EARTHWORDS: THE UNDERGRADUATE LITERARY REVIEW showcases the best literary and artistic endeavors of students attending the University of Iowa, fosters an undergraduate literary community within Iowa City, and provides its staff members with the experience of producing a literary magazine in real time. While EARTHWORDS’ board, style, and length change every year, its dedication to promoting the creative works of the University of Iowa’s undergraduate body remains a constant in every issue.

Each piece that appears in this volume of EARTHWORDS was subject to an anonymous reading and voting process. All members of the editorial board were given the opportunity to express their opinions and vote on each selection, and staff members were required to abstain from voting on their own submissions or work they recognized. This publication has received funding from UISG and the Magid Center; it is free to University of Iowa students.

This issue of EARTHWORDS was typeset by Hannah O’Connell in the winter of 2015. The body text is Bembo Roman, with titles in Frutiger 47.
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When he turned thirty-five years old, Elvis Presley fell in love with karate. Following years of breakout albums, hit films, and a brief stint in the US Navy, Elvis Presley, King of Rock n’ Roll, decided that he loved the cheesy karate of early 70s movies. It was said that Elvis practiced karate before shows, had karate jumpsuits made for concerts, and that he made slow motion karate chops in the studio when performing such hit songs as “Can’t Help Falling in Love” and “Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear.” It was said that he watched karate movies late at night in his tremendous house, every light turned off. It was said that with his face lit only by the blue light of the television, the King of Rock n’ Roll would sit alone in his underwear, mouthing along to the words of his favorite movies. “Come at me,” he would whisper as Bruce Lee did a high kick across a California studio. “Come give me your master’s revenge.”

To many Elvis fans, this sudden turn was puzzling. How could a man who had sent girls into a fervor from moving his hips on The Ed Sullivan Show be suddenly obsessed with the discipline, goofy stances, and high kicks of 70s karate? How could he insist on being left alone for hours, demanding that films and chicken wings be sent up to his hotel room so he could consume them in the dark?

But I hold a suspicion that, were our EARTHWORDS 35 authors alive then, they would have understood this turn in Elvis. They would have understood that the campiness of Hollywood karate movies, the blatant excess, the careful precision, and the emphasis on joyful abandon all have to do with the strange process of aging that EARTHWORDS has come to terms with during its thirty-five-year run.
That perhaps the loudness and power with which Presley embraced karate resided in a deep sense that to be heard you must be loud, and to be strong you must be wild. This may account for how, in this year’s issue, you will find pieces that demonstrate such loudness and such tenderness that the King himself would blush.

From pieces about exploding manure to sudden and terrible mudslides, from the 1971 liberation wars in Pakistan to Hollywood actors transforming into rare and beautiful birds, EARTHWORDS 35 contains explosive, visceral, and talented writing: prose and poetry that demonstrate incredible vulnerability and a keen sense of humor, piercing despair and riveting joy. This year’s issue, if anything else, comes to terms with swiftness, how we remain joyful and alive, and how, after thirty-five years of campus presence, we continue to find the loud excessive precision that Iowa City deserves from its literary community.

I am proud to say that we have maintained an incredible campus presence this year, from our Hallowreading at the Deadwood Tavern to our first series of online contests, and ultimately to our determination to represent the best and most talented that the undergraduate Iowa City community has to offer. EARTHWORDS continues to find joy and life and excess in a thirty-five-year career of rock n’ roll, tenderness, and the belief that karate can still save us.

So thank you to our readers, our terrific editing team, our fantastic venues, and, of course, our tremendously talented authors. We wouldn’t be the team that we are without all of your support for this incredible project, and I look forward to high-kicking our way into the future. “Come at us,” you may find us muttering in hotel rooms, our tour bus waiting outside. “Come give us your master’s revenge.”

All the best,

David Freeman | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
# Table of Contents

1. **LAKE**  
   *Emma Van Dyke* | **Poetry** | **Editor’s Choice**

3. **BIRDMAN**  
   *Sara Crandall* | **Art**

4. **VILLAGE NEWS**  
   *Elena Bruess* | **Nonfiction**

10. **CHANGING WOMAN**  
    *Abby Peeters* | **Art**

11. **RED ROCK TOWNSHIP, C. 1850**  
    *Nathan Kooker* | **Poetry**

13. **THE WORD MADE FLESH**  
    *Megan Bowman* | **Poetry**

15. **DAY 7**  
    *Natasha Chang* | **Art**

16. **OSO MUDSLIDE**  
    *Emma Van Dyke* | **Poetry**

19. **ROSIE**  
    *Catherine Shook* | **Drama**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>HIS FATHER’S CHAIR</td>
<td>Gray Lantta</td>
<td>ART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>JAWS OF DESERT JACKALS</td>
<td>Sajid Sarker</td>
<td>FICTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>SALMON</td>
<td>Thea Pettitt</td>
<td>POETRY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>THE FOAM</td>
<td>Nathan Kooker</td>
<td>NONFICTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>LIEGENDE FRAU</td>
<td>Alexander Bradbury</td>
<td>ART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>INDIGO</td>
<td>Emma Van Dyke</td>
<td>POETRY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>LEAVING HOME</td>
<td>Carol McCarthy</td>
<td>POETRY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>CILLIAN MURPHY, FEBRUARY 2ND, 2003.</td>
<td>Gray Lantta</td>
<td>POETRY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nothing sudden is happening here.  
More is just suddenly being revealed.

— Denis Johnson
Loons are madmen, alone in crypts
of deep water

where there’s nothing to be but mad

and awake. Warm dock, lapped by lakewater

in Alaska, under the vigil chant
of a sun that never sets.

The blue tail of evening dissolving
on crisp lines of trees.

And loon says enough blankness

dives to ting its beak
on a shipwrecked spoon.

It breathes out through its feathers,
makes itself a stone.

The transformation of one thing, so wholly, to another—
some people still have the hang of it.

The Suquamish man who came to our school
would not wolf dance for us—too sacred.
I loved him for it.
Because what is madness but sprinting
to the world when it demands
your utter destruction?
What written guarantee do we have
that another mother waits,
half-crazy in love, to add you to her soul?

My mother
could cup her hands and blow

in a canoe, idle in lakewater
(I never loved so hard and true)

making of herself and her
million tender human rages

one low, shivering note.
BIRDMAN

Sara Crandall
Today, we are going to watch Judas explode.

According to some reports, the Greek economy shrank by 23% between 2008 and 2013. All the popular economists stood around and scratched their chins. No one’s ever seen those numbers. A world record, they said. Last November, the unemployment rate stood at an outstanding 28%. The homeless count went through the roof, and then off the roof as suicides littered the streets. The health care system almost shut down while black tar heroin became a new kind of currency. Every week, protests erupted like fire in the major cities as aggressive measures were taken by the European Union. The people pleaded like dogs from the cracked and crowded sidewalks. Winter was coming, but all the coats were burned up.

Located between the city of Kalamata and the Mediterranean beaches, the village of Astis sits biding its own time and baking in its own grime. Layered in dust and dirt, the streets haven’t seen traffic for years. Its small clay homes are all painted a bright and blinding white to guard from the coarse sun, but years of dry summers and humid winters have left the walls caked in dried mud. Hardly ever marked on a common map, Astis used to profit from the cozy and heartwarming nature that small towns bring, but that soon died. The people sat in their plastic white chairs and watched as life dried up and old cats started to fight in the empty streets.

In the late 1990s, the large and immigrated Gypsy populations of Romani in Greece were all aggressively kicked out of the major areas. Big cities like Athens and Thessaloniki looked to the seas, shrugging at the bad media attention from northern Europe and pretending to concern themselves
with the lives of the real Greeks. We need to focus on our people first, they all said, defensively. So, rubbing pepper spray from their eyes and taping up the burn holes in their shirts, the Romani migrated to the small villages around the country.

Ω

Astis used to have a train station that attracted some visitation from bored urban relatives and curious tourists looking for authentic Greece, but it closed when the repeatedly stolen tracks became too much of a hassle to replace. The mayor of Kalamata, Kostas Parastotos, traveled to Astis for several brief conferences with the town. During the last meeting, the villagers crowded around the podium and held Parastotos’ gaze with narrowed eyes. Starting off with a stumble and a cough, he gained speed with talks of that damn economy. It’s really for the best, he said, now our money can go to those in need. A little later, two stray dogs stole his meeting notes and the villagers left to take their afternoon naps.

Ω

Once, some Gypsy child stole several flower pots from my yaya’s front porch. Having paid good money at the Kalamata market for them, she pulled on her street shoes, cracked her knuckles, and grabbed her chicken knife. Slightly concerned, my papou took a shot of Ouzo and told her he’d take care of everything. Don’t wait up for me, he said, and left down the dusty village road. After about a day, my papou returned with two flower pots and a bottle of wine. He sat in the garden and drank until it was time to scare the cats away from the growing tomatoes.

Ω

When I was 14, my family moved to Greece for my dad’s sabbatical. For four months, we lived in Astis with my grandparents while my father did research on small Greek villages in the 1940s. My room took the upper northeast corner of the house. Within pale white walls, under a large antique lamp hanging from the high sloped ceiling, I slept on an old couch covered with handmade quilts and pillows filled with chicken feathers. The room had the only windows on the second floor, but the balcony was the real treasure. On particularly cool nights, my dad and I would sit and watch the mountains in the far distance, fading in and out behind the droopy clouds and growing dark as the sun bent down on the horizon. We hardly talked. Occasionally swatting at mosquitoes, we listened to the hum of the quieting village.
During the German occupation of Greece, the Nazis had a rule that for every German soldier killed or injured, 15 Greek civilians would pay the price in execution. As the Greek resistance started to build up more power, the price paid increased to 20 civilians. Then 35. Then whole towns. Early on June 10, 1944, a group of rebels from the resistance attacked a brigade of Nazi soldiers by a mountain pass. Three killed. Ten injured. Later that day, the small village of Distomo experienced what it was like to feel a massacre. The Germans arrived late but stayed all night. Some said the screams could be heard for miles.

Ω

The neighbor boys across the street are from Canada. I don’t know Greek very well so this is exciting for me. The youngest is called Michaelis and the older is Demitris. Demitris is nicer, but he’s fat and just watches consecutive seasons of Charmed. Michaelis is only a year younger than me and resembles a child Antonio Banderas. The first time we meet, he gives me a mischievous smile and says he knows this village inside and out. He tells me he steals from the Albanians next door. What do you steal? I ask. Anything you want, girl, he returns, giving me an almost wink. How about a DVD player? I say. He looks shocked. Maybe, he mutters, looking away. In the end, no one is a thief and we go play soccer in his dirt backyard while his dog chases flies.

Ω

On the night before Easter, the villagers of Astis light hundreds of candles and parade through the streets. It is a tradition in almost every part of Greece. Apparently, the celebration in Athens is incredible. Somehow no one burns anything down while thousands of Greeks hold hands and sing at the top of their lungs. Astis isn’t much different. I light my candle and hold hands with my yaya while listening to the chorus of hymns. My mother starts to cry a bit. I want to believe it’s because she hasn’t seen a Greek Easter for almost 20 years, but as we pass two crumbling houses, I begin to guess otherwise. Every so often, she reminds me to hold my candle still. Don’t drop it. Just don’t drop it.

Ω

As June approaches, the heat has become too much in Astis. Temperatures begin to rise past 95 degrees Fahrenheit and no one has the courage to leave their homes anymore. My yaya has one air conditioner in the living room that hasn’t been used in years. Her brother bought it for her back when fans were still the best source of cool air. She refuses to use it though.
It’s for special guests, she says crossly. And we’re not special? I ask as I sweat out on the floor of the tiled kitchen. Hardly, she responds. When I try to open my bedroom window, she panics and swings it shut. You leave this open and the Gypsies will shoot you from over there, she says and points down to the dirt road where a couple of cats are cooling off in the shade.

Ω

The soccer field in Astis sits behind the village pizza restaurant with spots of barbed wire fence surrounding the perimeter. No one remembers why it was ever barred, but it doesn’t really matter to anyone anymore. Due to the cruel heat, the field never has time to grow grass. Sometimes dried yellow patches tuft around the sides and by the road. Every day during the summer, the village kids gather on the field, sides are chosen, someone produces a ball, and a game starts. Rules include: no shoes, no shirts, no blood, and no exclusion.

Ω

There is a point during our stay in the village when Michaelis’ dog will not stop barking. One of the mangy mutt’s ears has been burned off by a previous owner. She is inappropriately called Aphrodite, after the goddess of love. Every night, she barks and yips and begs with no end. My dad is about to lose his mind after the fifth sleepless night. I’m going to throw a ham laced with drugs, he swears each morning as he watches Michaelis kick old soccer balls through the dirt with her. Yet no one ever does anything. I mean, what can you do? My mom asks. He loves that ugly thing.

Ω

At my papou’s funeral, a Gypsy man shows up. He quietly sits in the back pew of the village church and keeps his head down. My mother pleads for my yaya not to make a big scene, but she is furious. How disrespectful, how embarrassing, she says, what does he think he is? Eventually, my great uncle, Yanis, yells at him to leave. He nods like he understands and disappears out the back door without a second glance at the casket. After the ceremony, my mother sits outside and smokes a whole pack of cigarettes.

Ω

In May of his sabbatical, my dad and I go to the Distomo memorial. It is a long drive from Astis. Just past Athens, the marble monument stands high up on a mountainside. My dad parks the car alongside the road, and we slowly walk through a small dirt trail to the white stone, ablaze in the Greek heat. Three large marble statues are built at the top, Greek soldiers running.
Frozen in time. No one is there and, judging by the dirt and twigs tossed around, I doubt it is regularly visited by anyone. Distomo is the sort of history that stings, but fades eventually. I pause at each side of the monument, carefully reading the names etched in the marble. Maria Antos, 6.

When we leave, it is like ripping off 3 Band-Aids over the same wound repeatedly. We run out the door, dragging luggage and still-dripping swimming suits and bags upon bags of fresh fruit. My yaya woke up especially early to pluck the best ones for our trip. Then she stands at the gate, barefoot and frowning, waving as we drive off. Not until as we pass the battered and rusty sign welcoming us to Astis does my mom call her mother and say how much money she hid around the house for her. They’re both crying and laughing now. It’s okay, my mom says, it’s okay.

Stuffed with straw and grass, the Judas hangs from a long pole in the middle of the soccer field. It is draped in a black cloak and a very clumsy face has been drawn on with brown paint. Two village men are down the field, holding several boxes and cords that stretch to the dummy betrayer. Everyone crowds around, standing by the old fence or sitting on their cars and trucks. A neighbor is handing out lamb on a stick while some Gypsies are selling water bottles for a Euro each. I am not prepared when the Judas explodes. There is no countdown or chant. There is no song or announcer. The Judas merely rips apart suddenly. It erupts into a ball of fire and for a brief moment, I can really feel the heat moving around me in smooth waves and fading into the air behind. Eyes closed, I am frozen for a moment. A single second in time when everything is gone and stopped, and I am alone in the debris of Judas. I imagine the heat never ends, but builds and builds until it suffocates everything. That it surrounds us, leaving behind only ash and dust. But as sudden as it came, the fire of the explosion fades and the world rushes back into place. As the voices return, I peek at the field. The Judas is gone. All that is left are blackened fragments and burned up fabrics. My yaya looks over at me with watery eyes. He will burn every year, she says, until we say stop.

Some say that the Greek villages were most impacted by the failing economy. The cities make louder noises, but the towns fall apart in silence.
Aphrodite ran away during the night. She dug a hole in the dirt and broke through the wooden fence, took off down the road in search of smells. For days the villagers look. Finally, it is Michaelis who finds her, painted in the mud just off the side of the highway.

What’d you expect, someone says, it’s just a damn dog.
CHANGING WOMAN
Abby Peeters
RED ROCK TOWNSHIP, C. 1850
Nathan Kooker

Before she was drowned
in forty feet of silt and squalid water
Red Rock was a post for river rats
meandered up the muddy Des Moines,

come to toe the line of east,
as far west as it had been, come
to steal ponies and rob coaches
and make business with the Fox

who would trade a bear skin
for less whiskey than you might
spit between your teeth. She
was a square-mile plot of rutted
ground and barnwood shanties
where a saloon stood for city hall,
where a preacher was made to deliver
the mail, where Good Judge Lynch

presided over all matters of unwritten
law and transgressors were whipped
or bludgeoned or hanged or shot dead
and rolled log-like into the river.

There are many myths as to why
they are red, those sudden faces
of sandstone that rose around the town like barricades, like heaven’s blinds.

Row out to the place above Red Rock where a reservoir now laps at the chin of those rusted cliffs, where your paddle might skip on a chimney or the gnawed trunk of that state record sycamore, and you will catch the glint that’s shards of buried bottles and window panes cut through clay gums like a wicked grin,

an artifact of that which has been twice flooded and never washed away.
In Catholic school, we learned that
Lightness is freedom because
Mass is a prison.

Standing in granite pews before the
Stone crucifix and its
Skeletal Jesus,
Twelve-year-old girls hide
(calves shoulders kneecaps pink-tipped breasts)
Behind ironed pleats and
Crosses hanging from thin metal
Chains hanging from throats, as
Graying Father delivers a homily about
wide-hipped mother
Eve,

Banished from the green leaves of Paradise
For tasting an apple.

We receive

Communion,

But when the Body is a wafer and the
Way weighs nothing in our
Grasping hands,
Then anything
(blood muscle bone pink-tipped toenails)
That tips the scale of this Holy Place is
Displeasing to THE LORD.

As if the Incarnation could exist without Carnatio,
Our adolescent brains consume bible verses, and
Our hungry palms clutch at psalms because
‘MAN shall not live by bread alone but by every
Word that proceedeth out of the
Mouth of God.’

Even our shapeless
Sisters, bound by their
Rings of gold and black habits, who

Sip air and talk about Jesus,

And for His sake
‘Starve for forty days in the desert,’ or
Give up desserts for
Lent, sing these hymns
Fat Tuesday through Easter,
As though denying the flesh
Chocolate cake and apple crisp somehow
Allows the soul to feed off the wasting body—

A kind of spiritual fungus
Spreading,
Between pubescent fingers,
Folded in prayer.
DAY 7
Natasha Chang
Is this what the world looks like to you after half a bottle, Ed?

Mountains raging down like drunken fathers? You’re intimately familiar with the slam

Of stone against stone. Speak with me, wild boy: after all, you saw your own father ramrod in a chair, alone with a ravenous God.

I am far from home and home is drowning. It’s two after five, Ed. The gallery is closed &

my breath is warm against your paper face. I can’t decide if you’re lost or if you take pleasure in tearing up maps.

God folded my land across a seam and rent it apart

because rain is a kind of predator. Torrents and roars of earth. Mass wasting. A great salted wound. Dysentery, fat on the trails of Oregon and Tears, pricks up her ears.

my people learned their savagery from the immense souls of herons. the crabapple trees of America, tightlipped in wonder, and readiness

and you, dear and sullen child, all cragged over with drink: your father washed and washed and washed his hands after
you lost your women early,  
in a tectonic world etched into  
ever smaller boxes. Dutch cities  
crammed with gardens framing  
one tulip like a jewel.

You had to touch your mother’s dead hand, see your sister’s face as a black  
curtain draws near. I want to wake you from this nightmare of stones  
smashing in fierce  
dialogue.

But I can’t wake myself. Hands open in rictus. Listen, Ed (born in horror  
of lines inked by time) I’m not asking you for comfort.

I’m asking you to draw.

I need to see again sunny light limned by shadows of ink. Show me  
the voltage of the skyline, silver fish pressing mouths to silver water.  
My home is the great green heart  
of some watchful titan. Rage  
shimmers always at the edges.  
Soggy logs break underfoot,  
dropping young girls into freezing pools. A black dog caught in white  
rapids, tossed against stones.  
Even the dog knows not to cry out. The world can be warm  
and sweet as a mouthful of plum  
but not here.

We live knowing God  
can erupt from forested ground, burn  
His short madness,  
and be gone.
Look. Rescuers in their silence fan out across sinkhole and great waste looking for survivors. Only the whites of their palms are visible, like petals in a flooded gutter.

They found a boy buried up to his knees, eyes wide and gone with horror, pleading for his mother and for Sophie, Sophie, Sophie—

Even reflected, inked, slammed, distorted:
suffering survives. Anyone who spent more than a moment with your eyes knows you clutch it, just off-frame.

We reach through wreckage shoulder to shoulder with death, a jackal
girl alight with merry sympathy. Our hands clever as rain.

We all lose those things sweeter than us, Ed. We, all of us, stare up at a wide angle lens. The only way to tip your chin up and keep walking is to enter into a grave

contract with the dead. You always draw a

veil

and a sufferer, Munch.

As a boy you knew the dead have as much claim to us as kin.

No one knows gold until it snaps

in the sky like a war pennant over broken pines. The mountain is a holy cup now. A scrawl of oily ink on stone.

Rage down on the world, Ed. No matter how you slash it, you spill great seething blocks of

light
CHARACTERS:
Man/John—a man in his early thirties.
Woman/Ann—a woman in her early thirties.
Rose—a girl, between the ages of 8 and 11.

SETTING:
A living room. There is red.

*Lights up.*
*At the edge of the stage sits a young girl and a checkers board.*
*She is in a living room with a piano, a small circular table and a door behind it. She is alone, and she is playing checkers with only the red pieces. There are noises coming from offstage and behind the door—a man and a woman, fighting but not yelling.*

**MAN**
It isn’t *my* fault.

**WOMAN**
I didn’t say it was, John, I—

*The girl looks up. She smiles wryly.*

**ROSE**
Red is my favorite color.

*She looks at the board, abandons it, and walks towards a painting USL. There is a splash of red in it.*
I’m always looking for it. Like some people, they keep their eyes down when they walk around and they pick up change, pennies. They like to collect those things, put them in a jar, like chance, they like to jingle chance around in a little piggy by their bed. I’m like them. But with red. And the piggy bank,

*She turns towards the audience, smiles again, and taps her head.*

I like to jingle red in my head. I could tell you all the times I’ve seen it, you know, picked it up like it was mine.

**WOMAN**

I just wish you would’ve told her that we’re busy. I don’t have time to see—

**MAN**

We’re not busy, Ann. And I don’t like avoiding her. She’s my mother.

**WOMAN**

She’s going to bring it up again.

*Rose is walking towards the door.*

**MAN**

I know.

**ROSE**

Like sometimes, you know, if you stand real still and you’re on the street, and you keep your eyes still too. So still that things start to get all shaky, they start being fuzzy, the cars’ll come by, and they’ll go real quick. Like, like, fast. And if you’re standing still and your eyes are standing still, the people in the cars, well, they start looking red. Like little red dots just zooming by.

**MAN**

We ought to deal with it sometime.

**WOMAN**

Deal with it? Do you hear yourself? This isn’t something—this—I can’t believe you’re telling me to deal with this.

*The girl is slowly tracing any red items placed subtly on the stage.*

*She comes to a cherry hard candy on the table. She picks it up.*
ROSE
Or you know, on Valentine’s Day, when your mom takes you to the sweet shop and they’ve got all those cookies, those hearts, those cookie hearts. And those cookie hearts, they’ve got all this red icing just smeared on top and when you eat them, it’s like, that red gets all over you. And you feel all sweet too. Sweet and pretty and red. That’s the best.

She places the candy down again. She walks back to the chess board.

MAN
I didn’t mean it like that, Ann—it’s just, when are we going to start living again?

WOMAN
You still expect to live?

MAN
Ann—

WOMAN
No, tell me, John. You think that after what happened to her, what happened to our—

The woman sobs.

MAN
I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

Rose moves a piece.

ROSE
I guess you’d think, you’d think it’d get kinda boring, thinking about red all the time. And I guess, you’re kinda right.

She moves another piece.

Like what’s the point? What do I do with all those pennies, all that red? Do I, do I give it to anybody?

She moves another piece.

Or do I just get it? I just—I don’t have anything to buy with it, but I, I just can’t stop thinking about it. It’s—everywhere.

The door opens. Ann steps in wearing a very red dress, behind her is John. He closes the door behind him. Neither of them takes notice of Rose as she continues to play. When Ann first enters,
however, she looks at where Rose is without seeing the girl there. Instead, her look is vacant.

JOHN

I can call her, if you need. Tell her not to come.

Ann, wiping at her eyes.

ANN

Thank you. I’d like that. I—need it.

Beat.

JOHN

You look nice today.

ANN

Hm.

She walks towards the table and sees the candy.

JOHN

I haven’t seen that dress in awhile.

ANN

It’s her favorite.

Beat.

JOHN

Maybe my mother should come over for a bit.

ANN

What?

JOHN

Whether or not she’s here, you’re still going to think about her. About it. Clearly.

ANN

Of course, I’m thinking about it—it’s always here. It’s like I find the memories whenever I walk in the street, like something you just pick up, and you want to pick it up, but you don’t want to pick it up because it
hurts, but you need it. It’s like it’s cough medicine. That thick, cherry-red cough syrup.

Rose looks towards Ann.

JOHN

...cough syrup?

ANN

Yes, cough syrup. It almost tastes good, and you need it for your cold, but the aftertaste—well, it’s always there much longer.

JOHN

Ah.

Rose returns to her game.

Beat.

Come here, Ann.

Ann allows John to embrace her, but does not appear comforted.

Now, maybe if we just sit and calm down for a bit—we’ll—you’ll be okay with my mother coming? You know she misses seeing you too. She doesn’t always say the right things—

ANN

Like if we’ll ever try again—

JOHN

—But she means well. She loves you. She loves us.

Beat.

ANN

Fine.

Ann moves away from him and sits at the piano by the table CSL. She looks at the keys. John sits in the chair on the other side of the table and takes out a newspaper. Rose looks at him.

ROSE

You know, I heard this joke once. It’s like, it goes, what’s black and white and read all over? A newspaper. I—I don’t know if I think it’s funny, but I like that it makes me think of red. It’s like before you think of people reading, you’ve got this picture of something that’s black and white, but it isn’t really, because it’s all red. I like that.
She moves a piece.
A boy at school told that to me once.

Ann plays a note on the piano. John looks up, but does not say anything. After a moment, Ann looks around the room, forgetting about the piano.

ANN
You used to pick roses for this room. Put them on the table.

JOHN
Ann—

ANN
I miss that.

ROSE
But he wasn’t really that nice, the boy. He liked, well, he liked to make fun of me. He’d always come up to me and sing, “Rosie, rosie, pocket full of posie.” All like that.

ANN
Why don’t you do that anymore?

ROSE
Cause of my name, you know. He thought it was funny.

JOHN
You know why.

ANN
I know. But still—it’d be nice to see some roses in here.

ROSE
But I didn’t care, really, cause I like my name. It’s like, I know there’s white roses and everything but, anytime anybody talks to me—

ANN
—or at least one—
ROSE

—I just think of one—

ANN AND ROSE

One red, red rose.

Ann is looking towards Rose.

Black out.

End scene.
HIS FATHER’S CHAIR

Gray Lantta
Zaman Khan told his grandson Saleem many stories in between puffs of his cigarette, back when the country in his heart was still new, and his grandson even newer. The smoke would curl up to the ceiling, leaving behind a dark tar stain with every tale. Khan’s thin and stooped frame would be shrouded with paisley quilts during the Bengal winters. The weather would be cold and sweet, and the stories flowed with the smoke from his lips, ever enchanting, ever enthralling. They were fluid histories. Always about life, simple joys, and on occasion, the lies behind the eyes of men. They sat in the cool tin house suspended from the soft earth on stilts and enjoyed their recluse together.

‘Do you know why the lizards cluck their tongues?’ Zaman Khan would ask.

‘Why, Grandfather?’ asked Saleem.

‘They take offence at silence. They love hearing my stories.’

‘Did you always tell them stories?’

‘Always, but now they listen to you also.’

‘Oh,’ said Saleem, in wonder at the simple shortness of his existence. The lizards clucked their tongues to fill the silence.

‘I shall tell you the story of how I brought you here while you were still unborn.’

It went like this. Once upon a time there was partition of the Indus into East and West Pakistan. The East was of the Bengalis, and not Pakistani at all. Zaman Khan of the East was not a weak man, but wise within luck. He understood the politics of his time and suffered too the injustices wrought
upon his nation by its other detached half. So Zaman Khan observed and recorded and scrutinised with his shining dome and his face bore a frown worn under his moustache during moments of concentration. He had watched as the westerners came eastwards. Family and countrymen were forced to pay the high tax, obey the western army, and speak in their “language of God.” Zaman Khan saw all this and knew. So he prepared a home deep in the jungle of the village of his birth before he was forced to watch inflation turn the money in the bank he had run so well into paper before his eyes.

Zaman Khan’s family knew the sorrow of their countrymen. They knew the hunger pangs as food was rationed out for fear of flood and famine, while the western army grew fat on rice and lentils and mutton. So he hired farmers to till the land deep in the jungle of the village of his birth where he had built his larger home by the pond. There would be no hunger in the eyes of his wife and daughter nor emptiness in their bellies. Then the day came that the eastern student party walked the streets to protest the “language of God” in favour of Bangla, and the western army rose in anger and the bodies of the rebellious students blossomed in red. Many knew the red was ominous. After the West Pakistani armies had overrun the university and the presses and the homes of the intellectuals, spreading the red roses of February in its sister state, my grandfather knew it was time.

On the eve of his daughter Amina’s first decade, Zaman Khan packed his home by kerosene lamplight into two scooters and readied them for the drive to the village house. The chill of the springtime night cleared his head and he realised the keys to the bank’s vaults were still with him. His wisdom was only second to his honour for he would never consider disappearing like a thief in the night so the keys had to be returned. Parul Khan knew not to test her husband when his jaws tightened and his brow knit in displeasure. She watched wide-eyed as her husband was swallowed by the mist that shone bright yellow-red by lamp flame and scooter headlights.

Zaman Khan walked briskly along the familiar road to the bank. The road was shaded by trees and opened up to the bridge over the lake where mosquitoes swarmed in the moonlight. He inhaled quickly, half blocking the stench of the scum lake and half stopping mosquitos flying up his nostrils. Yet he walked tall with keys in hand and would not bow his head to ward off the insects from his eyes. The bank’s porter and guard, already on edge, were frightened to see boss shaheb walk up to them at the dead of
night. The porter saw the lack of fantasy in Zaman Khan’s expression, and leaped up from his cot to step on the guard’s foot. The guard dropped his bamboo cane on his other foot.

‘Khan shaheb, you are here, what is it you wish?’

‘These are the keys. Assistant Manager Shah alone knows the combination. Give these to him.’ With that, Zaman Khan entrusted the keys to the hopping guard and made his way back to his family. Through the soupy stench of scum lake and insect haze, he crossed the bridge back. The trees shaded the end of the bridge from all light. That night, death emerged from the well-worn path to drive the fear of caution into Zaman Khan, and shake him out of any sense of security. Out of the darkness emerged a squad of West Pakistani soldiers. They were clad in khaki, heads capped and rifles bayoneted. Moonlight flickered off the barrels of their rifles. It was as though a dry wind from the arid deserts of Punjab blew apart the mist to reveal hungry jackals. They had travelled far from their lands with a hunger and they halted in front of Zaman Khan, who saw their teeth. Wordlessly, two of the soldiers walked to him and pushed him roughly to the ground. A rifle was cocked to his head. It clicked. They stood alert with great piercing eyes.

From amongst them, the sergeant’s hulking shape emerged from the fog. His shoulders were broad and his belly preceded him. The dusty uniform blended into the murkiness of the sickly light. His eyes betrayed a glint of some great thirst. Spittle dried at the corners of his mouth as he leered down at Zaman Khan. The sergeant’s mouth formed a joyless grin. Sweat trickled down his brow in the humid air, but he did not flinch when mosquitoes flew into his eyes.

‘What is your name?’ he asked in Urdu.

‘Khan.’

‘You are out very late. Are you a thief?’

‘No.’

‘Are you a murderer?’

‘No.’

‘Are you a rebel?’

‘No.’
‘Are you an intellectual?’

‘No.’

Sergeant licked his lips and delivered his victim a strong kick to the back. His prey buckled but did not writhe under his boot. The prey’s arms were held tightly behind his back, restraining him from movement or escape. The only matter of concern was the time of the kill. A phantom voice broke through the humming of the night, and sounded distant as a hundred realms from emotion or dream.

‘I cannot fear you. Are we not Pakistani? Do we not belong to Allah?’ asked Zaman Khan.

Silence greeted this utterance, swallowing up the fear in the night, the intent of the squad, and the veil of death that was fast approaching through the mist. The sergeant’s teeth did not disappear.

‘Oh, so it is now your Pakistan too? Soon you will say it is your Islam, then your Allah. But Allah is one. Islam is one. And naturally, Pakistan should only be one.’ Sergeant’s eyes glinted at this proclamation.

‘But tonight you have pleased me, and since I am as Azrael, I choose to let you return home. Go home and love your wife, love your Allah, and above all, love your country.’

The soldiers dragged Zaman Khan face-forward until the dirt of the road stained his clothes before they let him go and watched him hobble home. His legs shook like reeds in the wind in fear of rifles’ thunder. Zaman Khan returned to the scooters that night a little stooped. He carried the stoop in his bearing for the rest of his life as a reminder of the pride he had sacrificed. This uncharacteristic weakness did not go unnoticed by Parul Khan as they drove far away to the safety of exile, but she never questioned him for fear of what she might find out. And that was the story only Saleem was told.

Saleem aged with East Pakistan and like it, travelled far from those purer truths about which his grandfather had told him. A thirst for change visited him once the shiny wonder of youth had worn off. Daily horrors of village life were closer to the eyes than those of war. The lush green paddy fields disappeared under the murky flood waters. Inexorable cyclones that uprooted trees and submerged rivers also brought shortage of rice and the ruination of men, women, and children. Saleem remembered watching them from the cyclone shelter as their backs were whipped by the wind.
and some stumbled and fell and were lost to the impending waters. The stilts had kept Saleem and his family afloat for many years. Finally, it came to be that the few slow cattle they still owned were also all washed away into river, sea, and air. Yet not until the departure of the father on the warpath did Saleem lose his innocence. The evergreen land was verdant like an emerald, but one could not eat the memory of rice from empty husks after the war. His father had not sown the rice crop before he left, nor did he return after the barren harvest.

East Pakistan was no longer. A fervent nationalism had swept across the country, borne on the hearts of joyous messengers and spread swiftly with winged death. The absence of the father did not offend Saleem. Bangladesh, born in blood and martyrdom, was sacrosanct. It was as though it had always existed, even before the glory of Bengal. Lo, the allure of the forsaken city and capital brought Saleem out of the reclusion he shared with his grandfather and mother. Dhaka, that very city which grew and grew to devour the simple village folk around it, in their ironic pursuit of a richer life. Dhaka, the British Dacca, the Mughal city of Jahangirnagar, from where Zaman Khan narrowly escaped. There Saleem went.

Joys were no longer simple, and life was a struggle as one among millions. The hope and independence of Saleem’s country fell short of bringing happiness, and he lived day to day from hand to mouth. Gone were the days of the singing Fakir Lalon, the poetry of Tagore, and the liberating science of Chandra Bose. Pragmatism moved Saleem forward. Parts of Dhaka aged differently, as the ruins trapped time while new buildings and huts and houses sprang up from the riverbanks like toadstools after rain. Saleem made his shack in a slum by the old town. Motherless children played on the streets there, as naked as the day they were born and abandoned. Married and widowed women alike walked the roads between home and bazaar dressed in silken saris which shone in the sun. Their few surviving sisters had suffered the most in the West Pakistani camps during the war, and no longer dared to walk the streets by day or night for shame and fear. Sweaty rickshaw-wallahs cycled through the torrent of people. Ringing bells and painted hoods added to the din of faded sounds and colour. Over a few years, Saleem was able to put away some money. So he took a city-wife, to the displeasure of his mother, and took off for London to work as a fishmonger. Zaman Khan remained in reclusion with his dutiful daughter and nodded along with it all.
'The story must go on, Amina dear. Your grandfather was not pleased with me either when I was young, but he had you to thank for that,’ said Zaman Khan.

‘It is different, Saleem did not have the guidance of his late father. You were always too lenient with him,’ said Amina.

‘He craves success, Amina. I only offered us all life alone in this paradise, and my son-in-law gave Saleem a country with his blood.’

A distant sadness wet Amina’s eyes over a river of time and she remained silent. The lizards knew enough of the stories not to be offended.

It took some more years for Saleem to work off the debt of his move, for of course he had to rely on the benevolence of the “government agents” to depart Bangladesh. They were kind enough to give Saleem ‘A new life! In London! Plenty of work, plenty of opportunity, here is your passport tip-top!’ In return for such a great boon, the “agents” sought usurious rates against the ideals of Islam, to whom they were martyrs for the sake of their “disadvantaged countrymen.” However, Saleem kept faith in Allah and prayed.

‘Blessed may my father be in eternal Paradise for his martyrdom.’

‘Blessed may my grandmother be, for I never knew her.’

‘Blessed may my mother and grandfather be, for they struggle in my stead.’

That was the year their leader, Friend of Bengal, was assassinated by the order of his General. A sense of hopelessness had gripped the country. Protests did not bear down upon Dhaka from all corners of the land, symptomatic of a dissatisfied people from a fatherless nation, forgetting their fathers. Letters went back and forth between London and Bangladesh once a month, then once a year, and then none at all. Saleem and his wife had become busy with a daughter. Zaman Khan did not write him very often, for his voice was better than his writing hand, yet he never wished Amina to hear all he had to say. Saleem read the stories his mother wrote of, and knew his own was being told to patient ears with greater hope. Once in a while, he would be transported home again by the smell of crumbling palm sugar, the golden flash of cigarette-box foil, or the sight of paisley shawls draped on the pale English womenfolk.

‘Saleem,’ said Shahed Nazir, ‘Harold sahib wanted the eels on display.
Should I attend to that?’

Dawn had not arrived to dispel another dreary night. Clouds only brought tepid rain outside the fishmongers in Whitechapel where Saleem worked.

‘I am tending to the herring now. Yes, you bring the eels, Shahed,’ Saleem said over the squelching of water and scales. ‘They’re fresh in from the Thames, so you’d better hurry.’

‘Ji, Saleem bhai,’ he agreed.

Shahed Nazir slapped Saleem’s back and cantered off to the end of the store and brought more ice for the eels.

‘Pray we get many customers today! Harold sahib has not been too pleased with me,’ said Shahed Nazir.

Faint footsteps on the cobbled pavement greeted their ears. A young man was running in great agitation towards the fishmongers and the footsteps grew louder with his approach.

‘Nazir bhai! Nazir bhai!’ he yelled. ‘Nazir bhai, the white-skin Angrez broke into your house after you left! There is fire!’

The horror was met in Shahed Nazir’s eyes. ‘Why did they do this? My wife, my wife!’

‘The Angrezis took you for Bangalis! By Allah, they don’t know the difference in a Pakistani!’ said the young man.

Saleem stood at a corner of the displays framed by the open window. Shahed Nazir and the man were both bolting up the road in the fear of fire. The first melancholy light could be seen before true dawn. The herrings were left unattended after the news. Saleem recalled the times he had sat by Zaman Khan’s feet listening to the stories. A cigarette lying straight on his grandfather’s lips and smoke streaming up like incense. In the loneliness of the shop smelling of English rivers and European seas, Saleem found it hard to imagine anything but the magic of Bengal he lost and left behind.
NOTES

I wrote this story knowing that some of the South Asian colloquialisms and idiosyncrasies of the English language will seem foreign, and even inaccessible without context. I chose to do so in the hopes of understanding the extent to which words and phrases may be familiar without marring the flow of the story.

Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, was formed in 1971 after secession from West Pakistan. East and West Pakistan splintered from India sometime after India’s independence from British colonialism.

East & West Pakistan were geographically separate from each other. West Pakistan sought to control the East through the common religious and political ideology of Islam. Bangladesh/East Pakistan were, however, culturally secular, and averse to the idea of relinquishing many freedoms to an autocratic and militaristic West Pakistan.

The liberation war of 1971 brought secession and freedom at a very high cost. 3 million ordinary men, women, and children alone were killed by the West Pakistani army, a number excluding war casualties among Bengali rebels and soldiers in actual combat. A significant portion of women were kept in rape camps.

Urdu and Bangla are different languages with similarities. Shared words include “bhai” (brother), “shaheb/sahib” (sir, Bangla/Urdu), and “Angrez/Angrezi” (the English), among others.
Start with the head.  
Slide the knife upward  
toward the jaw, til it catches  
then angle down and  
push  
use both hands if you have to  
it should come off clean. You can throw it out  
or give it to the Chinese woman  
from the restaurant down the street  
for stew—she’ll bring you some  
and the cheeks are delicious.  
Sweet and fatty, they melt on your tongue.

In Seattle, at Pike Place, it’s burly young men  
who toss fish—only men—giant fish  
captured by giant boats, long liners and trawlers.  
Down here in Portland  
Seattle’s younger, sluttier sister  
I do women’s work  
Shellfish mounded opulently, shining like salty jewels  
Lobsters in their gleaming armor  
Lined up in orderly rows  
iridescent scales gleaming on my nails  
like lacquer, blood and oyster  
liquor staining my apron.
Removing the spine is tricky.
The blade will bounce along the vertebrae like a car with bad shocks on a dirt road push too hard and you’ll slice clean through too light and you’ll lose the best meat.
It’s second nature after awhile, like pulling lobsters from the live tank and throwing them in the pot. Don’t worry, they don’t scream.

On my days off I drink like a fish and I fuck like a sailor I only fuck sailors and men who pretend to be sailors when they ask about the tattoo on my chest I tell them it’s a birthmark.

The fins are the easiest a flick of the wrist, a quick pull, and they fly right off. Pick them up off the floor and throw them away. Out of water they’re good for nothing not even stock.

My first month in Portland I got a tattoo in shape of Vermont. It healed poorly because the lobsters kept splashing it with salt water. I called the scarring topography and felt unique until I met five other people with the same tattoo.
Taking off the ribs is best when the knife
honked zealously once a week
on the whetstone
drawn across the sharpener
before every fish
is razor sharp.
Angle the blade up. Lead
with the point
it should glide easily
between the delicate bones
and the delicate flesh
they’ll slide off after four or five
careful strokes.

My parents
and my sisters
and my friends
keep asking when I’m coming home
there is an idea of home
there is a tattoo on my chest
that’s the best I can do

At first it will seem impossible.
You will rip jagged seams
in the flesh. Tear out chunks,
lose pounds of precious meat.
But one day
out of nowhere
it will come to you
you won’t be fighting the flesh.
It will give beneath
your blade, offer
itself to you.
It will come as a revelation, which
will come as a surprise.
In the soggy summer air that settles on the Hog Belt—that tract of land two counties tall and straddling Iowa’s northern border, Big Sioux River to I-35—there hangs a scent to make the nostrils ache: the sickly, warm stink of just-laid hog shit. The stock of every county along the Minnesota line drop enough of it to outweigh the daily sewage of greater LA, twice over. But mention that scent to anyone who lives in this stretch of country and they will tell you almost reverently that this smell is not shit. It’s not crap or scat or poop or any other potty-mouth noun better fit for the filth in the treads of a shoe. No—what you smell is manure, of the Latin manura. A life force of the land; last leg of the nutrient trip from earth to plant to beast and back. Hog farmers would wilt were it not for that manure spread yearly over fields. It feeds the corn that feeds those hogs that go to market for three hundred dollars a snout. Manure is prosperity. And so it’s due concern that has been mounting in the Hog Belt these past few years, now that the stinking blood of the whole hog industry threatens to send it up in smoke: The manure is starting to explode.

It happened in Bigelow in 2011, and then in Sleepy Eye and Ocheyedan and Jackson. In January 2014, north of the border in Hardwick, some four thousand swine blistered in a midnight hog-house fire where subzero temperatures had firemen reeling in their frozen hoses, retreating to trucks to watch the building fold into the blaze. Witnesses say the explosion that engulfed that barn was concussive, with a plume of fire and a spray of molten excrement. The farmer from the Ocheyedan incident claims a blast lifted his building a clean two feet off the ground, tossing him six yards airborne from his John Deere saddle seat. Other explosions, on the contrary, were less atomic: a quiet wave of blue flame that sped across the floor with a breathy whoosh like the first flare of a stove. In every case, it was the manure that
caught spark and blew. And now, on six sorry farms, Iowa goosegrass has begun to crawl over the charcoal remains of burned-to-dirt hog barns. Total losses. The barns, the pigs, their fertile manure—million-dollar operations cooked to a pork rind crisp.

Taming high tides of hog dung is never a do-si-do. Farmers have reported small-scale fires for decades—ever since the advent of “deep-pit” storage systems, now a standard for manure treatment. In deep-pit barns, the manure of a thousand-odd hogs is sloshed with urine and trampled through slats in the floor. Up to half-a-year's worth collects in a subterranean cistern and stews with a broth of natural bacteria that digests its simple sugars, producing the ammonia that makes manure such potent fertilizer. A byproduct of this microbial feast is methane gas, which belches from the barn through dozens of giant fans and makes for part of the iconic aroma that sours the air of the Hog Belt. It’s not uncommon that a stray spark will flick a harmless flame in the methane that leaks from the sludge below the floor slats. But only recently has hog manure gained an explosive demeanor, and only among those sites peppered throughout the upper Midwest. In deep-pit barns west of Grand Island and east of Chicago, hog manure remains totally inert. The difference is in the anatomy of the manure itself. What distinguished the slough of those six barns—now cinders—was foam.

It was a gray-green foam that the farmers found oozing across the surface of their manure pits during the months preceding the explosions. Some barns developed a froth four inches thick. In others, there was four feet—enough to breach the floor and mire the hogs in their pens. The foam was heavy, wet, gelatinous: not the foam of a bubble bath but more like bread pudding. It flooded pits and clogged the pumps. A precursor to every manure explosion to date, the foam has become a Hog Belt menace, steadily rising in the bellies of nearly a quarter of the region’s barns.

There wasn’t foam anywhere on the map before 2007. That’s because 2007 was the year when Distiller’s Dried Grain with Solubles began to enter the diets of Midwest livestock. DDGS is a derivative of ethanol distillation, and along with a nearly fourfold increase in Midwest ethanol production over the last decade came a surplus of the cornstuff. It’s supercharged in nutritional value, a fine mulch of kernels having spent up its starches in the refining process. Pound for pound, DDGS contains twice the helping of vitamins and proteins in regular corn grain and for this reason is advertised to farmers as a cheaper, wholesome alternative to commercial livestock.
fodder. But read the fine print: DDGS is the culprit in the pit. It’s the fuse and the match, the ghost in the foam. And to see just why, one must turn a microscope to the deadly deep-pit.

Milkshake or manure, it takes just three ingredients to whip up a froth. First comes gas—a good deal of it—to fill the cosmos of bubbles that give a foam its form. Second is stabilizer, some dot of dust or microbe to be the kernel around which each bubble forms—just the way that particles in the atmosphere make for the seeds of raindrops. Both gas and stabilizers are readily found in a cistern of manure, where hungry bacteria leak barnfuls of methane each day.

It’s foam’s last component that until recent years was missing from the anaerobic soup of hog barn deep-pits: **surfactant**. Surfactant is the soapiness of soap; it’s any of a number of organic chemicals distinguished by their curious bipolarity. At the molecular level, they look a lot like bulb-nosed minnows, although their attitude on all things wet is more feline than fish-like. When immersed, the water-fearing tails of surfactant molecules will turn about-face and barricade themselves behind their less skittish heads, forming a dry-sealed sphere, a self-made splashguard—that shimmering skin of a bubble. It’s surfactants that trap the gas, giving rise to foam. But where have they entered the chemistry of a poo pit? Via the hog’s mouth, of course. And into the mouth by way of a DDGS diet. While the corn byproduct is rich in nutrients, it is just as rich in “nondigestible, long-chain fatty acids.” That is, **textbook surfactants**. They slip right through the pig and into the pit.

Because DDGS feed has yet to cause any complications in hog operations throughout the rest of the country, researchers are still perplexed as to why foaming has kept to the Hog Belt. But so far as current hypotheses stand, the story of the exploding manure goes something like this: as DDGS-fed hogs ripen their manure with surfactants, foam brews, trapping flammable methane in bubbles on the surface of the pits. Methane suspended in foam isn’t easily ventilated, and so it settles, growing to lethal volumes. Undisturbed, the foam is too dense to explode. It might burn, but it won’t blast. However, suspicions have it that before the six fires along the Iowa–Minnesota border lit, something prodded at their pits. Perhaps it was the sprinkle of loose feed spilled from a trough, the ricochet spray of a pressure hose, even the gentle churn of the agitators used to stir the aging manure—any number of routine happenstances would have been enough to break
the foam, freeing latent methane which, when mixed with open air, diffuses
to an odorless, colorless, volatile fog. At this, any lost-adrift cinder from a
nearby brush burn, any thumb-struck flint of a farmhand’s Zippo could
readily reduce an acre-long barn and a thousand head of hog to a black
slough of smoldering meat and metal and manure.

What of those hog barns still whole? What of those muck-booted men on
one fourth of Iowa farms who peer daily into the dark of their poo lagoons
to find foam and more foam, silently brewing? A permanent solution
isn’t on the horizon. It’s a matter of scientific rigor, politics. Until a study
underway in three states draws up an official report, DDGS isn’t going to
come off of the market, and no farmer with half the business sense it takes
to balance a checkbook is likely to switch his swine back to full-kernel
feed.

Instead of fighting foam at its root, many farmers have turned to doping
their deep pits. They plunge Rumensin 90 by the fifty-pound brick into
the bowels of foaming hog barns. It’s a brown-powder antibiotic usually
prescribed for bloated cow stomachs and now used to kill off bacteria
in deep-pit sludge, slowing methane production. It works well enough.
Rumensin regimens have reduced, even eliminated manure foam in barns
across Iowa. But Rumensin is hardly a cure. That’s because even the most
potent antibiotics can’t snuff out all the bacteria that simmer in a deep-
pit—just the weak ones. The hardy survive, take to breeding, give rise to a
new generation of drug-immune germs. With every Rumensin treatment,
Darwin grins in his grave. And so they don’t seem unsound, some scientists
fear that doping a deep-pit could bottleneck the bacterial gene pool,
induce evolution, blind-engineer resistant strains ready to slink beyond
deep pits and into human skin. The Rumensin solution may well christen
an epidemic. And yet the farmers press on—for the safety of the sows.
For the sanctity of their manure.
LIEGENDE FRAU
Alexander Bradbury
Come dash with me, you battered dog alive
With shaky joy: before we see again
That I am odd & fierce and you a tumbler
of any rotted kelp. We both are born
of narrow watchers, savage, patient, grim

a captive people, stuck in traps we built
to bleed a beast so much more sweet than we.
But here on shore the wind holds court: & those
Who feel the brutal call, whose ears snap taut
Begin to run, to flap as dog

To whom we trust to always know the truth
Of Man, and snap our heels until we roar &
remember) even Tuesday nights at seven—
eleven. Whiskey Jack, I know your hands
I saw your head snap up & grin your grin

of rounded pebbles & ocean glass. The sky
reminds me: I am not so strong, or kind, or
immense in soul as herons, killer whales
or kelp. My one defense a brief & frenzied
brain. Come on: the gulls appear too

peaceful
I can’t breathe—
like paper cuts
behind my eyelids
I cough up
banana peels
every time I kill
a spider.
I miss laughing
and the jingle of dog tags.
No one plays the piano anymore.
Cillian Murphy drifts up to the sound of rain streaming down the walls of his modest shelter. He is living under a sea grape tree in Salvador, Brazil. This is only temporary, as Cillian tries to achieve perfection. The actor begins his day like any other, by practicing his levitation. Yesterday during levitation, he managed two centimeters. Today, he becomes a bird.

Cillian realizes that today is not like any other, as he has never become a bird before. He looks at the rain puddle on his floor and identifies himself as a banded cotinga. Cillian is proud that he is such a rare and beautiful bird.

Cillian has come to Salvador in order to work on his vain condition that followed his latest film’s success. Buying a house in the jeweled rainforests outside of the expansive coastal city isn’t a big step, but he did make sure it was only a modest shelter. Cillian spreads his thin amethyst wings and the tart ocean wind takes the bird.
Cillian has come to Salvador in order to work out his relationship with Yvonne McGuiness. His long time girlfriend, she has found difficulty in accepting his burgeoning celebrity. It has been so long since his horrible band, The Sons of Mr. Greengenes, first spat noise at her in that basement in Cork. Is that who she wants? That boy strangling his guitar couldn’t grow whiskers. Cillian has worked with acclaimed director Danny Boyle. Whoever she wants, he is most likely not a bird.

Cillian glides spiral onto the coastal markets of Salvador. It is a grapefruit evening, everything moves with a citrus glow. Strong men, thin men lift burlap sacks of rice over their heads. They allow one stream of rice to trail from each sack. Children follow the rice and gather on limestone steps before the goddess Yemaja’s parade marches by. The narrow buildings have all been painted varying shades of white. The windowsills a unifying Egyptian blue. Grandmothers cook the vatapá in great vats, while men ready the fireworks and drink cachça with the girls. A golden lion tamarin walks methodically, striking his matches on the white paint, and lighting the candles that line the rocky street. He leaves dark cuts of ash on each home. Cillian never sees his face, but he sings low, under his breath between his fangs. A hand grabs a bird.
Cillian is cupped in someone’s hands. Callused pillows. He smells coconut lotion, store bought. Salted crab from the Atlantic. His roof splits open, and fire enters. The candles are now strung from the açaí palms, lighting the sky. The wheel had turned, and the sun is sinking back into the clear ocean. The candlelight melds across the dark, as if right out of Yvonne’s oil work. A woman looks to her hands. Her skin would have reminded Cillian of a dry stout back in Ireland, but it was cruelty to drag that idea to this place. To drag the idea of emerald summers, the furrowed eyebrows of Yvonne. Here, it’s winter and humid, the waves drag their tongues on the beach, people in white bring baskets to the Queen of the Ocean. The woman, her eyebrows burn blonde on her forehead, white heat runs down her scalp in thick dirty waves. Maroon lips kiss his shaking blue head, and linger until he is still. She takes a doll made in her likeness, and ties it with twine to the bird.

Cillian Murphy is put in a wicker basket. He warbles out a call as orchids blanket him. A fisherman takes the basket from the woman and places it in his boat. Great dragons burst in the night, and the crowd gathers on the beach, singing their songs to Yemaja. Cillian watches the woman fade away into the haze of the candles. Her ivory wool skirt bundles in the sand. She is
gone with the ocean swell, and so is
the bird. Cillian hears the fisherman
drip muddled English between his
missing teeth, as his weak arms paddle
the boat further. The brown doll gazes
at the bird, and Cillian does not see an
up-and-coming actor in its polished
eyes. The fisherman drags his hooked
fingers over the jittering bird’s bright
plumage, places the basket into the
water, and pushes it under. The orchids
float to the surface. They will land on
some far away beach across the Atlantic,
and Yvonne will work them into her
latest painting. The doll soaks in the
salt water and descends to the bottom
of Rio Vermelho with the rare and
beautiful bird.
MEGAN BOWMAN is a junior at the University of Iowa, where she studies English and Creative Writing. A Des Moines native, she now makes her home in Iowa City. In addition to school, Megan works for the Bookstacks Department at the University of Iowa Main Library, and she is also a member of the Iowa Andhi dance team.

ALEXANDER BRADBURY is a sophomore at the University of Iowa, where he is studying Creative Writing and Studio Art. His work can be found at alexanderbradbury.com.

ELENA BRUESS When pushed to discuss their new full-length feature, Disney Princess has described main character Elena Bruess as “brown-eyed” and “kinda nice.”

NATASHA CHANG finds delight in using ink to draw things such as buildings, or animals wearing chunky-knit sweaters. One time, Natasha thought it would be cool if ink flowed through her veins, but then realized that it would have some serious physiological consequences.

SARA CRANDALL is in her first year in the Teacher Education Program.

NATHAN KOOKER is a senior studying English and Philosophy. A proud Iowan, he writes mostly on the Midwest. Previous essays for the UI Museum of Natural History can be found online. EARTHWORDS 35 marks his print debut.

GRAY LANTTA wanted to be a paleontologist. An Austin, Texas native, he now studies Communications and Writing here in Iowa. He still has a deep respect for dinosaurs and encourages others to pursue careers in their study.
CAROL MCCARTHY is a junior at Iowa studying English, Spanish, and Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies looking to bring voodoo dolls to your local fast food industry.

ABBY PEETERS is a senior at the University of Iowa with a double major in Art and Social Work and a certificate in American Indian and Native Studies. Her piece is inspired by the Diné creation story.

THEA PETTITT just had a baby and will graduate from college soon. Both of these things are pretty amazing.

SAJID SARKER is a graduate of Economics from the University of Iowa. He is also a nomad from Bangladesh, and has traveled and lived in as many countries as can be counted on two hands. His fiction has previously appeared in publications in Stockholm, Sweden.

CATHERINE SHOOK is a senior majoring in English, though you may have seen her face haunting the theatre building before. Her past short-form dramatic works include *Just One Puff* and *Boy in a Cage*, which have been performed at the university’s Ten Minute Play Festival and The New Play Festival’s Undergraduate Reading Series, respectively.

EMMA VAN DYKE is a senior at the University of Iowa studying English and Creative Writing. She works at the University Art Museum, grew up near Seattle, and can play two chords on a banjo.
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