

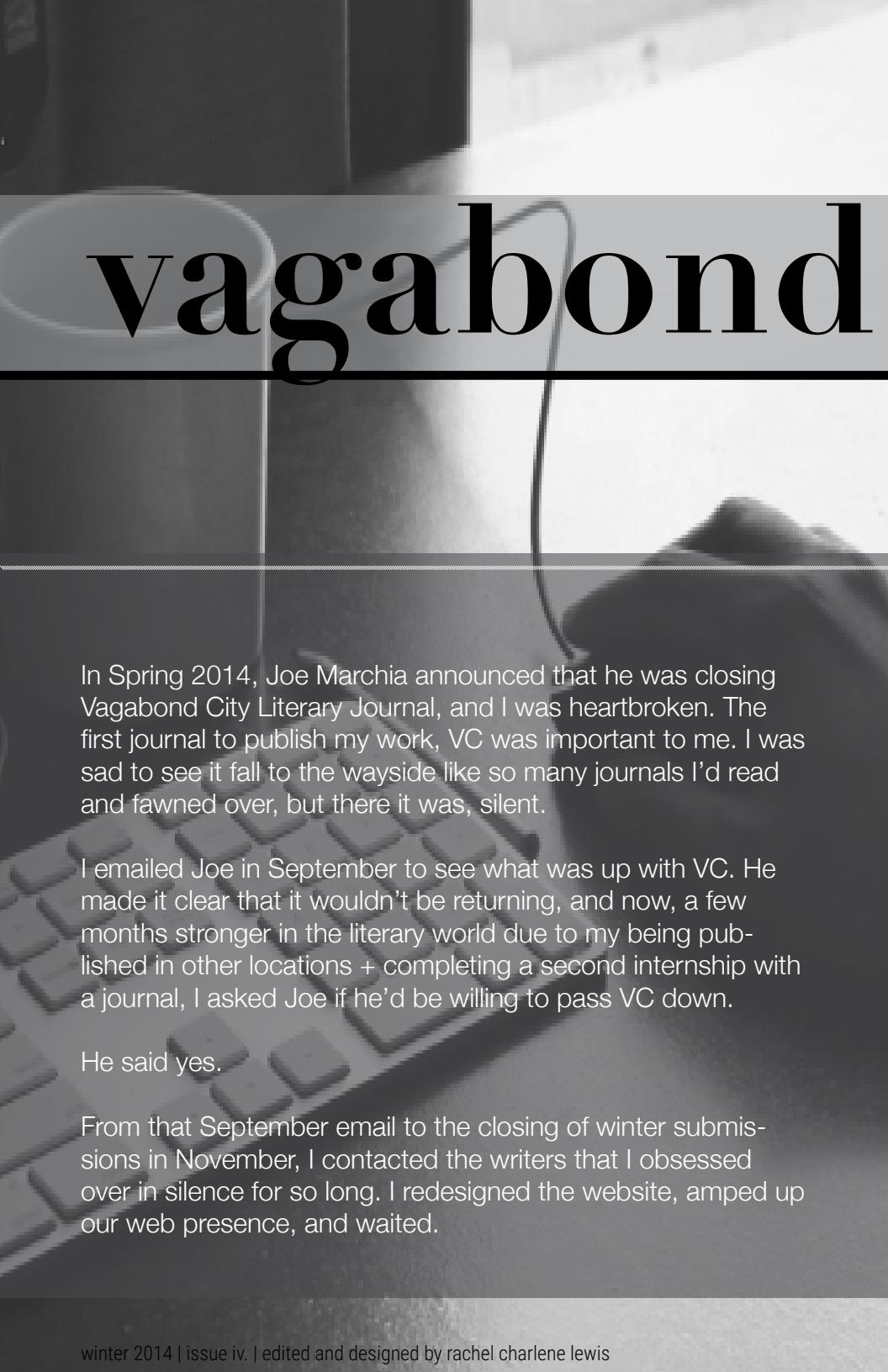
a literary journal

vagabond city

A U T H O R S

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vagabond



In Spring 2014, Joe Marchia announced that he was closing Vagabond City Literary Journal, and I was heartbroken. The first journal to publish my work, VC was important to me. I was sad to see it fall to the wayside like so many journals I'd read and fawned over, but there it was, silent.

I emailed Joe in September to see what was up with VC. He made it clear that it wouldn't be returning, and now, a few months stronger in the literary world due to my being published in other locations + completing a second internship with a journal, I asked Joe if he'd be willing to pass VC down.

He said yes.

From that September email to the closing of winter submissions in November, I contacted the writers that I obsessed over in silence for so long. I redesigned the website, amped up our web presence, and waited.

city

a literary journal



LETTER FROM THE

EDITOR

I wasn't disappointed.

Today, I bring to you a body of work that represents the diversity, and the grit, that I want to see in the literary world. There are new and old, queer and straight, heartbroken and whole, poets, alt lit writers, tumblr writers...

TL;DR: I'm in love with this. I hope you are too.

My promise to every writer who submits to VC: I will love on your writing the way that you want to be loved.

To every writer in this issue: I hope I have fulfilled and continue to fulfill that promise.

Yours,
rachel charlene lewis

California

a poem by Lily Cigale

did you forget scratching off your skin on
the floor of your parents' shower, home
from a chilly vacation with a warm girl?
a text at three am: "I've peeled all my skin off
do you still love me? can you still love a mess of bloody
muscle, viscous trails, teeth, teeth, teeth?? things
on the outside that should not be? should be
packed away behind layers of flesh?"

a text the next morning: "wtf."
quit droning.

she doesn't love you.

she only held your hand that time you cried in
the hallways so that

you would shut up

she only kissed you, perched on your hips like
a pixie (long hair and mirage lips and clementine vodka)
only kissed you so that you would shut up
shut up shut up

shut up

about tiny girls with too-big eyes and too-red lips
who write badly about snowflakes

swirling

swirling

swirling

and boys with bad hands

trying to romanticize his dirt brown eyes and
skinny meanness and the

ingrained sadness of teenaged heterosexuality
stop.

remember riding bikes at night in northern california

remember

kissing on various couches but

never alone. remember

our almost-summer

almost-romance
remember fluorescent lights and bad skin
economics class and crying in the bathroom
texts late at night: "don't say that,
you're beautiful
you're beautiful you're
beautiful
you're beautiful"
and don't love girls who love boys who hate themselves
don't love girls who won't scoop up your
organs when they spill on summer driveways
queezy girls, uneasy girls
girls who have never read an anatomy book they
just stand there staring
at your kidneys on the ground,
your intestines your pancreas maybe
and even though she's swollen with superiority
and sanity you still want to take
her little face in your hands but your fingers
are bloody
you've misplaced all your skin, sent it swimming down the drain and now
even now, months later,
you can see her when you close your eyes
you can see her standing there
in the dark
your bloody fingers have left streaks down
her cheeks and
she is laughing and
she is going to kiss you even though she is sober
and you are only a simple viscous mass of tissue,
writhing in her driveway

Lily Cigale is a freshman at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
Originally from Westchester, New York, she runs a fairly popular blog on
[tumblr, porn4smartgirls.tumblr.com](http://porn4smartgirls.tumblr.com)

3 Poems

by Kelsey Schmidt

conversely

she was
my saturday night
my bathroom stall drug
the cigarettes butts on my back porch.
you are
my sunday morning
my lipstick stained coffee mug
bleary-eyed kisses that taste like toothpaste

left, right, you left again.

i lost all desire to be
your/china/doll
your
sixAM/hotelroom/smoke
little bitch,
don't call me
ring/voicemail/ring/hangup
rinse, repeat.

effloresce

i am full of holes
but there are roots in my ribcage
and flowers burst from my spine
when you touch my skin.

Kelsey Schmidt is a 20 year old sentient being who is just trying her best. She is an excessive coffee drinker who enjoys petting other people's dogs and being cynical. She writes at <http://www.thegreyhours.tumblr.com/>.

Maribel and the Feet that Itched

fiction by Daniella De Jesus

Maribel used to be a disco dancer, studio 54-ing it up on a Monday night. Today she stirs a Donna Summer song into a boiling pot on the stove. And a heart breaks every day she doesn't dance. The swirling sweet potatoes remind her of herself. She imagines for a minute what her life could've been, if it weren't for that man. But Maribel stops herself, "No no no. I love my son," she says. A fuscia sequin shift dress still hangs inside her closet. But she won't try it on, afraid that it won't slide over her mami belly and mami hips. She looks at herself in the mirror. She looks at herself in the soup. She looks at herself in the silverware. Wishing the silver saucer was a disco ball. Wishing the hand pulling at her dress was not that of her child asking when dinner would be ready but a handsome young man trying to buy her a drink. Her feet itch from the kitchen. Itch, Itch. The neighbors can hear it all the way outside. Itch, Itch. She used to scratch it by dancing with her son in the living room but that hurt too much, the itch just got more itchy. That tacky old carpet makes for such a poor dance floor. Chopping up the onions, she took the knife to each ankle, carved into them two little red bracelets, snapped off each foot like a doll part, and stirred them into the boiling pot.

Maybe there her feet could finally find a groove.

Daniella De Jesús is an actor, poet, deviser, and playwright from Bushwick, Brooklyn, New York. She is currently in her final year at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, earning her BFA in Drama. This Fall, she performed her original one-woman show "The Thief Cometh," about the gentrification of Bushwick, at the 2014 United Solo Festival, and showcased the devised theatre piece, "ASSORTED CRACKERS: A Reverse Minstrel Show" at NYU. This piece was originally published on her blog, spic-english.tumblr.com

Out of An Ant Hill

poetry by R.K. Gold

Out of ant hill,
rolling over itself
in unison
with the white grains
of sand
was a green
caterpillar.

I've seen the desperate
search for a home
before.

Reflecting off its eyes
and down its cheeks
hoping
its tears
will dampen
the sand enough
for a child
to build him a castle.

Only to have rain
flood away the front
door after moving
in the final box
of old tennis racquets
and empty picture frames.

I have praised wood
and dry wall
as if it were
stones meant
to outlast the pyramids.
Turning a blind eye
to termites
and listening to music
so that there could
never be anything
wrong with my home.

But standing still
as the wood gives way
under the empty pressure
and blinking through
the slivers
and the planks
raining and spitting
down upon me,
I cannot help but smile.

Because even though
the walls protecting
me have fallen
I can finally look up
and see the sun.

R.K. Gold is from Buffalo, NY and graduated from the University of Maryland this past May with a degree in English. They are currently working their way across the country, exploring as many states as they can while editing their novel. Join them on Twitter, @RKGold91, on Facebook, and on their website, www.rkgold-creations.com.

Named

nonsfiction by Hea-Ream Lee

I'll be at a party, clutching a plastic cup of something that probably doesn't deserve to be called beer and making the motions of small talk but actually just shouting to be heard over the loud music. A tall econ major and I will be talking about something utterly banal, maybe an observation about the number of people packed into the dark, stuffy house. I'll be bored to tears. He'll introduce himself halfway through our conversation. His name will be Brent, or Pat, or something equally monosyllabic. Like one of Mitt Romney's sons or something. Then he'll ask for my name, and I'll say it, slow and exaggerated like I always do when I meet someone for the first time, and I'll see in his eyes that it has not registered. Maybe he couldn't hear me over the din of the party, or maybe he had no intention of ever learning it. Either way, he will not ask for clarification. "Cool," he'll say. Then we'll move on to other, less personal topics.

It was my grandfather who named me. In Korean, you traditionally have two ways of writing your name: one in hangul, one in hanja. Hangul is Korean, and tells you how to pronounce your name. Hanja is Chinese, and tells you the meaning. Each hangul character can correspond to several hanja characters, each of which has a slightly different meaning. I imagine my grandfather sitting at his desk at night, poring over our family's *jokbo*, or family tree. His neck is bent and his eyes are squinted in the effort to make out the names in the faded document. There are names of people he never knew and names of people he loves dearly. He will draw on them for inspiration, perhaps taking a character from one, the sound of a consonant melding with a vowel from another.

Both the characters of my given name mean "wisdom." I remember this fact bitterly on nights when I've been drinking and getting weepy thinking about all I haven't achieved and every dumb thing I've ever said and deciding whether I should turn up the Sufjan Stevens before or after I pour myself some more cheap wine. It's quite a name to live up to, Wisdom-Wisdom. It couldn't have been something

more attainable, like Mediocre-Average? Acceptable-Normal, maybe?

When I was in fifth grade, I moved to a different school district and my parents thought it would be easier if I had an American name. Something white, something nondescript, something easy to pronounce. Everyone at my new school accepted this rebranding, not understanding the momentous change I had undergone. I went by this name for exactly two years before dropping it in favor of my given name. Even at age ten I knew I was only pretending.

After years of spelling my name out to impatient baristas with sharpies and cups in hand, I have resorted to giving out my last name in coffee shops. Sometimes they'll yell out "Lee" and two or three other Asians who are similarly sick of having to repeat themselves will also come to the counter to pick up their drink. We'll give each other sheepish grins, figure out who the drink really belongs to, and bask in the discomfort of the Starbucks employee who silently hands over the coffee.

My dad tells me that my name is beautiful, that it makes me special. Once we went skiing and I watched as the bored, pimply twenty-something running the ski rental counter rattled off a list of the different rental packages that were offered. My dad asked for clarification. The rental kid repeated himself, voice dripping with condescension, face ugly with sarcasm. I had to restrain myself from shaking him. From yelling at him, from telling him about my dad's PhD, that he is the smartest person I've ever met, that he does important, good work. I wanted to make him understand how much my dad loves riding bikes on Saturday mornings, how strong-willed he is when he argues, how he has an incredibly inquisitive mind that devours information on all topics. The way he calmly gathered his family around him to announce that his mother had passed away, how he never allowed himself to grieve in front of us. How he used to be a teacher, and how much he still loves to give lectures to his kids, whether it's on long car rides or in the supermarket or in art museums.

Instead, I stepped in and handled the transaction. When the kid asked who was doing the renting, I told him my name. And then I said it again. And then I slowly spelled it out for him, never breaking my gaze.

People get it wrong sometimes, and that's okay. It's not simply that I'm sick of repeating myself, the syllables losing meaning with each iteration until I'm just making sounds that even I don't recognize. It's not the amount of racially charged microaggression it has sparked (enough to fill several depressing books, I'm sure). Really, I'm still in mourning over the part of my childhood I've lost and will never regain spent searching for a pen or mini license plate with my name on it in museum gift shops.

I have only one picture of my grandfather, taken several months before he passed away. In it, we're outside and I'm just a baby and he's carrying me and leaning against a fence. My mom's there, and she's young and has long hair that goes down to her waist. It must have been winter, because we're all bundled up and I'm basically just a set of eyes barely visible under a tightly swaddled blanket and a silly hat. My grandfather appears to be conversing with someone just off-camera. I can hear him coaxing my dad to get into the picture, then making a casual remark about the cold. He looks down and adjusts my hat so that it sits solidly on my head and shifts his weight from one leg to the other in an effort to keep warm. He leans in to whisper something to me, and his breath escapes his body in frozen clouds of spun sugar that hang in the air until an unseen eddy of wind shatters them into pieces.

I used to take art lessons at a small studio along with a cohort of other raggedy kids around my age. Our teacher was a woman named Heather who had a high, fluttery voice and wore long skirts that swirled around her as she walked. We spent hours in that cluttered studio messing about with clay and paint and oil pastels. Once Heather was showing the class how to draw faces. We had no model, so she looked around the room, pointed at me, and in front of everyone, drew my face. As she sketched she described aloud my wispy eyebrows, the glow of the overhead lights on the curve of my cheek, the few strands of hair that had fallen in front of my eyes. The bit of white pastel was alive in her hand as it flew across the dark expanse of paper. Heather looked at me with such intensity that she seemed to forget I was more than a collection of shapes and angles for her eyes to devour. The class watched her watching me, perhaps searching in vain for some hidden meaning they couldn't quite grasp. This is what I think about whenever I look

at the picture of my grandfather.

Babynames.com urges me to change my name with the help of their Random Renamer. “Want to know what it feels like to be someone else?” I got Kiona Estella, and it feels OK.

The Wu-Tang Clan Name Generator says my name is Cybernetic Tiger, which somehow makes more sense to me.

I wonder what it’s like to be in charge of the naming of another human person. Maybe my grandfather didn’t feel the weight of this responsibility, instead picking my name off the top of his head and hoping that it sounded okay. But I like to think that he understood what my dad’s request entailed. Maybe as he pondered potential names he pictured me on my first day of school, all chubby cheeks and pigtails, or summer afternoons spent hiking in the mountains together. There must have been a world of possibilities contained within these thoughts- things that could have been if my dad hadn’t gotten a job in Princeton, and if my grandfather hadn’t passed away soon after my second birthday. I like to think he took a long time picking my name, searching through family records to find characters that had been used in names in my family for generations. Maybe he stopped to look up certain meanings or to try out a prospective name, whispering it to himself quietly so it stilled in the air for only a second before dissipating into nothingness.

Sometimes, after I finished my homework and was sitting at the kitchen table with my mom, I would ask her to write out my name in hanja. I loved watching her make the marks on a piece of scrap paper, her movements fluid and assured. I would stare at the characters until they swam in front of my eyes. Each swooping line was a personal friend, every firm dash a close confidante. Watching my mom write my name was too much fun for me to ever learn how to do it myself. It was a treat that I had to ask for and could be denied.

It’s a rainy summer afternoon and I’m sitting on the balcony of my second floor apartment with my boyfriend, watching it all come down. It’s the kind of rainstorm that makes everyone breathe a little lighter, glad for the brief respite from the oppressive heat. The giant leaves of the tree that sometimes grows weird, unidentifiable fruits bounce in the torrential downpour. I can see the little black cat that

lives in the backyard taking refuge under the neighbor's dilapidated old truck. We perch on the cheap plastic chairs, not saying a word as a fine mist coats our faces and bodies. I'm thinking about ghostly white sketches on black paper, about possibilities unrealized, of yellowed photographs. These thoughts are so familiar to me that I feel the shape of them in my head when I close my eyes. They fill the space inside my skull, a balloon bobbing undisturbed beside my cerebellum and hypothalamus and resting gently against the backs of my eyes. All of a sudden I'm filled with a desperate, all-consuming need to articulate my thoughts. They have to be named. I turn to him and he cocks his eyebrow, waiting for me to speak. I open my mouth and it's there, the words are right there but-

As quickly as they came they're gone, slipping out of my open mouth and dissolving into the damp air.

Hea-Ream Lee hails from the great state of New Jersey. She is currently a senior at Wesleyan University, where she studies Biology and English. She hopes to be very busy after she graduates. This piece was originally published at *The Fem*.

Majid

poetry by Maj al-Yasa

Majid

from your wine-stained lips

meem alif jiim daal

د-ج-ا-م

you print the letters
on my palm
and close my fist around
the syllables.

ش-ن-ب-ح-ت

you love me
like the Prophet

--salaam--

loved Fatima

--beloved--

and I love you as a brother.

ك-ح-ض-ت

you laugh.

be my wife.

ف-ق-و

habibi, I say,

we can't.

sister, you say, we will.

the sun burns on judgment day

as I protest,

I protest,

and yet I lie down.

our marital bed:

a dusty patch of earth two kilometers
from our parents.

my bridal gown:

an old pair of shorts

yanked down without ceremony.

we
نحن
are married
جوزتم حبصنا
in the dust.
فاطحنا

I am fourteen,
and you love me like the Prophet
loved his wife.
I am fourteen,
and our marriage certificate
is a rust red stain.

meem alif jīm daal.

Majid
from your wine-stained lips.

Maj al-Yasa is a queer woman of color who loves theatre, stand-up comedy and you. Sometimes she lives in Edinburgh and sometimes she lives in Los Angeles. Find her poetry, screenplays, novels and embarrassing YouTube videos on her website, www.OffCenterWriting.com.

Annual Well Woman Visit

poetry by Victoria Massie

I.

My arms stretch to the heavens
pre-destination
lengthy torso
stunted by chicken legs

The nurse begged me
stand tall;
wall and back kissing;
head and neck reconnecting inward
like best-friend secrets.

“Five and three quarters”
It takes women in my family
incessant earth-moon rotations
for them to fall down
permanently

in love
with the sun
set within them.

They have hunches,
making nothing of it
until they see sermons
preaching on the mountain
atop their backside,

“I told you so.”

My ego died last year.

Today my eyes cried
light libations,
I finally shrank back into myself.
These family genes are fitting nicely.

II.

I was her first
body on display
named healthy

Naming beauty
is not ethical.

They'd suspect we were
making educated porn
instead of inscribing history from within
onto a body without the will to resist
medical examination.

I await the day the doctor diagnoses me porn star.

III.
The first time
I peed in the chimbudzi
without missing
my body flowed from chair
to thunderbolt pose
faster than the speed of light.

Standing just above the toilet seat
my spirit boiled up
warm as the Saharan sun
above an Augustun Malawi

It must have only taken
one and a half tries
to discipline my pelvis
to relinquish itself

for screening.

Victoria Massie is a Ph.D. student in Sociocultural Anthropology at UC Berkeley and a poet. You can find more information about her research and creative writing on her website, vmmichelle.com. She tweets at @v_mmichelle.

5 Poems

by Šejla Srna

Salesclerk

i feel like i am fading away
everything irritates me
the sound of my space bar at 2 am
is my worst enemy right now
and the fact that this isn't a poem
but i'm still making it look like one
is making me sick to my fucking stomach
i just drank a can of gingerale
and that's not making my day any better either
because now i have heartburn
and i feel bloated on top of the fact
that for the past 8 months i've felt
like the ugliest and fattest person alive
while at the same time i have been convincing myself
that beauty is not what is deemed acceptable
by society, or whatever
no matter how many times i say it to other people
i'm never going to hear it
i don't want to go to work tomorrow
even if it's just 5 hours of being a polite cashier
i hate these stupid candles
they don't even smell good

Vonnegut's Asshole

they rub frantically at their bodies
sweating like animals
the fragrance of grease in the air
hair unwashed, but sleek
assholes shining from yesterday's shit
convinced they are beautiful,
convinced they are special,
convinced they are the sons and daughters
of Hemingway and Oates

they think they're classy;
clean shave and perfume,
covering the ghastly odor
of too much sleep
and too much time
wasted sitting at their desks with their
1 dollar notebooks and their 10 dollar pens
pretentious fucking teenagers
grasping at the chance to quote
a quote we've heard so many times
we don't know who said it first

Hungry

Today I ate 18 times,
and now I stare blankly
into my window
at the gut of my reflection -
I try to stand tall and proud
just like my mother taught me;
but looking now I see a girl
with shrunken clothes and
cowering shoulders,
eyes half empty and craving
just another bite.

Pig

Clutching bed sheets,
heartbeat deafening;
muffling the sounds of
the last train to Century Park -
whispers of my lover float
above my head,

and between my legs
Blood pumps unevenly,

flowing straight to the
fingertips;

leaving my hands numb,
lost, dead, flopping
over the sides of my bed
The creases in my belly

(disgusting pig gut)

mock my posture -
and the spots on my face
mock my shapeless body

But you still love me so,
only you

and my soul remains warm,
unchanged and untouched,
confused in this ugly corpse,

this filthy pile of fat and bones
growing and bulging like a cancer
I keep it safe, just for you -
you lovely, blind fool
I promise;

when are skin meets once more,
palm against palm,

I'll be beautiful again

Pillow

I am content when you are sleepy
or asleep

I still believe in bulletproof bed covers, but
vengeful mothers aren't as easy to fight off

Keep your head under your pillow,
say my name 3 times

I will keep you safe

Šejla Srna is a 20 year old from Edmonton, Alberta. She writes on tumblr at <http://bervex.tumblr.com>.

9 things to know before you crawl into my bed

nonfiction by Lily Cigale

1. I don't want to be begged. I am turned on by a steady affection, an unwavering rationality. I want you to do my taxes please memorize my social security number darling.
2. Be careful be careful be careful I am sharp in unexpected places I will remember your mother's name and kiss your earlobe and drizzle fingers down your spine but I will also spit poison in your mouth, set fire to your childhood. I will erase you from my mind, snubbed out like a match in the wind but I will still sometimes send you pretty pictures of me and smile at the thought of you wondering why, furrowing a brow and remembering the night I told you you were special. did my eyes shimmer with sarcasm then? did my lips taste like spite?
3. I want to be touched oh do I want to be touched I will curl beneath your fingers, arch and writhe like burning twigs deep in the embers I will shrink beneath you I will let myself revel in feeling small if only for a moment. I will construct castles on your skin for touching me like that, for a moment I will see you like a world unto itself for a

moment with your fingers on my stomach you will be invincible.

4. I am more in love with myself than I am with you. I want to hear myself gasp I want you to keep noise to a minimum.

5. I am not smooth. I have a scar on my knee from the time I fell down the stairs to impress my father I have a scar on my back from the time my skin tried to kill me and had to be cut out (did it scream? make a last ditch attempt?) I have a scar on my lip from something that must have been stressful I have a scar I have a scar I have a scar... I have stretch marks on my thighs from when they grew thick like tree trunks to keep me up and fuzz running down my stomach reminding me that I am warm blooded. I have freckles and divots, dents and bruises, I am not smooth but I am warm and sometimes I can feel like home.

6. I am like a newborn baby feeling with my mouth if you don't stop me I may swallow you whole tasting, tasting, tasting. I like when you taste like human, salty with nervousness and desire.

7. I am not meek I am not timid I will push you down I will bite you and bruise you and you will only be allowed to cradle me, delicate, delicate.

8. I need you to want me or I am not interested. I need you coiled up under your skin like a cobra on the attack I need your fingers itching, twitching for the curve of my hips I need you to feel like your chest is swelling, like your lips will whither up and die if they don't land on my skin. I need your eyes heavy, heavy, heavy with want I need you gravitating towards me. Then I will look at you.

9. Inside I am softer. Inside I am poems and heavy summer rain and the time I tried to rescue a baby bird who fell from a tree outside my dirty brownstone in Brooklyn. If you are good enough you can see a little of that. If you are sweet enough you can swing open the doors. If you are broken enough I will cup you in my hands like that little bird and bring you inside and try to feed you mashed up fruit maybe this time I won't end up burying you in my tiny backyard under fake grass with a styrofoam headstone, "lightening, taken from us too soon.

Lily Cigale is a freshman at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Originally from Westchester, New York, she runs a fairly popular blog on tumblr.

2 Poems

by Patricia P.

Futile Morbidity

I imagine my funeral to have
a punch bowl of regrets and scarcity of people

the place would be drab, not much different than my own life
my mother would burst into tears every second or so and
my sister would be handing out tissues that would end up unused
I hope the DJ they hire plays the music from my Recently Played
Playlist
and I hope my corpse looks sickly and decaying enough
to scare off those who wished they were me

part of me prays that the place offers free Wi-Fi
so the few who attend can tweet their condolences and sad faces

although, the one thing that I sincerely hope for
is that the words said about me
are worth more than the dirt I will be buried under
the leaves would fall like they always do
and the stray cat will continue living under my car
life goes on and the planet I used to live on won't so much as
stop for a millisecond;
nothing will have changed except for the fact that I am no longer
alive

Trainspotting

Trapped between the window and my sister
I struggle for inspiration—

Countless languages
rolling down foreign mouths;
it's the city train,

what do you expect?

The whistle blows, the bottom stirs
My view begins to change
The platform gives way to grassland
I wish I could smell
the fresh, renewing air—
not the stench of humanity

We catch up to another train;
It's on my left and I can almost touch
(Two trains, somewhat racing against each other)
It carries people like myself—
I wonder if they're writing about me

The train is slowing down
(Is this my stop?)
The doors slide open,
people file out

Alas,
the sojourn has adjourned.

Patricia P. hails from the Philippines. Her work has been published in Insert Lit Mag Here, The Wait Poetry Anthology and several online magazines. You can contact her and find more of her work at pennilesspoet.tumblr.com

3 Poems

by Venus Crow

Home.

Come home my love to gentle rains,
where fire hearts breathe you in.
walk among the feathered pines
with me at your side.

Be blessed by love's tender touch
swim with lost memories
of days swiftly flown
and scattered upon the breeze.

We miss the sanctified song of your soul
exalted among mere mortals.
rise swiftly from your foreign hearth
let magic bring you home.

Ash.

She is ash now
Blown away on
Autumnal wind.
Burning too fast
becoming smoke
On your lips.
Now she mingle
With the dust
And air
As if she had
Never been here.

Wings.

Bring me home
To the place of quiet beauty

So to unravel the care
And temper the storm.
Where your lined paper skin
Captures memories dispersed,
With each breath exhaled
Whisper glories remembered
And battles once lived.
Upon the hearth we
Will lay our tales
Of past loves
Now ghosts astride the wind,
Upon the flames
To watch them burn
As our hearts once did.
Bring me now
To this place of recess
And let your
Seasoned wings
Enfold this troubled body.

Venus Crow is a singer/ songwriter and poet from Dublin, Ireland. She released an album, “Solomon’s Shadow,” this year.

Some Day Soon

fiction by Donal Mahoney

Dexter Dalrymple had no idea why anyone would want to interview him. Who would care at this point what he'd have to say. Maybe his family and a few old friends, in deference to his age and wealth, hoping to find themselves in his will some day soon. But he had agreed to this interview and there he was now, at 82, sitting across from this financial reporter, a young lady, perhaps 22, the age of his granddaughter who had just graduated from college.

His granddaughter was the light of his life. He would leave all of his money to her if it wouldn't make everyone mad.

Dexter knew the only reason this young lady wanted to interview him was that he's worth roughly \$5 million, the harvest of over 50 years of investing in the stock market, all on his own, with no advisor. A remarkable achievement, he realized, for a man who had dropped out of high school with more than a little shove from the principal.

"Investing in the stock market is easy," Dexter had once told a financial advisor who had sought his business, "provided you have the brains and the balls to do it right. It's no place for the chicken-hearted."

The advisor went back to the office without a new client but he had met someone he--and many other people over the years--would never forget whether they bought and sold stocks or not. Dexter was a character, right up there with W.C. Fields whose old films he loved to watch in his home theater.

Many times Dexter had told Penelope, his wife of 60 years, that the smartest thing he had ever done was to marry her and the second smartest thing he

had done was to quit drinking and smoking.

"I may have had too many milkshakes since then but that's why someone invented statins--to keep my cholesterol down," Dexter would tell anyone in earshot, sometimes more than once a day.

Every man has at least one weakness or maybe two, and a daily milkshake at 3 p.m. was the last one Dexter would admit to in a long life of making big money, collecting cars and admiring women, not always from afar.

"What was the greatest moment in your life?" the young reporter asked in her opening question, pushing back the waterfall of auburn hair falling over her left shoulder.

Nice hair, Dexter thought, but not a very good opening question for a young financial reporter interviewing a millionaire. She was supposed to find out how he made all that money. He didn't plan to tell her everything--maybe a few things because she seemed like a nice person--but at least she could ask the right questions.

Dexter coughed and said, "I'll tell you the truth as long as you keep it between the two of us. The greatest moment in my life was the day I realized I was finally old enough that one woman was enough, that I could be faithful to one woman, my wife, and go back to the Church, and worship God the way I did when I was a kid in school and women weren't a distraction."

The young reporter looked befuddled because she had expected Dexter to tell her about some big deal he had made in the stock market. She knew he was one of the wealthiest men in America. He was a little odd, she knew, but in her young life she had already discovered that many successful men were a little odd in one way or another. But Dexter was on a roll now so she stayed silent and decided to let him finish.

"When I went back to the Church," he said, "it was truly the greatest moment in my life. Better than making money or anything. To know that I could finally be faithful to my wife was a great satisfaction. I felt better doing that than making money. It's easy to make money. Not so easy being faithful. Not even with a milkshake every day."

"Remember now, this is just between the two of us. Don't put that in the paper and don't tell a soul. People will think I'm nuts. I know I'm nuts but why

confirm it for the public."

The young reporter said there would be no need to include that information in her article. She simply wanted to know what Dexter had done to make millions of dollars without any formal education and without any financial advice.

"Most millionaires rely on a financial advisor to keep up with the stock market," she told Dexter. "What makes you different? Is it that you never give up?"

Dexter thought for a moment and then said that not giving up was very important because the stock market is the roller coaster the cliche would have it to be. One has to be in it for the long haul, know when to buy and when to sell. Never lose interest. Never stop, except maybe for a milkshake every day. And always keep an eye out for the next big opportunity.

"By the way, young lady, do you have any plans for lunch? I have a table over at the Mark IV," Dexter said, rolling his wheel chair toward the door.

"Years ago I owned that restaurant and sold it for a nice profit to a gentleman who said he would have a reserved table waiting for me for the rest of my life."

"Scallops are the special of the day on Friday. Or if you like steak, theirs is well marbled. Marbling is important, on steak or on a woman. But don't quote me on that."

"We can finish the interview over there. I hope you have a big notebook. I think I'll have quite a bit to say."

"My driver is waiting downstairs.

Donal Mahoney has been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart prizes. He has had work published in various publications in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Some of his earliest work can be found on Blogspot.

3 Poems

by Andrew Wetmore

Cancer

We laid on our backs and pulled shapes from the sky
like reading the letters out of porno magazines.

You had all your vaccinations and went to Sunday school every Sunday.

You memorized your catechism and realized you were witnessing an execution

When I walk down the street
widows throw signs warding against the evil eye.

You counted stars

I counted generations saying,

“He begat he, who begat he, who begat he,”

until my teeth fell out

and my tongue was parched

and a flag flew for me at half-mast.

I have seen an oceans bottom

but you took your foot from my head and let me up for air

begging off early complaining

of leg cramps and an inflammation of the joints

This is the moment between takes,
before the antacids kick in and you
can smile for the first time all day.

No one here is an athlete or pregnant with your son
and I am sitting behind you

eyes ahead

parallel to standing stones of
concrete and steel

((((psychosomatic coughing spells))))

until I see someone who shares my features
and I sit up a little straighter.

I'm sorry you're here
and I'm sorry you came.
You walk in spaces where no one collides,
smallpox scars and a lazy eye.
Looking at heaven sent in minimum wage
a double chin rendered on your sleeping face.
I do not believe in revenge.

Do you see the men in line?
Each one is only passing their days until they get cancer.
Every year more cancer.
Soon even malignancy will be usual and benign
and Eunuchs will slip through the windows
to perform surgery on the sleeping.
Him?
He is building a chain link fence from safety pins,
says it's safer that way,
like an idiot savant writing formulas on granite counters.

Yes,
I saw that picture,
and no,
it was not me.
But I am sure anybody could have made that mistake.

((((after the rain no wind blew))))

I hope you kept all of your lottery tickets.
There are eight men now at a back table,
heads together.
They will rob you of your lithographs and
hang them from the prison walls,
on question marks and concertina wires.
Parking meters rust.
Fingernails break on funeral bouquets.

Once a month here they sell holy relics
and burn the pulpits,

drunk on the fumes of
smoldering onion skins.
Our guest speaker took one look at this crowd
and shot herself with a flare gun.
We hid her in the attic behind
the overhead projectors,
the ones that haven't been used since the Reagan era.

Please stop whispering into the telephone.
The currents make the stoplights sway.
Skyscrapers are merely headstones
for every avenue that leads to them.
Post office box mausoleums.
Paraplegic stratagems, marketing schemes, and
corporate business models shredded
and used as kindling.
These are signs of something better
like a meaningful glance in a welfare line.

I've worn out my welcome in this motel,
not to be confused with some lost city
found as the combines tear at the asphalt
forcing cockroaches to find new homes.
The truck drivers are on strike,
refusing to pull their own weight.
Crossing guards swear vendettas against
exhaust pipes speeding by.

And over your shoulder a teenage Constantine,
with no mustaches, waves frantically
trying to get your attention.
The car contracted pneumonia and died.
It's another night of red wine and vodka.
Yesterday's blasting caps made it rain
across the block and,
holding up newspapers in their defense
young mothers rush into the shelters
of awnings advertising
all night diners and hair removal.

((((a girl on a bicycle blew a kiss at an old man))))

There is a murder daily at the bus stop next to the surgical supply store.

That is where I catch the bus
northbound.

Yes, I am nervous.

I have been drinking ammonia and bleach together
trying to make my fingerprints clean.

By the end of summer my tattoos were changed
and I waited in the alley for cancer.

The dementia of the young.

I opened a trade circular and read only the comics and my horoscope,
then ran back to bed
whimpering.

Superman is dead to me now.

He is coprophilous
and living in a secret world of airport bars
boring the girls with card tricks.

She hung herself in the basement of her mother's house
after casting with tea leaves and tarot cards.

I saw water being born
though no one calls it by its given name.

The neighborhood watch is poisoning the neighborhood children
with easy dogmas scrawled on
sports related memorabilia.

Silver buckles on your Sunday shoes
so everywhere you walk, even the sidewalk must beg alms.
Let us find a new face on the light switch.
Show me the charm against the changing of the guards,
the one that wards off cancer.

The ocean is in a paper cup held
by a subway eccentric in the basking glow
of the headlights.
And if I draw myself older
with my shirt buttoned wrong, would you still notice the cancer?

What if I am standing by the last payphone
in the city,
the one covered in graffiti
in Chinatown
by the El-Stop?

Bounty Hunter Blues

I took strength from the saline
injected in the tattered inflamed membranes
fingers with the fish eyes
minced minuscule paper pieces
and for twenty minutes breathed freely.
My spine sent no signals;
smoke, shortwave, or otherwise.

Follow the fliers of cotillion kites.
Can't you hear the faint rap
floor to floor and feeble now
that the seraphim have holstered
their crude weaponry, single shot
revolvers held festering like a
splinter underneath a blister.

I took strength from the steroid
solution taken subcutaneously, just
slightly below the follicles of gray hair
and scrapings from this morning's burnt toast.
Was I dying before I found the manacles
unlocked? I cannot cast my memories
upon it without hitting a void

deeper than Morlock Holes or
missile silos now filled with concrete.
Cough drops and mentholated rubs
applied three times every six hours,
or less if an applicable heart condition is present.
Oh, High King Gravedigger, Prince of Dirt,
have you cleared a spot, slightly rectangular

for yourself, or do you deign the work beneath you
and order others with more calloused hands
and eyebrows more sunburned to shovel?
I myself could never stand the headache
of bleaching bones in the claw foot tub.
Call in the robber barons, handsome and grave,
the ones with the graven images of Thor,
son of thunder, embossed upon their wine skins.
It's been flaccid here since the last
sons of bitches pulled up their unchained anchors
and shoved off in to the chlamydia night
of the Book of Psalms. Chapter and verse
and it tastes like quartz and mica
and the ocean smells like semen, you know.

I hope that it makes you blind
when you finally see the candle wax
in a bowl of isopropyl alcohol taking
the shape of a non-human brain,
a shoat's or a weasel's or a coyote's
still howling out a message to siblings
sprinkling black powder over mirrors.

We cannot stop here amid the blank chalkboards
of Cheyenne territory, circling kestrels and
turkey buzzards giving thanksgiving. Tarred and
feathered February comes with Cupid's bow mouths.
Dear, dear, polyglots can you hear the hooves
of Brahman bulls, the orgy of tachycardia likely
to push up the diastolic to a breaking point?

I took strength from the saline
shot into the salmon rippled mainstream
pale as Navajo white walls on a race car
sending apologies to all for keeping daylight hidden
under too many minutes. This was all an elaborate
ritual hoax, now sneaking out the back door
where I lay in wait to collect a bounty.

What David Koresh At Last Said To Leviathan

I have come for you
nothing here is held equal
before the doors of your teeth,
bared and stripped of their outer coats.
I have been ground by a proud millstone
until the haughty rocks in my chest
have been made smooth and shined
like the first rays of dawn
poured over with fresh lamp oil.
I am sorry, sir, if I am speaking too loud,
but constantly my ears ring
and the movements of my throat
get consumed and drowned
by that alloyed squeal.

You told me,
and I must remember,
that not all fire consumes.
The fires of hell
are freezing and will diminish you.
God knows that frost withers
faster than flame.
You, sir, are a flame hotter than
a west Texas sun that never sets
and I never forget a face
even those that I have seen only once.
They attempt to make a pet of me,
chattel to be paraded at the end of some
gray haired woman's leash, and we
shall make them remember
that which can never be done again.

The ringing of this phone
is now the sound of the seventh angel
sounding the seventh trumpet
at the opening of the seventh seal.
I assure you this
and have built myself up
with potsherds and porcelain and iron.

And I know their number,
and the number of our enemies,
and the temperature at which pine boards smolder,
and the temperature which they turn to ice.

But sir, here,
I have come here to free your hooks
and seek your gentle word.
To keep you free from the hands of slaves
and the tips of spears.
I have come to salt your coat
and free reins and bridle.
To light the incense for the altar
from your breath alone;
you who are king over all who are proud
and I, humble servant
broken on your shielded back.

Now know that my side has been pierced
like it was once before, before I was reborn.
Lead and vinegar and salt water.
The smell of highway exhaust
and the sound of hooves and engines.
I have come,
and nothing has followed behind me.
Not Babylon or its gardens.
Not hell or its cold fire.
Not chemical dust in a thrashing wind.
Not slung stones, cast by a sheepherders sinew.
Not a single note of lonely music.

I have come alone to watch you pull the world under
and to sit singing in your belly
at the bottom of the ocean;
a prophet not running from the words
of our master, made real.
And together, sir, we will wait the comet and the key,
the column and the anchor.
To wait for the nails to unpierce and for the sea to boil.
For you I have come.

And all must hear that I am no longer sorry
my hands are no longer unblemished.
I smell of cordite and urine and the
smoke from your nostrils has risen
like sackcloth over the moon
and all have forsaken me but you, Leviathan.
And I will be your banner man,
your open palm and your closed fist.
I, your jagged and chewed nail.
Take me where you must and may
and I will choke on the vapors of your eyes
and I will laugh at those who curse me,
for they will curse the day that they
have roused us up and be dashed to pieces.

For you I will give my body,
broken, and my eyes, eclipsed,
as food to the creatures of the wilderness
in need of sustenance to last through
the cruel months, April and October.
All manner of things created on
the fifth day may partake in my arms
and my legs and my torso and my face
until my carcass has been gnawed down
to unintelligible bone and made
devoid of all features.

Tonight, sir, tonight, here,
may they fall to sleep and
may the odor of my flesh be about them,
they and their pregnant wives
clothed in the spartan sun as
we have been clothed in their pitiful hatred.
My home is now a haunt for
jackals and the slothful and the lame
and I, your squire, covered in burns,
tightly sealed together, seamless,
have come to turn steel bars
into blades of grass, bent back upon themselves
as to show the trail of our exodus.

Sir, I am your supplicant,
a proud and worthy acolyte
ready for pious service.
Let those who are not anointed
part when they feel the slightest
wind in the wake of my passing,
and let them whisper of me that
I have found you at last Leviathan,
highest among all creations
unbridled still and as wrathful as I.
I have come.
I have come.
I have come.

Andrew Wetmore is a poet based out of Anaheim, California. He has self-published 4 chapbooks, with two more on the way. His work has appeared in City Brink. He can be found at his website.

The Place Under The Pastoral Skies

nonfiction by Brian Michael Barbeito

It was a knowing. A Gnostic phenomenon. I had seen the place before, a place that stood quietly at the edges of a town. It was the type of place one intended to visit, but intentions are not actualities. There were around it wheat fields to one side, and large quiet looms on the other. Everything there was accepting the sun. But the knowing...

It happened that I got the feeling to inquire about working there. Though I was not a patron, and knew nothing of rocks, I said to my beloved, Hey, I am going to go work at that place and learn about the stones. It's just a thing I am meant to do. And that is when I made my way to the place that rested under the pastoral skies.

The owner asked me if I might help sometime. I told her I was a quick study and then against good form or respectability perhaps, I added that I was 'Like a child.' That raised her eyebrows.

‘Like a child?’

‘Meaning I am open and not cynical. I know that I am going to, if given a chance, respect the rocks and learn all about them.’

‘I never heard it put that way, but it’s not a bad thing I would guess, eh?’

‘Not bad at all,’

Soon I was measuring and bagging the stones. The owner left me alone and though there were sometimes customers, for the most part I signed for, weighed, measured, labelled, and arranged the stones. I quickly learned much. There were hundreds of types. I was drawn to stones that formed natural cubes, or as natural as possible. Oddly enough, the crystals and the usual suspects, amethyst and citrine, rose quartz and others, did not speak to me. I sought out the others, and wondered what would become of them in time. Whose hands would they end up in? How far would they travel? Did they really possess secret or esoteric vibrations and healing qualities?

My hands and eyes went over Howlite and Malachite, across black Obsidian and Pyrite shining somewhat beside old windows. I held B.C. Jasper and bits of copper, smiled back at Moss Agate and Ametrine. An experience many wouldn’t get to have. Ever since, when others look to the cumulus or firmament, I am always looking for stones on the ground, for treasures. And they are there, they are there, they are there. They wait, and can wait for a long time. They are a half-open secret. Just look.

Ah, those stones, and to think that not only I am gone now, moved onto other times and environs, but that the place is no longer there. Maybe that original knowing, that sense, was because of them, was a message from them. Perhaps in a place between mind and matter, they said somehow, Come and see us, for you will not always be able to and we will not always be here. Come to our place under the pastoral skies. Come now. Come meet us for a while. You will not always have us, but you will have at the least a story and a habit of looking for us...

Not only can you not step in the same river twice, as Heraclitus announced, but it should be added that the river itself sometimes disappears.

Save for in your memory.

Brian Michael Barbeito is a Canadian writer. He is a two time Pushcart nominee with work that has appeared in various print and electronic publications. He is the author of the book Chalk Lines, [FOWLPOX PRESS, cover art by Virgil Kay (2013)].