SHORT VINE

Spring 2011

Founding Editor
Katie Harshock

Fiction Editors
Chelsie Bryant
Brian Kittrell

Poetry Editors
Ryan Victoria McCord Sweeney
Nikola Pajic

Logo Design
Luke Mayle

Graduate Advisor
Peter Grimes

Faculty Advisor
Michael S. Hennessey

http://shortvinejournal.com
© 2011 the respective authors

Short Vine is the Undergraduate literary journal of the English Department at the University of Cincinnati. It is published by the George Elliston Poetry Fund and sponsored by the Elliston Foundation and the Department of English. No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher. All copyright reverts to individual authors upon publication.

Printed in Cincinnati, Ohio.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Allendorf</td>
<td>Because I Was Susceptible Reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd Covalcine</td>
<td>After August Comes September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Crum</td>
<td>Statuesque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Miller</td>
<td>Katrina Cough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell Redder</td>
<td>The Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three Cs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariana Rinehart</td>
<td>Conundrum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>601 Lowell Avenue, Apt. 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan Sherman</td>
<td>Souvenir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because I Was Susceptible

Irretrievable as a specific
Crash from a specific cymbal,
The fly lands and cements
My fidelity to that moment

When you parked your car by the pharmacy,
Tilted your head like a dog and kissed me.
Now you turn the bright
Light to a dim light,
Balance a half-eaten apple on the fireplace
And admire your own paintings.
The storm sirens sound, the weather is severe
Once in winter I whispered in your cauliflower ear
And watched the sparks fly
As you took off your clothes.
Lover, who never knew
My favorite color or meal,

I crumble the papier-mâché crow we made and cough,
Drink and drink and drink my Maker’s on rocks.
Reconstruction

Alexander Allendorf

After the last lover, I grew delicate
Without realizing it,
Made myself flashcards with words
Like accident
And spent the weekends
Perfecting my posture
In darkness.

Every morning, when there was still a tooth
Of hope, I’d gather myself in spools,
And fall back into the landscape of a fable,
Where no one gave a damn. I flopped
Like an American Remake

And made a sweatbox and papier-mâché’d
Pictures of you all over its walls,
Spent hours and days filing away
My fingerprints and reciting the names
Of every person I’ve kissed.
Salma cupped her hands under the brown dribble of water leaking from a shattered wall. A burnt sofa clung to a gaping second-story window. Jets flew low overhead, blue stars painted on their underbellies; clouds of dust choked the street. She wet her forehead and cheeks, running her fingers just under her headscarf, squinting into the sun.

The roar of the jets rolled away from her, as they banked low over the sea, turning back to make another pass. She coughed and blinked and stretched.

Sitting on the concrete breathing in the salt-sea, Salma’s clothes were old skin. Gulls hung on the sunlight above the rush and wash of the waves. She pulled the empty jugs closer to her, the hard plastic covered by a thin layer of grit. Inhaling quickly to wake herself, her nose filled with the smell of bread. Her stomach tightened itself in an angry gurgle.

Outside the shop, the children had swept the pavement clear of debris. With chalk they had drawn a rectangle divided into eight sections. Salma had watched them play x since four that morning. Now they laid in the shade beside their mothers. Salma smiled at the dirty-faced little girl sitting beside her. She held the x stone, a fine piece of smooth marble. Large eyes over thin arms crossed in front of her, the girl tilted her head into the smell of the bakery. Salma shut her eyes, lifting her nose.

“No fruit or vegetables,” Khalil said. “Only bottled water.”

The woman at the head of the line had her bread and still stuck out her hand.

“No fruit, no vegetables,” Khalil gestured with his cigarette towards the far end of the street. “Tell them.”

A wall of sandbags and tangle of barbed wire sealed off the street. Over top a cluster of steel drums, each with a blue star painted on it, the muzzle of a machine gun emerged.

“Nothing till Abu Ammar is gone,” Khalil said.

The line began to move and Salma stood, carrying her empty jugs in one hand. Khalil took money, wrapping pieces of
flatbread in newspaper. Salma squeezed her hands, hunching her shoulders as she turned her back to the street.

“He is leaving,” Salma heard. The little girl stood at her hip.

“Abu Ammar is leaving, yes, habibi.” Salma touched her cheek.

“Kamal.”

“Kamal could not come,” Salma said. “He is resting.”

The little girl looked to Khalil then over her shoulder, down the street, the corners of her mouth playing up and down. She placed the stone in Salma’s hand.

“This is Kamal’s.” Her eyes followed a distant jet. “He is leaving.”

Between the buildings at the other end of the street was the sea, and south along the shore the harbor where Abu Ammar would leave the city. Abu Ammar would leave and afterwards the rest of them. Salma squeezed the stone till its single sharp edge cut her fingers.

Khalil waited at the counter. Salma raised her hand with the stone. His eyes bulged at her and he threw his hands open. She set the stone on the counter and showed her hand again. He gestured with his fingers impatiently. Setting the jugs down, she pulled the gold band off and set it on the counter. He looked it over and weighed it on a scale beside him. All of Salma’s fingers rested naked on the counter, the nails broken, the skin chapped. They didn’t look like hers. And then there was a pile of bills beside them and the water a few feet away and she snatched the bills up quickly, along with the stone and the stack of bread folded in newspaper from Khalil’s hand.

In a rush she turned, taking one, two steps away from the shop. She saw the blue star at the end of the street, the sandbags and steel drums. She was thirsty, standing in the board.

The stone fell with a thud into the first square. Hopping on one foot, she kicked the stone at the same time, into the next square. Rapidly, she jumped to the next and the next, the piece of marble sliding easily to the end of the board. She bounded out of the rectangle, glaring at the end of the street. Breathing harshly, she reached for the stone, but her hand was like something newly-returned to her that she had forgotten the purpose of.

The little girl applauded. Salma clutched the newspaper, crushing the bread within. She straightened up, pressing the bread to her chest. Turning back, she wrapped a plastic bag from her pocket round the bread and stone and retrieved her empty containers.
Hurrying along the edge of the buildings, her muscles ached from waiting in line. Soon would come the call to prayer. But for the gulls, the sky was empty. Her heart raced to think that the jets were gone. She wanted to walk slowly, to enjoy the open air, to pray where she was when the time came. But there was Kamal. And moments like these were wet paper.

The plastic jugs bouncing against her legs, she climbed over a broken wall at the top of an embankment. One slipped from her hands, skittering down shattered concrete. She snatched at it quickly, leaning too far and following it down. Her legs kicked under her as she tried to keep from falling. Jumping from slab to slab, Salma made it to the bottom in a stagger.

The women at the railing looked over their shoulders, and bent back to the ropes pooled at their knees.

Retrieving the fallen jug from a pile of bricks, Salma knelt at the railing, setting the two jugs and bread at her feet. Pulling a thin rope from one of the jugs, she tied one end round its handle, dropped the jug over the railing, and fed the rope till the jug hit the water.

Far out the sea was bright glass.

Occasionally the hands of the women clanged the railing or their feet shuffled the pavement. The distant roar of jets scraped the sky. A chatter of rifle fire buzzed away to the south where the ships filled the port. Spray speckled their cheeks. One woman hefted her containers and walked away heavily.

“Abu Ammar will be leaving soon,” one of the women nodded to the south.

They bent their heads to their tasks. Slowly, the first jug grew heavy, tugging on the rope. Salma’s knees began to hurt. The woman in front of Salma looked over her shoulder.

“Are you okay, Salma?”

Salma shrugged.

“How is Kamal?”

“Kamal is okay, Ghada, insh’Allah,” Salma said. “And Walid?”

Ghada turned away. She pulled on her rope, drawing it slowly. The cord was strong and the jug came up over the edge. She reached through the railing, grabbing it.

The woman who had spoken first had her jugs capped before her. She rested her back against the railing.

“They say Abu Ammar is going to Tunis. They are all leav-
“Not all, Rima,” Ghada said. “Not enough of them.”
“His men are going to Yemen while he goes to Tunis,” Rima said.
“And their women and children?” Salma asked.
“They will stay in Sabra and Chatila,” Rima said. “There are guarantees.”
Salma drew the rope in slowly. She used the railing as she hauled up the jug, leaning down with her weight; hand over hand, till the container appeared. She stuck her hands through the railing, gathering the jug to her. She capped it, untied the rope and tied it to the other jug, dropping it over the side.
Rima jerked her head to the eastern section of the city.
“They promise not to cross the green line.”
“And they said they wouldn’t come forty miles into the country,” Ghada said. “But they did. Then they wouldn’t enter Tyre. But they did. They bombed Saida and denied it. Now here they are and the Phalangists welcomed them into the city with flowers. So what is the green line to them?”
Ghada slapped the cap on her last jug.
“The Phalangists have the presidency,” Rima said.
Ghada scowled.
Rima rose unsteadily, her containers tied together by the rope slung across her shoulders. She headed off north along the sea. The rooftops were broken teeth in a blind face, their shadows falling thinly over her. Salma turned back to the rope that was quickly growing heavy.
A chorus of boat horns like newborn thunder lifted out of the port, chased by a rain of gunfire. Salma and Ghada watched quietly for a moment, the echoes staining the air between them.
In a voice that crumpled with the weight of buildings, Ghada said, “May he take all of August with him.”
The rope stretched across her shoulders; she turned to Salma.
“Walid died in the night.”
Ghada’s toenails were chipped; the hem of her skirt caked in old blood. The containers brushed her knees. Salma clutched the rope in both hands, nodding slightly. Ghada’s leg moved away. Salma breathed heavily a few moments.
Hands shaking, the rope taught, she leaned into it. One hand, another, the rope rubbed against the railing, a month’s worth of smoke and pain. The jug came into view under a sky that had bristled
steel for weeks. She laid her weight on the rope and reached for the jug, like digging through rubble. The rope snapped. Her head pitched against the iron railing, and she fell atop the other jug. The cap popped off, saltwater spilling.

Tears filled her eyes and she couldn’t hear for a moment. Her face and blouse were wet. She scrambled to right the jug, shaking her head, blinking. There was still more than half left in the container. She secured the cap. The rope was short now. She wiped at her face, and squeezed out her blouse.

Keeping her eyes on her feet, she picked her way up the embankment. Setting the jug in front of her, she climbed with her hands, slowly, steadily, the bag of bread with the x stone between her teeth. Abu Ammar was leaving. She need not hurry. The jug was half full and the rope was short, but there was bread and it was good to not have to hurry. At the top, she straightened and stretched.

Just off shore, ships waited like ghosts on hot glass. She looked as far as she could, but the sea was opaque and she couldn’t tell where the vessels hailed from. Salt and sea blew in her face, and knowing that the land was under her feet made her legs feel heavy once again. Sweat dribbled down her back. No matter. She set her teeth against the rest of it.

Salma walked deliberately, slowly, down the middle of the street, toward the sandbags and steel drums. Her stomach growled and her breath clawed her throat. Her head throbbed. She could feel a knot forming. A helmet moved on the other side of the barricade. The buildings gaped dryly and the sky fell through the top of the city. The blue stars painted on the drums were stolen. The basements of buildings were tombs. The schools had become tombs. The muzzle of the machine gun lowered. Hospitals were targets. Another helmet moved. Husbands, children… Salma turned down a side street, never breaking stride, one foot in front of another, the jug bouncing against her side, the bag of bread in her naked hand.

The mangled remains of the cannon slumped in the courtyard of the hospital. The painted Red Cross peeled off the walls. Inside, she found her way through the dark hall to the rooms in back. In one she stopped and placed the jug of seawater on a counter beside two bottles of mineral water. There was a sink and she tried the faucet, waiting a few moments but nothing. A voice called from the ward.

The empty steel frames of beds had been pushed aside and overturned. The windows were blown out, stripped of curtains.
Salma had swept clean the area that they used, clothing stacked neatly along the wall. A picture in a frame atop a small stack of books rested in the corner.

Salma kneeled beside the mattress on the floor, setting the bread to the side.

“Kamal, habibi,” she said. “Did you sleep? Did you read?”

“I slept, mother,” he said. He tried to lift himself, but she gently held his small body down.

She looked him over, the bandages on his arm, his chest, and his head. They were dry, stiff. Patting his thin arm, she stood, taking his cup with her.

In the first room she poured water from a bottle into Kamal's cup. In another cup she poured seawater from the jug. Kamal called again. She carried both cups with her.

“Hayati, drink,” she said. Lifting his head, she placed his cup to his lips. “Slowly, there's plenty of water.” He took slow, long sips, looking up at her. Salma smiled at him. He drank half the cup and she laid his head back, brushing the hair from his forehead.

“Your head,” he said.

“Nothing, habibi. I fell, that’s all.”

She opened the bag, unwrapped the newspaper, and extracted a piece of bread. Tearing it in half, she handed a piece to Kamal. He took small bites, the piece of bread flopping over in his hand. She held up the x stone.

“There were children at the shop. I even played x,” she said.

“Was Walid there?”

“No, he wasn’t.”

“Is Abu Ammar gone?”

“How do you know about Abu Ammar?”

“I heard people talking outside the window,” he said.

“And what did they say?” she asked.

“They said he was leaving and he was taking his men with him.”

“Well, it's true,” Salma said, rubbing his arm. “He will leave soon.”

He looked at her for a long time, his eyes like fish in a shallow bowl. She rubbed his arm lightly with the tips of her fingers, and then touched his cheek and chin.

“What, habibi?”

“Are you going to drink your water?”

“In a minute,” she said. “The grocer said he may have some
fruit and vegetables soon.”
   His face was washed, the eyes red and the lids falling across them heavily.
   “Is it over?” He yawned. His eyes opened. “Did you win?”
   “Did I win, hayati?”
   “At x.”
   His small chest heaved, and then rolled smoothly, like a sea that swallows a ship and is sated. She ran her hand along his cheek and arm until she noticed her bare finger. She kissed him lightly.

   From the balcony at the back of the ward, Salma watched the port to the south a long time. The sea was calm, empty underneath. Eventually, the air erupted once more with horns and gunfire. Flags snapped in the breeze and from the crowd of boats a ferry emerged, flanked by two warships; its nose jutting forward and up like a finger; escaping, slipping away like a small laugh; a beautiful vessel that far enough out stood atop the waves, one size for a long time, and then was nothing at all.

   Soon the call to prayer would drift across the city. Long before that, Salma had begun to shake involuntarily. The x stone fell from her fingers something less than a toy. With both hands she brought the cup of seawater to her lips, drinking to distract herself. She knew. As she prayed she knew; as the cool of the evening came like a stranger; as the sun slipped quietly into the sea, a great red egg, dipping into and spilling across the water.
i promise not to break you, you're worth more to me than gold:
   a rosary, a necklace, a Pope caught in his robe.
my duty as a metallic preacher, is to fill your mind with lead
i'll weigh you down with misfortune and starve you with length dread
i am the Son, the Father, the Holy Ghost; I am the living dead.
a light that shines through every pore in your translucent skin;
a corpse without a soul, where do i begin,
to compare you to such things: a star, a lamb, a jew?
   No words will do to you what i do.
i am your God, believe in me, don't leave me here to rot;
i am not one to rise from heavy stone; a wooden cross;
i will starve on bread and wine, the blood of a Godless Lot.
Katrina Cough

In August, Katrina hit. The lights went out. The birds flew away. The people flew, too. For months New Orleans was an empty bowl. In January some of the people came back. Some of the lights turned on. The people were students and the lights university lights. But the birds stayed away because the birds knew better.

I sat in class while the professor called roll. American Literature: Tuesdays and Thursdays at two. Fifteen of us in a classroom meant for thirty and a professor with a wrinkly forehead like Moby-Dick’s. “You can’t hide from me,” he liked to say. Really liked to say. He must’ve said it five times the first day of class. Today was only the second day.

I missed my name because I was making eyes at this boy across the way. Professor Snare plowed on through his list. I didn’t notice I’d been left behind until my boy chimed, “Here!” Vogler, Johannes. Shaggy hair. Tight jeans. He had the sniffles and a bottle of orange juice.

“Did I miss anyone?”
“Me.”
“Who’s me?” Snare squint-eyed us.
I raised my hand barely over the desk’s horizon, “Me, Eva Lee.”

“Well.” He smiled with teeth, “Me Tom Snare. Me big chief English.”

The class giggled. I hid my hands under my thighs. No way would I look to the left, to Johannes. Since moving in two weeks ago I’d been tongue-tied. Now this. I guess I wasn’t used to talking. Too sensitive. Softer than a sponge.

But help came quick when a girl raised her hand and, like, asked if, like, the quizzes would be like, open book.

Snare said, “No. Just memorize everything.”

Laughing at her, I looked at Johannes, who was laughing at her, looking at me. We stopped laughing. I looked down and away, then down and back. He scanned my eyes, lips, tits, hips, thighs, ankles, toes, ankles, thighs, hips, tits, lips, eyes. Then he looked away.
Our game might’ve gone on forever. Realizing this, I wanted to stop. Not about to wear out a good thing. Not me. So I paid attention to Snare as he belittled the Puritans and their silly, earnest poetry. I daydreamed about tattoos I wanted—I didn’t have any—and drew them in the margins of my notes. Except I can’t draw, so I had a lop-sided heart, a misshapen naked girl, and a fleur-de-lis looking more like an ink blot test. Class ended.

“Read!” Snare called, “You can’t hide from me!”

In everybody’s rush to escape Snare’s gaze, a desperate bottleneck formed at the door. I pushed my way behind Johannes. He turned around, found my eyes, and bit his bottom lip. I bit mine.

Out in the empty hall we followed each other. Walking side by side silently, I liked him. I liked his quiet. Got excited, thinking we might hook up without a single word spoken. A real soul mate. But then he cleared his throat to ask the most typical question. The question all of us asked each other, over and over. The lost boys and girls in New Orleans constantly asking: “Hey. So what’d you do during Katrina?”

My dad and big brother drove me to New Orleans while I slept in the back seat, dreaming heavy and waking up in a sweat on I-10 South. When I woke I had a text from my best friend, Kate: “Don’t get blown away!” What the fuck did that mean, I wondered. That night we walked Bourbon Street, where my brother disappeared and my dad and I ate slimy pizza off paper plates, gawking. There were loose women and pickpockets. There was a club advertising LIVE SEX ACTS. I held on to the sleeve of his flannel like a little kid. I kept slipping in beer and worse on the street. My dad took it well, and my brother turned up at the hotel late saying, “I love this place, dearly.” That killed me. Dearly. “I saw a midget stripper slip in her own puke,” he said, “You picked good, kid.” I guess every one of us Lees loves a freak show.

Doomed move-in day: August 28th. I had it all. Extra-long twin mattress pad. Extra-long twin sheets. Extra-long plastic cover so I didn’t catch meningitis from the dorm issued extra-long mattress. Shower caddy. Mini-fridge. A new bike. A new bike lock. My books packed preciously in too-heavy boxes. My clothes, pillows, shoes, hangers, notebooks, on and on. We made short work of moving in. My dorm was girls only with French windows and French doors opening onto balconies. Dad kept waxing on about my luck. I was
first in my family to make it to college. I’d only applied to Tulane. Secretly, I was escaping.

Standing in triumph with hands-on-hips above the great piles of my new life, wondering out loud about my roommate, someone knocked at the door. “It’s her!” I said, flinging the door open.

“Are you my roommate?” I asked the girl who’d knocked.

“No,” she pointed at her t-shirt where R.A. was printed huge, “I’m here to tell you that the university is closing. There’s a mandatory evacuation in effect,” she handed me a flyer and, by way of apology, shrugged and said, “They just now decided.” She walked away.

We stood reading, stunned. The thing named Katrina, spinning enormous. Collision imminent. We honestly hadn’t noticed. Too busy thrilling about college to turn on a T.V. or radio. A pack of Midwestern clowns. But now we noticed. My dad and brother and I stepped out onto my balcony to look up at the sky, blue as an eye and cloudless. We looked down at the parking lot where half the families moved out and half moved in, bumping and confused. We looked up again, birds flying north. We looked down again when my brother said, “Look!” He pointed to a sewer drain. Thick rats were scrambling out and running along the curb, following the birds. My dad said, “Listen!”

There was a low, long mournful sound we hadn’t noticed before. Roaring and screeching and this low, long sound.

“It’s the zoo,” I said, “The zoo’s next door.”

Giraffes, seals, lions, and elephants: crying.

“They know,” I said, savoring it, this moment of broad, unrepeateable drama. Not yet realizing I’d be trapped and crying back home. My escape failed.

Like someone pushed rewind, we put my shit back in the car twice as fast. The bike, my books. Extra-long everything. We drove for eighteen hours north until we landed in Ohio. I watched Katrina on T.V.

“Pretty cute,” Johannes said of my story. He’d ridden the storm out safely in Texas, hadn’t even bothered to come down. Nobody from Tulane had actually been there. Tulane kids are rich bastards, in general. Not me, though. I was on more scholarships than I could count. They pelted me with them at graduation.

I hung around while Johannes smoked a cigarette behind the English building. I didn’t smoke, but I liked the smell. Reminded me
of boys. A giant yellow drainage tube hung off the building, pumping water and bad air out of a window on the second floor. The tubes were everywhere, like a race of monster worms sucking on the city.

“I like the part about the elephants,” he offered, when I didn’t respond.

“Yeah, the zoo thing usually makes me want to cry.” I wasn’t great at conversation.

He stared at me, unreadable. I brushed a long strand of hair back behind my ear.

“I’m sure they’re okay,” he said. He ashed his cigarette into the dirty pool of water around the tube’s heavy base. The whole machine vibrated, the happy worm humming.

“Kind of loud,” I said.

“What?”

When I leaned in to complain he caught me around the waist so suddenly I laughed. He kissed my neck once, and let me go. “Here. Tuesday’s a long way away,” he said, handing me a torn piece of notebook paper with his number. I should say he wasn’t the first guy to do this. Not the first that week, not even the first in that English building. Not that I’m hot, but I made a lot of eyes in class.

“Don’t be obvious,” he said, “I’ve got a girlfriend.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said, dropping the paper into my purse.

He was a little pink in the face from the cold he’d been nursing in Snare’s. The orange juice on his desk was probably a gift from her. Goddamnit. He wasn’t the first with a girlfriend, either.

But if you want to blame anyone, blame me. My parents love each other. My grandparents even love each other. Nobody was more nourished with love than your humble narrator. Some babies come out all smeared with sunshine, and light up rooms and lives and all that shit. Some are born bad and drawn to shadows and nastiness and backs of buildings. I liked to think that was me, Eva Lee.

By the time the last huff of Katrina blew into Ohio, downing trees and tossing tornadoes out like frisbees, Tulane cancelled the semester. My freshman year on hold, my peers tucked safely away in their waterless schools, I sat at home with nothing to do for a month while my social life gasped and clutched and died. I mean, not that I had much of one before. I would’ve preferred to drown in New Orleans than be in Ohio, thinking about what I didn’t want to think about ever again. To distract myself, I got two full-time jobs as a sales
girl at Patty-Cakes, the mall lingerie store, and as a nude model at the Art Academy. I wanted the copyright on sex. Never could figure out which job made me worse.

At Patty-Cakes, I stayed miserable. Surprise: I’m not that great at sales. To make things worse, I realized quickly that Jen (all five of my managers were named Jen) would never move me out of Naughty Mistakes, where for twelve hours a day I worked alone, wading in the swamp of crotchless panties and back-seam stockings. There were other sections to Patty-Cakes where girls worked in teams. I could see them from my own dark corner: Muses, where they kept their lacy silky classy numbers, and Muffin, panties with cheeky slogans on the ass aimed at high school girls. But, no. My place was in the back with the slutty Santa skirts, the widow makers, the rhinestone bras glittering in the murk like pirate treasure. How to fold a body thong? Or a bra made out of two red ribbons? I didn't know. Each day the garters on the walls closed in on me like kudzu vines.

Patty-Cakes didn’t offer much distraction, but the Art Academy offered transcendence. My job: to do literally, nothing. I made the perfect object. I’d taught myself in those first weeks to think of nothing, to suppress every sneeze, ignore each itch, breathe slow as a lizard, and stare unblinking. Sweet meditation. No customers mooing at me, no Jen-manager with empty eyes spouting corporate-speak. The only job I ever had where I didn’t break the dress code. I took modeling nude too seriously. I’d pose until I fainted without even a warning, dropping unconscious from the pedestal like a shot bird. I must’ve scared them all to death.

At the end of my shift at Patty-Cakes or Art Academy I’d drive away. The next day, I'd reappear at work. There was oblivion in between, as if at night I drove straight into the river to be kept safe by a sympathetic water god, emerging from the depths each morning with a flooded engine, my tires tracking sand down the highway, little fish caught in the grill.

After class I sat on the ledge of my dorm’s roof, fingering Johannes’ number, watching girls come and go. I didn't have any girlfriends in New Orleans. Or anywhere. I had them once. The last was Kate.
I’d been at home, standing hands on hips triumphant observ-
ing my closet of stolen lingerie when she called.

eva!

“Kate!” I said, trying to match enthusiasm.

“Is modeling working out?” The job had been her idea. She
said art schools were always desperate. But she didn’t wait for my
response, “Guess what? Remember I was telling you about Nick?”

“That guy that asked you out, right?” Kill me.

“No that’s Eric. Nick? He wears a top hat? Licked my face on
the first day?” Kate laughed, so happy at art school. She’d got the only
girl’s room on a floor of boys in her dorm, “all freaks” she’d told me
with a thrilled whisper. Since leaving Ohio, her voice had a dreamy
air, and her laugh was, I thought, affected.

“What about him?”

“He asked me out today!”

“Yay,” Deadpan, “I’ve got to go.”

“And like, obviously, I said no. Because of Dan. Do you really
have to go?”

I clenched my teeth, “No.”

“Anyway, Dan’s coming home on leave December first, and
I’ll still be in school. I told him to come by Patty-Cakes to see you.”

“Dan and I—“

“I know you don’t get along.” But she didn’t know why.

Because Dan’s little brother, you know, raped me at this lame
party. Kate was there, flirting with Dan. I hate this part. I hate this
part. Such bullshit. I’d flirted with him, out of boredom, but I didn’t
think—didn’t want—wasn’t, anyway. He held me down. I’d never had
sex before and all. I’d never before. And so. But.

He’d told me afterwards, “Don’t tell Kate.” Trying to keep it from his
brother, of course. I’d done what he wanted. He got what he wanted
from me, again.

I didn’t tell her. Tried to at the party, clutching at her arm to
get her attention, but she was miles away, with Dan, and shook me off
like a crawling bug. Her mistake. Left alone with the feeling and the
fact and the blood I made three out of one. Dan, Kate, and him. If I’d
only escaped Ohio, it could’ve ended there.

Kate went on, “You two will be fine. He wants to see you.
Okay? Hold on—” Kate giggled and in the background, guys laughed.
They’re laughing over something dumb, I told myself, like Dungeons
& Dragons.

“I’d better go,” she said, “Thanks for doing this.”
“Wait,” I said, then heard the click. Bitch. I threw the phone onto my bed and went back into my closet. Using only cleverness, fitting rooms, and a massive black pea coat, I’d five-fingered the lingerie from Naughty Mistakes. I had a little Noah’s Ark of panties and bras, garters and stockings. A stockpile. Behind me, hanging on the walls, stacked on the floor were all my favorite pictures of me from the Art Academy. Naked me in paint, oils, and pastels. In pencils and pens. I just had to ask. Asking flattered the artists. They’d hand anything over. Yes, I’d be ready for sex when sex found me again.

On the ledge in New Orleans, watching girls come and go, I felt I recognized a few. Not from class or the dorms or anything, but from the way they stalked on high heels, the sun’s shadows making empty sockets of their eyes, or the ones you could see for a split second, lifting the blinds with a finger to look out the window before snapping them shut. I knew these girls.

I called Johannes and we set something up. I wouldn’t call it a date. The big past time for kids at Tulane was housebreaking. Easy and fun. There were entire subdivisions of abandoned houses. I knew of a good one from an earlier misadventure. I said let’s go to Fontainebleau, where I’d followed a boy the week before class started. I mean, I didn’t mention that part to Johannes. We said we’d meet there the very next day.

Fontainebleau is a neighborhood of cinematic destruction, where the high water mark runs across the old mansions as thick as my eyeliner. I waited for Johannes inside the blue gates, but he never came. I gave the kid all the time in the world, tossing around coconuts, trying to crack them, thinking I hope he wears a leather jacket, I hope he remembers to bring a condom, I hope, I hope. Finally, I called. No answer. I figured fuck him and decided to be obvious. I called and called. I sent texts. I got needy and then sad. Then mad. I walked home alone.

Tuesday was a long way away.

Alone in my dorm, I schemed. My roommate, whoever she was, never came to Tulane. I had a lot of room for myself. I decided to ignore him more completely than he’d ever been ignored. I knew how to ignore whole classrooms of pierced, staring art students, to ignore teachers pointing out the shape of my breasts with a yardstick,
to ignore my own arms and legs as they steadily fell numb. Johannes wouldn’t be a problem for the likes of me. He’d come up to me all sorry and pathetic. I’d walk away. Psh. Ignored.

He ruined my plans by coming in not at all sorry, ignoring me, and took a seat in the desk right in front of me. That Tuesday there were only ten of us, instead of fifteen. Before Snare came in the class spoke in rumors.

“I heard there’s a weird disease around.”
“It’s the air. It’s spreading mold from the abandoned houses.”
“It’s the water. They chlorinated the water after Katrina, and now we’ll all get sick.”
“My roommate has it. She can’t stop coughing. She coughed blood.”
“My girlfriend has it.” Guess who said that.
“Somebody said it’s T.B.”
“Is that contagious?”
Etcetera. Then Snare burst in, announcing that today he would be fielding our questions on Walden as Henry David Thoreau himself. He wouldn’t respond unless we addressed him correctly, “So I hope you’ve read. You can’t hide from Thoreau.”

After class Johannes and I ignored each other. I couldn’t expose myself by raging in his face about what a good ignorer I could be. In the next class on Thursday there were only seven students. Johannes sat in front of me. And the next class there was five. They called it Katrina Cough. Something like strep and mono and bronchitis rolled together with this terrible cough that made a person sound like a raptor. Whatever it was, the school wouldn’t acknowledge the plague after all the money they’d lost on the hurricane. Class continued. Johannes still showed up to sit in front of me with his orange juice, coughing. Everybody coughed now. I wasn’t going anywhere but Snare’s. I got too weak to walk to my other classes. All I could do was lay my head on my desk with my eyes closed, smelling the cigarettes on his clothes. This, I knew, was a bad turn.

But I could outwait anyone, anything. By December, a month before Tulane reopened, the teachers at the Art Academy had me posing in their private studios or for their art clubs. The best students hired me. They paid me out of pocket. Timidly, they’d asked how I
held so still and for so long. The other models move. What do you think about, Eva?
   Nothing.
   If I’m patient, my mind gives up. Releases me.
   Nakedness became so much more comfortable than wearing clothes. I hated clothes. They disfigured me. Interrupted my curves. That’s what modeling taught me: to be patient and naked.

   So I waited for Johannes to turn around.
   My skirts got shorter, my socks got longer: knee highs, thigh highs, and fishnets.
   There were four students in Snare’s.
   Then there were three.
   The last Thursday in January, I woke up. My eyes were crusted shut. I felt my way blindly to the sink in my room and splashed warm water on my face until I could peel open one eye, then the other. Then eye drops. I coughed my way around my dorm, coughed into my clothes, and coughed out the door. I coughed down the street to the English building and coughed my way up the stairs. I coughed into Snare’s class, where Johannes was coughing behind dark sunglasses. Snare coughed into the room.
   “My two best students,” he said.
   We looked back at him.
   “That was a joke.”
   Johannes stifled a cough.
   “Are you trying to kill me?” Snare asked, “I can’t figure it out.”
   “At least we’re not—” cough, cough, “—hiding.” I said.
   “And I kind of respect you for that, Eva. So get the hell out of my classroom. Come back when you’re better.”
   We didn’t move. It’s not that I wasn’t going to move, it just took me a lot of time to gather the strength to get up again.
   “Then I’ll go,” Snare said and, coughing, left us.
   Johannes finally turned around. “Are we still friends?” he asked.
   “No.” I said. I popped a lozenge in my mouth and sucked viciously.
   For a while the only sound was the click of the candy against my teeth.
   “Is it bad?” I asked, “Your eyes?”
He lifted the glasses, eyes red as stoplights.
“Can I see your dorm?” he asked.
“Okay.”

Dan walked into Patty-Cakes on his leave from Iraq, all alone. The girls working in Muffin chorused hi, giggling at each other after he wandered by. The rare male. The army had shaved off his long hair but he looked good from all that soldiering, if a little red with embarrassment. He guessed wrong and looked for me in Muses. Quickly, I tugged at my two big braids until one elastic band snapped and the other flew invisible into the folded thongs. I shook my hair loose, looked in the closest mirror, wet my lips and waited for him, half-hiding behind the flirting mannequins. I remembered reading Kate his love letters from boot camp that summer while housesitting for her family—they were always away on vacation. I blushed to think of all those clichés in a guy’s scratchy handwriting.

“Eva?” He’d discovered me and hugged me tightly to him, “This place is…awesome.”
“I guess you’ve been away too long.”
“I missed this, that’s for fucking sure,” he said, looking around him with shining eyes.
“Well if you find something that fits I can get you a discount.”
He just smiled, “When do you get off?”

In my great white car, Dan turned the heat on max. Soon the vent’s hot breathing made me sweat, but Dan still shivered. “I’m used to sand,” he said, “I might die if a snowflake hit me.”

I shed layers, driving aimlessly through Loveland, our hometown. Dan pointed out new buildings, changes, destructions since he’d been in the desert, new to me too since I’d turned inward and stopped seeing what was in front of me. We drove the antique strip, we drove the high school campus, we stopped at an independent toy store—the only shop open downtown at 11. Inside we took turns sticking our hands into a hologram, a barrel of putty, a gyroscope, a 3-D puzzle. We admired the jet pack behind the counter, not for sale. We disappointed the old proprietor by leaving empty-handed.

Back in the car, Dan asked, “Do you smoke?”
“No.”
“Want to share a cigarette?”
“Okay.”
We drove through a donut shop. He bought coffee for us, before we could light up.
“I’ve never had coffee before.”
“You and Kate were always the pure ones.”
“I’m not pure.”
He looked at me, steady. “I mean, no drugs or drinking. No guys. You hated me when I started with Kate.”
“Let’s not start with Kate, okay?”
He shrugged, “Let’s find a place to park.”
I hesitated, “So we can drink and smoke?”
“Yeah, you’ll be too distracted to drive,” he leaned back into his seat.

My car’s interior was squeaky blue leather. The seat complained with every shift, so I could see Dan—peripheral, squeaking—without seeing him on the unlit back roads. I circled back to the high school, not the front lot or the back lot, but down a maintenance path that appeared in the dark just for us, cupid flying ahead of the car sprinkling gravel. I parked at a dead end.

“Are they building here?” Dan asked, handing me my coffee.
“I think this is where they bury the bodies. You know, bad students. Overdosed cheerleaders.”
He ignored me. Looking out the fogging window he said, “Want to hear how I almost died?”
“Yeah.”
“Not fighting or anything. I work in the hangar. But there was a rocket attack at night, and one exploded beside the barracks. When I woke up the next morning this wicked-looking piece of metal shrapnel, sharp as fuck, was embedded in a helicopter windshield that someone had left on the other side of the wall, like, right where I sleep. The walls are real thin and all. So if that hadn’t been there. I just stood looking at the thing. I kind of left my body, staring at it for so long.”
I wanted to touch him.
“But, don’t tell Kate,” he said.
“Sure. God forbid Kate ever gets hurt.”
“I meant—”
“God forbid Kate ever go through anything. She’s got to be protected, right? Her innocence? I mean, no matter what, I should
never tell her anything that might upset her. Her mind is just too fucking precious to survive a single mean thought.”

“I thought you were friends?” He seemed calm, despite me. “No. She’s cheating on you,” I said, lying, “She calls me to brag. She’s a slut.”

Dan stayed quiet for a long time. I knew better than to break a silence. But then he passed me the cigarette. “I figured,” he said, “She doesn’t write me back anymore. She didn’t even come home to see me.”

“That’s just because of school,” I relented, feeling almost bad. “Who cares? We never even fucked.”

I coughed on the smoke. “Yeah, who cares?” I let him take the cigarette back and ran my hand over his new, severe haircut. The leather squeaked as he leaned in to kiss me. After all that stealing from Patty-Cakes, I wasn’t even wearing panties.

There’d been others, but sex with Johannes reminded me of Dan. The pleasure they took in their guilt like scratching a poison ivy rash. That was me. The rash. I hadn’t seen Johannes’ girlfriend but I assumed she was like Kate, a distant princess. While I felt like a statue that only came to life to fuck.

Johannes left my dorm late, worrying about his girl. We’d fallen asleep in bed, perfectly naked, too tired after sex to even cough. I thought, like with Dan, that he wouldn’t talk to me again. But in the morning when I opened my door I tripped over a pile of food. There were cans of soup, chili, fruit, candy and a note from Johannes that said, “Stay Alive.”
The Butcher

Maxwell Redder

I cut up meat
    sizzle in
Grease on pan
    Sit and sniff in the kitchen.
I cut up paint-
    Chips to compose
A construction
    Of art that many viewers tend to question.
I cut up poems
    Paste them around
    Different word follies
    Bounce and arrange.
I cut up time
    Into schedules
    Take the pieces
    Collage them into a way to spend my day.
Three Cs
Maxwell Redder

“Clever, Conceited, Contrived”
— Merlene Schain

See one paint stroke, you’ve seen them all.

See two colors, you’ve seen nothing
Like the twenty I make dance on canvas.

See three opinions, you’ve obliterated
The artist humbly speaking
Truth into his collection of constructions.
Conundrum

Ariana Rinehart

Mosaic Grecian tiles, chipped enamel—
a decayed, dilapidated fresco, disintegrating.
Its stark white veining littering these ten semicircular palettes-
gnarled, half-bitten, asymmetrical.
Bordered and equally secured by this yellowish-peach
and creased, leathery peel.
Highlighted by white-ash pointillism,
arcs of minute pallid scales
licking the chapped and cross-hatched edges
of these waterproof branches—staggered and opposable.
601 Lowell Avenue, Apt. 18

Ariana Rinehart

Let them be a durable

Stencil about me—definitive, hard.
— Albert Goldbarth, “Object Functionsong”

Leaning precariously over the rust-varnished edge of the kitchen sink, above a tumultuous sea—all chopsticks, teacups, smeared butter knives. Freezer-burnt snap peas—snickering harlequin lumps hissing on my plate. Another menial dish for the disposal beast’s insatiable appetite. Let me be empty.

They gawk. This flank of ringed crows atop their titanium alloy power line. As index strokes tongue, fingers uvula, penetrates pharynx. I cannot hide from them. Let me be weightless.

They mock me. These Stonehenge, stone-faced fixtures—lacquered in their pitted, mahogany trappings. And the plush brute’s thick arms—tackily clad in a cinnamon microfiber skin. Mimic the sharp crest of your slender back, the slight bend of your thin wrists. All still, all riveted, all guarding this prison cell studio apartment: 601-18.

Captive among this fleet of chipped tea-stained mugs, the small armada of sullied washcloths manning the molding ledge of the porcelain tub. These are my inmates; they, too, are guilty.
Souvenir

Your scent lingers
on my hands
like a blood orange.

Fold back the skin,
suck the gorging pulp
off the rind.

No matter how much
I wash, it stays.
It’s what I take home.

Nathan Sherman