

5-2015

Jigsaw 2015 Complete Volume

Jigsaw 2015

The College at Brockport, jigsaw@u.brockport.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/jigsaw>



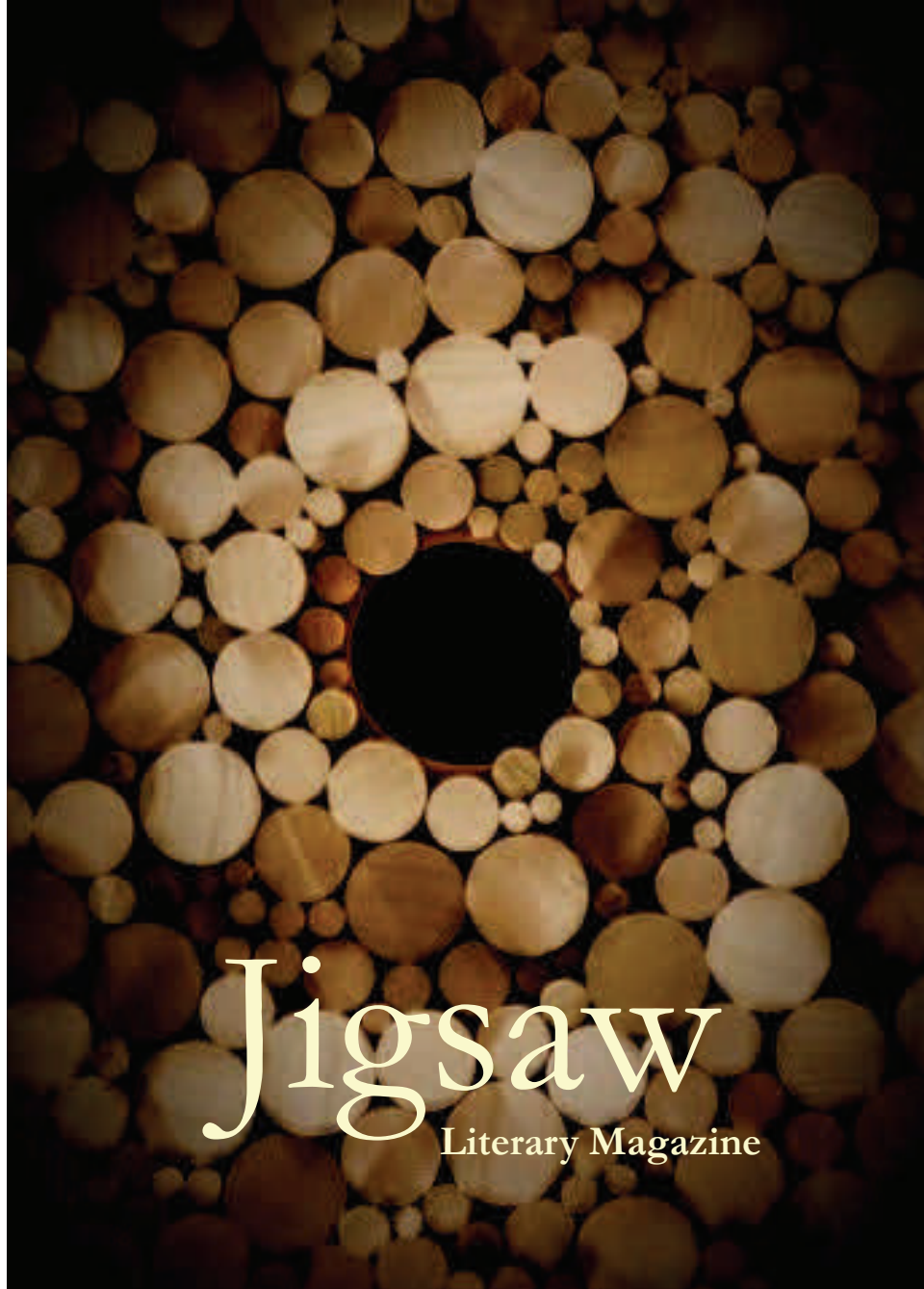
Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

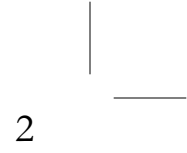
Repository Citation

2015, Jigsaw (2015) "Jigsaw 2015 Complete Volume," *Jigsaw*: Vol. 2015 : Iss. 1 , Article 42.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/jigsaw/vol2015/iss1/42>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jigsaw by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.





Jigsaw

Literary Magazine

2015

Presented by Brockport English Club

Cover Art courtesy of Sabrina Franek





The College at
BROCKPORT
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Table of Contents

Art

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|----|
| Antique Flowers | Danielle McLymond | 30 |
| Glass Reef | Sabrina Franek | 9 |
| Handy Self Portrait | Sabrina Franek | 71 |
| Twin Koi | Sabrina Franek | 94 |
| Universe Wood Dowel | Sabrina Franek | 60 |

Fiction

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----|
| A Toast | Evan Kern | 74 |
| Clarity | Allyson Osborne | 42 |
| Drop into My Ocean | Mark Sutherland | 104 |
| Four Letters | Daniel A. Duval | 96 |
| Grim | Josh Seiler | 54 |
| Love in Postscript | Danielle McLymond | 111 |
| Prey | Evan Kern | 16 |

Poetry

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-----|
| About ready to begin the show | Kristin Flulher | 48 |
| Another day at church | Josh Seiler | 32 |
| Crystalline | Allyson Osborne | 11 |
| Eavesdroppers Never Hear Their Own Rumors | Samuel Brock | 12 |
| Entropy | Allyson Osborne | 31 |
| Eternity's Black Forge | Zachry Robinson | 38 |
| Forty Nights of Violence | Samuel Brock | 39 |
| Goodbye Letter | Kiara Alfonseca | 50 |
| I Am a Softer Me | Mark Sutherland | 33 |
| La Cicatriz | Mark Sutherland | 62 |
| Love Poem | Christina Hedding | 34 |
| Must Heard Mustard | Mark Sutherland | 52 |
| My Attempts at Domestication | Samuel Brock | 106 |
| Nervous | Josh Seiler | 95 |
| No Survival Plan for... this. | Danielle McLymond | 36 |

Poetry cont.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----|
| Ode to Cat Hair | Christina Hedding | 72 |
| Ruminations in Wonderland | Christina Hedding | 15 |
| Self-Love | Kiara Alfonseca | 91 |
| Steroids and EpiPens | Sarah Elardo | 109 |
| Stripped Guise | Brandon Dixon | 102 |
| The Stillness of Euthanasia | Samuel Brock | 66 |
| The Stolen-From-Us | Brandon Dixon | 92 |
| Untitled | Nathaniel Jones | 47 |
| Untitled | Nathaniel Jones | 59 |
| Vacancy | Allyson Osborne | 64 |
| Willow | Nathaniel Jones | 10 |



Glass Reef, Sabrina Franek

Willow

I see your beauty,
even though your limbs are weak, and
base partly uprooted
eroded from the years of tears
and dreary, delusions
that seem to keep you leery,
on the precarious cusp, for the
fear of losing—it
continues to pull you down into
opaque darkness
or leaves, that already departed
detached themselves from carcass
and lay to cushion the soon to sprawl.
Yet...she still stands tall, once.
The respect, her hairs a knotty
mess
of twigs and empty nests, left
over from the fall.

Nathaniel Jones

Crystalline

You were a tree, twisting and contorting
your limbs around my heart, and thwarting
all attempts I made to keep to my own.

You were rays of the sun; you had sown
the warmth in my lucid bones, frozen deep
until the touch of another seeped
through every extension of my being.

You were a whisper of wind, seeing
in which ways and how my spirit fluttered,
and what it took for skin to shudder
against the bitter cold of disregard,
wounding further one already marred.

Allyson Osborne

Eavesdroppers Never Hear Their Own Rumors

What secrets are you keeping from me this evening? What have you not told me that I cannot already smell on my own? The defeating stench of infidelity and the unchanging sunny weather in California. I stumbled under the mellow trees, approached the side streets with a boiling headache, glaring at the half-moon and feeling self-conscious.

In my fragile fatigue and shopping for accompaniment, I traveled with raspberry stains on my collar, dreaming of your company.

Aisles full of abandoned teenagers under the moon and the smells of you in darkened classrooms while security shined a light in the white chariot I drove you in.

What liars and what deceptions! Entire families in the middle of the night! Bedrooms silenced! Wives bent over, husbands from behind! Such a lonely place I frequented often to chip your orange makeup—and you, Salvador Dali, what were you doing near *The Basket of Bread*?

I saw you, my horrible former love, my blonde mannequin, childless, a chased virgin, faking your own teenage innocence in front of a group of comedic believers. A false persona, you trampled the evenings of my greatest moments

of you undressed, under the rain, on your stained knees,
and gave false modesty to your own nightly death and heard your
various attractions: the shame of dishonesty, a liar's story,
the uncontrollable instinct to spread your personality.

I wandered through those naked nights following you
and followed in my shadows by our parental detectives.

We folded ourselves between waterways and lakes
and found ourselves in the middle of lust-filled evenings.
Pants unbuttoned, laced shirts far above the mid-drift,
and underwear that only made a temporary appearance.

We walked down open corridors in our religious euphoria
tasting Africa, Italy, and made sure America was isolated.

Where are we going, love of my regretful, regretful life? Their doors
have been closed for hours. Where does your vanilla skin
point this evening? (Onlookers see my crying in public, arguing
with myself and I feel absurd.)

Will we walk for part of the early evening through desolate
and naked streets? The trees dance above our dance, lights out in
every home, my loneliness as an accompaniment.

Will you lead me on a short (lack of confidence) leash
though the filthy Mexican ghettos of Los Angeles, dreaming
of the lost United States of love near silver automobiles in parking
lots, home to our imaginary and nonexistent cottage?

Dearest mother, old and gray, missing your nights
of thrusting to the sounds of coarse music and defining language
that sucked you dry, what regrets of me did you have
when free will became oppression and you walked out
in the middle of the night naked and full of desperation as your
boat drifted away over the black waters of the White Nile?

Samuel Brock

Ruminations in Wonderland

I take the world and lose it.
I find there is no fate in
crooked men with crooked smiles
or Bluebell and Violet ladies
blooming from dusty day dreams,
as commonplace as the
cracked spines on my shelf.
Alice believed six impossible things
before tea and biscuits,
of disappearing cats,
and cabbages and kings.
But I stumble over
the rabbit hole and into
my fluorescent kitchen.
My coffee still hot,
tripping on my mother's words
be not as a nail,
but as a hammer.

Christina Hedding

Prey

Shay could already see the note on the kitchen counter by the phone, even before she left school. Ignoring the fact that her parents left her at home while they toured Italy (for *two weeks*) to use up their collected days off, she went to the gym to watch Ashlynn and the rest of the Milton Mamet Senior High Golden Gov'nors volleyball practice. Finding a seat high-up enough in the bleachers to avoid foul volleys, but not enough to look totally detached from her best friend's passion, Shay checked her messages—nothing, but she should be used to that, she thought. She sighed and plopped down on the bleachers, keeping her phone in-hand, glancing at it occasionally.

Some of the other girls' boyfriends were at the practice, others' brothers, their rides home. Shay glanced over at them, like some of them had been glancing at her for the past 20 minutes or so, and pulled her skirt more over her knees each time. She'd never been one to be surrounded by guys, despite her modest West Coast fashion sense, varied taste in film, love for books and sports, and her "killer personality", as her brother Matt so eloquently put it. Matt was gone, too, so Shay's time at home would be doubly boring until her parents got back. Which was exactly why she stayed after to watch Ash's practice; her bestie was her ticket away from utter boredom...if only for the night.

Her phone buzzed:

The Matt-rix

uMessage

Today 2:34pm

Hey sis

Hey Matt <(^_^<

What's up?Just @ Ash's practice. She's
comin home w/ me tonight.

U heard from mom?

Today 2:48pm

No. They in Italy already?Ig. They left rlly frickin early
this morning..**Haha gotcha.****So what're you two gonna do
tonight?**

Guess we'll see lol ;)

When r u coming home?

Read 2:56pm

**Soon. Workin' late tonight
though. Ttyl sis :)**

* * *

At least she'd gotten her foot in the door with her brother. His work—which Shay still didn't completely understand—was tedious, she knew that. He couldn't quite talk about what he did, and she understood, heeding the clichéd “If I tell you, I'd have to kill you” end-all. It paid well, Matt was happy, engaged, living off in San Bernardino but making the drive up the coast to Sac Town to visit every

once in a while. Last Shay heard, he was overseas with a foreign dignitary. He carried a nice gun, and Shay knew guns—a Sig Sauer P229 Elite Stainless, cherrywood grip, nickel finish. Top-of-the-line. He'd let her fire it at a range in town a couple times, and she liked the feel of it.

She really wished she could know what he did. Sounded Bond-y.

Matt posed a really good question to her on the phone though. *What were they going to do?* Shay thought about it all while the team had practiced, while she waited for Ash to change, on the bus, all the way home.

The bus was the same—popular kids and jocks in the back, band geeks and the learned in the front, all other peons found their way to the middle. Ash found it in her heart to keep Shay company every time they took the bus together, in spite of her being goaded to the back by the other players on their route.

“Y’know,” Ash said, looking away from her phone for the first time since leaving MMSH and leaning in to compensate for the ruckus of the back-seaters, “Reese Ritter’s gonna be working at American Apparel tonight.”

“And...?” Shay answered, raising her thin eyebrows.

“*And...* I was wonderin’ if you wanted to go later?”

“To the mall?” Shay’s friend nodded. “To see Reese?” Again, she nodded, grinning. “I dunno, Ash. Not really lookin’ to hook up with Mr. Science Fair.”

“He’s grown up an awful lot since two years ago, Shaybaby,” Ash reassured her. “Gotten taller, *filled out* a little more. On top of that, he’s *single*.” Ash hung on that last syllable for what seemed liked for-

ever to Shay. She rolled her eyes, put her knees up in the seat. Checked her phone again. Still nothing.

“Like I said, Ash. Not int’rested. Besides...I kinda got a guy.”

Ash went pie-eyed. Shay felt them boring into the side of her head. “Spill,” demanded the blonde.

Shay blushed, bit her lip, noticed it was their stop. *Saved by the bus...*

Ash was relentless, though, as they stepped off the big yellow taxi and walked up the stone path to the oakwood front double-doors. “He’s...” Shay began, noticing her next door neighbor’s Lexus IS, shiny with a fresh spring wash. “He’s my neighbor.”

Ash followed Shay’s eyes to the car as well. “Mr. High-Roller?” she sneered. Ash’s eyes wandered over the house next. *Modest enough...* “How’d ya land that gig, Shaybaby?” The brunette unlocked the front door and the two of them went in. Immediately throwing her stuff down on the couch, Shay kicked off her moccas and went straight to the kitchen. There, on the black granite countertop—the only piece of color in the kitchen besides the birchwood cabinets—was her parents’ note:

Shay ~

By the time you get to reading this, dad & I will already have landed. Remember that we’re six hours ahead, kiddo, if you want to call us before you go to bed. I’ll have my cell on me wherever we go. Left my credit card there ~ use it sparingly. Try not to turn the house upside down while we’re gone, ok, sweetie?

Love you! Miss you!

~ Mom

“I’m gonna go shower,” Ash announced, halfway up the stairs.

Shay crumpled up the note and tossed it in the trash, taking note of her mom’s card plastered to the phone cradle with tape. “Kay.” Shay, too, went upstairs. As she heard her friend turn on the water, she began to undress. Peeped through her bedroom window, next door into her neighbor’s—their usual “meeting spot”. Standing there, half-vulnerable, Shay Lynn Kern’s shoulders drooped a little. Maybe he’d seen her come home with Ash and so was keeping to himself today. She pulled up her uMessage and texted him:

<3

uMessage

Today 3:28pm

R u home ? ;)

Delivered

After a few minutes, Shay frowned. No response.

She shut the curtains, continued to undress. Ash had finished up in the shower; she’d never been one to dawdle in there. Shay’d already changed into a baggy cut-neck tee and a pair of vibrant-orange short shorts, sitting cross-legged on her bed, underneath her Kat Dennings poster (whom Ash had told her time and again she was the clone of) by the time the tousled blonde came strutting into the bedroom. The nerdy brunette lifted her eyes from her laptop long enough to see Ash wrapped in one of her favorite cyan plush towels, before returning to tumblr.

Ash paused, her eyes darting about the room. “You changed your stuff around...”

“Hadda make room for my new desk,” Shay said, pointing out the white-washed faded-wood furnishing without looking up. “Like it?”

“Eh.”

“Whataya mean, ‘eh?’”

“I mean,” Ash said rummaging through her rope bag and finding something lazy to throw on, “you’re a dweeb. And ya know it. No one buys desks, Shaybaby.” Shay chucked a pillow at her, face beaming. No one knew how to give her mood a jump-start like Ash. “Make me dinner?”

“It’s not even 3:30, Ash. Besides, I ain’t your maid...”

“So what if it’s 3:30?” Ash clasped up her bra, dropped her towel. “You saw me out there today. I carried my team. I *need* my energy back, *hommie*.”

“It was practice, chill. ‘Sides, you were too busy bendin’ over for Thom Ferrer. And don’t deny it—I saw you. No one could *miss* you in those volleyball shorts.”

“Again, so? That’s a lotta work too.”

Shay shook her head. “Don’t get ghetto on me, Daisy Duke.” Shay stuck her phone in the elastic belt in her shorts and made for the door. “We pasty chicks gotta stick together.” She shoved Ash playfully as she passed, just narrowly dodging a return slap as she went downstairs to the family room.

It’d always been her favorite room in the house. First thing one saw when entering the family room was that it had a wrap-around

upper banister where, standing from any of the five upstairs doorways, one could see down into it (mom and dad had very much liked the Parisian style of that when house-hunting), and was also equipped with a master fireplace and wall-space for the plasma-screen television, floor enough for the beige shag carpet, jet-black lounge couches, and a glass-top coffee table dead-center, with the freshest editions of her dad's *Forbes*, *Fortune* and *The Wall Street Journal* and her mom's *Newsweek*.

It was a relatively-sterile room for Shay's tastes, but she liked it nonetheless. Made her feel fancy. She frowned, however, eyeing the neatness of the coffee table's "assortment". Pushed up her cobalt Ray-Bans; all of her "nonsense magazines"—*GameInformer*, *Teen Vogue*, *Pop Sci* and *Cicada*, among others—were "kept" upstairs, in her room, underneath her 32-inch flat-screen and Xbox(es).

Shay knelt down by the coffee table and drew out a small chest (also black) from underneath. She ruffled through the many take-out and dine-in menus—Shay's emergency go-to in case of...well, parents' trips to Italy. Mom had left her card with the note by the phone. Shay was sure to get her use out of it while her parents were gone. "Sparingly" was not a word she quite knew the definition of. No mall trips, though; she wasn't in the mood, and she wasn't that kind of girl.

Settling on a place—*Xian Qiè* Chinese Kitchen did delivery—Shay called up to Ash, still changing in her room. "How's Chinese sound?"

"Fine by me, chica. I could eat anything." *Sweet*, Shay thought. Chinese was heaven. She flew to the phone in the kitchen and dialed

the number on the tri-fold pamphlet, deciding to order for the both of them. A sweet-sounding Asian girl answered after a few short rings. “Hi there. I’d like to place an order for delivery...?”

The food had taken a little longer than Shay’d hoped (she checked her phone—4:18), but the two of them had built up enough of an appetite; they’d been watching old episodes of *Sleepy Hollow* on Netflix—the lead, Tom Mison, enough to spur the teens’ hunger, kept them sated until food arrived. “I’ll get it,” Ash said, jumping up from the leather couch to answer the doorbell. She swung the door open dramatically. “Well hey there,” she purred to the tall, dark, chiseled delivery guy. Shifted her weight onto one leg. He smiled back, presenting the food and a dazzling array of polished teeth. Ash, having preconceived the whole ordeal, reached alluringly into her shirt and removed the tip money. “Thanks a bunch, cutie.” She sent him off with a wink, looked him up and down as he walked back to his car. He looked back, to which she waved at him and twirled once before shutting, but not locking, the door behind her.

Shay didn’t need to see what went down; she knew Ash well enough by now. “You’re such a whore,” she kidded as her friend returned with the warm bag of Oriental goodness. Its aroma quickly spread throughout the entire room. “But you’re my whore.” Shay tore open the bag, found her House Special Lo Mein—beef, shrimp and veggies, *yum*—her eggroll and fortune cookie, and dug in.

“*Damn-straight.*” Ash collected her food, as well, and plopped down on the adjacent couch, letting the plastic bag succumb to the

wilt of gravity.

The girls had gotten through about a third of the first season by the time it started to get dark. The sunlight that still shone through the windows made interesting patterns of orange and red on the walls, sinking slowly as it set. “So I texted Reese,” Ash said finally, breaking the post-supper silence and putting a spear in one of Tom Mison’s witty-as-ever quips from the show. Her friend didn’t budge. Her forte had always been serials like this, and Shay excelled in keeping all of them sorted out.

“Oh?” Shay responded, too drawn-up in the show to totally hear her friend out.

“Yea. He said he might stop by tonight after he gets off.”

“Kay,” said Shay half-heartedly again. Ash shook her head, smirking and counting to herself. *Three...two...one...*

“Wait, you did *what?*!”

“I told Reese I was over at your place. We’re cool, y’know. Said he’d stop by, dependin’ on his motivation level to do Rivoli’s take-home test.”

“Why don’t *you* date him then, Ash? I told you, I’m not looking for a boyfriend...”

“Can’t go hookin’ up with your next door neighbors all your life either, Shaybaby.” Ash had her there. *Touché, chica...*

“Oh,” Shay said, remembering something. “Matt said he wanted to Skype tonight—she checked her phone again—**8:12**. He *said* any time after eight... “You wanna see him?”

“I mean, I *guess*,” said Ash. “I always thought he was chill.”

“Don’t lemme pull your leg, man,” Shay laughed, pausing the TV on Tom Mison’s scruffy face and snatching up her laptop from the coffee table. Ash made a joking face and leaned in toward the screen. Starting up the app, Shay fixed her hair in the reflection of her phone screen, as well as her make-up.

“So you’re willin’ to look nice for your older bro, but not Reese Ritter? You got somethin’ *wrong* with you.” Shay elbowed Ash in the ribs as the call went live. Matt’s face came on the screen, pixelated at first, but clearing up. He’d started to grow his beard again, Shay noticed. Matt was one of those guys that didn’t look like a complete asshole with face full of hair; it was just in its early stages though. His eyes had slight bags under them, his hair was a tad longer than Shay remembered him with last time, and shaggier. His winning smile, however, had not changed. “Hey Matt,” Ash purred jokingly.

“Ms. Owens,” Matt returned with a cheeky grin. “Sis.” He nodded to Shay, who returned with a genuine smile and a wave. “What’re you two beauties up to? Not gettin’ into too much trouble, are ya?”

“Tons,” Shay answered, stifling a giggle. “Ordered Chinese a while ago, I’ve been introducing Ash to *Sleepy Hollow*.”

“Oh?” Matt said. “Good one. How’re ya likin’ it?” he asked the blonde.

“I like Tom *Mison* as Ichabod.” Matt chuckled at that.

“How’s Laurie?” Shay asked him.

“She’s good, she’s good. At work right now, otherwise I’d have her on to see you guys. Her pregnancy’s goin’ along without a hitch.” At that, Matt knocked on his tray table. “She’ll be expecting

in about two months..." He crossed his fingers and said, "Here's hopin' I'm home for it."

"You're getting deployed again?" Shay asked, disappointed.

"Yes ma'am. Someplace *clean* this time. Stuttgart."

"Germany?" Ash said. "*Wow.*"

"Can't say any more than that, though, huh?"

"Sorry, miss," Matt said, putting on his secret agent front, "that's classified."

"Congrats, Shaybaby," Ash chimed in, "your brother's a spook." She turned to Matt on-screen. "What *is* your official title anyway?"

"Quality control specialist," Matt said, holding back a chuckle, himself. "Sounds like bull, doesn't it?"

The three of them stayed on the video chat for the next half-hour or so, catching up on odds-and-ends—Shay's senior year, Ash's full-ride scholarship for volleyball to UCLA, and Matt and Laurie's new place in D.C., not ten blocks from the White House. Overall, though, Shay was just happy to see her brother again, even if it *was* just over Skype. "Later, bro. Love ya," Shay said, blowing him a kiss. Ash waved goodbye and Shay ended the call. "Hmm," the wavy-haired brunette sighed, contented.

"Where's your mom keep the glasses 'round here?" Ash prodded. "I'm thirsty."

"Right this way, chica," Shay answered her, leading the way her dad's den, where the mini-bar was.

One hour and about four stiff drinks later, Shay was quite warmed, up in her room, on her bed, a half-emptied glass of Skyy in

her hand. Ash was slouched in Shay's bean-bag chair, an equally-empty glass of Jack Daniels at her feet. Her folks were cool with her drinking at home, just as long as she didn't try going out.

Shay was opposed to the idea of going out even before leaving school that day. "You hear anythin' from Reese yet?" she said, a buzz setting in.

"Not a thing," said Ash, solid as a rock. She was better at handling her drinks, and so hardly seemed bothered by the whiskey—she'd been doing it longer than Shay. At that moment, her phone buzzed. She looked, it was Reese. "Speak of the Devil." She read the text. Responded. "He said he can't—he really wants to get home and do Rivoli's homework. Sorry, Shaybaby, no entertainment tonight."

"What're you *talkin'* about?" Shay rolled over, curled up on her bedspread. "This *has* been fun, Ash. I like spendin' time with you—you're one of few chicks that get me." She sighed, licked her lips, disregarded the glass in her hand.

Ash hurried to get up and set it on her friend's bedside table before it spilled. "I'll be sure to dilute that with orange juice tomorrow morning for breakfast," she said, giggling. "So hey, tell me about this guy? Mr. High-Roller Lexus Driver?"

Took a minute for Shay to register her friend's query. Then, "*Well*," she began, slow at first, the vodka smoothing out her voice, "if you must know... His name's Alex. Alex Poiccard. He's a bit taller than me, likes to surf, so he's tanned—obviously. He's cultured—likes movies, art, oldies—he's a feminist, which is a rare thing for white-collar surfer guys who drive Lexuses."

Ash shook her head. “You got a pic?” Shay nodded, pulled up her phone’s camera roll, handed Ash the phone when the image loaded. “Damn,” she said, her eyebrows arching. “He’s *hot*.” She took notice of his sharp, business-like eyeglasses—slim, glinting rectangles which, she thought, completed his face. “Good catch, Shay. How’d ya do it?”

“Honestly,” Shay said, blushing, “I just appeared at my window at the right time one day.” She pointed to the one right next to her bedside table. “Just kinda...showed myself off to him. We started talking after that, met for coffee, I slept over there a few times... he’s a great guy. Dunno if mom and dad’d approve though.”

“Why?”

“Cause he’s, like, 24.” Ash went pie-eyed. “I *told* you he was white-collar. He just made Junior Associate at a finance firm downtown.”

Ash shook her head again. “So damn unorthodox in everything you do, I swear.” The blonde yawned. “Is it okay if I crash on your bro’s bed? Don’t want ya gettin’ up in the middle of the night and crushing me.”

Shay nodded. “Sure, go ahead. Just be sure to make it up in the mornin’.”

The blonde took one last gulp of her whiskey, scalding as it went down, and set the glass down next to Shay’s. “Yes, *mom*.”

“G’night,” Shay said. She finished off her vodka, clicked off her lamp, laid her glasses atop her latest read (Stephen King’s *Doctor Sleep*) and crawled underneath her covers. She heard Ash plop down on Matt’s bed just down the hall as she groaned herself to sleep.

Shay grinned, passing right off into sleep as well.

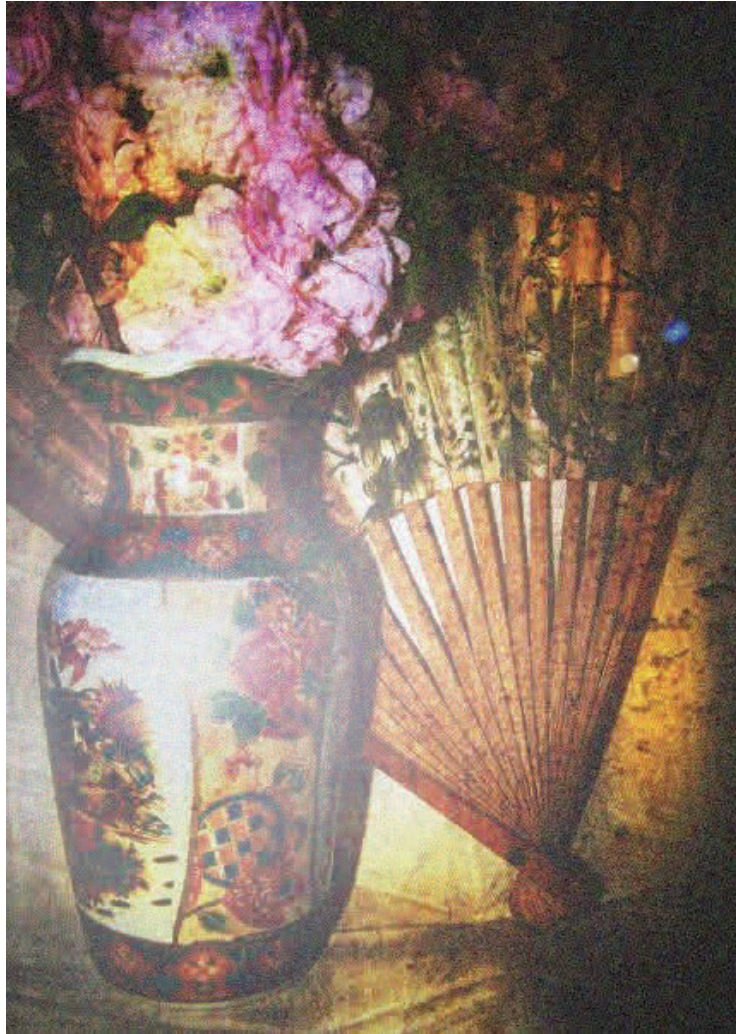
Shay awoke to a stirring. Looked at her clock—**1:17**. She threw aside her covers, fumbled with her glasses in the dark. “Must be Ash tryin’ to find the bathroom,” she mumbled as she made her way for the door. Looking down into the family room, at the smoldering embers of the fire, Shay noticed the door handle jiggle out of the corner of her eye. Still semi-delirious from her drinking, a mild headache setting in, Shay hurried down the stairs. *Matt!* Shay thought. *That SOB, thought he could fool me by callin’ from a hotel room. He’s home!* Hurrying across the cool tile floor in her bare feet, Shay opened the door, finding it already unlocked. She swung the door open, a wide smile beaming ear-to-ear, a loving “Hey bro!” at her lips...

...but the glinting of the slim, rectangular eyeglasses in the moonlight told her that it *wasn’t* Matt. Shay was paralyzed, seeing the shimmering, polished blade in the man’s clenched right hand.

“*Shh...*”

Alex Poiccard’s smile was incorrigibly-devilish.

Evan Kern



Antique Flowers, Danielle McLymond
(Photograph)

Entropy

The water just isn't the same
lacking your hands, without my name
on your mouth, or the wind on bared
arms, but to admit that I'm scared
would require I had a voice
to speak it with; still this white noise
is so damn loud without your breath
in my ear, and it's shocking the depth
of emotion that I witness
when deprived of your caress;
How absurd that just your presence
stirs me, and the lack of laments
on every single inch of my lips,
and each one of my fingertips.

Allyson Osborne

another day at church

I grind my teeth
the sound amplifies in my jaw
As pastors speak, I wonder
their intentions

Donations?
A sense of rationality?
Hopefully for someone to
get rid of these darn gnats

I swat with my hairbrush
and the people roll to the
front for prayer, like
peas onto the Church's fork.

I look away
I look at the paper maché
rose pedals on the wall
and wonder their intentions.
I grind my teeth and picture sand between them.

Josh Seiler

I Am a Softer Me

I am a candle
waxing—
Moon? Not as much.
More shine the closer
fire consumes my melting
head expanding as I shed
us to find
me
in the traces of light
peering from those shadows.
Scars of ash,
your burnt face
up to the demons smoking
nostrils flare without snarling
darling, and the sting in
this throat tells me
I need solitude.
I'm terrified of melting,
done with being hard—
a softer wax suits me
even when I know
I'm melting away.

Mark Sutherland

Love Poem

I.

Before me lies a sea
of amethyst sheets
and cardboard dinners
briny with the past.

I want to
taste your ocean
on my lips as I kiss
away the tide
of black and blue.

In the beginning
ecstasy is limitless like
the navy waves that
crash against my chest.
My heart stirs: alive.

II.

I gave you my heart,
a shiny new penny.

I watched you
eat, savor, and spit
it out. On the floor
it looked like
amber-gris scraped

from the gullet
of a decaying whale,
a yellow bubbling mush.
I scoop it with fragile hands
and heave it back into
my chest. It promises
to work better next time.

Christina Hedding

No Survival Plan for...this.

She died two hours ago

Her eyes were never that white

She groans...the bite hurt

She never died, the doctors lied

With the hasty scrawl, hasty life.

Never trust a doctor. Or the Bum

She smiles, showing
those plastic white teeth

I love her smiles but she
looks like a rodeo clown

high on those drugs
she never wanted

Nothing is wrong, my
love is fine, sublime

She holds her arms
for a hug. I love

her hugs when
she holds me so

That lives off the side

Street and reeks of

Death

tight I can't
take a

breath

that grin
again

Danielle McLymond

Eternity's Black Forge

The poets, vacant of
that incapable art,
surmise, report the muffled notes
that ring from eternity's black forge

My rich-proud triumph
Sullied by iniquity
Enfeebled by loss, and time
Makes music, soft and eerie

The once-honeyed gate,
Now razed and broken
(The gold has lost its hue)
Sits tarnished in a vacant lot

Anchored to that savage vision,
The self-captive offenders delight
In their poisoned, aimless wanderings
As the miser rebukes the grave

Zachry Robinson

Forty Nights Of Violence

I will never again
crawl over the blood on the Hilton floor in Bulgaria
to look over my marble balcony and
smile about the mysteries of naked men and women.

I never had a booklet or an invitation from beautiful
women to have enlightened and memorable evenings
of sex or violence, standing in the middle of orange Madrid.

Since Los Angeles, I was never the same
and privately cried over the many female scammers
that ruined my unmeasurable talent and once full hairline.
They dance with driving alcoholics,
writing in their Rum Diaries, men who seek women,
women who hide their addictions under
tight shirts and tighter pants.

I once knew enlightened writers and belonged
in Bland's household, discussing red wine and dark women
while on a plane to Poland or Peru.
Never again will I travel over oceans to music festivals
or drink green tea under snowfall in mellow Japan.
Never have I known an untroubled sleep, motionless,
or undisturbed.

Never again will I wander into an old coffee shop,
smelling of cinnamon and roaring with artful ambition
while my hotel skies overhead, playing tennis
with other loud buildings. I will never
pass Tinsmith Street and hold memories of you
at our long lost café where your mouth burned
each time you forgot to hold the peppers. Burning
my feet near the Tangiers or drink a fancy martini
in their aqua bar at Turning Stone, pretending
that when I spend money, I don't care. Nevermore
will I watch the sphinx eclipse the sunset in Las Vegas
and I will not travel through the dusk of the desert,
mourning the loss of one of our greatest friends,
crying all the way back to Los Angeles.

The ghetto alleyways of Atlantic City won't see my face
ever again and I certainly won't travel Amtrak's rails
to meet strangers for intimate meals through Kansas.
I won't climb the Woodlawn staircase or meet you
at the sliding glass door, listening for the gate to unlatch.
I won't go live a month in France where Fitzgerald
Met Hemingway and Dali met Picasso. I won't crack glass
against my face in Thailand
and won't cascade down Veil Mountain. Instead, I'll dream
of you and your husband in Bali, while a skinny and smiling woman
gives you directions to the Boreno Forests where painted
men and women dance at your dinner table.

I won't go shopping for records on Sunset Boulevard, buy women's clothing on Melrose Avenue, and won't eat valet dinners in Malibu with regret. Brunette hair Thousand Oaks, a slim waist in Simi Valley, and an overdose in Westlake Village, I will remember you all. I won't teach writing in Agoura and won't stare at the undressed mother of the son I am writing with. No more argumentative and memorable summers, swimming with lovers and best friends. Nothing of myself, except in an urn of collected ashes.

Samuel Brock

Clarity

I sat alone in the expanse of field, the breeze sifting through my pale curls. I gathered my hair up in one hand and held it at the nape of my neck, enjoying the scent of fresh grass and fall leaves wafting into my nose. A river flowed lazily a few feet away, and wildflowers wavered in the soft wind. Releasing my hair, I rose and walked along the stream.

It wasn't real, this place. It was something far back in my own brain, something that could only be accessed through my mind. I knew that, at least after it was over. Despite this, and although I'd been to the same place countless times, I continued to explore my surroundings. I dipped my hand down into the water; it was cool to the touch.

Everything always seemed too real to be imaginary. I could see the trees swaying, hear the slow ripple of water. A cricket sang a few feet away as I continued to follow the curve of the river, which eventually branched out into a small pond. Cautiously, I submerged my toes into the water, feeling the sodden sand beneath them.

"You shouldn't do that."

I flinched, glancing quickly behind myself at a tall, lanky frame and then turning back to the pond. "Why not?"

"Fish might bite your toes off," he replied, and I knew he was joking.

I turned to fully face the figure now. He was a boy of about nine-

teen, young-looking but towering over my small physique. His eyes were brown, so dark that they were practically black, and I shrunk back in surprise.

He gave a slight smile. "Sorry if I scared you." His face was placid, gentle, and despite how malicious his eyes had seemed just a moment ago, they were kind now. I turned to walk along the bank of the pond, and he followed behind. "What's your name?"

"Salem," I told him, glancing backward. "What's yours?"

He shook his head, smiling again. He trailed along with me for a couple of minutes in silence, before raising another question. "What are you doing here?"

"Seeking solitude," I replied honestly. "It's empty here."

"It is, isn't it?" He gazed out over the water. "But it's quiet. Peaceful."

"Yeah." We stood together silently for a few seconds. "I've never seen you here before."

"I don't come often." He picked up a flat rock, skipping it across the pond. "Only sometimes when everyone's bugging me."

"I come here a lot," I replied, tossing a stone as well. "A few times a week, actually. I don't plan it."

Nodding, he said, "I know," and then looked down at me from the corner of his eye. "You don't hear voices, do you?"

"No, why?"

"Because I do. That's why *I'm* here, I guess, to get away from the demands in my head."

I glanced up at him. "Is it annoying, hearing voices?"

"Sometimes," he responded. "It's like my conscience has split

into five different people yelling at me all at once.” He began to follow the border of the pond again. “Usually it’s okay, though. They’re like naggy siblings. Hey, watch this.” He stalked the edge of the water for a moment before plunging his hand in, pulling out a writhing fish.

“How’d you do that?”

He released the fish back into the water. “Luck, mostly. Hit and miss. I thought I was going to get a handful of water.”

I grinned at him. “But you didn’t.”

“I would any other time,” he replied. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“What happened to your arm?”

I scrutinized the fading bruise on my bicep with a grimace. “My ex-boyfriend wasn’t exactly the nicest person.”

“Is that why you’re here?”

“I guess so, yeah.”

“Do you hate him for what he did to you?”

I pondered that for a moment before replying with, “No.”

“No?” The boy seemed surprised.

“No, I pity him.”

“Because what he did was weak,” he finished for me.

I nodded, my eyes settling on the river. “It gave me a new take on life. Trivial things don’t bother me anymore. I see things clearly.”

“It gave you clarity,” he offered.

“Yeah. And this place gives me clarity, too. But,” I gazed down at our reflections in the water, “I wish I hadn’t needed disfigurement to see the world transparently.” The freckles across my nose didn’t

distract from the scar on my jawline, or from the scabbed gash next to my right ear. The nameless boy stared over at me.

“You’re beautiful, you know,” he said. “Even with all of those marks.”

“I’m a wreck.” He glanced at me skeptically. “So are you, but only inside your head.”

He shrugged. “Different kinds of a mess.”

“Damaged goods,” I offered.

He grinned. “Sure.”

The water surged suddenly in front of us, and the grass at our feet rippled in unison. The boy glanced at me and raised an eyebrow, a grim look passing over his face. He must have known what that meant.

Frowning, I said, “I think I have to go.”

“I know,” he replied, taking a step back. “Maybe I’ll come by here more often.”

“I hope so,” I said, and he gave me a reassuring smile. I was about to say goodbye when the short grass and winding river began to fade from sight and sound, and I vaguely realized that he’d never divulged his name.

I’ll ask next time, I told myself as my vision vanished. There were sounds again, but no longer the calming flow of the river. I heard the bubbling of an aquarium, the scratching of pen on paper, the rhythmic whirring of central heating. I could feel the stiff recliner under my back, and the flat pillow behind my head. There were boots on my feet.

My sight returned slowly, and when I came to, my therapist

was sitting beside me, tapping her nails to her notebook. She gave me a small smile.

“How was your dream?”

“The same as always,” I lied. I wanted to keep the boy a secret for a while. Therapists didn’t need to know *everything* that occurred in your head, right?

“I figured.” She sighed in defeat. “Oh, well, we’ll try again next time. There has to be something in your subconscious other than water and fields.”

I smiled. “Sure.”

She patted my arm as we both stood, and opened the door to her office. “Bye, Salem, I’ll see you in a few days.” I nodded in response.

Stepping through the threshold, I looked out the window. Snow was drifting down in small white tufts and I pulled my coat tighter around my torso. When I looked forward again, I noticed a boy sitting in the waiting room, head bowed. He appeared to be sleeping until the secretary’s phone rang. Jolting forward slightly, his face rose, meeting mine. He had a kind mouth, strong chin, ebony hair that settled just over thick eyebrows. And his eyes were brown, so dark that they were practically black.

Allyson Osborne

Untitled

It's mistiness on a dreary day,
And I'm up to more mischievous schemes and
my dreams carry clouds of rain.
The acidity burns holes through my plans,
hit and miss as I lay weary and
wide awake.
In a state of lacking intrinsically and meaning to my
existence
I just try to keep my love to the brim
but it's a mystery how deep my cup
half full will remain, when I'm still thirsty.

Nathaniel Jones

About ready to begin the show

and the absent-minded
bashing of boys and men has already begun. Irascibility
caresses the back of their necks, into their ears and through their
mouths,

defending their right to violence to comply with our hyper-
masculinized society which, in
essence is a new form of the blame game, coming
first and foremost before their famed game of soccer or baseball.

Gawking at Mr. Katz's evidence in disbelief.
How could they be in the wrong when they do the can-can on a
stage of green,
incandescent bulbs illuminating every move.

Just as the performance delves into the delicate dilemma, like
kids they shout and protest at the mere idea of such a thing,
like infants writhing in colic-infested bodies, howl their objection.

Men could *never* be to blame, when those athletic attendees could
never strike their calloused palm across a woman's cheek;
only rogues do that. And competitors could never be the

paternal villain that is so often convicted by even the dog, and then
questioned by courtroom strangers, only to relive the crime vicari-

ously through NFL greats like
Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson. Rarely do those renowned sports-
men face

societal rejection because
they are the greats, and the greats can never waver
under the influence of Grey Goose or a bad temper because that
would betray their

identity as the empathetic competitor that they undoubtedly are
while the woman quivering in the crook of the breakfast nook has
hope, that an oxygen-
xenon compound will burst in the company of her assailant so she
can

yearn his demise no more. Only then can she remove her cubic
zirconia ring from her withering finger, in an effort to
alleviate the horror that accompanies her every move and wish.

~In response to the Jackson Katz lecture on October 22, 2014.

Kristen Flulher

Goodbye Letter

Hello.
It's been 6 months.
The tracks your fingertips had left
up and down my arms,
the stains left from your hands on my cheeks,
the smell of your house, of cleaning products
and maple syrup
that cloaked me in memories when i fell
asleep,
a quilt made from parts of you,
well,
they've finally left.
I am finally apart from you,
because as I wake at 3 in the morning
I don't await your messages to brighten up
my cell phone's screen.
The butterflies have left me along with you
because with no hand to squeeze
during the sad parts of movies,
or no lips to kiss
when the slow dance is over,
they've found me to be useless.
And sometimes when I lie in bed,
if i stroke the wrinkles in my bedsheets

it should have reminded me of your veins
that lie within your strong hands
and if I snuggle my teddy just right,
it should have reminded me
of your black bear-like hair that I
often laid my face in.
With your absence has come
the erasing of my senses
and every bit of you is
fading
into the tragedy of the past.
Time has left me no scraps from your
existence,
no crumbs to carry your name.
I refuse to need pictures
to etch out your face in my brain.
I am fighting to keep you,
though I've already lost you and
I don't care to hear what they all say.
Those blank stone eyes are not the same.

Kiara Alfonseca

Must Heard Mustard

Mustard's excess—
meant to be licked.
We never do it
in the morning.
Look at you go,
been so long
I can hardly smell
vinegar's sweet embrace.

Memory toys with me—
a playground bully you can't
tattletale, befriend, or ignore.

Do I rise to the occasion?
Uncertainly sure. Crust
at the edge of eyelids compete
for attention and coffee gurgles
after a violent grind routine.
More to do, brewing
in 5am's stillness.
Dawn's a few cups away,

cinnamon rises, beating out
Columbian's scent while
Alexander Paley plays 3 Pieces:
Op. 2, Etude Op. 2, No. 1 for lonely me.
Another great Alexander
scribed the notes, sir name Scriabin
and that wordplay amuses.
iHeartradio and my city stirs,

cars dance unbeknownst to flute, violin, and
clarinet—music tells a story below
two bedrooms half full.

Beep beep beep interrupts piano.
Wait is over, a new pot begins
its final drain.
My feet brush hardwoods
in last night's socks and trance
for milk. Rinsing yesterday's
mug, face too.
iHatedishes.

Music receding, momentarily
for a first cup. Fleeting
like every tasty thing heard must.

Mark Sutherland

Grim

“There’s something off about this camera,” said Vinnie.

“Here try posing over here by this bench,” Natalia said.

She looked gorgeous that day. It was their honeymoon and what a beautiful time of year to have it. With icicles hanging from the cliffs and snow falling, Niagara Falls looked almost as breathtaking as Natalia.

“Here, wipe off the lens, my gloves are wet,” he said.

“Well if you weren’t throwing snowballs at me all day then maybe they wouldn’t be!”

Natalia took the camera and tried to wipe it clean with her sleeve. When she handed it back to him she held it tight and pulled him in for a kiss. They both smiled afterwards. It was the kind of smile that contagiously makes you smile too if you’re watching them, or perhaps even a little envious of how happy they are. The lens was still foggy. Vinnie looked concerned.

“Honey, I’m sure the pictures will turn out just fine,” Natalia said.

The shutter snapped again as soon as she finished speaking.

“I wasn’t ready! You’d better not put the up on the mantle at home!”

“Nope, this one’s going in my wallet.”

He grinned. They were dating for a year before they married. “A match made in heaven” is what Vinnie’s mother thought about them. She never said that about his last girlfriend Maria Visk-

etti. They were engaged when she died, and no matter how much he misses her Natalia will always understand. She respects that he lost someone close. It had been over a year after her death before Vinnie started dating again. It seems like enough time to mourn, but he still has some repressed feelings. There have been instances where he would wake in the night and think Natalia was Maria for a second. Natalia is very compassionate and understands. Clearly these experiences haven't driven her away at all. She still loves Vinnie all the same. It's not like Maria is a threat, she's not coming back.

"Have you ever been to that overlook up there?"

"I told you, Natalia. I've never been to Niagara Falls before."

"Come on, follow me."

She grabbed him by the hand and tugged at him like a dog on a leash pulling their owner. They took more pictures on the lookout.

Then a month later, they're already bickering.

"I told you to find that camera last night and you decided to watch football instead."

"Relax, babe. I'll go get it right now."

He shuffles out of his seat at the breakfast table and murmurs profanities under his breath. Natalia waits impatiently before she parts on her adventure to take pictures of the freshly blooming flowers in Central Park with her girlfriends.

"I never got it developed from our honeymoon," was the first thing he said as he entered the room with the camera in his hands.

"You're kidding me."

"Hey, you didn't get it developed either, now did you?"

“I can probably do it before I go out with the girls; Stacey already said she’d be late.”

While Natalia waited at the CVS on 53rd and 10th for the developing process, she contemplated how much they’ve been through in the past year and how grateful she is to have Vinnie in her life. As she thought of a resolution to the ill-mannered way she’d been treating Vinnie lately the clerk approached her.

“Something was off about this camera, I’m sorry it took so long. Where did you get it anyways? This thing is an antique,” said the clerk.

“I don’t know, my husband bought it before our wedding because neither of us had a camera for the honeymoon.”

The clerk looked confused for a moment. Natalia thought it was because apparently everyone should have a camera before their wedding day, right?

“Well the pictures did turn out great; this was once a top of the line camera.”

She handed her the photos and smiled. It looked like she was faking it.

“Well, thank you.” Natalia said.

“You’re welcome. Have a nice day.”

Natalia walked out of the shop and began heading north to central park to meet her friends. She was perturbed by the awkwardness with the clerk. Putting that moment behind her, she then decided to look at the pictures before sharing them with her husband later on. She felt a little wrong about it, but was pretty excited now that they were finally in her possession and Vinnie was laid back

guy, he didn't take moments like this as seriously.

The first picture was of Vinnie leaning over the railing looking down to the majestic falls. The clerk was right about the quality of camera because you could see the water droplets spraying out of the mass of gravity forcing the water off the cliff. It made her smirk a little because she remembered being so worried that he would fall over the railing. The second picture was the falls in the summer, which confused her. Before studying the second picture for more than a couple of seconds she began to flip frantically through the others. Nothing seemed right. They were of all different time periods. They were the same place, all Niagara Falls, but different seasons and times of day. Then something even more peculiar caught her eye. In one of the pictures was Vinnie sitting on a bench, very close to a woman, a woman who wasn't Natalia. They were embracing. She was on his lap. Vinnie didn't look happy in the picture; Natalia wasn't happy looking at it either. In fact she was furious. She thought the camera was bought that day, and she thought that Vinnie had never been to Niagara Falls. With a one hundred and eighty degree turn she almost collided with the person behind her and a picture almost slipped out of her grasp. In this one the woman and Vinnie were kissing. Since she was furious seeing the gentle embrace, the kissing created a new limit to her anger. She began running back home. The girls could wait.

Vinnie was sitting on the couch enjoying a bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch when his wife stormed in the front door. It didn't take a genius to recognize her mood.

"What happened?" He asked with a mouthful of cereal.

“You tell me.”

She threw the pictures on the coffee table and they spread out surprisingly well enough to show the content of some of some key players in the mix. He put down his cereal bowl and glanced up at his wife who had a twitch in her face due to her current state. He began flipping through the pictures. You could see him trying to disguise a small frown when he saw his ex-girlfriend in a couple of them. What was visible in the pictures hit him just as hard as it did Natalia, but he was probably even more confused than she was angry.

“So who is she?” She snapped.

“Honey, that’s Maria.”

“Maria?! You said you’ve never been to Niagara Falls before. What else don’t I know about your past relationships?”

“Natalia, I haven’t been there before, I promise. Please calm down this must be the wrong camera or something.”

“This is you. In Niagara Falls. This is not the wrong camera, damn it! I want you to tell me what’s going on!”

“I don’t know! I’m being honest I don’t know what this is. Baby, I love you. I haven’t been with another girl since our first kiss.”

Natalia made a grunt, stormed out of the living room, and then became silent in the bedroom. Vinnie began to examine the pictures. His heart was probably racing faster than Natalia’s. Here was his ex-girlfriend on his lap, in a place he’s never been before, in the stack of photos of his and his wife’s honeymoon. The worst part of it was the impossibility of it all. Unlike Natalia though, the kissing

picture wasn't what grabbed his attention. It was a subtle picture of the HSBC tower that told the date. November 17th, 2010. It was almost a full year into the future.

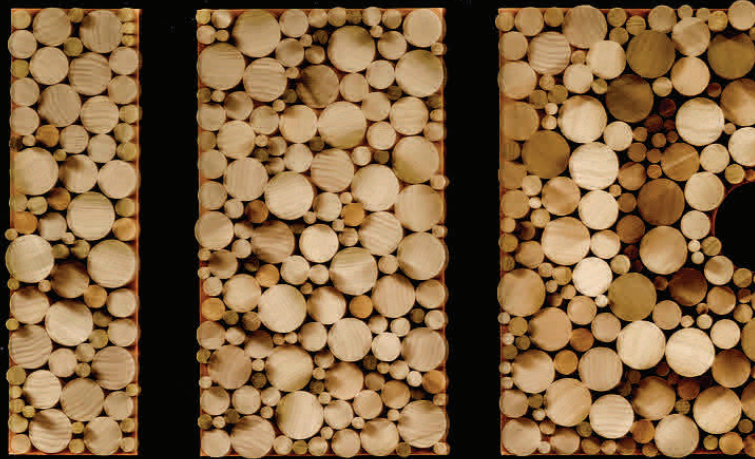
Vinnie, almost with a hint of fear in his voice, yelled into the other room, "Honey, you have to see this."

Josh Seiler

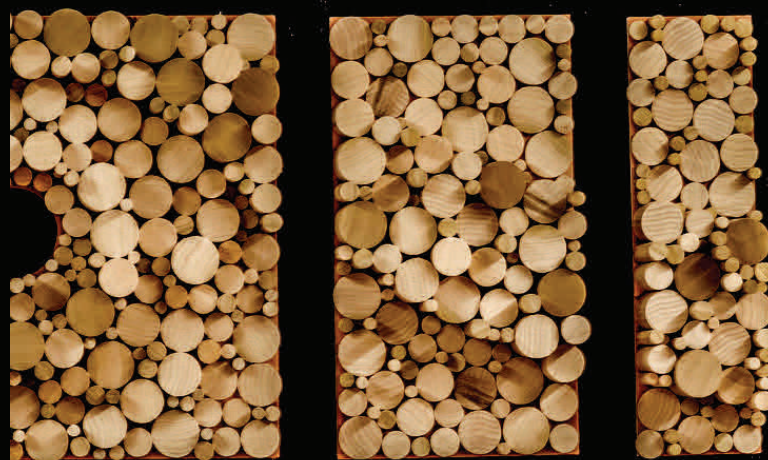
Untitled

I feel raw energy between my bare hands,
So I grabbed it.
The genuine originality comes falling
from the sky and lands
bewildered and in a-mazements
havoc,
inspirations, elaborate labyrinth
holding me captivated in a daze.
Enchantment. Is not a phase, for
creativity's absence
it may get lost, but finding the
way back is where I found the magic.

Nathaniel Jones



© Sabrina Franek



Universe Wood Dowel, Sabrina Franek

Cover Art

La Cicatriz

Oppression never shows
her teeth before she gnaws your last
decade away. See how your trust drips
from clever fangs finding your aorta of youth.

Her shovels are the Earth's pencil scratching
m e t a l o n m i n e r a l,
rewriting crust you can't see from space
but still, she has man by the throat.

If you drew me, draw me as close as I to you—
I would dimple press into the flesh
of ground. Make me a crater,
I'm your depression.
A low shadow from a
rainless cloud overhead, constant—
friend.

Dry eyes wash everything We
but wind ruminates and you find
new ways to blow kisses

of kicks and scratch out my ears
with the manipulation of innocence.
These dust floods are my dear
Pegasus losing his footing. We're
hoofing it,
these souls of mine.

Dig in, dig in, dig in—
Move some earth around
and all that inward diggin' leaves scars
no one sees. Found my worth in writing
la cicatriz.

Mark Sutherland

Vacancy

I hear your voice even when it's
hours away, and I admit
when I can't sleep, I think only
of your face; although I don't see
your hands now, your touch is vivid
in my memory, and amid
the cloud of chaos, eyes like rain
are prevalent still in my brain.

This distance is comparable
only to torture, and the lull
of this silence rings in my ears;
days feel like months and months like years
without you resting next to me,
and now when I inhale, I breathe
in air that you don't occupy,
space you no longer abide by.

But these miles only separate
corporeal beings; we wait
to be near but our affection
isn't far, and the direction
we desire is within ourselves
rather than outward; we must delve
into only our hearts to find
exactly what we have in mind.

Allyson Osborne

The Stillness Of Euthanasia

Your quivering evenings still haunt me
like backwards figures painted
against the sky. Suffering, you
would hold me through half-deserted streets,
the muttering gossip, stilled
under lampposts and street lamps.
This was what I looked forward to.
God, I was so lonely. I am this still.
Our restless nights in cheap hotels,
tasting of sawdust, hearing the crackling
of oyster-shells and lifting the sheets
of our ivory bed to check for the hidden
monsters who crept in the hallways.
If they were there, how you would throw me
in front of you to protect your thoughtless life.
I was always the lesser of us.
The thick fog that caresses the glass window
reminds me of another lost night,
another muzzle that lingered around my throat.
What is a drain without water? A man without a lover.
Let us fall back into the coolness
of summer afternoons, remarking about sex
and the fullness of Italy.

I would slip on your heightened terrace,
fall asleep with you, or make a dramatic leap
if only to see another October night
or the curling of your auburn hair
combed by the passing wind.
There will be a time
to prepare a face, a disguise of camouflage
to meet the many other faces like mine;
men who will worship you
simply because there is without a simple reason.
There will be a time to murder,
and time for a hundred revisions,
because I have known the absence of inspiration.
The very absence of you. My nights are dark and dull.
I have known this neutrality already. I have
known mornings, afternoons, and evenings
without you still and the stillness of you
The Stillness of Euthanasia – Samuel Brock
is far worse than our reality. I have measured
my world with thinning hair and bald spots,
and have seen the dying fall of music beneath
the presumption that I would never play again.
These fingers ache and bend
like my grandmother's when she would lift me up.
We were all stronger yesterday.
I have known the absence of you. Those eyes
that you fix on desperate men, desperate

for temporary companionship. Call it sexual,
call it painful, call it vengeful. Those arms
that embraced black and white perfume
and expensive dinners with side dishes
and waitresses that were forced to wear
men's clothing. Tucked in during August and sweating.
Because of you, I have known dusk
underneath the smoke of narrow streets
and have watched the rising of fog from the sewer
pipes that trickle from the chests of lonely men (like
myself) who lean out of bullet train windows
on trips to a wealthy and classless California.
I should have worn a pair of sharp, but damaged
claws so you would fail at dragging
me across the floor of your seductive ocean.
In those afternoons, our evenings would sleep
and I would trace your naked back, imagining letters
with my protective fingertips. Although I have
starved myself, sacrificing my every need for one of yours,
wept in the middle of the night, brought to my knees
in prayer, and have grown altogether bald
because my hair would not remain in my obsession,
I remain wounded, scared for my future, and collectively broken
like the shattered monsters who you let eat me alive.
I have seen my own greatness wither,
and I have spelled our names ten thousand times because
each dance sways entirely different. I was afraid

you would love (have sex) without me and would forget
the easily moving photographs of being afraid.
It would have all been worth it had you
the strength to bear my hideousness until the very end
The Stillness of Euthanasia – Samuel Brock
of me. After the insults and broken nights of mistrust,
it would have been worth the sunsets and middle of the night
drives to the edges of nowhere, and the fiction novels,
and the bluish underwear in the middle of our room.
It would have been worth the secrets and lies,
the falseness and disguise.
I am not a prince or a king and suddenly
my hair is even thinner this afternoon. I am
a short scene in a forgettable film or the yellow
tape that surrounds the real public gathering.
I am the fool who will grow old, has grown
old, and will fall in the water and have my picture
taken by young boys on red bicycles who find
me amusing. I will comb my lifeless hairs over
and will walk along the beach until satisfied
with the images of our last kiss. I will retreat
to my cabin, missing you more than previously.
They are all I have and this makes me cry.
I will not hear the crashing of our ocean.
You will be somewhere else, laughing
with an able-bodied young gentleman
twice the man I am with three times the strength

I never had. Hemingway would be proud of him
and they would rub shoulders over games of
Russian Roulette in Vietnam. What a hero!
I have seen the smirks of young girls
today, and although their beauty is incomparable
to your own, the dull needle in my arm sends
me traveling above the whiteness of ocean waves.
For I am gone, and the combing of my hair
really never was that important, nor were my
heavy slacks or my matching shoes. Never mattered
were the ways in which I walked or who
I decided to tell the truth to. I dined in expensive
cities and will always carry your folded photograph
in my back pocket. You were there with me.
I have seen the deranged looks of modern
youth, crying for the age of what is routine
and will go on regretting the moments
that made the broken us who we are today.
Swimming over the sea, I can still imagine you
as a child until I drown and a new me is made all over again.

Samuel Brock



Handy Self Portrait, Sabrina Franek
(Pen and Ink)

Ode to Cat Hair

Cat hair, you clingy piece
of annoyance.

How is it that you
are everywhere,
on everything I own?

My new sweater
not even removed
from its bag, begins
to mirror your
ticked color.

Why cat hair,
did you choose to
grace the sugar cookies
I made for work
with your pencil-tip thin
presence? Appearing in
pastel pink frosting as
a reminder to everyone
that I'm single?

You invade my dinners
like pepper in my soup
& salt on my eggs.

Your owner lacking
the ability to open

the refrigerator, yet
there you are, oh vile shard
sticking out from beneath
the tightened milk cap
as I lap the last drops
from my cereal bowl.
When I sleep, I fear
awakening in a coughing fit
resulting in the production
of my own hairball.
Oh cat hair,
how can it be that
a community of your friends
has changed the color
of my couch arms coating
them in layers of black snow?
I attempt its removal
scratching with my own claws.

Christina Hedding

A Toast

The first snowfall had already come, and 664 Bodleian Way couldn't be any more of a picturesque Kinkade winter home. The backdrop of Upstate New York was the perfect setting for a young couple in love, ready to start a family, who enjoyed the scenic appeal of the four seasons. The procurers of the home on the winding, suburban street—the woman, Morgan Robinson, especially—hadn't minded a bit of the snowstorm warning that had been in effect for the past three days, so long as it cleared up enough for the Christmas dinner to be had that Thursday. Then again, unlike her husband, Dale, she worked from home, a self-published author of both short- and novel-length fiction.

A native of Queens and a graduate of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, down on Long Island, Morgan had found her love for words and for storytelling at a very early age, entering herself in as many school literary magazines and fiction contests as her keyboard could carry her. Just recently had she been persuaded by her husband to hire an agent, as her work became more refined and her popularity spread. She was suffering from a harrowing bout with writer's block as the snow fell, but no matter. Christmas was just around the corner, her favorite time of year. It always had been, ever since she was a little girl—big family dinners, presents under the tree, loved ones and warmth all around, in spite of the winter cold.

Dale Robinson was a software engineer, part of a growing multi-national company that dealt in synthetic organ replacements. He'd majored in Technical Engineering at the University of Buffalo, and locked down a job in Rochester almost immediately after graduation. Dale had had a hard life growing up in North Tonawanda, his parents divorced and living on opposite ends of the country, not a sibling to keep him company. He found solace in school, his studies, and he excelled at everything he put his mind to. He met Morgan at a Yankees game the summer of their junior year and they immediately clicked. They managed to hold onto a long-distance relationship long enough to get out of their hometowns and start a life of their own, moving to Rochester a short three years ago. To Morgan, Dale had never been a real warm kind of guy, but she couldn't imagine herself with anyone else. Dale loved Morgan since the first time he laid eyes on her; despite his general introversion, he felt most at-home when he was with her.

Happy as they were, their ideas of Christmas couldn't have been more disparate. And it was today.

"Looking forward to tonight?" Morgan asked her husband, sitting across from him at the dining table that morning, sipping her coffee and glancing up from her copy of *Cicada* long enough to take him in.

Complete with five o'clock shadow, Dale was thumbing through the morning paper. Morgan rarely saw him around *without* a fresh edition of the *Democrat & Chronicle* or *The New York Times* or some such thing tucked under his arm. So mature—she liked that about him, that he was learned. Dale cleared his throat, pushed his

bookish glasses up on his nose. “It’ll be nice,” he said plainly.

“You know what I meant,” she chuckled. “Christmas, Daley. Not the dinner but just...*being* with people again, y’know? This’ll be our first hosted Christmas here. A big one.”

“I looked over your invite list, Morg. How’re we supposed to fit everyone in this house?”

“Our house is plenty big, Daley. My mom and dad, my brother Will and Lydia, plus their kids. Bill and Chloe and little Steph are comin’. Your mom and her boyfriend from Buffalo will be here, as long as they’re not totally snowed in. We can extend the table and put up more chairs, if we need to, and then there’s the living room just over there. The kitch—”

“I know, I know,” Dale said, folding his newspaper and sipping his coffee as well. “Just doesn’t make sense from where I am. I mean...isn’t the whole idea of the holiday to be *together*? *In one place*?”

Morgan giggled. “Don’t necessarily have to be *looking* at each other all the time, but yea, you’re right. We’ll all be here, in this house, together. That’s always what it’s been about for my family.” She crossed her legs on the seat of her chair. Adjusted her sweat-pants. “Uncle Frank,” she added with a stifled laugh, “finished his meal one year and went and passed out on our couch. We didn’t bother to wake him up, he looked so peaceful. Stayed there clean through presents the next morning.”

“I don’t see where this is going...”

Morgan sighed. “That’s what I’m talkin’ about when *I* say the word ‘together’, honey. We don’t all have to be in the same room or

even at the same table, just so long as we're with one another for the holiday. *That's* the Christmas I know." Morgan smiled, her rosy cheeks undercut by dimples. She glanced over his shoulder at the Christmas tree that illuminated the otherwise-dark family room. "I like our tree," she said, hoping to change the subject.

Mr. Robinson strained to turn around in his seat and look at the tree. "It's big," he observed. "I tell ya, those naturals are gettin' more and more expensive these days." As he turned around to fold up his paper, Morgan frowned. For as long as she'd known him, Dale could *never* see Christmas like she did, for what it really was. To Morgan, it wasn't just tinsel and *tannenbaum*, purchasing gifts and losing sleep over bills, but the only time of year where people can put aside their differences, especially within their own families, and come together to celebrate something bigger than themselves, something warm and hopeful, something with meaning. And even though what Christmastime means differed between people—Morgan knew that—it was still a family affair. She hoped, sooner than later, Dale would realize that.

Morgan's cell buzzed on the table, scooching its way slowly toward her coffee mug, ring by ring. She answered, "Hello? Merry Christmas!"

"And to you, Morgie," greeted Sharon Robinson from the other end.

"Mornin', mom," she said warmly, winking at Dale across the table. He rolled his eyes. His mother. "How are you? How's the weather in Buffalo?"

"Ah, we have some lake effect," said Sharon, "but nothing I

haven't dealt with before."

"Cause you North Tonawandans are a *hearty* people, right?" Morgan giggled.

"You've heard that one before," Sharon scoffed. "How early are you two plannin' on setting up today?"

Morgan shrugged. "Not too early. I mean, the ham's thawing, but everything else was really day-before kinda stuff, y'know? Left it out in the shed 'cause it's so much colder out there than in our fridge!"

"Alrighty," said Sharon. "Just thought I'd check so Matt and I could plan our drive. We can come and help out, if you think you'll need it?"

"Aww! Don't have to, mom. Daley and I pretty much got it figured out—everything's here, I mean. That said, you're welcome whenever. I was thinkin' of a kuchen or something, just to hold us over 'til dinner, so there'll be left-overs for people to graze as they come."

"How's noon sound then?" Sharon asked finally. "Too early?"

"Not at all," Morgan said, upbeat. "Take your time. And you're still bringin' the dessert, right?"

"Yes dear, it's in the icebox. Pumpkin pie and my layer cake, just like you ordered."

Morgan licked her lips. "My mouth's watering just thinkin' about it. See ya then, mom. Drive safe."

"Take care, dear." Morgan hit the **END CALL** button.

"For a woman of 51," Dale commented, "she sure is up ear-

ly.”

“She’s excited, honey,” Morgan retorted. “Of course, *I* can’t sleep with your snorin’.”

“I don’t *snore*,” Dale kidded, standing and stretching. “You turn into Mohammed Ali when you’re asleep.”

“Can’t help it if I’m fightin’ crime in my dreams,” Morgan defended herself with a smile. “That’s how I get my best ideas!”

Dale shook his head. Took a final swig of his coffee and carried his cup to the sink. “I’m takin’ a shower, then I gotta run to the office for a bit before my vacation *officially* begins.” He set the mug on the other side of the stainless steel partition, looked over his shoulder. “You wanna join me?”

“Hmm, *yes*, Mr. Robinson,” Morgan purred, setting her mug, half-drained, down on the stone countertop and following him upstairs to the bathroom.

Morgan was the first out of the shower. “What do you have to do at the office?” she asked, towel-drying her long, dark hair.

“Just make sure some requisition orders are filed before the holiday,” Dale answered, closing the sliding door behind her. “You got work to do today?”

“Yea,” Morgan answered. “I’m within *sentences* of finishing this chapter in my book, and I’ve been working on a short on the side for *Highlights* and *The Literarian*.” She started brushing her hair.

“Oh, will you try and submit it anywhere else?”

“Maybe,” Morgan answered. Dale had shut the water off, and steam rose from the enclosed tub—she liked her showers to be

like saunas, and luckily she married a guy that felt the same. “Alex knows a guy in Syracuse that runs a pretty handsome journal, gave me his business card.”

“Surprised you didn’t invite *him*,” Dale said, wrapping himself in his own towel and exiting the tub. “He’s your agent, after all.”

“Al? He’s got a dinner in Troy he’s going to. Most of his family’s in Pennsylvania.” She ran her fingers through her dark hair, working it so it’d end up frizzy, natural—just the way Dale liked it. “Otherwise, he’d be here.”

“That’s nice. Good for us too—knowing him, he’d be the jack-ass to bring the fruit cake.” Morgan punched her husband playfully in the shoulder as he walked by the sink and into the adjoining bedroom. “Kidding, kidding. You know I like him, Morg.”

“Mmhmm.”

Dale rummaged through his side of their dresser and pulled out several things without giving them a second look. Began clothing himself. Tucked in his shirt to his jeans and slapped a belt across his waist. “Coat’s downstairs...okay. I think I’m ready to go.”

“Be gone long?” Morgan asked with a cheeky grin, shifting her weight to one leg and standing in the doorway.

Dale clenched his jaw. “I’ll be back before mom and Matt get here.” He kissed her on the forehead and whispered, “Happy writing, Morg.

Morgan nodded and kissed him back. “I love you, Daley.”

“I love you too.”

When Dale left the bedroom and trotted down the stairs, grabbed his coat off the stand and locked the door behind him,

Morgan resumed her morning attire—her Stony Brook sweatpants and plain-white tee—and decided she'd write downstairs in the family room, by light of the Christmas tree and their bay window. The sun was already well-above the eastern horizon, and she smiled. Morgan grabbed her phone off of the bathroom counter before heading down—8:57. Plenty of time to get some good work done.

Still, she thought of the days leading up. Presents would be exchanged that night after dinner, and Morgan had been looking forward to that. The dinner, however, she felt she was overestimating.

She remembered the call she'd gotten from her doctor not two days before, when Dale was at work, and she'd been silent about it, hadn't told him a thing. She was so emotional that she just sat and cried and slept and cried some more, and when he finally came home, she couldn't get up the strength to tell him—just settled into a nice evening full of Chinese take-out and gushy Christmas movies on the Hallmark Channel. She'd been contemplating it all yesterday, happily snowed-in with her laptop to keep her company, and Dale helping her with the tree that afternoon. When the weather had finally cleared up, and the tree was set except for the string of cranberries and the topper, they went out to eat—her favorite seafood place.

Then the hours ticked by into Christmas Day, and Morgan was now faced with something even bigger: she needed to find a way to, creatively, sneak in the hint without making a big deal about it over their family dinner and making a hubbub out of the whole evening. *Everyone's gonna be there*, she thought, unplugging her Net-

book from the wall outlet beside the couch and plopping down on the cushioned windowsill. The slight chill from the glass soothed her, and she leaned against it as she booted up her computer. *Let's worry about that tonight, brain*, she told herself, opening her word processor.

That infernal cursor blinked away at her, mocking her, the end of Morgan's chapter within sight.

* * *

Noontime came too soon for Morgan. She had hardly written two pages before becoming so fed up with the distraction inside her that she closed her laptop (without saving her work) and went back upstairs to get dressed. Dale came home shortly thereafter. When Sharon and Matt didn't show, she thought they'd been caught in traffic coming out of Buffalo. An hour passed, then two, and still nothing. "She's a big girl," Dale reassured his wife. "She can handle herself." And so, they waited.

The doorbell rang around 2:30 in the afternoon. Taking one last, long look at herself in her full-length mirror, all done-up and wearing her new red silk cocktail dress she'd bought just for the occasion, Morgan accompanied her husband downstairs to greet her mother-in-law. She keyed the stereo, set to a special Christmas Radio station on Pandora, and straightened the wrinkles in her clinging dress. At the door, she checked Dale's face for any spots he'd missed shaving, he fluffed her moussed hair, and they both took one big, collective sigh before opening their home to the first of their family to arrive.

Sharon Robinson smiled ear-to-ear. "Hi, Morgie!" she

gushed, spreading her arms wide and stepping over the threshold. She enveloped Morgan. Matt and Dale simply nodded to each other.

“Merry Christmas, mom. *Again.*” They pulled apart and Dale welcomed his mom and her boy toy inside. “How was the drive? Did ya get held up?”

“Not bad,” Sharon said, handing Morgan and Dale her dishes and hanging her and Matt’s coat on the rack. “And no, we had sun and vacant roads most of the way.”

“Guess that bodes well for the rest of us. No snow in the forecast!”

“Yea, but you know what a cinch being a weatherman is,” Matt commented gruffly.

Sharon shrugged. “Hopefully a light dusting later. I *hate* green Christmases.” Morgan smiled, handed the chilled desserts to Dale, who took them to the kitchen to thaw a bit in the fridge, and Morgan offered them a drink from their mini-bar.

“Manhattan, dear,” Sharon ordered. “On the rocks.” Matt held up two fingers: *The same.*

Morgan poured the drinks over ice in their glasses and handed them over, her heels click-clacking on the hardwood floor. Cincinnati Pops Orchestra came over softly on the surround speakers in the family room—Morgan’s favorite. She crossed her legs and sat on the opposite couch, a glass of Sprite in her own hand. Matt eyed the curvature of her thighs discreetly as she settled in. “So what held you guys up, if not traffic?” Morgan asked.

Sharon rolled her eyes. “Oh,” she began, a twinge of gossip in her tone. She leaned in toward the coffee table. Put a firm hand

on Matt's thigh. "Sadie got to my dress in the parlor and used it as a personal scratching post. Tore the bottom-half to shreds before Matt got to her. We ran to the Galleria Mall to get me a new one—since the one I *had* was the only nice one at home—and they didn't have much in my size, to boot." Morgan couldn't tell; the one Sharon had on at the moment must've been about a half-size too small for her gym-toned physique and the surgical enhancements that monopolized her chest. That must've been how she picked up Matt, Morgan laughed in her mind. "So, we would've been here at noon, had it not been for the damn cat. But, thankfully, we're here first!"

"Glad you made it okay," Morgan said half-heartedly now, grinning.

Unbeknownst to them all, Dale had been watching out of the corner of his eye and listening from the kitchen as he finished up with some of the food from the shed out back, an eye on Matt's wandering gaze, in particular. "Morg, can I get your help in here?" her husband called.

Politely, Morgan held up a finger, set her glass down and got up to go to the kitchen. Matt (tactfully and without Sharon noticing) followed the slight sway of her hips all the way around the corner. "Yes, hon?"

"I think you'd be better off changing into something a bit less...*alluring*," Dale growled. "That creep's been stripping you in his mind ever since you sat down."

"Oh, *psbb*," Morgan said, waving the notion aside, "Matt's harmless. Sharon seems to have him on a pretty tight leash, from the looks of it." Then, quieter, "I think I know why they were late,

and it's not 'cause of the cat."

"They don't even *have* a cat..." Dale commented, his brow furrowing.

"*Exactly.*" She pecked her husband on the lips. "Don't worry, Daley. I can handle myself. But just in case, I got my *big, stwong man* here to protect *wittve ol' me.*" She smiled at him.

Dale couldn't resist her dimples. He kissed her back. "Still wouldn't leave my drink unguarded around him," he added.

"*Sbbb!*" Morgan chuckled. The doorbell rang again. "Yay, more people!" Morgan passed Sharon on the way to the door, heard her mother-in-law ask Dale to help. Morgan put on a warm face and opened the door.

On their stoop stood her brother, Will, bundled up as if going on an Arctic expedition, and Lydia, his wife—more loosely-dressed to accommodate her bulging baby bump—and their boy and girl, each with rosy-red cheeks and arms filled with gifts. "Hi!" Morgan exclaimed, ushering them inside. "Come in, come in! Set those things down anywhere and I'll get 'em in a minute." She hugged her older brother as he unbuttoned his parka. "Hey, big brother," Morgan hummed, shoving aside the sudden twinge of envy for Lydia's present condition.

"Howdy, sis." He hugged his sister back. Beneath his coat, Will was warm as the hearth that crackled beside her corner Christmas tree. "Merry Christmas."

Lydia was next, and Morgan was careful of her tummy. Will took their coats and hung them on the rack. "Hope we're not too late?" Lydia said.

“Nah,” said Morgan. “Sharon and Matt just got here not ten minutes ago. You’re fine.” Lydia waved to Matt, who raised his glass and sipped.

“Hi, Aunt Morgan,” Will and Lydia’s kids said together.

“Hey guys!” She knelt down and hugged them, one in each arm. “Merry Christmas! All off from school now, huh?” They nodded, grinning impishly. Their dad took their jackets. “Uncle Dale’s in the kitchen, if y’all wanna go say hi. I’m sure he’ll be more than happy to get you some pop or somethin’.” They made for the kitchen, resounding ‘Uncle Dale, Uncle Dale!’ as they went. “As for you guys,” Morgan said to Will and Lydia, “the bar’s *this* way. I’m sure ya could use it.”

“It’s actually not that bad out,” Lydia said. “Roads’re clean, just a light flurry coming down right now. But, as long as you’re offering, I’ll have a Coke.”

“Make it two, sis,” Will said, shaking hands with Matt as he passed. “I’m drivin’.” His eyes grew wide upon viewing the tree. “*Oob*, nice spruce. How long did it take you guys?”

“Couple hours,” Morgan said, pouring their pop and handing them their glasses. “Daley and I were in all day yesterday, so we figured we’d put it up. Been sittin’ in water for about a week, he’s just been too busy and I’ve been too tired to worry about it,” she laughed.

“Looks good,” Will said after clicking glasses with his wife and sister.

“Well, it holds up better when you *don’t* have a little pup at home.” Will and Lydia rolled their eyes; they’d invested in a fake

tree a few years back after they lost two, in the same week, to their dog's seemingly-unquenchable thirst. "Kids have a good Christmas this mornin'?"

"Yep," Will said. "Got a big ol' bonus from work—and possibly a *promotion*, come the first of the year—so I'm takin' everyone on a cruise after we have New Year's. Which you and Dale are invited to, by the way."

Morgan, leaning against the bar, lightly applauded her brother. "Congrats, Will. I'm sure you've earned it! And yes, mark us down."

The rest of the afternoon went pretty much like that—people coming, bearing presents, Morgan greeting them all with warm conversation and drinks, receiving complements her tree and her home. When her dad showed up, though, and wouldn't look Dale in the eye (he never was a fan of the man stealing his 'little girl' away from him), was when Morgan knew she had her hands full. Sharon had employed Will and Lydia's kids to help set the table for their early-evening dinner, and Morgan relished the moment: her favorite part of Christmases growing up, which trumped all their minor squabbles throughout the year.

Finally, the ham was set down center-table, flanked by two peppermint candles in freshly-bought silver-plated candlesticks, and laid in a bed of its own baste and holly (fake). Sharon brought out the smashed potatoes and cranberry dressing, followed closely by Dale and Will with the bread and two big bowls of veggies, respectively. Morgan lit the candles with the Bic left at her place-setting and the candy cane smell topped off the room. Red wine was set out

on the table—grape juice for the little ones—and baby Steph, put in her swing in the corner where it was quieter. Bill, seated between his wife, Chloe, and Dale, led the prayer.

Morgan's heart was pounding in her chest all through grace. She kept her cool, though, steadied her breathing and sat straighter as it closed. "Amen," Bill said, and everyone released hands. "And now," he continued cheerfully, rising from the table, wine glass in-hand, "a toast, to my favorite—and *only*—step-sister, Morgan Marie, and her husband, to their successes thus far in life and to this beautiful house, tantalizing dinner, and our home for the holiday." Bill smiled, raised his glass higher. "To Morgan and Dale!"

"Morgan and Dale!" everyone else repeated, and all drank.

The young Mrs. Robinson smiled. "Thank you, Bill," she said as he sat down. *Now's the time...* "And now, if y'all don't mind," Morgan continued, standing on shaky legs, "I've got a toast as well." Morgan steadied her trembling hand, held her glass at about eye-level. She exhaled. "I wanted to wait until we were all together, so... here goes." Morgan watched the light refract through her wine as she shook. "I..." she stuttered. "I have cancer."

Dead silence.

Morgan continued, already feeling her strength returning. "I had a test run a while back, about four weeks, and I just got the results a couple days ago. It's terminal. Liver cancer. Dr. Revas said this...might be my last Christmas." She looked around at everyone. *She* felt better, having gotten it off her chest, but Dale's face was ashen, his eyes glazed-over.

Morgan's mother collapsed onto her father's shoulder, began

crying her eyes out. The kids had no idea what was going on—they were too young to understand adult stuff yet. Matt and Sharon sat still, lost in their own thoughts. Will reached an arm around Lydia, and Bill stared long at his step-sister, massaging his wife’s neck as she started wiping the tears that rolled out of her eyes.

“There’s,” Dale started, “*nothing* that can be done?”

Morgan shook her head somberly. “No, Daley. It’s too-far-gone. All Dr. Revas said she could do is keep me on steroids to help with my other systems and just...pray that it’s quick.” Morgan paused, smiled. “But not *too* quick. We still have Christmas, New Year’s, and Lyd, you’re expecting in April. I plan on stickin’ around for that.” Morgan raised her glass. “*I’m* in good spirits. So let’s make this Christmas—everyone together, here, in our new home—the best we’ve ever had. To you guys.” She sipped from her glass and sat down.

Her dad stood up, patting his wife’s arm. He took his wine in-hand, steeling himself amidst all the emotion for his babygirl stirring in his gut, and said, “To you, my little soldier. I always believed in your strength as you were growin’ up.” He ran a hand over his bald head. “And now here you are, fightin’ a battle greater than what *I* faced, myself, overseas.” He paused, then added, “I love you, Morgan.”

“I love you too, dad.” Morgan smiled, her eyes welling up.

“You were always the tougher one growin’ up, little sis.” Will breathed deep and sighed, joined by Lydia as she stood. “You’ve proven me right. Lyd and I’re just over in Brockport. Please don’t hesitate...” He moved over to her and embraced her, but he was

gentle about it, as if she'd snap if he hugged her too tight. "I love you, Mo."

"I love you too, Will," Morgan whispered, kissing him on the cheek.

Dale was the next one up from the table. "I'm...I'm sorry I've seemed so cold and tight-laced over the years, everyone. I just...was so concentrated on my career that I barely got a grip on what's truly important." He looked to his wife, sitting at the opposite end of the table. "My darling Morgan..."

Dale's lip began to quiver. No one had ever seen him cry before—not even his own mother. He held out, adding, "I'm gonna start treating this relationship like I should've all along. We'll go out more, do more, have more family gatherings. Now that we've opened up our home, let's make good use of it. And honey, I'm sorry to *you* for not being more attentive. I should've known that something was wrong." Morgan was so touched, she went over to Dale, looked him in the eye before she hugged him so tight he felt his back crack. He wrapped his arms around her too. "You're my soulmate, Morg. That won't change, no matter what."

He felt his pressed shirt soak through to his chest with silent tears, and in spite of everything that happened, it was indeed the merriest Christmas Dale James Robinson had ever had.

~ for Willow

Evan Kern

Self-Love

Stand up tall, dear,
flowers will grow up your spine,
sunflowers and daisies
will wrap around your bones
and hug you with life.
If you swipe each falling teardrop,
faithfully,
they will fall to the floor
and open giant rivers
that will flow through your soul
and cleanse you.
If you play each sob of sadness
like an instrument of happiness,
the melody will fill you,
the harmony will soothe you,
and mother nature will follow your path
with blankets of sunshine
mimicking the light within you.

Kiara Alfonseco

The Stolen-From-Us

Even the wind howls in remembrance
as the students gather
in their best purple polo's
around the boulder, near the dorm
she lived in during her short time here.
Too short a time.

An albino squirrel jumps
down from its tree—knowing
one of these people will shoo it away
with a chocolate-chip cookie
if it waits long enough.

The boulder reads:
“It is not the length of life,
but depth of life.”

And while her old friends are giving
their speeches and everyone around you
is crying, all you can think about is how
the quote would sound so much better
if a simple “the” was added
between “but” and “depth.”

The mob walks with heavy feet,
dodging the furry rodents
every step of the way,
over to the pool

where she spent most of her time,
practicing for competitions she would
never participate in.
Chlorine burns
your eyes—finally
you look like you’re crying!
All this because a boyfriend went mad
and hit his “love”
again and again
until he was beating
a motionless body.
Her face—beautiful,
shines beyond the grave
at the crowd here to remember her.
Do you promise?
Never
to harm
your loved ones
as long as you live?
I do.
And you better too.

Brandon Dixon



Twin Koi, Sabrina Franek
(Clayboard)

Nervous

These girls make me nervous.
What do I say?
Jesus was so nice, turning the clear to blood red
but what does he think of me?

The end of days scares me.
Fireballs falling, I feel their heat
earthquakes shaking beneath my feet
pirates in Scandinavia. They're scaring me.

But I'm so brave, I'll take them on
I'll break up fights in the bars at night
I'll confront the dark and stare into stars
and face those staring back at me.

When this is done there's one thing left
I really fear I can't get back to
that time when things were oh so sweet.
When I was still with her,
when my nerves were calm,
when my life was complete.

Josh Seiler

Four Letters

I dropped my backpack onto the desk.

My books made a loud thud against the hard wood top and the room was quiet. There was a boy sitting beside me wearing a pair of red Beats headphones and filing through a deck of index cards. He must have felt the vibration against his elbows as he used them to prop himself up on the desk. His pencil rolled off the edge of the desk and fell to the floor just before he could reach it.

My hand shot to my mouth apologetically.

He looked at me and smiled as if to say, “Don’t worry about it.” He adjusted his headphones before bending over in his seat to find where his pencil had gone.

I knew he couldn’t hear me, so I threw my hands up to let him know I would get it for him.

I bent down and grabbed the pencil and he retreated back into his seat. I placed his pencil back on the desk, but something caught my eye from under the table. Dangling, unconnected, from the bottom of his shirt was the jack-end to his headphones. I stood up slowly and he smiled a thank you, and then started bobbing his head.

He had one of those cute crooked smiles like Jesse Bradford. I sat down and unpacked my books from my backpack. The bell rang to signal that second period had officially started. There was a bearded man slouching in his seat at the head of the class room. He was

wearing checkered suspenders and a pair of sunglasses. I couldn't tell if he was staring at me or not and I couldn't help but glance over to check at least once every few seconds. The words "Study Hall" were written behind him on the black board.

I looked at the clock and watched the second hand tick, tick passed the twelve.

Only forty-nine more minutes.

I realized my foot had been tapping restlessly against the tile floor. I looked at my books just sitting there along the desk and attempted to open my Algebra II textbook, but when I felt how thick the cover was I started to tap my fingers against it. It was the first week of school; I had nothing to study *for*. I glanced over at the cute guy sitting beside me. He wore a brown leather jacket, almost identical to his dark brown hair. I watched him bob his head to imaginary music as he filled out an index card and added it to the pile.

I tried to think of a subtle way to get his attention, so I grabbed one of my notebooks and started scribbling the names of all fifty states, purposely bumping my right elbow into his left. The first time I did it, he just looked at me and smirked. I smirked back. The second time I did it, he moved his elbow without even turning his head. By the third time, he dropped his arm from the table altogether, but I think he smiled the last time.

Real subtle, Julie!

I glanced down to find the stray jack dangling from his shirt, but he started to shift in his seat and placed his left hand on his lap.

Okay Julie, stop being a creep.

Forty-nine minutes passed and any attempts I made to initiate

conversation with this boy were futile. The bell rang to dismiss us and the bearded man in checkered suspenders jumped up in his seat. “Class dismissed.”

And the boy with the crooked smile was gone.

The next day, I gently placed my backpack on the desk.

The cute boy was already in his seat, head bobbing and index cards shuffling. I dug into my backpack and pulled out a stack of 150 colored index cards. I slipped a light green one from out of the pile and grabbed a pen.

Hi 😊

I slipped the card under his arm so that he had to pick it up in order to see what I was doing. He grabbed the card and read it, crooked smile slipping onto his lips. He grabbed one of his own plain white index cards and started to write. A second later he placed the card in front of me.

Hey

I smiled so hard, I thought my cheeks were in my eyes. I glanced over at him and all I noticed were his green eyes smiling back at me sheepishly. We both looked away and suddenly I was worried other people were watching us. I felt my face heat up with embarrassment even though no one seemed to notice us. I grabbed another index card, this time purple.

My name’s Julie. What’s yours?

I slipped the card back under his arm and he read it immediately.

Nice to meet you Julie. My name’s Carter.

What song are you listening to?
 It's a special song. You wouldn't know it.
 Can I hear it?
 Maybe some day.

Stumped by his last card, I didn't know what to say next. When he noticed I wasn't writing anything down, he grabbed another one of his cards and started to write.

So what classes are you taking?

For the remainder of Study Hall, Carter and I exchanged index cards and we talked about everything from classes, to favorite books, to exotic places we wanted to travel to. By the end my pack of 150 colored index cards had dropped to a measly six cards. I looked up at the clock and noticed we only had a minute left before the bell rang. I grabbed another index card and started to write, but the ink in my pen died. I shook it a few times and even tried to wet the point with my tongue, but nothing worked. Carter tapped my arm with his pen and offered it to me. I quickly scribbled onto the card.

Would it be too straightforward of me
 to ask for your cellphone number?

I gave Carter the index card, but after he read it there was a frown on his face.

No! Where's your sexy crooked smile? Why are you frowning?

He took another one of his white index cards and started writing.

I'm sorry, but I don't have one.

Then the bell rang and Carter quickly stuffed his books into

his bag and fled out into the hall with the other students.

The next day, I got to Study Hall at my usual time, but Carter wasn't there.

Only about five minutes had gone by, but when you're as impatient as I am it felt like more. I couldn't help but glance at the entrance every few seconds, hoping to see him walking through. After another ten minutes rolled by, I gave up and put my index cards away.

There was a gentle tap on my shoulder and I turned to find Carter smiling back at me. He was wearing his leather jacket again and his headphones were still glued to his ears. He placed one of his white index cards on the desk in front of me.

Hey there beautiful

I blushed at the compliment, but shook it off and gave him an affectionate glare.

Why are you late?

Carter sat down promptly and searched for more cards in his backpack.

Sorry, I didn't hear the bell ring.

I shrugged my shoulders to say, "It's okay." Watching him adjust his headphones only made my curiosity stronger.

Could I hear your special song today?

This made him frown again. He looked at the card and then at me several times before shrugging his shoulders and nodding his head. Carter pulled his headphones from around his ears and placed them on mine. I knew the jack was unconnected, but for some rea-

son I was still expecting to hear something.

Once the headphones were on tight, I sat there for a minute and pretended to jam out to a great song. Carter looked at me with a puzzled expression on his face. I stopped bobbing my head and laughed silently. Then I pulled the cord from his shirt to reveal the unconnected jack. Slowly removing the headphones from around my ears, I noticed Carter's right hand moving closer to his chest. He started with a closed fist and one finger pointing at himself followed by spelling four letters in sign language: D.E.A.F.

For a moment we just stared at each other. There was an embarrassed expression on Carter's face and he looked away. Then I tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention and placed my left hand on my chest just as he did.

Then I spelled four letters: M.U.T.E.

Daniel A. Duval

Stripped Guise

Look at the chameleon, changing everything about itself—it's color, attitude, and thoughts, all to avoid the two moaning teenagers who roll around in the sticky night grass. It slowly retreats to avoid any threat the two interlocked bodies may pose, turning green with envy for the lovers, which helps it blend in and become part of the wilderness.

The boy stops his invasion of the girl's body to ponder about what will happen when they are done. *Will she want to date afterwards? Do I even like her? Does it matter?*

He never swears around girls like this one, tells them he has never looked up boobs on the internet and “gladly” watches any movie that was originally a book written by Nicholas Sparks. His friends call him whipped—he doesn't know what to call himself.

The chameleon doesn't change colors to blend in, like most people think. The change is a visual signal of mood and aggression, territory and mating behavior. It becomes something else entirely,

not because it needs to, but because it wants to.

The wind hisses in his ear and he notices
the girl is losing interest.

Reverting back to scumbag mode
to appease her, he analyzes every move she makes
and her reaction to every move he makes—optimizing
her pleasure and fading
into the background
as he does it.

Is this who I am?

Brandon Dixon

Drop into My Ocean

Siblings, brothers watching from our roost, gazing out at the islands and sea around us; we watch the clouds chase each other on the meniscus of the hotel pool. Then a sea breeze bends my mirror, rippling the return of the sun's glare. My perch is overlooking a garden maze of tiered staircases being worshipped by ferns, succulents, and delicate flowers. From above I realize the maze is not a trick or a game, but a squared, curled up, sleeping serpent forever connected and repeating.

I lightly sip from my Columbian coffee and notice the snake again circumventing the cup's rim. Pressed to my lips, the serpent can't resist an informal kiss, aquamarine eternity on silver embroidering, all resting on white, a polished porcelain background of snow.

It is the Greek symbol for infinity and this cultural décor can be found everywhere. The garden is subtle whence compared to others that I've seen. I trace the design with my eyes before turning the cup around and around in my palms.

I set down my cup and begin to wash off my consciousness. Instead, I fill myself with this pattern's seemingly intended awareness.

A right angle, within a right angel, repeating; a square takes form in the white space of the center, the squares repeat, & the space between must follow, too. I called you a squared snake; do you symbolize fate? Am I on those islands slithering in circles? No,

surely I'm alone on a life raft going to, not from. I have a single sail. I am setting the kitchen table on my eternal cloth patterned like the ring I bought in Athens being turned with my thumbs' provocation.

Looking up, I see the same horizon, the constant ocean waves that rock the floating sails going to and from these spotted islands. They are all carefully, artfully nestled. Each island is adorned with orange cliffs that burn red when the sun declines. They are spotted with lush forests lined by narrow, steep streets being squeezed by stucco homes of more and more blue and white. I see the pattern of their painted walls and arches: kitchens lay with milk-colored table cloths, the smell of sea salt, and more winter-colored stone columns bearing infinity patterned tapestries to attract the eye; lest we forget the marble, etched with this Greek repetition, a reminder circulating the imagination and the real.

The Earth is round, another sign. Visions; I see centuries of sailing merchants with the finest wives money can buy. Look at their long lines of able virgin sons and musing daughters all entertaining hopeful potential suitors to lengthen their lines of genesis. Follow the parallel and end at your origin. They all take turns adorning this right-angled repetition before making their final ninety degree downward about face.

Each step of the garden's maze repeats a silent rhythm, each step beckons: *Come up to your room or down for a drink; come, descend to the pool, fall further to the beach or wade into the water and end up where you started. Drop into My Ocean.*

Mark Sutherland

My Attempts At Domestication

When my eyes are sickened bloodshot,
I hike to the height of the tallest building
 and stare at my lamp-lit world, a screaming city
 my crumbling buildings, streets I've prowled under,
 lofts, beds, penthouses, flats
—on Ditmars Avenue below, which I obsess over,
 its tiny cars, microscopic yellow taxis, beautiful and heroic men
 ambling the size of pocket specks of floating wool—
paranoia of the dusty bridges, sunrise over city escapes and
 expensive homes,
 where the sun falls down far over the city where I was born
 where I drowned an ant hill in my uncomplicated youth—
my remorseful loves of many men and women,
 under dimmed street lamps,
 my once fabulous odors in the darkened streets
 distant and distance—
paths crossing in these hidden arenas,
 summed up history, coupling my collected absences
 and celebratory ecstasies in the middle of the night—
—sun shining down on all I own, all I formerly owned
in one fogged eye blinks over the horizon
 in the finality of my last eternity—
 A savage rage.

drowsy,
I storm the elevator and fall
disoriented,
stepping on the blue and black discolored pavements staring:
stained glass, plate glass, custom glass,
questioning who loves, who uses body parts
and stop, confused
in front of an antique store window
staggering, found in calm thought,
traffic drifting up and down behind me
waiting for a memorable moment.

...movement stops
and I amble in the emotionless sadness of existence,
tenderness pouring from the buildings,
my fingers touching reality's face, (not sexual)
my own face streaked with tears in the cracked mirror
of some aged window—at broken dusk—remembering my
father's fist
where I have a lessened desire—
for blossomed flowers—or to own Japanese
lampshades of intellect—a December spring.

Typically confused by the gorgeous spectacle surround me,
older man struggling up the unwinding street
with heavy packages, newspapers, hangers galore,

colorful ties, beautiful suits
toward his pressed desire
man, woman, streaming over the summer pavements
red lights clocking the time on hurried watches and
movements at the traffic congested curb—

And all these streets leading together again,
so crosswise, honking, busily, lengthily,
by avenues, forming an imperfect circle
stalked by high buildings or crusted into a shriveled ghetto
through such apprehensive traffic
screaming cars and teenagers
so painfully to this hectic and congested
countryside, this busy graveyard,
this alive stillness
on my deathbed or mountain top,
which (pretty much) are one and the same,
once seen, once remembered
never regained again or desired
where all of that beauty I've seen must
disappear.

Samuel Brock

Steroids and EpiPens

were quickly injected by the Muslim doctor
Nissiem into the biggest
muscle in my body; my bare, white,
glute. “There had to have been a circular
sticker on the glass” said the guilty nutritionist.
He was innocent, and I, while sprawled
out on the hospital bed, red bumps taking over
my body, causing every hole and opening
that connected my inner organs to the real world
to swell shut, was a liar.

The purple onions, drizzled with warm oil
sat in the grey serving platter behind the
glass in the dining hall that Wednesday evening.
Mixed in, the thick parmesan balls and the green
beans in the dish looked surprisingly,
edible. The rare commodity was too good to turn
down for such an underprivileged stomach.

“Are there nuts in this?”

“I don’t think so!”

The server made a simple mistake.

After the first bite,

the body was engulfed with the pricks of allergens as
the walnuts squeezed every last bit of air out of the lungs.
The oiled, purple onions that stuck to
the green beans seemed safe as they
all traveled down
the esophagus smoothly,
but after a few seconds I knew.

The server had made a simple mistake.
She probably didn't know that the platter
had tree nuts in it,
she probably just chose to tell a white
lie. But at that moment, when she thought she could
quickly get rid of me, instead, she watched me get pricked
and jabbed with needles helplessly,
as I desperately gasped for survival.

I listened to the nutritionist apologize
for the missing sticker.
This is not about the sticker, I said.
This is not about the sticker at all.

Sarah Elardo

Excerpt from *Love in Post Script*

To: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

From: gmitchell@sansonarchitecture.com

Subject: Lottie Update

Sent: 28 Feb 2010

Dear Connor,

I'm writing to you to give up an explanation and update on Lottie, because out of everyone you deserve it most. I apologize for being so abrupt on the mobile, but as you know, it was quite a bad time to be calling.

The doctors say that Lottie had a major heart failure brought on by her condition and stress. Looking at her scans, the doctors say that her condition had been aggravated for quite some time, and that she must have been in pain for a long while. Has she said anything to you about it? Lottie tells you everything, I feel.

We are also worried about her mental state when she wakes up too. If she had been keeping her state from us, then there might be a greater lingering problem. She had been so happy to finally be well again. Please be there as you always have, for I fear she will be in desperate need for someone to speak to when she awakes. Currently she is stable, but still in the ICU. Hopefully she will be waking soon.

Thank you for being there for Lottie.

Best,

George Mitchell

To: gmitchell@sansonarchitecture.com

From: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

Subject: Re: Lottie Update

Sent: February 28 2010

Mr. Mitchell--

Thank you so much for telling me about Lottie. I feel terrible that I can't be there to help her out, but I'm so relieved to hear that she's ok. God, I can't even tell you how relieved I am. She had told me that her arm hurt before it happened but she didn't seem any worse than usual. I'm just as shocked as you are that it happened. She said she was also experiencing some trouble breathing. We often joke about her pain though, and she definitely didn't seem any worse than any other time. Thank God the dogs were in there.

I'm sorry for panicking on the phone. I didn't know what else to do. I feel so awful about it, but to be honest I was scared shitless. I still am.

I'm more sorry that I can't be a better friend for her right now. I wish I could be there. God, I wish it so much.

Please let me know if there's anything I can do now.

I hope she wakes up soon, too.

Tell her I'm rooting for her.

—Connor

∞

Everything hurt.

She didn't dare open her eyes in fear that it finally happened and she might actually be dead this time. Her heart finally gave up, she

felt it stop when she stood to turn up the heat.

Connor.

Oh God, she had been joking with him only moments before, laughing at his worry. Then suddenly everything was wrong and the world stopped and all she could see was his worry over the screen. Then there was nothing. Nothing but the persistent pain and blackness, sometimes stained red.

She had to wake up, tell Connor she was alright, that she wasn't going to die this time. But she didn't know if she could. "You have to at least try, Lots." She could hear his voice, sounding as sweet as it did on their rare phone calls. He was right. She should at least try, but it was hard to keep trying every day and act as if she wasn't as sick as she felt. She had perfected the act of being so well for so long. Everyone didn't think she was sick anymore. She was living a normal life for once.

She ruined it all in the span of one moment.

She had to fix it. Slowly she felt the touch of a hand in hers, much larger than her slim bird-boned fingers. Who? It couldn't be? Her first thought went to the impossible. *Connor.*

A flutter of movement told her that she had somehow tried to groan the name. It made her aware of the pressure in her throat and she couldn't breathe anymore and her hands tried to make their way up only to be held down as she tried to rip the tube from her throat.

"Lottie!"

Connor.

"CHARLOTTE."

Connor....she had to tell Connor everything.

“CHARLOTTE. You have to stop! It’s helping you breathe.” She finally recognized the voice and let her hands drop with the pain in her stomach. Connor wasn’t here of course, he lived in America, where he didn’t have to be by the side of a doomed girl. Her father stroked her hair when she stopped struggling and blearily opened her eyes, the tears beginning to fall. She saw the sad look in his eyes as he nodded, leaning over her to press a kiss to her head.

“I know my dear girl, I know.” And she cried as the wrong man held her close.

∞

To: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

From: lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

Subject: I’m so sorry

Sent: March 10 2010

Connor,

I don’t even know how to begin to respond to you.

I don’t even know how to feel yet now.

I just...I had so much hope you know? That I was finally going to live a normal life. And suddenly I fall and my entire world has changed again.

I should be happy with your words. But that’s what they are, words. You are just words to me, no matter how much I wish you to be more. No matter how much we wish we could be at each other’s sides, we can’t be. We aren’t anything more than millions of combinations of the same twenty six letters.

I wish I could be yours, I wish I could give you my heart.

But I have no heart to give, I can't be devoted to anyone. I can't mean so much to someone when any day I might die. I can't do that to anyone.

I can't do that to you Connor. I can't bear the thought of leaving you behind to learn how to live without me.

I woke up two days ago. I've spent two days trying to figure out how to leave you, how to stop sending these letters like I'm a small child still. I could have just never spoken to you again, but I can't end it like that. Like you mean nothing to me. Because you do. You mean more than you should, and I'm a horrid selfish girl.

I don't want to stop, I can't force myself to do what I should do. I wish I was strong enough to stop, but I'm not. I'm going to continue to cause you so much pain.

I wish I had died. Then you might have eventually gotten over it, and moved on with your life. But now I'm going to continue to worm my way into your heart because I can't stop. You are all I have Connor.

I'm so sorry for putting you through this.

—Charlotte

P.S. The doctor's say I have to stay in the hospital for the foreseeable future. I've been labeled a danger to myself. The nurses always watch me now.

P.P.S. I'm going to die here. I'm sure of it.

To: Lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

From: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

Sent: March 10 2010

Subject: please don't be sorry!

Lottie. Thank God you're awake, thank God you're emailing me, I can't even begin to describe how happy I am to hear from *you*.

But listen. Did you know we've been talking for just about seven years now? That's a long fucking time. That's almost the majority of our short lives here. I thought you would know me better by now.

You know me better than anyone else, Lottie. You should have known before you sent that email that this was the response you'd get.

We can't stop now.

Yeah, ok, all we have is a mishmash of poorly written letters and stupid IM chats and a couple of emails. Yeah, they're words and they're nothing else and there's no way we can really be together because I'm a fucking foster kid and you're in a hospital dying.

I'm more than fine with that.

I know it hurts, Lots. I know you're just as lost as I am, and I know the words are a burden because so much depends on them. I know I'm not perfect and I know that I'm nothing to base your life decisions on. But you'd have to be fuckin' insane to think that I can live without you at this point. Don't give me your heart, Lottie. I know you can't. I don't want it. I want you.

You're not your heart.

If you need an extra one, though, mine is free.

—C

P.S. You're gonna pull through this.

P.P.S I would never move on, Lottie. That's not gonna happen.

P.P.P.S You're all I have, too.

To: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

From: Lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

Subject: [No Subject]

Sent: March 11 2010

Connor,

I just don't know what to do anymore.

I'm going to live out my life in this hospital, tied to machines that tell me how fast I'm dying.

The person I love is on the other side of the planet.

I wish you had just said you can move on. That you would, that you could live without me. I can't handle the pressure of meaning so much to you.

Charlotte

P.S. I can't make any promises

P.P.S. I'm sorry for that too.

To: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

From: gmitchell@sansonarchitecture.com

Subject: Another update on Lottie

Sent: 10 March 2010

Connor,

Lottie has been placed on watch. She isn't responding to anyone. If you can get anything out of her, please inform me. She just...she's given up, I've never seen her so desolate before. It's not that they

think she might do anything to cause herself harm, but she no longer even wants to be better. They worry over her future. The mind is part of the healing process.

I know it isn't right to put this burden on you, but please, I know you can heal her with your words, you've done it before .

You are Lottie's hope, Connor.

Best,

George Mitchell

To: Lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

From: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

Sent: March 11 2010

Subject: RE: [no subject]

Charlotte,

You're stronger than this pain, Lottie. I know you are. Please, don't live for me. I'm just another person on a planet full of people. You aren't just another person. You have so much to live for. You still have so much left here for you. This isn't about me, Lots. This is about you. I was being honest when I said I can't go on without you. But the reason is because I can't imagine this world without you. It's not about my pain, Lottie. It's about your salvation. Please. I'm begging you to reconsider. I'm begging you to realize that you're one of the most important people in the world.

Remember when you wanted a prince to come and rescue you and make you better? Do you remember that, Lots? I'm sure you do, seeing as you have that memory like a steel trap and all. Well, you

don't need a prince. You don't really even need me. You need to come through because you want to come through.

I just need you to know that. I just need you to realize there's something utterly and incomparably beautiful about you. I know I'm all the way across an ocean, and I know I'm just words to you. But behind all the words and across all the distance is someone who infinitely admires you. Come on, Lots. Don't let it beat you. I know you're stronger than that. Hell, I know you're more stubborn than that.

Please write me back.

P.S. I don't know if it'll help, but I need to say it. I love you.

To: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

From: LotsofLottie@hotmail.com

Subject: No words

Sent: 12 March 2010

Connor,

You are my prince. That much is true. I'm sorry I can't make you a superhero in my story though, I'm sure you'd prefer that.

I'm going to continue on, only to keep writing to you for now. Maybe I will find another reason eventually, but for now, you are enough for me. You are worth more than any treatment I may receive.

Someday I'll be able to cross the ocean and be with you. Until then, I fear I may struggle to keep breathing.

—Charlotte

P.S. I'm sorry I can't say it back yet. Thank you for your lovely words.

P.P.S. I'll try harder to be stubborn again.

To: lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

From: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

Sent: March 12 2010

Subject: more words

I'm no prince, Lots. I'm just a guy trying to express the inexpressible.

Maybe I'll beat you to it and cross the ocean to see *you*.

I'll try to continue to be your enough. I can't make any guarantees. I make a lot of mistakes. I can guarantee, though, that I'll always be there for you. Please. Tell me all about the pain. Or don't tell me about the pain. Whatever you need to do.

The struggling sucks. But the breathing is good.

Yours,

Connor

P.S. don't worry so much about saying anything right now. just worry about you.

To: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

From: LotsofLottie@hotmail.com

Subject: RE: More words

Sent: 12 March 2010

Connor,

Thank you for not giving up on me when I did.

Its odd to actually be dying.

Well, I've always been dying, but its different to actually be dead for once. I died for a minute there Connor.

For a minute I didn't exist.

I think that's what hit me the hardest. I almost never woke up again, never pet Elizabeth or Charles II again, never ate Marmite with Daddy again, and never wrote you another letter again.

I think not writing you a letter again would have been the worst part of being dead. I'm glad I can keep writing you Connor. I'm glad you didn't give up on me, didn't leave when I told you to.

That makes you better than a prince Connor.

As for pain, everything hurts right now. They are worried they might have to operate again. I have a lot of needles and wires and tubes and I have that stupid tube in my nose. My heart hurts and not just because of my condition.

Its harder for them to heal that kind of hurt.

Lottie

P.S. What if I worry about you instead? I'm tired of worrying over me. Whatever happened to those chavs that were bugging you?

To: lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

From: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

Sent: March 12 2010

Subject: RE: RE:more words

It's so hard for me to fathom. That for even one second you were just...gone. I'd rather not think about it because it takes me back to that moment. I was sitting there being an asshole one minute, and then the next, I knew something was going on and I knew it was earth-shatteringly bad. I wish it could have been me. It makes me so fucking angry, to be honest. It makes me want to sell everything I own and get over there anyway I can. I'm no doctor, but I think I could help.

You REALLY shouldn't worry about me, but if it'll take your mind off of things, I'll tell you a story about the other day. I tried to skip school the day after everything happened, but Marcia was pretty insistent that I go. I had no explanation for why I had been up all night (probably shouldn't have told you that, don't worry) so I had to go. Well, it happened to be another chem day and the bastards I was telling you about were pretty insistent that I help them out with the upcoming test. Turns out they're not gangsters, Lots. They're actually a bunch of assholes who are in an elite cult masquerading under the athletics department as a "school sport" (a.k.a. the wrestling team). The main mission of their cult is to make my life miserable. The thing is, I'm actually really terrible at chemistry. They singled me out because I'm the scrawniest guy in the room. I guess I don't look like I spend a lot of time lifting weights. (maybe I should start?) I also look like a nerd, I guess. I'm a huge target. Something's gotta change, obviously.

Anyway, the next day they came up with an elaborate plan for me to help them cheat. Basically I was supposed to write up five individual and completely original lab reports for them. *But I suck at*

chemistry. I ended up writing five individual lab reports and I think I managed to fuck them all up in five unique ways.

No consequences as of yet. The papers get handed back in some time later this week, so I guess we'll have to wait until then.

Another reason to stay alive! Obviously you'll be wanting to hear the end of this epic saga.

Keep me informed.

—C

P.S. You wouldn't happen to know any chemistry, would you?

P.P.S. I feel like you would know a lot about it. You seem to know a lot about just about everything.

P.P.P.S. Stay strong.

To: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

From: Lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

Subject: Chavs and Chem

Sent: 12 March 2012

Connor,

It wasn't that painful honestly. Yea it hurt, but it was more...nothing. It was empty for a moment, like falling asleep. It was still horrid and I recommend you never do it. I would be distraught if you did. And you do help, without having to abandon all your things. Do you still have that Charles I sent you all those years ago? Charles the Second got to visit for a bit today, since we have him certified as a therapy dog. It was lovely to see him again. I'm two weeks into to my sentence and I'm already itching to leave. I

have exams to study for and just...being here just reminds me of how sick I am.

I'm pondering how wise it is to mess with these boys Connor, they sound like a bunch of dull bastards, but still they have numbers on their side. Have you ever been in a five on one battle? It goes well in films, but those are just films, not real life. It's bad enough I'm in the hospital, you don't need to end up in one too. I've heard awful stories about what boys will do to other boys.

Though it is pretty fantastic that you did that. :) It sounds like something I would do for sure. Maybe you should start lifting weights though. I bet you'd end up looking pretty fit! ;) And I'll always want to hear about you.

—Lottie

P.S. I know about...zero things on chemistry. We take it in Year 12 here, so next year I can compare results with you. I'm really only good at Maths, I just listen more than you.

P.P.S. I'm not lifting any weights, Connor.

To: lotsoflottie@hotmail.com

From: connorontheroad@yahoo.com

Sent: March 13 2010

Subject: 7 days until your birthday

I didn't get to mention it earlier, but there are only seven days until your birthday.

I miss chatting with you. Emails are great but I never realized how much I had come to rely on our daily conversations until we didn't

have them anymore.

Listen Lottie, I don't want to worry you. And I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, so there's a chance I won't be able to pull off what I'm planning to do. But I just checked the bus schedule and there's one that leaves town several hours from now towards a nearby city where Tommy lives. He just turned 18 and he decided to get a place with a couple of friends from the foster agency. That happens sometimes.

I'm going to get on that bus, Lots. I'm leaving Marcia and Gary's. It's been really hard to make this decision, but I can't afford to go back to school tomorrow. It's a little worse than I've let on. I think the chav's are planning something really bad. So I'm just going to leave. Please don't be disappointed in me.

I can't guarantee when I'll be able to get to an internet connection again, but I'll write you. Don't worry. This'll all work out for the better. I hope.

I'll write you soon, I promise.

Love,

—C

P.S. Don't let this distract you from getting better.

P.S.S. I'll talk to you ASAP.

Danielle McLymond



Special Thanks to:

Dr. Kristen Prohl, Dr. Megan Obourn,
Brockport Student Government,
and Pinnacle Printers Inc.

English Club:

Alma Hulbert, President
Danielle McLymond, Vice President
Courtney Withey, Editor-in-Chief
Daniel Duval, Secretary
Ian Hauck
Felicia Heidemen





