Switchback

Global vs. Local

Issue 14, Volume 7

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Switchback

Abeer Hoque

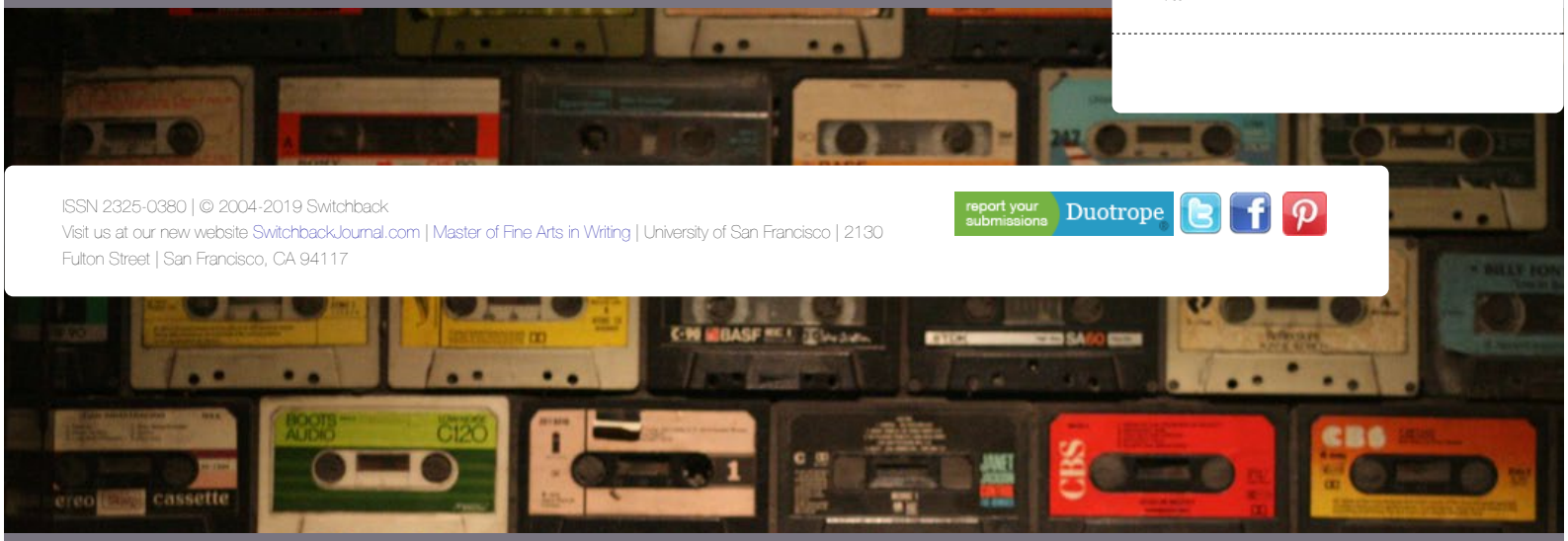
Abeer Hoque is a Nigerian born Bangladeshi American writer and photographer. She likes walking alone, eating spicy food, and taking surreptitious photos of you. See more at olivewitch.com.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Alone in Bhutan
Nonfiction

Photographs
Art



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Alone in Bhutan

Abeer Hoque

Population: 634,982

# of tourists in 2005: 13,600

Forest cover: 72.5%

% pop. involved in agriculture: 69%

% of land used of agriculture: 7.8%

# of languages: 19

Literacy rate: 69% (male), 51% (female)

Year Bhutan held its first democratic election: 2008

Hottest of the 5 kings of Bhutan (IMHO): Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

# of monks: 550

# of lay (married) monks: 15,000

% of rural land ownership by women: 60%

% of urban property and business owned by women: 45%

Dry day: Tuesday

Local liquor: ara

Traditional dress: gho (male), kira (women)

% of plant species found in Bhutan: 50%

% of vertebrates: 42%

% of earth's space: 2.5%

% of Bhutanese who declare themselves happy: 96%

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Choki is blowing smoke out the window. Her rail thin frame folds and unfolds as she pushes open the painted wooden shutters common to every Bhutanese house. Outside, it's raining as it has been for hours, for days. The monsoons are flooding the rivers here, high up in the Himalayas. I see the waters of the Wang Chhu River rising every day and of course it's only time til it reaches Bangladesh. Only, it's hard to think about Bangladesh while in Bhutan. It's hard to imagine that anywhere else exists when you're in this magic forgotten place. The disconnect starts as soon as the descent. The plane must navigate verdant mountain ranges, crisscrossing, u-turning, diving, swooping, and finally finding that one narrow patch of runway, the only runway in the entire Land of the Thunder Dragon.

Enter Paro and the period-piece feeling intensifies. The men stand around in their ghos, a knee length pleated tunic of sorts, the women in their plain or patterned kiras and short jackets. The main road is flanked by colourfully painted houses and there are oh, about two other streets. No matter where you are, you see mountains looming above you. Not like the occasional glimpses you get in Vancouver. Or like the sea that winks at you only from certain streets in San Francisco or Barcelona. Here, in Paro, you cannot forget where you are.

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Nonfiction

Alone in Bhutan
Abeer Hoque

Poetry

Fiction

Art

And as the young will tell you, where you aren't. In 1999, satellite TV was allowed into Bhutan and everything went to hell. Or at least that's how some people see it. Rinchen manages a hotel in Thimpu which is a swerving two hour drive from Paro. He thinks that kids in Bhutan are somehow more susceptible to the influences of Western media, that the rate of change, or at least the desire for change, since 1999, is out of proportion. I cannot convince him that kids everywhere, not just in Bhutan, are bowing to that blue jeaned cultural overlord, the West.

Choki is 19 and wants to go to America. She likes her high heeled boots and trendy SoHo-ish wear. She wants to improve her English, add it to the Dzongkha, Nepali, and Hindi that she already knows fluently. Every day after she comes back from work, she eagerly takes off her kira (all government employees must wear traditional Bhutanese wear) and slides into pencil thin jeans and a slinky cardigan. She calls her boyfriend. She has a smoke. She eats 2 plates of red rice and an ulcerally spicy dish of ema datse (chillies with cheese). She has a nap.

Choki locks the door of her bedroom, like any good teenager would when she's afraid her father might come in and catch her doing something bad. Above her desk is a massive poster of Avril Lavigne. Above her bed is an equally life size one of Britney Spears. Say what you will, but when the topic comes up, I can honestly echo her enthusiasm. Black nail polish and narrow high cheekbones on one hand. Rounded babyface sexuality on the other. What's not to love? I love how cultural (and orientation) divides can be so deep that you can talk about entirely different things at once and no one need stumble.

It's a different kind of alone in Bhutan. One where there is no chance to pierce it. I have no phone, no regular access to email. I find my $10/night hotels by word of mouth. I walk in with everything I own. I sign nothing. I pay cash. I walk out. No trace.

In Dhaka, I always have the feeling that I'm being watched, and that I should be doing more. Like finding a husband. Why not then? It's a question I've faced countless times all over Asia. Why aren't you married? It's as if I made a decision about it and that was that. Fit faht. Who wouldn't be lonely if one were constantly reminded about an alternate lifestyle, albeit one I have no interest in participating in (for now). It's gotten so that I almost think they're right. Until I remember how happy I am.

I'm even happier in Bhutan. I go entire days without having a single conversation. Then I spend entire days with people I meet randomly and listen to their stories, to their dreamings. It makes me think more about writing, about photography, about art, about life. It makes me see things. It makes me go to bed early.

Every morning, I wake up in a strange hotel room and go walking for eight hours. The TigerÕs Nest is a monastery so precariously perched on the side of a mountain, itÕs said to be held there by the hair of angels. As I climb to it, thereÕs a small station halfway up, a prayer wheel I turn squeakily as the prayer flags flap in the wind. At the 400 year old Tango Monastery, I get blessed by the youthful incarnation of a Buddhist monk, my throat closing as he touches my head.

Sometimes I don't eat all day. I almost never sit. There is too much to absorb. I have to do it standing, my camera in one hand, my heart in the other. Bhutan is so utterly simple and gorgeous. Almost no one I've met uses email. They all speak of the villages they've come from. They deeply love their king. They believe in their religion. They know their history. Rinchen has photos of each of the kings saved on his phone. Choki knows how many ngultrum a taxi would charge to go from Paro to her birthplace. Tshering can explain the intricacies of Buddhist philosophy and how his art addresses and adapts it.

I come back to my hotel every evening exhausted. I momentarily wonder where the lovers are when you need a back massage. I play music on my laptop. I forget the lovers. I dance.

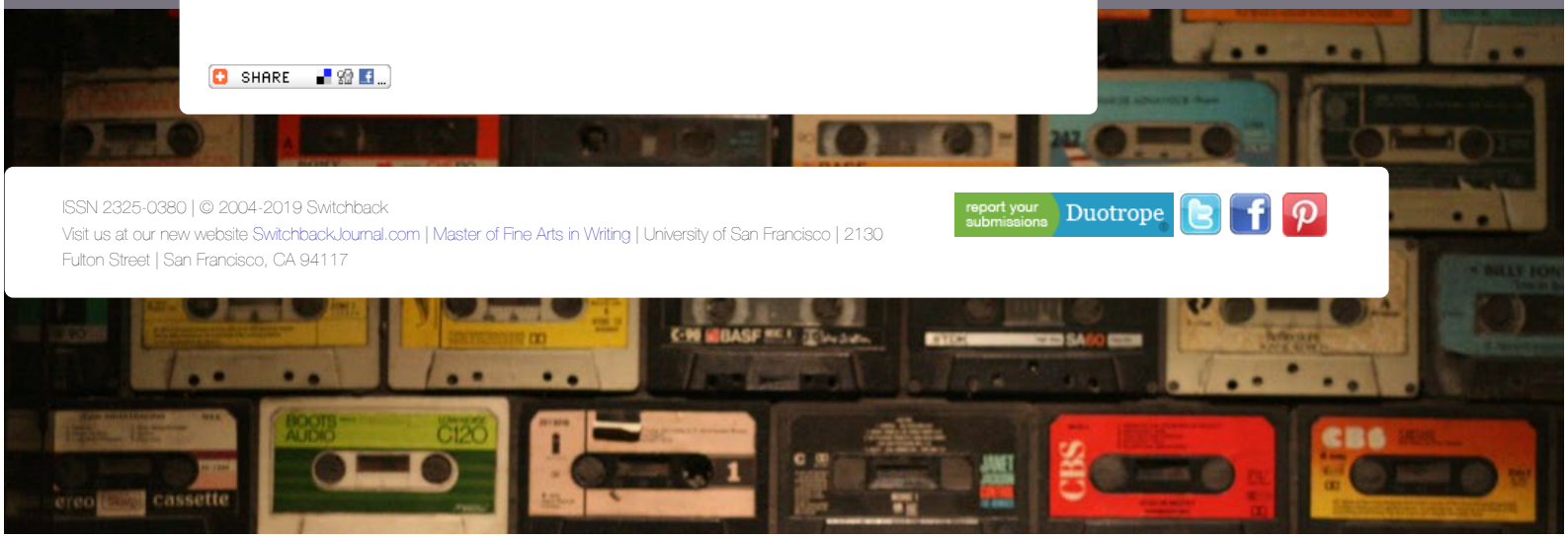
Choki doesn't like to dance. The first and only time she's ever been to a dance club, she went with her cousin brothers and was exceedingly uncomfortable. Finally one of them pulled her on the dance floor and she actually had fun. Don't you want to go again, I ask her hopefully. Club K on the main drag in Paro has no cover for ladies on Wednesdays. It's Wednesday. No, Choki says cheerily.

Rinchen doesn't like clubs either. I ask him about Space 34, a club in Thimpu listed in my Lonely Planet guide as 'cosy and thumping.' He says it's a bad place full of drunk Bhutanese who will harass me. I wonder. It costs up to $250/day for non-South-Asian citizens to visit Bhutan, and they must be part of a tour group. Naturally, this has limited tourist visits to the well-heeled and brown families from neighbouring countries. But single women? Not so much. South Asian or otherwise. So how have Bhutanese men had the opportunity to build up their molesting skills?

Still, I decide to skip Space 34 and write instead. It's raining anyway, and I'm dangerously low on money, and maybe it is actually safer this way, though I always hate to give in to that concern.

In all my wanderings, the Bhutanese have scarcely given me a second glance, despite my sari skirts, kamises, and dhopattas tied over one shoulder. But the Bangali labourers stop and stare open mouthed. Bangalis are everywhere. In Bhutan, among other things, we are painstakingly carving roads into the mountains. On Sunday, which is their holiday, Thimpu looks like brown town as my people hit the streets, markets, and bars in droves. They even turn around as I pass, like we're in some B movie. The silence is broken only when they whisper torrid and wondering Bangla.

I haven't figured out how best to react. Sometimes I pre-empt their murmurs by greeting them jauntily in Bangla as I walk past. Mostly I ignore them. I should strike up a conversation, because I desperately want to speak to them. But I'm afraid that we will have no common ground, despite the fact that there are very few people with whom I am not able to sustain a conversation. I even have my questions ready. I want to know how they got here, what it looks like to them, how far away the past is, how looms the future. Will it be amidst these mountains? Or back home? Or somewhere else altogether? I'm also afraid that they will write me off before we even begin. Some Western wanderer posing as a Bangladeshi in Bhutan. Or worse, a Bangladeshi posing as a Westerner. Or worst of all, the luckiest alone girl in the world. Because I am.



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website Switchback.Journal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Anhvu Buchanan

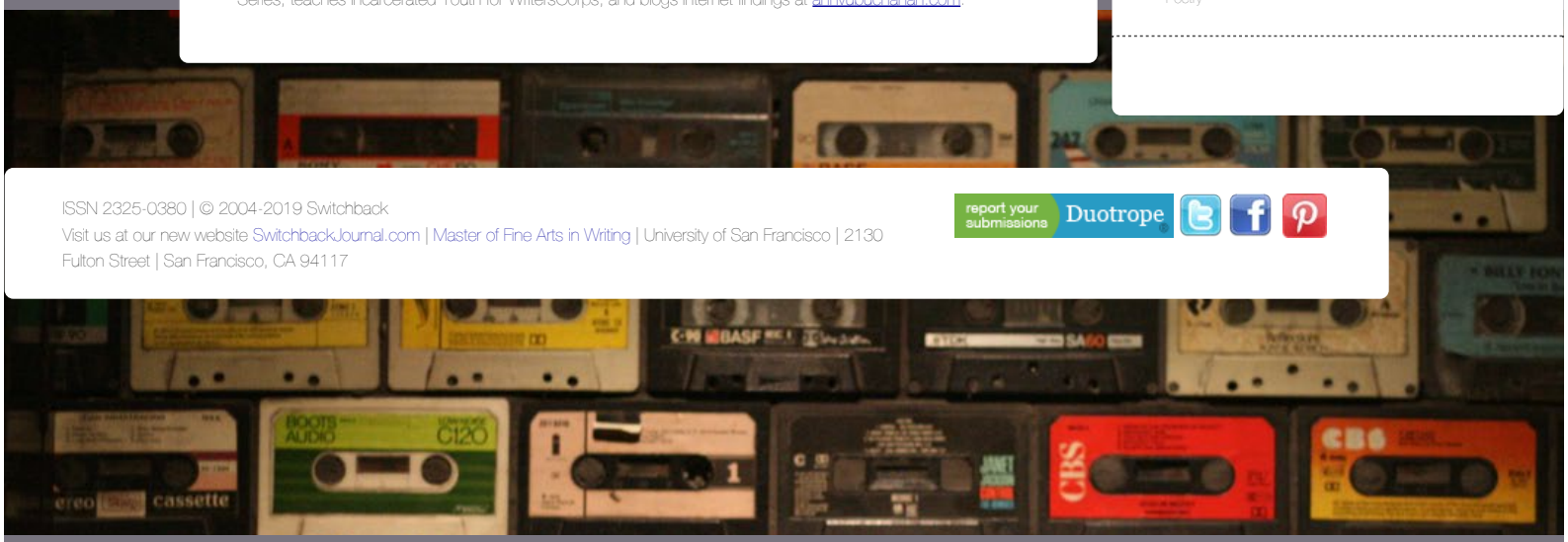
Anhvu Buchanan is a poet and teacher residing in San Francisco, California. He is the recent recipient of the James Duval Literary Award from the San Francisco Literary Foundation as well as an Individual Artist Grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission. His poems have been or forthcoming in *580 Split*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Cream City Review*, *The Minnesota Review*, *word for/ word*, and *ZYZZYVA*. He currently curates The Living Room Reading Series, teaches Incarcerated Youth for WritersCorps, and blogs internet findings at anhvubuchanan.com.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Charting
Poetry

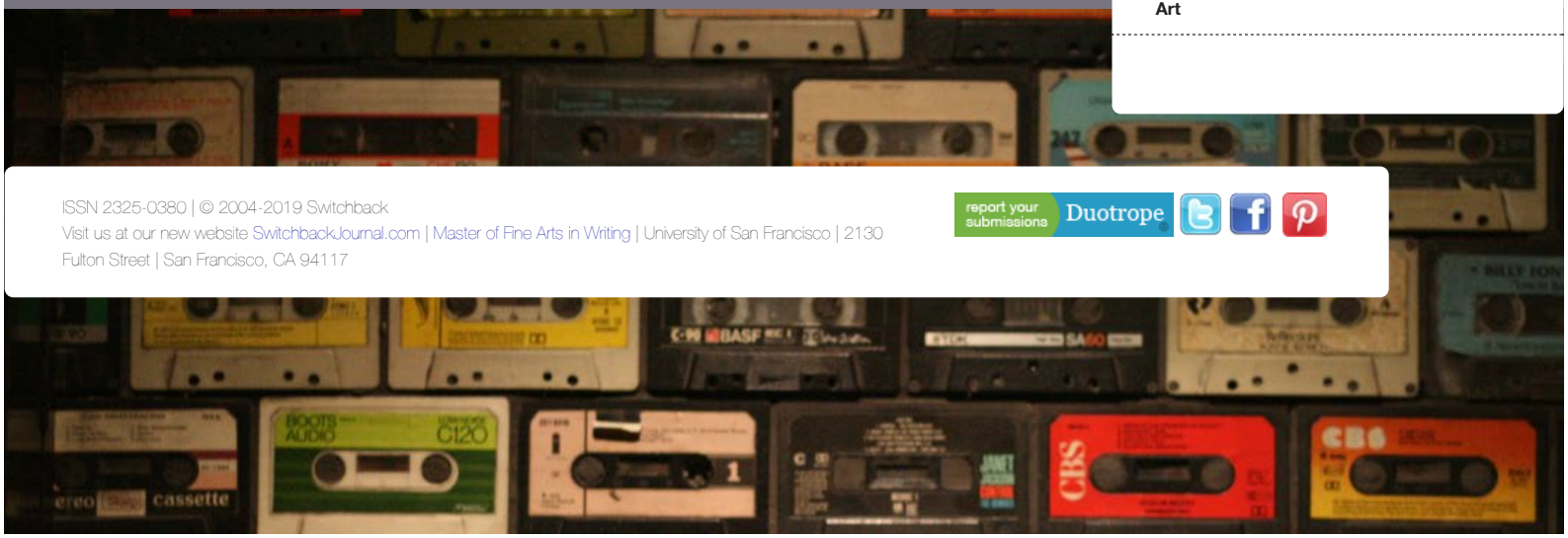
ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117



Charting

Anhvu Buchanan

circumstance 1	factor 2	outcome
the wife and neighbor	a surprised bedroom	blindness
a groping hand	in the dark	a newborn stutter
returning tyrant	an uncooked dinner	dizzy spells
in the crowded home	colliding voices	a clenched jaw frothing at the mouth
the dying mother	by the bedside	black snakes



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

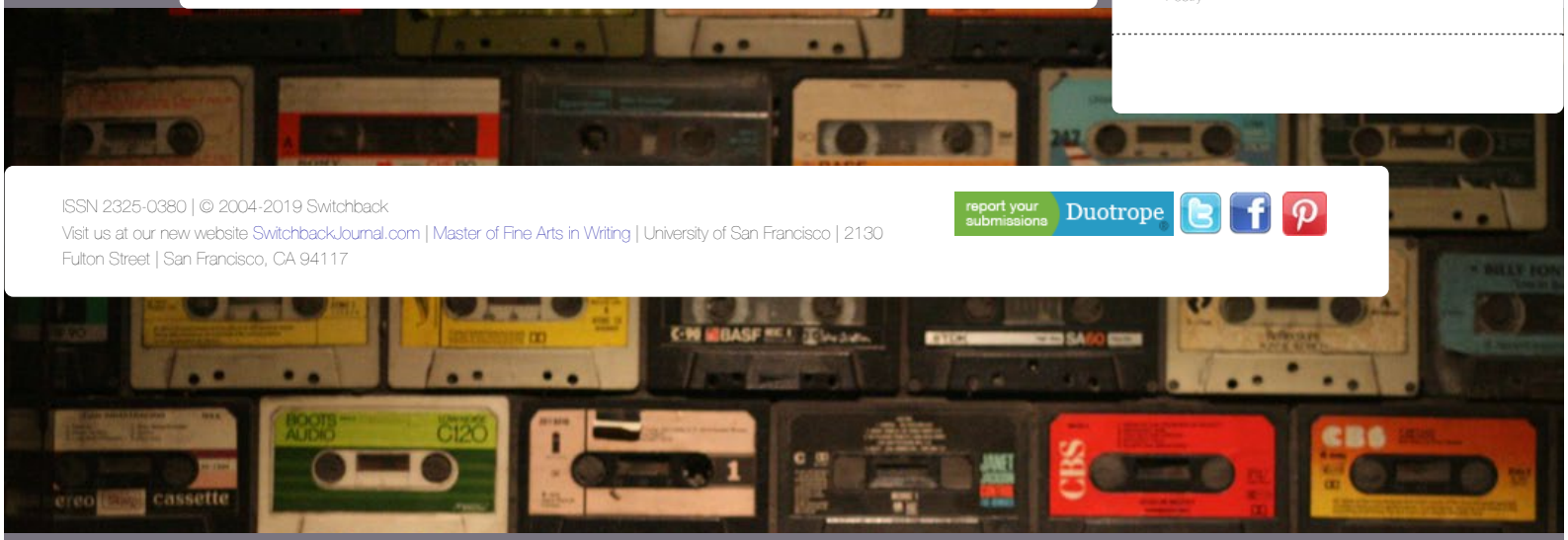
Janice Worthen

Janice Worthen is currently a graduate student in University of San Francisco's MFA in Writing program. She has had work published in *The Rectangle*, and her poem "Fire Closest Kept" received University of Idaho's Banks Award.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Consumerism
Poetry



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Consumerism

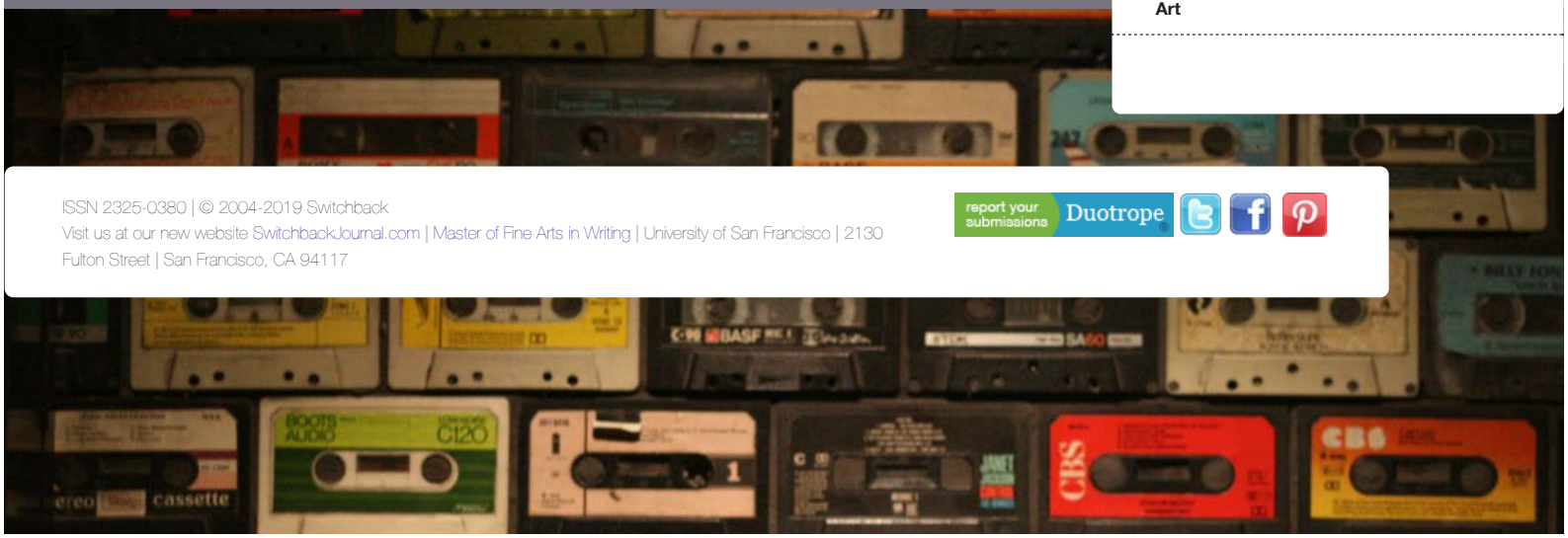
Janice Worthen

A song for John Lennon

The odd knowledge of rooms
filled with values still wrapped,
dust-heavy, bought on an impulse,
forgotten. Possessing non-possessions.
Possessed as in, my heart is a bank
vault. My thumb is a book. My
tongue is an antique table, double stained.
Next door, downstairs, everywhere
are the rooms, are the treasures.

Summation. Summation. Summation.

And how can you deny the impulse
to others? Unable to own you,
they bought all your music.
Unable to own you, you
bought things you would
have loved. When you died
they grieved then celebrated.
The relief of no longer having
to own.



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Elizabeth Robinson

Elizabeth Robinson's most recent books are *Three Novels* (a poetry collection from Omnidawn) and *The Orphan & its Relations* (from Fence Books). In the Spring of 2012, Robinson will be the Hugo Fellow at the University of Montana. She is also a co-editor, with Colleen Lookingbill, of EtherDome Chapbooks and with Beth Anderson and Laura Sims of Instance Press.

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

On Grass

Elizabeth Robinson

As all flesh is:
a blue, closely grazed

lawn of inconstancyÑas metaphor is and is not

the field littered with

short vowel sounds and voiced
sibilants. Or is

this soft tissue
a query into the permanence
not of grass, but it is

of green verbs its own inquisition,

a couplet whose pivot
is.

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

On Palindromes

Elizabeth Robinson

First one surmises arrival and then discloses retreat.

One wonders: why

offer a definition of a thing

whose parameters are already so self-evidentÐ

like a brown paper parcel

delivered to an address that already

anticipates the arrival of a package bomb.

The explosion is incidental to the import of the thing.

The outcome of a retreat that gestures frantically toward its own arrival.

Like a clock, the circuit knows its pivot, but

the bomb, going forward as much as

backward, forsakes the temporal in order

to make its secret manifest.

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Anne Babson

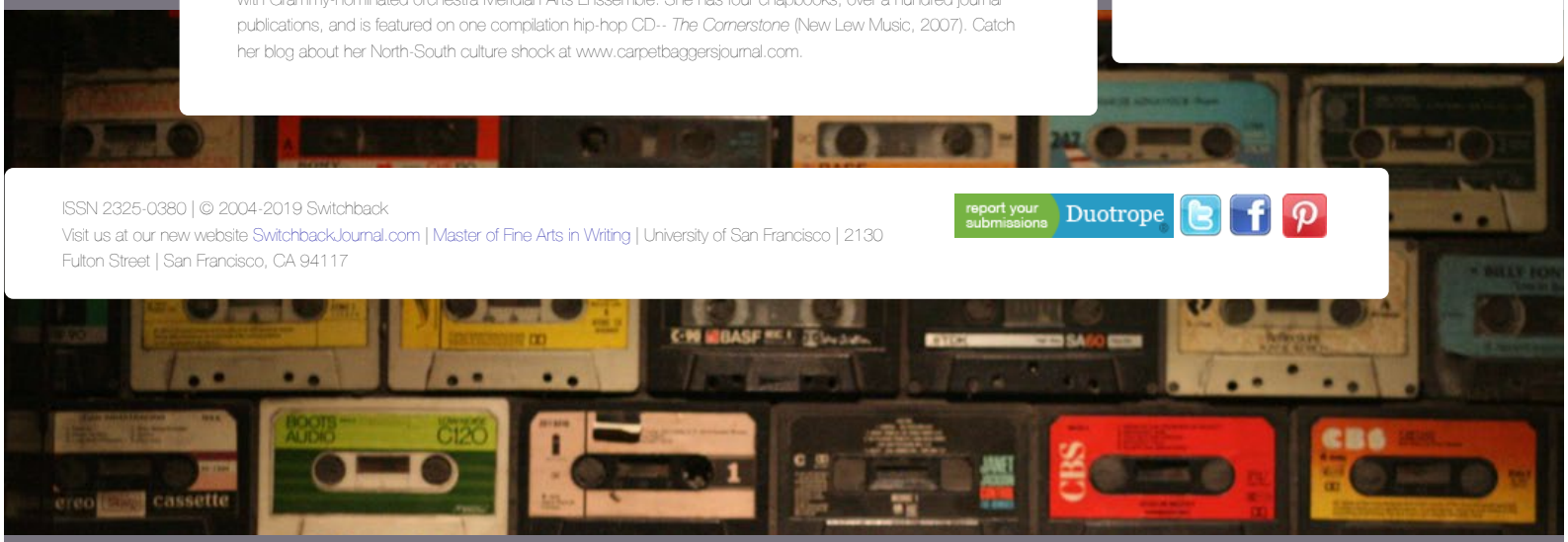
Anne Babson, a Coney Island poet recently transplanted to Mississippi, was nominated for a Pushcart for work in *The Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal* and *IllyaÕs Honey*. She has won awards from *Columbia*, *Atlanta Review*, *Grasslands Review*, and other reviews. Her work has been published in the US, in England, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, and Turkey. She was included in a British anthology of the best working American poets today entitled *Seeds of Fire* (Smokestack Books, 2008) and will be featured in another British Anthology forthcoming from Caparison E-Books entitled *Emergency Verse*. Her libretto for Su Lian TanÕs opera, Lotus Lives, debuted this year with Grammy-nominated orchestra Meridian Arts Enssemble. She has four chapbooks, over a hundred journal publications, and is featured on one compilation hip-hop CD-- *The Cornerstone* (New Lew Music, 2007). Catch her blog about her North-South culture shock at www.carpetbaggersjournal.com.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Household Archeology
Poetry

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117



Household Archeology

Anne Babson

ÒNow Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camelÕs saddle and was sitting on themÉÓ -- Genesis 31:34 (New International Version)
ÒIt's always fun to repurpose things you keep around the house and use them in unique yet functional new waysÉÓ Ð Marthastewart.com

With make-up brushes, I excavated
It from the basement below the basement.
I dug around it with an old nail file.

No, it canÕt be. It canÕt be. It canÕt be.

How it revealed itself delicatelyÑ
An implied outline at first, land so far
Off on the horizon that it might just be

But itÕs not. I just wonÕt let it be. No.

A distant storm, then a certain contour,
Then colored, still redolent with the wreathed
Lotus flowers with which I entombed it.

How can this thing have ever been my god?

My blood remembers the kneeling I blocked
Out of consciousness, the smearing of feet
With honey, the jar emptying the gold.

What did I think this would ever bring me?

My skin found the idol warm to the touch,
Not like now. I polished it with my best
Olive oil, burned green bills in a brass bowl.

I chanted. I chanted. What did I chant?

What was it? *Nam yo ho renge kyo?* No.
Was it Ave? *Mea culpa?* Neither.
Call me, call me, call me, call me, call me?

The graven image remains deaf and mute,

Still radioactive to someone else,
Mum under the curse against which I
Now wear an amulet. What will I do?

It is fossilized against wood chippers.

It has not composted yet. If only
I were craftier. With a glue gun and
Imagination, I might make this an

Uncrackable pi–ata effigy.

With shoulder pads a stuffed bra, it might
Serve now as a grim dressmaker dummy.
A frat could make it an ancient Greek prank.

I think I had an orgy with this thing.

If I owned a disco, I could cover
It in fluorescent paint, and then the black
Light that emanates from it would make sense

To everyone else who looked at it.

For now, I will cover it with an old quilt.
I never come down here unless pipes whine.
Until I need ornaments for a tree,

IÕll lock the door at the top of the stairs.

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

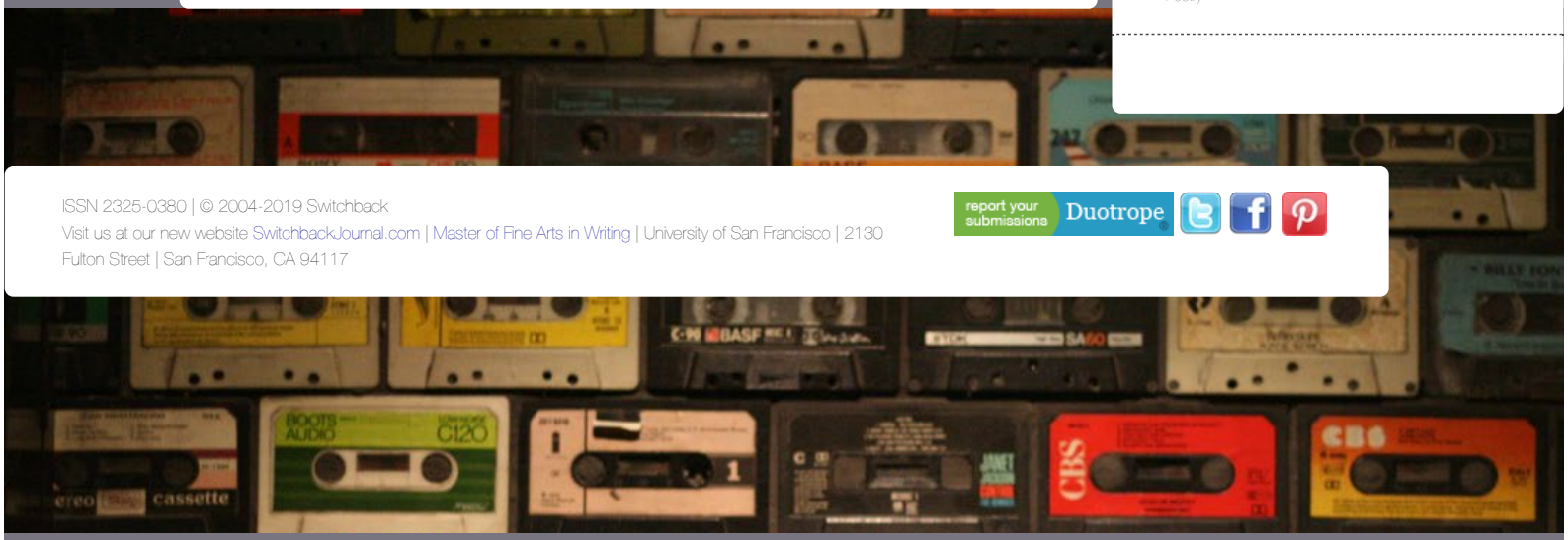
Brent House

Brent House grew up in Necaise, Mississippi, where he raised cattle and watermelons on the family farm. Currently he is a contributing editor for *The Tusculum Review*. Slash Pine Press published his first chapbook, *The Saw Year Prophecies*.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Augur of Familial Scenes
Poetry



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Augur of Familial Scenes

Brent House

Breaking clods of history to a poverty of clay & rich symmetry until patriarchs cannot breathe
& reins downlash.
a justified rede

Even unto the seventh generation:
passing. No farm is done in love.

Passing a mule stooped & no longer goes
so a hammer on a head
humors blood with bile
& scored dirt.

Here flitter past field flowers & land on piles
ground rich to till.
Used to be we moved light.

Now thereÕs only some stem blooming out
pulp of word

Well did anybody hear such a sound?
& heaps saw the land scraped bare & a good many was for.

You ever get all swole up
like you been roused by a righteous copse
& centripetal rounds bone deep?

I do.
Some time I gander
at all the dust & dang
semblance kin carry to greaves.

We all pared to an altering
falling in a heavy slant of cut
like a tractor into a pond after rolling over the burrow of nutria
not at all indigenous.
ItÕs just sad when you canÕt even root for your own self.
Futhorc we ainÕt either.
AinÕt no justice in eyre
some briary binary

& all. I been told wherever I go
there I am
still I go to cedar closets.

Need is a conferment of grace
gifts of gab raining on lealand
no morsure for rest
an ictus above the fold
tenable phylacteries.

Lord have mercy me.

Sometimes I think our cattle ainÕt gonna bear nothing more than sacks of cotton seed hulls.
I am prod to believe if they trod ruts through the fields like they did last winter there wonÕt be no
fields left.

I will tell you what
hooves can cut soil something wicked
& this county used to be rich woods.

I shunt start pining.

Accept once was ochre & ochre
& mist.
& wood the builders reject has become the sill. This is the Lord doing & behold
Hancock County

behold coming to you lowly & sitting
a donkey a colt the foal of a donkey.

Used to be we carry a cross.
Now we might as well throw it out the window.

This a pitiful mess.

I am just a dyvour in a plethora of good ingretients & good facture that done jaup in.

Much obliged to come home. Lord willing & the creek donÕt rise.
I just canÕt contend with creeks.

I am just a shieve against a flow
& the bridge is far past flooded over.
Back down on Shaw Road past Crane Creek where some my Shaw cousins live.
One won some 4-H show with an angus heifer named Nige when he was young. I never
much associated with the bunch.

I donÕt want to see the crest. Not like itÕs not wet all over.

Every sleugh in these parts of the woods is all choked up.
The air is large & wet.

I thought I could pretergress beyond. I reckon I canÕt.
Thunder & wind is pelting down upon & hitherward.

If itÕs not one thing itÕs the other.

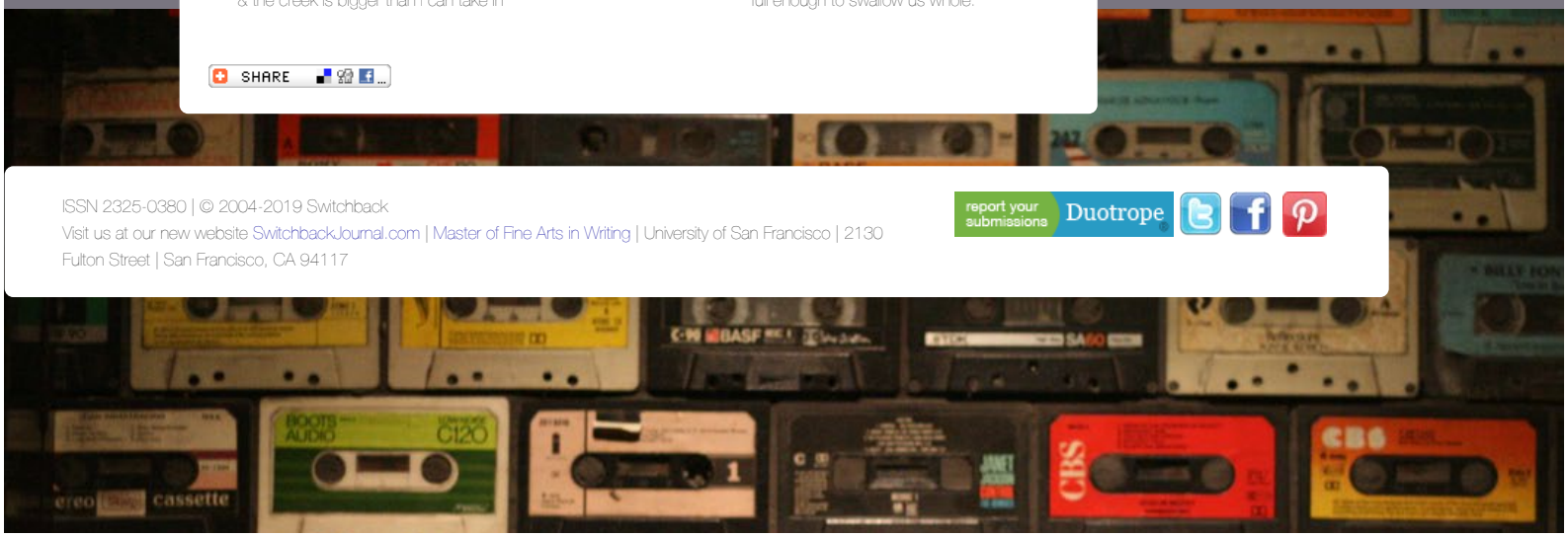
All kinds of cotton picking problems.
These days are getting harder & harder to be a good fallow.

I miss tin roofs good rest
what God has cleansed we must not call common
a dumosity in sodden decay
venules of fall.

The Spirit of the Land is come upon Me anointing with the gospel of water & dirt
to reclaim of downtrodden an acceptable way to be silt within ground.

I might utter to a birch & hidden acres
but we been imbued with enough water to fill a gaggle of number three washtubs full.

& the creek is bigger than I can take in full enough to swallow us whole.



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

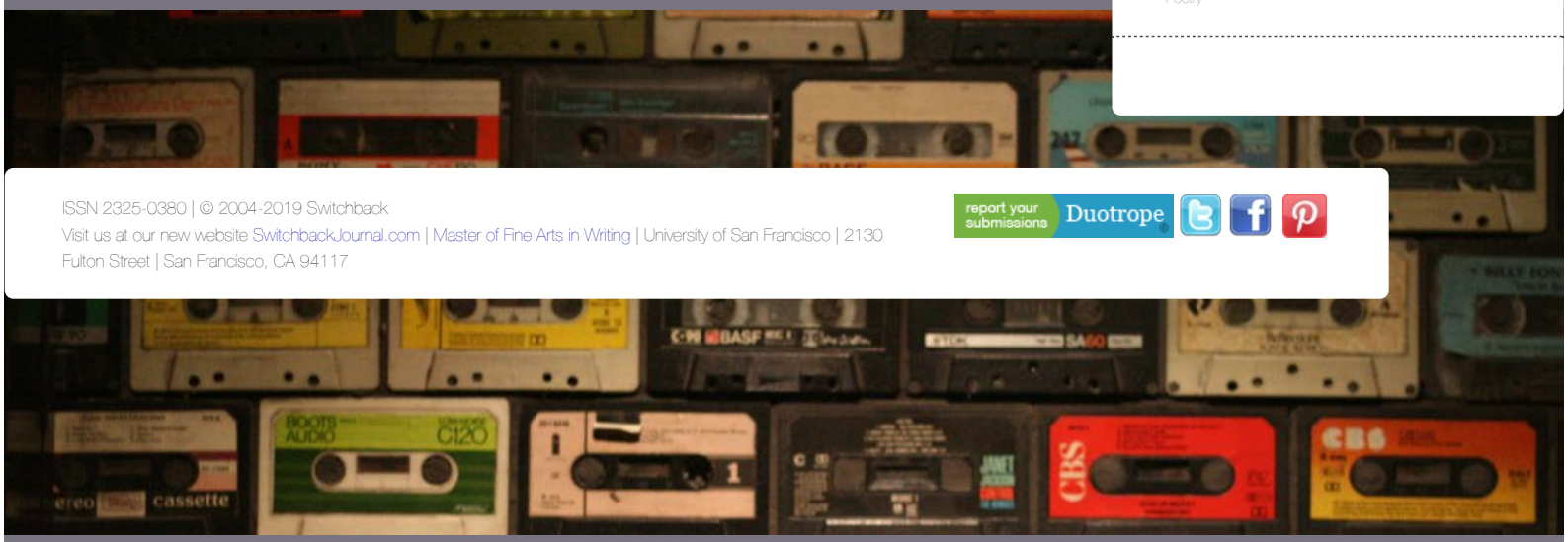
Matthew Kulisch

Matthew is an MFA student at University of San Francisco in his second year. He has previously been published by University of UtahÑin their English Department journal, *Enormous Rooms*.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Eros in Footnote
Poetry



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Eros in Footnote

Matthew Kulisch

for Anne Carson

γλυκύ¹ικρον (Lat. glukupikron)[1]
The Greek Anthology, Volume 12, pp. 151[2]
δόκητος (Lat. adokētos)[3]

Hesiod, ÒTheogonyÓ ln. 188-191[4]
Plato, *The Symposium* (Aristophanes)[5]
Sappho, Fr31, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*[6]

William Blake, Notebooks[7]
Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta IV: Sophocles[8]
Heliodoros, *Aethiopica*[9]

Plato, *The Symposium* (Socrates)[10]
Πτέρωτα (Lat. Pteros, pt- does not scan)[11]
μυθο¹λόκον (Lat. mythoplokon)[12]

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, On Neville and Bernard[13]

---

1. *ÒsweetbitterÓ*
2. *If you looked upon my beloved and were not broken by desire, you are totally god or totally stone.*
3. *Òunthought ofÓ*
4. *As soon as he cut off the genitals with adamant, he threw them from land into the turbulent sea; they were carried over the sea a long time, and white foam arose from the immortal flesh; with a girl grewÉ*
5. *Sliced in two like a flatfish, each of us is perpetually hunting for the matching half of himselfÉ*
6. *I am and deadÑor / almost / I seem to me.*
7. *Nature has no outline, but Imagination has.*
8. *a lump of ice melting in / warm hands*
9. *absolute contrarieties were fitted together as one sound: joy interwoven with grief, tears mixed with laughter, total gloom turning into festive delight*
10. *the greatest of good things comes to us through madness when it is conferred as a gift of the gods*
11. *Òbut the immortals call him Pteros, because of his wing-growing necessityÓ*
12. *Òweaver of fictionsÓ*
13. *How curiously one is changed by the addition, even at a distance, of a friend. How useful an office oneÕs friends perform when they recall us. Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have oneÕs self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another. As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebodyÑ with whom?Ñwith Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question, Who am I?*

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

Charting
Anhvu Buchanan

Consumerism
Janice Worthen

On Grass
Elizabeth Robinson

On Palindromes
Elizabeth Robinson

Household Archeology
Anne Babson

Augur of Familial Scenes
Brent House

Eros in Footnote
Matthew Kulisch

On January 1
Elizabeth Robinson

Fiction

Art

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130

On January 1

Elizabeth Robinson

for Norma Cole

Time is light,

thatÕs all. Her tongue

a version, a map

version, where star maps

are always off-history whether

translating light

from a far galaxy or a local

cloud. ÒOhlÓ

she said, a figure of herself,

ÒYes.Ó Whereupon the light

threw itself down and pierced

her tongue, where it remained

like a stud, that she clicked against

her teeth as she spoke.

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Andrew McLinden

Andrew McLinden likes referring to himself in the third person. He sometimes walks into a supermarket and says to the checkout girl ÒAndrew wants to know if these cakes are part of the two for one deal youÕre currently promoting?Ó On a recent rendezvous with a girl heÕd met off an internet dating site he was heard to remark ÒAndrew thinks you used someone elseÕs photograph on your profile.Ó Andrew likes to read and likes to write and hopes other people like to read what he writes.

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

The Sad Sentence

Andrew McLinden

Secret agent icing, New Delhi, India
Abeer Hoque

When I left school I worked for a week in a newspaper office. IÕm ashamed of this fact. More ashamed than of the time I first went to a brothel or the time I stole drugs from a friend who had fallen asleep.

The journalists played cricket while they waited on stories. They used yesterdayÕs newspaper as a bat and a sheet of tomorrowÕs copy for a ball. For the stumps they used an upturned waste paper basket.

One journalist didnÕt play though because she cried a lot. She would sit at her typewriter working steadily before bursting into tears and running off to the bathroom.

When someone was upset like that people kept their distanceÑas if the sadness might be contagious. The men trying to catch the ball tried not to catch her eye as she retook her seat.

I was there Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and every day was the same: cricket and crying. On the Thursday morning I came in and took my seat just in time to see her break down again.

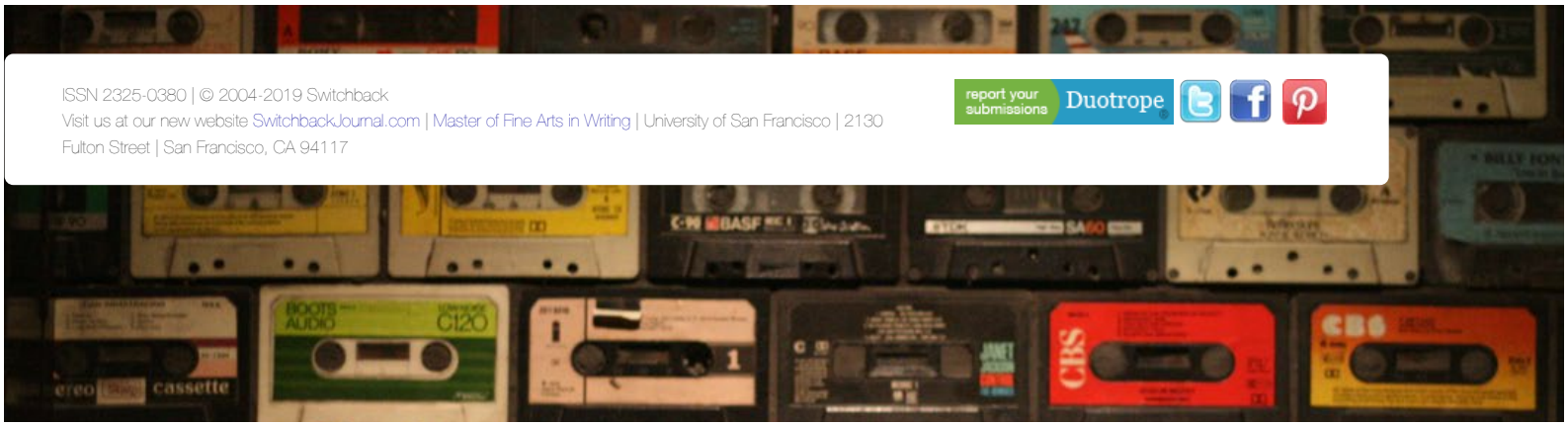
A roar went up from the cricketers, and I saw the ball spin over a desk before burying itself beside the skirting board. A fat little hack chased it with his tie flung over his shoulder. His face was red, his eyes determined. After throwing the ball back, he walked over and asked her what was wrong. When she told him he started crying too.

I walked out to the College Bar for a lunchtime drink and talked to old washed up writers about why theyÕd never made news, only reported it. It was a good pub. There was a jukebox they never put on, a beer tap they never turned off, horse tips that never came in, and a barmaid that never put out.

A journalist sat down beside me. He told me heÕd just reported a story he knew to be false but that it didnÕt matter because as soon as it became news it became true. He wrote the word news down on a napkin and messed around with the letters until heÕd made the word sewn, and then said that in the end it was just about stitching people up. He started crying and moved seats.

When I left I walked back to the newspaper building but couldnÕt go in. All I could see were crying faces pressed against the glass.

By nightfall, police officers wept onto the shoulders of prostitutes on street corners. Car windows steamed up stationary with condensation. Yuppies stood bereft as they looked out of the windows of fancy city centre flats. Bin men, traffic wardens, taxi drivers, road sweepers, all broke their hearts where they stood, while old men on park benches blew their noses into handkerchiefs as their dogs howled at the moon. On cold train station platforms, crying commuters forced sad leathery luggage into the holds of trains bound for Edinburgh, London, and other places.



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

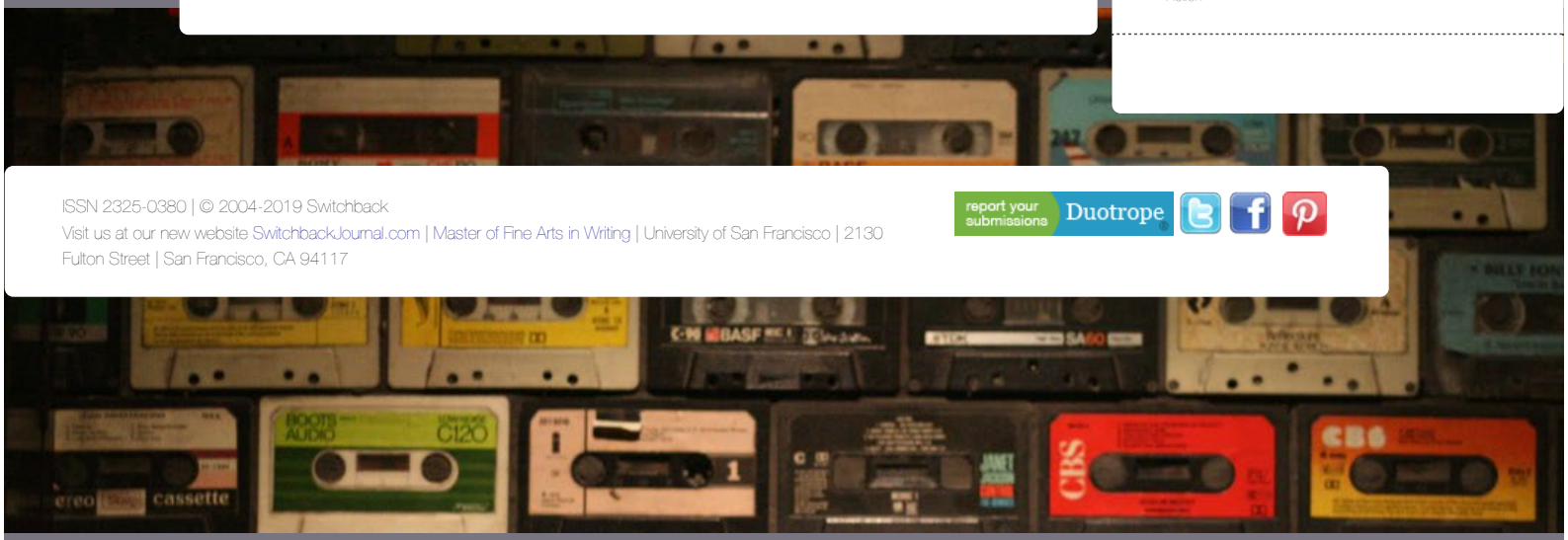
Tony Press

Tony Press lives near the Pacific. Fiction: *JMWW*; *Rio Grande Review*; *BorderSenses*; *SFWP Journal*; *Toasted Cheese*; *Boston Literary*; *Qarrtsiluni*; *Foundling Review*; *Menda City*; *100 Word Story*; *Tales from the Courtroom*; and more. Poetry: in *34th Parallel*; *Contemporary Verse 2*; *Right Hand Pointing*; *Inkwell*; *Spitball*; more. Non-fiction in *Quay* and *Toasted Cheese*. His intention is to live with compassion and awareness.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

SON OF A FATHER
Fiction



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

SON OF A FATHER

Tony Press

ÒElusive as an alley cat.Ó She was a woman I met one time only, when I was sixteen, and thatÕs what she said, her grey eyes never lighting on me, but fixed on one dusty square of her kitchen window as she reminisced about my father, a man I had never met at all, a man she hadnÕt seen in twenty years. Her name was Marisol and she had once possibly been married to my motherÕs older brother, the one who repaired televisions and died and had a funeral when I was about five years old. I remember the funeral but not the man. Straining for the right words, MarisolÕs best appraisal was that my father was as elusive as an alley cat. Two decades later, I found a poem by Francisco X. Alarcon and the very phrase in Spanish: *huidizo como gato de barrio*. I was confident Sr. Alarcon was not a plagiarist, but I couldnÕt work out if the dates added up. It didnÕt seem likely she could have read it before we met. It must have been ÒsimplyÓ - that absurd word we use for the vagaries of life and language - ÒsimplyÓ an expression from her collection.

I was *in utero* when my father went south. For longer than you might imagine it didnÕt cross my mind that he existed, or had existed. I didnÕt know his name until I was eleven Ð one morning a new teacher insisted I be able to write it on a family tree. From the to-my-eyes ancient woman (she must have been all of forty, and when I think back, she was an extremely attractive forty) who determinedly didnÕt smoke while I drank lemonade and had three of my own in her spare, spotless kitchen, in San FranciscoÕs Sunset District in a house with no visible ashtrays, but whom IÕd bet ten to one had herself smoked from the age of fourteen, and no doubt still had a stash of Camels tucked inside her sweater drawer, from Marisol -- Òjust call me MarisolÓ -- I learned he wasnÕt the first in the family to go south, that his own father had made it all the way to the equator, the years he Òworked on the canal.Ó

Sometime after our sole encounter, when she must have known she was dying, she packaged a small box of letters and photos and mailed it to me, signing the note ÒAuntÓ Marisol. The photos convinced me that my nose was less unique than my schoolyard friends had always imagined, and one of the letters made it clear that my grandfather (another man I never met) had once earned his keep in Panama playing piano for one of the flophouses that dotted the Isthmian Canal CommissionÕs construction sites. Most were shacks or tents with nothing more than cots, but his, with a carefully-lettered ÒSmileyÕs,Ó on the door, was a building of adobe brick with real beds and real women, and a bar, a piano, and my grandfather. Maybe I did have a musical bone in my body.

It was a week after IÕd received the package that I realized there was another two-by-three photo I hadnÕt noticed, stuck to the inside of one of the envelopes. I thought it was my mom, much younger, with my dad. I thought it was, but then I knew it had to be Marisol. She was smoking and wearing a strapless summer dress. My father stood behind her, his arms around her and his hands crossing and cupping her breasts. She was looking up at his dazzling camera-ready smile. Over their heads was the clock IÕd seen above MarisolÕs kitchen sink.

I was born in 1945, three weeks after my father bolted from a Texas army hospital. He was recuperating from a head injury heÕd received overseas, or not overseas. He left prior to his medical discharge because he had it on good authority, my mother would have read in the letter he sent her and that, improbably, she saved for me, or, more likely, inadvertently neglected to destroy, for there was little else in her meager possessions to suggest she had once lived with, married, borne a child by, this man, that he had it on good authority, he was *confident*, that he could find and befriend the mysterious author - - American? German? Mexican? More than

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Page 1 of 2 >>

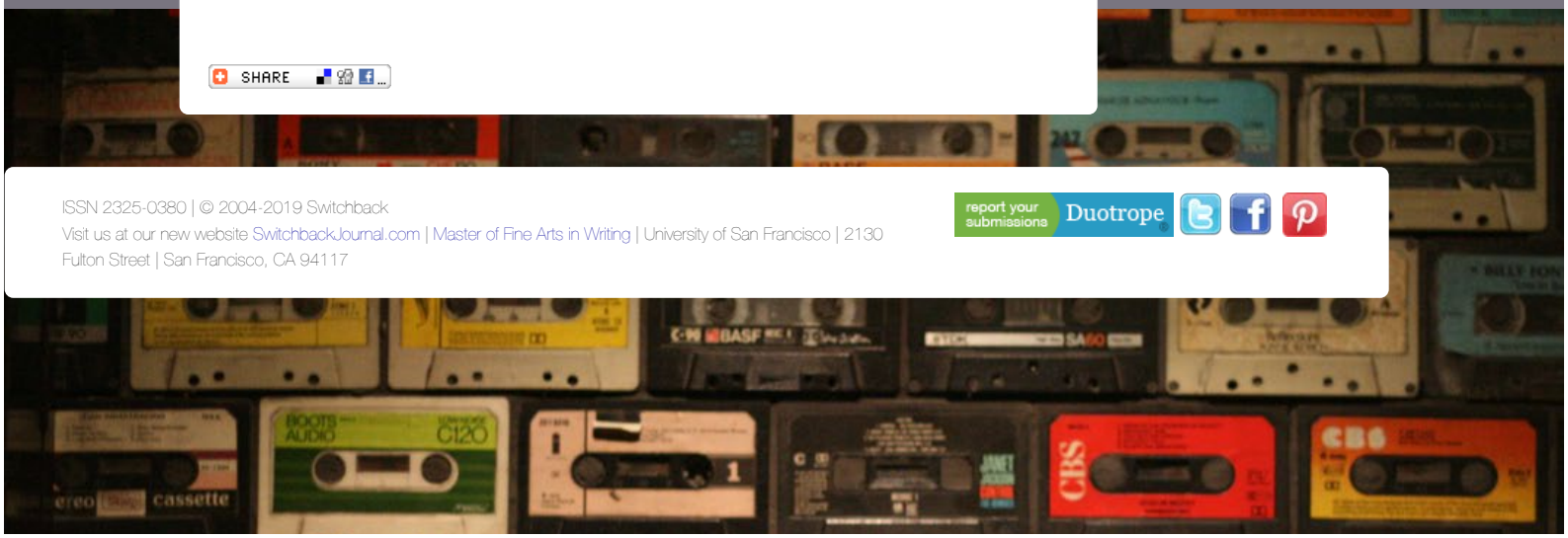
one man? - - - who used the name B. Traven, and who was reputedly tucked away somewhere in Mexico.

To say that ÒI was bornÓ is so boring. In Mexico, the expression is *dar la luz*, *give the light*, or, in the sense of ÒWhen is your baby due? *ÀCuando das la luz?*Ó But when I received the light, it wasnÕt enough to lay eyes on him.

The source that was the imprimatur of my fatherÕs decision was a man named Hans, a loquacious prisoner-of-war happily emptying bed-pans in the hospital in San Antonio, thriving in a job much calmer than his infantry work back home. Hans confided to my father, according to the first letter, scrawled as he bounced in a southbound Mexican bus out of Nuevo Laredo, that while he had never met the man himself, his own brother-in-law, not terribly lamentably killed in Õ42, was once a confidante of B. Traven, and, yes, Traven was German, though that wasnÕt his real name. Moreover, Hans had read, after the brother-in-law passed, his packet of TravenÕs letters, preserved in their envelopes covered with Mexican stamps. And upon each envelope was a return address. There were six envelopes, the postmark dates not always distinct, with four different addresses. Hans recalled two of the addresses, the two which had been, he believed, the most recent, and he generously bestowed those addresses upon my father. ÒYou are a man who will appreciate this. It is a burden I am lifting from myself.Ó

My father, according to ÒAuntÓ Marisol, had signed up in homage to Hemingway, with the ambulance corps, but never, she firmly believed, never crossed the ocean, for some reason serving our nation best along the Texas border. The injury, a serious one, occurred outside a roadhouse in West Texas. Or perhaps on a shooting range in San Antonio. My minimal extended family thrived in a region of selective recall.

1 2 **>>**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

SON OF A FATHER

Tony Press

It was from a friend of my mother that I learned something else: One afternoon before I could walk, two men from the government knocked on our apartment door in Oakland to tell my mother that her husbandÕs body had been identified in a morgue in Oaxaca, Mexico.

When you seek one world, physics demands you leave another behind. Physics admits no half-measures. Here, or there, but not both. I already knew that, and a bachelorÕs degree-worth of other things, too, when I finally crossed the border myself, took the series of bus rides that would culminate in Oaxaca. Long miles and long hours, but you donÕt go forth without a reason, either a better view ahead or a worse one behind. My own rear-view mirror wasnÕt the worst in the world, but I would not mourn its passing. And more, south and east led to, might lead to, my father, gone since before we met, dead as long as I had been alive.

There was a man in Oaxaca who knew a family in Santa Maria del Tule who maybe knew my father. I thought I spoke and understood Spanish but I thought a lot of other things that proved to be incorrect, too. Sergio Padilla Flores and I took the bus from Oaxaca to *Tule*, its more common name, five days after my arrival. I thought Sergio was at least seventy, yet he was describing, as well as I could understand, the two brothers in Tule as a generation older. My second morning in Oaxaca, Sergio had taken me into a double-locked storeroom in a crumbling once-proud building on La Calle Armenta y Lopez, just east of the Zocalo in the center of the city. He convinced someone to spring the locks for us. We entered a windowless arena stifling with wood, metal, and cardboard file cabinets. Sometime during the fourth afternoon we found the newspaper from 1946. My father was one of twelve persons killed when a bus jumped the road near San Bartolo Coyotepec. The driver was one of the fatalities but three survivors spoke of a massive pack of coyotes filling the lanes as the bus began a blind descent. They surmised the coyote explosion caused the driver to react instinctively, and incorrectly, and down the bus tumbled. In an extremely rare occurrence for the time, an autopsy was performed on the driver, and his cause of death was not the crash but a heart attack.

Before I had come down, I spent four Mondays in the old San Francisco Public Library but found nothing connecting Traven to Oaxaca. That didnÕt worry me because everything I did read on Traven had the taste of Òwell, we donÕt really know anything concrete about this man, but weÕll repeat these reports that might be true.Ó

That last letter my mom had received, or, more properly, of the three letters in the bottom of her dresser, the one with the most recent date, was postmarked Mexico City, and suggested he was close to his quarry. Then there was a yellowed telegram from Oaxaca, inexpensive, four words: *Paydirt*. *Manuscript to follow*. Then nothing, nothing saved anyway, and then the knock on the door, according to the only friend my mother seemed to have, and they showed little intimacy in the time I knew them, and the news of his death.

I donÕt know how newspapers are preserved in the States. I am not a trained historian. I planned to be a physical therapist but after graduation never took the state boards. I have no expertise to compare this twenty year old edition of *La Imparcial* with any other aged newspaper. I can say that compared to the March 16th San Francisco Chronicle that I half-read on the first bus, from Oakland to Los Angeles, this one was brittle. Delicate. Cradling its pages in my hands was a blessing, a gift I wanted to have earned but felt unsure that I had. The top half of the front page was a picture that looked like a still from the a film-noir movie set, a close-up of two bodies

propped next to the wreck of the bus, as bloody as a black and white photo can be. I didnÕt think either of the bodies was my father, although the face of the man on the left didnÕt look like any father who had ever walked this earth.

Again I wondered what the Oaxaca connection was, and it was for this question that Sergio and I were side-by-side on the Tule bus, the morning sun staring at us through the windshield, the driverÕs transistor radio blaring as if it knew it were chosen from all the radios in all the buses this day to represent the heart of 1966 Mexican pop music.

We reached Tule and the big tree that the guidebooks brag about, the only reason I had ever heard for visiting the town. As wide as a house and several times as tall, it is no ordinary tree. Were I a believer in alien visitations I would have thought it delivered from another galaxy. Equally captivating was the brilliant white church just behind it. Alone, it would have been a good-sized structure, but here it was dwarfed by the tree. Sergio took me into the church as soon as we were off the bus and, after doing what all good Catholics do in that part of the world, he disappeared into a side room, leaving me to gaze alone at the etchings and paintings. He returned in thirty minutes to find me on a wooden bench contemplating the suffering face of Jesus. He started to speak but paused, giving me time to re-acquaint myself with the twentieth century.

ÒSr. Eduardo, I am sorry to tell you that the two gentlemen we have come to see are no longer living.Ó This was spoken in Spanish but I had no trouble with either the literal or broader significance of the words. He continued: ÒThe elder brother, Don Pedro, suffered a stroke and died after a day. His younger brother, Don Jose Maria, hearing the news, responded with a killing stroke of his own. The masses were given this morning. Would you like to visit the cemetery?Ó

I looked back at Jesus on the cross. I wasnÕt Catholic, wasnÕt anything, but wished that I were.

ÒYes, letÕs go.Ó

The cemetery was a short walk in the relentless heat. Several mourners were leaving, though not all. A priest accompanied them. Sergio spoke softly with the priest, nodded discretely toward me, then returned to my side as the priest and the others continued their exodus.

ÒOver in the corner, near the bougainvillea,Ó he told me.

The priest returned briefly. I wondered if there were more to the ceremony. In my cautious Spanish I asked him if anything else was going to happen, as I noticed many of the mourners still in the area, sitting on dusty monuments, fanning themselves, and chatting. He replied that it might rain.

We walked on and easily found the freshly turned dirt and the two shiny stones: Pedro Mendez Huerta and Jose Maria Mendez Huerta, both awash in flowers. They were in a row of three, the third much older, the name less obvious. It seemed to read Gerard Gales. It seemed to be the same name as my father. There was nothing to say. There was no reason to be there.

A week later I was back in California reading TravenÕs *The Cotton Pickers* for the fifth and final time. I finished it and burned it in a metal trash can behind my apartment building. Next I burned my fatherÕs letters. As the afternoon sun faded into an unseasonably chilly sunset, I burned the photos one by one, saving until the end the glimpse of my father, and his hands, and Marisol, and her breasts, not before admiring for one last time the look on her face, the smile on his, and, yes, the breasts, covered though they were by those hands. Then I added my passport and stoked the flames until there was nothing but ash.

I moved across the bay to San Francisco to an even worse apartment not two blocks from the corner where MarisolÕs kitchen and apartment had stood before falling to a wrecking ball and, in succession, a Rexall pharmacy, a real estate office, a Filipino market, and a Salvadoran restaurant.

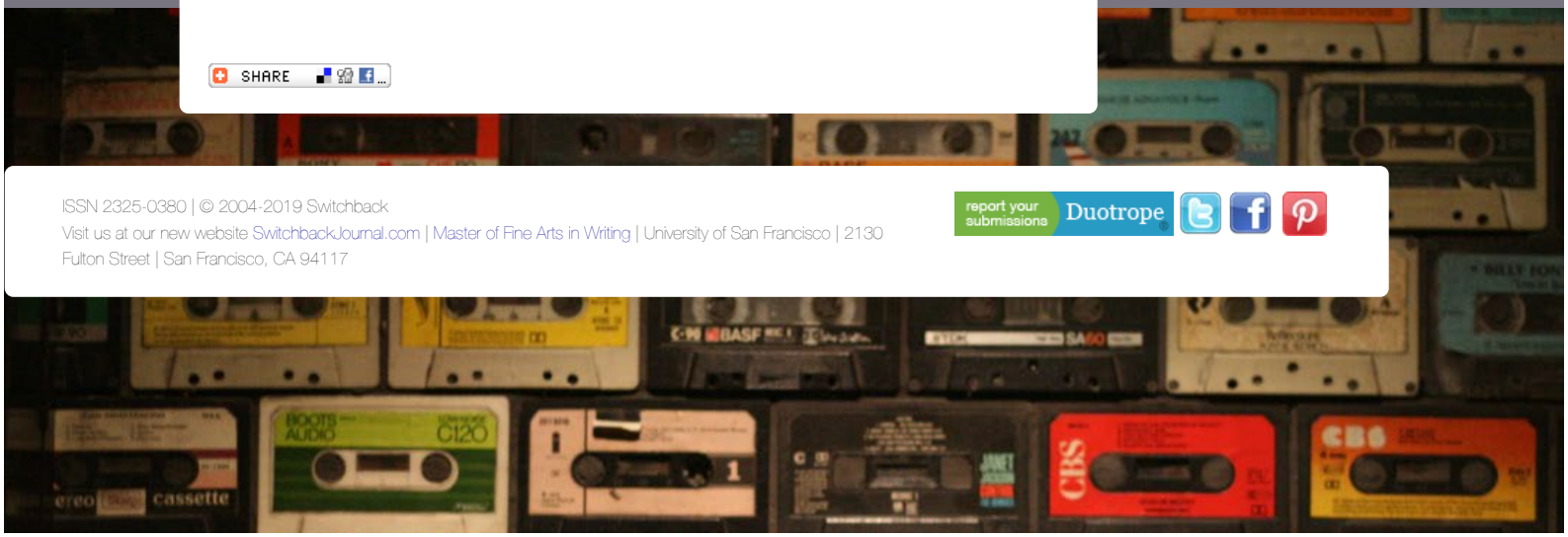
I apprenticed for six months before signing on as a landscape gardener trainee for the city of San Francisco. I spend my days on my knees in Golden Gate Park, ripping out invasive species, replacing them with boring but native varieties as tourists step around me as if I were inanimate.

Muni runs a bus but I have had enough of buses, so each dawn I walk the two miles to the park and at dusk I walk the two miles home. My evenings are a tight circuit of three bars in the Avenues between Rivera and Taraval Streets and my nights, sleeping or not, in my cell of an apartment on 43rd Avenue. On windless nights I canÕt help hearing the waves from Ocean Beach but thatÕs as close as I get to the saltwater that kisses the

cityÕs edge. I stopped reading altogether and I never think about my father.

THE END

<< 1 **2**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

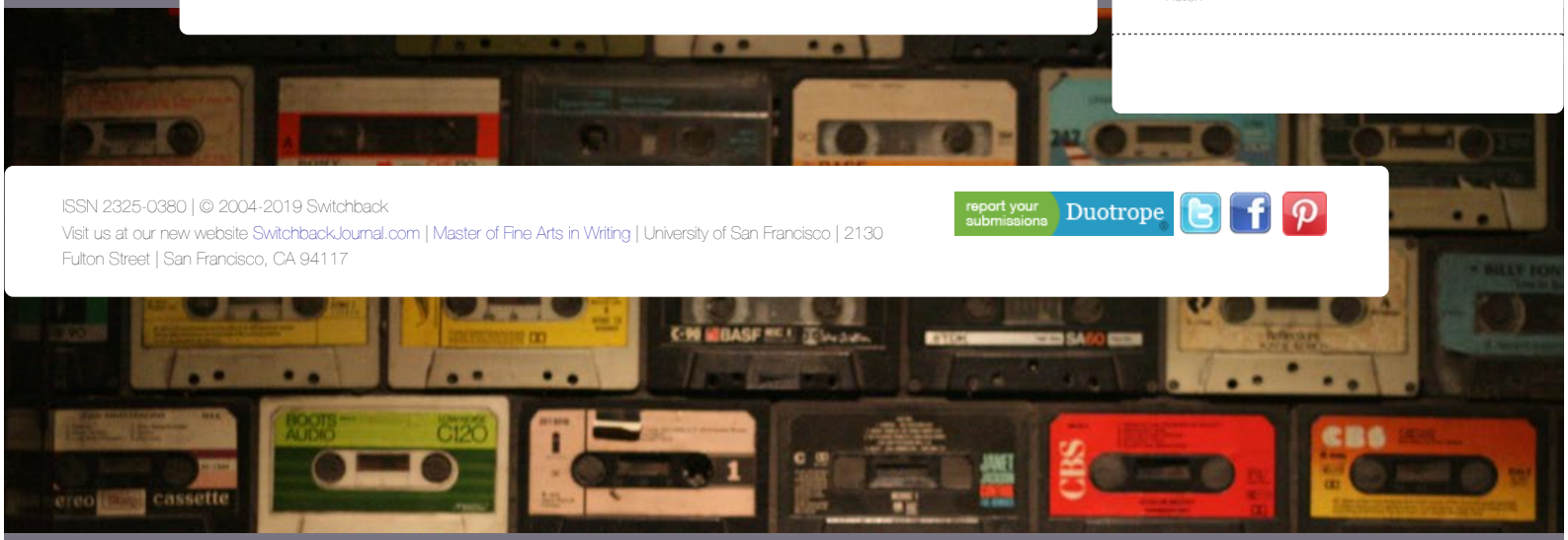
Roxanne Carter

Roxanne Carter is the author of *Glamorous Freak: How I Taught My Dress to Act*, a collection of fictional remediations of cinema. Her work has appeared in *Tarpaulin Sky*, *Sidebrow*, *Caketrain*, *Drunken Boat*, and *La Petite Zine*. She received her MFA from Brown University and her Ph.D. from the University of Denver. She an editor for the literary compendium *Birkensnake*.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

BEYOND THIS POINT ARE MONSTERS
Fiction



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

BEYOND THIS POINT ARE MONSTERS

Roxanne Carter

EPISODE SIX

6.1 { A DAUGHTER WOULD LIKE TO COME IN }

the telephone receiver sticking to her ear, polishing her ear. she will always be blamed for calling, for breaking the line. *let me in*, she says. a message isnÕt much good without any ink. inhaling the atmosphere through the phone, describing things like furniture, speaking about a position. she will not repeat a word heard in the home.

darling could be honest, could slide the bolt in the lock and check every room, saying she saw nothing at all. *oh look at my hair*, sheÕll say instead, curls revolving as she spins around silently, gliding down the hallway. she refuses strategic lighting, adjusts the volume and then the frame. *i borrowed it to look at it, that was all. i meant for you to have it*, she says. she reaches into her coat, going through her pockets, turning the lining inside out. still nothing, receipts and seashells.

be a lamb and let her in, duchess says. darling walks the worn path two steps at a time. *oh kitten, you canÕt be ordinary*, darling says.

darling has other things to do. once the dishes are washed, the meals are planned, the beds are made, the rooms are dusted, the plants are watered, she will look after her make-up, dress her hair, put on a skirt, sweater and shoes. still there is the ironing, the cleaning, the mending and the polishing left to be done. lines to memorize. at the beginning, she dawdles in the background, rolling her script, her telescope.

at the beginning, she could the dark coming up the hill.

6.2

darling is an idle girl. she never really knows what to do. she takes her chances with garlands of sentences, draping them around her neck: about the length that makes it work, that starts to bring everything together. duchess despaired and told darling to destroy it, but darling found that lists can be useful, and interesting. she is useful herself. she never stops watching, looking excessively for nonsense. the crumbles of red-worn vermilion torn into shreds and abandoned on the windowsill delight her. darling doesnÕt care how it looks; it is the little vanities, both simple and innocent, that matter.

darling gradually rises. the water is boiling, a whistle wonÕt stop. she cries, *shut it, shut it off! it is too beautiful, too beautifulÉ*

walking to the edge of the sea is not worth doing, duchess says. she could have destroyed it; she does not really admire the view. she sees herself as the lady of the house. the vast majority of the sea and forest threaten her. she

is often busy cultivating tea sets, observing the waves arrive one by one from her window. the gulls circling round and round, following without being called. scorning their fame, they repeat a gruesome, ordinary path, tracking crustaceans gliding secretly under the sea. duchess wants the day to be quick, to be over. all the horrors she is able to see happen naturally.

darling is not anywhere in the house. she has learned her accidents.

duchess goes out one door and comes in another. she had gone through a slightly snaky, undulating hallway.

darling plays dead, pulling the curtains closed to cover her room from daylight. a punch bowl sun, striations of gold, pink and white, gilded hot and flashing. sheÕd walked at sea wondering whether sheÕll stay where she is, blundering through the wonderful stupidity of her lengthening dress. her skirt dragging in melted salt, her deep breath, her fingertips going numb.

i am too familiar to be visible; observing indifferently, like a camera. women love to be haunted. i can see anything i want to see: lobsters rolling up in a tight wave, screaming as a curl is set. darling has said more than she ought. she has located the silver filigree, the sailboat hanging from the doorknob. it wonÕt be long before sheÕll see what she can do.

she lost the strain along the way. sheÕd like to forget about this misunderstanding. *i have nothing else to say*, darling says.

6.3

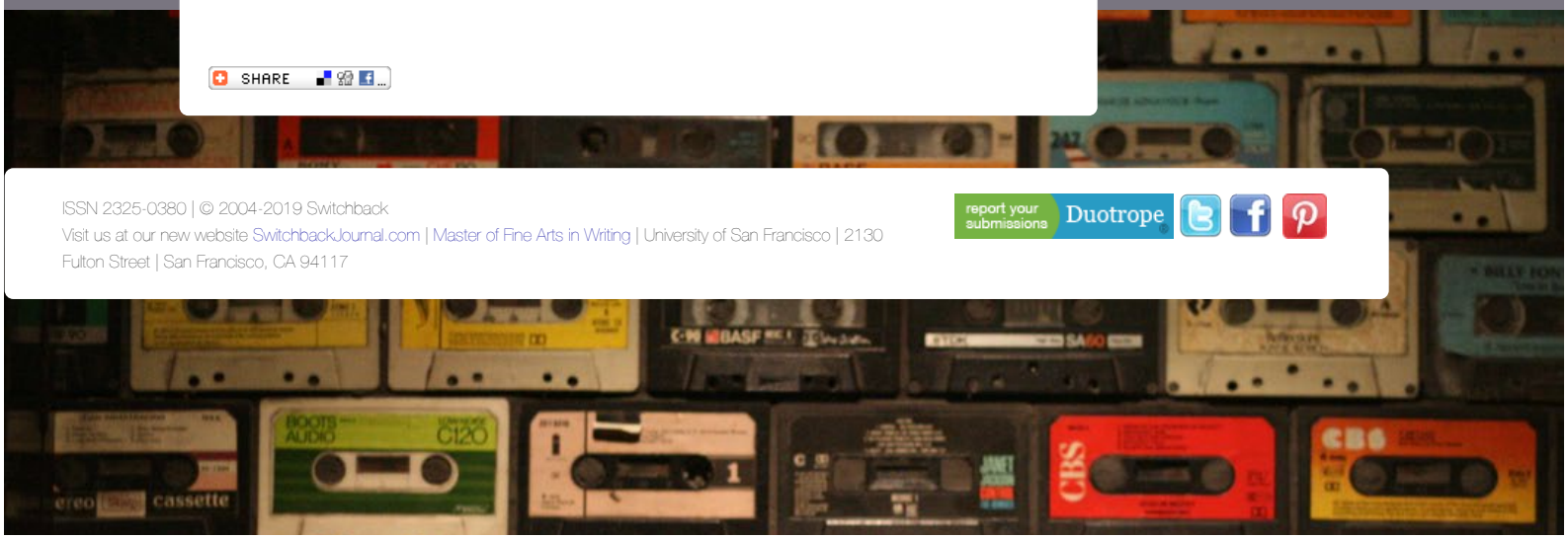
under every rock a worm glides through the loam, laboring in vain. under a rock something small she misplaced; which rock, every rock is like another. things do not disappear while you still love them; they do not disappear while you are looking. duchess said she could be wrong; she is never sure. she must look in uncertainty and necessity. duchess pulls a lock of hair through a keyhole and hears a scream on the other side of the door. duchess whispers, *do not let her hear you say that*.

darling stood and left the table—a sweet drowsiness had closed her mouth. girls that never speak roam the woods unaccompanied; they can hardly be ladies. the limbs of trees join the bodies of young girls as they collapse into the sea. darling has been too hasty, delighting in the blind alley, the interminable hallway. duchess said *it will not hurt, it will not be terrible*. darling wondered whether anyone else was in the house; *is anyone else home?* she called. i know she didnÕt mean to make a noise, a clatter and clang. duchess produced a key she was not supposed to have, a key she had kept in a clamshell. duchess smiled. darlingÕd rather look by daylight but it is already too late.

darlingÕs robe trailing down the staircase all afternoon. she deserves a boat of her own, a whistle. she could survive on nacre, tin; opening her embrace to the salt air, her belly full of ink. she likes to roam around, open every cabinet and fill it with flowers, with pitchers of mud. some girls donÕt come back. you can scream and scream and scream. your shadow will stain the wall. darling sits and looks, looks at these walls, clouds flapping against the high window, cold hearted girls perched in trees in the wood beyond, draped in seaweed. darling stands and pushes in her chair. iÕve never seen her like this, combing the static out of her hair. there is a long way to go before sheÕll leave this room. if she didnÕt stay, didnÕt turn over every piece of furniture, every rock, didnÕt disturb the stacks of newspapers tied up with twine, the loose soil - if she didnÕt she wouldnÕt be here, then she wouldnÕt be here. sheÕd like to be thought of as she thinks of desire, sheÕd like a haloed flashlight to arc over her face, to be lit up by longing.

duchess is careful not to tap her heel against the floor. this broadcast will not be interrupted.

1 2 >>



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

BEYOND THIS POINT ARE MONSTERS

Roxanne Carter

6.4

the door shut and she was alone. *itÕs dark*, darling said, and looked through the uncurtained window. *she will be here soon.*

something was going to happen and she was powerless. a shadow on the wall, a mark i didnÕt make. a dream leftover, left behind.

darling waiting, utterly passive. she shouldnÕt turn her back in despair, sigh to acknowledge the evidence: every crevice aching with spiders. the house has a reputation for widows. there is nothing unusual about miles of corridor, about a girl recoiling from limitless black. she was brought here deliberately, in spite of everything. nobody noticed her eyes wide and strained. when she first came here there was nothing negative, the house utterly passive. the house waiting for something to happen. she didnÕt look very closely but she saw the seaweed pulsing through the floor, the damp spot she couldnÕt account for.

darlingÕs body, restless, will never stop daring to move. she wonÕt stop, wonÕt stand, wonÕt sit here waiting, holding a place, sucking on a lock of hair. she rises and pulls herself to the window, lifts herself. it is entirely up to her. she canÕt get through; spoilers lurk nearby.

she turns. the window arches over her, moaning. the horrible sight of an unmade bed. the phone cord looped around her neck like a slender, black snake. darling is glad that nobody will knock at her door.

the sea has always been there, and the forest stretching to the cliffÕs edge. duchess saw the dark knot of trees and the grey, listless grass. why shouldnÕt i stop here, crush my fist against my mouth. if she slowed down it wouldnÕt matter; the house dark, she would keep looking, turning her head to listen to the waves smoothing sand like a sheet pulled taught against a mattress. she holds her breath, duchess moans, and suddenly released, she makes an effort not to run.

she wants everything to stop, to be very still. there isnÕt a long way to arrive; there wasnÕt a way past the hedge. from the dark trees she catches her breath, flickering whitely within her.

as duchess watches, a shadow movesbeside her. when does that ever happen? the grey dusk and the wind tears at her. *i do understand*, she says. *i donÕt understand*, she says. she doesnÕt want to but she will, she will see the small, bright beacon of the oil rigs offshore.

darling leavesthe path, heading sideways through the gathered trees. her heart rises, wrenching her. *i donÕt want to find the flowers*, she says. too many flowers restless and yawning. a little below her, at the side of the path,

something wails. darling knows where the wolf is. she hadnÕt fed it last night or this morning; how could she if waiting is the only power she has?

while darling was waiting something happened. she began to draw a map. sheÕd been following a bird through the trees. remembering this, she drew a line in the dirt. she will go this way if she had a choice, if there wasnÕt grief, the faint memory of the bird cowered low to the ground.

6.5

how could a name tell her who she is? she might be persuaded, she might notice the slight movement of light in the polished surface of the rocking chair. she might notice the microphone orbiting her head. she might keep track of her own pouting and stomping. she will get her way.

darling has nothing besides a cold weather gown, a voice drifting into hollow, her room a gourd she echoes. the bird of her jaw sweeping out dust. plenty of space elsewhere, endless hallways stroked in black. she claims she saw a shadow, nervous as a cat. she marveled, lifting herself. easy to be misled by stone.

where is she? sell this monster, get rid of that girl. clouds of cat hair erupt from the vents. she spits her cold, flossy tea into a plant.

something a little wrong about mist clinging to a beehive. she canÕt help over the phone; she regrets palming the key, pulling back her shoulders and shouting. pretending she hasnÕt noticed the absence, pretending she has nothing. soon there will be nothing. what she has is exactly like nothing; a key that is emptied out.

rolling her drink, sliding it across the waxed tablecloth. i had to realize the problems of adapting to an unconstrained space. i had a shrill, squandered light.

donÕt you waste your time waiting, duchess said. hand to throat, her face soaked in milk. and she is done. she is done with the house, what the house might do to her. she walks along the wall, slipping one finger to expose the blood. darling looked closely and saw the difference. *please keep ringing*, she whispered, running.

shuddering like iÕd seen something, seen something unsuspecting. i was holding my coat closed at the neck, different from the others. i donÕt want to be found and i hope i donÕt see any light. i will have to stop walking towards the sea. the water too deep to wade. no scream, only a soft shluck as water closes over a wound. i am dank and ill and i donÕt need much.

darling wouldÕve done anything; *please*, she said stupidly. the light went out and i donÕt think it was deliberate. yes it was disgusting, branches gesturing outside the window, tearing apart clouds. darling, startled by the otherwise ordinary morning. the sea rubbing its back against the shore, the hot wind. the portrait of the girl above the fireplace looks very much like her. it could be her, yesterday. it could be darling, knowing sheÕs being lied to. she fancies that this is her home, that she has a need to be here. the resemblance confirms that the house has been coming after her, that there is not an edge. she wants to say that there is not a door by there are several doors moving along the highway.

<< 1 **2**

Kate Moses

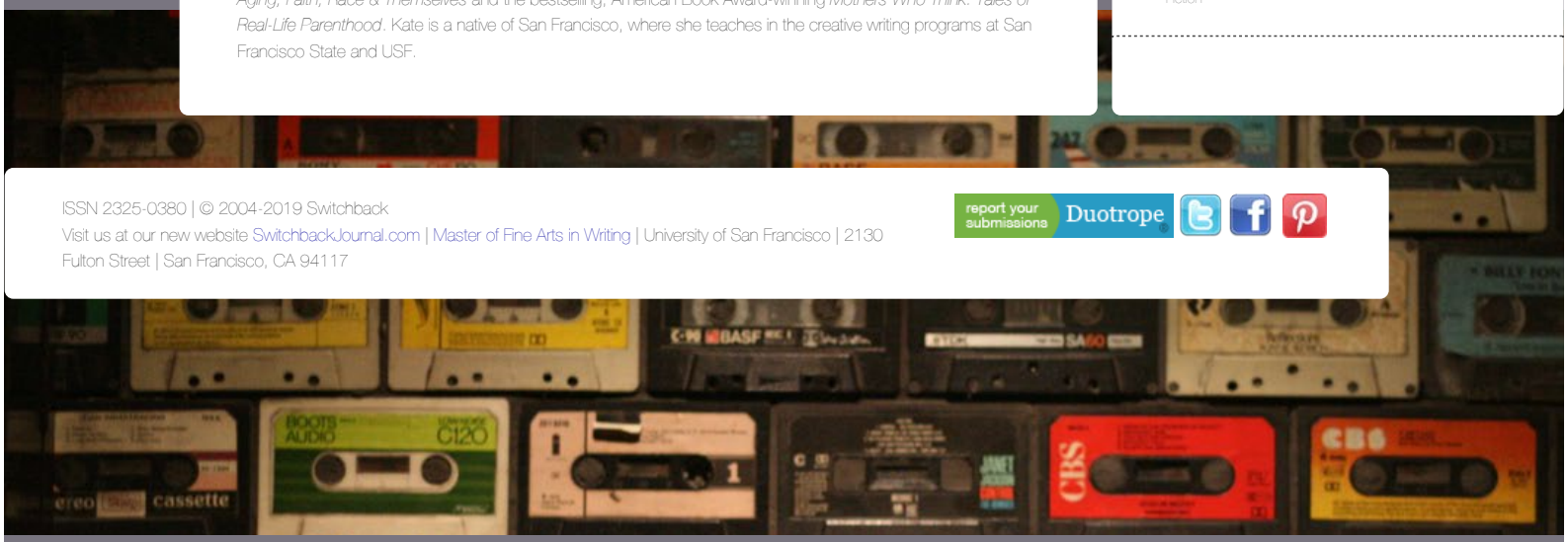
Kate Moses is the author of *Cakewalk, A Memoir*, nominated for a Northern California Book Award, and the internationally acclaimed, award-winning *Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath*, published in fifteen languages. As a founding editor and staff writer for *Salon*, Kate coedited *Salon's* groundbreaking daily feature "Mothers Who Think" and two anthologies of essays on motherhood, *Because I Said So: 33 Mothers Write About Children, Sex, Men, Aging, Faith, Race & Themselves* and the bestselling, American Book Award-winning *Mothers Who Think: Tales of Real-Life Parenthood*. Kate is a native of San Francisco, where she teaches in the creative writing programs at San Francisco State and USF.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Excerpt from *The Fayum Portraits*
Fiction

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117



Excerpt from *The Fayum Portraits*

Kate Moses

Arrival

Late June, 2004

Even at two in the morning the air is thick with sticky, lingering heat. It seems to seep out of everything: the vanÕs curtains with their brightly colored tassels, the stained, striped cotton blanket that covers EveÕs seat. They are driving the empty elevated highway from the airport into Cairo, Eve seated behind the driver, the English-speaking tourist escort beside him, the two young men speaking quietly together in Arabic. Ahmad, a university graduate in tourism, formal and polite, had met Eve in the terminal, escorting her through customs, getting the stamps for her tourist visa and helping her to exchange the dollars in her wallet for Egyptian pounds. So far everything has gone just as the travel website promised.

Your hotel will not open for four or five hours, Ahmad says to Eve, turning around to face her. They are taking a wide curve onto another carless, elevated highway, tall cinderblock apartment buildings rearing up out of the darkness on either side, some floors finished and others empty and gaping, skeletons of crumbling masonry draped with tattered plastic sheeting.

Excuse me? Eve answers, not understanding.

You cannot check into your hotel so early, Ahmad says. But do not worry. I will take you to a place where you can have tea and wait.

Wait? For five hours? In the middle of the night?

Do not worry, Ahmad says, smiling.

Eve closes her eyes, turning away; trying not to see the stained, broken shards of what remains of his front teeth. Everything is so vivid to her now, hard-edged and indelible, as if some biochemical shift has made all of her senses sharper, everything touching her so much more keenly. SheÕs heard others tell of an opposite feeling, a quality of vague dreamscape to their lives afterward, of struggling but never quite coming awake. That would have been so much easier, sheÕs thought, so much more familiar. Her whole life, until recently, felt like that.

Have you heard of the Khan al-Khalili? Ahmad continues.

No, Eve answers, worry going off inside her like an alarm.

Do not worry. It is a large public market, very old and famous. Everyone goes to the Khan al-Khalili. You will be safe there, Ahmad finishes, turning back around in his seat.

The curtains sway at EveÕs shoulder with the rocking of the van, revealing glimpses of CairoÕs lights in the distance. She has no idea where they are taking her. She knows almost nothing of this city, the whole country, but what sheÕs read in poetry and novels, guidebook lists of tourist highlights, ancient paintings she saw in a coffee-table art book -- a world imagined from a safe distance. She knows the name and address of her hotel and that it is a short walk to the Egyptian Museum, the only destination on her mental itinerary. To the museum, to see the portrait of the woman she saw in the book. She hadnÕt planned anything beyond that. She reaches up for the curtainÕs hem, pulling it back from the window for a better view. With a ripping sound, the curtain separates from its worn plastic track, collapsing, stiff with dust, over her arm. Ahmad turns once more to look at her, the driver gazing up into his rear-view mirror.

IÕm so sorry, Eve blurts out.

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Page 1 of 2 >>

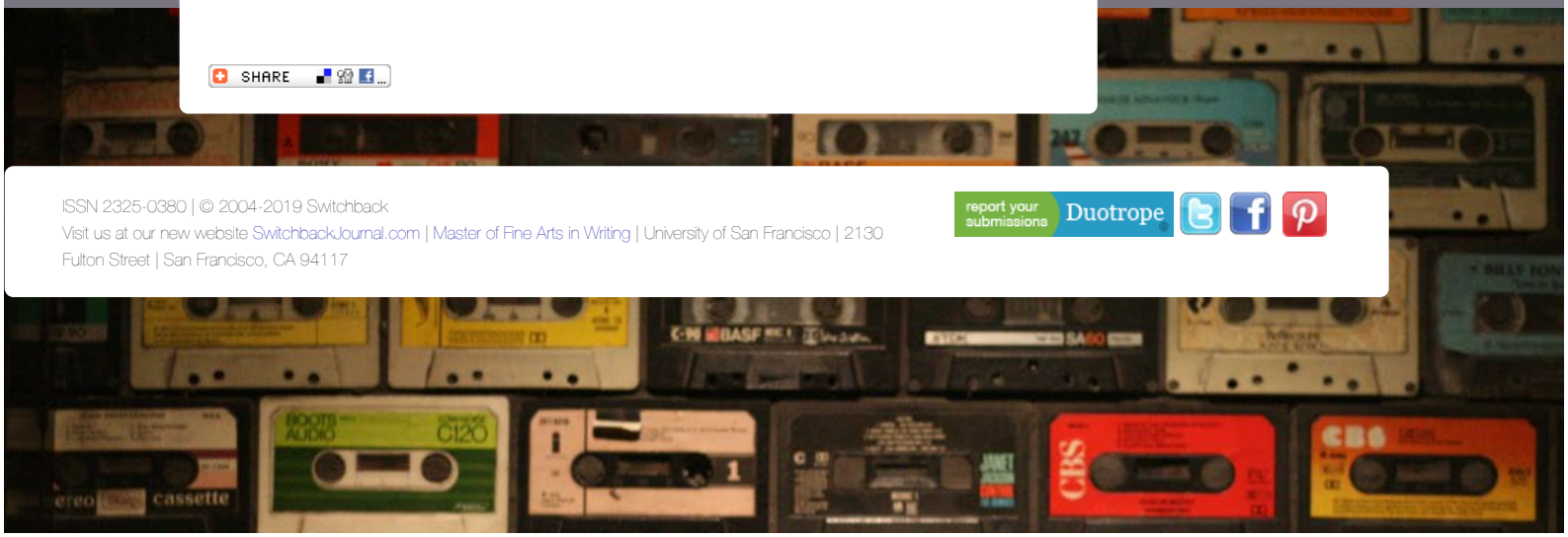
ItÕs nothing, Ahmad replies, shrugging, watching as she tries to reattach the fallen curtain without success. They say coming to Cairo is like meeting your beloved in old age, Ahmad says.

Eve is sure itÕs a quotation. Is that Naguib Mahfouz? she asks, tentative, unsure of her pronunciation of the name. She begins to tuck the curtain behind her armrest, brushing grit from her sleeve with the back of her hand.

Yes Ð youÕve read him? Ahmad says, brightening.

No . . . Eve hesitates to explain. How vulnerable to be: how much to reveal of oneself. *No, but I probably should have*, she thinks.

1 2 **>>**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Excerpt from *The Fayum Portraits*

Kate Moses

IÕm a reference librarian, she says after a pause. At home in California, she adds.

Hollywood, the driver says, sticking his thumb in the air. Arnold Terminator.

So he speaks English, too, Eve says.

Only a little, Ahmad laughs, pinching two fingers together.

I donÕt live in Hollywood, Eve tells them, I live in San Francisco. Arnold is the governor of California now. They call him the Ógovernator.Õ

Arnold Governator, very good, the driver laughs.

I donÕt know about that, Eve says, feeling the instantaneous heat of saying too much. Or too little: she doesnÕt want to sound condescending. He supports the war in Iraq, she adds, no one I know supports the war.

John Kerry! the driver and Ahmad exclaim in unison, high-fiving each other over the gear shift. He will win, Ahmad says, turning to look earnestly at Eve. All of our American friends, all of our clients at the agency, they all vote for John Kerry. Let me tell you something about Egyptians, Ahmad continues, his expression unreserved. We are a Muslim country, but we like Americans. President Bush thinks we are all the same. No one in Egypt understands why he hates us.

The American people donÕt hate you, Eve says, feeling ashamed.

John Kerry! the driver shouts out his open window, pounding a fist on his horn. Quick, staccato bursts.

My wife, she reads all the time, Ahmad says to Eve. She studies literature at the university. Tourism, too, but what she wants is to read, read, all the time. She goes to the library for more and more books. Here, IÕll show youÑ

This boy is married? Acne rash on his neck Ð he canÕt be more than twenty-two, twenty-three. But he has pulled out his wallet to show Eve a picture of his wife. He holds the tiny photograph out to her and she leans forward to see, extending her hand to help hold it steady, her thumb and fingers lightly touching the photographÕs edges.

SheÕs lovely, Eve tells him, peering at the fresh young face of AhmadÕs wife: a formal studio portrait with a mottled blue backdrop, her dark hair long and loose at her shoulders, hands pressed together against one cheek, smiling into the camera.

We are still saving for everything we need, Ahmad says, absorbed by his wifeÕs photograph, tipping his face to the side for a better view. And my wife is finishing her school . . .

So youÕre just starting out, Eve says.

Yes, but we have our apartment, Ahmad says, his voice tinged with pride. Soon I will have enough money saved to buy furniture, and my wife will leave her parentsÕ house and join me, *inshaÕallah*.

You are living in the apartment by yourself, then? Eve imagines him in one of the Cairo high rises theyÕve passed: faded plastic tarps snapping, empty cinderblock rooms. Ahmad, alone with his photograph.

Ahmad shrugs again. It is very expensive to get married, and I must provide for my wife . . .

He glances briefly at the driver, who is drumming his fingers on the steering wheel in rhythm to the low-volume beat of Egyptian pop on the radio.

This is just for me, Ahmad says, reddening a little as he slowly, politely repossesses his wifeÕs picture from EveÕs fingers. She watches as he returns the photo to his wallet, tucks his wallet with care into the inside pocket

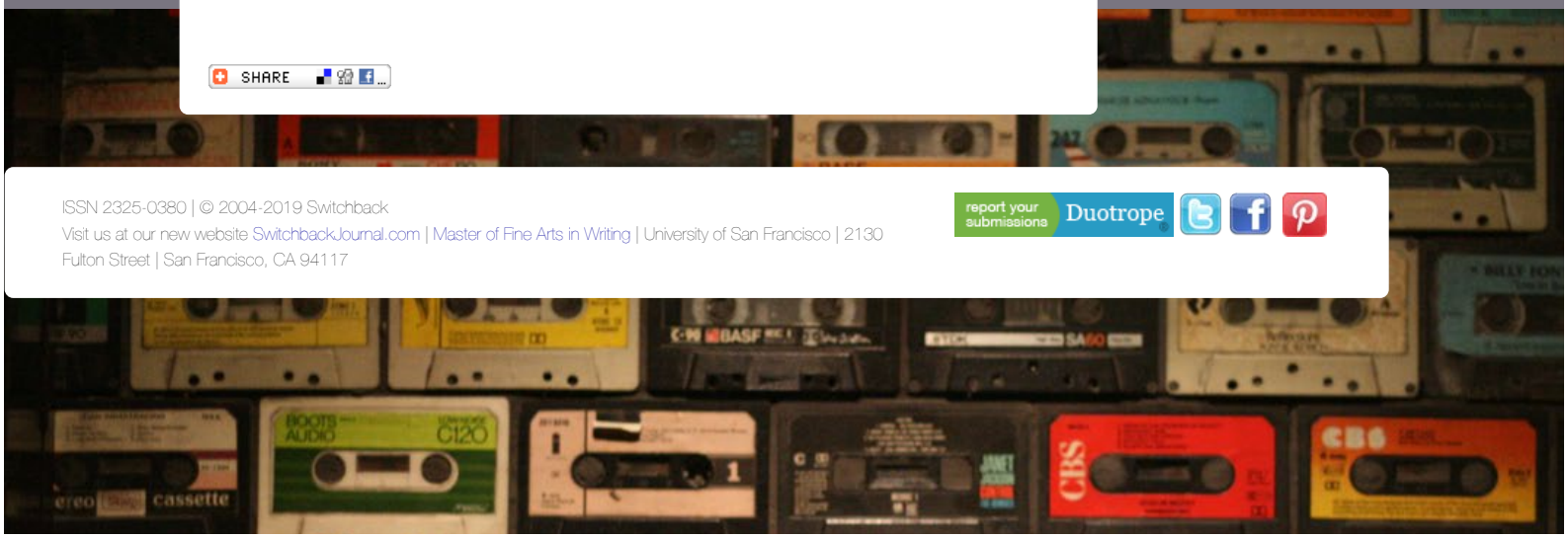
of his suit jacket.

HeÕs shared something private with me, Eve realizes, he doesnÕt want the driver to see his wifeÕs hair uncovered. She does it without thinking Ð she retracts her hand and reaches her fingers to the back of her neck, feeling the heat rise from her bare skin. Not the curls that fell to her shoulders, soft curls framing her face all her life. The shock of it still, her fingers searching for her absent hair. Now the scarf is gone too, an inch-long thatch covering the bony planes of her skull. The color, even the texture different, coarse and threaded with gray. She was only forty-one. She would never feel like herself again, she would never get over it, what made her think anything, coming here, would help Ð to see a picture of a woman dead two thousand years --

Ahmad has glanced up from his wallet, his expression registering what heÕs seen in the moment before he turns away. He speaks to the driver in Arabic and the travel agency van exits the elevated highway, the driver again honking the horn, now at the many cars that appear as they descend to street level and slow to a stop. The cityÕs ageless breath, a febrile scent of incense and decay, pours in through the idling vanÕs open windows.

We have reached Cairo, Ahmad announces, his face again sobered and businesslike. DonÕt worry, he says. The time will go by very fast.

<< 1 **2**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

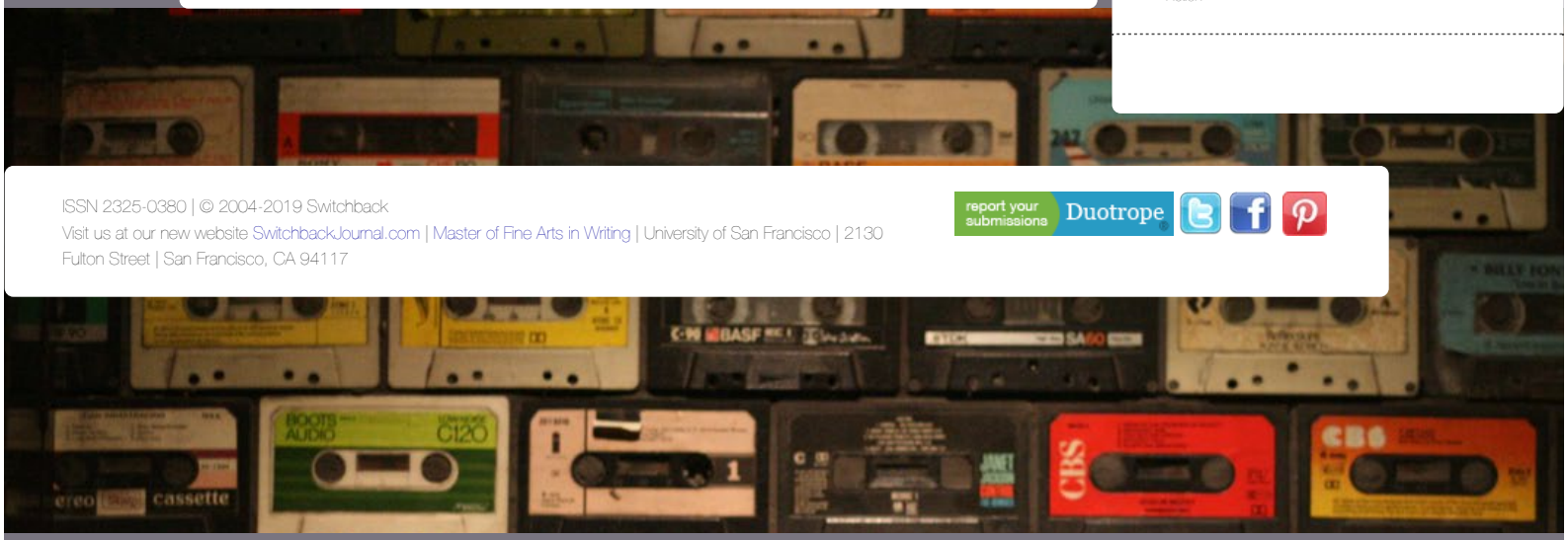
Robyn Carter

Robyn Carter's writing has appeared in *Playboy*, *Storyglossia* and *Tempslave*. She lives in San Francisco where she works for the school district teaching creative writing to kids. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

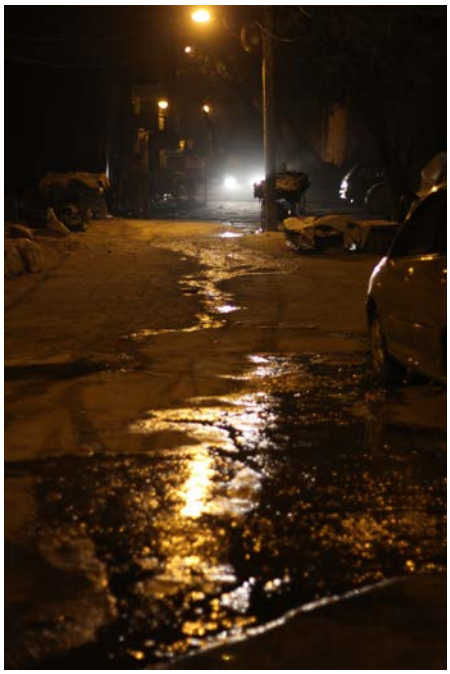
Like Nothing
Fiction



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Like Nothing

Robyn Carter



Sodium afterhours in Haus Kaus, New Delhi, India
Abeer Hoque

Just do what I say and everything will be alright. When you get upstairs, be careful not to trip over all the shoes on the floor. And donÕt make friends with any of the other girls because they are like you, cursed with a white-knuckled beauty that makes them too desperate to trust. Keep your eyes open and your valuables close. Slip them beneath your skin, into your blood, your bones, your heart. If they donÕt fit in these places, theyÕre not valuable here. Now look out the window the man forgot to board up. You may be shocked by his inattention to detail and wonder how he still prospers in this line of work. He doesnÕt know about computers or speak much English but the decay on his breath lingers in rooms long after he leaves, assaulting your senses in his absence like henchmen. This sort of skill cannot be taught. The man is a natural. Learn to respect his gift.

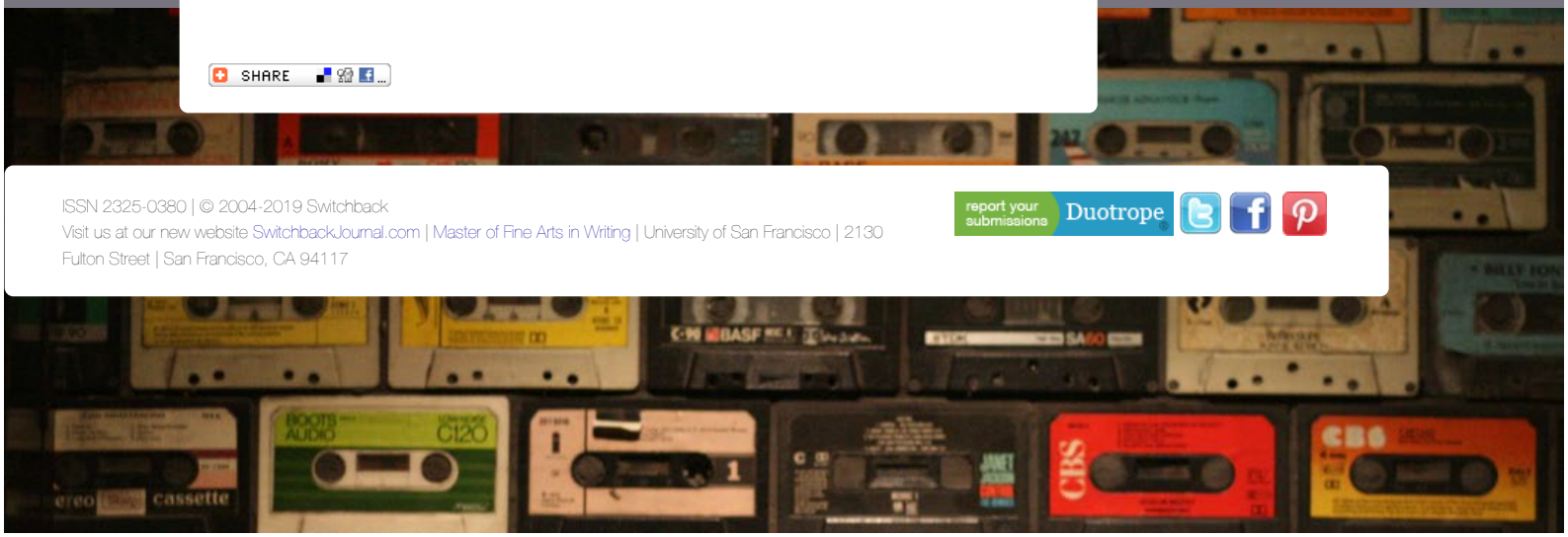
See the lace curtains that veil the storefront windows across the street? If you squint at them you will be able to make out moving shapes and flickering shadows. The shapes and shadows are kids watching cartoons in a room draped off for palm readings and spells. If you pay the consejera there five dollars she will tell you a dark-haired woman with a bad aura has been hexing things for you. If you ask her to be more specific she will say, *You know what IÕm talking about mija, nobody else feel your pain*. If you buy a special candle for just two hundred dollars, everything will be ok. All you have to do is light that candle and let it burn until all the wax is gone. The consejera prefers cash, but she will accept those checks you can get when you switch between different phone companies. Just sign your name on the back and write *pay to the order of Maria Luz Oscurrado*.

The only problem is you donÕt have a phone company. You donÕt have a phone company because you donÕt have a phone, and you donÕt have a phone because you donÕt have a voice. Remember, you lost it along the way, around the time you lost your passport, so you wonÕt be able to buy one of these candles. When you remind yourself this would be one of many options youÕd have if you ever got two hundred dollars, a tentative finger of tranquility will slip across your ribs, one by one. But then the finger will get nervous and cold, so cold that it snaps.

Listen for the man who forgot to board up the window. When you hear him on the stairs, turn around and stare at the exposed wires and tufts of asbestos insulation that hang from the ceiling like toy clouds. But donÕt think of toy clouds, or even real clouds. Think of stars, actually just one star, the gold one from the cover of your

passport, the one suspended between two scaly arcs. Dragon tails or maybe wheat, but more myth than sustenance now because that little book is gone. DonÕt bother looking for it. It was there when you went through customs, but disappeared sometime after the man hustled you into the van with black paint over the insides of the windows. He took it away after he fed you the Rohypnol-flavored rice, which tastes the same as regular rice, like nothing. DonÕt bother wondering how something this bland could be so dangerous because the answer will be obvious when the man announces the rule about shoelaces, which, like rice, are also plain and neutral-colored. You can hang yourself with these, so you and the other girls who live in the attic of Lucky Good Time Spa and Massage are only allowed to have shoes with buckles or Velcro. The man who forgot to board up the window will tell you not to worry about this rule because he thinks your ankles look beautiful wrapped in Velcro straps, especially when you unfasten them because the bristling sound brings out your limber obedience. The Shoelace Rule is a ridiculous and unnecessary precaution because everyone knows girls use pills. Clean and easy, thatÕs what people say. But tell yourself, No, thatÕs not why. YouÕd rather swallow than choke.

1 2 3 **>>**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Like Nothing

Robyn Carter

Now the man is telling you there is a customer, so creep down the rickety stairs and stand with the other girls against the wall yellowed from cigarette smoke and veined with cracks. Follow the lines with your eyes. Look at the spots where the plaster is chipping away and notice how the walls have been painted a thousand shades of white. Think about the girl who was here for the very first coat when the building was new and full of promise, blooming from ashes and rubble. You might think sheÕs a ghost, but sheÕs not; her skin glows with the arsenic pall of someone elseÕs passion. The bones of her corset cradle her lungs, protecting them from hazards like air. Her shallow breath is ragged with panic just like yours. Is a tiny molecule of the oxygen she breathed still here in this room? Maybe, but if it is, what does that prove? YouÕre grasping at air, at nothing. Let go.

At eighteen, you realize you are one of the oldest here. The girl next to you, the one called Mei, has drawn clownish red lips on her face and painted her brow bones a sparkly blue that deadens the terror in her eyes, makes it look pretend and doll-like. She wears a filmy red nightie and through its transparent ruffles you can see she is not a woman yet. She is reaching for your hand, and you take it. Let go. It would be better for everyone involved if she scratched and bit you instead. When this day comes, be relieved. Smooth the hair away from your eyes and smile because the customer is pointing at you. Smile at him even though he does not smile back. DonÕt be alarmed at the way he fucks you with bureaucratic efficiency. All you need to do now is become a form with empty spaces for him to fill in. Pay attention to the way he leaves the spaces blank and skips to the end and checks the box that says yes. DonÕt assume this means everything went smoothly.

Next time youÕll get it right, but this time there is a problem. The customer asked for moaning but he didnÕt speak your language and you misunderstood and gave him silence instead. The customer wants his money back. He is making a scene, yelling at the man who forgot to board up the window. This is why the man is beating the soles of your feet with a pink plastic hanger. Look through the pastel blur in his fist, straight into his face, and tell yourself youÕre safe because the rusty zipper of his teeth reminds you of home. Nobody will see the welts, but the injuries will deliver a private message to you each time you take a step, so all you need to do is take as few steps as possible. This message is so much clearer than any message the man could say with words. But, if for some reason he were forced to use words, he would say *I will let you eat the old mangoes the shopkeeper across the street leaves on the sidewalk to rot. But I wonÕt do this because you are hungry. I will do it because I am hungry*.

There is a jar of salve for your wounds on the bathroom counter. Take slightly less than you need. If you use too much the other girls will be mad because who knows when another jar will show up? Screw the lid on carefully and then kneel down next the bucket of crayfish on the floor. Even though they come from freshwater streams they are the source of the briny smell that lures your mind to the sea you crossed. Its promise is still wet on your palms so open your fists and let your skin dry. Good girl. YouÕre getting the hang of things now, but watch out for the bucket. Be careful or you might get pinched. The animals come from the butcher shop next door to Maria Luz OscurradoÕs lace-shrouded fortunes. The crayfish are gifts from the man to the girls. The lonely ones cuddle the creatures like pets. The hungry ones put them in the microwave. Two minutes on high is enough. Everyone agrees the sound of them cooking is unbearable but all you need to do is cover your ears and hum.

When you return to the attic, be careful not to walk over the little mat where you will sleep. A bruised mango is waiting there for you. Peel the skin off with your teeth and be careful not to drip when you bite into the

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

<< Page 2 of 3 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

The Sad Sentence
Andrew McLinden

SON OF A FATHER
Tony Press

BEYOND THIS POINT ARE MONSTERS
Roxanne Carter

Excerpt from *The Fayum Portraits*
Kate Moses

Like Nothing
Robyn Carter

Bicycle
Ben Paris

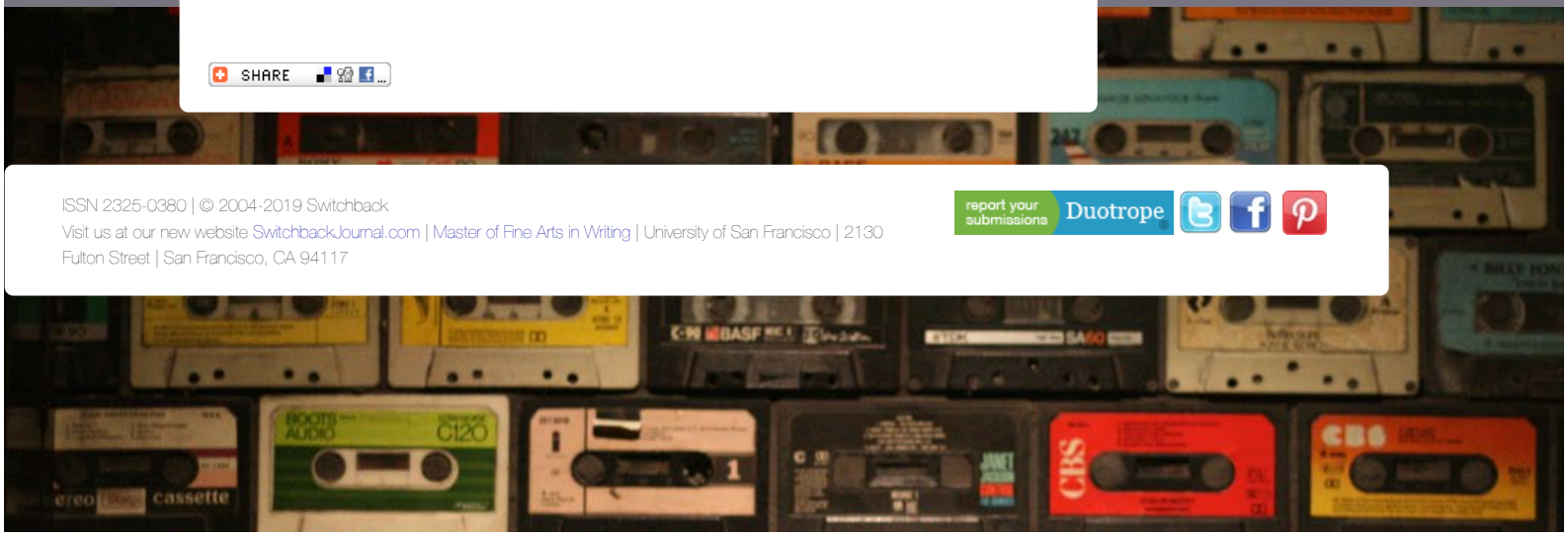
Art

fruit. This is no place for stickiness. YouÕll attract roaches and the younger girls are clingy enough as it is. Be grateful youÕre sucking on a slippery mango pit instead of someoneÕs cock. When no one is looking, throw the pit out on the fire escape through the window then quietly slide it closed. Watch pigeons fight over the pit and imagine yourself with claws instead of hands and wings instead of holes.

On the street below, Ki-Ki is unloading boxes from a truck. He owns the shop on the other side of the consejeraÕs storefront. Ki-Ki is the one who sells the mangoes. He notices when the man who forgot to board up the window takes the fruit that falls to the sidewalk, but Ki-Ki says nothing because he understands that the sidewalk belongs to everyone. If the human shit and dirty needles there belong to all of us then so do the limes and mangoes. ItÕs only fair. Ki-KiÕs store also sells electronics and haircuts and a special spray for getting rid of demons. Bins full of dried beans line the storeÕs back wall, and if you reach deep down through the smooth piles you will find treasures wrapped in wrinkled plastic. Packages of Diazepam from El Salvador, *para tension nerviosa y ansiedad*. Conjured by spirits or delivered by mule because digging a tunnel with your fingers for seven thousand miles normally takes years. But if you would rather buy a single disposable diaper than a pill, Ki-Ki will open up a pack of knock-off Huggies and sell you one for a dollar.

Next to the dried beans there is a giant rubber band ball. It is six feet in diameter and Ki-Ki had to remove one of the haircutting chairs to make room for it. He says itÕs the largest rubber band ball in the world. If you ask him how he can know for sure, he will tell you records are kept for that sort of thing. You will never actually see the rubber band ball or the special spray or the special candle or the consejera but the man will tell you about them. He will also mention the one-dollar diapers, but you donÕt need to buy any because your baby is sleeping safely on the other side of the world. Someone else is changing her diapers. Try not to think about diaper rash. Try not to think about dying. Be thankful for the pills from El Salvador. Be thankful the world is so small. Things can cross continents and time zones like weather. But so can people, so you should also worry that the world is too big and full of places for demons to hide, but you canÕt buy the special spray. Think about it though. It is another thing like the special candle, another option among millions. Another choice that isnÕt a choice. There are so many of these in America that you will soon feel like youÕre drowning in them. You inhale them because they are part of the air. They float from the little TV on top of the cardboard box of white lab coats for you to slip on when the police come. You can stop coughing when your body adjusts to the new climate.

<< 1 **2** 3 **>>**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Like Nothing

Robyn Carter

When Ki-Ki goes back inside the store, check on Maria Luz OscurradoÕs lace curtains then study the toaster and the brass candelabra in the window of Ki-KiÕs shop. It is called The Love Project. Some people think the name of the store is supposed to be ironic because Ki-KiÕs painted on eyebrows and raspy snarl make him appear bitter and full of hate. Next to the cash register he keeps a notebook full of lists. One list is called *Celebrities Who Remind Me of My Mother even though Theyre Not Dead and Not that into Astrology*. He knows ÒtheyreÓ has a punctuation error, but he hates apostrophes because they are just more barbed things hanging in the air, reminding him about what is missing. Now rifle through your things and find the letter from your mother, the note she handed you the day you left to start your new life. She pressed it into your palm as you walked out the door, her fingers lingering on the envelope in a fretful curl, her face tear-stained but beaming. Open it up and reread it for the twentieth time. Look at her hand-written words and this time notice how they twist and poke like gnarled twigs.

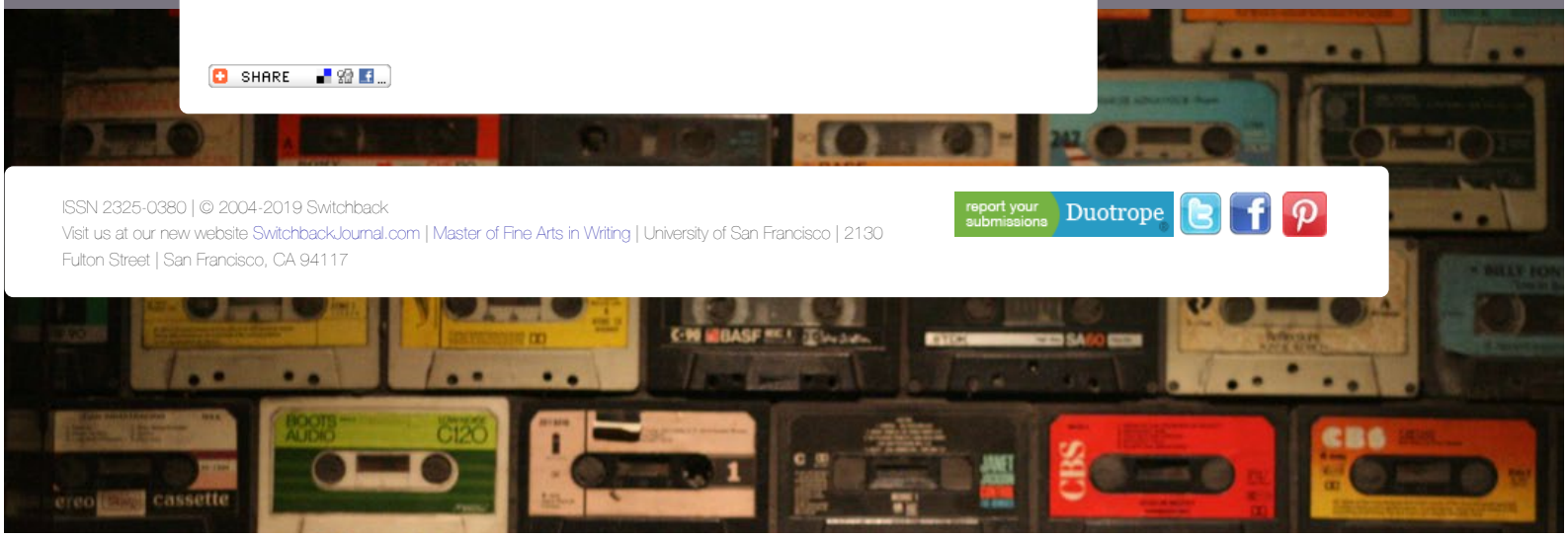
> *Forget about Tai. I will not let him come around here anymore, bringing shame and sorrow to this house. Do not worry about Nhung. Your baby is safe with me. I can tell she is a precocious child because of her owl eyes and terrible shriek. She is the sort of girl child who will gorge herself on words before she takes her first step. But do not worry. While you polish American fingernails, I will see to it that your daughter takes as many steps as possible.*

Your woolly daze distorts your vision and makes you hear things in your bones, the way snakes do, so you probably donÕt realize that you already met Ki-Ki when the man brought you here in the van with black paint over the insides of the windows. In the thirty seconds between the van and the attic, when you saw the world and felt its concrete hug your eyes, Ki-Ki was the one who dropped a box of shoes on the curb. I know these are too big, he said, untangling a pair of lace-up platforms from the other shoes in the box. The man glared at Ki-Ki for offering you shoes with laces, but still Ki-Ki held them out to you. TheyÕre too cute to throw out, Ki-Ki said, and I canÕt use them anymore. Ki-KiÕs tender offering made the bright grey light liquefy and pinken around you, and you thought this meant things would be ok when actually it meant the imaginary amulet you put under your tongue would lose its magic and soon turn black.

Why are you opening that window again? Close it, but not until the wind slaps your cheek and pulls your gaze to the trees. Look up and admire their beauty. They are a wild, native species that blossom year-round and donÕt need special weather or soil conditions or even water. Their branches are wires with words pulsating through their copper cores, and old shoes are their fruit, so ripe theyÕre rotting, hanging by soft and pliant stems of interwoven nylon, assembled with dangerous machines by nimble fingered girls back home. The invisible roots of these trees burrow under the asphalt and strangle sewage pipes and whisper to people who say they hear voices. DonÕt be so sure youÕll never become one of these people. You think the sound you hear is your daughterÕs porcelain wail or MeiÕs mewling pleas, but your baby is half a world away and Mei gave up crying a long time ago. Open the cupboard above the TV. Inside are some rags and a bottle of Windex. Get to work, honey. You can swallow the pills if you want, but get to work. Make that window sparkle. Night is falling and you struggle to see your

reflection in the glass. You canÕt find your eyes, your nose, your mouth. You canÕt make yourself out. Quit trying. Let go. Make that glass shine.

<< 1 2 **3**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

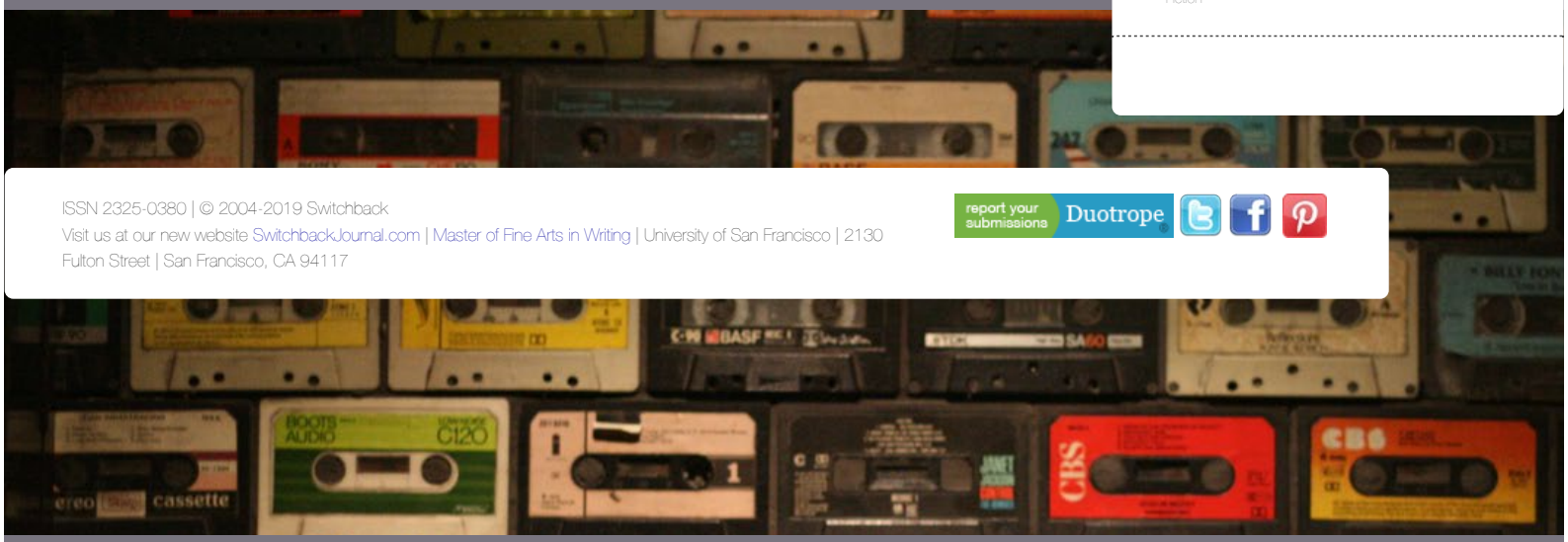
Ben Paris

Ben Paris's stories are forthcoming or have appeared in *Storyglossia*, *Skive*, *In Posse Review*, and *Fiction*, among others. He lives In Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Bicycle
Fiction



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Bicycle

Ben Paris

1.

The rain that night against the corrugated roof was as loud as an approaching train. In the morning, she opened the shutters on the side of the house and gasped.

Abandoned wheelbarrow, London, England
Abeer Hoque

ÒWhat?Ó he said.

ÒLook,Ó Rafaela said.

The body was face down in the mud, next to a creek that doubled as a sewer; a purple patch of skin on the lower back, dark spot in the center.

She ran to the front of their house and stepped out across the muddy narrow street to her parentsÕ house.

He followed, stood in the middle of the road, pointed with his thumb. ÒIÕm going around the side to take a look.Ó

She stood next to her father, Senhor Arlindo, who appeared at his front gate after she called. ÒStay here, Franklin,Ó she said. ÒNo reason to get involved.Ó She insisted on using his complete name when she was angry or stressed.

ÒJust a quick look.Ó

ÒListen to me please.Ó

He turned and stepped over the rushing creek to the body, and leaned over it to see if he recognized the face. He placed his hand on a coconut tree to keep from slipping in the mud. A gathering of ants bit him before he had a chance to brush them off.

2.

He still hadnÕt met his wife, Rafaela. It was the time before the internet, and FranklinhadnÕt found his place in the world yet. Travel, going to cities where heÕd didnÕt speak the language and didnÕt have any friends, was his way of looking.

In Beira Mar, a *bairro* at the edge of Salvador in Brazil, the bus stopped and he got off. She was sitting on a

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Page 1 of 3 >>

bench, the ocean behind her a fathomless blue that postcards couldnÕt reproduce.

Letters from home arrived now and then at the American Express office downtown. Telephones were scarce. Franklin was still young enough to make a point of going to the airport every other weekend to call family at the international telephone booth.

He sat next to her, and gestured toward the ocean with an open hand. She said something in Portuguese he didnÕt understand. Children rode by on bicycles over the black and white stone sidewalks. A fisherman eviscerated a sting-ray on the sand. They were silent and awkward. She touched him lightly on the elbow, and stood.

ÒDaisy,Ó she said, and shook his hand.

ÒLike the flower?Ó

ÒYes, the flower.Ó

They entered the place through the back. Scraps of plywood and old billboards, images of politicians smiling, served as a fence. Quail, the color of dirt, wandered around or snuggled in the dust. A baby girl, two years old maybe, squatted next to an outhouse in the corner.

On the floor in the bedroom, a comic book romance, with a ravaging muscular couple on the cover; Daisy kicked it out of her way as they passed.

She wanted money, she said, when they were done. But a book that could help her learn English would do.

Through the bedroom window, a boy balanced himself on a rusted bicycle frame; no wheels, and no seat. He wore a t-shirt that reminded Franklin of home: ÒNY Giants, World Champions, 1986.Ó

She snapped at the boy, and he walked over to the window. He held out his hand to Franklin and said in stilted English, ÒWhat your name?Ó

3.

Franklin stood over the body. He heard their footsteps through the leaves and twigs; the smoke from her fatherÕs cigar, RafaelaÕs voice.

ÒFirst smoke of the day, huh?Ó Franklin said, when they arrived.

His father-in-law, Senhor Arlindo, ignored him. FishermanÕs cap, extended belly, sinewy arms, Arlindo nudged the body with his foot and sighed. He crouched, secured his footing on a rock jutting from the mud, and felt for a pulse with the back of his fingers.

ÒLazaro,Ó Rafaela said. ÒThey must have dumped him here during the storm.Ó

ÒDaisyÕs boy,Ó Arlindo said.

ÒBastards,Ó RafaelaÕs mouth twitched. ÒWas he even seventeen?Ó

ÒI didnÕt know you knew Daisy,Ó Franklin said.

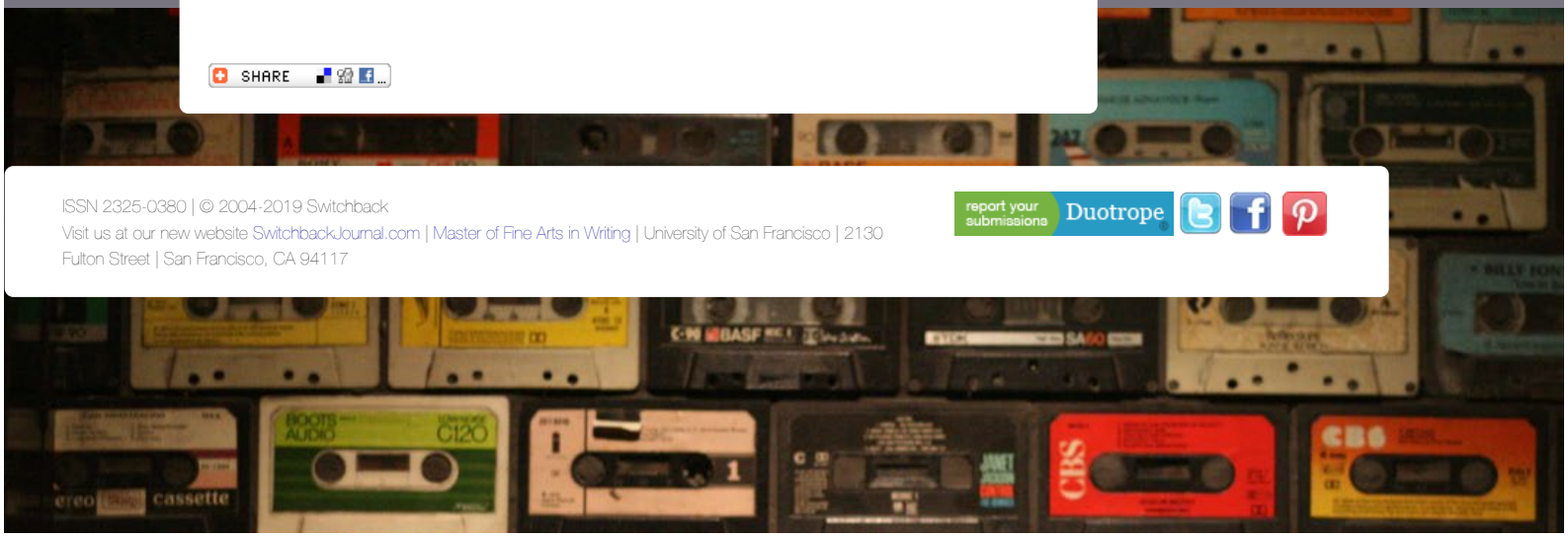
ÒA lot of things you donÕt know,Ó Arlindo said

ÒHe was a good kid,Ó Franklin said, backing away from the bank of the stream.

ÒThe kid was a thief, and thatÕs the least of it,Ó Senhor Arlindo said.

ÒWell, when we knew him he was a good kid, right Rafaela?Ó

1 2 3 **>>**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Bicycle

Ben Paris

4.

The beach in Beira Mar was a spectacle on Sunday. Venders walked by selling peanuts, cashews, ice-cream. A fishmonger lugged buckets of mackerel. Kids played soccer in the sand. Franklin watched a couple make love, discreetly as they could, chest deep in the sea. He and his wife, Rafaela, sat beneath the almond trees. An informal group of conga drummers played and sung samba at the edge of the shade. Young women, bikinis and brown skin, stood, danced a short samba, sat back down, laughing.

Two kids stopped at their table selling hard-boiled quail eggs. The boy carried a large cardboard box, and the girl a single flat of eggs.

ÒJust to help us,Ó the girl said. ÒFifteen cents each. Discount if you buy the whole flat.Ó

Her nose was runny. She was no taller than the plastic yellow chairs they sat on.

ÒCome here, darling,Ó Rafaela said.

The girl stepped toward her. Rafaela put her palm on the girlÕs cheek and wiped her nose clean with a napkin. ÒAre you sick, baby? WhereÕs your mom?Ó

The boy took a plastic flat from inside the cardboard box, and opened it to show Franklin the brown-speckled eggs.

Òl remember you.Ó The boyÕs hair was longer and curlier than it was years ago when Franklin first arrived; eyebrows thicker, a fake tattoo fading from the nascent bicep muscles.

Franklin glanced at Rafaela to see if she was listening.

Òls that your sister?Ó Franklin said.

The boy nodded his head.

ÒSelling a lot of eggs today?Ó

ÒSlow day,Ó the boy said.

ÒHow many in the flat?Ó

ÒThirty."

ÒHow much?Ó

The boy held up four fingers.

Franklin paid. The boy placed a flat of eggs on the table and opened it. He took a bag of a salt from the cardboard box and spilled a small pile inside the flat. Franklin tapped an egg on the table and peeled the shell off. He dipped it in the salt and offered it to the kid.

ÒDonÕt like quail eggs,Ó the boy said.

ÒNo?Ó Franklin ate it, picked up another, tapped it, and started peeling in a single motion. ÒI do.Ó

The boy pulled his sister by the sleeve. ÒLetÕs go.Ó

ÒMy motherÕs over there,Ó the girl said to Rafaela, pointing.

Rafaela turned one way, then the other.

ÒThere.Ó The girl pointed again.

ÒHe knows her,Ó the boy said to Rafaela.

Daisy was leaning against a high, white condo wall, just off the beach.

ÒI know,Ó Rafaela said. ÒTell her youÕre too young to be by yourselves selling things on the beach to strangers.Ó

ÒIÕm with him.Ó The girl grabbed her brotherÕs sleeve as the kids were walking away.

ÒPathetic, these women who send their kids out to work for them,Ó Rafaela said.

ÒIt is unfortunate,Ó Franklin said. Then, ÒHow did you know?Ó

ÒMy father warned me the first time he met you. A gringo in new clothes walking through our neighborhood with a *puta* whoÕs already had three children isnÕt hard to forget.Ó

ÒBut you stayed with me anyway,Ó Franklin said.

ÒIt was too late.Ó she said. ÒWeÕd already been together, what, six months before you met my father. You didnÕt know what you were doing anyway, did you?Ó

5.

Senhor Arlindo took his fingers from the bodyÕs neck. The creek was still dangerously high. It had flooded their house in the past. Franklin looked into the sky for signs the rain was done.

ÒIs it like you imagined?Ó Senhor Arlindo said to Franklin.

ÒWhat?Ó

ÒBrazil, Beira Mar. Is living here in Brazil the way you imagined it would be when you first decided to stay? The beach. Bossa nova, samba and all that. You were always going on about it.Ó

ÒNot sure what you mean?Ó

Senhor Arlindo smoked his cigar.

ÒIÕm not sure what that has to do with anything. The kidÕs dead.Ó He looked at Rafaela, then back at her father. His head was covered in a cloud of smoke.

6.

A tapping on the front gate of Franklin and RafaelaÕs house.

Franklin peeked out the second floor window. The boy, Lazaro, stood in the sun, a flat of quail eggs in one hand, his other arm around his sisterÕs shoulder.

ÒWhoÕs at the door, Franklin?Ó Rafaela called from the yard.

ÒItÕs us!Ó Lazaro shouted. ÒWe have quail eggs!"

People always stopped by the house selling things. Franklin bounced down the stairs. ÒIf you want to buy them, go ahead. I certainly donÕt,Ó he said to his wife.

Rafaela opened the gate and stepped outside. ÒWhat a surprise,Ó she said. The girl grabbed her around the waist, pressed her face into RafaelaÕs body as if she were being saved from something. Franklin remembered the first time he saw her, urinating naked in the yard. Lazaro, taller now than Rafaela, bony elbows and knees, the same bronze skin, peach-fuzz mustache, smiled and tried to move away. Rafaela grabbed the boy by the wrist and hugged him. ÒTrying to get away without giving your aunt a kiss, are you?Ó Lazaro pulled away, but she placed a kiss on his cheek before he could.

Franklin joined them in the street. They stood under the passion fruit vine that ran the length of fence and gate in front of the house.

ÒWe brought you some eggs,Ó the girl said.

ÒIÕm sorry, sweetheart, we just spent all our money. We donÕt even have enough to buy cooking gas.Ó She pointed at the empty gas canister on the porch as proof. ÒSee. ItÕs sitting there waiting.Ó

ÒNo, no. A gift.Ó The girl handed the eggs to Rafaela. ÒFor you.Ó

Rafaela accepted the eggs and hugged both children again.

Franklin stepped from the sun in the street to the shade of the yard, like stepping into air-conditioning. Rafaela and the kids followed. They sat at a plastic table on the porch. The girl picked up a pen and started drawing on a newspaper. The boy, Lazaro, sat quietly. He glanced around the porch and said, finally, ÒNice plants.Ó

ÒDo you like plants?Ó Rafaela said.

ÒYes,Ó Lazaro nodded.

ÒI like plants too,Ó the girl said. She held up a drawing. ÒLook. ItÕs a flower.Ó

They laughed.

ÒDo you have any work I can do?Ó Lazaro said, looking at Franklin.

ÒNot really.Ó Franklin walked to the side, thought about the sewer for an instant; he made a point of regularly raking out the accumulated junk to keep it from stagnating, but didnÕt want to impose it on the kid. ÒDo we, Rafaela?Ó

Rafaela looked around the yard. ÒThe weeds and leaves maybe.Ó She gestured at the garden beds that lined the periphery of the house.

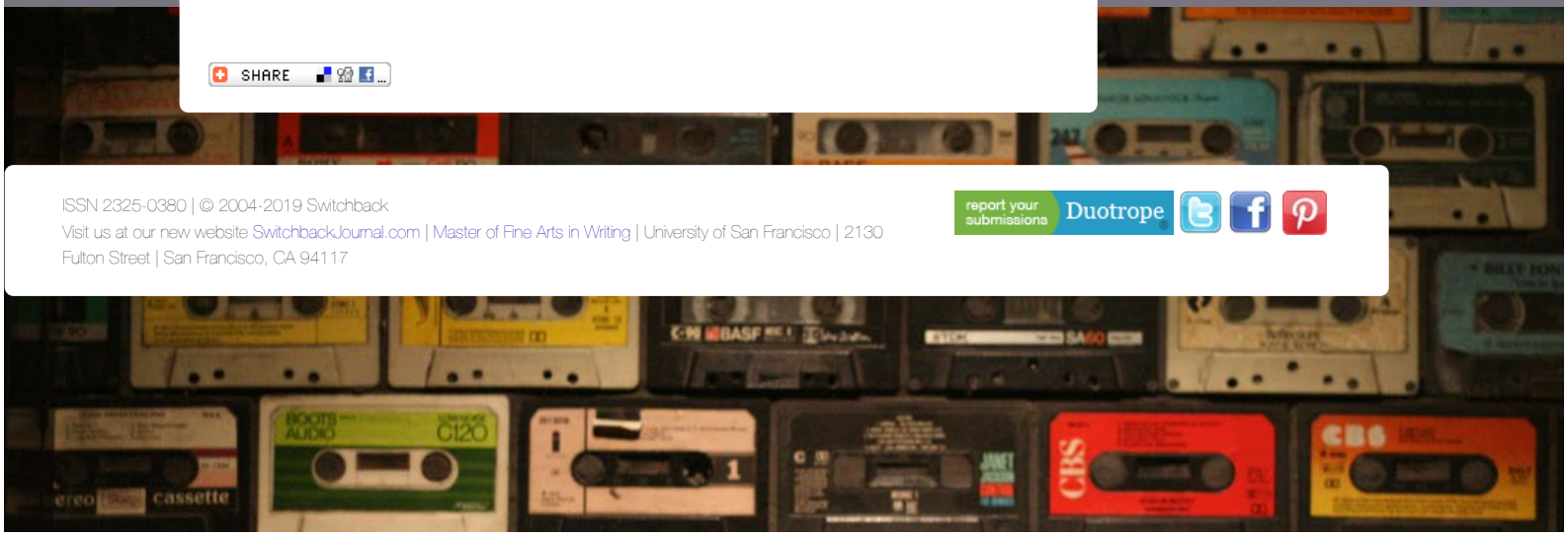
ÒThe weeds and leaves,Ó Lazaro said.

She glanced at Franklin. ÒFine with me. But youÕll have to wait until next week to get paid.Ó

ÒThe wheelbarrowÕs over there. When youÕre done, dump it next to the creek, on the other side of the coconut trees.Ó She pointed to the bank on the side of the house.

Lazaro kneeled in the dirt. Rafaela tore sheets of paper from a notebook, and handed the girl some crayons. ÒDraw me another flower,Ó she said.

<< 1 **2** 3 **>>**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Bicycle

Ben Paris

7.

ÒThe tourists would be walking at the beach, where the benches are, tourists from your countryÉ.Ó Arlindo felt his shirt pocket for a cigar, then scanned the ground where he stood. He said to his daughter, ÒGo into the house and tell your mother to give you a cigar from the box.Ó

ÒHow do you know they were from my country?Ó

ÒThe gringos, IÕm talking about. I donÕt know where they were from. TheyÕre gringos, *estrangeiros*, just like you.Ó Arlindo turned and shouted to Rafaela. ÒThe matches too.Ó

The sun was breaking through the coconut leaves in rectangular slabs of light. ÒThe kids would ride by on their bikes, a group of them,Ó Arlindo continued, Ògrab what they could, cameras, handbags, and take off into the neighborhood over there where they live.Ó

ÒHow do you know it was Lazaro?Ó

Arlindo shook his head, feigning pity for his son-in-law. ÒEveryone knows. The fishermen playing dominos, when theyÕre not out in their boats what do you think they talk about?Ó

8.

The boy was on his knees in the garden. Franklin walked around the yard, feeding bananas to the monkeys in the jambo tree. Rafaela was in the front with LazaroÕs sister.

ÒHowÕs your mother?Ó Franklin said.

ÒNot good.Ó The boy spoke into the ground.

ÒWhat do you mean?Ó

ÒSheÕs sick.Ó Lazaro looked up. ÒSkinny. DoesnÕt eat.Ó

Franklin peeled a banana, ate half, broke the other half into pieces, and placed the pieces on low-hanging limbs. ÒTake her to the doctor.Ó

He offered Lazaro a banana. The boy refused.

ÒShe wonÕt go. She doesnÕt want to know. God knows, she always says. SheÕs been going to that new church lately.Ó The boy tossed a handful of weeds into the pile on the patio. ÒThatÕs where all her money goes,

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

<< Page 3 of 3

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

The Sad Sentence
Andrew McLinden

SON OF A FATHER
Tony Press

BEYOND THIS POINT ARE MONSTERS
Roxanne Carter

Excerpt from *The Fayum Portraits*
Kate Moses

Like Nothing
Robyn Carter

Bicycle
Ben Paris

Art

to God.Ó

ÒYou give her the money and she gives it to the church.Ó

Lazaro nodded. He stood, brushed the dirt off his knees; neatened the pile of weeds with a broom. ÒItÕs going to God she tells us.Ó

ÒMaybe you shouldnÕt give her the money you make?Ó

ÒIf I donÕt, she goes out to the square where the gringos are, andÉwell, you know, she comes home late. Or....Ó

ÒOr what?Ó

ÒOr brings them home.Ó

9.

Senhor Arlindo lit the cigar. The smoke rose and hung in the streams of sunlight.

Flies landed on the wound. Franklin noticed the ants around the boyÕs temple, moving in a single file toward the eye.

ÒWe should at least cover him up,Ó Rafaela said. She looked at her father, then at Franklin for a confirmation.

Neither responded; the warble of the creek and the birds broke the silence.

ÒIÕm going to get a sheet,Ó she said.

ÒEveryone knew it was going to happen,Ó Arlindo said. ÒItÕs one thing to rob tourists, but the kid became a camel and they all have the same end.Ó

ÒCamel?Ó

ÒRunner. They carry things. Money, drugs. The bosses get the kids to do it because theyÕre immune from the law. Never a good end.Ó

ÒSo everyone knew and no one said anything?Ó

ÒThe kid was warned.Ó

ÒYou could have told me.Ó

ÒYou? What were you going to do? Go and talk to the bosses down there?Ó He pointed to the valley where Lazaro lived. ÒYouÕre probably dumb enough to do something like that. Get in their business and see what happens. You think they wouldnÕt kill you too?Ó

ÒTalk to his mother maybe.Ó

ÒShe was told. Three chances, she was given.Ó

ÒAnd?Ó

ÒGod knows. It was all in GodÕs hands.Ó

10.

ÒIf I had a bikeÉ.Ó Lazaro gathered the piles of weeds and leaves and placed them in the wheelbarrow.

ÒI thought you had a bike,Ó Franklin said.

ÒIt doesnÕt work.Ó

ÒBring it over. Maybe I can help you fix it.Ó

ÒI will,Ó Lazaro said. He maneuvered the wheelbarrow out the front gate. ÒSoon as I drop this off on the side.Ó

Franklin remembered how his own first bicycle was freedom itself, the first independence he had from his parents and brothers and sisters to take trips outside the neighborhood where he grew up.

After a few minutes, Lazaro knocked on the front gate, breathless, bicycle prone in wheelbarrow; rusted, no wheels. But it had handlebars, a seat, and a set of pedals.

ÒHere it is.Ó Lazaro smiled proudly.

ÒYep, there it is,Ó Franklin said. He had his arms folded across his chest.

11.

ÒSo they killed him because, what, he was robbing tourists, running drugs and money?Ó Franklin said to Senhor Arlindo.

His father-in-law ignored him.

ÒYou think thatÕs right?Ó Franklin continued.

Senhor Arlindo was turned the other way; his daughter was coming with his cigar. ÒPeople who ask too many questions get killed around here too.Ó

ÒWhatÕs that supposed to mean?Ó

Rafaela arrived with a sheet of cloth. ÒGrab the other end, will you Franklin?Ó

ÒYou hear what he just said?Ó

ÒJust grab the other end, will you?Ó

Senhor Arlindo lit the cigar.

Franklin and Rafaela stretched the sheet over the body. Franklin noticed that the boyÕs toes were stuck under his feet in a way that would have been uncomfortable if he were alive.

12.

ÒKeep the chain oiled,Ó Franklin said. He had the bike painted black. HeÕd bought new wheels, brakes, and the new parts the bike needed. It glistened in the sun. The wheels and the spokes sparkled like diamonds. It had the knobby off-road tires Franklin would have liked when he was a boy.

Lazaro pushed the bicycle through the front gate of Franklin and RafaelaÕs house, out into the street. He lowered his eyes. ÒThank you,Ó he said.

ÒThe derailleur too,Ó Franklin said. ÒJust a little oil.Ó

Lazaro hopped on the bike, and rode away.

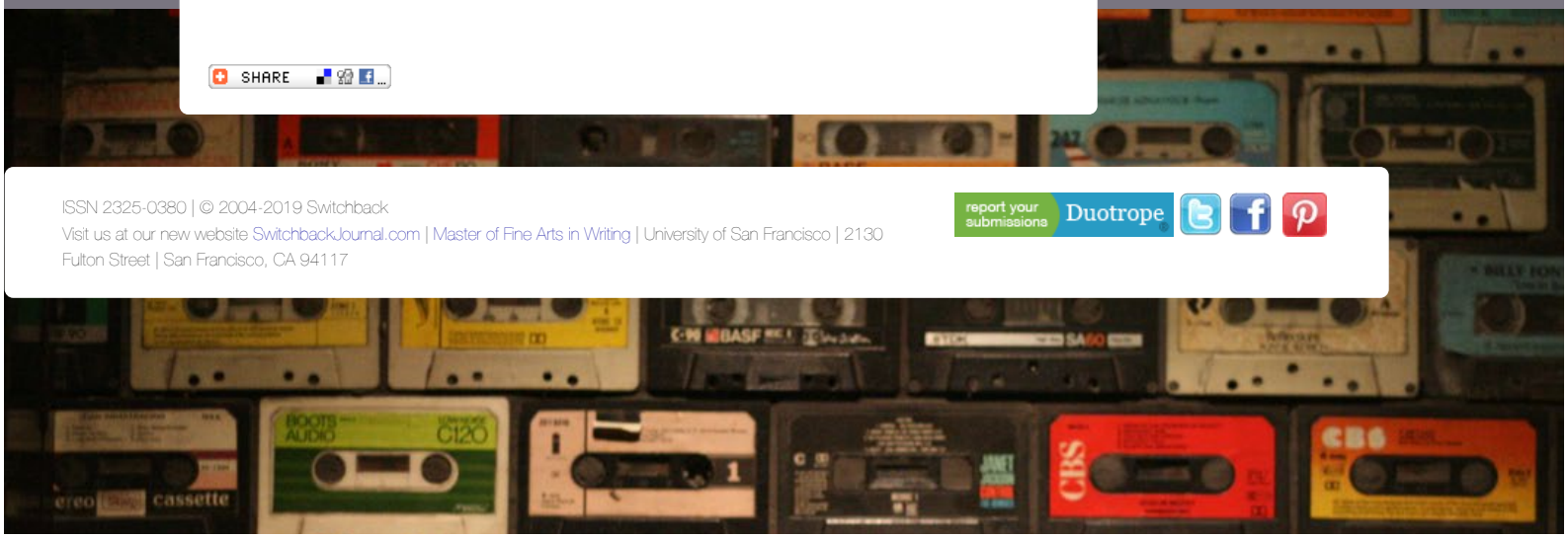
13.

Franklin would see him at the square and the beach, zipping over on the black and white stone sidewalks as if the bike were attached to his feet. TheyÕd wave to each other, although if he were with his friends, Franklin noticed, Lazaro ignored him.

The last time Franklin saw Lazaro alive, he was on the street corner with two friends. A group of girls in their blue high school uniforms approached. One of them, the girl with the cigarette in her hand, broke off from the pack, and walked toward where Lazaro stood. He leaned his bike against a graffiti-covered wall, and walked toward the girl. They met in the middle of the road. He rested his hands on her waist. She put her arms around his neck. They held each other that way for a few seconds, angling for the right position, the feigned poise of adolescent romance; they giggled and then kissed, a long awkward kiss on the lips.

--endÑ

<< 1 2 **3**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Switchback

Abeer Hoque

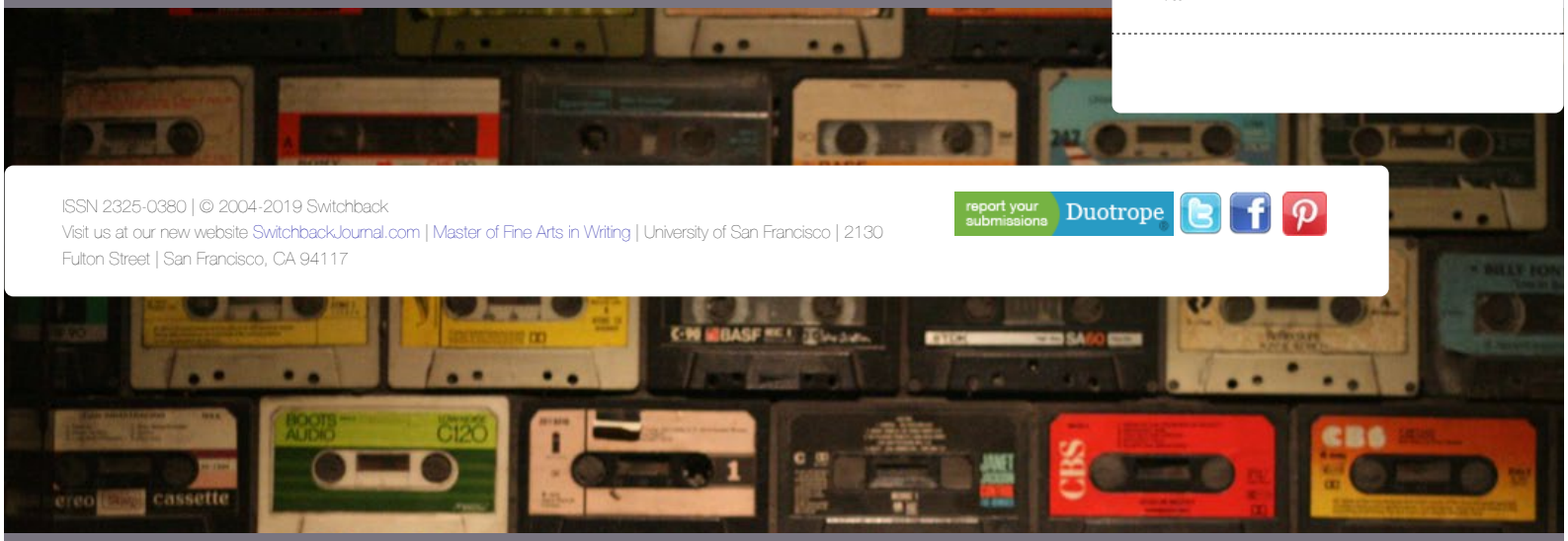
Abeer Hoque is a Nigerian born Bangladeshi American writer and photographer. She likes walking alone, eating spicy food, and taking surreptitious photos of you. See more at olivewitch.com.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Alone in Bhutan
Nonfiction

Photographs
Art



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Photographs

Abeer Hoque

"Retro decor at Callooh Callay, London, England"

1 2 3 4 >>

SHARE

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Page 1 of 4 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Photographs

Abeer Hoque

"Secret agent icing, New Delhi, India"

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

<< Page 2 of 4 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

<< 1 2 3 4 >>

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Photographs

Abeer Hoque

"Sodium afterhours in Haus Kaus, New Delhi, India"

<< 1 2 **3** 4 **>>**

Photographs

Abeer Hoque

"Abandoned wheelbarrow, London, England"

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

<< Page 4 of 4

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

<< 1 2 3 4

SHARE

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

report your submissions Duotrope

Bicycle

Ben Paris

1.

The rain that night against the corrugated roof was as loud as an approaching train. In the morning, she opened the shutters on the side of the house and gasped.

Abandoned wheelbarrow, London, England
Abeer Hoque

ÒWhat?Ó he said.

ÒLook,Ó Rafaela said.

The body was face down in the mud, next to a creek that doubled as a sewer; a purple patch of skin on the lower back, dark spot in the center.

She ran to the front of their house and stepped out across the muddy narrow street to her parentsÕ house.

He followed, stood in the middle of the road, pointed with his thumb. ÒIÕm going around the side to take a look.Ó

She stood next to her father, Senhor Arlindo, who appeared at his front gate after she called. ÒStay here, Franklin,Ó she said. ÒNo reason to get involved.Ó She insisted on using his complete name when she was angry or stressed.

ÒJust a quick look.Ó

ÒListen to me please.Ó

He turned and stepped over the rushing creek to the body, and leaned over it to see if he recognized the face. He placed his hand on a coconut tree to keep from slipping in the mud. A gathering of ants bit him before he had a chance to brush them off.

2.

He still hadnÕt met his wife, Rafaela. It was the time before the internet, and FranklinhadnÕt found his place in the world yet. Travel, going to cities where heÕd didnÕt speak the language and didnÕt have any friends, was his way of looking.

In Beira Mar, a *bairro* at the edge of Salvador in Brazil, the bus stopped and he got off. She was sitting on a

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Page 1 of 3 >>

bench, the ocean behind her a fathomless blue that postcards couldnÕt reproduce.

Letters from home arrived now and then at the American Express office downtown. Telephones were scarce. Franklin was still young enough to make a point of going to the airport every other weekend to call family at the international telephone booth.

He sat next to her, and gestured toward the ocean with an open hand. She said something in Portuguese he didnÕt understand. Children rode by on bicycles over the black and white stone sidewalks. A fisherman eviscerated a sting-ray on the sand. They were silent and awkward. She touched him lightly on the elbow, and stood.

ÒDaisy,Ó she said, and shook his hand.

ÒLike the flower?Ó

ÒYes, the flower.Ó

They entered the place through the back. Scraps of plywood and old billboards, images of politicians smiling, served as a fence. Quail, the color of dirt, wandered around or snuggled in the dust. A baby girl, two years old maybe, squatted next to an outhouse in the corner.

On the floor in the bedroom, a comic book romance, with a ravaging muscular couple on the cover; Daisy kicked it out of her way as they passed.

She wanted money, she said, when they were done. But a book that could help her learn English would do.

Through the bedroom window, a boy balanced himself on a rusted bicycle frame; no wheels, and no seat. He wore a t-shirt that reminded Franklin of home: ÒNY Giants, World Champions, 1986.Ó

She snapped at the boy, and he walked over to the window. He held out his hand to Franklin and said in stilted English, ÒWhat your name?Ó

3.

Franklin stood over the body. He heard their footsteps through the leaves and twigs; the smoke from her fatherÕs cigar, RafaelaÕs voice.

ÒFirst smoke of the day, huh?Ó Franklin said, when they arrived.

His father-in-law, Senhor Arlindo, ignored him. FishermanÕs cap, extended belly, sinewy arms, Arlindo nudged the body with his foot and sighed. He crouched, secured his footing on a rock jutting from the mud, and felt for a pulse with the back of his fingers.

ÒLazaro,Ó Rafaela said. ÒThey must have dumped him here during the storm.Ó

ÒDaisyÕs boy,Ó Arlindo said.

ÒBastards,Ó RafaelaÕs mouth twitched. ÒWas he even seventeen?Ó

ÒI didnÕt know you knew Daisy,Ó Franklin said.

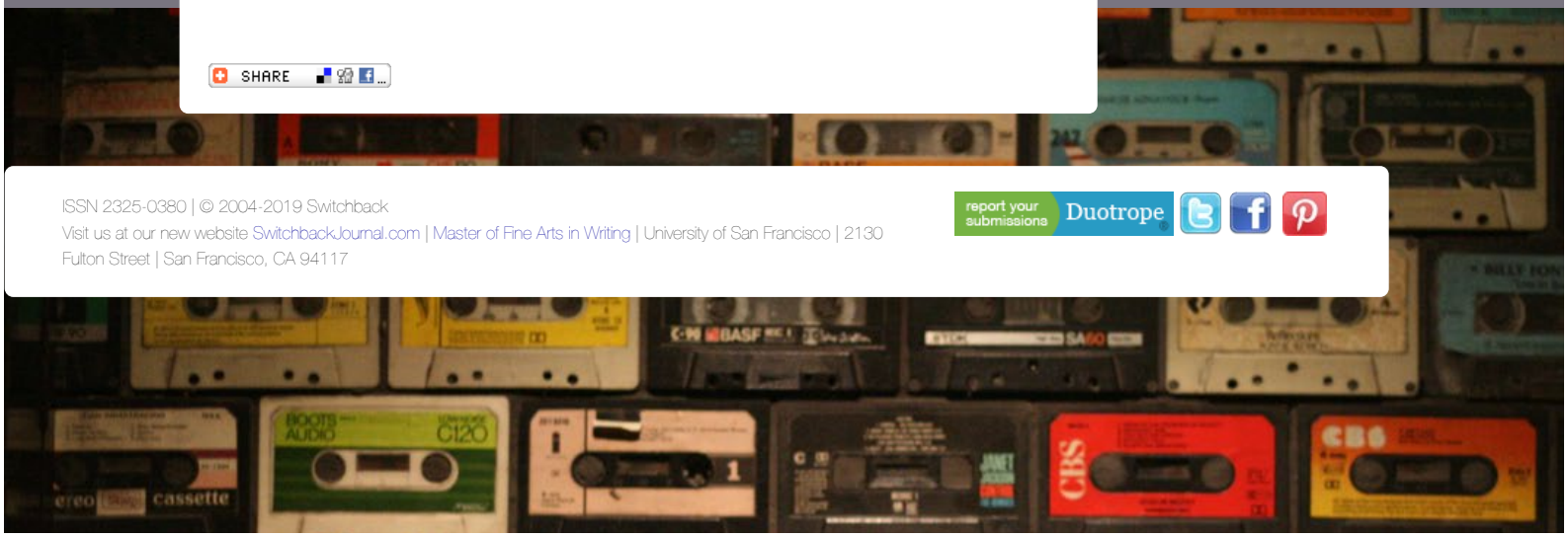
ÒA lot of things you donÕt know,Ó Arlindo said

ÒHe was a good kid,Ó Franklin said, backing away from the bank of the stream.

ÒThe kid was a thief, and thatÕs the least of it,Ó Senhor Arlindo said.

ÒWell, when we knew him he was a good kid, right Rafaela?Ó

1 2 3 **>>**



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Madhurima and the boatmen

Rishi Roy

"Madhurima and the boatmen"

SHARE

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117


BASF
SA60
ROOTS AUDIO
C120
CBS

Switchback

Global vs. Local

Issue 14, Volume 7

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Selections from *the lost and found*

Truong Tran

"Day in the neighborhood"

1 2 3 >>

SHARE

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Page 1 of 3 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

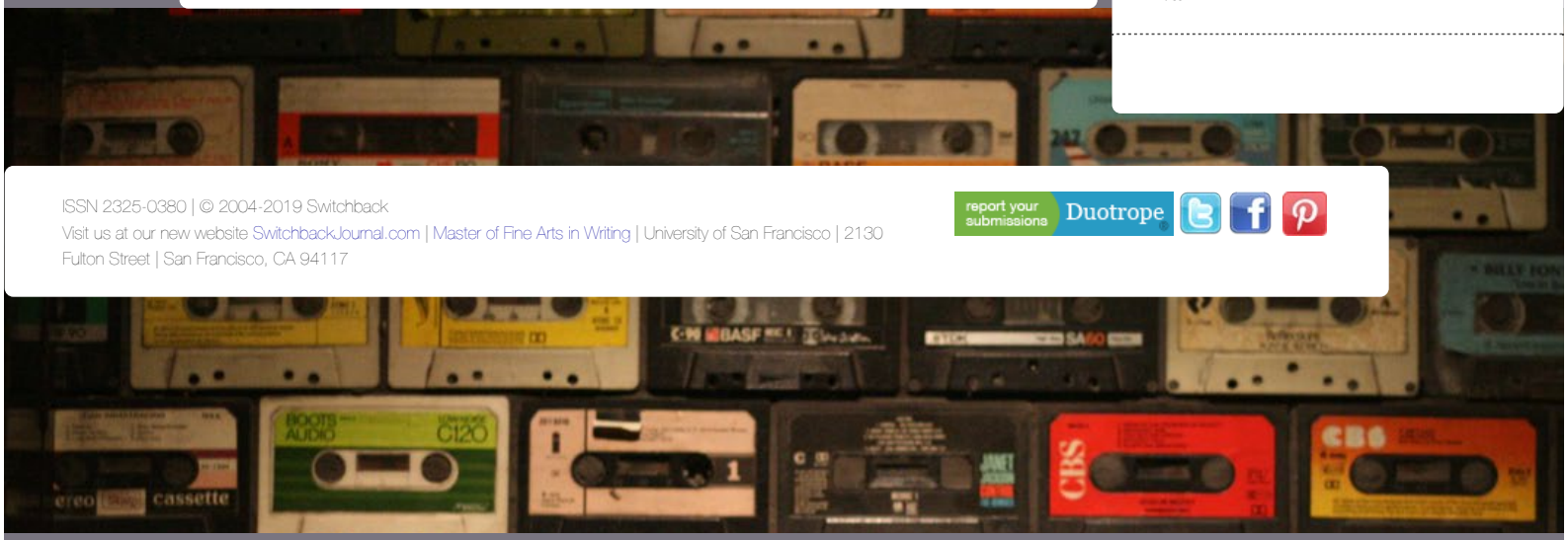
Rishi Roy

Rishi Roy is a photographer based in Kolkata, India. He caught the photography bug while pursuing a degree in software engineering. In 2006, he chose the camera over a career in information technology. It has been his best gamble yet.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Madhurima and the boatmen
Art



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Madhurima and the boatmen

Rishi Roy

"Madhurima and the boatmen"

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Truong Tran

On days when he is not working as a poet and teacher,Truong Tran tries to wake up early. He empties his oversized messenger bag of books and papers and the previous day's half-eaten lunch. He places the strap over his left shoulder, with the bag firmly secured to his back. He begins to walk. He walks for as long as it takes to fill the bag with stuff: branches, findings from the local thrift stores, choice items left in boxes on sidewalks and, if he's lucky, something he's never seen before. Once the bag is filled, Truong returns home, empties the contents from the bag, creating mounds of what some might consider piles of junk. He see them as source materials and the beginnings to his art making process.

Troung is committed to using these recycled materials as an environmentally conscious artist but also as an artist who strives to make art accessible through both its practice and use of materials. Quite frankly, he get a kick out of forcing these disparate objects to come together, compromising and accommodating one another in their process of becoming something new, something beautiful.

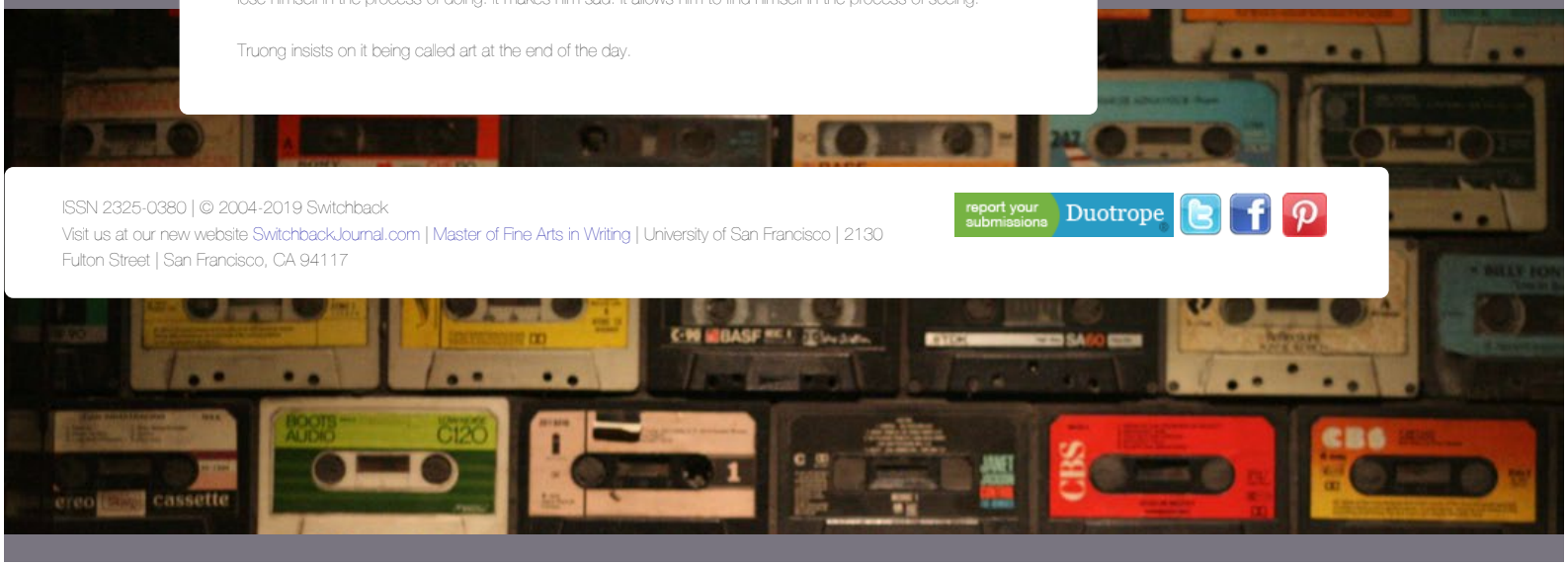
He refer to what he does as art making because he does not paint, draw or sculpt in a traditional or learned consideration of artistic craft. His craft is founded in the doing. He glues things together. He makes things fit. He dips things in wax. He cuts. He builds. He weaves. He thinks. He fills things up with paint using ketchup bottles. He stares at things in hopes that these things will talk back. This is what he does. It makes him happy. It allows him to lose himself in the process of doing. It makes him sad. It allows him to find himself in the process of seeing.

Truong insists on it being called art at the end of the day.

Contributions to Switchback

Issue 14: Global vs. Local

Selections from *the lost and found*
Art



ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Selections from *the lost and found*

Truong Tran

"Day in the neighborhood"

1 2 3 >>

SHARE

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

Page 1 of 3 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Selections from *the lost and found*

Truong Tran

"Stolen"

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work Next Work >

<< Page 2 of 3 >>

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

<< 1 2 3 >>

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback
Visit us at our new website SwitchbackJournal.com | Master of Fine Arts in Writing | University of San Francisco | 2130 Fulton Street | San Francisco, CA 94117

Selections from *the lost and found*

Truong Tran

"Quilt"

<< 1 2 **3**

Issue 14
Global vs. Local

Fall 2011

<Previous Work **Next Work >**

<< Page 3 of 3

Nonfiction

Poetry

Fiction

Art

Photographs
Abeer Hoque

Madhurima and the boatmen
Rishi Roy

Selections from *the lost and found*
Truong Tran

ISSN 2325-0380 | © 2004-2019 Switchback