

NY

apartments

NY _____, Issue 1. Winter 2012.





John Quilty

NY_____ is a quarterly magazine that publishes short fiction and creative nonfiction, poetry, photography, and art about different aspects of living in New York City. Each issue has a theme, and all work in that issue speaks to the theme. This issue's theme is "apartments."

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Laura Podolnick

AFTER AND BEFORE

By Amanda McRaven

Lower Manhattan still smelled like burning computers, but on the Upper West Side we could pretend everything was normal. It was January. Blizzard followed blizzard.

I was driving Sarah from our hometown in Virginia to Columbia Teacher's College. We have been friends since childhood and have spent every milestone together. In 2002, after meandering through our post-college years, she was the first to make a firm decision about life. She would be an art teacher.

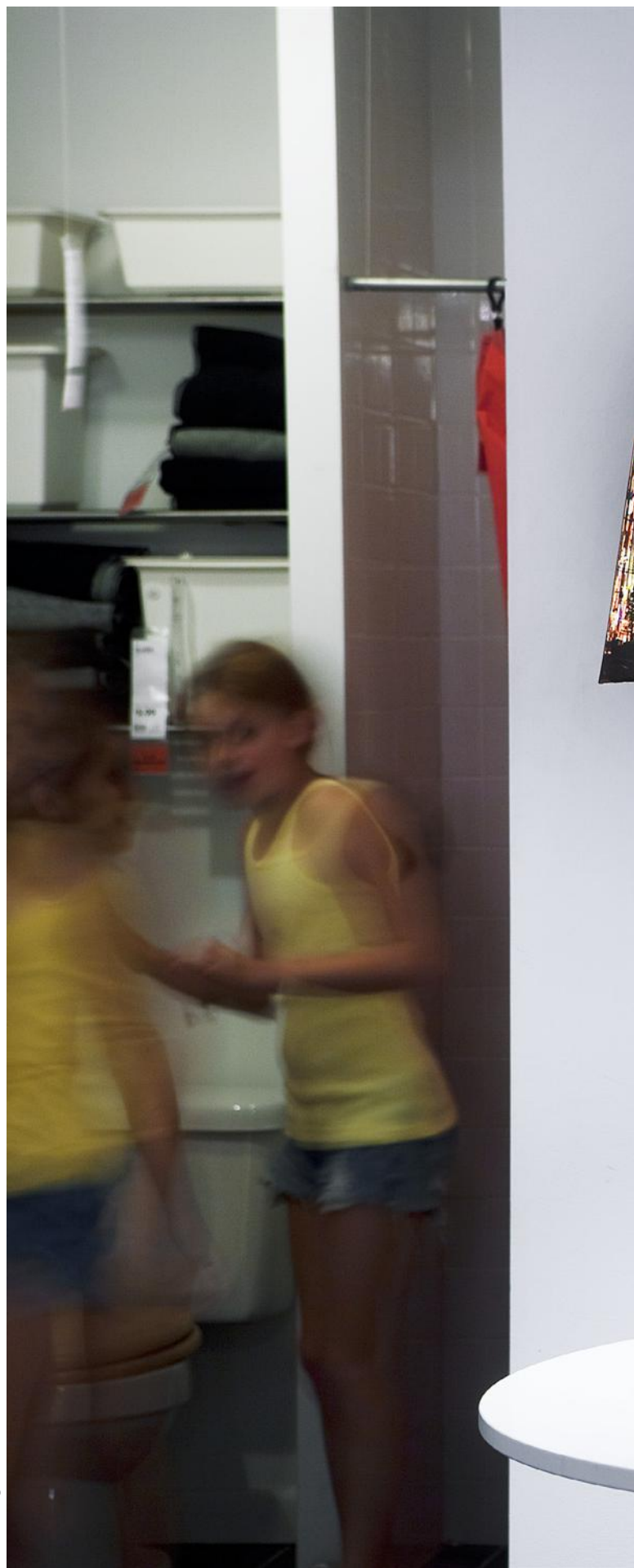
We pulled up to the Greystone. A poor man's Chelsea Hotel, the residents were Columbia or Manhattan School of Music students, or they were on subsidized housing. As soon as the elevator doors dinged open, I was in love. This was exactly where Stingo (Styron's *Sophie's Choice* narrator) would have stayed if he hadn't lived in a boarding house in Brooklyn. I, too, was a wide-eyed Southerner, still confounded by fast elevators. The doors were wooden and green, the numbers large and gold. It smelled like novels. And soup.

The apartment itself was ragged and tiny. Tall ceilings and windows, horrible carpet, tiled bathroom floor, ancient radiator, Mozart from someone's piano, and what we imagined was the sound of the typewriter ghosts of Thomas Wolfe and Tennessee Williams. No kitchen—a mini-fridge and a hotplate. For three years Sarah washed her dishes in the bathroom sink, watching the light fixture above it fill with water when the neighbors showered.

While she lived there I was on the road, a touring actor. Miserable, I lived in identical Comfort Inns from Mississippi to Fargo. I imagined her painting in her worn little box, creativity percolating. But her strongest memory is huddling on the floor collaging family photos and crying. She says, "The city has so much on your senses—the subways, the commute—that little shithole was my cocoon." She spent those first years in New York numb and swaddled, pre-butterfly.

When Sarah graduated, she bought an apartment in Park Slope. It had hardwood floors, a kitchen, a bedroom. Scope. Light. It smelled only like her. There was not a man across the hall who died leaving thousands of cat pictures pasted to the walls. There was not a man in the lobby who told everyone he invented jogging. There was not an elevator spattered with vomit. Just long, wide stairs. This was Sarah, grown-up.

Now Sarah is married. She lives in Michigan. Her house is big and baby-ready. "That place is probably really expensive condos now," she says. She's right. The website plays groovy electronica and reads, "Originally built as a stately hotel in 1923, [it has] been newly renovated with an eye for old New York glamour fused to contemporary, free-spirited living."



Julie Coongo





LANDSCAPES

By Ansley Moon

They wrap this building in a severity of glass. From floor to ceiling. And delicate crown molding. You tell me that you wouldn't want to live in a world where everyone could see.

Still I long for that day under the persimmon tree, the smell of faint honeysuckle stuck to your skin like home.



PART I: MOUSE

By J Hobart B

“Have you talked to Katja today?”

The call was from Michael. He sounded agitated. A frustrated, guttural sigh heralded each sentence.

“No... Why?”

“She’s driving me crazy! She woke me up last night demanding that I kill a mouse. I told her I would do it in the morning, but I forgot. Now she won’t stop calling me!”

The last few words were muffled; he was probably rubbing his face the way he did when stressed.

“Anyway... I guess I wanted to see if she was calling you too.”

“No, I haven’t heard from her.”

“Okay.”

A beat of silence.

“But, if you get home first today, would you mind doing it?”

“Sure.”

...

Michael, Katja, and I were college friends, now out in the “real world” and enduring ever-lengthening post-graduate existential crises. When Michael joined Katja and me in our move to Harlem, he was a refugee, having escaped from his own dysfunctional living arrangement. He moved in with us to get away, though I doubt he knew the fresh hell he was entering.

A year earlier, Katja and I lived in Brooklyn. It was an emotionally trying period in many respects, but over time we had accepted and settled into our roles in the roommate relationship: She the authoritarian, often-unhinged older sibling type, and I the irresponsible but well-meaning man-child.

During that era, handling mice was my job, though not one I ever officially applied for. It was, rather, bestowed upon me one night when, after drifting off to sleep, I was woken by a knock on my bedroom door and Katja pleading with me to do something about the mouse that had been successfully caught on a glue trap on the kitchen floor.

“It’s stuck to the trap, it’s screaming and I can’t sleep.”

“So, pick up the trap and throw it away. That’s what you’re supposed to do, right?”

“I can’t. And it’s still alive, we need to kill it first.”

That was a habit of hers that always got under my skin, that use of words like *we* and *someone* when what she really meant was *you*.

“It’s screaming,” she repeated, tears sputtering from her red eyes.

So I got up. I shuffled to the kitchen and found the mouse in question, twitching and squeaking on its adhesive deathbed between the wall and refrigerator. I regarded the creature for a moment, relating strangely to its predicament. Then I picked up our frying pan, gritted my teeth, and brought the pan down hard onto its head.

What I didn’t realize at the time was that, with that fateful clonk, I was accepting a new position as a hired killer of tiny vermin. It was, in fact, the first of many disturbed slumbers, many red eyed pleas, many momentary connections with a lower being severed abruptly with a sweep of a pan. My life, after hours, quickly began to resemble a grim, bloody nightmare version of a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon.

TWO FISHERMEN, ONE ROOM

By Bruce Harris

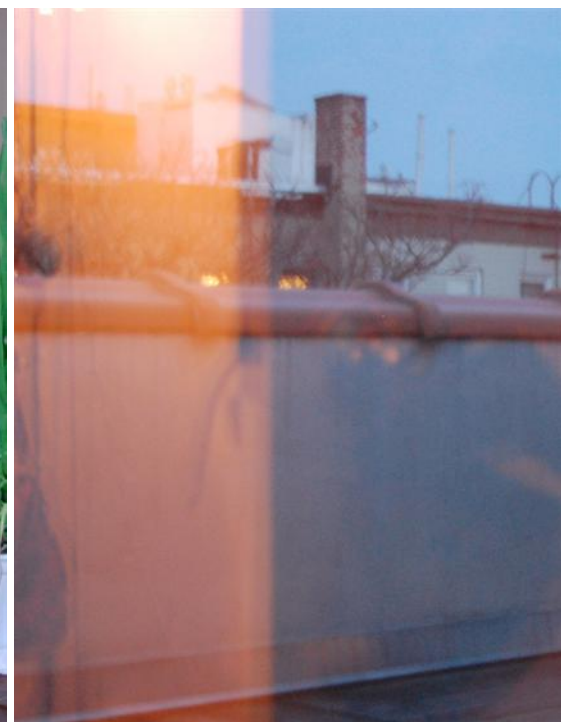
Pets were not allowed in the apartment. This didn't apply to tropical fish, though. I guess they weren't considered pets. I had a five-gallon tank, which sat on a table either in the bedroom or living room, depending upon the time of day. My aquarium had a faceless scuba man standing knee deep in green pebbles. Bubbles flowed from his helmet up to the water line. Sometimes when the people a floor above us dropped something heavy, I'd see the fish flinch and the water shake but the scuba man never waivered.

My father told stories about the two of us fishing in places unfamiliar to most and he'd boast, "fishing bonds generations," that's because he was a serious fisherman; his fisherman's vest had lots of pockets, hooks, and flies and the flies were colorful, but he also had a fisherman's hat that had the same things pinned to it and was just as colorful but he was most proud of the matching father and son fishing poles he bought one Christmas, the ones somehow lost during our move to the six-story walk-up on Sullivan Street.

"All men should fish," my father would say, "you eat what you catch because that's what a man does and that's what my father did and his father before that, catch it, clean it, cook it, and if it was good enough for them then it sure as hell is good enough for me and you," but he'd never look directly at me when he said that. I'm going back years. The kitchen area was tiny. My father was a big man. Funny thing is I don't remember ever seeing my father eat fish.

In the fish tank I had two tropical fish, guppies to be specific, but one day they were flushed down the toilet, despite wavy movements in their rainbow colored tails, the downward circular spiraling water took them out of sight. "They're dead and buried now," my father said as he hung the still dripping wet fish net on a nail on the bathroom wall, the wall with two dark spots where my knees touched when I sat on the toilet bowl, the same nail which once held a framed photo of a seahorse. That night, despite the rain, I fell asleep on the fire escape listening to the sounds of a barking dog and police sirens.

Johanna Beyenbach



MEANWHILE, DOWNTOWN

By Elissa Gordon

That Chatham Square apartment
 came with a huge parking lot.
 We were a family with a car.
 On road trips, my father sang
 songs about cool water,
 endless verses about what to do
 with a drunken sailor,
 and some twangy tune
 where he called my mother good lookin'.
 More fun to watch that last one though,
 which he also sang once we were back in the city,
 twirled her around the entry,
 pulled her close and waltzed her
 around the living room.

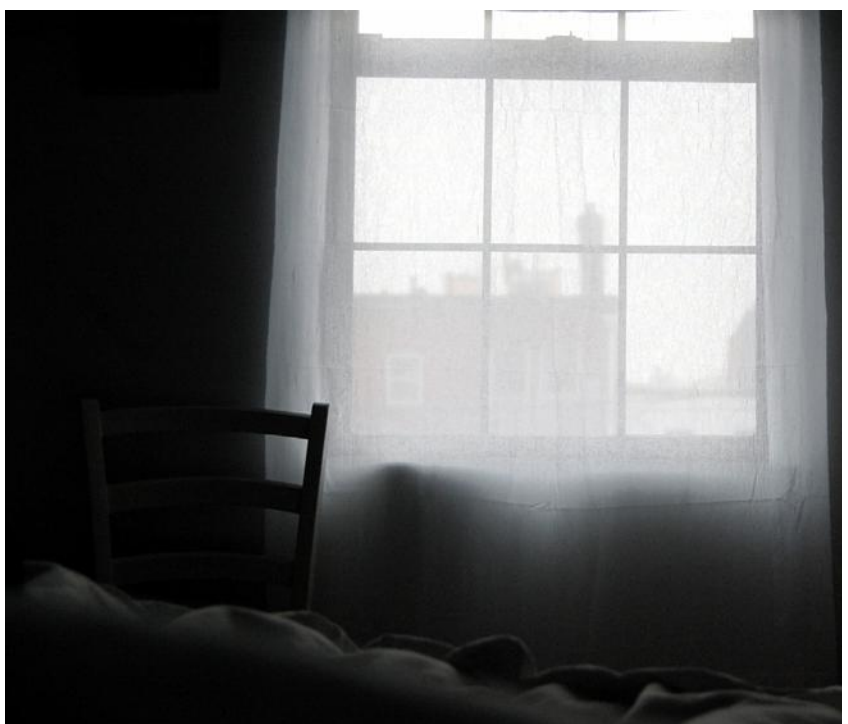
He crooned it while she was cooking,
 but pronounced it with a grin, as cookin'.
 They moved in bouncy little steps,
 as my mother stirred
 her spicy spaghetti sauce,
 and they mimed The Lindy
 in our
 narrow
 galley
 kitchen.

SECOND AVENUE

By Jameson Fitzpatrick

Each time, his kindness startles me—the shock of
 skin in the window, his slow and unconcerned undressing.
 He never bothers with the blinds.
 Tonight he kisses a woman barely half his size. She
 has to reach to pull his shirt over his head and
 off. I don't see where it lands.
 She spreads her little hands across his chest and then
 a switch is flicked, darkness, their bodies
 indistinguishable from the room that holds them.

Days in that converted bedroom—remember?—
 you, my only window and my only view.
 What did the weather matter. What did I care
 where the light was coming from.



TENANT INTERVIEW

By Carl V. Rossi

"I run a strict apartment building," Doris said through a mouthful of fries. I already knew. She was Doris Matheson, battleaxe landlady with a building full of affordable, empty apartments. Affordable because the price was too high.

My Brooklyn neighborhood is nice, with nice people, but it was time to cross the bridge to chase a sales job. I want interviewers to know I'm serious. More serious than Brooklyn. And that led me to the McDonald's on 3rd. I started to mention, in a polite way, her reputation preceded her, but she interrupted me, "Don't interrupt." She looked me over. "I've seen your type. I know what you do."

Oh crap. Did I forget to hide something on Facebook?

"You people, with those gay men and their hair products. I won't have it." What is she talking about? "They bring liquor into the house. I didn't spend fifty-four-and-a-half years as a nun to run my building like the foot of Mount Sinai."

"Gay men? I don't understand."

She stopped eating. Finally, the pig realized the trough wasn't going anywhere. "Don't play stupid." Tilting her head at me like I was the Queen of Lies. "Whatever you kids call them. Suitors, Wooers, Bachelors, not in my house. I run a building of chaste women."

There it is. The rule that keeps her apartments cheap. "No men at all?" She must allow serious relationships. Even nuns know marriage follows dating.

"No men. No male pets. I don't want them spraying everywhere."

"Men or male pets?" I half joked trying to lighten the interview.

"Both." She said lacking humor. "Now repeat after me. I will be a good tenant."

"What?"

"Repeat."

She wants me to repeat an oath? Fine. "I will be a good tenant." And with that over, I took a bite of my salad.

She interrupted me. "I will not allow penises across my threshold." I felt like I had a mouthful of food when someone suggests saying grace. Then, insistently, "I will not allow penises across my threshold."

I repeated it. No penises cross *her* threshold.

"Nor testicles will I hold."

"Come on."

"Say it."

"Not even outside the building?" Doris gave a whispering sigh as if to say, *This girl missed her chance*. Before she could get up, I repeated, "Nor testicles will I hold." Manhattan address.

Doris went on, "And if I do, may I feel the lick of hellfire on my netherly bits. May brimstone blackbirds tear at my eyes, and I shall share the fate of murderers and Democrats."

Flat, I repeated it all. Manhattan address.

She slid a key across the table. The heaviest goddamn key I've ever seen. "Good. Apartment 410. And you'll be expected to attend mass on Sundays." Manhattan address. Manhattan address.





WELCOME TO MY MEAT MARKET

By Rob Williams

“What kind of woman could love a man whose bathroom smells like smoked ham?” I wondered as I trudged up the hill to my Park Slope apartment for what would be the last time. It was raining outside and I was concocting sad little loneliness scenarios in my mind as I swished past the branches on the narrow sidewalk that runs along Prospect Avenue. A few hours before, I’d picked up the keys to my new apartment in Manhattan—a beautiful, oddly narrow one-bedroom on Second Avenue, right above the famous East Village Meat Market & Deli. For the last week or so, I’d been in a manic fit, bouncing from one squalid dump to the next, so when I found the Second Avenue apartment I took it immediately, neglecting to consider what the cons of living above a meat market might be. That is, until people started wrinkling up their noses at the mere mention of it.

“Meat ... market,” they’d murmur, staring at me, wide-eyed, struggling to maintain control of their facial features, trying not to dampen my obvious enthusiasm, the boyish spasms and fits of talkativeness I was experiencing. A meat market, they warned, might have certain *smells* associated with it. Hadn’t I considered that?

Well! I was considering it now. The day I picked up my keys, I raced over to the apartment and did some serious sniffing. My most alarming fears—that the smell of dead animal carcass would be wafting up to my little haven on the fifth floor, or that the courtyard would suddenly have become drenched with the blood of a thousand pigs—were assuaged pretty quickly. There was nothing *that* offensive going on up there. Sunlight was streaming in through the windows and the parquet floors were luxuriating in a fresh coat of wax. The countertops and appliances twinkled.

However, I could definitely smell *something*. The first thing that hit me was a trace of paint fumes, but that gave way to another scent: something smoky and ... mouthwatering? My stomach growled. I hadn’t eaten all day and the aroma in the apartment was only making me hungrier. It was a rich, meaty smell—smoked sausage or ham, perhaps. The windows were wide open and I assumed at first that the aroma was wafting up from outside. It seemed stronger in certain parts of the apartment, like in the kitchen and the hallway next to the bathroom. After some investigation, I decided that the smell was strongest in the bathroom itself. Apparently it was being piped up via an airshaft. A was aghast. My visions of entertaining comely young coeds were thrown right out the window—and I very nearly threw myself out the window after them. What an insult! A bathroom that smells like smoked ham! No young ladies would come near the place. And if they did, they’d wrinkle their noses in disgust and run.

Exhausted by this realization, I fled back to Brooklyn, my mind in obsessive overdrive as I speculated about the various kinds of odor-absorbing and odor-neutralizing products on the market. Trudging home, my jacket scraping against the wet tree branches, I wondered if it might be possible for me to become the kind of person who constantly burns candles and incense—while still retaining my fragile dignity. On the verge of despair, I considered what kind of woman could love someone as obviously troubled as myself, someone whose bathroom reeks of smoked ham: She would have to be a very strange, very forgiving woman indeed.



Rebecca Maya Lessem

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

By Eric Tabone

Oct 05. I moved to Brooklyn.

I thought of the apartment as the Watchtower. It was like a sentry post, facing the busy traffic circle that separates south Windsor Terrace and north I Can't Handle That. Inside, I could handle the searing hot bathroom steam pipe that scalded you every time you used the toilet. I could handle the only same-floor neighbors, a nice couple with an exceedingly large 16-year old with mental retardation and a penchant for jumping and throwing himself against our dividing wall. I could handle the cockroaches.

What I remember is her pounding at my door in the middle of the night, screaming. She had introduced herself in the hallway a few weeks before. A 40-ish Hispanic woman living alone, her name was Zomethingcomplicated but she said people called her Z. With one eye barely open against the blinding hallway lights, I asked Z if she was okay and what was wrong. She was pointing and screaming at me and I couldn't understand her. I shushed her politely, pointing out the racket she was making. She caught her breath and started over.

Apparently, my girlfriend and I were making a ton of noise. This was news to us, as we had been sleeping soundly for hours. We were talking and laughing, and Z could even smell the coffee we were brewing.

I explained how she confused us with another apartment. The apartment kitty-cornered from mine was within earshot from my bedroom and I could hear those tenants as well. And smell their coffee. Someone in that apartment worked a graveyard shift. I showed Z how our lights were off and we were sleeping, as we had both had jobs that required rest. I convinced her and even gave her a hug before she left.

When I spoke with her the next day, she said the hug I gave her was very thoughtful and it made her feel much better, that she knew I wasn't at fault. She invited me in. Her apartment, with the exact same layout, had universally inverse guts to mine. Where my apartment was practically bare with no more than white, hers was full of furniture and colors in every room. And a lot of Christian objects. We spoke for ten minutes, mostly about things I can't recall. I did deflect her attempt to coax my girlfriend and I into making websites for her religious groups. She smiled vacantly throughout our conversation. When my social barometer hit its peak, I excused myself and went upstairs. Z had a way about her that didn't jive with my soul, so I decided to put the prior night's events past me and leave her be. She never apologized.

SHE ONLY (BRIEFLY) LEAVES AT SIX-THIRTY

By Alissa Fleck

Francine keeps the TV on all day and night— operas, cartoons, cooking
shows peel through the plaster, demand release from being
stuffed inside— Francine keeps the Hellos and Hows too, inside, but What
is that noise and What and— furthermore how slowly, how deliberately the
confusing craters of a nose, just close enough to see, two pairs of looped
eyeglasses, fear of falling down stairs elbows first/heavy heat
all keep her inside. The dog is dead and (may be) stuffed
too, he told me he has heard things at night— beyond the operas, the cartoons, the
cooking shows so we have been careful, we have been taking notes, we too have kept up and
been keeping watch—

BRICK VERSUS SKY

By Johanna Beyenbach

In the spring of 2009, *New York Magazine* published an issue called *My First New York*, filled with stories of well-known residents' first experiences in this city. My favorite was Tommy Tune's account from 1957. His first day here, he went to the Algonquin.

"Then I lifted the window shade to look out and there was a brick wall. It was the most romantic thing I'd ever seen. In Texas, you have sky. Here, a brick wall!"

That little paragraph made me jump up in my seat. Tears welled in my eyes, and I excitedly shoved the magazine into my boyfriend's hands. "Read this one!" I practically shouted. He did. He looked up. He seemed confused. "Isn't that great? A brick wall!" He looked at me as though I had just told him I wanted to join the circus. He told me I was nuts.

He was a country boy at heart, and held a not-so-quiet contempt for New York City that grew a little more each day. People don't give a shit about you here, he said. If you were in trouble, nobody would even notice—and if they did, they wouldn't care. I was furious and indignant.

The relationship eventually crashed and burned, and he returned to Vermont. Last I heard, though, he had moved back and was living in what he once called The Land of Entitled Children, otherwise known as Williamsburg and Greenpoint, otherwise known as my former home. And, well, I'm moving neighborhoods too by now. The bathroom in my new apartment has a window in it. And you know what my view is? A brick wall.



Rob Williams



THE PARANOID GROUSE KIT

By Kyle Hemmings

In the basement apartment in Chelsea, walls were thin & Grouse slept next to them, listening to whoever was listening to him. He thought of Manhattan as questionable life-forms behind glass, rumors-to-be-true, lovers waking up with unexplained scars.

He was working on The Extinction of Seven files when his cell phone buzzed. His old girlfriend, Wilma Tannen, wanted to move back in. He was tempted to click and press delete. She was all high maintenance, thirty colors of skirts, impossibly short, yellow pills for acute mania, an obsession for thrash-metal. He thought she was a spy. A spy for his mother, tortured by dyskinesia & involuntary night slashings, a spy for his friends who loved leaving their girlfriends dangling in rooms with no heat, a spy for his father who worked incognito in all downtown kinds of love. A spy for any brittle form of counterintelligence west of Madison—men and women running from their proxy selves. Grouse felt that stupid old yearning return, that feeling of falling through the least amount of air. As a child, he was always someone else before awakening. Later, he was always someone else's discarded secret.

It wasn't the same. Grouse tried to flush then revive the old days of despair & heart, of finding rubber bullets under the sheets. Wilma admitted she lived in poverty since leaving Grouse at some indie film bash on New Year's Eve. She claimed her lovers, rich, bald, pious only with things, used her because she reminded them of someone who cheapened them with hurt. She filled her belly with the contents of their refrigerators.

He kept asking why. Why did she leave?

She said It was the mania.

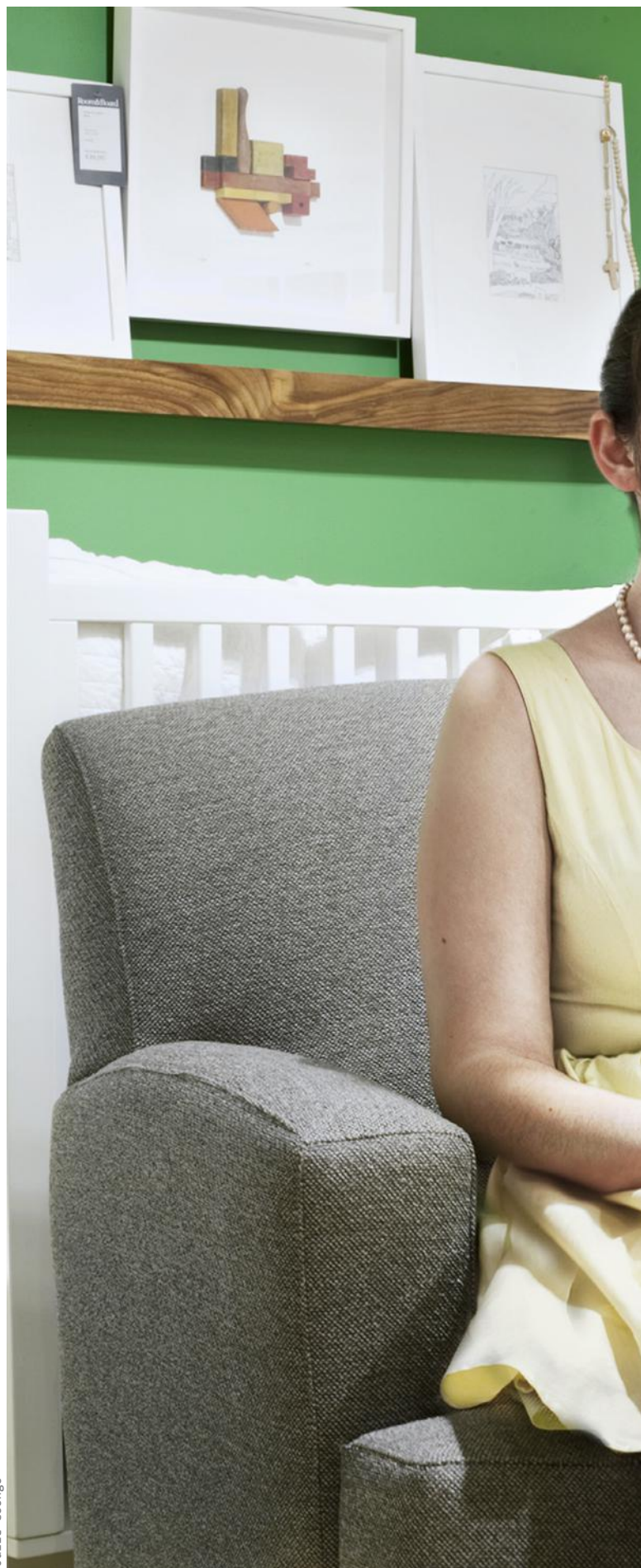
He wanted to shoot her through with rubber bullets & see if she could float.

Above their twisted bodies, the ceiling leaked other voices. In her eyes, Grouse saw sky-tails, spots on the sun. After many nights of solitude & amateurish foreplay, of such bony love-thrusts that it hurt them both, Wilma confessed to betraying him to The Men of Zone 3. Quietly, he asked her to leave.

Alone in the room, similar to the ones that swallowed his adolescence, Grouse called his 4th Ave. Controls. They were men & women who dressed like college students or futuristic doom punks, drinking beer at a bar with a short life expectancy, perhaps a fake liquor license.

Grouse had her killed.

At night, Grouse returned to his old habits of listening to the walls, of closing his eyes & seeing a world of people behind glass speaking to him at once. He felt something falling & not catching it, perhaps, a Mew Gull, a Kittiwake, a Bridled Tern. After awakening, he'd sit on the edge of the bed, inspecting his hands, turning them over. They were bitten, chewed. They were full of red markings that needed to be decoded. If it weren't for gravity, he'd be a hole unto himself.



Julie Coongo





SUMMERTIME WINDOWS

By Joshua Shockey

Vince could hear the muffled tones of the Lower East Side rising up through the closed windows at his back.

"It is only a mini-fridge, but that keeps the kitchen from dominating the entire room." The voice came from the small, mousy man showing Vince the studio apartment. "Besides, the size is really a benefit, when it comes to upkeep. You did read in the ad about the upkeep? The cleaning and the plants?"

"Yeah, the ad. You're asking fourteen, right?" Vince asked without enthusiasm. He had seen so many ads and apartments over the past three weeks that they were all just a blur of disappointment. He drifted towards the windows, and looked down on the hustle of the avenue, the passersby a constant parade.

"Fifteen, actually. The ad said fifteen. But that is a bit flexible for the right person. I am really looking for a good fit more than anything."

Vince cupped his hand around his forehead as he scouted the street below. "Is that a bar? That place with the blacked-out windows and brick walls?"

"What? Yes, but listen—"

"It's not a bar for suits, is it? They're wound too tight."

"Suits? No. It is a younger, artsy crowd. Like yourself. But listen, I am looking for a reliable tenant for the sub-lease. I mentioned in the ad about some chores and the like."

"I'm no artist."

"I'm sorry?"

"You said it's an artsy crowd, like me." Vince peeled away from the window and turned back to the man. "I'm not artistic, really."

"Well, I just meant, they dress—never mind. I'm sorry." The man rubbed his hands together as he spoke. "I didn't mean anything by it."

"No worries," Vince spun back to the window, spewed hot breath on the glass and traced shapes in the misty patch. "I guess I could be, it's all just lines and colors nowadays."

"Yes, well, I don't really know about all that."

"There's just no life left in it. None left anywhere." Vince cupped his forehead against the window again as the shapes on the glass dissolved with the fading vapors. "Nowhere that I've found, anyway."

"Well, it can be very lively around here."

"Really?" Vince asked, as the man joined him at the window.

"Oh, yes. The buzz of it all keeps me up late some nights. It gets to be too much for me in the summer time. That's why I rent it out."

"Yeah? It's like that the whole summer?"

"Very much so. It gets busy and keeps on going, on into the early morning, and then just continues right through the next night."

"Okay. Yeah. And you can hear it?"

"Of course you can hear it, but more than that, you can sort of feel it. It has its own rhythm, in a way." The man pushed open the window and let the pulse of the Lower East Side pour into the apartment.

"All right," Vince said, as he soaked it all in. "This is all right."



Laura Podolnick

MAKING RELATIONSHIPS WORK IN AN ILL-SUITED SMALL APARTMENT

By Gregg Meluski

Given the limited amount of space, at times there was the deep spiritual necessity to Get The Fuck Out of the cramped 3rd Avenue apartment. Mobilizing downtown and finding a bar became the equivalent of moving to another room. When there's no basement, bedroom or alternative in-house space to chill in, you go out.

Dave and I would occasionally walk the couple miles to downtown Manhattan and back, making a stopover at the occasional bar or two. This is a trip I would repeat with many friends throughout the course of my time living in a Manhattan apartment, but Dave was a significant exception. He was not only a longtime friend, but he was also temporarily living at my place to mend his marriage with my roommate.

There were three rooms in the apartment, and three people. Dave slept on the shitty Ikea pullout loveseat that I had wrangled for a couple hundred dollars a few months earlier, which was situated in the kitchen / dining room / living room / foyer that separated the two bedrooms. The lack of comfort in a small apartment can be fairly depressing when you're living with a semi-acquaintance or complete stranger—either you're hearing other people have a great time when you just want to be alone, or you're so sick of the small quarters but realize that there's really no comfortable place to go. Having a friend in the place actually makes living there better, despite the cost to one's personal space.

In the extremely cramped space of my bedroom (maybe a foot of space to the immediate left of the queen-sized bed, one and a half feet at the foot of the bed before the brief relief of openness was ended by the clothes hanging from the closet) I could usually hear my roommate's TV blaring throughout the night. Despite the lack of auditory privacy, we all managed to avoid any awkwardness that you would expect from having a couple actively working on their relationship in such small quarters. Either they did all their fighting when I was out of the apartment—which was often—or they did it beneath the snappy dialogue of *Family Guy* when I was sleeping.

Eventually Dave got tired of walking the five flights to our floor and moved out. Also, he and my roommate decided to get divorced. Soon after, I met someone and we moved to a place far, far away from the tight spaces and chaos of Manhattan.



Jon Handel



JIMI HENDRIX USED TO PLAY AT THE 8TH WONDER

By Reinhardt Suarez

I'd developed a multi-step process for when friends insisted on coming over to my place. Phase One—I'd meet the friend on the street, the farther down the block the better, the closer to 5th Ave. the better. "Only a block," I'd say, pointing toward Washington Square Park. "I can smell the NYU students' patchouli from my window."

As we walked toward my building, I moved to Phase Two. "8th Street is famous for its shoe shops." Never mind that my only shoes were worn out Pro-Wings from PayLess. And never mind the mass exodus of shoe shops in favor of flavor-of-the-week patisseries with lifespans measured in days. I'd note where Jack Kerouac wrote *Tristessa*, where James Thurber lived for a year, where Hendrix performed with Curtis Knight & the Squires back in the day. I'd point out the army surplus store that littered flyers on the sidewalk, the boutique that offered the latest in skank-chic, and Eva's, my eatery of choice that offered a wholesome alternative to Gray's Papaya on 8th and 6th Ave. That's how I'd put it: "I'm eating so healthy."

Once inside, Phase Three commenced on the elevator. This is when I'd strategically describe everything using the words "charming," "classic," or "vintage." "How vintage are these buttons?" I'd ask—one of several rhetorical questions I'd spew out without pausing in between. Countless fingers had worn away the numbers on the buttons, so only through trial and error did I learn which one would take me to the very top. About halfway up, I figured I'd start to throw around the word "penthouse" liberally until we arrived on my floor.

Phase Four—My friend properly conditioned, I'd cut into our fun times with an injection of truth: "It's not a big place." Then I'd say, "87 square feet." The number 87 usually connotes a hefty sum. When I leased the apartment—sight unseen—it seemed to me to be small but adequate. That is, until I factored 87 out into dimensions. 10 x 8.7. 11 x 7.9090 (repeating, of course). Friends from out of state seemed to take the number in stride. New Yorkers did the math by instinct. I could tell by the frowns.

Phase Five—I'd open the door to an iron-latticed window facing a brick wall and a sour water-damaged spackle smell. Eyes would stray away only to spot the lofted bed held up by rickety posts that may actually have been repurposed mop handles. Reactions ranged from a sudden onset of general pity accompanied by ennui to outright rage at the conditions of my home. One friend started to cry (or I started to cry because she looked like she was starting to cry, and I took that as permission).

Phase Six—the kill: "Do you wanna go for a drink?" I'd ask.

"Sure. It's on me." Different friends would use different words, but the meaning was usually the same.

WANA FLASH #1

By Gloria Beth Amodeo

I met my landlord at the realtor's office. Wana (pronounced "Yana"). Hair short and spiked, brown with obvious highlights. She wore sunglasses inside and had a designer-looking bag. Accent sounded Slavic. She gave me three phone numbers. "Call us for anything," she said. "Just don't call us to fix lightbulb."

The apartment was a Victorian hideaway in the middle of a questionable neighborhood, dirt cheap at \$750/month with central air. Bedroom, living room and kitchen. Dark green hallway carpets. Hardwood floors. Stained glass light fixtures secured to the wall by golden cornhusks. One set of neighbors below me. A couple with a baby.

But getting Wana to return my calls was a part-time job. I had called each of the numbers three times about the air conditioning. "Nothing's showing up on the thermostat. I bought a thermometer. It's 100 degrees in the apartment. My cat is panting. I don't want her to die."

Fifteen minutes later, Wana called. A younger voice than I remembered. "Oh, Julia! When I heard about kitty cat, I was so upset you can't even imagine." I felt a gust of cool air. "Go check thermostat." I walked over and saw that the numbers were back. Temperature down to 95. "Good, good," Wana said. "Give kitty cat a kiss for me."

What the hell, I thought. Does this woman have a button in her house that's connected to my air-conditioning? Why didn't she push it sooner?

A month later, my bathroom sink was stopped up. I called all of Wana's numbers for two weeks. "A pipe might burst," I said. "My cat could drown. Please call me back."

And, of course, my apartment flooded. Water was dripping from the neighbor's ceiling. We prepared to evacuate. Then I heard a knock at my door.

A woman with a long, white fur coat entered. "I am Wana, too," she said. She inspected, white suede heels clicking through water. "This place. Worth so much more."

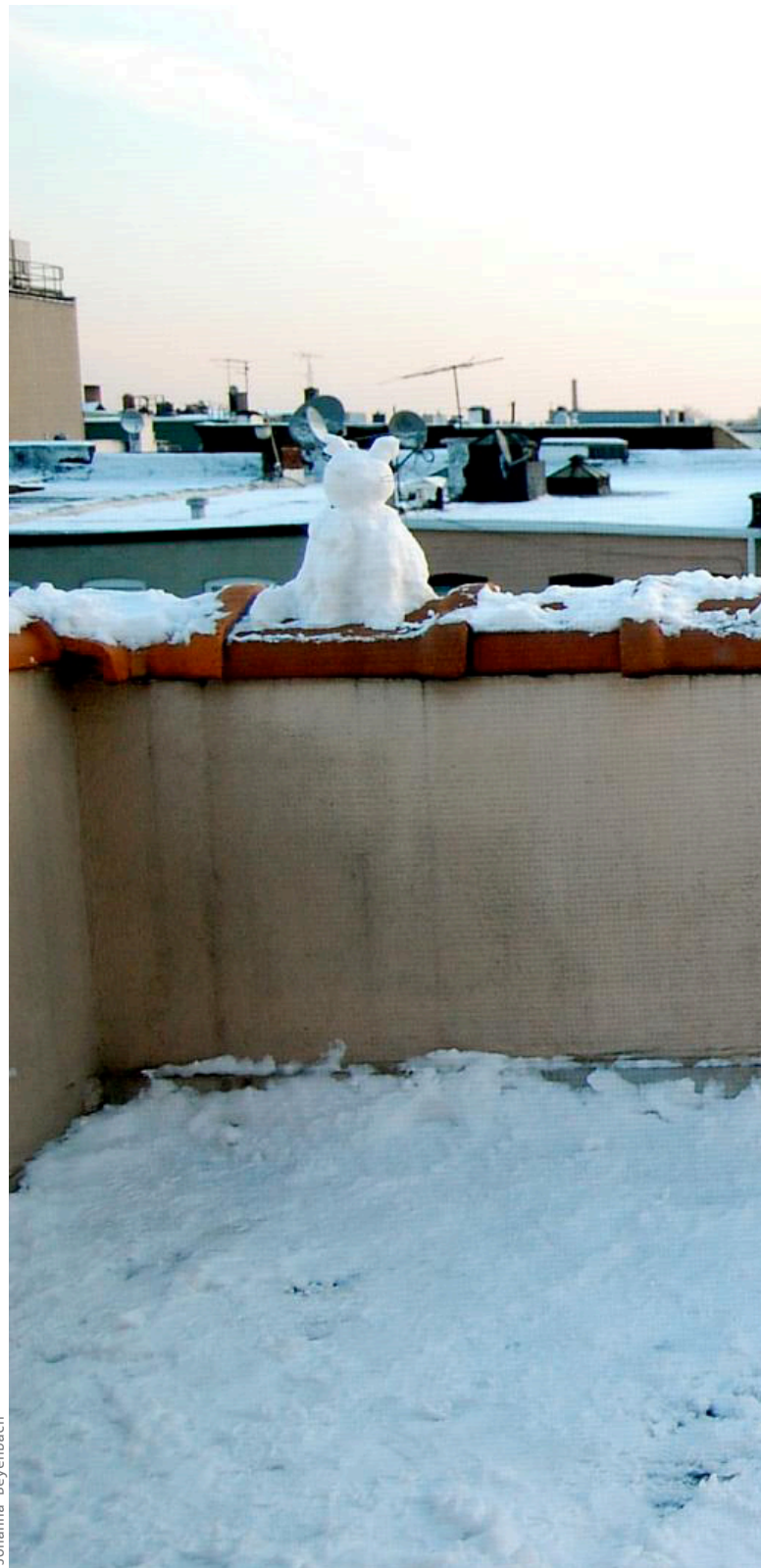
Another woman came running in. Short black hair with thick bangs. Grey sweats. "Kitty cat!" she screamed, the high-pitched voice I remembered from the phone. My cat was in the carrier. She scooped it up and ran out.

"That is Wana, too," the other woman said.

We all went outside and the Wana I had assumed was the only Wana was at the entrance in sunglasses with six burly men in black t-shirts. "Keep tenants outside," she said. The Wanas went into the house. The men stood in front of us.

Five minutes later, the Wanas exited. "Let them back inside," the sunglassed one said. The men scattered. I took my cat carrier and ran upstairs. The water was gone. The bathroom sink was working. There were chamomiles on my kitchen table and a note pinned by three hands.

We only charge you half months rent next time but it will be raised higher soon and tell your cat I love her and her brown head spot.



Johanna Beyenbach



PART II: SKINLESS

By J Hobart B

Another call, this time from Katja.

“Have you heard from Michael?”

“I just talked to him. He told me about the mouse.”

“He told me he would take care of it in the morning, and he didn’t, and I can hear it screaming in the kitchen all the way from my room!”

“Katja, I know you don’t want to, but I think you’re just going to have to summon the strength and kill the mouse yourself this time. Either that, or wait until tonight.”

Silence.

“Okay?”

More silence.

...

That night, the three of us saw a play. We came home. Michael went to his room and shut the door.

Katja sauntered toward her own room.

“Oh, the mouse is still in there, it’s on a trap under the oven. So, we need to take care of that.”

She shut the door, leaving me alone by the kitchen.

And with that, I had been reinstated to my former position as mouse slayer, albeit under a new set of circumstances. This time, there was nothing heroic or selfless about the position; it was just expected of me. I felt like a chump.

“Oh, we need to take care of that? Okay, sounds good! If we need to take care of it, then I guess we’d better get started, right? Good luck to us!”

I stormed to my own room and slammed the door behind me.

Hours later, I heard Katja creep to the kitchen and turn on the light. Then I heard her turn it back off, and scamper back to her own room.

The next day, I learned what she had seen. On the glue trap where the mouse had once been was a loose, grey, velvety skin. Nothing more. Nearby, a trail of tiny, bloody footprints led off behind the oven.

I still wonder how far the fugitive might have gotten before succumbing to the elements, how long he was still among us, skinless. And I have to admire the courage and survival instinct demonstrated by his choice to literally pull himself out of his own skin rather than wait for one of us to take responsibility.

I wish I could say I would have done the same thing, but I probably would have just stayed on the trap.



Rob Williams



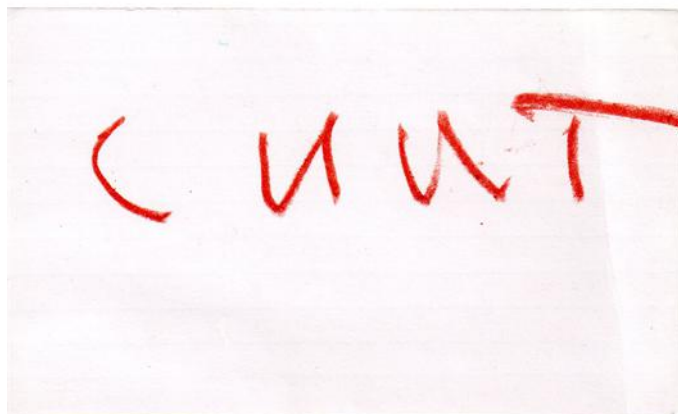
NOTES FROM MY UPSTAIRS NEIGHBOR, GREENPOINT, BROOKLYN, 2008

By Agnes

7am. Loudly stomps down stairs.
Bangs on door. Slips first card.
Cuint. Stomps back up stairs.
Scribbles furiously in red crayon.
Stomps back down. Bangs on door.
Slips second card. Cuut. Stomps
back upstairs. Scribbles madly.
Stomps down for the final time.
Bangs on door. Slips third card.
CUNT. Exits front door.



Epilogue: Three days later.
Returns. Walks silently to door.
Does not knock. Slips note. Tries
to sneak back upstairs. Gets caught.
3+ hour conversation ensues over
yogurt, carrots and olive oil.



L [REDACTED],
Sorry about the
curse words. I have
a drinking problem, which
I am getting help for.
M [REDACTED]

CONTRIBUTERS

AGNES left her family home in 2000 and has lived in apartments (or apartment-style dorms) in Greenwich Village, Gramercy, Florence, the West Village, East Williamsburg, and Greenpoint. She currently resides in Middle Brooklyn. She only ever had a washing machine in her apartment when she lived in Italy.

ALISSA FLECK is a poet from Minneapolis currently pursuing her MFA at The New School. She has been published in the Argos Books anthology *Why I am Not a Painter*, and has work forthcoming in FutureCycle Press's anthology *American Society: What Poets See* and on FailBetter.com.

AMANDA MCRAVEN grew up in a log cabin in the Virginia woods. Her love of the tactile in a digital world comes from the rocks and dirt and sticks that populated a TV-less childhood. She lives in Topanga Canyon, California.

ANSLEY MOON was born in India and has since lived on three continents. Her first book of poetry, *How to Bury the Dead*, was just released from Black Coffee Press, and her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *PANK*, *Southern Women's Review*, *J Journal*, and elsewhere. She is an associate editor for Black Lawrence Press and an associate poetry editor for *The Furnace Review*.

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ERIC TABONE lives in Homestead, Massachusetts. He thinks there's very little awesomeness in America & the world at large, but that that awesomeness is super-concentrated and stellar. Lately he's been thinking about unexplored uses of digital as a media platform. When he finishes his exploitative and secretly sarcastic "business book," the cover picture will be the classic indescribable Paul Reiser smirk.

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KYLE HEMMINGS is the author of several chapbooks of poems: *Avenue C* (Scars Publications), *Fuzzy Logic* (Punkin Press), and *Amsterdam & Other Broken Love Songs* (Flutter Press). His work has been published in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Elimae*, *Nano Fiction*, *PANK*, *Night Train Online*, *Juked*, *Diddle Dog*, and elsewhere. His work has been nominated for several Pushcarts. He lives and writes in New Jersey. He blogs at <http://upatbergasse19.blogspot.com>.

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ROB WILLIAMS is a mercenary copywriter and copy editor who lives above a meat market in the East Village. You can find more of his stories at itmustbebobby.com.

Everybody in New York has an apartment story. People who live in other places also have apartment stories, but like most other things, they aren't as good as the ones from New York. The great density of population that makes New York a place we want to live

also makes our apartments, by necessity, bizarre. They are expensive little boxes of endearing idiosyncrasy. If we're lucky, and someone, if we are not. Our buildings are old; they have history and vermin. Our neighbors are weird and play the bass. We climb five flights of stairs without complaint. Our heaters scream like

