

Steam

by *Nicole Elizabeth*

The woman was becoming a part of the train and there was nothing I could do to stop her. I had been riding the rail from Boston to New York for twenty years and can still remember when she first showed up on the scene. She was tan and beautiful when I met her. Tall in a blue cap with a new clicker for the tickets. Now, she let her hair run long and wild and it had all turned to silver, pouring down her back. I sometimes hated our ride between places. I wondered if my weight in one place changed tectonic plates somewhere else and if I was where I really was supposed to be going. I needed to breathe. I snuck out between the train cars to hold on and stick my face out into the air. I turned my head, and there she was, back fused into the wall, iron growing over her shoulders, arms unable to move, she opened her eyes and said, "One way's half price."

Locavore

by *Erin Fitzgerald*

My wife Maggie reads to me from the newspaper. Chimpanzee Eats Face of Human Owner. Moose Spotted in Area Back Yard. Do Animals Sell Other Animals for Food? I want to go out front of the house and tear the grass out with my teeth.

Look, she says. Listen. School Temporarily Closed Due to Asbestos. Mayor Embroiled in Arson Scandal. Maggie reads me these things, but I'm already there. I'm a field mouse and a squirrel and maybe even a coyote.

My thoughts and my mind are in squishy chunks that almost connect to each other. They're only big enough to hold eight letters or less. destroy. house. garbage.

No matter what or where I am, I shiver.

Awake or asleep.

Maggie stops reading for a minute. Just one minute. You need protein, she says. And you need vitamin C. That's why your skin is so messed up. It says so here. I'm only trying to help. She taps the newspaper. They're only trying to help.

I would be better if I took a burning log to the woods behind the swing set in the backyard. I would shiver less if I could eat the past that's on my plate. But there's no fire, I can't hold a fork, and I can't remember.

Cherbourg

by *Ben Brooks*

Sitting on your balcony in Cherbourg.
Set against the argent morning
With Beirut on
And bowls of bitter coffee in raw hands.
Smoking cherry tobacco in king skins
And falling asleep.
It is 6 and
Still
No
Sleep.
There are hundreds of whitewashed apartment
blocks staring
And you hide beneath the knitted blanket.
Wearing torn jeans and no t-shirt.
Sitting cross legged at your feet.
Feeling thin hands turning my hair over and over.
Smile,
the hair on my hands.
Call to arms.

Last Wish

by *Ben Segal*

I'd like you to do it with your own two hands. Some of the things I love most in this world are your perfectly slender fingers. My own are plugging and meaty. My body is a plugging and meaty disaster. It sticks to the vinyl

recliner, shirtless, coughing. I want to slide unstoppable.

So grace me darling, and grease me. Butter me up. I want slicking through doors, frictionless, smooth and lubed. A simple last wish, really. Hardly any trouble. The Crisco's where you keep it- in the fridge, behind the half-finished canned beans you sealed over with plastic wrap.

When we pick out my coffin, I'll say to get the cheapest kind of pine box, but you should take the coffin man aside and secretly order something with carvings, upholstery, stained and treated wood. I have this fantasy of slopping around, dead and oiled in my silk-lined coffin. My weight will shift, throw off the pallbearers, cause them to fumble the casket. It'll split wide open and out I'll come-dead, nude, greasy me, slipping away down the synagogue aisle.

Block

by *Ben Stein*

Got a broke hand club down the block, around next the wolf house, by the two that split fence. Scrummed front-teeth boys with eyes odd sizes and white crust halfway arms. Worm nugget fingers like stuck on with gut. Shame for good dirt. Take a slot spade down their way, give out some holes to dig, but not a hard whole hand to the yard. Wolf brunt comes so near, bound to pick up some crown bug, some stuck look. Bound to pass it to dirt and dirt to trees and trees to wires and by summer it's me and mine got to boil our caps and shut each other's eyes for sleep. And them to stunch each heal again, on to none but none. Three smits with two bricks. One in the dirt, one brung down on the fist. Some can do himself, just crunch crunch crunch. Some group up. Two in and most take a blood spit from tongue bit. He gets a big swole jaw walk who juts a slint of glass in his hand when he does it.