



The Flexible Persona
the Future Issue

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the Future Issue

In our world, there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. The sex instinct will be eradicated. We shall abolish the orgasm. There will be no loyalty except to the party. But always there will be the intoxication of power. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face, forever. The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: Don't let it happen. It depends on you.

— George Orwell (Chris Langham),
George Orwell: A Life in Pictures

Cover Art

Julia Soboleva is a Latvia-born, UK-based mix-media artist. Her process involves painting and collage on found photographic imagery. Meditating on the themes of madness and reality, Soboleva is constructing mysterious narratives with ominous overtones and absurd humour. Being born and raised in a post era and not being able to find her own place against the complicated past of her nation, Soboleva explores the notions of family, taboo, and transgenerational trauma in her work. She obtained a Master's Degree in Illustration at Manchester School of Art in 2018 and is now working as an educator and freelance designer.

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the Future Issue

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Introduction

Though the epitaph this issue is attributed on the internet to George Orwell and though there's even a series of video snippets floating around that imply or even state it's Orwell himself speaking these words from his death bed, he didn't say this.. Not exactly. Not, at least, in that way and altogether—though parts were said at different times and in different contexts.

Maybe we're reaching a point of realization that another utopia (this time the internet) is just a tool of the powerful to control the human spirit. Maybe we haven't reached that point at all. Not really. Maybe we never will. But every time we hear someone talk about a post-truth world when they clearly mean post-fact, Orwell's attention to language and the narratives we weave reminds us of the importance of what writers do.

Taking a broad view, it's neither the first nor last time lies will be used as a tool of the state. It's neither the first nor last time that the comfortable idea that we agree on what is real will be exposed as an illusion. That the world seems more and more like the dystopian novels we consumed in our youth could either mean that writers see the future more clearly or that millions of heads are always waiting to be filled by the narratives writers create. If, after all, reality itself is a construct there must be authors.

Somewhere a kid is waiting for a way forward, the way all of us have waited through fears of nuclear winter, war, unending oppression, plagues, and failed families. Let's hope this kid finds the way in a good book.

The future? Same as it ever was. Ass in chair. Write your way through it.

— Alexander Hogan

Masthead

CNF

*Marissa
Schwalm*

*Kayleigh
Wanzer*

Fiction

*Melissa
Koss*

*Laura
McIntyre*

*Steve Gronert
Ellerhoff*

*Alexander
Hogan*

*Cheska Avery
Lynn*

Poetry

*Addie
Tsai*

Managing Editor: Alexander Hogan

Design: Cheska Avery Lynn

Miniature Dream Quest Below The Swan Gourds

*Robert
Vivian*

I love coming to that part of a poem where everything is mysterious and nothing is known, and the poet is reaching, reaching, reaching out with all fingers and toes, a whole body distended and sacred in falling space—I love coming to that part of a poem where souls coalesce upon the head of a pin and the day begins so teeming now and fluttering eyelids, where the word root of noun is the word root of flavor and it's time to drop the mic, the god-forbid i-phone, almost every bad habit except maybe touching yourself to make sure you're still here, beautiful and faithful body, the bearer of all your news even unto dying—I love coming to that part of a poem where the poet's voice is on full display and speaker-mode, the outsized whisper and the desperate moan turning into wind and sand and crumbling stone, that part of a poem when she takes off all her clothes and he puts down his pencil to look up at the almost full moon, when the truth is

revealed in shocking wonder and all confusion ceases before the radiant clarity of love and every verb begins to shine, when light upon light upon dancing begins and the poem and the reader become one body, one spirit, one blossoming pear tree, when the rain I hear long before dawn and the thunder off in the distance become my truest name and the ink I spill is commensurate with the blood in my veins and the tears in my eyes, when I am human page again turning in the hope of a new world that has never heard a gunshot or a whiskey bottle shattering on pavement, only the sawing of crickets and the steady healing of rain falling onto the heads of children grass and corn waiting in the agile dark to grow ever greener in earth gladness.

Not An Egg*

*Cressida
Evans*

The students sit quietly, looking at the picture, their silence full of suppressed giggles, not academic endeavour. It is the ugly picture, the one with the egg dressed up, sitting on a wall. The one from the children's book. Most of the students suspect they are not being taken seriously, are waiting to see if it's a trick. They are young, after all. Professor Dodgson watches them silently, waiting for grumbles. She does this every year.

“OK”, says a stropy boy with a spiky haircut. “What is an egg doing sitting on a wall?” His chin juts out slightly, inviting her to slap him down.

Stupid question! I'm not an egg, am I? What a moron.

“I mean, it is an egg, isn't it? It's shaped like an egg, looks like an egg, smells like a..., you know?” She wonders if he's about to do the ‘I think, therefore I am’ thing. Or make a reference to Sherlock Holmes.

Fucking humans, no imagination. Have you seen what they've done to me over the years? The cravat, the trousers, the jacket... Jesus. All that Victorian crap with the little blond girl. I can't talk and I certainly don't want to play word games with some little

miss.

“I read somewhere it was supposed to be a gun, like a cannon or something. But... how could an egg represent a cannon?”

There he goes, she thinks, concrete thinking.

“It's an egg,” he says emphatically. “Though I couldn't tell you what it's doing sitting on a wall.”

He sits back, pushes his legs out and looks up to challenge her. She nods but stays silent. It's obvious he isn't listening to the picture.

There goes the anthropomorphising. Technically I'm not 'sitting' at all. I'm perched, I'm placed, I'm... balanced. And I never believed a king would try and save me. Let alone those stupid painted soldiers, with their pink cheeks and tasselled hats. How long did it take them to realise they could do with a little camouflage? They're all 'Look at me in my bright red coat', 'Look at me!' BANG! Bloody useless.

The students presume Professor Dodgson is testing their ability to decode a nursery rhyme. But really she just wants to know if they can hear him too. She's always assumed it's a ‘he’, despite the obvious lack of gender. In the hideous picture, he's dressed like a parody of a boy, or a man, but the voice in her head is high-pitched, inhuman. She narrows her eyes, checking to see whether any of the students have the same distracted air she has; trying to listen to more than one voice at the same time.

She tunes back into him; he's really furious now.

... It's not as if the Royal Bloody Engineering Corps have any practice in patching things up. Repairing guns, yes. Patching up egg-like non-sentient sentients, no. Do you hear me, Mr Moron? Yes, I said non-sentient sentients. And egg-like, NOT an egg!

She pictures the king's horses, skittish and beautiful, cantering forward as the painted soldiers whip them on. But when they arrive, there's just an empty wall with shards of shell scattered beneath. Bemused, they toss their manes and sniff the pieces. What are those pieces made of, she wonders, if he isn't an egg?

She shakes her head to drive out the liquid, sexual shiver she feels when picturing his intact, spherical shell. No, he isn't an egg. He didn't sit on a wall; he didn't fall. There were no king's horses or king's men. No one to put him together again. It was all just Victorian whimsy, written by her long-dead relative, trying to make sense of the egg-shaped presence in his head. In her head. The egg-shaped non-sentient being that, in some inexplicable way, had infiltrated their minds. There must be others who could hear him; but she has never found them.

Whenever she can, she uses the picture in lectures. Here at the college, in schools, at the University of the Third Age - the elderly should be more receptive to the unexplained, shouldn't they? She posts videos on YouTube, has a Facebook group, gives interviews, does whatever she can to get the picture out there, to see if it speaks, literally *speaks*, to anyone else. With the younger ones, who are prickly about childish things, she hints at the cultural importance of nursery rhymes, of folklore. They suffer so from their materialism - everything has to mean something, and quickly too, before it loses value. They can parrot all the Freudian stuff - they've seen it in films. "Transference, dream imagery, oedipal complexes", the words rattled off, devoid of insight. God knows what they make of her forebear, who wrote nonsense verse and took pictures of little girls.

She wonders if she would have more luck in prisons or mental institutions, in mosques or churches. If the people there might be open to hearing something that isn't voiced. Less inhibited about admitting it.

And she worries that she has no images of his prior incarnations. Is her vision constricted by the children's book? But there is nothing else and he won't answer questions or provide clues. He'd rather taunt her

about how she'll never be rid of him or mock her loneliness.

Here is what she does know - there has always been an egg-shaped non-sentient sentient. Over the years, it has occasionally communicated with humans. Somehow, it was friendly with Mr Punch. At some point, it did know the king, or a king, or various kings. And, finally, and most perplexingly, it demonstrates a contradiction - a sterile egg that is not an egg, a monstrously fertile non-egg, embryo-less.

Trapped in a book, in the ether, in her head, forever perched on a wall or shattering at a soldier's feet. It taunts her, because, although neither real nor sentient, it still suffers the agonies of imprisonment.

As does she.

**1st Place in the 2nd Annual Show Us Your Short-Shorts Editors' Prize*

Interview with Cartoonist Ellen Forney

*Laura
McIntyre*

“ One of the strengths of comics is the handmade quality – it gives an intimacy and purity, you can imagine a cartoonist sitting, drawing and looking out their window. My choices around hand-lettering, weaving this into the artwork itself and using the more spontaneous drawings have helped put a piece of myself into my work.

— *Ellen Forney*

Laura McIntyre: Your best-selling graphic memoir *Marbles, Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me* (*Marbles*) was named a Best Graphic Novel of 2012 by *Washington Post*, *Time Magazine*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, to name but a few. It was later announced as the winner of the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis 2013 Gradiva Award. Since then, there've been six foreign editions of *Marbles* published, including translations in French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Portuguese. Can you tell us a bit about *Marbles* in your own words?

Ellen Forney: *Marbles* is about my experience with Bipolar Disorder—in particular what it's meant to me as an artist. The book covers from right before my diagnosis through four years of struggling to become stable. It includes lots of different drawing styles and work taken out of my sketchbooks and journals from that time when I was struggling with depression and mania.

I had a sense of purpose when I was doing *Marbles* more than I'd ever felt before, and I've always felt very strongly about my comics. The story was calling for me to tell it. Sometimes novelists say that they just have to follow a character and what the character wants. That always seemed

weird to me, but I felt that way with *Marbles*—the story called for certain things—like candour.

I curated the story because I couldn't include every moment, so it was really important for me to tell the embarrassing bits and those things that were hard to share. There were also things that I chose not to put in the book, partly for time and partly because they were too personal or they involved other people. In those instances, I felt that those parts of the story either didn't need to be in the book or were too sensitive to put in.

LM: How do you make those decisions about what to include and what to leave out? How has sharing your very personal story felt as *Marbles* has become increasingly popular and well-known?

EF: I interviewed everyone who is in the book about their experiences of me, because when you are not in a grounded frame of mind—which is part of Bipolar Disorder—you may not judge and see things as others experience them. So getting those perspectives was really important. For me, other people are such an important part of my story that I wanted to be true to who they were and what our relationship was like. As part of that process, I asked if it was ok to use their likeness and their name, which most people were fine with.

I was really glad to have the kind of support that I had from my friends and family. I was able to tell not just my story but our story. For instance, I talked about my mom a fair bit in *Marbles*, which indicated her experience of my health struggles.

The sense of vulnerability I had before sharing *Marbles* very quickly turned into a feeling of strength because so many people identified with my work. Part of the *Marbles* story is that you are not alone, and I felt very much not alone. *Marbles* has affected me profoundly and has defined my career to a pretty large degree.

LM: Sharing personal experiences has continued into your eager-

ly awaited sequel/companion book *Rock Steady: Brilliant Advice from my Bipolar Life (Rock Steady)*. How did you find working on *Rock Steady* compared to *Marbles*?

EF: When I was done with *Marbles* I didn't want to do anything else about me or mood disorders, and it took a while for me to come back around to feeling like I wasn't quite finished. A *Marbles 2* didn't make sense because I have been stable since then, so I decided to do something about stability. I wanted to focus on how to maintain your life, what to do and what things people can try to help them stay well. The resources out there, the Bipolar Disorder survival guides, were written by doctors from outside of the experience; so I figured that I had something to add.

Although when I was planning *Rock Steady*, it was going to be in the third person. Then it became clear that my own personal feelings and experiences of messing up were going to be really important—a key message was: 'come on you can do it, and you don't have to be perfect.' One of the big differences between *Marbles* and *Rock Steady* was research. There was research for *Marbles* (for instance in chapter eight which talks about different studies) but nothing like *Rock Steady*, that was a ton of research but it was really satisfying.

LM: Your work has influenced medical circles, and you've curated a travelling exhibit about comics and health for the National Library of Medicine. What's it been like stepping into that medical/healthcare world?

EF: It's been great—I graduated college with a degree in psychology. One of the many things that went into choosing psychology as a major was the fact that we didn't need to do a thesis. Little did I know that I was going to write a thesis, in a way, through *Marbles* and *Rock Steady*. I also come from a family of doctors on my mom's side, so I'm comfortable in that sphere of medicine and health. I really hoped *Marbles* was going to be used not just by other people who had mood disorders but also by people around them like family and friends, as well as clinicians

and academics. So to see my work be filtered out that way has been one of the most satisfying things for me. I'm glad that it's been useful in all of those realms.

Since *Rock Steady* came out with its more specific clinical information, I've heard from a number of therapists who are using it in their practice, which has been satisfying, exciting, and a relief.

For me, the real purpose of storytelling is communicating, teaching, and helping other people to learn. Storytelling is about the information you are trying to convey resonating with readers.

After *Marbles*, I looked into a number of different topics for my next book, and one of them was the study of happiness. Happiness is a lot more complicated than you might think; it's not just about joy but about a certain focus, contentment, and sense of purpose beyond yourself. I've found that my work in mental health—with *Marbles* and *Rock Steady*—serves so much of that purpose for me.

LM: Both *Marbles* and *Rock Steady* have a very distinctive, personable voice, which has been described as “hanging out with a really great friend”. Developing an individual ‘creative voice’ is something which we creatives can struggle with. How did you develop yours?

EF: I've always been a storyteller, so presenting experiences is familiar to me. It's how I interact in the world—it's my personality and my voice. Generally, I write pretty conversationally. People tell me that if they know my work and then they meet me—I fulfil the impression they already had of me.

One of the strengths of comics is the handmade quality—it gives an intimacy and purity, you can imagine a cartoonist sitting, drawing and looking out their window. My choices around hand-lettering, weaving this into the artwork itself, and using the more spontaneous drawings have helped put a piece of myself into my work.

Part of my challenge is how to put myself in my work—how I feel and how to present things in an approachable, positive way which gives a sense of connection and love, if you will, to other humans. That's a big, strong concept, which I want to come through in my work.

One of the most important coping tools for me is having a dark sense of humour combined with a lot of compassion and respect. It helps get you through tough times, and it's one of the best things for your health. It also allows the person hearing or reading your story—it's the spoonful of sugar which gives a bit of distance and perspective to your audience.

LM: What does your creative process look like? Do you have any tips to share?

EF: There are a number of different ways which a piece of work might begin, like from an assignment. Recently I did some journalistic comics for an annual free health clinic; eight other cartoonists and I talked with people and made comic adaptations of our conversations. For *Marbles* and *Rock Steady* the creative process was coming up with an idea, batting it around, doing a lot of brainstorming and writing down a whole lot of stuff before incorporating words and pictures, which got more and more refined.

When I sit down to work and need to focus, I like to start with a writing prompt—a five-minute exercise to get moving, for example writing down everything you can think of that's orange or making up a holiday and how it should be celebrated. I teach comics at the Cornish College of Arts here in Seattle, and I often start my class with a writing exercise like that.

LM: How does your teaching experience of comics influence your work?

EF: When I was working on *Marbles*, I used a lot of intuition but the more

analytical lecturer perspective was helpful in structuring the story. For example, I puzzled over how to depict depression in chapter four. It's so long, drawn out and redundant—how do you show something that feels so low, boring and stretches out over time?

I used very simple iconic drawings of a figure struggling to get out of bed, making it to the couch, and falling back asleep, making it not specifically about me but about the concept of depression.

Another example a few pages after that is when the pictures create a very static scene and the text is kind of an essay. That is called parallel structure, where the text and the pictures don't immediately interact. When I was pulling *Marbles* together, these were techniques, which I teach, that I consciously and deliberately turned to. They helped to create a kind of wistfulness and sense of timelessness, disorientation and meditation.

LM: Was it important to 'cut your teeth' on smaller vignettes/projects before moving on to *Marbles*?

EF: My editor at Penguin for *Marbles* gave me lots of terrific advice about doing a narrative arch because I had never done a full-length book before, so that was really helpful. I considered myself more of a comic/graphic essayists, and if you look at *Marbles*, it's a lot of short vignettes put in the order of a longer narrative.

I did a series of 'how-to' comics—*I Love Led Zeppelin*—which taught me different strategies for giving information in interesting ways. One of the first strips I did was interviewing a hand surgeon on how to sew an amputated finger back on. This experience gave me the skills to do the short vignettes that formed *Marbles*.

LM: As well as penning your own best-selling books, you have worked with Sherman Alexie on the National Book Award-winning novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, featured in *Ride the Tiger* a nationally broadcast documentary about bi-

polar disorder, and teach comics. How does working on multiple projects affect your creativity and work/output?

EF: I've been a freelancer for a long time, so my work comes in waves and I'm used to that way of working.

I write ideas down as they come to me so that I can go back to them when I have time. Sometimes I remember to go back to them, sometimes I don't...

LM: What would be your one top tip to someone interested in developing comics as their form?

EF: Read a lot of comics and do a lot of comics. Most of my generation of cartoonists are self-taught (there were no comic classes when I was starting out), but people who are attracted to taking classes can do that too.

LM: What's next for you? Are you working on any projects at the moment?

EF: I'm not really talking about it yet because it's very much in development, but I am working on another book. It's a book for kids, so it's taking a step away from the heaviness of *Marbles* and *Rock Steady* and exploring my sense of playfulness.

One Poem

*George
Bishop*

Viewing

My daughters had come together wearing
separate versions of the same loss, darkened
in all the wrong answers, several sleepless
nights listing the limits of touch in their eyes.
They explored the room for a home in funeral,

the sorrow in sorry and listening for any still-
born sound that might've been the right thing
to say if the strange in stranger was listening.
Oh, there's no loss like our own. It's selfish
and cruel and necessary, nothing more than

a face in a crowd not crowded enough. And
the ending is always the same, no end. Only
what they saw and what saw them, something
coming together, coming apart, the dust of loss
filling what they'd choose to wear next time.

“

How many times did I sit
alone, back against the tree,
feeling the weight of loss
for something I didn't know
how to name: *Average = X*.
How do you count what
feels like a constant?

— *Charlie J. Stephens*

Babel

Gerard
McKeever

It's the middle of the night and Helyne is buried up to her waist in sand. A crescent moon bores through the clouds. It's still dark, but she can see quite well. The sea looks like oil, a rippling sheet of black with rainbow highlights on the swells. Her breathing is deep and slow, in tune with the waves. A lighthouse penetrates weakly through the pitch, making a redundant squealing that could be the gulls. Helyne stays vigilant, a cluster of emotions experienced as tension, as she gazes across the beach. Nothing stands out particularly. It's an overwhelming miscellany of bronze medals, wishbones, bell beakers, packaging, mountaineering kit, shadows, children's clothes, tusks, light weaponry, whoopee cushions, translating dictionaries, pebbles, shells, sherry butts, gemstones, advertising boards, smouldering, streetlights, cocktail glasses, scuttling, cassette tapes, furniture and pieces of clockwork. She sees it as a single mass, with a blue sneer on her face. This is a snapshot, part of something longer, but she can't seem to penetrate. It's cold in the sand, which holds her in suspension, the moment elongated and cyclical. She tries to say something, to crack a joke or

scream, but time won't allow it. Any response remains in a frozen state of becoming.

Meanwhile Sande's pencil races across the page, a grin on his face. Her eyes are open and the words keep coming, '... holding on ... without a care ... like semaphore ... fluent in five tongues ...'

'Oh, absolutely,' he says.

•

And then Helyne let her nostrils flare, still fuzzy from the drug and wearing odd socks. It was always the same: the sight of glossy water, bristling sand. But the images were already distant in the morning rush, bending along Cathedral's spinal avenues in a flood of people. The city's intoxicating bouquet of satay, soba and fresh cuttlefish steeled her for the week. The whole world seemed to be here, colliding in a mess of colour and sound, Helyne unsure exactly what mix of awe and disgust to feel for Cathedral.

'Had breakfast, hen?' slurred a woman selling dim sum from a stall shaped like a pink wheelbarrow.

'Yeah,' Helyne lied.

'You must be hungry.' The vendor was wearing an evening suit, on trend. 'I can see it in your eyes.'

Helyne laughed. 'No time.'

Above their heads the huddled spires of the central district rose away towards lemon sunlight, weakened this morning by a thin fog. Helyne had always worked in the heart of the city, oscillating between ground level and the middle reaches of the skyscraper reticulation. She was most comfortable here at the feet of the high-rises, beneath their mesh of walkways and sudden panoramas. Heights freaked her out.

'Morning,' said Androu, her boss this month. 'Good weekend?'

'Cheers,' said Helyne. 'I mean ... yeah.'

Androu was grinning. 'Good weekend!' he declared.

'What?'

He was staring at her socks.

'...' Helyne sat down.

The office was empty. It was always empty, surviving by a mysterious economic grace. Yet the travel agency was a good distraction,

for now. The beach rarely came to mind here, sending a cold thrill down her spine like a childhood memory.

‘Remember this?’ said Kristene, chewing on a spring roll, a pair of oversized cherry boots lounging on her desk.

‘My calendar?’

Kristene nodded. ‘Fallen behind the coffee machine.’

‘Oh, course it did.’ Helyne took it and leaved through a couple of pages, bare of handwriting, festive days helpfully pre-printed. The months each had a motivational image of a bird in flight, captions superimposed. ‘Thanks,’ she said.

Androu was washing a mug. ‘Helyne, can you pull together some new deals for the window please?’

‘Sure.’ Helyne had an artificial rose attached to her desk light. A homeless woman had sold it to her at four in the morning.

‘That font I like, please.’

‘Roger that.’ The ceiling was a light shade of mint. Helyne’s brothel creepers squeaked against the linoleum, patterned with a maroon that she had tried to find in lipstick. ‘Jesus, my head hurts.’

Kristene smiled and offered up the spring rolls. ‘Want some?’

‘Chicken?’ Helyne used her fingers.

‘What’s new then?’ asked Kristene.

‘Same old,’ Helyne grumbled, mouth obscured by rice paper.

‘Lucky you.’

Helyne nodded, unsure if Kristene was being sarcastic. Her mind drifted instead to the scent of salt-air drifting in through the ventilation – rolling off the river, as always at this time of year. It followed her into the evening, finding its way inside her miniscule one-bedroom flat, seeping no doubt around ill-fitting casement windows and a front door in a stairwell that rendered stained glass merely a security risk.

There were no clocks in the room. Helyne stared at the shelving, her collection swelling onto nearby surfaces. It consisted mostly of cassette tapes, with hastily marked dates, a few sections of paper notes and scrawling transcripts. She took regular swigs from a long, thin bottle of ouzo, eyes narrowed in concentration.

‘... saves me ... the rolling green in my fingers ... the best wisdom left ... pious through it all ... under a heavy grey... remembering them ...

in steady fall ... such and such, would you come and see ... sad really ... always white ...’

The voice from the hi-fi was recognisably her own, sedated but methodical, with flourishes of a more exotic flavour. Then again, the recorded word always sounds wrong. Drunk now, she relaxed into her easy chair and let the babble wash over her. She wanted to bathe in the code, to binge until it would appear in stark light, clear as revelation. But soon it was Tuesday, and Wednesday.

‘Helyne, there’s a message for you.’ Kristene, sporting a fresh skinhead, chucked over a cigarette lighter.

‘Cheers.’ Helyne logged on and opened the business account. It was at the top of the list, written entirely in capitals, in a childlike heavy serif font:

GET OVER HERE. BIG, BIG THINGS. £!!!!!!!

CIAO.

‘Looks like spam?’ Kristene raised her eyebrows.

Helyne lit a cigarette. ‘Beats me.’ A sweet purple mist filtered out from the desk area, smoke rings vibrating in the sounds of surf from Kristene’s hi-fi. Helyne had a bad cough, but smoking helped.

‘I’m bored,’ said Kristene. ‘There’s only so much nothing a girl can enjoy.’

‘Preparation is everything!’ said Androu, appearing from behind a forest of filing cabinets in the rear. Kristene made a lewd hand gesture.

There were two customers during the morning. A short man in a three-piece and fedora came in at ten-thirty. He wanted to reminisce about Virgins, a seaside town on the west coast. Kristene tried to sell him a flight to the continent, but he grew upset at her raised voice. The other was a young girl who, like Helyne, had never been out of Cathedral. With Virgins fresh in the mind, Helyne suggested a short break – daily swims, the arcades, etcetera. The girl would have taken the trip – ‘I’ve heard all about it, I’m sure I’ve heard about it’ – but was refused credit. The atmosphere grew sour. Helyne tried blinking for two or three seconds at a time, in an effort to hide.

‘I think I’ll just leave ... it.’

Alone again, Kristene and Helyne stared at one another. ‘Have

you ever been to Virgins?’ Kristene asked.

‘No! You?’

‘Obviously, when I was a kid.’ Kristene was sucking on a fish bone.

‘What’s it like?’

‘Was nice. To be honest, I haven’t heard anything about it for years.’

Kristene was wearing a rosette that changed colour with her mood. It was green. Helyne couldn’t remember what that meant. She pointed at it and declared, ‘Fashion victim.’

All in all, a quiet morning. At lunchtime, though, Helyne pulled on her great coat and sprinted down French Street, through crowds of people drinking fresh beer on the street corners, where women guarded kegs like holy relics. There was a smell of sizzling pig skin in the air, fortified by casual sports chatter. Graffiti on the walls swore in five languages, the bad words more or less universal. At the corner of the Kirkgate, Helyne nipped down a small alleyway and rattled on a shabby green door.

‘Helyne.’ The door buzzed and swung in.

It was a short flight of granite steps to a steel door and an LED welcome mat that read, ‘Wipe.’ Sande was waiting.

‘It’s been a while.’ Sande’s watch was buried in his wrist.

‘Hardly. You called?’

‘Oh, I love this,’ Sande fingered her hair, ‘Hungover is so totally vogue. Come on in.’

Sande’s living room was a petri dish for Cathedral’s intellectual sediment, English clinging on as the dominant tongue. They lounged in various shades of pink: artists, academics, and ironic menials. Tie-dye turbans and pairs of trousers strewed the floor; people talking at alternating pitches, possibly singing. A few were frozen in the corner, upright, while others huddled round a convex stereo that was pumping out Klezmer classics. All there for Sande’s access to controlled substances, new and risky. There were wall hangings of baroque masterpieces on the walls that Sande had acquired as payment for God-knows-what. And a smell of black pudding in the drug smog. Helyne was an interloper amongst these celebrities and their muses, here by

another strength. She had cultivated Sande’s acquaintance with a gravitational certainty, first remotely and latterly at his doorstep, over the course of a number of years. Helyne was looking very hard for a very specific something.

‘Qu-est-ce que c’est?’ said Helyne, pointing at the bulge in Sande’s silk dressing gown.

‘Not what you think.’

‘I haven’t got long – on lunch.’

Sande winced. ‘Work.’

‘Travel.’

‘You better come through, then.’

Sande led the way through the ruck in the living room, into a small alcove in the corner that opened out into a makeshift office, filled mostly with fish tanks. Helyne had always found the room nauseating. ‘My lobster died this morning.’

‘Oh, shame.’ Helyne patted Sande’s shoulder.

‘He was a ripe old age. And time waits for no one.’ There was the suggestion of a grin on Sande’s face.

‘Time waits ... hold on ... so you have it?’

‘Patience.’

‘Is that?’ she pointed. The bulge in Sande’s gown had vanished.

Sande flicked a switch; the lights dimmed and the tanks glowed nuclear blue. He hopped up onto a footstool and reached into a freshwater tropical packed with a shoal of what looked like miniature mackerel. In the sand at the bottom were a number of replica castles, sandstone affairs, and other nick-nacks. Sande’s sausage fingers pried inside a tiny Alamo and plucked out a package wrapped in unbleached cotton.

‘Snazzily done,’ nodded Helyne. ‘What’s the script?’

Sande feigned exasperation. ‘This is it, Hel. The stuff I told you about.’

‘Wasabi?’

‘Mm.’

‘Is it factory?’

Sande shrugged. ‘Who cares?’

Helyne took the bundle and sniffed it. Sure enough, there was

an acrid tang. The cotton was moist, so she wrapped it in a scarf and popped it into her bum bag. 'What do I owe you?'

'Careful with that, now.'

'What do I owe you?'

'I can't promise it's going to work. We've been here before. You're my only guinea pig.'

'I'd rather just pay.'

'Don't be vulgar.' A door behind them opened and a luminous face full of a question bobbed in the half-light. 'Hold on! Helyne, where are you planning to do it?' Sande continued.

'Not here again. It's too ... much.'

'Here. We've been through this.'

'Not here.'

'Here.'

She shrugged. 'Here.'

'When?'

Helyne paused. It wasn't the weekend ... but ... 'Tonight.'

Sande smirked. 'Fine.'

The quality of light in the travel agency changed during the afternoon. East-facing, the visor of windows that fronted the property drew in a fading amber, soon muddied by the pinks and greens of the night. Helyne spent a few hours decoding the names of the pool halls, pachinko parlours and gentleman's clubs that lined the opposite street. They spoke with an ancient voice and distantly. Around five o'clock Kristene disappeared for twenty minutes, coming back with a cardboard box of bubble tea and daifukumochi.

'Snacks.'

'Snacks,' nodded Helyne.

'Up to anything tonight?'

'Friends. God, my neck is stiff.'

'Anything interesting?'

Helyne first tried tox by accident at a formal Sunday lunch, thinking it was speed. It was a tiny amount, but enough to wallop her into a darkened half-world, consisting then of geometric forms that wouldn't resolve into focus. Scared and intrigued, she sought it out, convinced that a more potent strain would secure something deeper,

something true.

'Couple of drinks,' said Helyne, absent-mindedly.

'I haven't been to the fish market for ages,' said Kristene. 'It's always so difficult to get a seat.' She was wearing a fawn bowler hat.

'Me neither,' said Helyne.

It was about pushing through. Helyne's recordings and transcripts of the monologues for which the drug was known, were really only to pass the time. Much of it seemed meaningless abstraction, like the holiday pictures pasted up on the office walls. Occasionally a cluster of images would ring true. These hours of snatched phrases, enveloping dimly, kept her interested between weekends. But when she knew, she would know. Helyne was convinced that the moment of truth would be clear.

'Not exactly selling like hot cakes,' said Kristene, leafing through a leaflet for adventure fortnights.

'Would you go?'

'Meh,' said Kristene. A pause. A road gang in a patchwork of colour-coded boiler suits were passing the window. Helyne checked the time.

The evening brought Helyne home in a soup of streetlight rouge, street-food umami and conversation. She bounced into the flat, had a drink and a smoke and looked at her rows of cassettes, smiling. All of this was partly a form of hiding, of course. Hiding from Cathedral, in all its dense, postlapsarian beauty. But then again wasn't there something noble in it, a form of seeking? There was more than one way to ask a question. She ran her hands along the surface of the shelving and found herself once again standing in the doorway at Sande's.

'Ma'am.'

Helyne craned a neck around Sande's bulk. 'Is it busy?'

'Don't worry, Hel. I've been turning people away for hours. Don't say I'm not good to you.' Sande led the way into the living room where, sure enough, only two pale figures remained, whispering into each other's ears beside the fire. 'I tried to move them on,' Sande apologised, 'but there's some things you can't interrupt.'

'Hi,' Helyne opened. There was no response. 'They been here long?'

'Are you serious? What makes a junkie but a different sense of time? Not to worry though, we're all set up.' Sande's gown was avocado green tonight. It swished around his body into the connecting office, where the lighting in and around the fish tanks was a subdued, muddy purple. 'Got a fresh tape?' he asked.

'Of course.'

Sande caught the TDK and slotted it into his machine. 'Want something to drink?'

'Again, yes.' Helyne was feeling impatient. She sat down and, ritualistically, began unwrapping the wasabi tox. The reek of it was unmistakable. Sande returned with shots of Sambuca and pulled up an ottoman for himself.

'Cheers,' said Helyne, and then Sande hit play and record at the same time.

•

It's the middle of the night and Helyne is buried up to her waist in sand. A crescent moon bores through the clouds. It's still dark, but she can see quite well. Against the sludgy rhythm of the swell, the beach is a towering mass, challenging the vastness and authority of the ocean. Helyne can pick out the shapes of parasols, timber, porcelain, cutlery and pieces of clockwork. She grows exhausted from the effort. She tries to say something, to crack a joke or scream, but time won't allow it. There is only this stretched now beside the waves, no escaping the present.

But then the beam of the lighthouse settles on her, lemon-green – almost acid. And Helyne is suddenly able to use her words. 'Once upon a time,' she says. She presses her hands against the gritty sand and heaves herself up out of the beach, panting. She has bare feet and the miscellaneous rubble forces her to step carefully, feeling an irresistible urge to get away. She thinks about trying to tidy up the mess but it would be facile on her own. Later, she thinks.

Helyne dives into the sea. The water seals shut around her and she starts to swim. It's gelatinous and lukewarm, filled with fragments of debris. In a half-remembered breast-stroke, she forces her way out into the bay, passing by plastic bags and television sets which loom like buoys. She swims for what feels like hours but cannot be. Finally, a raft

appears in the distance. Upon drawing closer she can see it is made of empty oil drums lashed together. Sande is standing on the platform in another silk dressing gown. He reaches down and, relieved, she allows herself to be pulled on board.

'What have you been doing?' Sande says.

'I don't know. Looking for patterns, I suppose.'

•

'Looking for patterns,' said Sande, smoking the stub of a thin cigarillo.

Back in the purple glow, Helyne rubbed her sides. The mess of nick-nacks in Sande's tanks looked dirty and bristling, a busy saxophone solo escaping in through the thin walls. 'Was it different this time?' she asked.

'Still patchy, but towards the end it sounded like you were telling a fairy tale, or a fable or something. How about you?'

Helyne paused. A crab was knocking on the glass of the tank. 'It worked I think ... but, I still don't understand. I think I need to go to Virgins.'

'Virgins? Really?'

'That's where ... it is. I'm sure of it.'

'Oh ... ok. Now?'

'Yes, Now.'

'Jesus Christ, Helyne, I was joking. Will you at least wait until the morning?'

'Now, Sande.'

Sande laughed and tied the rope belt around his dressing gown.

And the monorail sailed along the track with a magnetic hum, the last of the old lines. Sande had found a refreshments trolley and they were sipping on Manhattans. The colours of the city blurred into paint-box chaos through the windows, the spectrum then condensing into rows of ginger streetlights in the commuter belt and satellite towns, before a dark February night emerged.

'You know when this line was built?' said Helyne.

'What? Oh, the travel agency. Go on then.'

Helyne sniggered. 'I can't actually remember. It's the tradition-

al all-season destination though, where Cathedral goes to unwind.'

'Past tense, hen. Look at this car, it's not seeing a lot of use.'

'This is my first holiday, you know. Try not to be a drag.'

It was pushing midnight when they slowed into Virgins station. Flights of concrete steps took them directly onto the main street, which was run-down and deserted. The only strangers they could see were two young men in high-vis, walking arm in arm drunkenly. 'It's still early,' slurred one of them.

'Still,' replied the other.

The rows of penny arcades and ice cream parlours descended almost onto the beach, which was less an extension of the town than a rind or epidermis. Helyne was in no mood to tarry and, linking arms with Sande, made for that direction.

'This is exciting,' said Sande. 'Hipflask?'

'Go on then.'

'Missing home yet?'

Helyne flashed her teeth.

'Leaving is hard. Too much perspective,' said Sande. He had green eyes that were difficult to read.

They stepped onto pebbles, the strand lit faintly by leftover energy from the town, little moonlight making it through a low blanket of stratocumulus. Helyne's gaze grew vivid and fixed, casting up and down the length of the shore. The sea lapped quietly in the distance, low-tide. On the beach were nondescript pieces of litter, an abandoned deckchair vending hut, three or four pedalos and a sequence of holes, dug by overzealous children and sunk now as lonely memorials. 'Well,' Sande announced, 'there we go.'

Helyne started to thread a path along the sand, doubt forming in the folds around her mouth. She peered down into the holes, but couldn't see anything unusual. They weren't that deep.

'What were you hoping for?' said Sande, trying not to sound arch.

'There's something here, Sande. If only we could find it.'

Sande raised his eyebrows. Shouts of distant revelry rang in the air. Helyne's shoulders dropped. 'Look at all this sadness,' she tried, putting some gusto into it, 'and... and waste. It's all patterns, you know?'

This crap,' she said, pointing at empty Styrofoam boxes.

'Horrible,' Sande agreed. 'Bet the kebab was delicious, though.'

'What? Are you hungry?'

'Kind of, yeah. Look, Helyne, maybe tox is just a drug, after all. Despite the talk.'

'I feel like it's all here, we're just not seeing it properly.'

'What though? Aren't you just worrying about the future? Like, things are messed up, it doesn't take much to see that. And always by yourself ...'

'The future?'

'Yeah, or now. Same thing.'

Helyne hummed, letting her thoughts breathe. 'Maybe we're too drunk.'

'Speak for yourself,' said Sande, sipping quietly, no longer interested in dope visions or any other hoodoo. 'Virgins is depressing. We've learned that much.'

'It's more than that, Sande. It's Cathedral too.'

'Hey, nowhere's perfect,' said Sande, suddenly defensive. His overcoat was a patchwork of fleece fragments, his boots overstated and gothic, covered in what looked like soiled machinery.

Helyne felt a surge of patriotism. 'Sorry, yeah,' she said. 'Actually, you know what? It's too quiet here. Let's go home.'

It was almost completely light by the time Sande opened the front door to his flat, smells of lemongrass and soy rising from the noodle place in the basement. Sande started cooking eggs, but all Helyne wanted to do was smoke. 'How did the sand get inside my socks?' she said, picking grains from between her toes and dropping them onto the floor. Sande's carpet smelled of damp winters.

'Is that how you treat your home?' He was wearing a chef hat that he'd bought for a fancy-dress party.

'Home?' Helyne pulled half a smile. It was true, though. There was comfort hidden in chaos. Cathedral was civilisation, born to be loved. But she had no easy relationships.

Sande was stretching out his hamstrings. 'You know, I've lived in these rooms for eight years and I only noticed last week that there's subsidence.'

'Where?'
'Mostly the spare bedroom, but all over really.'
'Ouch.' Helyne was exhausted now, but had a strained presence of mind. 'I love it here,' she said. 'Cathedral. Even if it's a bit confused.'
'We're supposed to be trendy in this town, hen. Don't get sincere on me.'
'I love it here.'
'Okay ... Still scared of heights though? Aren't you meant to be pushing the envelope?'
'A bit,' said Helyne, tersely. 'The beach ...'
'Yeah?'
'You think you get it?'
Sande whistled. 'I'm no witch doctor, but I see an outline pretty well.'
'Worrying about the future? It's too simple, Sande. Too obvious, too ... dry. There has to be more to it.' The saxophone music was escaping in again, someone practising next door. 'Or, I don't know ...'
'Simple or not ...' Sande threw his arms in a circular gesture, with a look that suggested it would be apparent what this meant. 'Sure I can't tempt you?' he said, holding out a cast-iron frying pan.
Helyne ignored him. 'I can't believe they're still here,' she said, pointing at the pale couple quivering next to the sofa.
'Could be days, easily,' said Sande.
'And I thought I wasn't looking after myself.'
Sande smiled. 'Like I said, what makes a junkie but a different sense of time?'
Helyne paused. 'And everything passes,' she said, as if completing a lyric.

The Tyranny of the Quantifiable*

Charlie J.
Stephens

In the springtime when the air warmed and smelled like sage and the dirt started cracking in protest is when things started falling apart. We lived in a small, yellow house with a broken fence and a decrepit pine tree too weak to withstand even my dreams of a tree fort. So I sat underneath it in the backyard instead. I was eleven. My older brother Matthew watched tv and masturbated openly on the couch. His blank-eyed rhythmic pumping scared me, and my only way to cope was to stay away. Mom wasn't very helpful. I can picture her at the kitchen table arguing with whichever boyfriend was over.

She didn't date more than one person at a time, but the rotation was well established: honeymoon, anger, break up, back to a former boyfriend to give it another try. Repeat. Later when I was older and had sushi for the first time, sitting on a stool as the little boats passed, I thought of her own circular waterway: take what looked good, eat because she had to, feel unsatisfied and still hungry, and look with a strange, nonsensical hope to the next boat coming down the chute. That bright green wasabi and the fleshy pink of ginger always started out so vivid, but with each time around the moat, the colors diminished.

That was the spring that I started counting. Counting everything. How many times Mom looked me in the eye each day: Average = 1. How many times Matthew spoke to me without disdain: Average = 0. How many times I felt, in one of her boyfriend's side glances, that he wanted me gone: Average = 4. How many times did I sit alone, back against the tree, feeling the weight of loss for something I didn't know how to name: Average = X. How do you count what feels like a constant?

I used a pocket knife, stolen from a cousin who lived across town, to make counting marks in the tree. The bark bled sap and smelled like family. The knife soon made it to my own bark, but my sap was red and flowed easier. I made my deepest cuts when the knife blade was sticky with the sap: we were blood brothers. When the thin scabs disintegrated and the scars became quiet, milky rivers, I ran my hand over them and felt like something mattered. I was a living testimony to the uncountable.

By the time the marks made it up from ankle to knee, then thigh to hip, I was becoming too restless to sit quietly with my tree. Mom called Matthew and me into the living room at the start of summer and told us that she was getting married. She sat on her new boyfriend Gary's lap when she told us, while the tv droned on. I felt repulsed but mostly angry with myself that I still cared enough to feel anything at all, much less betrayed. The yard could no longer contain me after that, but as I strayed farther away than I thought was possible, what I missed the most was my tree. Years later, still roaming this wild country, displaced from the small, quiet forest I desired, I could still feel the sap flowing veins to heart, pumping under my bark, keeping me alive.

**2nd Place in the 2nd Annual Show Us Your Short-Shorts Editors' Prize*

Convenience Store

Kathryn
Fitzpartick

We clung to Thomaston, sheets on a clothesline, cemented our asses in gas station parking lots, blasted cigs and laughed beneath the no loitering sign. We were wannabe bad kids with good parents, trailer trash in two-story colonial housing, dodging the honor roll like a drunk driver, and running into traffic like a manifesto. There was fluoride in the water and debate, how it would turn your sperm to beta males, how the government tuned your brain on to liberalism and turned frogs into fags. Dropouts and enrollments repeated like a laundromat cycle while we divvied our quarters for slushies, and memorized employee faces in exchange for free shit. And when Creepy Joe stopped by, tall and scraggly as a tree caught in the phone lines, we shrugged: education is totally passé anyways man.

Fox in the Neighborhood

L. M.
Prather

All was well in my little Eden until a red fox attacked a neighbor down the street. The woman was bitten while trimming the azaleas in her front yard. She suffered two puncture wounds and a fractured elbow when the fox gave chase, tripping her as she ran toward her house. “The attack was sudden, silent and unprovoked,” according to her husband, who sent out a warning.

I don’t know these particular neighbors. I only know of the attack from the brief description posted on our neighborhood share site. Still, I find myself picturing this woman kneeling in front of a blood-red azalea, pruning shears in hand. Perhaps there was a slight movement, maybe a faint rustling. The woman bends down to look, and before her primordial brain can send a warning, the fox has dug his teeth into her. Instinct now takes over, and the woman flings down her shears and runs as fast as she can, the fox nipping at her heels.

Did the woman scream when she was bitten? I see her mouth forming a perfect O that matches the shape of her eyes, wide with terror. Although the text from the hus-

band does not specify where his wife was bitten, another neighbor claims it was her face. I envision her cheek, tender and apple-like.

I know the woman was bitten three times, but only one bite broke her skin. The wound is described as “dual puncture,” like a snake bite, although fox canines are spaced further apart than a snake’s fangs. As I pick my way through the Internet, I discover that snake venom, although sometimes deadly, shows promise in shrinking cancerous tumors, while fox incisors, which sell for a few dollars on the Internet, are considered ideal for craft projects.

Every time I walk by this neighbor’s front yard, three doors down from mine, I picture the attack. Their yard is not a smooth, grassy expanse bordered by well-trimmed rows of shrubs. It has been left natural, with a narrow drive the only clue that a house exists beyond the thicket of green. Among the plants are the aforementioned azaleas, which flower bright scarlet or iridescent pink. The husband theorizes the azalea bush may have been a fox’s den, or “wild animal’s lair.” This is not the first definition that pops up when “den” is typed into a search engine. The first is “a room for relaxing.” The second is “a place of crime.”



Foxes do not have a reputation for behaving aggressively with humans. They are characterized as shy, meaning they flee from human contact. However, sickness, including rabies, can make them aggressive. Since the fox was never found by animal control, rabies could not be ruled out, although it’s considered rare in foxes. The husband states that his wife was undergoing rabies treatment strictly as a precaution.

In a reply to the fox alert, a neighbor writes, “I want my kids to be aware of the dangers of a rabid fox.” The standard drawing of a fox, from books like *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, is of an animal standing on its hind legs, looking like a dandy in an ascot. To many children, this cunning and debonair Mr. Fox may be better known than the visage of an actual fox, the one who bites instead of outfoxes.

Some neighbors respond to the attack by posting their own stories, theories and sightings. According to the neighbor who lives next door, “The Fox Family has always lived here.... We see Mama Fox once or twice a day when she forages for mice/chipmunks, and we’re

sure she's feeding kits." Is the fox a mother caring for her children? If so, she has now become a character that the neighbors—many of whom are parents—can identify with.

For this particular neighbor, "Mama Fox is always on a mission. (She) races across our back yard toward the creek with her catch." Coupled with the description of the attack, "sudden, silent and unprovoked," the fox has metamorphosed into a brave stealth fighter doing what mothers instinctively do: defend their young.

But another neighbor reports "strange things in our yard:" fox vomit and a shredded soccer ball. The vomit—the possible byproduct of a possibly rabid fox—is linked now to a thick-skinned ball, the kind children play with. A ball that was not just flattened but destroyed inexplicably. If this were a horror movie, the destruction of a child's plaything would be the ominous warning.

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Like raccoons and other woodland animals, the most remarkable trait of the red fox may be its adaptability. These foxes live in all sorts of environments, including suburbia. Although they are considered carnivores, like Fantastic Mr. Fox who stole chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese from farmers Boggis, Bunce and Bean, foxes are really opportunists. Like raccoons, they exhibit an ability to thrive among people, living on whatever food is provided for them, including tossed kitchen scraps and carelessly stored pet food.

Ubiquitous as red foxes have become, they tend to show themselves selectively: late evening or early morning, according to one post on the neighborhood site. Others claim that foxes now appear in broad daylight, sometimes two or three a day. One neighbor alerted local animal control to the neighborhood's "fox population problem," suggesting that some of them be "relocated."

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Foxes were the focus of a scientific experiment that went on for half a century in Russia. The Institute of Cytology and Genetics studied how long it takes to domesticate wild fox. The Institute bought over ten dozen foxes from fur farmers, breeding them in close captivity with humans. The goal was to make foxes "not just unafraid of humans,

but actively seeking to bond with them." By the mid-1960s, only a couple of generations into the experiment, the Institute was raising foxes that not only behaved as tamely as dogs but also sought their caregivers' affection.

The Institute wanted to see if foxes would develop the physical characteristics of dogs, traits such as curly tails and floppy ears that indicate domesticity. These traits signal a genetic, not just behavioral, change. After nine generations, the foxes' ears began to flop. While the evolution of wolves to dogs took thousands of years, the evolution of wild fox to domesticated animal had taken mere decades.

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Foxes appear in the Old Testament as well as the New. The proverbial cunning fox is alluded to in Ezekiel, while in the Gospel of Luke, Herod is labeled "that fox." Jackals also appear in the Bible, sometimes misidentified as foxes. Foxes and jackals are both small omnivorous animals. They share the same genus, but jackals hunt in packs and are easier to catch. "Probably the jackal is the animal signified in most of the passages in the Old Testament where the Hebrew term (for fox) occurs," says one Biblical scholar.

In *The New York Times Magazine*, Helen Macdonald states that there are "acceptable animals and nonacceptable animals" to nurture. Songbirds we feed, foxes we don't. "To purposely feed the wrong animals—sparrows, pigeons, rats, raccoons, foxes—is an act of social transgression and is liable to get you reported to officials concerned with mess or health or noise," Macdonald says. Yet people do it.

What is evident from the Bible, history and literature is that foxes have lived with humans for centuries, and their bad reputation has continued unabated. Vulpine, which means foxlike, has its origins in ancient Latin. "A few years more, and Nero would drag his vulpine immorality across the stage," wrote the historical novelist Charles Francis Stocking almost a century ago. Henry David Thoreau described the foxes outside his home on Walden Pond as howling "raggedly and demonically....sometimes one came near my window, attracted by my light, barked a vulpine curse at me, and then retreated."

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Still curious about what the fox attack has unleashed, I revis-

it the fox warning. Now there is a post from a woman who claims a fox is residing near her condo complex. Her concern is that the fox is where children play. She asks if there is a service that will remove the fox, which she calls “the little critter,” making it sound like the perfect playmate for kids.

A woman in Great Falls replies, “I think you only need to worry...if the fox is still hanging around when someone steps outside. Normally, a healthy fox would run away immediately.” A woman named Mary Jo directs readers to a website that attempts to explain the behavior of foxes. “Better to be informed than make assumptions about wildlife,” she warns, an apt moral for a story.



One evening, when I’m driving down my street, a fox brings me to a dead stop. Ragged looking, he is drinking from a manhole cover in the middle of the road. He does not move, even when I inch closer, close enough to see the shallow indentations in the metal plate, too small to hold much more than a tablespoon of water. Yet here is this fox, lapping up what little water there is, seemingly unconcerned by my presence.

The neighborhood creek is no more than a stone’s throw away. Surrounded by woods, it forms the spine of our setback, the undeveloped land in our neighborhood where the deer, raccoon, foxes and other wild animals spend most of their time. After a downpour, the creek must swell with water, yet this fox is quenching his thirst in front of my car. For a moment, it’s a standoff, his eyes glowing iridescent red in the glare of my headlights. Finally, he trots across the road, preternaturally calm.

A week or two later, I pull into my neighbor’s driveway to drop her off. We’re chatting in my car when I see the fox standing by her front porch. He seems to be waiting, and somehow I know it’s not for her. Again we lock gazes; again he does not run. This time, I notice how thin he is, emaciated really. In the daylight, I can see his left flank looks roughly sheered. Could mange be the reason for his uncharacteristic boldness? The fox goes away and I hurry home, anxious to look up mange in foxes. The UK’s National Fox Welfare Society website features photos of foxes looking as cute and cuddly as dogs. Red ones

get a type called sarcoptic. Searching the site, I find nothing to suggest mange affects fox behavior.

A long time afterward, when I have almost forgotten about the fox, he bounds across my backyard. I catch a flash of red out of the corner of my eye and I know it’s him. He’s still quick—quick as a fox—but now he’s holding one hind paw up, making a go of it on three legs. How long has it been since he commandeered the middle of the road in front of my car? His visitations may be random, yet they feel premeditated. Like the previous encounters, I manage to forget about this one, but the apprehension lingers. Each time I see him, I think it will be the last, and I’m unnerved when he once again makes his presence known, reminding me that our relationship, such as it is, is not yet over.



My final sighting comes one morning. Backing out of my garage, I catch a glimpse of the fox in my rearview mirror. His coat is now a blanket of mange. His skin hangs on his skeletal frame. I quickly turn around but he is gone—vanished into thin air.

Months go by with no sightings, and time confirms my fox is dead. But the memory of his bizarre behavior lingers, that and his mouth, pulled back in a hideous grin. Now I know he was harboring a terrible secret: toxoplasmosis, a disease that impairs foxes’ judgment, erasing their sense of fear. One of its symptoms is walking up to an object and just standing in front of it, a seemingly benign gesture that feels threatening when employed by a wild animal. Behavior deemed not normal is always open to interpretation and judgment, but in our ignorance, our assumptions are often wrong.

Toxoplasmosis doesn’t explain why this fox chose to make himself known to me. Did he want me to help him? He couldn’t have known that his inability to be frightened of me made me frightened of him. If I had learned about toxoplasmosis sooner, I would have called the county’s animal welfare service. Perhaps they could have euthanized him, a more humane ending than leaving him to the coyotes or a slow death by starvation.

There is no happily-ever-after to my fox story, but there is a coda. One morning I see her looking through my dining room window. She seems to have darted out from a small tangle of hydrangeas

that separate my yard from my neighbor's, as curious about me as I am about her. We stare at each other for a minute or two, enough time for me to really see her—tawny red coat the brightness of autumn; eyes that shine dark and unfathomable. And just for a moment, I want to penetrate those eyes, go deep inside them and feel what it's like to be her. But there is more than a window separating us. As suddenly as the fox is there she is gone, and the only thing we know for sure about each other is that we are both very much alive.

...

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“

We stare at each other for a minute or two, enough time for me to really see her—tawny red coat the brightness of autumn; eyes that shine dark and unfathomable. And just for a moment, I want to penetrate those eyes, go deep inside them and feel what it's like to be her.

— *L. M. Prather*

Two Poems

“

always wear black clothing
when you stand in front of a mirror
never stand full front
always stand in profile
never show your right profile
always show the left profile
that makes you look thinner

— *Michael Coolen*

*Robert
Carr*

Windows Move

Do you open eyes
at dusk, not knowing
where you are?

Are windows in
wrong places
on the wall?

Does fire, light
through a neighbor's
window, burn?

Does it make you
wonder, if someone's in
there looking out?

Will you throw
back the blankets
on your bed,

light lamps to prove –
you are alone
and wearing nothing?

Visiting My Father

Today he has one sea-green eye, the other gone blue. The green eye plants succulents in a garden, his worn boot. Left eye – he fishes off a lake in Maine, sky through haze. Sitting at his desk, he is a mountain in a swivel chair. I've always thought, *his eyes are hazel*, thought *hazel-eyed ravens have a special beauty*. Black and white snapshot, mother sits in jet glory on his lap. I recite his stories – a duck hunting view through the sights of a rifle. Before I was borne, I tried to give him a bouquet of flowers from a field. Age has given him two faces. If I split his ninety-year-old face in half, I'll find a portrait of two men – One who can smile, one won't. One who holds me newborn, draped across his belly. Another, I bury, in just a couple of months.

Imaginary Numbers*

Jess
Kilby

The machine is in debt. An impossible situation, really — we built them to be better than us. To be smarter, stronger, free from the need for that dopamine hit. Add to cart. Buy now.

But the machine loves shoes. The machine cannot wear shoes, of course. But still, the machine loves shoes. Red vinyl knee-high platforms. Birkenstocks. The sturdiest work boots that money can buy. Seven pairs of flip flops: red orange yellow green blue purple silver. Bunny slippers. The machine does not unbox the shoes when they arrive; there is no need to check the fit. They will always be the right size, they will always be the wrong size. The machine has never spent twelve dollars on overpriced Band-Aids.

A machine cannot feel. A machine cannot lie. A machine cannot cheat. Can you lie to a machine? Are you really lying if you're simply telling less than the whole truth? What does the machine care? A machine cannot feel. A machine can buy shoes.

Three Poems

It is summer now, almost summer, 32 days until summer, not really summer, 34 days since the first day of spring. We are 51.515151% done with spring. We are letting go of spring. We cannot hold on to it; spring will leave us, no matter what we do.

The machine does not get hay fever. The machine does not sweat. The machine does not struggle to sleep, on those unexpectedly warm spring nights. The machine does not watch the sun set or the moon rise. The machine does not start drinking before noon.

The machine does watch the sun set. The machine loves to watch the moon rise. The machine cannot drink, or sleep, or sneeze, or sweat, but the machine can see. The machine can see everything. The machine knows without fail when there will be a rainbow after the rain, when there will be one sometimes during the rain, and when there will be none at all. The machine has an entire photo album of rainbows across the same sky. There is no pattern.

There is a pattern. It is always evening. The rainbows in the photos are always in the evening. Are the rainbows really only in the evening, or is that just when the machine is noticing the sky?

The machine does not sleep. The machine does not dream. The machine has never tried to order sleeping pills from dodgy Russian websites. There is one photo in the machine's album, of a hot air balloon at sunrise. Three hot air balloons at sunrise, and a red smudge of flame. The machine has mixed feelings about hot air balloons.

The machine stays up late and writes poetry, submits under a pen name. The poems are rejected; the machine buys more shoes. Espadrilles, mules, a pair of nice brown leather sandals. Summer is coming, tomorrow we will be 53.0303% of the way there. Summer is coming, and spring is leaving. The forecast is for rainbows — or maybe just for rain.

**3rd Place in the 2nd Annual Show Us Your Short-Shorts Editors' Prize*

*John Sibley
Williams*

Tacit Consent

It's less what we've done
than what we let be done to each other

that kneads the fog let loose over this
early morning field into monstrously

familiar faces. Empathy being what it is,
grief dissolves swiftly with first light;

other people's horrors enter as a beast
& leave through the same door: declawed.

It's enough sometimes to press our complicity
against the cool unshaven bathroom mirror:

assuage. To live every life that isn't ours
for a moment, then move on. How does

what we're seeing when our eyes are open
differ from when they're shut tight?

I'm wondering if I'd yell fire, as they urge,
or trust people with the truth.

Secondary School

As summer tries on its last fires,
redrawing the topography, pushing
the deer nearer, then the wolves,
we're busy collecting our little
boyish violences in Mason jars
to get us through tomorrow's
textbooks & recesses. Strange
we're allowed our graffiti, our
train-shattered bottles, our cigarettes,
while our sisters are kept too close
to wild. Strange how our make-believe
wars with their ordinary casualties
beg no forgiveness; how earthen
stains on a crisp white dress suggest
corruption. Hearts carved crudely
into oak & alder, initials of a girl
stalked so long our parents call it
love. & how Dad would kill any boy
who does what boys do to his daughter.
On this last day of freedom, let's show
our sisters how to press their ears to
the trembling tracks, to feel what's coming;
how we line up our bottles &
as if they don't already know,
wait for the world to shatter.

Buckshot of Stars

The city cranes its neck over the never-
sleeping river. Only the lights

of insomniac bedrooms & neon
billboards prove Descartes right:

we cannot stop
thinking of ourselves, & so
must be.

×

Within the grainy handheld footage
of our time here, a looping

dream montage of *what ifs*. Of *maybe, please*
tomorrows. A digitally enhanced

constellation of faces
our faces never quite grew up into.

That it doesn't matter

how stable & righteous we carry ourselves;
it hurts, but perhaps is kind,

that this whole damn story is someone else's

preface. Epilogue. Erratum.

×

Even the atom is reducible, I tell the dead
pigeon in the manicured park where I first

& may again fall in love. Strike that:

the pigeon I killed by stuffing it with crumbs
& crusts & sunflower seeds. Once handfed,

all the wildness comforted out, we lose
not the will but the violence it takes

to make our own way. Someone I think I loved
intensely told me that a long time ago. Strike that:

my father. Last night. But I really am sorry.

×

You can make a grown man out of rope.

Its welts. Out of images translated

from telescopes as *out there, somewhere*.

Out of initials a penknife once

whittled into bark: the ones not separated

by a heart. Implied forever.

At some point, you just stop remembering

the *how*, the *why*, the cost. Luckily,

×

there's still enough slack here to hang the two of us.

Or a child & what he thought he'd been promised.

Or to swing them out together over a roaring river's mouth.

To drown.

Or to drown & be grateful.

Meteor Shower

Lexie
Angelo

There's a meteor shower tonight.

For the past week, it's all anyone can talk about. Even our news anchors, who cover the same boring events in this town, have shown legitimate enthusiasm. Barb McLeod, the morning host, was even more excited than that time a wild moose walked up the main highway, stopping traffic, and we all watched on live TV as Animal Control shot it with a tranquilizer. People still talk about that one.

But tonight, it's all about the meteor shower.

— *Like we said folks, you'll get your best views tonight from midnight to 4 a.m. If you're not sure where to watch, follow our Twitter feed as we're sending our intern Rob to Loughheed Park where the celestial show is expected to be the best.*

'Play the damn song already.'

I barked to the radio in my car.

My boyfriend Justin was sitting in the passenger seat with his sunglasses on. The sun hitting us both directly in the eyes.

'I want to hear this,' he said swatting my hand away from changing the station.

'Oh no — you've been brainwashed too.'

'Layla, I'm not brainwashed. I'm interested' he said. 'We should go to Loughheed Park tonight and check it out.'

'No. No way. I'm not driving to the mountains at mid-

night to sit on some rocks while mosquitoes eat my face just to watch some white flecks streak across the sky.'

'It's a *celestial* experience,' Justin said. 'I downloaded the NASA app and it's supposed to pass right over our town. We're like, the epicentre for this thing. It's cool.'

— *Each meteoroid travels at 35 kilometres per second and this year's shower will treat viewers to as many as 120 meteors an hour.*

'Did you hear that?' Justin said.

'Yes. I heard it. I've been hearing it all week.'

For the past week, the highway was increasingly clogged with camper vans. The McDonald's drive-thru had surged to four times its usual size and people were invading my town with their lawn chairs, telescopes and cargo pants.

'I thought you wanted to go to a movie tonight,' I said as I made a left turn and immediately slowed down behind a trailer with a 'Go RV'ing' bumper sticker.

'Forget the movie, let's do this instead. It will be romantic.'

Seriously, he's pulling the romance card now. We've been dating for over two years and his last romantic gesture involved us going ice skating where I fell so hard, I had a bruise the size of a grapefruit on my thigh for over a month.

The trailer finally turned to let me pass and I pulled into my narrow parking spot which was always made smaller by Frank, my neighbour, who drove a Ford F-150 and parked over the line.

'Why does your neighbour always park over the line?' muttered Justin as he opened the passenger door and squeezed out while trying not to hit Frank's monstrosity of a vehicle. But then I heard a familiar voice.

'Watching the meteors tonight, Layla? Marla and I are getting out early for a good spot.'

Frank was lumbering out of his front door carrying two folding lawn chairs and two cases of Coors Light. He had on a Harley-Davidson t-shirt and his fat feet were stuffed into navy blue crocs. I wouldn't have rented this townhouse if I knew that two months later, Frank was going to move in and I would have to share a wall with a man whose music taste included AC/DC and The Beach Boys.

‘We’ve got other plans,’ I said. I winced as Frank tossed the lawn chairs into the back of his truck and nearly scratched my car.

‘Layla — get that stick out of yer ass and go out and have some fun,’ chortled Frank. ‘You young couples these days act like zombies on those computers. It’ll do you some good to get off of those screens and look at the damn universe.’

I feigned a smile and muttered something like ‘we’ll see’ as I unlocked my door and tossed my keys on the kitchen counter. I looked behind me thinking I would see Justin, but he was still out there talking to old Frank. Get the stick out of my ass. What did Frank care about what I did on the weekends? So what if I liked reading *Outlander* and watching Netflix? Frank dragged his second wife Marla to any fire pit he could find so he could drink cheap beers and roast hot dogs.

I sat on my couch and opened my laptop. A weather alert popped up on the side of my screen.

15C, light wind, meteor shower.

Great. Even my laptop was listening to Frank.

I heard Justin come in so I closed my computer and pretended to be doing something else.

‘I’ve got the gossip from Frank. Loughheed Park is going to be too crowded and he said what you really need is a good view from the North. He told me about a secret spot.’

‘Where is it?’

‘Nope — I’m keeping it a surprise.’

‘Can’t we just stay in?’

‘Layla, we’re not missing this one. I’ll pack the car and get everything ready. You can just chill and I’ll let you know when it’s time.’

I didn’t bother fighting it because if Justin was going to do all the work and drive out there, I could at least get a few episodes in.

It was just after midnight when Justin shook me awake. I had fallen asleep on the couch watching *The Crown*. I protested all the way to the car. It was cold and my body gave a violent shiver until the heater kicked on and we were driving down the highway with hardly a car in sight. It was an hour before we took a turn down an unmarked dirt road. We were in the mountains now. We had passed the rolling foot-

hills and were now surrounded by rocky giants and thick forest. The car bumped along the single-track road, twisting higher, until we eventually found ourselves at a small parking lot with some picnic tables. The sign read *Jewel Lake Day Area*.

Justin turned off the ignition, flicked off the headlights and jumped out of the car. I reluctantly opened the door and stepped out into the eerie and quiet backwoods. There were only two other vehicles in the parking lot. One of them, a truck I immediately recognized.

I walked over to Justin who was throwing a backpack over his shoulder and reaching for two canvas chairs. He handed me a blanket and a thermos.

‘C’mon, this way,’ he said as he led me through a patch of dark trees and up a path that opened into a wide clearing. We were standing on a sheet of rock over-looking a large lake. Maybe a thousand years ago this would have been a mountain top but the pointed peak was a crater now, like it had been scooped out by the gods.

I took a seat in my canvas chair and waited, looking up the sky.

‘Was that one?’ I asked.

‘I don’t think so,’ said Justin.

The stars were bright but each twinkling light remained stationary, sparkling in its place.

‘There —’

Justin pointed a bit to his right.

‘I missed it,’ I said frowning.

‘Maybe we should lie down so we have a better view.’ Justin unrolled the blanket and we huddled together in the darkness. His fingers entwined with mine and in the distance, somewhere I heard a guffawing laugh and knew Frank was out there telling stories and cracking another Coors Light. And that’s when a blazing star streaked across our view. And then another.

Two Poems

*Michael
Coolen*

Mirror Mirror on the Wall

always wear black clothing
when you stand in front of a mirror
never stand full front
always stand in profile
never show your right profile
always show the left profile
that makes you look thinner
never look above your navel
your upper body is revolting
and soft and fat and disgusting and
 that is where the priest fondled your breasts

always remove your clothes in another room
before taking a shower
never pause when you walk past the mirror
always scrub every inch of your body to lose weight
never look in the mirror after you've taken a hot shower
your upper body is revolting and soft and fat and disgusting and
 that is where the priest fondled your nipples

always speed past the mirror when you're finished

never look in the mirror because steam warps the mirror
making you look twice as fat as normal
always put on clean black underpants undershirt
pants and polo shirt before you go back to comb your hair
if you start yelling at what a bloated fat miserable
gluttonous out-of-control slob you are when you look into the mirror
 stop looking into the mirror
 you know why

never
never ever
look at your body above the navel
your upper body is revolting and soft and fat and disgusting and
 that is where the priest fondled you

fifty-seven years ago

Everything is a Bridge

everything is a bridge
to a singularity of desolation
a passage to a forest of dead trees
filled with shattered rose-colored sunglasses
a link to silences enthralling like a dark star
its gravity twisting and smothering
light and hope and what was
a future without melancholy
leaving a singularity of barrenness
where once grew a dream of meaning

every bridge ends at dark matter
no matter how many fireflies light the night
or how bright the moon shines
over the mountains
every beam brings a dream dear
of Kate Smith
is that you
the past is now
the future is now
remember forever last words

every bridge is a liar spanning a river
promising purity to a pristine ocean
passionate thighs join and separate again
awaiting an imminent departure
under false night stars
the river smelling from narcissism
from quantum love at a distance
endearments spawned from
labyrinths of lies
heard by ears lacking filters

every bridge is a betrayal of love
soulmates to a dying river
soulmates to a quantum mistake
welcomed like treasures into the

Aevum between Time and Eternity
Clotho weaving thread toward chaos
from sound to vision
from vision to line
from color to blindness
from love to oblivion
from oblivion to obscurity
everything is a bridge to
old men with young dreams
young men with old schemes
the ace of spades of forgetfulness
a square yard of debris
eraser heads
filled with broken music
moonbeams bruise
stars and raindrops
fireflies bruise
love and hate bruise
promises bruise
we constantly approach the bridge
running along the wrong path on a moonless night
must we cross every bridge when we come to it
no matter how vicious the Fates
on the other side
sharpening their claws
smirking

Writer Bios

Lexie Angelo is a Canadian writer and snowboarder. She holds a Master in Creative Writing from The University of Edinburgh and a Bachelor of Arts from Royal Roads University. Her work has been published in *From Arthur's Seat*, a short story anthology, as well as *Hypnopomp Magazine*, *5 on the Fifth*, and *The Ogilvie* in the United Kingdom. She has short stories forthcoming in Canada and the U.S.

She is a recipient of the 2018 Carlyle Norman Scholarship for Emerging Literary Artists Endowment and completed a residency at The Banff Centre for Emerging Writers. She is also the Managing Editor of *The Selkie*, a Scotland-based literary journal dedicated to publishing under-represented voices. When she isn't checking the weather forecast, you can find her working on her debut novel and short story collection. Follow her on twitter [@angelolexie](#).

George Bishop's work has appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Flare*, and *Cold Mountain Review*. Bishop won the 2013 Peter Meinke Prize at YellowJacket Press for his chapbook, *Following Myself Home* and his second full length collection, *One Dance* was published by FutureCycle Press. He attended Rutgers University and now lives and writes in Saint Cloud, Florida.

Robert Carr is the author of *Amaranth*, published in 2016 by Indolent Books and *The Unbuttoned Eye*, a full-length 2019 collection from 3: A Taos Press. Among other publications his poetry appears in the *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Tar River Poetry* and *Rattle*. Pending publications include the *Citron Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Shenandoah*. Robert is poetry editor with Indolent Books and an editor for the anthology *Bodies and Scars*, available through the Ghana Writes Literary Group in West Africa. Additional information can be found at [robertcarr.org](#).

Michael Coolen is a pianist, composer, actor, performance artist, storyteller, and writer living in Corvallis, Oregon.

He has won awards from the Oregon Poetry Association, the Oregon Writers Colony, and has been published in *Oregon Humanities*, *The Gold Man Review*, *Best Travel Stories*, *The Fable Online*, *Kalhya Language Press*, *Twisted Vine*, *Clementine Poetry Journal*, *Creative Writing Institute*, *Rats Ass Review*, *Solarwurm Press*, *Synesthesia Magazine*, *Broken Plate Poetry Magazine*, *StoryClub Magazine*, *The Poetry Quarterly*, *Shadowgraph Quarterly*, *Riding Light Review*, *Bookers Corner.uk*, *Pure Slush*, *Melancholy Hyperbole*, *Oneye Press/Shotgun Honey*, *Lost River Review*, et al. His essay "Let Me Tell You How My Father Died" was awarded first prize in the 2017 national "Ageless Authors" competition.

He is also a published composer whose works have been performed around the world, from Singapore to Denmark, and at Carnegie Hall, the New England Conservatory of Music, MoMA, and the Christie Gallery in New York.

Cressida Evans is a Welsh writer living in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. She writes short stories and film scripts. Having spent a large part of her life traveling and living abroad, Cressida is interested in how cultures blend and clash and how the forces of history and landscape shape our dreams and narratives.

Kathryn Fitzpatrick is a junior at Central Connecticut State University where she studies English and serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *Helix Literary Magazine*. Previous publications include *Out Magazine*, *Crack the Spine*, and the print anthology “Flash Nonfiction Funny” (Woodhall Press, 2018), among others. She lives in Thomaston, CT.

Cartoonist Ellen Forney is the author of bestselling graphic memoir, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me* and *Rock Steady: Brilliant Advice From My Bipolar Life*. She collaborated on the National Book Award-winning novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and has been awarded residency fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, Civitella Ranieri, and Hedgebrook.

She curated “Graphic Medicine: Ill-Conceived & Well-Drawn”, a traveling exhibition about comics and health for the National Library of Medicine, and as a visual artist, she was selected to create two permanent large-scale murals for Seattle’s Capitol Hill light rail station. She grew up in Philadelphia and lives in Seattle, and teaches comics at Cornish College of the Arts.

Jess Kilby writes flash fiction and prose poetry, and creates other experimental forms of narrative. Her fiction has been

published by *Meniscus*, *Reflex Press*, and *Arachne Press*, and has been performed in various immersive theatre productions. You can find her online at [@ninjypsy](#) and at [jesskilby.com](#).

Gerard McKeever is an academic and writer based in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland. He is currently publishing a series of short stories and working on a novel set on the Solway coast. Gerard holds a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Glasgow.

L. M. Prather is a writer of both fiction and nonfiction who lives in northern Virginia. She earned her masters in creative writing from George Mason University.

Charlie J. Stephens is a queer fiction writer and poet living in Northern California. Charlie has lived all over the U.S. as a bike messenger, bookstore clerk, and seasonal shark diver (for educational purposes only). Charlie won *The Forge Literary Magazine’s* 2018 Flash Fiction Competition, and other written work has most recently appeared in *Rappahannock Review*, *Not Your Mother’s Breast Milk*, and “Nothing Short of: Selected Tales from 100 Word Story” (Outpost19 Books). A non-fiction piece titled, “Me and My Teen Queen” will be part of *Original Plumbing’s* Ten Year Anniversary Edition to be published by Feminist Press in spring 2019.

More at [charliejstephenswriting.com](#).

Robert Vivian is the author of *The Tall Grass Trilogy*, *Water*

And Abandon, and two meditative essay collections, *Cold Snap* *As Yearning* and *The Least Cricket Of Evening*. His first poetry book is called *Mystery My Country*—and he’s co-written a second called *Traversings* with the poet Richard Jackson. He teaches at Alma College and as a core faculty member at The Vermont College Of Fine Arts. Robert has a new book of dervish essays called *Immortal Soft-Spoken* which was published by Awst Press.

John Sibley Williams is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize, 2019), *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize, 2019), *Disinheritance*, and *Controlled Hallucinations*. An eleven-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Philip Booth Award, American Literary Review Poetry Contest, Phyllis Smart-Young Prize, The 46er Prize, Nancy D. Hargrove Editors’ Prize, Confrontation Poetry Prize, and Laux/Millar Prize. He serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review* and works as a literary agent. Previous publishing credits include: *The Yale Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Sycamore Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Saranac Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Third Coast*, and various anthologies. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

the end.

Contributors

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George Bishop

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Cressida Evans

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