korbela

## Summer in Yosemite



Joshua Ro  
**In Our Place**

I could never make out what you were saying, perhaps to me, from across the room, but it was quite a regular spiel during your lunch hour at *Ann's* on West Lexington Street- your coffee and cold-cut sub. I remember one day in winter it was so damn cold that I couldn't leave the store, and you told me to sit down.

"Why do you always want to get the hell outta here? It's shit out there anyway; grab a coffee or something, for Christ's sake." You spoke lazily in an awkward tone, but it was colored correctly. "I'm Laurie."

"John. I'll go get a coffee then," I nodded.

"What do you do, John?"

"I'm a writer."

We sat there. You had your black hair tied in a ponytail, and there were food stains on the left side of your wrinkled dress pants. You kept talking but didn't look at me, proceeding to confide in your peripheries about how you had just broken off an engagement and that the banality of your life as a PhD student was all that was left. It was some kind of molecular biology at the medical school, I remember, and your "demonic" supervisor was some shade of gloriously ignorant. He seemed to be one

of many academic parasites that made you desperately want to escape Baltimore. But that was your imprisoned life, cruddy studio apartment and all, and back then, I didn't blame you—you and all of your personal laboratory musings that were so utterly irrelevant to me. I began to welcome them, strangely enough, every day of the week, sometimes even outside of our corner sandwich café.

Then, as the snow came in January, everyone moved away, their voiceless echoes forcing us to reexamine a hollow city, and we became increasingly interested in each other's company. You seemed to hate that I'd been alone for most of my life, and sometimes you stopped visiting for weeks at a time. But you always came back. I would listen to your stories as you critiqued my novel in all of its hopeless idealism. "Love's no fun, John," you'd tell me, "Write about something useful." Once a month we made our faithful visit to a park, or *The Senator* theater to resemble romantic couples, and that was good. Everything was usually good, except, of course, when you suggested stupid things, like opera, seducing me into the hellfire that was three-hour long tragic Puccini.

Whatever we did, we spent our time together for the next year or so, and you taught me how to breathe again. For all of the silences I'd had to endure in the past,



you were somehow there to fill what was missing in me, and though after that winter I was forever bereft of the companion that was my other self, I found that I had you. Even in the midst of our broken city, you were shining, and I listened as your lips managed to move gracefully about the stories that were painted before us, muting the sound of our frantic minds. At times, when you were smoking, you were expressionless and didn't say a word, but to me you were still the most powerful of places; though sometimes the world seemed to drop violently on me, we were dancing.

That year, summer arrived suddenly, and we were both happy.

"Come out with me tonight, John," you said to me, one Friday in June.

"You know I don't go out at night, I'm sorry. I've got some writing to do at home anyway."

"What the hell, it's just one night. Is it me?"

"You know it's not you."

You kissed me. "Let me come over then."

It wasn't until 1999, two years later, that we decided "coming over" really meant getting married, and "going out" meant discovering our neon green, one-bedroom apartment on Houston Street in New York City. When

we moved in, we both knew that even in the amalgam of strangeness and culture that was Greenwich Village, we were more familiar to each other than ever, and the noise and chaos of the streets seemed to belie our incorruptible peace. In what felt like a darker time, you rested in my arms.

It was our timeless haven. But that was the beginning, and now as I look back on the good things, I can see how obviously different it is now. I am learning how to glean my life's only hope from those former years because the reason for our current failure is not yet clear to me. In my struggle to forget, perpetual insomnia reminds me that the moments that brought us here are still so vivid in my mind.

In 2002, when I finished my novel and you received your research grant, we slowly began to see less of each other and slept separately. Even on the weekends, you took breaks away from home. And though we still laughed occasionally, the seemingly sudden awkwardness that stood between us evolved into an immutable void. One Saturday morning, over breakfast, you asked me, chuckling softly, "Hey, do you remember at *Reno's* that one night?" Of course I remembered. But what I can't seem to figure out now is how that was the only thing you could get

yourself to say to me during that otherwise silent meal. At what point did we begin to end? It wasn't that I was surprised at the idea that you could have lost interest completely. Your blatant behavior over time actually made it clear to me that you had. The culmination of my anger and your disappointments in me over the years was a testament to the truth that we were always strangers to each other. But even as we witnessed a collapse, I strained to believe that the shallow emotions were as redeemable as the real ones that others glorified.

§

The day I discovered the e-mail message, you forgot to log out of your account, and I was left to reaffirm the fact that I had already been locked out of your life:

Laurie,  
You are one intelligent woman, you know that? I left the files on your lab desk. And come over tonight, the house is empty!

Can't wait to see you,  
Jake G

It was raining that night, but I parked the car by the river and meandered aimlessly near the bank; I bought a single beer afterwards. When I came home, you had fallen asleep on the living room sofa, and I walked into our bedroom to wait for the morning. You told me later that you were out with your colleagues for a department party, and I still believed you.

§

Sometime last month, we managed to start up another storm of a fight; ever since the night of that department party, I had grown increasingly anxious and we couldn't escape our conversations without a raging battle. Amidst all of the unraveling that had been occurring through a constant war, I spoke to you again, and together we finally deconstructed the remaining foundations of the hope that was once ours.

"Did you go to the bank today?" I asked.

"No, I'll go tomorrow morning. God, for once, just let me be."

"Oh what did I say now? All I did was ask if you went to the bank today. Don't try and start something without reason." The wind blew through the windows for a moment.

"You know what, I really can't take this right now, let

me..."

"Take what? You're the one who's causing a mess with everything. And by the way, where are you going? Isn't it a little late?" You were putting on your long coat to leave the house again- the third time in a row that week. I don't know why I kept it going with you that particular night; I was used to things by then. "Why can't you answer me, Laurie?"

"Jesus Christ, you don't always have to know every fucking thing that happens at every goddamn minute of my life! I'm getting outta here," you sighed bitterly while putting on your boots.

The room was getting colder, and I paused until I could hold myself. "I know you're fucking him."

"What?"

"This Jake Goldman friend of yours, I know you're sleeping with him. You can't hide that from me. Don't you think I would've had some kind of suspicion about the way he throws himself at you, those flowers he sent you last week, the amount of time you spare for him in return? Did you think I was fucking stupid, Laurie? Did you? And over all these years..."

"Over what fucking years, John? My God, they meant nothing to me. They were never supposed to happen, you

know that, don't you? It was all shit. I've never loved you. Yes, I am having sex with Jake. That's who I run to every night, and no, no I'm not ashamed about it. I don't care anymore, so why should you?" You looked at me. "What the hell, get out of my..."

"Because *I* still love you!" Where in the world did that come from? I still don't remember exactly, and everything is a blur now, except an image of your tears and the silence that followed. There had always been the ever-impending explosion of what I tried not to know about myself, that corner of my mind which would startle us both. And as I stood there, shaking, with my emotions as naked as when they were conceived, you didn't cover me.

"Goddamn it, John."

§

It's not quite over, really, though it should be; I've just noticed that we don't talk now. You're still here. Sometimes you courteously cook something for me in the kitchen before you leave the house. There are no tears anymore, but there is the rain. It is the fortnightly review of my life that I read in your journal- the one you leave outside. I always hope that what I've so often experienced on the earlier pages would remember itself to me in the place where the words were imagined. But it's no use when it's clear that

now, even the inch we might leave between us can ravage our passing memories. At night, when you drive away, I can see through the door behind you that you'll be back in the morning, and there is at least the lingering assurance that we need each other, if only for the bank statement resting on the bedroom table. In those hours, the silence that decays the city is the vice that consumes me as I wait for you.

And all the while, in this fading wind, the air silently freezes, and the world becomes a laconic whisper from a hopeful and clearer past. I have found this to be the best time to rethink our story, and I do it beside an open window because that is comforting. But as the final breaths of my soul are now getting embedded in these pages, I know that I have wasted them. I sit admitting that you have never understood me, until the lilting placebo of a melody blinds me and carries me away.

Jordan Nicole Vogel

## Chaos

Dust  
Plaster  
Earth  
Float in the charged air,  
Creating an impenetrable cloud.

Unidentifiable objects,  
Scattered,  
Like shattered shards of a mirror.

Heartbeat

Ringings fills the senses,  
While warmth spreads along the dirt speckled face,  
Sight is of no use,  
Only touch.  
Moving creates an unbearable pain,  
Tiny knives piercing every nerve ending.

Slowly chaos is able to be heard,  
Shrieks  
Screams  
Cries  
Jar the soul.

Pain  
Fear  
Horror  
Creating an entity,  
Attacking all that are enveloped.

Andrew Bauss

## A Mystical Being

Black, green, brown  
It is blank  
A continuous slate

The board is a beacon  
It calls to the left minded  
Compelling them to create  
An everlasting stare  
Instigating a response from its audience  
Beckoning for an intimate touch

The board is flat  
The board is open  
The board is willing

There is a playful smile  
Though not easily seen  
Except by the right minded

A servant, an aid, a friend  
Use it as he will, Man  
He will always learn

A creation pending  
With the tool in hand  
Man becomes God

Silence is yammering behind the board  
Or is that the board itself?  
Perhaps neither, perhaps it is we

Can we discover who we are by looking into the black?  
Think again, we know it is not black after all  
The darkness has helped you and I

How forgetful, how merciful  
Allowing mistakes  
Often occurring

The board displays its affection  
By bearing our mark  
It is submissive yet kind

A gentle touch of ours  
A gentle reaction we achieve  
Affection so lovely

What a mystical being  
Taking our thoughts and our wishes  
Putting our minds before us

Rachel Ridley  
**Hit and Run**

Have you ever been afraid of something you did? So terrorized by a mere accident that you couldn't think straight for long enough to remedy the situation? Been in a situation where you knew there was some kind of solution, but you were so in shock that you couldn't handle things properly?

I have.

It started on a particularly awful Monday morning. I woke up at eight-thirty: an hour later than I usually did, and only half an hour before I was supposed to be in to work. I was employed at a rather elite company although my personal position wasn't much to fuss over. It was an average nine-to-five job, but it put bread on the table—enough for my girlfriend, Sandra, and I to thrive on. She worked too, of course, but we did our best to split the bills.

I skipped breakfast as well as my usual shower and ran out of the house, leaving Sandra to sleep for another hour; she didn't need to be into work until eleven today. In that moment, I envied her shamelessly. The usual twenty-minute commute to the office was going to have to be squeezed down to fifteen.

Traffic was not at all on my side. I was swerving in and out of cars that were going slower than usual due to the accident on the right-hand side of the highway. I couldn't think of a time when I had ever cussed so much. My heart was racing and I had half a mind to call my manager and tell him I was running a bit late, but I kept putting it off until it was eight-fifty-eight and I was pulling into a parking space at the side of the office building. I wasn't sure how I'd managed to make it there on time. Perhaps fate was on my side that day.

I had a dreary day at the office which included several very angry phone calls from buyers who were unsatisfied with something or other. The trouble with consumers was that they always wanted to blame the person who answered the phone instead of the root of the problem. Although I was accustomed to it and prided myself on handling those pesky phone calls in the best way possible, it got to me every so often.

"All right, Doug?" asked Henry, my coworker.

"Mm," was the only answer he received from me.

I slouched out of the building at precisely five-o'clock, just as the sun was beginning to set. *At least this day is over*, I thought to myself as I situated myself in the car. I started the engine and pulled away, glad to be on my way home.



My mind refused to relinquish thoughts of a conversation I had had with a certain caller. The man was a business owner himself and was displeased with how our company had handled a particular situation of his. "You have to do it all over again," the man barked over the phone. "It was simple *ghastly* and I won't stand for it. What kind of business are you running here?"

"Sir, forgive me," I said to him calmly, "but I just answer the phones. I don't have anything to do with this business problem of yours, although I am sorry—"

"HOW DARE YOU TALK TO ME LIKE THAT!" shouted the man. Obviously I had plucked a nerve. "Sir, sir," I cooed even as he yelled right over my timid voice. A few of my coworkers had noticed that I was dealing with a particularly nasty customer and gave me looks of sympathy. I responded with a few light-hearted eye rolls and planned on venting my frustration to them as soon as I had finished. But the customer managed to squash any intentions I had of letting out frustration. He ended the conversation with, "You disrespectful prick! I'll have you fired, I will! Right out on your ass, out on the curb. Show you to talk to me that way..."

And he hung up the phone.

I had never dealt with a customer so fired up about anything. Despite the fact that people often took out their rage on me, it was never to that extent, and more often than not, they even managed to apologize for the way they'd spoken to me. But this man seemed to find everything I did a problem, and it had begun to eat away at me at some point in the day. Even as I was driving home, it was still plaguing my every thought. Calling Sandra didn't help and neither did turning up the radio to an unreasonable volume. I didn't want to say that I was hurt by the conversation, but I couldn't think of any other reason.

"Dammit," I muttered, banging my fist on the dashboard. I was traveling on a main road, but not the highway I usually drove. I took the alternate route to allow myself more time to clear my head before I went home to Sandra. I was driving faster than I normally would have as it was; I thought that the less familiar course would give me more focus.

I was more wrong than I could have imagined.

There was a crosswalk ahead, just before an intersection. Evidently, the light I was coming up to was red—I didn't even notice that there was a traffic light. I was so distraught.

The hood of my car collided with something that could not have been another vehicle. It was a soft object, one that bent at the motion of my car, but was heavy enough to send me skidding off into the middle of the intersection, almost mounting the curb. The shock of it didn't allow my mind to register what I had crashed into. I thought that maybe it was an animal, but when I looked behind me through the back window, my heart nearly stopped.

There was a man—or rather, what was left of a man—sprawled out on the tar road. Bright red blood was pumping from his mangled body onto the white paint of the crosswalk I had completely missed. Without a doubt, he was dead, and the people stopped in the other lanes at the red light were aware of it. I saw people getting out of their cars, deep fear and disbelief in their faces as they gingerly approached the dead body. A woman pulled out her cell phone with immediacy and presumably dialed the police. The situation was in disorder.

I, however, was still driving.

I could feel particles of a human body wiping off my wheels as I continued down the road as if nothing had happened. My subconscious willed me to stop the car, for

God's sake, to turn around and take the responsibility of breaking the law and...

And actually killing a man.

But there I was, driving faster than ever, doing thirty over the designated speed limit, alert in more ways than ever. My heart was racing uncontrollably, and I could feel water sitting in my eyes, as I prepared myself to burst into tears. The tears themselves never rolled down my cheeks. I was far too stunned to cry. Stunned that I was still driving, stunned that I had run a light, stunned that I had killed a man, and stunned that I was, all in all, committing a hit-and-run.

*Go back!* I thought. *Go back and help! Don't make this worse on you! Don't bring this home to Sandra.* It wasn't enough, however. Nothing persuaded me to do it, and I couldn't think why. Perhaps it was the man from earlier, his voice ringing in my ears: "You disrespectful prick!" It seemed to mean so much to me—seemed to be so tied into my hitting the man in the crosswalk that I could not bear to go back and face the man who would scream at me, tell me I was a prick and that I was disrespectful and that I would be fired. I could not handle his demeaning voice and the expression that would have been plastered to his face. I could not handle anyone looking at me

with such disgust that I might have been someone else's chewing gum found on the bottom of his shoe.

A song by an eighties artist was playing in the background, further tormenting my mind. My psyche was aware that my world was continuing to spin despite the fact that I had stopped someone else's. Moments ago I was simply driving home from a bad day at work and everything was proper and in its place. Now, I was a man on the run, and I had put myself in that terrible position because of my own stupidity.

My hands were going blue on the steering wheel, now that both of them were gripping it so firmly. I could see my green veins swelling and pulsating with my rushing blood. Everything had slowed down to a remarkably unusual pace. It was akin to watching my life flash before my eyes: recollections of meetings, occurrences, and conversations were flashing through my mind with just as much slowness as speed.

I missed the turn that I should have taken to get home intentionally. Going home seemed senseless, although it was entirely inevitable. Even if I made it home without a single cop tailing me, the guilt would have eaten away at me and I would have told Sandra, who would have gone into a pure panic. And then what could I have done?

Called the police and confessed lately? Wouldn't that simply make matters worse?

I took to murmuring to myself and turned up the radio yet again. I was doing my very best to drown out the entire scenario, to squash it so finally that there was no hope of it being reality. Maybe I had dreamed it, I thought wistfully. Maybe it was simply a hallucination. Maybe I was only losing my mind. A lost mind was better than a murder.

I pulled into a McDonald's and sat, parked crookedly in a space that was furthest away from all of the other cars in the lot. Every glimpse of a person seemed threatening to me. I tried desperately not to make eye contact with a soul, not even through the mirror. My teeth were chattering as my jaw shook. I was too afraid to drive anymore. I knew that I wouldn't go back at this point, but I was not yet ready to go to my home. I did not want the man's death to cast a shadow on my whole life. It had ruined my security in driving, and I could not bring myself to have it ruin my home life. Everything had been okay. There were things that certainly weren't perfect, but dammit, things had been *okay*.

What does one do in such a situation? Is it right and proper to turn round and subject yourself if you've

already been labeled as a hit-and-run criminal? Or is it better to simply phone in and tell the truth: say that you were overcome with shock and nerves and that you hadn't *meant* for things to turn out the way that they did but you weren't sure what to do or where to go from there. Honesty was the best policy, was it not? Or was there something I was forgetting?

It was then that I finally started to cry. My nose stuffed up and began to run. Sobs were lodged deeply in my throat and saltwater ran down my white face and blotchy cheeks. I could not face this sort of thing. I had never thought such a thing would happen in my life. I had never thought that I would kill a man.

I drove home after an hour and seven missed calls from Sandra with voicemails from her, asking if I was all right. I had to block the experience out of my mind; I refused to call her back even though hearing her voice in the messages had calmed me down a great deal. I couldn't talk to her about the whole thing over the phone. It simply didn't seem right.

I pulled into my usual parking space and started up the stairs. I hadn't decided what I was going to do yet, and I wasn't sure if I were even capable of deciding. The only thing I wanted to do was curl up in bed with a warm drink

and have Sandra fall asleep with me. There was nothing else I could think of doing. "Oh, God," I said in nothing more than a whisper as I walked up to my door. "Oh, *God*, what have I done?"

Jeannette Spohn

## **Sebastian and Nemo**



Elizabeth G. Godfrey

## My Mother's Crystal Bowl

My mother's crystal bowl sat in the center of our scarred oak table. It caught the afternoon sunlight as I dumped my schoolbooks in a chair and unloaded my day's troubles onto my mother's shoulders. Rainbows bounced around its carved pattern, shooting sparks of brilliant green and violet into my eyes. Sometimes my mother let me flick my finger on the bowl's rim and listen to it sing. Then she moved it out of harm's way while I spread my homework on the table.

A simple wooden music box with a cross inlaid in the top lived on the bookcase next to my mother's collections of poetry by Longfellow, Tennyson and Shelley. As she dusted the shelves, my mother always paused to wind the key on the bottom of the box. She sat in the rocker listening to the music box sing *Auld Lang Syne* before moving on with her housework. The bookshelf was a soundboard, causing the music to resonate as in a concert hall. If I asked, my mother placed the box on the hassock next to me and opened the lid so I could watch the prickly tumbler turning inside, catching the metal prongs to create the music. But on the hassock the

sound was disappointingly dull—one of my first scientific observations.

A flat pewter dish shaped like a lily pad graced the marble-top table under my mother's bedroom window. She placed her pinchy earrings on it as she pulled them off one at a time after coming back from shopping. A tiny pewter frog sat on the lily pad guarding her earrings. While my mother changed into her housedress, I hopped the frog around on the dish, fitting his little feet into the carved pewter lily pad lines, half-listening to the stories of movie stars my mother had gleaned from the grocery line magazines.

*A place for everything and everything in its place*, my mother said. And that is where everything stayed for thirty-two years until my father insisted they move south. After much grumbling, my mother found homes for all of her things again in their new house. Only then was she comforted. When I came to visit, these old familiar friends looked startling in their new locations, and I searched them out like a treasure hunter, trying to regain my bearings.

After my father died and my mother needed help, first a little, but gradually more and more, I warned the nurses not to move anything. Not even an inch, I said. She may

be going blind, but she'll notice and there will be hell to pay, believe me. The nurses did their best, but they had to dust. When my mother complained that her whole house was in disarray, on my next visit I returned them to their proper location, a smidgen to the left or right.

Josephine, her old rag doll, was almost as old as my mother. Her toes were worn through and her nose and neck had been clumsily repaired with a lighter fabric so that she looked clownish. But her painted eyes were still soulful and her body was firm enough to withstand my mother's hugs as she rocked her in her arms and patted her round, flat head. *Don't worry*, I said. *I won't forget to tuck Josephine in with you when you go.* Through her tears, my mother asked, *Do you think I'm silly? Of course not*, I said. *If the pharaohs could take things with them, you can, too.*

My mother's house feels both empty and full now. Empty of her welcoming smile, her cloudy hazel eyes, her frail alto voice calling my soon-to-be-forgotten nickname. Full of one hundred and one years of her possessions, lovingly collected—each with a story: a special memory of her childhood on the farm, her single years in Manhattan, her marriage and travels with my father. I have come to clear out her house before the new owners can tear it down and rebuild it to fit their own lives.

I know my mother doesn't need her possessions any more—these temporal, transient, earthly things. But in her life she loved them deeply, fussed over them, fondled them, and worried what was to become of them since neither my brother nor I had produced any heirs. How can I be certain she understands now, that she will forgive me for not carrying all her precious things away with me to cherish as she had done?

I know she would have liked to take it all with her. And failing that, she would probably want me to carry them all home, to look after her precious things forever. But I can't. I can only take a few: the crystal bowl, the music box, the pewter frog, the Longfellow poems.

I am distributing some of my mother's things to distant cousins and have located worthy organizations that will sell or give away the rest. I hope other children will touch these things and grow fond of them. Maybe stories will be told of how these special objects were discovered in such-and-such a shop. The parents may instruct how to treat them with care so they will last a good long time. Surely my mother will smile when she hears this and she will be comforted. I hope.

Michelle Kreiner

## **Never Tell**

The weeping willow was shelter  
A place to hide  
To not exist  
To hang upside down and let everything fall out  
Whispery branches barely glance  
As if arms with no hands  
An embrace without a touch  
Underneath the green canopy  
Lies a little bible  
And a ghost  
A ghost of a child  
A ghost of a childhood  
And the willow weeps.  
Limbs flow heavy  
with the sap  
of deep-rooted secrets.



Deidra Hill

**Rose**



Patricia Jakovich VanAmburg  
**Viennese Stair**



Marie Westhaver

## Baby Steps

The entrance hall of the assisted living facility was full of old folks scattered around like broken toys. Dani passed old ladies in wheelchairs blinking the world into focus, duffers shuffling around in slippers, folks in their right minds looking around for someone to break their routine with a greeting, and the blissfully unaware, staring into space as if waiting for a bus.

"Can I help you?" the receptionist asked her.

"Just visiting my mom," she said, breezily, as if she knew the way, and the receptionist went back to her computer. *If only*, Dani thought.

*More ladies than men*, she noticed. Leftover ladies, waiting in corridors and inside rooms, looking up at the sound of every footfall, hoping that the next person in the doorway would be a visitor.

She had heard about this place at another conference taking place at her hotel, one devoted to elder care and services. Dani hadn't meant to crash that group either. She'd bought a teddy bear for her niece's baby shower in the gift shop and wasn't paying attention when she returned to what she thought was her conference. She listened to two men discussing the qualities of a certain

old folks' home in Chicago before it dawned on her and had wordlessly accepted a business card from one of them before escaping up one floor to the right conference.

"What's holding you back?" the woman running the breakout session at her conference asked her group. Dani knew exactly what was holding her back or at least what was winking around the corners of her mind almost all the time.

It was an impulsive decision after the breakout session. She went down to the first level, still carrying the bag from the gift shop, and got into a taxi, giving the driver the business card. "Come back in an hour?" she asked, and he said he would. Dani had gone inside the building as if she knew what she was doing.

"Are you here to visit me?" a voice asked from inside one of the rooms. Dani stuck her head inside. "Hi," she said. She noted the name on the door: Evelyn.

Somewhere out there, her real mother might be alive, 15 years older than her, which must have seemed like a lifetime when she had given her up for adoption, but was nothing now that Dani was 53. She didn't know any more than that about her mother and that she had been from the Chicago area. She had always wished she knew more.

"How are you doing?" she asked, sitting down across

from Evelyn, who was following her every movement with watery eyes, trying to place her.

"Fine," Evelyn nodded repeatedly, a dandelion bobbing up and down.

Evelyn suddenly spied the bear in the bag. "What's that?" she asked.

Dani followed her gaze to the tip of the teddy bear's ear peeking out of the bag from the hotel gift shop. "What?" she asked. *That*, Evelyn pointed, as she pulled the bear out slightly.

"That!" Evelyn said, fixated, as Dani pulled the bear out slowly, just so its nose peeked over the side of the bag, and then ducked quickly back into the bag. They both broke into peals of laughter. She pulled the bear out and Evelyn's eyes grew big.

"Well look at that!"

Dani placed the bear on Evelyn's lap and watched her stroke it, a gaping smile spreading across her wrinkled face.

"I've got to go," she said, squeezing Evelyn's hand.

"You'll come back?" the old lady asked.

"Of course," she said with a smile and stood to leave. Evelyn was probably somebody's mother, maybe her mother, maybe not. She might have brought a

few moments of human contact to a stranger before disappearing if Evelyn even remembered her later.

*Welcome to my world*, she thought, pushing the front door open and walking to her car. *You looked at me once before you disappeared. If it was you.*

Peggie Hale

## Life in the Cosmos

Charting a course through the  
    Supernova remnant in the Large Magellanic Cloud  
Unsure if the path is prograde or retrograde.  
    Maybe that left should've been a right  
The moon is waning gibbous  
When I'd rather it were waxing crescent  
Should my magnitude be absolute or should it be apparent?  
    Can't we just agree that I'm just plain bright?  
Guiding my way are two Mars Rovers  
    Opportunity and Spirit  
        (Opportunity has been slow to respond)  
        (Spirit has good days and bad)  
Take the scenic shortcut, 'cross the solar system,  
Short stop moon hops:  
    From Charon to Triton  
    To Hyperion and Titan  
    To Jupiter's moons as seen by Galileo  
    Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto  
Jupiter has acne  
    Or at least a Great Red Spot

There's a Dragon Storm on Saturn  
    That's been the talk of the Milky Way  
        (Don't drink the water; you know what they say)  
Photo ops and tourist stops:  
    maria on the moon, mons on Mars  
    A constellation named Cassiopeia  
    And a spacecraft named Cassini  
    Everything named celestially dreamy.  
Except, of course, homely Ida  
A potato shaped asteroid  
Who just happens to have its very own  
sweet as can be,  
and oh so tiny,  
moon baby  
Named (Spud! They should have called it Spud!) Dactyl  
  
Just making my way through the crowded galaxy...

Devin Trim

## The Final Metamorphosis

The strangled sun hurled deliciously unforgivable blasphemies at the array of dim and charnel clouds approaching with threats to scatter their hideously inbred filth across the streets and rooftops. It was beneath this bleak sky that Dr. Caldear—as he introduced himself—walked to the center of the town square, accompanied by what appeared to be a tamed lizard.

He seemed set on a street performance of some sort, and naturally a crowd formed around him and his uncommon companion with a silently unifying understanding that they were not a mere crowd any longer but an audience. Once he felt that his audience was sizable enough, he addressed the spectators. After giving his name, he acquired an alluringly mysterious air: “Ladies and gentlemen, you see before you a large green lizard, no? A chameleon, in fact. I, however, see the reddest of June roses.”

Instantly the chameleon was nowhere to be found; a lascivious scarlet rose lay where it had stood. The man bent gracefully and brought it to his face, inhaling sensuously before returning it to its place at his feet. Every bit as suddenly as this change had taken place, it was reversed:

the chameleon stood where it had before, and the rose was gone. The audience gasped with mingled delight and wonder.

Dr. Caldear asked a woman in the audience what she would like to see his chameleon become. Cynically,—he had chosen her first precisely because of her clear disbelief in the chameleon’s abilities—she replied that she would be very interested to see it take on the appearance of her recently deceased housecat. Dr. Caldear smiled, knowing the specific nature of the request had been a clever attempt to expose the performance as a fraud.

Despite her mistrust, no sooner had he repeated her request to the lizard than the transformation was complete. So taken aback was the woman that she exclaimed joyfully and ran from where she stood to hold and caress the feline. After a few moments, she self-consciously put the animal down and the chameleon immediately reappeared—it had begun to change back even before her hands had left it, and she shrieked in surprise, drawing much laughter from the onlookers.

By this point, Dr. Cadlear’s “magic chameleon”—as the audience members had begun calling it—had aroused the insatiable fascination of all present. Individuals slipped away here and there to fetch friends and family to witness

the spectacle, and requests for the remarkable reptile's metamorphoses flowed swiftly, with an ever-increasing thirst for novelty. At the end of three hours the chameleon had been a jade tarantula, two dead philosophers, a chandelier from Versailles suspended in the air, a centaur, a locally infamous grave robber, and a snow leopard, in addition to many other rarities. Its versatility and adaptability to things and individuals it could never possibly have encountered before was nothing short of astonishing.

Having seen all of this, the audience began to tire slightly of the chameleon. Requests were fewer now, separated by silences of various lengths and intensities, and audience members were beginning to wander away alone or in small groups. The show seemed about dead when a man suddenly called, "Become life!" The undeniably strange nature of his request at once piqued the interest of those remaining; those who had left but were still within earshot sauntered back curiously.

Dr. Cadlear seemed thrilled at the prospect of concluding on such a memorable note as this promised to be. With considerable energy he repeated the request. Instead of changing, however, the chameleon looked confusedly—and rather pitifully, with substantial fatigue—

at its master. He laughed nervously and repeated the command once more, to the same results.

Audience members were laughing and leaving, congratulating the man who had made the request on finally outwitting the chameleon. Seeing that he was being made to look moronic, Dr. Cadlear flew into a sudden rage: "Change, damn you! Change!" The creature was absolutely panic-stricken now. Its master withdrew and uncoiled a long whip from his coat pocket and began to lash the creature violently. Doing whatever it could to avoid the beating, it began a frenzied series of transformations into everything imaginable, no matter how grand, or absurd, or mundane. Eventually it was shifting with such quickness that it was nothing more than a blur of light into which Dr. Cadlear screamed and whipped.

Following a few desperate moments of this, the transformations ceased and the light faded. Dissatisfied murmurs trickled through the audience—who had remained not out of wonder, or even mere curiosity, but something altogether hollower. The chameleon stood in a daze before its master, a haggard shell of itself, full of fear and hunger and deathly exhaustion. The latter simply stared at it with unspeakable loathing for allowing him to

be made a fool of. He was about to kick the creature when it collapsed of its own accord, unmoving and no longer breathing. Dr. Cadlear began whipping the chameleon, screaming at it to get up, with occasional threats of punishments too severe to name.

Dusk, with her raven tresses and amethyst eyes, descended over the dismal scene. It finally began to rain—lightly at first, but quickly escalating into a torrent. The audience—sensing that the show had ceased for good—hastened home, their minds already distant from the chameleon that they had so marveled at a mere hour earlier. Dr. Cadlear simply stood there, mutilating and shaming the reptilian corpse at his feet as the lightning flashed and the rain cascaded, ushering in the phantoms of ripe evils done under a broken moon, in the graveyard of the heart.

And for all I know he stands there even now.



Katherine Farrell

## **St. Saturnin, Provence**



Matt Larabee

## The Draugr March

I cannot sleep. I hide my face  
From surf and swell and blow  
Since I have seen the queer grey men  
Who drag themselves from dusk

The fingers of cold mist rise  
Dripping through the doors barred shut  
Stroking souls asleep in bed,  
Teasing out the soul.

The village squats in sodden, dripping night  
With sea-mist draped and drear.  
And aye the waves, oh aye the waves  
Come rushing far and near.

Once each door is locked and barred  
Every curtain drawn in fear  
'tis then they come, unseen but heard.  
Forsook. Forgotten. Forlorn.

Dragging hooks of rusted metal  
Dripping bilgewater, rot and flesh  
The decrepit flesh stiffens fast,  
The cracking of bones come marching in.

The stench of rotting flesh,  
The sight of buried flesh and bones,  
Carried on the mist of drowning death  
Of smothering, crushing, choking sea.

They are the drowned, they are,  
The dead that rise from the jealous sea.  
Walking, marching home at last,  
Dragging the stench of tombs long lost.

Into the trembling town they walk  
Unhallowed eyes shriveled in the skull,  
The breath of graves, the breath of old,  
Flowing through dried and withered lungs

The old know better then to look,  
Upon this dismal parade of woe  
The young are fast abed tonight,  
For the drowned have come to walk

But I, with lonely cynic's pride,  
And science in my head,  
Encourage myself to look upon  
This honor guard of forgotten men.

I looked, I say. I looked out then,  
Peering through the curtain sea-mist,  
I saw the dead drowned shapes,  
All macabre splendor revealed to me.

A ragged captain, hoisting his flag,  
A whaler, sea-hook imbedded in his eye,  
A starved old man, wheezing as weakly,  
As he had begged for bread in life.

A drowned lover, eyes filled with grief,  
A fishermen still tangled within his net.  
A gruesome corpse, half-shark-eaten,  
A weary soldier, bullet filled, beats his drum.

A cacophony of different cries  
Moans of sorrow, loss and woe  
This grisly march moved onward  
Searching for those who do not hide.

I looked indeed, upon these unquiet dead,  
Who rise again to escape the grave  
I shall not look again, I believe,  
For know I cannot feel.

The cold grip of grave-mist,  
That insidious chill that numbs the soul,  
Entrenched itself within me,  
Calling me down to join the drowned.

I look no more, I look no more  
My eyes have stricken blind,  
By the hollowed faces of the drowned,  
In the mist beyond the glass.

# contributors

**Lisa Arbareri** grew up in Columbia. She left to study languages, bounced around France, and because she can never decide what she wants to do, sang in clubs, made a demo, and acted silly for a good long time. She is currently in Columbia again raising two boys. She is working as an ESL lab assistant at Howard Community College and apparently writing tortured poems about vanity and lost youth.

**Andrew Bauss** is currently in the Teacher Education program. He loves writing and has been taking it seriously for almost two years. Andrew thanks his English teacher from high school, Corey O'Brien, for helping him find his direction.

Born in Washington, D.C. and raised in Prince George's County, Maryland, **Alysha S. Brown** has always aspired to be a writer. She was introduced to the art of poetry and fiction at age 5 and had her first poem published in the Young Writers of America publication at age 9. Her first love being spoken word and poetic writing, she is now venturing into writing plays and short fiction stories. She hopes to one day publish a novel and a book of poems.

**Liam Casey** is looking for that one true sentence. He plans to attend the University of Maryland in Fall 2012.

**Lindsay Anne Dransfield** is a photography student at Howard Community College. This spring, she will graduate with an associate's degree in photography and plans to attend UMBC in the fall. She loves taking photos of everything, but especially people. As a Christian, she hopes that her photography will help others see the beauty of the world and the people that God made.

**Katherine Farrell** is an Irish born former public health physician who has lived in Maryland since 1973. Since retiring in 2008, she has studied painting, drawing and design at Howard Community College. She has shown art works in student, juried and invitational exhibitions and had a solo show in 2011. She occasionally writes verses just for fun. Katherine and her husband Bernard live in Ellicott City.

**Liz Femiano** is an instructor at Howard Community College, a Columbia native, and a current Baltimore resident. In her spare time she enjoys typing out words and seeing if they hang together.

**Patricia Parra Garcia** was born in Caracas, Venezuela. She has a major in Audiovisual Arts and is now majoring in Special Education. English is her second language, and she is proud of her identity as a Latina woman living in the US.

**Elizabeth Guertler Godfrey** is a retired Howard County Public School teacher. Although she currently resides in Frederick County, she lived and worked in Howard County from 1976 until 2004. Since her retirement, she has been writing essays for adults and fiction for children. Elizabeth is pursuing a Masters in Fine Arts in Writing at Spalding University.

A 2011 honors graduate of Howard Community College, **Peggie Hale** continues working towards a BA in English as a scholarship student at UMUC. Published in the Howard Community College literary journal, *The Muse* 2011, as well as the *Tidal Basin Review* she enjoys writing and enjoys the support of an eclectic group of family, friends, and fans.

**Robert Hamill** enjoys taking classes, writing fiction, investigating neural networks, walking, and bike rides.

**Deidra Hill** currently attends Howard Community College and is studying Mass Media Productions. She attended an art High School by the name of Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy and also attended the Art Institute of Washington. Besides writing, Deidra also enjoys photography, drawing, painting, acting and singing.

**David Johnson** is an art major at Howard Community College who aspires to transfer to MICA. His piece “Kiss of Dawn” was inspired by different shades of light and how emotions and messages that can be translated through the right amount of light and shadows.

**Erin Kline** is an Howard Community College employee who enjoys capturing the uniqueness of what surrounds us.

**Stacy Korbela** is an Assistant Professor of English here at Howard Community College. In her spare time, she enjoys travel documentary photography, singing and dancing, and being a “foodie.”

**K. J. Kovacs** is an adjunct assistant writing instructor at Howard Community College. She is also a freelance writer, editor, and fine artist whose work has been published and exhibited in the US and UK.

**Michelle Kreiner** is a preschool teacher at The Children’s Learning Center at Howard Community College. Presently, she is working on a Bachelor’s Degree in English.

**Matt Larabee** is a very enthusiastic writer, but not the most outspoken of people. He is a big fan of horror and science

fiction/fantasy, and tries to show this in his writing. His major is videogame design, and he hopes to be the narrative director of a major videogame company. His main inspiration is his own dreams and stories from authors he admires. The main focus of his writing is science fiction and horror, much like his favorite things to read.

**Claudia Martucci** is an Italian artist currently living in nearby Clarksville, Maryland. She studied Studio Art and Art History at the Liceo Artistico and the Accademia di Belle Arti in Lecce, Italy, graduating in 1987 with a Masters in Fine Arts. Claudia “translate[s] into an ideographic poetic language [familiar] scenes, landscape, objects, and beings....”

**Carl A. Merritt** has been an employee for Howard Community College television studio for over 10 years. He has a bachelor's degree in Film and Video from UMBC, and recently completed the Professional Program in Screenwriting with UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. After the purchase of a DLSR, he's been taking photos of many things.

**Jarred Mitchell** is a creative writing student at Howard Community College. He enjoys writing short stories and the ability to portray characters in fiction.

**Lenett Partlow-Myrick** is a visual artist, poet, and teacher at Howard Community College. She combines visual, literary, and musical elements in compositions that explore themes of spirituality and cultural identity. Her work has been featured in the award-winning video documentary “Mbele Ache” and the CSN-TV special “Voices of Our Past.”

**Kim Osterhout** is currently a student at Howard Community College, but will graduate this semester. Her interests are primarily in photography and writing, but she is also highly interested in other facets of art such as drawing, clay shaping, painting, and leather embossing.

**Rai Podorski** is a psychology student at Howard Community College.

**Tim Powling**, during his erratic wanderings has been a well natured delinquent, a poet soldier and a traditional miller. Despite this appetite for change, he has matured enough to have elevated himself into the role of unkempt student and manages this image as well as he did his others.

**Rachel Ridley** is a nineteen-year-old first year at HCC. She is currently editing her first full-length novel and will submit it for publication in the next few months. In addition to writing, she is active in her local community theatre, participating in several musicals.

**Joshua Ro** is currently a third-year undergraduate student majoring in Western European History and English Literature at the University of Maryland, College Park. He's always been interested in creative stories, but his first experiences with writing were with music. Joshua has been a songwriter for six years now, and that has helped him explore what kinds of emotions he is best at expressing. His literary influences are of the American tradition—Mark Twain, Norman Maclean, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Annie Dillard.

**Torsten Schulz** is a 1974 graduate of St. Mary's College of Maryland. Until last year, when he was published in *The Muse*, he never took himself seriously. Torsten's creative pieces included in this year's *Muse* issue are inspired by his advanced creative writing course. Presently, he continues at Howard Community College in search of his true voice and is in constant awe of the agile minds with who he continues his exploration.

**Tim Singleton**, a once upon a time student of Howard Community College, is a co-chair of the HoCoPoLitSo board and co-publisher of *Little Patuxent Review*. He offers this year's submissions in the spirit of Robert Bly's *Morning Poems*.

**Mallory Smith** is a sophomore at Howard High School. She has attended poetry programs such as the Pomfret School's Broken Bridge Writer's workshop and the Sewanee Young Writer's Conference. Mallory also sits on the board of directors of the Howard County Poetry and Literary Society.

**Jeannette Spohn** is a novelist-in-training but likes to take pictures and knit as wordless hobbies. Her favorite food is orange chicken. Jeannette likes to listen to Neil Gaiman audio books and watch tv shows on Hulu. She is also becoming an expert in assembling Ikea furniture.

**Ben Tarr** is an English Major at Howard Community College. He hopes to transfer to St. John's in Annapolis and to one day teach literature and philosophy.

**Devin Trim** is an English major in the Rouse Scholars program and has received numerous awards for his literary endeavors.

**Patricia Jakovich VanAmburg** teaches literature and creative writing at Howard Community College and has recently published poetry in *Little Patuxent Review* and the 2011 Maryland Writer's Anthology.

**Rachel Staub** loves all aspects of the arts. She plays guitar, takes photographs, performs in theater productions, and writes frequently. While she writes songs and short stories, poetry is her favorite genre.

**Lauren Visnic** is an English major at Howard Community college and will be graduating this spring. She is more of a reader than a writer, and is primarily drawn to historical fiction and fictional stories involving animals. Accordingly, her favorite books include *Pride and Prejudice* and *Watership Down*.

**Jordan Nicole Vogel** is an avid reader, writer and watcher of movies and TV and if she can find the time, she throws some photography into the mix as well.

In addition to teaching, **Floria Volynskaya** is an Instructional Technologist at English Language Center at Howard Community College. She enjoys taking pictures and is often seen with a DSLR at Howard Community College events.

**Marie Westhaver** is an Associate Professor and the Director of Film, Humanities, and Interdisciplinary Arts at Howard Community College. This short story is part of a larger collection called “The Conference” which will be published in Amazon’s Kindle Store this summer.

**Lisa A. Wilde** is the Director of Theatre at Howard Community College and the Resident Dramaturg for Rep Stage. She holds a doctorate in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from the Yale School of Drama. She has worked at Center Stage and for Young Playwrights Inc. and serves as the Chair of Dramaturgy for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Region Two.





Submit to issue.11

Deadline: March 1, 2013.

Email submissions to  
[themuse@howardcc.edu](mailto:themuse@howardcc.edu)



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