





# NUDE BRUCE REVIEW

*Issue 6*

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Behold,

Into the maelstrom of 2016, like a comet swinging low as sweet chariots do, ‘round and ‘round the ambulant ambit of ailing planet Earth, who runs a fever and leans toward fascism; into and throughout the ragged ecotones, into and around the shimmering, stove-top streets; here in the heat and heave of summer does plunge a familiar, ne’er effete, figure: our beloved, beneficent Nude Bruce.

Issue 6 of *Nude Bruce Review* is—thank god awmighty—more of the same: poetry, fiction and non-fiction to accompany any and all who pass these months huddled next to the A/C, savoring every licking tongue of recycled air. This issue is heavy on prose, and poems lurk here and there, like heat lightning on the horizon. Joel Martinez, an illustrator and friend of Bruce, produced the cover art for this issue. Joel resides in the land of Arkansas, where the breeze comes and the breeze goes. We love you, Joel.

We know that a poem can mean the difference in good times and make the difference in bad times. We’re proud to present these poems and prose to you, whoever you are. All thanks and praise to the authors who shared their work with us, and for letting us share the work with you, wherever you are. All power and glory to the radicals in the streets this summer. May the Bruce be with you.

The editors,  
Andrew Alexander Mobbs  
Timothy B. Snediker  
Ciarra Proulx



# An American, a Turk, and a Syrian Walk into a Bar

by Alan Orr

The wind comes in gusts and blows sand across the beach; it feels like a hum against my feet and ankles. Little dunes form on the backsides of beach chairs and umbrellas that are stacked and padlocked. The beach is busy but not crowded. A Turkish teenager in cut-off shorts and a crushed cowboy hat held in place with one hand jogs up and asks if I want a paddleboat to go to the castle. I pat my heart and say, “Thank you,” which suffices for *no*. The boy scans the beach for other arriving tourists, sees none, and returns to his fleet of five or six boats pulled up on the sand.

My wife, Sara, is sitting on a small purple towel from the trunk of our car. She faces into the wind to keep her hair out of her eyes. The beach where she sits is clean enough despite the beer bottle pop-tops and other small bits of trash that sparkle in the sand. Nearby, a grocery bag drags in the surf.

When I arrive, I hand Sara a beer from the shop on the corner, and we share it between us, making sure to cover the top whenever the wind kicks up sand. There are mostly male bathers and children playing on a sandbar. Past that, across the water, is a creamy-colored castle on an island. *Kizkalesi*: *kiz* for female, *kale* for castle. It’s Ottoman, blocky, of the desert, but in the sea.

Sara and I are about halfway through our beer when a small Syrian child comes up and offers us bottles of water from a small plastic bag for the equivalent of forty cents each. She holds the bag by one of its handles, and it almost touches the ground by her feet. She says the price again and calls Sara *sister* in Turkish. Sara speaks to her slowly in Turkish, and we buy two bottles. The girl urges us to buy a third. We explain that we're just two people and that's why we only want two. For a moment the girl seems to understand. She looks down the beach and shifts her bag from one hand to the other. Then she looks back and offers us a third bottle again. Sara asks the girl how old she is. She's seven. Sara asks for her name. The girl answers shyly and then runs off. We lean back on our elbows and drink the water. It is cold. The wind begins to die down as the heat comes back up.

Sara and I have made the trip to the coast for a long weekend; we have driven down through the mountains from the landlocked city we call home. We have lived there about a year. Whenever we take our highways, we see blue terrapin tents tucked into the corners of fields. In the evening, Syrian men walk along the highway shoulders returning to the tents. Sometimes they carry groceries from downtown.

Before we left, we were stuck in traffic as two Syrians pulled a cart of discarded plastic bottles across the street. They spoke in Arabic, and the smell from the bottles was sick and sweet. The two men stopped at the nearest trashcan and

began to dig through it. No gloves. Behind us cars honked with impatience. Most of the Turks I know have said they don't know what their country is coming to. They say the Syrians are taking their jobs.

From where we sit on the beach, the Syrian border is about two hundred miles away. It's May, 2015. Turkey considers both ISIS and the Kurds fighting ISIS to be enemies; the country seems to be content to watch them bleed each other out. Cooperation between the US and Turkey against ISIS is still uncertain. Everyone is just sitting around, waiting for the next move.

Down the beach, a scene of Desert Storm ennui begins to play out. Loud utterances of American English erupt from a large group of short-haired, muscular men. These are the airmen of the Incirlik US Air Force Base; they wear aviator sunglasses, short shorts, and grey tank tops. Two voices get louder, and I turn to watch as a stinky blonde man sets his can of beer down, another man his American football. The two face each other and interlock arms to wrestle. The other airmen form a circle and goad them on. There's a lot of grabbing at the back of the head and neck. One of the men tumbles into the sand and scrambles up again. Through the men, in the distance, I see the Syrian girl. She walks in a wide semi-circle around them.

Each night that we've been here, American country music has blared out of a street-level patio on the same narrow road where Sara and I are staying. When we walk by

we see Hint of Lime Tostitos and Jif Peanut Butter being washed down with Budweiser. You can't get those things in Turkey. American children run between the tables and around the knees of the men and their wives.

Last night when we returned to our hotel, I asked the owner what he thought of the Americans from the airbase coming to his town. We were drinking tea on the porch, and the lyrics of the country music down the road were crisp and clear.

The owner, a lanky and friendly Turk, said, "The families are okay. I don't like the young guys. They get too drunk and loud, especially at night. And they get into trouble, you know, with some of the women here."

"Most of them," he said, "stay at the hotel over there because it's owned by an American who was in the military or something. He's married to a Turkish woman. But sometimes there are too many guys, so they stay at my hotel, too." The owner drummed on the arms of his chair. "They keep us in business when no one else is here because of the base. Turkish tourists won't come until August."

"They seem obnoxious," I said. "I'm not one of those Americans who thinks all Americans are great. We're," I pointed to Sara and myself, "just English teachers."

"You know," the hotel owner said, "let me tell you something." He leaned forward. "One time this big general stayed at my hotel. This guy had lots of decorations." The owner brushed his shoulders. "During the day the general

was talking about how America is just helping spread peace. All this Bob Marley stuff. The general said that he really believes that America can help countries become democratic.”

“I liked him,” the hotel owner said. “I agreed with him. But at night this general completely changes. When he got drunk he started saying that America is the best mother fucking country and that if the Middle East doesn’t listen, America is going to blow it all up.”

I shook my head. “That’s messed up.”

“But, like I said, they help us through the slow season,” the owner said. “So I can’t say no when they want to stay here.”

On the beach, my wife and I have finished our beer. The afternoon is burning away, but there’s still plenty of day left. Some friends of ours from our city are meeting us here. They’re an American couple, Mark and Carrie, and Mark’s sister, Emily. All of us are teachers. Emily has brought her three half-American, half-Turkish sons. We’re not supposed to drink around the kids, so I sneak off to dispose of our can when I see them approaching.

When I return, the middle boy, a year older than the Syrian girl, is whining about who is going to get a turn with the inner tube first. He calls the inner tube a *simit*, which is a food like a bagel. It’s a heated conversation. Emily takes the boys into the water, although the issue is unresolved.

With Mark and Carrie, we chat about the drive to the coast until I ask Mark if he wants to swim to the castle. It'll take just over an hour, round-trip, and Mark says he's up for it. Sara goes to find Emily and the boys in the water. Carrie hangs out on the sand. Before Mark and I go, we use shoelaces to make a sling to bring our flip-flops as we swim. We jog into the waves, jumping over them until it's deep enough to dive. We do the breaststroke for a while, and once that gets tiring, we swim like jellyfish, backwards, looking back at the coastal town.

“What do you think of the Americans near us on the beach?”

“The Air Force guys? What about them?”

Mark and Emily grew up on military bases, the children of an Army dentist.

A paddleboat filled with airmen passes about fifty meters away; they're on their way to the castle as well. They shout and raise their beers to another boat of guys, making it clear that it's a race.

“They're driving me nuts. I don't like what they represent.”

“The military or America?”

“America as represented by the military.”

“We represent a lot of the same things, man,” Mark says. “As much as you and I might not want to, we do.”

“Like heavy-handed exported American culture? Being loud all the time? Neocolonialism through the English language or what?”

“Yeah, maybe that. And globalization and diversity.”

“They’re so damn awful, though. Part of me wants to believe that I’d be as offended if it were people from another culture being loud tourists. But it’s the closeness to home that’s getting me. It’s hard to disassociate with them without disassociating with myself.”

Mark glances over at me. “I’ve had a lifetime of it.”

His words hang in the salty air. The waves bring us up and down, though they become smaller as we approach the island. The airmen in the paddleboats have reached the island ahead of us. They are still shouting like they’re on a rollercoaster everyone’s enjoying together. Mark and I drift into the shallows and watch for broken glass in the rocks as we put on our flip-flops.

The castle walls tower above our heads, and Turkish paddleboaters wander around the ramparts. Mark and I take the gravel path through the entryway and explore a series of metal planks constructed over small hallways of the castle’s interior. Eventually we climb up a narrow stairway passage to the highest turret that faces the coast. On the way we get stuck in a traffic jam with a Turkish family, and a small boy asks his father, “Isn’t there a boy castle?” We emerge onto the top of the crumbling turret. Here, among tourists taking selfies, we have a view of the gradient blues of the sea with

the town and other Ottoman ruins in the distance. There's space on the turret for us to sit, so we dangle our feet and try to find Carrie on the beach and Sara, Emily, and the boys in the shallows.

Mark says, "We're lucky to be here," and I agree.

"Last night at dinner," he says, "we met this Syrian waiter from Aleppo who could speak Turkish, and English. We were chatting, and he found out we were teachers, so he asked me if we could line up a teaching job for him. His English was okay. Not bad, but not that good."

"Too bad we don't have that much sway at the university," I say.

"I know, right? The guy said that the restaurant where he works pays him half of what the Turkish waiters make because he's Syrian. He works twice the hours to make up for it, and he says he brings in most of the foreign tourists. You can see him doing it, too. He speaks to everyone who walks by. We left him a good tip."

Mark begins to suggest that we all go there tonight, but he's suddenly cut off when American English comes booming up the turret's stairway. A group of five airmen soon emerge from the passage and onto the tower. They push each other out of the way, trying to get a clear view.

"You can see all those motherfuckers on the beach," one of them says. He begins to wave.

"Fuck'em." This airman raises his fist and middle finger.

Another one climbs onto a shorter airmen's back and shouts toward shore.

From where I sit on the edge, I look straight down, fearing I'm going to get nudged off the tower. Then I turn to look a few of them in the eyes because I'm curious to see whether they'll say something to a fellow countryman abroad. They don't give Mark or me a second glance. One of the airmen drops the beer bottle he is carrying, but he catches it before it shatters on the rock floor.

Bored of the view, two of the men begin creeping out on one of the castle's narrow walls; there are drops of twenty-feet on either side. The wall leads to a wider area where a flagpole in the rock displays the red Turkish flag with its star and crescent moon. One by one, the rest of the airmen follow. They bumble across, tripping and catching each other before they fall.

"They're so young," I say, and Mark shrugs and agrees.

When the airmen have reached the area with the flagpole, they try again to get the attention of the men on shore by jumping and waving. A black-haired one tries to climb the flagpole but doesn't get far before he slides back down. In the wind their voices carry. An assertive malicious voice says: "We should take this fucking thing down and raise an American flag."

Mark and I stare hard at the airmen.

A couple of them begin to try to untie the ropes that hang down to the base of the pole.

“We have to get out of here,” Mark says, getting up.  
“This stuff happens outside of bases. It could be bad news.”

Although tourists are coming up the turret passageway, we stick close to the wall and are able to get down. We walk in strides on the path to the shore where we tie on our flip-flops. Mark dives off a rock and begins to swim away. Before I leave the shore, I see three Turkish ladies in a paddleboat trying to land their boat. They wear headscarves, tunics, and jeans. One of them jumps into the shallows and nearly gets soaked. She still has trouble pulling the boat up, so I come over and explain in broken Turkish that I will help. They consent and say thank you when their boat is on shore. I swim to catch Mark, first doing the crawl and then switching to breaststroke.

Eventually, we turn over on our backs and watch the few remaining airmen disappearing from the turret. The Turkish flag remains in place. It twists and turns in the wind. The temperature of the sea is cool, but not cold. We have about twenty minutes to go. We are still watching when the airmen return to their paddleboats; they try to jump from one boat to the other just after they’ve launched.

When Mark and I come up on shore, Emily and her boys are still out playing, but Sara has returned. She and Carrie hand us dry towels. I try to describe the castle to Sara, but Sara looks past me toward the beach. I turn, expecting the airmen, but see the young Syrian girl who sold us the

water instead. She is not carrying a bag of water bottles this time. She walks straight to Sara and calls her sister again. The girl holds her fist out, and Sara opens her hands to receive a collection of seashells. The shells are for Sara, the girl says. In Turkish Sara says they are beautiful and says the girl is very sweet. She blushes and runs away, kicking up sand.

At dinner that night we meet the Syrian waiter who only vaguely remembers Mark, Carrie, and Emily from the night before. Carrie reminds the waiter that we're teachers, and he asks again whether we can help him get a teaching job. We say we're just teachers, not administrators. He quickly looks away and says he understands. He rushes to his next table. We give him an American-sized tip, which is double the local custom. When we leave, Mark carries one of his sleeping nephews from the restaurant to their hotel a few blocks away.

Sara and I wait in the lobby while Mark and Carrie give their nephews a formal goodnight. When Mark and Carrie return, we go back to the beach with some beers, and we are careful to make sure the bottle tops get into the trash. A stray dog rolls around under a street light. Down the beachfront walkway is a group of Syrian girls sitting on a curb. It's hard to tell, but one of them looks like the Syrian girl with the shells. She holds the hand of a girl even smaller than herself.

We sit on a bench in the sand and watch as the castle across the water lights up in blue, then green, then red, then pink. Its upside-down image is reflected in the dark water. A neon-colored beachside club is at our backs. Without

warning, the club turns up the Turkish dance music so loud that the bass seems to vibrate the sand. The club's windows are open, and we can see that the place only has a few customers. A blue string of lights outlines a massive mirror behind the bar. Heading toward the club on the beachfront walkway are airmen, first only in pairs and then in larger groups. We pass even more airmen on our way back to our hotels. The young Syrian girls have disappeared.

This is the beach town of *Kizkalesi*. We are the Americans abroad.

# Why Dogs Would Be Great Films Directors

by James Croal Jackson

It was tough to leave for work this morning,  
collie's silhouette usually at the top of the stairs  
a shadow slinking, eyes glowing.

Your heart nearly stopped flailing its arms  
as it sank deeper and deeper into the ocean.  
When you watched *Silver Linings Playbook*  
you saw your dog in the face of Bradley Cooper  
those dark eyes shining in the greater darkness—

driving home with the key stabbing the ignition,  
you drove wanting anything to please you.

It wasn't in the trees or the swaying lights  
or the Post-It notes crumpled in the bagless bin—

no, collie ran in circles. You reached for a treat,  
your heart compiling sand and blowing glassworks—

collie on set with Bradley Cooper, his eyes  
on her galvanized eyes and all she wants is ham  
*you've never seen a ham this juicy* and  
*why am I excited about ham* and

collie with her eyes makes Bradley  
see the ham, want the ham,  
want the ham like never before.

# I Dream in Corners

by AJ Huffman

of mirrors that are not  
really there. I play at reflection,  
a foolish child wearing ghosts  
two sizes too big. I try to work myself  
into angles of plausibility,  
but the light is too soothing,  
and I am always the one softening  
into nothing more than a misted breath  
of a scar.

# In The Hour of Living Authentically

by Keith Witty

“As they told you before you made your way back here, my name is Kristen and I’m a graduate-assistant here in the PhD program. Full disclosure: these sessions are private, but they are between three people as I am monitored by a full professor and our session will be reviewed later and I will be judged for my competence. Is that okay with you, Seth?”

“That’s fine.”

“Great. Let’s begin. Why are you here to see me today, Seth?”

“Because I told my friend I wanted to lay on the sidewalk and wait for a cyclist to hit my neck. So my friend drug me here.”

“Do you know why you said that? Clearly he seemed concerned that you meant it.”

“I’ve been depressed. That’s a self-diagnosis.”

“What makes you think that you’re depressed? And just like you were read in the form you filled out – I’m just restating here – you don’t have to worry about me gabbing this to the world or anything like that. This is totally between you and me.”

“That’s a really hammy line, but I’ll answer the question. Some days I just kind of feel worthless. That I’m a horrible person and everyone has yet to figure it out.”

“What do you mean ‘has yet to figure it out?’”

“Give me a minute to think about that. I don’t think I’ve ever articulated it.”

“I’m in no way pressuring you, Seth. I want you to know that. I need you to feel that. If you want to sit here for an hour in silence we can do that, but I would like to help you. That’s what every here is hoping to do for you.”

“You have to stop that. Is that not weird for you to say?”

“What do you mean?”

“That just seems like such a line. Every single part of what you said to me to make me feel better seems like it was read from a card someone slipped under the door. I’m sorry. I just wonder how a person could ever authentically mean that.”

“Would you prefer I say something else? I do actually want you to feel okay to speak with me about anything. That line is probably a company one, you’re right, but it’s also open-ended. Now we’re talking about it.”

“No, no, I’m sorry. I don’t know why I honed in on it. I know you’re just trying to make me feel better.”

“You said you feel depressed. What does that feel like? Have you figured out a way to put it?”

“It feels weird to say, but I generally have a lot of friends. I don’t understand why they like me. At any minute they’re going to realize that half the jokes I make are true, but because I understand cadence I can make them laugh anyway.”

“I have two questions, Seth: First, I want you to tell me what you mean by cadence. Secondly, is it possible you’re underestimating your friends?”

“Cadence is essentially the way you say something. Let’s say I talk to my friend Ben, who grows a beard, and he’s proud of his beard, and I tell him his beard looks like a small bear took a shit on his face and that while aforementioned

shit was in descent it got matted up in some fur and then you—you as in Ben—called it good. Ben laughs. Thinks I don't mean it. I do mean it. His beard looks like exactly that. But I'm trapped inside the way I say things. It's impossible to explain; I'm realizing that as I try to explain it."

"And you don't think Ben knows you mean it?"

"There's no way he does. And that's nothing against Ben. Ben is a sharp cookie, Kristen. If Ben realized that then there's no way he would stay my friend. What kind of person stays friends with a person that tells them something like that?"

"Friendship isn't a rational thing most of time. People work together and that's that."

"I don't buy that. I'm all for questioning rationality; I kind of think it's the new geo-centrism. Though not as absolutely fucking stupid. It works, yeah, but have you ever traced something through cause and effect? Eventually that whole thing requires you to believe it doesn't follow its own logic. Take rocks, for example—"

"I'm stopping you. You're out in left field. Bring it back in. By your own logic, do you think Ben and you rationally work?"

"Yes and no. But the basis of our friendship is on common ground, common interests. We work as good friends because we understand a lot of the same things."

"But he doesn't understand this."

"I don't know. Maybe."

"I'm going to ask you some questions, Seth. Is that okay?"

"Oh my God. I'm not fragile. You talk to me like I'm melting ice."

"I'll work on it. You want me to be more frank?"

“I don’t know. I’m just an asshole. I’m sorry.”

“I’ve heard worse in here. Let me ask these questions though. Have you ever been the victim of physical or emotional abuse?”

“The answer is my mother. Am I supposed to say ‘my mother’ as an answer to all these questions?”

“Only if it’s the actual answer.”

“Well then how’s this: Not physical. Emotional is debatable.”

“Tell me.”

“My mother.”

“The root of your depression may be that emotional abuse.”

“We don’t have time for me to tell this story, Kristen.”

“Give me a short version. I’m not being nice. This is me not being nice like you wanted.”

“Well if you go all meta and do me the favor of telling me you’re fulfilling my wants by not being what I didn’t want then that’s pretty nice of you, isn’t it?”

“Short version.”

“Fine. There was this girl – Let me have a preamble to say that I thought crazy women—and I don’t mean that in some patriarchal meninist bullshit way, okay?”

“Continue with the story. I won’t go down these rabbit holes with you.”

“So. Before this girl, I really did think that crazy women were just a plot device for TV shows. I’m sure there are crazy guys out there, too. Actually I know there are. I had this friend Donnie, punched a hole in the wall beside the face of his girlfriend—”

“Story, Seth.”

“Alright. This girl, I meet her. She seems cool. She’s not. She keeps wanting to argue. I’m not a fighter, Kristen. My grandpa told me to walk away from fights because they’re not worth it. Well one day she has me cornered and she’s yelling at me. Gives me an option to leave. I take it. I grab my shoes and get up and she freaks the fuck out even more. So me, I’m just confused—say what the fuck you mean, you know?—and I sit back down on the bed. She grabs my shoes and flings them at the wall and dents it. Then she locks herself in the bathroom. When she comes out she’s calm. Gives me some sort of ultimatum: spend tomorrow with her and if at the end of the day I still want to go then she won’t do anything to stop me. That sounds like a good deal, right? Fucking wrong, Kristen. I was young and stupid. And she was only wearing panties. When a girl is just down to her panties. Holy shit, Kristen. I don’t think I’m subconsciously scared of vaginas or something like that; I just like panties. Why I am telling you this?”

“Move on.”

“Yeah, so I agree to this final day. Meanwhile, I had been texting my older sister, telling her I was trying my best to get the fuck out of there. She was telling me that I needed to do just that. But I had that final-day-date thing that was a sure-fire bet. I’m out. I’m done. No worries. So I wake up in the morning and the girl—”

“What is this girl’s name?”

“Ellen. So I wake up and *Ellen* isn’t there. I reach over to the windowsill and grab for my phone and it’s not there. I’m panicking at this point. She’s fucking going through my phone, I figure. Sure enough, I walk out of the bedroom and she’s sitting in the living room floor. She has clothes on. Which, Kristen, all that goes through my head is that she has

yet to have clothes on since I tried to leave and now that she's out of the bedroom she does. I hear all these stories about women who want to do it places other than the bedroom and I never get to date them. Is the living room really too much to ask?"

"Continue the story."

"Yeah. Sorry. So she's sitting in the floor, right, and beside her is my phone. So I asked her, 'you go through my phone?' and she says, 'No, I don't know how that got here.' I picked up my phone and it was a text screen to my mother. My mother, Kristen. Here's the thing. I had sent one text right before I fell asleep to my sister and closed the app. When I open my message app it always opens to the last screen that was used. So Ellen is busted. I call her a liar, tell her I'm taking a shower and then I'm leaving."

"Why would you take a shower? Why not just go?"

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness, Kristen."

"If you want help you have to actually answer my questions, Seth."

"I'm getting to it. I go to the bathroom and lock the door and I just hear screaming from the other room. There's stomping and other noises, but the sound I catch onto the most is the opening and slamming of drawers in the kitchen. My mind immediately sprints to 'here's Johnny!' I figure that she has a knife. I don't take a shower. I am not going to be in an Alfred Hitchcock movie. I just stay sitting there on the toilet. I text my friend Anthony and tell him what's going on and he doesn't believe me. Tells me I'm on my own. I needed him to come pick me up and he said no."

"Wait, why did you need him to pick you up?"

"The same reason I took a shower there. A day or so before this we had been having problems. I walked out to my

truck and my back passenger tire was slashed. Literally slashed. Big freaking hole in the side of it. I couldn't change it because Ellen was in the middle of moving to this new apartment so we had removed my spare tire from the back of the truck to make room for more boxes. So I was stranded and Anthony wouldn't come get me. We are not friends anymore. Not really because of this. Mainly because he's a two-clowner. One of those guys that if you tell him you had a clown at your birthday party he'll say he had two."

"Okay, so you're trapped in the bathroom."

"Yeah, and I tell her I'm not going to come out of the bathroom because I think she has a knife. Upon hearing this she goes into to full apology mode, saying she lost her cool and that she was sorry that she freaked me out. She swears she doesn't have a knife. I wait in the bathroom for another hour. I finally peek my head out and she is sitting there on the bed. There's no knife. I tell her I'm going to take a shower, but I'm still pissed she read my phone. And the language here, Kristen, I just want to say that it wasn't this filthy. I was deeply religious at the time and now I'm trying to make up for lost words. But really, part of the reason this was so traumatic of a relationship was due to the fact that we were having a lot of sex and I wasn't sure how I felt about it."

"Why did you start having sex with her if you were religious? Was she not?"

"We both were, actually. Extremely religious. We just got carried away a couple times and it turned into a daily or nightly thing. We'll get to it. Now I'm telling you to let me finish."

"Continue."

"So I finish showering and figure my only option is to go with her all day and do whatever it is that she has planned

out. It wasn't fun. It was mainly awkward. She took me to see the professor of the class in which we had both met. I hope to God the professor could see that I was not wanting to be there and that Ellen was off her rocker. Man, do I hope that more than almost anything else in the world. We talked to this professor for an hour or so. Then it gets blurry. I really don't remember much except that I went to work and Ellen sat in the car outside of my work the entire time. Just waiting for me. When I got off it was night and she told me she had one more place. This place was church. She took me there and we went in. She told me that she wanted me to pray to God and ask him for guidance because she knew that God would show me that I needed to be with her. That we belonged together. This story is still so long, Kristen."

"It's fine. Keep going."

"I have been to seminary in my life. I spent a year there before deciding it wasn't for me. At the time, I was so devout... what she was doing was hard to handle. I really didn't want God to somehow tell me that I was supposed to stay with her. I don't know how to explain it. We prayed at the altar for a few minutes. Her for longer. While she was praying—oh yeah, I should explain. While I don't remember a lot of what we did, I do remember that I felt like this day wasn't going to end. She kept coming up with things to do and I was sure this day would extend into the next. So on the way to the church I screamed at her. She's the only person I've ever screamed at in my entire life. I screamed at her to let me go. That I just wanted to leave. That I didn't want to be with her and that I was miserable. It is, still, to this day, the most pain I have ever felt emotionally. I needed out. I felt like there wasn't going to be a way. My family lived four hours away. My friends who I lived with were mad at me because I

had ‘abandoned’ them for Ellen. But really I hadn’t. It was just that every time I tried to go see them without her she threw a fit and acted like I didn’t want her to be around my friends. There just wasn’t any way out of it. But yeah... so while she was praying I just kept thinking how much bullshit it was that God was doing this to me. That I was in so much pain and it seemed so unnecessary. I know there are starving kids in Africa, but this was unfair. I had been nothing but a spokesperson for God my entire life and this is the girl that he has put in my path? Even if it was for growth that’s bullshit. You don’t need that much pain to learn a lesson. She got up and asked me what God said to me and I told her that God told me we needed to break up. She paused and simply told me that I was praying wrong.”

“What does that mean? How does one ‘pray wrong?’”

“I don’t know. It just pissed me off.”

“Okay. We will probably return to that at some point, but we’re burning through minutes and I want you to finish the story.”

“Well being told that sent me over the edge and I told her I had to get my tire. I yelled at her. I made her scared of me. It was horrible. I took her car and went and got my tire and I couldn’t lift it onto the truck to put the lug nuts into it after removing the flat. I got up the nerve to call my best friend Bernard and he told me he had thrown out his back but would come down to help in any way he could. He was still pretty angry with me. He told me later that my entire friend group had taken to referring to me as *Kuwabara*, which is this character from a ridiculous anime called *Yu Yu Hakusho*... but it’s the guy that everyone despises because he is so annoying. I don’t hold it against them. They don’t anymore call me it anymore. We don’t really joke about it,

though. It did mean something. But anyway, Bernard showed up and he really couldn't do anything but stand and watch."

"Where is Ellen during all of this?"

"She's in her apartment. All I told her was that I was going change my tire and then we would talk."

"I see. Keep going."

"Well there were like three guys that walked by us that refused to help me. I don't know if we looked suspicious or what. But nobody would give me the time of day. Finally a guy did, and he was cool about it. I just told him I was a weakling and that Bernard had thrown his back out. He laughed and did the rest of the job for me. Really great guy. So I turned to Bernard next and I told him that I needed one more favor from him. I needed him to stand outside Ellen's door while I went in and broke up with her. I wanted him to count to thirty and then knock on the door and I would leave."

"And that's how you ended the relationship?"

"Pretty much. I went in and I threatened her with a restraining order. Which seems harsh, but I couldn't get into all the details here. This is the short version. She asked me if my sister was putting me up to this and I told her it was just me. That we were done and that she wasn't allowed to talk to me or my family or my friends again. Then Bernard knocked on the door and I left. But, what's funny about it, is that it didn't end that tidy. That would have been a dream. She ran out after me and told me I still had her keys. Ha-ha. That's the real end. I tossed her the keys and went back to Bernard and then we went to Wendy's. The best tasting spicy chicken sandwich of my life was served to me that night."

"Have you considered that this trauma is at the root of what you're feeling?"

“The sandwich was more delicious than traumatic.”

“Answer my question.”

“I guess, no. I haven’t.”

“I would think about that if I were you. That was question one, though. We need to do question two. We only have a few minutes left, so I hesitate to ask... Have you ever thought about or attempted to hurt yourself?”

“My mother.”

# That Crazy Assassin

by Jack D. Harvey

Jerry Lee bopped off,  
they say,  
two wives, Lewis and Lois,  
unbidden angels,  
they lost their way,  
they say,  
suffering faces upturned  
to unmerciful heaven;  
they were his babes,  
lost in the woods, maybe,  
for a long day and a night.  
In death,  
in the waning moon,  
their color the color of  
pool tiles,  
color of cream, their flesh  
holy lamb's blood  
overspread,  
drove him to be  
done with them.

Hear his left hand still  
thundering in the dark;  
balls of fire  
in the lonesome night,  
feet of iron  
jumping down the hills,

shaking down the country roofs.  
The personal friend of Satan,  
nothing loath,  
leans towards the deep,  
his weight a feather  
in the balance;  
his song  
atonement for  
those fretted murdered souls.

Death, the taker, takes;  
Whiteboy's innards,  
shaking his shoes,  
move with pity;  
his mother, the giver,  
is nowhere, everywhere;  
gentle earth to earth.  
At the grave site  
the sermon slow,  
the singing weary;  
the women  
one by one file off,  
no strangers to the slaughter.

Again and again,  
Agamemnon's daughter  
bleeds on the altar;  
grief  
by the windless shore  
that would bring  
tears to the eyes  
of an army.

# Fisherman's Daughter

by Melissa Jenks

The water was so cold it made her fingertips silver-blue. In the 3000 miles she'd traveled this was the coldest she'd been. The pain coursed from her shoulder blades to the soft skin that eased into scales at her waist. As always, the lower half of her body felt fine. Her arms, though, burned blue, her nipples chafed and raw.

She'd swam, in winter, to the Boston Medical Center to hear an expert lecture on synesthesia. Humans believed that no one paid them any attention, but in truth others were just as susceptible to the human condition as humans themselves. Autistics, cancer patients, Buddhists, all of them swam thousands of miles beneath the waves to press their fluted ears against the substructure of various buildings to hear specialists pontificate. They'd listen for hours, for days, delicate vibrations passing through molecules of earth and thence into water.

Since she was a tadpole she'd been unable to distinguish among her senses, or had them confused, as if it wasn't hard enough being half-human, half-fish. Always homeless, her human self suffering the indignities of water, her piscine cells unable to survive without. But unlike her family, she felt pain in her body as color—heat as red, pleasure as yellow, rough edges as purple. Their midnight singing she felt in the depths of her bones, a grinding vibration. The small fish she crunched between her teeth she could not taste but only hear. A long view through clear water gave her a metallic twang on the back of her tongue.

Her nose was the only thing she could rely on, and she'd follow scents for weeks, just a trace of blood in the water, a smell she recognized and she'd swim till she ached, till the effort burned pink in her muscles, till she'd found the person or fish she'd been tracing, each scent a welcome. After her family kicked her out, she found a scent and traced it to the Mediterranean, where the last whale of its kind, a fellow outcast, swam off the coast of Albania. She'd rested on his back, his lumpy skin a carpet of orange below her exhausted body. He was still her only friend but when they tried to mate it hadn't worked, despite the yellow shivers in her fish half, the sensual smoothness of his high-pitched song.

Finally, tracing vibrations in her tail, rumors that echoed through earth, she'd learned the name for her disease: synesthesia, a crossing of the wires in her human brain, wires that forbade her from seeing the world clearly.

She swam to the closest access point, oily and clotted with garbage, the metal joists that stretched into the water from the hospital. She pressed her ear to the flat surface of rebar. The words she heard as sharp twinges in the muscles of her chest, but she listened, distracted from the silver cold, and found the threads of meaning. Humans were so stupid. All of this talk about acceptance and belief. All the stupid fucking doctor was doing was studying it. When a girl took the podium, another girl with the same disease, when she spoke of it as a gift—the colors that appeared when she listened to opera, the numbers she experienced as smell—the mermaid began to cry. The tears traced green paths down her face.

It wasn't till swimming back, out from the harbor, weeping, that she realized her tail was wrapped in monofilament. When she struggled, a net from the lobster

boat swooped down. Out of the water for only a few minutes and her limp body ceased processing oxygen, and she appeared, to the humans, as a giant striped bass. They ate her. That night, the fisherman's daughter awoke, a whale's song shaping a grinding sharpness in the knobs of her spine.

# Young and Hot

by Corey Mesler

Sometimes the sound  
from the other room  
was poetry.  
We dared each other  
to listen. You began  
to unbutton your shirt.

# Keying a Car

by Julie Rea

I keyed a car a little while back in a moment of rage. I don't admit this without guilt. I don't drive anything aside from my wheelchair, but I do respect the philosophy that you don't mess with a person's ride unless severely provoked.

The car-keying occurred a few minutes away from my Philadelphia-area apartment. I was on my way home when I went to cross the street. The car, a beat-up silver thing, was blocking the crosswalk as it waited for the light to turn. The front bumper was badly dented, and on the passenger side, part of the body of the car had been cut away, revealing rusting metal underneath. The car's occupants were two women.

The driver of the silver car was on her cell phone. She looked at me and then away, the phone not moving from her head. She would have known that I had the light and that she was in the way. She could've backed up; the next car in line was giving her a wide berth. And there was no way I could go in front of her without rolling into rush-hour traffic.

In a fury, I went alongside the silver car, my wheels sleeping in the muck of the gutter. I took out a giant key and scratched the door with it as hard as I could. I saw the passenger watching, and I held up the key and smiled.

Here, a contextual note is necessary:

After living in New York City for over fifteen years, I got used to pedestrians having the right of way in crosswalks. Accidents happen, but the norm is for drivers to yield to the carless. I appreciate New York's attitude towards pedestrians.

Wheelchair users are not equipped to leap out of the path of a pile of motorized steel.

I moved to Philly in 2009, and compared to NYC, drivers are a lot more casual here about rolling through crosswalks when pedestrians have the right of way. At my first close call with a car in Philly, a NYC-style statement of alarm, generously laced with F-bombs, flew out of my mouth. I saw the driver's eyes go wide, maybe with surprise, as at a glance, I don't look dangerous: There's my wheelchair, my thick spectacles, and the fact that I'm a 110-pound chick who often wears little flowery dresses in warm weather.

It took a while for me to stop swearing at and pounding on the hoods of cars that didn't yield and thus almost clobbered me. At the urging of friends who wisely foresaw I would end up in the hospital after chewing out the wrong person, I reluctantly abandoned my one-woman war against careless drivers.

But on the day I reneged on my surrender and keyed the car, I was angry long before I got to the intersection. My cat had died a handful of days prior. She was euthanized after a series of violent seizures. Although she had lived almost a good eighteen years, I was pissed about her dying badly. I had been up when it happened, at about two in the morning, awake because of bad nerve pain, a chronic condition related to my spinal cord injury. As always, my little tortoiseshell cat had come to me purring as I clutched myself in the dark. But a half-hour later, she was dying. There was nothing, aside from getting her to the animal hospital so she could be put to sleep, that could be done. My friends and I had spent thousands of dollars and hours in medical care for the cat. I stupidly believed that these efforts would allow her to die in her sleep, curled up on her heating pad. I had been ready to

lose my cat; she was old and ailing. But I had not been prepared to watch her frail body frantically strain as she suffocated from seizure after seizure.

I have a hard time venting healthily. I bottle things up. People more sound than I, who shepherd his or her beloved pet to the hereafter, I imagine go home afterwards and have a good cry. I am not like that. After my cat died, I took up smoking cigarettes again. I didn't cry. I slept on the couch several days, leaving my boyfriend in the bed alone. I didn't want to be touched. I watched various *Real Housewives* franchises, using the bickering and other dysfunctions to drown out everything else.

Back to keying the car: after I had done the deed and was rolling across the street, I heard an angry squeak from the driver, who had rolled down her window: "Did you do something to my *car*?"

I turned to grimly nod at the driver, thinking at her, *yes, I messed with your car. Watch out, or I'll mess with you too.* For the first time since my cat's death, I felt strong.

Somebody in the line of cars behind the one I'd keyed rolled down her window to ask if I was okay. I gave the thumbs up to convey that everything was copacetic.

But then, the car that I'd keyed did a near-suicidal U-turn out into the heavy traffic and came roaring after me, driving against the one-way traffic, half the car on the sidewalk, half on the street.

I cut through a parking lot to try to get away, but snowdrifts blocked my way out.

The silver car slammed on its brakes, pinning me between it and the snow. I could have gone around the car, but I froze, fearing it would run me down.

The driver got out, her fingers clenching her giant cellphone. She yelled that I had done something to her car.

I acknowledged that I had keyed her car with as much scorn as I could manage. I smiled. I wanted the little woman to take a swing at me so that I would have an excuse to hit her. My arms are long and strong, and I could feel the muscles in my biceps tense with the pleasant anticipation of throwing a punch. I gave the driver the double middle finger as incentive to come get me.

Here was a situation that I could address in a way that I couldn't when my cat was dying a bad death.

"Okay," the driver said, "Okay." She nodded as if to say *We'll see what you get* and started towards me.

It was then that a couple appeared by my side. It was the woman who had earlier asked if I was okay, the one to whom I had given the thumbs-up. She and her companion had parked their car and arrived to defend me.

They spoke to the enraged driver. They said that they had seen her blocking the crosswalk and that I had been right to do what I did.

The driver snarled something about bullshit. The phone disappeared and she ducked back in the car.

I thanked my defenders and scooted away.

When I got home I erupted into tears. I cried because if the couple hadn't had intervened, I probably would have taunted the driver until she slapped my glasses off my face, pulled my hair, shoved me out of my wheelchair, and I would have hit and clawed right back. I cried, for the first time, over the loss of my cat and the torturous way in which she died.

After this incident, I bought an air horn. It's strapped to my wheelchair, and it makes a giant sound. Before trying it

out in the field, I had thought that drivers rushing or blocking me in intersections would yield upon hearing the horn.

However, several times, I've blasted my horn at near misses. Not yet has a driver stopped. My speculation is that drivers who hit the gas so they can beat me across the sidewalk would do this regardless of a horn or an obscene word or gesture.

But at least I am seen. Maybe my horn will keep all future similar experiences merely close calls.

And being able to sound my horn negates my desire to pull out my key, raise my middle finger, pound on hoods, and scream epithets. My horn has conferred upon me a sort of grace, which remains even during my saddest moments.

It remains to be seen whether or not I'll be done in by a car, but I may have found a way to maintain my dignity while respecting other people's property.

# Big Willie

by Hassan Riaz

Bill needed this time in Los Angeles, a break from all that campaigning, schmoozing, and strategizing, to reconnect with himself, throw his game, and remind himself that he still had the magical touch, especially after having spent two backbreaking weeks in Iowa. Politics was too serious these days, and now that he was nailed into an election all over again, he needed juice, fun, time to himself. He'd learned his lesson about indiscretions, of course, and wanted to avoid situations that could lead to temptation, but at the same time, a man needed to unwind. Hillary had been less than pleased this morning when she'd learned that he'd taken the jet to L.A. Not only hadn't he gotten her permission to head out of town, which she wouldn't have given to him anyway, but he'd left before all-important New Hampshire. She'd called him on the plane and then when he'd landed at LAX on his cell over and over again, and each time he'd told her not to worry because he'd be back in three days, Monday night at the latest. If he was on point--and that's what this weekend of politically correct debauchery was all about, an opportunity to recharge and focus himself--he only needed a day in New Hampshire to will her to victory.

He was rolling solo on a Friday night. When his motorcade hit up the valet station at the club on Sunset at midnight, the attendants in the red vests didn't know what to do with the string of black, tinted, two-ton armored SUVs. They didn't have enough space out front, but made some, of course, because even though this was Hollywood and

celebrity was ubiquitous, Bill was rolling hard, even for out here, and no one was used to this level of domination. Forget Leonardo and Justin and Brad--Oscars and Grammys be damned--and the usual cast of characters. They were just blips on the radar, celebrities for celebrity sake, but he was the real deal, the big cheese, el presidente, per se.

The promoter put him up in the club's VIP room, but he didn't stay there, because velvet couches and table service weren't for him. He was a man of the people and needed to be amongst them, and there were a lot of people, guys and girls, too many to count, crammed into every corner of the club. Once the babes found out that he was in the house, they congregated towards him, and no matter what their political persuasions might have been, they wouldn't leave him alone. He danced to reggaeton with honies who did that whole butt-popping thing, threw back shots with models and actresses, and posed for pictures with long limbed go-go dancers who possessed the kind of confidence that came only from spending a good chunk of time around a pole. Even the men recognized his game, and gave him pounds and props, and slapped him on the back each time he had another collection of honies shaking their hips around him. By the end of the night, he had the whole place jumping around and moving in unison, party-over-here-fuck-you-over, and when the club closed at 2:00 a.m., he filed out with the rest of the revved up, life-loving patrons, and asked twenty of his newest friends if they wanted to hit up a late night diner to grab a burger or maybe some breakfast, and of course, they agreed, because he was Big Willie, and the weekend was just getting started.

#

As she was accustomed to doing, she sent Al, who was

in town doing his slideshow on global warming, to the hotel in Century City the next day in order to keep an eye on him, and although Bill tried to ditch Al by telling him that he was headed to dinner with one of the bigwigs of fundraising out here, Al, like he tended to do, invited himself along. Of course, there were no plans with any titans, just a baller dinner at a steakhouse on the Strip with a few of his new crew from the night before. Over steak and crab cakes, Al kept talking about energy conservation, destruction of the rain forests, and the general end of the universe as they knew it, as if he were on a cable news show instead of at the hippest restaurant in Hollywood with a dozen ultra-fine hotties on a Saturday night. Bill could feel the attention of the table waning with every additional doomsday proclamation, and didn't want the babes to think that the most successful administration since Ike--and yes, that included the current--was all about gloom and procedure. He tried to shut Al up by kicking him under the table, but as he attempted to do so, he brushed against the stilettos of a brunette with huge knockers, and somehow her heels and his cap toes came off, and he found himself enmeshed in an exhilaratingly refreshing game of footsies. Although he wouldn't have minded sharing with the girls some of his own stories, such as the time Abdullah and Yasser brought out the belly dancers at the summit at Sharm-el-Sheikh in 2000, the activity beneath the table at least partially made up for the banality occurring above it.

After dinner, they hit a lounge on Argyle. By now, not only had the news channels and entertainment shows gotten wind of his weekend, but cell phone pictures of him vibing had surfaced on TMZ as well, so the place was infested with paparazzi. But the Secret Service agents had anticipated the

scenario and planned accordingly. By the time the motorcade rolled up to the front of the lounge, Bill, Al, and the gang had already snuck into it via an unmarked car through the service entrance in the back. Bill spent most of his night near the pool on the outdoor patio so that he could enjoy the sixty-five degree February weather, while Al ducked inside and held court on the purple couch in the corner. Hillary called repeatedly, and whenever she did, Bill darted inside, and put Al on the phone, so that his former main man could relay to her that all was well and calm here in L.A. After the fifth call, though, Bill stopped handing the phone over to Al, because Al had thrown back a few too many martinis with a blondie from the Valley, and so not only was he slurring his words, but he was calling Hillary "big momma" and "senator-ita" when he spoke to her. Bill motioned to the bartender to cut Al off, and subsequently took it upon himself to explain to Hillary about the thumping and giggling in the background, and when he ran out of explanations after a few more of her calls, he told her that the battery on his cell was dying, and turned the phone off.

At 1 a.m., the DJ called him to the stage that was set above the steaming pool and someone handed him a saxophone, and before he knew it he was belting out Coltrane with everything that he had, and the audience was clapping and shouting and whooping it up, and the DJ was tossing in a breakbeat groove, and the crowd was swaying to the rhythm, and girls were tossing off their clothes and jumping into the pool for a nighttime dip, and despite all the problems out there--terrorism, health care costs, Trump--all felt right with the world. At the end of the night, a couple of enthusiastic sax encores later, he returned inside, pulled a wobbly Al to his feet, and told the girl hanging off of him that Al had to go

home. The Secret Service agents snuck them out the back and into the SUVs that had just pulled up, and as the motorcade blasted down a side street, Bill asked Al how he'd enjoyed the night. Al rested his head on Bill's shoulder, burped, and said "I loved it, Big Willie, but please don't tell Tipper."

#

On Sunday morning, he pampered himself with a straight shave and haircut at a men's day spa in Beverly Hills, before heading to Santa Monica to do some shopping in the afternoon. He bought a couple of humongous flat screens--one for watching the news and the other for sports--and when the salesperson asked him to where he wanted the televisions shipped, he told the sales guy to send them to his office in Harlem, so that the missus wouldn't give him grief about his purchases. He hit the Promenade and downed some wings and a couple of beers at a sports bar while he chatted up the waitresses, all of whom had nice legs, and all of whom were more than impressed with his ability to throw back the hottest hot sauce.

By the time he returned to his hotel, he felt energized again. Al called him as he was heading out the door of his hotel room, and since Bill didn't want to babysit him, he let the call go to voicemail. Plus, he was too busy trying to think of creative answers to Hillary's questions of where he was and what he was doing and when he was coming to New Hampshire to devote any more attention to Al. She was calling every ten minutes.

His plans for hitting a rooftop bar had been leaked, because as the motorcade barreled down Wilshire that night, every variety of news van was in pursuit, and after consideration, he told Secret Service to kill the bar idea, find

one of those hip boutique hotels instead, book a suite, grab a DJ, and commandeer a bartender, because tonight he wasn't going to the party, the party was coming to him. The agents took care of the logistics, and he took care of the guest list, texting every cool dude and variety of babe he'd met over the last couple of nights. When he descended upon the hotel, the suite was set and people were already rolling in. He mingled, danced, and even bartended mojitos, as house music blasted the space and people popped and locked and dime stopped. The guests in the neighboring suites complained about the noise, but Bill, ever the diplomat, broke bread, and personally invited them over, and as they immersed themselves in drink and dancing and even some stimulating conversation, their grumblings faded. Even Arnold, the Governator, who'd heard about the party from a friend of a friend, rolled through, and smoked a couple of stogies, chatted up a few babes, and tossed back a couple of longnecks--blue and red together at last.

At 4 a.m., the DJ killed the house music and put on some downtempo, and the exhausted partygoers, who unanimously remarked that they'd never attended a better party, filtered out into the night. Bill stood at the door of the suite as his guests left, and when a few of the girls tried to invite themselves back to his hotel room in Century City, he smiled, pointed to his ring, and politely declined. He'd gone down that miserable road before and wasn't going to repeat the same mistakes. This weekend was about fun, not dumb. As his guests left, he made sure to remind everyone to get ready for the California primary in June, maybe something more chill since he'd have his wife in tow, but just as fun.

#

Hillary arrived at his hotel room at dawn. She pulled the

comforter and sheets off of his sleeping body. He opened his eyes, and the first and only thing he saw was her glaring down at him. He kissed her, and without a word, pushed himself out of bed, so that he could get ready to head to New Hampshire.

# Reading Ashbery

by Robert Beveridge

Sometimes I forget  
that the ways people talk  
can be twisted, scoured  
into Lautreamontian lines  
that writhe and wriggle  
into the subconscious  
like a man on the street telling you:  
“whatever you do,  
don't think of orange elephants.”

And so the parade begins  
orange elephants who sing  
old John Lee Hooker tunes  
down West Mechanic Street.

And to think that I saw it—  
oh, forget it.

\* \* \*

In the background a neon  
bar sign spits green haze  
into the night.

No, that's not it—  
the emerald dress  
and necklace

of a sixteen-year-old prostitute  
flashes with the change  
of a traffic light.

No.

Robert Quine plays  
with a Rolling Rock bottle  
under a spotlight.

Whatever,  
a flash of green.

Orange out of the corner  
of your eye.

A smear of lavender lipstick  
on a front tooth  
soon to be kissed away  
by a teenager.

Remember the wriggle  
the twist  
watch for the flash  
of raggedy orange tail

in your rearview mirror

# Berkeley Buzz

by Thomas Piekarski

I know of no other city than Berkeley  
that would name a middle school after  
a radical like Malcolm X.

Back in the days when Berkeley hummed  
they were more than tolerant of liberals  
like Mario Savio, who touted free speech,  
drawing overflow crowds at Sather Gate  
and blocking the entrance to Sproul Hall.

In Berkeley they backed Bobby Seale  
and his ravenous Black Panthers  
with zeal unusual in any era.

That's when extreme emotion was  
status quo. The people loved  
to get riled up,  
avidly anti-establishment.

Berkeley years ago one of the first cities  
to declare itself a nuclear free zone.  
And now the sign hung on Durant Street  
designates it a drug free zone as well.

But it really isn't drug free, because  
plenty of junkies still call People's Park  
sweet home, along with winos and drifters.

And as for nuclear free, what can this possibly mean? The atom's been split and you're not going to stuff that genie back in the bottle.

The university students mix well with lots of screwy types and tourists along Telegraph Avenue.

These days I feel this relative indifference amongst the population. Be they dismissive, laissez-faire, uninvolved or introverted, it's as if they couldn't care less about changes that don't bode well for the human race.

It doesn't bother them that skyscrapers pop up like hotcakes in the area, bold structures the Earth can't afford anymore. They'll apply great strain on the electric grid and water resources, depleting the Earth of materials that should remain untouched for generations.

Collectively the people have no clout, perhaps because they've forgotten how to shout.

And yet among them the geniuses we must count on to dig us out of a hole. Without the likes of Cal and its brilliant minds there would be no solutions possible. We would bow to pollution and consumption and let humanity fade away.

One could look at our Earth as a huge  
battery, its native riches immense,  
barely tapped over billions of years.  
And then comes modern man  
with his heavy hand  
draining it of life and limb.

We're seeing Capitalism at its most vain,  
but Capitalism isn't the only culprit.  
The cup from which midnight oil  
is daily sipped is running perilously low.

And Berkeley keeps its fingers crossed.

# Flying Lilies

by Kenneth Pobo

My exceptional brother Al, an Admiral, graduated #2 in his Naval Academy class. I graduated from Humbrick College, a middling number jostled by other middling numbers. My exceptional wife Marge has won the businesswoman of the year award three times in our bland but cheery town of Walona. She doesn't hold my not being exceptional against me. Al does. In a speech I heard him use the word "excellence" seventeen times. Seventeen! It was like a sack of hammers thrown at the many unexceptional heads there.

But I see things they don't. Marge likes the word "tip top." She tells me how she keeps her office "tip top"—and her ledgers. "Tip top" makes me feel like a high mountain is about to roll down on me, a glacier that melts just from looking at it. I don't tell her it bugs me. We've been married twenty-one years. We have some silent spaces. That's not exceptional, is it?

When I tell Marge about the flying lilies I see, a tango they do with fireflies, she says, "That's nice Wally, but I don't see them. Point them out."

I try to but they go so quickly. She squints. She doesn't believe they are lilies but doesn't think I'm lying. I don't lie. Much.

Our kids, Sheena and Robby, don't see the flying lilies either. Sheena would rather listen to Breaking Benjamin than sit out on the porch with me. She's seventeen and I probably embarrass her. I know I'm out of it but I don't really want to

be with it either. I'm the guy in gym class who could climb halfway up the rope—then fall on his ass.

At fourteen, Robby's already come out to us. That seems exceptional. Marge disagrees.

"It's not 1977 anymore, Wally."

"But how does he know that yet?"

"Trust me. He does."

I trust her. That's a big part of marriage, right? Al trusted his first wife, Andrea, but she left him for a hippy painter. While I didn't like seeing Al hurt, I couldn't say I was sad for Andrea. The admiral needs to stay excellent at all times. And be tip top.

I planted the lilies. Callas, Asiatic, tigers, Easter. Even a twenty-five bulb surprise pack that I got on the cheap at Waymore's Nursery.

My garden is the closest I get to exceptional, excellent, or tip top. I admit that much of it dies. I get lazy about watering. Weeding bores me. But my lilies have been commented on.

And not because they fly.

They get deep creamy centers, some with red speckles. I haven't told Marge yet, but I ride for several miles in a crimson Asiatic. I'm always safely returned. Silences in marriage. She wouldn't want to know. Lily flying is exceptional—but not in the way the Admiral wants. Whatever. Why not fly when the invitation is so genuine?

# Nobel

by Jason Keuter

Some organization that alleges about itself that it works more diligently than anyone else to somehow limit the proliferation of chemical weapons won the Nobel Peace Prize but announcement that the prize had been awarded had to wait.

The Nobel committee had a difficult time reaching the group through its offices and ended up leaving a message, something to the effect of, “you just won the Nobel Peace Prize, please get back to us as soon as you can, so we can inform you officially, which we prefer to do, and have been doing so by unwritten custom, ever since the first prize and medal and monetary award was given out. Once we receive from you confirmation that you are fully cognizant of having been awarded the prize, we can then tell the press, which these days, requires no actual press at all, the kind that prints, as it consists mostly of reporters from TV, but why diddle daddle making these kind of points? Anyway, please contact us once you get this message. Many thanks.”

The message was left in English by a secretary, who went by another title but nonetheless performed all the functions of a secretary, including being very attractive, some said extremely, though mostly to themselves, in desperate or bitter private moments.

In directing her to leave this message, the Nobel Committee assumed this group checked its message machine, and in continuing to direct her to leave still more messages after checking back with her and being told that, as of yet,

there'd been no response, continued directing her based on the same assumption. The committee's queries to the secretary indicated also they assumed the group read its emails, and read also the comments posted on its website, means of making contact she had tried also and was queried about also and then told to try again also. She had, in fact, said, to the committee's emissary standing nervously at her desk, in an offhanded way that she would keep trying, and then the phone rang and she spoke into it in pretty rapid English and started flipping through some manila files on her desk after pressing the phone to her shoulder with her ear. The emissary stood above her and looked at her anxiously mouthing, "is that them?" in Swedish, and she simply shook her head no.

He stood near and above her, and she had the phone between her shoulder and ear and spun to try hinting he should leave with a look that only enticed him further to stay, if entice has come to mean that he was so stunned by her beauty that he stuck in his spot like a man in gravity boots or an ankle deep pool of quick drying cement. She sent him away with a flutter of her hand, which an instant later was clicking her computer mouse and navigating its way towards the group's website, which loaded slowly. There, she left a comment, saying she was writing on behalf of the Nobel Committee, and asked, again, for their immediate response, and assured them further it was not a hoax, typing in she wasn't a Kenyan trying to rip them off, and that last part she deleted, smirking the whole time. She next hunted around their site for an email, and found one finally, that was different from the other one she'd been using, and she sent to it more or less the same message, with assurances again that it was no hoax. She was forbidden from saying through these

insecure mediums they'd won any prize and was thus left imploring them to simply contact her, the representative of the Peace Prize committee.

She went back to the website and saw it had a microscopic number of visitors, and concluded most of them were inadvertent. The site kept count with some old fashioned looking counter. The number was an odd one, in the low hundreds.

The Nobel Committee kept expecting an instant response and kept sending the same smitten emissary to request that she call back, which she dutifully did, and continued getting the machine.

The secretary always called anyone not actually Swedish; hers was the clearest, most perfect kind of British English.

Then the emissary showed up, and she said she would not call again. She couldn't stand intellectuals, and hated also the committee. She did not tell this to the emissary but invoked instead Swedish labor statutes and scared him half out of her wits saying she had no need to involve her union, as their contractual clauses protecting her from being harassed by futile work that detracted from other imperative tasks were all simply rewrites of national laws that union took credit for.

The bits about not being able to tolerate intellectuals and hating the committee she ranted to her boyfriend over dinners. That night she ranted they were giving awards out to groups that can't answer phones.

“What if we were calling to alert them to the existence of a massive chemical stockpile? Do they have a special hotline phone that flashes red?” She asked.

There was no turning back. The prize had been announced within the pretty big circles of people that are

privy to such things, and it couldn't be rescinded; and, even if it could, what would be the reason? Failure to perform basic clerical tasks?

Such a thing had never been done, someone had thundered, and we wouldn't be starting now. When Henry Kissinger had tried returning his peace prize because the actual peace he negotiated never came to be, he was refused. A Nobel Prize is for life, no matter how wrong it might later turn out to be. Minority factions had begun grumbling about their own secretaries growing restless not being able to plan all the attendant ceremonial functions until the group called back.

She bitched over a plate of smoked slivers of fish, and her beau concurred the whole batch of them were all idiots.

Then came the next day, and she said to a new, more composed and contemptuous and fastidiously and fashionably dressed representative from the committee who had to come to her desk to ask her to call the group again because she was not responding to the Nobel Committee's emails the following:

“You gave a peace award to a group of absent minded men who have absolutely no record of ending any kind of violent conflict and an equally spotty record of answering their own phones, and spotty is a nice way to say nonexistent. And you are now taking from the wrong of giving them the award some kind of carte blanche permission to harangue me in violation of my contract, and, what's more, the portions of the contract you are now violating also happen to be statutes passed by the very representative body you are apparently merely pretending to represent.

“Now, the fault lies not with me, nor does it lie with your sniveling predecessor, who performed the task allotted

you functionaries by the committee of coming in here constantly and harassing me because you awarded a peace prize to a group without checking first whether they were apt in the most elemental principles of office communication logistics. Well, it turns out they're not.

“We can guess they got the phone because they intended to answer it, they thought it a good idea but ultimately could not muster the will to actually answer it – they got a message machine next, thinking, okay, in this interim period of not answering our own phones, we'll get an answering machine, thereby signaling an interest in one day fulfilling the underlying communicative motive of getting the phone itself, and we will then be able to at least know who is calling when we are refusing to answer the phone. So far we have failed to call back – not being in the office from which our presumed heroically diligent and unremitting efforts to rid the world of chemical weapons is directed, when in actuality, the office is little more than a place to put a desk and atop it, a phone neighbored by an old fashioned answering machine – the kind with cassette tapes; if you're wondering how I know that, they make a rather obvious noise and the sound is awful and nothing digital nor computerized has come on the market to mimic it. “

She said this with a dart of her eyes at his pants pocket in which he had tapped his own cell phone to quiet its old fashioned jangling ring.

“But the messages are all there, and one day, they tell themselves, we will respond to them, even though the mounting number discourages us, and we hide, leave the office, and more and more these days, just don't show up, and pawn everything off on our own secretary, who has come to realize that she hardly need show up since none of them

do either, and they are the wimpy absent minded sort, more likely to shuffle around gloomy in worn wool and tweeds mumbling than ever take action and fire someone. Oh, and since the secretary is presumably not protected by Swedish labor statutes, they can do that with impunity, but they don't have the balls.

“They thus go on proclaiming themselves heroic, willing and able to rid the world of the horror of chemical weapons, a war riddled world in which very, very, very, very few wars involve the use of chemical weapons, and you catch wind of their bragging, probably vicariously, through second, third, probably tenth hand sources, and you give them your stupid prize, they, who shirk in terror from answering their own damn phone.”

He left shell shocked and with renewed appreciation for the reasons why no one else volunteered to get a status update from her and concluded also that the progressively more manifest signs of terrified dishevelment exuded by his predecessor had little, if anything to do with her legendary stunning looks, of which he 'd been apprised by a few chortling pigs he worked in a neighboring department related tangentially to the prize in economics.

Her boyfriend listened impatiently to her lament that night over candlelight in a Stockholm Italian restaurant. She mentioned all of the above to him, and he said the group sounded like Macbeth – able to slice through an entire rebel army but cowering like a puppy before his shrew of a wife. She told him she did not wish to get into all the ways his analogy fell apart, but couldn't help herself and asked which army the prize winners had sliced through, to which he readily said “good point” and snapped in half a dry thin reed

of a tasteless breadstick and looked with mild beseeching at their passing waiter in a futile, silent plea for more water.

He joked about the unseriousness of her job and asked her if her considerable salary as a secretary was not itself a kind of farce too.

“You’re taking their side,” she said.

“Well, Nobel Prize aside, aren’t they really like us? Who among us does not experience a jolt of dread whenever the phone rings; who among us doesn’t watch it ring in neurotic torment? Who among us doesn’t stare at the name and number on our cell phone, dreading answering the phone in that moment and dreading equally the caller’s knowledge that we know they called?”

“Really, shouldn’t the Nobel committee start awarding people for bravery for simply answering our phones?”

His phone rang and his father’s name came up, and he slid it over to her as the space alien ring tone played loud enough to be embarrassing, surrounded as they were by the luxury restaurant portion of Stockholm’s dining public; the phone’s vibration rattled a bit the silverware until it edged over and clanged a bit on her plate, and the waiter came storming over in shock and awe at their umbrage, and she hit cancel.

“He’ll know I hung up,” he said.

“Coward,” she said.

The waiter arrived and spoke emphatically about their cell phone policy, employing an almost anachronistically formal form of address and near parody like righteousness in tone.

She explained that she worked for the Nobel Committee and received many urgent calls and couldn’t suspend her

duties because he was too daft to have recognized her when she came through the door.

He apologized and nodded walking away backwards.

She looked at her boyfriend and said, “I meant you’re taking the side of the Nobel Committee,” she said. “For giving the Peace Prize to people who can’t even answer their phone.”

He said that she was wrong – that they didn’t merit the prize for other reasons. That war is everywhere and not fought anywhere with chemical weapons. That Assad in Syria will say okay to them and agree to having the Russians come in as inspectors and say no weapons here, and Assad will use machine guns and bullets and just mow everyone there down, hang them from lampposts and set them on fire and things of that like.

“And cut off their heads,” she said.

“Yes, and put them on pikes all over town,” he said.

“They’ll bring back the crucifixion,” she said.

“I don’t see why not,” he said.

“And they’ll give the prize next to the group that doesn’t answer phones trying to put a stop to that.”

A new waiter arrived and asked if he could take their order.

“We’ve yet to look at the menu,” she said.

The boyfriend chimed in that they already knew what was on it and ordered for them both. She didn’t mind. She never ate much of anything there anyway. Elsewhere she ate and snacked freely and never gained weight. These kinds of restaurants were nothing more to her than another place to be. In such places, she felt herself no different than an unanswered phone on a cluttered neglected desk and delighted in ringing out just as obnoxiously to the distress of

those in attendance, who wished for some secretary or servant or other kind of lackey to run over and pick her up and make all their little neurotic fears all go away.

# Talking is Hard

by Jessica Demarast

I swallow 40 milligrams of fluoxetine  
alongside my vitamins, every morning  
to keep from disappearing,  
though I've never explicitly thought  
of killing myself.

I don't want to die.

But sometimes I don't eat and now  
I stand naked on the scale, unable  
to see the numbers climbing,

I know.

my mother worries when she hears me crying,  
into the telephone, a three hour drive to her arms.

Talking is hard and my family's no good with secrets  
So Grandma ends every message,  
"Always remember that I love you."

1 in 10 people develop depression in their lifetime.  
But I never believed it until  
a boy in my class took a gun to his head  
five months before graduation.

They said no one saw it coming

but I'm pretty sure that's a lie.

We're not as mysterious as we think we are.

# The Dog and the Arrow

By Tomas Sanchez Hidalgo

A dog  
is my dog,  
and he sees towards me an arrow:  
it departs swiftly,  
through the white smocks,  
reaching the arrow,  
and it avoids him,  
and he avoids the arrow.

A dog  
is my dog,  
and chases an arrow:  
needle of worthy end  
to a good man,  
body of peace  
and cruel field  
of horizontal extermination  
(desired sword  
by the  
wild bull itself,  
which is the voice of its master).

A dog  
is my dog,  
and he forgets an arrow,  
watering with his warm verb  
to the touch,  
like a dropper,  
a harsh plateau,

barren:  
other lives,  
human and my own.  
My dog  
tries to regret an arrow,  
and the dog is a whole life,  
and in no life  
I turn into an arrow.  
My friend  
chased an arrow,  
and the arrow is beautiful.

# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

(listed alphabetically)

**A.J. Huffman** has published twelve full-length poetry collections, thirteen solo poetry chapbooks and one joint poetry chapbook through various small presses. Her most recent releases, *Degeneration* (Pink Girl Ink), *A Bizarre Burning of Bees* (Transcendent Zero Press), and *Familiar Illusions* (Flutter Press) are now available from their respective publishers. She is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee, a two-time Best of Net nominee, and has published over 2500 poems in various national and international journals, including *Labletter*, *The James Dickey Review*, *The Bookends Review*, *Bone Orchard*, *Corvus Review*, *EgoPHobia*, and *Kritya*. She is also the founding editor of *Kind of a Hurricane Press*. [www.kindofahurricanepress.com](http://www.kindofahurricanepress.com).

**Alan Orr** is an English language and literature teacher. He currently lives in Thailand. Previously, he has been a reader of submissions for *Thin Air Magazine*, and has published stories and essays in *Four Ties Lit Review*, *Nude Bruce Review*, and *Ash Magazine*.

**Corey Mesler** has published in numerous anthologies and journals including *Poetry*, *Gargoyle*, *Five Points*, *Good Poems American Places*, and *Esquire/Narrative*. He has published 8 novels, 4 short story collections, numerous chapbooks, and 5 full-length poetry collections. His new novel, *Memphis Movie*, is forthcoming from *Soft Skull Press*. He's been nominated for many Pushcarts, and 2 of his poems

were chosen for Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac*. With his wife he runs a bookstore in Memphis. He can be found at <https://coreymesler.wordpress.com>.

**Hassan Riaz** is a physician, financier, and writer. His fiction has appeared in *Slice Magazine*, *Perceptions Literary Magazine*, and *Paragraph Line*, among several others.

**Jack D. Harvey's** poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *Mind In Motion*, *Slow Dancer*, *The Antioch Review*, *Bay Area Poets' Coalition*, *The University of Texas Review*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Piedmont Journal of Poetry* and a number of other on-line and in print poetry magazines over the years, many of which are probably kaput by now, given the high mortality rate of poetry magazines. He has been writing poetry since he was sixteen and lives in a small town near Albany, N.Y. He was born and worked in upstate New York. He is retired from doing whatever he was doing before he retired.

**James Croal Jackson's** poetry has appeared in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Rust+Moth*, *Glassworks*, and other publications. He grew up in Akron, Ohio, spent a few years in Los Angeles, traveled the country in his Ford Fiesta, and now lives in Columbus, Ohio. Find out more at [jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com).

**Jason Keuter's** stories have appeared in a number of publications, most recently in *Wraparound South*, *Dappled Things*, *Abstract Jam*, *The Corvus Review*, *Icarus Down Review*, *Cowboy Jamboree*, and *Brilliant Flash Fiction*. He currently resides in Italy.

**Jessica Demarast's** writing has been featured in Black Fox Literary Magazine, Yoga International, and Om Yoga Magazine in the past year. She is also a contributing writer at Chivomengro.com, a creative nonfiction publication based out of Champlain College.

**Joel Martinez** is a freelance graphic designer and amateur doodle maker born in Chicago. He currently works as a screen printer in Fayetteville, AR at Half & Half printing. You can find his more of his work on Instagram under the name @ohmyghostmeat

**Julie Rea's** work has been published by Atonal Apples, The Promethean, Thoughtsmith, The Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine, and The Otter and has been read by Abington Theatre. Her work was most recently published in the anthology Mosaics: A Collection of Independent Women. She is a graduate of the City College M.F.A. Creative Writing Program and the N.Y.U. School of Law. Currently, she lives in the Philadelphia area and writes about life in a wheelchair and other fascinating subjects.

**Keith Witty** is a student at the University of Central Arkansas getting his Master of Arts in teaching after receiving his bachelor's in Religious Studies from the same school. When he is not substitute teaching he spends his time writing, reading, and avoiding the sunlight. He lives in Valley Springs, Arkansas for the time being.

**Kenneth Pobo** had a new book out in November 2015 from Urban Farmhouse Press called Booking Rooms in the Kuiper

Belt. His work has appeared in: Slant, Mudfish, Caesura, Indiana Review, and elsewhere.

**Melissa Jenks's** nonfiction has appeared in Lonely Planet, the progressive biweekly the Christian Century, and the anthology 180: Stories of People Who Changed Their Lives by Changing Their Minds. Her fiction has appeared in the Maine journals Echoes, Vera, and Upcountry. She has been awarded a full fellowship by the Haystack Mountain Artist Residency and a grant from the Vermont Studio Center, as well as an Honorable Mention in a contest for new writers by Glimmer Train.

**Thomas Piekarski** is a former editor of the California State Poetry Quarterly. His poetry and interviews have appeared in dozens of literary journals internationally, including Nimrod, Portland Review, Mandala Journal, Cream City Review, Poetry Salzburg, Boston Poetry Magazine, The Journal, Gertrude, and Annapurna. He has published a travel book, Best Choices In Northern California, and Time Lines, a book of poems. He lives in Marina, California.

**Tomas Sanchez Hidalgo** is a Spanish writer [and that's all we know about him!].

**Robert Beveridge** makes noise ([xterminal.bandcamp.com](http://xterminal.bandcamp.com)) and writes poetry just outside Cleveland, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Chiron Review, Random Sample Review, and Guide to Kulchur, among others.

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