



Asylum

By Rachel Yoder

We fled on the hottest day of summer and charted a path to the moon. Specifically, we would seek asylum on the dark side, where the moon milk was sweetest. We departed as the lunatic yelled from the lawn, on the television, in our houses. We burned an ashy path through the white sky that only enraged him further. We loved our home, but we could not live there anymore.

On the moon, we became aliens. We founded a colony with the permission of the craters. In a bubble, in the dark, inside the cool quiet of outer space, we existed in a constant state of meditation.

After a while, we evolved into our own gurus. The children soon taught themselves how to levitate. Eventually, they came to understand everything except their origins. We remembered Earth and passed down elemental tales of greenness and light. We told them we used to kiss the sun's warm face. We told them all life on earth grew from the broken bodies of what had lived before.

But when will *we* become dirt? the children questioned. When will *we* get to grow flowers and strawberries?

We had always considered death a tragedy, but thanks to the children's teachings, we began to see it in a new light, in a moon light. Why had we never before longed to be mulch? Why had we never before fantasized about unfurling lettuce leaves? We meditated at length on such questions, so long we finally ascended to a higher plane.

Some say we've slipped into a black hole. Others think we've broken apart space-and-time itself. I like to think we now exist only in the dreams of those still living on Earth. While there's no way to be certain of precisely where we are, what matters is that we made it here together.

Deviation on Returns

By Daniel Khalastchi

You purchased a Spider. A 1981 red Fiat Spider that you bought—brought home, waxed hot in the un-lofted soft-rot garage—the same beige afternoon I first lost time to the second past lapse of my recently bruised crude wisdom tooth surgery. In that car you hid your immigrant image, unsettled a check paved deep in your savings to add a new crisis and run off the gun. Maybe insurance ensured my mouth would be served, sutured and gauzed right-white and pretty—or maybe you hemorrhaged a weak year's pay without asking your wife to park the dark wheels heel pitched in our driveway, a damage still damned as you flit toward retirement. The tires I tired of deep in that brief post tooth-loss sleep tried to hold us well in the middle of class. *Get away* I said when you brought to me ice, brought to me Arabic sliced-rice prayer. You slept on the BarcaLounger next to me on the couch, the garage, your car, your 1981 red Fiat Spider. It was Passover. When I opened my mouth two workless days later, all of my friends lived in gated communities. I forget their names—the streets and the golf clubs, the power train engine specs I never could clutch. Twenty-five years have shook and took with them your colon, your knees, your need to be colonized for having left home. *Belief* you have said *is the grieving thief pulling damp leaves from the gutter. Guts* I never had any. You gave up the car. It lives with my sister. The night throws its sand. We are handled in airports. The band in your speakers speaks coarse of the country that saved you, divesting investments still leaving me thinking you'd have more to say.

From *This Far, By Grace*, a novel-in-progress

By Tameka Cage Conley

He stood over graves and fought the voices of the dead that sounded as serpents and cicadas in his ears. Young, dead white men hissed that if their lives were worth nothing, how much less was his? Stay here, in the bottom of the grave, they'd say, until the dark of night turns into the dark of death, until you suffocate on quenchless aloneness and the deep despair of being forgotten, until hunger wears your belly down and thirst drives you mad. *Then die, nigger. Die.*

He longed to kill them all over again. Strangle their necks. Bear hug their middles and squeeze until their guts burst. Shove their own fists down their dry throats. That was one part of his mind. He called it BlackWish. He had been set ablaze in Shreveport more times than he could remember with desire to deaden a white face that had called him a hurtful name or made him feel like the lowest of low.

But compassion won out. He invented stories about the dead to remind himself that he was human. This part of his mind was called StoryLand. He blessed the dead with loving parents and decided which ones were an only child and which had siblings. Some liked ice cream while others loved bread slathered with butter. An especially tall boy with big hands was a good runner. Another could hunt. He decided their ages and how long it'd taken them to die, whether it was instant or long and slow.

Mindless was the part of his brain that dug, dug, and dug as if he was a machine, and this was his best friend because it helped him to forget he was serving in a war that called him *boy* over and over again. He dug like Lucille was at the bottom of that pit, and the sooner he got to her, he could grab tightly to her hand, close his eyes, and they'd be home again, back in the shed. But he'd have to shake himself from fantasy because this was war and while burying the dead, he could take a fatal bullet and never see his twenty-first birthday. ByeGeorge was the part of him that faced the possibility that he would not survive. Every few days, he would stand tall in the mouth of a grave and hold a memorial for himself. He removed his helmet and held it tightly in his hands. He remembered all the people he'd loved and all who loved him. He thought, *George was a good man, a faithful son, and he sought to do right by everybody. He loved a tall, pretty girl named Lucille. He did not want to leave this life, but God called him on. He served his country by laying boys in the ground. He is gone but not forgotten.* He hummed a bit of a hymn, wiped tears before they fell, and dug.

Untitled

By Jan Weissmiller

She has seen some in a pickup truck
Do something extreme.
Meadowlarks perish in reams of black ink
While she submits (is this a gloss?)
Her thick dark hair to culture's imperatives.
Not a bed near the figure, no shadow,
A bonfire and a flute. There is no doubt
That someone has done something extreme.
O Money wasn't in question!
There are wings in between.

THAT THERE IS AN EVASION OF TRUTH DOES NOT MATTER

By Jan Weissmiller

The crystal hypothesis impossible
to ascribe resides in the non-blinking man's
version of his burden. Consider the incessant
allure of a rather imagined war
fought from the yellow saddle. And, although
he'll admit that he does not know, has not known,
the bounds of his occupation, and that
his crown is flawed, his Rayon sword is torn,
still he is either deity or something like that.

The Sleep

By Nick Twemlow

touches everyone. The sleep is pinned to the junipers
wracking their collective sunshine for the answer. If only,
one said, we could sleep inside the machine's
breath, we'd dream of the other orchard, the one
that sleeps in cunning, colors in the leafy margins
a cobalt blue sampled from the leaf's imaginings
of sky-as-blue, blue-as-death.
All the sand, too, the cormorant as natural
engine, subject lines, medicated correspondence
bottling its essence in tinctures, tinctures
favoring feverish, feverish describing
the immigrant labor napping beneath us. Too tired
to dream the way the rich dream. Flies collect
on the crust of the sandwich flopping from
one's hands, so restful, the hand, the fly,
the dream inspired by gears turning over,
levers and levels, all the abstraction drawn
into focus. A worker proud of nothing,
the interior homelessness circumscribing
itself around two or three of her best dreams.
An accord with linoleum floor, an accord with
recurring nightmare. An accord with husband
and wife sharing a towel, blessed towel.