

# Rune

LITERARY COLLECTION





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2016

## **Rune Literary Collection**

Rune is the literary journal of Robert Morris University.

Rune accepts photography, poetry, artwork, and creative writing. These include short fiction, creative non-fiction, and dramatic writing. Rune accepts submissions from the Robert Morris Community. We also accept submissions from writers and artists from the surrounding Pittsburgh area.

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## That Behind

On the way to Chicago  
hurtling through Wheeling,  
West Virginia, I didn't understand

the brakes on my twenty-four-foot  
Ryder rented with the expectation  
of seventeen—and no experience

of any such behemoth and the hauling  
itself, so full of odds and ends but really  
all of my worldly possessions—an entirety

in its miscellany, but heavy nonetheless  
and careening, scraping toward me,  
a monster moving to smack my spine

and skull while the Ohio river below  
unaware of my impending collision  
from behind and the additional in front,

as a car's rear-bumper waited—oblivious  
like the river—unless those brakes  
that I pump pump pump against

the beast and bridge's steel hold

And they do

The butterflies drop back  
into my stomach's stew

unlike the river that drifts in sleep  
to warm gulf destinations, which is

unlike me, riding with new knowledge  
and resolution, into another state

– *John Zedolik*



## Reborn

Trixie arrives at the fish grotto wearing a vinyl skirt, shoe-boots, fishnets, and a Ministry t-shirt.

"Table for one, please."

"About 15 minutes," the greeter hands her a pager.

She sits down by the lobster tank. They already look dead, except for one. That one scurries near her, taps on the glass with his taped-up claw, waves, and then winks. Trixie peels off her fishnets, as the men nod in appreciation, and scoops him out. She runs to her car while the greeter is busy "texting." She dumps her purse, places a plastic shopping bag inside, and fills it with water. She adds a few packets of salt, and pulls the tape off his claws. He clasps her lipstick, then writes "Thank You" on the dash below the CD player.

Trixie smiles and pats him on the head, "I will name you Zarephath."

– *Nick Romeo*

## For Fat Girls with Skinny Friends Going Prom Dress Shopping

Jesus Christ, please, not another  
MB Bride or David's Bridal or dress shop  
For girls with waists the size  
of my calf. The only dresses  
that fit me are the ones  
my grandma would wear,  
with giant flowers the size  
of my ass and tiny  
sequins the size of your tits.  
Yes, that sheath, sheer  
turquoise, open back size  
six dress is beautiful but no,  
I will not try it on. The open  
back would reveal my fat  
rolls and ass crack,  
the sheath style would hug  
my huge stomach,  
and I haven't been a size six since  
I was six. But go ahead and tell  
me how you're  
actually jealous of my  
lack of thigh gap  
because Beyoncé  
doesn't have one either. Tell me  
I'm lucky guys don't  
notice me because  
dating takes away so much  
time you could be focusing  
on school. Tell me how  
I don't know how hard it is  
to be the skinny friend.  
Slice into me like  
the hot, greasy pizza  
you'd never eat anyway.

– *Toni Murabito*

## Sweetie

1995 and I am a year full of life;  
Chubby arms and legs kicking at  
Who knows what, a string of sounds  
And made up words toppling out of  
my mouth.  
You are younger and not aware that  
your  
Father is going to die of brain cancer  
Or that your son is going to have a  
gentle heart  
Or that I am going to have a temper  
just like my  
Mother and her mother:  
So goddamn stubborn.  
Your shorts are too short and I'll  
laugh at them when  
I'm 21 and watching these old videos.  
But now,  
in 1995,  
I don't mind.  
I giggle and smile  
As you lean in and say, "Cailin,  
Sweetie, what are  
You doing?" your hands pulling on  
my pink toes.  
"Sweetie?" you repeat with a wide  
grin.

For the next twenty years you never  
call me  
That name. I get too big and I shut  
down a lot.  
The expected barrier between father  
and grown  
Daughter slowly appears, but it's not  
all bad. It just is.  
Twenty-one and I'm all swear words  
and blaring music and  
Literature and Poetry.  
I fall apart a lot and my heart hurts.  
Then one day the other shoe drops  
and the bottom

Falls out. I get the phone call that  
the small  
Love of my life, in the form  
Of a chubby gray cat – well–  
The surgeon says:  
His tiny heart has stopped. Mine  
falters.  
My words are drowning and a  
terrible, sad,  
Grieving sound takes their place.  
But you, you pull me into the first  
real hug in  
Years and say in a gentle shaky  
voice:  
"Sweetie. I'm sorry sweetie"

And I am a daughter again and you  
are  
My Papa. Just like that.

– *Cailin Smith*

## Blanket Fort

Stop being so childish.  
This, is what they say.  
Apparently, we become  
adults at age 18.  
But I don't know  
a lot of people  
who act grown-up.

I am supposed  
To do the adult thing  
But what is that?  
The world of nine to fives  
Of retirement funds  
And of coffee-driven days  
It's much too loud.  
I need a nap.

You asked me how  
I can pretend  
these things do not exist  
My answer is  
another question.  
How do you survive  
without trying  
to ignore them?

Stop being so immature.  
Well, I think  
believing you are grown-up  
is, perhaps,  
the childish thing.  
We are all (mostly)  
just bigger, wiser children.

Any trip to  
a college campus  
will tell you:  
We are not adults.  
We are not responsible.  
At least,  
I know I'm not.  
If you need me,  
I'll be in my fort  
Coloring.

– *Elizabeth Beck*

## Dear You

Someday  
Someone  
Like Me  
Will Say,  
“What if  
These words  
I write  
Don’t weigh?”  
“What if  
This work  
Can’t fight?”  
Runs away.  
But what I  
Had wished  
I’d known  
All along  
Was that  
It’s possible  
To stay lost  
And still belong.

– *Caleb Pass*

## Elixir

King Midas would not touch you  
anymore than the philosopher's stone  
would graze  
your skin.  
For there were too many impurities  
to simply melt away  
into gold.  
Instead, you would rust—crack and  
weather  
and age—until your bones ached.  
You grew weary and sick  
looking at your decrepit body in the  
mirror,  
feeling your skin  
flake away like pieces of ceramic  
without an alchemical cure  
There had to be something  
inside yourself  
to make you this ugly.  
Perhaps there was coal in your lungs,  
and you only needed to choke  
For your body to glitter  
like thousands of diamonds  
But even those are imperfect,  
scratches and fractures,  
carbons and clouds.  
You do not learn this immediately,  
but all treasure can be cursed.  
It is not until you are older  
and have mapped every inch of your  
reflection  
(The meandering path of your veins,  
constellations of freckles,  
trenches along your ribcage)  
that you realize  
King Midas did not need to touch you,  
For you were always gold.

– Ashley Messner

## Look at the Birds

There's a house on my street  
Where a young couple began  
Where they painted and replaced  
And made it their own  
Where they dug out the old and  
overgrown  
and planted the best  
and the songbirds would nest  
in the crook of the downspout  
each spring  
There's a house on my street  
Where new babies came home  
And played in the patches  
Of sunlight on carpeted floors  
Then grew to stand tall enough  
To reach the knobs on the doors  
And the tree in the yard  
Was strung with a swing  
And the songbirds would nest  
By the downspout each spring.  
There's a house on my street  
That was all comings and goings  
School busses and cars  
and changing hair styles  
workdays unseen like the stars  
rolled by all the while  
punctuated by parties and pastries  
to mark the time and the miles  
then music would ring.  
and the children gave names to  
the songbirds that nested  
by the downspout each spring  
There's a house on my street  
Where the shrubs lost their trim  
cold winter's ice and sleet  
broke the limb that held the swing  
and the birds unraveled  
the frayed rope for its string  
to build their nest in the crook  
of the downspout in early spring

There's a house on my street  
Whose front windows are blocked  
by budding bushes' unrelenting  
nature  
a sale sign punctuates the greening  
lawn

the doors thrown open to strangers  
Cherished books, music , a chipped  
ceramic swan  
mismatched silverware , everyday  
dishes  
and exhausted wishes now sold for  
a song  
and the birds sing along  
as they construct a new nest  
with gathered leaves and twigs  
in the neck of the downspout  
for their offspring  
There's a house on my street  
where a young couple  
carry boxes through the back door  
moving in their things  
too busy for sure  
to notice the bird that sings  
in its nest by the downspout that  
spring

– *Brian Convery*

## The Journey Home

It seems so strange  
to be back in this place.  
I feel I've traveled  
through both time and space.  
Two weeks where the cares  
of this home couldn't haunt me.  
But here I am now,  
couldn't run any further away.  
I didn't think I'd change my life.  
I wasn't banking on being  
a stranger when I returned.  
But here I am;  
I see the misery all around me  
and I wonder if I was blind to it before.  
I'm not bitter anymore.  
I'm not the cynic I was.  
I've seen the world and all its beauty.  
I've tasted freedom,  
and truly,  
I savored it,  
the flavor it was  
so decadent  
but perfect for the palate  
of a young woman  
who needed some air  
and some time  
to figure out what she wanted  
from this planet.

– *Chelsea Varela*



## Forget the Second Amendment

My father threw my cousin out of our house,  
not physically, but by yelling enough,  
because Dad wouldn't have "those damn guns"  
in the house, even if they were empty  
in gun cases in the trunk of my cousin's car  
in the basement garage.  
My father knew himself too well.

I have acrophobia. Cannot stand heights.  
which my friend, Jim, pointed out is a fear  
of my own imagination: what I might do  
to come down, not just to speed up that descent,  
but my whole precious life's.

I know a guy who got so far  
as saliva on the barrel.

Dad's dead, natural causes.  
I'm older, stay lower,  
praise the Lord,  
but don't pass any ammunition.

*– Jay Carson*

## Love as a Truer “Weapon”

I am pressed into the tears & joys of my recollections.  
Why?

When I was in high school sometimes when girls or boys wanted to fight me I was surprised they had animosity towards me.

I would tell them I preferred not to fight them because, I loved them. And, how perplexed I was they had not known I loved them.

Some of them still punched and hit and were quite excellent at it and I with regret but repetitiously learned acumen did the same. I could truly administer a beating but was repelled by it and invigorated by it at the same time. That harder part of any human being even with moral beliefs still is there.

Yet, more than not they heard me. More often than not, the tenuous dissolved and we held each other tightly as if to let go would make room for the love to slip away. One girl told another girl in class

One day when she said “That bitch needs  
Her face punched out.”

“No, I love Romella. Not that sex kind of love, that ‘platonic’ thing,” the girl replied. Kindness and love should be held into others this way. Pressed in and never let go. Or, we create the environment which will eventually destroy us.

– *Romella Kitchens*

## The Rainbow Path

Sliding off the rainbow path, drifting far,  
The brother gazes at friends shooting by,  
Cursing Lady Luck, praying for a star.

Green comets whiz around the night and jar  
Careless friends careening with wailing sighs,  
Sliding off the rainbow path, drifting far.

White-hot light decimates good friends who are  
The Unfortunate ones, now shrunk in size,  
Cursing Lady Luck, praying for a star.

Golden traps, small glittering trickster stars,  
Cause a carousel of slippery demise.  
Sliding off the rainbow path, drifting far.

Floating squishy creature, spraying ink tar  
On to unsuspecting people, who cry,  
Cursing Lady Luck, praying for a star.

The brother grins, ahead, when from afar,  
Zooms in a sharp blue comet, he cries “why?”  
Sliding off the rainbow path, drifting far,  
Cursing Lady Luck, praying for a star.

– *Tabbitha Gordon*

## The Immorality of Vicarious Redemption, An Open Letter to God

I would argue  
that my grandfather's death,  
suffocating on the black,  
viscous, alien tar,  
with tubes inserted and removed  
tearing at his esophagus,  
was more violent  
than the death of God.

"Father," you cried,  
"why have you  
forsaken  
me?" I hear those words echoing,  
like the heavy  
thud  
of a prayer bench  
in some empty cathedral,  
off the walls  
of my temple.

In that beautiful garden,  
so much like Eden,  
so unlike hospice,  
you begged and pleaded,  
bleating like the scapegoat  
You would become.  
My grandfather  
wept, not for pity, but because he wanted to die;  
and he thought, in that, he was failing You.

I would argue, my Dear,  
Loving,  
Deity  
that in the hour after my grandfather's agonal breath,  
though the veil was not torn,  
though the dead did not rise from their graves,  
though heaven and earth did not shake,  
his wife, shaking  
with the tectonics of grief,

her tears falling so lifelessly,  
that no greater love  
was ever shown.

so deprived of joy,

Until his faith, matched only  
failed with his heart,

by your ambivalence,

I had understood You  
as divine sacrifice.

The blood of Christ stains us; the  
scarlet mark

out for your  
Master's sin. Though You tried to  
dodge  
Your holy obligations, he  
suffered a slave's death

of bleeding

with a noble dignity.

You and  
mortal and

I must now part ways,

imagined deity.

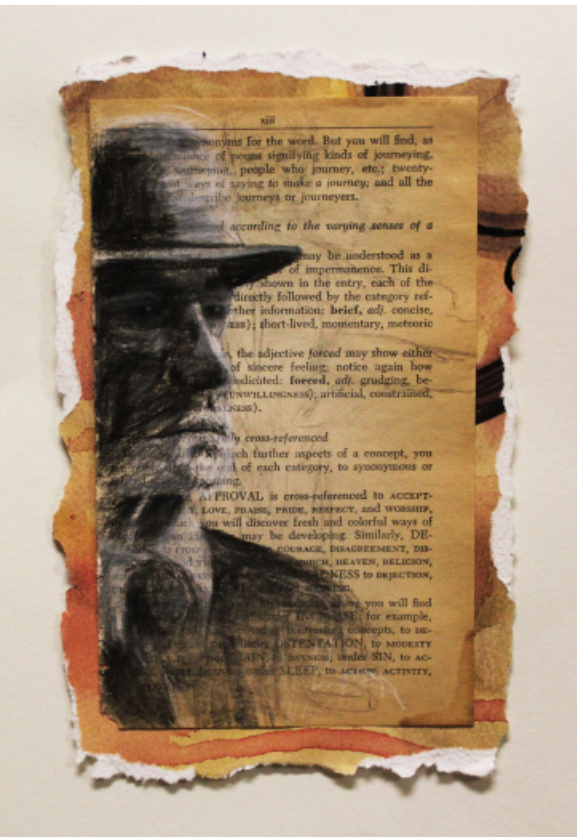
– *Mike Stancil*

## How to Get Free Drinks at the Bar

After Lorrie Moore

How to get free drinks at the bar is something most girls want to master, yet few actually do. First, you have to look older than you actually are. Leave your hair down, be subtle with your make-up, and know exactly what drink you want when you order. Don't act like you just turned twenty one four days ago, even if you did. Make eye contact with a hot, older guy, preferably not married but do what you gotta do. And yes, they usually have to be at least seven years older than you because let's face it – guys your age are cheap. They will not spend money on drinks for girls because they barely spend money on drinks for themselves. They drink the cheap beer, you drink the fine wine. You know the one without sulfates that prevents you from getting a hangover and goes down like water. Next, you have to talk to that guy you made eye contact with. Normally they will come up to you because they will be excited that a hot young girl was staring at them. You'll have to pay attention to what they say and act interested. At this point, make sure you are almost chugging your first drink down so they notice and offer to buy the next one. Then, mid-way through your next drink you're feeling the buzz. You start talking about all the fancy places downtown you frequent and before you know it, he's offering to buy you and all of your friends, bottles of champagne at the next place. Finally, you are drunk and all you paid for was your first drink. You thank the guy for a fun-filled night and take a taxi home – without him of course.

– *Laken Eddy*

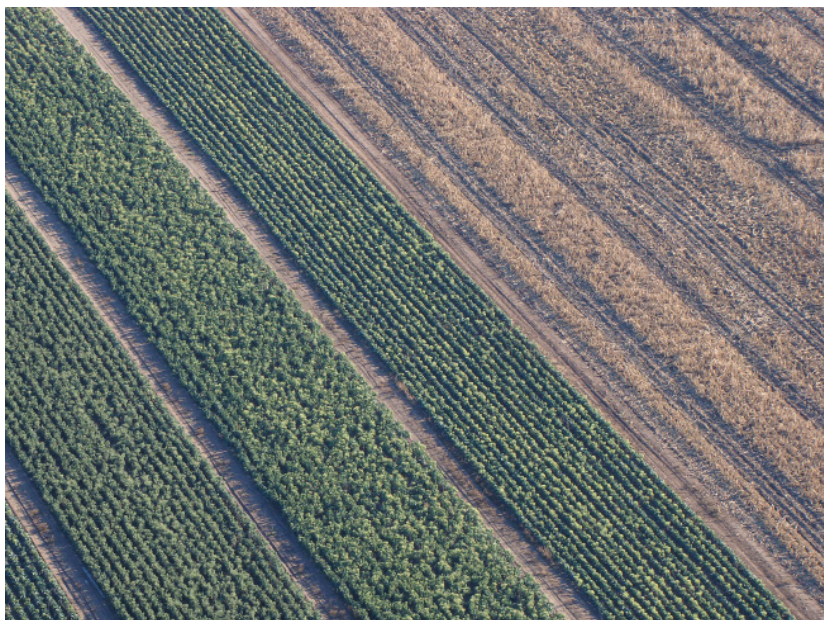


Without Words – *Destiny Eames*



First Kiss – *Destiny Eames*





Continuity I – *Moriah Hampton*



Continuity II – *Moriah Hampton*





Continuity III – *Moriah Hampton*



Santa Monica Pier – *Courtney Pirillo*

## I Hear My Train a Comin'

Do not forget your roots, heroin blues and  
Rust belts were anthems and tattoos on lovers.  
Railways were life then death, blood on the tracks,  
Frozen expanses are now limits  
When once considered freedom.  
And yet I hear my train a comin'

I see the sorrow of generations in a row  
House, home, none see it as such  
When the facts turned to facades and the tea  
Became lemons to ade.  
The wild flowers do not grow here anymore.  
And yet I hear my train a comin'.

Death pursuing, immortal in mind, clouds  
Show no sun. Stare into the trees, apathetic.  
Rustles in the leaves. Slight vibrations,  
Shake silence and deafening whispers.  
Subtle numb, emaciated minds ignore this.  
And yet I hear my train a comin'.

Console self egocentric altruism purveyed  
In presence bereft of fidelity  
Shaking earth worlds torn stones tossed  
Saint-like death sans actions deserving such  
Silence shattered forsaken cry from the forgotten hero  
And yet I hear my train a comin'.

– *Miles Doban*

## Things I'd Never Say to God

I wonder if you are really there.  
Sometimes I want to say *Show me*.  
Who says you are always right?  
You gave me a sharp mind,  
so why am I instructed to follow you blindly?  
Just accept what you say without question.  
You say *Vengeance is mine* but then do nothing.  
I cheer when terrorists are killed  
and wonder why they were ever born.  
I can't stand my mother sometimes.  
I wonder why good people die young  
but some real bastards live to a ripe old age.  
I wonder why perfectly reasonable prayers are never answered.  
I wonder what the big deal is with premarital sex.  
We do have birth control these days.  
I sometimes get bored sitting in your house.  
I sense hypocrisy there  
though I have no stone to throw.

Who am I kidding?  
You knew what I was going to say.

—Andrew Carrera

## Le Magnifique

There he is, *Le Magnifique*.

Perched on his granite pedestal,  
overlooking the city he came to love,  
but who loves him more.

The black glass backdrop of the hockey house he built  
reflects the majesty of man and city.

Look at him.

Focused only on the task at hand  
with a quiet but fierce intensity even his foes admire.  
Unfazed by two formidable defenders closing in.  
They cannot contain him.  
He bursts between them  
to the crowd's deafening delight.

A moment captured in bronze  
lives on.

He did not ask for this tribute.

He would not.

Never seeking the spotlight or public acclaim,  
choosing rather to live humbly,  
helping others without fanfare,  
he will live forever in the hearts and minds of Pittsburgh.

– *Andrew Carrera*

## How to Fall Down the Slippery Slope

Set that reminder for the AA meeting in the First Lutheran Church basement each Tuesday at 7:00 and drop Cole off at lacrosse before hand--if that coach yells at you again for not paying that charge for running your Acura into the goal post and breaking it, it's back to Atria's. At least they have their chicken parmesan back on their weekday menu. You get the text from Coach Caccia while Elder Carol is reading 1:13 Corinthians, "*Love never--*"

It's been a week, and that bottle of Jack Daniels is looking mighty fine.

Set that reminder for the AA meeting in First Lutheran Church basement each Wednesday at 8:15. It moved because Elder Carol's involved in the high school's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. You get past Elder Carol reading something from an ancient text that you rarely listen to outside of Christmas, Easter and when one of your nieces or nephews whose parents you send Macy's gift cards to every year are getting baptized. Then you get a text from your daughter Bella--you forgot to pick her up from her SAT tutoring.

It's been a week, and that bottle of Jack Daniels is looking mighty fine.

Set that reminder for the AA meeting in the Second Presbyterian Church basement. This week the First Lutheran Church is holding a pasta dinner at 8:15 to raise money for their mission trip to Mexico. You sleep through half of the meeting--is that Elder Carol's twin sister? All saints look the same to you. This time it's Micah 6:8. "Walk humbly before your--" lead eyelids close. A text from Cole vibrates through your two-hundred dollar Coach purse.

He crashed his BMW into a tree on his way up to Seven Springs--and stole your mighty-fine-looking bottle of Jack Daniels.

– *Morgan Boyer*

## Heroin

*[for Alex, mom and the people of Washington County, PA]*

Like spiders inside a shell of an abandoned babydoll,  
the baking-powder-looking substance sits by a needle

while policemen carry away a half-living woman from  
the floor of the employee bathroom in a Walgreens

a former mill worker and grandfather sits with his grandkids  
on a porch with chipped white paint as lifeless as its occupants

he hears the sirens--the gunshots--the neighbors on their porches  
roll their eyes as they continue to read the Observer-Reporter

another addict overdosed, stamp bags next to her, needle stuck in her arm,  
demonic baking powder turning up name after name after name in the obituary

unfortunately for the ex-all-American mom on the uneven tile floor,  
the angel of naloxone can't be in seventeen places at one time

– *Morgan Boyer*

## The Fireworks Were Wet in 2011

It was the Fourth of July and I was sitting at home alone working on my manuscript. I hadn't eaten that day, but Jack Daniels filled me full. My boyfriend was drunk in a park, not answering my calls. My best friend posted a picture of him and her on Facebook. I continued to write about devils, continued to get drunk. I called again. No answer. I took off my clothes. Wrote naked. Drank pain. I looked at the picture of them some more, etched it in my memory. I woke up in my bathtub hours later. My skin looked blue. I was freezing and my hair was clumped together in thick strands of black tangled knots. My phone, on the countertop, rang and rang and rang. I answered it—my throat burning-- and he said that he was sick of me playing victim. That if I wanted to die, I should just do it. I hung up, checked my messages. "I hope she's worth it. Don't let my brother find me." At least I didn't say "I love you" before I tried to drown myself to sleep. Dignity. I still had my pride. I dried off, walked back to my desk, kept writing about devils, but that time, I wrote about me.

– *Stephanie M. Wytovich*



## My Brother is Bleeding in his Bedroom

Messy mouthed boy doesn't know  
what to do with his body  
other than cut it up  
and feed it  
to the robins  
outside.

I want to suck the tired out of his eyes  
like a straw does soda  
beat the fuck out of his depression,  
make him love  
himself.

*Get up.*

*Get up. I'm sick of you  
layin' around all the damn time.*

But he's sick, mom.

He needs help.

*– Bri Griffith*

## Growing Pains

My heartbeat pounds in my ears. I clench my fists, the sweat itching between the crevices of my palms. In a brilliant flash of inspiration, I turn my back to them. It's infallible childhood logic. If you can't see the monsters, they'll disappear. *Poof*. A magic trick.

Except, when I turn back around, they're still sprawled across my floral bed sheets. A reminder of my sins, my imperfections. A denim demon pulled from the abyss of my closet.

My old jeans.

I try to steady my breathing. One breath, then two.

*They're just pants, Melissa. Snap out of it.*

I stretch a hand toward them. My finger outlines the seams, runs over the bumps of thread that will certainly burst at the mere sight of my thighs now. The fabric feels smooth and worn, as familiar as a lover's embrace.

My palm moves over the waistband. I can feel the jiggle spilling over the top of my sweatpants retreat from the button's glare. Could I—should I—?

I peel down the tag and suck in a breath. No way was I ever that small, not even at my sickest. I don't even think I've seen GPAs that low.

I shimmy out of my sweatpants. They pool around my ankles like a pit of black tar. The breeze from the ceiling fan cools my thighs, but reminds me there's no gap between them. Not anymore. My legs form a brick wall, impenetrable by light and air. They stick together in the summer heat.

A metallic sourness taints my tongue. Sure, I smiled along with my mother and the doctor at the weekly weigh-ins, outwardly celebrating each gained pound. All while, the creature deep inside me wither away in pain.

I slip one ankle inside the jeans.

I used to measure my life in 80-calorie yogurt cups eaten, egg whites painstakingly poured into oatmeal. Stair steppers climbed, miles ran. Baggy sweatshirts, too-loose bras.

The other ankle makes it into the pants.

I used to count my life in hours until a dinner of carrot sticks, minutes until another stick of gum to ward away the hunger. Gallons of water, grams of carbs. Clumps of hair lost, inches of me gone.

The pants bite into my calves.

I look up and catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. The first thing I notice is the glisten in my blue eyes. My skin's no longer the sickly yellow of a faded Post-It note. My cheeks hold a pleasant blush, my shoulders a golden tan.

The pants strain around my knees.

I now measure my life in cookies baked with sisters, meals made with dad. Family barbeques attended, games of volleyball played. Late-night impromptu outings for ice cream, lazy days spent on the couch.

The jeans fall to the carpet with my sweatpants.

I now count my life in questions asked, feelings revealed. Gut-twisting laughter, soul-bearing tears. Love given, love received.

My sweatpants fit perfectly back around my cellulite-smiling thighs, my beautiful body. The body that's always been there for me, even when I treated it so badly.

I hook the jeans' belt loop around my index finger and take them downstairs to the donation pile. I've grown out of them, and that's okay.

For once, I'm okay.

– *Jessica Walker*

## Freedom

Desire resides in old man Simon's mind like a stone.

It anchors his boney feet to the home place, to the cabin, to the dirt: he seeks to take back the adjacent hill, high and rocky, named for the thief who stole it, who plundered and degraded it, the hill that Simon once hoped to claim his own.

He strains a careful, practiced eye through the gun site for his prey, Raymond Torbo, anticipation clutching at him like whiskey- hunger now, like woman-hunger once did, long ago. He doesn't wonder at the why of it, doesn't care.

Once his wife Alma asked him if the hill mattered "only because Torbo grabbed it, and named it... 'cause one Lord in heaven knows, ain't nothin there worth having, there on Torbo Hill, ..."

Simon hadn't bothered to explain, couldn't have, even he had wanted to, which he hadn't.

Early each day he takes his place behind the gnarled pines that surround the front of his cabin, and waits. Torbo may or not appear, but Simon sets aside the time, just in case. He must not miss the moment, fears it may come at once, like a sudden snapshot: Torbo in front of him, sharply outlined, clearly detailed---so Simon knows he must be there. His craving has gone on for months now, and has become a vital part of what he does.

He suspects this must be by design, simple and meant to be, the way morning overtakes the brightest moon.

Otherwise he would be able to stop. Unpossessed, he would turn away, or attend to other things. The few acres he owns but no longer farms lie fallow behind him. And if he cared to capture game, there's plenty nearby. A crack shot, he has always protected Alma, his daughters before they grew up and went away, and his cabin, from every menace--big varmints, mountain cats and on occasion, a bear; smaller critters, squirrels and birds, he's left alone.

Now he spots Torbo riding his little chestnut mare half way up the stony path that leads to the hill's crest. The man's back is to Simon, offering a good, though narrow, red plaid target. Simon squints. Shooting Torbo in the back is not the way the old man wants it. He doesn't like it. Tension tightens his jaw, shallows his breathing. It doesn't feel right.

But he leans forward anyway, cocks the rifle, his expectation still to see the bastard explode right there in the clear morning air. He draws a deep breath and aims. The shot discharges with a loud report and zings well past Torbo and his horse, who rears back in fright, and takes off at a gallop.

Simon blinks. He missed; the fact of it registers in his mind and gradually settles in, like cold water slowly pouring over burning skin. His breath expels in a long, steady whistle. He doesn't shoot again, does not choose to. He sets the rifle on the ground beside his feet. He glances ahead, just briefly, as Torbo and the mare ride on, then he strides away, breathing easy, leaving the rifle behind.

Hungrier than usual for breakfast, he doesn't look back, or wait to see horse and rider disappear. He heads toward the cabin door. After the meal there's the day stretching ahead, and Alma said something about wanting to go into town.

– *Judith R. Robinson*

## Good Neighbors

Jake had been watching them quarrel through his bedroom window for several minutes. They were his neighbors, a couple in their sixties who had always treated him like a son. Mr. and Mrs. Catonacci had no children of their own, and he knew this was the reason they fought so much. At least three or four times a week, he could hear them arguing, through the walls of their house, through the twelve feet separating them from the walls of his house, and even through those too. Mrs. Catonacci left no doubts about why they had never had a child during their long forty-six years of marriage. “You have no balls!” she would scream. “You didn’t when we were twenty, and you still don’t now! You’re not a man!” And almost always, this would end the argument. She would storm upstairs and Mr. Catonacci would stomp his way out onto the back porch and light up a cigarette. End of story.

Today, however, they seemed to be dragging it out. Jake tried to keep himself hidden behind his curtains as he listened and watched, mildly amused. Fingers were pointed viciously at the open air between them. Words were thrown even more venomously, said with such anger and hate that Jake thought he could see the spittle raining from between their wrinkled lips. *I’ll have to remember to wear shoes in the kitchen the next time I go over*, he thought to himself, a slight smile curving up from the corner of his mouth. “Why didn’t we ever adopt?” Mrs. Catonacci asked, and then answered her own question. “Oh that’s right, you have no balls. You are not a man, Charles!” And she stormed out of the kitchen so fast that an old porcelain mug fell off of the counter and shattered on the floor. Mr. Catonacci stared at the broken pieces for a moment, then ran his hands through his thinning gray hair and walked slowly out onto the back porch. Jake turned away from the window, confident that he had seen all there was to see. Mr. Catonacci would light his cigarette and life would go on as it always had for everyone.

But something made him glance back out the window before he left the room. Mrs. Catonacci had been gardening over the past weekend, and had left some of her tools on the porch instead of returning them to the shed. Jake’s eyes widened as he saw Mr. Catonacci flick his cigarette into the flowers, grab the shovel, and head back into the house. “Honey,” the old man called from the kitchen. “Could you please come down here?” After a minute or so, Mrs. Catonacci began to make her slow descent. “What do you want?” she said as she rounded the corner into the kitchen, and those were her last words. The blade of the shovel slammed into her face, and a sickening jet of blood splattered against the window. Jake stood, mortified, as Mr. Catonacci slammed the shovel into his wife’s head

four more times before it slipped from his arthritic grasp, clattering on the linoleum kitchen floor. Jake stared, wide-eyed, slack-jawed, at the corpse of his elderly neighbor, watching the blood slowly creep across the yellow and white checkered floor. When he could finally bring himself to look away, his gaze met Mr. Catonacci's wild eyed stare.

Jake immediately dropped to the floor, his stomach in knots, his heart nearly bursting in his chest. He was paralyzed with fear. The old man had surely seen him. He needed to call the police. Slowly, he peeked over the window pane. Mr. Catonacci was gone. And so was the shovel. Before he could think, he heard a knock at his door, and the fear gripped him once again. Jake slid against the wall, shaking, terrified. *I'm okay in here*, he thought. *I locked the door. He'll have to beat it down and surely someone will see.* Heart in his throat, sweat dripping from every pore, he slowly crawled towards the doorway. The only phone in the house was downstairs in the kitchen. Why am I crawling? He asked himself, slowly climbing to his feet. *I locked the door. He can't get in.*

As he reached the top of the staircase though, he heard a soft click, and that old familiar creak of the front door opening, and a moment later, it shut. He had forgotten to lock the door.

– Nic Reese

## Black Ice

Part of me wishes  
I'd slip on black ice, snap  
some ribs clean  
in half – maybe compress  
a few vertebrae.

I wish my skeleton could rip  
through papery skin  
just so I could  
get a good look at my bones:  
their curves, their solid white lines –

I'd study the hollows the bones  
leave, too, look for whatever else fills  
the gaps inside –  
Is anything else inside?

Part of me wants  
to bisect myself vertically,  
study one half,

then the other,  
see if they are the same –

see if one half  
becomes whole  
when pressed  
against a cold mirror.

– *Sara McNally*



## My Mother Picked Up a Dead Bird

My mother picked up  
the dead bird  
with her bare hands.

It could've happened to anybody – honest.

I saw her standing and holding  
the mangled, black-and-white speckled woodpecker  
as orange light sliced  
through clouds above  
her yard in DuBois, Pennsylvania.

*What'd you pick that up for?* I asked.  
(She was staring into the bird's black eyes.)  
*I thought it was a pair of your socks, she said,*  
*I didn't see the feathers.*

Sometimes light hits your eyes from  
just the right angle to make you see  
something that's not really there.

Sometimes you'll remember something that  
happened years ago,

(dead bird in your hand)

like when Greg stole the office  
stapler and got away with it – the thief –

but once you tug  
on your friend's shirtsleeve to talk about Greg's kleptomania

(mangled, feathers missing)

you realize it wasn't a memory at all – it was a dream,  
or it was a story someone told to you.

– Sara McNally

## Contributors

**Elizabeth Beck** is a senior at Robert Morris University graduating in English. She was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and hopes to attend law school next year. Her ultimate goal is to be a published novelist.

**Morgan Boyer** is a junior Creative Writing major at Carlow University who lives in Dormont, PA with a mother, sister, and two dogs, Snickerdoodle and Pierre.

**Andrew Carrera** is a junior at Robert Morris University majoring in Communications with a focus in applied journalism. Andrew is a member of Alpha Chi National College Honor Society, and a recipient of the Dean's Academic Achievement Award.

**Jay Carson** is a seventh-generation Pittsburgher. He taught at Robert Morris University for many years, where he helped start and was a faculty advisor to *Rune*. A seventh-generation Pittsburgher, he taught at Robert Morris University for many years, where he helped start and was a faculty advisor to *Rune*. He published a chapbook, *Irish Coffee*, with Coal Hill Review, and a longer book of poetry, *The Cinnamon of Desire*, with Main Street Rag. More than 80 of his poems have appeared in local and national journals, magazines, and collections, including *Rune*, *The Alembic*, *Bayou*, *Connecticut Review*, *The Fourth River*, *The Louisville Review*, *Poem*, *Uppagus*, and *The Yalobusha Review*.

**Brian Convery** is a writer, professional sand sculptor and an Occupational Therapist. He has had poems published in *Pittsburgh Quarterly* and *The Tri-State Anthology*.

**Miles Doban** is a senior studying English at Robert Morris University. When not at work, he enjoys reading and writing poetry. Some of his artistic influences include Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Kubrick.

**Destiny Eames** is an undergraduate Graphic Design student, who plans to pursue a second major in illustration. She is currently the layout coordinator for *Critical Point* and *Carlow Chronicle*. She's a member of the National Society of High School Scholars and was awarded first place in the Student Art Awards, by the Women's Club of Altoona, for her piece "Broken." Most recently she has been accepted into the Vira I. Heinz Women in Global Leadership Program, which will support her plans to study abroad in South Korea the summer of 2016.

**Laken Eddy** is a senior at Robert Morris University majoring in Marketing. She is an aspiring event planner.

**Tabbitha Gordon** is a fiction writer and poet living in Pittsburgh. She has written for Seton Hill's newspaper, The Setonian, and has had several articles published since 2012 and was the Arts & Entertainment Editor from August 2013 - August 2015.

**Brianne Griffith** is a freshman Creative Writing major at Carlow University. She has two minors: one in Professional Writing, and the other in Communications. Her poem "Empty" is going to be published in the 2015 version of Critical Point, Carlow's Arts and Literary Journal. She also writes for Carlow's newspaper, The Carlow Chronicle.

**Moriah Hampton** teaches in the Writing and Critical Inquiry program at the University at Albany. She writes fiction and takes photographs in her spare time.

**Romella Kitchens** has been publishing poems and presenting poetry joyously for many years in the Pittsburgh City Paper, Uppagus, HeArt Online Poetry Journal, Chiron, and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, among other venues. She has poems upcoming in Uppagus and the Pittsburgh Poetry Review.

**Marrissa Loreto** a senior Media Arts major at Robert Morris University. Her concentration is Photography with a minor in Web Design and Graphic Design. She is originally from Lancaster, PA. She is also a staff photographer of the Patriot yearbook as well the PR/Social Media Chair of Nonprofit Leadership Association.

**Sara McNally** is a sophomore who double majors in English and Creative Writing at Carlow University. She is the open mic emcee for Carlow's undergraduate Red Dog Reading Series. She has poems forthcoming in The Critical Point.

**Ashley Messner** is a junior at Robert Morris University majoring in English Secondary Education. She is enrolled in the Honors Program and recently became a member of Sigma Tau Delta. She enjoys reading, writing, and binge-watching Netflix.

**Toni Murabito** is a senior Communication for Advocacy major at Carlow University with minors in Public Policy and Leadership and Creative Writing. Her work is featured in the Roanoke Review and Carlow University's Critical Point. She writes with the Madwomen in the Attic as well. Toni's work focuses on body image, mental health, sexuality, and feminism.

**Caleb Pass** is a Pittsburgh based writer who had a memoir published last year titled "Don't Get Me Started"-- a collection of short stories. He received a degree in Psychology from Robert Morris University and is a co-founder of the Robby Hague Memorial Scholarship, a non-profit organization located in Sewickley.

**Courtney Pirillo** is a junior at Robert Morris majoring in Photography. She takes 35mm black and white film photos. Her photography mostly consists of street photography and candid photos.

**Nic Reese** lives in Toronto, Ohio, is 25 years old, and has always enjoyed reading and writing.

**Judith R. Robinson** is an editor, teacher, fiction writer and poet. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, she is listed in the Directory of American Poets and Writers. She has been published in numerous magazines, newspapers and anthologies. Her recent books include *Dinner Date*, 2010, Finishing Line Press; *The Blue Heart*, 2012 Finishing Line Press; *Orange Fire*, Main Street Rag Publishing, 2013. She is also an author and co-editor of *The Brentwood Anthology*, Lummo Press, 2014. She has taught and conducted workshops for the Pittsburgh Public Schools, Winchester-Thurston School, Allegheny Community College, and currently teaches poetry for Osher at Carnegie-Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh.

**Nick Romeo** is a multidisciplinary artist, musician and poet. His poems have been published in "The Brentwood Anthology, by Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange," Uppagus, Rune, StreetCake Magazine, Eye Contact, Syzygy, and upcoming Pankhearst. He lives in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania with his wife and cat, Megatron.

**Cailin Smith** is a junior at Robert Morris University majoring in English Secondary Education.

**Mike Stancil** is a Pittsburgh-based writer/journalist and currently an MFA candidate at the University of Texas El Paso while pursuing a Master's in Publishing from George Washington University. He writes for Allegheny West Magazine and is co-founder of the art/tech/lit collective American Cyborg in New York, NY.

**Chelsea Varela** is a junior at Robert Morris University studying Corporate Communication and Public Relations. Varela writes each day and aspires to publish a novel in the future as well as pursue a career in professional writing.

**Jessica Walker** is a coffee-addicted junior Creative Writing major at Seton Hill University who loves to people-watch, but has yet to decide if humans are fascinating mysteries or just plain weird.

**Stephanie M. Wytovich** is an Instructor of English by day and a horror writer by night. She is the Poetry Editor for Raw Dog Screaming Press, a book reviewer for Nameless Magazine, and the assistant to Carlow University's international MFA Program for Creative Writing. She is a graduate of Seton Hill University's MFA program for Writing Popular Fiction. Her Bram Stoker Award-nominated poetry collections, *Hysteria: A Collection of Madness*, *Mourning Jewelry*, and *An Exorcism of Angels* can be found at [www.rawdogscreeaming.com](http://www.rawdogscreeaming.com), and her debut novel, *The Eighth*, will be out in 2016 from Dark Regions Press.

**John Zedolik** is adjunct instructor at Chatham University. He has had many jobs including archaeological field assistant, obituary writer, and television-screen-factory worker, which—he hopes—have contributed in positive ways to his writing. He has had poems published in such journals as *Abbey*, *Aries*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Eye on Life Online*, *The Journal (UK)*, *Poets' Espresso Review*, *Pulsar Poetry Webzine (UK)*, *Shemom*, *Straylight Online*, and in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.





