

# Passwords

Volume 11 Issue 1

Fall 2010



Passwords  
A Claremont Colleges Literary Magazine  
Volume 11 Issue 1 • Fall 2010

Cover Art By Christina Bejjani

# Passwords

A Claremont Colleges Literary Magazine



Robert Bodor

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

# Passwords Staff

## **Editors-in-Chief**

Stephanie Stein

Emily Miner

## **Publicity Coordinator**

Mary Buchner

## **Editorial Board**

Melissa Anacker	Hannah Lee
Christina Bejjani	Hanna Levin
Erica Bellman	Phoebe Maddox
Christina Boardman	Chelsea Muir
Laura Bottorff	Eliza Pennell
Mary Buchner	Hannah Pivo
Anne Dreshfield	Cait Powell
Hunter Dukes	Mike Opal
Renata Gerecke	Wendy Qian
Corin Hamilton	Brendan Rowan
Alicia Hendrix	Ella Schwalb
Sharon Jan	Amy Shoemaker
Ratna Kamath	Savina Velkova
Aliza Lalji	Madeleine Wolf

## **Magazine Layout**

Stephanie Stein

Renata Gerecke

## Editors' Note

Passwords, a five-college literary magazine of poetry, prose, and visual art, is published each semester. Our mission is to provide a literary forum for the community of the Claremont Colleges, and our editorial board is open to all students.

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

We would like to thank the Associated Students of Pomona College, the Pitzer College Student Senate, the Associated Students of Harvey Mudd College, the Scripps Associated Students, the Associated Students of Claremont McKenna College, and the Motley Underground for their financial support.

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

Stephanie Stein and Emily Miner  
Passwords Editors-in-Chief

# Contents

*Writing Contest Winner*

## **Untitled**

Emi Sawada..... 8

*Writing Contest Winner*

## **Untitled**

Natalie Orenstein..... 9

## **Pacific**

Cait Powell..... 10

## **First Aide**

Hannah Shoenhard..... 11

## **Continental Drift**

Renee Johnston..... 13

## **slice**

Catherine Parker Sweatt..... 14

## **Smoke**

Anne Dreshfield..... 15

## **Untitled**

Alexandra Gutowski..... 18

## **I'm Home**

Maya Booth..... 19

## **Monday on Mullholland**

Madeleine Wolf..... 20

## **A Moment in Summer**

Lisa Storc..... 22

<b>Spell It Like a Lawn Gnome</b>	
Liz Carnathan & Madeline Wyse.....	24
<b>I wear rose-tinted lenses</b>	
Ben Fish.....	25
<b>sailing</b>	
Savina Velkova.....	27
<b>How He Got Lost</b>	
Ray Serrato.....	28
<b>Untitled (excerpt)</b>	
John Maidman.....	32
<b>In the Place Where Apples Grew</b>	
Hanna Levin.....	35
<b>Samuel</b>	
Cait Powell.....	36
<b>Map making</b>	
Savina Velkova.....	37

## Artwork by

Christina Bejjani

Robert Bodor

Cassandra Campeas

Patrick Liu

Nicola Parisi

Wendy Qian

*In this semester's writing contest, contestants had one hour to write a poem or prose work relating to the theme of "hands."*

## Untitled

Emi Sawada

self-manicure  
by night.

bathed in the twilight of fluorescent reverie, she  
    falls into the loveseat;  
spun in hues of a gossamer kaleidoscope, its colors mined  
    its cushions sigh  
    in tandem with her tears.

by morning.

gold and burgundy, shades of wealth to match  
    her skin tones, to match  
her people, gold like the color of a customer's  
    currency, like  
her hair, gold like angels, but with hard eyes and no smile.

by noon.

doused in saline to disinfect the struggle, to  
    manicure the pain  
like myths of prosperity in the lining of her dress,  
    priced with  
numbers as high as her now bankrupt hopes.

by evening.

as repayment for her loans, in change just for  
    start-up; with  
two sets of five fingers; two hands of loneliness,  
    the clock slows to midnight  
and she manicures them in gold.



# Untitled

Natalie Orenstein

We would watch the schoolchildren exit the buses en masse and congregate around the roasted peanut stands. They would fish crinkled dollar bills out of heavy, grubby backpacks and exchange them for grease-soaked newspaper cones. From second-story apartments, we watched them break off into groups of two or three and amble leisurely down the block, licking sugar from their fingers.

University students huddled together under the fluorescent lights in those trendy Vietnamese sandwich shops. From the sidewalk, at night, it looked like they were praying, heads bent low over their \$2.99 specials.

The young parents didn't seem to eat. We watched them push strollers down the entirety of the expansive block, never stopping. They carried curvy, metallic water bottles, which undoubtedly lacked the Evil Mineral of the Week.

The older generation still ruled the block, still inhabited the two-bedroom apartments, still ate at the Jewish delis that had unfathomably survived gentrification. Pastrami on rye, always.

# Pacific

Cait Powell

The house where we had slept is burnt down  
and the dog is sleeping in the ashes. I remember nights spent late  
by windows and skylights, drowsy with daylight and artificial morning.  
I remember the sidewalk so far from the door but now it remains  
and the door is crumbled and dead. Tomorrow I may find it  
in the part of my hair or the folds of skin where my elbow bends.

The house where we had slept is burnt down and someone is building  
inside its ghost like a supernatural pregnancy;  
there is a palace where the yellow bathtub used to be.  
I would have bought you a canoe that Christmas  
if it would have made you stay.

Your spread table was the best day of me, your laundry basket  
the most taciturn night. It does not snow in this town,  
and nor does it rain, but hovers on the occasion. I have never found  
a holiday in this gray sad ground and the great belly of the Pacific is roaring  
just down the street from me. I would run but I am so very certain  
that the asphalt would become green and slick and I would cling like a child  
to the rocks it would swallow in its wake.

I spent last night among the winters of our anticipation;  
I slept in your yellow bathtub with its big claw feet. The seagulls  
that fly in off the Pacific ate my hair until it grew from between their  
feathers.

The house burnt down and I use the ashes for lipstick this morning,  
so that someone will tell me it is beautiful.

# First Aide

Hannah Shoenhard

On or about eight in the morning on a sunny August day, the President fell apart. First went his right hand, along with the clipboard it had been holding. The President stared at it as an aide hurried up to reassure him while the black-suited Secret Service men kept poker-faced behind their sunglasses.

“This is perfectly normal,” the aide said. She was wearing a fawn-colored suit bearing a name tag which read COLUMBIA, just in case the President was suddenly seized by a populist impulse to call his staffers by their first names.

The President blinked at hand, still clutching the clipboard with nerveless fingers, on the White House lawn. Then he bent stiffly at the waist, stashed the hand in the pocket of his suit—even though it was August, the President was a professional—and tugged the clipboard away with the hand still attached to his body.

“It’s called ‘going to pieces,’ sir, and it’s not a serious issue at all, very curable, very fixable,” the aide said. “Abraham Lincoln used to do it every other week when the war was on.”

The President seemed to be trying to speak.

“What? Oh, you poor man, you’ve lost your voice, too! Don’t worry, half the folks in Congress have got that. It goes around every once in a while.” She snapped her fingers and an attendant appeared. “Could you get us some hot tea, please? The Boston variety?” The attendant returned an instant later with a dainty teacup brimming with brown liquid. He handed it to COLUMBIA, who gave it to the President. He took a deep drink and spat it out.

“Surprised you, didn’t it?” the aide laughed. “There’s salt mixed in. Easy on the vocal cords, not so much on the taste buds.”

“Thank you,” said the President. His voice was, indeed, only a little hoarse now. “...but I believe my hand—”

“Oh, don’t you fret,” said the aide cheerfully. “Like I said, that’s happened more times than I can count. Did I ever tell you about the time during the Iran hostage crisis when Jimmy Carter walked clear out of both his feet? Or when James Madison sneezed his own eyeballs out? That took some explaining. Right in front of the Marquis de Lafayette! Splashed potato soup everywhere. Lord,” she said, grinning, “but that was one hell of a mess. Course, he’d had similar troubles himself. He was very understanding.” She gasped. “But you’ve got a speech in ten minutes!”

“I know,” said the President. His head wobbled precariously.

“Now, don’t be nervous. The worst thing you could do right now is be nervous.” COLUMBIA took the President by the hand—the left, connected

one—and led her to an old toolshed behind the White House garden. She shoved open the old wooden door, pulling on an overhead chain irritably. A few seconds later, the lights flickered on. The President gasped. The room was full of...spare parts.

“Prosthetics,” the aide explained. “Some of them are practically antiques. I think we might even have George Washington’s teeth in here.” She picked up a hand and examined it. “Whoops, that’s a lefty. Ah,” she said, selecting another from the floor and blowing the dust off it, “this one looks about right. A little hairy, maybe, but nobody will notice that. Just tuck it in your cuff...like so...and the press will never know the difference. We’ll put the real one back on when we have time, later. But we’ve got to hurry!”

A minute later, as the President stood at a lonely podium before a crowd of over a hundred journalists and officers of the press, a bead of sweat appeared on his forehead. He swallowed, and when he next opened her mouth to speak all that came out was a croak. He turned to look at her aides, on the sidelines, but the quick snap was too much for his neck, and his head fell off.

There was a beat of perhaps a quarter of a second in which the scribbling of pens and tap of laptop keys was silenced, and then a very quiet explosion of note-taking occurred.

And then the President tapped the microphone with an unusually hairy hand. The journalists, as one, went still.

The President took a step back from the podium, but his leg landed oddly. His foot twisted off at the ankle. His right arm slipped out of its sleeve and landed with a wooden thunk on the stage. As what was left of the President began to melt like hot wax under the heat of a thousand blazing lights, COLUMBIA took the stage.

A hundred pens wavered in midair. But none of the journalists needed to write down what was said next.

“Uh,” said the aide, “could somebody fetch me a mop?”

# Continental Drift

Renee Johnston

*It turns out that the world today goes the same way as the worst of worlds that have been; it simply drifts.*

-Ortega y Gasset

On her 84th birthday,  
My grandmother ordered the iceberg salad  
Thousand Island on the side.  
Nobody believes they're going to die.

Except in Ecuador.  
where everyone sticks mainly to rice  
in bulk. Spilling  
off roofs of manic busses careening around sidewalks and stray Bachatas.  
Out the windows the whole world wobbles

like the chicken necks Celia's aunt would break  
and fry in clouds of Catholicism and corn oil.  
People prefer the dark meat there,  
while the American Protestant appears to favor  
Jesus. Marshmallows. Miracle Whip.

Which do you like better?  
Celia always asked me over  
plates of legs, wings, breasts  
but I never had an answer, lacking  
the vocabulary to say much  
of anything beyond  
I don't know. Thank you. I'm sorry.

On Tuesdays at 11:45am,  
my mom eats a premeasured Tupperware cup  
full of cold ground turkey (extra lean),  
on the drive to work at World Gym.  
It's easier that way.

## slice

Catherine Parker Sweatt

I ate a watermelon today.

Sometimes, I think I will burst for plenty,  
for the red juices, green stripes overflow—  
voluptuous.

But then I realize  
they are seedless in America.



Nicola Parisi

# Smoke

Anne Dreshfield

Seniors were lining the main pathway of the locker banks, though not in the normal clumpings of frenetic chatting, laughing, and latte-swapping students. We sat cross-legged or hugging our knees to our chest or sitting on our legs—any way at all to feel safe again. We were all silently scrambling backwards, lashing out against the thought of you that screamed us mute. It was the same with every person who arrived as if it were any other school day: open the door, shiver at the abrupt threshold of the temperature changing from 15 degrees Fahrenheit to seventy-plus, look up, and realize that it had happened again. Not for the second time. Not for the third. This was the fourth, the one that no one would have ever thought would happen, but then again, who would have ever thought...?

I was sitting there, too, thinking of you. I had found out the night before. Sleep wouldn't cradle me away, even though I knew just how important it was that I got enough rest before the AP Logic and Rhetoric exam.

You killed yourself, everyone was saying. You drove out to a forest reserve and lit yourself on fire.

To me, winters in our small suburb of Chicago always felt like they were etched in gray. Our tracks in the snow turned gray with grime from the bottom of our boots, as if we were tainting the earth. The roofs of the houses were folded in smoky velvet. Your eyes were dark blue and lined with the heavy underbelly of storm clouds.

Our school was an odd one—too large for any of us to feel at home and too small for any of us to outrun the fact that we hated it. Three stories of fluorescent lights and newly laid linoleum floors greeted us every morning at 7:20 AM sharp. The open tongues of the velvet seats in our auditorium waited to be filled; the cavernous gym was void of any echo of screeching shoes leaving trails of scuffmarks behind. We filed in, hunched up and scaly from the cold, before the sun had even risen. Most of us trudged out by the time the wind chill and snow had made the sunlight dim and weak. It felt like sunset was at 4 PM every day. Maybe it was; maybe we were all too busy to look up and see when the sun actually burnt itself to darkness.

You and I were both in the same AP U.S. History class, first period—a dreadful enough topic, made worse by the early time. We shuffled to our seats every morning with the kind of dread that makes even moving your lips a task too difficult to attempt. I will admit: I almost always fell half-asleep in that class. With the school's heater blasting the frostbite from our bones and the drone of our teacher, Mr. Roncone, falling steadily on our ears, I couldn't

help it. I sat two rows away from you, one row up; just close enough to see the shaggy crop of your dusty red hair from the corner of my eye.

“Computer kid!” Mr. Roncone would always bark at you whenever he had to employ—God forbid!—*technology* in his lecture. “Gimme a hand!”

And you would. We’d all laugh wearily, knowing that any of us could turn on the computer or figure out where exactly to plug the speaker jack in—you were the designated whiz merely because you’d volunteered to help the first day of class. You always unfolded from your chair like a great lumbering accordion, sighing out your weariness with a smile. You were not only helpful but brilliant, as well—as a sophomore, you upstaged all of us juniors without even blinking. Mundane facts about the groups of settlers who first landed in the Americas? You knew what they ate for breakfast. It was like your mother had ingested history books while you were in the womb. The rest of us could only blink at you. We were still processing how the hell we’d managed to get to school without spinning off of the roads that were slick with black ice. Even Mr. Roncone, who had quite the reputation of putting students down in the name of good fun—he once called a girl complaining about a test a BMW, or, a ‘bitcher moaner whiner’—was impressed. He loved calling on you, whether for an intricate answer to one of his hair-raising questions or just to get some help to pull up a web browser. He could always count on you to be one of the only kids paying attention to his lectures.

There was one day, though. Do you remember it? The entire school shuddered to a stop that day, the day that the first of what would soon be many teen suicides made everyone go quiet and still. Mr. Roncone perched on his front table and stared at us all, fidgeting with a dull pencil.

“I want you all to know that we’re going to talk about Kevin today,” he said to our upturned faces. For once, we were hanging on his every word—hollowed out with shock, aching with the pure, ringing sound of pain. “Though if this is too much for you, please feel free to leave. Suicide is an awful topic. You won’t get in trouble, I promise.”

I know you stayed. I know you stayed in your seat, shoulders hunched close as if you were still warding off the cold. And since you stayed you had to be listening to Mr. Roncone; there was no way you could ever tune him out. You *had* to be listening.

Didn’t you?

The tiled floor was cold, dirty. We’d been sitting there for at least twenty minutes, staring at each other across the aisle of the locker bank, mute. Underclassmen walked past our lockers and stared in, a kind of willowy confusion bowing their shoulders. A group of varsity water polo girls were crying into each other’s hair by the exit; you had been their scorekeeper and announcer.



The bell rang, too soon.

Some of us didn't move. Some of us opened our mouths as if to pray or scream or God knows what, but stood when no sounds came from our throats. I got to my feet, hauling my bag along with me.

*The AP Logic and Rhetoric test can wait, I thought blearily. Can't it, for this?*

I went. Somehow, I made it to the wrestling gym—a dismal space to spend longer than ten minutes in, much less sit through an AP test in. By the time I got there, other students were already seated. The juniors were staring at their hands, waiting for instructions. Most of the seniors were staring at the administrators, waiting for nothing. To them, we must have looked like little children, lost in the supermarket—ours eyes glazed over in wordless fear, our cheeks wet with tears.

In the end, they told us we could re-take the AP tests in June, when this was behind us. We stared, blindly. Some of us left, already crying too hard to give their names to the bumbling, apologetic administrator at the door. Some of us stayed, stupidly resolute in our belief that this test could make us forget what had happened the night before.

All I remember is that I wrote about fire.



Robert Bodor

# Untitled

Alexandra Gutowski

You kept attempting to tell me about the shakes you got at night

*How you knew it was a disease,*

*but couldn't tell where it started and you stopped*

*How you weren't afraid of cops,*

*but needed to hide when they drove by last night*

*How you want to pay tuition,*

*but couldn't stop buying these maps and old cars*

*How you had tried accepting change,*

*but had no wisdom to know the difference*

but when you told me about shakes i only saw you picking me up from pre-school and letting me ride shotgun and lifting me onto the counter in the dinner by the jetty and ordering vanillas for us both



Wendy Qian

# I'm Home

Maya Booth

After midnight, Mom can hear me in the next room  
washing my hands with the soap she bought  
which I swear smells just like Fruity Pebbles.  
She'll have been listening for the sounds that I'm home.

They didn't call to see where I was  
or when I'd be back. The trust feels  
scratchy, not foamy soft and cool as I let it  
run over my hands, testing its weight.

Relieved, she'll let her eyes close quietly,  
the only part of her body still immune from sleep,  
as the drain opens and the day's dirt gurgles away.  
The last of her satellites are safe and accounted for.

Mine is now the only light left on in the house.  
I perch on the bed and survey the mid-motion mess,  
a guilty queen over her ruined kingdom,

inhaling with eyes closed the cold cereal scent of clean hands.

# Monday on Mulholland

Madeleine Wolf

“Hey pretty girl, time to wake up.”

—The Cowboy, *Mulholland Drive*

Mulholland Drive and it's gray outside  
Somber air over the canyon  
It is just like in the movies

We are quiet now and I write poems in the fog in my head  
and think of lies to tell my mother

She says she wants To Visit  
to see her baby girl who has  
lost her twanging prairie accent  
who has streamlined into a real woman  
with a tan  
just like in the movies

But I speak softly and say Mama  
Don't come  
and I talk like a little girl, like her China Doll  
coming down the stairs in the morning  
with curly hair in a flurry around my face  
with rosy cheeks and my nightgown

You are beautiful she says  
I am broken, but I don't say that

Gray over Mulholland  
and the Hollywood sign,  
but who would ever build a road like this

where the houses spill over the hill  
I know how they feel—  
Any moment I will collapse and plunge over  
the majestic letters into your city of dreams,  
of human detritus waiting to be interred.

Do you know that I loved you?  
But love is only in the movies

I've got to wake up  
We are about to drive right over the edge

What would my mother think of her little girl  
who hates herself this much  
that she is willing to close her eyes and simply wait  
to be exhumed from this chintzy city of falling  
flaming  
careening stars



Casandra Campeas

## A Moment in Summer

Lisa Storc

Margaret sat on the porch staring at the bottom of a glass of what used to be lemonade. She had tipped the cup up, letting the sweet drink flow into her mouth and drown her tongue with flavor before she swallowed. Margaret closed her lips over the edge of the glass to look inside. She could see her aunt Lily through the transparent glass, looking more wobbly than she remembered but with the same tight bun atop her head. This distraction was enough for Margaret to forget about the ice melted together at the bottom, and when it dislodged to fly toward her she did not have a chance to stop it.

The ice hit her upper lip and tickled her nose before falling to the ground. Margaret scooted closer, not caring how her new summer dress she had only worn twice dragged on the ground, and looked at where the ice had fallen. The porch floorboards, which were always a light and ashy gray from years of use, turned dark under the ice. She gasped to see a pool of color spread, like a moving shadow dependent on something other than the sun.

Slowly the ice cube got smaller, disappearing into the wood. Margaret clutched her glass as the circle of dark brown—or was it black?—turned into a bean-shape. She had never thought much of the porch, with its creaking boards and dirty look no matter how many times it was swept, but now it seemed *alive*. Even after the block of ice was gone, she could see the stain of color.

As Margaret watched, and her aunt Lily took a long drink from what looked like iced tea but smelled sharp and almost bitter, the odd shape of color began to disappear. It could not last, like most wonderful things, but Margaret watched until not even a pin point of vibrancy was left.

This broke her trance, and as her heart longed after that same brightness of color that came from something colorless her hand reached into her glass and grabbed for another piece of ice. “A lady does not touch her drink with anything but her lips,” Aunt Lily said automatically, but it was too late. Margaret had the ice in her fingertips; she smiled triumphantly as cold lemon-smelling water dripped down her hand. It was turning her fingers pink, then red. The same magic change she had seen before now happened to *her*.

The girl brought the ice cube to the wood, smiling as the first drop of water hit the porch. Color again came to the ashy wood, and Margaret wondered if she could control this magical phenomenon. Slowly, so that the color would not get scared and turn up slightly dull, she dragged the ice down. Delighted to find a line, she looked to her aunt to share.

“I don’t know why you go on wasting your drink,” Aunt Lily said, her lips in a thin line of disapproval. Margaret wanted to press the ice cube to those

lips, so that they would look more cheery. Instead, she dragged it in slow lines, trailing water along the old porch floor to form a lonely “M.”



Robert Bodor

# Spell It Like a Lawn Gnome

Liz Carnathan & Madeline Wyse

You are no friend to me.

You are my best friend,  
You are my only friend!

He's huge with no head—  
HUGE MAN  
NO HEAD  
(alphabet soup)  
Get back on the nostrill!

Fair square  
four square  
foreswore:

Ski through the woods of your dreams.



Robert Bodor



# I wear rose-tinted lenses

Ben Fish

*On Rosh Hashanah it is written,  
On Yom Kippur it is sealed.*

I wear rose-tinted lenses.

The sun streams light of fiery vermilion  
Showers sprinkle droplets of pink lemonade  
The shadows that find me at night are deepest chardonnay  
And women's skin is unblemished coral.

The paintings on my wall all pixelate into little red dots  
I try to pick up the pieces and it rains blood on the floor.  
The ideas in my head find scarlet jags of glass, and I weep primrose tears.

I like to think that Plato didn't wear glasses.  
We thought he merely had poor vision, peering into the unadulterated dark.  
But those fuzzy images were shapes to him, and  
The shapes were the sun, and  
The sun was God.

God, on the other hand, wears lenses of all the colors all at the same time.  
Aquamarine and ocher float into His head already composed around some  
vision,  
Hidden inside the beams of sunlight that Plato had peered up at.

I want to find colors like that.  
I want to find Louis XIV's velvet purples  
Van Gogh's starry blues and blacks  
And the only reds and greens in the universe that can't fade to unhappy  
brown.  
It is so difficult –  
As I age, I forget more and more that I am even wearing glasses.

Now, I am supposed to repent,  
But I do not want to repent for the sins of my rose-tinted lenses.  
I want to see beyond the hale of pink,  
But it is such an uneasy feeling,  
When you are told, told, that it requires the very man who so jealously

guards each and every Color.

My fate, though, despite my unease, is not yet carved as colorless cuneiform into the marbled gray of the past.

I ate the golden honey and yellowed apples, and I know they are not, cannot, be roses.

I see the gilded cut-outs on my walls, and I know they are Plato's ideas.

And I know, I know, there will always be another Yom Kippur.



Robert Bodor



Patrick Liu

## sailing

Savina Velkova

foot on white surface    rope in hand—we  
are the feet and hands    of the fish men  
who roam the ocean

eyes blinking salt    hair, nipples hard to the  
touch of the breeze    please remember to say  
a prayer in your soft    morning bed

fair winds are more than giants    blowing  
in our faces    what we are doing  
resembles life    is quite serious

# How He Got Lost

Ray Serrato

All I wanted to do was take the kid outside for a talk. The kid needed something like that because he was getting outta line. If you ever were with a woman who had kids of her own, you know the kind of kid he is. Talks back to his mom and makes her cry and doesn't respect nobody. Then when you say something the kid just looks at you like you ain't shit and you know that he's thinking, You. Ain't. My. Daddy. Goddamn kid.

So when I told the kid, hey, let's go for a walk, he just looked at me like I was stupid and said, What for?

I said, we need to have a talk, you and I, and I walked outside and waited for him to come along. From the look on his face I could tell he was afraid. I think he thought I was gonna kick his ass or something. I said kid, loosen up, we're just takin a walk. I woulda never beat up a kid his age, but come to think of it, maybe I shoulda. I wished someday he'd come home beat up by one of the neighborhood kids, but it never happened.

You know, we're a lot alike, I said to the kid, but he didn't answer right away. He was looking straight ahead with his hands stuffed in his pockets. The alley was dark and there were people milling in the street. The neighborhood was the kind of place where you always saw people in the street, drinking from cans in paper bags, smoking cigarettes or dope, just standing around doing nothing. There were kids all over the place, going barefoot from one apartment block to the next.

You think you're like me? the kid said with that smirk of his. He had a real soft face, girlish even, and liked to smirk at people like he was better than them. How do you figure?

Well, for one thing, we have the same birth date.

This shut him up and he just kept walking with his head down. He lagged a little behind, trying to annoy me no doubt. I wasn't gonna let him piss me off that easy though.

You're a Taurus and I'm a Taurus, I said. We're bulls, ya see, so we butt heads.

He didn't say anything, just kept on smirking. What I woulda gave to wipe that little smirk off his pretty face, but I couldn't take him for a walk and then come back with the kid all beat up. I'd have his mom sobbin all over the place and acting up and then I'd have to deal with her too and who knows what woulda happen. Somebody might've called the cops, or maybe she woulda herself, and I was still on parole after all.

I don't see how we're alike at all, the boy said.

When I was growing up, I didn't have no daddy either, I said.

I have a dad.

I looked around real dramatic like and said, I don't see your daddy nowhere.

He maybe met his daddy three or four times, back when he was younger and I first started to come around. I was outside one of these times his daddy came by. He was some big shot worked over on the other side of town, a factory manger or something like that. He picked the kid up with a real nice car of some kind, sleek and beautiful like a girl in a little dress. When he first drove up, I thought maybe the man getting out would walk over to me with one of them giant sweepstake checks and I was finally gonna be outta this dump, but it didn't happen. The man stayed by his car and yelled up at me, Is this the Johnson residence?

I said, What's it to you? and looked at him real hard. He had on a pressed shirt and a tie with stripes all over it. By now I had figured he was just trying to sell something or was some kind of bill collector. The man started to open his mouth to say something, but then the old lady came outside with the kid and shot me a mean look; it was the kind of look she gave me when the social workers came by and the house was all cleaned up and we had to sit ten feet apart pretending like I was her long lost brother or something. She started talking with the man over by the car and it was then I started to realize just who he was. I'd seen a picture of the kid's daddy some years before when the old lady and I first met. He looked almost exactly the same, except now he had on some real nice clothes and that magazine-ad car by his side.

The kid was saying, I have a dad.

Well, I said, sure is hard to see when he ain't never around.

So what. I still have a dad.

He was such a little smart-alec, this kid. I said, Look, I don't wanna be your goddamn daddy is what I'm trying to tell you. I got two kids of my own elsewhere.

I'm real glad for you, he said.

Me and you, I said, we need to start seeing eye to eye cause I'm getting about done with this shit.

We were coming to the end of the alley and I thought I'd take him over to the liquor store and buy him a coke or something. He slowed down some more and started to kick rocks around the street. He was looking at the ground when he said, You wanna know what it is—it's that with my mom, I mean...I don't like how it is. How it is with my mom.

What'd you say? I didn't hear you. Say it again.

He said it again and I said, What's that? You need to look at me when you're talking.

But he didn't say anything after that, just kept looking at the ground and

kicking rocks around the street.

Let me ask you something, I said to the kid. You never had a dog, did you?

He shook his head.

When I was a kid, I had a dog. I didn't have no daddy, but I had a dog. He was just a little mutt I found in the street one day, some poor dog somebody had got lost and probably didn't want anymore. See, if you ever had a dog, you would know when they're just puppies like that they go to pissing and shittin all over the place and when they do that, in the house or someplace, you gotta hit 'em.

You gotta teach that little dog what's right and wrong. You gotta do that cause you love that dog. You love it so much that it hurts you and it hurts that little dog too, cause it doesn't act right and you gotta show it how to.

Just then a car turned down the street and headlights went across both of us. It got bright enough to light up a whole room, then the car went by and the dark alley swallowed us back up and for a minute all I could see were the kid's milky eyes swimming in his head.

Do you get what I'm sayin? You do it cause you really love 'em.

Well, the kid said, I never seen any love like that.

What should I have said to that kid then? He didn't know the first thing about love, about how it felt, or what it looked like—when you were locked up and all you could see of it were letters in the mail from a woman you only saw behind glass, a woman you wanted to take care of, but couldn't cause you were in here and she was out there and you were in here cause of her, cause of what you wanted to give her—and cause of what you didn't want to, but sometimes gave to her anyway, on account of how she could be sometimes, when she said the things she said, when she got outta line. He didn't know about these things; he was just a kid. He didn't know what it was like when his daddy left, when he was just tall enough to reach the countertop and his mom was just learning to be alone and I came along and tried to take care of them both, driving trucks across the country, back when his mom and me were so in love we could hardly ever be apart and she'd even go with me to work. There's nothing like having a woman in the cab next to you while you drive those big rigs. I could drive all night with her next to me, those long pale legs lighting up the dark. One time we were in Colorado and near the truck stop there was a river or something. We could hear it bubbling in the dark and his mom, she says to me, Let's go take a swim. But I wouldn't do it. I said, You're absolutely crazy lady.

We stumbled to the river in the dark and she undressed and walked right into the blackness. That was the most beautiful thing I ever saw, her white naked body and the moon and the running water, like all this black oil. But

she could be a real bitch too and she had a way of talking to you that wasn't no way a woman should talk to a man, especially one who was locked up. I couldn't let a woman like her talk to me however she wanted. She was like this, who needed a talking to now and then.

It don't matter, I said to the kid. It ain't none of your business what all goes on between your mom and me.

Not anymore it isn't, he said. And fuck you man.

I was going to grab him then, but he started running. I started calling his name, but he was already going down the street, running into the traffic, and all I could see was his dark body in all those headlights. That was the last time I saw the kid.



Cassandra Campeas

# Untitled (excerpt)

John Maidman

XI.

I was beaten by a bowl of yogurt today  
blueberries left in a creamy culture  
were too hard to swallow  
It was stupid

You've got a towel wrapped around your head  
that raises up your eyebrows like mountains  
steam from out of the bathroom makes it warm  
but fails to blur the air in my memory

I don't recall what look was on your face  
or how you moved or what we said  
I know your face so well though  
I imagine you were glad to see me

This second hand chair is too wide for one  
My neck cramps when I try to lie in it  
And with skinny shoulders draped over its arm  
It's as uncomfortable as squeezing side by side

With every day I see the day before  
More pale since then for all past suns were brighter  
With every night I will forget my dreams  
The joyous colors of an impossible sky

XII.

there's a giraffe who lives with me  
his name is frederick  
sometimes frederick will reach his long neck across the dinner table, reach-  
ing for prunes  
I don't like prunes but sally, the awful matron makes me eat them every  
night  
when sally isn't watching, I take prunes off of my plate and feed them to  
frederick  
under the table  
frederick always smiles with his stupid giraffe face



I slap frederick right in his stupid giraffe face  
you never listen to me frederick I say, I shout  
frederick stop eating my prunes, I didn't give you permission  
he doesn't listen so I hit him again

XIII.

I'm not all I'm cracked up to be  
He said, smiling on the outside  
I'm not either, said she  
And laughed 'til she cried  
Fist in mouth they strode  
Losing daylight hours  
And track of time

XXI.

UNFREE YOUR MIND IN THE SPIRIT GARDENS OF TOMOR-  
ROW!!!  
The sign says  
I'm reading it

Two weeks later I walk into the lobby of a hotel  
It's a quarter past  
Missed introductions

Hello my name is unimportant  
I'm here to learn and to forget  
I've lost my way but found my path  
Welcome to tomorrow  
Welcome to neverland

My bed is not a bed  
It's a mattress  
I don't sleep

My roommate and I make love on the hard floor every night  
She says she's never been with a heterosexual man before  
All her old boyfriends were fags  
Indoctrination is the word of everyday

Raining outside  
Haven't been there in a while

Window is a reminder that I don't know what's real

I consent

I consent to not caring or wondering, wishing or imagining

I am one of you

I am one with you

I am not

You are not

We are

Where are we?

Unfree

Here in the spirit gardens of tomorrow



Christina Bejjani

# In the Place Where Apples Grew

Hanna Levin

In the place where apples grew we wept, for now it was empty. They had taken all the fruit and put it into perfume bottles and shipped it to the hungry women at the stores. It began here, but it ended there. And so, we cried.

Matthew collected our tears in his thermos. He said he liked to watch the water stand perfectly still at night. But they took all the water too. Mother said soon we won't be able to cry; soon there'll be no more tears. She said we only have so many.

I remember when mother's warning became our truth. After they had left our orchards bare, they discovered the butterflies. The hungry women wanted those as well. So their men came and captured them all and made them into earrings for the women to wear. How lovely, they would say, how marvelous. The butterflies had left our land for theirs, but sometimes I swore that I could hear them whisper to me when I sat in the place where apples once grew. They told me they were sore from standing so still all day. They told me they wished to fly. I tried to console them, but I could not respond.

That was the next thing they stole: my voice. Mother's too. And then Matthew's. We learned to speak with gazes, to understand each other's heartbeats. But the momentary sparkle in mother's eyes could not replace the stories she told every night before bed. Listening to Matthew's pulse could not replace the games he created on those warm afternoons where we wallowed in the tall grass by the creek. And so we began to write. When they discovered our papers and our pens, they took our hands.

They didn't try to steal Mother's life, but they did. How old she grew in those months, how quickly she aged. When they took Matthew, she withered away and fell into the earth.

In the place where apples grew I wept, for now my heart was empty. They had taken all that was sweet and beautiful and childish and wise and shipped it to all the hungry women at the stores. Although I was now hungry, I knew they were not yet full. Then, there were no more tears.

# Samuel

Cait Powell

poor Samuel, standing at a sink with my clothes in your hands.  
I have come not to love you but to show you all my remorse.  
I am a naked woman spread on your bed to be painted  
and either your feet have grown or your shoes have shrunk, Samuel.

in this deep carolina town my only regret is that I do not regret  
that I am not holding you. when I awake in you I am buried  
in christmas, but soon january eats at my heart  
like a heart attack three hundred and sixty four days of the year.

(poor mother: she waited by the door for the world to come clean.  
she waited for soft white December snow but it did not come,  
not in this carolina town.)

I stayed in that car with you until you learned to sleep through holidays  
and I celebrated with my lips to foggy windows  
and your hands on the rick-rack of my spine like you were pretending  
I was someone else.  
poor Samuel: your feet are too large for your shoes  
and your arms for your sleeves.

(poor mother: I leave her by a snowy window that is snowy  
only in my heart, and I promise I will come back  
after the holidays.)

Samuel washed my mouth out with soap and his hands were ashy.  
my eyes were wet and clear.

poor Samuel, standing at the sink with no clothes in his hands.

## Map making

Savina Velkova

In a cellar under my bed,  
you dig into a wooden globe  
to find inspiration to live.  
Outside the trees shout to each other, “you and I, we know time”  
but you don’t know.  
You haven’t eaten for a week.

You’ve propped the door with old  
safari photos and laid the floor  
with band-aid waste  
and in the darkness you carve into the faces of the continents  
promising to find it soon, coming  
up to let me know you almost got it,  
going back before I’ve had a word.

You dig deeper still.  
You cut yourself and a sea  
becomes Red,  
lick the wound and in the bed I lick my wounds—  
my sea is always Black.  
Dig deeper still.

You carve carve carve  
into the bark of Europe  
and my euro heart jumps.  
You peel away the Balkans and empty your bladder in the closest river.  
I go down on my knees, I knock,  
I draw a picture of the bed and slip  
it under but there is no more  
room left on your map—  
you’ve carved out all the beds.

The bed is now in danger of extinction  
and I take responsibility for keeping  
it safe, although I do expect  
you in the night with fishtail chisels and knives, wanting to carve it away.  
You say the bed ties up the hands:  
whose hands?

The bed becomes extinct.  
I am skeptical of your skills.  
The line between creation and destruction is thinner than the borders  
on your map  
and just as changeable.

One day you carve the shape  
of a flower and bring it up in an  
empty shape of a vase.  
You and I, we are so proud of you.  
And when I am away you carve a lion and leave it on the bed  
(you leave the bed untouched?)  
and I come back surprised

you've left the bed untouched  
and when I look into the lion shape  
I see my carved-out self.



Nicola Parisi

# Passwords

A Claremont Colleges Literary Magazine

Volume 11 Issue 1 • Fall 2010

