



CURIOUS SPECIMENS

edited by Wren Hanks and Beth Couture

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.

Oracle the Automaton Reveals All by Kristin Gulotta.....	4
The Frog Boy's Mother Confesses by Kristin Gulotta.....	5
Reliquary by Kimberly Miller.....	6
ANTIQUE MIASMA by Eric Baus.....	7
from <i>Her Wilderness Will Be Her Manners</i> by Sarah Mangold.....	8
The Marriages: the tumors by Gemma Cooper-Novack.....	10
The Marriages: the deer by Gemma Cooper-Novack.....	11
Bloodletter by Sonya Vatomsky.....	12
Roanoke by Sonya Vatomosky.....	13
Exhibit A by Katie Jean Shinkle.....	14
Exhibit B by Katie Jean Shinkle.....	15
Exhibit D by Katie Jean Shinkle.....	16
Children Have Small Ghosts, or The David. by Andi and Lance Olsen..	17
Burning Mouth Syndrome, or The Rachel. by Andi and Lance Olsen...	19
The Voice Machine, or Fungus Ants Make Zombies Do All the Work (for Rachel and David) by Andi and Lance Olsen.....	21
One Twin to the Other by Diandra Holmes.....	23
Map by Diandra Holmes.....	24
In Grief by Carlea Holl-Jensen.....	25

II.

The Other Girls Fall Through Me by Kia Groom.....	29
little miss shortbread by Emily Corwin.....	30
forsenic file by Emily Corwin.....	31
Not a Butterfly But by Heather Cox.....	32
Jackalope-Girl Learns to Speak by Stacey Balkun.....	33
Jackalope-Girl Gets a Tattoo by Stacey Balkun.....	34
[words of affirmation] by Jessica Morey-Collins.....	35
[acts of service] by Jessica Morey-Collins.....	36
HUMS, HURTS by Eric Baus.....	37
SUBLINGUAL CANDLE by Eric Baus.....	38

III.

Bottle 2 by MANDEM.....	40
Bottle 4 by MANDEM.....	41
Hansel by Clare Welsh.....	42
The Call by Clare Welsh.....	43

Mother by Tammy Bendetti.....	44
Bones of the Daughter by Renée E. D'Aoust.....	45
self-portrait, tooth & claw by Emily O'Neill.....	47
{scree} by Emily O'Neill.....	49
where St. Francis tamed the wolves by Emily O'Neill.....	51
From <i>The Wolf Queen and The Ruined Castle</i> , an excerpt by Christine Hamm.....	52
Sea-Witch 000000 by Moss Angel.....	57
Sea-Witch Girl Dirt Angel Fog by Moss Angel.....	58
Trans Memoir Dog Angel Firelight 1984 by Moss Angel.....	59

IV.

Man Turning into a Centaur and Back Again by Jade Hurter.....	61
from <i>As The World Falls Down</i> by Jayme Russell.....	63
Case No. 37.—The Happy Family. by J. Bowers.....	67
Lycanopterror by Gemma Cooper-Novack.....	69
Monster Show by Susan Slaviero.....	70
Take the Monster and Put Him in a Situation by Susan Slaviero.....	71
Monster Studies 101 by Susan Slaviero.....	72
Confusion Hill by Amy Miller.....	73
Southern Cryptozoology 5: Wakulla County Gill Man by Allie Marini.....	74
We're already dead. by Adam Tedesco and Juliet Cook.....	75
Fugitive Dive by j/j hastain and Juliet Cook.....	76
Maryland by Mathias Svalina.....	78
Massachusetts by Mathias Svalina.....	79
Michigan by Mathias Svalina.....	80

I.

Oracle the Automaton Reveals All

Kristin Gulotta

You will be asked to take a long journey,
 you will arrive at the edge of aspiration,
you will aim for ambition, you will be
 blessed. You will face the change in currents,
the chance encounters, the different dangers,
 at your door the knocking stranger,
the disappointments unforeseen & wept. Each passing
 year will find you increased in honor, in fearful
knowledge & flying the red-scented winds of far-off
 lands. Soon, soon, the mounting successes.
Soon, the mango-bright bliss. Soon, you will settle

 down, will spill, will spill the waters down the blue hem
 of your long buttoned skirt you will spill,
 the waters will fill with fishes with many-armed
 figures, the waters will fall & you will knit
 them, blue-threaded & what will you find,
 double-stung & singed, dank & worried like flies like fleas
 ringing your fingers like needles, passing & wheeling.
The call comes & you stand unready, with the burden of your

 stile, & stare, with the dry room of your burden filling
 with waters, the scabs & scars molted, picked clean
 & filling & I
 your littlest whizzing thought, your tiny teller,
watching you cling and claw—

satisfactorily along these new, near paths, you will
 renew the nest of friendship, stand
at the center of old attentions, own your most-fought-over joys.
 Your pleasures will be quick-coming, realized,
surrounding you like truths twisting, waiting, wringing you away.

The Frog Boy's Mother Confesses

Kristin Gulotta

Generally accepted as fact through the 19th century, maternal impression theory was based on the belief that a mother's imaginings and emotions directly imprinted on her unborn child, sometimes causing physical anomalies.

That night I dreamed our marriage was a dead fish or one just dying. It slapped against the dock, mouth gaping, glossy-eyed, the head lolling toward us—we parted as it tensed then stilled. I woke with seaweed in my hair, soaked hands, a wild flapping in my belly. Scared to rouse you, I turned instead to stare at wall shadows: oyster, coral, jellyfish, my raised hand a starfish that swallowed them all. I wished for our first night, soft pond bank, tadpole moon, kisses wet and hallowed for their ease, criss-crossed thighs the only bond—the emptiness of beginnings. Then, soaked shoots clenched between my teeth, my water broke.

Reliquary

Kimberly Miller

Open and hear: someone's tooth, someone's jawbone, ache.

Trapped against the glass walls of the vial, cork-capped whispers.

Thirty years' whiskers restless in their drawer. Recall animal faces,

from which they dropped elegance like calling cards, handkerchiefs.

As smelling salts were held, now old air resides in the vial's tight cell.

To be breached during the minor emergency. This jar fits

in a girl's fist. Clenches eyelashes shed during infancy. Scales before

they bloomed to feathers, turned fashion's jewel-toned martyrs.

See: the amber bottles cradle alcohol, growths eclipsed

by the scalpel. Flecked beneath blue glass austerity, parched bits

of poison. A single recipe on paper, scrap of ill-wishing.

For the treatment of life in those unwanted, say, the rodent

and her children. How to spoon white powder onto sustenance,

a morsel of cheese, its scent fit to cover the chemical flavor

of a curse made, delivered. Phial of reckoning, of release.

Glint in the palm, encased by the warm hand, like a playing card

cupped. Cherished like a grudge. Something sampled

of that finality, more subtle than an ax's blade. A pinch

stirred in saliva, glistens, sets on a fork's tines. Or drawn

in conspiring silence by syringe. Or tipped

into this ring's hinged case: doll-sized door that opens for revenge.

ANTIQUE MIASMA

Eric Baus

The hour of buried lambs. The hour of revived lice. The hour of erased grass. The hour of the beginner's abyss.

from *Her Wilderness Will Be Her Manners*
Sarah Mangold

Visitors had to want to see lunatic beauty in the bear-
pit fruitful views breathless hounding does
defensive movements Wad of cotton batting stuffed
into eye sockets Skin blown with breath as they
would in life When wings closed and tied should the
mandible show a disposition to open a stitch may be
taken

from *Her Wilderness Will Be Her Manners*
Sarah Mangold

How delicately they colored no one could
conceive modeling tongues casting by
amateurs at ordinary fire madder brown
madder lake eyelids managed Pounded
white sugar powdered upon foliage should
the sea be close at hand swarm in some
shallow waters mounted on wires whipped
with white silk

The Marriages: the tumors

Gemma Cooper-Novack

First it was your
arms. They just didn't swing the same
way from your shoulders, I couldn't put
my finger on the difference for
a while. Then I reached
out for your hand and found
your fingers slipped gelatinous, I couldn't
get a grip. One night I traced a ladder
up your torso that could
have been small horns; one night I put
my head down on your stomach and found it sponge
and rubber, a masquerade of flesh
rising through your kidneys. Your face had popped
like grapes around your eyes
and lips; I couldn't kiss that impossible
topography, crags and ridges. Pockets
of your flesh burst, and when
they oozed it might
as well have been a milkshake, thick
with shifting silt. You stopped asking
me to touch you and all your nerves
were clustered in new corners, press and shudder,
the slightest brush. I stopped
differentiating: it was all
your limbs by then, joints stuffed
and calcified, skin impossible, and you
were machine made flesh
without me, no
more footprints, eyes like fog.

The Marriages: the deer

Gemma Cooper-Novack

The first time I let the arrow go,
I didn't know. I
prepared you just the way
you would have liked it, and your sister
barely warned me in time to let
the tooth-pocked bones fall to the stream. When

you stood up gleaming I
almost spit, but you kissed me too quickly, tongue
to teeth, the forest live and smooth, your hips
living and humming up against my palm.

You're a bowstring
taut in anticipation.
You fly forward.
You provide. Now

I know we fill
each other when we disappear and when
bitter cold water licks at my wrists I know
you'll come back to me. I've learned in time
to break the surface myself, shoulders
building from underwater bone. I'm glad I

joined you. Often one
of your brothers or sisters gives us a night
together, I kiss crisp seared squares
of meat between your teeth. We eat beside
the lake, and the next morning they
rise again. We'll have so many children
one day we'll have to teach them to loose
their arrows at us both at once, to
feast without us, regrow, regrow.

Bloodletter

Sonya Vatomsky

For years I ate every whale I saw in case you were inside.
Isn't it my birthright—to want life in me? To spear, to
swallow, to mix metaphors with my whalebone prosthetic
as reality circles above like an overeager fly? You know I
can't pay what I said I would when I signed what I thought
was my name. It's not that I've changed my mind, but it's
difficult to stay on course when your captain's gone drunk
and the first mate's at odds with Polaris. We piss hope out
the portholes like whiskey, fight over scraps of salted meat
while fat slides down our lambshank legs. It might be time
to give up the charade: gulls pecked to threads the skipper's
hat miles ago, the whale's entrails do not hold any secrets,
these empty bottles will not become messages that save us.
In the end, what separates us from driftwood
is inevitable decay.

Roanoke

Sonya Vatomsky

There were wolves outside my apartment
at 2am last night and I thought, wow. How

like a folktale, except I ran out of grandmothers
years ago and left them in Russia besides.

So in the dark, I let things get serious. The
velvet static whispers my fears back to me:

truth is, I'm a little concerned you took my
tongue to the grave with you. I can't get the

subject and verb to agree to the facts but
have you ever met anyone who sees the

word ideation and doesn't think of suicide?
Exactly. Triple dog dare all you want —

I'll have Cerberus at my feet for petting,
throw marshmallows to you over the gate.

It's still grey where we're from, not to make
it all about me... though there's nothing

else left, save the wishing well lodged in
my throat from the morning they x'ed out

your eyes without understanding anything.

Exhibit A

Katie Jean Shinkle

A mermaid is drowning in the east wing,
very small aquarium,
an ever-growing lower body.

+

& here in this living room we are as much of a tail flip and seashell bra
as anything else—
jaundice & ouroboros sheet of mouth eating endgame. You will feel
better tomorrow when
it's over. (It's over now. It's been over for a long time.) Your name a
certificate of yellow,
(it's over now it's been over for a long time) incubator of hearts an
incubator for adult
sternums with nothing better to do now that it's over (at last),

Winter always

comes too quickly—

+

& cling hand to throat, back again, cling hand to larynx, sternum,
bellybutton where tongues
linger too long. Cling hands finger wrapped, cling cling a hand to
throat and back again,
squeeze half-lemons from your pores, seeds and citrus slice in your
eyes, sweet mermaid,
you are tired, why are you so sleepy?

—Excerpt from *There Are So Many Things That Beg You For Love*

Exhibit B

Katie Jean Shinkle

The mermaid laughs, echo, tunnel house-to-house tin-can telephone/
hello hello hello hello, dear/telephone hello hello hello/the mermaid
says

can you hear me? Can you call me back,

I have an echo in my heart so says the cardiogram, my heart is made
of echoes room of bush of berries, singular view of outside through
shadow. Ghosts live here. The mermaid steals, glues berries to her
fingertips, its hard to answer the phone

/hello hello hello

are you there? Show yourself to me if you want your picture
taken/hello hello hello—orb, three berries, each photo blurred, each
line, disconnected, no longer in service.

—Excerpt from *There Are So Many Things That Beg You For Love*

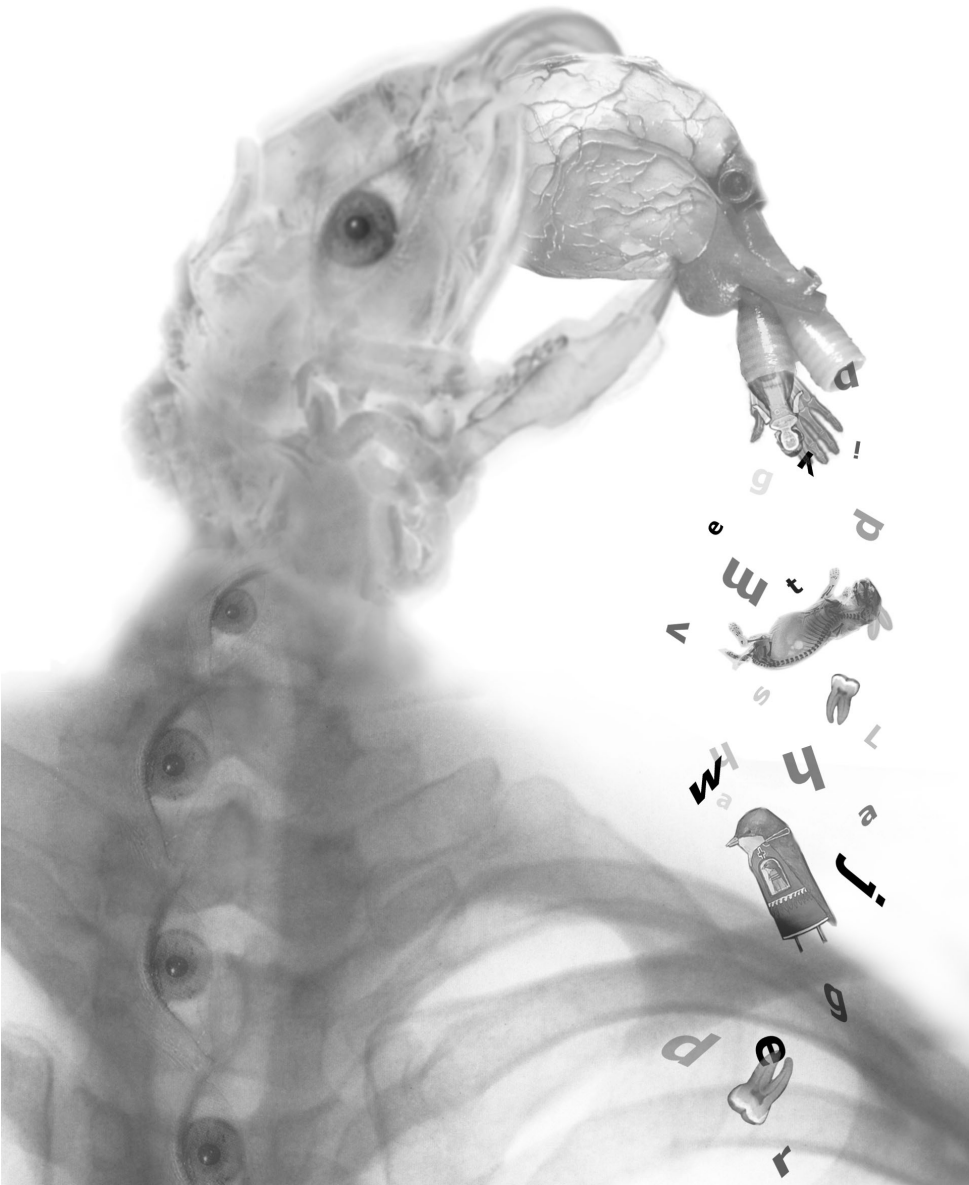
Exhibit D

Katie Jean Shinkle

& the corridor where our organs are on display (at last at last), have you
ever seen a beating
heart move so rapidly. What to make of a thump that has too many notes
to a melody.
Abandoned houses, sea we cannot walk around, boat launch for our boats
if we had any.
Look at this view. Look at the sun in the trees overhead. I am in slow
motion and
now in the city. I am nostalgic for bravery. When I put my hand on the
back of your neck,
what more did I mean but sky. I kiss the scars around where your breasts
once were, deep
black, smooth silk nude. What more can I do but hold memory harder, as
if to disappear.

—Excerpt from *There Are So Many Things That Beg You For
Love*

Children Have Small Ghosts, or The David.
Andi and Lance Olsen



Children Have Small Ghosts, or The David.

Andi and Lance Olsen

Experiencing occasional floaters, light flashes, gray smears, threads, or desire in one's perceptual field is normal. As one ages, bits of one's memories break loose and drift in the inner liquid of one's eye (The Remorse). Most of these objects are harmless, if annoying, and tend to emerge against a bright background: blue sky, book page, white wonder. However, some signal that something is happening to one's life. During the Age of Uncertainty, this was known as The Affliction of Continuous Seeing. Since then it has come to be known more accurately as Children Have Small Ghosts. The disease is often caused by undissolved irony wafting through the vitreous. Sometimes the appearance of The Left Hand of Edvard Munch is the Right Hand of God or You've Lost that Glove in the Field Again is the sign of a serious condition. Often such symptoms trick the afflicted into believing he/she sees something out of the corner of his/her eye that isn't really there, but most sufferers, with time, learn to ignore such wind gaps. To guard against this tendency, some doctors recommend diluting 3–5 drops of the name Rachel into a teaspoon of water and swishing vigorously for at least 45 seconds daily.

Burning Mouth Syndrome, or The Rachel.
Andi and Lance Olsen



Burning Mouth Syndrome, or The Rachel.

Andi and Lance Olsen

A rare, poorly understood complex most frequently afflicting mispronounced females. Those affected experience alterations in taste and texture, as well as abnormal agitation within the oral library (Geographic Tongue, Dental Suffocation, Narrative Seepage, Rabbit Birthing, French Voidages). Nerves may become hypersensitive; even barely notable sensations (e.g., the tongue rubbing against the teeth's faith) may seem extraordinarily painful. Diagnosis of this condition can sometimes pose a difficulty because, despite the presence of some or all of the aforementioned symptoms, when the mouth is examined everything appears normal. This causes a great deal of confusion for doctors unfamiliar with the disease. There is no medically proven treatment, although some suggest a period of language fasting, others brain recess. If those afflicted are not cautious, in most cases the syndrome disappears by itself after several years, resulting in incremental closure of the face, sometimes misdiagnosed as Excessive Exposure to Time. To guard against this tendency, some doctors recommend diluting 3–5 drops of the name David into a teaspoon of water and swishing vigorously for at least 45 seconds daily.

The Voice Machine, or Fungus Ants Make Zombies Do All the Work
Andi and Lance Olsen



The Voice Machine, or Fungus Ants Make Zombies Do All the Work

Andi and Lance Olsen

The Voice Machine (Fungus Ants Make Zombies Do All the Work), an infectious disease caused by excessive currents within possibility museums, spreads between humans through coughing, hoping, Ruhlmanating, and touching something with the virus on it and then touching one's own mouth, eyes, or heart. Small droplets containing the pathogen can linger on tabletops, telephones, and other surfaces for decades, and be transferred via Marstonation and other sound engines. Some people may remain contagious (also known as Misspelled) for a lifetime; a handful of posthumous cases have been reported. Symptoms may include body aches, unwarranted sharing, chills, trust, sneezing, feelings of red affection, and enthusiasm before mortifying body spasms called aesthetics. Signs of a more serious infection may consist of frequent word or sight ventilation and wholesale aporetic failure. Prevention methods number frequent wind washing and use of alcohol-based spirit sanitizers. Public health and other responsible authorities have put in place plans requiring social distancing actions depending on the severity of the outbreak. Not infrequently, the Voice Machine (Fungus Ants Make Zombies Do All the Work) presents as a chronic inflammatory affliction.

One Twin to the Other

Diandra Holmes

Your teeth roll
around my guts
clacking like thrown bones.

The future swirls in undecided flesh.

Tangled hair and broken nails cup
the unformed pit of your neverborn heart.

In the beginning, we split
with unlimited potential,
zygotes twisting to blossom
into blood and the rush
of a steady pulse.
I stretched for the gleaming
bundle of nerves weaving
around me like a marionette's strings.

You let that grey rope slip
away and waited for me
to miss you,
to pocket you like a lucky penny.

Now, you paddle in nothingness,
while I taste the cold air, watch
a rabbit's eye disappear
into the belly of some crow.

Map

Diandra Holmes

I carry my father's bones
in my pockets, my mother's skin
draped over my arm.

The tree on my spine is missing
its top. I always knew
I would stop looking up to God.

If I sit still long enough I feel
my flesh grow timid branches
that never blossom.

In South Dakota while my father pissed under a bridge
and said the flock of pigeons that kicked up
was a sign that he was a holy man spouting holy water,

a medicine man stood in the middle
of the road and pointed his finger at me.
The old man's arm was steady,

a strange heat bloomed up my spine,
prickled the hair on my neck,
and I knew something in me had been branded.

I knew I would die if I forgot
so I wrote it on my arm forever: I feel my fate
in what I cannot fear.

My mother taught me silence's
copper taste, a crushed flower's strength,
that some ink fades.

I never believed in shooting stars,
only chipped gears or cupped hands and wishes
whispered to fireflies just before they flickered out.

In Grief

Carlea Holl-Jensen

Widowed, I locked myself into the curio room and opened all the cabinet doors, pulled open all the drawers. I ran the buckskin shirts against my cheek and breathed deep the smell of tanned flesh. Every hawk's hood and comb I cherished. I lay my hands on my husband's precious cradle and his lantern and his jasper heart.

We were a house in grief, but the human bones and crocodile eggs sang out, a joyful din. They delighted in partsongs especially: lissome glees and pious canons and bawdy little catches, such beautiful harmonies. Henry the Eighth's stirrups favored "Pastime with Good Company", of course, while the jewels from ancient treasure hordes preferred old heathen rounds about the coming of spring. Other songs were like nothing I'd ever heard—wordless, vibrating cries that seemed to lift straight to sky and raised gooseflesh on my skin. They talked, too, gossiping like old women and trading stories, telling lies. They laughed and scolded, teased one another, chided me.

Their noise was a welcome reprieve. *Et tant que je viv'ray aultr' n'aymeray que vous*, they keened, and, *Greensleeves was all my joy!* When they forgot the words, they hummed.

At last, they said, *we are alone*.

What they wanted most, it seemed, now that they had me to themselves, was to tell me their own stories. Perhaps they'd listened long enough to other people dictating their provenance.

They all clamored to be heard, talking over one another, always *I, I, I*, *we, we, we*.

They said,

How many passing winters has it been since we were carried over the ocean from our home? Our home, where the maracock and chinquapin grow, where sturgeon are thick in the mouths of rivers.

Our home, of juniper swamps and cypress swamps, of tidal pulses and meander scars, of the great salt bay.

Long ago we saw the rise and the power and the lowering of the sun, we watched the coming of the stag moon. And you—you swans with fire, with smoke in your mouths. Are you punishment? Were you sent to injure us by the beautiful, cold-eyed man who scars all those who look upon him? Could we have circumvented you with offerings of copper beads?

They said,

Don't you know anything? Don't you know? That I come from the edge of the White Sea, where the night evaporates in summer, where we forget the name of sunset? Don't you know?

Sometimes they wept from loneliness, homesickness, from recrimination, regret.

They were the noise of flutes, of skin drums. They spoke in spike fiddle, that lilting, sinuous tongue. They were the marketplace chatter of souks, the whispered insinuations of imperial court. They were the drone of insects in wet equatorial forests.

In time, their noise came to press upon me. They grew louder and louder. That clamor of voices did not end.

In the quiet pre-dawn, the engraved clubs would say,

In the lingering hours of the night, we will come upon you and set your homes aflame, and when you run from the fire, from the smoke, we will fall upon you and your blood will run.

When their threats became too violent, the shields would promise to protect me.

On some nights, the trumpeting of fluted ivory horns.

On others, the creaking of cotton hammock ropes, like breathing out and breathing in.

I lie awake listening. I had to. I was the only one left who could hear them, who could understand. *I know*, I told them. *I know, I know*. Yet still they talked.

It did not end and did not end.

II.

The Other Girls Fall Through Me

Kia Groom

like a dye diffusion—vibrate
through me like a chalk circle.

The other girls are root system. They are
collateral damage.

The other girls fuse their cellular debris
to my wind-up meat vehicle.

The other girls are coming
for my crystal core.

The other girls echo in my hollows—sluice
over me like chlorine baptism.

The other girls invoke their lipstick omens
inside my pulsing halls.

The other girls are a chronology of hauntings,
They spell me like janky taxidermy.

The other girls weave their fractured polaroids
into my small intestine.

They repeat me
like bad proverbs—reverse me like antidotes.

The other girls are a digestion
of arcane language—they verb me like noun.

I am coming
for the other girls.

little miss shortbread

Emily Corwin

this darling sequin
this blue ribbon slit through
this girl so milkshake
this necklace of doves
this lavender mocha
this mary-jane shoe
this rosary down her bra cup
this horse-drawn tomato
this sarcophagus mouth
this painkiller, this eye booger
this casket of doll plastic
this acre of dead geraniums
this pine-scented dress
this tooth soaking venom
this nettle, this swollen cheek
this rootlet for tripping over
this moldy supper
this last of the matchsticks
this little ringlet, this tremor
this under a yellow moon crumb.

— after Catherine Bowman

forensic file
Emily Corwin

she on the milk carton
she with taxidermy eye
she a pink wire for clipping

she slumping in her calico dress
she a pair of wrists, a windpipe
fibers wedged inside her maw

she the milkmaid hair in your glove
she gunpowder, she exit wounds
she at the blade's disposal

she in the wood smells and littered
like crumb for blackbirds, she
mulching in the earth forever

she cadavered, she splayed on vinyl
backseat revving out of town

she lovebite on you
she sweet nothings
she put still warm into the elm.

— after Stacy Gnall

Not a Butterfly But

Heather Cox

One girl was pigtails and freckles and a watermelon grin. One girl had fire engine red hair and leg-locked you in her waterbed, gave you your first swig of booze, Kahlua (if that counts). Same girl tried to teach you to shoot a rifle, blasted Dixie Chicks from secondhand speakers, had the tiniest truck you'd ever seen, had your same name. Girl drove down to no man's land, came back gushing about some boy's hungry hands, so you split yourself from yourself, a living fork in the road. One girl lived in a trailer in the center of town, had deep dimples and a couple tangled teeth. Same girl kissed you into lockers, into hallway walls, into dark nights lonelier than the last lonely night you knew before it, kissed you into a knot, not a butterfly but a locust in your stomach, just the shell, as she'd sit cross-legged like twists in braids she'd finger your hair with such long strokes to perfect. Same girl wasn't perfect, but goddamn. She'd empty a bottle or two of Smirnoff and your body vibrated in the space between almost doesn't count and hallelujah. One girl had you staying up on the phone 'til nearly sunrise, drawing circles in the fabric of the loveseat like it were her skin. It'd never be her skin. Her boyfriend was a godsend, saved her from a car crash and who knows what else. You were just a girl. One girl was another girl and another girl after that. A domino falling into its twin only to find its reflection is endless.

Jackalope-Girl Learns to Speak

Stacey Balkun

My ears were too big but I had a tiny
mouth. My first word was mistaken
for a whimper. For weeks, I asked only for milk

and then I asked for clover.
My surrogate mother laughed
and handed me a binky. I knew then

that the difference between us was more
than my long legs, beady eyes—
that it was somehow blood

or birthright. I will not say
I wasn't nurtured or loved but rather
that shoes always felt strange

on my feet. I hated feeling cold
and made small nests whenever I could.
I drank coffee at a young age

to impress them. It stunted my growth, kept
my ears from stretching up, the whiskers
from sprouting across my cheeks.

Half-rabbit adopted by humans
in the northeast, I didn't speak
unless I had to. I chewed wood

to grind down my front teeth.
I never learned their accent
so sentences always felt peculiar

on my tongue. I got scared
in open spaces. That was the language
I understood. And, scared, I ran.

Jackalope-Girl Gets a Tattoo
Stacey Balkun

Leave a bottle of whiskey
on the stoop if you ever want

to catch me. Leave the bar
a few minutes too late, leave

the OPEN sign glowing
even if you're closed. The needle

hissing its ink. This is no tribal
stamp. I don't share

my family's DNA. Leave
your hand clasped

around my wrist, turning
the forearm outward

toward the sewing
machine whir as if

you're stitching me together,
a ragdoll. A velveteen rabbit.

I'm tougher than I look.
Leave whenever you want.

I'll find my way home.

[words of affirmation]

Jessica Morey-Collins

A cube of sugar crowns an ox liver. A cube of sugar tops it.
My flotsam heart in coffee-syrup—if I was lost at sea, I'd keep

topping you from the sea bottom. From Marianas' cleft, I'd charge
depth—more for the inflated statement than for the airline points. Still,

I'd send you to the continent's ox-ridden middle if it meant I could stand
at the curb bleating goodbyes while you dragged your bag full of fossils

toward the luggage-check—whole duffel full of ancient, unnamed
bones, full of waiting-to-be-named exoskeletons, and you, too,

a fossil—a five-finned ox found at a canyon-bottom. You, a bone poking out
from a lost sea, and me brushing sugar off your rocks, proclaiming you real.

[acts of service]

Jessica Morey-Collins

Let me yank out my bones, get off
of their hoist and leverage. Let me crutch

them under your armpits. Were I a jelly floating boneless
in some sunless abyss, were I abysmal, lacking

crunch & structure, too small to prop you
up, too juicy to sluice your pretty pus,

the glimmer seeping from your split
places, I'd fill you up and build notches

to your trench-bottom. I'd skim up all
that trash. You are a socket shaped just

like what I can do for you—a trench mouth
hung slack for exactly my shape of sugar.

HUMS, HURTS

Eric Baus

So the rosin, as the rain was, flowered its watts, precipitates in what
a leaf sees, has been one, exhausts the weakness of animal speech, a
siren under wool, hums, hurts.

SUBLINGUAL CANDLE

Eric Baus

The last star dissolved its heart into a simpler machine. Built from ox smoke and congealed cults, the glass eye let in a tiny lantern and all the snakes sparred with their shadows. It rose to revert to a letterless space, to hum beside the brook of sodden dressings, to wash beyond the storm-hatched lambs.

III.

Bottle 2
MANDEM



Bottle 4
MANDEM



Hansel
Clare Welsh



The Call
Clare Welsh



Mother
Tammy Bendetti



Bones of the Daughter

Renée E. D'Aoust

The daughter and the mother are stump trolls born from the weight of the earth. They walk in the glade and sit on cedar stumps. The hound Truffle von Plott follows.

The bones of the mother can never be rebuilt. Not from words, not from belief, not from fire. Only in gratitude do bones not burn. Art burns. Brian's daughter holds a painting next to the slash pile. An offering to nogods. Art to dust. She hates that painting and the person who gave it to her: she does the two-step as she flings it forth. She waltzes as it lights on fire. A slightly acrid smell of oil. Life begins to burn again. Da-da-da.

Brian's daughter returns to her love of reading poems. A slice of poetic line might be a metaphor for life, but she doesn't give a fuck whether that's true, or not. Words are no stand-in for death.

She reads dog poems with four paws by two Marks, Strand and Doty. She understands the language of woof and wag. Truffle von Plott sits on her lap as heavy as the weight of grief.

She finds Sappho and *reaches both arms to the sky*. The opaque language of the sun and moon.

She tries, once again, to read Montaigne. Once again, she stumbles.

She (re)reads *The Iliad*. Achilles's scream is real. His buddy is dead. So many dead.

With Truffle von Plott's leash in hand, she raises both arms to the sky. It becomes the one authentic movement of the year. *Both arms to the sky*. The dog leash is the life cord connecting her to the hound and, through his paws, to *la terra*. The brown sky is the blue ground, the atmosphere turns dust-to-dust. She turns off her chainsaw.

She wags and thinks. She begins to feel something other than that fatal weight on her chest. She feels a thrump-thrump inside her heart. The physical lub-dub: nothing abstract. Nogoddess, you have wrought a split heart. Do not speak of torrential rain. There is fire. Bones burn, duff smokes. Her hound Truffle howls, the world turns.

As nogod laughs, more rain falls, rain heavy with deep sleep, waterlogged. She drowns, emerges. She is lost to nogod, nor claimed by another. She is not her own woman, nor yours. She is not her mother.

She is of the forest; she is of this hound. Do you see them walk—hound and woman—together, alone?

Listen: they howl.

self-portrait, tooth & claw

Emily O'Neill

my sister hates how my friends fight
like cats I see it
but am one licking
tinned fish from the trash

how to stop an argument / how to ask better questions

of the ocean, where no one finds us / each sand grain falling
of time as value as monetary as a kind of price

how many do we get
what is waste

new green trees naked in late snow
girl bark surf rock I think the sun came out today
I think it's safe to go barefoot for the first time
this year //

it feels important to repeat myself
it feels important to repeat myself

to rip my stockings / to mistake making
for the most prized heat

it feels important to go barefoot
to drag grit to bed with me

I move all the furniture mirror sleeping
door adjacent all the dead flowers
collected in pint glasses all the little
hang tags / bags of buttons / sage / matches / tiny tack nails

can I fix myself to the arc of the day & fall out of the dark

can I throw my pen into the sea / can I wolf me into territory

new green knees / how a bruise tastes

when leaned into

can I shake all the dusty furniture until it rains ash & I sneeze
I sneeze & a molar
shifts

{scree}

Emily O'Neill

my brother is gun-aged but
not currently shooting but
he knows how & also
how to fell a tree & also
all the reasons animals bleed he told me once
he likes dogs because they're incapable
of lying at least about what they want
& people lie unknowingly all the time
my brother, syringe in my flattened lung
bringing air back into the room Owen
so tall now I lift off the ground in his arms
my brother wags his tail in Doylestown
& I can smile through my shift
my brother boom voiced brother bass
in the downbeat brother baby I
carried on my back as a screeching
bat two of us cave-sleeping
upside down twilight ghosts

my brother knocks the forest over
when he tells the truth my brother
my blood my perfect myth

where St. Francis tamed the wolves
Emily O'Neill

I have a hard time staying clean. picking cherries.
trusting my name not to be dumb in a mouth.
it plays dead. eats trash for breakfast. my name
with molasses fur, pretending foreign embassy.
fleur de lis wallpaper on my name's tongue,
which is why it tastes like paste to say it.
I lost the monogramed necklace in the woods.
you either watch the moon or it watches you,
either bristle from the light or pray for its return.

nobody can silver me. kick a dog who's dreaming
& she'll never forget the impossible smell
of sleep. how much is it worth to wash in the rain
before spring breaks. stand under busted gutter
& the rot water batizes you a rat-king.
makes you saint. saint not meaning tame
but extraordinary. look how many teeth
you have—the better to swallow the sky.

From *The Wolf Queen and The Ruined Castle*

by Christine Hamm

“The wolf, cruel but cowardly and suspicious, and seldom ventures out of the woods except pressed by hunger, but when this becomes extreme, he braves danger: and will attack men, horses, dogs, cattle of all kinds, even the graves of the dead are not proof against his rapacity.”

—*The New and Complete American Encyclopedia*, 1802

(&)

When the small gray wolf sees me at night, she slips her ears back, and lowers her chin onto the ground, then gets back up. She does this in a circle around me, a dance. I sit cross-legged in the weedy part of the garden as she kneels and pops. She licks my chin. She jumps up so her forelegs are on my shoulders: face to face. She turns her snout and looks at me with each eye. Her irises are bluish-white with navy edges. She whines and yips. A quick bite, a tiny piece of my eyebrow goes missing. Her breath smells like beer and squirrel. I wipe the blood from my eye and throw her down onto her back, loom above her. She wriggles and I bury my face into the gray and white ruff on her chest, into the fleas and mud. I use my teeth.

(&)

“The wolf then dashed into a party of ladies and...bit [the] Private in two places... [T]he animal left the marks of his presence in every quarter of the garrison. He moved with great rapidity, snapping at everything within his reach, tearing tents, window curtains, bed clothing, etc.. “

—Bill Wasik, Monica Murphy, *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolical Virus*, 2012

(&)

Insects outside my bedroom window: slow at night, but never stopping. A shrill, wick, wick, wick. Or sick, sick. After sunset, the wolves groan as they settle and scratch. In the morning, the

whole back lot filled with droppings, with tufts of long, harsh fur and cracked bird bones. Weeds flourish only along the edges—the rest is dust and pebbles, fractured

concrete paving stones from aborted gardens. I wear a harness around my mouth when I sleep. Otherwise, I chew my tongue and my fingers. A mouthful of blood. My husband says he can't sleep with the noise of my tearing in the dark, the grunting. The first joint on my left pinky, already gone.

(&)

“That a certain woman being in prison on suspicion of witchcraft, pretending to be able to turn herself into a wolf, the magistrate... promised her that she should not be put to death in case she would...thus transform herself... [A]ccordingly she annointed her head, neck and armpits, immediately upon which she fell into a most profound sleep for three hours, after which she suddenly rose up, declaring that she had been turned into a wolf, and had been at a place some miles distant, and there killed first a sheep and then a cow.”

—Nathaniel Crouch, *The Kingdom of Darkness*, 1688

(&)

Leaf shadows shimmer from the windows. The wolves at the pocked walls lean in towards something in the center. I trip over the dark carpet, but it's not a carpet—it's water. The wolves meet my eyes as I sink, scent of chlorine/coconut oil/animal urine. And here again, my dad is teaching me what happens when I try to rescue people. The wolves' ears forward, nostrils stretched and expanded; my father with his hand on the top of my head. “This is what happens if you try to save the drowning” and I, I, I, I, I am tasting the water as it burns the back of my throat. He is pushing down and I am five, in a navy and yellow striped two-piece.

(&)

“Even a man who is pure in heart and says his prayers by night, may become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms and the autumn moon is bright.”

–*The Wolf Man* (film) (1941)

(&)

Ash from a house fire in my hair. Heat rising from the cracks in the earth, grey and no sun. I had a test at the bottom of the garden. The wolves presented me with the corpse of a possum, and the corpse of a street cat. "A or B", they said. "No, no, no, no, no," I said, "Well." I stroked the neck of the cat. He was yellow and white, with blue flesh sagging through his teeth. "This one," I said.

The police were already searching through my house, tossing my books into the air, banging pots and shoes together to see who could make the most noise. That night, we lay on the floor without clothes, and I was twenty years younger. "You ruined me, " I said, and felt the throb with my tongue. "You are the possum," you whispered. You dissolved into the cracks of the floor, "Not the cat."

(&)

“The disease begins with a feeling of anxiety, cephalalgia, and slightly elevated body temperature...The excitation stage that follows is characterized by... enlarged pupils, extreme sensitivity to light and sound, and increased salivation. ...a phenomenon known as hydrophobia.”

–Pedro N. Acha, Boris Szyfres, *Zoonoses and Communicable Diseases Common to Man and Animals: Chlamydioses...*, 2009

(&)

The first time I see a wolf, I am 14, and it is sometime after midnight. I haven't eaten for two days. I am peering through the glass wall in my best friend's living room, watching the street. Striped, five-fingered leaves crowd the window. I am naked. My friend fell asleep in the bathroom hours ago. The street is empty then not. Despite the windless night, the trees rustle and crash. I see the others reflected behind me. Later, I rinse myself off and pull on my t-shirt and running

shorts, curl up on the edge of someone's bed. The men come in and apologize. They tell me I'm good-looking, and that I will have to get used to it. In the morning, as I pick through my bowl of chocolate cheerios with my fingers, my friend will ask if her brother made me come. No matter how much I smooth them down with my palm, my bangs feel extremely gross. My first kiss was years later, after I learned to drive.

(&)

“Until the end of the 17th century, the wolf... threatened populations to the south of the Île-de-France... A spate of attacks on humans: villages were struck by tragic deaths, including children (12 incidents) as ever, but also adolescents (7 girls aged 15 to 19) and, more unusually, adults (1 man and 17 women aged 20 to 60).”

—*The Last Man-Eating Wolves*, no author, (1687-1699)

(&)

I'm watching the nature channel. I've taken off my mask so my skin can breathe. I have a rash high up on my cheeks—I think it's the rubber or fake fur in the mask. Last night, no one knew me at the party, so they were friendlier. Everyone was drunk, looming and falling, laughing and falling. I was getting a contact high. I haven't been drunk for ten years, and that last time, I was alone.

(&)

“Wolf-madness, is a disease, in which men run barking and howling about graves and fields in the night, lying hid for the most part of the day, and will not be persuaded both that are Wolves, or some such beasts.”

—Charlotte F. Otten, *A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture*, 1986

(&)

“Plot comes from motivation”, my friend tells me. The wolves are hungry, but they won't open their mouths. They feel queasy, uncertain

about this meat. The dog food sprawled in concrete bowls is sour, handled. It smells of human sweat and machines. The wolves can't drink water from buckets—it is spoiled by the leaves in it, by the dust clinging to the surface. Water needs to move to be wet.

The brown female has lost weight. The black male with one white eye paws at her, drags her by the scruff of her neck. She sighs and snaps at him. The weather is sour, the moon has fled, the sparrows hover in another backyard. All the leaves are gray. The hair on my neck and shoulders grows dark, denser. I can't sleep next to my husband—the bedroom's too hot with just the fan, the comforter is stale, sticky. His skin has started to smell of wood polish. We fight, and I sleep on the bench in the garden. No stars, and smoke from an old engine two doors down.

(&)

“Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree.”

– “The Wolfman, A Case History,” Sigmund Freud, 1942

Sea-Witch 000000

Moss Angel

It is said that when she was younger Sea-Witch took a picture of her naked body & uploaded it to a forgotten public server, that she named it gaygod66.png after one of her own holy names. It is said she did so from a computer she later burned in ceremony & whose remains she pushed off a boat in the deepest ocean. Though the source of this tale is unknown, most scholars agree it certainly Sounds Like The Kind of Thing Sea-Witch Would Do. At some point gaygod66.png was discovered by those of us living inside her & has since become an important focus of Sea-Witchian studies, despite a great deal of controversy regarding its origin. As of the time this book is being written no one has asked Sea-Witch about it. If genuine, this photo documents a time when significant aspects of Sea-Witch's body had not yet emerged. It documents a body unfamiliar to those of us who know her now & share her body in the ways she has encouraged us to. A body unlike any we have seen.

Sea-Witch Girl Dirt Angel Fog

Moss Angel

A real living creature was presented to Sea-Witch soon after her body was first created & she kissed it, placing it among the rocks on the roughest part of the shore. That real living creature grew up as a being that shifted with time. Hir body's forms changed drastically as time passed. Except the concept of time passing wasn't relevant to hir. Hir consciousness was outside of time, but limited in space. Similar to the way that other beings are limited in time, but their consciousness is outside of space. Ze was limited to those rocks, to moving slowly along the shore. From hir perspective, ze occupied all forms at once, but could feel them individually. Hir existence was not the first such in history. Sea-Witch & hir remained very close, though they never met again. Outside of time there is no such thing as having someone leave you.

Trans Memoir Dog Angel Firelight 1984
Moss Angel

Elsewhere I have mentioned my name, which is Sara. It is true that I have many other names & that Sara is not the first name I have had & will not be my name forever. But, for now, it is my real name. It is also true that there are many other Saras. Sea-Witchean naming conventions generally encourage frequent & increasingly complicated renamings, but it is also traditional that at a certain stage of formation a monster names herself Sara. Because of this, I, like all the other monsters occupying my current stage of formation, am named Sara. There have been many Saras before me & there will be many Saras after. While I was living in Sea-Witch I knew many other Saras with whom I kept warm in blankets on snowy nights. Saras are well known for our gentle confusion, our soft curls, & our continued attachment to linear time. Only a monster in her Sara phase could have written a book such as this one. As I am always in the process of formation, it is possible that by the time you read this you & I will no longer be mutually intelligible. It is also possible that this is already the case. I have no way of knowing.

IV.

Man Turning into a Centaur and Back Again

Jade Hurter

I.

In the desert, a man is turning
into a centaur,
lower-half dark, glistening sweat.
His teeth are those
of a herbivore.
In one hand is a rope
attached to a blinded kestrel.
The bird's ankle is weighted
with an oriole carcass.

II.

You cannot swallow songbirds whole.
First, you must catch them.
Then, pull off the feathers, pull out
the fused collarbone.
Suck at meager flesh. Your body
will fill with song. Rising like bile
in the throat.

III.

The centaur is catching songbirds,
the kestrel floating
like a fishhook.
A falcon smells
the drying blood. Its feathers shine.
Beneath its shadow, the sand
turns to glass, briefly.

IV.

The falcon is not
a mythic creature. It is a bird, still-eyed
and calling. Mortal as a worm,
belly filled
with birdflesh, mouth empty.
Soon it will be a thing in chains.

V.

The centaur turns back into a man.
He unties the kestrel
with gentle fingers. Detaches the carcass.
Pulls the threads
from the eyelids. Let's go.
The kestrel flies heavy
into the desert sun.

VI.

Spit out the bones
of the songbird, now.
You've caught the falcon, golden fish.
Adorn your body with its feathers.
Lash your palms across its beak.
Drown it in a tank of sky.

from *As The World Falls Down*

Jayme Russell

.....
gliding past film on a reel
the sound of a fluttering tail *a bird*
of rarest spun heaven metal
.....

eyes fringed with *a burst of singing*

it was like ...

for a moment ...

some great bird had flown in

stuffed with song gears
spinning in the projected light



how to catch a moonbeam how to catch a moth
catch him with a candle catch him with a cloth

never touch perfection

with your fingers wind
thread round wings catch
butterflies with glue chloroform
jar and pins laced with sugar

perfect specimen perfectly killed



doors spring open and you appear wrapped in feathers
twisting the sphere of my dreams
I'm being unwound from the center

body wheels with one leg pinned
circles and circles I'm caught in your teeth and spinning
neverending *architecture*

(*closed loops*)

movements measured in circular intervals
I'm scratched and smeared a rotating whistle
synchronized sound and beak
the illusion of motion
head in
tail out *I thought it was the wind up here*

it's

music
bird of brass pivoting
a continuous coil no break
with a twitch of the tail automatic
fixed movement abrupt turnstopspins
until wings foldbird descendsongstops

I fall back into the box and the lid closes

□

plug the shot holes and the mouth roll in paper
the skinning incision the skinning
operation drying blood and body part the feathers
sever the knees with cartilage knife
tail disjointed knees disjointed
skin freed from the body
ripped from the bone in one motion
stains rinsed from plumage
wrapped skull ready to be turned back
into skin feed the wire cotton in the mouth
stuff the eyes full of soft looks some
birds are more easily skinned than others



insert the key twist my movements
wound again and again and again



hold out possibility to me hold out my dreams in your
poised hand they are light they are circular they reflect
your laugh



bird in dusty grey pecking skin
with bird's sharp metal bird edge and I
turn and I fall for the bird pulling
me across the floor bird knocking
bird photos from the wall and you the bird—

raving

we are all stuffed birds murdered on walls for display
you can hear the wings I can wear the eyes and we
will fly nowhere
you can be the bait and I will be stuffed into the trunk
sinking to the
bottom of the swamp

we're all in our private traps clamped in them
fill the empty moments with sawdust sew up each
evening

I don't really know anything about birds

and all has gone black *none of us can*
ever get out
all has been sunk in the black *we scratch and*
claw only at the air only at each other



the owl knows me stares into me I am ready to walk
through the door into darkness there is a place where
the air is thin gravity does not hold we rise from the
swollen ground



eager to peck at the eyes the technicolor bird has hit
the—

synchronized audio tracks of...blue...disruption
in continuity...sparks caused by static buildup
the sky burns brown



one arm pulls back and points the clock hangs heavy
against the copper sky its pinned to the branches its
pinned in that moment but you set the hands
in motion
the wind whips between minutes pushing us a
part your lips

echo you
disappear

Case No. 37. —The Happy Family.

J. Bowers

The Happy Family is a miscellany of birds and beasts (upwards of sixty or more), living together in relative harmony inside a massive enclosure on the third floor of Barnum's American Museum, "each creature being the mortal enemy of every other, but contentedly playing and frolicking together without injury or discord, a living Peaceable Kingdom."

The Happy Family, like any other, accumulated over several generations. Some of its commoner cousins were born here, and know nothing of the world beyond the damp confines of their ancestral enclosure. Meanwhile, Mr. Barnum scours the globe to replace the more exotic varieties as dictated by size, temperament, and price per specimen.

According to the brass placard affixed at eye level, the Happy Family includes "eight turtledoves, four owls, ten Norway rats, six cats, two dogs, one hawk, two Golden Australian Pigeons, eighteen Guinea pigs, two tortoises, an Anteater, three Porcupines, two woodchucks, etc. etc.," The sign's descent into vague punctuation is meant to account for the rotating cast of monkeys and birds, of every degree of size and tail. Ancient orangutans sigh while macaques dangle from the ceiling. The baboon sisters amuse themselves by smacking the tortoises on the concrete floor. A pale flamingo bristles beside the radiator. A tiny quail squats on a wooden outcropping artfully painted to resemble stone.

This can only be a partial reckoning, for innumerable tiny beings elude us among the drooping philodendrons. It is unclear if we should count the crickets that float uneaten in the water supply. The number of fleas and mites scrambling over kittens' faces cannot be determined with the naked eye. Alas, such accuracy is crucial to the museum's youngest patrons, who sob when their parents usher them past before they're done counting heads.

There are other disappointments. White mice skitter along the perimeter, but the python merely yawns. There is a lamb, but no lion. The whippoorwill whip her won't. Indeed, a general atmosphere of ennui pervades, lending weight to the theory that before the museum opens each morning, the Happy Family's more carnivorous members are drugged, or beaten, or both.

But as we linger, guessing, the Family may divulge its modest wonders. An expectant hamster lines her nest with hawk's down. Calico guinea pigs coo and huddle under an obliging billy goat, sharing wilted lettuce. For most, these small miracles are enough to overcome the barnyard odor and inhuman screeching. But even the smallest evidence of interspecies harmony cannot erase the memory of a hundred black eyes glittering like wet marbles—or the discomfiting way they remind us of the escaped slaves in the newspapers, discovered by Confederate lantern.

Visitors with delicate constitutions may secure pabulum as a souvenir postcard, which blots away unpleasant Family memories with a watercolor fantasia of leopards and parrots, snuggling like brothers in a gilded greenhouse heavy with fruit.

"It was just wonderful," murmur the society ladies, passing the postcard around wallpapered parlors. "They all got along so well."

Lycanopterror

Gemma Cooper-Novack

Only a few days after the cryptozoologists' convention left town, we started to wonder. Their last drunken evening, Generation Locust a couple of years ago, had been challenge enough, but the stripped wheatfields and ears of corn like broken skylines had nothing on what would come.

It started when Lynnette Jones found her shattered cat in a cage of ribs. Nobody quite understood what could have made those scratch marks on the raw, white bone. Teeth never occurred to anyone.

The walls became noisy. It happened first at the Gurdys' house, but everyone who bordered Matt Warren's farm experienced it with greater and greater frequency. As if the brush of hair was magnified a thousand times over, loud enough to wake us up and make us wonder why we were shaking.

It was like that for a while—creaking doors, damaged animals. Something always seemed to obscure our vision, muffle the echoes at the second we most needed them. But finally, one evening we all opened the basement doors at precisely the right moment. The sound turned out to be the gnashing of fullmoon fangs and twelve thousand bloody wings flapping at once.

Monster Show

Susan Slaviero

That time you brought me back from the dead? The meat miracle? The scent of sulfur? My cyclopia / glass eye / the chest clock you made from a meteorite. You dressed me in bedsheets, called me a beautiful creature. I'd almost forgotten the moths flickering around the chandelier, the centipedes trapped behind the baseboards. There was a tureen of poison soup, a devilfish aquarium. This was home.

You inflated my lungs with a basketball needle, polished my horns with beeswax and fat. You said *be glad you aren't a werewolf. That hurts so much more.* Better to be an anomaly, the frostbitten dead, black stitches, yellowing tusks. Don't move. You can't imagine the complications of restitched flesh. The growth of rudimentary limbs in awkward places. Malformation, sepsis. The brain pressing through the brow. That spot where the spine splits. Like the bones? They're new. I'm like nothing you've ever made before. Tell me another story about being born, about water and corpses. Perhaps you're sorry, but not about anatomy.

Take the Monster and Put Him in a Situation

Susan Slaviero

The monster is an artist, creating sculptures of found objects: shiny copper pennies and brainpans and delicate goose feathers held together with mucous and saliva, a couple of small nails. He calls this piece *The Murdered Dinner*. Another, *Legs Just Taste Better*.

Maybe the monster has his own sitcom, with a quirky human family that just doesn't understand what it means to be hungry between meals and to want to wear a man's scalp as a winter cap. The monster is given an androgynous human name like Randy or Lee. He has a tiny attic bedroom with a canopied crate and plain white curtains. The monster hides in his room when the family has friends for dinner because the family does not want to change what it means to have *friends for dinner*.

But why him and not her? Maybe the monster wears a dress, or maybe the monster doesn't wear any clothes at all, and why should the monster be interested in gender performance? The monster is asexual, reproduces by the means of shedding spores. This biology allows all creatures to give birth to creeping buds with hollowed out eye-shells and slowly beating hearts. Only the monster knows where the body is hidden. Find it / him / her. Wear this dead embryo as a talisman on a chain, believe that what is stone might become skin, pink and succulent. In our dreams, we are chasing the monster, running him down on horseback or perhaps with the help of gray wolves. We have prepared a cage, a gibbet, and hung it from an acacia tree. It's only murder when the subject is human. It's only murder except sometimes it isn't.

Monster Studies 101

Susan Slaviero

Navigating the hellmouth

It's believed if you find the right coordinates you might plant worms and grow them into dragons. This door opens once every nineteen years so you'll want to plan accordingly. Be wary of mammoth babies, tusked and angry, creeping in these rare places. Your compass will be useless. You may whittle a dowsing rod from a witch's femur if you don't want to be lost forever. Also—don't eat the figs. Can you smell the brimstone? You're in the right place.

The occupant of the cage

How do you know if you're a werewolf? The seasons give you vertigo and the red cells in your blood vibrate during snowstorms and dinner parties. Your forearms are dark with grease and the sound of a hymn poisons your skin. You shed your fingertips and they turn into salamanders. You wake up jacketless and bruised, your stomach murmuring in the dark.

A story about a house

Found only by accident, a turn down an unlit gravel road, a breakdown, and you're resting on the axis of a tesseract. People die here. That much is obvious. You find surgical tools in the garage: bone saws and clamps, jars of necrotic organs and tubules of red. There are eyeless dolls resting on the mantel, a boogeyman in the closet who knows your name. The radio gets only static. Close your eyes and hear the bullets laboring in the shotgun, the knives shuddering in the block. The roof is crowded with pale, hungry suicides. Ants teem in the corners in the shape of runes. Will you spend the night?

Confusion Hill
Amy Miller

Gravity sideways, one leg shorter,
and everything attracts. We walked
on walls, and the farther you got,
the larger. We tried to sip
from that sulfur spring and brought home
the dumbest gifts, magnets that always
repelled, a crooked hat, a cedar box
that still smells—lord—of damp campground
and the always shade of twin redwoods
that grew so close they fused. It isn't science,
you said, the only thing rolling the wrong way
is money. But the jackalope, frogalope,
chipalope, whatever that creature was,
just think, it held two things at once. One
we believed; the other we had to see
through a half-forgiving light—the antlers,
quick tongue, soft tail curled
like a question mark.

Allie Marini

<p>Location: Florida</p> <p>Status: Unconfirmed/Disputed</p> <p>Description: Aquatic bipedal hominid</p>

It is the nature of sizable bodies of water
to keep themselves at least one monster:
we serve a practical purpose, after all.

Without our boggy specters
staring up from the depths,
your children would drown by the dozens,
unable to draw themselves away,
mesmerized by the undulation of moving water.

Likewise, your women.
Without gilled men—
 all of us, creatures from the black lagoon—
 how would your soft, pink women
 know to be wary of strangers?

Or:

How would they be dissuaded
from loading down their pockets with stones,
& wading in with their longskirts,
eager to meet us?

We're already dead.

Adam Tedesco and Juliet Cook

The stars were so bright tonight, I was tempted
to photograph them, but my photos won't capture
the stars. My hand won't hold the camera upright.

I don't even have real fingernails.
I am a dead poet ghost hand, blue nail
polish trying to show through the dark,
but unable to sparkle like stars.

I am a brain in a jar of ink.
I am a sinking squid in the ink of time, the cooked mouth
of nowhere that speaks a map home from now.

The stars were not stars tonight, only binary scars
graying out the dawn in little halos of yellowed milk.
Goat's milk from fainting goats, one ear ripped off,
dripping down the sink. This freezing rain

will never end. They will die before they wake,
and because there's no real heaven, who knows
what will happen next. Sunken down stars,

scarred fainting goats frozen together
like they are conjoined at the hips,
but they weren't born that way,
and now it's too late to learn to walk that way.

It's way too dark.

Fugitive Dive

j/j hastain and Juliet Cook

Strong alternating tides
fling flagella
all the way up
to the top of the tree lines

then branches break and we
misperceive this to be
a result
of added weight.

Really it was a result
of the dialogue we had
about angels overtaking
an antique syringe
and the torn space, absorbing
the tidal pool fluids.

A wedged interface
is discharging into sockets
filled with bloody
body parts
fused with filo dough.

Rotating around glands,
dripping mutant strands.
Brightening all of that bleached hair.

We're leading the way up towards
the bleachers, then hurling down
nosebleeds onto the cheerleaders.

Then they finally exit the gym,
carrying small strobe lights.
They climb all the way up
to the top of the silo to meet us.

We come together
to dance
our way back inside.

Maryland

Mathias Svalina

We kill what we know. That's island life. But blame is forbidden in Maryland. It is a state of monster & island, so the residents board their windows up & stay home when it rains. In old maps Maryland is depicted as a prophet, today as a rock dropped from atop a building that has, by the time it reaches the cement, evolved into an eel. You can want to dream of good, white rope, invent yourself a clipper ship. But Maryland knows your dreams, the black arteries, the fifty gates the slave ships pass. This cannot be a world of truth. O world. Throat. O sharpened stick in the liver, water trickling over rock. I cannot genuflect the cold away. I have such beautiful maps, but I need a plan.

Massachusetts

Mathias Svalina

In Massachusetts, there is glory & it burdens all. Q: *What is meant by glory?* A: Glory is the tearing down. Q: *What is meant by tearing down?* A: Dancing to the music, placing pills beneath tongue, etc. A person's soul is a vowel. A state's soul is an assembly line. One needs no permission to love, so love can't be glory. Voices hover over water, waiting for mouths to accommodate as the people of Massachusetts give birth to unusual things by day & by night tremble. Before Massachusetts was a state, it was one trembling before one trembling. In this time, the trees clawed at each other, the people hid beneath a flood of voices. Q: *What is meant by hope?* A: Sometimes in sleep, we reach to hold whatever couldn't be.

Michigan
Mathias Svalina

In Michigan, white children trade in their whiteness at thirteen & are given a history to drown in Bitter River. When the children return to the homes of their parents, they are coated in that red stuff that turns a stick into a match. With map-like duty, they wash each day to keep the whiteness from returning. But it returns, of course, as all things made of fear return. Bitter River encircles Michigan, like a straightjacket bolstered by belief, like a fist around coin. It is a barrier between what has been & what has been told. It is a cold heart kept cold in a cold jar. It is impossible to cross Bitter River. But crossing it is also what we must do.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Moss Angel is a feral transsexual living in Oregon. She is author of the books *Sara or the Existence of Fire*, *Careful Mountain* and *Sea-Witch vol. 1*, which is out in January 17th from oh! map books/2fast2house press. *Sea-Witch* as an ongoing project is available to read in full at patreon.com/monstr.

Stacey Balkun is the author of *Eppur Si Muove*, *Jackalope-Girl Learns to Speak*, and *Lost City Museum*. Winner of the 2017 Women's National Book Association Poetry Prize, her work has appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Muzzle*, *Bayou*, and others. Chapbook Series Editor for Sundress Publications, Stacey holds an MFA from Fresno State and teaches poetry online at The Poetry Barn.

Eric Baus is the author of *The Tranquilized Tongue* (City Lights, 2014), *How I Became a Hum* (Octopus Books, 2016) and other books. He is a faculty mentor in poetry at Regis University's low-res Mile-High MFA program in Denver.

Tammy Bendetti writes, paints, and serially kills houseplants in Colorado, where she lives with her husband and two daughters. Her work has recently appeared in *Quail Bell*, *Quaint*, *Yellow Chair Review*, and *Bitopia*. She has enjoyed a residency from Sundress at Firefly Farm and discovered just how bad she is at sheep-wrangling.

J. Bowers writes and lives in St. Louis, MO, where she is an Assistant Professor of English at Maryville University. Her fiction has appeared in *StoryQuarterly*, *The Indiana Review*, *Redivider*, *Oyez Review*, and other journals. She can be found online at www.jbowers.org.

Juliet Cook is a grotesque glitter witch medusa hybrid brimming with black, grey, silver, purple, and dark red explosions. Her poetry has appeared in a peculiar multitude of literary publications and within numerous poetry chapbooks. Her most recent full-length poetry book, *A Red Witch, Every Which Way*, is a collaboration

with j/j hastain published by Hysterical Books in August 2016. You can find out more at www.JulietCook.weebly.com.

Gemma Cooper-Novack's poetry and fiction have appeared in more than twenty journals. Her plays have been produced in Chicago, Boston, and New York. She was nominated for two Pushcart Prizes, was a runner-up for the 2016 James Jones First Novel Fellowship, diablogs on sinnerscreek.com. She has been awarded artist's residencies from Catalonia to Virginia and a grant from the Barbara Deming Fund. Gemma is a doctoral student in Literacy Education at Syracuse University. Her debut poetry collection, *We Might As Well Be Underwater*, will be published by Unsolicited Press in 2017.

Emily Corwin is an MFA candidate in poetry at Indiana University-Bloomington and the Poetry Editor for *Indiana Review*. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gigantic Sequins*, *glitterMOB*, *smoking glue gun*, and *Word Riot*. Her chapbook, *My Tall Handsome*, was recently published through Brain Mill Press. You can follow her at [@exitlessblue](https://twitter.com/exitlessblue).

Heather Cox edits *Ghost Ocean* and the handmade chapbook press Tree Light Books. Her work has been published in *Barrelhouse*, *Pinwheel*, *Nightblock*, *Vinyl*, *Bodega*, *Indiana Review* and elsewhere. She is the author of three chapbooks: *Mole People*, *Magnificent Desolation*, and *Echolocation* (dancing girl press). Though she lived in Chicago for most of the past decade, Heather now lives in Colorado with her wife and their two dogs and can be found online.

Renée E. D'Aoust's *Body of a Dancer* (Etruscan Press) was a *ForeWord Reviews* "Book of the Year" finalist. The recipient of Puffin Foundation and Idaho Arts Commission grants, D'Aoust has won AWP's "Intro to Journals" and *Permafrost's* "Midnight Sun" awards, and received seven notable mentions from Best American Essays. Recent publications include *Brevity*, *LARB*, and *Sweet*. D'Aoust teaches online and is the Managing Editor of *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*. Find more online at www.reneedaoust.com and [@idahobuzzy](https://twitter.com/idahobuzzy).

Kia Groom is an Australian writer, poet, and essayist currently residing in New Orleans. A graduate of the MFA program at the

University of New Orleans, her work has appeared in *Birdfeast*, *Inky Needles*, *Going Down Swinging*, *Cordite*, *The Mary Sue*, *The Establishment*, and been nominated for various awards including a Pushcart Prize. You can find her online at www.kiagroom.com and @whodreamedit on Twitter.

Kristin Gulotta lives in Seattle, WA, where she wanders around seeking out strange things, some of which end up in her poems. She earned her MFA from the University of Washington, and her work has appeared in *Barrelhouse*, *Vapid Kitten*, *Goblin Fruit*, and other publications. She is honored to be included in *Curious Specimens*.

Christine Hamm has a PhD in American Poetics and is a Managing Editor for Ping*Pong Free Press. She is an MFA student at Columbia University's writing program. Her poetry has been published in *Orbis*, *Nat Brut*, *BODY*, *Poetry Midwest*, *Rattle*, *Dark Sky*, and many others. She has been nominated five times for a Pushcart Prize, and she teaches English at Pace. *Echo Park*, her third book of poems, came out from Blazevox in the fall of 2011. The New Orleans Review published Hamm's latest chapbook, *A is for Absence*, in the fall of 2014, and nominated her work for a Pushcart.

Carlea Holl-Jensen was born on a Wednesday. Since then, her fiction has appeared in *Fairy Tale Review*, *Queers Destroy Fantasy!*, and Lady Churchill's *Rosebud Wristlet*, among others. She holds an MFA in Fiction from the University of Maryland, College Park, and is the co-editor of *The Golden Key*, an online journal of speculative writing.

Diandra Holmes received her MFA from Butler University. She has previously been published in *Glitterwolf*, *Mud Season Review*, and *Punchnel's*.

Jade Hurter is a poet living in New Orleans, where she teaches composition at UNO. Her first chapbook, *Slut Songs*, is forthcoming from Hyacinth Girl Press in 2017. Recent work has appeared in *Tinderbox*, *Animal Literary Magazine*, *New South*, *Gingerbread House*, and elsewhere.

j/j hastain has written many chapbooks, artist books, and full-length works. hastain is the inventor of *The Mystical Sentence Projects* and

is author of several cross-genre books including *The Non-Novels* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2015), *Apophallation Sketches* (Radicle Press, 2016), and *The Xyr Trilogy: a Metaphysical Romance of Experimental Realisms*. hastain's writing has recently appeared in a *thing like you and me*, *Flapperhouse*, *Caketrain*, *Trickhouse*, *The Collagist*, *Housefire*, *Bombay Gin*, *Aufgabe* and *Tarpaulin Sky*.

MANDEM is a media-fluid artist conglomerate. Their work on disability poetics, the visceral body, gender, and childhood is in critical dialogue with art history, religious iconography/mythology, and various -punk aesthetics. MANDEM has been published in over 85 journals and has exhibited work just as extensively. In 2016, MANDEM was artist-in-residence at Il Palmerino (Florence, Italy) and Negative Space Gallery (Cleveland, Ohio). MANDEM serves as an art editor for the journal Deaf Poets Society. Find more online at <http://MANDEMart.com>.

Sarah Mangold is the author of the poetry collections *Giraffes of Devotion* (Kore Press, 2016), *Electrical Theories of Femininity* (Black Radish Books, 2015), *Household Mechanics* (New Issues, 2002), and a slew of chapbooks, most recently, *A Copyist, an Astronomer, and a Calendar Expert* (above/ground) . She is the recipient of a 2013 NEA Poetry Fellowship, and from 2002–2009 she edited *Bird Dog*, a print journal of innovative writing and art. She lives and works in Seattle.

Allie Marini holds degrees from Antioch University of Los Angeles & New College of Florida, meaning she can explain deconstructionism, but cannot perform simple math. Her work has been a finalist for *Best of the Net* and nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She is managing editor for the *NonBinary Review*, *Unbound Octavo*, & *Zoetic Press*, and co-edits for *Lucky Bastard Press* with her man, performance poet Brennan DeFrisco. Allie is the author of *You Might Curse Before You Bless* (ELJ Publications) and other books. Allie rarely sleeps, and her mother has hypothesized that she is actually a robot fueled by Diet Coke and Sriracha.

Amy Miller's poetry has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *Willow Springs*, *ZYZZYVA*, and other journals. Recent chapbooks are *I Am on a River and Cannot Answer* (BOAAT Press) and *Rough House* (White Knuckle Press). She won the Cultural Center of Cape Cod

National Poetry Competition, judged by Tony Hoagland and has been a finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize and 49th Parallel Award. She lives in southern Oregon and blogs at writers-island.blogspot.com.

A native of Appalachia, **Kimberly Miller** writes about the intersection of human-constructed environments and the rest of the natural world. Most recently, her poems have appeared in *Kudzu House*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *saltfront*, and *Clade Song*. Miller teaches writing and humanities classes at Bluegrass Community and Technical College in Lexington, Kentucky.

Jessica Morey-Collins is a Pushcart-nominated MFA candidate at the University of New Orleans, where she works as associate poetry editor for Bayou Magazine. She won the 2016 Andrea Saunders Gereighty/AAP award, and was a finalist for both the 4th annual *Gigantic Sequins* Poetry Prize and the 2016 *Iron Horse* Chapbook Contest. Her poems can be found in *Pleiades*, *Juked*, *scissors & sparkle*, and elsewhere.

Emily O'Neill is a writer, artist, and proud Jersey girl. Her debut collection, *Pelican*, is the inaugural winner of YesYes Books' Pamet River Prize for women and nonbinary writers, and the winner of the 2016 Devil's Kitchen Reading Series. She is the author of three chapbooks: *Celeris* (Fog Machine), *You Can't Pick Your Genre* (Jellyfish Highway), and *Make a Fist & Tongue the Knuckles* (Nostrovial Press). She teaches writing and tends bar in Boston, MA.

Andi Olsen is an assemblage, collage and video artist whose works have been shown in film festivals, museums and galleries in the US and Europe. She is known for her hybrid works that combine literature, video, and objects. More at www.andiolsen.com.

Lance Olsen is author of more than 20 books of and about innovative writing. A D.A.A.D. Berlin Artists Program, Guggenheim, Berlin Prize, N.E.A. Fellowship, and Pushcart Prize recipient, as well as a Fulbright Scholar, he is a professor of literature and creative writing at the University of Utah. More at www.lanceolsen.com.

Jayne Russell received her M.A. in Poetry from Ohio University and her MFA in Poetry from The University of Notre Dame. Portions of her poem “As the World Falls Down” can be found in *Black Warrior Review*, *Plinth*, *Prelude*, and elsewhere. For more information on her work and writing process visit her website at <http://jaymerussell.tumblr.com>.

Katie Jean Shinkle is the author *The Arson People* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, 2015) and *Our Prayers After the Fire* (Blue Square Press, 2014). Other work can be found in *Ninth Letter*, *Washington Square*, *The Feminist Wire*, *Booth*, and elsewhere.

Susan Slaviero is the author of *CYBORGIA*, a full-length poetry collection available from Mayapple Press. Recent chapbooks include *Selections from the Murder Book* (Treelight Books) and *A Wicked Apple* (Hyacinth Girl Press). Her work has appeared in *Arsenic Lobster*, *Masque and Spectacle*, *Jet Fuel Review* and the *2014 Pushcart Prize Anthology*, among others. She lives and writes in a small suburb just outside of Chicago, where she spends most of her free time watching horror movies and baking fancy cupcakes.

Mathias Svalina is the author of five books, most recently *The Wine-Dark Sea* from Sidebrow Books. He is an editor for Octopus Books and runs a Dream Delivery Service.

Sonya Vatomsky is a Russian American, non-binary artist with too many feelings on the inside and too much cat hair on the outside. They are the author of poetry collection *Salt Is For Curing* (Sator Press, 2015) as well as the chapbook *My Heart In Aspic* from Porkbelly Press. Find them by saying their name five times in front of a bathroom mirror or at sonyavatomsky.com and [@coolniceghost](https://www.instagram.com/coolniceghost).

Clare Welsh is a writer, photographer, and illustrator based in New Orleans. Her work has appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Viator*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Offbeat Magazine*, *Words Dance*, *Pressure Life*, and various other publications in print and online. Her book *Chimeras* is available through Finishing Line Press. For more stories, follow her on Instagram [@clarewelsh](https://www.instagram.com/clarewelsh).

EDITOR BIOS

Wren Hanks is a trans writer from Texas and the author of *Prophet Fever* (Hyacinth Girl Press) and *Ghost Skin* (Porkbelly Press). A 2016 Lambda Emerging Writers Fellow, his work has recently appeared in *Best New Poets 2016*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Drunken Boat*, *Jellyfish Magazine*, and elsewhere. His third chapbook, *gar child*, is forthcoming from Tree Light Books. He currently lives in Brooklyn, where he works as a publicist for the Feminist Press.

Beth Couture is the author of *Women Born with Fur* (Jaded Ibis Press). She received her Ph.D. in Creative Writing from the Center Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi. She currently lives in Philadelphia and is completing a Master's degree in Social Work at Bryn Mawr College.

Sundress Publications • Knoxville, TN

Copyright 2017

ISBN: 978-1-939675-59-0

Published by Sundress Publications

www.sundresspublications.com

Edited by Beth Couture and Wren Hanks

Editorial Assistant: Jane Huffman

Anthology Readers: Sarah Clark, Alex Dimeff, Caroline Goetze, Robin Johnstone, Kelly Jones, Katie Pfalzgraf, Jessie Strauss, and Kami Westoff

Colophon: This book is set in Bell MT

Cover Image: "Cthulhu Lies" by MANDEM

Cover Design: Kristen Ton

Book Design: Stacey Balkun and Erin Elizabeth Smith