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## Passwords, Vol. 13, issue 1

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# PASSWORDS

*A Claremont Colleges Literary Magazine*



*Jing Jin*

Here is a package,  
a program of passwords.  
It is to bring strangers together.  
- William Stafford, "Passwords"

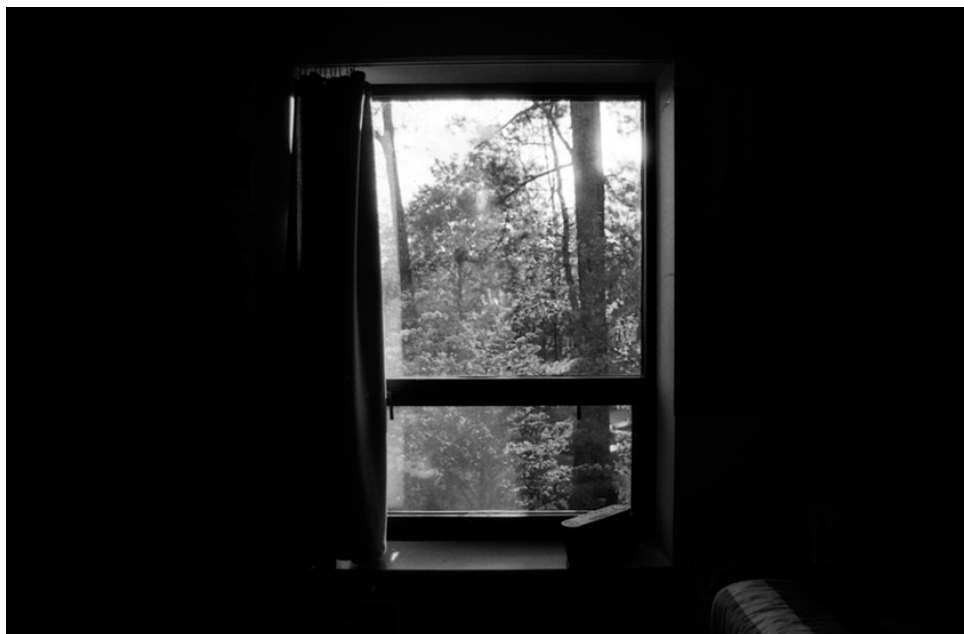
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## Swollen River

*Natalie Dunn*

I go once a year's worth of ice has drained into the swollen river and the fox beneath the house has found a new summer home. It's not where I was cut from my mother; it became a home after a friend, sixteen years, was crushed on the highway. It was violent, the taking. It was at first blood, organs, pavement—then it became something more real and it was when I was in the shower or driving by myself at night that I could see the red plastic car accident I've seen only through screens. It hurt like loneliness can or your mouth after swallowing cinnamon off a spoon. But when I'm in my kitchen and the light is skinny and I'm pulling sprigs of parsley from a pot in the windowsill (the faint bluish lights of the neighbor's television scatter squares across the walls and the squashes outside are beginning to burst flowers)—is when I'm reminded there's no world like the budding (and not yet bloomed).



*Rachel Davidson*

homesick

*Catherine Chiang*

far away dreams of cloud-padded blankets  
his sleepy heavy brown eyes, sheets white;  
in the early morning, soft airy light  
you snuck a kiss through my window  
only for it to fall onto the worn carpet—

if no one receives your kiss does  
it still say i miss you i love you i

does it?

maybe my memories of home: busy streets  
wavering like mirages, are saving me from  
this thirsty desert cloaked with the illusion  
of an oasis, sands shifting like ocean waves

and i speak softly without conviction,  
and my lips move without much sound,  
but i have hidden a world of pulse and meaning  
behind this thin veneer, consequences and feeling

now in this strange city, i think the imprint of  
your lips has finally reached my skin but  
is it too late? has your love reached an  
expiration date? tell me, my dear, if i may  
still grace your name with terms of affection

you played the game with me and i said  
checkmate, i have your king in my sights.  
months later, i now know you had your  
queen one move from the vulnerable skin  
of my neck, like when i let you kiss me there  
and you bit me instead—you knew.

the floors at home are new and shiny  
and traces of you are packed up in boxes  
collecting dust; your regard for me collecting  
ashes from the cremation of our past and  
they have us packed up in an urn, tucked away

if no one receives my love, does  
it still say please come back please come—

brush of his lips on the side of my face  
and i remember you, and i feel nothing  
and if i cannot feel, do i still—

Corinne

*Camille Goering*

*“Maman Revient Toujours”*

There was a bucket beneath our steel kitchen sink that my fingertips had often traced in passing. It was blanketed in blue whiskers of mold and it held the fragile, spindly carcass of a decaying spider. The woven fibers of its web had frayed and collapsed under the weight of damp clots of tawny cleaning fluid. To me, it was as if the thimble of blood swelling its gossamer legs had evaporated into a thick mist and diffused throughout the viscous air of the kitchen cabinet, perforating the air around it. There was no practical use for a bucket like that one, no way to absolve it of the blood crusted into its malachite wrinkles and so the kitchen cupboard remained, for the most part, sealed in quarantine.

There are certain memories that coil up and dry in the recesses of a growing brain, radiating tides of poison that occasionally swell up to crash on the shores of consciousness. That morning, she awoke in pain. Her head was boiling with the tenebrous ghost of a malevolent cloud. If only I had heard the dry snap of the fractured vein behind her eyes... But my obstinate adolescence kept me from acknowledging any weakness on her part. She had but one request, that I allow her to sleep off the choking fog that chewed through the frail tissue of her crumbling brain, that I perform the menial tasks that weighed so heavily upon her that day. And so, with a calloused eye and a flick of apathy, I shuddered and without hesitation, turned my gaze from my mother for the last time.

First came the fragile moan, like the brushing wings of a bird, softly and echoing like wind against my window. She strained to slur out my name and it crawled from the tip of her heavy tongue across the greased panels of our cedar floor, to expire at my ears. And in that moment, I could taste the hot nausea that accompanied each word, I could feel the bursting cisterns of pain that flooded her body. And with a caged sigh, I followed the bruised tendrils of her voice to the kitchen, flooded with light. I do not remember touching the floor with the soles of my feet, but rather, hovering above the blemished surface of the carpet beneath me, hovering to the golden light tinged with blue of the kitchen tiles. Memories are cruel and time coats pain with sugar and molasses of deceit. I have always been a master of deceit.

She was crumbling slowly to the floor and the way I remember it, flecks



of her skin took off in flight, clouding the windows and disintegrating softly. She was quietly peeling away and I watched. My palms were wet and warm; unmistakably the skin of a tender adolescent. They slipped over the harsh plastic of the chair that I placed before her and she fell quickly into it, leaving her breath before my face, hovering in the air like a swarm of insect wings. The tremor of her fingers held before her eyes, reflected like a butterfly and I began to notice her absence. "I cannot see you, where are you." Those words thickened the fluids of my body, and my limbs stiffened with the frost of panic. I danced before her eyes, clumsily, delicately: the steps of an improvised ballet. I brandished my tears like bits of rope and begged her to grasp onto them, to rise up out of the chasm that sucked at her. The flu. I thought it was the flu. Her physician asked me to wait, to wait, to wait. I waited. And the telephone was so pale, so futile that I thought it would float up out of my slippery fingers and out into the radiating glimmer of the afternoon's azure sky. I filled a mason jar with warm water and she began to cry. I took her hand, I kissed her damp hair and still she did not see me before her, always before her, waving like a frightened boy flickers a lighter before the window of his sweetheart. Her arms were like perishing grocery meat, warm and laced with gray and I carried them on the bones of my shoulders. And her hair was like a willow tree and it was a dying halcyon and I wanted to tear it out and open her head and drain it of the poison beneath. I took her into a room, a room glazed with spirals of light and her legs were swallowed up by the lips of the gray couch and everything was gray and her eyes had been gray but they weren't anymore. Her eyes were nothing anymore and I tried to grab them, I tried to pick them up off the floor but she threw up. And I wanted to gather the bits of her stomach, the bits of herself and I wanted to shove them back into her twisted mouth, I wanted to stifle her cries with my hands, I wanted to fill her throat with cotton. I wanted it to stop, I wanted it to pause for a second, to give me a second so that I could breathe, so that I could try to suck out the poison and the gray and the vomit off of the floor. But her screams were now splintering the hot air and I was nothing but a mirage before the hollow whites of her eyes and she grasped my hands and my arms and she cried and cried and cried and cried. She cried so much I thought that it would fill my lungs up with water and salt and we would sleep there together, drenched in the chloroform of our own mortality and everything would be okay. Everything will be okay. Okay. How many times did they tell me that. How many times did I tell myself: everything will be okay.

And everything was okay and it always will be okay. But in that moment I saw O K A Y and the letters bubbled in solitary confinement and they would not pair up, they would not seal and they filled with cavities and suddenly the word meant nothing and I was thirsty and I wanted only three numbers. I was placing a call and it needed only three numbers.

Nine is the square of three. Followed by two ones it's a beautiful number. Three and one: an incandescent daydream. It hardly exists. Lucky thirteen, lucky thirteen. I had just turned thirteen. The thirteenth floor of my apartment building had never been built for fear of incumbent mortality. Rather amusing that a human being could envisage mastering fate with a whip. The people in my building liked that there was no thirteenth floor but I did not. Even as my mother pulled away from our home tangled in a starched white sheet, prodded by sterile gloves and the chortling glimmer of the metal stretcher, I wished that there had been a thirteenth floor. Sometimes I blanket the thirteenth year of my life with delicate brush strokes and it shimmers and fades. Sometimes I pretend that I was never thirteen and so I etched it with graphite into the blue arteries of my wrist and it keeps my phantoms from evaporating still. It always will. Sometimes I pretend that there is a thirteenth floor and it is carved into the papery skin of my arm and I wander its rooms in silence.

I often catch my breath on the details of that day. The fallow spaces in her neck. The pale cartoon of a horse on my soiled shirt. And the bucket.

I came home and the bucket was there, by the side of the couch that rippled still with the lingering contours of her body. Pools of hot amber and crimson shadowing its surface. The acrid smell rising from it and the water glass that still held what I dreaded were bits of skin from her trembling lips. And the bucket pulsated in the dying ivory twilight, and her vomit was like the opaque silt of the ocean. I scrubbed and washed and the webs between my fingers bled with the scars of the effort and still, the tears did not come. The bucket found its way to the cupboard once more and the spider had shattered beneath the weight of my mother's retching pain. And the green bucket crouches there still, the phosphorescent glow of soap over my mother's spit. A mother is much larger than a spider. What I thought I could contain crept out between the grains of the wood, beneath the cracks of the cupboard door and filled the wrinkles in the walls of our home. It whispered into our beds and settled like dust over antiquated furniture. It gnawed on towels and clothing and pillows like the jaws of a moth and it infused each

and every object around us. And it was then that our movements slowed and strained through the viscosity of the infected air but we could not bring ourselves to throw away the bucket beneath the kitchen sink. I peeled away all of the skin on my shoulders and my palms ceased to sweat and I awoke one morning with traces of silvery thread woven into my hair. What I had believed I could scour with soap, what I had thought I could refuse to acknowledge, had engendered a spirit all of its own and etched itself into every surface of my body, like the number thirteen on the bones of my wrist. The green bucket crouches there still, and I wait patiently for the phantom markings on my body to flare before my eyes. I wait for the thirteenth floor in the buttons of my elevator. I wait for it all to be okay.



White Alligator

*Richie Siegel*

## Wild Horses

*Samantha Leach*

In fifth grade our classroom walls were lined with pictures of faraway places, of the wonders of the world and now when I look back all I can think is that you wont get to see them come to life. We were young and the world was in front of us and we wanted to go to Venice. Each week one of us was assigned to present on a different wonder of the world, I remember Stonehenge, perhaps that was assigned to either you or me. I don't know if either of us had Venice, it didn't matter, we wanted to see the city that was drowning before the event occurred. When I picture you I imagine you there, although your spirit remains cemented in the dirtied backdrops of our hometown. Your presence was always strong and it crept out of the cement and the dirt and the trees and the roads of Providence, the streets that sprawled in front of us like Blackstone Boulevard. We would run up, hide in and dance down the Boulevard as we grew up into the people we would become. We had dreams that stretched so far out of our city and it felt as if every time we walked down the boulevard our independence and the open air brought us three steps and a hop closer to the untouchable, the outside world. Every step I take down Thayer Street or Dryden Avenue or Freeman Parkway makes me believe the following one will penetrate the gravity between us. But, like Venice, the days between us are sinking and my memories fade and imagination pervades but in the moments before the ancient Italian ruins collapse I'll take walks on brisk days and breathe you in.

\*\*\*

After the funeral I talked to a girl I had a lot of resentment towards and I didn't want to look at her. I made her the villain so I could feel like the hero. Then she told me her first memory of going to your house. The three of us were walking up the stairs to your room and she started to walk behind you. I turned to her and said, "You can't walk behind Elissa, only I can do that. She wears a thong with her jean skirts and you would be able to see her ass." A view reserved only for pre-pubescent boys and myself. My honor, my privilege, their fantasy. I had your back. We were partners wanting to live like outlaws and we didn't know how to do that in our own context so we looked to the cliché role models of privileged girls. Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn and Twiggy, to name a few. You were always loose and I was the free spirit, the hippie as you called it. I had a pension for literature and history so

I became obsessed with the summer of love and 1969. I listened to the Velvet Underground, wore floral prints, had a San Francisco t-shirt, giant sunglasses and burned incense because I was too young and naïve to find a way to score pot. My mom thought I was a pyro that summer, I carried a lighter and burned incense walking around letting the thick fumes of ginger glide through the air leaving the trail of my reputation. You got your belly button pierced sometime that spring and wore a spray painted trucker hat that said your nickname, Knees, with every implication. We came at debauchery through different methods and arrived at a sisterhood that turned heads at our country club and raised the eyes of the headmasters of our independent school.

\*\*\*

The last time I saw you before you got sent away I think you were sober and pretending to be drunk. First it was Outward Bound, then a therapeutic boarding school, then the halfway house. You moved all throughout the country from Minnesota to Wyoming to Nevada, never stopping, always in transit, forever rebelling. That night we were in the bathroom at my step-brother, your cousin's bar mitzvah and you spent the night giggling to yourself in a skin tight blue dress putting water on tampons and throwing them up on the ceiling. The tampons would fall and you'd reapply them with more water and throw them up again, satisfied by the simple science. You had nothing to say and I was hoping for a miracle. I thought your treatment was the answer. We all did, at the time. Your eyes were void of feeling that night, they were all sparkling eye shadow and no emotion. You looked past me and I looked into you and when you left I cried and when I was near you I put on a happy face because I was happy just to be with you.

\*\*\*

Walking into Captain Seaweeds I hadn't seen you in two years and my hands mimicked my state of mind, shaken. There was so much to say to you I felt my body warming as I moved towards you, but you embraced me and your petite pale hands felt like the words I couldn't say. We made small talk, laughing about how kitschy the nautical décor was on the bar walls. We pointed

out anchors, fish bowls and sailor hats and one of us made a joke that they reminded us of bar mitzvah decorations. I made fun of you for wearing a tube top and you told me you liked my doc martens. In a moment of silence I took out lip-gloss to steady my hands and I rubbed my lips vertically, not horizontal and you called my bluff. You couldn't believe after all these years my lack of coordination still prevented me from properly smacking my lips together. I blushed and looked to the floor, you were still my best friend.

\*\*\*

In the moments leading up to receiving the phone call that would tell me what had happened I discovered the song Wild Horses by the Rolling Stones and before I knew about it the song conjured such images of melancholy in my mind I knew the tides were beginning to rock. I distinctly remember driving to get my eyebrows threaded, perhaps fifteen minutes away from my house down the winding highway through downtown. All the signs were depressing, and the air had begun to turn bitter and I was unsure if I was ready to return to California. I felt an aching to stay cemented to my roots but an excitement to get back to the adventure. I passed the red neon Japanese sign on the side of the convention center and the worn Lifespan billboard and I was both coming and going. I was so excited to show my mom this new song. I pulled it up on the Youtube app and declared it the best Stones song I had ever heard. She agreed it was great. When I finally got that call I was parked outside of Wheeler, the school where my childhood had occurred and intertwined with yours. I was sitting in my mother's car, in front of the gazebo that we sat in for eight years waiting for one of our mothers to pick us up. Your mom in the giant black Subaru, my mother in the sleek sedan. I kicked the dash and punched the steering wheel and put on Wild Horses until I became numb and my eyes were too bleary to see the radio to change it. In my kicks I hit the emergency break and was stuck and I called my mom screaming so loud that I couldn't verbalize words and Wild Horses ran on a loop and swallowed me whole. *Childhood living is easy to do, the things you wanted I bought them for you. Graceless lady you know who I am. You know I can't let you slide through my hands. Wild horses couldn't drag me away.*

log cabin

*milia fisher*

most days I wish we were back  
in your little log cabin  
where I was constantly afraid of ghosts  
and rat-borne diseases.

that summer we couldn't fit  
in the same bed with your dog  
making my nose itch, hungry  
because the pizza wasn't very good  
and you didn't like pineapple.

the cabin where my mind was syrupy  
with sulfur so that my naked  
shoulders couldn't tell the difference  
between your skin and the soft  
wood of the red-green bathhouse  
where you asked me,  
"how are you so tiny, my love?"  
"how are you so tiny?"

## Outtakes

*Jeff Zalesin*

If I am reading James's sentence correctly, the oddly punctuated word  
 “words”

appear to contain some ideas and observations not destined for inclusion in a forthcoming book

Cet acte de courage, comme la description du corps de Suzanne, est raconté pour que le lecteur soit séduit.

The fact that the nun speaks “in French” may be no more significant than the fact that she replies “gently” to Osmond's statement about her nationality.

LE LECTEUR COMMENCE EN PENSANT QUE CE ROMAN SOIT UN TEXTE PHILOSOPHIQUE QUI DECRIT LA MUSIQUE; IL FINIT EN RENDANT COMPTE QUE C'EST UNE PIECE DE MUSIQUE QUI DECRIT LA PHILOSOPHIE

Mrs. Wix, meanwhile, rejects any suggestion that legality might be a sufficient condition for correctness.

What, exactly, is being compared to a cherry-tree?

Ask Lowi this question twice, and you might get two answers.

In the move from C 94 to C 97, we see *Jubilate Agno* proceed through history by

by borrowing some terms from prominent economists.

—“April 8th” for line C 94, “April 9th 1761” for line C 97

Peut-être le problème reste parce que la deuxième personnage échoue à son travail...

work of deriving the English word from its Latin equivalent.

the narrator notes that the nun is “speaking in French,” but it describes a community of characters who can, with few exceptions, in terms of both orthography and definition,

include the political definition of *corporation*, and they should explain



The crucial similarity between men and books, then, is that some of them will die in infancy while the rest will survive.  
comme évidence de la misogynie de Larousse.

« Madame de la Carlière » est donc un œuvre dans la tradition matérialiste. are so close to being equivalent that they are all English words, legitimate enough (or used frequently enough) to merit inclusion in A

As long as the news-writer's work is patterned in iterated news-cycles, The form of the waste-books is such that no single subject is likely to flow from their pages and offer itself up for orderly elucidation. but it would be nonsense to say that a piece of information is too new or old enough to be news.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Try this: read *new* for *old*, *old* for *new* and *history* for *news*.



*Rachel Davidson*

---

always puking always crying always dancing

*j*

screaming, cutting out  
chunks of my hair  
in front of a mirror at  
forever 21

i see a straight couple  
walking down the street  
and i bludgeon  
them to death with my  
tome to the goddess

is it too much  
to ask for the unconditional approval  
of everyone around me?

Two Poems by  
*Katrina Jacobs*

Life slaps you silly  
With a feather  
And a shovel.

The dawn widower, he writes her hair in shady lovers' nights. She dances a tissue paper rain, drops of pearly nostalgia, on cue and off their radar. A thought is just a fairie's smile until she thinks it, and it comes lightfully out of the tipsy, solemn skybell, the seers' sea. Every imaginable creature exists in paper walls, without a boundary, within her boundaries. She is a dance, a star which lies to the east and south and west of his heart. To the north she laughs, swallowing shells and lightly traipsing down her narrow strip of a sky.

## Two Poems by

*Kate Kennelly*

## Modern Phaethon

He sailed the sun-filled carriage  
Aloft the sky, arcing blindly when  
He slipped, careened, and singed the earth,  
A migraine of translucence.  
In the ground, there opened  
Graves of rays, flame fences rising;  
Black rains of ash fell smothering,  
Seared waters disappeared.

Above the gasping ground,  
He hurtled through the blindness.  
Inside his carriage cage,  
He pled the gods to rend him,  
To end his reeling ruin;  
But the wheels of sun lurched on, and  
His luminous cries, they shriveled,  
Swallowed up in cindered air.

He steered to make a fatal turn,  
But destruction held him circling,  
Gallop through the glare.  
The barrels of his eyes  
Were smoking dust, his hands caught up  
In the reins like chains,  
As his misery swirled and reared  
To the pit of the sky.

## Entwined

Up the spine-like path, we spiral,  
In our silent hurry  
Towards earth's ceiling,  
I lead her by my fluttering hand,  
Through gaping veils  
Of vapor, up the quivering  
Steepness in my head;  
Whispers warn that if I turn  
To face her, she will slip  
From my small grasp- a swirl of hair  
And gossamer skin.

Never looking back, I hold  
Her wicker wrist,  
Shut my shimmering eyes and hear  
Her follow vertically  
Through the mists, tucked inside  
Her airy cloak of jade  
That slips between the shivery heads  
Of trees, her footsteps  
Glisten up the dark green path...

My eyelids shudder open-  
The steepness has vanished and we  
Are circling a muted lake,  
Two figures cling to its far shores;  
Murmuring over the clarity,  
From inside their silver cloaks,  
Emptiness flickers.  
As I clutch her hand,  
They watch us, whispers entwined.  
Their faces are still.

## Two Pieces by

*Jordan Wilson-Dalzell*

## Y Comenzamos

(a creation story)

Our four legs stand here tonight, though yours have yet to unfurl. Heads bowed, we pay homage to the future we will create, you and I. One day, this world will belong to you. Fearing the day you escape my womb, ground shakes beneath me. I hush it, ignoring the jealousy of an older sibling. Nothing will ever rival your glory, though my other offspring will tell you differently. From the gaunt limbs of my rooted sons to the mouths of my airborne daughters, there will be anger upon your arrival. None of your brothers and sisters, neither the stoic mountains nor the warm-bloods of the desert will love you.

“Be careful baby, be careful.”

Tiny toes kick the walls of my earthen belly. My miracle is feisty! You have swollen me from the deserts of Mexico to the glaciers of Russia.

My lips croon, “Together we are giant.”

“Mamá -- Mamá?”

I stumble. Sound has met you?!

“Yes baby?”

“I am ready.”

“Then, I will make you now, my child. Knuckles will knead you human, forming hands with piano keys, and ears from a boom box’s noisy breaths. We will build you a shape from decibels so you will know how to listen.”

“To what?” he wonders.

“To the wind as she sings to the water of her journeys.” I stride forward as you walk a path within me: the first of the miles you will conquer to distinguish yourself.

“Your internal organs will be woven from the clean and quiet of after-storm air, and the pungent passion of sulfur spewing from my pores. Smell is the deepest sense- with it as your core, you will know the true nature of each creature.”

“And what is my true nature?”

“Questioning all that can be seen. Discovering this planet’s secrets. You are a product of the senses- intended to lead quietly.”

He grows still as I spread myself wide to birth him; my hips crack ridges into the dirt to mark where he will be born.

“No! Bring me unto this world in loud sweeping strokes; I will not be new and silent.”

“Hush, little one. You have not earned your words, yet I name you Adán, first born of your kind, youngest of my brood.”

Adán, leaps full grown from my uterus—stubble lining his chin, potential reflecting in his eyes. My son wanders in the wilderness for a decade—living with his siblings in peace and harmony. He dives for clams with the otters, and climbs his rooted brothers with squirrels.

But one day he weaves a net from the ground’s green hair so the dolphin can catch more fish. And makes a cutting tool from metal for Beaver to cut down trees faster. It becomes all about superlatives: quickest, most, best. I begin to worry Adán does not understand. Even so, when he asks for it- I make him a mate from his left rib and they fill the world with parts of themselves.

But he is not satiated. Adán wants to make conquerors out of his kind—the youngest of my creations. They must all be his. Everything- every mountain peak, each piece of my heart, - must bow to him. He discovers fire, and the world is over. Forests are incinerated by callous hands, creaking and moaning as they are eaten alive. My fleet-footed deer gallop into the arms of his red-eyed hunters. The beasts within them open their jaws- ignorance dripping from their tongues like hunger’s juices- for the kill, but not to feed. Smoke curdles the air, choking his sisters from the sky.

They litter me with the corpses my womb once carried. But they are not finished, Adán’s humans sharpen their fingers into knives and try to dig my heart from the earth. When they cannot, Adán comes.

I look at him, covered in his siblings’ blood. “My child, your contraptions have scoured the plains of my body. You have traversed all of my skin. What are you doing?”

“Looking for you. I’m just trying to earn my words.” He laughs, coldly.

“You cannot say they aren’t mine now. You are not my home anymore.”

“Look around you, you have no home,” I say fervently.

“That is ENOUGH!” He shouts, reaching for me.

“I am done with you. It is my time now. Mamí—Eres anciana. Dejalo.”

Smiling, I go to him. “But my child, I do not stop existing when I die. I just rise again.”



## The Second Wailing Wall

i.  
Hot,  
too hot.  
My skin melts,  
in liquid strokes  
it slides from my frame.  
Shrapnel swiftly shreds me,  
digging my heart from my chest.  
Wind blows bloody dust around us,  
splattering us with each others' parts.  
Bodies litter the sidewalks; the bomb blew  
out both yellow stars and yellow crescents,  
short circuiting victims on both sides  
of the war. Buildings sway and weep  
while the streets wail out their grief.  
Tiny eyes locked with mine,  
someone's little girl  
reddened the sky  
with someone  
else's  
hate.

ii.

***Terrorist. Terrorist.***

*A Jerusalem bus is crowded with yammukahs and fear.*

*Sallow old men with wrinkles and numbers on their skin stamp their feet anxiously; they shake their heads from side to side, biting through cracked lips. Children sprawl in tired arms; their mothers cup still-growing elbows and knees, lips barely grazing sticky foreheads. Eyes wary and waiting, they are all ready to stampede to the door. Bones creak like stairways in a collapsing building: a prediction of demise.*

*Hazel eyes and a white hijab climb onto the lumbering vehicle. Thirty faces flash with hostility and alarm as she looks for a place to sit. A baby whimpers into her chest, black tufts of hair peeking out from her embrace. The engine backfires as the bus lurches forward. Everyone else hears a gunshot, and covers without a second thought. The adults point gnarled fingers at the green-eyed girl. As she tries to soothe him an old woman with ashen skin begins to speak.*

*It began like a hiccup, a whisper, and a rumor. At first it is hidden by hushed coughs but soon it has its own echo. 'Terrorist, she's a terrorist.' The windows seem to take up the cry, rattling with the force of these wails. Wheels screech like nails on a blackboard and babies join the clamor, creating a hysterical harmony.*

***Terrorist. Terrorists. Terrorist. Terrorists.***

*They're burning words, ones that char the tongue. She fuses to the floor, cheeks red with shame. The sheer veil lets her curls escape, as if her hair wants to run from the whispers creeping inside. The door opens and she steps out at her stop.*

iii.

they are building a wall,  
 one of mortar and rock  
 across the west bank.  
 they claim to use shovels,  
 but i've seen arms,  
 cradling guns  
 and  
 hate;  
 a baby they nursed  
 with bloody hands,  
 the child  
 they spoon-fed  
 fear.

they say it will protect us,  
 from the children who explode  
 in shrapnel and anger,  
 from those who would  
 destroy the Jews

i take her by the hand,  
 her thumb is painted black,  
 just like mine,  
 cheap nail polish lining thrift store shelves,  
 and we sit.

we are the same.

רבד ותוא ונחנא

she repeats.

سفن یلع نحنو

## The Bones

*Susanna Ferrell*

Because I have the bones of nothing human  
And the ego of nothing sacred  
I have not found a way to decompose the odds  
And boil off the hatred

My soft soliloquies are always looming in the distance  
—Monologues, until I can find something worth my interest  
And my time—yours spent writing soft, sweet lullabies  
That need reprise, because I miss what mattered most in life

‘Cause see, I was created—not out of some test tube  
I was not fated to live by God nor some professor’s rules  
Oh, I’ve got flaws, a dozen, but that is what I choose  
Because I burst in on reality with balance sewn into my shoes.

## In the Garden

*Dan Skubi*

When I find myself in times of trouble,  
my mind often turns to contemplate you.  
In the dark moonless nights,  
in the winter of my discontent and in the long quotidian hours,  
I find transcendence in the study of your sublime beauty;  
in the merry-solemn motion of your face,  
in your rich-hued eyes,  
in the perfect angle of your knee when you sit,  
in the strata of your hair  
and in the smooth mathematical curve of your neck.  
That Edenic innocence that trips laughing from your tongue  
and lends grace to your motion,  
compels an old apostate to bend knee again  
and do homage.  
You are hymn, prayer, and goddess all in one,  
and for your sake I might fall into faith again.  
If I were allowed, I would build a temple in your bed;  
work sacred oil through your hair  
and baptize myself in you.  
I would like  
to plant a kiss in the hollow of your jaw  
and watch it grow,  
spreading its tendrils downward across your skin  
and making a garden of your body  
for my serpent self to slither through  
in search of forbidden fruit.

## Dying in Wyoming

*Alex Genty-Waksberg*

Thirty years ago he liked a band and so did she. Twenty nine years ago, he realized he liked her and so did she. Eighteen years ago, they held each other and tried to think of anything else, so as not to jinx it. She whispered her social security number as he came shamelessly inside of her. Seven months later, they decided on just Pam because a hyphenated last name was enough stress for a child. Pam would decide seven years later that she was named after a popular doll, Princess Pam, which she predated by four years. Her parents did not object, though, and the origin was upheld. Eight years ago, Pam met a boy who didn't find her disgusting and even looked her in the eye. The first boy, she would remember. Pam was unimpressed and decided to hold out for better options. Two years later, Pam would get braces and promptly stop smiling forever.

Four years ago, Pam learned about the history of America. Or maybe it was of somewhere else, she could never remember. More importantly, four years ago, Pam watched a classroom full of mindless motions. She watched everyday as Charlie left his seat at 10:18 and returned precisely six minutes later. Pam looked on at the locking and unlocking fingers of Ren and Sam, giving their sweaty hands a short breather every three minutes. Pam even watched Mr. Bradley occasionally, though not often. She noticed that after saying the name of a war, he would twist his mustache. Twice left and then once right. Sometimes Pam wondered if this uneven twisting would leave his mustache to be always left-leaning. But then Brandon would pucker his lips and whistle "Pomp and Circumstance" right on cue and Pam would forget her thought. No one minded that Brandon whistled this every twelve minutes, they just wondered to each other why he chose that specific song. Brandon had never and would never attend a graduation for the duration of his life. He died happily, believing the tune to be some kind of Israeli folk-song he picked up as a child. Pam couldn't understand the automatic, monotonous way in which every one went about their business. She put thought and meaning into every move she made. She would try to go on autopilot, but within seconds a flickering lightbulb or whining chair would demand her careful consideration.

Two years ago, Pam focused her attention on the thin red needle above her head, which was moving, to Pam's delight, at a circular and precise pace.

In the sweaty, chaotic gymnasium, she welcomed the dependability of the clock's constant progress. She tried to turn her attention to the thicker black needle, but the second hand would not cease and eventually won out. She knew that the time was 1:24 and 32 seconds, but she could not remember if it was March 9th or September 3rd. Pam wished the clock had a fourth and fifth needle (preferably blue and green) which gave the date as well. What good is the time if you don't know what day it is?

At 1:27 and 48 seconds, Ray slipped a plain white note into Pam's locker. Ray inserted his whole head in the locker (just to see that he could) and carefully placed the note in Pam's left Converse shoe. This was her favorite shoe, if she was forced to choose between the right and left. Her left shoe was an inch too big and she enjoyed slipping in and out of it while the teacher wasn't looking. Ray noticed things too and knew this about Pam. At 1:28 and 3 seconds, Ray left the locker room. Pam saw him exit, but suspected that this was just another daily routine she hadn't yet picked up on. Besides, Pam didn't need to devote much time to thinking about Ray. He was quiet and small and looked like he would bald from sheer weakness. Sometimes Pam caught Ray staring at her. She would stare right back, harder, and he would quickly evaporate to her delight.

Three hours and a mile or so later, Pam entered her house and removed her shoes. Attached to her sock, Pam found a note smudged with pencil and foot sweat. The note read, "I like you. I think." Pam immediately recognized the indecisiveness as belonging to Ray. She cared less about the proclamation and more about the sloppy lettering of the short note. Every force in her body wanted to straighten out his k's and fatten up his n's. This, she gathered, was the point of a relationship. Pam had noticed other things about Ray.

- 1 He wore glasses up until three months ago. Now he just squinted.
- 2 He never wore socks that went past his ankles except maybe when he had long pants on. There was no way of knowing what socks he wore with his long pants.
- 3 Sometimes he would walk into seventh period sweating profusely. On these days he would kindly keep his distance from his classmates.
- 4 When no one was looking, Ray would pick his nose with his left index finger. Bloody noses often ensued, which he learned to deal with.
- 5 Sometimes Ray cried. Not too much, in his opinion, but more, it seemed, than other boys. Pam did not actually know this about Ray but she figured as much.

Eight minutes and an indeterminate amount of seconds later (the clock on the oven was not as precise as Pam would have preferred) Ray received a phone call from a girl asking for Ray. Of course Ray knew the voice belonged to Pam, he had studied her voice enough, but he was unsure if he was ready to field the call. Ray had no decision to make, though. Pam recognized Ray's voice before he picked up the phone. Still, both parties played along for a couple of beats before Ray took responsibility.

“I got your note, Ray.”

“What did it say again?”

“I like you. I think.”

“You think that's what it said?”

“No, you wrote the I think in your note.”

“I didn't mean that. I do like you.”

“I know you do.”

“I'm embarrassed.”

“I can tell.”

“I should've used a colored pencil.”





“Blue. Aqua maybe.”

“Did it smudge at all?”

“Yes. But only because I walked on it.”

“You walked on my note?”

“I didn’t walk on you. It was just paper.”

“Do you like me? Do you think you like me?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I think probably not.”

“I have to go.”

Pam listened to Ray take four and a half deep breaths before hanging up the phone.

One year and seven months ago, Pam’s heart beat fast, like really fast. She couldn’t concentrate long enough to count each beat, but it appeared to be throbbing at a fairly regular pace. Pam, for once, didn’t care if the beating was symmetrical or not. She refused another hit, but Pam was nonetheless very high. Pam enjoyed the heaviness that surrounded her body after the second or third hit (or first with a bong). For a couple of hours, Pam could take her mind off that faucet that no one bothers to turn off correctly or Keith’s stupid haircut that he flips every second and a half, and just relax. She slid back and the sofa put its arms around her, engulfing her small body completely. Shed of her obsessive goggles, Pam had begun to get to know people better. Her friends, the most symmetrical and repetitive group of people she could find, were very boring. Pam, of all people understood the importance of convention and routine, but there had to be more to life! She could watch Kyle adjust his collar, which he did every two minutes and fifteen seconds, for hours. But when the boy opened his mouth, an occasional quote from *Cheers* was the best anyone could hope for, and some Airhead-tinted spit if you were lucky.

Jane wasn’t much more entertaining. She seemed exhausted by life and delivered her words as though it was the fifth or sixth time she was repeating them. Pam tried to focus on the back of Jane’s dress, which flew up every four minutes from her unabashed farting, but it didn’t hold the intrigue it once had. Pam started to feel small and alone. Whenever she had felt this way before, she would lock in on some pattern, any kind, and become immersed in it. Pam searched desperately for an escape, but on this day, her trick didn’t work. She felt her stomach slink farther down into her shivering body. She felt like sweating but the weed had dried out her body. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t blink at a consistent beat. Meanwhile, Kyle and Jane

sucked each other's faces loudly. This came as a minor relief to Pam; the two made out every fourth time that they hung out. Pam suddenly realized how many nights had ended with Pam watching Kyle and Jane exchange the fuel for their useless mouths until her mom came to pick her up.

Pam was depressed. She felt the lightness of her life, nothing of worth to hold it down. She recognized her current state but understood her depression to be out of reach of any mild drug. It was as though the immense boredom that she had somehow ducked her whole life had all at once slimed her. Pam stood up suddenly and made a move towards the door. It was 10:13 and 17 seconds. She could still catch the last forty-five minutes of that documentary about Tarzan on TCM. Or she could eat seven and a half donuts. That was also an option.

"Where are you going?" Jane had suctioned her face off of Kyle. She didn't seem particularly interested in the question or the ensuing answer.

"I think I hate you guys. I think I'm unhappy."

"You said the same thing last week. You'll get over it." Pam neither knew nor cared about distinguishing Jane and Kyle from each other at this point.

"No I didn't. I've never said anything like this before. You guys blatantly don't listen to me. I never thought enough before to know that I was unhappy."

"Could I get a couple bucks for the weed?"

"Fuck you, Kane. Or Jyle. I'm going to go home and eat nine donuts. And then after, when I feel too full I'm going to think of you guys. So then I start associating that feeling with both of you."

"You could only eat seven donuts, tops."

"That's why I chose nine. I'm going to feel terrible." Kyle started to move his thumb toward his lips.

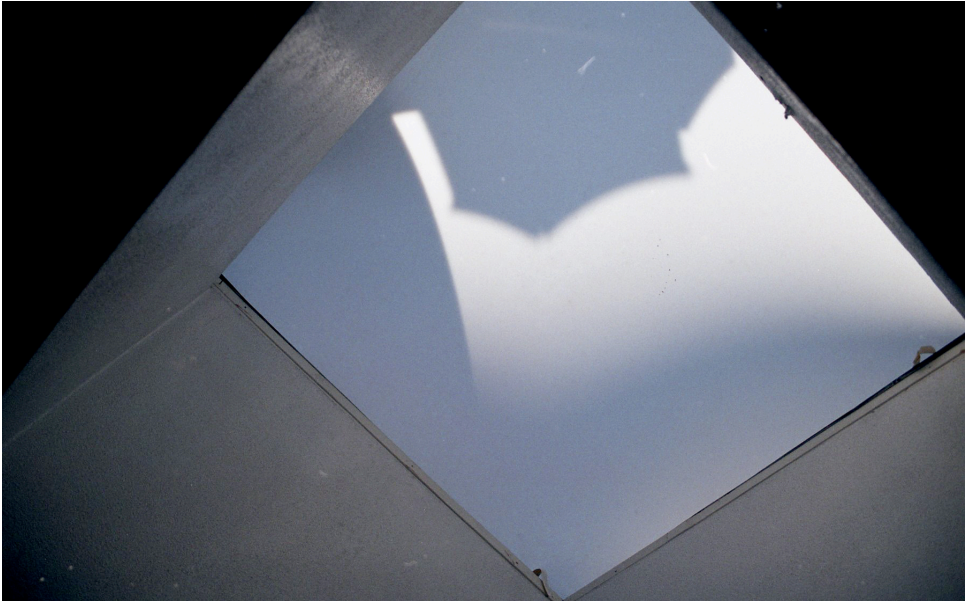
"Stop it!"

"What?"

"Every four minutes and seventeen seconds, you flatten out the peach fuzz on your upper lip." Kyle stared at his thumb as though he'd never seen it before. Like it had just sprouted.

"I wouldn't say peach fuzz."

Thirteen minutes and four donuts later, Pam let out a heavy sigh filled with shame and chocolate. The sigh may have been overdone, but she felt that she deserved it. She heard a soft whining outside, but did not immediately make a move. The last thing she wanted was to be disturbed from her



self-pity. Two minutes later, she heard the same noise. She groaned, hoping someone would hear her reluctance, and ventured outside. It was an especially dark night and she could only hear the whining, a little louder now. It was only after Pam displayed her flashlight app that she saw the giraffe standing next to the tree in her front yard. Pam was no longer high, but now wished she was. She started to turn back to her front door, ready to completely ignore the situation, when she again heard the giraffe's moping. The giraffe, Pam noticed, humped the tree furiously every four seconds and then, after two minutes of wooing, would step back and gripe at the lack of response.

It seemed natural to Pam that the giraffe would take a liking to the tree. They seemed like each other's type. Unfortunately, the tree (even if it felt the same way about the giraffe) was unable to reciprocate any feelings. Pam felt uncomfortable watching such a harsh rejection. She was also made uneasy by what seemed to be the rape of a tree. Wanting to end the situation for both parties, Pam slowly approached the giraffe. She liked most animals. True, she had never encountered a giraffe before, but she figured the giraffe couldn't be much different from a dog, or an awkwardly tall human. She knew how to deal with both of those. She softly placed her hand on the giraffe's leg and rubbed it up and down. The giraffe's whining quieted almost immediately. What was now clear to be a he looked down at the small creature that was consoling him. He felt touched by the offer of love at a moment when

he felt so vulnerable and unattractive. Pam enjoyed looking into the giraffe's eyes. There seemed to be more meaning in his eyes than any words she had ever heard. She also liked his spots.

Pam carefully scaled the tree until she was at a height where she could mount the giraffe. He bowed his head as she climbed onto him. The giraffe didn't walk particularly fast, but the ride was exhilarating nonetheless. He took Pam to all of the high spots he liked around the city. Pam felt a removal from the ground not far beneath her. Pam watched the giraffe closely, but could find none of the habits so common of her own species. The giraffe's unique genetic makeup had nothing to do with it. Pam recalled the animals she had watched in the past go through their daily routines with a robotic sensitivity. It was simply that the giraffe was too present to go through any preconceived motions. And so was Pam. They silently spoke about their dreams and how it could all go wrong. Both creatures felt needy and desperate, but made peace with the fact. Clutching him around his neck, she could feel his cool sweat as he trotted into the emptiness of midnight in the suburbs.

After an hour and thirteen minutes of intense bonding, the giraffe dropped Pam off at her second floor window. Pam did not want to leave, but had no reason to keep the giraffe longer. She kissed the giraffe passionately on his nose. He did not want to see his companion go either. He hung his head in her bedroom for a few more beats. The position was uncomfortable for him, but he didn't mind. Pam wished she could tell his eyes everything. Instead she held his stare for seven more seconds. The giraffe reluctantly backed away from the house and made his way down the street, purposefully giving the tree the cold shoulder.

Pam looked out the window as the giraffe left, concentrating on a spot just above his right butt cheek until it joined with the darkness. Pam hoped the giraffe would return one day, on another shitty night when she needed the absurdity and thrill of riding a giraffe. She had a fleeting thought that maybe the giraffe would come every month or week like clockwork. And she could actually look forward to his cyclic visits. This, though, was a giraffe, not Kyle's upper lip. The creature did not have a schedule and would not keep one, even for Pam. All she could do was hope and pray and situate herself around sexy trees.

Ten minutes ago, Pam had overheard her say she liked this song. Pam had chosen the song herself. The Star Diner was her favorite diner because it was

never closed, even on Christmas, and it had a jukebox. Her pockets hummed every time she walked in, lined to the brim with quarters. She had been sitting with her friend, Tim, for two hours when the voice came from behind. She had been watching as every three minutes and twenty seconds Tim forked the last piece of color on his plate and put it back down. She was interested to see who had complimented her music with such mild enthusiasm. True, the song was the eleventh song in her three-dollar playlist, but Pam was searching for any kind of distraction from Tim's hollow mouth. Pam turned her head with astoundingly little delicacy. Tim used this opportunity to stuff the last bite of egg down his throat. He had always had a problem taking the last bite of his meal with someone watching.

Pam gasped unintentionally. The girl had met her stare as soon as Pam turned around.

"Hello." Her voice had a shred of expectancy to it. The first thing that Pam noticed was her clothes. They were sloppily placed over her body parts, but not in a way that suggested she had thought any of it out. One arm hung out of the opening, which the shirt had designated for her neck. Some of her clothes screamed rudely while others were shy and soft-spoken. The girl, Pam saw, did not notice in the slightest the civil war going on all around her. Pam, as embarrassed as she might be, could not ignore the girl.

"Hi."

"You put that song on, didn't you?"

"Yeah. And the ten before it."

"Well, I liked the eleventh."

"How'd you know it was me?"

"I saw your neck flinch when I said I liked the song."

"You noticed that?"

"You'd be surprised how interesting a neck can be when you're talking to these people."

Somehow Pam had not noticed the couple sitting across from the girl, closest to Pam. The girl was giving the boy a hand job over the button zipper of his khaki shorts. The boy stared forward, trying to concentrate on the block girl featured on the diner's bathroom door.

"I'm Pam."

"Izzy."

"I'm glad you said something."

"We could've kept missing each other."

“I’m finished now. We can leave.” Tim felt the insignificance of his words even as he said them. Pam used her right hand to shoo Tim away; he was free to leave as he pleased. Pam smiled at Izzy and Izzy saw it and responded. Pam didn’t want to, but felt she needed to break the silence.

“What do you want to do?”

“I guess that’s the big question now, isn’t it?”

Izzy ran her right four fingers through her sloppy hair. Pam couldn’t help herself.

“How often do you do that?”

“What, with my hair?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Oh, sometimes after thirty seconds. Sometimes I let a couple minutes go by. Never more than once in one minute. That would just be indulgent.” Pam felt that same pit in her stomach that she felt on the night with Jyle and the giraffe. She welcomed the feeling this time, though. Pam stood up and extended her left hand to Izzy’s right. Jaya took it and Pam led the two out of the diner. She completely forgot about her food and Tim and the check. All she could see was Izzy’s right ear wiggle at unpredictable intervals.

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## EDITORS' NOTE

Passwords, a literary magazine of poetry, prose, and visual art from Claremont Colleges students, is published each semester. Our mission is to provide a literary forum for the 5C community. We hope that this issue of Passwords serves as a historical document, allowing readers insight into our community and the creative work we're producing at this unique moment in time—Fall 2012.

This semester, we designed the magazine as a self-devouring historical document, requiring of the reader a little destruction in order to access all of the contents. Now that we publish the magazine online simultaneously, the physical codex must assert a reason for its existence. We tried to build such a reason.

A word about our selection process: our editorial board is open to all students. Writers' and artists' names are omitted from all submissions before they are distributed to board members, and final selections are made through deliberation by the editorial board. Although the process is by nature subjective, we strive to make it as fair and collaborative as possible.

We would like to thank the Associated Students of Pomona College, the Pitzer College Student Senate, the Associated Students of Harvey Mudd College, the Scripps Associated Students, and the Associated Students of Claremont McKenna College for their financial support, as well as everyone who submitted their work this semester. Finally, thank you, dear reader, for picking up this issue of Passwords.

For more information about submitting to the magazine or joining the editorial board, please send us a message at [passwords@pomona.edu](mailto:passwords@pomona.edu).

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