“THE FEATHER”

Certain exemplary works were selected by the editing team for Howl’s Writing Challenge. Winners of the Writing Challenge receive cash awards generously funded by the Copper Mountain College Foundation. 2017 Howl recognized five winners. Those works are tactfully indicated throughout the edition with this feather.
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ART & LITERATURE

LINEAR CHAOS
By Dawn Martinez

BASKING ETERNALLY
By Carlos Roman Guzman

APOLOGIES
By Courtney Paige Freeman

AFTERBURN
By Margo McCall

BALLADEERS OF THE EMPTY GLOVE
By Greg Gilbert

BOLANO
By Mike Green

ELEGY FOR TERRI MARIE BROOKS
By Benjamin Goulet

DESERT SOLILOQUIES
By r. soos

HOMESTEAD
By Lisa Maher

LOOKING FORWARD
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MOJAVE
By r. soos

JoJo & The Hole
By Brianna Hams

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Often I hear, from those who pay more attention to their surroundings than I do mine, that the desert is constantly changing. This fact is hard for me to validate or put faith in. Beneath me, the sand seems solid; around me, the mountains appear constant; near me, the contours of my surroundings feel familiar. Even still, I am continually reminded of the transience of things: shifting sands, changing pressure zones, unseasonal rains, haboobs, floods, slides, and erosion. It’s funny, really. Being a Taurus, I enjoy believing I can stay in one place, and that place will stay there with me. I am pleased, at least, I can laugh at myself and my perception of control even as I watch it crumble around me.

This edition – Howl’s twenty-first, and our fourth year as a team — was an exercise for me. Giving up control, or rather the illusion of control, and allowing the players to play was an experience in accepting the facts I did not believe nor want to believe in. Once again, I find myself at this final hour amazed by the talent, dedication, energy, synergy, and support that go in to making Howl a success. Even with all of the changes in production, this 2017 edition is an amazing collaboration of all the disparate elements which came and went in the high desert of California in 2016 and 2017.

China Ice has been a comfort and a stalwart presence. Despite her ventures and travels, she and I explored arenas of our work and personal relationships and have become closer than I would have imagined. A woman about whom I felt protective over as I do my little sister, I now consider her a close friend and partner in editing and creating Howl. China, at times, seemed to me like a mirage this past year, yet she always returned and renewed my hope in our team.

Gary Tufel spent many days traveling the globe as well. Regardless, he managed to shoulder the bulk of the editing from his exile in Venice. This year again, I was pleasantly surprised by his dedication to Howl and his ability to negotiate social circles needed to create all that Howl has become. Gary has never let us down. Even from the southern hemisphere, Gary would respond to my insomniac inquiries with expediency.

Joshua Torres is a force to reckon with. We met two years ago, and he remained in professional contact with me until Howl sprung up again. In addition to our other collaborations, once he inquired regarding Howl, I knew I had a dedicated student editor. His presence, remote at most times, as his time is in high demand, allowed me to believe Howl 2017 was possible. When I would detect tears in the fabric, Joshua would appear and reassure me things were whole again.

Lawrence Thayer and I began our relationship as student and professor. However, on day one in my class, I knew Lawrence was a
star. In a sea of stunned students, his voice rang out above the silence in response to the question: “Are there any questions?” Lawrence is a dream student and has done much to add to Howl and its success. Watching Lawrence come in to his own as a leader gave me confidence in his role as our newest student editor. Once again, a shift occurred and brought Lawrence in to the fold of Howl. We hope he will remain a solid member as he moves through his promising ventures.

Sherry was a constant amongst the change. Joining our team as a community editor, she never wavered in her commitment to the collective. Although she was new to the project, she slid in and embedded herself as a solid force. Staying connected and welcoming the changes that approached all of us, Sherry attended religiously and brought the much needed levity missing in Rob’s absence. She fed and nourished us during each meeting. Sherry was the one who kept us on task. For one to come in to this melee and hold it together would be hard for anyone, and to come in as a novice on top of that may appear challenging. Nevertheless, Sherry has our heart felt gratitude. Thank you, Sherry.

Brenda Canas is the funniest, most rascally, and endearing vixen of a student. She gave me one of the best challenges a professor can ask for. Rob Wanless brought her to the first Howl meeting, and I knew Howl was in good hands. Once Rob left, though, she dropped me and tried to ditch Howl. Somehow, all of us managed to keep a handle on her and keep her intrigued and involved. We baited her with promises of fame and reckless abandon, and we hope she will stick around long enough to see those come to fruition. I believe she likes to keep me guessing.

Once again, this year’s Howl would not be possible without the generous and willing contributions of Melissa and Rosa, Sandy Smith, Diana Morris, Cathy, Jolie, and Michel. Many thanks to the sponsors and contributors. We received many new submissions, and we hope that trend continues to grow. Howl 2017 received generous donations from faculty, staff, and community members, all of whom deserve a piece of praise for the making of this magazine.

My personal support system was in force until the last moment. Thank you to my son, my boyfriend, my friends, and my family. The stability on which I depend happened to be here all along. Perhaps the changes the desert experiences on a daily basis never truly rattle the foundation. Perhaps the bedrock upon which all of us stand is actually made up of the web we create in order to buoy us in times of uncertainty.

Ellen e Baird  
Joshua Tree, California  
2017
LINEAR CHAOS
By Dawn Martinez
BASKING ETERNALLY
By Carlos Roman Guzman

Her locks true black thrive by night’s bleak air

Her eyes cause trance, her paralyzing peer

Brings forth emotion, from bliss to fear

Her soft, full crimson lips give way to fangs long worn

That lust to feast upon the blood of flesh they’ve freshly torn

Basking eternally at mortal’s expense, she never frets the day

For when she feels the coming sun, she flees the other way

As many times she’s round this earth are times we cannot count

So be forewarned next time you choose an evening walkabout
APOLOGIES
By Courtney Paige Freeman

Once said and meant,
   Forgiven.

Twice said and meant,
   Forgiven and shame on you.

Three times said,
   That's the charm shame on me
   And shame on you for saying sorry.

Four times said,
   I still forgive and you pretend.

Five times said.
   The last button pushed.
   The last straw cut.
   That's the end.

Sorry dried up.
AFTERBURN
By Margo McCall

My father defied gravity and tested the limits of flight and now he is dead. But he’s not really gone. He still buzzes around my skull’s higher altitudes, pesky as always. I feel small and disconnected, fiddling with the radio in my rental car, getting static. I’ve been driving hours, conscious of ground passing under tires. I haven’t been in a military facility for years. I resent having to show ID to the kid in the guard shack.

I don’t remember much, except I was born on this base. Summers were the worst. My pale skin baked. I couldn’t go outside without my mother trailing behind, saying, “Don’t let yourself get burned.”

Burned. The consuming of fuel. What remains after an explosion. You remember lights from the rocket propulsion lab shining through your bedroom window, creating glare in the plastic eyes of your stuffed animals. You can’t drink the water. It leaves a salty rim of jet fuel around your lips. Your clothes come out of the washing machine stiff. Your mother won’t stop crying.

In the pale California sunlight, my husband and daughter at home in Virginia seem imagined. I clung to their images while wending my way from LAX over the traffic-clogged freeways, up through the San Fernando Valley, by the overpass that collapsed in the earthquake, past the upturned rocks where bandits once hid. But when I hit desert, they
floated away, my daughter inside a plastic bubble, crying “Mommy,” the shadow of my husband’s eyes closing. The sand and sky and vegetation blend into vast nothingness, like the rooms of my childhood after the movers came.

At dawn, the general could be found blasting into the stratosphere, twisting and turning, spiraling toward earth solo then thrusting upward, closer to God. The pink canyon walls, panorama of orange and gray radiating over shifting sands, light playing off metal buildings, cars crawling below like ants—all was his. And always that achingly blue sky. He loved the sky more than anything.

The first thing I do after settling into the guest barracks is look up Debbie. My old friends—girls with movie star names like Judy, Debbie, and Barbara—easily made the transition from military brats to military wives. Nothing in the housing area has changed in twenty years. The cheap, postwar dwellings still stand, with their brass lawn signs indicating rank. Debbie’s husband is a colonel. I press her doorbell. Its shriek nearly breaks my eardrums.

Debbie answers the door in a flowered dress, and clutches at me as though I’m something to be consumed. “You look so different,” she says.

“I’m not sixteen anymore,” I say.

“That’s how old my son is. Can you believe it?” Debbie’s trying not to stare, shocked at coming face to face with the object of the stories. She knows about me screaming antiwar slogans, the arrests. I feel much smaller than my reputation.

“Come on in. I just made cookies,” Debbie says. She takes my hand, but can’t seem to think of anything to say. “So tell me what you’ve been up to.”

“Not much,” I tell her.

“Well then, would you like coffee?” Debbie collects cups and saucers, and the clean kitchen reminds me of another time. Nine years old again, sitting in my mother’s kitchen. My mother’s making a cake for the Air Force Association potluck the first time I hear the story.

“It was the middle of summer when we drove out—hot and not even any air conditioning. I prayed for a town—Lord just for some sign of civilization, but there was nothing but sand.” A halo of fine dust rises as your mother sifts
flour. You watch her crack an egg into a bowl, and begin her slow stirring. “It was so different from Maine.” Cold sea slops at the pier footings. Your mother likes the clammy caress of fog and the man whose kisses are like ocean waves. Later, your father will wipe dandruff from his flight suit and ask you to wave at him as he flies overheard. You do, but he won’t wave back.

The dress I wear to the awards ceremony for my father makes me uncomfortable.

When my turn to speak arrives, I’m nervous. I tell the group of grizzled pilots about the time my father crash-landed thirty miles from nowhere right before lunch.

“He searched the pockets of his flight suit for something to eat. He didn’t care that he crashed, only that his stomach was empty.” I have to scream to make myself heard. The old codgers are all deaf from the roar of jet engines.

You think the sky will never end. There are always planes screeching through it, and explosions that shake the ground. You lie in the backyard and feel vibrations from things blowing up. The sky’s the limit, one giant step for mankind. You walk over sand that melts your shoes, looking for wreckage. Then your father is being transferred. You cry; you’re getting good at it.

Debbie tells me she liked what I said at the ceremony. “Your father would have been proud,” she says. “And that’s such a pretty dress.”

I run to the rental car that will take me away. I feel the sky closing in as I grapple for my keys. There is the fear I won’t get out before lifting off into space.

Your father’s casket wears a flag. “Taps” lingers in the chilly air. Something inside you explodes. Your screech is like a jet taking off. You’re convinced you’ll understand if you can see it from all sides. If you could get to the other side of the pink clouds, burrow under the layers of sand to bedrock, you could bring the edges together.

Above is where heroes cruise many times the speed of sound. Larger than life, their lungs fill with pure oxygen, their bodies holy receptacles for earthly G-forces. During the day, they’re black specks that look like birds. At night, they’re ghostly red satellites that circle but never land.
BALLADEERS OF THE EMPTY GLOVE
By Greg Gilbert

Think on this Sir Thomas Malory
The past that we celebrate never happened
It’s a realm just outside our human reach
And we like river rocks tremble in the stream
Debris collecting at our toes, hollows at our heels
And Mt. Baden crumbles into time’s dusty currents

The past is a silence filled by balladeers
Prognosticators and their jumbled histories
Troubadours, fabulists, and raconteurs
Prologues to a future as silent as the grave

How we fling ourselves at these stories
Histories not born within us but imparted
And we in our times are transformed into myth

What will you say for yourself, Sir Malory, your tales
Of envy, glory, and duplicitous love, what will you say
That hasn’t been recounted in every generation?

We are born into a world that is born into its self
Little plot-points clichéd by countless recountsings
Those who glorify the favor of an empty glove
A pressed flower, a bit of ribbon or a photograph,
Tokens to supplant the banalities of daily life
All this questing and requesting and devotion that
Answers the call to arms affirmed by trusted elders
Calls to protect and serve those arms that one day
Like human grails will cradle our embattled hearts
And in turn usher their children off to Mt. Baden

The empty glove trembles amid ancient ballads
The dainty lambskin digits, a hollow token encircling
With fixed indifference the lances of devoted legions

And your champions, Sir Malory, herald our warriors
Their solitary struggles, each story a unique ballad
Of youthful virtue fogged by war and lethal yearnings
Called forth from adolescent grace to live the ancient tale
Wherein a slaughterer of men, God’s own radiant warrior
This bravest of knights, this mighty champion, Sir Pelleas,
By his own cunning, arrives bound and encumbered
Delivered thus to Lady Ettard beneath the belly of a horse
When Roberto Bolano rolled into my life like a guillotined head I
needed a swift kick in the balls even he would
have said so
I had held on too long to a country that had left me for dead
not completely
But critically wounded floating
In its fartwake as it sailed gleefully away from my dream.

Not just me
There were others who never saw it coming
fistfucked and feetfucked
I got the shits the chills my bones cracked with cold my lungs
filled with paddy water many of us thought This is no way to
live a heavy cancer colored cloud descended Death's
wet kiss
In iced over baths we floated and then sank each last breath
coming like a puff of ash

The morning it bled rain my country flipped out went crazy
as if this were the only day the only morning in 400 years
we turned to the future with nothing at our backs but falling bodies
now the world has caught up with us car crash
dog meets fender in reality jaw seized in pain taste of tongue
and blood

We gave thanks for the poverty of our dreams
dangled in our scrotal skin
felt the center wobble  heard the parts fall
knew even futility has its price

I saw him  Roberto
on dirt roads  out past the border
driving at midnight  lights busted out  this crazy
honking will give us  meaning
infants barking
girls with green finger nails braid their father’s thinning hair
lost in the forests of the sea  or  those streets at 2
each street lights its own moon or water filled blister
each mouth filled like a dog’s

I saw him  Roberto
out there  in the hills
over the desert
looking like the last dream of a Hollywood hit man
driving through the streets of LA
his words went out as smoke across the city
a trunkful of sonnets and Pisco

I saw him  Roberto
driving a black ’63 Lincoln Continental convertible with suicide
doors
tuxedo interior
never
yielding the right of way
smoking a Delicados
firing off a few rounds at every other street corner

Keep your heads down he shouted

The cholos said Esta loco

he keeps finger banging our dreams
deflowering our desperation

He wanted too much I told him to suck my dick
He told me I was just tired of all the tricks all the empty
dirty streets hollow houses lost faces
in broken windows families in abandoned cars
living like cats wind and dust

I never thought I would be writing

like this I always thought it would be

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

all over again.

Who wouldn’t be happy with that?

But, there is no well-loved remaining, only
dross,

and severed pink fingers flying over LA.

How can there be so many poems in such a time of loss?

Well you might ask. Only to sweep back the sea sand

of fear.

They line up my poets with their poems like brooms

like early morning street sweepers ready to push back a
filthy tide.

The gutters are full of dead dogs

and their shit-eyes
glaring up as if beseeching heaven’s lost patron
saint
of vanished faith
and these poems only the soggy butt of their
memory.

Where is my army of poets
he called driving their verse like stolen Escalades
through the dark LA streets Tristran Corbier bumping
Nicanor Para on heavy rotation
cruising for another land another Country finding
only
a backyard
after a 5 year old’s party torn streamers, bashed in piñata,
deflated jumper, a little innocent blood in the cake, Bozo arms
akimbo sole ruler of it all
Sovereign of our new Emptiness.

I was talking about my army of poets
bendejo monkey poets
apes chimps bonobos howlers especially desert howlers

He said
you’ve got to fight which was easy for him to say
because he was a fighter
most of us are more like worms
you are a lot like worms I know
that’s not meant as an insult even a worm can look dashing
in a certain kind of hat Stetson would be best I think
with a red white and blue hat band
ELEGY FOR TERRI MARIE BROOKS
(Killed, at 26, in a car crash on January 14, 2015.)
By Benjamin Goulet

A quick look,
maybe eyes in a squint,
your final seconds we’ll never know –
on the morning you were torn from the world
at the corner of Route 62 and Utah Trail.

As a native daughter of the valley,
The Hi-Desert Star devoted four hundred words to you
and that’s how I learned of your story.
The picture they ran:
brown hair, long to the shoulders,
eyeglasses black of rim,
bundled up on some excursion
while flanked by your family,
a shy,
easy smile.

You were smart and driven,
armed with a hard-earned degree in nursing.
A devoted mom with quirky tastes,
as a fan of both Marilyn Monroe and the Dallas Cowboys.
And the universe spun its unpredictable magic
when you fell in love
with a Marine.

He had sandy locks and an accent laced of the Carolinas,
a world of greenery and old tradition,
so different from your wild place of cholla and dust.
I imagine you entered the union
with a fierce and total love,
open to the burdens of a military wife,
its restlessness, its boredom,
and a periphery mined of tortuous unknowns.
The nights can be so sleepless,
the minutes seem to hover and mock.
But what were the chances of meeting him?
(His sister described you as the miracle of her brother’s life).
It seemed that fate could only protect.
Your circle grew:  
bringing two children into the marriage,  
a daughter followed,  
then another daughter – lost at one month old.  
It was a blow that could crush, even destroy.  
But for you, it did neither,  
as you discovered the comfort of simple acts:  
on her birthday, a display of balloons –  
one for each year that she would have lived.

In the accident’s wake,  
your husband pleaded with the public  
to remember you only as joyful,  
but the crazed animal of internet commentary  
would not heed his call.  
Online, the grief exploded.  
The readers damned the location in rage,  
– the bad signage and a lack of traffic lights –  
thanking God that your kids survived.  
Passing around stories of 62,  
a scrapbook of inveterate mishap,  
this long gray ribbon, littered with deaths.

Out of the carnage of untold numbers,  
you emerged a symbol of grotesque neglect.  
But calls for action tend to fade,  
like the tail of sound off a clangoring bell,  
as we imagine government at its worst:  
the city planners pore dumbly over maps and statistics,  
the experts weigh in with suggestions ignored  
and the politicians shrug, then lecture on cost.

And who am I? Who am I to speak of you?  
A stranger, a newcomer lost in the orbit of your hometown,  
barely able to find an ATM or the nearest beer.  
I haven’t earned the right to wallow in the void of your loss.

But your story,  
it took hold  
as it glows off the screen,  
pouring out toward the vast black mountains,  
where the clouds roll soundless  
and lightning flashes.
daybreak
the cactus calls shadows
for rodents to hide from flames on
the horizon, a silent blaze quieting
intrinsic voices and ghosts

believe
warm azure daylight
glistens in the desert sand
engraving pleasures
noon
peyote prays life for life
and lives rodent sweat

humming
a tune
that feels relevant
as I daydream
of the desert
the sun a torch
the hot air washes
my dried throat
and my instrument
loses the memory
of the tune

purified
I became desert
befriended by holy rocks
sheltering the harsh sun
twilight
afire the sun signals
blood to darken the skies
painting red the time/space
between day/night
painting the edge of sunset
with reds and oranges
recalling a dream
reflected in the mirror
drowning tears
of poetry written
by crickets waiting
for darkness

sky
voices from the void
sing the spirit of the world
passing through death’s gate

epilogue
the desert
does not sing praise
after I recite my song
over its holy sand

anguish approaches
in coyote form tonight
howling freedom songs

dance with dead
midnight spirits
HOMESTEAD
By Lisa Maher
LOOKING FORWARD
By Margaret Snyder

Spring has sprung and little flowers are blooming.  
The air smells sweet and clean.  
The sky is clear and a brilliant shade of blue.  
There is expectation in the breeze that wafts across my face.

Above are birds, riding on the thermals.  
A mating pair of red-tail hawks are overhead,  
chasing each other through the sky.  
They seem to be caught up in the magic in the air.

Everywhere I look, pairs of birds are flying together.  
Why have I never noticed this rite of Spring before?  
I’ve seen the tiny wrens build nests in my Joshua tree,  
and lay their wee eggs, and watched the babies take flight.

But this year, through spring and into summer,  
I saw the birds in pairs, dancing together in the sky.  
Each time, I felt a feeling of awe flow over me,  
and saw the renewal of life in a different way.

I’m looking forward to Spring time next year.  
I’m looking forward to the flight of the birds.  
I’m looking forward to the feeling of awe.  
I’m looking forward to life.
MOJAVE
By r. soos

enter
through broken rock
skid on loose gravel
look up over the tops
of the joshua trees
flowing from here

reach up
touch the blue
with your fingers
I remember that morning very well. I was nine and he was ten and we were both terribly prone to getting into trouble whenever we were within a five hundred foot radius of each other. Our mothers had banished us from the house shortly after breakfast, setting us loose in the backyard with shovels and spades and permission to use the water hose. JoJo’s smile was infectious as he grabbed my hand and pulled me after him. “We’ll dig to China!” he proclaimed. “C’mon, Bean! Let’s go!”

To this day I don’t know why he called me “Bean” and neither does anyone else except him. JoJo was like that. He just did things for no reason; whether it was giving someone a weird nickname or filling up the clothes dryer with Hot Wheels cars and turning it on or even super gluing his fingers together. But back to the story.

We broke ground on our great adventure under the shade of a lone evergreen tree near the back right corner of the yard, claiming the space as our own with a small, wonky mound of mud that listed to one side and had a large stick protruding from it. From the ballast of that stick we flew a flag made of an old Hershey bar wrapper. JoJo declared the land ours and within the hour we soon had ourselves a beautiful muddy hole just big enough for the both of us to sit in comfortably. “I’ll be right back,” JoJo said. “We’re missing something.”
He then took a moment to run into the storage shed and rummage around for whatever it was he was so convinced we needed, making an awful ruckus as he went along. After a few minutes JoJo emerged from the shed dragging a large tarp made of blue plastic behind him. He gave a great whoop of triumph as he ran back to our newly made fortress, climbed down into the hole next to me, and pulled the tarp over the mouth of the hole, shrouding us in a pale aquamarine darkness. “We can hide in here forever,” I told JoJo. “Just you and me.”

“Yeah,” JoJo nodded. “We’ll sneak out some food and blankets and then we’ll be set.” JoJo then reached over and took my hand in his. “You really wanna spend forever with me?” he asked.

“Well, duhh.” I answered. “Who else is gonna rule the world with me? You’re Pinky and I’m the Brain, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember,” JoJo said as he shifted around in the dirt and brought our faces close together. “Come here,” he said. “I wanna try something.” He brought our closed mouths against each other for a split second and just like that, JoJo stole my first kiss.

I can’t recall what happened the rest of that day. All I know is that we got caught by JoJo’s older sisters and they told on us. The spanking that followed was swelteringly painful, but in the end none of that mattered. What mattered was that my life had changed. Something occurred in that hole under that blue tarp. I think that what happened was that I grew up a little bit… just a tiny, tiny bit of me was no longer a child.

In the years that followed I grew up the rest of the way and so did JoJo. He goes by Joey now and he proudly serves in the Air Force, building engines for fighter jets. I go by Brianna and I’m eking my way through community college, trying like hell to be a writer. He’s engaged to a girl I’ve never met and I’m trying to find my special someone too. We have both have bills to pay and lives to live. But even considering all of those things, I have to admit that there isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t wish I could be nine years old again and back in that hole, being kissed for the first time. I wish that he could be JoJo and that I could be Bean and that the world could be as amazingly simple as it was that day.

The day we dug that hole.
PURPLE RAIN
By Tania Love Abramson
RAIN
By Courtney Paige Freeman

The sky is dark the cloud cover high
Rain pours down
A loud pitter-pat sounds from above
A puddle of water forms below
I run around searching for something to catch the leak
No luck, Ah ha! An idea comes to mind
I dash for the kitchen in search of a bowl
I place it under the hole in my roof

All is calm inside until
A faint pitter-pat sounds from another room
I frantically search for this sound’s maker
I find it, and lo and behold another hole
I dash to the kitchen in search for another bowl

And all is calm inside until
A tiny noise I hear as if it’s almost a…
Another PITTER-PAT!
I look around fists held tight heart beating fast…
And there I’ve found the source once again.

All through the afternoon I’ve found new leaks
More holes more bowls and I’ve grown tired of
The pitter-pat that led me to run again.
Finally a break... silence, nothing.
Not even a pitter-pat in range.
An hour passes still nothing.

Convinced that all leaks have been found
I rest my eyes for just a moment when...
A small ever so gently drop of water drips on my face.
I shout in anger and march to the kitchen,
I search for a bowl...

Cabinet after cabinet I search and find, Emptiness.
I begin to panic
Of course I have more bowls
There has to be more!

Soon I hear pitter-pat, pitter-pat pat
All around the house
And not a single bowl in sight
Then at last I find a bowl... but where shall I set it?
There are too many holes.
With a sigh I turn over the bowl
Place it on my head and simply give in to defeat.
Red Rock Canyon
By Margo McCall

Nineteen is hard, my mother tells me. So are twenty and twenty-one. It’s late afternoon, a glittering crystal of time when it’s just the two of us. Home from another day spent changing sheets at White’s Motel, my mom slips off her shoes and rests her feet on a kitchen chair. Sunlight has chased away the shadows, erased her wrinkles, burned away the hard feelings between us.

“When I was young, I didn’t want to stay here either,” she says, examining her hands, red from all the cleaning chemicals. “But after your father and you kids came along, where was I going to go?” She glances at the faded pictures of me and my four brothers on the fridge, then back to her hands.

In the brightness of afternoon, as she shakes her golden hair free from its rubber band, raises a glass of water to her lips and drinks, I watch the movement in her throat, and imagine her being young once, too. But then she bangs the empty glass down on the table, and the sun moves on to some other kitchen.
“Life is tough,” she says. “Sooner you get used to it the better.” She carries the glass to the kitchen sink. Now that the sun has moved on, her eyes look tired and her tinted hair like dry straw.

“Well, better get started on dinner,” she sighs. “Your father will be home soon. And Lucy, shouldn’t you be getting ready for work?”

Pauline is already behind the counter at Don’s Market when a gust of wind blasts me through the front door and deposits me in a disheveled mess among the racks of candy bars and potato chips, the leathery hotdogs twirling listlessly in their stainless steel cage, the rows of glass doors holding Coke and Pepsi, Sprite and herbal iced teas. There’s already a line of people impatient to buy gas and snacks, make restroom stops, and put this windy desert town behind them.

“Hey girlfriend,” Pauline says, looking frantic. “You’re late.”

Pauline’s schoolbooks are under the counter as usual. Later, when traffic on the interstate dies down, she’ll sit on a stool and bury her head in Introduction to Business Practices or Standard Accounting. But right now her fingers are dancing over the cash register, her determined lips saying, “That will be $18.40” and “Restrooms are in the back,” and “Lucy, can you reset Pump No. 2?”

It’s jarring to enter Don’s Market, the noise and people a contrast from the streets I walk to work, the wooden shacks in need of paint, barking dogs lunging at chain link fences piled high with trash, alone but for hot wind and blowing sand. But after a few minutes, I too am speaking in sharp phrases: “Does your card have a chip?” and “Will that be all?” and “Roadmaps are by the door.”

I love the maps. Eastern Sierras, state of California, the entire United States—I’ve memorized all of them. After the whir of traffic on Highway 58 gives way to quiet, during the silent time when Pauline runs her pink highlighter over key phrases in her textbooks, I open the maps on the counter and hit the road.

The place I live is a tiny dot, connecting red lines of highways and black lines of interstates. I’m attracted to the bigger dots: Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami. For awhile, I thought Philadelphia had a nice ring. Then I began thinking that if I was going somewhere new, the place should have “new” in its name: New York, New Orleans, New Haven.

As I pick up the mop, my life feels like as big of a mess as the one waiting for me in the restroom.

Here in the Mojave Desert, the wind never stops blowing. Here you must stand your ground or risk being whisked away. The wind is a thief that takes what it can get. It eats slowly at the sandstone cliffs up in Red Rock Canyon, then blows into town, dumping a thick film of dust on houses and motels and highways and people. Sometimes I imagine myself filling with sand. When I can hold no more, I’ll revert to dust and blow away.

Bathroom crisis averted, I hurry back to help Pauline at the front of the store. Somebody has pulled the maps out of the rack. Don will have a shit fit if they’re not refolded exactly as they were. Don, with his sunburned face and beady eyes, reminds me of my father, always ranting, screaming at my mother one minute and snoring on the couch the next, both men acting like they own the universe. With Don it’s “my maps, my store, my girls” and with my father it’s “my wife, my sons, my house.”

After a couple of hours, the store clears out and it’s just me and Pauline. “Whew,” she says. “That was some rush.” She plants her ample hips clad in purple stretch pants on the stool and bends in two to fluff up her hair and adjust her pink headband. “So wattup, girlfriend?”


Pauline grabs a lollipop from the jar on the counter and unwraps it. “Oh yeah. I plan to ace them.”

Pauline’s the only girl I know beside myself who didn’t get pregnant or married right after high school. Julia, Amanda, and Leticia had their babies even before graduation. Funny how the school counselors always had more pamphlets on birth control and drug abuse than they did on college or vocational training. But Pauline’s mom, who teaches kindergarten, and her father, who sells real estate, have always pushed Pauline toward college.

“You stick with Pauline; she’s got a good head on her shoulders,” my mom’s been saying ever since Pauline and I became best friends back
in Grade 5. Pauline drives thirty minutes just to get to the community college in the next town. She wants to be an accountant. Already, she’s collecting the sensible pumps and suits she’ll wear when she goes to work in an office tower. Pauline thinks I should go to college, too. Maybe some day. But right now, all I care about is kissing this hellhole goodbye.

Outside the market, the wind rips at newspapers anchored by sparkling chunks of granite. During the week, mostly locals and barrel-chested truckers come into Don’s. The truckers hobble from rigs marked with hometowns like Friend, Oregon; Greasewood, Arizona; Recluse, Wyoming—amble in on spindly legs, ordering coffee and Marlboros as their engines suck up fresh diesel.

On weekends, there are families of children in clean t-shirts, leather-skinned men with fishing boats strapped to pickups, mountain bikers in vans, couples headed to Las Vegas to try their luck. Everyone just passing through.

Pauline leans forward on her stool. “Guess who I saw today?”

“I give up. Who?”

“Phil,” Pauline says conspiratorially. “Did you know he left that seventeen-year-old wife of his?”

“That’s old news, and she’s eighteen now,” I say, ripping into a packet of Skittles. I toss a few in my mouth. “Did Phil mention he got arrested again?”

Pauline takes the lollipop out of her mouth and holds it up like an exclamation point. “No way! Not the captain of our football team.”

“They got him on trafficking. Doubt he’ll plea bargain this one down to possession.”

I used to love Phil. Back in high school, I used to hide inside the green-walled library at Mojave High, peering through the sandblasted window at him and the other players scrimmaging on the sun-bleached grass in their shoulder pads and helmets. He finally noticed me, but it took him a year.

We met under the bleachers, on the cold sand where no grass would grow, where the wind couldn’t reach us, long after the games
were over and the cheering had stopped. His skin was warm on those cold nights. I liked running my fingers over the muscles of his arms, but even more, just stretching out on the ridges of sand our bodies made, my face resting in the curve of his neck.

Phil said he thought of me when he ran down the field clutching that ball. He said I was beautiful, and not just on the outside. But he was lying, because soon after that, he said he had to get married because Gina was pregnant.

It made me want to move like a tumbleweed rolling over open land, sloughing off the pain. He made it hard to live in my own hometown. But maybe I was just born to run.

I used to sit on the curb in front of White’s Motel as a little girl, watching the traffic. Cars loaded with families and semi trucks all going somewhere and I was stuck, there on that curb, the concrete pressing designs into the skin of my thighs. Sometimes if I raised a palm and fluttered it like a bird, someone waved back. But usually they were going too fast to notice. And then my mother would come out of a room, pushing a cart stacked with cleaning supplies, and scream in terror, “Get away from that road.”

Later she screamed other things. “Don’t you have any self respect?” and “If you don’t care about your reputation, at least think of ours.” I scream things back, like “I didn’t ask to be born here” and “I hope I don’t end up like you.”

I’m alone at the counter after Pauline leaves for her break at eight. Staring at the pinkish light accompanying the sun’s slow slide into the horizon, I think about what my mom said earlier.

I’ve lived my whole life in the house on Backus Road, stuck between the ribbon of highway and the tracks laid flat like jail cell bars. People used to call it the trainmaster’s house—it’s where the first one lived when he rolled in with the rails a hundred years ago. For the past fifty years, it’s been the Taylor place, where my dad grew up and spawned his four prized sons, strapping boys dutifully scattered around their birthplace like stones. Robert works at U.S. Borax, William at Cal-Portland Cement, Paul at the Air Force base, Steven for the railroad.
I’ve been invisible my whole life. Maybe I was never meant to exist here in the first place. A while back, I was in Reno’s, and someone asked, “Are you one of the Taylor boys’ wives? I didn’t know the Taylors had a daughter.” Of course that was before I made a name for myself by hopping a freight train out of town right before high school graduation. I was apprehended in the Colton train yard, returned like a shipment sent by mistake to the wrong destination.

“Why can’t you be more like your brothers?” my father always asks.

“Because I’m not,” I answer.

All the days spent at the borax plant, coming home covered with white dust, have leached away all his understanding. He used to laugh. His brown eyes were happy. Now he can’t seem to stand being inside his own skin.

When I see the motorcycle pulling up to the gas pumps, I feel like a terminator zeroing in on my target. Click, click—and he’s locked in for good. He’s wearing a black biker jacket with tight jeans, and a gold nose ring that glints in the sun. Leaning near the pumps is the blue metal-flake Harley that will take me away. The rippling desert heat reduces him to shimmering waves as he fills his tank. But when he saunters into the air-conditioned coolness of the store to pay, our hands touch and he proves he’s no mirage.

By the time Pauline returns and opens her books to where she left off, the sun has slipped below the horizon. The knot in my stomach grows; my fingers are crossed so hard it hurts.

Pauline’s dismayed when she sees the Harley pull up and the rider wave in my direction. I knew she’d be mad, and dread what’s coming next.

“I thought you were going to quit going off with total strangers,” she says, her lips pursed with disapproval.

“He’s not a stranger, his name is Jay,” I say.

“He’d be happy to drive you somewhere when the semester is over,” Pauline says. “You said you were through with these self-destructive impulses.”
I look her in the eye. “If I don’t get out of here, I’ll die.”

I don’t care that Jay’s only taking me to Reno’s, beyond the obscene glare of drive-throughs and mini-marts, only that there’s a chance to go further. The blast-furnace wind is hot in my face. Hooked onto his jacket in the dark, smelling leather and cigarettes and sweat, our hips collide with each gear-shift. It’s in that center that the roaring power of acceleration collects, the scattered energies that make me want to move, move, move.

People I know glance up with hostile boredom as me and my road warrior strut into the bar and slip into an empty back booth. Looking around, I see some of my father’s friends—laughing and drunk again—and kids I went to school with. No matter where I go, there’s always someone who knows my reputation.

Jay removes his leather gloves and smoothes down his frizzy hair with hands that seem delicate. On the back of his bike, his hair felt like steel cables lashing my face. But now, in the cocktail lounge’s dim lights, it appears harmless as a used-up scouring pad. He orders a couple of Jack Daniels and Cokes, and nobody seems to notice that it will be a couple more years ‘til I’m legal.

The next morning I wake up alone, and remember being in this same motel room with someone else—a Steve or a Brian. I can’t recall his name, only his white Nissan truck, and that eternal blondness, skin so translucent he seemed to disappear before my eyes. Right after Phil’s wedding, there was that Marine meandering through on his way to the base in Twentynine Palms. And finally, there was Earl the trucker, hauling Zacky Farms chickens to the City of Angels, so strung out on speed he had the permanent shakes. “I love L.A.,” I pleaded when he ambled into the market. But Earl insisted, “Sorry, no chicks in the rig.”

The disappointments come like quicksand. Soon, I’m buried up to my ears. I’m trying to figure out how not to sink any deeper, and don’t hear the rapid-fire knocks followed by my mother’s voice, calling “Maid Service.”

The force of her grip around my wrists is startling. “I told you what I’d do, didn’t I?” she sputters. “No daughter of mine’s going to…. and in the place where I work.”
And then she deflates, crying into the soiled sheets. Her pitiful wails show no sign of subsiding even as I hold her hand and try to calm her.

Nineteen is old enough to recognize when there’s no going back, when the place you live has become a mirage. Lying on my bed, looking at the ceiling, my bedroom already seems distant, the hard edges of emptiness that will come when I’m no longer there to occupy space. Goodbye to the ballerina jewelry box my mother gave me, stuffed animals from my father, mystery books I read as the wind howled outside.

I get my marching orders at the family meeting my father has called. “Out of my house,” he demands. “As far as I’m concerned, you’re no longer my daughter.”

My mother spreads a map on the kitchen table. “That’s where your Aunt Brenda lives,” she says, her finger touching the city of Minneapolis.

“That will be fine,” I say. The dot on the map looks so far away.

Aunt Brenda has agreed to let me stay in her guest room until I find a job and save up for a place of my own, and will pick me up at the bus station when I get there.

I follow my mother upstairs into the musty smelling room where my parents have slept for the last twenty-five years. She struggles to remove the false bottom compartment from her jewelry box, while I look around the room, trying to preserve it in memory. All the pictures of us growing up, sitting on Santa’s knee, climbing the metal jungle gym that got so hot it burned our hands. The pictures swim and swirl, ready to be sucked into the drain of memory.

My mother presses a thick wad of dollar bills into my hand, then carefully folds my fingers over the money. “I’m sorry I didn’t give you this sooner,” she says. “This is all there is, so don’t blow it.”

I hug her like I’ll never see her again.

Counting the money at the Greyhound station, I buy my ticket and climb aboard. The bus is filled with twittering senior citizens who point out scenery as we chug past the outskirts of town. “My goodness,
will you look at those funny plants,” one of the old ladies says, gesturing to the trees explorers named Joshuas because it looked like their limbs were praying.

My seatmate wears pink sweats and shocking white athletic shoes. As she stares out the window, the wrinkles in her face spread out like roads and rivers on a map. “Do you live in this area, honey?” she suddenly asks, turning her aged cheek from the scenery of desert pastels.

“I was born here,” I say, grimacing.

“I grew up in a small town, too, but I’ve lived in Paris and London, all over the world.” The woman turns and stares out the window again. “Leaving home was hard, but it was the best thing I ever did.”

Thirty minutes later, I stare at sandstone cliffs rubbed red as raw wounds, remembering the times my parents brought me to Red Rock Canyon to scamper around on the rocks. My father was strong enough to carry me on his shoulders then. He’d pretend to be one of the mules used to haul borax through the desert before rock was blasted out for the highway. My mother waved gaily and laughed as I climbed as high as I could and heard the voices of the wind. My heart pounded with the flash of raven wing, the undulating purple of mountains, the sparkle of sunlight on sand.

The state transportation department cut right through Red Rock Canyon to put in Highway 14. There was a time when I considered the place ruined, just like me. But now in all the bright sunlight I see that the road cut did little to diminish the rock formations’ grandeur. Even after everyone on earth has eroded and turned to dust, the rocks will remain.

A dust devil kicks up in the distance, rising and spiraling above the sand. And soon the bus is barreling along the highway, the wind from the open window tossing my hair. Distance reduces the cliffs of Red Rock to an etching of sand that will grow smaller and smaller then finally disappear.
A FAREWELL TO HOWL
By Rob Wanless

I had to leave—
To chase the dream—
To reach for that cliché—
To swing at the great piñata

But behind me
Great friends work
With one less hand
On that same field

A tear fell today
As I thought of writers
Far away
Working on that field

We shared a gift
From a thousand pens
But only a few feathers
for that rich field

One day the path
Will lead me back
To till the rich soil
Side by side
in that verdant field
FLOWER DANCE
By Zara Kand
SKINNY GIRLS
By Brianna Hams

I know why skinny girls are so sad
They watch me eating chili fries and it makes them feel bad

I know why skinny girls are so cold
They don’t have love handles so there’s nowhere for the heat to hold

I know why skinny girls call me a fat bitch.
It’s because what they really want is the other half of my sandwich

I know one thing that skinny girls have yet to learn
I know that my waistline does not determine the respect that I earn

The one thing I wish skinny girls could see
Is that I’m just as beautiful as them and they are just as beautiful as me

I know how skinny girls and fat girls can get along
All we need to do is recognize that these stereotypes are wrong

I know how skinny girls can stand up for what’s right
All they have to do is walk up to me while I’m eating and ask for a bite
FOOTSTEPS
By r. soos

they remain for days
till the desert wind engulfs
the marks in the sand
This is not good, thought Bradley as he turned and saw that the group he was with was nowhere in sight. Ironic to get lost during a desert survival class. He had been hoping to learn the ways of the desert; now, it was looking as though he would really have no choice. Fortunately his pack had food and water, matches, and an emergency blanket. He could identify Polaris and so knew he could get his bearings, but he might not be able to get out of here tonight. He walked off in the direction that he believed the party to be in, scrambling over the boulders that he thought he had come over. It was so hard to tell, almost every direction looked the same and the sun was up in the center of the sky, high noon betraying his sense of bearings.

He hiked for an hour or so before the sun showed him that he had been going in the wrong direction the whole time. He turned around and tried to retrace his steps as best he could but the landscape all blurred together into one endless cage that felt like it was closing in on him. Bradley stopped to sip from his water and scan the area from the top of the hill he was standing on, looking for any signs of shade.
that might get him out of the brutal heat. There was none anywhere near his vantage point. Were it not for his big floppy hat the skin on his face would probably have peeled off already. It had to be well over 100 degrees.

It looked as though it was miles away, but Bradley spied a small outcrop of Pinyon Pines at the base of one of the ancient extinct volcanoes. It was surrounded by a series of boulders, which in combination with the trees looked as though it might provide him with not only some shade, but also a place to spend the night. His only hope was that it was not in the opposite direction to which he should be going.

Opening his day pack he inventoried his food and water, eating just a little bit in case he needed to make it stretch. The food did not seem like enough to sustain him for the hike across the valley, but it would have to do for now. Bradley set off down the hill and entered the shadeless valley which he had to cross. He hiked for hours trying to remember to drink water often. The sun was now threatening to go down and its transition to the west made it, by Bradley’s telling, somewhere around 7:30 in the evening. Dark would come upon him soon and the outcrop of trees still seemed at least an hour or so off. He picked up his pace; it was cooler now and easier to move faster. It also felt as though he was moving for his life.

When he finally reached the outcrop he was both exhausted and disgustingly sweaty. The smell of his own body was beginning to bother him and he wished that he was arriving home to the comfort of his bed and a shower. Alas, he was not, so he went about clearing the ground from rocks and trying to build some kind of softer surface out of the scattered pine needles. When he was finished he had some semblance of a bed and laid his pack down for a pillow after removing the emergency blanket. Bradley looked up at the sky for the first time in a while and was amazed at how many stars he could see. It had not occurred to him but they had been lighting up the desert enough for him to continue his hike to the outcrop. He thanked the stars for allowing him to arrive there safely. Hopefully the sun of the next day would lead him home and out of this fearful desert that had swallowed him.

Gathering more pine needles and some sticks he lit a small fire for the night, which was beginning to get scarily cold. He laid down on
the bed he had made and listened to the crackle of the fire while gazing at the constellations that he wished he knew better, that he wished he could navigate by. Finding the Big Dipper, he traced its lines and found Polaris, glad that he at least knew this much. He got up and grabbed two sticks, jamming one in the ground and laying the other across it pointing in the direction of north. This way he would gain his bearings in the morning. Satisfied that he had done something that could help him the next day he curled back up under the silvery emergency blanket and fell asleep, exhausted from the day’s hiking.

Bradley shot up awake and looked into the dark night sky. It was freezing cold and he had no idea how to tell what time it was. Pondering this he realized what had woken him up. The air was filled with an almost imperceptible low hum. It felt like it was vibrating his bones. He looked at his blanket and saw that it glittered with the lighting of nightclubs. Gazing into the desert he saw what this strange glow was all about. He stood up, startled, wondering if the lights had just appeared. From this higher vantage point he saw that the ground was littered with thousands of scorpions, all glowing in the black-light. Oh my God, have I been sleeping with these all around me? It’s a miracle I have not been stung.

Abruptly the thousands of glowing scorpions rose up into the air as if gravity had been released. They hovered upwards slowly like a thousand miniature helicopters. They seemed to stand still far above him, then formed a funnel-like shape as they gracefully flew upwards. Only then did Bradley look up and see that the cone of floating scorpions was disappearing into what seemed like a hole in the night. As they disappeared into the hole he saw small pink lightning spark through the glow in impossible spirals. Then all went black and nothing but the night stars and the desert surrounded him.

It was next to impossible to sleep after the spectacle, but Bradley still found himself exhausted from the exertions of the day. Eventually he sank back into sleep with his skin crawling with the fear of scorpions. He woke with the sun beating on his face, drenched in a hot feverish sweat. The familiar shape of a Park Ranger hat then blocked the sun from his eyes.

“It’s a good thing you had that emergency blanket with you; not only did it probably save you from freezing, but the glare also alerted us to your presence. You are lucky that we came across you this soon.
You would not want to be out here for long during the heat of midday,” spoke the Ranger, friendly but stern.

Groggily Bradley answered, “I sure am glad to see you, I thought for sure I had at least a full day’s hiking ahead of me. On top of that my water rations are running low.”

The Ranger looked around at the scene and suddenly his mouth fell open. “What the hell was it that you did out here last night boy? This park is a preserve. How did you manage to take out that many scorpions?”

The events of the night before came flooding back to Bradley’s mind. The last thing that he had seen was the scorpions’ ascent. He stood up and looked in the direction that the Ranger was staring. There the ground was littered with thousands of dead scorpions, all with the appearance of having been sucked dry.

Bradley fumbled over his words as he explained to the Ranger what had transpired the night before. The look on the Ranger’s face grew grave as Bradley explained himself. The more he spoke the more he realized how unbelievable he sounded.

“You may be suffering from a bit of sunstroke son; here, drink this water and we’ll get to hiking. My Jeep isn’t but three quarters of a mile off from here. You should be able to make it.” The Ranger’s finger pointed north in the same direction as Bradley’s makeshift compass.

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Bradley spent the next several days thinking about what had happened and assuring the place he had taken the class from that there would be no lawsuit. He could still feel that strange low hum that had disconcerted him so during the night of him being lost. He bought himself a UV flashlight and began looking for scorpions at night. He could not get the strange yellow glow of the creatures from his mind. He bought several terrariums and began capturing the horrifying creatures with a pair of barbecue tongs and a long pair of tweezers. By the end of the week he had amassed several dozen of them.

Still fearful of the creatures he kept the terrariums outside and put up a makeshift tarp canopy to shield them from the direct sun.
Without the tarp they would die. He was not quite sure what to do about feeding them, but he did not think that he would keep them in captivity for long. Mostly he just wanted to see how the odd creatures behaved. His obsession continued and he began to read books about scorpions, all the while collecting more and more of them every night.

When Bradley had acquired more than several hundred, by his figuring, he realized that he was just begging to be stung. He would have to do something with all of them; perhaps he could sell them, or perhaps he just needed to let them go, somewhere far off from his property. He decided then that letting them go would be best and that he should do so first thing in the morning. That night he would set up a black-light strip and watch the creatures all night, for they were nocturnal and he had not witnessed all of their doings.

He sat up with a six-pack of beer watching the scorpions scurry around within their terrariums. They were not as active as he would have imagined. Collecting the scorpions had done nothing to ease his confusion about the night he had been lost in the desert. Still, he could not believe how many of them he had seen, nor the odd yellow glowing cone of the rising scorpions. As he pondered this his bones lit up with an all-too-familiar buzz. He realized that the illumination of black-light was much stronger than what his small light could produce. He quickly got up and unplugged his lamp. This did nothing to darken the glow. The scorpions still shone yellow and began to hover in their terrariums.

Bradley looked up; the air was snapping with the same pink lightning he had seen before. An almost identical window into the sky was opening, gaping larger, waiting for the scorpions whose hovering was blocked by the lids of the tanks. Forgetting his fear he walked forward until he stood directly beneath the hole in the sky. His whole body seemed to be surrounded with the strange lively pink electricity. The air smelled sharply of ozone and sulphur. All around him the terrarium lids began to break with a horrible crunching sound. These floated into the air followed by the scorpions, again forming a conical shape, this time all around him.

The violent hum whirled into a greater frenzy, making it sound like the world was spinning around him. For the first time he looked straight upwards. There, in the window of the sky, was a great stone; from this stone protruded something like the trunk of a large tree. Instead of branches, vines hung in every haphazard direction. The vines
swayed in an odd and seemingly apparent motion. In the center of what seemed like the trunk was a small depressed colored circle that somehow looked softer than the rest of it. From this enclave appeared, as if rising from jelly, some semblance of a face. Not the face of the human, but some unearthly ancient-looking protrusion. Around the tree-like thing hung a silver ring that looked like a sort of miniature conveyor belt. As the scorpions rose near to it small mechanical arms reached out and attached the creatures to small rivets in the metallic ring. Small funnel-shaped devices filled the air around the scorpions, each attaching itself to the tail and poison sac. A horrible slurping sound began making it obvious that the creatures were being milked. Then a long needle came out from the machine and pierced the forehead of what seemed to be the face of the terrible tree in front of him.

He looked back towards the ground because it had begun to feel as if he was hovering as well. The glowing scorpions about him seemed to form a pyramid, of which he was the center. He looked back up towards the tree-thing and saw on its face a look of pure and ugly euphoria. The hum produced by the machine pulsed louder than before and seemed to be becoming more rhythmic as the thing reveled in some form of pleasure.

*It’s as if it is on drugs.* As he thought this he felt as though his body was being pierced by a thousand needles of pain. He looked down again and saw himself covered in the creatures. His body hung feet from the ground. The sounds of the machine made him frantic coupled with the pain of so many scorpion stings. Bradley continued to float upward until he was face-to-face with the tree-thing. He cried out and in almost comical mimicry so did the tree-thing. He saw it again make the face of pure euphoric pleasure and at that moment realized that it was still mimicking his own. The scorpions fell like rain from the cone around him as he felt the small mechanical arms reach out and pull him upwards towards the conveyor belt.

End
POET
By r. soos

I do not grow old
I simply feel more wild
with the need to dance
TIME
By Jolene Stolla

You start out life with your family and friends,
   With promises you make - till the very end.
Time goes by and life goes on,
   We all grow older - we sing our own song.
Family and friends, now some are long gone,
   Some moved away - while others moved on.
As much as we believed our promises to be,
   Our friends and our family - we rarely do see.
One by one they disappear,
   Just memories left of forgotten years.
Keep your loved ones close, keep their love in your heart,
   All too soon comes that day - when a loved one must part.
Treasure the stars shining brightly above,
   It’s there you will find the proof of their love.
I DON’T MATTER TO YOU
By Lowen Baird

I don’t matter to you
I’m like a match lighting your way,
But my use is done
You blow me out.
WHAT DO YOU THINK
By Mike Green

What do you think
That the young are stupid
Or, that they are not people?
Just keep lying to them
You’ll see.

Our wallpaper of ideas
Will they die for that?
Go ahead---Ask them

They’ve already grown tired of your past
So you owned a skate key, Louisville slugger, poodle skirt.
They say---Suck it.

Their present is nothing like a snowfall
Or, a clear stream with painted pebbles gleaming.

They pierce their tongues, labia, scrotums
Like all the step-children of the world
they slam the door in your face.

Busted cars, long division, worship,
They’re fed up with professor’s droppings.

Stop being outraged, shocked, disgusted
Don’t ask them what are their goals
They’ll say---Shove it.

Their kids have ADHD, autism, ringworm
Their parents Alzheimer’s, anal drip, shingles.

They’ve cleared a hollow space in their fury
And, filled it with zombies.
There are bite marks on their veins
And, a noisy silence in their eyes.
They’re in the ER at 4 am.
This is what we have left them.

And we have to ask:
What do you think
Are they stupid?
LANDSCAPE
By James Aldrich
Both of me were instantly impressed by, and very much attracted to, the fit, lithe and lissome Norwegian named Sonja whom we had just met at a wine-tasting room in Sonoma.

The inner me, the 28-year-old Adonis, once bronzed and fit from having been a sailor for several years, lived on within the other, the outer me. The other, the one the world saw, was 58 years old, very slight of paunch, but still a tall, unstooped and strangely spoken chap who had, in pursuing a lifelong interest in all aspects of food and beverages, decided to extend his knowledge of wine and the vintners art by working as a cellar rat in one of the best boutique wineries in the Napa Valley. A fabulous experience but, in terms of hard work, one which would have been better and more easily accomplished by the younger, fitter me - the inner one who strode the earth 30 years before.

We began our dance of courtship, and although I was smitten, I could not be sure that Sonja realized our meeting was anything more than yet another old tart exchanging pleasantries. During conversation
we both discovered that, to our great delight, besides being an oenologist, she also led a gentle Hatha Yoga class in the village hall on Tuesday mornings. We rattled on, “Yoga. How wonderful etc. blah blah blah.” and whilst we remarked effusively that although we had long admired the sport/pastime/discipline/exercise/Eastern regime with all its elegance, grace, display of suppleness and meditational aspects, “No. We had never actually taken a class.”

No surprise then that the following Tuesday morning we found ourselves lying flat on a brand new, extra thick olive green compressed foam yoga mat. Gazing at the vaulted redwood ceiling and gently stretching, breathing deeply from our core, de-stressing and generally seemingly indulging in some sort of slow motion while recumbent tai-chi, all under the murmured direction of the object of our desires. This first session wound up with several minutes of reflective silence and, much to our surprise, feelings of tranquility, peace and general well being; which state of bliss was then wrapped up by slowly uncoiling, rising, standing, bowing and namasteying all round. Very pleasant and relaxing indeed. So much so that we went the following week.

And the next.

After which, obviously having impressed the supple yogini by our progress, I was invited to join her and several fellow asanaistas in repairing to an owner-operated small cafe on the square for coffee and a delightful session of social interaction. As we were leaving Sonja drew me aside and, prefacing her comments by remarking how well I was doing, suggested I was ready for the next level. Should I be so inclined, I could join her in a Saturday morning session an hour or so to the south.

Had the elder me not been so busy puffing out our egotistical chest whilst twirling our imaginary hiss-the-villain waxed and pointy mustache, instead of being captivated by her we would, no doubt, have been made at least a trifle cautious by the twinkle in her eye. I promised to be there at 9 a.m.

Vanity alone cannot have been the sole cause that excluded such cautionary signals from being received. But then maybe it could, as both of us chose to ignore them.

I arrived on the dot of nine only to find the room, unlike the village hall with its ten or so tantric congregants, a bustling and earnest competitive hive of about 200 souls, all ready for some gentle rhythmic
turning, folding, bending, toning and spiritually uplifting breathing and body exercises.

Or so I thought.

The room quieted and entered then the leader of the class. He looked remarkably like the Adonis of yore that I once was. Apart from being not quite as tall as me he was undeniably leaner, lither, fitter, and much more strikingly handsome than I ever imagined a human being ever could be, one who electrified and took command of any room faster than a speeding bullet. Perhaps it is superfluous to mention I was one of only five males in the room. Not a coincidence. With gentle welcomes, introduction and instructions over, the class began. Five minutes later, when the rest of the class was barely warmed up, stretched and ready to begin, both of me were already gasping, panting wrecks. The rest of the session was a blur made bearable only by being hidden at the very back of the room, out of view and thus able to lay, mimicking a panting blubbering whale on my yoga mat, able, and having to, stop moving for longer and longer swatches of time throughout the session, thereby saving me from everything failure and certain death.

Finally it was over and, until the unwinding, almost everyone, Adonis excluded, were, if not panting heavily at least breathing less gently than they were before. Took me a while to get up and be one of the last to leave. As I did so there was the object of my desires at the doorway, lightly glowing yet barely out of breath talking to the torturer, a.k.a. the Swami of the session.

"Hello there." said Sonja. "Did you enjoy yourself?" Turning to the god she then said. "I would like to introduce my fiancée, Jorge. He is from Norway too. He is one of the very best yoga teachers on the West Coast. I do hope you will come to this class again next week. See you on Tuesday?" So said the twinkling eyes. Still out of breath what could I do but smile, bow and wander out.

All four of us knew, that, just as we had failed to truly comprehend the meaning of the printed sign: POWER YOGA CLASS. Saturday 9 a.m, that we would not be coming back.

Both of me had been thoroughly downward dogged. Just not quite in the way we had hoped.
“odors bleed
from the sweet throats of the night flowers.”
Sylvia Plath Drunk again on noon wine – have a nap and finish the bottle.
What is there then to do?
water the gardens,
leaving the hoses
to run all afternoon.

Sober again, drive into town for the lottery another cold bottle and
moonflowers by the road.
Moonflowers: phallic Datura,
furled like flags
hard-clenched on the shadeless gravel
fisted at
the harsh self-righteous sun.

Pull over.
I carry the clippers always for these:
my grandmother’s flowers
grandfather’s “noxious weeds.”
I cut them for the table
the way others must have roses, lilies – they will pay – I never do.
Only the wine and the numbers
cost; these weeds are free.
Waxy as candles set in a centerpiece
on a pale damask circle –
when sundown hits,
the western windows bloom
in neon.

Then moonflowers trumpet
their poisonous perfume,
glory the darkening spaces
under the angled ceilings, room to room.
Breathe deep.
The wine sits in the icebox, untouched,
Under the influence of this nocturnal narcotic the notebook opens
on its own and sings.
It sings.
PIN AND DORTHY
By Jaime Newton
I am a one percenter. Many of the reasons which make me so are simply because of when, where I was born and where I live today. I figure in the top one percent of denizens of this blue planet in several ways. Amongst them are net financial worth (not difficult in the USA where even the poorest are better off in terms of income than most people in the world) in health, diet, fitness, weight, availability of health care, height, access to running water and several other too-often-taken-for-granted features of modern day life.

The one percenter label concerning this tale needs refining a little so as to disbar the blind, the solitarily incarcerated and to remove those without recourse to any form of electricity from the headcount.
Excluding those above, my reason for qualifying as a one percenter is simply because I am one of the very few folk on Earth who holds the distinction of never having seen a single moving image of the catastrophic events that occurred in New York City some 15 years ago today, now an infamous day reduced to two simple but instantly universally comprehended numbers: 9/11. At the time I was living in a loft on San Francisco’s Market Street. Then, as now, I lived simply and happily content without benefit of many gadgets currently considered essential by others. No motor car for, oddly, it was less expensive to hire a vehicle by the day than to incur the cost of parking fees for a 24-hour day. No cellphone, although far fewer people had one then than do so today. No bathroom, although an always spotlessly clean one was just two doors down the corridor and right next to it, the laundry room. No kitchen, but a more than adequate hotplate and microwave. No wine cellar, but a small fridge that stored quite enough fresh food and kept beer and wine at proper temperatures.

And, most germanely to this tale, no television. But I did have a radio.

It was on that radio that I first heard reported the strange fact of a plane crashing into one of the Trade Centers twin towers. For a large aeroplane to collide with a skyscraper was not a unique experience in New York’s recent history. It had happened at least once before when, on July 28th 1945, a Mitchell B-25 bomber en route from Massachusetts to La Guardia encountered thick fog. The pilot, ignoring warnings not to attempt to land with such reduced visibility, then flew on, and into, the Empire State building, killing 3 people on board and 11 civilians in their offices. Life magazine ran a pictorial feature which included an incredible black and white photograph showing the rear two-thirds of the plane sticking out of the building way above street level. My instant thought, as the sketchy first news of the day and that wartime image merged into my mind, was “How the hell are they going to get that down?” As the day and the drama unfolded I stayed in my loft, transfixed by the radio broadcasts. Gradually an audio picture of the wretched events far away on the East Coast emerged and from my top floor window it was apparent that the city, the nation and the world was frozen. Very little traffic or street movement of any kind was out and about. I did not venture out of my home for the next two days. I had no urgent need to for on Sunday I had, as was my custom, stocked
up at the farmers market in front of city hall and had plenty of food. I was, however, a little short of wine as I had but two bottles in the house. One, a non-vintage Veuve Clicquot champagne, which, being known in wine lovers circles as “The Merry Widow,” seemed totally inappropriate. The other libation was a half bottle of the 1997 Ca’Togni, a Napa Valley luscious dessert wine crafted to be sipped many years in the future. There did not seem much point on that uncertain day of waiting. And so, with a dish of ripe fresh peaches lightly dusted with black pepper and creme fraiche, I drank half of the bottle that night and the remainder on Wednesday.

Being known amongst friends as one interested in all manner of things photographic I have been asked several times why I have no interest in seeing moving images from that awful day. My response is that on January 28th, 1986, when I was visiting friends in Los Angeles, the Challenger exploded. It was repetitively shown throughout the day at three-minute intervals and because of that the powerful spectacle of televised explosive death is, 30 years later, still locked into my brain and to this day instantly retrievable, sometimes even whether I wish to recall the event or not.

I have no such visuals from 9/11 in my head and as such consider myself blessed to be a one percenter.
SCHOOL DAZE
By Brianna Hams

My heart is an empty classroom.
My brain, a busy hall.
My body is a crowded staircase.
My soul, a yellow sticky note stuck to the wall.
Have you ever had the feeling that someone is watching you or an eerie sensation that raises the hairs on the back of your neck for no reason? What do you do when the unexplained comes for you? In today’s society, people are enthralled by the thoughts of aliens from outer space coming to our planet to exterminate us. They are horrified and exhilarated by the thought of the dead rising and the eventual end of the civilized world. Some are petrified and hide under the sanctity of the covers on their beds in fear of the boogey man. As children, these fears are amplified, but as the children get older, the fears of the macabre begin to lessen until it is all but a faded memory. This is not true in every case, of course, but if you are reading this while wearing a tin foil hat, I apologize for offending you.

The Shadow Man
By Joseph Lechner

Art & Literature
A few months ago, I was privy to a weird conversation between my two youngest children. My daughter was making fun of her little brother for being afraid of the dark; of course, my son, being a male, could not let this go. Funny how no matter how young you are, if your sister challenges your machismo, you’re going to stand up for yourself. He denies being afraid and counter accuses her of the same thing. The banter of who is more afraid goes on for at least ten minutes. I can’t help but stifle a laugh from where I stand in the hallway because we all go through a phase of being afraid of the dark at one time or another. Some cases are worse than others, but no matter who you are, at one point in your life, you were afraid of the things that lurk in the dark.

My youngest son has it pretty tough at the house. His brothers rather enjoy tormenting him, and they get a kick out of scaring him all the time. They tell him monster stories and convince him that their stories are real. No amount of convincing him otherwise from his mother or father will change this. He worships his big brothers and takes their word as gospel. He also has a tendency to sneak into the room while his older brothers are watching scary movies. This, unfortunately, gives credence to his brother’s monster stories because we all know that if it’s on television it must be real. Needless to say, my son has some issues that he’s currently working through. First, he does not like going to the bathroom with the door closed. I don’t know how many times I have walked past the bathroom, and he’s sitting on the toilet. When he sees me, he feels the need to wave at me, even if he is in the midst of mid wipe. Second, he does not like sleeping in his own bed. He prefers my bed or the couch to sleep on, which becomes really awkward when you don’t see him right away, for he is small and squishy. Third, he will not turn off any lights. It doesn’t matter if it’s day or night; his bedroom has to have the light on. So, to end the debate, yes, my son is a Scaredy Cat, but don’t tell his sister that because she will never leave him alone.

Hiding there in the shadows of the hall like one of the boogey men we are all so fond of, I listened to my children chat it up. My son finally concedes that he is a little afraid of the dark. He says that he is afraid that a bad guy will come in and get him. My daughter asks him whom he thinks will come for him, but my son doesn’t give her an answer. Finally, after a couple minutes, in a whisper of a voice, he says, “The Shadow Man will get me.” My daughter, being a sophisticated
woman of 11, asks him where the Shadow Man is going to come from. My son looks at her as if she has lost her mind and points to the closest. Like all understanding siblings, my daughter laughs in his face and tells him that he has nothing to be afraid of. My son shakes his head vehemently and asks how she can be so sure about this. She smiles at him and says, “Daddy won’t let anything happen to us.” My son replies to her, “What if Dad’s not here?” She laughs again and says, “Then, he will find us.” The way she looks when she says this breaks my heart. She is completely confident that her daddy will come after her no matter where she is taken. She believes that her dad will fight off undead hordes to save her. She believes that no alien will stand between her and her father. That the boogey man will take one look at her dad, pack up his stuff, and go to the neighbor’s house.

My daughter’s confidence in my ability to be a hero makes me smile. If she only knew how I was when I was her brother’s age. My father allowed me to watch scary movies with him when I was a kid. I was so scared that the boogey man was going to get me I would hide under the covers of my bed unable to move. I wouldn’t sleep all night and worried that if I stepped off my bed, he would grab my ankle and drag me to hell or wherever it was that the boogey man would take a young boy. Every noise in the house made me jump, and I wished like hell my parents would allow me to have a dog instead of my guinea pigs. My dad wouldn’t be any help either. While we were watching the movies, he would let it get to a suspenseful part in the movie; you know the part, where someone is about to go down into the dark cellar, and you as the viewer absolutely know that he is going to die. My dad would jump up and scare the shit out of me and laugh his ass off.

My son tells his sister that he’s scared right now. She raises an eyebrow at him and asks why? He tells her that the Shadow Man is here right now. She quickly scans the room but sees nothing. His eyes are fixed on the doorway leading into the hall, and he begins sobbing uncontrollably. I rush into the room to comfort him, and he lets out a primal scream. I stop dead in my tracks when I realize he is staring at me. I am the Shadow Man who frightens him in the night. I am the unseen watcher in dark that haunts the halls at night, for I now walk among the dead.
IN-BETWEEN
By Margo McCall

Drifting through the night hours
Somewhere between earth and sky
Body tuned to the deep vibrational frequency of rock
Mind connected to the higher pitch of the cosmos
Watching the Perseid meteor shower
In Indian Cove Campground
Riding the earth’s back as she spins.

The desert sky a cloak of creamy darkness
Onto which handfuls of gleaming light
Were tossed to guide our way.
I see you up there, floating, far away
Wherever you are
And I with my back to the ground
World spinning, stars moving overhead.

As night turns to morning
I rise to float with you there
Watch as we twinkle together
Then the sky grows opaque
The lights flip off one by one
And it is morning and
You are gone.

Howl 2017
GIVE SODOMY A CHANCE
By Paul R. Abramson

MISFITS,
HYPOCRITES,
FULL OF SHIT JESUITS,
MAKING BETS,
NO REGRETS,
SPINNING LIKE PIROUETTES,
OSCAR WILDE,
LOVE CHILD,
JACK SPICER RECONCILED,
FREEDOM,
DELIRIUM,
PENDULUMS AND SUGAR PLUMS.

IT’S SODOMY, IT’S SODOMY, IT’S SODOMY,
GIVE SODOMY A CHANCE.

BYRON WHITE,
UPTIGHT,
DYNAMITE,
DISTORT,
LAST RESORT.
A TONY ON HIS KNEES,
JACK OFF,
JACK SHIT,
BRAD PITT,
JULIETTE,
JOHN RAWLS,
NATURAL RIGHTS,
CANAANITES AND ACOLYTES.

IT’S SODOMY, IT’S SODOMY, IT’S SODOMY,
GIVE SODOMY A CHANCE.
IN THE DARK IS WHERE YOU WILL FIND ME
By Joseph Lechner

Alone in the dark is where I lie.
Buried by life’s little lies,
Hounded by the memories of the past,
And the fear that time wavers too fast.

Alone in the dark is where I lie.
No one hears the screams that rattle in my mind.
No one can feel the walls that close in.
No one can see how crazed I really am.
Alone in the dark is where I lie.
Understanding what was once misunderstood.
The nightmares taking shape in the fringes of my head.
As my mind slowly marches toward madness.

Alone in the dark is where I lie.
Buried in the dirt but still alive.
Lost in my own mind as life flashes by.
Under a great old oak tree is where I died.
PROBLEM WITH BOTTLES
By James Aldrich

A beauty
slips away
with a bottle,
fingers clasping hope,
held heart close,
no help
by man

or boat
to cast afloat
her wish in a note
secured by ribbon and string,
but written
in the deep ocean tones
of stones.
I met Billy at Amagi, a run-down karaoke bar in Gower Gulch, that sad forgotten strip mall on the corner of Sunset and Gower. The Gulch is a concrete parking lot, surrounded by monolithic movie studios, whose monstrous, national chain businesses hide behind Western facades, bestowing on them a kitschy, local flavor. When the Western movie was in its heyday, cowboys hung out on the campy corner, hoping to make $5.00 or $10.00 a day as extras. That’s how Gower Gulch got its name.

Amagi was home to a peculiar cast of characters. There was James Z, a slight Asian man, about 5’6” and 120 pounds soaking wet, if he was lucky. He was a computer programmer by day, painfully shy and awkward with people. But at night, he donned his red head bandanna and came alive, screeching out Guns’N’Roses songs with wild abandon. Lorna was a sweet Midwest girl, lost in Hollywood. She loved Steven Tyler and Aerosmith more than life itself, I think. She only ever sang

Billy
By Cooper Gillespie
Pink by Aerosmith. One night, drunk on nothing but a successful karaoke performance, Lorna hit the sheets with a Hollywood grifter who disappeared before she awoke the next morning. The result of their brief union was a pair of twin boys whom Lorna promptly christened Steven and Joe after The Bad Boys From Boston. My favorite couple was Sam and Cherry. Sam was an African American man around six feet five inches tall and eighty-five years young. Cherry was his longtime partner, a white woman who was at least a foot shorter and thirty years Sam’s junior. They always arrived dressed to the nines, he in a suit and Cherry in a fifties style dress with lips as red as her namesake fruit. Sam and Cherry sprinkled their magic on an otherwise unremarkable lounge. Anytime someone sang a slow song, Sam would grab Cherry by the hand, lead her out to the “dance floor” (an 8’ x 8’ square of beer-soaked floor), and they would glide around the place as if no one else was alive on Earth.

It was here that I celebrated my twenty-second birthday, where I met Billy. A guy from my acting class, whom Billy and I later dubbed “Leather David” after his penchant for wearing leather pants, a giant fur vest with no shirt, and even larger, rose-tinted sunglasses, brought Billy to my party. They had been roommates at the University of Michigan. Dave was my age. Billy was eleven years older.

Billy made quite an impression. He was naughty, enveloped by a musk of stale beer and bad decisions. He never looked for trouble, but it always found him.

There was a study several years back that claimed it only takes a fifth of a second to fall in love. It took me three minutes and forty-five seconds to fall for Billy. There was a hush, the lights dimmed; then, he took the stage in his black leather jacket, lit in soft, chartreuse light, and sang Life on Mars by David Bowie better than David Bowie. If I hadn’t witnessed it, I would consider that statement sacrilegious, but it’s the truth. And, that was it. I was hooked, not in a “Oh, my God, he’s so hot. I want to have his babies kind of way,” but more in a “This guy’s like heroin. I can tell he’s gonna lead me down a dangerous path, but I’m pretty sure I’m gonna have a helluva good time until it all turns bad” kinda way. I stood transfixed, wrapped in my black feather boa and blue glitter eyeshadow. When his song was finished, he swaggered offstage straight to me and said, “You’re a parade. Wanna go out?”
It wasn’t a physical attraction, for me. Billy had terrible hygiene. Who knew the last time he took a shower. And to describe his teeth as British would be an insult to all British teeth. So, how do I explain Billy’s allure? He was magnetic, the most compelling, intellectually stimulating man I had ever met. In short, I admired him. He was my religious experience, simultaneously attracting and repulsing me. Perhaps, I was flattered that an older man who knew so much would be interested in me who knew so little. As I’ve wizened with age, I’ve realized that part of the reason he liked me must have been that I didn’t know any better. Women his own age would never have put up with his shit.

We dated, if you can call what we did dating, for about a year. Every other day we broke up, then got back together. However, we couldn’t seem to stay away from each other. The Sturm und Drang was exhausting and exhilarating. We weren’t quite Sid and Nancy, but we had our moments.

Take our penultimate breakup experience, for example. It occurred one balmy evening in the summer of 1999. There was a sushi restaurant that doubled as a nightclub at the site of the famed Roxbury on the Sunset Strip. It was massive, with three floors and seven sushi bars. The vibe was of a rock’n’roll sushi joint. There were waterfalls, music videos, and the servers were always medicated to oblivion. One girl literally nodded off in the middle of taking our order.

We were at Miyagi’s celebrating our buddy Lucas’s birthday with a group of friends. The weather was perfect. Drinks were flowing. The night tinkled with laughter and good conversation. And then, I tipsily referred to Billy as “Ol’ What’s His Name” in a conversation with one of our fellow party-goers. Billy picked me up by the arm and dragged me outside. “We’re leaving,” he snarled. As I handed my ticket to the valet, Billy’s face contorted, and he screamed at me “I’ve had my penis in you. How dare you call me ‘Ol’ What’s His Name!’” Ew, I know. It gets worse.

Suddenly, something flew at my forehead and stuck. Slowly, it dripped down my face. Gradually, I realized. He spit on me. Spit in my face. (Okay, maybe we were Sid and Nancy). My car arrived. I tried to get in and drive away, but Billy was butted up against me, chest self-inflating, the way guys posture before they fight. I managed to squeeze into the driver’s seat, but he stomped in front of my car in an effort to
prevent me from leaving. Nothing was going to obviate my departure. I pressed my foot on the gas. I wasn’t trying to run him over, but if that’s what it took to escape, that’s what I’d do. Okay, maybe I was trying to run him over, just a little bit. As he made contact with my Subaru Outback Impreza, Billy jumped on the hood, still shouting at me. I was furious. I wanted him off, but I wasn’t going to slow down. I drove 55 mph down Sunset Blvd. while Billy dangled from the hood of my car. Onlookers thought he had taken partying to a new dimension. They whistled and thumbs up-ed him as we roared down the street.

Eventually, my fight or flight reflex relaxed. I pulled over. Billy slid off my hood, the violence in his eyes replaced by shock. “Don’t ever contact me again,” I hissed. Then, I sped away into the heavy Hollywood night, leaving Billy, wild and windblown, in my rear view mirror, where he belonged.
VIRTUAL HERO
for Eric Lawson (Now With More Ewoks!)
By Lalo Kikiriki

Power up the Nintendo:
We join the saga in progress,
insert ourselves
among pixelated players:
Han Solo, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, Luke Skywalker
Earth, Fire, Water, Air:
the elements of myth
personified.

Your quest,
should you choose
to accept it, Prince Luke, Sir Link:
to wield your sword in the service
of justice and truth,
to champion the fair,
carry on in the footsteps
of Yoda and Obi-wan Kenobi.

You boldly go
where many have gone before,
where dragons and morphing demons
await your controller,
and love, that pesky monster from the id, only demands you
pledge your opposable thumbs to a beauty that does not fade,
that only grows more defined with each new edition – like
Zelda, Fitzgerald’s love, perennial and always in need of rescue.
The other miners called Audrey Beryl “The Mayor,” and her shack in the Pintos “The Mayor’s House.” She built it at the top of a steep and treacherous path, overlooking the camp, with the intent to dissuade drunks from stumbling up and banging on her door after their money and luck ran out. A very few tried, but even fewer after Eugene Crane was found one morning down the ravine, badly hung over, and with a broken leg. Audrey roped down and with the help of a few others, hoisted Gene up the side, set his leg and tended his many wounds. She’d lost a day of work due to it, but Gene lost more. He was never able to return to his claim.

Audrey built a rocker cradle and managed to pull $300 of gold out of her placer claim over the first three months of the year. Along with her mules she’d take her rifle, tools, canteens, a hunk of bread and cheese, and a book. Wild lavender grew along the sheltered side of the dry wash and when the sun crested about 10 a.m. the scent of lavender spread on the warm air like jam on toast. Those days Audrey felt established in her ways, though she was 26, single, and wore pants under her skirt.
Stories about Audrey swirled through the camp and many a telling ended with a blackened eye. Audrey was loved, and a bit feared. She wouldn’t step foot into either of the saloons, even though it was 1889. She took her meals around back with the wives, children, Mexicans, and any native passers-by.

Wilson always left before sun up, silently and deftly goat-stepping down the path in the dark. A year passed before their tryst was exposed. The only story that made sense to minds simpled by the incessant din of the stamp mill was that Audrey was a whore.

It was then that Audrey packed up her mules and made a claim in Morongo, some 50 miles west. Wilson spent more time freighting to and from the grade. When they married the notice in the paper read,

“Another volunteer has been enrolled in the noble army of miners and prospectors. ‘Quartz’ Wilson, of county fame, deserves the credit for enlisting a fair partner of his joys and prospects. The happy couple leave to-day for their home at the Palms.” 1

Over time Audrey’s name and occupation were forgotten. Unable to imagine a woman mining, loved, maltined, and born anew, “The Mayor’s House” was wedged into the space in history books reserved for “red light districts.” But the sand between the pages tells a different story and this is the gold that I have panned for you.

1. The Daily Courier, San Bernardino County, December 12, 1889.
LITTLE OLD MAN
By Margaret Snyder

Little old man, why are you so mad?
Has the world disappointed you,
Or maybe you disappointed the world?

Little old man, why do you kick and scream at the day?
Is the sun too bright and the day too hot,
Or do the clouds anger you in some way?

Little old man, why do you cry so loudly at night?
Is the moon too full or has it begun to wane,
Or do the stars, in their beauty, make you feel ashamed?

Little old man, you should look around.
The world still spins; the sun and clouds still live,
And the moon and stars still inhabit the night.

Little old man, throw away your anger.
Pick yourself up and enjoy the day and the night.
There are few tomorrows for you, so stop wasting your life.
SAND MAN
By James Aldrich

With one hand
I comb the sand,
then suddenly
two feet!

The sand man
she now stands on,
but a minute drawn,
is fast asleep.

His golden face,
our saving grace,
erased
by one wave’s thorough sweep.
Standing in the waiting room,
white and blue, white and blue.
The sun glinting off the surface of the sea.
Legs unsteady. Knees unsteady.

Make a wish, even for our enemies.
Make a wish. Time is crashing.
Say a prayer on the golden shore.
Make a wish.

Someday, I’ll wake up from this dream.
And this will all be over. And I will regret nothing.
And when the time comes to swim for the other shore,
slowly I’ll turn around
and wait
for you.
BREKKFAST POEM
By Aubrey Leahy

yestermorn I found
a note on the icebox
a much gentler name
than refrigerator
which implied
I had erred
in eating the plums
which were meant
not for my breakfast
but for one
usually so sweet
yet today so cold
scripts which hinted
there would be
no morning delights
until they were
replaced on the
proper shelf so now
I hasten to scour
the orchard there
to pluck twist
tug from the tree
purple ripe plums
for your breakfast

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Howl 2017
James and Jason Sutton were strategically placed at the strangle point of the small creek. They waited on the arrival of the French troops who were sent to overrun them and take control of the small waterway that would ensure the survival of their people on the island. The Suttons stayed hidden from the French soldiers as they poured through the forest. They were brilliantly hidden among an outcropping of rocks and could not be seen unless one of the French soldiers stepped on one of them. The Suttons were confident that the French soldiers had passed them by and were about to sound the call of approaching enemies when they heard a rustling on the rocks above them. James and Jason readied their arms and were prepared to attack this French straggler when a sprinkle of water started splashing their heads from above. Taken aback by this change of weather, both of the Suttons were glued in place, for there was not a cloud in the sky. Then, they heard the laughter coming from above them as their older brother Jacob continued to rain down pee upon their heads.
James and Jason bolted from their hiding place and ran toward the water to wash the filth from their brows. Jacob continued to laugh at his little brothers’ expense and watched them as they plunged their heads into the water. James and Jason said in unison, “Why did you do that?” Jacob tried to stifle his laughter but could not and started wailing even louder. His twin brothers, who would be seeing their seventh summer in two days, ran at him like they really were a couple of English soldiers dead set on vanquishing their foe. He let them tackle him to the ground, and three boys wrestled upon the banks of the small creek hidden among the rocks and trees, lost in laughter.

None of the boys saw the mist rolling into the woods that threatened to engulf them. When Jacob finally looked up from his brothers, who were still giggling, and saw the mist rolling through the small valley, it was already too late. The mist had blotted out the sun, plunging everything into darkness. Jacob could hear a soft buzzing noise in his ears as the mist continued to close in about them. He quickly pulled his brothers to their feet and drew them in closer to him. Jason whimpered, “I’m scared!”

James says, “What are we going to do?” Jacob grabbed hold of a hand from both of his brothers and started to slowly head upstream. The three boys continually fell down upon the rocks they couldn’t see but Jacob kept them moving. Then the first voices came to them from the mist with helpful reassurances that everything would be okay if they stayed and allowed the mist to take them. The voices pleaded with them to stop and rest and all three boys felt an unexplained tiredness wash over them, but Jacob kept them moving. Then the voices changed to menacing threats that if they continued they would be killed and eaten.

Jacob continued to drag his brothers through the mist, the fear beginning to wash over him like a tidal wave. His brothers were shaking so badly that Jacob had to forcibly yank them along after him. The mist began to clear a bit, and the boys could see the makeshift bridge made by their little town that crossed the creek, just up ahead. They picked up their pace as they raced up the bank of the creek to get to the path that would lead them across the bridge. As they topped the bank, the whispers subsided, and all they could hear was silence. A strange new odor lingered in the air around them, a rancid smell that hit them so suddenly that both of Jacob’s brothers broke into dry heaves. Jacob
pulled his brothers towards the path that led to the bridge and back into town when their little hands were ripped from his with such force that it sent him careening onto the path alone. Jacob quickly got to his feet just as a pair of lanterns hit him in the face, plunging him into unconsciousness.

Sarah White never saw the boy wander into the road. He seemed to have appeared out of nowhere, and she hit her brakes right at the last second. The car came to a screeching stop, hitting the boy and knocking him to the pavement. Sarah got out of her car and ran around to the front of it. She could see the young man was still breathing and that he was bleeding from the back of his head. She fumbled her cell phone out of her pocket to call for help but realized she did not have any reception out here. She ran back to her car and threw the phone inside, and reached into her duffle bag in the back seat. After a few moments she withdrew a long scarf and ran back to where the boy lay upon the asphalt. She realized she could not leave him on the side of the road, like an animal, while she went for help. She would take him to the hospital. She leaned over the boy and started to wrap the scarf tightly around his head to help stop the bleeding. Sarah examined the rest of the boy and was confused at what she saw. In front of her was a kid of about 13-15 years old. He was sickly thin, but it was his clothes that disturbed her the most. This kid looked as if he had been dumped here 300 or 400 hundred years ago! He was wearing a mud-stained leather jerkin over a long-sleeved doublet, tucked into breeches, with knee-high hose that tucked into his stockings. Where the kid’s shoes had went she had no idea. She shook her head slowly, grabbed his arms, and dragged him to the car. Once Sarah had the kid in the back seat, she took off towards the center of Roanoke to get assistance.

To be continued in the next Howl
STAGE FRIGHT
By James Aldrich

If there was a dress rehearsal
I can’t remember.
Never ending questions
caused a reversal of true growth;
impressionable bones
bending in family gravity zones
never mend.

And so the story goes.
Then, I went the path my parents chose,
complaining words cannot deflect
a rock thrown.
Now, I lob poems about like stones,
eyeballing any who cry out, or groan.

Running son, phone home!
Your Father has gone silent,
blown out like a pilot.
His eyelet’s too small to thread in,
and lately he’s been bed-in
and shut us out.
A crowded house now, 
with no place to board a mouse comfortably, 
much less me, the least likely suspect 
able to face this: first draft, 
no flash cards or bathroom breaks, 
kissing straight on the mouth 
the death of a thousand resentments.

I rely on resentments---I need them 
(minus a run through) 
to expose the you 
that notices me 
imposing my poetry 
on an unsuspecting reality 
without rehearsal 
or needed editing.
A NEW DAWN
By Nathan Cordova

Salt stains the pages as they are read turning joy into ruin

Words written in ink manifest fears of one fallen

The love of one departed, but not at all forgot

Neglected will never be the memories of a journey full

Day to day from start to finish were the days of sadness and bliss

As life rolls on, distress surrounds the bottom of a bottle

Self-induced are the nightmares that have become routine

Falling from grace sets the stage for numbness

While on a downward spiral a light shines bright

A shimmer of hope has been revealed

A life bestowed from one lost

Brand new beginnings from the seed
One day, Zinah woke up in an unfamiliar place. It was beautiful; so peaceful. The sky was periwinkle blue. The air was fresh and crisp, the grass was soo green and felt like velvet on her paws. There was a large golden gate behind her.

She didn’t see her family anywhere. She barked and sniffed, but nothing; not a trace. She decided to wait. She knew her family loved her and would be back. Her family always came back. The air smelled wonderful, like plumeria blossoms. She looked up; the sky was changing color, it was moving like a kaleidoscope. Zinah fell asleep.

When she woke, she heard the distant sounds of dogs barking, playing, and having fun. It was a joyful sound. “I’ll go see if I can play
too,” thought Zinah. Off she went. Not too far away in a clearing, she saw lots of dogs playing, laughing, and talking. A group of dogs greeted her: Chuy, the Chihuahua; Linda, her friend she hadn’t seen in a long time; Tara, the pitbull, and a Dalmatian named Sparky. Sparky greeted her. “Hello, you must be the new dog. We’ve been expecting you.” “Hi, I’m Zinah,” said Zinah. “I’m Sparky,” said the Dalmatian. “I’ll be your guide.” “All right.” said Zinah. “I’m going to show you what we do here,” instructed Sparky. “While you wait for your family to join you, we have a very important job,” he continued. “We help children if they’re sad, or lost or lonely”

Just then, Sparky and Zinah heard the sound of a child crying in the distance. Sparky said, “You’re up”. “But how will I get to him? How will I know where to go”? Sparky replied, “You’re an angel silly, use your wings”. Then Zinah spread her beautiful wings and suddenly, much to her own amazement, she knew the crying child was Timmy and she knew where to find him. Before you could say “Dog Angel” she was standing next to Timmy, who was sobbing inconsolably until he noticed the beautiful blue pitbull standing next to him.

Now, when dog angels are on earth, they look like ordinary dogs. Children can understand them but adults only hear barking when they talk. Children can see the magic adults have forgotten how to see. “Hello dog,” sniffled Timmy. I, I, I’m lost,” he began sobbing. “It’s okay Timmy,” Zinah reassured him, nuzzling his hand gently. “You know my name??” Timmy was amazed, not so much that the dog could talk, but more that she knew his name. “How do you know my name?” asked Timmy, temporarily forgetting his crying. “I’m a dog angel,” Zinah explained. “I’m here because I heard you crying and I’m going to help you get home.” “B-b-but I don’t know where my house is!” Timmy’s sobbing began anew. “I was just going to take a walk around the block with my Truckie.” (Truckie was a toy truck on a string that Timmy was pulling along with him.) “Just like Grandma and Grandpa and I do every evening after dinner. Now, I’ve been walking and walking, and I can’t find my way back. Nothing looks familiar!”

So Zinah and Timmy started walking; shortly, they saw a man gardening in his yard. Zinah ran up to the fence. “Bark, bark, bark!” she said excitedly. “Timmy, talk to this man, maybe he knows where your house is!” Timmy asked the man, “Do you know where my house is?” The man replied “No I’m sorry. I don’t know where your house is.”
They kept walking. Zinah saw a cat lounging on the sidewalk. She rolled on her back purring, enjoying the sun. Zinah said “I know, let’s ask her.” Timmy asked the cat, “Kitty, do you know where my house is?”

The kitty said, “Meow” and stretched. “No, I don’t know where that is.” Timmy began crying again, “We’ll never find my house!” “Yes, we will,” said Zinah. She nuzzled his hand again. Just then, they saw a car coming up the street. It was a police car. “Hey, over here!” shouted Zinah. All the policeman heard was ‘bark, bark, bark.” So he kept on driving. Timmy waved, but he was???, and the policeman didn’t see him.

Zinah and Timmy continued walking. They came across two dogs playing in their yard. Zinah asked them, “Do you know where Timmy’s house is?” “No,” barked both the dogs. “We don’t know where that is.” Just then Timmy cried out, “Here comes the police car again.” Zinah ran into the street and sat there so the policeman had to slow down. This time, he saw Timmy and Truckie. “Is your name Timmy?” asked the policeman.” (“Everybody knew his name today”, thought Timmy.) “Yes,” Timmy replied. “I have been looking for you,” the policeman told Timmy. “Your grandparents are very worried. They called us to help them find you. Come on, get in and I’ll take you home.”

Zinah and Timmy got in the car. They drove to Timmy’s grandparents’ house. Timmy’s grandparents were waiting outside. “Timmy, we were so worried!” they cried and hugged him. “I wouldn’t have seen him if it hadn’t been for his dog,” said the policeman. Timmy’s grandparents were puzzled. “Timmy doesn’t have a dog,” they said. “But, she was with us in the car” said the policeman, looking around. But Zinah wasn’t there. She had completed her task. “Thank you, Zinah,” whispered Timmy.

Zinah was back in the forest clearing with the kaleidoscope sky. Sparky ran up to greet her, “Hello, Zinah, welcome back.” Suddenly all the dogs were barking excitedly. Zinah turned to see what had them in such a tizzy. She saw a fuzzy human form walking towards them. “Sparky! Sparky!” called the form walking towards them. Sparky barked excitedly! “Woof, woof, I’m here!” and he ran towards the man. It was the one Sparky had been waiting for. He ran up to the man. The
man put his arms around Sparky and said, “I’ve missed you so much, Sparky, now we’ll always be together.” They walked together, side by side, to the big golden gate, and it opened. Sparky and his human walked through and faded out of sight. “That’s so wonderful,” Zinah sighed; little tears of joy were falling from her eyes. Tara reassured her, “Don’t worry, Zinah, it happens for all of us. Our people always come for us.” “They won’t forget me?” worried Zinah. “No,” said Chuy the Chihuahua. “Sometimes you can hear them call you in their dreams and you can go to them while they are dreaming.” Zinah felt better. Off in the distance, she glimpsed a familiar face. He was off by himself and wouldn’t come join the other dogs. Tara said, “He got here right before you, Zinah. He’s been in that spot the whole time. We called to him but he won’t come. He just sits there and cries.”

Zinah knew why the dog was crying. “That’s Spooky,” Zinah said. “He was part of my family.” She trotted over to him. “Spooky,” She said, “Don’t be sad. We all forgive you” (she meant herself and her family). “Come, join all the other dogs. Help children. You can be happy again.” Spooky whispered so softly she could barely hear him, “I was a bad dog. I bit people. My human won’t want me.” Zinah disagreed. “Yes, she will. You weren’t bad, you were just sick.” Spooky looked up. He stopped crying. “All right, I’ll come join the other dogs,” said Spooky. Spooky and Zinah went together to the clearing where all the dogs were playing. They rolled in the velvety grass, chased squirrels, played with toys, watched the kaleidoscope sky and took turns helping children who needed them.

Zinah curled up into a ball to take a nap. She was happy. She was doing what she had always done: Bringing her special joy and happiness into the lives of everyone she meets. She wondered who she would help next. Then she fell asleep.
PROFOUNDNESS?
By Margaret Snyder

I sit here, trying to write something profound, but profound is not my thing.
Where does one dwell in order to find profoundness?
And is profoundness even a word?

I like the lighter side of life.
A laugh is as profound as I can be.
I think you need a serious bent to be profound.
But I am definitely bent the other way.

Finding joy in life is the path I walk down.
Laughing out loud is my daily exercise.
Finding something to laugh about is my daily chore.
And laughing at myself keeps me humble and sane.

Laughter is the best medicine, they say.
The right kind of laughter chases away the bad things in life.
It lightens the load that life places on your shoulders.
It might put wrinkles on your face, but they are happy wrinkles.

On second thought, I am profound – I am profoundly happy.
I have a profoundly sunny disposition.  And as obnoxious as that sounds, just wait until you hear me butcher a joke.
Laugh with me and we will both be profound!
DESERT REMAINS
By Zara Kand
CRIB DEATH
By r. soos

I want the song of your mouth
to fly over the desert
with my beautiful body
you sit there among wild flowers
with secret smiles and naked voices
your long finger barely caressing your face
I see the daughter of your body
burning the darkness above
your heart with beautiful eyes
TIDE’S TEST
By James Aldrich

Tides divide,
making bait
of fictive imaginations,
and fishers
of creative men.
“Cactus Jax is a desert dog.” That is the first line in the song my dad wrote about our family dog Jax Williams and boy, is it an accurate statement. What I mean by that is that Jax seems to be part cactus. He is prickly and mean to people in general; however, he is very loving towards my mom, dad, my other dog Sue, and me. He has been like this since we first got him, but I love that dog all the same. This story is about him; this is his origin story.

We got Jax in the summer of 2014. My dad and I were in Los Angeles working on a job. We had been there for about two and a half days, staying in a hotel room, trying to sleep through the loud noises
of the city and the light pollution that would seep into the windows if the curtains weren’t shut completely. We would get up about 6:00, bathe, eat our food, and head out to work until about 3:00, driving by all the grey, dull buildings of the “Great Los Angeles. Today, though, had been a different day. My dad and I had been working hard for about four hours when one of the other guys on the jobsite decided to start acting like an asshole, being overbearing and condescending to us and another dude who worked there. He tried to tell people how to do their jobs, and he was just being an all-around prick, and finally my dad had had enough, and we left. That night, though, something awesome happened. My dad was on Bookoo, and he found an ad about a red and black male German shepherd dog who was fairly cheap and almost a puppy. The ad said that the dog was a mean dog who did not like women and hated people in general, especially children. We also learned that he had spent most of his young life in a cage inside a hotel room. Also, he apparently had been shaved and picked at by the owner’s children. My dad was really excited about seeing the ad, and he immediately called my mom to look at the ad on his laptop. She saw the ad and thought the dog was such a beautiful dog, and they both agreed that my mom would meet someone to get the dog. They agreed that something about the dog was calling to them. So she went to Circle K in Joshua Tree and met a man there with this loud beast that was almost foaming at the mouth. She described the man who brought the dog as afraid and timid. She believed even he was scared of that dog. The man helped her get the carrying container with the loud dog in it, and they went their separate ways. My mom said that Jax barked the entire way home, and she just talked to him and said that she knew he was scared. She also comforted him and sang to him to calm the poor dog down. She took him home and introduced him to our other dog, a little black female German Shepherd named Sue, who was about eleven or twelve years old at that time. The two dogs instantly loved each other, which was obviously great for my mom. For a dog who supposedly didn’t like women, it was pretty shocking that according to my mom he stayed curled up by her feet all night and did not leave her side for a moment, which I think is pretty sweet. While all that was happening, my dad and I were looking at some pictures of the dog, and he was so awesome. We also learned Jax was just the name they called him and that his real name was Treu Beschutzer, which in German translates to “True Protector,” which he definitely is. The next morning we had
to go to my uncle’s house; then, around 11:00 we headed home to go see our new dog. The whole way we talked about our beautiful new dog and how the two to three-and-a-half-hour drive was just too long before we got to see our dog. We noticed when we pulled up that it was fairly quiet; however, once we stepped out of my dad’s van we heard it: “Arawrawrawraw.” Then we saw him. There was an angry furry face in the window snarling at us; then, BANG BANG! Jax was crashing into the window in a rage to get to us, and I remember my dad looking at me, saying “Oh shit! We have to go in there with that. Well, here we go.” He opened the door, spread his arms wide, and said loudly, “Hey there, buddy!” Jax ran into the kitchen in fear, slightly barking as he ran away. We had noticed that the poor dog pooped on the wall in the kitchen while trying to get out of his cage. My mom had to go to work and didn’t want to put him outside, but she also didn’t want to leave him out of the cage in his new house, so she put him in a cage, and he got out before we got home. My dad opened the door to our backyard, and we all went outside. We both said “hey” to the dog, and he ran behind me, hiding, and barked at my dad. I turned and was able to pet him until he walked away a bit and barked at me a little bit, too. But after about ten minutes, he loved us so much. We also learned when we looked at his birth certificate that he was a puppy that some friends had bred, which was cool for me.

Jax is now three years old, and he was barely nine months when we first got him. He is an amazing guard dog and still doesn’t like people at all, but we love him dearly. He is the perfect dog for our family. He has matching personalities with all three of us, especially me and my dad. Treu Beschutzer or Jax is basically my best friend, and my bubba. I love that dog very much, and I hope to have more adventures with him.
The Faded: What Might Be…
By Briana Williams

Clack Clack Clack…

The room was bathed in blood red, and a buzzing sounded around us from the artificial light. My wife walked beside me, long black hair and skin reflecting the red light. Even in this terrible light she looked beautiful, but stressed; her bottom lip pulled between her teeth, and my hand clenched tight in hers.

Clack Clack Clack

The woman walked in front of us, leading us through this room filled with covered cylindrical tubes, each covered with a black cloth; it was the night cycle, her shoe clicking against the tiled floor. We looked for our number, 00933; a harsh beep sounded through the room.

“Welcome.” We came to a stop in front of a tube, no different from the rest with the exception of the number, 00933, our number. The woman turned and looked at us, her face was fixed, and a cold smile meant to be warm greeted us. You could not see most of her face, cast in shadows helped by the red light. My wife came closer to me, our shoulders touching, but her eyes never left that tube, covered with black cloth. In her face I could read hope, fear, and something new; I turned back to the woman.

“Subject Number 00933, correct?” She spoke, voice as real as her smile, filled with “happiness.”

“Yes, that is correct.” I responded, doing my best to keep my feelings to myself; my wife and I agreeing previously that I would do the talking. We both knew that they would not have heard her anyway. The harsh beep sounded again, echoing this time by the tube; my wife stared at it in desperation, I now recognized. She stared at the tube with hope, fear, and desperation.

“Subject Number 00933, confirmed, commence reveal.” The woman spoke, not to us, but the room.

“Acknowledged, reveal in process.” A computerized voice responded. Meant to sound pleasant, it merely sounded like the baby dolls I’d once had. But, soon after, the sound of shifting fabric filled the precious silence.
It was perfect, five toes and fingers, tufts of hair already forming on its head, black, like my wife’s, with a sliver streak at its crown, like mine. My wife gasped and left my side to approach the tube that contained the small form. I only just stopped myself from following. Instead, I turned to the woman.

“Subject Number 00933, registered sex?” I spoke, my voice softer than I’d meant it to be, but none-the-less it, the computer, responded. The woman smiled wider, her teeth glinting red, unaffected by my acknowledgement of the computer over her.

“Sex: Male, do you wish for a full report?” it responded, issuing its own question.

“Yes,” I said, after looking to my wife for confirmation, she gave me a distracted nod, “Full Report.”

A warbling sound filled the room, and the figure in the tube shifted almost like it had been aggravated.

“Sex: Male, Length: 20 cm, Weight: 6 lb. 15 oz….” it continued, as I joined my wife in gaining a closer look at the figure.

“Do you accept Subject Number 00933?” the voice asked, having run through the full report. I looked to my wife, leading, knowing the answer, but checking just the same. She nodded again, never speaking a word and together we looked back to the figure. Its eyes had opened, and it was looking straight at us, green eyes, as expected for his faded once had green eyes.

“Confirmed, we accept Subject number 00933” I responded to the computer, my eyes never leaving him, our son.
CITYSCAPE
By Jim Aldrich
Go ahead, just jump! The voice in my head echoed, do it! You’ll be fine. What could possibly happen? It’s just water, Jump, Jump, Jump! This was my mantra this beautiful Sunday afternoon out in the lush landscape of Wimberley, Texas. Finally, I stepped out on the giant flat rock in front of me, and with the courage of Superman in his blue and red suit, whoosh! I dove into the crystal clear water, my head hitting the water with the intensity of a ten pound sledge hammer being dropped on a concrete sidewalk three stories high. I felt the coolness of the water as my body slid into it. The first thought I had was I’m okay! I have survived the great “Jacob’s Well.” Then, terror struck me as I realized, Jim, you’re not an excellent swimmer. You’re not even a good swimmer, but you can swim, and swim now you must! So, like a little fish in a big fishbowl, I started kicking my legs and moving my arms in an upward motion to rise to the surface of which now had become extremely frigid icy water. I started to feel a sense of deep dread. What have I done? Am I going to have enough air to get to the surface of this majestic water reservoir? I kept pushing and pushing upward, chanting over and over, “You must survive, Jim, go to the top.” Finally, like a ping pong ball on a fishing rod, I bounced to the top of Jacob’s Well. All is good: all is well.

As I lay floating on my back in the pristine clear water, like a marshmallow in chocolate milk, I made the conscious decision to look upward to where I had made such an impulsive choice to jump. It looked like it was more than fifty feet. What was I thinking? Or better yet, was I thinking at all? Now, to climb five to six stories up the side of a mountain and get to safety. I started the slow calculated climb up the mountain to finally get to the top. As soon as I got to dry land, I realized that I was completely spent. My legs felt like rubber bands that were about to snap, but I had a confidence that nothing was going to stop me from my quest to conquer Jacob’s Well. I moved slowly at first; then, as my excitement to reach the top increased, I moved quicker and quicker, until I was like a gazelle, running up the trail to the top of the mountain. Finally, I reached the top! You did it! I was back where I started from and understood that I had faced the demon of failure face to face and had defeated this foe by just listening to my heart. Go ahead, just jump!
“Sometimes I feel like there is a hole inside of me, an emptiness that at times seems to burn... I have this dream of being whole, of not going to bed each night wanting, but still sometimes when the wind is warm or the crickets sing, I dream of a love that even time will lie down and be still for.” — Sally (Practical Magic, 1998)

Long ago, a race of ancient, immortal, celestial creatures inhabited this universe, indescribably vast in their beings. Nevertheless, these creatures were, essentially, incomplete. None of the beings could understand what was missing, for none had the knowledge of what had yet to be conceived. However, this absence of something was felt by all.

Alone and traversing the deepest and most remote region of the cosmos, one of the beings happened across a system of stars in orbit around one another in a never-ending spiral. The spiral was so perfect and harmonious that it made the being jealous, but when the being tried to intervene, and take the place of one of the stars to become part of the dance, the two stars fell away from one another, destroying the spiral. This made the being sad, but when it tried to return the stars to their original orbit, the spiral was not quite the same as it had been, no matter how much the being endeavored to make it so.

Disheartened, the being moved on unaware that another of the beings had witnessed the former’s struggle. The being that witnessed the events prior was so moved by the attempt to right the mistake that the aforementioned began to follow the first being surreptitiously throughout the galaxies in an attempt to understand the motive behind the action.

The second being followed the first for what seemed like endless amounts of time. Growing weary, however, the second being became careless, and followed too closely to the first being, eventually colliding directly into it. In sheer force and energy alone, the collision caused a small ripple in the very fabric of space. So startled by being struck by the second being from behind, the first being spun about to face its follower— having been previously unaware of being pursued. The motion of the spin, though, was also so forceful that it pulled the
second being into a spiral around the first. However, when the beings were both in the spiral dance, something changed and the spiral became significantly more intense as the beings ceased fighting the gravity of the motion. This is what had been missing all along, and as soon as the spiral gained momentum, both beings understood that what had been missing could be found in each other.

The spiral continued without losing energy—quickly becoming more and more powerful until greater ripples in space came in enormous waves. The ripples were so intense, that more of the ancient beings felt them across the universe and alerted others as they traveled to find the source.

Eventually finding the first two beings interlocked in the spiral dance, the rest of their kin stood in awe as the dance suddenly became more violent and energetic until the ripples stopped altogether, and the other beings felt an immense, unseen force tug on their forms— the spiraling beings had collapsed inward, becoming one. So inspired by the beauty and magnificence of the event, more of the beings eventually spread throughout the universe (having paired up over time) and entered into the same spiral that each had witnessed before. Identical to the first pair, the other beings began collapsing inward as well, into an enormous and colossal force of gravity that stopped time itself using the presence of another.

**True** love is just as immeasurable and endless as space and time. So much so that it cannot be seen, heard, touched, or understood… only felt in the fabric of being—a thing of beauty, devastation, and immense power. This is how the first black hole was created.
simply signs of tears
heard so silently within
he sees them fading

each day he struggles
knowing it still feels painful
to heal each heartbeat

he understands pain
he lives it inside and out
he’s sensing the world

he’s painting the sun
and shadows of the desert
new buds on cactus

he hated her wrists
till he saw his story spoke
to all those who cared
STILL LIFE STUDY
By Katherine Walworth
Paul R. Abramson  
Paul R. Abramson is a professor of psychology at UCLA. He is the author of 11 books, published by the likes of Oxford University Press, MIT University Press, and W.W. Norton. Paul is also the lead singer and lyricist of the Americana Desolation Punk Rock band Crying 4 Kafka (crying4kafka.com). Paul often writes lyrics about human rights, including Give Sodomy A Chance. Paul and his wife Tania recently purchased property in Joshua Tree. It will serve as the site of a small publishing house, Asylum 4 Renegades Press (asylum4renegadespress.com), and an art/advocacy project, Planting Seeds Now (plantingseedsnow.com).

Tania Love Abramson  
Tania Love Abramson, MFA, Claremont Graduate University, is an artist whose work is imbued with psychological insight and layered processes. The Abyss series is part of her current project, 50 Years Later: the long shadow of childhood sexual abuse (50yrslater.com). In Abyss #14: Purple Rain, dramatic tension is evoked through obsessive mark-making spiraling inward, only to be softened and altered by rain drops hitting the surface of the paper, the weather creating its own random pattern.

James Aldrich  
I may have been born and raised in Orange, California, but I was conceived in the Soho district of New York. True story: My mother flew home to give birth near her family in California. Unfortunately, I haven’t visited NY since I was a zygote, and I think I’ve been trying to find my inner Soho ever since.

Lowen Baird  
My name is Lowen. I like burgers, burritos, spaghetti, meat and pizza. My hobbies are swimming, climbing, eating, and making potions. My spirit animal is a toad. My favorite super hero villains are The Vulture, The Toad, and Sabretooth. I’ve been promoted to Howl three times. I am a son of Dionysus. My favorite super heroes are Iceman and Gambit.

Nathan Cordova  
Nathan Cordova
Courtney Paige Freeman
A local to the desert she knows there are always surprises when it rains. When her mother first read her poem “Rain” she immediately asked, “Courtney is your room leaking again?!”. Courtney has always enjoyed writing and plans to continue it in the future, with the highest of hopes that the rain does not leak on her work.

Jean-Paul L. Garnier
Jean-Paul L. Garnier lives and writes in Joshua Tree, CA where he is co-owner of Space Cowboy Books, a used science fiction bookstore and independent publisher. His short stories and poetry have appeared in: Specklit, Eye to the Telescope, Scifaikuest, and many other anthologies and webzines. Recently he earned a certificate in creative writing from Wesleyan University. http://jplgarnier.blogspot.com

Greg Gilbert
Greg Gilbert is a Trustee and Professor Emeritus at Copper Mountain College where he founded Howl literary magazine, now in its second decade. Greg writes daily, mostly prose but some poetry. He and his wife Candace, also an educator, reside in Yucca Valley.

Laney Gill

Cooper Gillespie
“some people never go crazy.
what truly horrible lives
they must lead.”
-Charles Bukowski

Benjamin Goulet
Benjamin Goulet’s work has appeared in both local and national publications. A Rhode Island native, he lives with his wife Melissa in Twentynine Palms, California. He can be reached via his website: benjamingoulet.writerfolio.com

Mike Green
Lori Griffith  page: 97
Lori Griffith is a student at Copper Mountain College, majoring in Spanish and hoping to get into the nursing program. She has been in the Twentynine Palms area for 2 ½ years. Originally from Los Angeles, she lives with her four fur kids. Her tagline is “Better Late than Never.”

Carlos Guzman  page: 13
My name is Carlos Guzman. I was born on January 1, 1973. I developed a love of reading at an early age. I was like the chick from the Foghorn Leghorn cartoon, interested in something I would read about it: magic, origami, code writing, jokes. Books have helped me learn chess, how to draw, about the universe, how to save lives. Reading along with listening to music inspired me to write. I missed last year’s deadline and have been looking forward to this opportunity.

Brianna Hams  page: 31, 47, 70
Brianna Hams is a twenty-five year old Joshua Tree native pursuing a degree in English at Copper Mountain College. She enjoys collecting cursed objects, stealing people’s lawn ornaments, and discussing existentialist poetry with Eric, the goblin that lives under her kitchen sink. She also has a deep fondness for paper clips, fluffy pillows, and Mexican candy. She once met Travis Pastrana at an In-N-Out in Huntington Beach. He asked for her autograph.

Lalo Kikiriki  page: 64, 83
Lalo Kikiriki was born in Oklahoma, grew up in Texas; and moved to California in 1979, after ten years on Pacifica Radio Houston and publication of a chapbook, Old Movies, Other Visions, with Pam Palmer. Lalo earned a Masters Degree in Humanities from Cal State Dominguez Hills, 2007; the poet is also a ZZyZx Writer, itinerant accordionist, and queen of Poetrypalooza 2015.

James King  page: 111
Here I sit at my computer wondering about “My Life.” What does a life consist of: just a bunch days, time, or hours? Well mine surely is that, but more.

I was married at seventeen and a father three months after turning eighteen. By the time I turned twenty, I was a father of two and a private in the U.S. Army during Vietnam. I struggled just to get by, although I did! After I got out of the service, I started to play music professionally. My wife and I divorced after ten years of marriage, and I became a single parent of my children Jennifer and James. We grew up together!
In the next chapter of my life, (fifteen years later), I was a fulltime musician and my older children were on their way doing their thing. I met my current wife Kim and we have now been married for twenty-three years. We have two children, Joshua and Kellie, who are fulltime students at universities in California. I have eight Grandchildren, four boys and four girls. I am much blessed and very busy living life at this tender young age of sixty-four. I have finally, after forty odd years, semi-retired from the music business and have gone back to school, carrying fourteen credits. I am now in my second year and struggling still, but my desire to live is still intact so surviving I am, and live I will. My Life as James King.

**Aubrey Leahy**  
Although his Biological clock is fast unwinding and he remains Biotically in this Biosphere he yet retains hopes that, even as his Biorhythms continue to Biodegrade, the final chapters of his Biography are not writ anytime soon.

**Joseph Charles Lechner**  
My names Joseph Charles Lechner. I am a husband and a father, with a big family. I am an English Major but my passion lies in writing. My genre of choice is suspense mysteries, but I also dabble in horror and fantasy. Most days I spend my life chained to my restaurant, only able to vision what I would like to write about. Favorite authors are Stephen King, Dean Koontz, and Terry Brooks. I love reading now but it wasn’t always that way. As a child reading was a challenge for me and I had to work hard to hone that particular skill. I am glad I didn’t give up on reading and writing or I would have no outlet.

**Margo McCall**  
Margo McCall’s short stories have been published in Pacific Review, Heliotrope, In*tense, Wazee Journal, Sidewalks, Rockhurst Review, Toasted Cheese, Writers’ Tribe, and previously in Howl. In an age of viral video and memes, she still believes in the power of words to convey what it means to be human. A graduate of the M.A. creative writing program at California State University Northridge, she lives and writes in Long Beach, but her heart wanders through many places, including the desert. For more information, visit http://www.margomccall.com.
r. soos
pages: 26, 30, 48, 55, 103, 114
r soos has visited Joshua Tree several times a year since the 1970’s. Rather than waste gas to visit anymore, he simply retired here as of Jan 1, 2017. His books of poetry available on Amazon at http://amazon.rsoos.com

Teresa Sitz
pages: 85
Teresa Sitz lives in Wonder Valley and writes about the High Desert.

Margret Snyder
pages: 29, 87, 101
I was born a long time ago, and will die sometime in the future. I live, between these bookends of life, with as much joy as I can and as little regret as possible. Writing has given me wings to express my inner clown. Now all I need is a terrific pair of bright red shoes!

Jolene Stolla
pages: 56
Hi, my name is Jolene Stolla and I am on my 3rd year here at CMC. I have another one to go before I grow-up and become somebody. I have a home in Yucca Valley in which I live with my two adult children. We are all happy.

Rob Wanless
pages: 45
Rob Wanless is a golfer, a poet, a nomad, and a part time English teacher. He currently is living with different family members in the Midwest and Pennsylvania on some sort of quest for some life thing or another. Rob misses the desert and the desert writers.

Briana Williams
pages: 108
I’m Briana Williams, 23 years old, and I’ve been writing most of it and drawing the rest. The Faded is a book I’m working on and hope to finish one day. The work I am submitting is an excerpt of it.

Thor Williams
pages: 105
My name is Anthony Thor Williams, I prefer to be called Thor. I am 21 years old, born April 12th 1995 in Long Beach, California. My parents are Anthony James Williams and Jane Elizabeth Williams, I have one sister Jasminerose Kashmir Williams and I also have two dogs Tsunami of the Wind or Sue and Treu Beshutzer or better known as Jax Williams. My hobbies include watching movies and TV, reading, drawing, singing, playing video games and hiking. I hope to one day become a lawyer to help people out or to be an actor which is something I enjoy quite a lot.
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