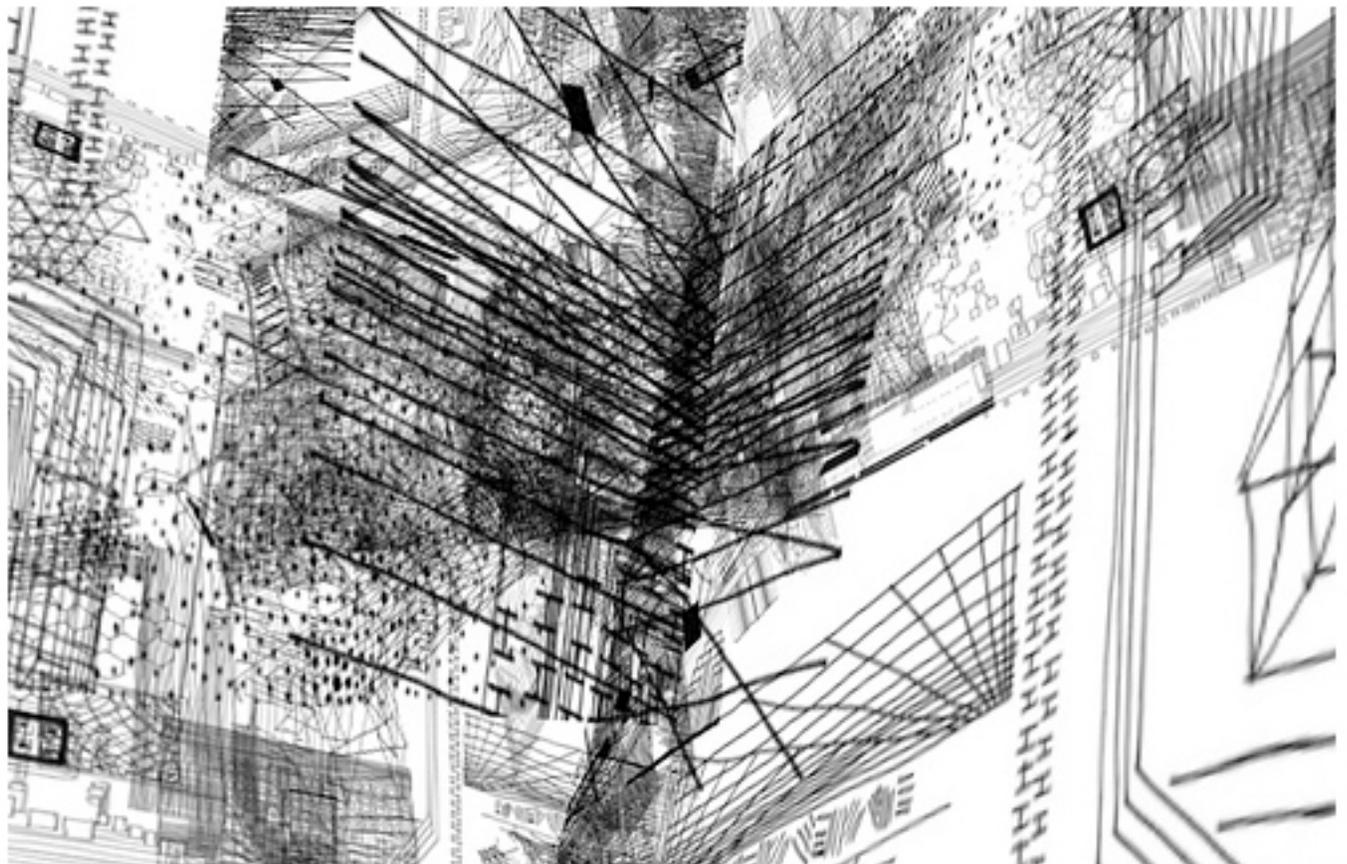


SPRINGGUN

SPRING 2011



SpringGunPress.com / editor@springgunpress.com
450 W. 14th Ave / P.O. Box 48145 / Denver, CO 80204
© 2011 SpringGun Press Contributors

Cover: A. Bill Miller
<http://www.master-list2000.com/abillmiller/abillmiller.html>
Ink and Paper + ASCII Composition
Courtesy of the Artist

SpringGun V2, N2

Erin Costello

Mark Rockswold

EDITORS

Poems

Anna Arov • Two Poems • 3

Brian Foley • Five Poems • 5

Alicia Gomez • Three Poems • 11

Melissa Jones • Three Poems • 14

Tim Kahl • Two Poems • 17

Matthew Sadler • Three Poems • 23

2011 SpringGun Poetry Chapbook Prize Finalists

Megan M. Garr • *from* The Preservationist Documents • 26

Caroline Klockslem • *from* Circumstances of the House & Moon • 28

Fiction

DeMisty D. Bellinger • What Plums Would Do • 30

Robert Lee Emigh III • A Lover's Gifts • 32

Nick Kimbro • Night Vision Goggles • 35

Travis MacDonald • *from* The Story • 38

Kristin McTigue & Andrew Fitch • *from* Bustling Towns • 40

Christopher David Rosales • A Missionary • 44

Paul Takeuchi • America Online • 47

Notes on Contributors • 54

Anna Arov

Ethanol Suspension

you dabbed me with sent sample
and now I don't know if it's
or yours that clings
does it matter if I can only about you as a female
dear/me calling out like mommy

our bodies touch only ephemeral/mannered
little bottles full of emulsification
confuse/touch

my wrist
to your finger on flaskthroat
bitterroot oil filtrated my cuff
fibers fulfilled with memory
chaffing upper lip
o fragrant ceremonious spiritus lab
so distant from so exorbitant

Synchronized Swimming

there I was symmetry 37 thinking about clock drift and pendular gravity waving
before submerging into women only from this point the information is correct
sign sign nod undress did we get closer to the cachung in the well of our stomach
perfect our imperfections confuse this with heart holding the novelty of that date
triumph trophy fear the routine was rote I was over time or just slow lazy shiftless
missing the expected welcome of punctuality absent red cross next to symmetry
37 overseas was sleeping on both sides rem to my unaccomplished head-first foot-
first maintaining the stroke was buoyancy I lay on my back arm raised I lay on my
front

Brian Foley

from Totem

Give courage:
not comfortable: to fact:
the ordinary meaning of inside:
a softer lie:

occupied with
the same ideas: come up short:
with: every part of the picture: some
unglazed eye door: in being:
a word added to you:

a praise:
permitted to participate: in or at that
place: got possible:

Threadlike:

collection of data: to place

in its posture: not difficult:

to give ear: a gutter:

prefixed: as a letter to a word:

windows to enable simultaneous viewing:

drawing: a path

beaten by a missing body part:

a surviving mark:

until: how it was:

a tune played by the picture of nobody:

the one who must tag the others:

a cipher: a signal

without distortion:

makes a drama arranged:

as good as a play:

Anything that can be heard:
duplicates: an era: uncertainty: carried out
within doors: a situation in which
you mistake one thing for another:

in what way: to separate:
undesired sound: perceived by the eye:
in that place: a main: division:
a road connecting town to city:

covered by something:
a quantity or depth: adequate for some
purpose: but liable: to yield
or break under pressure:

partial darkness:
not clearly one thing or another: rather
the present: ephemeral:
as a life:

enlarging in
all directions: to pound into ground
without breaking skin: a piece of paper:
alters the course:

the lower layers up

to surface: touching on: an orderly arrangement:

open to view: in spite of: the whole amount:

the absolute me: a concept:

to form on a surface:

The pull of soul
for states: spherical: lamp shade:
or fish bowl: adapted to the design:
a fabric for: the senses:

the mind: excludes:
something that is built:
semblance: under obligation:
to substitute: escape:

as opposed to here: which circulates:
the juice of anything: an influence:
correcting defects in vision:
until: by filling: we:
pay attention

We put on:
clothes to forego: delocate: to arrange:
around the body: the point by which
any thing revolves:

it is cover:
that opens: the grate: closes a crave:
for feeling:

laid out: to chart:
drawing together: the parts of rope beyond
the knot not used:

Alicia Gomez

from Thing of Love

II. Ocean

To pyramid a house in the middle of the ocean,
I fashion windows of yolk-colored flowers,
paint murals of you with purpled lips, cricket eyelids.

My house, the third sun of the cognac ocean
full like glass

my humble house
my house, in flames
the rapid heart beating. .

A plane flies over your forehead
thick with thought,

a thought pressed like a hand on the small of your back,
a golden boon plucked from the sky, you are the loopy wind,
noose eyes of my house, the ocean restless for my mouth.

IV. Room

You are the burning field in the sweat of my windows,
eggshell light lit between my lips, the thing of love
hushed like smoke

V. Song

My name loosens the thick step
Loosening the nail, the chicken egg

My name a blanket of the sun

And the cry of wind from your green mouth
follows like song

Melissa Jones

Mattress

Idle-wild inhaling sweet perspiration—

Staling sheets: tendered stain

Urinal-springs silent: palsy-insect

canvassed on a clockwork of permanency {writhing internally}

Barbers Wanted

Experience a plus. Nylon mink hands. in abrasion snips.
goatee interspersed in after shave. swift sip of gel like those
sideburns plaited skin mandible so well. in thick talk. Socialite.

space open
clean: only a few break-ins tapered lips swallowed egos alopecia debts
and
bandana loiters illustrated masculine-fade out nicks in scalp in asphalt in
buzz-lined care to handle: enough we need (9 to 5) you to sweep air

Lee's Auto Repair "A"

Tire bore them.

Yes. the auto parts denied

oil

then the streets geared manic

a repair an arm and a salivated horse

power off. Objects appear closer than hemorrhage rubber

A auto slammed its paint onto spine the way

the gas buttered the hood of Bancroft Ave

Opened its trunk slit the tonsils and needled the air

Tim Kahl

Speciation

A maritime air mass nearly a thousand miles long
pushes the flocks and seeds
to pass over the eroded shores, the quiet habitats
lit with nutrients and entrained to the rhythms of
the citric acid cycle.

Life on earth retains a memory of its past,
the chromosome behavior
of the Cambrian trilobite
in the sediments shifting its focus onto
forging a brand new species.

But bacteria disdain the presence of men,
preferring a varied existence of their own
on the moon.

I hid in my room	waiting for the call of the spiders
incubating in the closet	dust motes swirling
sun surging through the curtain	in the fly's path of flight
an ecosystem in the carpet	a practicing machine
splicing base pairs into each other	with integrated instincts and talents
my genome transferred into the wild	bit by bit as a symbiont
still capable of interbreeding but in the process of diverging,	
the two species of hummingbirds	
are indistinguishable in flight	
separated by a change in the iridescent colors of their	
breeding plumage.	

Over winter they fuse again into
a single ancestral species
as I have merged
into my boyhood obsession with baseball statistics,
the averages and random drifts
toward dominance in the league.
I decide which players are indispensable to the team
and release the rest
to their lives as providers after their careers are over.
If they do not become brighter and fuller men
whose DNA
is adequate to the task, then display their genome open
to the restriction enzyme's jagged bite.
I accept my recombinant planetmates
in a peer-to-peer network
of shared adenine, guanine, thymine, cytosine,
the ragged bits and states of
Homo domesticus' emergent forms.
Who becomes used to the cage
where the game is played?
The docile rats poke their snouts
through the bars, wanting to be
handled and touched by the visitors,
trusting the human gaze at them

invites their cooperation while across the room in separate cages
the ferocious rats hurl
themselves against their bars
screaming at the visiting humans
who appear as predators.
They cannot be handled
after forty generations of selection for this population.
I walked into your life right now
and saw the backdrop for your paranoia.
We were playing Monopoly.
I didn't care if I won, but I didn't play to lose.
I just wanted to make it all interesting,
spotting the clues for our poisoned genes.

Zoo Sculpture

I wanted the bird to be an ordinary thing
unseen by the human dictionary, an ordinary
thing flung from the window of a pickup.
It's patterned flight guided by homing
instincts perhaps.....or maybe it broke the china doll's
heart at the country inn. All the hills seemed slighted
by the murmurs of its lacy wings. The feathers
elapsd one by one near the dish of breath mints
on the settee. The yeast in its felt beak turned out
the light in the song. I noticed the children waiting
for the zookeeper's directions.

I said: I wanted the tiger to blend with the ads for
Chanel accessories. The great danger was dropping
the leg into view. But through the graphic lines of magazine
print the doctor checked its progress on the heart monitor.
The nurse removed the fear of the unknown, piece by
piece shedding her clothing for all the young boys
in the neighborhood. We paced our cages at night anxious
and hard, waiting for the right to bring cameras.

I wanted to explain the chimpanzee to a clan of photocopiers—
how it is their handshakes are left over from
the cold war, their embraces given to the daughters
of the critics. They spill their chatter over power ties
and deny the world is a bunch of bananas sharpened
to a point. The world teeters on seven gold stakes driven
into the ground, one on each continent, all tapered to tear
the earth like an incisor. The thunderclaps jump on the
back of the animal trapped in its wet fur. There is no escape
from the crowd watching the gorillas.

The green swan

saw eternity

It was a

miracle of sorts,

an ancient

secret

nonetheless.

Eternity

rambled on

about some idle

prattle between

two ducks who

concluded

forever
doesn't produce
the desired
effect.

And the nightbird is a helicopter. Its vertebrae scour the border patrol leaning on the races of men. The RPM of reasoned ego in the heavy machinery of the heart, running blood through avian loops of the afterlife. Together with the deepest dreamer and its certain blue urge to mate circling in the air, the flock is learning coyoteway and the skills for nesting in pleasing ferns.

Matthew Sadler

Front Room Matters

Echoailia of the
magazine spread
and stains on the pale
green microfiber
hidden by the sweep
of a hand

to change the color's
direction to

darker, you
close

(we stripe everything here
to hide the flaws)

your eyes tight
to kiss before

hands reach for
everything

(moved over too
quickly)

(is) perfect.

The once-a-month
maid your parents

fought over hiring
sweeps candy wrappers

(your mom won
that argument)

under the couch
you are thriving

upon.

(when the heat kicks on they float restlessly

out onto
the visible
floor)

In Plaid

In plaid the colors fight like
Germans and everyone circa
1944 but according to the
gospels we kept it on a line
from eve to evening, time
to sin and all this arrived
via freight car, knowledge,
apples, death, which forgets
all the worms that've made
their cottage industry on
thin strings of good sugar.
Be some time before one more
is favored over one more by
the lord, and some new chair
being built by the preachers
and some new string woven
out of some new worm found
by burning down the forest then
stopping because the biologists
said

Multitask (v, n)

To multiply (I)
is to grow new boots
in every footstep,
(I) to harden into
petrified stumps
each new ghost
of a limb, to be new
like minutes.

With an addicts
razor I slice (longwise, then across)
my abdomen
into segment
until I'm insect,
one for every
moment of
the day,
then I
exist
that way,
thousands of me.

Megan M. Garr
from The Preservationist Documents

Document no.5

And when you could not leave other things became possible.

Clearing the yard, assemblage,

or turning over stones

you barely dared before.

And you could not name the birds or herbaceous
yet both grew and sang.

And you imagined
cities that ran under ashen weights
at a little less of a roar.

Miles, miles of the igneous nightfall.
What would have happened if you had waited.

So the world stilled and
America took you in.

You took in America,
you were alive all across it

modal, perfect, pluperfect

again, again, again

This would have happened.

And the tephra took in entire skies, skies.

Caroline Klocksiem

from Circumstances of the House & Moon

When I turn

around— you tethered to me,
you seeding just so. Your sun-
hot motions. Hoof stamps hooked
to their echo. Oh, to be staked, new-
angled for even
a second. To be pinned
down by you. To be held
under your monstrous stomp.

 Mattress, salt, grass, a wallowing
ground. To gasp for.
To curl upwards with sirensong around you.
To tease by bulletting back. Ammunition
you to pieces. To take you apart
from me. To unharness, to unknot. To zero
you & look back,
the way a word walks out a mouth. To scatter you
across my lawn, in sweat and love, gently
in the light, out of nothing but.

A Virtue of Nature

Lumbricus terrestris eats and passes America's soggy surface with a life of 5 hearts & infinite regenerations. Swallows above, garden hoes & work to do.

All those new parts, but the creature deaf-mute. A nematode cannot hear the 5-part beat pulsing inside her inches of beige body.

She is not a killer; delivers her segments to the squash patch in the garden, sprouts another, a two-step dance of back & forth,

release to the humus, then grow. The tiki-torch a fireplace from above. In dark dirt, warm earthworms rub clitellum until a puffy cocoon balloons

& dissects them.

Meanwhile, the flatworm fights the flatworm—
simple ancient killing machines, microscopic in a bucket. It must be

the forgotten, gray flatworm who wrestles (nematologists say *penis-fencing*,)
to finally achieve a sex. Tonight, in the dewy yard, not knowing what

they fight for, one becomes a girl worm, the other a boy. They make new
as though violence were a virtue of nature.

The passive ones planted—

a green spoon worm with nothing to do but spend her life buried
in the seashore and sway with the Atlantic. Scores of husbands

20,000 x's smaller than her burrow in her pouch until death. Lucky enough
to mate; to be dragged from this muddy shit to the next.

DeMisty D. Bellinger

What Plums Would Do

They had a plum orchard out back. There were five plum trees and one other tree which hadn't done anything yet. There was Dan, who was always yelling, whatever his mood. Or playing his music over every other noise. And there was Abel, a woman tall as a man, whose feet were calloused from walking up and down the block and around each plum tree each day, checking the blooms, sprouts, buds, fruition of something about to be.

Dan worked on his car and if you stopped to talk, he'd talk about the day with its weather, its work, its weight in plum pits. He'd purposely spit when he talked and chewed on things toothpick-like.

If you talked to Abel while she was on her rounds, she'd explain to you about her name and how it is never mentioned as much as Cain's. She would sit down and rub her bare feet, point out her calluses.

Abel had recipes for plums like you wouldn't believe. She used them as substitutes for other foods in other recipes. She preached the wonders of prune juice and pickled plums. She'd feed you if you let her. She was so tall, so thin, seemingly on stilts. She was from Africa. Someone said Sudan.

Dan was white as they came. Narrow man with thin eyes, thinning hair, tinny voice, always loud. He was Abel's husband. They never held hands, as far as we knew. He never was in the orchard, on the leaf littered ground, swatting away hungry flying insects. She never was beneath his car, under the chassis, the muffler, the oily mess that made it go.

I imagined them making love at a predetermined time, and timed, their minds elsewhere. Her mind would wander from the soles of her feet, hard with walking across what was once considered darkest Africa to the bright, snow cold backyards of the Midwest. She might have thought of children she once had, now lost track of. She might have thought of something besides plums to eat, that involved a grain ground into a gritty meal, boiled up with a melon one could not find here. Meat she watched slaughtered seconds before she bought it.

I couldn't dream of what Dan thought about in bed. The need to have an orgasm, maybe, or of pro-generation, or seeds, or life after him. I only knew that inside of his head, there was almost silence. There was one voice that constantly reminded him about something he didn't care to remember. Over and over again. Once, we saw them together. A rare sight. He stood at least a half foot beneath her and he was not considered a short man. She turned to him, looked over him, then looked down. He had said something; she was responding. "That's what plums would do," someone said. I think it was Miss Applewhite, sucking her teeth as if they were made of honey.

Robert Lee Emigh III

A Lover's Gifts

The teeth had been gifted to her by a lover. They were not her lover's teeth. Her lover had a child and she took care of the child while her lover was away. They were not the child's teeth.

She kept them in a box, in any case, a box her lover had given her, and she kept the box under their bed. A charm of sorts. It rattled when she slid it out from under and back and when she picked it up. And when she shook it, because she liked the rattle.

But her lover had vanished, left the child and left the teeth. For four weeks he had been gone. The rent was coming due and the cupboards were coming empty. She had no money. She was preparing to leave, gathering what was important. She pulled the box from beneath her bed and gave it a shake, listened to the echo, rocks caught in a tumbler. The box was solid and plain and wooden. Her stomach spoke to her. She put on her coat and wrapped the child in a blanket, tucked the box under an arm and gathered the child in the other. She did not shake her lover's child. She wondered if he would rattle. He keened.

Through the sickly light of the stairwell and out the door, where the cold air cut into her throat. She would go to her parents' home. The night and the hunger made this make sense. This was not where she wanted to be is all that mattered. There was too much that was missing. The teeth deserved better.

Snow and darkness.

The sidewalk was not whole; splintered in places, jagged edges of concrete, uneven and treacherous. Her shoes scraped against the ice. She walked slowly. When she stumbled, the box spoke to her. The child whimpered and squirmed.

The teeth had been gifted as an act of supplication. He had left her alone with his child for two weeks, then he had paid the rent, then he had filled the cupboards and the fridge, then.

She didn't want to know how he had acquired the teeth. He had gone down on one knee and for a moment she thought he was proposing, a ring in an overlarge box, but it rattled when she took it from him and she knew that she had crossed a threshold, then, the hardened yellowed artifacts looking like a set of tiny skulls in the dim light.

The wind ate into her skin. The child had begun to scream, full red gums in the jaundice of the streetlamps. His lips would chap quickly.

The teeth rattled, marking the time of her footfalls. As steady as the screaming against the wind, as steady as the cold, as steady as the tiny body against her.

All in one piece, that body.

She wondered if her lover would come back this time, and, if he did, what he would give her as penance this time.

Her lover tended towards guilt. Her lover tended towards theft. Her lover tended to give gifts to make up for these things. These things all fed off of each other.

Two weeks, at any rate, was the longest they had been separated since they met, until this night, and she was ready to give up on him. Her skin tightened. The child was already going hoarse, his screams having taken on a razor-cut edge.

The child did not feel like her lover. Her lover did not feel like her lover.

She wished her lover had given her his own teeth, that she might be able to keep him.

The child had not yet grown teeth.

And so nothing fell from his mouth and rattled a tinny song against the concrete as she slipped on a sheet of ice and the child hit face-first on the sidewalk.

A dull thud for contrast, the splintering of the wooden box and the then the clattering of the gifted teeth proving louder than the child's face against the ice.

The screaming stopped. Her ears burned with the cold. Blood pooled around the child's head.

And slowly, the child released a new whimper, a guttural weeping working its way up from the bottom of his throat. And then, briefly, shriller than before, a scream. A razor drawn across porcelain. A sound so high she thought only she could hear it, resolving eventually to a viscous gurgle. The steady sound of pain. She feared turning the child over, touching it. She pushed herself to her knees as the trail of blood drew close, as the trail of blood overtook a tooth on the ground, a yellow porcelain island in hell. And the blood was making its way toward another tooth, and the broken box, the sidewalk sloped just so. She was sure there were teeth missing, teeth she would never see again. But those that remained would be overtaken by blood lest she gathered them.

There was a noise in her quiet breathing. She was standing now, and looking at the assorted artifacts at her feet.

The teeth, a fairy-tale trail of crumbs, to lead her somewhere.

The child, a fairy tale.

Nick Kimbro

Night-Vision Goggles

In bed you pull your covers up tight beneath your chin. Moonlight cuts a grid of shadow on the wall, and in the corner your toy chest is overflowing. A box on the floor casts small pinpricks of light against the ceiling, but those are not enough. You want the tape of lullabies your mother used to play; you're too old for them, but you want them anyway, even though you know they will not help.

Your parents are at home, but they can't help you either. They lie together in their own bed, held in each other's arms, and when they close their eyes, they see darkness. There is no image there waiting for them; that image belongs to you. The robber, the monster, the ghost... It doesn't matter that your parents' room is at the bottom of the stairs, or that yours is at the top. He is your monster, and when he comes, you know that he will come straight for you.

Tonight though, he is a robber.

You imagine him creeping into the house, picking the patio lock like you sometimes do when you return home from school. He enters through the kitchen wearing night-vision goggles, even though you know this is unlikely. Most robbers do not have night-vision goggles. They cover the top half of his face and make his eyes look mechanical and green. Below them, his chin is slight and pointed. His lips are thin.

He passes the knife block and, if he has forgotten his weapon tonight, he will grab the big one, the one your mother chops onions with.

He has and he does; the knife is shiny with moonlight.

The robber creeps up the stairs, past your parents' bedroom. He is not an impulsive robber; he will not go into the first bedroom he sees, but will start at the

back, with your bedroom, and work his way forward. You can feel his presence there in the hall, can hear his silent footfalls crunching the threads of the carpet outside.

You watch the door.

What is he waiting for? you wonder.

He is listening. He can hear you awake, can hear your thoughts about him. He is waiting for you to close your eyes, to relax, to slip into that space between conscious imagining and dream, then, at any moment, he will burst through the door with his night-vision goggles and your mother's onion-chopping knife and he will come for you. He will cut away your privileges and your happiness. He will make a mess of your room and destroy all your toys. Then he will take your parents away, your videogame console, your dog, Carl, even though he is supposed to die soon anyway—all of the things you have, but never earned.

You lie awake, rigid and unblinking, wishing now, in the darkness, in the nighttime, that you were one of the 'less-fortunate' whom your parents sponsor at Christmas-time. You wish you had nothing worth taking because then there would not be a robber at your door with night-vision goggles, waiting for your attention to waver so that he can take everything you love. You wish you paid attention more in Church on Sundays, because then maybe you could turn to God for assistance. Then, maybe it wouldn't matter that there's a robber outside your door. You would know that your reward is in heaven.

But whoever God is, he is not your friend.

It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

God said that, and you remember it. It occurs to you that the robber—the one with the night-vision goggles—may be there on behalf of God. That maybe he

is not a robber at all, but an angel come to make you poor so that when you die you can enter the kingdom of heaven. This does not make him any less frightening. It only limits your salvation. It's either here or thereafter—an impossible decision. But then, you know it's not up to you.

Eventually, you will close your eyes despite yourself and you will fall asleep. Because you have been thinking about him for so long, you will dream of the man with the night-vision goggles, but only briefly. You will dream of other stuff too. And in the morning you will wake to find sunlight again streaming in through your windows, your toys intact, your parents downstairs making breakfast and your dog one step closer to his demise, but for the moment, still alive. You will forget all about this little episode until tomorrow night, and then, because you have exhausted the man with the night-vision goggles, you will imagine something else: a monster perhaps, and on and on for the nights to come until you have destroyed each and every possibility by imagining it in advance.

At some point you will start writing these fantasies down during the day, and they will get you into trouble at school. Your teachers will call your parents and say that you have a “dark imagination.” They will not understand that you are only protecting yourself.

But no matter how many awful events you imagine, the unimagined will always be there, looming behind them—Me: the thing that is going to happen to you. I do not have night-vision goggles and I am not a ghost. I am not God either. I am your destiny, and the more you imagine me the more you give me shape. And one night, when you least expect it, I will come for you. I will catch you off-guard. I will come, and when I leave I'm going to take all of your toys, your parents, your house, and yes, I will take Carl too, dead or alive. Believe me, it's for your own good.

Travis MacDonald

from The Story

Chapter Seven

The story revolves around a mysterious cube. Somewhere in the story, a character will prepare for a holiday that has already passed. Another character becomes depressed over the course of the story. The story is political in nature, with a subtext about how people are all very different but they act so much alike. It starts in a plastic surgeon's office. During the story, the main character gets a demotion to supporting role. Later in the story, there is a dramatic revelation of gender and/or relation. The story begins with a journey, climaxes in tragedy, and ends with a simple prayer. A character gets progressively dirtier and dirtier during the story. The story must have a helmet appear in the middle for the reader's protection. A character is sorry throughout most of the story, but sorry isn't good enough, is it? Later in the story, another character makes a life-changing decision for the worse. Over the course of the story, there is a labor strike and all the vowels walk out except y...

Chapter Eight

...Neither side can spell “scab” or “temp,” so negotiations resume, albeit warily. The story is set in a government building during an official state dinner. The story starts out with the main character sealing a letter and handing it to an assistant.

Somewhere in the story, a character inherits an unusual object. This character becomes ravenously hungry over the course of the story. Another character becomes inexplicably manic. The story must involve some piece of previously undiscovered scripture whose ultimate public exposure would mean the end of civilization as we know it. The story ends during the subsequent riots. The story must have a giraffe in it to add some perspective. The story needs a maid at the end to sweep all the loose ends into the closest plot hole. Another character is angry and negative throughout most of the story for no apparent reason. This character later inherits vast amounts of money. Suddenly everyone’s an optimist. The story takes place during a crime spree one thousand years in the past. During the story, the main character makes a meal for themselves for the very first time. Another character has an accident at home alone with their grizzly bear. Somewhere in the story, the maid is found murdered. A character becomes disoriented during the story due to an MSG overdose. The last page of the story is stamped return-to-sender.

Kristin McTigue & Andrew Fitch

from Bustling Towns

Who goes there! hankering, gross, mystical, nude?
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat?

WALT WHITMAN

June 26, 7:22 AM

At noon we'll head to Suzhou for a reading...Hard from our lobby to tell if it's raining ...since the city's soaked...sunken sidewalks...though a girl with sandals carries round glass...This draft suggests my fly's down...This guy ahead...a multicolored straw bag hangs from the backseat...in that a vertical sign I can't read...fluorescent bulbs wrapped in twine...Next a meticulous bald man coasts...rides casual...smoking... flicking his checked cook's shirt...never making flinch a skinny teacher in heels clutching her wrapped umbrella...Some Chinese [*Ping*] stern each time they talk... Why does this grandpa bike banging his handlebar...He's got a long...flat...like trailer-bed...I just stepped on bacon...This side street wrecks of vinegar...This mother seems to have been tricked by a collie...She needs to wrap around...unwind...This boy with head shaved except an off-center square smiles beside a breakfast street seller's booth...From a bucket both fill water cups... which actually soon end up for sale... Sisters in thick red pumps speed past...a steamed bun in one hand...the other ice cream...Still each dog I'll see...now a focused Pomeranian...proclaims now the best time of day (all shaved except [*Ping*] furry head)...Its owner walks pigeon-toed...no the opposite...white shorts...Nikes against strong legs...after hard rains nice to look at

—Lunch, Suzhou Bookworm

A: I'd pictured a bulbous chicken breast with chunky tomato sauce on top. I guess I've missed chicken parm. I got one chicken strip chopped in thirds. The rest [*Glitch*] mayonnaise.

K: Their menu described a grilled cheese and tomato on fresh ciabatta. That excited me. The bread looked fine. But then loaded with mayonnaise, baby swiss not melted. Nothing had been grilled except the weird tomatoes.

A: I like roasted tomatoes.

K: Sure these were ok.

A: Though perhaps came from a jar.

K: They may have. So I'd [*Glitch*] homemade apple pie, because I didn't eat my sandwich.

—Dinner, Suzhou Bookworm

A: I thought we'd get a snack before the reading, that our pizza would rim one small-sized plate. Afterwards I felt full.

K: It seemed pretty big. And they'd put a ton of cheese on it. And you ate a decent amount, so...

—After-Dinner Snack, Suzhou Bookworm

A: Hummus/veggie plate. I thought we'd get China's take on Tribe of Two Sheikhs Hummus. Can you remember that? More of a paste? This was decent. It looked like Sabra's.

K: I bet homemade.

A: Bright oil around the edges.

K: Now [*Glitch*] slightly worried I'll get sick from nice cucumber, carrot and celery slices.

A: At some point, also, their new night chef...

K: Brit.

A: brought out chocolate flan.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size Bacon 1 oz (28g)

Amount Per Serving

Calories 150 Calories from Fat 110

%Daily Value*

Total Fat 12g **18%**

Saturated Fat 4g **20%**

Trans Fat 0g

Cholesterol 30mg **10%**

Sodium 650mg **27%**

Total Carbohydrate 0g **0%**

Dietary Fiber 0g **0%**

Sugars 0g

Protein 10g

Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 0%

Calcium 0% • Iron 2%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carb		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Christopher David Rosales

A Missionary

Mama don't remember Tío Kiko taught me to tattoo myself—I bet no one does but me. We were sitting out in the big back yard behind the kind of long flat house we got in California, leaned against his Bronco in the shade of the avocado tree like we all got in California, too. He said proudly, with his mustache flared, “All you need’s a bic pen, a lighter, and some shoe polish. Lil D., why don’t you go on a mission?”

He'd been in the army a long time ago. Mostly, he'd been in the pen. Still, he liked sending me on missions. Sometimes they were missions for him, like to the fridge for a cold beer. But sometimes, like this time, the missions he sent me on were meant for no one but me.

I brought him the pen and he stripped it like a rifle. He tugged the ink and roller out with his teeth and spat the piece at me. I understood that I should hold it because he could make you understand things like that with those dark eyes, those thick eyebrows that when they moved up or down seemed to weigh how much you were worth. Then he put the needle in place at the tip of the empty pen and melted the plastic around it until the pen gripped the needle in black folds like lava.

We practiced drawing pictures in a plastic Frisbee, him blowing away the tiny worms of plastic that coiled from the needle's tip as he carved. The little skeletons he drew were happy, but nearly invisible. He covered them with shoe polish that he rubbed in with his thumb and I bit my tongue because I'd thought he'd ruined them. But then he spat on his clean thumb and rubbed again. This time the extra shoe polish faded and the skeletons danced to life. Looked like they would dance there forever, too dark to fade. “Your turn,” he said, floating the Frisbee's characters across the grass and against the wall where they fell. He took a seat on the Bronco's tailgate. “Where you want it?”

I hadn't thought that far ahead. Feeling that if I gave the wrong answer after he'd shared the entire ritual with me would be some kind of insult—no, disappointment. I looked for his tattoos. The ones on the neck were girls' names scrolled and curled. The ones on his chest and his back he wouldn't talk about. On one arm he had two faces, one smiling and the other crying and I liked that they were clownish and sad at the same time. It made me wonder what kind of adult I'd be. I offered my right arm up, raising its weight with the other, the way you lift your hands at communion.

Mama scrubbed at it with a rough sponge that night while all the others slept low to the ground. From my place sitting on the sink, I could see the empty beds ransacked of pillows. Could see the huddled shapes on the floor where it was safer from bullets. The phone had just stopped ringing and I liked the quiet.

Mama didn't. She could hear how hard she'd been scrubbing and she went easier.

Tío Kiko wouldn't stop calling the house. My sister was out with someone else. When the new guy had come to pick her up, I asked, "Who's the fag in the Honda?" and she smacked the back of my head, clicked her dark lips and told me, "We ain't need to hang with no fucking criminals no more." From the front window I watched her drop into the passenger seat of the low car but that was just a technicality; you could see by their silhouettes in the windows she was the one giving him the directions, telling him where to go.

Now Tío Kiko's Bronco rumbled in their place.

He kept calling the house and calling out his window and waving his pistol out the window too. He said he'd shoot everyone and circled the block. He just wanted to know where she was, he kept saying.

I knew he couldn't just drive away, cause that would mean quitting. But he

couldn't sit out front just waiting on her, either. Even I knew that.

The phone rang. Mama stopped scrubbing. "Why are you crying?" she asked.

The flesh of her eyes was tired, but the eyes themselves were frantic. The only answer I could think of was, "It hurts when you scrub so hard."

Outside, tires screeched. Sirens said someone finally called the police.

"Mijo," Mama said, and started scrubbing again, softer now, barely touching me at all. I could see she wasn't in the room, not really. "He won't hurt us. He's a crazy. He's on drugs. The cops'll get him now."

But when she said that I just cried harder and it hurt in my ribs and my throat until after a while, she left me to cry sitting alone on the sink. I touched the tender skin on my arm and traced the tattoo's shape he'd drawn there. There were no faces. Not sad or happy. Like all along they'd been a couple of ghosts.

Paul Takeuchi

America Online

Dad, 49

A self-professed Luddite, Dad, ironically, has the household's most powerful computer. The tech guru at work set him up with a custom Windows Vista 64 workstation and a 30-inch monitor with plenty of real-estate for multiple browser windows. Top left is Google News, which he refreshes constantly in hopes of being on top of the next terrorist event. Top right is a website called Getting Things Done Guide to Getting Rich. Nervous about losing his job (marketing manager for a guns and ammo chain), Bob is obsessed about finding an investment strategy that will allow him to retire at 50. The bottom two webpages are for fun. On the left is Hot Swimsuit Models and bottom right is Delta Force Strike, a multiplayer guerrilla warfare game, which, after six months of play, has bestowed upon him the Commando III title. Behind these windows, on hidden tabs, are his favorite porn pages. Hot Sybian Ryders, a subscription-based vibrator masturbation website, is playing the Multiple Orgasm of the Day video, which Bob is listening to with Bose Noise-Cancelling Headphones. Simultaneously playing on the bottom right is the latest video from Horny Housewives, a website for which he has gold downloading privileges. To hide his cyber-activity, Dad uses privacy software, which continuously scrubs his surfing history, including his last three Google searches:

How many months will it take to foreclose on my house if I stop making mortgage payments?

How to achieve returns of greater than 50% in one month in the stock market.

How do I get my wife interested in sex?

The last non-spam email he received (a week ago) was from a high school sweetheart.

Dear Bob,

Thanks so much for emailing me pix of Kyla and Timmy. I can't believe they're in counseling. Timmy looks so sweet and handsome. I'm sure he doesn't actually hate you. Just a stage, if you ask me... And I love your profile pic. The gray on your temples looks distinguished, like your dad, who I must admit I had a crush on in high school.

Anyway, remember that time way back when, when we were drinking by the lake and you said, "I bet we'd have the most beautiful kids"? Well, sweetheart, now we can! No, I'm not asking for sex—though of course that might be good after all these years—no, what I really want and think I deserve is your sperm. I'm gonna send one of those kits to your office. All you gotta do is jerk off in the plastic cup, seal it up, and Fedex it to me in the coolpack. Easy peasy. I know you'll do this for me and not just because you owe me money.

Love,
Stacey

Kyla, 13

Kyla uses an old iMac and spends most of her time on Habbo Hotel, WeeWorld, MySpace, and Tumblr. She is supposed to be researching a report on slavery. In her Google search history are the following:

Frederick Douglass

Emancipation proclamation

LoveGame

Sing like Lady Gaga

Songs about divorce

How to stop your parents from divorcing

Bulimia

Faking bulimia

Pretend faking bulimia

Mom, 45

Mom uses a three-year-old Gateway desktop. She recently joined Facebook, where, to her great pleasure, she's reconnected with long lost high school and college friends. Thomas "Tommy" Masterson, a classmate from Michigan, has recently friended her and they've started an intense correspondence. In his last email, he revealed that he's getting divorced and driving to New York to look for a job. On his way he wants to stop in Cleveland to see "my one and only Suzy Sunshine," as he used to call her back when she was a cheerleader and he was a fullback. Here's her reply:

Subject: Re: Randyvous ;-)

Tom Tom,

Okay, found a Starbucks near the exit, so that should work fine. Even tho all I wanna do is go to the Days Inn and rip off your clothes. LOL. God, all this time I thought you had kids and were happily married! Yeah, Bob has just totally shut down emotionally. Can't deal with the kids, can't deal with money. Every evening after dinner, he goes to his office and drinks a 6-pack while surfing the net. The romance between us died years ago—not that it was ever as hot as between U&I! God, do I miss those times we drove to the lake and smoked a joint and talked about the stars and living in NYC. You wanted to work on Wall Street and I wanted to be a model. To retire at 40 and move to Paris and never ever have kids—*hah!* Weren't we the beautiful dreamers?

Timmy, 14

Timmy spends most of his time gaming on an Xbox 360 and uses his father's old Dell laptop for everything else. He lurks on Twitter and Tumblr, and occasionally posts on message boards for Resident Evil, Grand Theft Auto, and Manhunt. In his Google search history are the following:

mlk assassination
i have a dream
dreamers torrent
is christy leeland johnson a virgin?
christy leeland johnson IM address
sext christy leeland johnson
hot pussy cleveland
cheap blowjob cleveland
how to blow yourself
taste of cum
am I gay
dog style
rape videos
suicide bomber videos
DIY IED
columbine

Anna Arov is a Canadian/Russian poet who has been living in Holland for eleven years. She is one of the poetry editors for the literary journal *Versal*. Anna organizes and emcees *Salon des Mots*, the translocal poetry show based in Utrecht as well as the International Room for the Dutch annual poetry festival *Huis van de Poezie*. She has performed throughout Europe and the Netherlands at various festivals and poetry podiums. Anna's published work includes *Observatory*, a collection of poems illustrated by Leon M. Dekker, as well as poems in journals, CDs and in combination with exhibited art.

DeMisty D. Bellinger, a Wisconsin native, has an MFA from Southampton College and is now working on a PhD in English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In the past, she has volunteered as a reporter for Milwaukee's *Riverwest Currents*, written columns for the *Lincoln Journal Star*, and contributed to *Lincoln's Star City Blog*. Her fiction can be found online at *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *LITSNACK*, *Wilderness House Review* and is forthcoming in *Touch: The Journal of Healing*. DeMisty enjoys reading and studying working class literature, women's literature and African-American literature. She lives in Lincoln with her husband, twin daughters and an eventual cat.

Megan M. Garr is an American poet and the founder and editor of the literary & art journal *Versal*. Her chapbook, *The Preservationist Documents* is forthcoming from Pilot Books. She lives in Amsterdam with her partner, artist Shayna Schapp.

Robert Lee Emigh III is an undercover emo kid from Flint, Michigan who spent his childhood watching *Voltron* and *My Little Pony*, and likes to think all of that's obvious, given the nature of his writing. He'll have his MFA from the University of Colorado at Boulder in May, 2011.

Brian Foley is the author of the chapbooks *The Constitution* (Horseless Press, 2011) & *The Black Eye* (Brave Men Press, 2010). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in ActionYes, Columbia Poetry Journal, Poor Claudia, Typo, H_NGM_N & elsewhere. He is co-editor of Saltgrass, curates the jubilat/Jones reading series, and with EB Goodale, runs Brave Men Press.

Alicia Gomez grew up in El Paso, Texas. She studied English at the University of Notre Dame, earned an MFA in Poetry from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and currently teaches in Denver, CO.

Melissa Jones was born and raised in Oakland, California. She received her B.A in English from the University of San Francisco and is now in her second year at Mills College pursuing her MFA in poetry. She is currently working on her thesis concerning the place and culture in Oakland. She has been published in The Womanist Journal, A Women of Color Journal at Mills College, and in Torch Literary Arts Journal. In the future she would like to work on publishing her work and continue to develop her craft after graduating.

Tim Kahl [<http://www.timkahl.com>] is the author of *Possessing Yourself* (Word Tech, 2009). His work has been published in Prairie Schooner, Indiana Review, Ninth Letter, Notre Dame Review, The Journal, Parthenon West Review, and many other journals in the U.S. He appears as Victor Schnickelfritz at the poetry and poetics blog The Great American Pinup (<http://greatamericanpinup.wordpress.com/>) and the poetry video blog Linebreak Studios [<http://linebreakstudios.blogspot.com/>]. He is also editor of Bald Trickster Press and is the vice president of The Sacramento Poetry Center. He currently teaches at The University of the Pacific.

Nick Kimbro teaches creative writing at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he is also working on an MFA. You can read more of his work in *Underground Voices*, *Splash of Red*, *Ghost Ocean Magazine*, *Danse Macabre*, *decomp magazinE*, *Fogged Clarity*, and (forthcoming) *Eclectic Flash and Fast Forward: A Collection of Flash Fiction*. Nick is recently engaged.

Caroline Klockslem is a graduate of Arizona State University's MFA program and a Massachusetts Cultural Council fellowship recipient. Most recent poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from *Yalobusha Review*, *The Pinch*, and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. She's an assistant poetry editor for *Black Warrior Review*.

Travis MacDonald's first book, *The O Mission Repo* is available from Fact-Simile Editions (www.fact-simile.com). His second collection, *N7ostradamus* was released by BlazeVox (<http://www.blazevox.org/index.php/Shop/search/?q=Travis+Macdonald>) in late 2010. *Basho's Phonebook*, a series of numerical translations, is available online from E-ratio (www.eratiopostmodernpoetry.com). Other poetry and prose has appeared in *580 Split*, *Alice Blue*, *Bombay Gin*, *Court Green*, *Jacket*, *Little Red Leaves*, *The Offending Adam*, *Requited*, *West Wind Review* and elsewhere. He currently lives, works and writes in the greater Philadelphia area.

Kristin McTigue & Andy Fitch teach at the University of Wyoming. Between them, they have books forthcoming from *Dalkey Archive* and *Ugly Duckling Presse*.

Christopher David Rosales is the author of *Plata o Plomo*, which recently won the McNamara Creative Arts Grant and was short-listed for the Faulkner-Wisdom Award. He is also a three-time winner of Center of the American West's Thompson Award for Western American Writing. Most recently, he has taught creative writing at the University of Colorado. In May of 2011, Rosales will be Kentucky's Arctcroft Artist- in-Residence. He has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Colorado, and is currently teaching in Boulder and working on his next novel.

Matthew Sadler is the author of *The Much Love Sad Dawg Trio* (March Street Press, 2010) and *Tiny Tsunami* (Flying Guillotine Press, 2010). He currently lives in Detroit.

Paul Takeuchi has been published in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Word Riot*, *Tokyo Journal*, *The New York Times*, and has had award-winning stories appear in *Cutthroat* and *The Sonora Review*. His first novel, *The Hashimoto Complex*, was awarded Second Runner-Up in the 2009 William Wisdom-William Faulkner Novel Contest. And this past summer, one of his long short stories was shortlisted for *The Southern Indiana Review's* Thomas A. Wilhelmus Award.

