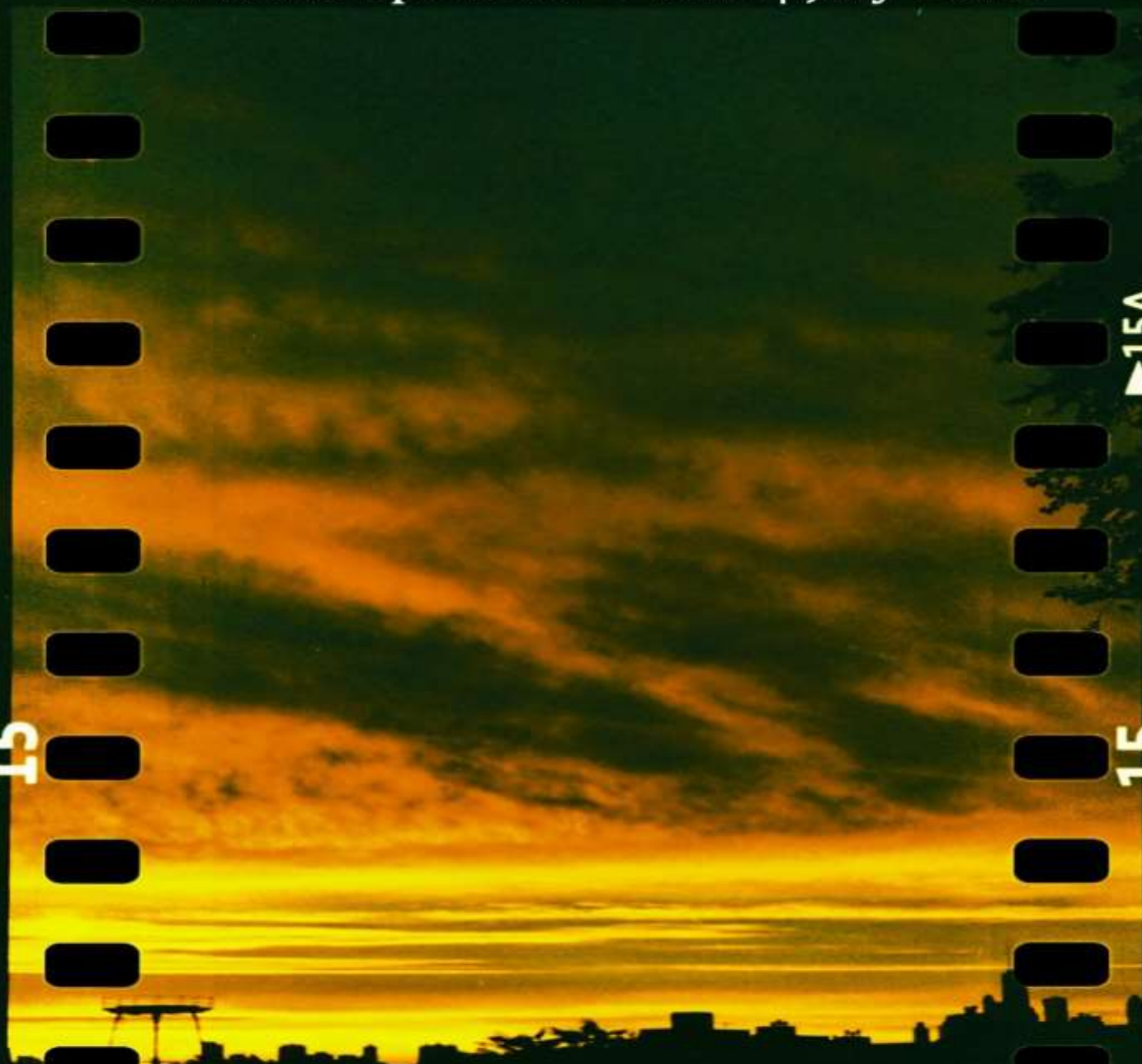


Curbside Splendor e-zine | July 2015



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Cover, "Light that Does Not Shine on Us" and photography by Biyun Feng

Editors – KC Kirkley & Marcella Prokop

## Editor's Forward

If there's one thing I wouldn't expect of an e-zine devoted to "urban grit," it's an issue about the natural world, and that's just why it's so appealing to me. We all know how claustrophobic our cities can sometimes be, how in this summer heat the waves of light and noise can ricochet back and forth between the concrete and glass and aluminum, how the atmosphere seems lidded like a jar. But refreshment is not so far away.

Here we have art that calls attention to the voice of nature even in the midst of blacktop and power plants. The night sky offers something of an escape from the confines of the freeway overpasses and high-walled alleyways, a window upward to the ancient lights, the constellations of mythic gods and heroes.

The singular tree reminds us of the earth we've covered over, of the deep life-giving soil beneath us. It all reminds me of Gerard Manly Hopkins' poem, "God's Grandeur," in which he notes that . . .

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.  
And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs.

Nature calls to our most ancient selves, our forgotten spiritual identities, the mysterious deep, the expansive, timeless sky. Look up, dig down, say this month's artists. The natural world is still with us.

KC Kirkley

## Alyssandra Tobin

is heading into her final year at the University of Vermont, where she's been studying English and Asian Studies. She has been published in *The Atticus Review*, *The Albion Review*, *Vantage Point*, *The Green Briar Review*, and she was recently awarded the Douglas A. Pinta Prize for an undergraduate focusing on creative writing. Alyssandra is also the assistant poetry editor for *Extact(s)* online literary magazine, and pays her bills barista-style (with all the other English majors).



Photograph by Biyun Feng

## Betelgeuse Seen From Boston, Massachusetts

by Alyssandra Tobin

It's midnight and I'm sick of people talking about stars. All of the girls lying together in a big jagged circle, cooing about how small it makes them feel, and the guys huddling around, scarfing down 40's when the girls aren't looking. *Stars*, they are all thinking together, I know it. *Stars, stars, stars*. And that's what everyone thinks of when they try to think of something beautiful; no one ever stops and whispers about the oily tire marks bubbling up in the CVS parking lot, no one ever smiles when they talk about how hard the north is, the dry air and the rough ice and the gray sea. I'm not 30 yet and my friends back there, they're not 30 yet, so this is when we should be appreciating all the ugly things. When we get older it'll be too late, we'll be ugly too and then ugliness will be boring. It'll be in the mirror, gray eyes and thin hair and pharmacy creams, you know?

There are places here where people wear all gray and black so they blend into the old streets, and when they exhale their breath is white and soft. I see them when the sun starts going down, and I know they don't talk about stars. They don't walk; they shuffle, and they talk about flesh and blood. If I had time I would feel bad for them and their sensible shoes.

Things change after midnight and I have to leave my friends back there, lying in the park where you can't even see stars cos of Boston's light pollution. But they can talk about them and play pretend: point up and gasp, make up dozens of stars, red, blue, pink, cerulean. Tell about their solar systems, the constellations they link together. They're not big balls of gas; they're trampled piles of flower petals, and when it gets too cold they spark and they burn and the smell of lilies-of-the-valley hits every planet in the universe. This is what my friends say.

After midnight I get sick of pretending. This happens every night, no matter how high I am or how cold I am and I have to walk around the Fens a few times before I can head home. I float around the darker streets and kick rocks, make my way towards Mission Hill and my big red apartment. The buses heave themselves through Copley Square and my body feels that heavy. Stars, stars. Black holes are infinitely dense. Last time my mother saw me she tossed fifty bucks my way and said *wash your hair, for the love of god*.

I am unclean. I won't talk about stars. I will keep walking home, though. I won't let my feet stop moving, I'll make it back to Mission Hill and I'll give Jake who lives in my apartment doorway a buck and that'll mean I'm good.

My friends have half-shaved heads and homemade tattoos and sometimes that makes me proud and sometimes I'm ashamed. Not cos of them, cos of me--I am a teenager with a pierced lip and I write poems and cry in my girlfriend's lap once a week and that is all so *unspecial*. My mother told me to patch my jeans. They ripped two months ago, rolling down a hill in the Commons and the grass turned into the sky and I laughed up into the oak trees. We'd thrown ourselves down that hill and we were all bruised at the bottom, just bruised, and we laughed till we choked about that--we threw ourselves and the ground caught us soft. *It's a sign* someone said and I howled up at the birds. Robins threw themselves up instead of down and took off together, a clump of furious wings. *You scared them*, she said, *those were our friends*. They all jumped onto me and pretended to kick me, to punch me, smiling at my clumsy attempts to push them away.

It's past midnight and I lied. I lied. I want to look at the stars, because what if they're looking back? I wanna catch them at it, I wanna catch them caring about us. They don't need us, but they love us. They wouldn't smile like that if they didn't.

- -

## Margaret Hellwig

is a writer, editor, and educator currently living in Chicago, IL. She received her MFA in Writing from School of the Art Institute of Chicago & her BFA in English Literature from Dickinson College. She has been published in a few small academic literary magazines and on *Atticus Review*. She enjoys photography, art history, and healthy doses of adult fiction binge reading.



Photograph by Biyun Feng



Tree  
by Margaret Hellwig

Land was created instantly. It went like this:

Masses of elements;

a vacuum of space;

no breath, no life.

No life-breath.

When mass is compressed,

it must expand.

A **stuffed** sandwich o o z e s

when squished in bag debris.

The [ ] became [ ]

Wide became wider,

from within, the smallest became lost in smaller-ness.

The [ ] was filled with nothing

of things.

The nameless things.

Insert a name, see the universe:

[1. [Lover to the nymph Larunda, whom he guided to the Underworld.

His elemental nature made a last minute decision to take the



MUTE GIRL in his arms.

Now insert the man whose children are unseen by Jupiter,  
who counts his money and recites his poems for no gain.]

2. [A Goddess spawn from sea foam,  
a sexless species to give birth to the most  
carnal of women.

Mother to a Trojan war hero: terrorist and lover.

The Chorus often shouts your name in agony,  
‘Oh, you make fools of us all!’  
Seafoam Queen, you curse us.]

4. [The God of War, God of plight.  
You make women howl and men fall.  
You tear the world in two.  
Had your Mother known,  
Would she have birthed you?  
With no semen, but the touch of a flower,  
Would beget the ruin of civilizations.]

5. [The eagle careens through the cloud,  
the muscles of sky and lightning,  
beheading the name “Zeus” for Rome.  
To think what your brothers thought--Neptune and Pluto:

Which white sacrifice do you prefer today?  
lamb, goat, or virgin?]

6. [We were all fooled by The Golden Age.

You reigned, but it is not known how.

We assume with glee: a temple for a holiday;

A house for a Saturday.

We feast in your honor, Roman God.

But tomorrow perhaps we will watch a gladiator

eaten alive or dragged,

across the stadium.]

7. [Gaia, presider over all Earth,

who birthed you and wed you.

Who would think that such an earthly lady

could perform incest with the sky?

Titans, old ones, it is forgotten;

Two deities, at the dawn of the earth,

could do little but procreate,

and maim.]

8. [Drawn by two horses,

sailing the aquarian transport of the seas,

guarding the streams, dams, and lakes.

We asked you to protect our wells and springs,  
We asked you to preside over our equestrian lot.  
Athena must have despised so,  
that she needed a man to help her  
build a chariot.]

9. [Bident pointed at her back,  
you led Persephone to your realm,  
an unwilling bride,  
in the shadows of the Underworld.  
Was it this crime which rendered you barren?  
Or that forced Dante to mock you,  
Dis Pater--  
presiding over the gamblers in Hell?  
There is no color that can shade a man,  
once his fame is defiled.]

3. [But what of the space,  
that has no Roman name?  
No course for history  
Other than a Germanic reference?]

A ball of ferocious fire.  
churning in the skies.

The Beings of Fire came first. They danced in circles for years. Their rage, their passion, their persistence covered every inch of The Earth. Our planet was forged in fervor, a fever, flatulent bursts of ash and poison. Languid and dizzy, the body asks that you sweat it out.

For no thing can exist within a pyre.

In drunken delirium, its passion forged a burning coal. Lulled into a sleep of gas and air, the fire begat Rock. As the Being of Rock aged, it grew and procreated. Fire was contained below its spawn. As a point of contention and anger, the Fire would remain volatile.

It spits, spews, and saturates.

As Rock perspired, dripping with its every breath, it formed Beings of Water. The baby droplets cooled and calmed the Rock. The gases from the sky rained down temperament. Water fell into gaps of the Earth, creating vast bodies of liquid, mixed with the most potent of salts.

The Fires still danced below: blowing geysers, splitting the ground.

To keep the Fire at bay, The Beings of Water birthed stages. Their most potent offspring expanded as a deep frozen layer. The Beings of Ice blew snow, and shook the Earth with every glacial step. Fire was their only mortal enemy, and they could not co-exist where it

reigned.

To balance, some elements breach on extreme.

Jörð, Mother of Thor, you appear so tranquil and lively upon your surface, but crackle and steam within. A tenacity ruled by temperature and landscape. For years your body moved and grew. For ages your transformation mushroomed, to make suitable for life.

And to accent it, you grew the first tree.

- -

## Thomas Broderick

is a short story writer living in Northern California. His influences (and favorite authors) include Raymond Carver, Philip K. Dick, and Kurt Vonnegut. In 2015, look for new stories in *Bahamut Journal*, *Space and Time*, and *Stupefying Stories*. Follow Thomas on Twitter @BROD\_in\_the\_AM.



Photograph by Biyun Feng

## Whisper in the Night by Thomas Broderick

Mark Geoffrey woke up in the middle of the afternoon, his pajamas soaked with sweat. He had dreamt a nightmare of concrete: a smokestack towering over Bodega Head. It took him many minutes to shake off the lingering dread.

Mark stayed at his Novato apartment only long enough to shower and dress. Just before leaving, he tore up the alimony bills sitting on his dining room table.

Driving his pickup truck north on Highway 1, Mark wound between emerald pastures, passing an endless succession of dairies and small farms. He turned left in sleepy Tomales. A quarter-mile past the town he arrived at the Catholic cemetery. He was the only visitor.

Stepping out of his truck, Mark walked past the faded granite headstones. In the back of the cemetery he found one that was not as old, one that still gleamed white in the sun.

Samantha Marie Geoffrey  
1990-1999  
Budded in this world to blossom in another.

There were no tears. "I'm so sorry, darling. I know I've said that so many times for what I let happen to you, but this is for what I'm going to do. There's . . . just no other way. No other possibility." He kissed her name, and left.

Mark arrived at his destination an hour later. Shutting off his pickup truck, he continued to sit behind the wheel. He went unnoticed. The gravel road at the mouth of Campbell Cove was deserted. A chilly March evening, the tourists had already left Bodega Head for the warmth of their costal cabins. Outside the passenger window the sun descended into the Pacific on a fog-less night. The hum of crashing waves was comforting, almost prenatal.

Mark watched the sun make its final descent into the ocean. By the time he got out, the first pinpricks of starlight were shining overhead.

--



Mark Geoffrey woke up in the middle of the afternoon, his pajamas soaked with sweat. He had dreamt a nightmare of granite: a headstone bearing his daughter's name. It took him many minutes to shake off the lingering dread.

Mark stayed at his Marincello condo only long enough to shower and dress. Just before leaving, he leafed through the overdue bills sitting on his dining room table. Mixed in with them was a handwritten note from his wife, Lynn. *Mark, we NEED to talk about these when you get home from work.*

It was gridlock driving north on the West Marin Freeway. Across Tomales Bay the apartment complexes and tract homes on the point extended as far as the eye could see.

An hour later he reached the exit for Bodega Bay. He passed strip malls and more homes on the main drag leading to Campbell Cove.

The first Mark saw of his destination was a cylindrical cooling tower in the near distance. Twenty stories of reinforced concrete, it was a dull brown color. A red warning light at the top pulsed on and off. The complex surrounded by razor wire, the only entrance was a booth staffed by two well-armed guards. The entrance sign was rusted from years of sea air.

Bodega Bay Nuclear Power Plant  
Est. 1971  
Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Mark's cell rang as he handed his identification to one of the guards. 'Sam' flashed on the display.

"Hey, darling," he said, driving into the plant. "No, don't worry about the money for next semester. Mom and I are getting it all worked out. Hey, I know this'll sound a little weird, but you know when you broke your leg? What do you remember about that day?" Her reply caused his mouth to go dry.

"No. Just thinking about it earlier. I'll talk to you later, okay?" After hanging up, Mark tapped his phone against the dashboard. He briefly thought about what she had said, and whether or not he had just lied to her about the tuition money.

Shutting off his pickup truck, Mark continued to sit behind the wheel. He went unnoticed. A chilly March evening, the other workers on the night shift were making the quick walk towards the

plant's administration building. Outside the passenger window the sun descended into the Pacific on a fog-less night. The hum of the plant's electric transformers was comforting, almost prenatal.

Mark watched the sun make its final descent into the ocean. By the time he got out, evening twilight was already forming into the crème colored haze of a million people coming home and turning on their lights.

--

Bundled up in an overcoat, Mark passed the time by pacing up and down the walking trails lining Bodega Head. He occasionally pulled a flask from his back pocket and took a sip. The whiskey burned his stomach.

Mark paused, and looked ahead at a curve in the dirt path. It had been there, twenty years before, when he carried Samantha on his back. It had been there, fifteen years before, when she asked him innumerable questions about the workings of the world. It had been there, twelve years before, when she tried to race him up and down the paths. It was all laid out in front of him: three images playing on one backdrop.

One of those images took hold, the others fading away. She was six, wearing a sundress, her light brown hair up in a ponytail. She did not seem to mind the cold or dark. Together they looked out over the ocean.

"Daddy, you know the waves? How they hit the shore?"

"Yeah."

"What if one doesn't?"

"What do you mean?"

"I see them out there. They go up and down the ocean, like the boats do. Do they go forever?"

"I don't know, darling. Maybe there's waves that travel together. Forever and ever."

"What do they talk about?"

"I've never heard a wave talk. Maybe they whisper to each other, but only when it's important."

Mark took many deep breaths as the memory ended. He started to jog in order to keep warm. There was still time until he could be sure that the Head was deserted. He would need to be completely alone.

- -

Sitting at his desk at the center of the reactor control room, Mark knew it was going to be a long night. Only fifteen minutes into his shift and he was already yawning. He reluctantly got up to make himself another cup of coffee.

The break area was a marked off 10'x10' corner near the door. It contained a kitchenette, along with a table and chairs.

"Thought you'd be long gone, Dave," Mark said to the daytime control room manager. Dave, sitting at the break table, was eating a sandwich.

"Didn't get a chance to eat lunch today." A sigh escaped his pastrami stuffed mouth. "Traffic sucks right now, and I'm not on again till Monday. Hey, you're leading the night shift nearly every day this month. What gives?"

"Stanford tuition, that's what gives." The cup Mark set under the Keurig was handmade, one of Sam's fifth grade art projects. The glazed, rainbow painted clay was chipped and worn from a decade of daily use. Sam had done her best to patch it up over the years, continuing to do so when she came home on break from college. "I'd go all year if I could. I mean, Christ, what kind of father am I if I can't afford to send her to school? Don't even suggest to me that she take out a loan." His voice had become strained near the end.

"You're a good dad, Mark. No argument here. Anyway, Ruth's looking forward to the company picnic this weekend. Is Sam going to be able to make it up from Palo Alto?"

"Nah," Mark said in a soft voice. "She's got midterms coming up." He smacked his lips. "Ruth's how old now?"

"Just turned nine."

Mark nodded his head, and sat in the folding chair opposite Dave. "That was a weird age for Sam. Behavior and mood were always...off. Some doctors said ADHD, others early onset bipolar. Lynn and I even put her on Ritalin for a week. Sam became a zombie on that crap."

"Anything ever work?"

"Long story. Sam had a pulmonary embolism about a week after we took her off the drugs. She broke her leg playing on a jungle gym. She started to have trouble breathing even before the ambulance arrived, unconscious when the EMTs gave her anticoagulants. The clot was smaller than a fuel pellet."

"Jesus, Mark. I'm sorry." Dave leaned back into his seat.

"No, it's all right." Mark said, forcing a smile. "She was fine. It was the strangest thing, though, when she woke up the next morning at Stinson General. She was still our Sam, but those issues...it's like they faded away."

"Doctors ever able to explain it?"

"Never. In fact I asked her about it when she called me today. She thought Lynn and I had driven her to the hospital. The last thing she remembered was me looking down at her. That, and the wind blowing."

"Hmm. It was a long time ago, Mark. Kids, you know, they tend to block out the bad stuff. Probably better to remember you than a bunch of paramedics poking holes in her."

"Yeah." Mark stood, and finished his coffee in a long drag. "I gotta get back on my shift. Go home. Go hug Ruth."

"Will do, boss."

--

At 9:00 Mark's cell phone rang. Though it was Lynn, he answered anyway.

"Mark," she said. He could tell she had been crying. "Are you watching TV?"

"What happened?" His voice stuttered from the cold. She quickly rambled through the news: the earthquake, the tsunami, the images starting to appear on TV and the web, how sad it all was. For a moment he considered the possibility that he was the only person she could call. He considered leaving the Head to be at her side.

"Listen, Lynn," Mark said, cutting her off. He sat down on a dune near the surf. "I know you've always blamed me for Samantha: that we moved out to the country, that we lived too far away from a hospital. I've apologized so many times, baby. It's okay if you don't love me anymore, if you don't want to see me again for the rest of my life, but will you ever forgive..."

"No." He could hear her slam the phone against the receiver.

Mark checked his cell's screen, just to be sure. He stood, dragging his feet as he walked towards the ocean. The phone skipped twice before disappearing into the waves.

Mark looked at his watch. It was finally late enough. He had not seen another person in over thirty minutes. He walked in the direction of his truck, though that was not his destination.

A well-worn footpath linked the road and a large freshwater pond. Mark came upon a waist-high wooden fence. Without pausing he climbed over it and continued walking.

Rain earlier that day had left muddy patches in the tall grass. Mark was soaked up to his shins as he stood at the pond's edge.

The ground had been dry the last time he had stood there. Samantha wanted to see it all up close.

"What's this, daddy?"

"A pond people dug a long time ago."

"Why did they make a pond? They could swim right over there in the ocean."

"It wasn't for swimming. They were going to put something very bad here, metal that could hurt a lot of people if it ever got out. But the people who lived here didn't want that to happen. So the bad metal was never put here."

"Better this way, isn't it?"

"I thought so, darling, for a long time. Now I'm not so sure." Mark said the words aloud, as they were not part of the memory.

Taking a deep breath, Mark reached into his inner coat pocket.

The revolver was small and dense. Even with only one bullet chambered, it still felt so heavy in Mark's right hand. He closed his eyes, and let his fault consume him like kindling set ablaze.

It had been August, windy and warm and glorious. Baked by the sun, golden grass extended for miles as Mark slammed the sedan's breaks. The engine was still running as he climbed into the back seat. He started CPR as Lynn stumbled out the door to call 911. It was all over by the time the ambulance arrived. Eyes fixed on her father's face, Samantha died.

Mark opened his eyes, and put the gun to his ear. The wind finally stopped, and the stars shone brighter than he could ever remember. It was then he heard a voice, barely a whisper: older, wiser, hers.

- -

At 21:00 the phone at Mark's desk rang. It was the direct line to the San Francisco head office.

"Control room. Geoffrey speaking."

The call lasted less than thirty seconds, Mark only stating an occasional "yes, sir."

"There's a tsunami warning out for the coast," Mark said to the reactor operators the moment he put down the phone. "We're scrambling."

The operators jumped into action, running through the startup procedures for the plant's emergency diesel generators. The next few minutes were a flurry of checks and double checks.

"Primary systems are now running on auxiliary power. Water circulation is stable. When you're ready, Mr. Geoffrey."

Mark placed his hand on the key for reactor shutdown. He turned the key clockwise. It responded with a soft clicking sound.

Mark lowered his hand as over one hundred green lights flashed on the large indicator board. Hydraulic pumps were raising every control rod into the reactor.

"All looking good," another operator reported, watching her monitor. "That's it. We're no longer transmitting power. Core temperature is steadily falling." She sighed in relief.

"Nice job everybody," Mark said, his eyes scanning warning indicator lights at the top of each control panel. Everything was quiet and still.

"I'm going up to the balcony," Mark said, breaking the silence in the room. He picked up one of the two-way radios charging on his desk and hooked it to his belt. "I'll call in when the lights come back on Tomales Point. Let me know if anything changes here before the grid compensates."

Grabbing a fresh cup of coffee on the way, Mark went up a flight of stairs and onto the fourth floor balcony. A metal platform capable of holding two people at most, it looked out over the reactor dome and cooling tower. In the distance Tomales Point, usually a saber of light jutting into the Pacific, was dark. So was everything else in a forty-mile radius.

Gazing up at the now visible constellations, Mark ground through the possibilities. Even if the tsunami never crossed the Pacific, shutdown meant nothing less than a two-week unpaid furlough while the NRC performed a mandatory inspection of the plant's readiness. The company, too, would no doubt have an investigation. They might give him some compensation for his deposition, but it would not be nearly enough for tuition, let alone the mortgage payment.

Leaning his weight against the railing, Mark stared at the ground below. An idea entered his mind. It was selfish, completely and utterly. It sickened him. Yet he could not help but think of how easy it would be.

"No other way. No other possibl . . ."

His cell going off startled Mark so much that it caused the cup to slip from his fingers. It shattered on the metal balcony. The coffee soaked his shoes and pant legs. He cursed himself before bringing the phone to his ear.

"Hey, what's up? . . . That's fine. Anyway, bad news. When you called, I dropped your cup by accident. It broke . . . I'm so sorry, darling." Her reply caused him to briefly shut his eyes, and rub his free hand across his brow.

"Well, thanks. I got to go. I'm at work, and I shouldn't stay on too long. I love you."

Mark slipped the phone into his pocket and looked down at the pieces of broken ceramic. He started to weep just as the lights reignited on Tomales Point.



- -

Her voice a shock to Mark's core, the gun slipped from his fingers. It fell into the pond, and quickly sank to the bottom.

Mark was stone. Tears flowed freely down his face. "I love you," he whispered once she stopped speaking.

Mark drove to Lynn's house, his old house, in Point Reyes Station. On her doorstep he stood eyes bloodshot, shivering, and wet. Lynn simply nodded, and let him inside.

That night they watched the news. They watched so much loss that was not their own.

At dawn they took Lynn's car to the cemetery in Tomales. Standing together at the grave for the first time since the funeral, they explained to their daughter that even though there was no longer any love between them, there was no longer any hate, either.

Afterwards Lynn went off to pick wildflowers for the grave while Mark cleaned the headstone with a damp washcloth. Wiping away the dirt and grime, he repeated Samantha's words to himself.

"Everything's all right, Dad. There's nothing to be sorry for."

- -

"Is the power back on at the Point?" It was Mark's two-way radio.

"Yeah," Mark replied, his voice shaking from the combination of tears and stinging wind. "Just now. I'll be back in in a sec."

Mark got on his knees so he could pick up the pieces of Sam's cup. The shards cut into his palms, some very deeply. He ignored the pain and the sight of blood trickling over his fingers. Instead, so grateful for the gashes on his hands, he repeated Sam's words to himself.

"Everything's all right, Dad. There's nothing to be sorry for."

- -

## Leia Wilson

lives in the desert of Las Vegas, NV. She hopes after much weeping to get her PhD in poetry. When she is not weeping, she plays Magic the Gathering. Her first book, *i built a boat with all the towels in your closet (and will let you drown)*, is available from Red Hen Press.



Photograph by Biyun Feng

## Three Poems by Leia Wilson

### *The Academy Grows You / You Have to Grow the Academy*

she climbs a tree to show off  
what emotional changes  
i have no idea what fault  
the top of the pines are the best so she climbs to the top of the pines to be best  
those early times  
even then we were in school/ schooled  
have you heard it isn't the weather it's quiet  
i sink into you disaffected  
name  
name  
name  
she demonstrates her braveness that stubborn animosity  
idiot  
unidiot  
she ties herself to the trunk of the tallest pine  
gust of wind unwelcomes  
she hangs there hangs there  
not quick enough  
if she could even feel anything after  
that initial inevitable adrenaline  
if there would be anything inside her even  
can that be called dread.

- -

*She Beheaded Her Priestesses Undressed Their Gorgon Masks*

she kills  
her own  
personality  
& now  
she is become  
best student  
she forgets how  
to fightfight  
fightfight she forgets  
how to use  
her katana  
what one even is  
& how  
she is ideal.

- -

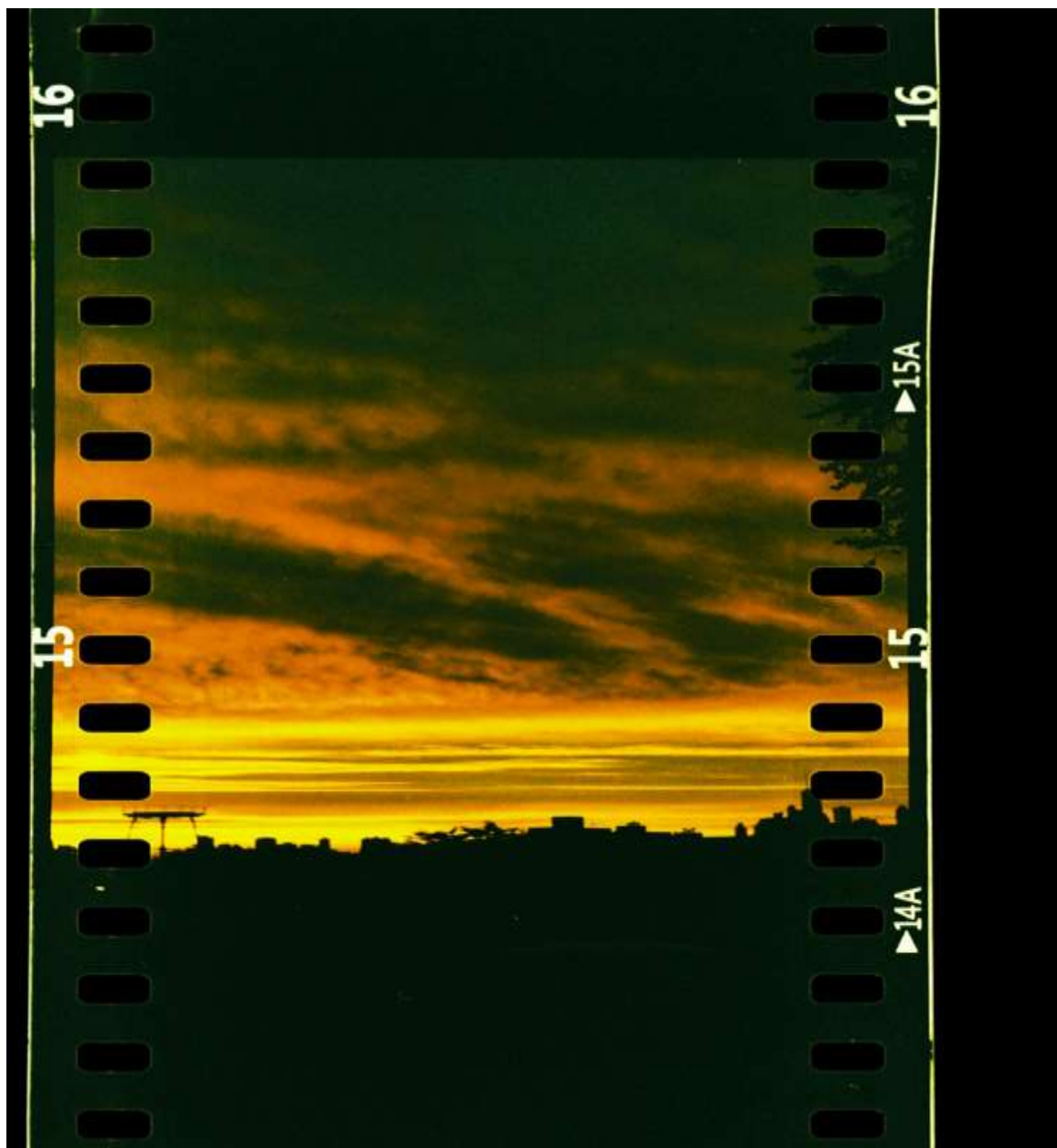
*Searching I Smell You in My Dreamseam*

anxiously i live  
a heart lands on my lap  
i eat it  
i speak  
the password *primeval*  
who wishes to walk  
with me  
will prove  
too late didn't you  
see i already  
hung  
all the mistletoe.

- -

## Eirik Gumeny

is the author of the flash chapbooks *Boy Meets Girl* (Kattywompus Press) and *Storybook Romance* (Red Bird Chapbooks). He lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with his wife and their dog. His website is [egumeny.com](http://egumeny.com).



Photograph by Biyun Feng

## Even the Losers

by Eirik Gumeny

The two of them laid out on the grass, the warmth of whiskey and wine between them and the deep October night. Shoulder to shoulder, they stared up at a universe spilling stars, filtered into a handful of pointed lights by the glow of the banquet hall. Her bare foot rested against his argyle ankle.

"This is a terrible idea."

"Everything's terrible if you think about it long enough."

Their shoes rested on the nearby patio, toes pointed toward a coffee mug exhaling spent cigarettes.

"He's right inside."

"We're not doing anything."

"Yet."

"Yet."

The girl took a deep breath, her cocktail dress crinkling. The boy pulled his legs in closer, dragging his stocking feet along the ground and tenting his knees. Each movement was a symphony in the still night. They were alone in the world. They were less than a hundred feet from everyone they knew.

A twinkling light began to crawl slowly across the sky above. The girl traced its trajectory with her finger.

"Make a wish," she said.

"I already did."

"She's not coming back."

"That wasn't the wish."

His tie half undone, his jacket beneath her back, the two of them stared into infinity, trying to outline a future they couldn't separate from their past.

"He'll be looking for you," he said.

"No. He won't," she said. "He never does."

The boy was Jack without his Jill; the girl a Cinderella who'd left her Prince Charming at the bar. They were Little Bo Peep and the Beast, stumbled from their fairy tales and into a story meant for someone else.

"I'd look for you," he said.

"Would you?" she asked.

"I'd look for you."

The rumble of a jet plane drowned out the spinning of their thoughts, their shooting star lowering its wheels and preparing for landing.

"I think I need another drink."

"The bar's inside."

"Yeah."

The two of them laid out on the grass, drunk and dreaming, their fingers intertwined. She could feel the heat rising from his skin. He felt her heart thundering as it would for a building on fire. They clasped their hands tighter.

The door to the banquet hall opened and closed, a barely audible clatter that hit them like a thunderclap. A gray-haired caterer leaned against the glass and lit up a cigarette, her figure swallowed by the light from the reception inside.

"You think they'll make it?" the girl asked.

"They seem happy."

"Lots of people seem happy."



"Maybe that's enough."

"That's a pretty thought."

Lost in the dark of the lawn, the two of them inched nearer, her bare knee rubbing against his pleated thigh. He turned onto his shoulder, put his hand on her hip and pulled her closer. She pressed her forehead against his.

"This won't end well," she said. "You know that."

"I know."

He ran a hand through the dark tangles of her hair.

"Nothing ever does."

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## About the Artist

Biyun Feng

*Light that Does Not Shine on Us*

Biyun Feng was born and raised in China. She first came to the U.S. in late summer of 2010 as a graduate student, and has lived in Chicago since then. Fascinated by cultural differences, she explores humans and urban lives to express universality via various art forms, including photography. She experiments with all kinds of cameras and film formats whether to replicate a familiar scene or convey what's usually ignored or rarely seen. Biyun currently works as a merchandiser and is enrolling at SAIC for an interior architecture program next fall.

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