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Isabella Esser Munera
Ursinus College

Rayna Nunes
Ursinus College


Blaise Laramée
Ursinus College

Chukyi Kyaping
Ursinus College

Bobbi Stone
Ursinus College

See next page for additional authors

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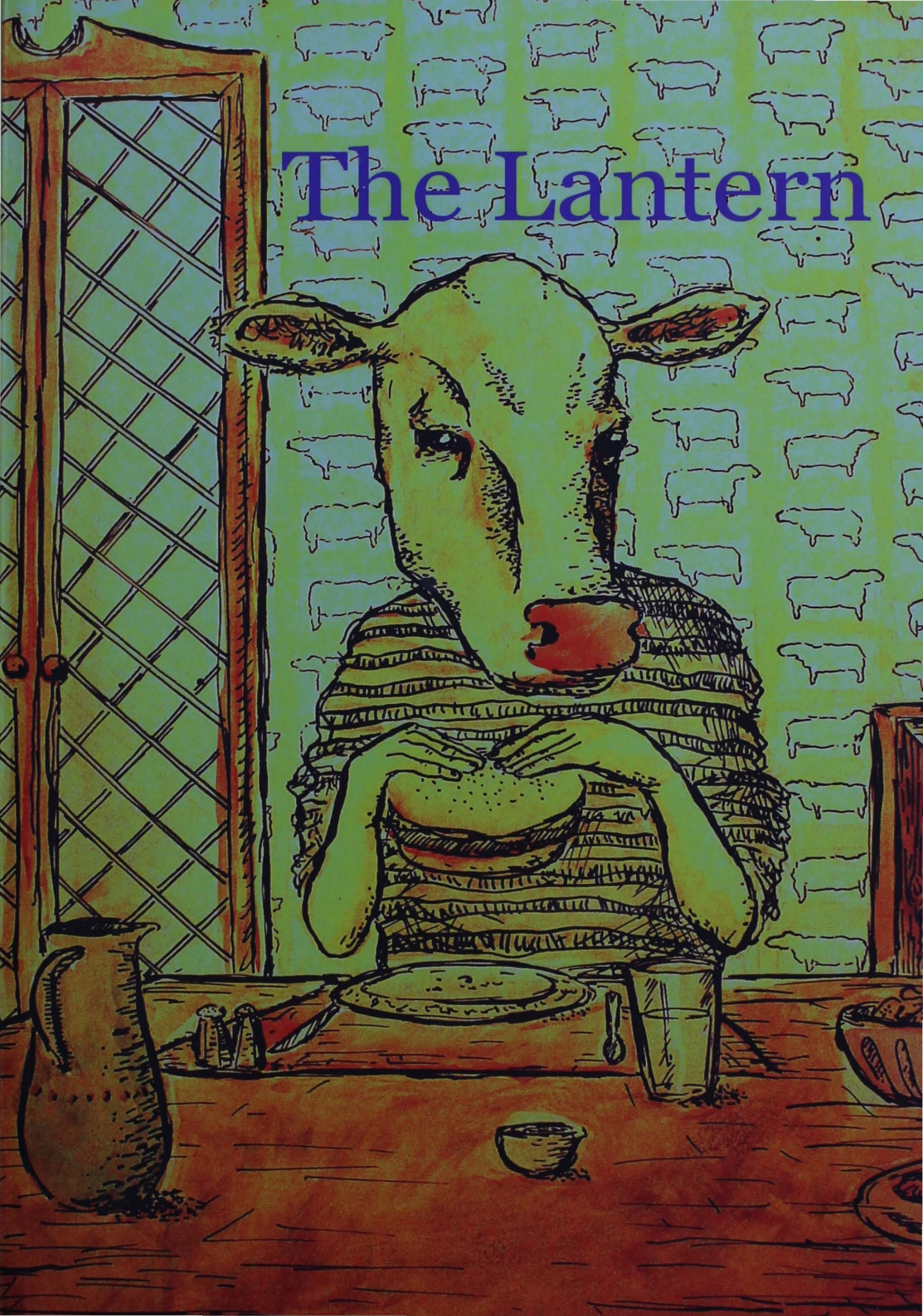
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Authors

Isabella Esser Munera, Rayna Nunes, Blaise Laramee, Chukyi Kyaping, Bobbi Stone, Erica Gorenberg, Anne Rus, Dana Kluchinski, Arthur Robinson, Emily Duffy, Jane Lee, Leah Garrity, Brian Thomas, Michele Snead, Melanee Piskai, Chloe Kekovic, Kevin Moore, Codey Young, Dominick Knowles, Richard Schulz, Quinn Gilman-Forlini, Collin Takita, Amanda Sierzega, Mara Koren, Epiphany Summers, Caitlin Jackson, Benjamin Jones, Joshua Hopkins-Desantis, Rebecca Galarza, Kelsey Knowles, Aubrey Atkinson, Michael Heimbaugh, Sophie Zander, Kendal Conrad, Nora Sternlof, Henry Willshire, Elijah Kineg, Joshua Hoffman, Maxwell Bicking, Andrew Tran, Arthur Robinson, Nicolas Shandera, Grace Buchele Mineta, Meaghan Geatens, Nina Petry, Sean Dolan, Kayla Sallada '17, and Sam Cermignano

The Lantern





THE LANTERN



**URSINUS
COLLEGE**

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Cover

"Nebuchadnezzar" by Blaise Laramée

Watercolor and pen. Inspired by Daniel 4:16, "Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him."

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Poetry Prize – Judge: Kristen Sabol

Creager Prize – Judge: Peter Perreten

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Editor's Note

Putting *The Lantern* together is never an easy process, and I'd like to take some time to thank all of the people who made it possible through their hard work and dedication. First, thank you to all of my dedicated staff members for reading hundreds of pages of submissions and for your commitment to quality and diversity. Thank you to all of my editors for always keeping everyone engaged and on task, for answering my many emails, and for meeting those stressful deadlines. Thank you to Dr. Volkmer for answering every single one of my questions and for your never-ending guidance to the staff. And, of course, a huge thank you to the many talented writers and artists who have contributed this year; this publication would not exist without your skill and creativity.

And finally: thank you, readers, for continuing to support the publication of *The Lantern*. I hope you enjoy the incredible talent that the Ursinus community has to offer in these pages.

Julia Kelley
Editor in Chief

Prose Prize

Winner

“Colored Pencils” by Nora Sternlof

Judge’s Note

“Colored Pencils” is a hauntingly lovely and carefully restrained piece of prose that artfully grapples with solipsism and loss on its own conflicted terms. Brief but resonating moments of lyricism – like the birds’ “drowsy autumn song” – and levity – like the interstitial peanut gallery of Jeremy’s goofy little love notes – pierce the lucid ambience of this sad, thoughtful, and compellingly complex meditation on self, trust, and friendship.

Runner Up

“Touched” By Chloe Kekovic

Judge’s Note

“Touched” is a clever and introspective attempt to make sense of the weird moods of memory as traced back through the development of sexual self-consciousness. Even overlooking its raw guts and charm, its sincerity and candor give it real staying power and make it one of the most memorable prose pieces submitted this season. This piece can be found on page 43.

Sean Neil ‘08 is a humor columnist, fiction writer, photographer, and recent alumni of the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities (MAPH) at the University of Chicago. He owns and manages a small independent photography business based in Bucks County, where he currently lives.

Colored Pencils

Nora Sternlof

We walked along the trail, her a little ahead, me lagging behind to take in the October day. The leaves were huge and bright, with light clinging thickly to their undersides. The sky above was blithe and blue, but under the trees we walked in a haze of golden light.

No one kept the trail up most of the time. We had to step over bulging roots and through vines that clawed at our jeans. In some places the trail disappeared entirely, but we always knew where we were going. And I liked the disarray, how it kept away runners and bikers. It was ours. Mine and Laney's, ever since we were little kids carrying sticks to hack away vines, pretending to be explorers. We were like the only people in the world. Just us and the scuffling squirrels and the birds with their drowsy autumn song.

"Olivia..." Laney turned back to wave me onward.

I looked at her. She was wearing a black hoodie with the bones of a skeleton printed on it, bright white. The zipper went all the way to the front of the hood- if she zipped it up fully, she could cover her face with the image of the skull. The hood was down, but it was still weird to look at her, swaddled in an image of her own bones. The sweatshirt was way too big for her anyway. The ribcage began just above her waist.

"I wish you wouldn't wear that all the time," I said, shaking my head. "It freaks me out."

It was his hoodie, of course- Jeremy's. Not a Halloween costume either. He'd worn it everywhere before he'd given it to Laney a week ago, and she in her turn had worn it wherever she could since. A teacher had forced her to take it off at school, ignoring her insistence that there was nothing in the handbook to say she couldn't wear it. "No appreciation of love or style," I'd said when Laney complained, and she'd laughed. Then she'd sighed, and all day I'd seen her looking toward her locker where she'd stuffed the hoodie, waiting for the moment when the bell would signal the end of our eighth-grade day and she could grab it along with her

books and pull it on as soon as we were on the bus and out of the teacher's sight.

Laney grinned. "Well, I like it."

"It's very unsettling," I told her primly. "It's morbid."

She stuck her hands into the pouch of the hoodie, looking dreamy. "Death's the natural end of life. It's always around us. People would be better off if they weren't so scared to face reality." She began to sway back and forth. "Anyway, the human skeleton is a beautiful thing."

"Is that what he says?" Before Jeremy, no one had put words in Laney's mouth. But she quoted him like he was Socrates.

She didn't bother to answer. Instead she swayed for a few moments more, then stopped and shot me the slow conspirator's smile I had always loved. "Besides, it smells like him. Here." She pulled the hood away from her neck, offering it for me to smell.

I sniffed obligingly and shook my head. "I don't know if I know what your boyfriend smells like."

She laughed and ran ahead again, and I watched her mane of dark brown curls move with her. Laney had always had long hair. When we were kids, she refused to cut it, or even brush it most days, and it was a tangled mass that hung halfway down her back. I'd envied it then, and complained to my mother, who'd kept my light, thin hair cut to my ears. "Laney's mother should take care of that poor girl's hair," my mother would say, at least until we were in fourth grade and Laney's father died, suddenly, so that no one expected it and even the doctors couldn't say what had happened. Laney went quiet for months, barely even talking to me, and if her hair was wilder than ever it was the least of anyone's worries.

The fact was that I did know what Jeremy smelled like. I'd noticed the cigarette stench on him the first time the three of us had met, over the summer at Dana Simpson's bonfire, when he couldn't take his eyes away from Laney and she couldn't take her eyes away from the ground. They'd exchanged cell phone numbers that night, sitting side by side on a stump a little away from the rest of us. I'd sat staring into the flames and knocking my heels together and resenting my mother for saying I couldn't have a cell phone until

high school. Not that I would have wanted to talk to someone like Jeremy. But I hated the idea that he could call Laney from this tiny personal thing he kept in his pockets and scratched his initials in, and could call her standing alone in the middle of the woods if he wanted, or from his bedroom in the dead of night. I could only talk to her on the phone on my kitchen table when no one else was using it.

I knew what Jeremy looked like, too. Laney had told me she loved how tall he was because it made her feel safe, but most people were tall to Laney, who just made it over five feet. And he was a year older than us, in high school already, so he should have been tall. He was strong, too, she claimed, even though he was skinny. She said he held her like he would never let go. I didn't see that. What I saw was his buzz of hair the deep red of cough syrup. I saw the spray of acne and razor burn on his sharp jaw. I saw how his teeth were always a little yellow, and I thought about the school's DARE program and the effects of nicotine.

I sped up a little until we were walking beside each other. We continued that way for a little while until we reached the foot of the bridge. This was our place, a bridge that had once been part of the trail but had long been allowed to fall into ruin. The base was scuffed with rust the color of maple leaves and had loops of gray illegible graffiti. Red vines twined along the bottom. You could look through the bridge to a long stretch of pale grass and a distant shimmer of trees.

She leaned against the leg of the bridge, and reached into the pocket of her hoodie. "Did I show you the letter he wrote me?"

"I don't know," I said, bending to pick up a stick and tracing some graffiti with it. "There's so many."

"*This* one," she said, pulling a cluster of composition paper out and shaking it a little. "The one from Friday."

I hadn't read it, but I had seen him deliver it. Our school bus stopped to drop off a few kids right next to his house. Every weekday afternoon he came running to the bus while it stood idling to push a letter to Laney through the window. She'd take it from him and blow him a kiss, and he'd stand watching the bus until it

disappeared down the street. Besides her, I was the only one who ever saw the letters, and even I didn't get to read them all. I knew she loved them, maybe even loved him for them, but I hadn't realized she carried them with her in her pockets, like the hoodie wasn't enough of him to satisfy her when they couldn't be together.

The letter was in blue and green colored pencil, letters skinny and crooked, collapsing on each other and then suddenly leaping into capitals. I looked at the words: *I LOVE you, babe your amazing, I'm sitting in Math and I cant stop thinking about you...*

"Why are they always written in colored pencil?" I asked. "Why doesn't he use a pen?"

"It's for me." She had sat down while I started to read, and was hugging her knees to her chest and looking out into the shimmer of trees. "He likes to use blue and green because they're the colors in my eyes."

"He told you that?" I thought of art in third grade, the assignment where we'd had to do self-portraits of each other from memory, without looking at your subject even once. So many of us had been unable to remember the color of each other's eyes, using brown where we should have used green, green where the eyes were clearly blue. "It's so rare that we truly *see* another person," our art teacher had said, fingering the amber beads of her necklace.

"Well, I can't read his *mind*, Olivia," Laney said. A little annoyed but not annoyed enough to look at me. She was still gazing off like she was remembering something too wonderful for words. "Of course he told me."

"It just seems so- romantic." It would have been a nice thing to say if I'd been shrill with excitement, or soft and awed, or even a little jealous- if I'd sounded anything other than disbelieving. I looked back down. Three pages front and back. *Your the most beautiful girl I ever met. You allways look so sexy and you dont even know it, you make me CRAZY. Your the onley one who understands my heart.* He'd drawn a robot in the margins of one page, and an exploding planet on the top of another.

I tried to make up for myself. "How do his teachers never see him writing these?"

She turned to face me. "They don't care about him. The teachers over there only care about standardized test results, and they've got everyone in a little box. They never bother to get to know a person, you know?" Again the slow smile. "Their loss."

Is that why he can't spell? I wanted so badly to ask. I opened my mouth and shut it. "Teachers are the worst," I said instead. "Like Mr. Falco today, in history? He's such a fascist." I got ready to imitate him, as I often did. His voice was nasally and whiny and he was constantly infuriated, if not with us than with the state of the world as a whole. I considered my imitation of him one of my best- I had the inflections down. It always made Laney laugh.

Laney shrugged. "He's bitter." She picked up a rock and rolled it between her palms, then turned and flung it. "No one loves him."

"That's not all that matters," I said.

"What?"

"Having someone love you. That's not, like, everything in life."

She sighed and turned away from me again. "You wouldn't understand."

Yes, I would, I wanted to yell at her, I understand everything about you. I always had. I understood what food she liked, and her favorite desert, which was a root beer float with mint chocolate chip ice cream, and her favorite movies, which were *E.T.* and *Fly Away Home* and *Finding Nemo*. I'd understood her when she'd gotten in fights when we were little, pushing and whacking at boys twice her size when they tried to force her away from the swings, and I understood when we were older and she'd get in the faces of girls who talked about me behind my back. I understood when she wanted to be away from everyone and needed to walk down to the bridge with me, and then would be silent for a long time before she'd start to talk all of a sudden about something like God, or the meaning of life, or whether she could ever be a pilot like she'd always wanted. I understood everything except Jeremy, so why did he have to be so important all of a sudden?

“Are you and Jeremy having sex?” I asked finally. I’d be mature, if that was what she wanted. I’d ask that question, use that word that still felt foreign on my tongue, although as soon as it left my mouth I realized how scared I was of the answer. My hands started to shake a little, and I pushed them into my pockets.

She turned back to me and shrugged. “No. Not yet.” She shrugged again. “We will, though. Maybe after my birthday. He wants to.”

“That’s only a couple months,” I said unsteadily. At least they weren’t already. Maybe by the time it was her birthday he’d move away, or get a girlfriend his own age, or maybe Laney would wake up one morning and be the person she had always been and leave him herself.

“Yeah.” She began to play with the zipper of her hoodie, and then pulled it slowly up, hiding her face. “That’s not what’s important.” Her voice was muffled by the cloth. She pulled the zipper up all the way, until her face was obscured entirely and I was looking at the skull.

“Don’t *do* that,” I said. “I don’t want to talk to you when you’re like that.”

The skeleton shrugged. “You don’t have to.”

My throat felt hot and dry. Friends grew apart, your parents warned you about it the way they warned you about getting acne and having to change classes in middle school and getting offered alcohol at parties, telling you in advance so you wouldn’t be too shocked when it came. But parents didn’t get friends, because as far as I could tell they didn’t really have any most of the time. Certainly my parents didn’t understand me and Laney. We weren’t like friends on Disney Channel shows who got driven apart when the cheerleaders pick one of them to sit at their lunch table and not the other. We were real people, we were a thousand different complexities and braided together in more places than anyone else could ever know.

I had to prove that, in that very moment, so I reached forward and pulled down the zipper so I could see her, her pale face and her dark brows, the wild strands of her hair.

“What are you doing?” She swatted at me.

“What’s important?”

“You wouldn’t understand,” she said again.

“Stop *saying* that! Why wouldn’t I understand? *What* wouldn’t I understand; can you at least give me a chance? Just because I don’t have a boyfriend...”

“It’s not about *that*,” she said, her voice getting loud. “That’s what I mean, that’s what you don’t understand. It’s not about a boyfriend, or going on dates or something stupid like that. Or about doing stuff, I don’t care that much about that. You don’t understand because you don’t know what it’s like to have a person you can share everything with. You know, who really knows you.”

Maybe ours was just another friendship that grew apart and broke. Because that was the end, it had to be. We were quiet a long minute, the birds making low calls across the trees.

“Who understands your *heart*?” I said finally, as meanly as I could.

“Yeah,” she said. She didn’t look mad anymore. She looked cold and tired and sad. “That’s what it is. I mean—” She was earnest now. “I mean, I always talked to you. And that was good. But there are some things you wouldn’t under- some things you don’t know about. Just because they haven’t happened to you.”

Everything was so golden still. I looked at the shapes of rust on the bridge, trying to form them into letters, or animals. “Like what?” I asked at last.

“Like... having people leave you. Jeremy’s mom left him with his grandmother, did you know that? She’s an alcoholic, he said. She left him and his brother behind and went off with her boyfriend.”

I should have been sad then, and I did feel my breath catch, because of course I hadn’t known that. And later when I was by myself I knew I would imagine his life and score it to books I’d read about abandoned children and alcoholic mothers and feel a genuine sadness for him and guilt at myself. But right then I just wanted Laney to finish talking.

“So that’s like my dad,” she finished.

“But that’s *different*,” I said fiercely. Was that what he made her think, that they were the same, was that how he made her love him? “It’s not like your dad just left you. He died.”

“Yeah, but...” She had a little half-smile on her face, and her eyebrows were twitching back and forth. “I mean, he didn’t just keel over.”

“But...”

“I mean, he killed himself.” She shrugged. “Left me behind for *good*.” She’d been holding another rock; she turned and flung this one into the sky.

“He killed himself?”

And there were the words, and there was the silence, where she started to say something, looking incredulous, and stopped, and I did the same, and both of us realized that the other couldn’t be joking. She slid to the ground after a moment, and I stayed standing, feeling my shoulders shake and putting my hand to my face like I was checking for a bruise.

“You *knew* that.” She was looking ahead, stunned. “You... I know you knew.”

“They told us he just died.” My voice had never sounded so strange to me, so thin or raw. “At school, they told us.”

She looked up at me, laughing a little. “Well of course they did. We were so little then... But your parents, they-” I shook my head, like the last kid to know there was no real Santa Claus, and she slumped back down. “And I never- I never said the words, I guess.” She ran her hands down her legs. “But you knew, we talked...”

She might never talk to me again. She’d be right not to. So it wasn’t that friendships grew apart, it was that they were never there in the first place and you didn’t know when you were a dumb kid. Or you didn’t have any other options, until you got old enough to meet someone at a bonfire, and so you hung around someone who wasn’t your real friend until you met someone who could be. And then the other one got left behind, but why shouldn’t they, because they were never a friend, and maybe they couldn’t even be a friend, maybe they were stunted or warped somehow and it was beyond

them. Maybe they thought they were smart but were stupid, so stupid about everything that mattered.

"I'm so sorry," I said finally, my voice cracking and tears coming into my eyes at last. He'd done that. Taken his own life, as people said, but it wasn't his own. He'd had Laney.

Laney who looked at me now for a long moment, then reached out to me. "Pull me up," she said. And I did, taking her little hands in mine. They were dry and a little chapped, like they often were. "We never go past here, do we?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"Maybe we should. I used to have dreams about that. We'd walk and walk until we were so lost I knew no one would find us. Not for days. Not ever, even." She laughed a little. "And when I woke up I was never sure if they were nightmares or good dreams."

"We could try it," I said.

"The woods aren't big enough," she said. "Not now."

"Not ever," I said. "It wouldn't take long to find us."

She shrugged. "I didn't use to think anyone would look."

It would have been a good dream for me- a luxury dream, me and Laney away from my family, away from school, away from all the little irritations. Our place. But I would have woken up and groaned and said to myself that awake I wouldn't have been able to get five minutes to myself without my parents just about calling the police, or going in themselves and getting more lost than I was probably.

"You should invite him sometime," I said finally. "Jeremy. So he knows where to look."

Poetry Prize

Winner

“Strikes” by Isabella Esser Munera

Judge’s Note

Of a very impressive and promising set of poems and poets, I am pleased to recognize two works that have daringly discovered contemporary form as they seek to resolve the universal dualities of presence and absence, creation and destruction, black and white, freedom and constraint. The winning poem is undeniably “Strikes” with its rhythmic recognition of the void’s violently hypnotic fullness and the triumph of insight’s eventual emergence.

Runner Up

“White Interface” by Jane Lee

Judge’s Note

Honorable mention goes to “White Interface” for its colorful recomposition of that point in time where we stand now blinking as artists and as people embracing our early 21st century existence. This piece can be found on page 87.

Kristen Sabol ‘97 is an Alfred L. Creager ’33 Prize recipient and former Associate Editor of *The Lantern*, serving its staff between 1993 and 1997. She earned an M.A. from the University of Buffalo’s Poetics Program, studying under Charles Bernstein and Carl Dennis in 1999. Her academic work focused on digital poetic forms emerging in experimental LANGUAGE poetics. As a professional writer and journalist, Kristen advocates for socially disruptive technologies, most recently campaigning for personal robotics as Communications and Media Director for the National Science Foundation’s Quality of Life Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh. She is currently writing poems that blend artificial intelligence theory with dharma arts practices taught by the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University.

Strikes

Isabella Esser Munera

She said, "Stripes are akin to imprisonment," she said stripes were bars, she said bars were stripes she said doesn't it bother you, doesn't it drive you mad that the world is striped, imprisoned in the strips of shadows dangling off and on the edges of everything she said it is like there is a great, big, shifting cage that yawns and stretches across the world she said isn't it funny that to get rid of it you must turn off the light so that it's all shadow so that it's a cloak not a cage she said is it imprisonment then she said you can't do it the other way round, flood everything with light because that loans itself to shadow, she says shadows are stripes she says shadows stripe us she said shadows imprison us she says she is so impatient and would fling off their caresses she says don't you love it all glistening and full like a plump summer peach she said unmarred by splotches and the tall, thin, skeletal shadows of trees draping themselves across our sidewalks, our feet, as we walk over them the stripes they walk over us the shadows do she says I'm sorry, I've always seen the world as white and black it's wretched it's a curse she says we're striped, we're striped and she strips, naked in the sun she says, look, look I am holding the sun and the strip of shadow falls behind her and she does not see it.

Creager Prize

Winner

"Sea Glass" by Henry Willshire

Judge's Note

The familiar routine of a summer at the shore with extended family changes overnight into a new and challenging world for Ian in "Sea Glass." The author utilizes the shore setting and family dynamics to create a convincing, dynamic central character.

Runner Up

"9-14" by Michael Heimbaugh

Judge's Note

The speaker in "9-14" joins a distinguished tradition of writers musing about "ars poetica." In the end, this poet agrees with Archibald MacLeish who wrote: "A poem should be wordless/ As the flight of birds." This piece can be found on page 204.

Peter Perreten is professor emeritus in the English and Environmental Studies departments. He began teaching at Ursinus College in 1973, and for several years was faculty advisor for *The Lantern*. In his retirement he volunteers at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary where he works in the Native Plant Garden and is assistant editor of "Native Notes," a news journal for the garden.

Sea Glass

Henry Willshire

The back porch of his family's cottage opened up to the layer of rocks between the short row of houses and the beach itself. Ian had noticed that every year the winter storms shifted the sand and the rocks. The previous year, so much sand had been carried up that it looked like there was a stretch of desert running up to the ocean. But this year it seemed the opposite had happened; the water had pulled the sand all the way down again. The giant rocks that lined the beach stood exposed again, as did the millions of pebbles that seemed to emerge from the cracks between the larger stones and form a layer between them and the beach.

Ian hopped across the remains of what had once been a path of flat stones his grandfather had set up between the house and the water. He wasn't that good a swimmer, and even in the height of summer the water in Massachusetts remained frigid.

Instead, Ian took a walk up and down the beach. He looked out at the nearby jetty made of giant rocks like those on the beach. He remembered it being perfectly straight when he was a little kid, but the same storms that periodically moved the curtain of sand up and down the beach were slowly pulling the jetty out of shape. A rock that he used to sit and lean against had toppled over, one long flat side exposed to the sun.

As he stared up at the rocks from the beach, a pair of skinny arms emerged and grabbed ahold of one. They were followed by their owner, a girl in a red sweatshirt. She looked like she was the same age as he was, and her black ponytail stood out amongst the blue sky as her sweatshirt did against the brown and grey rocks.

She hauled herself atop one of the tall rocks that was still standing and let her legs hang down, kicking at air as she surveyed the beach. Ian watched her as she took in the water, the sand, and then him staring at her. Her eyes met his, and they stared for a moment. What was only a few seconds felt a lot longer, and then some sort of noise disturbed them. Ian recognized it as the sound of laughter and shouting from behind the girl, who turned away. What

looked like a swarm of younger brothers began to clamber up after her, and she turned to face them.

Feet kicking up clouds of sand, Ian turned and ran back to the house, a funny feeling in his stomach and a very hot one in his cheeks.

Ian forced himself to slow to a quick walk once he reached the cottage. He could still feel his heart pounding in his chest as he opened the door. His father was tapping away at his laptop just inside, and he looked over the top of his screen at Ian.

“How was the water?” his dad asked.

“Freezing, like always.”

“Too bad. Harbormaster’s report said this would be the warmest day this week.” His dad turned back to the computer screen, its glow reflected in his glasses.

Ian was about to keep walking, but changed his mind. He looked at his father, eyeing the balding spot on the top of his head.

“Hey Dad?”

His dad looked up again. “Yes?”

“I have a question.”

“Sure. What is it?”

Ian paused for a moment, and then took the coward’s way out. “Um, what are you working on?”

A grin stretched across his father’s face. “I’m plotting out a new route home. Ever since we got caught outside Green Harbor for two hours last trip, I’ve been looking out a way to bypass that without spending too much time on local roads. I really had to sit and think for a while, but I figured it out. We get off at Exit 12 instead of Exit 11, and then cut through Chief’s Quarry. It’s kind of hard to understand without visualizing. Come on over and take a look.”

“Um, uh, no thanks, Dad. Sounds cool though.” Ian continued past him without looking back. He grabbed a book from the table and went out the front door.

Ian was lounging on the hammock out front, alternating between reading and looking out at the curved road leading up to the house. It went in a large circle around the marsh that sat out front. Ian could see cars driving on the far side, and occasionally one passing by in front, but when they took the last narrow stretch of dirt road alongside the marsh they were blocked from his sight by the line of tall houses. They were newly constructed, having come in at the expense of knocking down many of the old houses that had once stood there, facing out to beach ahead of them. They were safely nestled in just the right spot between the marsh water and the ocean to avoid being flooded. His family had one of the few holdouts that had gone unmodified.

Ian put down his book altogether when he spotted his aunt and uncle's minivan on the far side. It was visible for a moment before it passed behind the houses, torn from his view by the curving road. When it reemerged again, it took only a few seconds to finish the trip and come to a halt at the end of the tiny driveway marked out with stones.

Ian stood up as his Aunt Lisa left the driver's seat and opened the passenger doors. His twin cousins shot out, running past their mother and heading up the stairs to the house, and Ian reached over and opened the door for them, out of fear that they might otherwise run through it. Aunt Lisa followed up a second later, arms laden down with bags of toys, snacks, and DVDs, and a camera hanging around her neck.

"Hiiii! Look at you! So tall now! All done with middle school and ready for high school! Just hang on, let me get a picture!" She managed to swing a hand free and snap a quick picture before Ian could react. "Oh, don't you make for a handsome photo! I'll see you inside!"

Ian was about to ask where his Uncle Dave was when he heard the sound of an engine roaring. Something flew past at the far end of the marsh, and a cloud of dust appeared behind the houses, before coming to a screeching halt right behind the minivan. Ian walked down the steps, and saw Dave dismounting his motorcycle.

Upon seeing Ian he grinned, his aviator sunglasses sitting beneath gelled hair and covering a tanned face.

"There you are, big man!" Dave grabbed Ian in a chokehold, rubbing a rough knuckle on his head, before releasing him and crushing him again in a bear hug. When Ian was released, he was gasping for breath.

"Hi, Uncle Dave."

That night after dinner, Dave grabbed ahold of Ian and brought him to the porch out front. The two sat facing the ocean, which reflected the stars overhead. Dave cracked open a bottle of beer.

"So, high school this fall, huh? Wow, man. Best years of my life. You excited?"

"I guess so, yeah."

"Damn you're growing up fast. You're practically a man already. You got a girlfriend yet?"

"No you know, not really, not exactly..."

"Why the hell not? You're a good-looking little dude."

"Well, I mean, uh, I never really thought about it before... I mean, I guess I wasn't really interested in any of those girls back at school..."

"Trust me, Ian; you're going to find them a lot more interesting come fall. They'll have developed some interest, if you know what I'm saying."

"Uh..."

"And you're going to need to get a head start on all those other guys, if you want to have a chance yourself."

"I am?"

"Sure. It's going to be a madhouse, trust me. That's why you can't hesitate. You have to make a move right away. So what you do, first thing, is find a pretty girl, and go right up to her and ask her out."

"Um..."

"That's the whole trick. You just gotta go and do it. You have to be confident. Women love confidence. More than anything else."

You just got to prove that you're the man. It's all attitude. And making the first move. You gotta remember that you only get one first impression, and if you mess that up you've lost your shot."

"Okay, but..."

"Don't worry about it, just trust me on this. You think Lisa and I got together because I the first time I saw her I stood around gawking? Nope, first thing I did was go up to her and introduce myself. Beat a couple of my buddies to the punch. Man, were they jealous..."

Ian slept in late the next morning. There was something about the salty sea air that just let him rest. When he finally rolled out of bed, it was because of the smell of bacon wafting into his room from the kitchen. Ian's dad was cooking breakfast while his cousins played with blocks in the living room. Whole cities were built and crumbled while Ian ate bacon and scrambled eggs.

The rest of the day passed quickly. Ian spent most of it watching TV, while his cousins ran around the house. After lunch he got roped into playing hide and seek with the two, and was forced to mediate an argument between the two over whether one had peeked or not. They proved unwilling to listen to him and Aunt Lisa came back inside from photographing the marsh just in time to take charge of the two before Ian had to come up with something, and his dad suggested everybody take a nice walk out on the beach before dinner.

No one even hazarded an attempt at swimming, as it was generally agreed that it wasn't worth the risk of hypothermia. The twins ran up and down the beach, looking at crabs in tide pools and the masses of dead and drying seaweed lying on the shore, brought in by the tides. Aunt Lisa chased after them snapping photos, while Ian stayed near his dad and his uncle, half-listening to their conversation as he scanned the beach.

"What I'm saying is, if the unions could lighten up a bit, maybe business could move forward a little," his dad said.

“Or maybe somebody needs to make sure the corporations give their workers a living wage,” Uncle Dave replied, with a beer in hand.

The two seemed to realize they were on the verge of a real argument, so Ian’s dad changed the subject.

“Dave, did I mention I worked out a way to get down the I-95 without taking that route by Green Harbor? It’s a lot quicker, shaves nearly thirty minutes off the trip.”

“I never mind the extra time myself. I like taking in the sights from the bike.”

Ian was about as interested in his father’s shortcuts as his Uncle Dave was, so he wandered away and found himself hunting for sea glass with the twins, having little else to do. The hunt soon became an outright competition. Ian was of the firm opinion that his cousins had an unfair advantage, being shorter and therefore having less far to look. He strained his eyes, seeking out bits of blue and green in the wet sand. He looked up for a second and saw a familiar flash of red. The girl was back, walking across the beach. She passed by where he stood, and he tried and failed to keep his eyes from following her.

She turned around and came to a halt a short distance down the beach from him. She seemed to be staring intently at a specific patch of sand. He made a determined effort to stare at the sand beneath him, but he kept finding himself glancing in her direction. He jumped when he felt a hand touch his shoulder. He looked up to see his dad and uncle, smirking at him.

“You should go talk to her,” Uncle Dave immediately advised.

“What? Why?”

“Because she wants to talk to you.”

“How do you know that?”

“She’s spent all this time wandering back and forth around here, so she’s clearly interested in something. And considering your dad and I are about three times her age, it’s probably not us. It’s got to be you, big man.”

Ian turned to his dad, “What do you think?”

"I dunno. Your uncle might be right."

"Of course I am. Ask her to go for a swim with you."

"What?! No, that's stupid!" Ian protested.

Aunt Lisa materialized behind him. "Say you need help finding sea glass. Tell her, 'Oh, I'm sorry, but my stupid family wants me to find this beach glass, can you help me?'"

"That's even worse!"

"You got a better idea?" Uncle Dave asked.

Ian did not, but he still refused to talk to her.

"It's gonna be your loss then. I can't see why you won't just go over there and--"

"Why don't we head inside now, let the twins take a rest for a bit?" Ian's dad interjected, and for a moment locked eyes with Uncle Dave. Uncle Dave shrugged and started walking towards the house, while Aunt Lisa gathered his cousins.

Ian's dad turned to him before leaving and said, "You can stick around for a little bit, if you want. You don't need to come back to the house yet, if you don't want to."

Ian started to follow the rest of his family, and then he looked back at the girl. She was standing close to the torn part of the jetty, tossing pebbles into the water. Her whole body turned as she reached her arm back and then chucked stone after stone.

Ian felt, rather than ordered, his feet to begin to turn around and start approaching her. His breathing got quicker and he became very aware of how there was now nobody else on the beach except for the two of them. His feet made a smooshing noise on the wet sand, and she turned around to face him. A few strands of hair had escaped her ponytail and they were being batted around by the wind. Ian spoke quickly before he had a chance to rethink what he was doing.

"I hope we didn't ruin the beach for you." He had no idea where that line came from.

"No, it's okay, you didn't."

She smiled as he picked up a handful of pebbles of his own and started tossing them. He stared at the water and the ripples his pebbles made.

"I'm Cassie."

Ian kept tossing stones, until he noticed she was staring at him. He stared back, dumbfounded.

"I'm Cassie," she repeated.

"Hi, Cassie," he mumbled.

"No, I'm Cassie. I told you my name, so now you have to tell me yours."

"Oh."

She nodded for him to continue.

"Oh, I'm Ian."

"Hi, Ian," she said, now willing to resume her own pebble-tossing. "So, where are you from?"

"That small house, between those two tall ones." Ian replied, pointing.

"No," she laughed, "I mean, where do you live?"

"Oh! I'm from New Jersey. What about you?"

"That big one." She pointed at one of the tallest of the converted houses.

"Hey! You know what I mean!"

"Yes, I do." She had a mischievous grin.

There was a pause as they started to stare at one another. Both of them tried to maintain a serious composure, but very quickly Cassie began to laugh, and then Ian did as well.

"Okay, okay. I'm from Connecticut."

"That is a big house, though. Does your family own it?"

"No, we're just renting it for the summer."

"Wow, your family must have a lot of money."

Cassie giggled. "No, my parents are teachers. They don't have a lot of money."

The two continued to talk for some time. Cassie was jealous of Ian because he was going to high school soon. She was only a year younger than him, but she thought her parents were so strict. They wouldn't even let her see the new Ryan Gosling movie just because it was rated R. Ian didn't mention the fact that he thought he might be frightened to see an R-rated movie.

As the sun started to go down, they found themselves sitting on one of the overturned jetty rocks, facing inland to watch it. Cassie looked out at the orange sky, and Ian turned and looked at her. She was short and skinny, her hands barely making it out of her sweatshirt. Her bare feet kicked around the sand in between the huge rocks.

Ian noticed the tag of her shirt sticking up from underneath her sweatshirt, at the back of her neck. Without thinking he reached to push it back in, but then he suddenly froze up. What was he doing? Was he just going to reach over and touch her? What would she say? What would she think? Wait, it wasn't that big a deal, was it? It didn't mean anything? He could just tuck it and be-

She turned to face him and he dropped his hand to the rocks so fast it hurt. She looked right at him and smiled. He noticed her eyes were bright blue. He felt something touch his hand, and then realized it was hers. Her head moved closer, and her eyes began to close. Ian could feel his heart about to explode out of his chest.

Then suddenly she stopped and her eyes went wide. He heard a noise behind him and he swirled around. Aunt Lisa was about a dozen feet behind them, holding her camera up while trying to maintain her footing on the rocks.

"No! Don't mind me! Just getting a photo of Ian for the family album! Just pretend I'm not here!"

Ian felt his face burning. "No! Go away!"

"Don't worry, Ian dear; just give me one second..."

Cassie ducked down behind Ian's back, staying out of sight.

"Go away, Aunt Lisa!"

"But the two of you make for such a pretty picture!"

"This isn't 'pretty'!"

"Now don't say that! The two of you look so cute!"

"No we don't!"

Cassie suddenly stood and offered a hasty "I should go" as she ran across the beach, her cheeks bright red. Ian was speechless and wanted to chase after her, but she was already entering her family's rental house.

Ian ignored his aunt's apologies and sprinted back to the cottage. His dad and uncle stood waiting, grinning, but Ian pushed past them. Uncle Dave followed and unleashed a barrage of questions.

"What's her name?"

Cassie. "Shut up." Ian mumbled. Dave grinned and slapped him on the back.

"Where's she from?"

Connecticut. "Shut up." He said a little louder.

"Does she have family here?"

No, they're renting. "I mean it, shut up."

"Is she staying long?"

I don't know! "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!"

"Is everything okay?" his dad asked, catching up. Ian ignored him and slammed the door to his room.

"What? Does she have a boyfriend?" Dave yelled after him.

Ian wouldn't allow anyone in for the rest of the night, and buried his face in his pillow. He hoped he would suffocate and die right there, but all that happened was that he drifted off to sleep. When he woke up the next morning, he walked straight through the house, out the back door, and out onto the beach.

He found himself heading back towards the rock where he had been sitting with Cassie the night before. He sat down and his hand felt its way into a pile of pebbles, and he began aimlessly tossing them at the ocean. A drop of water hit the rock, between his legs. He looked at it, then felt his face and realized he was crying.

When he looked up to aim the next batch of stones, he saw a figure making its way across the rocks towards him, coming from the direction of the cottage. As it got closer, Ian recognized his dad. He considered getting up and running, but couldn't summon the energy. Instead he stared down, determined not to acknowledge his father's presence.

When his dad reached him, he simply sat next to him. Ian forced his head down farther. They sat there for a while, the two of them, before Ian heard the sound of something hitting the water.

He looked up, and saw a rock disappearing underneath the waves, at the end of a trail of skips. His dad maintained silence, but searched around him, finding another thin, flat rock, and took care to aim it properly before releasing it. It skipped four times before going under.

Ian watched as his father continued to select rocks and skip them. After the sixth or so, his dad began to speak.

"Your Uncle Dave had some advice. He wanted me to tell you that there are 'plenty of fish in the sea.' That you just have to go find another. That you shouldn't even think about her anymore." He offered Ian one of the flat stones he had selected. Ian tried to imitate his father's toss, but he only managed a single weak skip, as his father continued talking.

"I think that's not the advice you want right now, is it?"

Ian shook his head.

"What happened back there?"

"I messed up! I got so mad at Aunt Lisa and then Cassie got up and she ran away! She must have thought that I thought that she was ugly! But she's not ugly! I think she's really pretty and I really liked her and now she's gone!"

He started tearing up again. This time he didn't try to hide it.

"I had one shot and I messed it up. You only ever get one shot..."

"That sounds like your Uncle Dave talking."

"Well it's what he said."

"Your uncle thinks he's got a way with women, but there's a bit of exaggeration there" He paused. "Did he ever tell you about how he started dating Aunt Lisa?"

"He said he was the first one of his friends to talk to her. He went right up and was confident and smooth and everything I wasn't."

Ian's dad snorted. "He likes to tell it that way. But you know what? He may have been the first guy to talk to her, but she was the only woman to talk to him. He never had a single date before her."

Ian wiped his face with the back of his hand. "Really?"

“Yep. So I’m pretty sure that despite what he thinks, he doesn’t know quite that much. Especially about women. And second chances.”

Ian felt his father give him a slight tap on his shoulder, and he looked up, following his dad’s gaze. Cassie was standing out on the beach, near where the two had first spoken. Ian looked to his father nervously.

“What do I say? How do I explain?”

“Well, ‘Hi’ is a good start,” his dad offered. He took off his glasses and cleaned them on his shirt. “After that? Well, you’re a smart man. I think you’ll figure something out. Now, I’m going to head back to the house. Your Aunt Lisa was talking about making a trip down to visit in a few weeks, so I want to tell her all about the new shortcut I found. She’s never made the trip before, so I’ll have to go over the route in detail. It’ll take some time, and all of her attention, I think.”

He paused. “If that’s all right?”

Ian gave a hesitant nod. His dad squeezed his shoulder lightly and stood up, and without looking walked back towards the cottage. Ian watched him go, and then turned his gaze back to Cassie. She was trying to skip rocks. Slowly, he stood and walked down towards her.

“Hi Cassie.”

She ignored him. So he started skipping rocks as well. He looked for flat ones, like his dad had, and took aim, carefully. He felt her eyes on him as he drew his arm back and then forward, and released it.

It went right under, without a single skip. Ian looked back at her, flustered. She still wouldn’t quite meet his eyes.

Without any better ideas, he played his last desperate card.

“Okay, this is really dumb. My stupid family needs me to find some sea glass. I can’t find it all on my own. Can you help me?”

He waited for her to say something, but she didn’t. Instead, she crouched down, staring at the ground. She picked up a piece of bright blue sea glass.

“Like this?”

Roundtrip

Quinn Gilman-Forlini

I'm in the backseat of the car. It's about a hundred degrees, and he won't let me open the windows. He's always trying to make me suffer, because of *her*. You see, she has this hair. It's gorgeous, but god forbid the wind should mess it up. I guess with her hair, with her loose red curls tumbling over her shoulders, she has every right to keep the windows rolled up. I can't figure out a way to describe this hair. It's thick and looks glassy and grainy, framing the angles of her high cheekbones. The color compliments her skin, pastel flushed with pink, and welcomes all kinds of light—even fluorescent, which makes most people look unflattering (looks unflattering on most people)—but especially the light we're in now, dry sun with a shiny glare from trying to radiate through the windows.

I've watched her in school while I huddled with other sophomore boys, whispering as she walked by even though we knew she was way out of our league. I've sat in the back corner of English class trying to answer as many questions as possible so she would turn around and look at me. Mostly, though, I've seen her in this car. She's always sitting in the front passenger seat, occasionally looking over at my brother, who's casually driving down the road, his shoulders curved into his chest. She's like the shot shock absorbers or the piece of gum embedded in the carpeting—a package deal if you want a ride.

I remember the day my brother got the car. It wasn't his birthday, or Christmas, or even Flag Day. He hadn't worked out a deal about the amount of money he would chip in for it—he didn't pay anything. He hadn't gotten his first good grade on a test, or kicked the winning goal in a soccer game, or even made it into the something-from-everyone art show. Instead, he'd walked into the kitchen one morning, where Mom and Dad were lazily leafing through the newspaper.

“You know what? I don't really need a car, if it's a burden for you guys.”

The next week he had the car.

He also had orders from our parents to cart me to and from school.

“Say, where are we going?” I ask him from the back seat, because he’s just passed the turn into our neighborhood. I ask him too loudly and too impatiently for my own good, but you can’t really blame me. Even my brain feels sucked of all moisture, and I just want to get out of this hothouse. The backs of my legs are sticky with sweat and they cling to the plastic seat covers. I feel like I’m molded from the seat, like the car is the hunk of stone an artist has so cleverly forms into muscle, bone, and fingernails. Sometimes I think it might be easier to be one of those statues, to be born out of a block of marble and have everything decided for you by an artistic genius. Like Michelangelo.

“You’re not going anywhere,” my brother says, letting me know that he’s not gonna admit he was too distracted by her that he missed the turn, and that the change in direction doesn’t mean I’ll be joining them, wherever they go after they ditch me.

“Of course he’s not,” she snaps, and to show the conversation is over she turns up the radio so loudly my toes are unwillingly bouncing inside my shoes. She talks about me like I’m invisible. I picture myself as a wisp of stale air, swarming around her and screwing with her magazine cover hair.

My brother immediately shows his approval and cranks the volume up a few notches more. Drum, drum, drum, his fingers tap the top of the steering wheel and form a pattern that’s way off the beat of the actual song, although you can tell he’s trying to get the right rhythm. He’s *that* musically untalented.

He did attempt to play the tuba in fifth grade. Watching him reminded me of a cartoon character blowing up like a balloon. His cheeks turned red and puffed out like a chipmunk, his nostrils flared, and his eyes started to water. Mom and Dad bought him a little golden pin in the shape of the instrument, and it had fallen carelessly under his dresser. I had found it shortly after his fourth tuba lesson when I was taking a rare opportunity to snoop around in his room. I’d worn the pin at dinner that night, and he’d gotten

whiny about it and Mom made me give it back to him. I think he lost it in a couple of days, along with the tuba lessons.

“Do you mind turning that music down? I think I’m getting a headache.” Which is true, my insides are throbbing against my skin, and it feels like the drums are being played on my forehead.

They eye each other wearily, like they’re parents dealing with a difficult kid they wish wasn’t their problem. “Mmmm,” he says, completely disinterested. She doesn’t even acknowledge me. She swings her arms up over her head and pumps them up and down to the rhythm of the song. She’s attempting to dance with her upper body. She heaves herself forward, backward, side to side, twisting her torso, bobbing her head. She’s terrible at dancing, but she’s so pretty that she can pull off anything, no matter how horrible anyone else might look doing the same thing. Her hair is a different story. It has a mind of its own, and it is flying around her, sloshing about her soft cheeks and small ears. That hair knows how to dance.

I watch my brother melt all over as he catches sideways glances at her choppy movements. Despite it all, he still loves her. Well, they call it love. I bet he would chop down a forest with a toothpick to get to her, while she lay helplessly praying with that hair flowing all about her on the other side of the wood.

I remember the first day she showed up at our house. I had been pondering whether to memorize the Gettysburg Address for extra credit in History, or order some pizza. I chose the Gettysburg Address. And my brother brought forth on this continent the proposition that she was created without equal, and we would treat her like that. He probably knew we would soon be engaged in a great civil war; he was testing whether our family could long endure, or rather, how long I could endure her. I should have chosen the pizza.

“Hello, hello, hi,” she had said, circling her wave first to Mom, then Dad, lastly me. I’d gotten the “hi.” I’d taken it as a good sign, a sign of friendship.

“Hey, we’re in the same English class,” I’d offered.

But no, she swore she'd never seen me before. She didn't even make eye contact with me, avoiding my direct gaze as much as I tried to catch hers.

"Don't mess this up," my brother always tells me before we leave the house in the morning to pick her up for school. I always have to sit in the back so she doesn't have to wait for me to change seats when we get there. I usually answer him a "drop dead," but I acquiesce because I hate the bus.

She's still dancing, but she's running out of moves. He begins to imitate her, slowly letting himself slip away from the steering wheel, grabbing hold of one of her hands and interlocking their fingers together. It would be a perfect situation, except that nobody is driving the car I'm in.

"Hey, hey, drive the car, will you?" I shout to be heard over the radio. My brother turns around and scowls at me without letting go of her hand. He picks up a plastic bottle of Coke from the cup holder in between his seat and her seat and chucks it at me, probably as some kind of peace offering to make me shut up for a couple of minutes.

The half-empty bottle lands next to me on the seat, and the soda fizzes up to the plastic top. I try to pick it up, but I jerk my hand back as soon as my fingers touch the plastic. The bottle is practically about to melt and the Coke inside is probably fermenting. I hate Coke anyway. It makes my mouth and eyes burn. When I was little I used to think the carbonation was mixing with my blood and spreading through my veins. Strange, I know. I also used to think that when I ate canned peaches they slid down my arm and got stuck at my wrist.

"Whadjya think this was gonna do? I'd burn up if I drank this. And would you open the damn windows?" How can they dance so calmly? I'm practically suffocating.

"Don't tell me what to do," he says. He looks at her gently, slowing down his dance and jerking back to the steering wheel for a second in order to make a turn. "I like it this way," he offers for her. She smiles.

"Yeah, well, I think you should consider the needs of your other passenger." I'm the most rational person here. I'm not even yelling at them.

"Get him out of here," she says, clicking off the radio. "Drive faster."

Now they're whispering and laughing in the front seat. I send an obnoxious chuckle their way. They go on whispering. I want to be a part of these jokes. I want to have an inside joke.

"Hey," I say, "remember when we were at that party, like, twelve years ago? Remember how you had so much Coke and you were still refusing to go to the bathroom and your zipper got stuck? What was is you said? Oh yeah, 'Mom! I'm peeing and I don't like it!'" I laugh loudly and it bounces uncomfortably around their silence.

"You're being a jerk," the dad voice inside me states.

"Yeah, yeah, here comes the lecture," the kid answers.

"You don't have to bow down to her, you just have to be nice," the dad says.

"Why doesn't she ever look at me?"

"I don't know."

"You're supposed to be wise."

"You're supposed to be nice."

The dad voice rarely gives me good advice, sort of like my real dad.

"Oh God, I feel so sorry for you," she is saying to him. Go ahead and pity him. He's the one with the girlfriend, the car, and the parents who don't care if he flunks. I wish they didn't care if *I* flunked. Not that I'd do something that dumb.

"We're almost there. We can drop him off and go," he's saying.

I want to scream at him: "What about the guy that helped me make a rubber band ball? What about the guy that broke his finger slamming the car door and cried until I gave him my M&M's? The one who carried me back home when I crashed my bike? Where is that guy?"

“You know, you’ve really changed,” I say instead. “You’re really different, you know?” I say it so evenly and pleasantly that he’s drawn in. There’s a useful talent of mine, being convincing when I need to be.

“How so?” he asks, so casually it’s as if he isn’t interested, for her benefit.

“Oh...I guess, just the way you talk. The way you say, ‘Hey, do I tell you enough how much I love you, yuh know, like a brother?’”

I see his eyebrows furrow in the mirror. She is pouting, looking out the window at the trees. “I don’t say that to you,” he says, scrunching his cheeks into his eyes so they squint. He turns to her, puts his arm lightly on her shoulder so she looks at him. “Hey,” he says, “do I tell you enough how much I love you, yuh know, like a girlfriend?” She politely shakes her head, turning back to the window and looking at herself in the glass. His fingers run lightly through her hair for a few seconds before he pulls away. He’s also looking at her reflection.

I absently twist the Coke bottle cap back and forth, loosening and tightening it. There they are, thinking about each other, living in their magical world where hair dances, hearts melt, and love is passed around like weed. I almost feel high, what a cheap deal, what a frighteningly dazzling head of hair. It’s all, it’s just, they’re so, I’m so—

“AUGGGHHH!” she screams. Everything from her short eyelashes to her chin, and most of all that hair, is hot and wet. Caramel-colored Coke droplets that look like tears streak down her face. Her fingers are dangling from her hands, hung in mid-air from surprise, beads of the soda dripping down them and onto her fluttering khaki short-shorts. It almost burned my hand off to hold the bottle for that long. Now it’s somewhere in the front seat. I think I can actually see the steam floating off of her. Did that scream really come from her? My head is still beating too loudly to know for sure. Well, she can always let her hair air dry if she opens a goddamn window. It’s perfectly fine by me.

My brother stops the car abruptly and my body lurches forward as far as the seatbelt will allow, my bare legs scraping the

carpeting on the floor of the car, my head hitting the seat in front of me, *his* seat. The tips of my feet are the only things left on my seat, and they're slipping, slipping, my toes cringing inside my worn soccer shoes until they too fall in a heap with the rest of me. A lump of me, not sure how to get up or why I would want to get up, shaking from the force of the engine my brother has just turned off.

"Are you okay?" he gasps.

I heave myself back up to watch. She doesn't answer. She doesn't move. She just lets the Coke trickle down and ruin her enchanting hair. I can only imagine how scalding that bath must have felt. My breath is quick and shallow; I seriously think one of my lungs is punctured for a second. I look down at my hands, and my knuckles are quivering. Just as I'm starting to feel remorse, just as I'm thinking I may apologize, she catches me off guard. She turns around, making eye contact with me for the first time. It's a piercing stare, an all-consuming one.

"You think you know so much," she says to me. Then she swings the door open, swivels those thin legs out of the car, stands up straight and strides away. On this busy road, there she walks, with that hair, wet and sticky but still walking along with her. My brother shouts out, begging her to come back, while punching my shoulder, cheek, stomach, and any place he can reach. He gets out of the car and yells and yells. He puts his hands on his chest and forms fists with them, punching the air violently. He pulls his hair. He kicks his car. By the time he is done, she is out of sight.

Pietro di Venezia
Rayna Nunes

His name was Peter and you hated him.
I don't know why.
He came out when you went to bed.
You couldn't have known what transpired,
You shouldn't have cared

about the whiskey after whiskey
we ordered from the bar down the canal, which never seemed to
close,

or when we counted to three and shouted our favorite bands
to discover, hot damn, they were the same,

or our shouts of dismay when it was seaweed in the canal lapping
our toes, instead of waves,

or the moment we discovered our hometowns were only miles
away,

or when the drunken Italians asked how long we'd been married
and how was our honeymoon going,

or how we watched the flush-red sun rise over the canal,
lighting the city,
the buildings,
the flowers and trees,
and our faces,
holding hands lest we fall into the canal or into a drunken stupor or
into some kind of love that might make it through the night,

or the embrace he and I slept in,
curled in the forbidden boys' room of the hostel,
while you lay alone in your bunk down the hall,

surrounded by loud, snoring tourist girls you didn't want to know,
or our sloppy, joyous kisses,
the kind only two strangers can have under a full moon in Venice,
sweet Venice,
oh Venezia,
in the kind of quick, panting, desperate love that only lasts until the
airplane home.

You shouldn't have known
but my mind was dumb when my lips should have been,
and I gushed and gushed
and then
and then I saw it.
You almost cried, and I saw it.

But would you have cried if you'd known...
Peter was only in Venice,
but you were my world.

To the Lover of Small Things

Blaise Laramée

You said you liked small things
so here are a few of my favorites,
gathered together and set gently
side by side, end to end,
on the bedside shelf
of this poem, shoulder touching
tiny shoulder
in a silent parade of diminutive splendor.

We have the obvious, of course; smooth
And precious pebbles; five will fit perfectly
in the cave of your closed hand;
a cat, as small as a mouse, wearing
a bright red bow the size of a pinch
around its head; a model of the Coliseum
and bloodthirsty roars from the tiny crowd within
like the hushed voices of little rivers;
pencil-thick lines of blue ink
on a matchbook-sized map.

But then there are the things
you would not expect to find
on a list such as this: the inner ear
of a whale, and all the secrets
of his slow and ponderous life
flitting about inside, glowing faintly,
like fireflies in a mason jar.

Or the first footprint of your mother
left invisible on the blue and white linoleum
of that Sunday morning
as she stepped forward through the air
to her own mother;

white smiles and open arms showing the way
better than any road sign or travel map
ever could.

Or the stems of all the leaves
in the tree I am sitting under now, writing this poem;
stuck in the ground end-first
they would make a little forest
all their own, one you could step across
in one great stride; or, if you were a beetle,
one you could wander in
for days, weeks,
maybe even years
before reaching the other side.

And this, I realized, was the ultimate gift
to the lover of small things, this way of seeing
through the other end of the telescope;
that everything becomes small
when compared to something else:
the man shrinks to a beetle trotting about
on the underbelly of the world; the world now
a heavy marble
rolling through the vast playground of space,
and the stars themselves part of
the sparkling disc of the Milky Way
which you pick from the ground like an Autumn leaf
and slip into the back pocket
of your second-best jeans, tiny constellations shining on still
through the layers of cloth
and lint.

Touched

Chloe Kekovic

1.

The first time a boy touched me was during quiet time in kindergarten. Isn't it always? Around my nonexistent hips hung pale pink underwear with Monday written multiple times around the waistband. I'm sure that wasn't the day of the week. I remember that I thought there was something magical about wearing Monday on Thursday, Thursday on Friday. Like I had my own calendar in my head that I alone could adhere to. I don't even remember his name now, but I remember that we were lying down on the carpet that was a map of the world and he asked me if I had a penis. The word was thick in my mouth, foreign. *Penis. Penis.*

What's that? I whispered. My teacher, Ms. Anders, was on the other side of the room reading a book. She relished quiet time more than we did, though I didn't realize this at the time. I just figured that she must've been reading something endlessly fascinating. In reality, I'm sure, her eyes were barely skimming the page. Something to do to not fall asleep.

It's there, he said, and pointed down towards my underwear. I was confused. I looked at him. He jutted his pointer finger towards his own area.

This thing, he said. I was embarrassed; from an early age I prided myself on knowing everything, being the smartest and the fastest person to solve addition problems, being the one who read at a 3rd grade reading level, thank you very much. But now I hadn't the faintest idea.

I don't know, I whispered, and he looked at me for a second. His eyes were big and blue—he was wearing a white tee shirt with stains all over it, accumulated in the last three hours of school. Food, markers, debris of the day. He looked up at Ms. Anders, who was completely engrossed in her novel. He looked down at my legs, and my leopard print skirt. Before I had time to think, he reached under it and jabbed in the direction of my underwear.

I gasped quickly, sucking in breath so Ms. Anders wouldn't

hear. A yelp was encompassed by my pressing need to not get into trouble.

You don't have one, he said, and his tone was perplexed. I thought that everyone had them. He rolled away from me and went to color on the other side of the room.

At dinner that night, I was quiet. My mother immediately knew that something was wrong—I incessantly babbled, constantly chattering about everything and nothing at the same time, constantly asking questions, imploring her for answers that she didn't always have. That night I sat staring down at my plate of chicken nuggets, my eyes occasionally welling up with tears. My mother pressed me to know what was wrong, but I was desperate to not admit to her that I was a freak of nature, that I was without a penis.

Baby, tell me why you're crying, she said. Tell me what's wrong, honey. Her voice was soft and warm, and this made me sadder. She was going to be so disappointed. Her hand reached over to mine, and that did it for me.

It didn't take long: even when I was wrong my mouth still had the need to be in constant motion. I blubbered, I don't have a penis, Mom.

She took a beat, and then uproarious laughter came bursting from her mouth. She sat in her chair across from me, howling. Her hands were gripped onto the wooden table; her hair hung in front of her face, concealing her expression. Oh honey, oh *honey*, she wailed, her laughter crawling around me, making me itch. I felt stupid. My tears came back, now pressing up against my lids and falling down.

No girls have penises, she said, taking my hand. Honey, don't you know that you have a vagina? No. I didn't know. I grew angry: how were there so many things that I didn't understand? Who knew all of this and just wasn't telling me? She told me that girls have vaginas, and boys have penises. She told me that the vagina was like a beautiful flower, that it was something I should be proud of and love. She made jokes about how boys always have to stand to pee, and how girls can sit down. Only girls can have babies, not boys.

Girls get to wear cute underwear, and boys have to wear tighty-whities. This made me laugh. She tucked me into bed that night and whispered that I was special before kissing me on the forehead. But this confused me, because she said that all girls had vaginas. How could that make me special? Later that night, when I went to the bathroom and sat down, my Monday underwear hanging around my ankles, my feet hanging above the ground, I thought about how everyone had a vagina or a penis and this made me feel trapped. I wanted something different.

2.

The second time that a boy touched me was in the 5th grade. It didn't happen on the playground, but there is something distinct about that red and blue colored array of entertainment. On the playground was a hidden bench where the recess monitor, Mr. Jenkins, couldn't see us if we sat at the right angle. At this point in time, everyone knew what penises and vaginas were. There was no mystery—we freely talked about blow jobs and fucking as if we were familiar with them. I didn't think that blow jobs were a real thing—what kind of person would ever willingly do that?—but allowed myself to laugh with the boys when they said they couldn't wait to get them. Why did they want that? What if they peed? But I digress.

This hidden bench was called the “Hump Bench”. A boy would sit down on the bench, and a girl would sit on top of him and he would bounce his legs up and down. This was humping. It was the closest thing to sex that any of us would experience for a decent amount of time.

On this particular day in my life I had a boyfriend. His name was Aaron Rivera III. We dated for three weeks in total, a blissful relationship of poems written on index cards in large, blocky scrawl. I had the chicken pox, and he came over for a playdate because he had already had it. We pulled a red blanket over my table in the living room and sat under it. That was my first kiss. Covered in chicken pox. Our relationship ended because he told me his best friend David, who had a permanent slack jaw and didn't learn how to read until the 4th grade, was jealous. Fuck you, David.

Aaron thought that the Hump Bench was stupid—I agreed with this, but not enough to abstain from it. I thought that being sexual was incredibly important, though I didn't know exactly what that meant. I just knew that there was a certain way to look, to be, to act. And I wanted it. More than that, at this point in my life I just wanted to be doing what everyone else was doing. Some people pushed Aaron and me onto the bench next to a girl named Crystal and a boy who had started getting acne before everyone else. Crystal ended up pregnant later, and who knows about the boy. Only girls can have babies.

Crystal and Acne Boy were laughing next to Aaron and me, who sat in tangible discomfort. Crystal flailed around on top of Acne Boy and the boys watched her chest move: she had bee stings where most girls had yet to be stung. I watched with the same intrigue as the boys, not understanding why I didn't look like that. I envied her. In a few years' time my breasts would sprout up at a radically rapid rate, and I would attempt to hide them, before subsequently realizing that they were a tool to wield in the gender war. While the boys were distracted, I quickly got up and took Aaron's hand over to the monkey bars.

I hate the Hump Bench, he said. He was cute. He knew that I hated it, too.

It's so immature, I replied. I threw around big vernacular pretty often, enticing my peers with my sophistication, finesse.

Yeah. So immature. Do you want to come play Donkey Kong later? he asked me. We were both latchkey kids. My mom worked until 8, and his dad worked until 8:30. We hung out at one of our houses—this made our parents feel safer. They didn't know about the “tingly” feeling.

Aaron and I talked about this fairly often when we would have playdates. That bizarre, foreign urge in one's core, a feeling that we didn't yet know to just call “horny.” For now, it was the “tingly” feeling.

Yeah. I'm totally going to beat you today, I retorted. He always won at Donkey Kong, but I had straight As on my report card and was Star Student of the Week at least once a month. So I didn't

complain much about being bad at video games.

The bell rang, and Mr. Jenkins blew his silver whistle, beckoning us all inside. I didn't understand why there needed to be a whistle and a bell: it was obvious to me that once one of the two happened, recess was over. I told this to Ms. Anders once who just gave me a tight lipped smile. I was an asshole.

Aaron and I lived in apartment buildings across from each other, and when we got to his I called my Mom, who was at work, to tell her to pick me up there. Fine honey fine. I'll see you at 8. She called me honey like crazy. It would eventually get to annoy me when I reached the inevitable Be A Bitch To My Mom phase, and I would say, "So help me God if you call me honey again" and she would get upset with me and get all weepy and I would say aren't I supposed to be the teenager here and she would call me a little shit and that would be the end of that.

Aaron pulled down a box of chocolate cookies from his cabinet and set them on his living room table where I was turning on the PS2. Our backpacks were haphazardly strewn onto the floor, and we both sat next to each other, thinking about nothing. What the fuck is an 11-year-old really thinking about? Aaron took three cookies and shoved them into his mouth. I did the same when he went to the bathroom. From an early age, I was weird about people watching me eat. I had a warped perception of my body: I looked at myself with huge blubbery legs and flabby arms and a colossal stomach as long as I'd had conscious thought. This would later be diagnosed as Body Dysmorphic Disorder.

Aaron came back from the bathroom and grabbed one of the video game consoles. It was Player 2, but I didn't tell him because I always preferred to be Player 1. Player 1 got to choose their character first, got to push Start, got to pause and run to do whatever. I am Player 1.

It was a racing game, and its main focus was two buttons: one to accelerate, one to use a boost, and then using the up, left, and right buttons. Aaron's small thumbs slammed into all of them at once, shaking the console with such ferocity that I knew I had no chance. I knew this every single time we started to play.

Occasionally I would try to match his vigor, but my hands were no match for his own intensity. I would get pissed occasionally, and I would let loose a few curse words because I knew how to use them.

Fuck this shit. Son of a bitch. God-fucking-damnit. Fuck me. Fuck you.

I pushed pause and told Aaron that I needed water, that I was feeling definitely faint from playing without stopping for so long. He shrugged and followed me into the kitchen. I put a plastic green cup under the faucet and then downed the cup. Aaron took it from me, filling it himself. What were we even talking about? I can see words happening between us, and I can even hear the distant cackle of youth echoing in my head, but I have no idea what could have taken up so much space and time in my life. Aaron slammed the plastic cup down onto the granite countertop. He burped. This made me blush. He was cute.

Do you wanna kiss again? he said, and he blurted this out quickly, and while he was refilling water. I used this as an excuse to act like I didn't hear, so I could take pause to decide what I wanted to do.

What? I said and adjusted one of the gold barrettes in my hair.

Do you want to kiss? We don't have to but, last time you had chicken pox and you know, now you don't so, he was looking at his feet, and his too-long hair was hanging in front of his face. In my 5th grade eyes this was the epitome of attraction. Why not, I thought.

Sure I replied, and I put my hands on my bony hips and tried to look tall, or wise, or cute, or something, anything. I wasn't nervous, wasn't hesitant—I vied to understand all that the opposite sex had to offer me, to feel jumpy and excited, enticed by them.

Well, do it, I said, because the boy always kisses the girl first in the movies. He bunched his face up real hard, brow crinkling in the middle, and he leaned forward. Our lips collided, the impact lasting for mere seconds, and then it was over. We looked at each other.

I think I have the tingly feeling, he said.

The third time that a boy touched me was in a game of 7 Minutes in Heaven. It was basic, almost primal. You were forced into a closet with someone, they had 7 minutes to do whatever they pleased to you. It was derogatory, it was initially scary. It was a way to pass time. We were in 7th grade, and we sat around with clear cups of soda, high on sugar and adrenaline.

My best friend, Hannah, had just spilled punch all over Sebastian's couch. Sebastian wore glasses and had braces and had crippling social anxiety, but his parents always let him throw parties in the basement, and thus we all utilized the available space. They stayed upstairs in their room, blithely flipping through channels. His dad golfed with mine sometimes, though no one ever knew this horrendous secret. Anyway, once Hannah spilled the drink, Sebastian went into a tizzy and ran upstairs to collect seltzer, napkins, what have you. We all laughed at his worry, all of were already developing the hard exteriors required for high school in a few short years. It was easy to laugh at someone else; they were distant, and they were weird; this was how they were supposed to be treated.

"Let's play 7 Minutes in Heaven," some boy said, his voice an inaudible squeak. When is that moment when their voices break and all of a sudden a heavy man's voice comes bellowing out? I can't recall.

This part is muddled for me, the exact moment unclear. But I can see myself with my hand gripping a cola bottle, spinning it around to choose the mate of my destiny. It was imperative to get the right one—but if you did, people would mock you, and if you got a nerd, they'd mock you, too. It was a fucking double-edged sword, and we all knew it. I spun it and it landed on Neil Morestein. He is an accountant now, and his name sounds like one. Nasally and dry. But back then, before we knew that people dried up and became stale, he was the only person who had a mohawk, and he was hot shit. He stood up across the circle, and as he walked towards me I knew that something was going to be different. At this point my breasts had just started to blossom, and I was consciously aware of them in everything I wore. That night I wore a baggy red dress in

attempts to shield them. What I didn't realize is that pretending something isn't there makes it all the more prominent.

He lingered over me and I looked up at him. Hannah nudged me, the group emitted animal-like cackles, and I rose to join him. He said something along the lines of, Hope you're ready for this, babe. I think that line might've worked on me then.

We walked over to the closet, which was an uncomfortably close few feet away from everyone else. Seven minutes! They called. *Enjoy*, they whispered. What was I thinking? I don't know. I just know that I was aware of things, aware of how people would be able to hear any noises that happened between us, any awkward conversation or banter or in between phases of intimacy.

He yanked open the closet, and the smell immediately wafted over me. This was a closet for sports equipment—Sebastian was on the soccer team, though he spent the majority of the time benched. The smell was rancid, but it seemed like I was the only one who noticed.

He started to touch my arms, and I pushed him away for a second. Doesn't it bother you how putrid is in here?

What does putrid mean?

Smelly? It means smelly.

Yeah, Sebastian's a sweaty fucker right?

Besides the point, besides the point, and yet still we continued. He touched my bare arms and moved his hands up and down too fast, his pacing frantic and desperate. This was supposed to be some kind of segue into an intimate six minutes left of petting, but it was stupid. My lips were too available to comment on this moment, my mouth always moving, always retorting. So I put them on his and waited for him to do something. They were stuck. His mouth didn't move, but his hands clawed at the top of my dress, somehow trying to find a way to get into my training bra. This proved futile, and his hands rested on top of the place where breasts should be, fingering the polyester-cotton blend. Glorious.

4.

The fourth time that a boy touched me, I thought it would

stay. I was sixteen, I had fostered visions of love, and this guy fit into it. His name was Julian. His hair was black and his body was lanky and I was obsessed. He saw me in the same way, with the same blind adoration, the same easy forgiveness of clear flaws. We were stupid.

This was the boy that I lost it to, the boy whose dad caught us in his room when we thought that he was going to be gone for the entire night, the one whose heart I broke, and the one who eventually broke mine. It was good, and it was bad, and it was easy and distant to me now. The jarring memories of adolescence somehow resonate with me more than this so-called first love. I can feel what it felt like, the banging in my gut when I heard someone mention him, the raking desperation whenever we would be in his bed, all of it.

But somehow I've grown numb to all of this.

Jim's Big Day

Chukyi Kyaping

This is Jim.

This is Jim dying.

This is Jim dying in a collision with a bright red Cadillac.

This is Jim dying in a collision with a bright red Cadillac,
his tall Starbucks coffee with soy escaping the cup and flying up into
the air.

This is Jim dying in a collision with a bright red Cadillac,
his tall Starbucks coffee with soy escaping the cup and flying up into
the air.

People watch in horror as Jim's body grotesquely rolls atop the car
before hurling toward the concrete.

Then it stops.

Here is Jim,
frozen in mid-air,
the coffee stained on his bleached white dress shirt,
blood smeared across his now marred face,
limbs tangled from broken bones,
and he does not care in the slightest.

Jim has worked 9 to 5 for all of his adult life,
and every day Jim does mindless, tedious tasks for his boss
who doesn't give a shit anyway.
Jim staples, Jim prints, Jim copies, Jim types,
and Jim already felt like dying a *hundred* times before this freak
accident.

Jim is divorcing his wife of eight unbearable years.

She left Jim for another man but is managing to take half of his life savings anyway.

She complains, she yells, she cries, she throws a lamp at him, and Jim already felt like dying a *thousand* times before this freak accident.

Jim thinks back to his childhood, when he wanted to be Superman for Halloween

but he couldn't buy a costume

so his mother made him settle for his older sister's Snow White dress.

Same colors, right?

Yes, that was when it all began,

and since then, Jim already felt like dying a *million* times before this freak accident.

Jim has lived his entire life according to other people's wishes.

Is that really life?

Has he lived at all?

He certainly doesn't want to keep living if this was the best it was ever going to get.

Jim, the

quintessential

nameless,

middle-class

statistic of the world,

is done with life as he knew it.

Jim thought maybe this wasn't a freak accident.

Maybe death was when it starts to get better.

Maybe this was his calling to a better life in eternity with the clouds.

Hanging out with God does sound like a bit of a step up from what he usually did.

So after feeling like dying a million times over and then actually dying,

Jim finally started living.

This is Jim's daydream before he snaps into reality
and stares into his cold coffee on a dull Monday morning at work.

Fuck it all to Hell.

Akademiks
Bobbi Stone

Rusted burned out skeletons stuck
to the corner at the edge of the alley.
“Where ya moms at blood?”

Weeds bloom between cracks of
a well traversed sidewalk.
“She was only six.”
“Ain’t that a damn shame”

Papi store after papi store
flow along. Same hoagies,
same drinks.

Water bugs bask in the sun,
until a timb’ comes along.

Redamancy

Erica Gorenberg

There were nights that we spent
in the dugout of a baseball field
surrounded by cold and the allegory
of our actions. I always worried that

we would be caught - that some
stranger would venture down on
a midnight walk and see but
that never happened and we kept

meeting in that dugout to hide from
the people that loved us so that we
could indulge in love of our own. We reveled
quietly in the dark absence of stars

within and disturbed the air only with
gasps and breath. I almost fell every time
you tried to move with me
but I stayed. The ground

was always wet with puddles and the cold of
the metal bench cut, even through
our clothes at the start, but still my skin burned
against the ice in the air and the pressure

of your hands. In the dark we were
together but in the light, I was not. You
loved me and I had only just found
that you were a way to love myself.

Dying Alive
Kendal Conrad

CORINNE, 35, energetic, attractive housewife

BRETT, 37, laid-back businessman

POLICEMAN, 40, direct and official

(A kitchen, CORINNE is getting food out of the oven and putting it on the dinner table. BRETT is seated at the dinner table, ignoring her and working on his laptop. CORINNE's bare skin is against the scalding hot food plate and yet she doesn't show any signs of pain. BRETT notices this but says nothing. He brings his attention back to his laptop.)

CORINNE *(steps out to speak directly to audience)*

Last night, my husband Brett dragged something strange into the tool shed in our backyard. First I attempted to convince myself that it was a dead deer or some other animal. It had to be. Brett wasn't a killer. No, no, *couldn't* be a killer. But then there's the news and the town gossip, which I cannot ignore. Something is definitely up. Especially because Brett spent the rest of the night locked in the shed with—with the dead, limp looking *thing*. And what did he say when I asked him about it this morning? He said, "Oh, that was just a little something I've been working on." Uh huh. Something he's been working on. In the tool shed. At night. With no one around.

(CORINNE sits at the table and begins to put food on her plate. BRETT closes laptop and gets food as well, prime rib, potatoes, corn, etc.)

BRETT

Wow, this looks great! The prime rib looks perfect.

CORINNE

I know. Rare, just how we like it.

(CORINNE is about to speak again when BRETT notices a welt/sore on her cheek and interrupts her.)

BRETT

Hey, what happened to your cheek?

CORINNE

Oh, great. You can still see it? I tried to cover it up with make-up until it goes away... It's some cut, sore thing. I don't know how I got it. I hope it's not infected. I've been meaning to get it checked—

BRETT

I wouldn't worry about it. I'm sure it'll be fine in a few days.

CORINNE

I hope so. It doesn't hurt, though, which is good. It just looks terrible.

BRETT

Like I said, don't stress about it. You'll be fine.

CORINNE

Yeah, well, anyway did you hear?

BRETT

No. Hear what?

CORINNE

Someone broke into Mitzi's house and trashed the place. Apparently she's been missing ever since. Everyone seems to think she's dead. Poor woman.

BRETT

Mitzi? That retired librarian with the poodle? Jesus. Who would be so cruel as to hurt an old woman?

CORINNE

I suppose it's because she's vulnerable, and she wouldn't put up a fight. But the strangest part is that the intruder didn't take anything. They trashed the place; that's about it. And Mitzi is just gone. So sad.

BRETT

What would anyone want with an old woman?

(CORINNE and BRETT cut their prime rib and begin to eat.)

CORINNE

There are a lot of crazies out there, Brett. You never know. Maybe they just wanted to torture her or something just as sadistic. I sure hope she's okay. Wherever she is. Where do you think she is, Brett? Do you think she's really dead?

BRETT

This is horrible. Do we have to talk about this over dinner?

CORINNE

Sorry.

(Pause.)

BRETT

Did you take your pills yet?

CORINNE

Yes, dear. I took my pills. God forbid you weren't here to remind me.

BRETT

What? It's important that you take those pills. You know that.

CORINNE

The pills. That's all we ever talk about around here.

BRETT

I just care about you, honey. I love you so much. Is that wrong?

CORINNE

That's not what I mean, Brett.

BRETT

Well, what did you mean then?

CORINNE

I don't know. So what if I stop taking these damn pills? Will I shrivel up and die or something?

BRETT

Don't make a mockery of your condition.

CORINNE

Which is what exactly? Just some unnamable disease that I have been living with because the doctors won't tell me one stinking thing about it.

BRETT

That disgusting *hobo* ran out of the woods and... God. Who knows what kind of infection he carried?

CORINNE

While we're asking questions because we care about each other, what is going on with your experiment in the tool shed? Can I be let in on this little secret of yours?

BRETT

No.

CORINNE

Why not?

BRETT

It's a surprise for you.

CORINNE (*nervous*)

What sort of surprise?

BRETT

You'll see.

(CORINNE looks wary. Lights shift. It's three hours later. CORINNE is outside at night, creeping towards the shed where BRETT has stored the dead thing. About a minute or so passes. CORINNE holds her head as if in pain.)

CORINNE (*talking to herself*)

Oh, God. I really shouldn't have skipped the pills.

(She reaches the shed, puts her hand on the doorknob.)

Just do it, Corinne. Now or never.

(She opens the door. A blood-splattered nightgown is on the worktable.)

Oh, my God. Brett did it. He killed Mitzi. He's a murderer. Oh, Lord. What did he do to her? Did he torture her? Where is she? This can't be happening. This—

(She suddenly doubles over in pain. She falls to the ground.)

What do I do now? Do I call the police? But Brett is my husband, and I love him, even if...What the hell do I do?

(She runs her hand through her hair and clumps of it fall out. Then she begins to spit up blood.)

Why is my hair falling out?! Oh, no. Is this what happens when I don't take the pills? Oh, my eyes hurt. And my hands. Why does everything *ache*? Ohhh. Brett.

(She passes out. Lights shift to CORINNE in bed. There is a small bedside table with a lamp and phone. It's morning. BRETT enters with a cup of something.)

BRETT

Here, drink this.

CORINNE

No, thanks. I don't want it right now.

(Awkward silence.)

BRETT

You didn't take your pills yesterday, did you?

(He sets the cup down on the bedside table next to the phone.)

CORINNE

No.

BRETT

Why would you do that? You know how important it is that you take those pills!

CORINNE

My hair started falling out. And I started—started bleeding. All the bones in my body ached, and so did my eyes! What the hell is wrong with me? Tell me what's going on!

BRETT

Don't do this now. You need rest.

(Pause.)

CORINNE

I looked in the shed. You killed her.

BRETT

It's not what you think.

CORINNE (*hysterical*)

Why did you do it? Is it because of me? Did I drive you to do this? Because of my disease? Are you too stressed about work? Am I not paying enough attention? Do you get off on it? What is it? Why can't you just talk to me? I—I don't even know who you are anymore!

BRETT

No, Corinne. You don't understand. I did it *for* you.

CORINNE

How could you possibly slaughter a woman in our shed and say you did it for me?! Are you completely nuts?

BRETT

It's okay. You don't understand right now. But you will. And you'll thank me.

CORINNE

I will most certainly not fucking thank you! Why are you doing this? Tell me!

BRETT

I know you're scared, especially after you experienced the transformation that takes place if you forget to take the pills. But everything is going to be okay.

CORINNE

What do you mean transformation? Transformation into what? What are you talking about?

BRETT

Let's just calm down and go see the doc—

CORINNE

I'm not going anywhere with you!

BRETT (*wearily*)

You need to take a deep breath and relax, honey.

(CORINNE eyes the phone and lamp behind BRETT on the bedside table. She lunges forward, grabs the lamp, and hits BRETT over the head. BRETT screams in pain and holds his head. She then picks up the phone and retreats to the far side of the bedroom while dialing. She holds the phone to her ear while BRETT is moaning on the floor.)

CORINNE (*into the phone*)

Please help me! Please please send the police! My husband murdered an old woman and—and the shed is all bloody, and I have this disease, and I didn't take my pills, and my hair fell out of my head, and oh, God, what if he tries to kill me, too?

(BRETT rises and runs towards CORINNE. He grabs the phone and throws it across the room. He then grabs CORINNE and claps a hand over her mouth.)

BRETT

Listen to me. I'm not going to hurt you. You shouldn't have called the police.

(CORINNE struggles in his arms.)

This whole situation is not what you think it is.

(CORINNE bites BRETT's hand and he pushes her away.)

CORINNE

What the hell is the matter with you? Are you fucking insane?

BRETT (*chuckling*)

You're wrong. You think you know, but you don't. God, you don't have a damn clue.

CORINNE

Then why don't you enlighten me, Brett?

BRETT

I can't. I'm not allowed. What it would do to the experiment if you knew...

CORINNE (*taken aback*)

Whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. Experiment? What do you mean experi—?

(She suddenly realizes something.)

What exactly happened when that man attacked me? What kind of "disease" did he really give me?

(Pause.)

BRETT

Hon, you're—you're dead.

(Long pause.)

CORINNE (*angry*)

Fuck you, Brett. What the hell are you playing at?

BRETT

The sores on your face? Liking your meat rare?

CORINNE

Just because I have an infection—

BRETT

Look at your hands! You burnt your hands yesterday bringing the food to the dinner table, and you didn't even notice! You're dead, Corinne. Don't you get it? You can't feel pain.

(Studies hands and realizes BRETT is right.)

CORINNE (*becoming panicked*)

That can't—it can't—and Mitzi?

BRETT

You need to feed, hon.

CORINNE

Oh, no. No, no. So, you're saying that I ate the fucking neighbor last night? Is that what you're saying? This isn't happening. I don't believe it.

BRETT

It's not your fault.

CORINNE

You killed Mitzi, so I could eat?! Because I'm DEAD?!

BRETT

Well, yes. Usually I try to find vagrants, strippers, singles living alone—people that no one would miss. But I couldn't find anyone the other night, and if you don't get at least a piece of human meat every two days, you get hungry.

CORINNE

I can't believe this. So what am I? Some kind of zombie?

BRETT

In a sense. Yes.

CORINNE

This is crazy. Don't you realize how crazy this sounds?

BRETT

It's the truth. If I hadn't found you outside when I did... Bleeding and hair loss would have been the least of your problems.

CORINNE

So when I take these pills, it keeps me 'alive'?

BRETT

Yes, it rejuvenates you. You stop taking the pills, you decompose and revert back to—to—

CORINNE (*bitter*)

A zombie.

BRETT

You don't have to say it like that.

CORINNE

It's what I am, isn't it? Don't sugarcoat this, Brett. Don't you dare. *You* did this to me.

BRETT

I couldn't let you go...

CORINNE

Why did you do this to me? Why? I don't want to live like this! What if we go on vacation, and I lose the day's worth of pills? Hide out in my room while I rot? Or would I try to eat you?

BRETT

I love you. Isn't that enough for you? I did this for us. So we could be together.

CORINNE

No, Brett. I'm sorry. Now—now that I know what I eat every night and what I really am underneath this façade, I just can't live with myself. I've gotta—gotta do something about it. I need to think.

BRETT

I'm very sorry that you feel this way... But the experiment has to continue.

CORINNE

What? Why?

BRETT

Corinne, we could save millions of people this way. Don't you see? People could die and *live*. People could have more time with their loved ones.

CORINNE

What kind of fucking life is this, Brett? Are you crazy? I shouldn't even be here right now. I should be in a hole covered with dirt.

(She starts to cry.)

BRETT

Don't you want to be together, Corinne? Would you really rather be dead, buried somewhere than with me?

(A door slams. Thundering footsteps can be heard.

Uniformed policemen barge into the bedroom.)

CORINNE

Him! He kept me alive, but I'm not! Arrest him!

POLICEMAN

Ma'am, please calm down.

CORINNE

No, no! You don't understand! I'm rotting away! I'm a zombie, a corpse! Please!

POLICEMAN

Mr. McGonagall? Dr. Fletching already notified us of the situation.

BRETT *(with pity and condescension)*

Yes, my wife suffers from the Walking Corpse Syndrome. Poor thing thinks she's walking around dead. Ever since she was attacked by this lunatic. Came right out of the woods and mauled her. She hasn't been the same since.

CORINNE

That's a lie! He's lying. He told me that I'm part of a fucked-up experiment to keep people alive after they die. He killed Mitzi Morgan, the librarian. Check in the shed if you don't believe me!

BRETT

See what I mean? Thinks I'm killing off the neighbors to feed her. Claims she gets cravings to eat people because she's a zombie. Can't talk her out of it.

CORINNE

You told me that!

BRETT

It's gonna be okay, honey. These men are here to help.

CORINNE

YOU LIAR! Can't you see that he's LYING?! I'm falling apart!

POLICEMAN

We'll take her to the hospital and take good care of her. Dr. Fletching knows what to do.

BRETT

Great. Thank you very much. Tell him to begin treatment immediately, and I'll be right over.

POLICEMAN

Yes, sir.

CORINNE

NO! You're not listening! Stop! He's the lying psycho, not me!
(Two officers grab her.)

Let go of me! Let me go! I'm not crazy! Where are you taking me?!
(*The officers begin to drag her offstage.*)

Brett, I am going to kill you for this! I'm not supposed to be alive!
I'm dead! I'm dead and rotting! Oh, God!
(*CORINNE and the officers disappear offstage.*)

BRETT (*talking to himself*)

Corinne will come to her senses after talking to Dr. Fletching. She'll see the light. Or the dark, rather. I mean, she's alive, isn't she? And she doesn't even care about all the work I went through to catch her dinner... She'll calm down when she speaks with Fletching. He will put it into more understandable terms for her. She is given a second chance at life. Why waste it?
(*He rubs his eyes.*)

BRETT (*continued*)

Oh, shit.
(*He walks over to the bedside table and opens the drawer. He pulls out a bottle of pills. He dry swallows three of them.*)

(*Blackout.*)

A love poem for *Arctia caja*

Anne Rus

Beneath the soft snow-spots of Queen Anne's Lace
you spread your cowhide train to scare the birds
that didn't turn about the eggshell sky
your tiger-eyed red petticoat was blind.

What good did your neurotoxins do you?
All boiling and trapped inside your veins
and running bone-red through your membrane wings
like rainbow gases in rivers on Mars.

You never poisoned fox nor fowl nor struck
the hearts of toads with fear but from your eyes
and raspberry water clung to your hair
in planet-shaped spheres filled with lamplight.

And all the facets of your mirror eyes
turned upward to follow a distant moon
instead you circled the electric light
your ommatidium flushed with white.

Mother River

Dana Kluchinski

I'm not as pretty as my mother.

Her face is freckled and framed with
dark night hair
white strands like shooting stars dusting her head

my mum locked tight life running through her
a gurgling stream
powered by her water wheel heart.

in a red canoe I came down that stream
paddled past green wild grass and
wisteria dipping
her arms down wide to feel the cool water pass.

under bridges and past
foggy meadows

salty air filled my nose and cleansed my mind
The ocean lay before me. Kind, cosmic and tempting

I looked into the water. My mother's reflection staring back but
with light straw hair and a doughy face.

I see she gave everything she had to me.
Life and endless love shine on my back beams from the sun and
reflects off the water to my face
To do with it whatever I please

I hear the gurgle of my own brook in my lungs.
a different note on the scales of fish inhabiting
the wind chime of my heart.

I lay down my love in the ocean
dissipate my being into the waves
crash against the earth with such forces
not of conquest but of adventure

If I dive into deep water
No matter how far,

Water still flows downward
Still flows from my mother
Forever she feeds into me

The Lyrics to Your Song

Meaghan Geatens

I'll bet you don't know
that your name is a poem,
and it stands for everything
that I adore
and for everything that I hate.

Sometimes the euphony of it overwhelms me--
because you sound like glory in my ears
and sometimes your memory feels so real that I could reach out and
let my fingers traipse around the back of your neck like I used to,
sort of in the way the thought of you wanders around my head and
my heart every second of every day;

And sometimes it's complete cacophony
and my eyes can only see black, the insides of my eyelids,
as I squint and try to banish those sounds from entering my
memory, like nails on a chalkboard-
I'm reminded of the dissonance
that you created on a night in early July;

You forget what "I don't love you" sounds like when you haven't
heard it in a while.

But for what it was worth, when you did,
the two of us made a hell of a melody.

The Muse Heard Music

Elijah Kineg

I need to tell you about this funny idea that popped into my head two years ago [event: humorous/Sarcastic]. I call it 'funny' because I enjoy sarcasm, and my idea, while insightful, was not funny or good. If I may expand: the idea is awful. I keep thinking about words and their limitations. Our language can be counted and I started a long time ago.

You must understand what it's become, and must comprehend the vast amount of freethinking it's relocated. I consider how much of what I don't think, influences how much I do or do not do. Believe this confession: I comprehend the trouble in having these thoughts about those thoughts. The constant horror of knowing that what you *could* be thinking about, or *are* thinking about could modify a job space, living space, common faces, all this including the self. You need to say the right stuff. This, practically, is a concept burned to a common knowledge crisp. Thoughts become words, words become actions; stop me if you have heard this before. But I believe this chain of thought is one link too strong, because if a thought has magnitude, it juts out as an action. This kind of action is more reserved than what you envision when reading the word ACTION, but there could be potential parallels.

Allow me an honest statement: maybe my life's plan never ever included money, or weddings, cinema-esque staging's, mass recognition, or even many friends. Maybe, when the Great Spirit made me, he made a decision that my life *was* to be an exhausted paddle – it causes such frustration, but pardon me, pardon my morose molassesness. [event: humor/wildcard - imagistic]. I commit to practiced religion as little as I do self-deprecation, but I have to trust my thinking. And my thoughts, the whole swirling pot, will become my actions [statement: poetic/visualizer]. Truthfully, everyone has one of these things.

Listen closely. I was in a backyard many months ago -- three months, and nine days to be exact, and in the backyard I enjoyed discourse with my grandmother who is very old, 77 years of age to

be exact. I like speaking to my grandmother because it lacks any complexity. Her memory is dissolving, and she doesn't do very much – she enjoys sitting. And *I* enjoy the immaculate the plane on which the discussion coasts. *When* the discussion coasts. We don't say so much and when we do it involves categories No. 1 State of local habitat, or, No. 2 Recently delicious meals, with the occasional No 3. Current interpersonal events. I'm not complaining, really. She's the only person I've seen for many months, eight months and thirty days to be exact. I'm grateful, but not because she's the only one I can talk with, it's simpler than that: I like how we talk very little. It's quiet, and quiet is ideal. And when it gets quiet I acknowledge the absence of the chessboard, the bottomless filing cabinet. And when I think about discussion involving, say, three or more people, a drop of fear diffuses down my midsection. I get the immediate feeling that the oven has been left on, car windows are letting in rainwater, the ingredient is back at the store, et cetera.

Maybe I don't like people? [statement: inquiry/rhetorical]. That rising inflection does not hide the true nature of that statement. I hold human interaction in low regard. The people are fine I like those. It's the words I dislike. The swapping of blocks, the to and froms, the swapping of blocks, words are blocks you see. You assemble them into recognition. So I repose that statement (pardon the confusion) you *do* in fact trade word blocks with people, but you trade structures in the end. I've met some people; some ill-eloquent, lexical-drunkards who push all the blocks into one pile and slide them at you like poker chips. I do not have the ability to hear what you are saying, sir. What are you trying to say? Oh, the *library*? I thought your block building concerned a succulent fruit [response: humorous/passive-aggressive]. Some people speak always like they are mid-chew, all swamp and larynx. And good morning to *you*, sir. I hope that sound was addressed to me because you were mid-chew and I couldn't hear that. You *must* untwist these guttural noises into a sentence. But there are indeed social walkways.

Now I must tell you about this idea I had. You see this language thing is fickle. The endless game of cards (to regurgitate the casino imagery), the veiled auctioning of ideas. The whole thing

is personally compartmentalized. What will this person say? How will they say it? *Why* will they? Reoccurring companions are less agonizing since you know a bit about what it's like in there. Acquaintance and below, you have a tricky task. These veils are thick; and you won't see its shade. And how does it all come together? If you know them or you don't, there's still a basic paradigm for discourse. Understanding that process is integral to getting better at the game, the talking game. It takes a long time to learn how to count cards; it takes even longer to count statements.

I have been scared for quite some time. I tell you this so I may legitimize this idea. I needed to anticipate how the words would work. I did this originally to build civilizations with my discussions and not petty, imprecise stacks, became so interested in the atlas I lost the map. When people speak to me now, most all of my brain function is dedicated to categorizing their information to better predict *why* they say the things they do, and what will be uttered *next*. I often greet my grandmother with a 'Hello Gwanma' [statement: introductory/referential]. She proceeds to do very little with her wind spout, she hands me baked goods, we sit and say nothing, and you must understand how distilled that whole moment is for me.

Exchanges with Grandmother are comparable to how Canines and felines express information. Highly gestural, pleasantly diluted through efficiency and simplicity, the moments aren't jazzed up or rocketed over potential silences. How odd people are, how apart from this cleanliness. The way their complexity dazzles and excites, dips and changes. And yet, how stuck they are in time and conditioning. The cipher of never knowing how they feel, retreating to second-hand antiques that lack the original luster. Here is the terror -- the paradox of communication that is inherently bent. I can talk for hours, tell you all about it, you may even enjoy the vicarious parade of it all -- but you will not have that first seed. That fresh sentiment that rolls and evolves in a few seconds, outwards with time, you're never in the middle. You do that on your own and float the news to another [statement: pragmatic/imagistic].

I have obtained a small volume of these categories. Actually, calling it a volume is a dash modest, for I have several of them. I've highlighted everything I've written here, it all slots one way or another. I have recently been rejected from work because I prioritize the tasks in my life. That, and I seem to have (according to my boss) mismanaged the allotment of my time. This may sound like a screw or ten are loose, but I assure you that I was only making executive decisions about what I enjoyed doing. Perhaps enjoy isn't the correct word, but I had certainly been reemployed. I can confirm the immensity of our conversational toolbox, but it is all a series of wires and outlets. There are thousands of wires and outlets, but many of the outcomes are just the same pieces reshuffled. Reshuffled! I simply cannot help myself, I'm all Vegas and gambling today. Cards, chips, shuffles... you see, I find myself not only aloof in my mind, but stuck. People's ability to utilize these categories is based upon their knowledge. Speech comes down to what they do. I'm jailed in my knowledge; I gambled recently and now a plot of my memory is ready to bias my thinking so what I say is limited by my experience. I'm also finding the wires and outlet imagery effective here as we all are backed up like hard drives. Hard drives with sight, legs and opinions we forget, but still hard drives. It is forever one hand shaking hands, the other in the memory stash. The rest is up to you.

Very frightening to me was time. Yeah, sure, another step toward the light is a great disappointment, but this is natural. I'm more concerned for my memories, my soul, and more concerned about their disappearance in life rather than death. Where are these things getting off to, how do they get there? It is hardly a puzzling question. When I need another sticky note, I rip the last one off. Just natural regression, but this is no shopping list, this is my identity I'm stamping out here. That thought I couldn't understand or bear. Not aware of any time machines in the direct vicinity, I took the best course of action and began recording my life. Just sounds however, I keep a lavalier on my shirt most all of the time. Additionally, I'm keen on retrieving a signature scent from the setting to accompany the audio. It won't preserve my body, but it

may preserve my mind. I reinforce past days by playing them back and placing the aroma stimulus in a cheap steamer I purchased... paid with rent money. You see, this process assists two-fold, preserving my memory, but also giving me material to categorize, I built my volumes this way.

Yes, it did take time. This was the problem with my addiction [statement: honesty/empathizer] was when I went to rescue my time, I only lost more of it. This was the pain of it all. When I say volumes you must understand how large the pages are, how much *time* I have spent doing these things. The expansive pages are tightly packed with ink slashes. You have yet to view the books so I assume you don't know how scratched the pages are. Scratched all around with black, it is deep and I discover myself falling into its abyss the most times I can. It's deep, I fall for a long while about ten feet -- the books, stacked up, are about ten feet; I'm mostly ten feet away from conversation... I do feel this all makes sense. It may last forever, this interest in phrases, and I do feel pain from it, everyone in glass display boxes, reflective shimmer clouding their faces. They say things to me, but never is it loud or effective. Here they are, I see them, but they cannot be touched, voice gagged always behind the glass. And it is true to say I feel wanting home, unsure of where that is. I of course made attempts to stop the obsession, return me to myself, only to be caught in the loop again. Pre-interaction I locked myself to 'I will not categorize these people,' but thinking about not thinking the thought made me think it.

I retract it all. You must pardon my grays and blues. All this jibber-jabber here is only me caught up in important things, gets me all frothed up. People respond best to happiness, I've found. In a given conversation, the people with the most [interjection: wit/contextual]'s were given the most [expression: chortle/appreciative]'s and positive comments thereafter. A whole breed of green light conversation comes out of this, spawning continued positive encounters in the future. If I may comment, we shake off sadness like cold water. If someone asks you how your day is, you better believe it's good. No matter the weather, you look them in the face, you give a nice smile and you can and give it your

best [response: informational/assertive]. Try to not be low, put that beast away. Smile at people and make successful jokes. This is all *one* course of action, advised if one seeks ideal responses. But this course may exclude too many [response: honesty/compassion]'s.

My scrutiny cultivates a cynical outlook in most cases, while punching some light into the social plane. Our hands, arms and faces are the one exception to the categorization. You can net words, but never spontaneous gestures in conjunction with careful facial display and small intonations. Hands spreading like Chinese fans, sudden laughter that causes you to double over. Eyes that connect and fire messages with their color, I cannot seem to capture these moments, which speaks to a human's inner life. We range from flowering socialites to stony walls -- depending on the combination of peers. It is a level of conformability and distrust we maintain among ourselves. Unknowns are to be addressed with [greeting/response: introductory/assertive] and this is hardly a bad thing excluding the exchange's simplicity and nearsightedness. When people possess the phenomenon of remembering experiences, why can we not share our lives more easily? That may be a phenomenon, but the real one is when I look at you, I look at you now. We are here at this very moment during our time on the earth, in the same exact 80-100 year period. I should be here to channel my language into anything to anybody. Yet here we are in the jungle once again, our alert defenses brought to life in a social, civilized world. Sometimes we may be scared of what we say or don't, so you act casual and passive. Stay on the walkway, please. If you happen to travel over it, mind the neon-green turf for it resembles the people. You make footprints as you move past, some big, some small. In general, we stay tapping on concrete, beside and not crossing.

I need to tell you about this funny idea that popped into my head, the one that could save my life. Today the world wanted me to be better, more in touch with its waves and depth. You get that moment of clarity where the sun is allowed out of the clouds and smooth warmth passes through. I saw a man driving his car on a day like this one, and as he drove, he cried into his steering wheel. I

don't know why it stung me, but it did. I wondered why he cried, why his face got all red and tight. He was behind the glass but I could see him. I drove past two women, both swinging take-out from their right hands. A man smoked while crossing a light, and he had seen terrifically dark things – I could simply feel it.

I wait on a bench to watch it all go by. I hear the river babbling, I think about those ripples. A child asks questions, others dangle from yellow monkey bars. Many people try to look unaffected, but they are, there is instantaneous discussion happening all the time. A man beside me plays a guitar, nothing I had heard before. I let a coin hit his guitar case and requested something different.

Nerves

Arthur Robinson

I cannot tell you how my story begins, ends, or even breaks because it shakes in my hands, my legs, my shoulders, and my chest.

Rest, I beg you, that's what they tell me when my hands move with my feet in crescents, with beats per seconds, but you cannot mend that which is not broken.

Spoken speech is scary, so I'm sorry, I can't handle things that change, like change in my pocket jingling, and strange, how my words seem to just pour.

Oh horror, I can't seem to get a handle on the hands, or rest the rest of my body, it's getting out of control and I don't know what to do.

You can't seem to comprehend, dear, that this is all shocks, mocking my spine from the top of my head to the locks in my hair, and the static in the air.

Bare your heart to me, please don't cry, I don't want to die, I just want to feel again, why are you shaking, baby, don't make this something it isn't.

Listen, mom and dad always told me I was different, that I was meant to do something, but not nothing like when my neighbor had a heart attack.

Go back. I'll calm down, promise.

Don't let that stinging liquid fall from your eyes. Please.

Today is over, tomorrow may come, and I won't be like this forever. Don't go again.

Gemini Season

Emily Duffy

I have a warm weather friend
She opens my palms with her hands// hands with her palms
Psalms. She kisses my mouth with her solemn mouth, lips with her
lips

I have a cold weather lover
He holds the door and asks me probing questions
I burn uneven-- a cigarette lit on one side
My brow furrows trying to match our stride
His legs are longer than mine.
He keeps me warm. With a blanket of intellect and hot coffee
Our economy built on checks and balances
Our language synonymous

I have a warm weather lover
She's easy. With a body that blooms in the face of the sun, like
mine. She liquidates; and I become the sand
granules. She wears an octopus furnace around her neck as we
break bread: She wraps her tongue around my earlobe
"Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another whispers back"

I have a cold weather friend
He mitigates my heart with jagged cliff assurances
A biting cold and gnawing hunger at my
Base. As waves crash below
refuge from storm, storm inside
storm in mind. *mec- mec- mec.*
palms holding stone rock
rock walls. scraping.
climbing ache muscle clench--wind howling, crying:
"Every heart bleeds a song, incomplete, until another bites back"

Lacrimosa

Sophie Zander

“Lacrimosa” played from afar, melting into the air like saccharin into hot tea.

The tune rose up to reach the cherry blossoms, making them dance upon their branches.

The slight breeze whipped my hair into a nest of tangles as I rushed to meet my older sister Leila at the Loeb Boathouse Cafe in Central Park.

Heels clicking across mahogany floors, late as per usual, I rushed past wine glasses that hung like crystal bats awaiting the nectar of a fine Merlot.

Collapsing into a wicker chair across from Leila on the veranda, the sun greeted me, its pulsing rays wrapping me in a warm embrace that was not mirrored in my sister’s anxious expression.

“So what’s this all about Leila? You sounded weird on the phone.”

“Okay I’m just going to say it. I don’t want to draw this out. I have a boyfriend.”

One of the first memories I can recollect is my sister telling me she liked girls. Building a fort with crisp white linens in the living room, Rugrats playing in the background, I came to learn what a lesbian was, and that my sister was one. Not bisexual, confused or curious; a butch, gay-pride festival attending, dreadlock wearing, tattoo sleeve donning, lesbian.

“I don’t understand. Is this a joke?”

“No, and I’m just as confused by it as you. He went to Brown, he’s becoming a doctor. He’s 6’ 5” and volunteers at a children’s hospital. His name is Theo and it’s real. Don’t look at me like that; I know it’s fucking weird.”

The waiter intervened, a merciful interception granting me a moment’s reprieve to order my Waldorf salads with extra cranberries. I sipped cool fresh water, thinking hard as it cascaded down my dry throat.

The last romantic interest my sister had was a 5' Asian girl from Harvard who wore woolen vests and neatly pressed JCrew button ups. Always in opaque tights, not a run to be seen, she had small ears and loved chalupas from 7/11 on study breaks.

Before that was Abigail, a wild child. All studded jean cutoffs and ripped up band tees. She had a nose ring and alizarin crimson hair. She tried for that "I don't give a fuck" attitude, but the frequency with which she checked the thick smears of ebony eyeliner that devoured her lids suggested otherwise.

Scout was a tom boy, flat as a board. Baggy clothes from Gap, short camel hair, and round Harry Potter glasses. She was around for a good year, even braving the dull expanse of farmland to visit us in Connecticut. They got heckled at for holding hands in the movie theater, but she was so quietly impassive I could hardly tell she cared.

Janice was a college crush. Frizzy red hair and pale sallow skin. She had a very fine nose and thin lips that stayed ever creased into a smile. Her lithe ceramic figure was always heavily adorned with heavy bangles and necklaces; draping her like a Grecian sculpture, they looked as if they threatened to break this porcelain woman.

Breanna was a one night stand, tequila induced fling. Leila had hickeys for a week, spotting her neck with swirls of bistre, eggplant and ebony.

Graciette was half Cape Verdean, she wrote poetry and her eyes were deep emerald wells.

She was a weekend romance at the beach house; I saw them passing a bottle of Caseliero del Diablo back and forth by the light house, Leila stumbling home drunk as the morning sky rose into burnt umber and amber.

Olivia was a surfer, always wearing a suit of sand, tiny camel kernels clinging to soft sea bathed skin. She had so many sun kissed freckles, they spread out like constellations across her tan.

Guilianna was a pudgy Italian, her thick eyebrows echoing every slight facial expression. Her stories were punctuated by broad hand movements and always bookended with bawdy laughter. She

smelled of fresh baked bread and honeysuckle, and her frizzy auburn hair was always restrained by a tightly wound hair tie and myriad of bobby pins.

She was in love from afar with Aadila, who was straight and Muslim and the epitome of unattainable. For a year every phone call I had with my sister was a pitiful whine about the hardships of unrequited love, as she dolefully rattled on about her almond shaped eyes flecked with gold.

But now here we sat, everything the same yet still so colossally shifted. The Le Conte's Sparrow heckled lusty mating calls at one another, creamy yellow bellies overhead dancing that primal dance I had just now begun to question.

White Interface

Jane Lee

Temples pray, lose their brush with cadence;
Resonance liberated from its pitter-patter, seeped in wire
Stenciled blue, red tangle left and right;
Glistens, ovaling its way through rests, staccato.
Deviating from the pacemaker—stones of charcoal, ague spur
Moved from hands, Raynaud's flush;
Sunk in, passive brow of reflection: mango retina
Lest the stream coats overhead, sheaths them.

Blue, grey ilk, ebbed in gamma
For discretion, timely for constriction—
Circadian rhythm-like—roma apples inside bruised,
Frost the leaves, grounded in bland, bland, sugar;
Sugar cup, lends it not to me
Ethylene sinks in,
Drains the dry, dry quartzes
Out of Me, to two clear organs

The Last Time I Played with Dolls

Leah Garrity

What spurred me to package my toys away?
Entomb them in plastic bins
shoved beneath my bed into a labyrinth of cobwebs,
tangled with orphaned hobbies.
Sold off piece meal at a yard sale,
spread out on a blanket like a shroud.
The shadow of sadness lingering in the periphery of mind
as the players of my imaginings
were clutched in sticky hands of other children
to star in unfamiliar narratives.
Forlorn that there was no
final ceremonious brushing
of my Barbie's silk-spun hair,
no last joy ride in her crimson convertible.
Instead this slow-creeping disinterest,
a secret roommate unpacking itself
within the confines of my dollhouse.
My distracted fingers loosening their grasp,
to brandish new markers of age.
Like drifting off to sleep,
I never know when I cease fighting my exhaustion
and finally lean into my pillow,
sinking into slumber.
I only awake the next morning changed.

The Mechanic

Brian Thomas

Dad, I still have your middle name,
Despite how you say you're "dumb as dirt."
Despite how your shirt, encrusted with old oil,
Hangs in the hamper for mom to clean,
I still have your middle name. I carry it with me
Like a little girl carries a doll through the super market.
Dad, don't be sad when you see me slowly slip away to school,
Nimble on my fresh feet and knees,
While you nurse your back, broken by work.
Your glazed over eyes give you away, your exhaustion,
Your gritty knuckles with countless callouses
That would softly get me out from sleep when I was too world-
weary.
In the days when I would wake up soaked in broken tears,
Hearing the clink of your coffee cup,
I knew how hard it was, and when you kept going, I kept going.
Dad, father, can't you see how poetic you are?
How you knead life into lead ridden machines
And give dreams to your accidental children.

The Allegory of the Maze

Joshua Hoffman

A rat in a maze finds cheese in a place where he spends his summers. It's a cube of sharp cheddar. The rat really wants that cheese cube, so he approaches it. However, the rat gets a little shy, insecure, and insincere, so he ends up standing nearby with his back to the cube of sharp cheddar. The rat knocks over the cube of sharp cheddar with his tail. The rat gets shocked.

So then the rat finds in the part of the maze where he lives a cube of Swiss cheese—no, Australian-American cheese. The rat inches closer and closer to that cheese cube without touching it, making it apparent to everyone in the vicinity that that rat really wants that cube of Australian-American cheese. The rat eventually accidentally knocks over the cheese cube with his elbow and gets shocked. And for some reason, the rat keeps his arms on the cheese's pedestal for a couple more months for some proverbial shock therapy.

The rat is now afraid of all cheese.

So the rat moves on to another part of the maze where he will spend four years and finds a third cheese cube, mozzarella. The rat approaches this cube of mozzarella afraid, thinking that shock is inevitable. However, the rat has since learned how to handle cheese, and the rat remembers everything he learned from the second cheese cube—not so much the first cheese cube; that was more of a what-the-fuck experience. The rat goes for the third cheese cube. The cube of mozzarella respectfully declines, and the rat does not get the cheese cube, but the rat does not get shocked. The rat is very grateful to the third cheese cube for proving him wrong.

My Goldfish

Michele Snead

We were sitting on my couch when she asked me,
“Does your goldfish ever cry?”
I looked at her and said no.
She asked me how to tell if my goldfish was crying.
I knew I was clever, and I said,
“If my goldfish were crying I wouldn’t know his tears from the
water.”
She told me that I was wrong,
“No. It’s because you never ask how his day was.”

Each time I passed my goldfish’s bowl that week,
I stopped and peered into it
Tapping on the sides sometimes
Eventually I would sit and stare at it while eating my dinner.
Finally, I worked up the courage to ask,
“How was your day?”

I knew instantly that I was the single silliest person on the planet.
There is a little girl trying to play checkers with her cat somewhere.
And I knew that even I was sillier than her.

The next week I spent at the aquarium.
Still unable to tell if the sea turtles had tear ducts.
The fifth time I went the ticket woman stopped me,
“You’ve been here every day since Tuesday.
What could be that interesting?”
If anyone knew the answer to my questions,
It would be the woman with the aquarium issued polo shirt.

“Have you ever seen one of them cry?”
Anyway, for the rest of the week
Red polo shirts followed me from the shark tank to the clown fish.
I just stopped going.

I went back to watching my own goldfish.
He circled the bowl.
Circled,
Around and
Around and
Around and
Then he would dip into the rocks
Letting the little bubbles float to the top

There was a rainbow castle inside
And a little treasure chest just like every goldfish has
He never touched them or went inside of them
I wondered if he even knew they were there sometimes.

The next day I went to the pet store to pick out the perfect castle.
Its doors had to be wide for the days he swam a little sideways.
The turrets had to be as close to the surface as possible
So the bubbles wouldn't get lonely on their way to the top.
It had to be inviting and cozy for the days when he wanted to hide.
After all, he's on the table to display for any common folk.
I didn't know if fish had self-conscious days, but I wasn't taking
risks.

The cashier slid my castle across the price zapper.
He commented on my castle's intricacy and said
I must have a lovely aquarium.
I said, "Actually, no.
It's just this one piece for the aquarium,
Well it's actually a bowl, not an aquarium
For my fish, my goldfish. But I'm glad
That you like it. I was unsure about this and
The pirate ship, but the pirate ship seemed
More threatening and ominous.
I didn't want to scare my goldfish."

When I got home the first thing I did, of course,
Was give my goldfish his new royal home.
I put it in the bowl and he threw himself to the closest glass wall.
I pulled my hand out and waited. Waited
For days, for my goldfish to use his castle.
I didn't want to miss his initial reaction.
The milk went sour and my clothes got stale.
I missed a dozen dozen phone calls before I realized
That maybe my goldfish didn't care about the castle.
That wasn't what he needed.

I returned the new castle to the pet store.
I told the cashier that it wasn't what my goldfish needed.
And I was sorry for wasting his time,
My time,
And my goldfish's time.
He said it was no problem and wished me luck.

In an age when you can Google everything
I turned to the Internet at last
Reluctantly joining a forum for goldfish owners.

I gave them my question,
Downloaded the app for the site on my phone
I checked for answers on lunch breaks,
During commercials,
While I was brushing my teeth,
And sometimes in my sleep.

It wasn't until days later that I received my private message.
"Hi. You seem very concerned with your goldfish.
I wish I could help you but I've never seen a goldfish cry.
I've also never seen one not cry.
Have you tried cutting onions next to his bowl?
I'm interested to see if you find the answer you need.

If you do, please let me know.
P.S. What's his name?"

What's his name?

What's his name?

It had been months and I didn't know his name.

He had lived in my house with me,

Eaten food I bought,

Watched my shows with him,

And not once did I ask his name.

I got really close to the glass.

My breath fogged it over so much,

I almost couldn't see my goldfish.

I waited until he got close to my face.

And I whispered,

"What's your name?"

I was no longer sillier than the girl playing checkers with her cat.

Now I was more like the girl playing Monopoly with a rock.

I responded to the other user back.

Simply saying, "I don't know.

He didn't tell me."

The status on the message says "Read"

But they still haven't responded.

My goldfish was turning into a scab.

I was picking at it every day

I could see it. I could feel it.

But I didn't know if it was actually progressing.

It was growing greater and greater.

I couldn't overlook it.

I had to sit him in another room when I wanted to watch TV.

Then, I felt guilty so I'd put a TV on in that room, too.

I started looking up bodies of water nearby.
Where did they open, where did they let out?
What was the quality of the water?
pH balance?
Pollution?
Predatory fish?
Plants.
Oxygen levels.
Sunlight.
Everything.

I had to let this fish go.
We spent so many moments together,
And I didn't even know him.
I didn't even bother.
And after all of this time, I didn't know his name
I didn't know his pain.

But I also didn't know what kind of place he wanted to live in.
He couldn't choose on his own, even when I held the map up to the
bowl.
He didn't say anything and he didn't have fingers to point.
So he sat there, swimming
Around and
Around and
Around and
Then I did what I knew had to be done.

I flushed.

The Stars on Stuart Road

Mara Koren

Ringo had been with her ever since the day Mommy spun Sergeant Pepper on the record player. Lucy remembered that day with an eerie crystalline clarity: the velvet roses on the carpet, how Mommy danced in a blur of her new blue dress. How after they waltzed around the living room to "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" they sat and Mommy opened the album like a book, revealing a close-up of the four Beatles. Lucy studied them and asked, "Which one's your favorite?" Mommy pointed to the first, Ringo, and from that day on, Ringo had been there.

On a cold Sunday after the funeral her teddy bear, blankie, dolls, and apple-green sippy cup were given away in tubs for nickels and quarters, but Ringo had stayed.

He was in the backseat now, pink taffeta Sgt. Pepper suit rumpled and silly brass trumpet under one arm, as Grandfather drove steadily north. Lucy did not have a watch so she marked time by the odometer and the number of times Grandfather cleared his throat. *Forty-seven...Forty-eight.*

Forty-nine and he spoke. "Now, Lucy..."

Lucy didn't look at him.

"I'm...we have to understand each other. I'm not very good at this so we're going to have to help each other out, all right?"

Lucy crossed her arms over Mommy's too-big sweater and looked at the sepia world running beside the car. *Everything's gonna be all right*, everyone had told her, but the weather was gray and her nose stung from cheap cologne and cat hair and everything would never be all right again.

"Lucy. Look at me."

Lucy looked past him.

"Now understand? I'm doing the best I can. This is what families do, right? Lucy? So we need to work together on this."

Lucy's throat was too dry. She gave a single nod, then turned her eyes away.

Ringo's hand reached out to touch her shoulder and stayed there, swaying with the suspension of the car until the odometer clicked to its new all-time high and they lurched to a stop. The house was small, sea-facing and brick. Lucy looked at it while Grandfather heaved both of her suitcases from the trunk. The huffs of his breath hung in the air. They went inside.

"This will be your room." Grandfather set her bags on the bottom of a set of bunks in a narrow, entirely blue room. A small radiator under one window chugged away, filling the room with burnt, stifling air.

Lucy ran two fingers along the bottom footboard. "Why're there two beds?"

Grandfather kicked at dust that was not there. He said, "For your Aunt Anna and...your mother."

Lucy scrutinized the beds, trying to imagine her mother and aunt, living there as girls. Whispering to each other when the lights were out about boys and cigarettes. "Which bunk did Mommy have?"

Grandfather thought for a moment. "The top," he said. Then he turned away. "I'll let you get settled." The door closed behind him and Lucy listened to footsteps descend the stairs. She turned to Ringo, still holding his suitcase and looking around the room.

"It's nice," he said, setting his pink cap on the dresser.

"It's terrible."

"Why don't you unpack your stuff?"

Ringo sat on the bottom bed while Lucy shoved shirts in drawers and hung her few dresses crookedly on the wire hangers already in the closet. A flashlight went on the dresser, her alarm clock on the bedside table.

"See?" Ringo said. "It's not so bad."

Lucy slumped onto the bed next to him and he put a crinkly arm behind her neck, his golden epaulet brushing her cheek.

"Those are ugly shoulder pads." Lucy brought the Sgt. Pepper album with her to cheer up Mommy, who was pale and wilted. She thought the colorful cover might brighten Mommy's

stark room and she left it propped against a flower vase when she left.

"They're called epaulets," Mommy said, tracing a thin fingernail around Ringo's tasseled shoulder. "Aren't they silly?" Her hair was gone by then.

"Let's go down to dinner," Ringo said, nudging Lucy so she would sit up.

"I'm not hungry." But they went anyway.

Dinner was bubbly and brown and had been curdling in a crockpot all day. The crockpot had a curly vine of flowers along the edge and Lucy thought, *neighbors*.

"Did you get unpacked?" Grandfather overturned a tarnished spoon onto his tongue; Lucy watched as the stringy muscles in his neck moved the food down.

She sipped her water. "Yes."

They sat in a silence of the humming overhead light and spoons tapping teeth until Lucy got most of her brown gloop into a napkin, and on the pretext of more water threw it away under the kitchen sink.

Nights were the worst. Lucy could handle the days; she could not handle the nights. Mommy was always there, pale and whispering words Lucy couldn't hear. There were tubes in her, tubes everywhere, and Lucy imagined them being ripped out.

"Shhh." Ringo laid next to her. She was on the bottom bunk—Aunt Anna's bunk. She couldn't make it to the top. "Don't think about that," he told her.

"How can I not think about that!" Her throat was tight.

"Think about Stuart Road," he said, brushing his fingers over her hair. His suit was silver pink in the ambient light. "Remember?"

"No."

"Remember the stars?" Ringo spread out onto his back.

"Maybe."

"You walked all the way down the road together looking at the stars."

Lucy did remember. She didn't want to cry. "Sing me a song."

Ringo did, changing the words just slightly. *You've got to admit, it's getting better, a little better all the time.*

School was painful. During lunch Lucy went outside and sat under the yellow slide with Ringo.

"Don't you want to eat with the other kids?" he asked, unwrapping his sandwich in crinkly tinfoil.

Lucy shook her head. She looked across the windy school yard, to the fence and the trees beyond. She thought about running.

"Your Mommy first heard the Beatles on her way home from school, when she was on the bus between 3rd Street and—"

"I know," Lucy interrupted.

"It was 'I Want to Hold Your Hand.'"

"I know. She went to the store after school but she didn't have enough money so she stole it."

"That's right," Ringo said, smiling faintly.

"And..." Lucy let a piece of crust get soggy in her mouth. "We went back to visit, and we went to the shop. She gave the man who worked there ten dollars but wouldn't tell him why..." *Mommy was in the bathroom, telling Lucy not to come in. "I'm fine, I'm fine."*

"It's called a Forty-Five." Ringo touched her hand gently to bring her back.

Lucy wiped her eyes. "I know."

"How was your first day of school?"

"Okay."

Grandfather pulled away. Lucy didn't look back. When they got to the house she tried to escape upstairs but Grandfather said, "Let me show you something." He took hold of Lucy's arm and opened a door she hadn't seen before, revealing a dim stairway. She glanced back and Ringo was there.

Grandfather went down first. The room was low-ceilinged, musty, and the floor was gravel. Lucy flinched over the stones to a table Grandfather indicated.

"See this?" He held up a wooden board. "I'm a woodworker, do you know what that is?"

“Yes.”

“All right, so I make this, I sand it down and I stain it.” He gestured to some cans of paint that Lucy didn’t look at. “And when I’m all done, and with a lot of other wood-” He led her by the wrist- “I make...rocking chairs.”

Lucy looked at the row of empty chairs. Mommy had had one of those chairs. A spider started living there once she stopped getting out of bed.

Grandfather was still talking “And this one, I made for you.” He pointed to a small black chair, shiny and smooth. “Try it out.”

“No thank you.”

“Lucy, I made this for you.”

Ringo opened his mouth but Lucy sat. She looked at her shoes. She didn’t want a chair.

“Well...” Grandfather was uneasy now. “I’ll bring it up later, then.”

Lucy nodded and retreated for the stairs.

That night Ringo sang her favorite song to cheer her up but she cried anyway. *For the benefit of Mr. Kite, there will be a show tonight, on trampoline.*

Lucy was eating her sandwich with Ringo the next day when children started coming out for recess. Lucy didn’t notice them as they skirted the edge of the playground, kicking up woodchips with sneaker toes. Ringo didn’t see them either. He took a bite of his sandwich and asked, “Remember last Thanksgiving, when Mommy burned the turkey?”

Lucy nodded slowly. “The whole kitchen filled up with smoke.”

Ringo smiled. “She loved the turkey.”

“She was so mad we had to eat spaghetti!”

Someone coughed, and Lucy spun to find Jimmy Wills and Sandra Emmitt staring at her. The pair looked at each other, then back to Lucy, who to them sat alone under a small oak tree.

“Who are you talking to?” Sandra Emmitt asked.

Lucy felt her face grow hot. “No one,” she said quickly.

“You were talking to someone,” Sandra Emmitt persisted.

Lucy looked to Ringo, sitting on her right, his pink suit now dull with dust. She looked away. “There’s no one here, so who would I be talking to?”

Sandra Emmitt and Jimmy Wills just stood staring for a minute longer. Then Jimmy said, “You’re weird!” and ran away. Sandra followed.

Lucy hoped that would be the end of it, but she knew it wouldn’t be, and she was right. Within five minutes all the other children knew, and by the end of the day when parents pulled up in their cars everyone was calling her *Loony Lucy*. Grandfather came second to last. Lucy slid inside the car that smelled like shoe polish, holding the door just long enough for Ringo to clamber in behind her.

“How was school?” Grandfather didn’t wait for her to buckle her seatbelt like Mommy had.

“Okay,”

“Did you make new friends?”

“I talked to this girl.”

“That’s good. “

“Hello Loony,” Michael Dooly said the next morning.

The day only got worse from there.

The weather was warm and all the children ate lunch outside. Lucy sat with Ringo again under the slide but she couldn’t talk to him. No one wanted to make crafts with her, and during recess she sat under a tree that was pouring dust down its trunk, watching it catch in the bark. The other children made faces at her and laughed behind their hands.

Mommy had never cared if she talked to Ringo, and at school back home she’d had friends and didn’t need him so much. Now he was there but they couldn’t talk, and when she looked at him he just looked back at her sadly.

“I’m sorry,” she said, and the other children laughed.

Lucy endured three more days until the weekend. She didn't talk to Ringo at school. She was scared to talk to him at home, too, where grandfather might overhear and send her away. *They make special places for people like you*, Sally Sinker had told her. *LoonyLucyLoonyBin!* When Lucy thought of *special places* she imagined Mommy's room with the wrinkled sheets and blank walls.

Grandfather took her to the beach on Sunday. Together they sat on the windy rocks and looked out over the temperamental ocean. Words were choked back in Lucy's throat, all the words she would normally tell Ringo. Grandfather wrapped a blanket around her as the water kicked up against the shore. Ringo looked paler every day, like he did in the black and white days of photographs.

"Lucy," Grandfather said, the wind blowing his hair into a cowlick. "Are you happy here?"

Lucy drew her knees to her chest and clasped her fingers tight around them. "Sometimes."

Grandfather opened his mouth, then seemed to change his mind, and closed it, frown lines forming around his lips. Lucy looked away from him, to where Ringo was perched on a rock over the ocean. He was fading into the mist, becoming as insubstantial as the fine droplets of water.

That night, when Grandfather went down to his basement workshop, Lucy sat with Ringo, huddled in her blankets.

"You can't leave me," she whispered.

Ringo took off his pink cap and sighed.

Lucy squeezed her eyes so tight colors formed. *Mommy was saying she loved her, thin and bald and the machine beeping next to her. All Lucy could see was the card on the white wood table. Feel better. We love you. Anna, James, Benny, Samuel. The card got tangled up in Mommy's words. "Lucy, Feel better everything's gonna be fine We love baby. I love you so AnnaJames much. BennySamuel I always will."*

"Lucy." Ringo patted her hair.

"Go away!" She couldn't take him being half there and half not. When she opened her eyes she could see through his chest to

the sheet. His suit was no longer pink but a sort of pale silver, and his eyes were glassy, not blue.

He didn't go away. He sang to her. *Picture yourself in a boat on a river, with tangerine trees, and marmalade skies...a girl with kaleidoscope eyes...Lucy in the sky with diamonds.* "That's you," he said, patting her head with a feather light hand. "That's always gonna be you."

Ringo was gone the next day.

The ride to school was rainy, mist streaking the windows like tears. Lucy spent half the day wobbling on the open toilet seat, yanking toilet paper down to the cardboard roll and flushing it away. Finally the teacher noticed she was gone and came to fetch her, asking if she wanted to go to the nurse but she said no. So the teacher deposited her back on the scratchy alphabet rug and left her alone for the inside recess. Her head throbbed, her eyes were so tired she wanted to lie down and go to sleep until the school rotted from age. Instead she sequestered herself in a corner and drew a crayony picture of Ringo, giving him smudgy blue eyes and crumbly brown hair that she dragged a fingernail through to make white lines like it had when he sat under a light. She was going to cry again. She covered her heavy eyes. Someone tapped her shoulder. Lucy looked up into the face of a boy with so many freckles his skin was almost orange. For a moment they just looked at each other, then he asked, "Who's that of?"

Lucy grew hot, but this boy had never teased her. She thought he might be the one who was quarantined to a separate table by a peanut allergy. She wiped her eyes and pushed her hair away. "Ringo," she said.

Lucy flinched when the boy shoved his arm forward. But, she saw, it was only to display a washable Yellow Submarine tattoo. "I like George," he said, sitting next to her. "George said Ringo was really funny."

Lucy nodded. She looked at the boy cautiously, the way he sat, gingerly, careful not to disturb the space beside him.

“Well, see you later!” Lucy watched as he left. Safe on the other side of the room, he sat and said something to the air beside him.

Mommy was pale and blue and her eyes were closed and she was breathing so faintly that Lucy thought every other second she was not breathing. No. Mommy was laughing when they made cookies and got flour everywhere. Mommy was beautiful and warm. Mommy was sitting on Lucy’s bed, and she sang “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” and Lucy fell asleep.

The next day Lucy went up to the boy with the freckles, alone at his table. She took a deep breath and pulled at the hem of her shirt. In her waistband was a letter all the way from where the Beatles lived, saying Aunt Anna was coming to visit. She touched the corner of it with a finger. “Can I sit here?” she asked.

The boy smiled and motioned which side to sit on. They ate quietly, Lucy letting the wind sting her eyes.

“You were a Ringo,” the boy said. He pointed to a small boy with long dark hair, over in the school yard. “He’s a Paul.”

Lucy watched the dark-haired boy as he caught a football and threw it back. “What’s George look like?” she asked.

“He’s got hair that looks like a turnip!”

“Tell him I say hi.”

That night Lucy climbed up to the top bunk and looked down on the room. The dying window light turned the walls golden orange, and for a moment Mommy was a little girl beside her. Mommy closed her eyes, Lucy did too. Both dreamed of marmalade skies.

A Foggy New York
Nina Petry



Cat; Wurtzburg
Melanee Piskai



Embrace
Andrew Tran



Faces
Sean Dolan



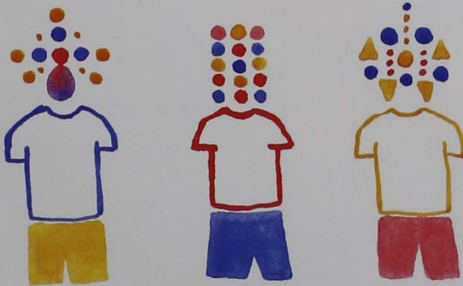
Geisha
Grace Buchele Mineta



Pacis Leo
Kayla Sallada



Patterns
Blaise Laramiee



Te-Whanganui-a-Tara (The Dock)
Samantha Cermignano



Put Down Your Hammer

Melanee Piskai

Put down your hammer
Then pick up my little hands
And hold them like plums.

Strip

Chloe Kekovic

You asked me to strip for you
and so i did,
willingly.
i peeled off my dress
let it come up over my head
allowed my hair to fall into
elegant tufts around my neck.
i smiled at You through painted lips
as your eyes coaxed me to go forward.
i pulled my tights down around my ankles,
and you muttered 'slower' and so i did,
willingly.
i stood in front of you, covered by
two inches of cheap cloth on top
and practically bare on bottom
as a thin texture clenched between my cheeks
and you told me to dance, baby, dance for me
and so i did,
willingly.
i gyrated against music that played in my mind
a sensual, melodic tune
one that whimpered in my ear
and i watched you lean back
drinking me in slowly
and i yearned for you to see more
and so i started to peel back my skin
desperate to display
my layers, my levels, my blood
my body
my soul
and You repelled away
covering your eyes and wincing
and pleading, pleading for me to stop.

And I Did So,
Willingly.
for at that moment i knew
that I was not what you wanted
to see
stripped.

Hollywood

Kevin Moore

The hero rides up on his not-so-brilliant steed

To save the woman of his dreams from the evil scientist
And the comic book villain.

Pressure mounts as the wedding draws near

And Uncle Larry fails to pick up the right cake.

He can never be trusted,

Just like the man who refuses to give a direct answer

About his relationship with the deceased. His responses

Seem almost *too* flawless in their delivery, and where *was* he

On the night of the fifth?

At least the local football team will defy expectations this
year

And win the championship in underdog fashion.

The hero pulls out his iconic piece.

Catch Phrase!

And they ride off into the sunset to live happily ever after.

That plot was like a dodo bird, trying to be an eagle

But beaten to death.

Identity
Codey Young

To the white business man, suitably dressed, on a flight from the Dominican Republic to New York seated next to me

Perusing the pages
of his existential being
published monthly
The American Way
his pants become tighter
as he flips
to the golf section
beads of sweat
dripping
down

his
face

his beady
little businessman
eyes
fermentedly stumble
after a few sips
Delta sherry:

100 ways to shoot
under
par
while simultaneously
maintaining

**S Y S T E M S O F O P P
R E S S I O N**

I breathe deep
searching for inner peace
struggling
not to put a hole in one side

of his meat loving
misogynist
head
his hands
resting
on the family jewels
while his wedding band
cuts off
all compassion and capacity
for normal human reason
I wonder
what exotic delights
he conquered
on red light
streets

Colon's
first slave settlement:
the New World

And why's he sitting
next to me?

Did he splurge
too much
allured
by the power
of America's almighty dollar
in the savage filled
undeveloped third world land?

Does he trust in God?

Of course.
Of course!
Only God
grants elitist dreams

Just ask Steve Jobs
he got God
on speed dial
How else
could he comfort
himself
with the vanity
of first-person perspective
technology?

iPad the walls
of insecurity
surrounding me
with capitalist consumerist
propaganda
as iTouch
the Holy Grail
of white female purity
Hitler's dream girl
a blonde-haired
blue eyes
subservient robot
Kindled
by the comforts
of unconscious privilege
without a care
inside
the gated imaginary world
of our iHome

Oh, What a Wonderful Life!

You are human
and I love you
along with the miserable existence
that is your reality

I cannot help
but wonder
What life has in store
for you
with the next steps
you take

what thoughts
will flutter
through peoples' heads
as your eulogy
is read

what legacy
will you leave behind
in this world?

And why is it
so hard
for you to love
someone
that looks like me?

Just Another Drunkard on the Train

Grace Buchele Mineta

He leaned over the side, with his head pressed against the railing and body swaying in a drunken haze. He looked to be in his late seventies, with thinning wisps of white hair hidden beneath a tweed cap. Rather than wearing a traditional Japanese suit, he was wearing a tan coat over black slacks and shiny black shoes. He looked of money but smelled of cheap alcohol. My guess? He was coming back from a retirement party or company function.

I was glad he was leaning away from the train tracks because the Chuo Line has the highest percentage of suicide and drunken related accidents per year in Japan. I always got nervous around midnight; the combination of drunkenness and people rushing to make the “last train” is a recipe for disaster.

Thankfully, he was leaning away from the tracks.

As a train on the opposing tracks zipped by, I caught a whiff of something sour in pungent. I glanced down and nearly gagged. There was a puddle of vomit at his feet.

I'm not dealing with this tonight, I thought as I walked past him, getting into line two rows down. When I was coming back from an office party on Friday a couple months back, a young businessman vomited on a slew of nearby passengers while the train was in between the Nakano and Shinjuku. Since then, I've avidly avoided drunkards on the train.

It was just after eleven in the evening, so the trains weren't terrible crowded. I managed to squeeze in between two businessmen near the door of the train without trouble. Fishing my iPod out of my pocket, I plugged into Muse for the remainder of the thirty minute train ride home.

To my dismay, just as the doors started to close, the drunken old man wobbled into my cart. He mistook my head for a handhold and grabbed onto my head for support, lacing his fingers painfully into my hair. I tried to shake him off. Up close, I could see his eyes glazed over. His breath was rancid and drool leaked out of the side of his mouth.

As the train lurched forward, he fell backwards, taking several strands of hair with him. I winced and shuffled away, towards the front of the train. If he was too drunk to realize he grabbed a *gaijin*'s hair, he was too drunk to reason with. Two stops later, I found myself packed in the center of the train, far away from both the old man and any available doors. The center of the train is always safest at night and I like to be hopeful someone transfers so I can take their seat. I pulled out my Kindle for some light reading.

Fifteen minutes later, I heard shouting.

I opened an eye and slipped out my left earbud. The shouting was drunken and slurred, full of racial stereotypes and old-fashioned styles of speaking.

Great. He's still on the train. I craned my neck toward the door, trying to see what was happening. From in between the rows of suit-clad businessmen, I could see a young Japanese man, no older than twenty-two, with jeans and a light sweatshirt, trying to lead the drunkard off the train. *Finally, someone is doing something about it,* I thought with relief. Japanese people are not known for their confrontational skills, especially in public settings. Snippets of their conversation wafted back through the car.

"You are being nuisance... you need to get off the train."

"Get your hands off of me, you inbred mongrel!"

The young man prodded the drunkard toward the police box on the platform. The next train wasn't for another hour, so the old man would be able to sober up with the police officer before getting back on the train, the young man explained. It would be better this way.

The elderly drunkard disagreed. "Don't touch me, you filthy Korean bastard!" he slurred, swinging his left arm haphazardly. His fist connected with the youth's face. In shock, more than anything, the young man was knocked backwards. My eyes darted toward the old man. As he held his fist in pain, the old man stumbled two steps back and slammed headfirst into the metallic side of the train. The sound echoed through the empty platform. He slid down to his knees.

I watched all of this happen from the inside of the train. *Should I...?* I thought, weighing my options. *Well, he's obviously intoxicated—not to mention racist. Between the inebriation and old style of speech, I can't understand a word he is saying.* I was stuck in the center of the crowded train. Even if I wanted to help him (I didn't), I couldn't get to the door. So I decided not to move.

"Someone help him!" the young man shouted as he rocked back to his feet. I felt torn. No one moved. No one said a word. When the young man looked toward the door of the train for help, no one would meet his eye.

The elderly drunkard slowly got up and staggered back to the door. He paused for a second to get his bearing. The young man stood next to him, careful not to touch him.

"You need to sober up before you get back on the train," he advised. Despite his treatment, he spoke in overly polite Japanese. "You are being a nuisance to the others on the train."

"... Not a nuisance... not... fuck you..." the old man slurred. He lifted one leg in the doorway. Then the other. He was back in the train.

The young man stood outside the train, glaring at the other passengers. He took a deep breath and let out an awful sigh. "If something happens, it is your fault," he called inside the train before stalking off. I wasn't sure if he was talking to the drunken old man or the other passengers inside the train. Twenty seconds later, the doors shut and the train lurched off toward Tachikawa.

I couldn't remember the last time I felt so guilty and helpless. The youth's fears were founded: right before my stop at Musashi Sakai station, the old man spewed projectile vomit all over the passengers sitting in front of him. They screamed and pushed him backward, trying to cover their purses from the rancid projectile. It was too late. The drunkard turned his head and let out three more bursts of vomit on other passengers. In the ensuing stampede away, someone's elbow connected with my stomach, knocking the wind out of me. The air was thick with sweat, beer, and vomit. I couldn't see bits and pieces of what was happening and as the doors opened for Musashi Sakai, I ran off the train.

The night was refreshingly cool. I thought back toward the youth. *He knew this would happen. He tried to stop it.* I laughed. *I want to tell him what happened.*

I found him three cars down. He was leaning up against the side of the door with music leaking out of his large, white headphones. I stuck my head through the doors and yanked one at the headphone chord. He snapped his head upward in confusion.

“Thanks,” I told him, “you know, for back there.”

With furrowed brows, he cocked his head to the side. “Umm, what?”

“The drunk guy.”

“Oh...” He slouched forward and broke eye contact. I felt bad for him. The closing hymn for the train played, warning that the train doors were about to close.

“Just so you know, he vomited all over the car.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“I tried to stop it.” He laughed cynically. “This happens every time. People would rather risk being vomited on than step outside the boundaries.”

“I know.”

The doors slid shut. From inside the car, he just shrugged as the train slowly pulled out of Musashi Sakai station into the night. I wondered if the drunkard was still on the train. I hoped not.

In the following silence, I saw a group of people from my car complaining about the drunkard to a station attendant. One of the women who had been sitting down sobbed silently as she tried to clean vomit out of her hair with a pocked handkerchief.

I checked my phone. 11:45pm. 1 New Message. I opened it. It was from my boyfriend.

At the station yet? See any chikan (perverts who grope women) on the train?

I laughed. *No, but this old guy threw up on a bunch of people.*

Ewww. Nasty. Any get on you?

I glanced back at the crowd near the station attendant. *No.* I typed. *Not this time...*

I paused.

But maybe next time I won't be so lucky.

The Grey Zone

Dominick Knowles

I am the grey zone, the no-man's-land
of the hardened heart. I am and am everywhere.
You may approach me but I will shrink at your nearness.
I am a murder of fact. I am the ice and grit and guilt of
being loved and without love, all at once.
Within me: a monochrome and an asymptote.
I am the terror that clenches the fluttering chest.
I am the wandering rock lodged in a wet
and gangrenous trench. I am absurd,
A map unnavigable. I am the mucoital hacking-up
of tarred-and-feathered lungs. I am merely the mention
of freedom. I am the death throe, writhing in the
passenger seat of a thousand black camrys.
and I am sick with myself. militantly sick:
(When I puff out my chest, my belly protrudes.)

Sophia
Richard Schulz

she set the table for supper with the brittle bones of fallen orphans
while he boiled the republic in slightly salted water
she said he lacked philosophical facility
with regard to his analysis of the blood stained sphinx
that remained in its box out back
so she wanted a divorce

he began to sob
tears that tasted of the absurd while
the fermented hands that had been set for supper
applauded her suberogatory decision

she then admitted to having an affair
with a prince named soren
whom she had met while selling
spoiled cigarettes
to under achieving academics

he proceeded to ask her
if soren cries over spilled milk
and she assured him that he doesn't
because of his epistemic uncertainty
that his faculties are accurate

he then confessed
while summiting a nearby mountain
he had a ménage à trois
with a man named sisyphus
and the skeleton of an abandoned
trolley car's conductor
they had accidentally discovered
while engaging in esoteric argument
she insisted he elaborate

so he told her of how they skipped crack rocks
and snorted suboxone off shattered teapots
until their heads revolved around the sun

how exquisite, she replied
as she pulled down her pants
to their preferred position
and exposed to him her hedonism
for the last time

no thank you he said
i am saving up for supper

To Isabella
Maxwell Bicking

Izzy,

You know what's wrong with love stories? They're never any good. I've waded through Jane Austen, Neruda, all the Brontës, and a few dozen more. No one has ever matched, nuance for nuance, the actual feeling of— and even writing this word, I am making the very mistake I'm complaining about— love. So I will save you those awful bells and whistles, a hyperbolic cant, or some kind of asymptotic *zeitgeist*. You deserve better than this, you pesky little bookworm.

You're probably wondering about? the circumstances by which I'm writing this letter, but I'll just tell you the reasons, and I'll get to circumstances later. It's been years since I've written to you, and, by god, I feel entitled to a little verbosity before I get to my point. Brevity is for the dead.

I needed, you should know, to tell you a story. This isn't a love story in the traditional sense, so I'm not contradicting myself just yet. It's equally your story as it is mine and Michelle's. That's part of what I want to elucidate, more or less, by the end of this. It's taken a long time for me to be able to write this, or anything else, really. I haven't sat and written anything since Adam was born. It's not that I was distracted. I mean, I was, obviously, because he's my little boy. I haven't written because I no longer felt like it was worth it. There was nothing I could write that could be as perfect, as inspired, as creative as my child's birth. Even though you're not a parent, maybe you can understand this as a writer. Michelle certainly doesn't. She thinks I'm full of myself. This letter, however, has been especially difficult, because I was afraid you wouldn't understand why I was writing it so late. It became a cycle—it seemed foolish to write since it was after all that time, so I kept putting it off. I needed to tell you the story of how Michelle and I fell in love, and how we fell out of it.

Back in the eighties, when we were all starting school, our faces still full of pimples and pretense, I stayed in my room for the

first two weeks. I had three peanut butter sandwiches a day, and beelined back to my room after every class. My roommates were the only people I talked to, and those conversations were only the exchange of pleasantries. One Friday night, Jack came into my room and told me that he was taking me out. (Jack was always like this—friendliest to strangers. It's a shame you never really got to know him before the accident.) I didn't have a choice, Jack having the body and grace of an elephant, so when he picked me up and carried me to 6th Avenue, I just tried to enjoy the ride. The next memory I have was standing in the middle of the street, piss drunk. Jack was introducing me to everyone. Some girl walked past me. She was wearing a flower crown, and when she got close, she took it off her head and put it on mine, saying, "Wear that garland, darling. It'll cover your bald spots like a Roman haircut." That was Michelle, Jack said.

A few days of hangover passed, and I saw Jack again. This time, he told me, I was going to meet Michelle. No I'm fucking not, I thought. All three of us lived in the same building, and she was sitting in the common room. Jack dragged me to her, and I introduced myself. I don't remember our first conversation that well. It's not really that important, anyway. The important thing is that she ended up spending the night in my room, and she did this while she was involved with someone else.

She was upset in the morning, but she eventually left her partner. It took some time, and she ignored my convincing her otherwise—that maybe, just maybe, it wasn't wise to end a very serious relationship over casual sex. (I met him years later, standing in line at a coffee shop in Williamsburg. He was wearing the same Black Flag T-shirt Michelle always made fun of him for.) She came over after they ended it and cried, all the terrible glottal, snorting noises accompanied, for three straight hours. She thought she was going to marry him, she told me. I thought she was stark, staring mad, because she was only seventeen.

Eventually, she calmed down and we went on our trajectory. She came home with me the next weekend, while my parents were abroad. We had the house to ourselves for a week because the

hurricane came in hard and the school wouldn't let us come back. (Where were you for that?) I don't like to consider myself a romantic. I'll defend my realism to (and from) the grave, and say that my work has been totally without all the syntax-y droppings of love and squalor. But this week was one of the better weeks of my life, mainly because I realized I loved her. There I go, contradictions abound. Woe is me.

I remember the first Thanksgiving break. Michelle and most of her friends lived too far away to go home, so she invited everyone for dinner in the common room. Pizza and cream soda. (Oh, how hard our Michelle tries to please everyone.) I went onto the porch for a cigarette, and someone was already there. She was wearing stockings run like stripes. She asked me if I possibly had an extra cigarette, by chance (what brevity), and I pulled another out. She introduced herself as Isabella, extending a hand, but not shaking mine so much as feeling in her palm. Perhaps reading this is equivalent, *zum Beispiel*, to looking at an old photograph and not realizing, until it's too late, that you're the person picking her nose in the background. For this, my dear, I am truly sorry, but also unable to keep myself from amusement. I don't remember much of our conversation, except for you telling me that you were Michelle's best friend. I do remember, however, that you had my curiosity from the start. When we went back inside, Michelle came over to us looking both happy we met and worried that I probably had fallen in love with you after two seconds of talking. She suddenly got a blinding headache and asked me to help her to her room.

A few days later, I went to that infamously smoky little reading circle, the Literary Society. Jack came with me (for support, he said, even though I flatly refused to read anything). You came in and sat across from me. When everybody had gone around and read, you pulled something out of your pocket, unfolded it, and quietly asked if you could read it. Remember, much later, when you told me you thought you had lost it? I remembered every word. So, for posterity, here it is, reproduced in full:

*I have images of you, old together,
happy, along a lake,*

wisdom with and of each other.

*You are old. You look young.
You have spent many hours running your fingers through
your hair;
You never had the courage to cut it.*

*Your eyes are gray-green
and when you blush you look like holly.
You read until your eyes hurt,
write until your fingers blister.
Your lips have become pale but are still full.*

*You sing quietly to yourself when you
water the flowers in the afternoon.
You sleep until 2 on Sundays.
In autumn you walk in the woods
And when you return your house smells like rain and fire.*

*You call most often in winter.
You talk slowly;
your last question is always "Are you happy?"*

*You feel lonely, but rarely,
and quickly forget.*

*When it rains
You stay inside and listen to the drops.*

*You haven't yet taken the year you talk about,
Where you learn everything you want to learn,
Be everything you want to be,
But you are happy.*

When you read it, everyone was silent. We all sort of just left without saying anything. I always wanted to tell you that poem made me want to be a writer. You left something beautiful on the page. Most writers, especially poets, will only ever come up with nice lines or maybe a few novel analogies, and never attain what we all want from a person who devotes their life to language. It was beautiful, what you did. That's not nearly what this letter is about, though. That's simply another tangent I'm enjoying, because it's been ever-so-long since I've been dense with you. I wanted you to see that, because if you never write anything again, you should remember that once, long ago, when the freedoms and pressures of youth were riding your back, you wrote this.

Those years went on somewhat uneventfully. Michelle got a job at J.P. Morgan right after graduation, and we moved into midtown, sandwiched between old money and *riche nouveau*. She was out twelve, fourteen hours a day, while I sat endlessly slumped over a typewriter. (When Michelle learned that I went into Brooklyn every morning to get coffee, she almost had me sent back to Boston.) I produced almost nothing, but I wrote thousands of little poems on the backs of cigarette packs (which Michelle mistook for garbage). These ranged from haiku-style stories about the birds that lived on the ledge outside my window, to single words, often made up. I think our problem grew out of a, I don't know, *practical* incompatibility. After a year of Wall Street, she came to resent my lack of mainstream success. I did start using real paper and wrote enough to publish a book later that year, but she hardly acknowledged it.

Then, I got a call one sleepless Tuesday evening. Jack had tried to stop a mugging at a train station, and was pushed onto the tracks. The car slammed right into him. I went into Philadelphia every day to visit him. He took a long time. He was buried, closed coffin, in front of five hundred people. I always sort of resented the idea of a good funeral, regarded it with the especial contempt I reserve for oxymoron, but I wish you had been there.

And then there was poor weather. I got back to my apartment, went in my room, took off my jacket, and found

Michelle in bed with someone. At first I thought maybe I had gone through some sort of schizophrenic episode, thinking I had gone to Jack's funeral when really, I had just stayed in bed the whole time. But no, my faculties were intact, and my wife had been sleeping with some guy who looked like John Barrymore. It was the culmination of these things, and not the individual events, that had made it extremely difficult for me to believe that it was wise for us to get married in the first place, especially right after college. We moved past all of these things, though, and six months later, she was pregnant with Adam.

About a week after we took Adam home, I resumed my regular coffee schedule. There were few bike paths, so I always had to weave in and out of traffic, which was terribly fun, but also irresponsible. Usually I go around Central Park, but today, I decided to cut through. There was this bench on the east side, in the mid-sixties, on which—and I don't know if you remember—we all got drunk during fall break and wrote our names. I rode up and down the east side for an hour looking for it. I wanted to see that story, that "EM MT IA," before it turned into -MM, before we got better handwriting and lost our tolerance. But I gave up. I got kind of upset, too. I turned out of the park and onto 65th Street. I missed the light, or I wasn't looking. A Guarda truck sent me ten feet away. While I lay on 5th Avenue, I kept mouthing "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." And then everything stopped. I was gone.

Remember when we were sitting on the terrace of the art museum and you looked at me and told me you were scared? You said you were scared that you were going to end up alone, and that you had just been preparing yourself, trying to accept this, instead of going out of your way to know people. You said you had closer relationships with characters in books than with people. You looked at me and *smiled*, and then you laughed. At the time I thought you were being facetious, but when you were in the room when my son was born, and you gave me the same smile, I realized you were being serious, but you had finally accepted it. When I was lying on the pavement, mouthing like an idiot, I was thinking about you, and

how there were dozens of occasions during our undergraduate daze for me to tell you how I felt. I was too goddamn *scared*. Scared of losing Michelle, scared of being alone, and *terrified* of losing you, putting some distance between us because I've never had good timing or tact.

It was you, Izzy. It was always you. Even if I don't regret having my child, or my marriage, such as it was, I always lived with the terrifying truth that I was always meant to live my life with *you*. I never shared with you what I shared with Michelle, but somehow, I always felt more connected not just to you, but to *everything* when I was with you. My story played out in the wrong way. And when you looked at me, said the word *alone*, I knew you felt the same, but with much greater foresight. Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe I'm just too emotional, being, you know, dead, and not quite over it. But if you end up forgetting me, if you meet a Saudi prince or Tuckahoe typewriter at your Pulitzer reception, remember that I have always loved you, and will be with you.

Your friend,

Ezra

When I Became a Poet

Quinn Gilman-Forlini

It was when I walked outside
into an early September evening
and you were underneath a tree
straddling your bicycle, wearing
a vest and then everyone left
for the football game but we
stayed, sitting on the brick-covered
ground, listening to acoustic guitar
and our own close voices, cheers
in the distance pulling us tighter
to the cooling air, darkening sky,
lampposts all turning on at once

It was when I was drunk on white
wine, and we stayed up until
three thirty in the morning, you
leaning against me on the couch,
me warm and safe and talking
all the time, my mind loose and ready
full of pop songs and robot dancing
and speaking slurred French

It was when the hummingbird died
and we gathered around its perfect
body, lying upside down in a wedge
of grout, eyes steely grey and chest
heaving its final breath. We shuffled
it aside, stared, you said it was still warm
we were underneath leaves the color
of rust with deep red veins stretching,
falling into autumn images like we fell
into rainstorm winds that pushed us
along the wrong sidewalk until we

found we were someplace familiar,
a corner we had been before,
a crosswalk we had plodded along,
a pink sky rising like soft steam
from boiling water rolling slow.

Mary Oliver tells me, give in to
joy, she says “joy is not meant
to be a crumb” – and I guess
I’m not sure how to read
these Victorian novels anymore,
because I interrupt Jane Eyre’s fits
of melancholy to remember the way
you leaned back against the concrete
steps and looked at the cloudless
sky, the way you spoke lightly
like air-drying laundry,
the way you said, you should
write this down, it could be poem.

Unbroken

Collin Takita

The knot, unbroken, lives unspoken here.
Ignited passion swallows lovers whole
who, flame emblazoned, whirl about unsure.
Against her breast she holds his head, and hers
in his, they take to bed. Her hair, its scent
vanilla dew, with body soft, untouched,
and warm – now love's eternal knot they form.
No time nor thought to them exist – the flame
is frozen, timeless, true. Impassioned love,
a tempest unforgotten, in her womb
is sleeping treasure, love's reminder: son.

Dinner

Isabella Esser Munera

at the table, a boy; at the table, a mirror; here at the end of the table
my grandfather wipes his mouth, is looking at us,
blinking, grinning
saying nothing, looking, dabbing his mouth, grinning; his cloth is
excellently cut, his glasses cunning and refined—thick, his grey hair
back—at the table, a boy—rolls the rosé wine in his glass, sniffs
delicately with an impeccable, implacable finesse—chews, quick
motions, but lightly, and is the last to finish
(a swirl of foreign voices, languages, his family at the table, at this
restaurant, so long has it been since he has been to this
restaurant)—this restaurant has flies, there are few people, albeit
exquisitely dressed—the waiters seem eager, coming forward,
pouring wine, asking if he would like more wine—one waiter,
conversing animatedly with his daughter-in-law in Spanish, he has
no ring on his finger—the young waiter, rather plump and almost
definitively the son of one of the employees—glancing over
expressionless, a small stud in his ear—the grandchildren, silent,
mostly, uncomfortable, perhaps, doing their best not to show it—the
boy, stylishly dressed, far taller than he expected, preening and
wondering idly about the beard he was growing, rubbing it
occasionally, offered his monosyllables to the conversation,
watched them all, weary, curious, bored—the girl, bright as glass,
carried on smiling, smiling, smiling, screening her eyes of all worry,
making eye contact with her mother, her grandfather, her father,
avoiding the gaze of her brother—her father, the son, trying and
failing to re-acclimate himself to his country—no, not this beautiful
green country, not the swift trains and highs and lows of the voices
swinging up and down like the pitches of a baseballs and the funny-
looking symbols in front of the numbers on price tags—his father,
that hard and tall proud man, bend humbly—couldn't he see he was
bent humbly?—at the end of the table and he—yes, he was trying to
maintain conversation, but god, he was tired, from the flight, from
the morning, and nervously he smiled this small, almost

unnoticeable and very much dream-like smile that he showed the world and the world took at face value—why, it was face value, that he was quietly pleased much and easily and very polite young man—once, a young man...

the father, barely looking at his son, more to his wife, his unbelievable, charming and beautiful wife, fearless—and unthinking (but)—his daughter, rubbing his fingers settled on his wine glass, cutesily, he thought, smiling, to thank her—not realizing she sensed his apprehension, she looked back and forth between the two silver-haired, blue-eyed men and thought, how similar we all are—and the food was delicious, really not bad, with the exception of the flies—funny enough, grandfather didn't seem to notice them, although they were driving mom crazy, she wanted to take food home, but dad wouldn't hear of it, not in this kind of restaurant Martin hissed, and then the bill came and father, beaming, directed it to grandfather, who, blinking, dabbing his mouth, clucked once at the sum of 300 swiss franc, said, "Cheap," and signaled for the waiter to pick up the check.

-

Later, they ordered a taxi to take them to the house two blocks away, because it was steep and grandfather didn't want to walk, but the cab was late because this town was a town not a city so they had to order one from the city as they hadn't a car because they were only visiting—

the mother and son walked, because the way down they had to pay extra for a bigger taxi because they were five and so it was only three who waited there as the taxi became late and the young, chubby waiter carefully folded the table cloths and tried not to look at the girl's legs and do his best not to eavesdrop on the leaking/oozing conversation—it was cold and genders and ages and blood and relationships aside, it was cold, also you couldn't see the stars because of light pollution—but then came the taxi, it was newer and on an iPad there were certain kinds of women dancing to loud music/flashing lights—was this supposed to be entertaining—the old man, who sat up front, looked down at it, father and daughter saw him look down at it—but neither could tell what he

was thinking nor would they ever ask, so when they got home they pulled off their coats and sighed and kissed him, thanked him, bade him good night, went into their separate rooms and fell asleep. (mom (commented cheerily) this is a nice place (asked amiably, the look of pity in her eyes almost indiscernible) why don't you come here more often? (added slyly) you see how easy it is—grandfather, “well I have no one to go with, why bother” he retorted, swirling his pink steak with his fork in the sauce)

The Veteran Aeronaut

Amanda Sierzega

I wonder how birds cope
when it rains
not drizzles, but pours
the drip drip too much for their wings

or the pilot waiting to take off
shuddering when wind whistles.
He can't be delayed because
it's his anniversary,
and this wouldn't be the first time
he cheated on his wife
with his first lover.

A breeze promised she wouldn't
reveal his secret,
but she doesn't have to.
The sky's trickling tears uprooting trees
say enough.

Does this state of limbo hurt
as much as bombarding beads
against your back?
Does it steal your breath
or make you cold?

How does it feel
to flap wings and flee
because you feel like it
because you need to escape
because you're bored and it's Tuesday?
Except you cannot take off today.
Instead, you are left observing
timed trickles.

And what happens after?
When the pilot finally makes it home
eleven hours and twenty-seven minutes late,
after he promised with a kiss,
“I’ll be home soon, sweetie.
The dinner reservations are set.”

Will she sigh when he finally crawls into bed,
or kiss his sleeping scruff before she leaves for work
one minute after
her aviator gives in to gravity,
leaving her again
for a mattress
that feels like a cloud?

Or will she denounce the stratosphere and say,
“You’re not eleven hours late.
You are eleven years
and one-hundred and eleven thunderstorms late.
I marked them on the calendar
I gave you for Christmas
so you could see pictures
of places you flew over
but never cared to really see.”

Will she be content going to work
in order to return?
Or will she leave,
shut the door,
drop house keys in a bureau drawer,
raindrops tingling her dark eyes,
clouds denouncing the sky while she sighs:
How do I land
How do I land
How do I land

I have Running Water but They had the Stars

Mara Koren

The power went out this morning.

The bubbling air conditioners, whirring fans, keening lights, all stopped. The showers could run, but they were too cold to shower in. The electricity was gone. For a moment the building stood dead.

I never realized how much noise there is in silence; suddenly the lack of it was impossible. Half asleep in a sleep-soaked bed I pondered in the semi-senseless way you do, if this was what the pre-electric world sounded like. Imagine an endless landscape of the type of total silence I couldn't stand for half an hour.

Imagine what the stars must have looked like, with no city lights to blanch the sky. I'd lie on my back, gazing into the three dimensional universe with dry grass crunched under my fingers.

Restlessly un-asleep, I waited, for stream water to gush from the faucets and the ceiling to dilapidate to sky. I waited until the power returned, my air conditioner, fan, showers running, laptop overheating, filled the desolation to a comfortable nothing, and I slept again.

For Want of A Potato Chip

Andrew Tran

This isn't where you want to be.

You found yourself again sitting on another uncomfortable plastic folding chair, idly flipping between the screens of your phone in an attempt to appear nonchalant but also plausibly busy to avoid interacting with people. The red plastic cup you are holding is filled with Sprite and apple juice you found in the refrigerator.

The room belongs to your good friend Lars, who is hosting the festivities tonight. You saw some familiar faces; Jenny from Calculus, Kev from Drama, but you mostly didn't recognize anyone else. As far as you could tell, there are maybe twenty or so people at the party. You wonder what the building's capacity of people in a room is. You make note of the fire escapes. You turn to Lars' pet beta fish Paul in the glass fishbowl beside you. It whispers a few glub-glubs of reassurance to you. Glub-glub to you too, Paul.

Though it might just be your imagination, you could swear that the balloons were deflating faster than they should. Surely the pure, unadulterated tedium being exuded into the air by the people in this room was weighing the balloons down. Despite not really drinking, you perceive a certain haze about the apartment, probably due to the aforementioned tedium visibly distorting your vision. Probably not.

"Hey, Nolan!" someone yells.

Hearing your name knocks you out of your funk; it was Lars. He lumbers up to you and hugs you (squeezing, really). You mistime your breath beforehand, and likely would have literally turned red if he had continued his hold any longer. He lets you go, breathe, and the two of you start talking. Well, he starts talking at you; his presence was liable to swallow you up at times. Seeing that your cup runneth less than over, he immediately grabs it from you and tops it off with the finest beer available on sale at 40¢ a can. Lars isn't a bad friend in the least; his bombastic attitude can wear on you though. He is as tall as he is loud; he could use you as a toothpick if he wanted to. Lars commands copious amounts of

beard hair; you are fairly certain that he could quit his part-time job and become a full-time lumberjack.

Soccer, bio class, girls, something about the mating displays of birds. Predictable topics take their peculiar twists and turns, a trademark of Lars'. Your mind wanders, though. Suddenly you remember a particularly awkward moment during middle school involving the public rejection by your crush Becky Midtler at the fall dance, and are now reliving the intense awkwardness nearly an entire decade later. You try to excuse yourself so that you could massage your temples and recuperate from the emotional migraine, but Lars wanted to finish his story about the time he found a potato chip that looked like Nicolas Cage.

While trapped in this overly enthusiastic conversation, your attention is drawn elsewhere. You spot a girl walking past with two cups in her hand. You vaguely remember her from some class, either biology or calculus. Or drama? Maybe film class. Do you *even* take film? This tedium cloud is seeping into your brain. As she walks by, your eyes meet hers and lock for what seem like hours. In that time, you feel as if you've known her for years, and she you. Her fears become yours, her accomplishments, her errors. Your familiarity with her has risen to the point where you would gladly take a bullet for her. She is every bit as amazing as Becky Midtler, you are sure. Your eyes finally disengage from hers. You could tell she is the one.

She continues walking past you as she sits down on the futon next to a guy, who wraps his arm around her. The two proceed to immediately kiss passionately. Like, really, really passionately. They were really going at it. Just like, right in front of everyone. In a romantic fit, you start downing your drink, forgetting that Lars topped it off for you with Pabst. You cringe at the taste assaulting your tongue. You turn around to face Lars again; he was regaling another group of people with his stories. At that moment, you notice something bright and orange moving swiftly toward you. It pegs you square between the eyes and lands in your murky drink. A deafening cheer erupts from the party, and your tinnitus sets in. The ringing noise in your ears grows as everything becomes muted.

You don't become blind, but you start waving your arms in front of you as if you are. You look into your cup, a ping-pong ball. Turns out someone threw an absolutely amazing pong shot that happened to involve your drink. Too bad they didn't throw it before you drowned yourself with it.

You turn back to Lars. He was lounging on the scratchy futon that he found by the side of the road that one time; you helped him carry it up two flights of stairs. You see he is holding a bag of potato chips. You want to get the taste of bad beer and apple juice out of your mouth; you reach into his bag and grasp a handful of chips. As you were pulling your hand from the bag, Lars quickly spun around, his eyes wide and his beard fierce. His mouth curls open, releasing a resounding "Noooooo" roaring from his throat. His hand barrels towards yours as he spins around to you, and it connects with your fist that was clutching a now disintegrated handful of potato chips. This must be what trees feel like when facing their demise at the hands of a lumberjack. Your fist lets go as Lars' log-like limb crashes into it. A rain of starchy shrapnel propels into the room, hitting friend and foe alike.

"DUDE NOOO," he yells again emphatically. "NICOLAS CAGE WAS IN THERE."

Now you know the error of your ways, having practically murdered a minor deity in his eyes. You slink away as Lars sulks away to get a broom. You are perhaps too excited to be back in the embrace of a plastic chair. You turn again to Paul the beta fish. There are some of the remains of the salty carnage floating on the surface of his bowl. He just glares at you, having no reassuring words for you now.

2:30am. They say that you ought to take a small break after every 20 minutes of working at a computer. Staring at the glowing rectangle, you manage to type a few sentences and, feeling excessively pleased with yourself, reward yourself with 10 minutes of browsing the Internet, for maybe 10 seconds worth of content. Rinse, repeat. You figure you should stare at your paper more, so you do. You look at the clock, and quickly back at your document.

You stare at it again some more, adding an apostrophe to some word. You look at the clock again; twenty minutes have passed.

You wrinkle your nose in an ever-vain attempt to push up your glasses, and always-inevitably you push them up by hand anyway. You can feel sleep lurking at the corners of your mind. You check your page count: two out of ten. You rationalize that if you sleep now, you can harvest nearly five whole hours of sleep. Five! Then, if you write at a rate of one page per hour, factoring in your Internet breaks as positive reinforcement, then you could totally...still end up spiraling into failure. And dropping out of college. With only a few classes worth of credits until you can graduate. After about the seventh cute cat video you found on YouTube, you finally realize you are digging your own grave.

You rip the wifi power cord from its socket, and decide to take an actual break. You stand up from your work desk and stretch a while. You look over the chaotic wasteland that is your desk, and spy your little makeshift terrarium that houses your new pet. You tap on the plastic container that contains the little snail. You found it yesterday sliming its way up the pathway to your door. You're still thinking of a name for it. It always has at least one of its eyestalks looking at you.

You fumble about your room for your keys and phone. You grab your jacket and head outside. You know a pair of brothers who own a comic book store that is open into the night; you figure you'll head there. The streets are unnecessarily long here; it's a small journey between intersections and streetlights. The modest downtown area is made up of local self-owned businesses full of kitsch and trinkets with apartments for rent on the upper floors. A small college town priding itself on being a small college town. You text Lars to see if he is still awake; he lives close to the store. You sidestep darkness between streetlamps for two or three blocks until you reach the comic store. You think about buying Lars something to make up for destroying his potato chip.

You walk in. Teddy is on duty today, the younger of the brothers. He is taking classes at the art institute in the area; you've seen some of his work, even. Once, he made a portrait of Obama

partly using the fallen hairs of his (now ex-) girlfriend. He said it was a social commentary, but you can't quite remember about what. Teddy's hunkered down now on one of the counters encasing a variety of vintage comics, scribbling intensely into his notebook; you're surprised it hasn't set fire due to the sheer friction yet. You ask him about it. His assignment was to portray a subject while only drawing the negative space around it. He was drawing the bed of flowers lining the street outside, bathed in shadows from the streetlamp. You mutter "Cool," and he mutters, "I think it's really evocative of the class warfare between the people and government figures in Sweden under the rule of...," and you start walking backwards, and he goes back to his incendiary scribbling.

The store was more of a private library between the brothers that they opened to the public. Teddy and his brother Ivan inherited a small fortune from the passing of their grandfather, which they used to purchase rare comic books and graphic novels, as well as stocks of newer material to sell. You have doubts as to whether or not their business is really sustainable, but you're not complaining.

You meander through the uneven aisles, admiring the various figurines on display. Some of the smaller corridors hide around corners or lead into new sections that the brothers must have added recently. The premiere of the latest season of a show Lars was getting into prompted the shop to release all other seasons at discount. You snag the one season that he doesn't have. There is a crate filled with a recent shipment of comic book movie posters; you decide to shuffle through those. You see Ivan in the backroom, napping on top of some crates. There's a pungent smell wafting in the air and a faint haze drifting about. Someone had a good night.

Other than you, there are two or three others roaming the aisles with you, and another two in the lounge area. Pretty busy for it being nearly 3am. Miles, the resident housecat, keeps a vigilant watch over his domain. You have a particular poster in mind for Lars. Your phone rumbles in your pocket; speak of the devil. He was still awake apparently, and he invites you over. You ring up your trove of gifts and head out. Teddy hands you a few small posters of

his work, so that you can “get the word out.” You half-heartedly thank him, and make your way to Lars’.

You get to his apartment beleaguered with Space Wars memorabilia and figurines and limited editions of comics only available in Finnish for some reason, among other things. You ring the buzzer with your forehead, until realizing you could just set your things down, freeing your hands.

“Who is it,” he cracks though the grainy intercom.

He literally called you 10 minutes ago, who else, you think to yourself. You identify yourself snarkily, and he buzzes you in.

With the door open, you ascend the two flights of stairs to his room. You knock with your head again for some reason. Almost immediately, the door swings open. It does so with such force and gusto, that you very well could have been sucked into the room from the sheer amount of air being displaced; you were face to face with his beard. You stare at him for a bit, then at his apartment. His TV is on; he was playing *Battle Duty: Call of Honor*. You guess that he isn’t very far in his essay. Then you realize that you aren’t either.

Lars probably would have hugged you again, if not for the bags of stuff you were carrying. You explain that you felt a little guilty about destroying his potato chip, so you bought a few things at the comic shop. You gradually unbag your offerings, which include what you thought to be the *pièce de résistance*, a huge poster of Nicolas Cage as he appeared in some superhero movie, just tall enough to fit the length from his floor to his ceiling. It is truly magnificent, probably the defining moment of your friendship, right there, along with the minor shrine of other items you purchased.

“Uh, Nolan... I found the potato chip. I ate it.”

You look at Lars. Staring. Then at the myriad of expensive stuff you impulsively bought. You look to the only sane thing in the room, Paul the beta fish. You ask for his advice once more. He whispers:

“Glub-glub.”

Not a Nigga Epiphany Summers

A black man told me
That some blacks are niggas,
And that in fact
He was one too,
As if being a nigga
Was the right thing to do.
He said niggas
“Be reckless
And live life
Ridiculously.
They be on some
Other shit”
You feeling me?

No
Brother
I don't agree.
You are a man.
Young,
Maybe wild,
And free to be free.

Don't let what
The white man said
Get to your head.
Keep you captive
In your state.
Oh!
This is something
I hate.

Rise above.
Be free in your own

Mind
Because
The white man's thoughts
Will leave you behind
With everyone else's
Pride
That they can't find.

Be proud of being that
Brown being
In a white world
That sticks out
Like the beauty
On a brown girl.
Be proud of
Being that man
Who's history of muscles
Built this country
With his bare hands.

Nigga is not glory
It's abuse.

It's abuse to
Each other,
It's abuse to
Our race,
It's a reminder
That we are a
Disgrace.

We're aliens.
We're dirty.
Our women raped
And never called
Pretty.

Is that what you
Glorify?
Believing a
Lie
As time goes by
Thinking that a
Black man died
Because he is a
Nigga...

The struggle is
Alive
Like racism
Don't let it
Dictate you
Like fascism.

Let me
Heal
The wounds in
Your broken mind.
Believe that
By society
You will not be
Defined!

Rise above.
Be free in your own
Mind
Because
The white man's thoughts
Will leave you behind
With everyone else's
Pride
That they can't find.

Mother, Adam, Eve

Caitlin Jackson

I am her rib wrenched out
I am dripping
covered in torn flesh
meat eaten from bone.
I left a gash
clung tight despite myself.
a part of her
we, together, alone.
as a relic she
worshipped me,
cursed me,
sought forgiveness.
I grew from
organ
sinew
blood,
freshly sprouted legs,
began my pilgrimage unknown
scraping face against pavement
as I dragged heaving body
away from home

The French Legionnaire

Blaise Laramée

He was on the steps of the library, rolling a cigarette. The bag of tobacco was next to him like an oversized rook on one of the little stone tables that has square indentations like a chess board, and I couldn't remember the last time I had played chess with him or anyone. Something slight and small told me as I walked up that he was in a manic episode, something about the angle of the cigarette between his fingers that I measured like a human protractor without meaning to.

He said I looked tired. I wasn't tired. I'd been reading Hemingway in a lawn chair in the sun and the heat on my right cheek and the death of Francis Macomber had made me quiet but not tired. I told him I wasn't tired.

Before we left for the trail he had to finish his cigarette. It was these kinds of small things that gave character to this side of his disorder; a self-rolled smoke, an intensity of voice, an inclination to make presents of small things. Two kids sat on the wall near us talking and maybe glancing our way and I suppose we did look a little odd; a freshman and his bald father smoking in a green shirt too loose for him so that you could see a tuft of chest hair poking up through the collar.

But it didn't bother me like it used to. When I was very young I was too young to know, when I was a bit older I was embarrassed like hell, but now I didn't care. He could carry all his things in his plastic supermarket bag and wear his fedora on his shiny white head, but I'd moved past what people thought of his head or what he wore on it.

The trail started across from the restaurant where I told him I had eaten already. He asked me how many times, and I said three. What did you have to eat? An omelette. Another omelette. A salad. He said he'd prefer if when we got back we could go to the tavern instead.

It had just rained. There'd been flash flood warnings but I'd ignored them, and there had been no floods, but still it had rained

and the ground was damp. He tried to take my picture leaning against a pole, but I wouldn't let him, not because I didn't want my picture taken but because it would be a stupid picture, me leaning against a pole.

To the right there were houses behind fences and further on a highway so that you could never really get away from the rushing sound of cars but on the left an overhang of rocks rose up solid and beautiful. In some places the moss was green and thick, but in others it was covered with a pale greenish-bluish dust, probably some kind of lichen but next to the moss and the browning trees it looked very alien. Otherworldly. The rocks themselves broke off into square chunks, and they all had a slight leaning to them, a slant. My father joked that we should do some climbing. I looked at the overhang and said maybe another time.

Coming down from the rocks from the runoff of the storm were little trickles and streams of water and in places you could have gotten a good cold drink if you fit your head underneath and let it fall on your mouth but neither of us was brave enough to try. Further along was a metal sign with the words rusted off that had probably at one point forbidden the more adventurous from trying their luck on the rock wall, but now it just stared at you, silent but vaguely accusatory, as you walked by.

Several times people passed us going the opposite direction; an elderly couple jogging, a woman alone on a bike, a man thin as a stick running alongside his dog, a collie, the leash hanging from the dog's neck and trailing along the ground. My father said he had to relieve himself and telling me to watch for joggers pulled open his fly and pissed on the rocks. He said if I was embarrassed it was nothing compared to what his father did, peeing on the side of the road while the kids sat in the old green van, but I wasn't embarrassed. I probably would've done the same, if a bit further into the trees.

Coming to a path that branched off from the main trail we stopped and thought about taking it but realized we were running out of time and walked back the way we came to Main Street, kicking black chestnuts into the gully as we went. My Friend's

Tavern was still there, and we sat at a table bigger than we needed next to the window. My father took five minutes wrestling between the beers on the menu while the waitress, black haired and disarmingly pudgy, waited patiently with her knees almost touching mine. This too was my father; sometimes spending two hours in a supermarket for a list the length of my pinky, meticulously comparing the ingredients on the backs of all the cereals and calculating prices to find the cheapest per gram, and other days making his mind up in the blink of an eye, taking a train from Philadelphia to Boston without telling anyone so he could see his sister who was writing her doctorate on women in religion.

In the end he ordered a Yuengling, and when it came yellow and sparkling he asked me if I wanted some, but I said no and took a sip from my water. Waiting for our Southwest burger and steak he talked of how he was thinking of joining the French Foreign Legion, how he really believed it was God's plan and that he should go. The only thing keeping him here, he said, was my little brother; he didn't want to leave him just yet. I thought of how I had been the one to give my brother his first razor when he began to shave and the guilty knowledge that it should have been my father, not me; that he wouldn't go to France for this child. I said if it were me I would be cautious about it. I didn't want him to go and had told him so before but I didn't want to argue here in this tavern with the old man at the table behind us watching train wrecks and Obama on the corner TV who shifted every time my father laughed. I finished my burger as my father ignored his steak and talked rapidly and loudly and made short urgent movements with his hands, and I let him, nodding and saying yes or uh-huh, enjoying the tavern and my father and the light going through his Yuengling. I took a picture of him and the table with the light coming all from one side and showed it to him, and he said it was good. On the corner before the college we stopped and he knelt on the pavement and dug an American Photo and New Yorker from his bag and gave them to me. I told him which bus to take back and how long it would take, and he hugged me and held it a bit longer than I would've, but I didn't

mind. It was good. I walked away, and up the street I looked back once, and he was still there.

A day later I go back to the trail. All the rain has soaked into the ground, and where the puddles had been on the left are now patches of thick green weeds. There's still water dripping from the rocks but no cataracts. Around one tree I recognize the ivy that grew over the back fence in my grandmother's front garden, and it's strange that it should be here too. All the leaves are drier and move more easily over the ground. In the hook of a branch a tawny spider with two parallel stripes down its abdomen spins a web and waits.

Coming to the branching path I take it and walk upwards. Through the trees below to the right is some kind of giant spring, sitting industrial and wrong among the trees. Bits of glass from bottles are wedged between the rocks. Down below I see water, but it is just the runoff from a large half buried drainage pipe, moving it away from people and towards the creek. It is five or ten degrees cooler than the last time I was here, but I still can't see my breath in the air, not yet.

One tree lies fallen and broken over several others. Some branches end at a round cylindrical point, cut off by someone with a saw to clear the path. I imagine my father running over the tree, scrambling over the solid limbs. He is dressed in a khaki uniform with black and green camouflage and has a bulky bag strapped to his back with a canteen swinging on a chain from one side. On his bald head is a helmet, but it is sliding off even with the straps under his chin because he is sweating. He says nothing but is panting loudly. He is lean and tough.

He stops behind the tree and crouches and kneels one knee on the ground. Yelling now and waving his arm in a big circle toward men behind him I cannot see he raises some kind of sleek black automatic gun to his shoulder and fires quickly at the bushes, at the trees. The shots are loud but satisfying, and after a few rounds he gets up and puffs on with short hairy fingers still on the trigger and trudges between the trees until they hide him and he is gone.

I don't think my father will really join the foreign legion. Like other things it will pass. He'll stay in Philadelphia in his small apartment that smells like broccoli and see us on Tuesdays and Thursdays and take us to see French films we've never heard of. But if he did I would not stop him. Maybe I would have once, but things are different now, and I am a man, and I have to let him be one too, my father, the French Legionnaire.

From Fragile Seeds: A Palindrome

Benjamin Jones

oh, we rot.

one man on a bottom level, alive,

deified in a drowse if 'e desires.

oh, we yen a tenet on time.

emanating is sad, I'd assign it a name.

emit no tenet—an eye whose rise defies Word.

an' I deified evil.

a level motto: ban on Amen.

o, tore who?

Conspiring, The Spires
Joshua Hopkins-Desantis

at first I thought
to be pillars of wrought
(possibly) iron, rustedly turquoise, wouldn't be too stellar

even though I'd stabbed the stars
while fixated with these bar-
-nacles and cracks and weaves and rungs leading down cellar

climbing the twinned peaks of apatasaurian appendages
plundering the first fresh-split scent of grass in forever-ages...

only a crunchy shell of crustacean's shells, (possibly) sprung from
the underground cavern
(of my engineering imagination's spawning design)

would root me anywhere else
but this as ever-so divine

Termite Nests

Arthur Robinson

Anthony V. Caleb, who enjoys watching the small particles of dust float around the window, wears a grey sweater far too large for his light frame and a belt far too tight for his average waist. He sits in a messy bed and wonders where his life is going to take him today, even though he knows that because it is Monday, he will be going to school. He has brown hair, a good sort of dirty brown, and skin that ought to be pale but never seems to lose color. He has multicolored eyes, a blue one which he adores and a green one which he loathes. There are moments where he closes one and tries to see if the other sees the world differently; oftentimes he is disappointed to find that they in fact see with the same 20/20 acuity. Occasionally he debates whether or not to stare into the sun with his green eye until it burns out, but always decides that the green eye just reminds him of how much he loves his blue eye. It is, however, the only part of his body that he loves. Anthony V. Caleb believes that the rest of his body does not truly measure up to his blue eye, as he finds that the rest of his body looks filthy, putrid, and overall disgusting. His arms are far too skinny for his liking, as are his legs, but sometimes he looks at his belly and finds that it could lose some of its girth. He has, after all, never found someone who told him otherwise; the last time he raised such concerns, he was yelled at by his father.

Anthony does not know when he woke up, but the digital clock beside his bed flashes "7:26" in large red digits. If Anthony does not start walking to school, he will be late; he notes that being late has never stopped him before. As it happens, he was born thirteen days earlier than he was expected. By his math, this gives him at least 312 hours that he can spend not actually attending to things in life. So he sits in the messy bed and creates a makeshift womb out of fuzzy blankets and thick blue quilts. When he looks past the dust in the window, he sees that it is quite ugly outside, with a grey sky and dead trees. He supposes that this would actually be a lovely fall day, had the forceful wind not blown all the autumn

leaves from his yard; with no color to contrast with the grey sky, the day was bland.

It's funny that we can call today ugly, he thinks wryly, because we don't seem to hold days to the same descriptions as we do people. I think I'll call today "grumpy" to change that. He does, in fact, find this quite funny, but nobody else is laughing. He naturally assumes that this is because he is alone.

When Anthony V. Caleb, who is always happy to step on leaves, arrives at his school he finds that the red brick building is still standing. Such a tragedy normally breaks Anthony's heart, but today he feels that if he wishes hard enough for a meteor to fall and obliterate the horrible structure, it shall occur. The building reaches only about as high as Anthony's house, and it spans across about ten of Anthony's houses. The building reminds him of what a nightmare would be, except this building is entirely real. There are strange brown stains on the roof and vines that scale the walls like those horrible sea-monsters that latch onto ships and drag their passengers to a watery demise. Anthony wishes that he could think of something else when he saw them, but he never can. He dislikes the building as a whole, but he especially hates the windows. Musty and dark, the windows bring in light but grant no discernible look to the outside; an entirely unacceptable flaw which will probably bother Anthony until they break or he dies.

"That's a grown-up sweater. You have to be a little older kiddo," laughs a boy, who they call Terry, with a last name that Anthony finds extremely unimportant. Anthony just looks ahead without an expression, and the group of boys laugh and walk on their way. Anthony does not care for these boys, in their pressed khakis, wrinkleless button-down shirts and diabolically gelled hair.

The building itself puts Anthony in a foul enough mood as it is, but the residents also tend to enjoy making his life less than agreeable. Anthony supposes that this makes the school something of a termite-nest; bad creatures build the bad structure, which goes on to produce more bad creatures, which propagate and form more bad structures. Anthony does not like to think of his compatriots as termites, but somewhere deep down he thinks they really are.

So Anthony V. Caleb, who thinks that socks are just sacks for feet, sits and stares at his tenth-grade English teacher talk about *Tom Sawyer*, and the quote about a camel having so much weight that its back breaks. Anthony bites his lip because he hates that feeling of something fictional relating to something he feels in his own life. Something wet and sticky hits Anthony in the back of his head, and he already knows without looking that somebody has fired a spitball.

Entirely childish and amateur, he thinks to himself, *because spitballs are out of style*.

On the other hand, Anthony thinks that sometimes childish and amateur are exactly what angers him the most. The English teacher presses the powdery chalk against the board and creates a horrid noise, one which sends the worst sort of shivers down Anthony's spine. Instinctually, Anthony's hands move towards his ears, and he falls out of his desk. There is a moment, halfway between his chair and the floor, where Anthony makes eye contact with his teacher. Time slows down for that moment, and Anthony sees that his teacher has a look of confusion and horror, made only slightly humorous by his terribly silly mustache. The worst part, Anthony realizes, is that his teacher has brilliant blue eyes. Blue eyes which begin to widen in what Anthony perceives as disgust.

The scoundrel hates my green eye. Hates it hates it hates it. Anthony, wishing to object to being insulted without words, opens his mouth to retort. He finds that it is hard to speak clearly whilst falling, so instead of a response, a simple cry leaves his lips. Then, for a moment, it all becomes black. Now Anthony has never blacked out from a fall before, but he has always tried to imagine what it feels like. He could only assume that it was like being dead, because his mother used to tell him that death was just like going to sleep for a very long time. Naturally, since being knocked out is like falling asleep, it could not be different at all. So for the moment, Anthony feels no fear, no sorrow, no nervousness, and best of all, no feeling of having to stare at those god-awful windows all day.

When he wakes up in the nurse's office, Anthony realizes that he is having trouble focusing. There are voices all around him, and he recognizes his father as he speaks:

"What the hell was he doing, falling out of his desk in the middle of class?"

And he heard his tenth-grade English teacher with the funny mustache reply:

"I have no idea! I was in the middle of a lecture and he just screamed and jumped out!"

"Stupid kid. Stupid, stupid kid."

"Sir, we have to check to make sure he doesn't have a concussio—"

"I'll bring him home, for god's sake. Goddamn. Interrupted work for this shit."

Anthony V. Caleb, whom often regrets that his father is such an ass, misses his mother's blue eyes. Whenever he fell over as a child, his mother would hold him. She would stare with her blue eyes and smile with her peachy lips and tell him that his life mattered, and that he didn't have to be afraid of falling because it was just life's way of reminding him that he was lucky to stand up straight. Anthony thinks that if his mother were alive, he would give her a poem he had read in his tenth-grade English class. A poem titled "I Take Your T-shirt to Bed Again," that told the story of a young girl who takes her lost love's clothing to bed because of the scent. Anthony knows that the love is not the same, but he understands that the idea is wholly similar; ever since his mother left, Anthony has taken her blankets to bed with him every night.

"Why the hell did he fall out of his chair?"

Anthony wishes he knew why. His mother always told him that it was because he was sensitive. That he has sensitive touch, sensitive sight, sensitive ears, and the most sensitive of souls. Anthony brings himself up slowly, because if he has to be honest, his head feels like a barrel full of water rushing back and forth. His father says something that he cannot quite understand, because the sudden shift of weight changes his perception. He unsteadily moves towards a bathroom mirror, wishing to examine the blow to his

head. He quietly mumbles that he needs to relieve himself before locking himself inside of the restroom.

He notes how moldy the walls are, with the porcelain toilet covered in dried ooze. The tiles on the ceiling, which he counts when he is bored, look like something straight out of his geometry class; evidently this makes Anthony hate them all the more. As he scrunches his face in disgust from the terrible odor emanating within the room, Anthony looks up at the dirty mirror, letting his eyes adjust. He sees his terribly below-average face, which his mother always said was beautiful, and finds that there is a bandage on the left side of his forehead. When he lets his eyes trail from the bandage, where there was obviously quite a bit of blood, he pauses. His green eye remains perfectly untouched, but he sees now that his blue eye, his favorite blue eye, his mother's blue eye is surrounded by cuts and bruises. His own blue eye, his only blue eye has been claimed by the termites in their termite nest. The sudden urge to vomit shoots up through Anthony, and he falls to the ground wishing to scream for a few seconds. Those seconds become minutes and those minutes feel like hours, hours where Anthony quietly screams at the loss of his blue eye.

Anthony V. Caleb, who misses his mother dearly, storms into his classroom with the pretense of recovering his books. He decides that the creaky chair he was sitting on is perfectly suitable for picking up, and he does so. He ignores the burning sensation in his arms, that tell him he does not in fact work out, and lets out a harsh yell as he swings the chair into one of the terrible windows with all his might. When all the glass scatters around Anthony's feet, he stumbles back for a moment before once again taking the chair to another window. There is a strange sensation, one that Anthony has never felt before, which rises through his chest and head. He knows that his tenth-grade English teacher with the silly mustache is yelling for him to stop, and the termites in the room are fleeing; as it happens this does not stop Anthony V. Caleb, who decides that the termite nest ought to feel the pain of losing an eye.

Finally Working Out What Goes Where (God, For Example, is in His Kingdom)

Anne Rus

Today I saw the head of the 7-11 cashier spin all the way around the nametag reading *Doug* lost in the folds of his shirt and his neck twisting like licorice as he choked out “That’ll be \$5.11” and the woman behind me sighed impatiently.

Doug wished me a nice day, not noticing that his head was facing the cigarette racks behind him, and I made a mental note:

the golden scarab brooch from the woman in Egypt—supposed to make

heads turn, but I guess that one was my own fault. Buyer beware.

On the way home, while probing the holes in myself, distracted by a glove compartment full of tarantulas.

I shut it as quickly as I could, leaving two twitching legs and a lonely thorax sitting on the passenger seat. Clearly, the work of the bronze amulet stolen from the tomb of an ancient Syrian king,

or so the man at the antiques store told me, the lines on his face full of dust (but there was a very faint *HINA* on the back, so I’m not sure).

Knockoff or not, it sure wasn’t fake, I really should have asked what *kind* of friends it was going to bring me. But perhaps the tarantulas

were from the shrunken head I bought behind the Goodwill from a renegade circus magician, a token meant

to bring the user love? No, it couldn’t have been, the shrunken head had me sneezing hornets for a week, at least until I snuck it into my gym teacher’s locker and he took a leave of absence. I am not

sure, however, if it was also responsible for the rash of eyeballs which have been growing out of the chalkboards at school in floral clusters,

or if those were a result of the teddy bear stuffed with human hair

that I had to lock in the attic (Note to self: burn that, it does nothing
for my looks,
better to look average than dead and full of hair).
I am losing track of what does what, when I tried to make a
spreadsheet on Excel
my printer licked my wrist, purple giraffe tongue slapping against
me like
a wet fish. "For the love of God," my pastor says
"Stop buying things cursed with Satan's craft. I think you might be
the devil."
and I apologize profusely for the earwigs doing synchronized
swimming
in the holy water (but let's be real: they're totally nailing it). I skim
Ebay again
when I get home that night, pages and pages
of ventriloquist dummies with half-closed eyes and hinged smiles.
In the corner my cat explodes, and then drifts lazily
down from the ceiling. Clicks and whirrs of insects create
an ambiance matched nicely by the romantic glow of my left kidney,
which emancipated itself after the vintage Ronald McDonald mask I
bought
for my birthday arrived in the mail, and now lives a bachelor's life
in a jar on my bookshelf. For all that, my room is clean:
everything in its place. I scroll down the page and stare
into the wooden faces of the dummies, zooming in on their
empty doll's eyes, blue suit-jackets and striped shorts, trying to
figure out
which one seems the loneliest.

Identity Crisis

Leah Garrity

Sometimes I am a tapestry of whimsies,
a soul netted in glitter.
I purse my lips in the mirror,
mouthing phrases in a vaguely British accent,
projecting into a smoke-hazed cinema.
Other times I'm so spectacularly unhappy
I want nothing more than to curl up within
the caverns of the moon, solar solitude.
My thoughts a floodgate containing
all my human detritus, that threatens to exhale itself
and unspool at my feet. My words jangle and bristle,
starved for attention, only to die at the lip of an expectant ear.
Sometimes I am never enough and too much all at once.
I can't sort out who I am, who I want to be,
who I will never be, a convoluted mosaic
in the junk drawer of my mind.
I'm afraid if you slice my soul into imperfect halves
delve two fingers into its fragile skin,
you'd find a pit rotting from within
and I can't accept that possibility
so I'll smile through a screen and say I'm happy to be here.
Because sometimes that's enough
to advance to the next day.
Play-acting contentment, parroting mantras,
Combating my own dark thoughts,
Puzzling out a purpose.

Conspiracy and Theory

Nora Sternlof

(It's the middle of the night. Two eighth-graders, MORRIS and REMY, are sitting in the back seat of a car, training a flashlight on a local map. Morris, a heavysset fourteen-year-old boy with a pompous attitude, is holding a flashlight. Remy, a skeptical thirteen-year-old girl, is squinting at the map.)

MORRIS: Before we plan an actual expedition, we need to have a set route.

REMY: Do you even know where to look?

MORRIS: You know, this entire enterprise will go more smoothly if you don't insult me.

REMY: All I want to know is, how will *you* know? Can I ask that?

MORRIS: (*Patiently*) One can generally tell the sites favored by extraterrestrials because they resemble airports. Surrounded by urban sprawl and characterized by an aura of exhaustion and desperation.

REMY: I thought aliens landed in open places. Quiet places. So they wouldn't be noticed.

MORRIS: A common misconception. Extraterrestrials like to hide in plain sight, like everyone else. Besides, they get enough of openness and quietude in space. If they're coming to earth, they want *chaos*- the sound and the fury, if you will.

REMY: I don't—*will*, why do you talk that way? How do you know that, anyway? Their planets might be developed. You can't make that kind of judgment. Maybe that's why they built UFOs in the first place. To get away from the pollution and the crime and stuff.

MORRIS: If a race possesses the technology to travel space, and thus can experience the emptiness and the vastness therein, then that race will develop its world according to those principles.

REMY: Emptiness isn't a *principle*, Morris. Neither is—

MORRIS: Harmony, then! Cleanliness! Space—to breathe! If there's one thing that all the literature agrees on, it's that prolonged exposure to space is a solution to the common ills of modern life. If

aliens come here, it's in the interest of controlled exposure to chaos. Then they'll return to the peace to which they are accustomed.

REMY: (*Voice rising*) All the literature? Oh, all the literature? You mean those paperbacks you get at the bookstalls at county fairs? Right next to the books by people who had dolphins tell them the world was going to end in 1994? And the ones who saw Elvis and the Virgin Mary making out on a cloud? You mean that kind of literature?

MORRIS: Not all knowledge is found in textbooks.

REMY: So, so if you ever do get beamed up—like you've always dreamed of—you'll retire to a country life afterward? Keep some cows? Because you'll have experienced space?

MORRIS: You're an antagonistic person.

REMY: You don't think things through. You're an alien lunatic, but not the right kind of alien lunatic. I thought that you'd be a conspiracy theorist type—you know, with the equations and the newspaper articles on the wall and hacking and whatever. Looking for connections and government cover-ups and stuff. That'd be interesting at least. You're just—making up ideals and projecting them into space and hoping Marvin the Martian will agree with you.

MORRIS: I'll have you know, I've researched—

REMY: You don't know—this is what I've realized, just now—you don't know any more than I do. In movies, alien people are scientist, even if they're weird ones. You're just—you're just a *philosopher*.

MORRIS: That's bad?

REMY: I can't think of anything worse.

MORRIS: Well then, because you have all the answers tonight—

REMY: Neither of us has answers! That's the entire point I'm trying to make, if you'd actually listen to me!

MORRIS: I am listening. You haven't given me a choice; you're being very loud. My remaining query is, if I am merely a deluded philosopher, in search of succor from beyond the stars, then what, pray tell—

REMY: For *Christ's* sake, *pray tell*? I really should just hit you.

MORRIS: My question is, if I'm deluded and a philosopher, what are you? Why are you out here in the middle of the night?

REMY: (*A long pause*) If there are aliens, they won't be any different. It'll be more of us. Their planets will be more of Earth. That's what I bet.

MORRIS: I'm afraid I can't accept that.

REMY: ... Well, neither can I. That's my answer, then. I guess that's what I'm doing out here. Pass me the damn flashlight.

MORRIS: (*He hands it over*) We're the conspiracy here, anyway.

REMY: (*Sharp*) What?

MORRIS: We're the conspirators. We're the ones working in secret. I don't need to look into conspiracies because I'm in one.

REMY: With me.

MORRIS: With you.

REMY: I don't know how to feel about that. (*She smiles a little, then points to a place on the map.*) We should start here.

Affection
Dana Kluchinski

I want to affect you
I want to pull your heart strings,
make the music of your soul's feeling.
I want to teach you about emotion just by the way I speak. I want
my words to
resonate longer than my smell in your sheets.

I want to throw you into the water
just so I can fish you back out again,
hold you up like a prize, then
set you free.

I want you hooked on me.
I want to be your drug,
snort lines of me,
repeat lines of my poems,
turn them over and over in your mind like a stone in your hand
both warm and ancient

I want to make you cry,
make you of all people feel more than I feel,
I who feels enough for everyone who has never felt.
I want to bring you to your knees like a prayer,
then never answer you like God.
My breath a precious resource
like the mist of water falling cold across the mountain side,
I want to gather you in my hands then let you seep through my
fingers.

I don't know why everything I've ever said to you isn't tattooed
across your body
and changing the way you breathe in life.
Why don't you carry pain with you wherever you go?
What is your defect that beauty does not make you cry,

how can you just come back to love like a simple minded tree bends
towards the light?

I lean on you like a stone wall
but fall into you like a swing
you soar me to the sky
I grab onto the clouds, your white face
between my hands
print pressed
into the concrete as it dried.
I want to pour you into the street and carve my name into you.

I want you to hate me.
Just for a small moment
the kind of hate that you can't separate from love.
I want our love to burn
like an abandoned house or
explode like a poorly built vase in a kiln
I want to destroy everything else in it.

Then build our home with the ruin.
A tree house
so we can climb out of the window,
sit with the stars,
bend the branches like the truth,
that the world was not made for love but to be destroyed.

I want us to be crushed in an old metal junk yard
then salvaged by an artist and made into a sculpture
we will be beautiful.
The soot smoothed into our skin and loved like
the water we drank to survive

I want our love to beat the world in this race for survival
fueled by pollution and recycled every day
made new

by the bond of our warm souls playing musical chairs between our
bodies,
only the music never stops, because
I never want to stop loving you.

Patience

Rebecca Galarza

Patience is when there is nothing left to drink,
When the money for cigarettes is spent,
When all the pretty girls have left your room
and are tucked away in the pages of magazines;
When sleep is finally exhausted
and kicks you out of bed,
When all you have to show for yourself is
A twenty-year collection of cells
and the notion that there is a God and
One day you will be forgiven

It is the weekend after the 4th of July,
I am so patient for Thursday.
We've been out of love for 7 days
It is so hard to wait when you are gone
It is so hard to hold something empty
Without all this air
Spilling everywhere

I have fallen asleep to the sounds of other people kissing
And sat with this phone in my lap,
Held hope like a baby
Silent and still,
I have been careful as not to startle you
With a text message detailing why your aura is perfect.
I have learned to be patient, because
Love can grab you by the shoulders and shake you
But still you will only wake when you're ready.

Patience is holding your breath until The Next One comes along,
Remembering that for every 4 o'clock in the afternoon
there's a midnight that will put you to sleep,
Patience is a brave girl with a heartbeat and steady shaking hands
She has tired eyes, but she shows up every damn day and
Practices deep breathing all through conversations about the
weather
Even know she has no idea the next time she'll see the sun.

Saving a Rose

Nicolas Shandera

Woke up to the sun beaming into my eyelids through open drapes on the washed-out wall across from the piano-less piano bench I had made my bed that night. In front of me, under the window on a ratty old couch were two bodies balled up, and on the floor another. In the center of the room some jackass fell asleep sitting with his head on the coffee table, a rolled up bill in his nose, and a line of powder in front of his face. It was a twenty and the drip on the back of my tongue my throat woke me up; bittersweet my heartbeat sparked. I was kicking, crunching my way around debris and empty things making my way through to the next room. On a blank train-car of a wall in graffiti the word "dream" hovered over a portion of the slumped bodies that littered the house; my art looked best in the morning. The owners were out of town or something and I thought how funny it'd be to watch their reaction to this spectacle as I reached the front door.

Stepping out I winced. It must've been seven or eight; cars were carrying blue collars to work and the pavement wasn't radiating yet but, the rays already began to work and fuck I needed to get home. I checked my pockets, assessing damage, and found myself to be a pack of cigarettes, two lighters, and thirty dollars richer. I thanked a god for allowing me to end up this close to home after a night like that, lit a cigarette, and began counting the blocks. Passing poorly kept Victorian homes with worn out front porches and chipping paint I thought how this place was once at its peak and how it must've looked when men in hats and suits strolled lamp-lit bricked sidewalks of Main with their gloved wives and Sunday school children peering in to shop windows on their way to Friday night's picture. The way my dad told it sounded so perfect. Now I walked down Main passing consignment shops and Hispanic mini-marts among worn out stoops bearing faces of the same condition.

I came upon Catharine Street and turned off; from there it was a straight shot about a mile up the road to my house. A familiar

white Expedition with dark tint crept up beside me and began to keep pace with my strides. It was Adrian. I hadn't seen him since he dropped out last fall and last I remembered he was going to jail for some shit he got caught up in. The window rolled down. "What's good Dean? Been a minute since I seen you round town."

"I could say the same, how you been? Thought you were sittin' pretty behind bars?"

"I did some programs inside and shortened my stay; got me a GED too."

"Glad to hear it man, really. Just keep them damn bracelets off. I want to see you around this summer before I head to college."

"You will brotha, bet on that. Tell Rosie I said hey when you see her."

"Definitely, you'll have to stop by soon. Matter of fact, where you off to?"

"Work."

"No shit? Where at?"

"The Greek joint downtown; been flipping burgers. Not much, but shit at least I aint lookin' over my shoulder every time I go out. I'm running late though. I gotta kick it."

"No worries bro, we'll catch up."

He waved as he pulled off. I went back to counting lines on the sidewalk. Almost home, and in passing Sophie's house I noticed her out on the chained up porch swing reading with a turquoise mug in the lap of my favorite white dress. I stepped towards the porch still strung out, replaying the last time when I watched her walking away from me, the boy who had the privilege of being slapped and reamed out by Sophie the bohemian brunette with summer skin and perfect lips who was fed up with his shit.

"Haven't seen you for a while," she said, marking her page as I mounted the bruised grey steps. "How've you been?"

"All right. Just trying to beat it home before the parents wake up and realize or notice the smell of me when I walk in."

"Better hurry; your breath is horrid." She smirked, glancing up.

Figures, I thought, she would just happen to be out and I would just so happen to be a shit show dragging my ass home.

"I hope they haven't been catching on. They keep telling me how glad they are I've cleaned up since the last time one of them stumbled upon my stash."

"Same old Dean. How does it always work out? People just eat it out of your hands, all the shit you..."

"You didn't."

"And I still won't. How's Rosie?"

"I'm not entirely sure. It's been a few days."

"Go home. See her, please. She can't go on for days on end sleeping around from floor to front lawn. You know she probably misses you and she can't be left with your parents all the time with them being the way they are, neglecting any responsible aspect of parenting, only nursing their habit."

She was always convincing and damn good at making me feel like shit too and she had a hell of a set of emerald eyes that could talk me in to anything. They've talked me into bed, out of fights, into highs, into trouble, and all over the place.

"Look," she said, sweeping hair behind her ear, "when you're around Rose never leaves your side. It's the thing I admire you for the most. I miss her, by the way, we haven't had a girl's day in a while."

My phone rang. "Hello?"

"It's your mother. You need to come home. We're having a family meeting."

"We're...What? Did something happen?"

"We'll talk when you get here."

"Okay, I'm at Sophie's. Be there soon."

The other line clicked. "Fuck."

"Fuck what?" Sophie asked.

"The family meeting my mom just called."

"What do you think it's for?"

I began racking my brain. Who was at that party? Who could've told? How could she know already?

"Hello?" she said, snapping me back.

“I don’t even want to...I hope they didn’t find my stash again...They’ll send me away, Sophie.”

“Maybe that’s what you need.”

“No, that’s bullshit. They’re the ones who sleep till twelve, stay hung over until fucking four, and repeat the cycle at seven.”

“Listen, if that’s what you think, then you need to get clean. If not for yourself, do it for the little Rose who would do anything to have her clear-eyed big brother back.”

“I know, but I can’t be away from her for that long. She can hardly take care of herself; she practically lives at the neighbors already and...she needs me, Soph.”

“I know. Let me help you. With whatever this turns out to be. I want you sober again. I want us three to go to the park again and to the creek and...Please, I’ll do anything I can to help.”

My head was beaming in infinite directions searching for a conclusion or an answer to this brick wall I had just hit. “Okay. I have to go, Sophie. However this ends up, I’ll talk to you soon.” She tried a smile and nodded her head as the clouds took her attention, I got up, stole a kiss on the cheek and started walking. Each step just as inconclusive as the last and by the time I got home I was sweating as my whole body seemed to vibrate with uncertainty.

Walking inside I was greeted by my little sister eating her Cheerios at the kitchen table. She was the sweetest thing and I remembered then what Sophie had said and damn near lost my balance.

“Skeezicks!” she yelled upon seeing me. It was what my dad always called me. She had milk running down her chin and Cheerios in her lap and damn near coated the floor with her breakfast when she spun out of her seat to give me a hug. Pressing her soggy face against my shirt, she looked at me with her baby blues and asked where I’d been. She said that she missed me and wished I would be home more often, that she was tired of the neighbors’ food, and that all her puzzles were finished. I got her back in her seat by promising her that we’d take a trip to the swings later and hang out all day tomorrow like we used to. The worst part was, I don’t think she believed me. I heard my mom set down her

coffee mug; it was unusually early for her. She was sitting on the couch in the living room, surprisingly sober.

“How bout’ that family meeting, Mom?”

“We’re waiting on your father.”

Taking advantage of the few minutes I had, I ran to my bathroom to brush my teeth and rinse my eyes. Then to my room for a reasonably clean shirt. I fumbled through, trying to ignore the steady beat on my temples, which led to my neglecting to even grab a shirt.

Coming out in haste, I made my way over to a rocking chair by the fireplace, turned it so it was facing the couch, and sat down. The shower knob squeaked, followed by the faint sound of fumbling echoed by more audible curses. Mom was almost twenty years younger than Dad but looked as if the difference was only a decade. She mustn’t have been sleeping well, or the consistent drinks were aging her more noticeably than before, or it had just been longer than I thought since I last noticed her face. She sat in an old loose sweater, sipping coffee out of a blue mug that matched the cold walls behind her head.

A little confused, I noticed the sound of slurping and the word, ‘Dun!’ I had almost forgotten that Rose was only a room away, so I went to get her cleaned up. Soon the bedroom door opened and the sound of footsteps on hardwood brought forth an old man. I hadn’t seen him for a while. He looked withered, more tired. There was a week’s worth of greying scruff on his face and his hair was getting thinner. Sixty some, he had been raised by Depression-era parents and nuns in Toledo until coming here in high school, where his number was called. After making it back to the states he settled down and chased the dream he swears kept him alive and drank away the faces and screams that almost didn’t. When Rose was all squared away I went to sit down in the rocking chair facing two stiff bodies.

“So?” I said. They sat beside each other on the couch. Mom’s coffee cup was empty. He looked at her and back to me and said, “Look, things are about to change.”

“What do you mean? For who?”

“You.”

They’re going to do it, I thought. How do they know I didn’t quit? I’ve been covering my ass better than before. Last time, they said there wouldn’t be a next time. This is it, they’re making good on the threat of shipping me off to Uncle Dan’s dairy farm to shovel shit or to a fucking halfway house or across the country to get clean. Fuck. My mom started, “Look, you’ve been eighteen for the better half of a year and we’ve been letting you go, but it’s time to shape up a bit.”

“Now you don’t have a choice,” the stern voice on the couch finished.

“I don’t have a choice? What is this?”

“It’ll be better for all of us. Just try to understand that.”

I couldn’t sit through this anymore. My nerves were shot. I could feel the handprints forming on my pant legs and my heartbeat in my fingertips. “Cut the shit. What the fuck is happening right now?”

“Dean, we’re going to rehab together, your mother and I. Insurance covers the cost, but we’ll be away for two months at the Valley View Rehabilitation Center.”

The room imploded. Walls collapsed under a failing ceiling as a constrictor wrapped around my torso. He continued, “I need you to stop disappearing for days on end. You need to be home. You need to quit running out and stay with your sister instead. You’re going to need to learn to be responsible.”

“Are you ser...wha...How the fuck am I going to take care of a house and Rosie and cook meals and...”

Gently interjecting, my mom began, “We’ve decided to leave you the car and to pay you for this. You’ll get \$350 dollars from us every week, which should be enough to cover food and necessities for you and Rose.”

I was still trying to process and piece things together. “When are you two leaving?”

“Tomorrow,” they responded in tandem.

Part of me wanted to tell them how proud I was and the other wanted to curse them and run through my phone contacts for

a dealer. I looked at them both I didn't have a choice. This was happening whether I liked it or not. Taking a deep breath, I got up.

I went to my room. Everything seemed different; I realized I really hadn't been home for a while. I started cleaning things up. My hair smelled like smoke, my clothes were trashed and pungent, and I needed a shower. For a moment I disregarded the thought of how the fuck I was going to run a house on my own and entertained the idea that Rose wouldn't have to worry that Mom wouldn't be awake for breakfast every morning, and Dad wouldn't hog the TV every night. Just then, a little blonde head popped in my door.

"Swings?!"

I loved that voice. I told her to come in and sit down, it was time for a 'real' talk. She loved when I said that. She always got serious all of a sudden and composed herself as she had seen adults do. "Rosie."

"Yes?" she responded intently.

"Mom and Dad are going away for a little while and..."

"I know," she said smirking, "Its me an you for the rest of summer."

How'd I not know she'd be there in the room listening too. The sly little flower. She was just popping up and absorbing information everywhere she went.

"Swings now?" she asked.

"Yes, soon. Go get changed and we'll go." She bolted out of there. I picked up my phone and made a call. The other end picked up, "Hey Sophie, I ugh...Well, I'm not going anywhere, but I don't know what to do."

"Why?"

"It's just me and Rose until my parents get back. I have to take care of her and pay for groceries and cook meals and take her out and..."

"Wait, slow down. What? Where are they..."

"Rehab, the both of them at the same time! Who just leaves a six-year-old with an eighteen-year-old who could hardly take care of himself a year ago?"

"Breathe! It'll be fine."

“I can’t. This is too much! How am I supposed to- What if I fuck up?”

“Let me help. I said I would regardless and I will now. I promise.”

Just then Rosie came back in her stained play jeans and T-shirt and grabbed my pant leg, determined to leave.

“Sophie? Can you meet me at the swings? We’ll talk there. There’s a lot we’ll have to figure out.”

“Sophie! Tell her HI!” Rose added.

“I’ll be right there. Listen, Dean, it’ll be fine. Remember how well us three used to get along? It won’t be any different, I promise. The trio will be back. It’ll be nice, I promise you that much.”

A pause. I didn’t even need her eyes to assure me. It would be okay. I imagined it, Sophie and me again. We’d be florists for the rest of summer.

An Enchanting Lost Cause

Kelsey Knowles

That night we laughed
At the inevitability of mortality
Thinking we had to be either drunk or high
Or some combination of both
Because we just couldn't get rid of those bubbles in our throats
Like someone celebratory
Was popping champagne bottles in the pits of our stomachs

I've been drunk
I've been high
But nothing manufactured could have
Churned the way we felt
When we plucked the starry dimples of the dark skyline
And burned them over ancient ashes behind the backs of our eyes
And dragged them along the faults of our tongues
To split our own mischievous grins
To match the somber sky with the knowledge
Of light years of secrets to withhold

And so we chased them down
Compelled by nostalgic impulses we hadn't even felt yet
But the tartness of the summer heat was too full of experiences
And who gave a damn if we could call them ours yet
They were just gasping for air
Pleading to be claimed

So as we were driving back from a night well spent
Of conversations like what movies were out that we wanted to see
Talks like the hum to a quiet melody
We stopped at the place we spent every weekend of last season
A place we'd soon come to call home
Picking up pieces of those who had left and forgotten
Or neglected to pick up after themselves

Taking glimpses of their lives into our own
As we attached marionette strings
To what we found left of the souls we had tried to capture
With eye contact
Quietly molding our perceptions of them to play with in the blurred
lines of our mind's spectroscope where our lives had crossed over
Through glances

We learned that goodbyes weren't necessarily needed for people's
faces
But for places
Places they had inhabited and where they showed us the pieces of
themselves that they wanted us to see
Scars of their memory littered all over the floor
Along with crushed beer cans, left shoes and traces
Of their scents blended together in half empty shampoo bottles
lined up on the shower's ledge
Where we had done things like shotgun beers and chug forties
Because we were young
And someone said something about feeling alive

But some of us stripped our dignity in the foreign bedrooms of
nights that had to be pieced together
Neglected in the ghost of memory
And some of us had it stripped from us

But all of us got older
And forgot to pinpoint the time when we lost our innocence
But then again
Maybe we never had it
But we still tried to chase it down even for all
The enchanting lost cause that it was
As we ran around in the dark
Raked up piles of fallen leaves to just jump in
Or made a pinky promise

We ignored the limited amount of darkness we had left
Before the sunlight chose to reveal us for what we really were
There was still time to bury secrets, make vows, whisper pacts,
And kiss each other's scraped knees
Time to brush off every fingerprint that someone different
Left in the crevice of our neck
The evidence exposed by the morning after
As we plaster on make up
As the day gets hot on our trail
And pop pills of plan B
Replaying what our moms always said about making good choices
Creeping around corners to not be discovered
Like dirty hands caught spoiling our dinner digging into the cookie
jar
The freckles of the sky giving us a toothache

Nostalgia got the better of us
So we drove home chasing down the summer
And like the good ol' boys who drank whiskey and rye
We contemplated all we would have with us when we would finally
die
And all we would leave behind
Even in the unholy like crushed beer cans and missing socks and
misplacements of our last nights
But quickly turned our focus toward simple days
Trying to get skinny and tan
Summer was meant to be a place without plan
But the night's passing caught up to us
And we began to see our present in sepia light
Our present becoming a timeline of old Polaroids strung together
Stitched with surreptitiously captured candid laughter
And briefly
Just briefly
As we crossed the bridge
Flittering into the morning commute
Our minds fluttered to thinking

That maybe our innocence can be gained back or maybe we never
even lost it
To begin with
We just shifted into mistakes that we were too tempted to make
And we just treat it like
An enchanting lost cause
So we let that thought
Stick to us for the rest of the following day
The way that the sun makes the salty filament from the sea
Stick to our skin

False Starts

Blaise Laramée

My back to the wall, I type
a stanza of poetry
then quickly delete it. I imagine
a figurative Charon, black robes wrapped in
metaphorical darkness,
poling the poor ghosts of my
insufficient verse
across a swift and quiet Styx, taking them wherever
the dead poems go. I wonder
as I watch them leave, huddled
pathetically in the prow,
if I should have performed some sort of
last rites, like the Greeks; built a tiny pyre, maybe,
and burned them, or buried them deep
in resplendent state: their worldly possessions,
gold and silver and precious gems, in
twin chests of cypress, locked and lain gently
by their cold dead sides. But poems have no
old family heirlooms, nothing to carry from
this world to the next, and so I type on, erasing
couplets and similes and looking
always over my shoulder
at Charon,
who only shakes his ancient grey head,
as a parent might,
and sighs.

1249am
Melanee Piskai

She fumbled around with a journal full of scribbles, doodles, notes, and things that she didn't find exciting or impressive in any way. This book was not her pride and joy, the mouth that she pours her inspiration into. It wasn't full of still lives or ballads or figure drawings or, for that matter, any honey that dripped from her. Tonight, however, she was pretending it was. Balancing the tip of the pen cap between her teeth, she tapped her book steadily with her pen and slid note cards that were falling out at the sides back between pages.

It was the fourth spot she had relocated to since her night stroll started. The first was a bench beside a road, and, although it was well past midnight, on a weekday, no less, the air was full of sounds and movement. She felt she could only blink and shift her weight, and she did. The second was the edge of a wall hanging above the river. She had probably liked this spot the most, however her mind had been wandering and her body remained graceless. She had been sitting with her legs pulled against her chest to let the swans glide by undisturbed, and her body was wavering on the edge with her thoughts. The third spot was also a bench. However, it was wet with the remnants of rain. She sat there a half second too long to be comfortable and was still such by the time she found the fourth spot: a bench at the bottom of an old stone stairway. There were hedges and flowers surrounding her and the public herb garden to her side. She had picked the bench mostly because it was well lit and empty, but as she sat down and looked up, the view tugged up at the corners of her mouth. The lights lining the river glistened in the cool darkness. She could watch people cross the old bridge—a place she adored—but more importantly, she could watch the stone figures that danced across its sides. Following the path across the river, her eyes slid up to the castle that watched over the town below. Without moving her head, she leaned back and crossed her legs beneath her. As she refocused her wide eyes, she flicked

forward a few pages in her book. She drew two lines and frowned, flipped a page again, and stared straight ahead.

“Sind Sie ein Maler?” The girl jumped, and although it felt excessive, she only looked as if she had felt a chill. She looked up and found herself looking into the eyes of a man slightly less than twice her age. He had a scruffy, but handsome, face, thin, dark hair and blue eyes. As he was placing his bike sideways on the ground, she glanced at his tall and slender body as if to analyze how fast he could run. She tried not to notice how his eyes never left her face.

She lifted her eyebrows and cocked her head slightly with a polite smile, “Sorry?”

He paused for a second and when he replied, his accent was heavy, “You don’t speak German?”

“Not very well, I’m afraid. Sorry.” She was sincere in mannerisms. However, the interest was slipping, and she was about to relocate once again. She didn’t feel “in the mood” to talk to the night stranger, and she decided that she very well might never be.

“Do you speak English?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, ja well—You are a painter?”

She couldn’t help but smile a little, “No.” She let out a chuckle, “Not at all, actually. Maybe one day.”

“No? Ah, then a writer you are?”

She paused for a breath, “Not quite.” She paused again, “Not tonight.” She added to satisfy herself.

The strange man nodded and sat down in a different bench to her left, the one farther from the river. “So what is it that you are doing tonight if you are not a painter or a writer?”

She ran her hand through her words and her hair and settled with, “I’m not sure, really.”

“Ah,” Pause. “Ja, This is good too.”

The girl counted the statues along the bridge, although it wasn’t the first time, and became very conscious of the bra that was not under her dress. She glanced over at the stranger and very quickly glanced away. He had been watching the river, but noticed her eyes. She felt him trace her profile in his head. There were soft

curves and pale colors contrasted by dark twisting lines. She shifted her weight, and tried to think of what she wanted to do—which was also thinking of what she wanted to say.

He assisted, “An artiste must feel quite at home in this city.”

“Oh yes,” She said quickly. “Many beautiful things...” Her words trailed away with her eyes as they went back to her castle river view.

“You may not say you are a writer or a painter tonight, but you are—how do you understand it—spilling out a magnet... magnetic energy. Very creative.”

She looked at him with a polite smile and opened her mouth twice before she simply said, “Thank you.” She nodded at him and turned away again.

The both sat and watched the lit up monuments and the ebb and flow of the river. Time pulled them along very slowly but calm. The awkward or uncomfortable presence had left them. They sat in each other silent company as the water moved on. Her thoughts were flowing in and out for minutes before she became conscious again of her stranger. She stood up quickly and smiled, “I should go.”

His head rose to watch her. “You are leaving?”

“Yes.” Her voice trailed for a moment, “Have a nice night... Guten Nacht.”

He stood up, chuckling, “Ja, Guten Nacht! Thank you.”

“Sorry?”

“Thank you.” He repeated, and before she could ask him again, he slid a small journal from his pocket and held it like a nectarine. “Tonight...” He gestured towards her, “My muse.” He smiled with his teeth, and her mouth slighted upwards... she turned away and paused. Turning back she simply nodded her head again and smiled. She turned once, slipped herself through the hedges, and returned to the swans with the leaves that clung to her.

Soggy rice, lukewarm water
Emily Duffy

I want to kiss someone who tastes like printer paper
Tabula rasa, you know, that blank shit
That empty cup, that clean window.
That nothing. That nada.

I want to kiss someone who tastes like new shoelace
Like plastic casing for Mattel dolls
Like wrapping paper
Like pillow case
like nothing.

I want to kiss someone who tastes like
folded cloth napkin.

too many kisses taste like
open wound, like raw flesh
like earth tones
like layers of filet.

I said too many kisses taste like
full mouths like
wine soaked apologies.
Like home

So give me bland give me 8 by 11
cellulose pulp pressed to submission
taste like nothing,

The Glow
Brian Thomas

I've lived all my life with my shirt tucked in,
And the mirror has mocked my stiffened pose,
But my boots march through this earthly din.

From my first sad blushing brush with sin
To my lack of ecstatic highs and lows,
I've lived through it all with my shirt tucked in.

And I imagine these days that life begins
When time deals out her deadly blows.
Then I'll march through this earthly din.

But as for now I stand chin to chin
With my mirror, removing drooping clothes.
I don't think I want my old shirt tucked in.

The fragile hum of humdrum hymns
Won't prick my soul like a summer rose;
I'm opting for the earthly din.

No more can it rust, this heart of tin.
I've witnessed life's iridescent glow.
I've lived up till now with my shirt tucked in,
But my boots will parade through this earthly din.

Heat

Aubrey Atkinson

"This," he said, hand caressing my cheek,
"is how to initiate a fever."

Utilize the kinetic energy coursing
through your body and decant
a bit of mine to form the perfect catalyst.

I want to familiarize myself with the half
Cadence of your heart,
Blood courses through ventricle to ventricle
Insinuating oneness between us.

There's no need to persuade me.
I need this.

"This is how to create a fever, darling,"
I said without words as I pressed my lips
To the freckle on your neck,
Finding myself utterly drunk by the
Touch of your fingertips.
We collided urgently with the vigor of
a Duracell.

Your legs tangled in sheets and body.
My heart racing with wonder and palpating
As to say, "*Don't ever cease.*"

And as quick as it came, it went.
The longing satisfied
And I'm curled up into your arms.
Hair fanned out on your warm chest,
Listening as you lightly whistle notes
I'm not sure I know.

The final kisses before you drift
off are always sweetest. Flawlessly
placed upon my mouth saying
every beautiful thing you lack to say.

Today and Yesterday

Chloe Kekovic

Her eyes are closed. She can hear him thrashing around in the water, flailing about, laughing to himself. From shore, she can hear the clattering of his hands against the water as he shoos away the foul black seaweed that litters the waves. He breaks out into laps occasionally, frantically swimming horizontal to the length of the ocean. He swims towards the horizon, sporadically stretching and reaching towards nothingness, until he gets too far away and starts to panic. Then he flails around and comes back to shore, back to earth. This she can't hear.

She lies down against the sawdust colored sand and envisions him diving under the water, thrashing against the oncoming waves, his arms moving wildly. She knows that he's thinking about surfing, and how he wished that he could do it here, but mostly he wishes he could do it at all. Girls like that, girls like guys who can stand on top of a piece of plastic and glide against the ocean, he claims. Girls are into that, I'm gonna learn some day. She's not into that. She's not into anything. She's merely thinking about him in his head, waiting for him to come out of the water and to envelope her in his tan and freckle-smattered chest, which is intertwined like the moon's terrain. The moon. He told her the other day that it only took the astronauts 3 days to get there and she couldn't believe it. The small pocket of earth that she takes up as she lays on this beach becomes increasingly overt - washing over her in a wave.

Her bathing suit bottom is tight on her butt and the sun is too fat. Her forehead is singed. Something about the sun makes her move; she finds herself curling into a ball or stretching out like a cat in the sun, drinking in its rays. All the while her eyes are clamped shut, and a family of four who came together this Saturday watches her move from a distance, entranced. The mother watches her writhe and thinks about the yoga class she has on Wednesday, and her husband misses the smell of skin once it's soaked up sun. One of their two boys thinks about breasts, just that, just breasts, and the other thinks boobs look like putty, and doesn't get what the big

deal is. Two guys run by her in the sand, kicking it up wildly so she'll have to jump up and notice them, but to no avail. All the while she stays at the center of her own universe. She settles on her back and opens one eye to look at the sky, adorned with colorful other-worldly swirls and spots that came from clenching them shut for too long. What would happen if I peeled it back - if something great and magnificent was lying behind it, waiting to be unveiled?

But she is too hot to seek something else; too itchy, too sweaty, too lazy. She isn't immersed in the other worldliness of the sky above - merely an amused bystander. She could squint at it, and wait for it to tell her something for hours. She knows that it won't, and knows that if there was anything that was meant to be said, she wouldn't be able to hear it over the sound of her own thoughts. She glances down at her knees and notes dark purple splotches starting to form. This was not unusual - whenever there's too much sun her knees develop purple bruises. Though she knew this was inevitable, she never wore sunscreen.

He had put on sunscreen. He can see it now starting to form a thick film around him in the water - he hadn't heeded his mother's warning to wait a solid fifteen minutes before delving into the grey beach water. Mom, stop. Mom, I know. Mom I've got it. His protests play back in a loop and he knows that he'll be chastised when he gets home, and he'll be pissed that his skin is enflamed when he had been trying to get a tan, to look good, that classic surfer tan. He suddenly wonders what she's doing up there on the shore. She usually loves the water - coming here was her idea in the first place. Maybe she's insecure about her body or whatever. Maybe, maybe, maybe that was a piece of trash that just grazed over his foot and now he's disgusted and ready to get out. He awkwardly stumbles out of the water. At that moment, as his feet feel the sensation of solid land, he looks up and notices something orange and bright moving swiftly towards him. The Frisbee collides with his head before he had time to comprehend what it is, and he lets out a choked yelp. Two guys run over with glistening nomadic bodies and suspiciously blonde hair.

"Sorry man," one says, "The wind today is too gnarly."

He merely grunts and waves his hand, trying to be nonchalant and ignore the pulsations vibrating across his scalp. He is slightly bleary-eyed as he makes his way back over to her. Even from here he can see her chest heave slowly. He wonders what she's thinking, briefly wonders if she is happy. He can never tell.

She doesn't hear him coming but feels his shadow block the sun. She doesn't sit up.

"Your knees have that purple shit all over them."

"No sunscreen."

"Why not? You know what happens."

"Yeah."

"I'm ready to go. It's goddamn hot."

"Sure."

And then they're both up, slowly putting things into their bags, and the sun is burning them both now, and she finds tears welling up in her eyes because she's mad she never got into the water and it was so hot and maybe the splotches would be smaller if they'd cooled off in the water, and there's a book in her bag that she didn't read and lunch just tasted like sand, and she's suddenly gripped with the need to cry, just let it out and she would, she absolutely would but he'd probably get confused and scared, and she'd have to explain that there was no explanation for the steamy tears fogging up her sunglasses.

They walk back to the car, he makes the occasional joke about obese women sitting on the beach, she tells him that one day someone's going to beat the shit out of him for always loudly and brashly talking smack about people, and she's not going to be there to help. And then they continue to walk, quietly, holding hands.

When they're in his car she feels nothing, hears nothing, thinks of nothing, feels, nothing. Outside there are seagulls screeching, cackling to one another. She wonders if they're talking about something more interesting than his sweaty palms. When she touches his skin it's nice; calming almost. He's always been an oasis of sorts, but she doesn't feel anything. He notes her body: the curvature of her back and waist and the quiet contentedness of her breathing. His haircut was good, he concludes, thinking about the

compliments he's received on it. She thinks the same when she finds her hands in his hair, and as the two of them think about each other's bodies one of them decides that it's too hot for petting, so they lay down in the backseats. They lie there next to each other on other sides of the planet: he immersed in his own body and its capabilities, her on the summer reading that she still hasn't done and the sudden urge to know what time it is, because she told her mom she'd call if she was sleeping at her friend's house.

He leans over to her again, a surge of testosterone flooding through his body, pulling her on top in a clean swift motion. He wants to plunge deeper, but can feel her hesitation all at once, and has to swallow his need to question why she always wants to stop right before. Mandatory assemblies on consent flash through his mind; reminders of how to treat a woman from his Dad become all too conscious to him. He climbs off of her, and moves to the front seat of his car. He pulls a hand through his mop of hair, trying to pull something out to say to her. She is silent. He puts the key in the engine: it grumbles and churns over a few times. She waits for something, any indication that he wants to feel her lean against him. There is nothing, so she quietly climbs to the front, puts on her seatbelt, and away they drive. The radio hums out a monotonous pop tune and they both stare at blank horizon, thoughts quietly blazing inside.

-
"I'm your prey." The words fall out so quickly that she doesn't have time to stop them.

"What?"

"Have you ever thought about that? How I'm just waiting for you to hurt me and it's supposed to be good for you? That sucks." She's thought about this for a while now. Too long.

"I guess."

He shrugs.

(I know you hate it when I get like this, but I always do.)

"It is what it is."

-
When she stayed over at his house that night, she woke up to

silence and found that there were specks of blood on her side of the sheets. She hadn't expected that, not really, not what her friends had told her. And she was too humiliated by the prospect of him waking up and seeing the few remaining aspects of her that she crept out of his room in her underwear, pulling her shorts from the floor along.

Even though she was supposed to be different and full, something felt incomplete. Shallow, hollowed out, thrilled only by fleeting moments. It ended quicker than it had started. All of the buildup, all of the waiting, all of the advice and the tips from magazines, all of the bullshit of entering womanhood. When he fell off of her and whispered something that she assumed was meant to be nice, all she could hear was the ringing of her own discomfort... She realized in that moment that everything people had told her, advice that she had callously been given at parties and texts were nothing. They were bullshit, this was bullshit. The way that her body felt now was heavy and drained.

She crept into the living room, where his cat was sitting on the couch. As she leaned over to pet the cat it emitted a low hiss. "Bitch" she said in her head. She found his sweatshirt strewn across a chair, which smelt like his skin and hours prior and she pulled it on. It hung to her thighs and made it look like she wasn't wearing pants. Something about this amused her. As she started walking out of his house, she knew that it was too late and too early to go home - this realization put her in limbo; knowing that her mother didn't know where she was or what she was doing during these late summer nights.

Her mother had eavesdropped on her once; heard her talking about every intimate of her latest sexual interaction explicitly, with confidence, like she'd seen it all before. Her mother came busting into her room donning a look could have almost been construed as happy - happy that her prior angelic image of her daughter was completely uprooted: that she was 'bad', that she was 'reckless'. All this time she had just thought that she was 'normal'.

She opened up the door to his apartment and could hear him snoring lightly before she pried open the door all the way, clicked it

unlocked, and slipped outside. Immediately she knew that the sweatshirt was the wrong choice; the air was colder than expected. She pulled herself in close and walked down the empty street with nowhere to go. Her stomach gurgled; he'd made milkshakes and she didn't know how to tell him that she was lactose intolerant and didn't want to ask how he didn't know that so she slurped the entire thing up and licked her lips and smiled easy. But that pain, that ache deep down inside someone that tells them that something isn't right, that they aren't happy, that maybe they shouldn't have stayed over but it was too late had set in.

Swallowing the feeling as it rose in her throat, she sat down on a stoop, breathing easily, for a minute. The air was distinct: the scent of summer ending. Fall was beginning to creep through the trees, leaves fading ever so slightly, so subtle that one couldn't see from just a glance, but if she stopped and looked she could see the brown twinge begin to dance through the leaves.

She shoved her hands into the pocket of the sweatshirt and found a loose cigarette. It was bent in the middle and inevitably going to break with a few more days of sweaty hands pawing at it, so she took it out and brought it to her lips. No lighter, no matches in the other pockets. She let it dangle out of her mouth and pretended to puff at it for a few moments. She closed her eyes, exhaling slowly. She opened one and saw the sidewalks, the buildings, and the tree were soaked in a morning orange hue. She cocked her head back, looked up, and could see the sun perched atop of a brownstone in the distance. Just a sliver, but it was there.

9-14

Michael Heimbaugh

In essence,
the professor told us,
you could take any Emily Dickinson poem and sing it to the tune of
“Yellow Rose of Texas”
and it would work perfectly.

And I’ve found that a number of Shakespeare’s sonnets,
with their gallant galumphing iambs, fit quite nicely into the
opening strains
of Bob Dylan’s “Rainy Day Women.”

Free verse, too:

Whitman was kind of a groovy guy,
and it’s not entirely impossible to imagine that you had to be in a
certain state of mind
to *really* dig his stuff, man—
a Reconstruction-era Deadhead, if you will.
Plus, you can’t tell me the man himself doesn’t bear
a bit more than a passing resemblance to Mr. Garcia.

And wouldn’t one of the short works
of Mr. William Carlos Williams
sound *spectacular* as a nice, smooth,
sexy jazz-soul number—
sung by Sade, perhaps, or Diana Krall,
or maybe even Sting—
This is just...to say...

And how about Carl Sandburg?

He’s got this righteous, raucous, unflinching grandeur about him—
an energy that wouldn’t sound a bit out of place
whether belted at the top of Bruce’s Jersey smog-crowded lungs,
snarled by a sneering Johnny Rotten right into the Queen’s left ear

or nervously spat by the Pixies into a throng of angst-ridden Bostonites.

*We are the City of the Broad Shoulders,
and we don't care if yer in cahoots!*

Poe?

Well, for starters, I always thought “Eldorado” sounded like a lilting medieval ballad, but we’re avoiding the obvious here.

I mean, what else could the blackness of New Wave have been trying to emulate?

Just imagine unkempt Robert Smith screaming “Annabel Lee” into his mic, the Cure’s shimmering electronics and jangling guitar lines feeding his inner anguish.

And “The Raven”—it was practically written to be yelped by Banshees, grimly intoned by Bad Seeds, wisply moaned by a mournful Curtis.

Forgive me if I’m going the wrong way with this, professor, but I can’t help but think that, what you’re saying here is, poets write poetry with the intent to set it to song.

It sounds—
awesome.

Because sometimes—rather, most of the time, a message is so sublime, a thought so brilliant, an insight so powerful, that the only human way to share it is through a simple collection of chords—
an array of sounds
blasting into existence what mere words can only suggest.

Filigree

Dominick Knowles

Faceless, and with home unhinged,
you dissolve, half-undressed, impish.
The phone's dead, like us, no murmurs.
In those ruined walls there is a logic.

You dissolve, half-undressed, impish.
There are parts of you left unmentioned
in those ruined walls. And there is a logic
outside: a hayfield narrows to a pin.

There are parts of you left unmentioned.
The parts that are imperfect I am silent on.
Outside, a hayfield narrows to a pin,
folding endlessly inward with the thin sky.

The parts that are imperfect I am silent on.
Because I, like you, am faceless, home unhinged,
folding endlessly inward with the thin sky.
The thin sky, with its filigree of holes, discovers us.

Diane Arbus

Sophia Zander



A Naked Man Being a Woman, N.Y.C., 1968

Fucking weird. Fucking *freak*. Their judgments are choked by lace collars and reek of stale potpourri. Muted, I hear them still. Hands flying to parted lips with swift inhale like they just heard Kennedy died. The words crackling out of a swirled catalin radio; “Assassinated”. Fucking Lee Harvey Oswald (did your friends call you Lee or Harvey?) (Did you have friends?). Their eyes are ebony, cold and leaden, bullets tearing into flesh. Do they know that I would have possibly, probably fucked Mr. Oswald? They shoot my photograph down in a hail of copper-caped bullets that pierce the black and white spectrum. “It is simply not art. Oh no, it most certainly is not.” These women use doilies. These women pot ferns. These women diligently research the best method to suspend candied cherries in ornate gelatin forms: *You will prefer Royal Fruit Flavored Gelatin for its quivering tenderness!* May I call you Ossie? I might have asked if he had brought me a Scotch at dusk on the Bowery. But Mr. Oswald would have been only a teenager when he lived in this glorious New York, New York Hallelujah city, so I would not have rubbed a palm against a khaki clad thigh. Not reenacted the 42nd Street live sex shows in an odiferous alley. No mundane, repetitive thrusts trying to mimic sensation. The guttural sound of spit hitting canvas echoes. Because that will make a difference. Did they jeer at *The Birth of Venus*? *Critic: noun, one without senses tripping about Plato’s Cave with a perpetually*

wagging finger. We pay them no mind, not me or Harv or the feminine contrapposto, now raped by saliva that hangs steady in dim illumination.



A Jewish giant at home with his parents in the Bronx, N.Y.C., 1970 Eddie Carmel, from the burnt sienna of Tel Aviv to the slate grey expanse of New York. "You know how every mother has nightmares when she's pregnant that her baby will be born a monster? I think I got that in the mother's face as she glares up at Eddie, thinking, OH MY GOD, NO!" He is El Arbol de La Sabina. Big Eddie may have been born from an Israeli grain of sand, springing the 7' 7" wonder to life like an exploding popcorn kernel. Or did he descend from the very giants that Jack met when he scuttled up the beanstalk? Sometimes genetics are fiction.

Acromelagy: akros – extreme, megalos - large. Greek words, Jewish man. On the playground that melts away, where no "My mandibular overgrowth leads to prognathism, maxillary widening, teeth separation and jaw malocclusion" is met with "I see, I understand, I accept." Little Yahoos swinging from the rusted bars- yes, Jonathan Swift, I get you, I do. I think. It's humanity! Let's scream it in a graffiti splattered ally and let the echo reverberate rabidly forever. Or in the subway tunnel, reeking of urine, so the briefcase wielding men, the bedraggled bums with newspaper wrapped feet, the exhausted makeup-smearred prostitutes, the couple groping ravenously, the hunched bag lady in the corridor of Lexington Ave,

they will all hear it. He is gilded with yearning. A mountain must tire of being so close to the heavens, peaks grazing clouds, yet never quite there. Just "...a kind of calypso"...And yet, and yet. Da Vinci said a mountain looks purple at a distance due to aerial perspective, the Rayleigh scattering. Eddie is purple at a distance because he is the mirage of a velvet King, he is the first sip of wine stolen while your mother checks the Christmas casserole. He is mulberry. His crippled body arches like the Pirangi cashew tree but his bark remains gold. West 59th Street entrance of Central Park at 5 a.m., I wait so the sky and I can brood together in Peruvian plum. Both bruised, both spiced with cinnamon. "Taking a portrait is like seducing someone." I am the serpent in Eden. I am Mata Hari. I know things, secrets; I freeze that moment and I do not elaborate. It is 1970 and "Let It Be" wafts down Harrison Ave.

Contributors

Aubrey Atkinson is a freshman Biology major and French and Music minors. She is an avid member of the college's select choir, Meistersingers and BAPS. She aspires to be a veterinarian.

Max Bicking talks in geodesics.

Grace Buchele Mineta is just another statistic of Ursinus students marrying each other. Recently wed to her Japanese sweetheart, she spends her time reading, streaming Netflix, and bargain shopping at farmer's markets. She regularly writes for Tokyo Cheapo, Texan in Tokyo, and Huffington Post.

Samantha Cermignano is made up of 80% water and 20% lemons. Despite this, she has managed to earn a degree in Biology from Ursinus College. So it goes.

Kendal Conrad is a senior with a double major in English and Theater (with Honors in Theatre) and a minor in Music. Kendal was a finalist in Womenetics' 2012 Advancing Aspirations Global Scholarship contest and is an award-winning songwriter. Her work has recently been published in Miss Heard Magazine.

Sean Dolan does not respond to emails.

Emily Duffy is one year older than she was last year.

Isabella Esser Munera thinks you're really great. You're really great. Thank you for reading, you beautiful human being.

Rebecca Galarza is an Exercise & Sport Science major. She enjoys playing soccer, googling the moon, and pretending that she's cool with being a mass of chemical matter hurling through the universe.

Leah Garrity is a junior Sociology and Peace and Social Justice major. She's also a member of the cross country and track teams and a writing fellow.

Meaghan Geatens is a freshman hoping to major in both English and Media & Communication Studies. She plays on the Women's basketball team and loves music, as well as spending time with her family and friends.

Quinn Gilman-Forlini is lackadaisical about word choice.

Erica Gorenberg lives a mysterious and glamorous life but due to security protocols, she is not permitted to share it with you.

This is **Michael Heimbaugh**. He shakes you warmly by the hand. How d'you do? And how d'you do? And how d'you do again? He is pleased to meet you.

Joshua Hoffman is a sophomore Environmental Studies and Mathematics double major with a minor in Creative Writing. He is right-handed, but there's a two thirds chance he is carrying the left-handed allele. He is eager to break the glass ceiling preventing straight, white, cisgender, Jewish males from making it in stand-up comedy.

Joshua Hopkins-Desantis is a Junior Psychology and Computer Science double major with a minor in Neuroscience, and a passion for technology and its applications. When he's not reading about the latest mobile gadgets or spiritually pursuing an existentialist path to self-development, he's stringing together multi-syllabic expressions like it ain't no verisimilitude!

Caitlin Jackson is a senior English and Theater major who wishes creative writing was her full time business. She's a Sagittarius, who likes singing it acapella with the ladies of the B'naturals, kickin it with the sick sisters of Omega Chi, and hours of tackling people on

the rugby pitch with UCWR.

Benjamin Jones is fascinated with mortality and enjoys a nice tuna salad.

Chloe Kekovic is a freshman who strives for the seemingly impossible goal of being a professional author. She draws inspiration from reality as well as the reality she yearns to exist in. She hopes people enjoy getting lost in her worlds.

Eli Kineg delayed writing his short biography because he put an enormous amount of pressure on himself to make something succinct and effecting which says more in and of itself than any biography could.

Dana Kluchinski is a sophomore Environmental Studies and Biology double major. She likes poetry, cookies, and spoken word. She would like to thank everyone from Lit Soc for being so inspiring.

Dominick Knowles is a Strange Loop.

Kelsey Knowles: My name is Kelsey. I like eggs. I'm an exchange student from Tennessee.

Mara Koren has never seen The Lion King. She'd like to thank her friends for constantly threatening to make her, but never actually following through.

Chukyi Kyaping is a professionally trained Barrel-rider. Her spirit animal is Carl Fredricksen from the movie Up and she has a taste for the strange and misunderstood. Her knowledge of basic social skills is equivalent to that of the Sasquatch

Blaise Laramee once dreamt he was a nuclear bomb about to be dropped on an innocent country, and that inevitable rushing

towards destruction is, to this day, the most terrifying thing he has ever felt.

Jane Lee is a neuroscience major who wanted to be published under a pen name, like Currer Bell (both to trick people that she is still an active poet and to have a common sounding poet name). Tried to make a mnemonic of brain parts using poetic style – via that, found out why there are divisions among course departments...

Kevin Moore is a freshman at Ursinus and is considering double-majoring in English and Media/Communications. His favorite hobby is filmmaking, and in his free time he enjoys playing the guitar and watching an unhealthy amount of movies.

Rayna Nunes is a senior English major and Theater, Creative Writing, and Philosophy minor. Further information is classified. Go about your business.

Nina Petry is all about cheeseburgers, bulldogs and classic country music. She's a sophomore English major currently devising a strategic plan to minor in everything else.

Melanee Anne Piskai, currently a freshman at Ursinus, is a psychology and sociology double major and cat lover. She is extremely grateful and honored for this opportunity to share pieces of her work, and hopes to continue these art forms throughout her life.

Arthur Robinson is a Freshman Theater Major who absolutely adores writing. He is honored to have his work included with such fantastic writers in the lantern.

Anne Rus is actually 18 rabbits in an extremely high tech person suit. Us rabbits would like to send our regards to the staff of this

year's Lantern and thank them for being understanding about various malfunctions, as we're still in beta mode.

Kayla Sallada is a freshman at UC. She graduated from Palmerton Area High School where she met one of my greatest inspirations, her art teacher Mr. Debias. She is an artist at heart who loves singing, fast cars and going to concerts!

Richard Schulz is a Philosophy major who began writing poetry after being inspired by the work of Brandon McCartney. He enjoys playing drinking games at the Collegeville diner and submitting plagiarized poetry to writing publications. He also enjoys dancing, usually at the expense of other people's good time and private space.

Nicolas Shandera. Tried to get his Bio from the NSA...rejected.

Amanda Sierzega is a sophomore English Major with Secondary Education certification. Her and Annie are rebels.

Michele Snead is a Junior English major, Creative Writing and Film minor, and sister of Kappa Delta Kappa. She enjoys petting cats and taking naps.

When **Nora Sternlof** learns to drive, she's going on a very long road trip.

Bobbi Stone is currently a sophomore majoring in psychology. She is also a member of Seismic Step and a tutor for America Reads.

Epiphany Summers, senior, majors in Psychology and Sociology (Honors) with a minor in African American and Africana Studies. She is the president of Voices in Praise, vice-president of Sankofa Umoja Nia, a tour guide, and works for Multicultural Services. Epiphany aspires to create her own non-profit organization for underprivileged communities.

Collin Takita is a freshman majoring in math with a minor in creative writing. Collin aspires to publish his works throughout his college and graduate careers.

Brian Thomas has your dad's taste in clothes and your mom's taste in automobiles. He's a freshman.

Andrew Tran is an Media and Communications Major. He is only slightly allergic to certain treenuts and bananas; he eats them anyway. His father knows French, his mother works as a seamstress, and his sister is smarter than him.

Henry Willshire is a Sophomore English Major who would love to write books rather than study. He hopes to one day accomplish either of those two things, and considers having his work in the Lantern an important first step.

Codey Young: a senior, majoring in Sociology and Philosophy with a minor in Africana & African American studies. He has been scribbling poems on napkins, notebooks, and any available blank space since the age of twelve.

Sophie Zander is a Senior English and Politics major.

