



*The Inaugural Issue*

Summer 2019

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**Masthead**

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## Letter from the Editors

Dearest Hunnybees,

A bee flies to thousands of flowers only to make a spoonful of honey.

This fact dons our website and we cannot stress how much it represents this inaugural issue. Our baby bee is finally ready to navigate the gardens of the world, pausing for pollen with you and others. We hope you enjoy the sticky and the sweet of the words below.

This magazine was the brainchild that grew from our love of the micromemoir form. After finding a shortage in the literary magazine circuit and a lack of places to submit our own micro work to, we teamed up with our favorite flash fictionist, Ashleigh Ray, and decided to fill the hole of short form writing in the literary world with the biggest buzz we could.

As we have taken on this new baby, our love for the short form has only blossomed. We have learned how beautiful small moments can be, especially when they are set in contrast against our fast-paced lives. Within our own jam-packed schedules, we have become more aware and more hungry for these moments. We crave the short form that packs a big punch and leaves us with that flying feeling.

This, our inaugural issue, is something we have been dreaming about forever, and we are so amazed at the work you have sent us—it has warmed our hive-hearts! We greatly appreciate your support, submissions, and patience throughout this process. It has been a long journey, but we are so thankful that all of your individual flowers get to be represented in this spoonful of honey.

Stay sweet, Hunnybees.

Stephanie Karakochuk Hardy and Macey Sidlasky



## **Sunflower Season**

by Kate Kobosko

Ah, farmer's market find!  
Beckoning her from behind  
    the succulents.  
A golden amalgam,  
slice of summer  
in this New York fall.  
Clipped clean of its  
    roots,  
stem sheared on a slant.  
This sunflower, subjected  
to the passing trends of  
Lower East Side  
décor. The Puerto Rican  
woman snatches the  
lone flower from its  
display pot, swipes her card,  
and trots to her fifth floor  
walk-up.  
Instead of a vase,  
she plops it in an  
uncorked wine bottle  
and lukewarm tap water.  
She faces the flower  
toward the open window,  
leaves it with shafts of  
light filtering between  
the bars of the fire escape.  
    Elsewhere,  
it is sunflower season.  
    Here,  
they are all transplants.

## **My Mother's Curse**

by Kate Kobosko

When you were small, they called you trouble,  
cut your hair short. That way, there was less of you.  
They wrapped you in layers of clothes, the final  
coat so loose it was impossible to tell if you were  
under there at all. They pulled scratchy knit hats  
with such force that they covered your eyes.  
I wear my hair long, split ends like open nerves.

When I think of you, I think of the smell of coffee,  
but not the taste. Cringing when the bitter liquid  
hit your tongue. Last gulp from an oversized Orioles mug.  
The evidence of exhaled breath on French doors  
when you pressed against them, spying on the neighbors.

I think of your strange curse: the love of  
paintings no one understands, like the one  
above the upstairs toilet of a bottle of Bud  
tucked in a shoe. I think of sacrifice, and not the  
patriotic kind. The kind where you have to  
sell your rights, like chopping nonessential  
pieces of yourself and auctioning to the  
highest bidder. A left ring finger for a career.  
A flat stomach for a daughter like me.

At home I collected the scissors, hid them  
from you. I wanted you to have hair like mine:  
blonde, untamed, a wild heap of straw. You  
have never been the kind of woman who listens.

## **Gold**

by Barry O'Farrell

With the price of gold at historically high levels, yesterday she watched a sign writer putting the finishing touches to a gold dealer's popup kiosk in the centre of the shopping mall.

Today she has worked up her courage and approaches the new kiosk, fumbling for the precious gold band in her purse. It doesn't seem to want to come out.

The Asian gold-dealer smiles his friendly, practiced professional smile as he patiently waits and then accepts the ring from her hand. He scratches it deftly on a touchstone followed by a drop of acid, a quick wipe clean and then onto digital scales.

"How much this ring cost you?" bluntly asks the dealer. Simple enough question.

Shattered plans, disillusioned dreams, profound sense of loss, all threaten to overwhelm her. How to suddenly calculate her double disillusionment of private, intimate hopes? She cannot find words. She cannot find any more tears.

## **Near the Mouth of the Gilão**

by Margaret Koger

It's August and my eyes ramble the naked mud  
Within the channel, an air of absence pauses;  
Crabs by the millions speed across the riverbed  
Today, I'll stay to see the salty sea flow in.

Tides have a way with them, rehearsing limits  
Stream like women wearing leggings and lace.  
Tides rise, flowing in, inch by sonorous inch  
I'll hear as long my lungs keep calling breath

In—harnessing our stories of new years  
Time's relentless march up January shores  
Ascending the Valentine's heart of February  
Granting flowers and chocolate for lovers.

Time for floating the high tides of spring  
For spelling the lines of summertime swells  
Rewriting the risks of September surges  
Caroling full-throated into December's mettle  
Dry as an August rose, petals endlessly lapping.

## **While You Were Sleeping (and Later)**

by Margaret Koger

At three or four a.m. finches call  
one to another sweet, sweet, sweet  
again and again sweet, sweet, sweet  
Light seeping into night's dark realm  
who flails against day's unruly reign

as nesting feathers shift, throats swell

a flycatcher's pinch me, pinch me  
rouses the troubled street-sleepers—  
a cramped wino on his cardboard jolts  
a mother in her car nodding off  
unaware of her son's fevered dreams

his father a male cock crowing—

reliving blows slammed into his body  
mother and sister crying please, stopit, stopit  
fearing how the boy will someday descend  
raging as his own boy cries no no no

tears washing yesterday's promise.

Still dawn's choristers insist  
the robins' wheedle, wheedle, wheedle  
the doves' coo hoo, coo hoo, coo hoo  
say here I nest, here I'll be, hear me  
singing awake the cowed sleepers

parched throats longing for relief.

All day a host of chickadees' plaint  
whoo me-e, whoo me-e, whoo me-e  
day failing to ease their shy solos  
'til dark stirs a great horned owl  
his stern hoo hoo you, hoo hoo you  
laying claim.

## **The Hunt**

by Margaret Koger

I stood in an old garden full of dead fairies  
statues of elves and sprites  
chortling with glee  
brandishing the weapons they'd used  
to kill their fey, gadfly cousins.  
Elves and sprites lurking amongst the flower beds  
toeing toward your feet on the gravel path  
ready to trip you. And then what?  
You were supposed to solve the murders  
one said, and then take your choice of weapons  
stash one in your bag. But it was like looking  
for the witchmaker's husband, peering  
under the benches, over the tops of hollyhocks  
seeing no one there.

As I struggled amongst the shadows  
they hissed—I kept losing my mind.  
Did the ssss or the SSSSS mean hot?  
Should I follow a scent or a spider's web?  
A tiny path into a maze of carrots?  
Look here! A gnome appears—  
like a statue, whispering  
not moving his lips.

**[you should have paid me more attention]**

by Marie Fields

When you pay other people to raise your children  
You do not have the right to be disappointed in the results.

## **At the Collier Mansion**

by Thomas Zimmerman

Brown skeletons awaiting better days:  
the way we see the trees. Friends stoking us  
with coffee in the morning, beer at night.  
Good morrow, and good morrow, and good morrow:  
chugging like full tugboats. Cell phone photos  
of the Mississippi River snapped quick  
from the car: they slide across my mind,  
chunked blue ice blurred by motion, sun, like aging  
eyes, or stars on windy nights. Infinity  
still undiminished: loss gapes wide, then morphs  
into discovery. Let's face the whole,  
be done with crossing out. Great sex this morning,  
Catholic wake this evening. Family from  
the south and west descend: this house sleeps ten.

## The Art of Telling in Three Parts

by Calyn Waddington

### Part I

We walked up to the ticket counter. I was ten or eleven and watched as my papa slid over a bill to purchase our stubs. We did or did not get popcorn, I'm not sure at this point. It doesn't really matter. We wound our way to our theater by first staring at the stub and peering up at the electric signs that dictate what lies beyond their barrier - an electric gateway. Our theater was to the left or right, and at this point it doesn't really matter. We had to sit close to the screen because the theater was full. The movie was *Ratatouille*. The cute animations and aspirations of the rat to cook had the audience enthralled. I, myself, was plastered to the storyline. My father, however, was not. I remember the soft sobs, the shaking beside me. It was small and confined, like the licking of waves at the beach as the sun sets. And all it once it is swallowed by the ocean. My attention had been swallowed, too. I no longer saw the movie screen. All I could feel was my papa, shaking beside me, repressed and contained. I whisper, *why are you crying?* He tells me, *your mother doesn't love me anymore*. The soft sobs continue until they ebb and die away. I don't remember much of the movie thereafter.

### Part II

Outside the house are cars. Countless amounts, like a party was happening within. I open the door and am greeted by faces of horror and grief morphing into smiles as I walk past because they see innocence and ignorance covering my face. I walk a ways in, confused at the presence of these people in my home. My papa is waiting for me on the couch. I walk far enough in to see his small head perched between people on the leather seats. I stop, or rather refuse to continue without an explanation. I was fourteen. When we know something is wrong we feel it in our gut. We can feel it growing and churning in our stomach acids and eating away at the walls between worry and uncertainty. We feel it crawling its way up our throats and into our mouths, ready to spit out at any moment - *What is it?* Papa looks at me with unease. *Come sit. No. Mom overdosed*. I taste these words for a second, enough to swallow them and put them into context. *She's in the hospital?* He tells me no. *Honey, no. She's gone*. The floor shifted below me. Suddenly it is out from under me. I am running on nothing, the floor has left me hanging and waiting for its embrace. But the sun is setting and melting through the living room window and I can hear my mother's voice saying in a sing-song way *ding dong, sunset time, ding dong, sunset time*. The sun crosses the void to meet me. It swaddles me. It tells me what my papa knows.

### Part III

I hurried back to the hospital after receiving a call from my brother. It was the day after my 24th birthday. *Dad is out of surgery. So soon? So soon*. I arrive and enter the facility and remember my way back to the waiting room. The walls and faces plastered to them hadn't changed. Only my brother's had. It was red and puffy. *The surgeon came and spoke to me. Okay. What did he say?* And he told me. I felt my heart drop from me, through the floor, through the world. I was thrust back in time. I was pulled in a million directions, and my mind was spinning, spinning, spun. My brother told me how papa has cancer. He told me how it was rare and aggressive. He told me how papa might lose his bladder altogether and how he would have to endure chemotherapy, too. I see my brother seeing me. And soon my vision is too blurry to

see anything. It came in sobs, not small and soft but heavy and violent. I didn't understand why. *But we can't let him see us upset.* My face had melted into my hands, a small puddle. We can't let him know we are upset. I held my hands to my face. I opened my mouth to ask why not, but only a sob came out. I wanted to tell him all my life papa has told me. And now I have to tell him. I don't know how to tell him. But all that came out was a sob.

## **Mom and Loss**

by Kenneth Pobo

Your dead brother's picture  
in your purse--  
you took grief in like breath.

Many called you gentle—  
did they miss the metal,  
the spine?  
Did I miss them?

One afternoon we drifted  
on a Wisconsin lake, yellow  
water lilies and eagles.  
You were seventy then.

I try to build a life  
on what must go—  
as you did.

**Before The Stillness**

by J.S. MacLean

heat death sneaks between trees  
as we stack more sticks on fires

## **Nighthawks**

by Edward Adam Frederick

*Inspired by the painting of the same name by Edward Hopper*

The busboy tuned the radio, flying past Gershwin and crooning Bing Crosby to a station where static popped. The old man at the end of the counter nodded his thanks under the brim of his fedora.

The busboy swabbed a glass with a wet dish rag and watched the woman sitting at the counter. She wore a smoldered red, low-cut dress tonight. With her porcelain face propped in one hand – like a bored goddess, he thought – she sipped hot tea with the other to cover the envelope glue on her breath.

She looked up, and the busboy crouched and pretended to rearrange the coffee mugs under the counter. He heard the click-clack of high heels on the tile floor.

“Excuse me,” she said.

The busboy stood. She was beside the man sitting at the elbow of the L-shaped counter. He had a leather portfolio in front of him acting as a blotter for his coffee cup.

“May I join you?” she asked.

“Okay,” he said.

She sat on the stool beside him. Their elbows touched. The busboy scrubbed the glass.

“Heading in?”

“Going home,” he said. “Big presentation tomorrow. Advertising.”

She smiled, “You mean like the Coca-Cola Santa Claus?”

The man grinned. “No, not exactly. I work for a different firm.”

“Can I see?”

The man took his first sip of coffee and chased it with a breath. “Okay,” he said, and unbuttoned the portfolio.

The busboy turned his head ever so slightly to see. The poster was brightly colored: a German soldier, with the black propeller of a swastika stamped on his armband, was bent backwards over the emblazoned slogan Beat Back the HUN with LIBERTY BONDS! The soldier’s gaping mouth was painted the same black void as his bulging eyes. The busboy could not imagine his pain or knew that such pain existed.

The woman looked away at her reflection in the aluminum coffee pot. She traced, with her thumb, the brass ring on her finger.

The man closed the portfolio. “You have somewhere to go?”

“Home,” her reflection told her, “but I don’t feel like going back just yet.”

“Okay,” the man said, and he moved the portfolio to the floor beside his stool, clearing the counter space between them.

Static popped from the radio. The busboy picked up the woman’s teacup and walked it to the sink, feeling the warmth in his hands. With his back facing her, he turned the cup to where her lipstick had touched and drank.

The radio crackled: “Good evening, America and all the ships at sea.”

The busboy noticed the old man over the rim of his cup at the end of the counter. His hands were held together in a tight ball in front of him, and he looked at them, resigned as though he knew they would stay that way forever.

“Can I get you anything, sir?” the busboy asked.

“No,” the old man said. “I’m fine.”

## **Bathing Beauties of Long Island**

by William Doreski

My birthday has gone limp on me  
like a baggy old sharkskin suit.  
Remember the bathing beauties  
of Long Island long ago?  
I think you still have the color  
postcard stashed in a bureau drawer.

No one's beautiful anymore,  
even cast in bronze or stainless steel.  
No one bathes thoroughly enough  
to scald off the rusty scales  
that laminate us in strata  
so tough we can't stoop to pet the cat  
or comfort the blazing child.

Leave the looking-glum to me:  
it's my birthday, after all,  
and I'll cast it in cheap pot metal  
just to frustrate the bathing beauties  
unaware they've drowned, like me,  
without even wetting their hair.

## How You Become Friends

by Marlene Heyning

Brenda and I are drunk. Not too drunk that we'll be hungover in the morning, but just drunk enough where words and stories are spilling out of our mouths. It's late September, and fall is just starting to pick up in New York. It's a relief we're all yearning for. We don't really know each other, aren't great friends just yet, but tonight we talk about death and dying. My dad, her brother-in-law. ALS and avalanches. I cry, but I can't remember if Brenda does, too. We're walking up Metropolitan Avenue; Brenda wants to go to the Alligator Lounge across the street. There's a pool table inside and cheap beer, but I want to go home.

"I have work tomorrow," I say.

"You're right, you're right."

We end up stopping at Little King, a few blocks up, on the corner of Graham and Metropolitan. This hole-in-the-wall is closer to our apartment, and there are fewer distractions. We can get away with one drink, not five, as would happen at the Alligator Lounge. She orders a beer, I order wine. She asks me about my dad, and I tell her mostly I'm fine now. This upcoming death anniversary, in February, will mark me living half my life without him. Sometimes, though, it feels like yesterday.

"Sometimes, I remember things in such clarity, and the grief is so raw. I can't believe it."

My tears flow out of me. I grab a napkin and wipe my eyes. I'm fine, I assure her. I am, really; I'm just drunk. I laugh as I say this.

I ask her about Jimmy, her dead brother-in-law.

She takes a minute to compose her thoughts. Six months from now, at the tail end of winter, when we talk about Jimmy and my dad, and all the other shit that's happened to us, in this same bar, Brenda will reach across the table and grab my hands and hold on to me in solidarity. We'll both be crying, both of us the same amount of drunk as we are tonight. But right now, we're just getting to know each other, just starting to open up.

"Cass had this feeling, you know? She didn't want him to go mountain climbing that time, because of the weather or the mountain or whatever. But he went anyway, and then got lost in the avalanche."

We are silent over our drinks. I imagine being taken by snow. I think of Disney's *Mulan*, the scene with the Huns and the horses and the Chinese, all escaping the mountain. The fighting stopped so the lives could be saved. I shiver. It's been years since I've seen snow. It's hard for me to imagine it as deadly. I grew up in Southern California, where we are prone to wildfires.

The first snow New York had that winter, on December 9, a Saturday, I awoke to see the flakes lightly falling outside my window. My first thought was, why is there ash? where is there fire?

Perhaps snow is deadly, even to an outsider.

We talk more about the aftermaths, how quick deaths and slow deaths compare and contrast, how, really, they are the same in the end because the living still suffer. We finish our drinks. We think about another but decide to pay and walk home.

The wind picks up, the car headlights blurring red and yellow as they rush past us. We are not in Manhattan, so there's less honking, but there is still a brashness in the street noise. The night is turning cold, even for September. Brenda stops, a slight smile forming on her face. I turn toward her. We're at the corner of Metropolitan and Bushwick, the huge Speedway gas station shining brightly across the street.

"Hey, remember when your dad was alive and so was Jimmy and life was better and we were happy?"

I keel over laughing, grabbing ahold of my stomach. I can't breathe I'm laughing so hard. It's the funniest thing anyone has ever said to me. No one has ever joked about death with me before, afraid of making me sad, afraid of pissing me off, afraid I'm too fragile, but Brenda understands the absurdity of my situation. She bends over laughing too.

"I'm so glad you laughed. That joke was 50-50."

I reach over and hug her. Our light turns green, but we stand still for just a while longer. We hold tight until the little red hand pops up, flashing, a forceful New York reminder: Go, walk. I smile the entire three-minute walk back to our apartment, my face warm from the alcohol. I'm still catching my breath as we ascend our three-story walk-up.

## **Sand**

by Melinda Giordano

Patterns of silica roam at my feet  
Like pretty serpents  
Handfuls of pastel alloy and distant alchemy  
The Philosopher's stone crushed into powder  
The threads of prehistoric landscapes and ancient seas  
That fit into the wrinkles of my palm  
Patterns of galaxies that are stitched into my skin  
Then return to the sky as I brush them away  
The haphazard satellites  
And future countries

## **Bloodless**

by Melinda Giordano

A cracked mosaic  
The languishing bower  
Crumbled and nibbled at my feet:  
With the furtive familiarity of a cat.  
My shoes stirred  
Beneath that brittle fabric;  
They pushed at the jagged facets  
Of a harvest colored prism:  
The withered reminders  
Of nature's edict  
That her beauty survives  
Even when death  
And the photosynthetic drought  
Will wreathe the ground  
With her bloodless garlands.

## **The Invitation**

by Melinda Giordano

The dead seagull lay huddled in the rocks  
Its head curved beneath its wings  
In a solemn, moribund prayer  
The air pricked at its feathers as if the bird still lived  
And could feel the salty, impudent fingers

Nature tried to interrupt the corpse's devotions:  
The air, the ocean  
Refused to let the deceased blood,  
The slowly evaporating DNA  
Disperse amongst the shoreline's lonely cathedrals

I did not take a photograph of the body  
To create a memory of its sadness  
But the grief stays with me:  
Of the soft creature prodded by the wind  
Inviting it to join its salty ranks once more

## **Missing Since**

by Emory Russo

They had only an hour before sunrise, but Annie worked alone, stuffing a garbage bag with hair clips and lip gloss, a charm bracelet from her mother, the denim jacket Luke hated and the tube top he'd paid for. Luke sat by the curb, digging through her CD collection and trying to light a cigarette. She could hear the useless working of his lighter each time she returned to the truck; click, click, click.

On her last trip, tottering down the porch steps with her arms full of Baby-Sitters Club paperbacks she hadn't finished, she began to cry. Luke spat into the gutter and slung an arm around her waist, rubbing steadily. "Come on, babe," he said. "This time tomorrow we'll be on Sunset Boulevard." She didn't remind him that it was a twenty-hour drive.

He drove eighty all the way out of her neighborhood, blasting rock music over her sniffles. They stopped only twice before they hit San Antonio, once to buy a bottle of Fireball to calm her nerves, once so she could tear down a flyer with their faces on it. She tried to doze, wanting to dream of white beaches and sunset on the pier, but Luke wouldn't stop humming along to Pearl Jam.

## **Little Rat**

by Emory Russo

She went to Prague to kill herself, but it was too noisy a place to die. The travel sites had promised the city of a hundred spires, cobblestone paths, and medieval castles; but American tourists swarmed everywhere in the old city. She heard her mother's voice in their mush-mouthed accents, and hid in the park, dozing on the memorial steps where bronze ghouls lurched towards the water. Again she dreamed of rivers, of Baltic cliffs, and mighty suspension bridges strung with multicolored lights. The water would be cool and quiet, rocking her into silence, even if her throat burned and instinct made her kick against the current. She woke up crying. For the first time in six months she thought of calling home, begging to be forgiven. Instead, she wandered further into the trees, and paid a squat old woman the last of her cash for a silver fox kit. Its snout was speckled, its eyes deep and dark. It climbed onto on her shoulders, and she cooed to it, "mali," as the woman had hissed when it nipped her sagging chin. Malý krysa, malý krysa. She knew no Czech, but the sound was sweet.

## **Femme**

by Emory Russo

Most of the time his breasts seem alien to him, bulbous sacks of pale goose-bumped flesh hanging from his body while he digs along the floor for his boxers. Only occasionally can he see their attractiveness. Squinting into the mirror propped against Sam's closet door, he catches their curve, the hint of sex in his nipples, small and pink in the late-morning sunshine. Sam watches from the bed, nose tucked just under the sheet so that it breathes with her. "Are you really gonna," she says, making a sideways peace sign with her fingers, snip snip. He folds himself back into bed, and she watches him scroll through PornHub, her lips against his cheek, one hand roaming anxiously over his chest. She touches him with no pressure, only the slightest drag of her fingertips, as if he were something fragile.

## Sirius

by Andie Brynn Weaver

The spider's shadow dangles,  
crawls up and down the white  
filled-in window  
behind the brick building.  
In the streetlight, it inches  
toward another shadow—  
a fly—both of them  
suspended like the moon  
and the dog star.

I search for meaning  
in the lanky legs climbing,  
like a shadow-box-  
tight-rope show. I decide  
the meaning is, Survive.  
The meaning is, *Don't be the fly.*

But what meaning  
is there for the fly?  
Some nights the moon  
outshines the dog star,  
but not always.

## **Identity Crisis in the Backyard**

by Don Thompson

The power line sags under this dove,  
not svelte but bulked up  
like an urban pigeon.  
Now it wears leather around its neck  
instead of black velvet.

Even hummingbirds have a bad attitude,  
flicking at you like a slap.  
And finches show up late  
with their heads dyed a new color—  
raspberry or iridescent chartreuse.

At least the sparrows still work hard,  
settling for minimum seed,  
and complain all day as usual.  
They've kept their traditions.  
So far.

## **Shoppers and Samplers**

by Paul Beckman

She spotted him looking at flannel shirts. It must be a gift, she thought, he's not a flannel kind of guy. She sampled the chicken sausage and moved on.

He caught a glimpse of her perusing the books. Nice to see still has an interest in reading, he thought and then moved on to pick up a twelve pack of strip steaks.

When did he become such a big meat eater, she wondered. Maybe he's having a cookout at his place. I'd like to go and see our old friends but it would be embarrassing all around.

She's spending an awful long time with the vitamins. Some things never change, he thought. I'll linger a bit talking to the lady giving out candy samples—she's bound to see me if she heads towards the checkout.

Maybe I can drive by and if I see a lot of cars I can say I forgot something and hang around for a bit, socializing. This marinade the sauce is in is nice and spicy, I should get a jar.

I wonder what she's doing this afternoon. I'm sure our old friends would like to see her again and I wouldn't mind her hanging around. She's actually buying that shrimp sauce. She never used to like hot and spicy. She'd probably stay the afternoon socializing and even offer to help clean up. That would be nice—like the old days.

He'd probably ask me to make the salad or my special dressing. That could be strange. I'd want to visit not work like I was the hostess of old.

I'll get in the checkout line behind her and when she spots me we'll see how things go. She's certainly looking good.

It's hard not to turn around and talk to him. He doesn't even know I'm here. I should probably leave the past in the past. Too bad he doesn't miss me.

## **Donna's Anniversary**

by John Grey

Your anniversary pops up  
on his laptop  
so he sends his personal assistant  
to pick out a gift  
in her lunchtime,  
have it wrapped  
by the store staff.

So what you're getting  
is the flourish, the flair,  
of indifferent strangers,  
the taste of delegated staff,  
and the efficiency of  
automated calendar software.

You wonder if the man  
really loves you.  
But nobody's been assigned  
for you to ask.

## **Revenge**

by Jane Hertenstein

Early in our relationship, my boyfriend and I used his parent's cable password so I could stream Dietland. When we split, he took the TV and cat. I didn't care about the cat, but the TV had brought me months of happiness. Eighteen to be exact.

So, I went over to a friend's house to watch TV (since all I had was an empty square on the wall) and gave her the password. Then I gave it out at work. I group texted it next.

I haven't seen him for a year, yet we're still connected, me and hundreds of others.

## The Girls

by Sarah Boudreau

The day of the ladybug incident, Lizzie was expecting a different kind of guest.

She took the cookbook down from its shelf. It was yellowed and used to be her mother's, but it was the only cookbook she owned, because it said it had a recipe for every occasion. Her eyes rested on the flashy spread of cakes and frostings, the text imploring her to *Make somebody happy today—bake a cake!*

She whisked through the pages to find the correct recipe and scanned the ingredients list again, though she could practically recite each line. Every Monday, Lizzie bought the exact quantities she needed for the week's meals—including the cakes—but she thought it wouldn't hurt to check again. Everything had to be perfect.

*Bake a cake!*

Every week, while Lizzie put the Sunday cake on the table, her mother would come over and fuss with the organization of her kitchen, sending the pair into a spell of bickering. Lizzie had almost completely cast this week's argument from her mind, but today Jonathan was coming over, and her anxiety hummed. She worried that her mother was right, that her house was disgusting. With an ill-kept home, how could she entertain? What would Jonathan think?

*Bake a chocolate cake for the man in your life.*

A glow emanated from the oven as she plucked eggs from their carton and broke them into the mixing bowl, relishing in the rhythm of shell against rim.

After depositing the batter into the cake pan and the cake pan into the oven, Lizzie retreated to the island barstool and her phone. A blur of motion in her peripheral vision made Lizzie's head jerk up.

As if a tap had been opened, thousands of ladybugs worked their way between window panes, erupted out of the sink drain, squirmed out of cabinets, and poured into the kitchen, coating it like a slathering of thick, red icing. Lizzie felt the panic wash over her brain like high tide: Jonathan would be arriving in sixty-five minutes—assuming he was punctual, and oh, Lizzie hoped he was a punctual person—what would he think about the messy swarm?

The bugs click-clacked across the tile. They crawled over one another, a lazy sea of shellacked shells and paper-thin wings. When they stumbled and fell off the countertop, they sounded like a handful of Skittles cascading to the floor.

Once they surrounded Lizzie, they all came to a halt, aside from a few strays who lazily twined around the legs of the barstool. The bugs gazed up at Lizzie. She wrung her hands as she looked down at the sea of polka dots and antennae. They looked at her expectantly. She did not know what to say. She did not know how to ask them to leave. Her broom was close by—could she sweep them away? Could she open the door and let them pour out? What would Jonathan say? What would her mother say? As her mind swirled, words of wisdom from the cookbook sang to her: *Bake a white cake with peppermint frosting for the girls coming over for bridge. Bake a cake—have a party.*

Maybe she could throw them a garden party? A little fresh air might do them good. She took mental inventory of her cupboards and refrigerator and inhaled sharply. She was not prepared to bake a cake—she had not planned for additional visitors this week.

"I'm sorry," she began, addressing the ladybugs. "But, um..."

*Bake a cake.*

She combed her fingers through her hair. Looking down at the ladybug army, she wanted to stomp on them, smash them all beneath her bare feet and feel shards of shell between her toes. She wanted to crush each tiny bead until its life burst.

*Bake a cake.* The grip on her hair tightened. She could feel her roots screaming.

The mass of ladybugs began to writhe, the individual beetles squirming and running into each other. Their legs tangled together, and they tripped over one another, flipping over, righting themselves, millions of feet tapping the linoleum in a miniature cacophony. They climbed up her body, and she could feel them brushing up her legs delicately, working their way under her dress, tickling her thighs like a hot breath. A bug meandered up her neck and traced the back of her ear. *Bake a—*

She took a breath and shuddered. A shower of ladybugs fell to the floor and scrambled to right themselves.

“If you’ll excuse me, dessert will be served shortly,” she told the rowdy party.

*Bake a cake?*

“Dessert will be on the lanai,” she added, firmly.

The ladybugs vibrated with excitement, and Lizzie began measuring and pouring, thanking God that she had a double oven and a quarter cup of milk left. After whipping through the process, she spooned batter onto a baking sheet, and the ladybugs watched her with awe and reverence.

In the ten minutes it took to bake, Lizzie and the ladybugs stared at each other blankly, and then Lizzie donned the good oven mitts—special guests deserved the blue ones with the silicon grips—and pulled the baking sheet out of the oven.

She stacked hot cookies on a platter and carried them to her back patio. The ladybugs followed her, organizing themselves into tight, obedient lines. Their shells clacked against each other as they hustled.

Lizzie placed the cookies on the ground as the timer for Jonathan’s cake began to blare. She hurried back to the kitchen, but made sure to lock the back door after the last of the ladybugs crawled over the threshold. She drew the blinds.

The cake had to be taken out of the oven and cooled. The icing was applied, and the kitchen was swept and the countertops disinfected. The dishwasher had just been loaded when Lizzie saw Jonathan’s car pulling into the driveway. She checked the cake, scanning for flaws, adjusting the angle on a plume of chocolate icing. Then she checked the clock and smiled—he was perfectly on time.

## Astrocetology

by Sarah Boudreau

Galactic gray whales' migratory patterns and simple, loud vocalizations make them perfect subjects for study when mapping the universe. They travel along edges, near the burning of young stars, and through recording their calls, scientists can chart the borders of irregular galaxies.

When she was a little girl, Janelle dreamed of wandering on whaleback, turning slow loop-de-loops around Jupiter's moons. She owned a picture book about the whales, which she read until memorized. When her sister was young, Janelle tried to read it to her, but Little Ashley tore one of the pages with her sticky toddler fingers, ripping a dorsal fin. Janelle had sobbed, even though she was twelve and considered herself too old to cry.

Janelle has Saturdays off, but she drives to the lab. She exits her car and walks past the tour groups gawking at the radio telescopes. The great dishes, 90 feet in diameter, look like giant ears cocked as they listen to the murmurs of distant clusters.

As she scans her badge and lets herself in, she is concerned that someone will remark that today is her day off and raise a fuss about it. Today, she caves to her whim, but this worry often keeps her from driving into work on weekends and keeps her in bed when she can't fall asleep, puzzling over some issue.

She shares the lab with a handful of astronomers. They like their predictable, stale numbers, and they don't care about the organic. They also don't care enough about Janelle to look up as she enters. A few sit at their computers, faces lit by their scrolling. They click pensively.

Her worries quelled, Janelle sits down, boots up her computer, and plugs in her headphones. When she works, she rarely listens to the whales' transmissions. The telescopes turn the messages into numbers, and the computer turns the numbers into sounds, and it's faster for her to just look at the screen. But today, she slips the cool insulation of the headphones over her ears.

She tunes into a familiar pod, one of the first she ever tracked by herself, back in grad school. She smiles when she recognizes the voice of Amatheia, the female in pod L-B813. Janelle has never seen her—telescopes cannot yet squint hard enough to get an eye on the creatures—but she has pieced together a mental image. She imagines her with soulful eyes and a fluke battered by meteoroids. That tail propels her forward in rhythmic bursts as the pod glides through the currents of gravitational pull.

Amatheia speaks to her latest calf, L-112, and he chirps back. Janelle leans back in her chair and lets their conversation wash over her. She tries to relax the muscles in her jaw.

Ashley had called her that morning. They never had anything to talk about, separated by eight years and eight hundred miles. Janelle had just embarked on this weekend's project—reorganizing her books in the Library of Congress system—when she was interrupted by the blare of a default ringtone. She waded through books to grab her phone.

When she saw that it was Ashley, she was puzzled, since it was February: too early to start coordinating their parents' Christmas gift. Janelle answered, and Ashley told her that she was pregnant, that she had taken a bunch of tests just to be sure, that they all came back positive, even the cheap ones, that she had made a doctor's appointment, and that she was worried about missing work to go, that she had felt sick that morning and nearly threw up, but she wasn't sure if it was nerves or not.

"And I've decided," Ashley said, and she paused for the first time. She took a deep breath. "I'm keeping it. You're the first one I called. I haven't told Mom and Dad yet."

"Oh, wow," Janelle said. She was not sure what she should say, but she suspected that that wasn't it. "Wow, Ash. That's, uh... that's big."

"Michael's excited to be a dad. A little nervous, but excited."

“Well that’s good.”

With her phone clapped to her ear, Janelle paced her apartment and piped up at what she hoped were appropriate intervals: “Oh, wow. What did he say? Then what did you do? Oh, ouch. How many weeks? Wow. Yeah. That sounds really frustrating.”

She wanted to cry, “You’re only twenty-two!”

The last time she saw her sister was over the holidays. Ashley and her boyfriend were squished together in her parents’ big recliner, legs intertwined, giggling at each other. Janelle tried to imagine the scene with a half-open diaper bag leaning against the chair, a stroller tucked into the corner, an actual, human child in her little sister’s arms. She tried to imagine a new weariness under Ashley’s eyes.

Janelle wished she had something better to say, something comforting. She couldn’t imagine why, of all people, Ashley called her first. She listened and “mmhmed” and hoped that’s what she needed to hear.

When they hung up an hour later, Janelle tried to return to her books, but she found herself slipping on her shoes and driving to work.

Janelle does the only thing she can think to do: turns up the volume and closes her eyes. She listens to the pod curling around the borders of the Sculptor Dwarf Irregular Galaxy, the calf trailing a few hundred miles behind his mother. Their bellows are so vivid to Janelle, but they are in the past tense: light years away, thousands of centuries old by the time earth’s ears hear them.

But in the present, out in the margins of space, scores of gray whales vocalize, almost harmonize, as they swim between solar systems. They trace the galaxies, straining the vacuum with their baleen. They call out to each other, and they call to Janelle—head in her hands, unfathomable millions of miles and years away—the woman who will listen to the anxious hums of the universe.



## Contributor Bios

**Andie Brynn Weaver** graduated from Young Harris College with a BA in creative writing. She currently lives in Athens, GA with a variety of neighborhood cats who don't belong to her but occasionally walk across her porch just before dawn.

**Barry O'Farrell** (@BarryO\_Tweet) is an Australian actor who sometimes writes. Barry's stories have appeared in *Writers Block Review*, *Skive Magazine*, *Cyclamens & Swords*, *The Flash Fiction Press*, *A Story In 100 Words*, *101 Words*, *50 Word Stories*, *Writers Grapevine*, *The Dirty Pool*, plus the anthologies *FUTUREVISION* and *MORE SCRIBBLES FROM THE SUBURBS*. Barry has enjoyed success as runner-up in both the 2018 Boonah Arts Festival and the 2015 Arts Alliance competitions.

**Calyn Waddington** is a Floridian scholar in Gothic and Feminist literatures, nonfiction writer, and poet. Her work involves how gender fluidity and a destruction of gender binaries in a heteronormative society lends a deeper insight into character anxieties, relationships, and identities within texts. Calyn has received a BA in English Literature from the University of Central Florida and a MA in English Literature from the University of South Florida.

**Don Thompson** has been writing about the San Joaquin Valley for over fifty years, including a dozen or so books and chapbooks. For more info and links to publishers, visit his website at [www.don-e-thompson.com](http://www.don-e-thompson.com).

**Edward Adam Frederick's** interest in writing began as a young boy, raised in Key West, Florida on the tales of Ernest Hemingway and the island's colorful history. He wrote fiction throughout middle and high school with the encouragement of his English teachers and school librarian mother. He entered college as an English major in 2009, with his first two publications appearing in the Pasco-Hernando State College student art magazine, *Mobius*, while earning his Associate in Arts degree. He currently attends the University of South Florida in Tampa with an interest in becoming a teacher of literature and creative writing.

**Emory Russo** is a writer and grad student living in Tampa, Florida, though he is a Maryland native.

**Jane Hertenstein's** current obsession is flash. She is the author of over 80 published stories, a combination of fiction, creative nonfiction, and blurred genre both micro and macro. In addition, she has published a YA novel, *Beyond Paradise*, and a nonfiction project, *Orphan Girl: The Memoir of a Chicago Bag Lady*, which garnered national reviews. Jane is the recipient of a grant from the Illinois Arts Council. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in: *Hunger Mountain*, *Rosebud*, *Word Riot*, *Flashquake*, *Fiction Fix*, *Frostwriting*, and several themed anthologies. She can also be found blogging at <http://memoirouswrite.blogspot.com/>

**John Grey** is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Hawaii Review*, and *Roanoke Review*.

**J.S. MacLean** has been writing poetry since the early 70s with two collections, *Molasses Smothered Lemon Slices* and *Infinite Oarsmen for One*, available on Amazon. He has had over 150 poems published in journals and magazines internationally in Canada, USA, Ireland, UK, France, Israel, India, Thailand, and Australia. He enjoys the outdoors, and indoors too. In 2007 he won *THIS Magazine's* Great Canadian Literary Hunt in Poetry (1st Prize). He strives for the lyrical and hopes for the accidental.

**Kate Kobosko** is a senior at Eckerd College, double majoring in Creative Writing and Human Development. Primarily, she writes poetry and fiction. She is the co-editor-in-chief of the *Eckerd Review*. After graduation, she will continue writing, adopt a dog, and (hopefully) attend graduate school. She is currently an intern at *Sweet Lit*.

**Kenneth Pobo** has a book of prose poems forthcoming from Clare Songbirds Publishing House called *The Atlantis Hit Parade*. His work has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Nimrod*, *Mudfish*, and elsewhere.

**Margaret Koger** is a retired school media specialist with a writing habit. She lives in Boise, Idaho. Some of her recent poetry appears in *The Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Red Rock Review*, *Collective Unrest*, *Heartland Review*, *Inez*, *Headway*, and *Voice of Eve*.

**Marie Fields** lives in the greater Boston area. She has been writing off and on for most of her life but has just recently found the courage to publish her poems. She currently has an e-book available on Amazon titled *Marie! (mah-RIE!)*. Twitter: @MarieFieldsPoet

**Marlene Heyning** works for Cornell University's ILR School in New York City. She's had poems and essays published in various magazines and anthologies, including *Florida's Best Emerging Poets*. She enjoys traveling, reading a good book of essays, and her weekly walks through Prospect Park.

**Melinda Giordano** is a native of Los Angeles, California. Her written pieces have appeared in the *Lake Effect Magazine*, *Scheherazade's Bequest*, *Whisperings*, *Circa Magazine*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, and *The Rabbit Hole* among others. She was also a regular poetry contributor to CalamitiesPress.com with her own column, "I Wandered and Listened" and was twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

**Paul Beckman** is an award winning author with a new flash collection, *Kiss Kiss* (Truth Serum Press). He had a story selected for the *2018 Norton Micro-fiction Anthology* and another nominated for The Best Small Fictions 2019 BSF. He lives in CT and runs the FBomb NY flash fiction reading series in KGB's *Red Room*. Some of his publications are *Spelk*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Litro*, *Pank*, *Playboy*, *Thrice Fiction*, *The Lost Balloon*, and *The Raleigh Review*.

**Sarah Boudreau** is an MFA candidate in fiction at Virginia Tech. She graduated with her BA in creative writing from Young Harris College, and her work can be found in *Columbia Journal Online*, *Little Fiction*, and elsewhere.

**Thomas Zimmerman** teaches English, directs the Writing Center, and edits *The Big Windows Review* <https://thebigwindowsreview.wordpress.com> at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor,

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**William Doreski** has published three critical studies and several collections of poetry. His poetry, essays, reviews, and fiction have appeared in many print and online journals. He has taught writing and literature at Emerson, Goddard, Boston University, and Keene State College. His most recent books are *A Black River*, *A Dark Fall*, a poetry collection, and *Train to Providence*, a collaboration with photographer Rodger Kingston.

