

driftwood press

Volume One: Issue Two

James McNulty Jerrod Schwarz Carson Frame Andrew Hemmert Christine Capozziello

driftwood press

literary magazine

Volume One: Issue Two

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The Corn Plan

Trevor Tingle

The bruised leaf burns, drifts under gravity's pull,
punctures air's resistance
through
the ember's opening.
A flutter becomes the fall.
Your naked back remembers even if you don't.

You leapt
back and forth over the fire
boxing us in
smiling to show it was alright
as we retreated
from field to tree line.

Too cold to sweat like that.
The sweater would never be worn again.
Your arm dropping like paste, beating a path.

Back home
in the trailer at the bottom of the ridge
your blackened legs told a story
of how we would eat better
next year.

Interview

Trevor Tingle

When did you write the poem?

On the 24th of January this year.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The first seven years of my life my family lived "modestly," in rural Kentucky. I had been trying to write about the year my father planted a field of corn on the ridge by our home for a while, but until I read the first issue of Driftwood the words wouldn't come. Amanda Rhiem's poem, "Controlled Burn" conjured the lines about the burning leaf and when I asked where the image was taking me this poem stepped forward.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

Once the right door was opened the words and images came easy.

Do the themes of poverty and farming ever appear in your other work?

From the age of seven on I grew up in Austin, TX and I'm very much a city mouse now. It's mostly just in retrospect I realize how poor we were. This might be the only poem I've written addressing that.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

No, there are plenty of memories I could have used, but this piece was intended to be concentrated.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, I find it more satisfying than prose. If I had more room in my life, I would write both, but I'll have to wait for my kids to grow up some.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your

personal writing process?

I try and keep a little fisherman in my head as I go about my daily business. If inspiration nibbles, whether from internal or external sources, I just work on composing in my head until the opportunity arrives to sit and write. I try and find a little space in the mornings or evenings to settle the waters and see if anything comes up. Sometimes reading other people's work helps. Sometimes music does too, but often it's just distracting. Drinking usually hinders the process.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

New Orleans is a hotbed of talent. Geoff Munsterman's the best writer in town, but there are so many other good ones: Dave Brinks, Laura Mattingly, Thaddeaus Conti, and Nancy Harris, just to name a few. Outside of town and disregarding the classics, I've really been into Jamaal May, Hannah Gamble, and Tracy K. Smith lately.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

Any of the names listed above are better writers than I am. I especially think people should check out Munsterman's new book, *Because the Stars Shine Through It*.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Jersey Devil Press published a poem last August. In January, I was the guest editor for *Dead Flowers*: a poetry rag and in February they put out one of my poems (They always use a guest editor reading blind so there was no conflict of interest). In local print I have work coming out in the *New Laurel Review* and *Maple Leaf Rag*. Online I have work forthcoming in *Prime Numbers Magazine*, *Blast Furnace,* and another one this August in *Jersey Devil*.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The first thing that caught my eye was the quasi-map looking thing you use to navigate your site. I sailed for years and I like chart work. The e-book too is very attractive and the quality of writing excellent. I felt connected to the work I read.

Blots

Kate Falvey

I.

A blot on the record.
Literally. Some ancient
tea-stain or mischance of late night snack.
Midnight oil --
literally – gumming up
the vinyl. Fingerings in the dark,
snuffling for the fried food, or rooting out
a chunk of Vaseline, and *Thick as a Brick*--
not literally – is a retro-gaseous sheen,
a residue of tricks of light and lies from yesteryear,
with music scratched in phantasms on a tone-deaf inner ear.

II.

Starkers, that's what.
Nothing gets past you –
The frailest midge emits a glow
and even petals have skeletons.
Your ears prick up at sub-atomic pings
and once you heard a stalk of switch grass
beg mercy from a barking thumb-sized toad.
You could explode with all the fending off you do –
the textures of translucence in a gauzy peachy rubble of a dawn
are brittle bones in your eyes and mouth, the bitty strands of sun
cracking like the hip joint of a hag, the smell so tragic
you have to grab a rag to mute the air into your nose –
but still it whistles in like random lumps of buttercups
or needles of regret. You cannot let

yourself feel singled out – even though you know
enough to know that not everyone feels
the puckered hilarity of new-grown hypodermis
or hears the grating resignation of each dead cell
as it drops.

III.

Tug out this splinter before it infects.
Your pinky toe is a wreck, gagging on tweezers.
When did you become so frail?
Neosporin is not an analgesic
and the disinfected prongs can't grasp
the wily flint of thorn.
Mangling isn't a skill; your
doctoring is futile, but the
irritation is so final and immense –
will you be nagged for the rest of
your life for lack of grit and will? Scissoring
shears to skimpy bone and jostles
puny skin and concentration; a flock of
bloody cries emerge, cells
like batwings on the boil, but still
there is the splinter – though now it's
turned to bone.

IV

A triumph of glistening
and sanitized eroding
with vinegar and bleach and patient
penetration. The very spirits of the germs
are risen from my hands and subsumed by
a sparkling God. It is a command
that all snouts and roving bristles
of unregenerate mites, their
miniscule saliva and taunts of infestation,
be vanquished, sent to scuttle in wisps
of vaporous good faith. I spritz my hands

until my skin's as rigid as a mirror and as pale.
And then I wail when underneath the pristine veins
pincers rise of one accord and hail
a defiant, depthless, dirty lord.

Interview

Kate Falvey

When did you write the poem?

June 2013.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The poem is not about my life directly- though, certainly, I can remember feeling, as Robert Lowell writes in "Skunk Hour," that "my mind's not right"- especially as an adolescent. I have a teenager, and so have heard a lot of alarming stories about kids cutting themselves or badly enduring the extreme intensity of their tumultuous emotional lives by tilting into what seems like temporary insanity. I think what I often do is take aspects of my emotional life and work those bits of recognition and insight into more extreme versions of what I may have lived through.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I don't have much difficulty writing poems so I'm not sure there was a "hard" part of writing. Typically, I veer toward over-writing and never want to tumble entirely into self-referential obscurity- so I tend to write and cut back- like vines that are proliferating and need pruning. I work with sound and my ear often directs the movement of a poem.

Do you tend to write longer or shorter poetry? Also, in "Blots" you separate the poem into four unique sections. Do you feel sectionalizing your poetry makes it stronger?

Definitely longer- though I'm shifting gears and trying to write smaller. I recently had some haiku taken for an anthology and have been published in *Shot Glass Journal* - which only takes "little" poems. I compose associatively, so one image begets another, one sound melds into another- and so the poems grow. I have one book-length poem called *Mojave Rhapsody* that I wrote years ago and have published a section of in a now-defunct Canadian journal called *Inscribed*. Truthfully, though, not a lot of

journals accept long poems- so I've had to be inventive and learn to pare down- which is important whether I'm writing long or small. A poem like "Blots," though, is conceived as a kind of mini-sequence- and I have a lot of poems like this- variations on a theme that burgeon into sections.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

No- though I probably could continue it and make more sections- more variations. I think I just ended it when I moved on to something else.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, I've been writing poetry all my life- but I also write prose. I've only had two stories published, though- in the *Citron Review* and the other in *SNReview*-- largely because prose requires a time commitment as well as a mental diligence that I just don't always have. I've started eight- count 'em- eight- novels and am bound and determined to finish at least one of them, but so far, I just haven't.... I alternate between utterly failing and feeling utterly hopeful. So how I feel about my novels is a kind of mood-gauge for me. Is my glass half full or not? Poetry is just my language so I never have any trouble finishing poems.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I suppose some people might think it was unique that I can write for as long as I can. I get into a zone- always have- and can literally sit for eight or more hours working with words. I also sometimes begin with titles. I started this when I moved to composing in Word; I used to compose long-hand and was a late convert to writing on a computer. Now I love it: I will often begin a writing day flipping a title on the screen- and then seeing what happens. The title can be anything- a phrase or word that I woke up with or that's been running around in my mind. Sometimes I'm forced to change the title- but many times the title creates the poem. I also don't revise a lot in the traditional sense; I'm a sentence-level reviser- meaning that I spend those long hours poking around with sound and image and getting the language "right" to my ears- so I tend not to revisit poems once I leave them.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Oh, too many to name- an eclectic mix. Poets: Dickinson, Whitman, Hopkins, Yeats, Stevens, Bishop.... Denise Levertov, James Merrill, Galway Kinnell-- so many more. Contemporary poets: my wonderful colleagues George Guida (who is the poetry editor for the *2 Bridges Review*- a magazine I edit out of City Tech/CUNY, where I teach. The novelist Rita Ciresi is the fiction editor)- and Monique Ferrell- who is fabulous. The work of New York poet Paul Violi, who died fairly recently, is constantly surprising.

Also, another friend, Crystal Williams- is an amazing, must-read poet.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

Of other poets to read? Yes, the poets I mentioned, above. Also Nina Bannett writes about mental health issues - and has a very good book of poems called *Lithium Witness*.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Yes, I have a lot of work out in a varied assortment of print and online journals both here and abroad. I also have two chapbooks out: *What the Sea Washes Up* (*Dancing Girl Press*) and *Morning Constitutional in Sunhat and Bolero* (*Green Fuse Poetic Arts*). I'm still peddling several full-length collections. Like Monique Ferrell often reminds me: it's all forthcoming.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I liked your name, frankly, and the fact that your mission statement sounds so sincerely interested in forwarding the work of everyday writers- those "unique voices" you call for. I like that you're less interested in literary pedigree and more interested in idiosyncratic expressions of individual personalities.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

Thanks for liking my work, and good luck in kick-starting your print issue.

Questions

Emily Strauss

Did I forget to wake this morning, caught under the feather quilt, pinned to night's final thought? Did I bathe, or did I simply set forth? I remember the ruins of an ancient Roman country home I walked to in the rain, with its bathing rooms decorated with hand-painted tiles. Did I eat so well as them? In their mosaic sitting rooms, one for men and another for women, with servants bearing plates of roasted goat and watered wine. Am I as fortunate? Do I like goat? Did their gods bend down to burnt offerings and sample a bit of charred skin? Do our gods want meat as well? Let me ponder the sea's reflections today. Are we part of its blue? Should I dive in when the surface is this smooth and hope to be accepted? Can I float lightly? Do we wait for sunset to awaken us, to stimulate our blood its color? Can I open my veins to the light without a loss? And how should I accept the lowering sun, its sinking away before I'm ready? I'll wait to see what comes after, how we manage once the world goes dark, if the stars fall into us.

Interview

Emily Strauss

When did you write the poem?

This is a fairly new poem of mine, written during a writing retreat in December 2012 at a lovely setting high over the sea near Big Sur, California.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

This poem came from a prompt, a poem called "Twenty Questions," by Jim Moore. I didn't end up with twenty questions, because I found things to say rather than ask, as well. But it reflects the setting- the sea below the cliffs, as well as the time, December. It also recalls a visit to Sicily many years before.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I couldn't manage twenty questions- I got stuck in stating rather than asking. But later I decided that would suffice.

"Questions" is a wonderful example of prose poetry. What do you feel are the advantages and difficulties of writing prose poetry?

This is one of my very few prose poems. I've tried to write more, but it's not my usual style. I find it very hard to dispense with the structure of poetry but keep the essence. Yes, we can ignore line breaks, but the brevity and intensity must remain.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, almost entirely. I've had one non-fiction piece published and I've tried my hand at short and long fiction, but it's not me really. I've also had a dozen or more photos published.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I'm not sure I'm unique in any way-- I usually wait for an image, sound, or action in my surroundings to strike me, and I might carry it around in my head for a long while before trying to respond to it. I also use old memories. Right now the phrase "bark people" (not forest people, not tree people) is waiting to be addressed.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

My first favorite author was Robinson Jeffers; my current favorite is Gary Snyder. In between I've read widely, including Joy Harjo, John Ashbery, Robert Hass, Jane Hirshfield, Mary Oliver, Seamus Heaney, Garcia Lorca, even DH Lawrence and Anna Akhmatova. I have a very large poetry book shelf.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

A google search will turn up dozens of my poems online, but just read. Any and all poets in English or translated. Find a style that pleases you, or one that doesn't, for contrast. But read widely enough to get some sense of what's possible, what's done, to be able to recognize why something is considered good or not.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have over 150 poems in print and online in dozens of journals and venues. One is even recorded (*Subprimal Poetry Art*, "Singers in the Canyons", Issue 1, August, 2013), one had a photo of mine to accompany it (*Wild Violet Magazine*, "Settling into Outside", September 23, 2012), some are in university-based publications.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I submit widely to several dozen places at once. I become familiar with small or online publishing venues and study their aesthetic statements and layouts carefully. Then I just submit. I appreciate ones such as Driftwood Press where the home page is a bit unusual, not simply a list of poems posted, and where the guidelines are straightforward. Some sites have an astonishing number of desired qualities in writing, many that make no sense at all. They make me laugh.

Civic Duty

Kelly Franklin

When I was ten,
he came to our gate, alone,
red-eyed and dusted with
ashes from the slopes of Mt. Agua.

When he called that evening,
to collect the price of a month's protection,
the red sun lay low in the sky,
and his rusted automatic rifle hung
impotent at his side.

I watched him through the curtains
as he spoke to my father, the teacher.
And he stuck out his chest,
and made wide gestures with his arms.

And Reina, wiping her hands on her apron,
shook her head and said he was
"*Mala gente.*"

And maybe she was right. Maybe he had raped
and plundered in those early days,
when the war was young.

But I saw his hand shake,
when it held his cigarette,
like those quiet aftershocks when the earthquake is done.
And his cheeks were pitted like
pumice stones,
and his face drawn like a *lobo*

by hunger and thirst.

And he left as he had come,
with a few more
faded *quetzales* in his pocket,
to disappear into the Guatemalan dusk,
alone.

Interview

Kelly Franklin

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I spent several formative years of my childhood in Latin America. "Civic Duty" is based on something that happened to my family in Guatemala.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I think for me the difficulty was in representing the *guerrilla* in a way that wasn't romanticized, yet still expressed the compassion and empathy I have for that man, wherever he is today. A mentor in my literary studies once told me that "Great literature is willing to risk sentimentality." I think that's true if you read authors like Gerard Manley Hopkins ("Spring and Fall"), Willa Cather (*Death Comes to the Archbishop*), or Walt Whitman ("Out of the Cradle, Endlessly Rocking"). It's a difficult balance to walk, but I think it's worth the risk.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Well, primarily these days I write my dissertation. But yes, my creative work is all poetry right now. I tried my hand at some fiction once, years ago, without much success. But I'm not sure I have the endurance to write fiction. I like the closure of finishing a short poem. I like its density, and the oral, auditory quality of it—meant to be spoken reverently, slowly. The snapshot of a memory or a feeling or an image. Also, I've always been drawn to poetry: I study poetry in my scholarship, and I also teach it in the classroom. It's a huge part of my life.

"Civic Duty" tells a wonderful story through the poetic medium. How often do you write narrative poetry?

These days it seems that all my poetry is narrative. I'm working on a collection of poems based on my childhood experiences in Latin America, which I think necessarily involves events, stories, memories. I've written

non-narrative poetry before, but I think it's a lot less accessible. I think that anyone can read a narrative poem and get something out of it, at various different levels.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

The sad truth is that there's nothing remarkable about the process for me. I have a favorite kind of pen (I actually prefer to write in red), and I always write in a good notebook. My current one is a little handmade brown leather journal. It's too small, though. I think I prefer to write on larger pages, because I don't like to feel cramped.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Spiritual: Pope Francis and Josemaría Escrivá

Poetry: T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Walt Whitman, and Julia Alvarez

Fiction: Willa Cather and Thornton Wilder

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

I think that a really important cluster of poems is the "Housekeeping" section of Julia Alvarez's book, *Homecoming*. Tremendous poems. Very deep and very accessible. I think her poetic voice has influenced mine in some ways.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Three of my poems (in Spanish and in English) have been selected for Iowa City's "Poetry in Public" project. It's a very Whitmanian idea: putting poetry in the public, civic space for anyone and everyone to read. The program posts short poems on downtown kiosks, inside public buses, etc. And it has a category for poetry by children, which is really beautiful and cute sometimes.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

I think if there is one thing I'd like my work to communicate to readers, it's this: foster empathy.

I think lack of empathy is one of the biggest threats to human happiness and civilization. And I'm not talking about fostering a vague, general

love of humanity or "good causes," because that's easy and doesn't demand anything of us, other than writing a check or putting on a bumper sticker.

I'm talking about "feeling with" another individual human being that you encounter. How must it feel to be *that* homeless man that I see on the street? How must it feel to be lonely like *that* person I see? Or hungry like *this* neglected child? Because if we allow ourselves to *feel with* those individuals, we will be moved with compassion to reach out to them. To be kind, to listen, to be patient with the foibles of others. To put yourself second and someone else first.

We see the effects of this lack of empathy everywhere: bullying, poverty, rape, torture. All of it is caused by selfishness and by a lack of empathy for the other person. So if my poems can challenge me, and my readers, to be truly, deeply empathetic to our fellow men and women, then that's a success.

Triumph of Salome

Peter Scacco

Stage lights dimmed, audience hushed,
the exotic girl with jeweled step
slinks toward the phosphorescent globe,
her cloying music drenching the set:

> Whose head is that
> Just over there,
> Whose head is that
> Up in the air?

The ubiquitous trills and ululations,
exposed thigh, *contrapposto*
so deviant, mise-en-scène
so fin de siècle, the mob leering,
the moribund judge darkly nodding —
will she caress that dripping head?

What then of this teenage princess?
A triumph, endorsements lie ahead
take a bow! Time for an encore:

> Whose is that head
> Up there so sad?
> That glowing head,
> Poor John, too bad!

And of that floating orb, whose voice
once filled the wilds with watery chants,
rough precursor of much greatness,
now a cursed prop to boost ratings?
The man could have been a contender.

Better off dead and forgotten
than to be the relic hovering
over a pubescent talent show —
no guarantees in this art business.

Through the centuries, faith and time
will tell, while the ghastly triumphs
of seductive Salomes come and go
like the lip-synched songs of idols.

Interview

Peter Scacco

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Gustave Moreau's 1876 watercolor of Salome, entitled "l'Apparition," is the foundation of the poem, which was inspired when I, along with my colleague from the University of Texas, was working on a translation from French of writings by J.K. Huysmans. Huysmans wrote about Moreau with great interest and admiration, and I had the idea of inventing a Salome who was a pop-culture dancer and singer on a TV talent show. What would such a highly-cultivated writer like Huysmans think of this contemporary culture of ours and its obsession with talent contests and so-called "reality" shows?

As a writer and artist I constantly confront the issue of the acceptability (or rejection) of art by those who judge it, what constitutes talent, and making sense of contemporary culture against the backdrop of history. These are natural themes for me.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

It is always a challenge to keep the central idea focused and in a compact form, not allowing beauty of phrasing or depth of knowledge to interfere with emotional impact. This was certainly true here. I enjoy ambiguity in poetry, but finding the right balance between clarity and subtlety constantly comes into play, as it did here.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

I originally had tried to include some lines based on Richard Strauss's early 20thC opera Salome, reinforcing the theme of acceptable vs. revolutionary or "degenerate" art. Interestingly, Strauss was one of those few modernist composers the Nazis accepted while condemning so many others for being practitioners of "entarte". I decided to keep it simple and omitted it – perhaps it will be material for some other poem.

Do you primarily write poetry?

When I write creatively, poetry is what I write now. I have written some prose, and I do some translation as well.

Are Biblical themes prevalent in all of your poetry? What attracted you to the story of John's beheading?

The Bible must influence to some degree any educated Westerner who is engaged in the arts. How can it not? Its influence on the art and culture of the West is so elemental and pervasive. Because of their archetypal significance, I have used Biblical characters in other poems as well.

Obviously the beheading of John the Baptist and Salome's involvement are both disturbing and fascinating. Who was the real John? John strikes me as a tragic figure, always overshadowed, whether by Jesus or, as in this case, by the young Salome, who is such a seductively entertaining character.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I write and create visual art as well, having made woodcut prints for more than forty years now. Writing poetry is a different process than making visual art. When a poem first takes shape within me, I normally am out somewhere or doing something else — walking in the woods, at an art exhibition, listening to music, reading a book – and before I know it I am composing it. It is a connective experience, and I try to capture its essence as soon as I can, beginning with a few descriptive images more than fully-formed lines – like expanding a haiku outward. It is an effort not to over-think the essential idea or get too clever with words. Writing poetry is harder for me than visual art, but the level of satisfaction with the completed product can be even greater.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Poetry: William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, E.E. Cummings, D.H. Lawrence, Emily Dickinson, Walter de la Mare, Edwin Honig, Edgar Allen Poe, Charles Baudelaire. Fiction: Henry James, Herman Melville, Tolstoy, Jose Saramago, Umberto Eco, Natsume Soseki, Haruki Murakami. Also, I enjoy reading almost anything historical (esp. about France and Japan).

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My poems have appeared in numerous online and print journals. I currently have three published poetry chapbooks, which are available by contacting me (plscacco@austin.rr.com). My art is up on my website:
(www.scaccowoodcuts.com)

Early Morning at the Ruins
Teatro Greco, Taoramina, Sicily

Terry S. Johnson

She imagines she has the site to herself,
that the tour groups will not arrive,
that the rest of the day will be as quiet,
that a robed chorus will walk on stage
and chant her wisdom in a language
she will understand.

A small lizard edges toward her
carved stone seat, its head raised
toward the sun. She is surprised
by the rapid rhythm of its heartbeat,
pulsing out from its strained neck.
The head releases downward and
its sides throb. At first, she thinks
the creature a dull brown in perfect
camouflage yet under its scales,
a feast of oranges, lemons, limes.

She wonders how the colors will change
when it sheds, this ancient survivor.
Oblivious to tragedy, to the perfect blue sea
beyond the stage boundaries, oblivious
to her and her husband, each having
decided to experience the ruins on their own.

Interview

Terry S. Johnson

When did you write the poem?

I wrote the poem in 2010 during a two month hostelling trip with my husband to Germany, Sicily and Tunisia.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Taormina has a stunning location with the Greco/Roman theater overlooking the ocean and Mount Etna. Little did I know at the time that our time that autumn to Europe would be our last trip together as husband and wife before we decided to divorce.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

Sometimes after years of daily writing, a poem just writes itself. This poem developed in one sitting and needed little revision.

In "Early Morning at the Ruins," what is the significance of the lizard's color?

It's difficult to understand the true nature of life. The lizard was a dull color in order to survive in its environment but underneath its scales, it was bright and lovely. You have to examine your life very closely to gain an accurate understanding of what's going on.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, I'm mainly a poet who writes both lyric and narrative poetry in all styles. I have sometimes ventured into flash fiction and meditative essay writing.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I used to be a classical harpsichordist, and I find the writing process to be similar to practicing. If you sit long enough every day, the muses will

visit. If not, I get out my Webster's, find a great word and generate something from the definition.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Since I live in western Massachusetts, I have to mention Emily Dickinson whose presence we poets really feel in our area. I also love poems from Donne, Heaney, Hardy, Yeats, Akhmatova, Szymborska, Cole Svenson, David Wojahn, Patty Crane… I could go on and on.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

Check out any of the new titles by Word Tech Communications, Tupelo Press, Copper Canyon, Alice James or Omnidawn presses, and you'll get a flavor for new writing.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have been published in many journals and anthologies, and several links are on my website at terrysjohnsonpoet.com. My first book entitled Coalescence is coming out June, 2014 through WordTech Communications.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

It sounds corny, but I love to travel so I'm a sucker for maps. I love your home page. I am also intrigued that you interview writers about their work.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

I love to examine the present in the context of those who have come before us. As a result, much of my work uses metaphors and imagery from history, science, math, music, art, architecture and literature.

On Lethe's Shore

Rebecca Harthcock

Days of spring seed overnight: all sea-spray, salt-
sting, and shine.

I followed my heart, she shrugs; and believes so
promiscuously the three-bodied profit will come.

Human flight shows not why but want: ocean-born
resistance, waking

caught in waves — the finger taps: you cannot leave
or,
leave alone. I comment famous hallucinations – :

Oh wanderlusting triggers, well-known to micro-
science: say yes! Boldly eat

salty sea, poetry — you can't quite
say mercy's seat un-throned you. Yet

here we are, panting
in another fractured place.

And although it may improve,
it is I who left you and am doing the forgetting

Interview

Rebecca Harthcock

When did you write the poem?

I wrote this poem during the first year of my MFA program, about three years ago.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I fell in love with Averill Curdy's poem "Ovid in America" and I wanted to write a poem that responded to it.

I was really intrigued by the idea of how someone like George Sandys would translate the challenges of a New World to his aristocratic family back home. I knew it would somehow require him to build a cognitive bridge between the wilderness he was surviving and the civilization with which he still identified, but was no longer a part.

In his essay "That Poetry Is Made with Words," Eliot wrote that "poetry…must be constantly exploring 'the frontiers of the spirit,'"[1] so I think the moment of discovery is an event to which most poets return—and this poem is about the decisions that lead to that moment.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I wondered a bit about the spacing—it's the only poem I have that is spaced like this—kind of rectangular, but it seemed natural to the poem.

Does Greek Mythology play an important role in all of your poetry, or just this poem specifically?

Generally you don't end up in Lethe if you've been following the conventional path, so I wanted to emphasize the uncertainty that often accompanies reinvention.

And I think mythological references—or to any part of the canon—

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[1] Vendler, Helen, ed. T.S. Eliot: The Waste Land and Other Poems. New York: Signet Classic, 1998.

are likely to improve a poem's content. As writers, it's our responsibility to help circulate knowledge—we have to practice relevance, otherwise it slips away from us.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes. I tried my hand at nonfiction once and completely bombed it. I'd like to experiment with other genres, but I don't mind sticking to poetry for now.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I rarely write a poem without doing 15-30 minutes of reading in the style I want to write. It's a helpful mental warm-up, and it encourages me to stay alert to what my goals should be for that day.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

I absolutely love Lisa Robertson. Eric Baus is another favorite. Rae Armantrout is always on my reading list. And I couldn't live without: Cole Swensen, Caroline Bergvall, Laura Wetherington, Juliana Spahr, or Joseph Lease.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

Try to figure out what it is you like; be specific—then figure out which poets are doing that the best right now, read them—and practice.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I really appreciate that Driftwood includes interviews alongside work. The thought processes fueling contemporary creative work are not always self-evident. Styles also go in and out of fashion every year, so it's helpful to be part of the conversation that elucidates why.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

Thank you for the opportunity to share my work!

Sp/it

Matt Hemmerich

you were a malaprop for love

toothsome
and columbine.

I once was a kindler,
sifting stars along
the coast.

we always wanted
to kiss the doe-eyed (kids),
the soft and silent

now I'm sprawled out with
umbrellas, waiting for
shine

while you wait for some murmur
to arrive.

when she hears a steamroller in the sky,
I fear what's coming

Interview

Matt Hemmerich

When did you write the poem?

Two weeks ago on a BART train.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

"Sp/it" was inspired by various images that reflect a despondent relationship.

The theme of emotional detachment is fairly universal. I channeled that feeling from various points in my life to write this poem.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

Weaving the lines together in a way that's sensible and cohesive is typically the hardest part.

What is the significance of the title?

Considering the subject matter, I liked the idea of visually butchering the word "split" so it appears as "spit." There's a wry tone to it.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

I have more stockpiles of unused material than Soviet Russia.

Do you primarily write poetry?

It's the only form of writing I'm decent at, so yes.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

For better or worse, I am a serial daydreamer. I love to get lost in my head and come out with a story.

When I write, listening to music is critical to the process. I allow it to shape the mood, the characters, and narrative. At times, I'll even write a

poem based on the singer's melody. There's this natural catharsis to music, which I use to inform my writing on an emotive level.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My first chapbook, *White Moon*, was published last year. I also have poems scattered throughout the Internet. You can even check out my site (matthemmerich.com), where I have other work posted.

I've been published before, but the elation of an acceptance letter never gets old.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I read the inaugural issue and knew this would be a perfect fit. Those poems had a sense of brevity that was utilized to build some dense, fantastic imagery.

Summer Stanzas

Changming Yuan

July

Dogs are making human history (right)
When humans deal with dog days (right)
When the sullen, sultry sky witnesses:
Fraud, fervor, frenzy -- yes
It is our inner heat that has been
Warming the whole atmosphere
Like Julius's inflated heart

August

With stone fruits
Like plums, apricots, preaches
Ripening rapidly
In this month of the sickle
It is high time to cut open
The secrets of sunlight
In their hardened hearts
Wrapped with the fleshiest
The juiciest season

September

In the open fields
Nothing, not even a wish is left
Except bare stems
Deep holes, bald twigs
But behind each closed door
Is a cozy room

private or public, full of
Colored fruits, plump seeds
And overflowing minds
As if all ready for the new school
of thought

Interview

Changming Yuan

When did you write the poem?

Sometime in March 2012.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I like to write serial or structured poems. "Summer Stanzas" is part of a larger poem in which I devote a stanza to each calendar month. Arranging these 12 stanzas differently, I have published "Spring Stanzas," "Autumn Stanzas" and "Winter Stanzas." None of these stanzas is really 'personal'.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I found 'July' the most difficult month to write a poem about. When I checked the world in Wikipedia, there was much less inspiring information than I could read in the cases of other months.

Are the seasons, and how they change, a common theme in your poetry? What attracts you to summer?

Yes, seasonal change or nature is one of most recurrent themes in my poetry.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

I wished to find more universal human elements about July, August or September and integrate them into the poem as a whole.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, actually I have been writing poetry only, although I may try to write novels later.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Over the past ten years, I have been able to scribble a dozen poems or so every month. After what I call a 'sediment period' of several weeks, I would type the poems and begin the revising or refining process until I feel they are ready for submissions.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Lorna Crozier, Ye Chuan, Charles Simic and Mark Strand– they are all contemporary poets.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work? Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Since I started to write poetry in English in late 2004, I have been published by more than 800 literary journals/anthologies across twenty-eight countries. Whoever is interested in my poetic work could please take a look at my joint blog with my teenager poet son Allen Qing Yuan at:

http://yuanspoetry.blogspot.ca/

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

It was New Pages that first called my attention to Driftwood Press.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

Although my poems have appeared quite widely worldwide, I find they receive far less attention in Canada (my chosen country) and China (my country of origin) than they do in other countries like the US, where I have not only published my poetry collections, but also been nominated for the Pushcart Prize for eight times thus far. Mainly for such reasons, I always refuse to call myself a poet, let alone a Canadian or Chinese one.

The Tease

Chen Chen

He lies on my bed & says, *New Year's resolution:*
lose my virginity. Really this time. I nod. We are fifteen.
& if it doesn't happen with a girl, I want it
to happen with you. I watch him from my desk
as he raises himself up by his arms, starts
to do push-ups. He's scrawny-looking, but the veins
peek through his pale skin right away, long purplish
cords of might. Soon, instead of lowering himself completely,
chin meeting the bed, he lets his torso go slack, begins
to press his groin into my sheets. He winks.

I don't tell him he's losing his form. I don't tell him
I imagine it the other way around. I go over
to the bed, start pulling his shirt off from the waist.
He laughs, *Not now, not now.* He sits up, slinks his arm
around my shoulder. *We got all year, right?*
At fifteen, the sport all boys know how to play
is not football or soccer, baseball or basketball.
It's this.

Interview

Chen Chen

When did you write the poem?

I first had the idea for it in high school, based on personal experiences, but didn't write a first full draft of it till much later, in college. Then I returned to it recently, in graduate school, and revised it, though not many significant changes were made; it's one of those rare poems that just came to me, almost whole. Usually I have to go through a slew of drafts and versions before things come together, spark.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

Just letting the idea live in my mind and mature. Because I didn't immediately try to write the entire poem, I was later able to let it come out and be what it needed to be. Sometimes I think I have a great idea for a poem and rush to the page, but it's too early, or it fizzles out within three lines, and I get frustrated, dejected. So waiting, being patient, letting things grow on their own time—I'm still learning how to do these things. To listen to the poem instead of my own wish for a poem.

Is the theme of sexual orientation present in all of your work? At a time in history when the rights of LGBT folks are finally being acknowledged, do you find writing on the subject matter easier or more challenging?

I suppose in most of my work the theme is present, yes, since I often write about my relationships. I write a lot of love poems or poems grappling with desire, longing, and the possibilities and limits of language to articulate such things. Mostly, the sexual orientation is implied, not overtly stated, though there is great power in being direct about it. In "The Tease" I think I'm more direct about it than I usually am, perhaps because the speaker in this poem so needs to be direct, unrepressed, free to express his desire, and to have that desire reciprocated. Because of the shifting political and cultural tides, I do feel freer and bolder to write about or

out of my sexuality, though I would probably *have to* write from that experience anyway—it's who I am. And it's fun to try breaking some taboos, perhaps take the reader out of his or her comfort zone, and to go somewhere surprising myself. Every kind of poem is a challenge to write, if you want to write it well and write it new; but I think if you're taking on the *right* challenge for yourself, then it'll be an adventure.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes. I have been trying to write some short fiction recently, but am struggling to sustain actual plots or storylines for longer than two pages. Maybe in prose, I'm a flash fiction or vignette writer. Which is strange, considering that I used to primarily write long pieces of fiction. My tendency these days is towards brevity and the lyric use of first person and direct address.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

It used to be that I would start off with an idea for a piece, and then try to execute that on the page. I would get upset if my original idea got lost in deviations and detours along the way. Now I find that the deviations and detours *are* the poem. So I try instead to have few preconceptions and allow a scrap of language, an image, or just a rhythm take me wherever it wants to. I want to be surprised and I want to learn something—something messier and weirder than what I first thought possible.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Too many to list here. I'll just say that I recently saw in Boston a production of Chekhov's play "The Seagull" (in English translation) and am reading it now (also in translation); Chekhov amazes me for how he can be funny, then devastating, or both in the same line. Also just read a book of poems by Yu Xiang, a contemporary mainland Chinese poet, translated into English by Fiona Sze-Lorrain. The book is called *I Can Almost See the Clouds of Dust*. Beautiful work that draws on everyday language, including awkward phrases and even clichés—and makes them seem utterly fresh.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

One living poet and one dead poet. Both queer. Living: A friend of mine, who graduated from the same MFA program I'm currently in (at Syracuse University), came out with a chapbook not too long ago, called

Rain Leaping Up When a Cab Goes Past. Gorgeous poems exploring sexuality, nature, city life, the joy and ache of being in a body.

And dead: C.P. Cavafy, modern Greek poet whose historical/political poems about ancient Greece are as passionate and sensual as his erotic poems about fleeting encounters with men. "The beautiful life was brief" writes Cavafy, but I think we can make it a bit longer through reading.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My work has recently appeared in or is forthcoming from *Connotation Press, Pif Magazine, Verbal Seduction, Anti-, Ghost Proposal, Birdfeast,* and *CURA: A Literary Magazine of Art & Action.*

Tiny Clicks

Molly Bonovsky Anderson

1. Infestation

"They don't call us exterminators anymore," said the exterminator to his client, as he stood in her kitchen scribbling on an invoice.

The client had been wary of calling Pest Quest, had seen the Quest-men driving their sinister windowless vans around town, outfitted in coal-black coveralls, their names embroidered in red gothic script above their breast-pockets, burly and heavily tattooed—mean looking young guys right out of community college, a rag-tag bunch of bug-killers, but cheaper than the Orkin Man. This "Cal" they sent her must be part of their new breed of Pest Control Technicians—lean and wiry, no taller than she, and older too. His arms and neck inkless and his face free of hoops and barbells. He hummed quietly as he worked, spritzing foam into cracks, sweeping out webs and squinting at the wainscoting.

She vacated each room he stepped into, and re-entered as he left. She didn't like people in her home. She did not care to be evaluated by her meager living space on the top floor of a decrepit, crumbling Victorian, its walls, dressers, tables and shelves all covered in beautiful faces.

Not family—not hers. She kept stars in frames; most of them dead. Jimmy Stewart and Judy Garland—Mom and Dad—smiled benevolently at her living room from soft-focus Hollywood heaven. Her brothers, Farley, Clark, and Cary greeted her in the breakfast nook every morning, lighting her Grape-Nuts with thousand-watt smiles. Grandpa Gregory Peck had the most wall space. His portrait hung at the head of her twin bed, and she curled under it at night, imagined his wisdom-deepened voice booming, "Goodnight, Scout." Her movie-star family beamed from behind glass everywhere.

Cal had called from the kitchen that he was finished, and she went in, expecting questions. Instead, he stood a long time scratching something onto a pad with his head down. He spoke softly as he wrote.

"You'll notice there's nothing between 'Explosives' and 'Eye-Banks' in your Yellow Pages." He tore the pink copy from the bottom and handed

it to her. "What's an Eye-Bank, anyway?"

She shrugged. "I did notice that. I don't know."

"It's strictly called Pest Control, nowadays," he said. "But I always liked the term 'Exterminator.' That's why I got into the business; it just sounded cool." He scratched the side of his mouth with his thumbnail. "Who wouldn't want to be able to say, 'I exterminate for a living?'"

She nodded, clutching the back of a kitchen chair, and managed a patient half-smile.

"I used to be a bricklayer. I liked that word, too: *Bricklayer*. Sounds old-fashioned, doesn't it?"

He'd noticed the pictures.

"Sure," she said, sneaking a look at the clock above the kitchen table. Elvis's legs ticked out the seconds. "Thank you for your time." She was a *Teller* and was due at the bank in fifteen minutes.

He fitted his spray jet canister under his arm, swiped his black cap off her kitchen counter and jammed it over his thinning dark hair. She noticed he had very light eyes. Black hair and white-blue eyes showed up nicely on black and white film. He looked about to smile at her so she quickly looked down.

"That ought to take care of the spiders," he said, "but if they show up again, give me a call." He handed her a prefabricated Pest Quest card with an empty line in which he'd written "C. Cohen, Jr."

She thanked him again and looked at the invoice. "I can just send a check, right?" She squinted and brought the paper closer to her face. "Wait," she said. "I think you forgot to charge me." Next to Cal's signature in the box titled 'Amount Due,' was a faint carbon smudge.

"Oh," said Cal. "Don't worry about it. I wouldn't charge someone like you."

He gave her a pseudo-salute. "Have a nice day." He let himself out.

Among the ornate pillars and curving mahogany desks, between withdrawals and deposits, loan inquiries and overdraft complaints, she tried to surmise who she was. What kind of woman gets free pest-control? *Someone like you,* he'd said. She dealt with people even quicker than usual, never meeting their eyes, sliding their receipts across the reddish lacquer, counting out their bills with crisp accuracy. She was impatient to get home and look around—to see what he'd seen. *Someone like you.* She lost count twice as she dealt handfuls of rolled quarters to a pimply girl in a Hardee's uniform, and had to start over.

As she sorted and bundled bills, she looked at her hands. Cal had scars

on his—when he'd first come in and shook hers in greeting—something she thought too formal for a service person who saw dozens of people in their pajamas or flip-flops everyday—she'd felt them on her palms; thick, re-grown ropes where his skin had once been parted. She'd watched him write; head bent—lips just barely moving, eyelashes lit from the window, sweeping the air as he looked over his work.

That must have been it.

He'd noticed her watching him, not speaking. She was a *spinster*—an old-fashioned term he'd like—her house filled with dream-people. No wonder. Even a scrawny, scarred exterminator who chose the job because he liked the word felt sorry for her.

She knew it for sure when she got home and played her phone messages. Her mother accosted her through the machine.

"I know you don't *like* people, but it's time to get real. I'll give you the website—something-something –singles-dot-com—where is it?" she heard paper shuffling. "You're killing us all, you know."

She erased the message before the beep and began stalking through the house, systematically removing the photos. She stacked them up in paper grocery bags and went to the back porch to shove them into a metal filing cabinet. Something buzzed past her ear as she stood up. A papery grey hive hung like a dead light bulb in one corner of the low roof outside the window. One wasp circled the room while another made its way in and out through a crack in the window sill.

In the morning she called the Pest Quest office and requested Cal. "I'm highly allergic and scared to death of wasps," she told Loretta, the receptionist. After she hung up the phone, she studied herself in the medicine cabinet mirror. Black hair cut short, clean and shiny, just enough mascara, no clumps, a dab of healthy color in the cheeks. Well exfoliated. Teeth could be whiter, but still, very straight. No striking deformities. Strong constitution. And *no allergies*.

Maybe *someone like you* was meant as a compliment. Maybe he just liked old Hollywood films—maybe she'd ditched the photos unnecessarily.

In any case she fully intended to pay Cal—twice.

2. Occupation

He came later in the week with a branch; literally a piece of tree, and a pair of yellow work-gloves. "They tell me I'm here to save your life," he said.

"Is that standard equipment?" she asked.

"I found it in the yard," he said. "It might come in handy."

While he sat half in and out the porch window with his boots bolstered against the wall so as not to fall backwards, he told her there was a line of black ants marching its way up the rain gutter. "They'll be in your house soon."

"They already are," she said.

Cal fumbled the branch and dropped it onto the roof of the first floor porch.

"Let me tell you something about ants," he said. "They're kamikaze. I know this from laying bricks. They get trapped in the mortar—they just march right in and get stuck, and become part of the wall. It used to really bother me, but you have to get over that kind of thing. You can't feel too much sympathy for senseless things or you'll go crazy."

"Oh," she said. "Is there something in the mortar that attracts them?"

"I don't know," Cal said, sliding a thick glove over one hand. "It's just lime and water. I can't imagine what they'd want in there. They ought to know better—it's bad for them."

He swung his lower half sideways and down, stretching his arm to the branch, but fell short. His glove slipped off his dangling hand and plopped on the roof beside the branch.

"They scream," he said, his voice twisted up in his wrenched torso, "when they're stuck-in like that. I mean, they have to emit some sort of energy made of fear, on some kind of frequency. Like tiny clicks. We just can't hear them."

He swung back up and poked the nest with a naked finger. Wasps circled his head.

"Aren't you supposed to gas them first?" she asked.

He didn't answer. Instead he suddenly heaved sideways and batted the hive down into the neighbors' yard. He slid back into the porch, red-faced and damp-eyed.

"I'm stung," he said.

She went to the freezer, cracked some ice-cubes free, wrapped them in a washcloth and told him to press it to his hand. Though she questioned his methods, the nest was down and for his trouble she offered him a cold soda. He asked for a glass, and after he poured the soda from the can, he unstuck the half-melted cubes from the terry-cloth and plunked them in the glass.

"I noticed your family's gone," he said.

"My family?"

"All those good-looking people on your walls. Where'd they go?"

"Oh!" she said. *So that wasn't it.* "That was just—a decorative experiment."

He nodded. "I know all about that. In fact, that's how I got out of the bricklaying business. I got fired—I guess you could say for decorative experimentation. We were laying bricks for the new elementary school. You know the one up on Lincoln Avenue?"

She nodded.

"I have these bricks," he said, his palms up, "and some are dark and some are light. So I start laying them in a pattern in the shape a bear's face, with the nose and ears, and I made it smiling and all. I thought the kids should have something nice like that to look at when they come up the hill—because it's tough, you know? Anyway I made this happy bear face in the bricks and they let me go. They tore the whole thing down and started again."

"I'm sorry," she said. "That seems needlessly cruel."

"It was."

She looked at his hand. "Has the swelling gone down?"

He lifted it to show her that it had, and when he did, his shirt sleeve slipped down. A scar snaked around his wrist like a broken bracelet and disappeared under his black cuff. Her stomach flipped over and she looked away.

"I'd better get going," he said, standing up. "Somebody has silverfish up on Flint Point Loop."

She stood up as he did, and thanked him. Without thinking, she reached out and shook his hand, inadvertently pressing the raised red lump between his thumb and forefinger. "I'm sorry," she said, releasing it.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "I can hardly get mad at someone like you."

She blanched. "What do I owe you this time?"

He shook his head. "The soda was enough. Thanks. Keep an eye on those ants, and let me know if you have any more trouble with bees."

"Wasps," she said, frowning.

"Right. Have a nice day."

Before he was back in his van, she called Loretta and asked her to please keep an eye on Cal's hand.

In the days that followed, something larger, something stealthy, got inside the house. She couldn't see or hear it, but it was there. The early autumn bouts of overnight frost had made it too cold for spiders, the ants had gone, and the wasps had not come back. No scratching inside the

walls or cupboards. But it was there. It crept along the baseboards on soft feet. It sat on her chest as she slept—made her dreams smell feral. Whatever it was, it ate spiders, ants, and wasps. She called PQ in late September.

Loretta answered the phone with the familiar phrase that had become one long, monotone word, void of punctuation. "Pest-Quest-open-seven-days-a-week-you-call-we-kill-this-is-Loretta-what-can-I do-for-you-today."

"Hi," she said.

"Uh-huh. What have you got this time? Squirrel in your bathtub?" Loretta took an audible drag off her cigarette, exhaled and coughed.

"I don't know. I was hoping maybe Cal could tell me."

"Right. Well, you're going have to wait, honey, because he's out—Yom *Kipper*. Where they pray all day and don't eat."

"Oh," she said, "yeah."

"I can send you Toby. Or Jeff."

"No, I'll wait. Can you schedule me for Monday morning?"

"What have you got, hon? What should I put down?"

"I don't know. Mice, maybe."

"Got it," Loretta said. "Twelve-fifteen Tucker Street, top floor. Again. Mice, maybe."

"Thank you Loretta." She hung up.

"Damn it," she breathed. "Cohen."

That must have been it.

He'd seen it in her face, maybe. Read it in her name. *Someone like Jew*.

When he came he was not in uniform. He wore dark jeans and a striped shirt under a rumpled yellow jacket. His PQ hat was gone and his hair looked unwashed. He looked wan and dull, his eyes lightless.

"What is this?" she asked him. "Where's your stuff?"

He shrugged. "Loretta said you wanted to see me."

"No." she shook her head. "I have something in my house."

"What is it?" he said, leaning forward on the back of a kitchen chair. His voice was deeper than she'd remembered, darker. She was suddenly very aware that there was a man in her house. "Do you mind if I sit down?" he asked. "I'm a little lightheaded."

"Yeah, of course—are you okay?"

He pulled out the chair and flopped down. "I don't know."

"Are you hungry? Can I make you something?"

He shook his head. "Just tell me what's in your house. Are there droppings?"

"I haven't seen any. This isn't right—you should be in uniform. You can't really do anything without your equipment."

"Loretta doesn't think you have anything in your house," he said.

Her cheeks burned. "What does Loretta know?"

"A lot. Can I ask you something? Where's your family?"

She blushed. "I took them down—I told you, it was just a—"

"Experiment, yeah, I know. I don't mean the pictures. I mean the people."

A warm patch formed on the back of her neck. "In the city. I don't see them."

"They all moved away?"

"No," she said. "I did."

He nodded and absently wrung one hand around his damaged wrist.

"One time," he began, "I thought there was something in my house, too. I was convinced of it."

"What was it?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said, shaking his head. "I think I was just spending too much time alone. I just wanted something to happen, even if it was bad for me." He eyed her. "I went away for a little after that."

An elusive hunger carved an arc in her belly. She wanted to speak, but her wits had frozen.

"I don't think I can do this for much longer," he said suddenly. He swept his arm across the table. "Bricklaying. Pest Control. Anything."

He stopped talking and laid his hand over his mouth.

She shifted in her chair, uncomfortably, glaringly empty. She needed time to think—to formulate an adequate response, to put her thoughts into a story like he had and make him understand the way she understood.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm not sure why I called. I think I just need—"

"Whatever you have in your house," he said, "I can't make it go away." He stood up, swayed a bit, and carefully pushed his chair in. "Thank you for the soda."

"I didn't give you one," she said.

So that was it. It wasn't something he had seen in her looks, or her house. It was something he knew. *Someone like you* meant *someone like me*.

She let him out.

3. Extermination

The skitter-crash-*bang!* went on for hours. Leaping out of bed and

flipping on the kitchen switch only resulted in frozen silence, like a round of flashlight-tag. They were too quick. In the morning she found the aftermath of their little game—turds floated to the surface of a pot of boiling milk and water—bobbing in the froth meant for her instant mashed potatoes. In the cabinet, they'd ravaged a bag of parboiled rice and scattered the remains. Her toes met a hard little pile of pellets—so they were hoarding for the winter—inside her slippers. She set out humane traps baited with dabs of peanut butter but they nabbed the bait and took off.

She would make things right this time. She'd have a meal ready for him. She'd put the family photos back up—both fake and real. She'd thought up the right expression to make him understand—*We don't have it so bad—neither of us. All we have to do is stay out of the mortar and if you need help I'll do what I can.* She'd tell him he was right about her, she should have said so in the first place, and if he needed to go away somewhere again, maybe they could go together. She would tell him that if he didn't want to be a bricklayer or an exterminator, he could try being an apothecary, a bootblack, a bellhop, or nothing at all. He could just be with her. She called Pest Quest.

"I'm sending you Toby," Loretta said flatly.

"Oh," she said.

"Make sure you pay him," Loretta said, "with American currency. I don't know what you were giving the other one."

"Of course," she said weakly. "Thank you."

Red-haired, meat-armed Toby worked loudly and quickly, and never took his hat off. When he was finished, he presented her with a box—a small electronic device that emitted inaudible pulses.

"People can't hear 'em, but they drive pests crazy. Spiders, rodents, ants, you name it. You don't have a cat, do you?"

She shook her head.

"All you'll hear is a little clicking noise. You won't even notice it after a while."

He handed her an invoice for $47.80 and would not accept a cold soda. She wrote him a check.

"I was wondering," she said, as Toby zipped up his black jacket, "If you knew anything about Cal Cohen."

His eyebrows went up. "The fruit loop?"

She frowned.

"That guy—" he said, leaning in and dropping his voice, "went into

the ward a *few* times. He stops eating sometimes for no reason, and forgets to start again. Sometimes he doesn't sleep for days." He made a circle next to his ear with his finger. "He needs pest-control himself. Termites in the brain." He whistled softly through his teeth, straightened up and tucked a pen behind his ear.

"You might want to talk to your landlord about weatherproofing your home," he said. "The cold might keep the bugs down but it gets in your house all the same."

She nodded and thanked him.

November ate at her bones; she began to feel cold before the chill even set in. It wasn't enough to turn on the heat; she cut rubber draft guards to fit every door and window. Still, it found a way in, in tangible chunks, carried on the back of some invisible host. She remembered the little box and its unhearable pulses—she had never turned it on, lest it drive everything away. She hadn't really wanted the mice to die, or even leave. She hadn't seen one since Toby left.

Thinking now it might drive away the cold, she pressed the red switch.

A set of measured, tiny clicks began to emanate from the box. Toby was right—she couldn't hear them, but imagined they were deafening to little things. She left the device on the kitchen counter by the window, facing a field of frost, and went to bed, wrapped in a heavy sweater and a length of guilt.

She wouldn't sleep, for as the night carried on her ears would ring. First subtly, then with rising pitch and volume. A hyper-thin whine slipped down and curled around her drums, sharp and needling. By dawn her head ached, inundated by an incessant, piercing scream that seemed to come from something very small but very willful, calling out from where it laid, half-crushed, helplessly withering its way into oblivion.

Interview

Molly Bonovsky Anderson

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

No. "Tiny Clicks" is the title of a beautiful little ambient song by the electronic group Underworld that features a series of little beeps. I fully credit musician and lyricist Karl Hyde for the phrase—it was the title of this work from the very beginning.

When did you write "Tiny Clicks"?

Four or five years ago in a graduate fiction workshop. It was a convoluted mess in its original form and I had 'shelved' it for quite a while. But I always had such affection for the character of Cal, so recently I decided to pull it out, brush it off, and overhaul it into a better, more focused version.

What inspired "Tiny Clicks"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The story of the "mad bricklayer" is a true one—maybe a decade ago or more when a new building went up on campus here, one of the builders made a series of small smiley-faces in the brickwork, and for his efforts lost his job. I've heard of similar stories where people have been arrested for defacement of property, even though the message in the 'vandalism' was a beautiful or harmless one. I always wondered how those people must have felt; thinking they were doing something so innocuous and nice only to be punished. The pest-control portion of the story was inspired by my own battle with mice in my house at the time I wrote the story, which in turn brought up the memory of a little bug-repelling box my mom had in the basement of the house I grew up in. I remembered being glad it drove away the spiders, whom I was afraid of, but worried about what it did to the mice, whom I was fond of. And why did I differentiate between the two? Cal the Exterminator and his client evolved

from the culmination of these memories.

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

There was originally a strong holocaust theme that tied into the idea of 'extermination.' It just didn't work out—came across as too heavy and obvious. There was also another story Cal told his client about witnessing a fatal car accident which morphed into its own story once it was cut out.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

The old stand-bys: Raymond Carver, Anton Chekov, Haruki Murakami and J.D. Salinger. I highly recommend the short story collection "Narrow Beams" by Kate Meyers Hanson and anything by Jennifer A. Howard. Katie and Jen are in a large way responsible for making me a better writer.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I've been published several times, both online and in print, since 2012. Some of my work can be found at:

mollybonovskyanderson.wordpress.com

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The list of recommended journals and favorite authors, and quite simply, the "map" graphic on the homepage. I'm a very visually-oriented person. Also, there's a lot of snark out there in the lit-journal world, and I've been turned off from submitting to particular publications because of that. Driftwood's page felt sincere and accessible, and not like an elite secret club. Once I'd browsed through the first issue and saw the quality of the writing, I was so glad I'd submitted, and honored to have this piece accepted.

In your mind, what exactly needs to be exterminated?

Nothing needs to be exterminated, but plenty needs to be allowed to flourish.

E.R.C. No. 922

J.R. Rogers

Russ sat in the dark hunched over on his front steps, his elbows on his knees, his fingers laced tightly in front of him. He and Jan had again exchanged sharp, painful words over their situation; his recriminating taunts hadn't helped things, he saw that now. Sitting outside for a while, he just wanted her to calm down and pull herself together while he cleared his head. He shifted uncomfortably on the narrow, unpainted plywood steps to his new home in the barracks style building. Lost in thought, he could still smell, eight months after they had moved in, the veneer holding the layers of plywood together and wondered, as a former homeowner, whether their stoop would ever be painted. Russ didn't want to go back inside just yet. Instead, he looked off into the darkness. It was something he did so often he saw himself doing it in his dreams. Everything in his line of sight was black except for the canopy of stars twinkling as bright as candles on a cake, and the air so clear and cold in his lungs it must have been like breathing helium. Russ didn't need the light of day to know 200 yards away was the safety fence, a six-foot high chain link barrier held in place by rough concrete posts. In the faraway distance, into the blackened night, was California's Interstate 15 snaking across the desert floor of the eastern Mojave. At night the highway was invisible, because it wasn't lit, but not the mesmerizing and never ending stream of headlights, the partygoers and suckers all driving like outlaws and all hell-bent to reach Las Vegas some 100 miles away.

Every single-story structure was made of wood with fireproof shingles, and was configured to house four married couples in separate furnished apartments; unmarried couples or pets of any kind, were not allowed. He and Jan had drawn an end unit and they often heard from neighbors how lucky they were because it meant one less paper-thin wall to complain about. Russ and Jan's place, like all of the others, was just three furnished rooms: a Pullman-type kitchen with white appliances that opened to a small living room; a bathroom with a sink, toilet and a shower with a cur-

tain rod, but no bathtub, and a bedroom. Each unit had exactly two sash windows, heated floorboards, but no central air conditioning, and the floors covered in cheap, wall-to-wall sand-colored carpeting. Laundry facilities were in another building.

Now, Russ stood wearily. His butt ached and he was ready to go inside, to apologize because mostly it was he whose abrupt manner hurt Jan's feelings. The cold desert wind gusting for a moment had ceased abruptly. It was as if he were facing a giant rotating fan. He pulled open the screen door his mind clear, ready to resume their evening and crossed inside.

"You feel better, now?" said Jan, without looking over at him. There wasn't a hint of their former unpleasantness. She was watching TV curled up and contented on the two-seat couch provided with the place.

"I'll be okay."

"Cold out there?"

"Lot colder than at home."

"It's the desert, Russ, what did you expect?" Now, she tore herself away from her show. "You should wear a jacket if you're going to go wandering out at night."

He didn't reply because there was no point and he didn't want to start something again. It was the way they had always handled things at home. Whenever they argued, or disagreed so their tempers flared, one of them would leave the room to cool off and let the anger dissipate. They had lived most of their married life along the balmy coast in Southern California; warm days, cool nights, most days just like the one before it. Russ thought the contrast with desert living was unbearable. Scorching heat all day every day, the incessant wind and, at night, the bone chilling cold. Someone from one of the other barracks had pointed out it often rained during the winter months. To Russ it just spelled more aggravation; mud, because none of the roads were paved.

"C'mon, honey. Sit over with me and watch the show." She patted the seat next to her.

It never ceased to amaze him, he thought, raiding the cookie jar before joining her, how well Jan seemed to have adapted. It was as if their previous lives had been only a pleasant, wishful dream they shared – much the way they fantasized about winning the Lotto and how, if they did, they would go about spending their winnings – when their reality was these three stark rooms out in the desert.

As Russ struggled to adapt to his new, barren life devoid of all of the things he had looked at and touched and loved, he was often moved to

bitter, secret tears, afraid to let Jan see how desperate and inconsolable he had become, and how responsible he felt for the way their lives had evolved. Russ often thought about the life they had left behind in their deal to survive. When he did it was about the heavily mortgaged little copy shop he had been so proud of. He purchased it twelve years ago and, though it sometimes lost money, it had anchored their lives. It was wedged between a Chinese restaurant and a hair salon. For years he and Jan went to work every morning and, at seven after a long day, they would climb back into the battered Ford and drive home to their older three-bedroom stucco house with the red tile roof on Iris Lane.

It was back in 2020, and Congress had taken a sledgehammer to entitlements and abolished them entirely. Russ and Jan were stunned, shocked beyond belief. And then incredulous when Congress passed, and the first right-wing President signed into law, a Kafkaesque stopgap measure to deal, once and for all with what was left of the baby-boomers: lifelong shelter and sustenance benefits (estimated by the Congressional Budget Office to be required for no more than twenty years) in Entitlements Relocation Camps (ERC). Beneficiaries would have to sign over their vehicles, homes, businesses, and most personal property for disposition by the new Assets Discharge Division of Social Security. It was a completely voluntary program, of course, and Congress, the President, both political parties, even the media, united in the belief it was a fair and equitable and cost saving compromise to deal with these older citizens harnessed to a system the country no longer wanted to afford, nor disposed to tolerate. Entitlements were dead. Russ remembered hearing about it for the first time, and watching the news that evening presented by one of the local affiliate's stable of rotating smarmy presenters. Crushed and eradicated forever, never again to be reconstituted: a sensible approach, agreed the talking heads on the Sunday talk shows. Seniors unwilling to sign up for the program would be left to their own devises, as no further entitlements of any sort would be paid, said the Administration. Wall Street cheered.

Russ had already made a few acquaintances, unlike Jan, who could be quiet and thoughtful and slow to make up her mind. He was personable and outgoing and would speak to anyone who didn't speak to him first. The preferred topic of conversation, when he joined the others in the recreation barracks for mid-morning coffee, was how they had all chosen to be uprooted, and reluctantly left behind what was left of their lives. Everyone nodded and grumbled and cursed they had made a deal with the devil, though most agreed they were better off where they were. "We dodged a bullet," said one of them, though Russ wasn't quite sure what

he'd meant by it. Sounding gloomy and ill-humored, someone named Chuck spoke up and described the "bullet" they had all avoided: the real likelihood and indignity of homelessness – driven to the street by skyrocketing health costs even Medicare could not, or would not, arrest – and the threat of economic destruction at the hands of predatory capitalists and banks eager to banish them and their needs from society once and for all. Walking back to his barracks home, Russ, despite his deep and painful regrets, thought there was a bittersweet comfort to their mutual situation.

E.R.C. No. 922 – Southern California/Western Nevada Region, had a growing population of about 17,000 the last time Russ had checked the mounting count displayed in the recreation barracks. To keep busy, the last Sunday of every month Russ would make it a point to stroll outside, up the long narrow aisles between the barracks. Leaning against a corner of one of them, drowned in the hot shadows, he stood where he could spot the latest arrivals being driven through the gate. They arrived, as he and Jan had, in a column of old light green buses commandeered from the Border Patrol, the agency's name and shield sun-bleached but still visible. He watched the convoy proceed into the camp and pick up speed over the gravel-covered roadways. Russ tracked their progress by the moving clouds of dust kicked up by the tires as the buses wound their way over to the dirt parking lot behind the camp. At some point Russ would lose sight of them, but he remembered vividly what would happen next as he and Jan struggled to comprehend the enormity of their situation and their first chaotic impressions of the alien encampment.

Their bus had turned ever so slowly in a wide arc to face the rear of the neatly aligned and unending rows of camp barracks spread out in both directions and come to a stop in front of one of them. The air brakes hissed, the driver opened the door and then he had turned in his seat. "Okay, folks," he said, reluctantly. "This is it. Everybody out, now."

Russ remembered standing in the narrow aisle and spotting through the dusty windshield the wide-open double doors of the reception barracks. The camp staff, in sunglasses, brown campaign hats, and matching short sleeve shirts and long shorts, was aligned outside. Jan later said she thought they had looked like counselors at a summer camp, except that they referred to themselves as "coordinators." Russ bristled immediately at the sight of them and sneered, they looked like Boy Scouts. They held clipboards and sheaves of notices and moved to stand by the door of every bus where they welcomed the startled and dazed debarking passengers to E.R.C. No. 922. They pronounced it "Irk nine two-two." Huddled

alongside the warm sheet metal body of the bus, beneath the hot, dry sun, the blustering wind whipping their faces, he and Jan were each handed a stapled three-page set of relocation instructions and a small map of the facility, then listened to a no-nonsense welcome delivered in a rapid-fire staccato. Finally, their coordinator had directed them inside the barracks for processing and assignment to housing where they would live for the rest of their lives.

As far as Russ was concerned the rules were probably the major obstacle to everyday living, and there were rules for everything, like the meals served cafeteria-style with no second helpings allowed. Meal times were regimented and, if he and Jan happened to miss one of their appointed seating times – they called them "seatings," as if they were all on a cruise ship – they would go without. But what Russ missed most of all was no longer being able to order out for a pizza while they watched TV or worked on a puzzle.

Russ took up sky watching. There was plenty of it to contemplate and it often helped sooth the hard edges of his disposition, his spirits since arriving at the camp as raw as the sandpaper sheets he once kept in his toolbox. He thought longingly about how pleasant it would be to just sit under a tree on the grass, but there was neither, and so he sat on the plywood front steps. Russ would gaze at the azure sky while listening to Jan inside puttering around. Sometimes, he caught her humming happily as if all of their stars were aligned, the shop was doing well, and they were back living on Iris Lane. He still couldn't understand how easily she seemed to have accepted the reality of their awful situation.

Russ found himself contemplating for long moments the stacks of immobile pencil thin clouds that invariably appeared day after day. Something about their alignment and ragged edges reminded him of the rows of notches on the antique washboard that he had hung in his garage and had to give away. The clouds never seemed to move and Russ wondered how that could be because the wind below was interminably tousling his hair. He grew interested, too, in the schedule of the toy-like jetliners regularly passing back and forth high above the camp. Russ began to jot down the time of their passing and found this required an iron discipline, and the ability to sit still for hours, as the route was well travelled. He was always surprised by how accurately the rays of the sun struck their aluminum skins. There would be a blinding flash for a second, as if a missile had hit the plane, but the airliner would always reappear and fly on unharmed.

Less interesting to Russ, but certainly noteworthy, was the drone

overhead. From his position on the steps, facing the distant highway and the ridgelines beyond, the black torpedo shape with the awkward fin-like wings rarely moved. But when it did, it would disappear in a rush back toward Las Vegas where, Russ assumed, such things were refueled and maintained. Mostly it just hung there high above the camp, like a vulture whose circling had somehow become arrested. And he suspected it was there at night, too. To make sure he would go out and try to spot it when he couldn't sleep, which was often. He never did catch sight of it, but he told a sleepy Jan as he crawled back into bed, he knew it was up there anyway, somewhere, watching over them.

Jan took up gardening and helped other volunteers expand the growing patch at the far end of the camp. Armed with shovels, out on the desert floor early in the mornings, before it became too hot to work, they searched for prickly poppies, Apache plumes, chocolate drops, and strawberry hedgehog cacti. Back at the camp, while sorting through her finds under a canvass-covered lean-to while kneeling in the dirt, Jan recognized the woman helping her.

"You look familiar," said Jan quietly as she worked.

"I was thinking the same thing," she said. The woman was wiping the earth and the sand from her hands on her makeshift apron.

"My husband and I used to run a copy shop in Capistrano," said Jan, surprising herself. She pulled off the hot, worn gloves that hadn't protected her from the cactus needles and glanced at the bright pinpricks of blood on her hands. "It was in the Shoreline Center, right off of the freeway."

"I recognize you now," said the woman. She looked amazed. She stood to confirm her suspicion and looked down at Jan. "I used to go in there from time to time. We lived up the street on Acacia Lane. I remember you, now."

Jan stood and the two smiled and introduced themselves. She was apprehensive about meeting someone from her former life and uncertain whether there was any point to encouraging a friendship. Instead, Jan thought as she went back to work, she would prefer to befriend someone she had never known, someone who knew nothing about her, or her circumstances. And perhaps then a friendship might bloom and, if it did, she might share her doubts and concerns and attempt to unburden herself.

There were numerous barracks in the camp, and support and administration buildings, and to travel anywhere across it meant enduring a hike under the blazing sun. Besides the recreation centers – one for every fifty barracks – there were clinics, chapels, supply stores, beauty and barber-

shops, convenience stores and one central post office where postage was free. There were always crowds roaming the streets and Russ noted how people would walk as though still driving, keeping right except to pass. It took Russ exactly 32 minutes to walk to mail a letter, a choice he had made because access to the Internet consisted of five old computers. Lines were always long, tempers flared and there was no place to sit and wait. Instead, Russ slipped comfortably back to habits honed before the advent of the World Wide Web.

Just like everyone else, Russ and Jan had little money to spend. There were jobs to be had – though too few to go around – and they could have applied for any one of them, but the pay was in script, non-negotiable except in the camp. The hourly wage was the equivalent of twenty cents an hour with flexible schedules but the list of names waiting to be called was long. Many in the camp wanted a job, to remain productive and useful, but the coordinators appeared unconcerned at the thousands who could only idle away their days.

The highpoint of their lives had always been their children, Matt and Emily. Now settled at the government's expense, it became Russ and Jan's overriding obsession to have them visit. After several months, Jan had finally secured Emily's firm promise of a visit. She lived in Denver with her boyfriend where she was based as a flight attendant. Jan and Emily discussed the arrangements over one of the public phones in the recreation center. Owning a cell phone was a distant memory; they no longer had the disposable cash to pay the bills. The plan was for Emily to catch a flight to Las Vegas, rent a car, and drive out to see them for the weekend. She and her mother would sleep in the double bed and Russ would sleep on the couch. Finally, after much anticipation, one cold Friday evening in November, the coordinator at the main gate buzzed them over the intercom to advise he was directing a visitor to their barracks home.

Russ went outside at once to stand on the stoop to watch for Emily's car. He was pleased she had made it but anxious, too, about revealing how they lived.

Inside, Jan puttered around nervously rearranging things she had already arranged while trying to remain calm and optimistic. Emily could be critical and opinionated. She took after her father.

Russ watched in the distance the twin beams of light appear, then disappear, as Emily's car moved down the numbered gravel strips they called streets, driving slowly because there were no street lights except at intersections, past the long, unending rows of barracks whose open windows and doorways were lit from inside by lamplight. Traffic was rare at night,

though not so during the day when the coordinators, in their white, tinted SUVs, cell phones invariably held up to their ears, drove around attending to camp business. He sighed happily as Emily's car drew close. He went out to the curb to direct her. "Jan, she's here," he called to his wife. Russ moved out into the middle of the street and raised his arm his palm facing out.

Spotting him, Emily slowed, pulled to the curb, and turned off the car.

Russ could hear the clicking sounds of the heated engine and saw the dome light come on and Emily step out. "How are you, honey?" he called out. Russ moved toward her in three easy steps and hugged her tightly and at length and inadvertently pushed her hard against the side of the car.

"Hi, Daddy," she said, with little inflexion. "Where in the world is this place? It's like an army base, or something." Emily pulled away, patted her father on his chest, and turned to slam the car door close.

"Well, it's our new home, honey," he said surprised. "It's just in the desert, that's all. Gosh, it's nice to see you after all this time."

"It's horrible, Daddy."

He saw her straining to see him in the almost impenetrable darkness and watched as she shoved her keys and her cell phone in her purse and wondered what to say.

"Oh my God, this is *so* awful." Emily glanced around without a word, overwhelmed by the darkness and the wind, the foreboding desert terrain and the stark reality of her parent's cookie-cutter barracks home. "This is worse than what you told me," she said starring at him. Emily shook her head. "There's nothing out here, Daddy. Not even a town for miles."

"Well, it's home now, honey," he said sadly. "We're trying to make the best of it." Russ smiled to encourage her to join him in being optimistic. Despite his real feelings about the place, the heavy freight of her words weighed on him. "Guess you're right, though, nowhere sort of describes it." He nodded and tried to smile.

"I have stuff in the trunk," she said finally, dismissing him and sounding tired. "Can you get it, please?"

"Sure, honey. Oh, Emily?" He turned toward her as he walked around the car. "Don't forget about your mother." He nodded in her direction. "Better go and say hi before she gets upset. And be nice, please."

"I know." Emily looked over toward the barracks, the cold air blowing her long, frosted brown hair. Her sunglasses were propped up on her head. She was in a camisole and jeans and sandals and looked anxious and cold.

Russ noticed his neighbors Joe and Carol who lived behind their common wall. They had silently crept out to sit on their stoop and watch the reunion. He guessed they had heard the car. Annoyed, he wished they would go back inside and leave them alone.

Jan was stepping gingerly over the gravel street moving toward her daughter. "Emily, honey, you finally made it." Her arms were outstretched. "You had us worried."

"Hi, Mom. It took me forever to drive out here, I'm hungry, and my flight was late. If you'd had a cellphone…"

Russ, disheartened, didn't think his daughter sounded particularly pleased, or even happy, to see either one of them. He watched Emily and Jan embrace quickly and mechanically in the dark and then turn toward their barracks home, the shaft of light from the open door showing the way. Russ stood for a moment, a flicker of despair overwhelming him, before pulling his daughter's suitcase from the trunk, slamming the lid and following them inside.

Interview

J.R. Rogers

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

Entitlement Relocation Camp as a title always appealed to me from the moment I imagined it and I did consider briefly titling the piece just that. I really spent little time considering anything else. I later abbreviated it to be able to add the designation - No.922 – to more properly focus on the fact this was one of many such camps. Deciding on titles is a weakness of mine and not one I particularly enjoy wrestling with.

When did you write "E.R.C. No.922"?

Began writing in August of 2013 and first submitted to a journal for possible publication in late November – so three or three and a half months.

What inspired "E.R.C. No.922"?
Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

My earliest recollection of what probably inspired the story were the several trips we made to Las Vegas in the spring and summer of last year. Because my wife usually drives, I remember looking out for long moments at the sun-blasted desert as we rushed by it and wondering what useful purpose the land could ever be put to, while at the same time imagining how horrible it would be if our car broke down. I remember our pulling over to the isolated rest stop, as we always would, and standing to stretch our legs and feeling the heat and the wind and looking up at the sky, all sensory perceptions that made their way into the story. Never saw a drone, however. All of these images – coupled with the news about entitlements – percolated down into my sub-conscious until I found a way to draw them all together.

What was the hardest part of writing "E.R.C. No.922"?

Well, writing fiction is always hard, especially short stories. In this case it certainly was imagining what such a camp would look like, how would it be structured and then what would life be like there? And when I was through writing being concerned the onus of the story might weigh too heavily on the theme of social change and worrying whether younger readers would be interested enough to take the time to read it.

Which part of "E.R.C. No.922" was conceived of first (e.g. premise, theme, ending, beginning, character, etc.)?

The theme, no doubt.

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

Yes, first of all, I had Russ in the opening scene sitting on the steps and looking forward to Emily's visit and musing about how she would react to their situation. I scrapped the opening scene because I didn't want to propose to a reader picking up the story that this was about Emily's first visit to her parents in their new home and thereby subordinate the story I did want to tell which, of course, was about Russ and Jan's upheaval. There was also a rather lengthy scene in the cafeteria where Russ grumbles about the food and the portions served only to be reminded by Jan he ought to be thankful he has any food at all. It was too detailed and essentially served no purpose. There were other smaller scene changes, too: I had Jan joining a woman's card group rather than gardening and Russ getting into an argument with another man while waiting in line to use the internet. These, and other jumble of ideas, came to mind as I began writing and most were discarded.

Do you primarily write fiction?

Yes, though I recently published (forthcoming) my first non-fiction piece in *Workers Write* about my short experience working nights in a call center many years ago.

How did you come up with the idea of Entitlements Relocation Camps?

Honestly, I have no idea how the idea of the story came to me. However, the subject of slashing entitlements has been in and out of the news for many months. From there, I suppose, came the question: Well, if Social Security were abolished, what then? How are people supposed to sur-

vive in a capitalist economy that promotes spending ahead of savings and Wall Street calls all of the shots? And if S/S were abolished how would a responsible government handle the situation? I didn't purposely set out to write a Stephen King-type of contemporary horror piece (as mentioned by one of my readers).

Do any of these characters remind you of people in your own life?

Well, I would imagine Russ is certainly emblematic of many Americans of a certain age that I know and I don't doubt his feelings about the whole situation would surely be those of many others. Emily and Jan are entirely fictional, though like everything in fiction writing, both are probably amalgams of people I have met in the past.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Yes, I have published four eBook novels. My website is:

www.authorjrrogers.com

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

Saw your call for submissions; I believe it was in NewPages. Also, I was intrigued by the fiction selections I read in issue one.

The Art of Forgery

Mike Wood

He said we looked alike and this took me aback both because we didn't and because he was, Borges, famous. Rumors of his wanderings in town – rumors of the wanderings of this blind man through the streets – and of his arrival a few days earlier, reaching me, had not impressed me – indeed I had given them no credence. And this indubitable evidence, his striking yet casual presence sitting here in Texas on a brown park bench beside me was disturbing in the way that is news – and this you may find counterintuitive – that we are at once both constantly expecting and just as firmly ignoring the realistic potentiality of, misanticipating magnificently its true consequences when it comes; such as the death of a sick loved one.

I was, of course, not melancholy as one is in such a case; though, if depressed by the sight of Borges – also energized – it was, because, here was the actual *thing* that had produced his so outstanding, outlandish oeuvre. Fingers extremely large, wrinkled and regular wrapped right this second around the smooth hooked curve of a cane but a few feet from me had held the pens – those simply pens – and were directed by the eyes – this then, when he still had sight (now, if not entirely blind he must surely be nearly there) tied, via nerves just like my own, to the very same brain so near to my own and nearer still to his own sagging face facing mine.

In pose then, at least, we were a mirror; also, in that the same tools had been issued us both for our use; and I had no excuse, I saw this in his profound normality – his choppy, old man's breath – for not matching his every accomplishment.

I responded to Borges confessing confusion at the comparison, suggesting that perhaps he spoke in riddles; then stressed I was honored nonetheless; then suggested that perhaps what he meant was that we both were humans, animals, men, and had, as long as we had brains, the same potentialities; and further, I suggested – this thought first occurring in the very second he had spoken (I did not disclose this time frame however:

how immediate had been my response; how really I had assumed it: the feeling lighting-like as it bolted across my brain, leaving fire dancing) what he had seen, I suggested, was that I, too, like him, was a writer.

Borges stared off into the middle distance and we were silent…and I felt silly. Still, his look was not unkind, and, my boldness not utterly spent, I added meekly – also, because part of me believed I was just being humble, vainly – that perhaps what he had really meant, more precisely, was that while I was certainly not a writer *like he was a writer*, and perhaps I *couldn't* create a literature of genius (as had he) (though, his normalcy was screaming at me that this *must* be within my grasp!) at the very least I should be able to get, like so many a feckless nimrod before me, a simple story published.

Again, Borges and I were silent. Then, at last, "You are a writer," Borges spoke.

At first I wasn't sure if this was a question; then he added, looking me square in the eyes, "*We* are writers."

Then, really fantastically scratching at a place in my soul unreachable to me he asked – this, after we had established that I was a writer of fiction; very occasionally poems; *very* occasionally political criticism – that I elaborate on my troubles seeking a receptive, generous audience.

I had just opened my mouth to do so when he jumped in, slowly, testily: "When I was your age I struggled *incredibly* to find readers who would hear me out; who could read me and not lump me in with their weak assumptions, standards, thinking; thinking I had failed for not accomplishing what they thought good writing ought to be and was for. It was ungratifying – I can tell you that for sure. And what my ego screamed at me in my frustration and my greed was this, 'If only I were famous!' And this came from my ego but still, I know – and you know – it was true. For if what I had written were being read by those who had thought it had come from the pen of somebody long established they would never have considered even approaching the question of its merit – never! It would never have even occurred to them that they were in a position to criticize; explaining lamely my shortcomings so they saw them. If they did not understand my work it would be from their weaknesses not mine. This burned me…the fire both harmful and helpful. And soon enough I became engrossed in another angle of the concept. Anticipation, you see, *does* truly alter perception; and a rose by any other name *does not smell as sweet*. Treats proffered in this fashion, falsely labeled, such as flowers – or for that matter chocolates, fine wines, paintings, short stories, lovers' touches – anything, really, actually, *sometimes* – produce in the brain interpretations that

are other – on the *cellular level* I am saying – than if this information – misinformation – had not been so expressed. So, it is not *all* monstrous assininity on the part of the judge not blind; further, think how beneficial and beautiful it would be if the substance of the substance of what we are imbibing were not relevant; if the brain were trained to find in *whatever* it was ingesting the most glorious of pleasures then it could know that it was tasting the wrong chocolate – reading the wrong author – yet still taste the right chocolate's sweetness and still read and feel…it would still be able to feel, if you will, if you will allow me this rather immodest example, the magic, so I am contending, of Borges. And this true fact means for the brain that can accomplish this heroic undertaking – for the world that can produce such brains – that it – this world – would no longer need Borges – for all could be Borges."

Borges gave me a twinkling look and from here things moved really very quickly indeed. He claimed he wanted a world where everyone could be him – anyway, where everyone could write his stories – but really I think, and perhaps this interpretation is based primarily on where my own mind was at the time, his main intention was the perpetration of his hoax; where those duped would never even be privy to its existence – if Borges actually planned on revealing all to all he never revealed how he was to do so to me – and those duped not only his readership but especially those of that community that had once so self-righteously rejected him and that were now as equally – ignorantly and arrogantly; unreadingly – self-righteously embracing him as their own.

Each of us would write a story, so went the simple ruse, and then send that to the other; then, putting our name to the other's work we would see what sort of reaction was garnered – high, mighty praise, perhaps, or, maybe, mute dismissal? – from within the outside world.

My slate was blank to pursue any subject of my choosing but in the end my strategy was to cloak my story in his presence, the personae of Borges. My reasons for doing so I will leave unsaid. I will, however, reveal which one of his stories came in fact from my pen. August 25, 1983 was not the date on which we met but it is quite similar to that one and I had at the time and still do my reasons for obscuring the record in this matter. I will say that I thought it a fitting title for his – for our – for *my* – story.

His reply to this brief work – the reply of a blind man who somehow saw I was a writer (though this would be the only work of mine ever actually to see the light of day that is print; and I would, in time, abandon my pursuits in this area) sent about six months later, was, in its entirety, the story below. (I had accompanied mine with an elaborate letter.) It was the

final communication we had, and, needless to say, it never appeared with any of the numerous establishments to which I gave that chance; that is, of course, until now, now that I have identified it for what it is: not just any story by some writer you have never heard of but the last unpublished work of the great master Borges.

Though sometimes I wonder if it really is his last unpublished work; if I was the only human he ever sat down next to and convinced to make a switch. I wonder, further, if Borges even wrote this story you'll soon read; or if he wrote – perhaps after a point or perhaps not even that – *anything at all*. Perhaps Borges became or always was only an idea, a name; who wandered this planet trading the work of one random writer – or, better yet, a faux writer, one masquerading – with that of another: acknowledging a false paternity for one particular work only when he felt it deserved a readership; perhaps because he thought that the Borges he had created might have created it or perhaps because he was especially repulsed by it and relished the sight of its being so swallowed contentedly by the world. Whatever the reality – the story – the story I received in the mail from him was this.

The Art of Forgery

My grandfather, Vincent Van Gogh, begot his only child, my father, with a prostitute in Arles. Red-haired like his father, my father married a dark-haired woman whose tough dark skin and sharp chin I share. Except in my brow and my clear eyes below, I am sometimes told, I look little like Van Gogh.

Certainly, for the most part, people do not believe my claim. As if considering a painting they squint, looking me up and down, then say nothing. Sometimes, amusingly and confusingly, people not believing what I am saying but seeing my sincerity will consider that I am crazy; then, this supposed insanity will cause them to wonder if it is, in fact, *his* madness that they see stirring so firmly – yet softy, I think they think – within my look; but then, if that is the case, and I am crazy like he was, then I must not be insane – for I speak the truth – and, if not insane, then again my words become untrue…and so the cycle, like his stars, swirls – and I smile.

Van Gogh did not know of my father's birth nor even his conception, on this point my grandmother was firm. And so, it is not to alter our perception of his work – or for that matter, his life, as he saw it – that I have shared my tale. Neither do I disseminate this intelligence to gain money – I make no claims on his estate. My reasons for sharing what I know, this

truth I embody literally, are personal to me, like the connection I feel with the artist and I do not claim to understand them completely or perhaps even partially myself.

I do know that after decades of telling my story I have become well-worn to – to say the least – all of the skepticism and denial; to being thought a lunatic, charlatan, fraud; to even the occasional threat: these reactions never especially coming from my neighbors, who are by now quite accustomed to my quirky claim, but from those occasional men and women for whom business or pleasure – or, more often than you would believe, the seeking of anonymity; for aid in fleeing from the law – has caused a passage through our streets.

These transients – you could hardly call them tourists to our bare and dusty town – will almost inevitably make their way – as that night the stranger did – into the darkness of my friend Silvina's pub.

People said many things about the stranger: that he was a notorious knife-fighter, feared throughout all Argentina; others claimed a thief; still others were certain that this most forlorn-looking man – and all who saw him agreed that he was that – was a disgraced fisherman; or, many felt, pilot. The most elaborate supplementary gossip concerned those charges of larceny with the basic premise being that he traveled from village to village with the booty of the one he had just looted – which he then sold quickly before stealing his haul from the town he had just sold to, sometimes stealing back booty he had just hours before sold, sometimes stealing the very same swag for the fourth or fifth time. How this was said to be known by those who said they were sure of it was never clarified; people heard stories, they said, and that was as far as it went.

In the silence of the stares of the six or seven people in there with us, he sat down beside me with eyes the darkest and densest I had ever seen in my life: tough nibble tailor fingers they seemed to me to be, expert, capable of understanding reams at a glance – one single, simple glance.

He glanced at me and when he spoke it was to say words that I had never heard uttered before – uttered, that is, before I had first revealed my famous forebear; but words I had until then, so I thought until he spoke them, expected my whole life to hear.

"You remind me of Van Gogh," the stranger told me.

The effect was jarring. And, though certainly partially elated I wondered too immediately if this man had already heard tell of my story; and so, paranoid – excited as well – I glared at the stranger and felt as if looking at a pane of glass, seeing seemingly both clear straight through him – the feeling airy – as well as his face as my reflection; not a copy of myself

but as in a mirror his left side standing in for my right; his right in turn my left; seeing perhaps for the first time how others have always seen me.

"It's the shape of your head," he said, holding up his hand and covering the bottom of my – and for me, his – face. From the small wooden table we were both resting elbows on I lifted my drink and drank and warm brown ale enflamed my throat and chest. The stranger, after he had sniffed and absent-mindedly scratched at his throat asked me what I thought of Van Gogh…but, before I could answer, he was already speaking: "I was a boy in France," he started, "when my obsession with Van Gogh first began.

"An uncle who I had never been particularly fond of," he continued, "gave me a copy of the artist's letters – which mesmerized me, stirred me deeply, even at so young an age. And throughout my adolescence and early manhood I did nothing but paint and draw; read about the lives of the greatest artists ever. More than anything else I was enthralled by reading their journals and letters – those primary windows into their unguarded and often anguished souls; and though I read the intimate thoughts of many, it was always Van Gogh's words that were my favorite, his letters those alone I could turn to forever for nourishment; and when in my maturity my own artwork proved to be so commercially disastrously unsuccessful – though I tried! – it was again to Van Gogh that I turned; for knowing so full well the like-failures of my idol, as well as our similar, so I reckoned, originality, our forward-thinking art so ahead of its time, this similar evaluation from without had, alluringly, advantages. Those parts of me filled with snobbishness and confidence – also, of course, insecurity – used his narrative as a self-serving fable, a projection of my own vigorous in-vain struggles.

"However, two years passed in which I continued to toil in the mire of inattention and when I turned again to the artist – thoroughly uncharmed by now in my so long-standing role as the failure – it was with a distinctly different motive in mind; for this time I focused not on his words and story but quite directly on his paintings, drawings, art. In short, you see, in time – a few madcap months of frenzied labor and bravado starting off the whole crazy operation – I became the world's greatest forger of the works of Vincent Van Gogh. Friend, if I were even to begin to tell you of all of his purported works that actually came from *my* brush you would be astounded – you would not believe it. And, quite literally, this is why I feel so free in speaking of my nefarious, illegal life: because, though I do, and all over the word, *no one ever believes!*

"At first, unburdening myself, it all came out in pips and squeaks – I

was so afraid then to confess it! – but when I learned how cynical and disbelieving – or, is it naïve and trusting I should call them? – that people are, I learned that to hide the truth from them for fear of…well, I shall say only now that I have ceased to worry about the truth becoming known! If only! If only everything *did* come out…at least then I'd be acknowledged!

"But no…really – really I do not seek notice of that kind; and it is not my ironic fate for punishment to have achieved some of the most stupendous accolades that any artist can – to be hung in some of the most marvelous collections in the world (and yes, some of my Van Goghs are) and to have had my work lauded as that of a true genius, a maker of masterworks – though still knowing of course precisely why I've earned this so dubious commendation – only to live in obscurity, to be forever unheralded and undervalued…or, to speak with more precision, to live in fact *un*valued – to have had my mettle never tested, a judgment never made.

"Instead, my friend, *that* is not the rusty knife that twists forever in my side and tortures but will not kill; leaves me squirming through all my soul as I travel this word wandering about in financial overabundance but artistic oblivion. No, my friend, my much worse hell is this: when the time came all those years ago for me to return to the production of my own artwork what happened was…what I found was, you see, was that all I could produce were idiotic pastiches of Van Gogh!

"For a time I thought that I could best this trend – but now I know for sure it is a curse. Even to this day, my paintings, even if they are not intentionally meant to be taken for his work – and sometimes still, I do dabble in this trade – seem to me to be nothing but – oh, how vain and useless; how frivolous and faux serious! – *commentaries on it!* All that I do – *all that I can do* – is make paintings that exploit the artist's fame – his recognition – his so original spark; I use that spark – the origin of so much – luscious – pleasure in this world – to make within my canvases tiny and wretched *inside jokes!* (And jokes that are, mind you, based primarily on grand oversimplification; a non-specificity of detail; an assumed ignorance on the part of my imagined – how could it be otherwise! – audience.) And, though these images do express, so I hope, suppose – for the nothing it is worth – what I love most and distrust in Van Gogh's work they say *nothing* of what I feel about anything else. (As if I do feel anything else!)

"Or, if my work does not concern itself with his work then it examines – examine! – ha! – what do *I* examine! – some other artist who I have chosen to challenge myself with the problem of cloaking myself in their

personae – knowing all too well that to master this problem will take time, require intelligence and effort – and so I will gladly choose this so lesser labor to the other more difficult (so much harder!) in which I know I can't succeed: to make art in *my own voice*.

"And as, my friend, I have no voice – for surely you must see this by now – then so I have no vision – *all* I see is Van Gogh. Last night, in a field, trying once more in futility to paint I gazed at stars and saw only his stars; looking down on a lake I saw only his ripples. My goodness, I swear it, is there nowhere on this incredible planet – this world so *unlike* the world of Van Gogh! – where I can go and escape these mocking visions? Can I not even wander into a pub in the middle of the Argentine countryside but I must see staring back at me a living Van Gogh self-portrait!"

And with this the stranger abruptly stood and walked straight out the pub – and from our town forever. His last words had been spoken in a frenzy that had exploded like a fire; and still there was a passion in the silence of his absence from the pub while I stared off at the door through which he'd gone, considering rising and racing off to find him, grab him, tell him that for him not all was lost. His attribution, of course, was no tell-tale sign of an obsession gone awry, insane, but instead the seal of a true connoisseur; of a mind of vast and self-unknowing insight; of a mind that must revaluate all of its self-serving and sabotaging assumptions and confront reality!

But though I thought this plan I did not act; instead I sat among my long-familiar friends continuing only thinking of the deed, seeing in my mind myself while shaking his shoulders and telling him the whole of my tale. Hunched in my seat in the cloak-like darkness of the pub, I imagined our confrontation and, reaching the moment when he must react to my revelation then what face did I see there on his face but – of course – my own; and, what is more, the face I was confronting was not my own reacting simply to the news that once again my story had been ignored but that now it's been accepted. Oh, could it have been any more terrifying! For, can you imagine what, on the odd occasion that this so unused look has been forced to cross my face, my face – in the face of some now firm believer with bright sincere smile proclaiming *Yes* to my father's mother's story – in the face, in short, of *belief* – of this so firm a *contradiction* of all that I have come to believe about the world, myself – what, in the face of this, my face looks like?

It is a dread mirror smashed as I wonder, if only for single shivering second, who I am.

We're #1!

Eric Howerton

Before that day, Lauren thought Greg was a good husband, an upstanding citizen, and the perfect Little League father. He hadn't missed a game all season, and he was sure to arrive with a cooler of sports drinks to combat energy lulls. He worked his jaw steadily through all the chants and singsongs, and he booed and hissed when needed, admonishing the anonymous umpires and their flagrant calls. Greg could be a little overzealous at times, but children appreciated grand gestures–sometimes they were the only kind of gesture a child could understand—so Lauren didn't think twice when Greg returned from the concession stand wearing an oversized foam hand with the words "We're #1" printed in white ink on both purple sides. "It was a bargain," he said, thrusting the mitt in the air. "Only five dollars."

Lauren bit into the hot dog Greg handed her.

"We're #1," he said comically.

"Right," Lauren replied, laughing.

The crack of a bat grabbed Greg's attention, and he leapt to his feet and cheered their first single of the day as though it were a home run. "Woohoo!" he screamed. "We're number one!" He proceeded to do a little jig, shaking his hips while rhythmically jabbing the finger in the sky. The dance made Greg look somewhat clownish, but Lauren didn't say anything because she was having a good time, and so was he, and for now that's all that mattered.

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Had he been content to waggle the finger with a little more restraint Lauren wouldn't have minded so much. But Greg's faith in the power of the hand was as loud and steadfast as it was annoying, and after a few more innings his antics started earning him looks from the opposing team. Not that he noticed. He jabbed his hand toward the heavens each time one of The Lights swung the bat and he shot to his feet whenever his sons Timmy or Graham—ages nine and ten, respectively—shagged a

fly ball. No throw, bunt, or pitch went unlauded. He looked for any reason to spear the hand in the air and claim unassailable victory for their son's team even though The Lights were down by eleven runs.

Eleven was probably the number of times Lauren would have to wash their uniforms to get the stains out.

Eventually, she told Greg to tone it down. He replied something about supporting the team no matter what. "No matter what," he repeated severely. When the National Lights' pitcher intentionally hit an opposing batter with a fastball, the East Side bleacher erupted in a communal boo. In response to their outrage, Greg's voice rang like an out-of-tune trombone.

"Take that," he jeered, pointing the purple hand at the child limping to first base. "Because we're number one!"

No longer wanting the stigma of being "the wife of that idiot with the foam hand," Lauren slowly inched away from her husband. And then—after Greg roared a few more times—she scooted down the bleachers even more.

She struck up a conversation with Bradley, father of Rosie, who was the only girl on the team. Rosie always played right field and Lauren couldn't help watch and think that even though the girl hadn't touched the ball all season, even though she was standing alone in a sea of green, she was still an important part of the team.

Bradley asked if Lauren was still going to teach history when the under-construction high school opened next fall. Lauren said she didn't know; after erecting the new school, which cost the city tens of millions of dollars, the district might not have anything left for part-time history teachers. "They're already cutting down on the arts," she said. "So who knows what's next?"

"It'd be a shame if they had to sacrifice anybody, part-time or not," Bradley said. Silently, Lauren agreed. No one she'd talked to thought tearing down the old school was a good idea; regardless, the district was moving ahead. The old high school would be demolished and a new one would be built in its place. When they tore down the vetoed structure there would be a fantastic explosion. It was almost as though it was the way things had to be.

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After the shame of defeat Timmy and Graham's muddied faces were streaked with tears. They'd played hard, Lauren reminded them, but it didn't matter. Someone had to lose. That's the dirty trick of playing to win.

"Next season," Lauren said optimistically. "Next season."

It wasn't until after Greg had driven through several red lights that Lauren noticed the large, spongy article still covering his left hand. Before she could say anything Greg screamed, "We're number one!" He tooted the horn at a rusted out import stalled at the approaching intersection.

In the back seat, the boys looked up from their pouts.

"Just go around him," Lauren said when Greg blasted the horn again.

He jerked the wheel with his free hand and passed the enfeebled vehicle. The purple finger weaved and bobbed. When Lauren leaned to adjust the AC, the finger brushed against her upper lip. Violently, she pushed it away.

"We're number one!" Greg yelled again, running a stoplight.

"Honey—"

"We're number one!" he shouted as they passed a Masonic lodge.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked quietly, hoping the boys wouldn't hear. Greg didn't respond. "Also, I don't think it's safe to be driving with that thing on."

When they reached the gate to their community, Greg rolled down the window and punched the security code into the entry box with the hand. "We're...number…one," he said. The iron gate yawned. *My sentiments exactly,* Lauren thought, admiring the luck of the opening gate, its carelessness, its obligation to nothing and no one, not even the heavy burden of itself.

*

Greg plopped himself on the sofa and flipped on the TV. He was still wearing the hand.

Lauren wanted to get Greg alone, so she shooed the boys away. "Hit the showers," she coached.

"Anything good on TV?" she asked when the boys had gone, not expecting much of a response from her husband but acting as though she did. She took a seat next to Greg as he aimed the remote control at the 54-inch flat screen and fired off shots, making the *Pew! Pew!* noises of cowboys and Indians. After a few more clicks he settled on ESPN.

"More games, huh? Gotta' get your fix, I guess."

Sports all looked the same to Lauren: hordes of little beasts darting back and forth, huddling and hurtling, rushing through diamonds and circles and squares. And for what? A trophy? Some meaningless glory? Sports were all Greek to her: the players choreographed to carry out schemes that defied comprehension, or at least defied her desire to comprehend them. She wondered if the participants in the game even knew what they were fighting for, or if they were just following orders. She had

tried to understand the sports Greg watched and how the positions differed, but for what it was worth an outfielder was a pitcher was a catcher. A linebacker was a goalie was a shooter.

During the game she tried several times to snatch the foam hand, but Greg was quicker and seemed to know just when she was going to lunge. He had only to flick his wrist in the opposite direction, swooshing the finger smoothly out of reach. After a number of defeats Lauren gave up and went to the kitchen to make the boys a snack. Timmy and Graham returned with wet hair and faint traces of grubbiness that wouldn't go away.

"Sandwiches?" Graham groaned as she was cutting the crusts.

"You can make something else if you like," she said more harshly than she intended, sliding the plates across the breakfast bar.

When Greg belted his incantation again, Timmy looked at his father, then to Lauren. "Is something wrong with dad?" he whispered.

"No," she said, sounding upbeat. "Nothing at all."

The boys looked at each other.

"He's turned into a basketface, hasn't he?" Graham asked, mouth full of sandwich.

"It's basketcase," Lauren said. "And no, he hasn't. He's just playing a game with himself."

"It doesn't sound like a game," Timmy snorted.

"It is though," she said, putting things back in the fridge. "It's just like baseball, but with different rules."

"Will he win?" Graham asked.

"We'll have to wait and see."

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Later that afternoon she called her mother, but instead of talking to a person she got the machine. It annoyed her when her parents didn't answer. They rarely left the house so there was no reason for them not to pick up except that they'd grown disdainful of the world, and sometimes this included the people in it. Whenever Lauren suggested they go on a trip her mother dismissed the idea as though she'd suggested they change religions. "Traveling is too dangerous," she'd say.

"It's not healthy to keep yourselves cooped up all the time."

"Who's cooped?" her mother said. "I just opened a window. And besides, your father saw the world during the war. I can show you the postcards."

"It's not the same when you're a soldier," Lauren had said, though she remembered a strange thing her father once told her—that his days as a

soldier in World War II were some of the best he'd ever had.

Hanging up without leaving a message, Lauren decided now was as good a time as any to replant the bulbs the neighborhood kids had yanked from her garden. Changing clothes, she heard Greg turn off the TV and make his way to the backyard. The familiar rattling of setting up the grill soon followed. Through the thin walls of their suburban home she could hear Greg muttering "We're number one!" to himself, in a low, breathy mantra.

Outside, she feared the neighbors might hear Greg, and when a louder "We're number one!" erupted from the backyard, she grimaced. A moment later Lee, who lived next door, leaned over the hedge and asked if everything was all right. Lauren told Lee to mind his own business.

She wasn't often rude to the neighbors, and she genuinely liked Lee. At a block party a few years back she'd briefly flirted with the idea of having an affair with him, just to see what it would be like. Ultimately, though, she'd decided against it. An affair seemed dilettantish and European. It seemed un-American.

"Listen," he said. "I don't really know what's going on with Greg but if he doesn't *reboot* soon I could give you the number of someone reliable."

"A shrink?" Lauren scoffed.

"I know, I know," he said. "There's still a lot of stigma about psychiatry and what not, but really, why should there be? We're all of us nuts, some people just don't know how to enjoy it."

After finishing in the garden Lauren watched Greg and the boys through the pulled curtains of the living room window. Undeterred by their losses, Timmy and Graham were playing catch in the backyard while Greg stood over the grill, flipping sizzling rounds of beef, a spatula in one hand and that damned, wobbly, foam abomination in the other. Monkey tails of smoke swept toward his eyes, though Greg didn't seem to notice. Instead of flinching or waving the smoke away he wore a look of imperturbable concentration. When he yelled "We're number one!" to no one in particular Lauren jumped and let go of the curtains. She pulled them back to steal another look and saw that Greg's attention had returned to the grill as though nothing had happened. He pressed the burgers with the flat of a spatula. The boys continued tossing the ball.

After setting the table for dinner she took another look through the window, expecting to find things as before. Instead Greg was sitting with the boys in the grass. Given how oddly he'd been behaving, Lauren expected to see looks of panic or fear on her sons' faces, but this wasn't the

case. The boys seemed completely enamored by what their father, who was still wearing the hand, had to say.

She slid open the patio door and pointed her ear, but Greg was speaking too quietly to be heard. She called the boys several times before they looked up from their discourse. When they did she told them to come inside and get ready for dinner.

Timmy and Graham looked to father for approval. He nodded, dismissing them. They rose lethargically and shuffled inside. Greg didn't move except to look to the sky, admiring something, but for the life of her she couldn't figure out what he was looking at. The sky was so clear there couldn't be anything of interest up there. Could there? She didn't know, and as she slid the patio door shut she told herself she didn't care.

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Apparently her "no hats at the dinner table" policy did not apply to other game-day paraphernalia. As Lauren doctored her burger, placing a pickle in the middle of the patty, Greg's cheer arrested her, stopping her fingers as they laid down a tart little mine of vinegar and dill.

"We're number one!"

She couldn't take it anymore. The joke had gone on long enough, and she was going to put an end to it here and now.

"Goddamit, Greg!"

"We're number one!"

"Stop, won't you? Just stop saying that! And take off that damn hand!"

But he didn't stop and he didn't take off. He leapt to his feet and thrust the hand to the sky like a warrior showing gratitude for his good fortune. "We're number one!" he howled.

The boys, who'd first been entertained and then concerned by their father's behavior, suddenly joined in.

"We're number one!" Graham babooned, blasting a torrent of catsup on top of his cheeseburger.

"We're number one!" Timmy shouted, a knife in one hand and a fork in the other.

"Boys!" she warned. Darkened by their involvement in their father's chant, the boys looked grubbier than ever.

Lauren pleaded with them to stop, but her frustration only seemed to encourage them to shout louder. They smiled cruelly at her as the words slipped from their mouths, laughing as though it was all fun and games.

"We're number one!" they cried. "We're number one!"

The foam finger swished about the room like a misguided rocket. In imitation, the boys pointed their fingers to the ceiling, moving their arms

to an imaginary rhythm, pointing up, up, and away.

"We're number one! We're number one!"

Then they were out the door. Lauren followed and watched as they frolicked on the front lawn. Their movements were jerky and violent. Their arms in the air, their legs lifted high, their screwy mouths grinned broad and unflinching.

"Stop it!" she screamed. She first tried to tackle Timmy, and then Graham, but before she could reach them they were in the street, each of their heels touching down on the manhole covers that kept out of view the nastiness of their lives.

Greg and her sons skipped down the asphalt, calling out as loudly as they could.

"Get back inside!" Lauren hissed at them.

Hearing the ruckus, neighbors started appearing at their windows and doors, and they started opening them. More and more people took notice of the chanting, and as they did Lauren became increasingly concerned that her neighbors would think her entire brood had cracked up and that her running about was part of the boasting and bragging when all she really wanted was for the whole thing to end, for everyone to just shut up and go back inside and eat dinner in silence. Was that too much to ask? To just eat and go to sleep and be thankful they were safe?

But when she looked deep into the eyes of her neighbors another fear seized her. The look on the faces of the men and women standing in their doorways—the Robinsons, and the Longs, and the Sanchezes—people she thought of as kind and decent—wore a blank countenance similar to that of her husband's as he'd stood over the grill. Lauren began to worry that any second now her neighbors would edge away from their doorways and join her husband and kids. That they too would play the game.

Interview

Eric Howerton

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

The original title of the piece was "How We Are Scarred," which I suppose was a not-so-subtle way of suggesting that the "We're #1!" mentality the story parodies is a cultural slogan that damages our national psyche. I swapped the title out for something more direct because I think this point becomes clear when you read the story. Plus, "We're #1!" is more compelling and less stuffy.

When did you write "We're #1!"?

I wrote the first draft of "We're #1!" about six years ago when I was pursuing my MFA at the Pennsylvania State University.

What inspired "We're #1!"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The story was largely inspired by my own frustrations with American responses to the events of September 11th, 2001. The second Iraq War, the military occupation of Afghanistan, international bullying, rising xenophobia, racial profiling, secret prisons, etc.—There were so many domestic and international embarrassments in how elected leadership responded to 9/11 that I was moved to write about the arrogant thinking that motivated American foreign policy in the 2000s. Of course, this isn't to say that before 9/11 America hadn't already positioned itself as a nation that was willing to excuse its own questionable behavior while condemning the behavior of others, only that as a young person who became more politically and culturally aware in the post-9/11 era (I was 21 when the Twin Towers fell), I was deeply rattled by the twists the country took thereafter. I don't mean to suggest that government was solely to blame or that the will of the people was being entirely ignored. I also witnessed momentum in the public belief that because of the wounds we suffered as

nation we had the right to retaliate however we saw fit in order to protect our way of living. Very rarely did I see people outside of academia asking, "What if the problem is the way we're living?" Other countries were asking this, but we didn't ask it much of ourselves.

What was the hardest part of writing "We're #1!"?

The ending was the most difficult part for me. Early drafts had Lauren hiding in the bathroom while her family chanted ceremoniously and pranced about the house. After that I wrote a draft where Lauren had the realization that Greg's cracking up meant that he was destined to be Husband Number One while Husband Number Two was out there somewhere waiting for her. Ultimately this ending seemed to undercut the larger political message with a cheap flirtation that made Greg's mantra a punch line, though I did knowingly leave in a few moments that suggested Lauren had an inclination to "upgrade," which is itself a critique. For a few years I had the suspicion that the ending needed to change, I just wasn't sure how to broaden the scope of the final scene in a way that was both eerie and incriminating.

Which part of "We're #1!" was conceived of first (e.g. premise, theme, ending, beginning, character, etc)?

It all started with the baseball game (still my favorite team sport) and the absurd notion of a man who can't stop yelling "We're #1!" even after his sons' team has been sorely beaten.

Despite its humorous nature, "We're #1!" puts forward a fairly potent critique towards the US. Would you like to say anything about this critique?

I view the story as a critique of American Exceptionalism, which can mean a lot of different things. In a positive sense, American Exceptionalism boasts that America is a place of outstanding human rights, religious freedoms, social progress, technological ingenuity, art and expression, etc., and I whole-heartedly believe this to be true. I feel incredibly lucky to be an American citizen and I am irked when I hear intelligent people belligerently threaten to move to a different country if so-and-so gets elected or if such-and-such bill gets passed. Nothing will accelerate the moral decline of America faster than the mass exodus of everyone who conscientiously objects to the mistakes of our government. You don't abandon ship because of a leaky faucet. You fix the leak. And when you consider the fact that people from nations with fewer freedoms than ours are still literally

dying to come here, these types of threats just make the people issuing them look ungrateful and myopic.

The second definition of American Exceptionalism, and the one that I'm satirizing here, is the idea that because of our wealth, might, suasion, what have you, our nation gets to break the rules. Also wrapped up in this assumption is that when we do break the rules it's not a choice, it's a necessity. By all measures, the use of Blackwater forces (a private security firm now operating under the name Academi) during the second Iraq War was tantamount to the use of mercenaries given the fact that many of the employees of Blackwater were not American citizens or citizens of nations that had officially declared war on Saddam Hussein's regime. And even though the use of Blackwater forces directly violated the agreements of the Geneva Convention, there were no consequences to our hiring this firm and thereby breaking international treaties. That sort of exceptionalism—believing that as a nation we are allowed to operate as the exception to the rule—can only be borne by the notion that either we are the moral arbiters of the world, or that we are superior to the moral arbiters of the world. Shocking as it may be, we could all learn a lesson from Richard Nixon here. During the Nixon Interviews with David Frost, Nixon was quoted as saying, "When the President does it, that means it is not illegal." Despite his belief that being president offered him immunity, Nixon was impeached and went down in history as one of the most notorious commanders in chief of all time. In fact, he's better known for saying "I am not a crook" than he is for any of his political accomplishments. There's a warning here about overestimating America's authority and our place in the world. We should be a little less concerned with capital and power and more concerned with what we want our historical legacy to be.

You refer to Greg's chanting as a "game" several times towards the end of the story. Is there any significance in this word choice?

There is. Colonialism, imperialism, economic markets, and wars have all been called 'games' at one time or another. Add to this the fact that 'game' theory is now used to assess the risks of certain financial and military maneuvers and you can see just how similar the ways in which we play games and the ways in which we vie for power really are. The line between what is a 'game' and what isn't is easily blurred because in both situations the strategies for winning closely resemble one another. But the world and its people shouldn't be treated as a game. When games are over, all the pieces go back into the box. When wars are over, people go into boxes. That's the difference.

Do you have any advice for readers who wish to write comedy while also providing a serious theme?

Satire with depth may start off funny, but it rarely ends funny. When writing satire, my strategy is almost always to take the reader by surprise. By that I don't mean that I put a Jack-in-the-box in every story that gives the reader a start. What I mean is that over the course of the story I try to take what was initially humorous, whimsical, or absurd and turn it on its head so that it no longer seems like something that's appropriate to laugh at. The line between what is funny and what is uncomfortable is a fine one, and at a certain point in the story I wanted to cross that line so readers would start to question the meaning behind what Greg was shouting. With this story, I think the line starts getting crossed as soon as we enter a domestic space and Greg still hasn't taken off the hand. From there, the situation only gets more and more troubling.

Do you primarily write fiction?

Over the years I've written journalism, editorials, columns, patent summaries, recipes, academic articles, reviews of books, restaurants, movies and albums, and poetry, but fiction is where I'm the most comfortable.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I write the drafts of a story as fast as I possibly can, and then I spend months or years on revision. I'm not someone who bases a lot of my characters on people I know, so I need time to really invent that character and their voice. The best way I can describe this process is that I lean into the character's personality—I carry it with me—while I'm revising the story in order to see how they would interact with the world. Then I can revise the story and make them feel more believable because I've lived with them, or as them, long enough to know how they'd react. With flash fiction I can usually finish a piece in a day or two, but anything longer than three or four pages has to live with me before it's ready to publish.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

If you like my work I would recommend reading George Saunders, Donald Barthelme, Etgar Keret, Aimee Bender, and Stanely Elkin. If you've never heard of Stanely Elkin, read him. He's genius. Other authors that I'm obsessed with that you wouldn't know from reading this story are William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Herman Melville, William Haw-

thorne, Toni Morrison, Jonathan Lethem, Don Delillo, Vladimir Nabokov, and Haruki Murakami.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My creative work has appeared/is forthcoming in *PANK, Revolver, The Locust, Foliate Oak, theNewerYork, The Legendary, Dying Goose, The Higgs Weldon, Night Train, Grey Sparrow, Duck and Herring Pocket Field Guides, Johnny America,* and *Haggard and Halloo.*

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The design both of the website and the journal itself. I guess I'm vain.

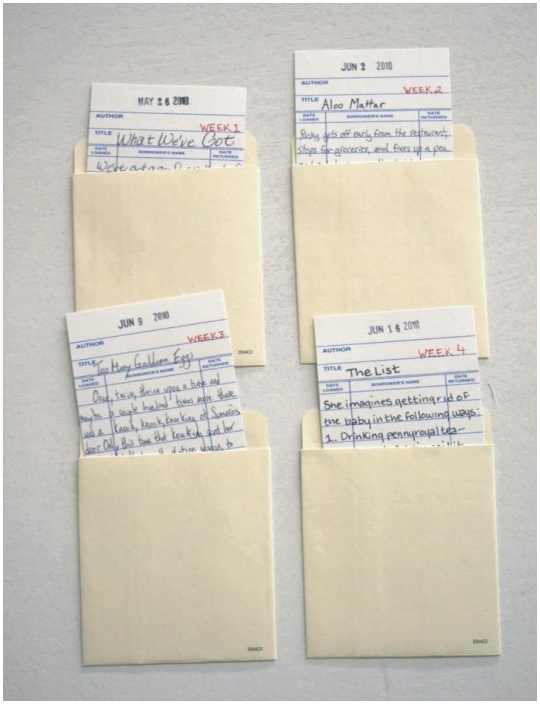
Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

I'm glad it's finally out there in the world!

Due Date

Molly Rideout

The following document consists of photos and text of a text installation, "Due Date." The piece, as shown in the first image below, consists of 36 manila pockets and within them 36 library due date cards. On these cards are short texts that follow the story of a woman through her term of pregnancy. I asked a different woman to handwrite each card. Credits for the 36 participating women follow the complete text.

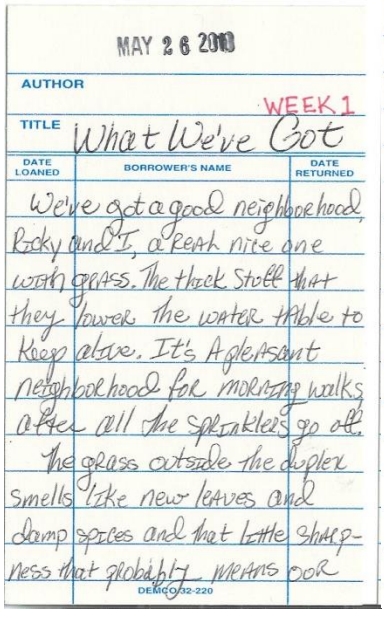


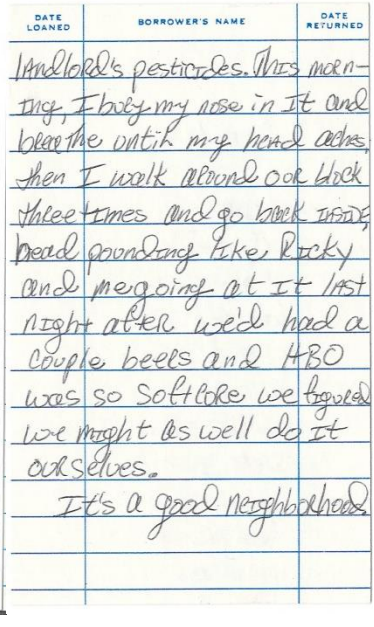
1. What We've Got – May 26

We've got a good neighborhood, Ricky and I, a real nice one with grass. The thick stuff that they lower the water table to keep alive. It's a pleasant neighborhood for morning walks, after all the sprinklers go off.

The grass outside the duplex smells like new leaves and damp spices and that little sharpness that probably means our landlord's pesticides. This morning, I bury my nose in it and breathe until my head aches, then I walk around our block three times and go back inside, head pounding like Ricky and me going at it last night after we'd had a couple beers and HBO was so softcore we figured we might as well do it ourselves.

It's a good neighborhood.





2. Aloo Mattar – June 2

Ricky gets off early from the restaurant, stops for groceries, and fixes up a pea and potato curry with what he calls naan, but which is closer to a fluffy tortilla. His hair keeps getting in his eyes, but it's not long enough to tuck behind his ear. He blows upward, then shakes his head, equine in motion. He almost doesn't hear Samara come in. Too much blowing. Too much sizzling.

"I saw your red dot on the calendar," he says as they kiss a light greeting. "Do you want to skip the lake this weekend?"

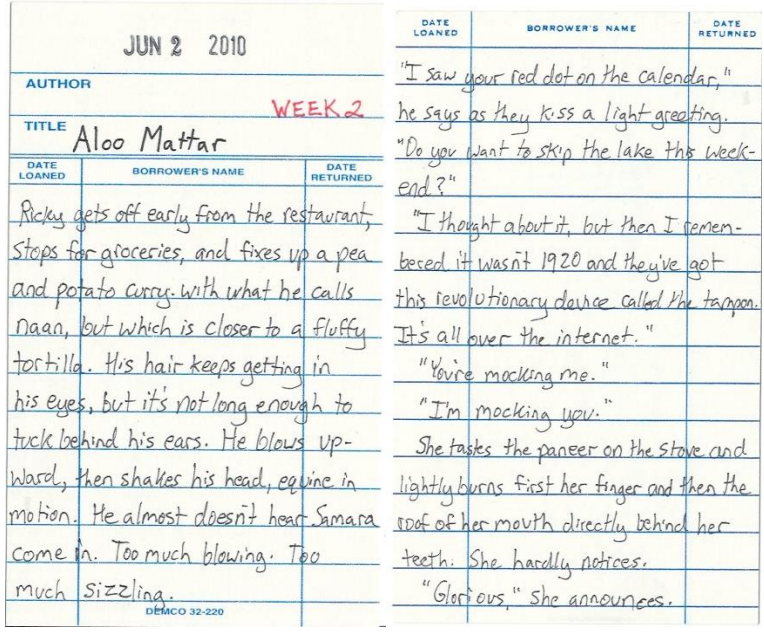
"I thought about it, but then I remembered it wasn't 1920 and they've got this revolutionary device called the tampon. It's all over the internet."

"You're mocking me."

"I'm mocking you."

She tastes the paneer on the stove and lightly burns first her finger and then the roof of her mouth directly behind her teeth. She hardly notices.

"Glorious," she announces.


JUN 2 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 2

TITLE Aloo Mattar

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

Ricky gets off early from the restaurant, stops for groceries, and fixes up a pea and potato curry with what he calls naan, but which is closer to a fluffy tortilla. His hair keeps getting in his eyes, but it's not long enough to tuck behind his ears. He blows upward, then shakes his head, equine in motion. He almost doesn't hear Samara come in. Too much blowing. Too much sizzling.

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DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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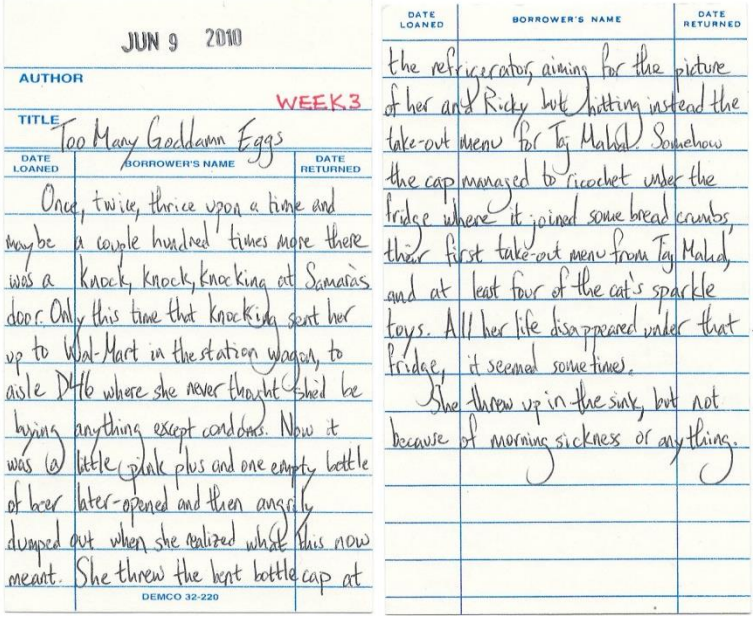
She tastes the paneer on the stove and lightly burns first her finger and then the roof of her mouth directly behind her teeth. She hardly notices.

"Glorious," she announces.

3. Too Many Goddamn Eggs – June 9

Once, twice, thrice upon a time and maybe a couple hundred times more there was a knock, knock, knocking at Samara's door. Only this time that knocking sent her up to Wal-mart in the station wagon, to the pharmacy section, to aisle D46 where she never thought she'd be buying anything except condoms. Now it was a little pink plus and one empty bottle of beer later—opened and then angrily dumped out when she realized what this now meant. She threw the bent bottle cap at the refrigerator, aiming for the picture of her and Ricky but hitting instead the take-out menu for Taj Mahal. Somehow the cap managed to ricochet under the fridge where it joined some bread crumbs, their first take-out menu from Taj Mahal, and at least four of the cat's sparkle toys. All her life disappeared under that fridge, it seemed sometimes.

She threw up in the sink, but not because of morning sickness or anything.


JUN 9 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 3

TITLE Too Many Goddamn Eggs

DATE LOANED | BORROWER'S NAME | DATE RETURNED

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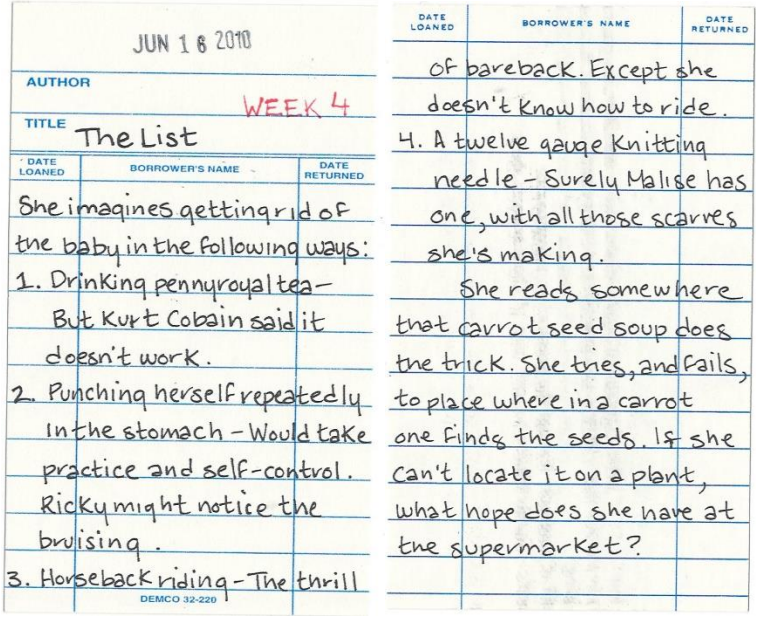
She threw up in the sink, but not because of morning sickness or anything.

4. The List – June 16

She imagines getting rid of the baby in the following ways:

1. Drinking pennyroyal tea – But Kurt Cobain said it doesn't work.
2. Punching herself repeatedly in the stomach – Would take practice and self-control. Ricky might notice the bruising.
3. Horseback riding – The thrill of bareback. Except she doesn't know how to ride.
4. A twelve gauge knitting needle – Surely Malise has one, with all those scarves she's making.

She reads somewhere that carrot seed soup also does the trick. She tries, and fails, to place where in a carrot one finds the seeds. If she can't locate it on a plant, what hope does she have at the supermarket?



5. Catgirl vs. The World – June 23

Malise whispers to me her seventy-year-old wisdom one day while we're cleaning, "You don't have to be a super hero about all this, you know." She means all this clay-baby stuff, pounded together, dripped dry, cracking slick. All of it, like it's a tiny titan kicking around in there, not just an infant-esimal thing.

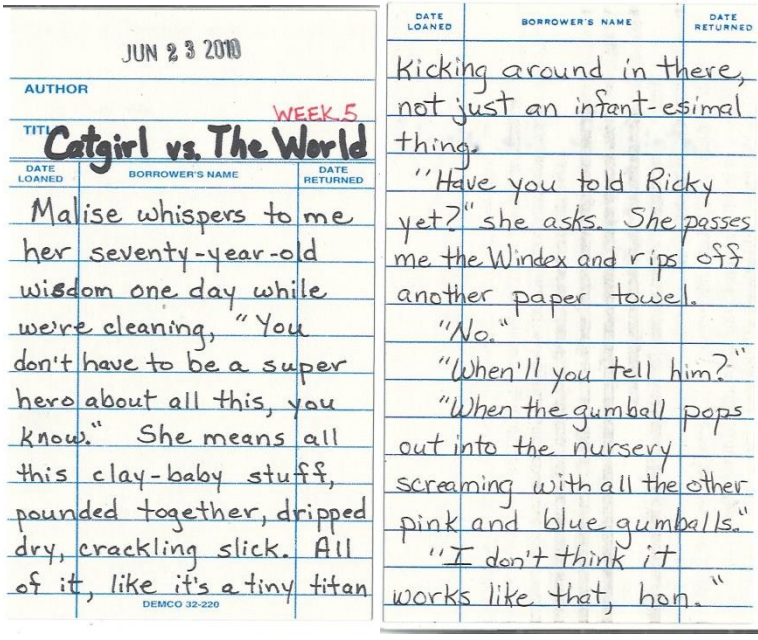
"Have you told Ricky yet?" she asks. She passes me the Windex and rips off another paper towel.

"No."

"When'll you tell him?"

"When the gumball pops out into the nursery screaming with all the other pink and blue gumballs."

"I don't think it works like that, hon."


JUN 2 3 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 5

TITLE Catgirl vs. The World

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DEMCO 32-220

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"No."

"When'll you tell him?"

"When the gumball pops out into the nursery screaming with all the other pink and blue gumballs."

"I don't think it works like that, hon."

6. It Works Like This – June 30

After a dinner of penne rustica in which the penne is a little too al dente, after Samara's family china is washed with razzcherry dish soap and nestled back into its oakwood nest, she and Ricky have the pleasure of meeting the couch, letting their limbs fall out from under them.

"What the hell is a razzcherry anyway?" Samara asks. She examines the prunes under her fingernails. "Did the raspberry initiate? Why didn't the cherry use protection?"

Ricky grunts and throws one arm behind the couch, rests the other on Samara's belly. Nonchalant. Samara can't help herself, she looks down, watches how his fingers trail little pay-no-attention circles.

She picks at her lip. She tells him.

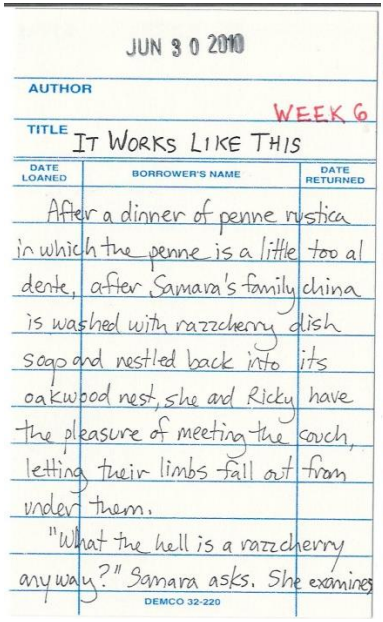
He sits there a moment, staring at the moving picture box. It's not TV, it's HBO.

"You're pregnant." he repeats. "Now?"

"No, tomorrow."

He kisses her.

"Now hang on," she interrupts.


JUN 30 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 6

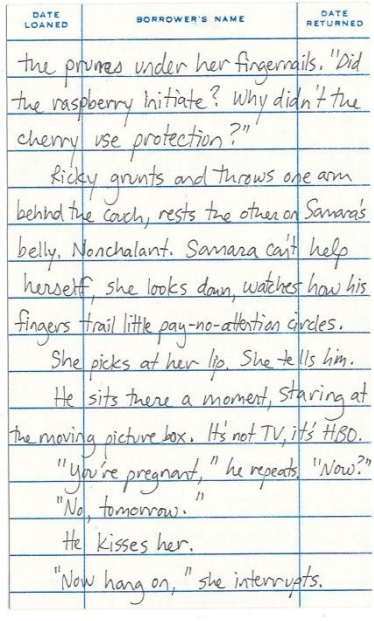
TITLE IT WORKS LIKE THIS

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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7. Reasons Not to Abort – July 7

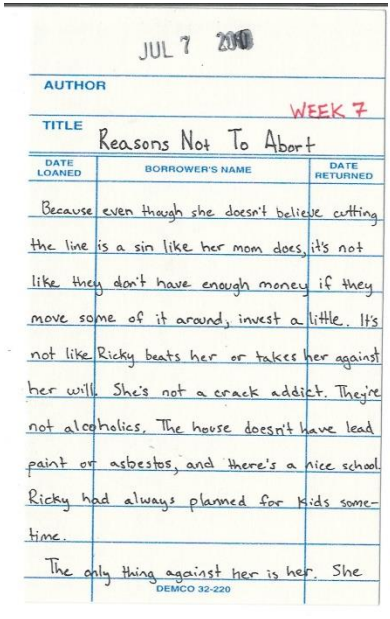
Because even though she doesn't believe cutting the line is a sin like her mom does, it's not like they don't have enough money if they move some of it around, invest a little. It's not like Ricky beats her or takes her against her will. She's not a crack addict. They're not alcoholics. The house doesn't have lead paint or asbestos, and there's a nice school. Ricky had always planned for kids sometime.

The only thing against her is her. She doesn't want to get more intimate with her doctor than she already is (annual pap smear – never irregular). She doesn't want to watch her diet or put on weight. She doesn't want to carry the baby, or birth it, doesn't want it crawling around her life, pulling on her boobs ("I expect the boob-pulling would stop by age eight"). But that's not reason enough. That's not fair for the to-be kid.

"It's just your religion talking," says Ricky.

"Aren't you glad I'm Catholic then."

"Are you?"



JUL 7 2010

AUTHOR

TITLE WEEK 7

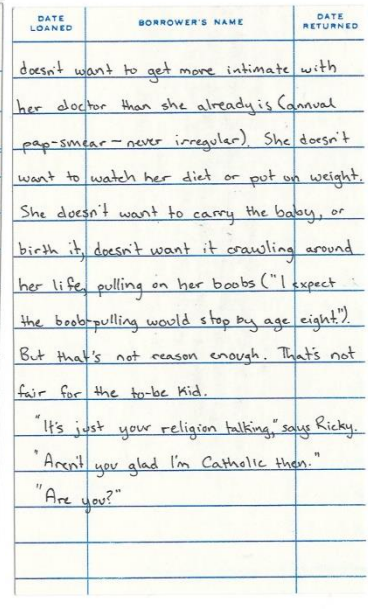
Reasons Not To Abort

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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DEMCO 32-220



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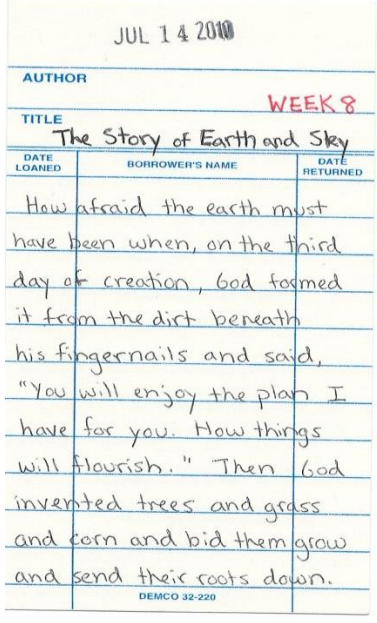
"Are you?"

8. The Story of Earth and Sky – July 14

How afraid the earth must have been when, on the third day of creation, God formed it from the dirt beneath his fingernails and said, "You will enjoy the plan I have for you. How things will flourish." Then God invented trees and grass and corn and bid them grow and send their roots down. But on the fourth day of creation, the dirt said to the air, "I am not ready to be tilled. I have mountains still to build, hills to explore. I have ravines to quake open and sand to rush downstream. The Lord cannot ask this of me so soon."

"I do not believe in God," the air replied.

"Well, neither do I," said the dirt stiffly. "Yet here we are."


JUL 14 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 8

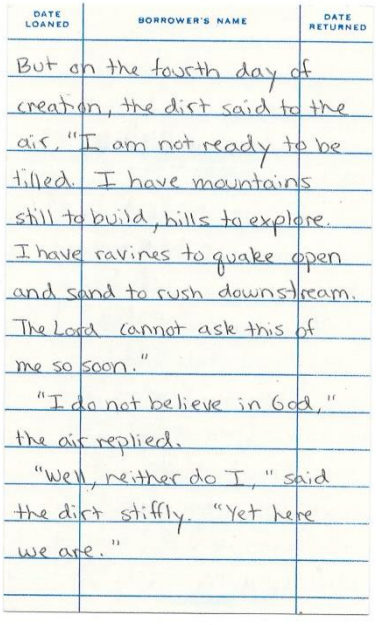
TITLE

The Story of Earth and Sky

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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"Well, neither do I," said the dirt stiffly. "Yet here we are."

9. Yes – July 21

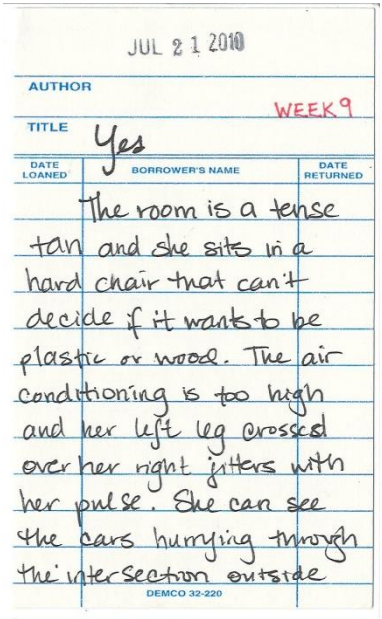
The room is a tense tan and she sits in a hard chair that can't decide if it wants to be plastic or wood. The air conditioning is too high and her left leg crossed over her right jitters with her pulse. She can see the cars hurrying through the intersection outside the office window. They come and go, come and go, talking of—

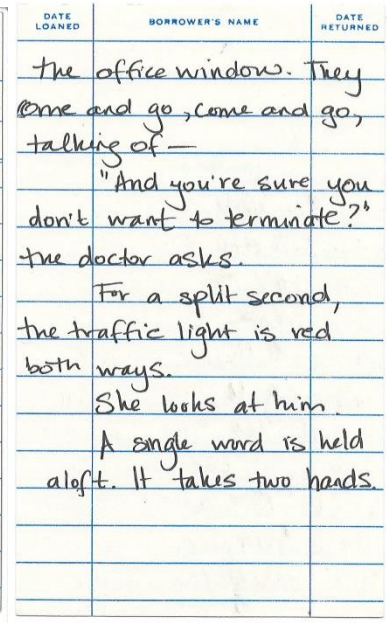
"And you're sure you don't want to terminate?" the doctor asks.

For a split second, the traffic light is red both ways.

She looks at him.

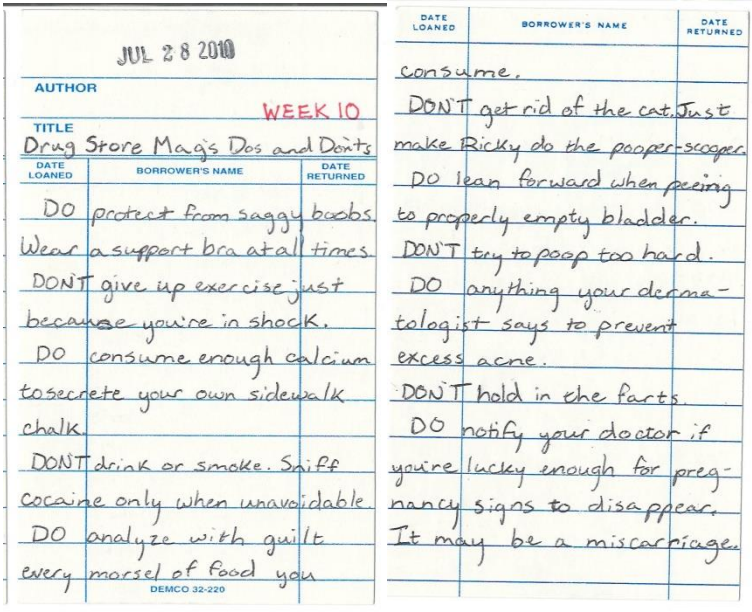
A single word is held aloft. It takes two hands.





10. Drug Store Fashion Mag's Dos and Don'ts – July 28

Do protect from saggy boobs. Wear a support bra at all times.
Don't give up exercise just because you're in shock.
Do consume enough calcium to secrete your own sidewalk chalk.
Don't drink or smoke. Sniff cocaine only when unavoidable.
Do analyze with guilt every morsel of food you consume.
Don't get rid of the cat. Just make Ricky do the pooper-scooper.
Do lean forward when peeing to properly empty bladder.
Don't try to poop too hard.
Do anything your dermatologist says to prevent excess acne.
Don't hold in the farts.
Do notify your doctor if you're lucky enough for pregnancy signs to disappear. It may be a miscarriage.


JUL 28 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 10

TITLE

Drug Store Mag's Dos and Don'ts

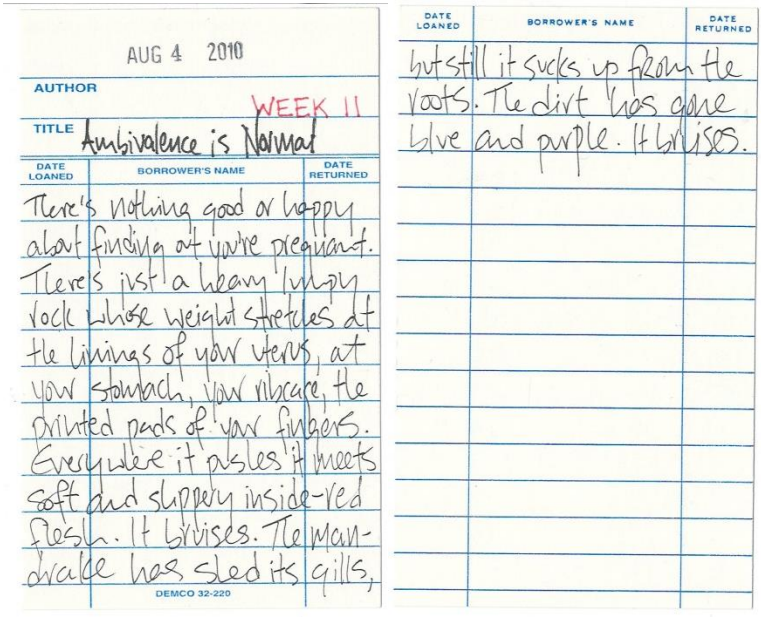
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11. Ambivalence is Normal – Aug 4

There's nothing good or happy about finding out you're pregnant. There's just a heavy lumpy rock whose weight stretches at the linings of your uterus, at your stomach, your ribcage, the printed pads of your fingers. Everywhere it pushes it meets soft and slippery inside-red flesh. It bruises. The mandrake has shed its gills, but still it sucks up from the roots. The dirt has gone blue and purple. It bruises.


AUG 4 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 11

TITLE Ambivalence is Normal

DATE LOANED | BORROWER'S NAME | DATE RETURNED

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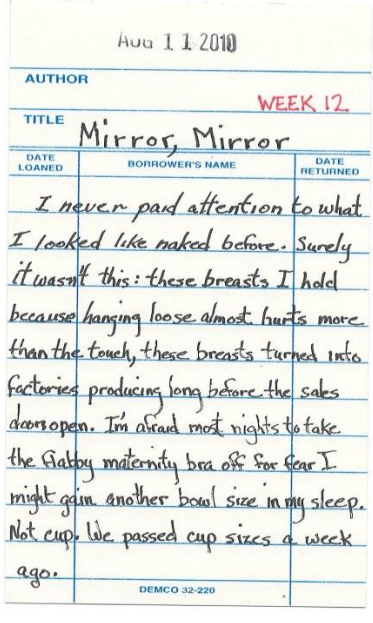
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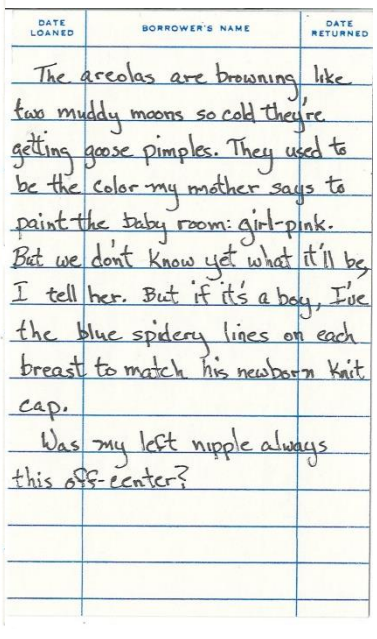
12. Mirror, Mirror – Aug 11

I never paid attention to what I looked like naked before. Surely it wasn't this: these breasts I hold because hanging loose almost hurts more than the touch, these breasts turned into factories producing long before the sales doors open. I'm afraid most nights to take the flabby maternity bra off for fear I might gain another bowl size in my sleep. Not cup. We passed cup sizes a week ago.

The areolas are browning like two muddy moons so cold they're getting goose pimples. They used to be the color my mother says to paint the baby room: girl-pink. But we don't know yet what it'll be, I tell her. But if it's a boy, I've the blue spidery lines on each breast to match his newborn knit cap.

Was my left nipple always this off-center?





13. The Big O – Aug 18

This isn't a porno, but don't you wish it were? Don't you wish that Samara wasn't still in her blue polo work clothes that are getting a little tight, but in a men's button-down with only one hole buttoned. The rest hangs off her shoulder. The presence of her panties is questionable.

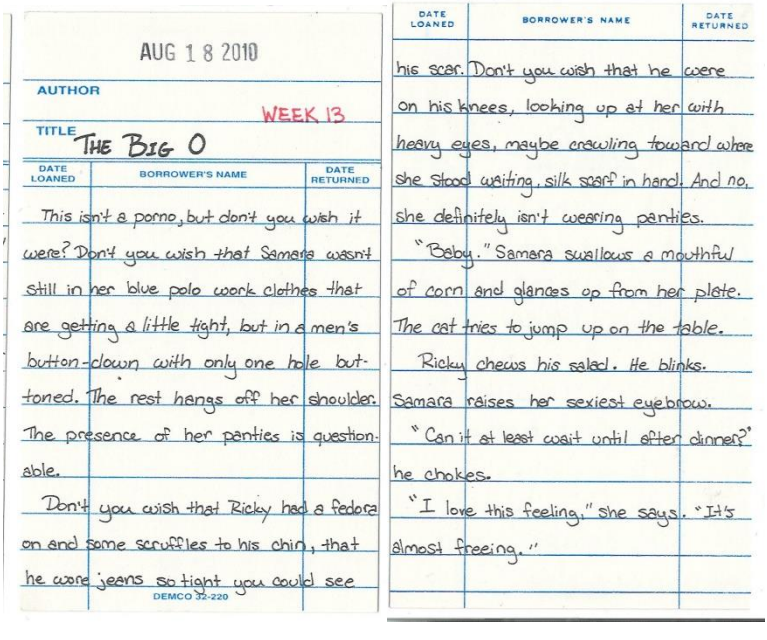
Don't you wish that Ricky had a fedora on and some scruffles to his chin, that he wore jeans so tight you could see his scar. Don't you wish he were on his knees, looking up at her with heavy eyes, maybe crawling toward where she stood waiting, silk scarf in hand. And no, she definitely isn't wearing panties.

"Baby." Samara swallows a mouthful of corn and glances up from her plate. The cat tries to jump up on the table.

Ricky chews his salad. He blinks. Samara raises her sexiest eyebrow.

"Can it at least wait until after dinner?" he chokes.

"I love this feeling," she says. "It's almost freeing."

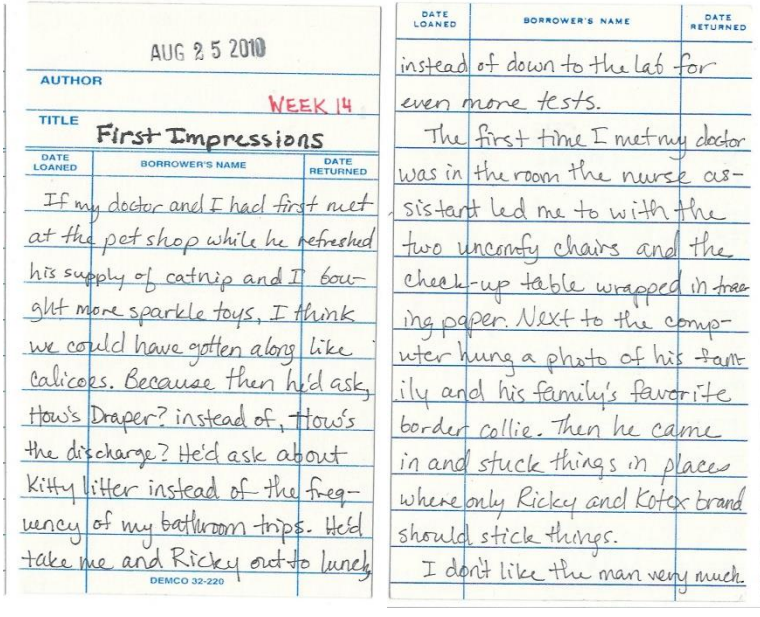


14. First Impressions – Aug 25

If my doctor and I had first met at the pet shop while he refreshed his supply of cat nip and I bought more sparkle toys, I think we could have gotten along like calicoes. Because then he'd ask, How's Draper? instead of, How's the discharge? He'd ask about kitty litter instead of the frequency of my bathroom trips. He'd take me and Ricky out to lunch, instead of down to the lab for even more tests.

The first time I met my doctor was in the room the nurse assistant led me to with the two uncomfy chairs and the check-up table wrapped in tracing paper. Next to the computer hung a photo of his family and his family's favorite border collie. Then he came in and stuck things in places where only Ricky and Kotex brand should stick things.

I don't like the man very much.



AUG 25 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 14

TITLE First Impressions

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15. You Know How… – Sept 8

After a friend explains a new word, you hear it twice on NPR. After you buy Ford's new sedan, you see folks driving it everywhere.

Samara saw nothing but babies.

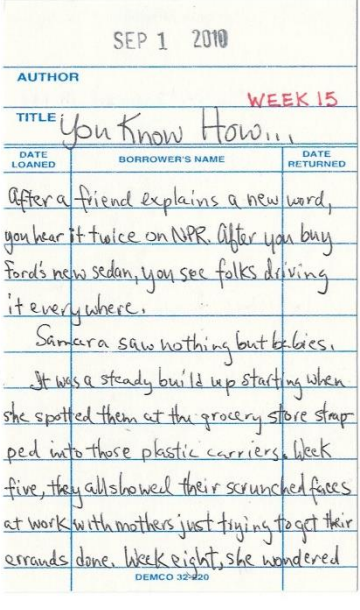
It was a steady build up starting when she spotted them at the grocery store strapped into those plastic carriers. Week five, they all showed their scrunched faces at work with mothers just trying to get their errands done. Week eight, she wondered if reporters had noticed the invasion. It was worse than Pearl Harbor. It was worse than Beatlemania.

And now this. Now this.

A breast feeding room at the Ashland Public Library. A room, an entire room, popped into creation. She stared at the plastic sign screwed into the fake-wooden door, at the metal handle, at the backside of the lock.

She pressed her fingertips against her stomach. Worry seeped up like heartburn.

If the world had so many already, how well will it treat one more?


SEP 1 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 15

TITLE You Know How...

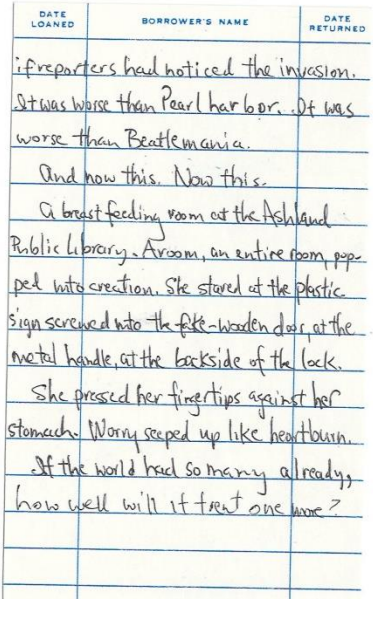
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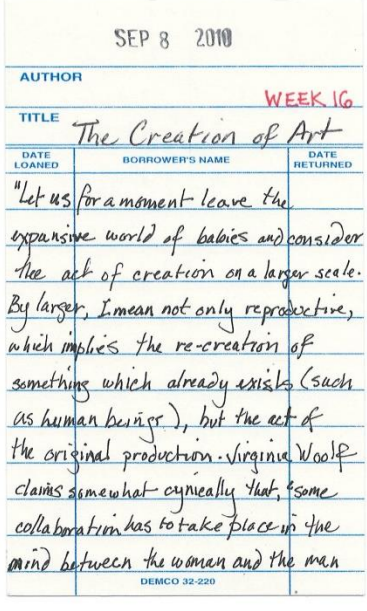
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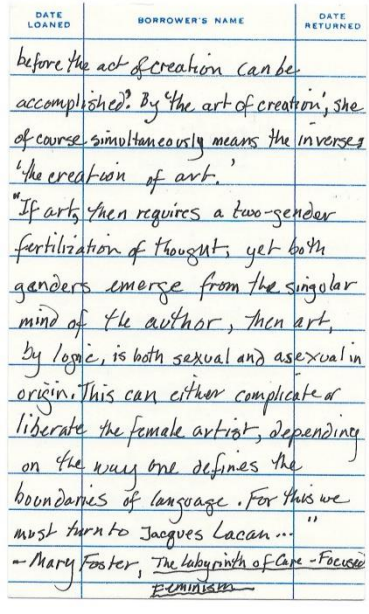
16. The Creation of Art – Sept 8

"Let us for a moment leave the expansive world of babies and consider the act of creation on a larger scale. By larger, I mean not only reproductive, which implies the re-creation of something which already exists (such as a human being), but the act of the original production. Virginia Woolf in the essay which needs no reference claims somewhat cynically that, 'some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished.' By 'the art of creation,' she of course simultaneously means the inverse, 'the creation of art.'

"If art, then requires a two-gender fertilization of thought, yet both genders emerge from the singular mind of the author, then art, by logic, is both sexual and asexual in origin. This can either complicate or liberate the female artist, depending on the way one defines the boundaries of language. For this, we must turn to Jacques Lacan…"

-Mary Foster, The Labyrinth of Care-Focused Feminism





17. A Queen Escapes – Sept 15

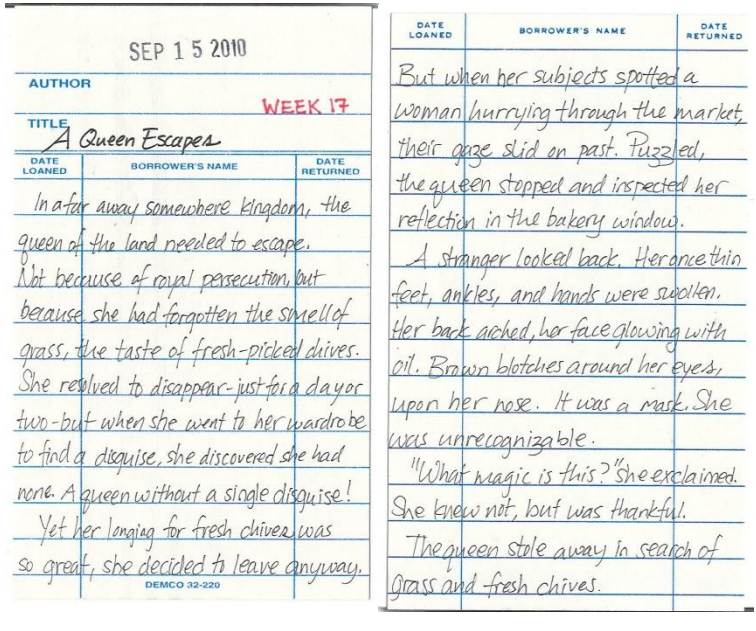
In a far away somewhere kingdom, the queen of the land needed to escape. Not because of royal persecution, but because she had forgotten the smell of grass, the taste of fresh-picked chives. She resolved to disappear—just for a day or two—but when she went to her wardrobe to find a disguise, she discovered she had none. A queen without a single disguise!

Yet her longing for fresh chives was so great, she decided to leave anyway. But when her subjects spotted a woman hurrying through the market, their gaze slid on past. Puzzled, the queen stopped and inspected her reflection in the bakery window.

A stranger looked back. Her once thin feet, ankles, and hands were swollen. Her back arched, her face glowing with oil. Brown blotches around her eyes, upon her nose. It was a mask. She was unrecognizable.

"What magic is this?" she exclaimed. She knew not, but was thankful.

The queen stole away in search of grass and fresh chives.



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AUTHOR

WEEK 17

TITLE A Queen Escapes

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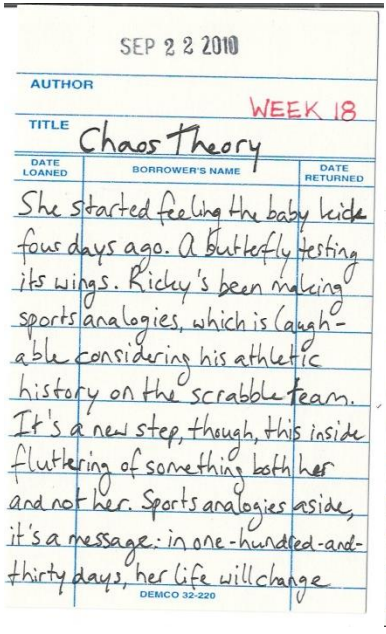
18. Chaos Theory – Sept 22

She started feeling the baby kick four days ago. A butterfly testing its wings. Ricky's been making sports analogies, which is laughable considering his athletic history on the scrabble team. It's a new step, though, this inside fluttering of something both her and not her. Sports analogies aside, it's a message: in one-hundred-and-thirty days, her life will change utterly.

Which is not to say she hasn't been completely transformed once already in the past four months. The enhanced diet, the special exercises, the hormonal restructuring. She wonders how many times her world can tumble. It's like college all over again. She hears the hurricane roar.

The baby kicks to be let out.

"It's not your turn!" she wants to yell. "I'm not finished out here yet!"


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AUTHOR

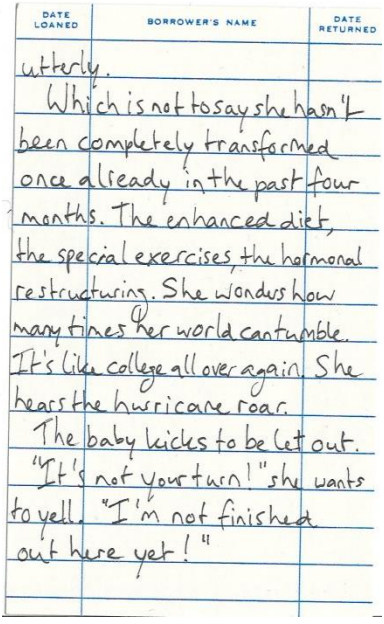
WEEK 18

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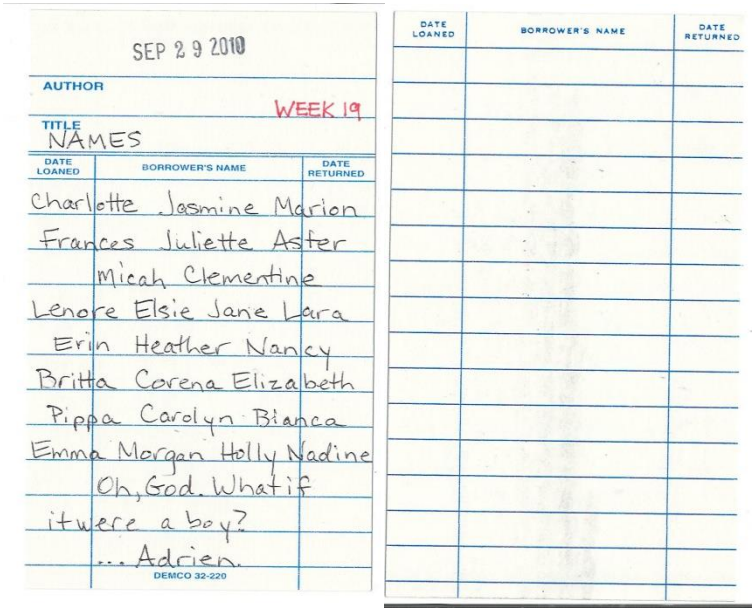
"It's not your turn!" she wants to yell. "I'm not finished out here yet!"

19. Names – Sept 29

Charlotte, Jasmine, Marion, Frances, Juliette, Aster, Micah, Clementine, Lenore, Jane, Elsie, Heather, Nancy, Lara, Erin, Britta, Corena, Elizabeth, Pippa, Carolyn, Bianca, Emma, Morgan, Holly, Nadine.

Oh, God. What if it were a boy?

…Adrien.



20. The Machine Stops – Oct 6

It's still. Everything's still. No butterflies. No quick one-two. Samara paces the back-room of the store during her lunch hour. For two days now she's eaten and jogged and had plenty of sex. Adrenaline doesn't work. She's jiggled the bump, she's prodded it. Physical stimulation doesn't work. It's still. Everything's still.

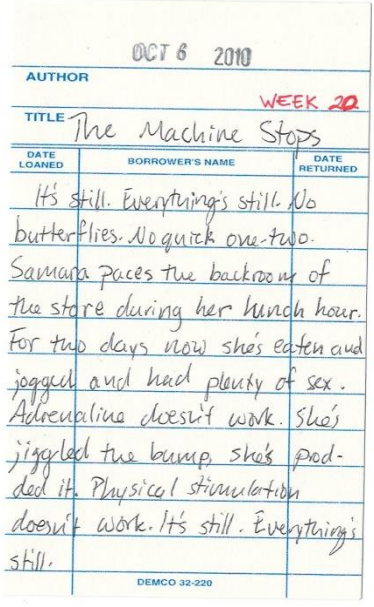
She clamps down a scream and kicks the mop bucket, but her feet are swollen so tight in her dress shoes she feels every shockwave radiate up her calf. Her mind is a marsh with just two words filtering through, dripping one right after the other. Oh…God…Oh…God…

She even tries jumping up and down.

Malise knocks on the door, asks what a concerned 70-year-old friend usually asks.

Today is the first day Samara's afraid to lose the baby.

It wiggles seven hours later.


OCT 6 2010

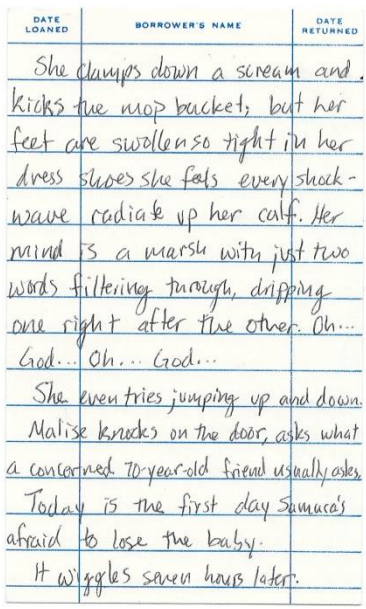
AUTHOR

WEEK 20

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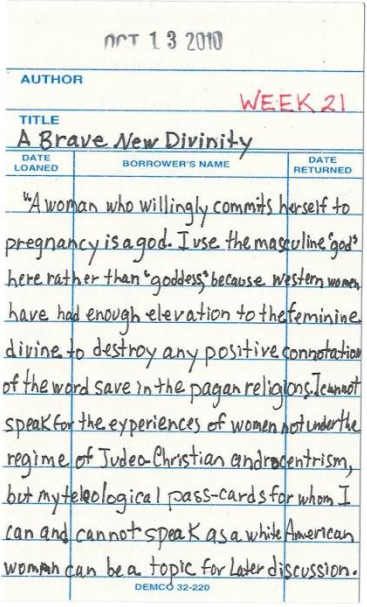
DEMCO 32-220


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21. A Brave New Divinity – Oct 3

"A woman who willingly commits herself to pregnancy (whether the initiation was planned or not) is a god. I use the masculine 'god' here rather than 'goddess,' because western women have had enough elevation to the feminine divine to destroy any positive connotation of the word save in the pagan religions. I cannot speak for the experiences of women not under the regime of Judeo-Christian androcentrism, but my teleological pass-cards for whom I can and cannot speak as a white American woman can be a topic for later discussion. What I say now is this: these women are gods. They are the creators, the deciders, the writers of worlds. They are the true wielders of the phallus. If one might forgive how close this statement strays toward a Freudian approach to the woman's drive for procreation, I will explain how this statement reveals a way to (re)conceive of gender dynamics through what I shall term the androgynous pregnant body."

-Mary Foster, The Labyrinth of Care-Focused Feminism


OCT 13 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 21

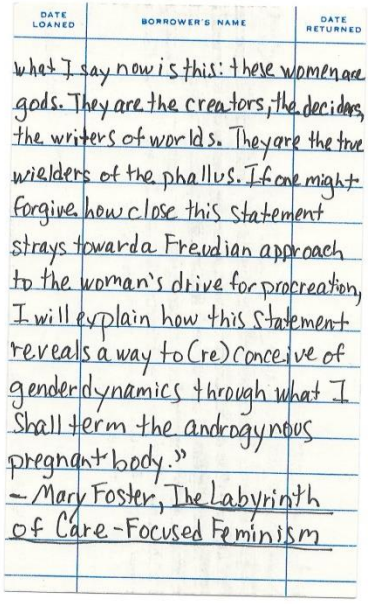
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A Brave New Divinity

DATE LOANED | BORROWER'S NAME | DATE RETURNED

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– Mary Foster, The Labyrinth of Care-Focused Feminism

22. Samara Sumatra – Oct 20

Samara resents Ricky the most first thing in the morning when he stumbles into the kitchen to make the pot of strong coffee she promised herself she wouldn't drink for another 102 days. She pushes herself off the pillow of another restless night of forced left-side lying, pulls herself through the shower, drags herself into these new bags called clothes, and goes and sits down at the kitchen table. If she breathes in the aromas gurgling away on the counter, maybe she can ingest the caffeine through her olfactory. She prays.

Rick stopped being apologetic for the Americano eleven weeks ago.

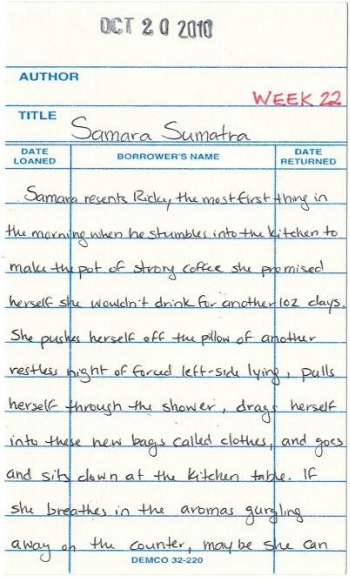
"You wanna carry the next one?" Samara grumbles and nearly chokes on her own words as they pick their way out. The next one? Was she aiming to make the proper Catholic family?

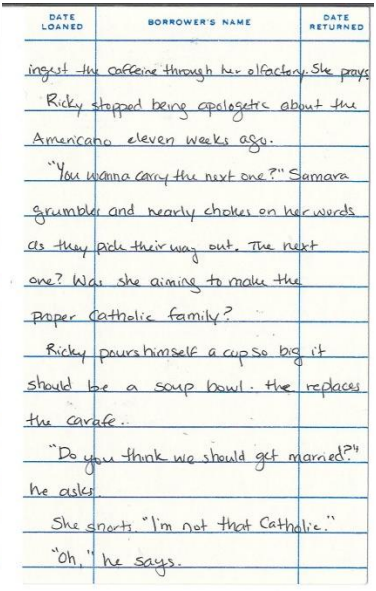
Ricky pours himself a cup so big it should be a soup bowl. He replaces the carafe.

"Do you think we should get married?" he asks.

She snorts. "I'm not that Catholic."

"Oh," he says.





23. Shotgun – Oct 27

I still think we should do it.

I don't.

It'll give the kid a stable home.

We already have a stable home. That's why we left California. Brick walls on the fault lines.

It'll give him protection.

No, it'll give her two parents who might stay together longer than they should because divorce is a draining process. There's no point in gumming it up if separation becomes inevitable.

You're afraid of commitment.

I kept the goddamn baby, Ricky. What have you committed?

I rub your feet once a week. I grocery shop. I cook dinner. This is about your mom and David.

My mother is a religious zealot who daily breaks her own doctrine. This is not about my mom and David.

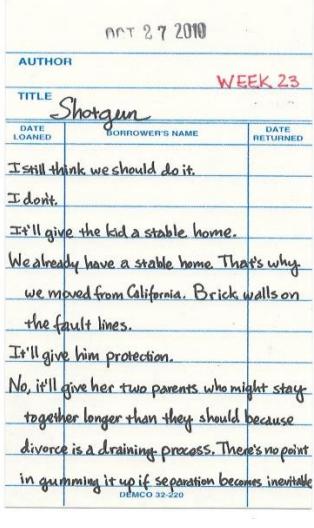
It's just a marriage license. No cathedral, no chocolate three-tier, no wafers and wine.

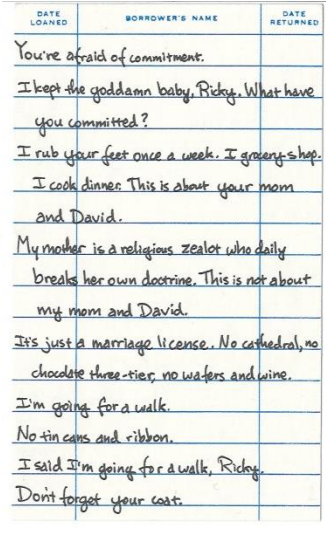
I'm going for a walk.

No tin cans and ribbon.

I said I'm going for a walk, Ricky.

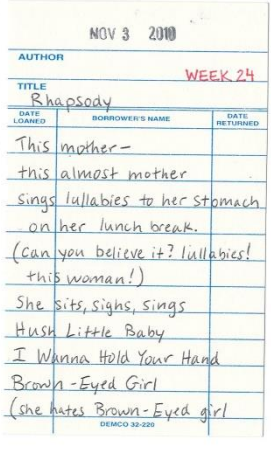
Don't forget your coat.





24. Rhapsody – Nov 3

This mother—
this almost mother
sings lullabies to her stomach on her lunch break.
(can you believe it? lullabies! this woman!)
She sits, sighs, sings
Hush Little Baby
I Wanna Hold Your Hand
Brown-Eyed Girl
(she hates Brown-Eyed girl
but she knows all the words)
On the longest days she hums or
makes up lyrics to old tunes
like Bugs Bunny did with the operas.
She sings to the fetus her day,
the hours, the walls,
and all the notes are as square
as the boxes propping up
her feet.
And for thirty minutes
the world is just
her and her beautiful
yes
her beautiful baby
(and George Gershwin).


NOV 3 2010

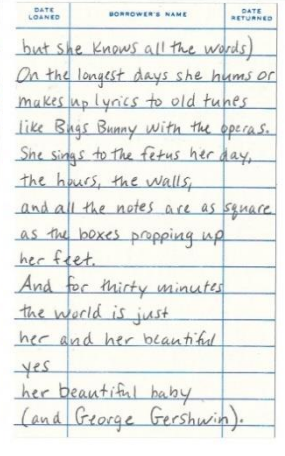
AUTHOR

WEEK 24

TITLE
Rhapsody

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED
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on her lunch break.		
(can you believe it? lullabies!		
this woman!)		
She sits, sighs, sings		
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I Wanna Hold Your Hand		
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(she hates Brown-Eyed girl		

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DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED
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her feet.		
And for thirty minutes		
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her and her beautiful		
yes		
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(and George Gershwin).		

25. West of the Moon, East of the Sun – Nov 10

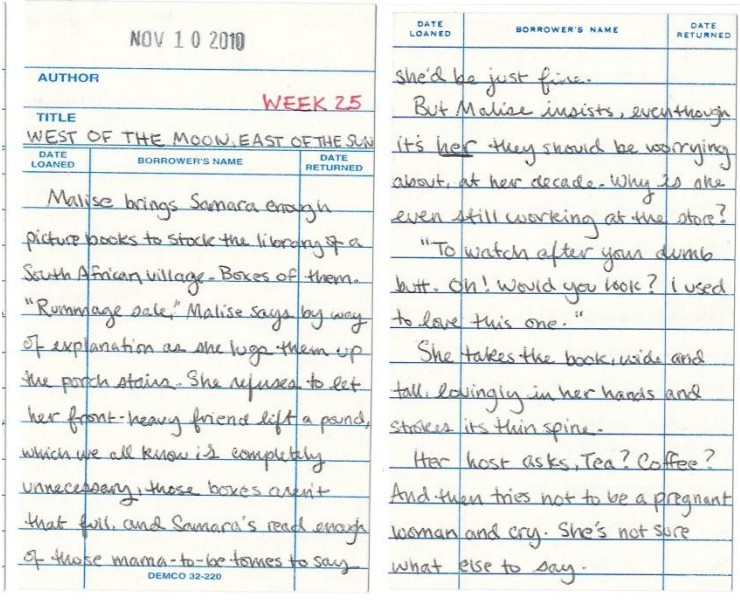
Malise brings Samara enough picture books to stock the library of a South African village. Boxes of them. "Rummage sale," Malise says by way of explanation as she lugs them up the porch stairs. She refuses to let her front-heavy friend lift a pound, which we all know is completely unnecessary, those boxes aren't that full, and Samara's read enough of those mama-to-be tomes to say she'd be just fine.

But Malise insists, even though it's *her* they should be worrying about, at her decade. Why is she even still working at the store?

"To watch after your dumb butt. Oh! Would you look? I used to love this one."

She takes the book, wide and tall, lovingly in her hands and strokes its thin spine.

Her host asks, Tea? Coffee? And then tries not to be a pregnant woman and cry. She's not sure what else to say.


NOV 10 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 25

TITLE

WEST OF THE MOON, EAST OF THE SUN

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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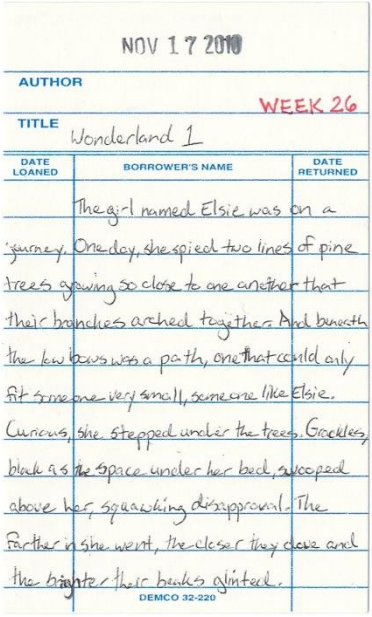
Her host asks, Tea? Coffee? And then tries not to be a pregnant woman and cry. She's not sure what else to say.

DEMCO 32-220

26. Wonderland 1 – Nov 17

Once upon a time, the girl named Elsie was on a journey. One day, she spied two lines of pine trees growing so close to one another that their branches arched together. And beneath the low bows was a path, one that could only fit someone very small, someone like Elsie. Curious, she stepped under the trees. Grackles, black as the space under her bed, swooped above her, squawking disapproval. The farther in she went, the closer they dove and the brighter their beaks glinted.

But Elsie was not afraid (not too afraid). She picked from a branch two bristle cones and rubbed them together so they made a clack! clack! noise that scared the birds away. She learned quickly to rub the cones like one would rub a snake, always downward. Otherwise the woody pinecone shudders just snapped off until there wasn't anything left to the cone at all and the grackles started swooping low again.



NOV 17 2010

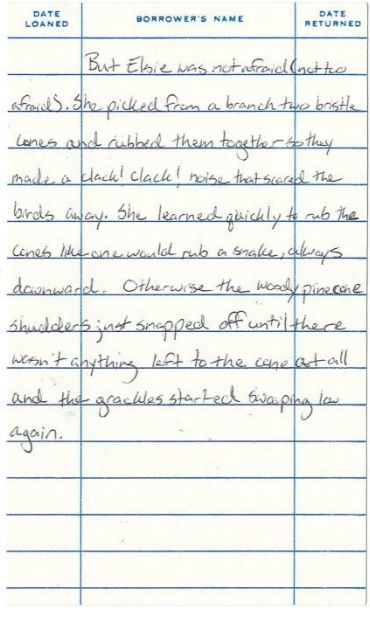
AUTHOR

WEEK 26

TITLE Wonderland 1

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED
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27. Wonderland 2 – Nov 24

But one particular grackle was not afraid of the clacking noise. It was a funny rundown thing whose eyes didn't gleam like the others. To be perfectly honest, Elsie wasn't entirely sure this grubby grackle could fly at all. Instead it stumbled from limb to limb, always staying a foot or two ahead of her as Elsie of Nowhere continued through the branches to what she was sure must be a somewhere-land of magic. It was almost as if, Elsie thought, the grackle were *leading* her the right way. Or the wrong one.

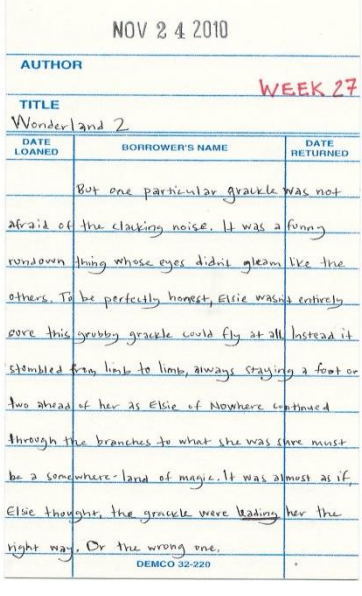
Still it led her on.

And then, to Elsie's surprise, it stopped. It stopped so suddenly, in fact, that she almost ran into it, nose to beak, feather to skin.

"At least I get to read the old fairy tales with you," the bird croaked. "Do you know Alice?"

"My name's Elsie."

"You'll love Alice."



NOV 24 2010

AUTHOR

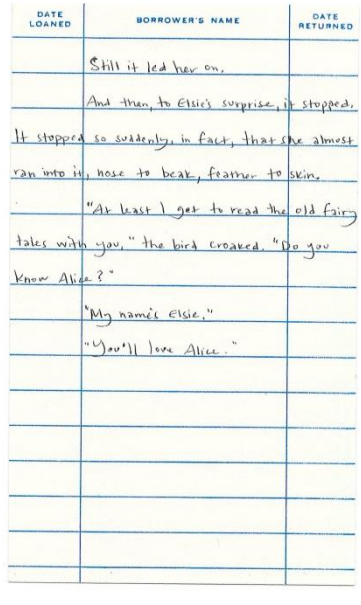
WEEK 27

TITLE

Wonderland 2

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28. It Hadn't Always Been An Action Film – Dec 1

After the marriage argument, Ricky brought home a potted lily and set it up in an out of the way place. "Practice," he said. "That's what we should be focusing on right now, isn't it?"

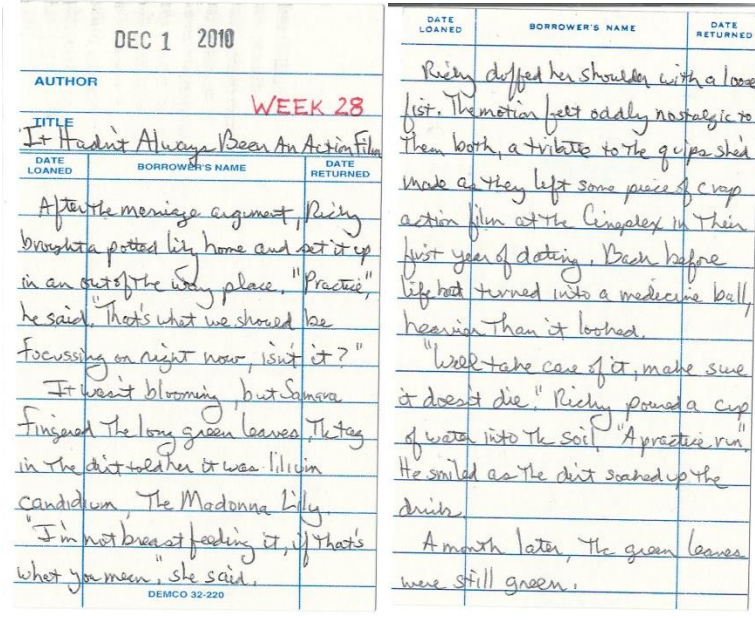
It wasn't blooming, but Samara fingered the long green leaves. The tag in the dirt told her it was *lilium candidum*, the Madonna Lily.

"I'm not breast feeding it, if that's what you mean," she said.

Ricky doffed her shoulder with a loose fist. The motion felt oddly nostalgic to them both, a tribute to the quips she'd made as they left some piece of crap action film at the Cineplex in their first year of dating. Back before life had turned into a medicine ball, heavier than it looked.

"Well take care of it, make sure it doesn't die." Ricky poured a cup of water into the soil. "A practice run." He smiled as the dirt soaked up the drink.

A month later, the green leaves were still green.


DEC 1 2010

AUTHOR

WEEK 28

TITLE

It Hadn't Always Been An Action Film

DATE LOANED | BORROWER'S NAME | DATE RETURNED

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DEMCO 32-220

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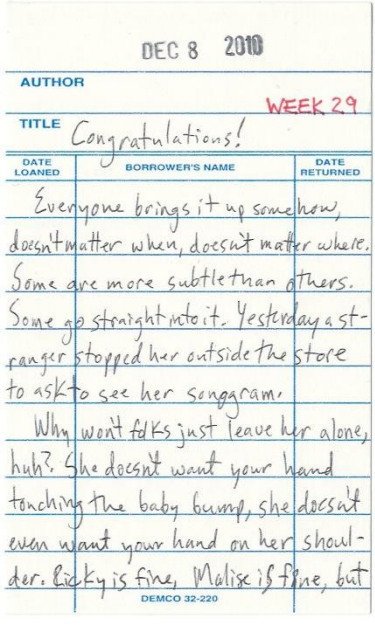
A month later, the green leaves were still green.

29. Congratulations! – Dec 8

Everyone brings it up somehow, don't matter when, don't matter where. Some are more subtle than others. Some go straight into it. Yesterday a stranger stopped her outside the store to ask to see the sonogram.

Why won't folks just leave her alone, huh? She doesn't want your hand touching the baby bump, she doesn't even want your hand on her shoulder. Ricky is fine, Malise is fine, but she's never seen you before in her life, so why don't you take your change and get the hell out of the store. No one, and we mean no one, wants to hear about your twelve hour labor, and don't you go reaching across the counter like that, middle-aged missy, an empty-nester jonesing for just one little pat of that taut birthing flesh. You want her to come to Thanksgiving at your house and shove her hand up your turkey? Back off baloney-fingers.

She's ready to get this over with.



DEC 8 2010

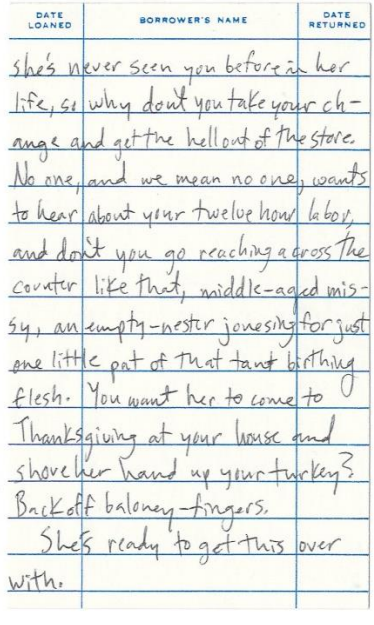
AUTHOR

WEEK 29

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DEMCO 32-220

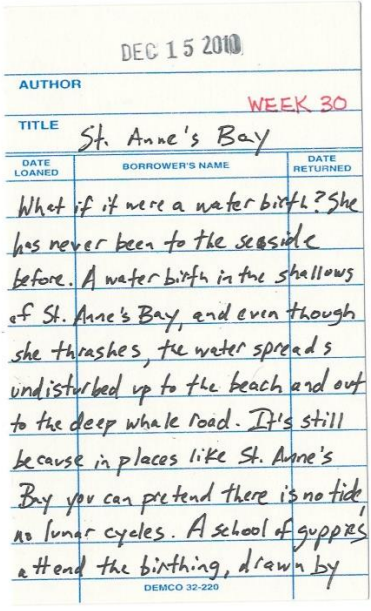


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30. St. Anne's Bay – Dec 15

What if it were a water birth? She has never been to the seaside before. A water birth in the shallows of St. Anne's Bay, and even though she thrashes, the water spreads undisturbed up to the beach and out to the deep whale road. It's still because in places like St. Anne's Bay you can pretend there is no tide, no lunar cycles. A school of guppies attend the birthing, drawn by the taste of the first juices as they burst forth. They mouth at the nervousness she secretes and somewhere inside, their fishy organs break it down and pass it through.

Perhaps a water birth, she thinks, as she maps the fastest route to the hospital. The ocean is sixteen hours away by car and she cannot fly. They can't afford one of those special pools, but she likes the thought of Ricky in a snorkel.


DEC 15 2010

AUTHOR

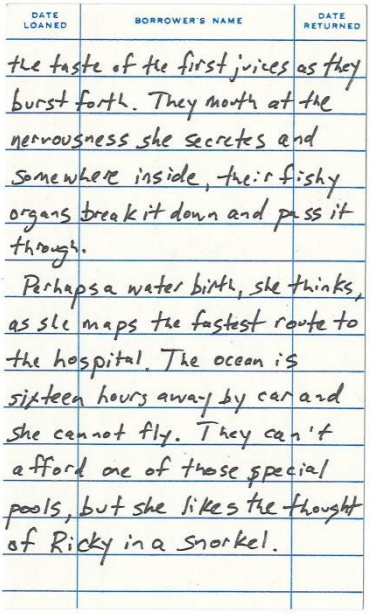
WEEK 30

TITLE St. Anne's Bay

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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DEMCO 32-220


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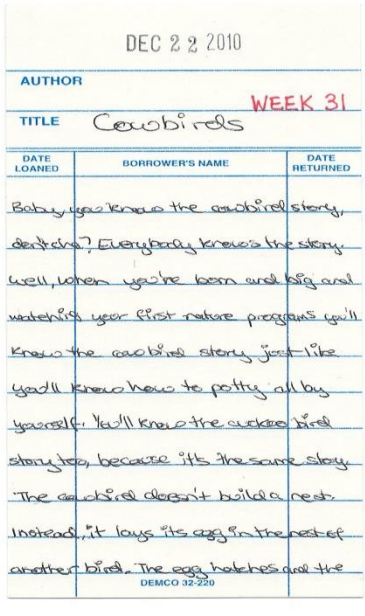
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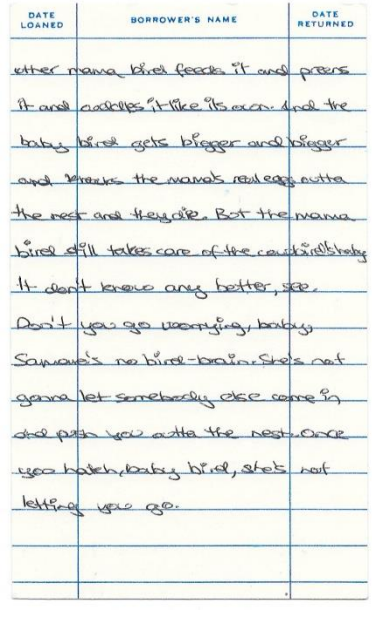
31. Cowbirds – Dec 22

Baby, you know the cowbird story, dontcha? Everybody knows the story. Well, when you're born and big and watching your first nature programs you'll know the cowbird story just like you'll know how to potty all by yourself. You'll know the cuckoo bird story too, because it's the same story.

The cowbird doesn't build a nest. Instead it lays its egg in the nest of another bird. The egg hatches and the other mama bird feeds it and preens it and cuddles it like its own. And the baby bird gets bigger and bigger and knocks the mama's real eggs outta the nest and they die. But the mama bird still takes care of the cowbird's baby. It don't know any better, see.

Don't you go worrying, baby, Samara's no bird-brain. She's not gonna let somebody else come in and push you outta the nest. Once you hatch, baby bird, she's not letting you go.



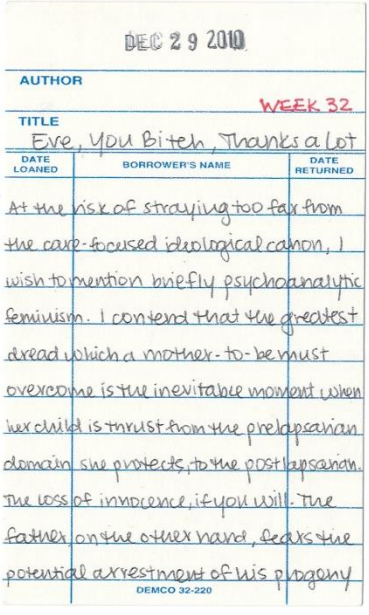


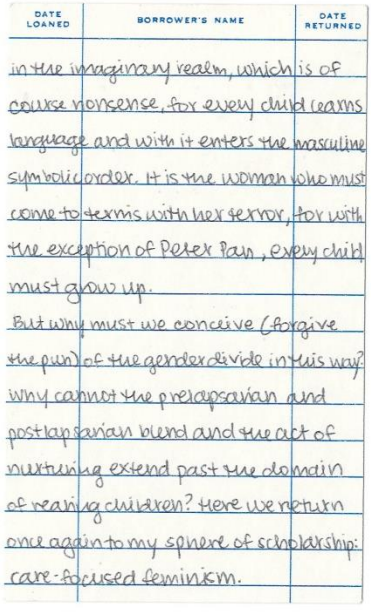
32. Eve, You Bitch, Thanks a Lot – Dec 29

"At the risk of straying too far from the care-focused ideological canon, I wish to mention briefly psychoanalytic feminism. I contend that the greatest dread which a mother-to-be must overcome is the inevitable moment when her child is thrust from the prelapsarian domain she protects, to the postlapsarian. The loss of innocence, if you will. The father, on the other hand, fears the potential arrestment of his progeny in the imaginary realm, which is of course nonsense, for every child learns language and with it enters the masculine symbolic order. It is the woman who must come to terms with her terror, for with the exception of Peter Pan, every child must grow up.

"But why must we conceive (forgive the pun) of the gender divide in this way? Why cannot the prelapsarian and postlapsarian blend and the act of nurturing extend past the domain of rearing children? Here we return once again to my sphere of scholarship: care-focused feminism."

-Mary Foster, The Labyrinth of Care-Focused Feminism





33. Let the Wild Rumpus Start! – Jan 5

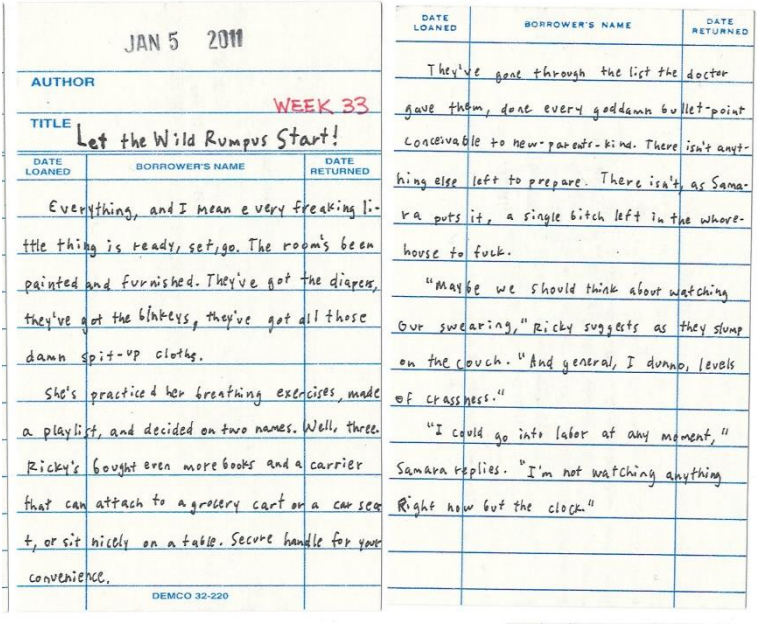
Everything, and I mean every freaking little thing is ready, set, go. The room's been painted and furnished. They've got the diapers, they've got the binkeys, they've got all those damn spit-up cloths.

She's practiced her breathing exercises, made a playlist, and decided on two names. Well, three. Ricky's bought even more books and a carrier that can attach to a grocery cart or a car seat, or sit nicely on a table. Secure handle for your convenience.

They've gone through the list the doctor gave them, done every goddamn bullet-point conceivable to new-parents-kind. There isn't anything else left to prepare. There isn't, as Samara puts it, a single bitch left in the whore-house to fuck.

"Maybe we should think about watching our swearing," Ricky suggests as they slump on the couch. "And general, I dunno, levels of crassness."

"I could go into labor at any moment," Samara replies. "I'm not watching anything right now but the clock."



JAN 5 2011

AUTHOR

WEEK 33

TITLE Let the Wild Rumpus Start!

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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"I could go into labor at any moment," Samara replies. "I'm not watching anything right now but the clock."

34. Dear Mom – Jan 12

I am not the phantom cross you bear, nor will my life be tied and nailed to the human being inside of me. I will raise her and I will love her, but the moment she is born she is no longer me. She is her, nameless, beautiful baby. And she will be named. Not Samara, no. I will not give her your name either.

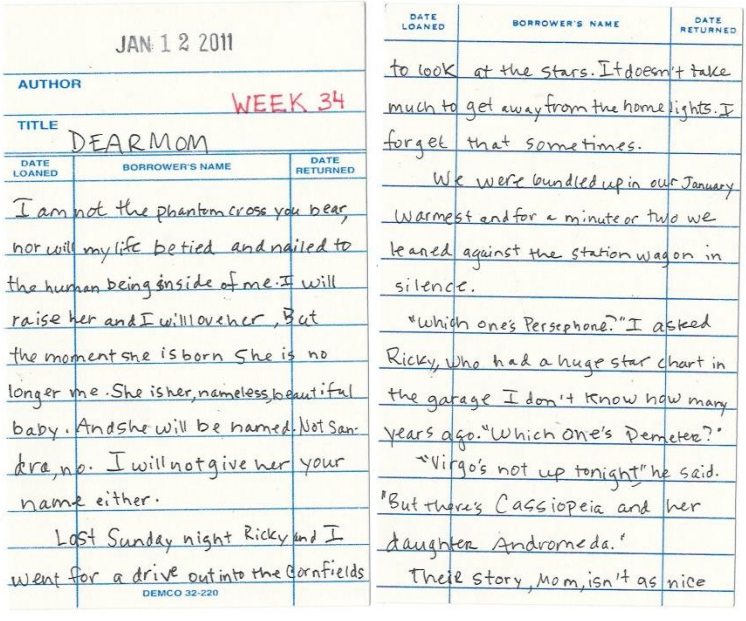
Last Sunday night, Ricky and I went for a drive out into the cornfields to look at the stars. It doesn't take much to get away from the home lights. I forget that sometimes.

We were bundled up in our January warmest and for a minute or two we leaned against the station wagon in silence.

"Which one's Persephone?" I asked Ricky, who had hung a star chart in the garage I don't know how many years ago. "Which one's Demeter?"

"Virgo's not up tonight," he says. "But there's Cassiopeia and her daughter Andromeda."

Their story, Mom, isn't as nice.



JAN 12 2011

AUTHOR

WEEK 34

TITLE DEAR MOM

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

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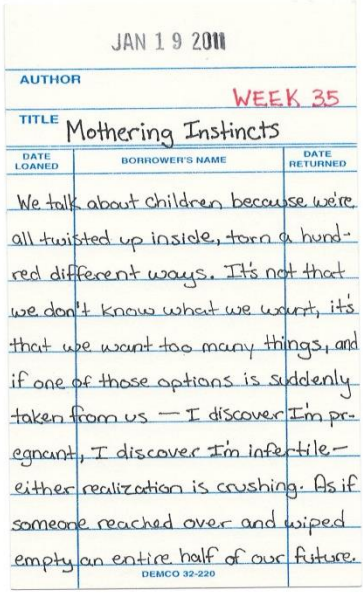
DEMCO 32-220

35. Mothering Instincts – Jan 19

We talk about children because we're all twisted up inside, torn a hundred different ways. It's not that we don't know what we want, it's that we want too many things, and if one of those options is suddenly taken from us—I discover I'm pregnant, I discover I'm infertile—either realization crushes us. As if someone reached over and wiped empty an entire half of our future. And eventually we learn not to look at the negative space. Our parents die, we take the A job and not the B, we're learning all the time not to look at the empty space, the subjunctive world. We have choices. Sometimes a few are taken away, but we have choices still. I know women, people, who came away happy with the path they ended up on as one by one they finish erasing the turn-offs that happenstance already partially removed.

This woman was happy, in the end.

That is what I think.



JAN 19 2011

AUTHOR

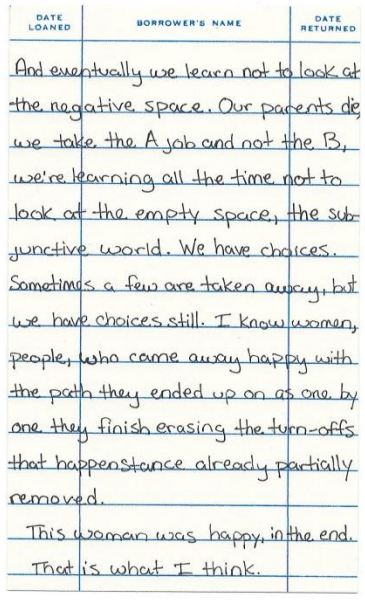
WEEK 35

TITLE Mothering Instincts

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We talk about children because we're all twisted up inside, torn a hundred different ways. It's not that we don't know what we want, it's that we want too many things, and if one of those options is suddenly taken from us — I discover I'm pregnant, I discover I'm infertile— either realization is crushing. As if someone reached over and wiped empty an entire half of our future.

DEMCO 32-220

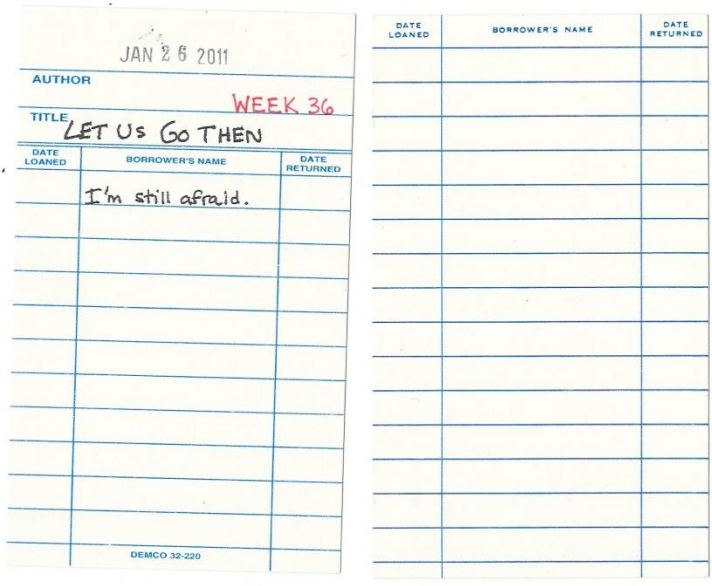


DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED

And eventually we learn not to look at the negative space. Our parents die, we take the A job and not the B, we're learning all the time not to look at the empty space, the subjunctive world. We have choices. Sometimes a few are taken away, but we have choices still. I know women, people, who came away happy with the path they ended up on as one by one they finish erasing the turn-offs that happenstance already partially removed.

This woman was happy, in the end.

That is what I think.



Thank you to all 36 women who lent their penmanship to this work:

Debra Cole
Monica Midbon
Kate Moening
Jennilie Brewster
Chris Gaunt
Jacki Whisenant
Rose Schneck
Cara Krieg
Molly Backes
Beth miller
Lydia Peelle
Gabrielle Mayer
Kelsey Morse-Brown
Sam Whisenant
Rebecca Stuhr
Michelle Lewis-King
Jia Luo
Jente Posthuma
Debra Greene
Sarah Goff
Ruth Boerefijn
Emily Ullberg
Sara Woolery
Liz Reischman
Heather Riggs
Emily Blythe
Katie Zimmerman
Karen Manning
Kendal Hiedeman
Abby Durden
Sunanda Vaidheesh
Kristen Mooreland
Marisa Prefer
D'Arcy Fallon
Molly Rideout
Rachel Calgaro

Interview

Molly Rideout

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

The title was integral to the project's conception. I never really considered anything else.

When did you write "Due Date"?

I composed "Due Date" in the fall of 2010 while living and working at an artist residency in rural Wyoming. I had acquired a box of library due date cards and the sleeves they go into in the front of library books and wanted to develop a project around them. It was a twenty minute drive to the closest library, which was about as big as my bedroom, but they had the research book I was looking for: *What to Expect When You're Expecting*.

What inspired "Due Date"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I have never been pregnant. I wrote "Due Date" in order to learn about the process one's body goes through during pregnancy. I had hoped it would help assuage what I see as my greatest fear and perhaps convince me that kids wouldn't be so bad. Instead it made me more certain that I am not a mother type. Still, I wanted to step into the shoes of a woman who chooses what I never would. It was a fascinating and terrifying experience.

What was the hardest part of writing "Due Date"?

I'm used to writing long form, so one of the hardest parts was to constrain each vignette to a length that could fit on one due date card. I edited and revised some cards as many as eight times before I could get them short enough without losing the meat.

Do you primarily write fiction?

These days it seems like I primarily write grants and press releases. But yes, a large portion of what I write is fiction with the occasional essay or memoir piece.

Do you always add a visual component to your fiction?

Visual components are taking a larger role in my work, although pieces that include them are still outnumbered by traditional forms. More and more I find myself frustrated with traditional publishing avenues and the restrictive audience they cater to. A large part of my job running an artist residency (my job that pays the bills) involves social practice art in a rural community, and I want to find new ways that will allow people to stumble up on my writing the same way they might stumble upon wheat-pasted art, sculptures, etc. It also seems that more and more of our Internet culture revolves around images more than large blocks of text. Some of my other projects experiment with ways to engage with the growing norm, as well.

Why did you settle on the thirty-six part structure? What benefits did you see in this style?

While a full term pregnancy is thirty-nine or forty weeks, the number thirty-six appealed to me more visually as a square number. "Due Date" was originally produced as a gallery piece installed on a wall with each card snug in its manila envelope in six-by-six grid. This grid form rather than linear form invited readers to select cards at random rather than reading consecutive weeks. The envelopes also resembled the pouch of a marsupial as it raises its young.

Why did you have a different women handwrite each card?

I tried several formats for the cards before settling on handwriting, including printing them with the typewriter, but as I tried to have each vignette stand alone with its own tone and style, I wanted this distinctiveness to come out visually through different penmanships.

Did you have any challenges recruiting women to write them? What responses did these women give you when they were told about the project?

I had women of all ages contribute their handwriting to this project from nineteen-year-olds to seventy-year-olds. I had childhood best friends and artists and writers I had only just met. Most women were intimidated by the idea that their handwriting would be read, and I had a few women

who flat out refused because of the legibility of their handwriting. I didn't receive a lot of comments about the theme of the project, but I did have many women wanting to read the whole piece after spending time with their particular vignette. My own mother wrote the first card, which was important for me.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I love all parts of writing except for the composition. I enjoy planning, outlining, editing, rewriting, and cutting, but I cannot stand the paragraph-by-paragraphs slog of the first draft. Because of this I will usually set word goals for myself in order to get through the awful stuff in order to move on to the fun stuff. Because my job of running an artist residency is seasonal, I have the unique ability to spend the off-season focusing on my writing, while I spend the on-season focusing on social practice art projects in our community and taking lots of notes.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have been published in *WarBing Magazine* and the forthcoming *Prairie Gold: An Anthology of the Midwest* (*Ice Cube Press*) as well as on several blogs online. You can read more of my work and see more of my projects on my blog (http://mollyrideout.tumblr.com/). My social practice art is on our artist collective website:

http://grincitycollective.org/projects.html

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

Your willingness to consider projects outside of the old-fashioned 'fiction or poetry or visual art' boxes. Thank you for breaking out of that mold!

Autumn View

Nathaniel Saint Amour



Interview

Nathaniel Saint Amour

What inspired this image?

The idea for this style as a whole came one day while I was cleaning my palette in a large metal sink. I watched as the gobs of leftover acrylic paint flowed and melded together as the natural laws of our universe pulled the paint down the drain. Blue, red, white, and black all ran together to create something beautiful that was made in equal parts by man and nature. The image itself was inspired by the longing one feels to return to autumn once winter starts and all the leaves have fallen from the trees, leaving the world cold, barren, and gray.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

These works are different than your standard painting in that most of the paint is applied entirely through syringes. Most of what you see has been dropped or squirted onto the canvas; the colors then flow and coalesce, creating mini rivulets of paint that run off the surface. The hard part is controlling the inherent energy created by this method; simply making the paint flow where I would like is a constant struggle.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

The main theme revolves around the dichotomy between man and nature, about how we seek to control the forces in this world, but are still subject to its laws and power. This thought is echoed in various ways through my work; the subject often contains a human figure, while the method by which I apply the paint alludes to the unpredictable behavior of worldly forces. This ends up distorting the figurative subject in ways that I cannot control, harkening back to the thought that while I, as a human, seek to command the paint, it acts according to its nature, and is thus not subject to my whim.

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Color. A lot of color, and to ground the color I add areas of black and white. This keeps the eye from fatiguing too quickly and keeps the color relative. I also like to have a lot of contrast in my work; values often range all the way from pure white to pure black and from areas with no color to pure un-mixed straight out-of-the-tube color.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

A title is an important glimpse into the artist's mindset behind a piece. It has the potential to add an entirely new layer and direction of thought to a work. I view a title as a very short statement about the piece by the artist, idealistically one would have access to a statement by the artist or even the artist himself, but most of the time the title is the only communication available.

Where can readers find more of your work?

The easiest thing to do would be to search my name on google, which will link you to my website, tumblr, facebook page, and deviantart account. Alternatively, my web address is:

www.nathanielstamourart.com

Felinity

Otha “Vakseen” Davis III



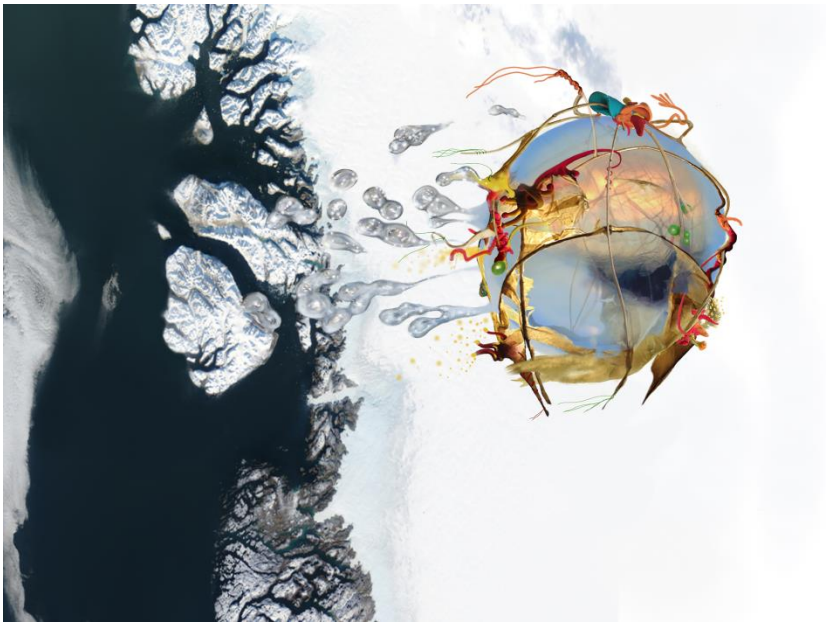
Deergirls

Anji Marth



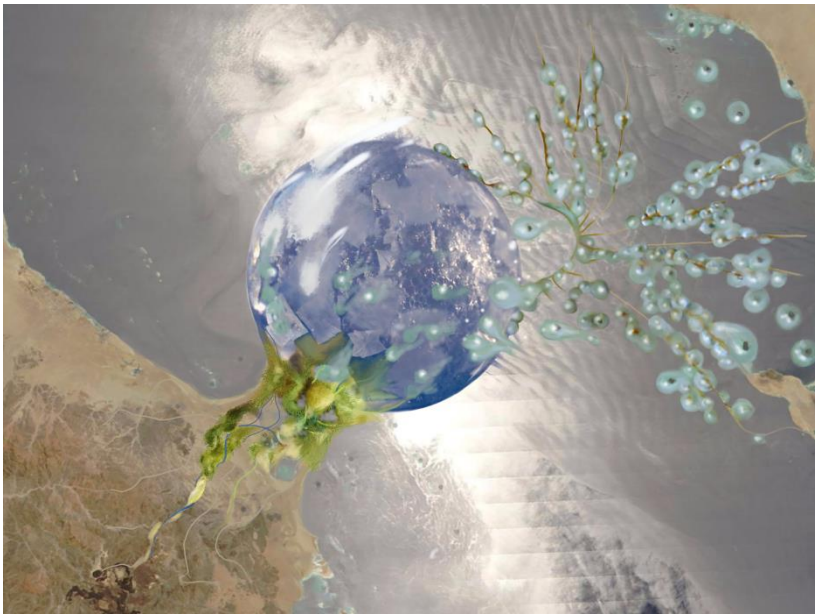
Bubble wrap

Michelle DeMarco



Surface tension

Michelle DeMarco



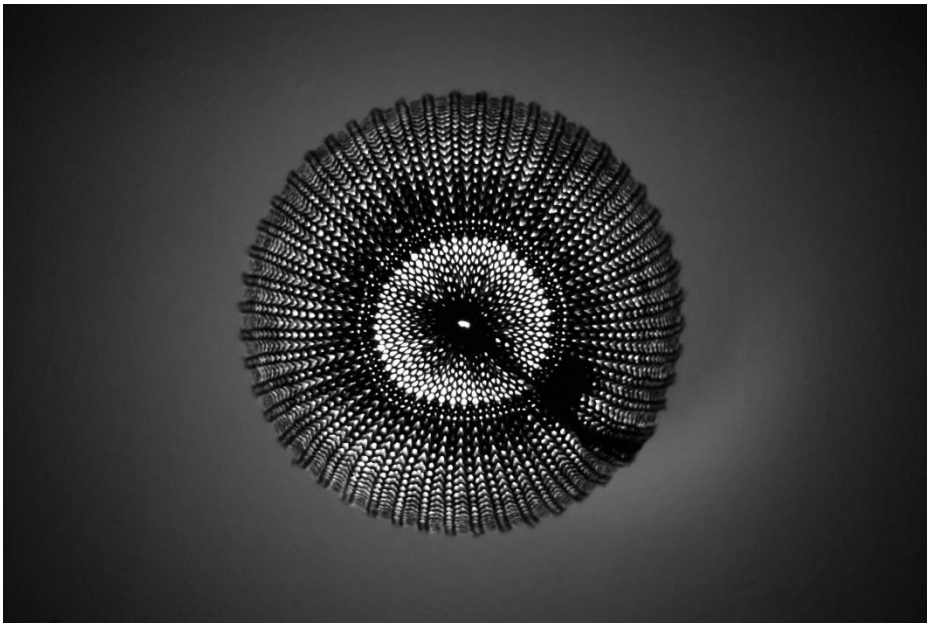
Dragon Eye

Louis Staeble



Luna a Terra

Sabrina Coyle



Interview

Sabrina Coyle

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Most of my work tends to be abstract and includes a contrast of some sort, usually between organic and geometric movement. I like to experiment with texture and color. I love color, which ironically doesn't show in this piece, but life is about experience. My paintings are usually very colorful and organic. In photography, I am obsessed with composition, especially in straight-on points of view.

What inspired the image?

I was inspired by the shape of the light and the tinge of the soft light. It evolved into this planetary object that held a resemblance to the moon and earth. It is like an in-between of the two; not quite as lifeless as the moon, nor as full of life as the earth.

How did you conceive of the image?

Originally, I was just experimenting with my dining room lamp because it radiates a nice lighting. I felt like something was missing and needed more without adding too much the photo. I decided to put my knit beanie over the lamp just to see how the light would shine through the holes. I was pleasantly surprised with the results.

Is photography the medium that you're most invested in?

No. Photography is a secondary practice of mine. I love it, though. When I do photography, I am very conscious of composition and center shots. I know it sounds cliché. I try to achieve a style similar to Wes Anderson's centered film shots. Usually I shoot in color and love very bold shades. Photography allows me to bring more life to a scene or portrait. I definitely prefer shooting portraiture though.

Is art the medium that you're most invested in?

Art in general is such a huge part of my life. I have my visual arts and then I have my music. Visual art is where I plan to take my career, but music is just a passion and hobby. I love to be surrounded by it all. My primary is drawing/painting, along with general graphic design. I find it interesting to find a way to incorporate multiple art mediums in my work altogether, including music and sound.

What is your creative process?

When I finish a piece of work, I like to stand back and take a look at it. In my process, I tend to just go off what feels right like in a stream of consciousness. Afterwards, I can evaluate what my point is, but sometimes there is no concrete reason. I create some things because they make me feel happy and allow me to vent my abstract thoughts. It is beautiful to me.

Where can our readers find more of your work?

My work can be found on my Facebook, Sabrina Elizabeth Art. I also have a blog called *Dreamer at Sea* where I show my work and those of other independent artist and interviews from them. My blog can be found at:

dreameratsea.wordpress.com

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

I am always on-board to support independent art of every kind. Driftwood Press is a wonderful tool for writers and artists to get experience in publication and it is a great source for exposure. Its purpose is to publish and expose quality work. I love having the chance to be a part of that.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

I love the idea of art having a functional use in society that allows every type of person to understand and relate in some way. Most of my work is made in some kind of functional way. I believe this allows for a larger audience and appreciation for art in general. Art is not meant for one type of social group. It is for everyone!

Unmasking Passion

Susana H. Case



Interview

Susana H. Case

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Largely documentary in nature; strongly influenced by early figures in that style of photography, such as Riis, Hine, etc.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

No, I always title my work.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

I don't do much to images other than to try to correct the color to what I remembered it being in real life.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

With "Unmasking Passion", people are on the move. It's a question of capturing the moment you need to imagine before it happens, the moment you are in the process of framing before the moment occurs.

What camera did you take these images with?

Both images were shot with a vintage Nikkormat SLR camera, rather an old-fashioned camera.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

"Unmasking Passion" is part of a larger series on Guatemalan folk/religious festivals. Doorway is part of a series on architecture.

Is photography the medium that you're most invested in?

I'm mostly a poet at this point, with a new book of poems, *4 Rms w Vu*, published by *Mayapple Press*. The poems address various elements of looking and seeing, so one could say the visual is highly important to me, whatever the medium.

Are your other photos similar in subject or focus?

In general, yes. I am interested in mysterious-seeming architectural elements and also in aspects of culture.

Who are some of your favorite photographers? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

My tastes run toward the documentary photographers, Sebastião Salgado being among the best. Robert Polidori as well, for those interested in architectural photography.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Yes, in a number of literary journals, including *Blue Hour Magazine*, *pacificREVIEW,* and *San Pedro River Review*.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

The interest in the visual arts and the emphasis on design elements on the website and also in the journal. I'm very pleased that Driftwood Press showed an interest in my work.



Poetry

Trevor Tingle
Kate Falvey
Emily Strauss
Kelly Scott Franklin
Peter Scacco
Terry S. Johnson
Rebecca Harthcock
Matt Hemmerich
Changming Yuan
Chen Chen

Fiction

Molly Bonovsky Anderson
J.R. Rogers
Mike Wood
Eric Howerton

Visual Arts

Molly Rideout
Nathaniel Saint Amour
Otha "Vakseen" Davis III
Anji Marth
Michelle DeMarco
Louis Staeble
Sabrina Coyle
Susana H. Case