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Portraits in Adolescence

Can she thumb the web of your palm
like a tango dancer gliding across
the freshly polished floor,
finding that spot near the base that connects directly
to your spine?
and raise her other hand to ask for a glass of
diet coke while her father sits across the cafe table
sipping chardonnay with one pinky off the glass?
and where will her little hand travel
on its lonely path, as she laughs about
sports and old boyfriends, that one with
the small fingers (you notice now, how sweaty
your palms are, how firm her grip is) and her father glances at the newspaper
he kept folded in his lap, and clips the tip off his
cigar?

Or, even better, will she wait for a test
in class, the teacher to shove her head inside a desk
for that vibrating cellphone, and, instead of looking at your
blank paper for the wrong answers to some question
on symbiosis,
this girl gives you the *eye*—a universal symbol
for what the hell?
or, what's going on?
and stops chewing her gum (you thought it
was sugar free) and puts two fingers in her mouth
and pulls a perfectly unfolded pink starburst wrapper
from her grinning teeth
so smooth you break your pencil lead

and the whole class stares at you
like you're an idiot?

What do you do with a girl like that? Who starts to bite
your lips when you kiss so hard you think
that she might be serious when she says
she wants to eat you alive?
or when she stares at her body—
so pale and beautiful against the autumn dusk
just outside the window of this apartment
that never warms—and tries to count
the lashes you left on the slope of her thighs with a bamboo whip? Like
little red tire tracks on another kind of lonely path leading
you to this place you're at now

where all you can do is stare at your naked
palm, the lifeline leading to your wrist
like a man facing a blank prison wall
ready to slash off all the days till his release?

Craig Ryan

Craig Ryan lives in South Florida and is an English Graduate student at Florida Atlantic University. He is currently 29-years-old. He is a great fan of Thomas Wolfe and Harry Crews.

I've spent most of my life near the ocean

I've spent most of my life near the ocean and found there are two ways of looking at the beach the first is as a separate paradisaal world with its own mythos an Eden in which no one has to work and no one is unhappy and when you go to the beach it's a return to your most natural state your birthright a bright world of light and warmth and beauty and ultimately love the air and the ocean are constantly flowing and you're comforted by the primal heat of the sun and the ocean welcomes you into its maternal gentle embrace you stop thinking and find that you are able to feel everything and the second way is to see the beach as the boundary between the known world and the unknown you live on the land side but you feel the pull of the other side the pull of all you can't know the incomprehensible extent of it maps and measures are nothing to it the great turning and revolving motions of the dark depths their obscure and endlessly intertwining various currents and whorls singing and speaking and chanting their eternal cacophonous chorus their turbulent fluid babble to themselves and you are lying on the beach alone on the edge of this great ocean space hearing the waves and silenced awed and haunted by the sense of your proximity to so much that is so far beyond your knowing and the first of these ways of seeing the beach was my father's way and the second has always been my way though I couldn't tell you why but this expresses the essence of the rift between the two of us

E. J. Evans

*E. J. Evans is the author of the chapbook *First Snow Coming*, published by Kattywompus Press. He has contributed poetry and prose-poetry to many literary journals, most recently to *Two Cities Review*, *The Flexible Persona*, and *RHINO Poetry**

I'm not trying to be difficult to pin down

I'm not trying to be difficult to pin down or gratuitously obscure honestly I'm not even though my former girlfriend Gayle used to complain that I was *hard to read* and it's not even so much that I'm inherently odd it's just that I've never been able to see enough I mean whatever there is of my world that I can sense with my paltry senses and know with my too-small mind is not enough not nearly enough for me and this is how you will know me and this is what I recognize most about myself all down the long dusty years like a kid who lives in a lonely house with gardens and yards surrounded by a wall and he feels the constant urge to look over that wall and becomes obsessed with finding a way to get up there and look over it and for me the entire world around me is that wall and always will be and I'm just a kid still trying to look over and see what's on the other side

E. J. Evans

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Self Portrait with A Glass of Strong Ale

Blustering
around noisily
like a fat housefly!

Jeffrey Boldt

Jeffrey D. Boldt has published more than one hundred short-stories, poems and essays in literary magazines. These include: Berkeley Poetry Review, The MacGuffin, Blueline, The Wallace Stevens Journal, Interim, Clare, Great River Review, Mickle Street Review, The Missing Slate (Featured as both Poem and Short Story of the Week), Seems, The J Journal, and Agave. Two of his short stories have recently appeared in The MacGuffin and an essay in Tikkun. Three of his poems have been included in anthologies. He has a short story forthcoming in Mistake House. Boldt is currently enrolled in the MFA program in Creative Writing at Augsburg University in Minneapolis. Website: [Jeffrey BoldtWrites](http://JeffreyBoldtWrites.com).

Far Enough South

If you go far enough south
you seem to reach the north again--
witness the snow-capped volcano,
Osorno in summer, beckoning to
you from above your alpine lodge
near Patagonia, as it had called to Darwin
when he saw it erupt aboard *the Beagle*.
Witness the cool breeze off Lake Llanquihue.

If you go far enough south
you just might reach yourself again—
listening to the fledgling young singer
sing to hardy tourists from four or five
Continents, as they sip Chilean wine
and admire photographs of themselves
with molting Magellanic penguins
at the southern end of the blue sphere we share.

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The Summer Day I Had That Vision (Or: The Tyranny of Reduction)

I swear I hadn't been smoking anything
just half-dreaming most of that warm day
or at least sort of devoid of awareness
but random stuff was still sort of swirling around
in my brain—you know, old Hopi songs
(about the Bean Harvest, I think)
that I'd heard years ago at the Smithsonian--
and some obscure facts about the Fjords
in my grandfather's native Norway--

And other rattling old cans of worms
that I didn't want to open but couldn't
quite resist (or quite close) either...

I was hoping to at least reduce
all of that claptrap and mild regret
when I suddenly starting see wayward
green figures smoking blue cigarettes
against a dark horizon and red sky
of un-nerving blank intensity,
“Aha and voila!” I said to myself,
in that jaunty sarcastic tone I use
when I am so scared that I am talking
to myself, “Aha and voila,
there is so much there, there!”

But when I tried to start taking notes
of what I was seeing, there was only
this tyranny of reduction--

this space between me and my vision--
this gap where it remains calm

and not quite complete.

Jeffrey Boldt

Jeffrey D. Boldt has published more than one hundred short-stories, poems and essays in literary magazines. These include: Berkeley Poetry Review, The MacGuffin, Blueline, The Wallace Stevens Journal, Interim, Clare, Great River Review, Mickle Street Review, The Missing Slate (Featured as both Poem and Short Story of the Week), Seems, The J Journal, and Agave. Two of his short stories have recently appeared in The MacGuffin and an essay in Tikkun. Three of his poems have been included in anthologies. He has a short story forthcoming in Mistake House. Boldt is currently enrolled in the MFA program in Creative Writing at Augsburg University in Minneapolis. Website: [Jeffrey BoldtWrites](#).

Cooking in the Americas

The hills hold families of green.
Drought is not a word that falls easily
from my first Spanish-born lips,
but the cacti whisper sobrevivir.

//I could have been the one holding the machete
hacking away at nopales growing against
a chain link fence
while chickens wild around me.\\

My abuela picks off needles one at a time,
grasps them with tweezers and tugs
beneath the girasol in still water skies.

//Almond eyes fall to the soil:
prickle pear pink fruit,
succulent sweetness — we feast.\\

Mama skillet onions to sun-kissed tan.
We cook for acceptance into a future
we've run from
or run towards.
Bronze garlic and serrano peppers.
Toss in whisked eggs and chorizo.

//Above all, we must sobrevivir.\\

When I prepare nopales I savor
their slime, their hint of lime
and barely-there sweet
mixing with zanahorias, queso fresco,
and fresh plucked cilantro we grow in a can.

I walk alongside my daughter eating salad,
swallowing slices of verde and point out
the hills hold the secrets of pre-bordered history
when this land was ours and we its future.

I tell her the coyotes have learned to survive famine
but eating freely dropped fruit.

I tell my daughter
we have learned to be needle-topped
to survive
I tell her we must praise this land.

//May these hills dissolved
by white man's eraser
live on,
in the words we speak,
in the stories we thunder.\

Valorie K. Ruiz

Valorie K. Ruiz is a Xicana writer fascinated by language and the magic it evokes. She is an MFA Candidate at San Diego State University where she works with Poetry International. Outside of her poetic work, she enjoys exploring digital literature and can be found working on her Twine game (Brujerías) or making galaxy gato themed websites in her spare time.

Last Man Stands

An excerpt from *Stick By Your Guns*

The Silk Road
began in Aleppo
which had been
inhabited maybe
eight millennia.

Heaven on earth
simple and kind,
secular Muslims,
Christians, a few
Jewish lived side

by side removed
from time except
for 500 year-old
olive trees; that is
until our younger

Assad starved us,
subjected refugees
to chemicals then
bombed howling
kids into oblivion.

Gerard Sarnat

Gerard Sarnat won the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, has been nominated for Pushcarts and authored four collections: HOMELESS CHRONICLES (2010), Disputes (2012), 17s (2014) and Melting The Ice King (2016) which included work published by Oberlin, Brown, Columbia, Johns Hopkins and in Gargoyle, Margie, Main Street Rag, New Delta Review, Tishman Review plus featured in New Verse News, Eretz, Avocet, LEVELER, tNY, StepAway, Bywords, Floor Plan, Good-Man-Project, Anti-Heroin-Chic, Poetry Circle and Tipton Review. "Amber Of Memory" was the single poem chosen for my 50th college reunion symposium on Bob Dylan. Mount Analogue selected Sarnat's sequence, KADDISH FOR THE COUNTRY, for pamphlet distribution on Inauguration Day 2017 as part of the Washington DC and nationwide Women's Marches. For Huffington Post/other reviews, readings, publications, interviews; visit GerardSarnat.com. Harvard/Stanford educated, Gerry's worked in jails, built/staffed clinics for the marginalized, been a CEO and Stanford Med professor.