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Litmag

presents

DESTINATIONS

University of Missouri - St. Louis

Volume 17 Spring 2004

After seventeen years of publication as a campus literary magazine, *Litmag* is reborn at UM - St. Louis as a newsprint literary supplement. The students of English 4895 Editing *Litmag* are its editors and producers: they have final responsibility for every facet of the publication. Available as a capstone course in the Writing Certificate, Editing *Litmag* is made possible by the University's MFA program in Creative Writing and in collaboration with *The Current*.

Supported by the English Department and Student Activities, the University's *Litmag* published sixteen issues between 1983 and 2000. The original, generic "Litmag" gave way to changes in format, subtitle, and aesthetic. In the mid-nineties, external grants brought perfect binding and color covers. Year by year, *Litmag* staffs planned for the future, meeting each spring to choose leadership for the fall, and sharing a passion for good writing and its publication with respect and style.

Over 140 submissions were reviewed anonymously for this year's rebirth of *Litmag*. Four prose pieces were chosen, which discuss themes such as adolescence, obsessive love and the limitations of love. The chosen poetry discusses similar themes along with religion, politics, college life, the media and death, just to name a few. The diversity of *Destinations*, this year's issue of *Litmag*, is sure to reach all lifestyles.

### The Wanton Writer (Annette R. Crymes)

She felt the bloated sensation  
Of a creative writer's constipation.

The learned scholar of English, Grammar,  
Old World Prose and Composition  
Expressed silent opposition  
To the incited reality of the 'what's up' generation:

*The Lyricist rap-tap-tap  
that rhymes all the thyme...  
A poet's sci-fi fantasy,  
rescued from dream...  
The novelist un-novel novel...  
A playwright's right to play...*

No! No! No! Just listen and obey,  
This cannot be the proper way!

But in her world of recreation,  
There exists no room for hesitant hesitation,  
To romp, rock 'n roll with the things in her imagination.  
No limitation of her wanton fascination.

No more frustration from the repression  
Of her intentful aggression...  
The unspoken words she left burning, penned on paper  
Her incantations kept the pages turning...

Correctly written, a professionally bound published piece of shit  
Left unopened, unread collecting dust on a wannabe's shelf...

She whispers in the wind, no my friends, not this frustration,  
It cannot be the creative writer's destination.

With a look of absent contemplation,  
The scholastic's recrimination:

I don't get this...do you?

### Manifest Destiny: The Culprits of the Pulpits (W. William Melton)

Audibly I can say that I am indubitably that auspicious emcee unscrupulously dismantling these unctuously preaching trifles speaking to disciples of greed regurgitating blasphemy, anxious to be something like me amongst the deities, but you can't swing from these trees your hearts' got no root so just leave...

Before I drop words like autumn-gold, or spring growth unfolding in a hundred color morning leaving the dark cold empty winter burning in the paths of new life born of thee, a brief sojourn of glee, can we forborne the temptations of forlorn and avidity, holding dear and cherishing the blessed gifts of divinity exchanging currency for this bountiful beauty of the real green sprouting the prophecy of Whitman who declared that, "there is really no death," or Cummings whose breath exalted "the leaping greenly spirits," of all that "is natural which is infinite which is yes..."

Spouting out like incandescent radiance I kiss the blessed days of this grim lands intent they cleaved from men by cursed ways, leaving the lost and stolen and raped enslaved to a land once grazed instead now paved, while the hungry scrape clouds for a taste of the maize that once abound was plowed by hands and feet of those who disemboweled by those who disavow what they did as thieves and say gee it's manifest destiny as if it was meant to be by some hand we can't see that they take over from sea to shining sea and make us free, well minus the 2 million in cell block C, put away sight unseen by the same pushers who invest in grams of keys, who contracting policies skew ontology with ideologies of individuality when refined, defined, colonized, systematized, and itemized, we are identified and solidified as I, an I which inevitably leads to mine, and away from mind...

And soon the eyes are preoccupied with remaining blind to the sights and clime of a time crying for the rhymes of the sublime to unite the universal chimes of the runes of ancient minds whispering from the sky for the ruin of the industrial kind stamping out people on factory lines, rampaging our lives only concerned about the bottom lines and the top dollars whilst lonely scholars, bare-knuckled brawlers, and hard-working blue-collars get shifted like pawns in a game of chess organized to fill their chests with the gold lacking from their soul because they forgot long ago the sound of OM...

And no longer believe in anything save sleep, but the seas of the forgotten still dream and we the begotten still breathe and still dance to the sounds of drum beats and heart beats like aborigines embracing this mystery of our phenomenology, chanting and praying for the victory of our cosmogony of the incredible, indelible, ineffable and in other words the oh so simple ripple of kinfolk that unfolds the unending roads of the lotus bestowed and foretold by thee as our one and only real mother-fucking manifest destiny.

### What I Learned While Becoming... (Ebony Hairston)

slave · men · ta · li · ty - \ˈslāvə\men-tal-ət-ē \ n. origin?  
Lost and found, not in some dusty volume,  
But in the fear and disappointment,  
That comes drifting off of the shelves.

### Introduction to Poetry (La'Vonda Merritt)

Lyricaly I speak  
Poetically I think  
As the pen scribbles  
Or as my lips quiver  
Writing verbs of power and nouns of desire  
Or delivering speak easys lifted from the sheets of timber  
I remember, learning my ABC's in the K.G  
Never knowing that those skills would develop into  
poetical tendencies  
As the ink splats and my lips spit  
The verbal offspring of my brain's intensity, I write  
until my fingers bleed  
For it is I the creative being "doing the damn thing."  
For I am a writer that thinks  
I am a poet that speaks  
I am the descendant of many but not the last to come  
And beat the drum of the pen on paper  
Or speak words of poetical nature.  
It is me, I am it the creator of my poetical hits!

### Hope (La'Vonda Merritt)

Hope is Hip-Hop with an "E" at the end—it succeeds...  
The quintessential essence of embraced unity  
Hope is the boom, boom in a Hip-Hop tune,  
It's the melodic freestyle embedded into Rhythm and Blues  
Hope is spiritually unexpected and unrehearsed,  
It's the prayer we say for mankind on our way to work  
Hope is the "revolution that won't be televised."  
It's the racist conversationalist sitting next to you in  
disguise  
With a probable chance of being converted by the  
unsuspecting you,  
Who possesses the indirect power to enlighten his  
darkened roots  
Hope is the sigh of relief after a defeat, cause in your  
heart tried,  
It's the sorrow of a nation that has mourned the lives  
of those who have died  
Hope stands still at a time when everything and  
everyone else is moving faster than the  
speed of light; it defies societal evolution thus causing  
the supposed "weakest link" to  
become the focal point of necessary existence.  
Hope is a visionary's blackness uprooted and scorned,  
With reconciliation in knowing that there will still be  
HOPE when MORNING comes...

### continue (Olivia Ayes)

to end the suffering  
deep in your dark, tired eyes  
that perceive injustice,

to lessen the pain,  
masked by strength,  
that hides from vulnerability,

to aid in your simple desires  
and genuine joys  
that seldom occur,

would be satisfaction  
and reason  
for my existence.

now  
that I am aware of your struggles  
because the unenlightened sees  
only the darkness of you,

i will not leave you  
to grow deathly exhausted,  
to be dulled by anguish,  
to continue hopeless yearnings

alone.

now  
you are my reason  
to continue.



**Black River**

(Annette R. Crymes)

Hiding amongst the willow trees,  
I watched the sun setting softly  
As it reflected off the river  
Like a mirror in the current.

The stark oak trees rippled in tune with the dancing water.  
The depths of its reach were incomprehensible  
With various springs contributing to its flow,  
It was running to a place that no one knew of.

The chill in the autumn air beckoned me to sit and stay.  
Does anyone dare wade across to the other side?  
Or safely float in a canoe, riding the eddies and tide.

Listening to its enchanting song, the bluff looked down  
And smiled a knowing, while the river ran on.  
The moon began creeping up behind me as the light of  
day faded,  
And the stars came stealing across the night sky.

In the darkness, I left Black River to its eternal journey...

**Within**

(Adie Bennett)

Maybe  
I  
Will hide  
Within myself  
And become  
Someone  
Greater  
Than me

**I Remember the Willow Tree**

- In Memory of Mary Frances Bafliner  
(Adena Jones)

Lying in the grass  
I close my dozing eyes,  
Dreaming about a time  
When I was innocent and young.

I see the willow tree  
Standing tall and free  
Dappling the lawn with white downy seeds  
Its cool shade I lay beneath.

Its limbs protected me  
Blow gently in the breeze,  
Shelter me from heat and  
Keep me safe from harm.

Innocent and happy times  
Were then until that day.  
Dawn had just begun,  
When she walked out to the tree.

In one gentle flowing motion  
It scooped my mother up,  
Lifted her to heaven  
And set her on a cloud.

The house was sold and left in tears,  
Her pain was gone but ours was new -  
The willow weeping out of sight  
But always on my mind.

The vision of those branches  
Stays vivid in my mind,  
And reminds me of the gentle mother  
I lost that summer day.

Times long gone but not forgotten  
Once brought pain and sadness,  
Now bring peace and serenity  
To create a beautiful memory.

Under the willow tree  
I wish I could be,  
So here I'll sit and dream -  
Soft branches swaying  
In the gentle blowing breeze.

**Naked**

(Lara Schrage)

How else can I say it?  
Standing on a platform I dropped a sheet, canvas.  
Botticelli's Venus, that's how I was described.  
If only I could have crawled into a shell,  
huddled there  
until everyone had packed up and left.  
Instead, parts of me, only reserved for the  
bathroom mirror,  
inspired, frustrated, and challenged  
those before me. Pencils swept over. Charcoal  
scribbled my nipple, rounding out its hardness.  
Eyes soaked up every freckle,  
jutting hip bones and ocean of hair, afterwards  
passed through veins into brainwaves, then  
through fingers onto paper.

And now

my words naked  
in your hands. You read these true confessions  
embellished  
by no one. Still, I am judged for events  
I cannot change.  
This book is thick enough.  
I want to rip pages out and slither inside,  
resting on dark shelves in Italian libraries centuries old.

**Fading Flower**

(Annette R. Crymes)

Just past the years  
Between spring and fall,  
A fading Belladonna blossom  
Hangs in late autumn  
Waiting for winter's call.

Emerging gracefully from the rich brown earth  
Her landscape will eventually become a barren oasis,  
Wrinkled and wasted before taking her last breath.

In the valley of its youthfulness,  
There runs an occasional red-stained spring.  
One day, it too will dry up and desert her.

For now, the nectar flows freely  
From a fertile Black Forest  
Not yet, brittle and gray.  
One last time,  
A flower-kisser courts her scant, sweet scent,  
A Cyclops seeks the cavern  
Found amongst the petals.  
Cautiously coming closer,  
Reaching into the darkness of the depths...

The compact, collapsing, contracting mud walls  
Invite the snake to release its venom,  
Flooding the cave passage like an uncorked  
Bottle of champagne.

Raging past the stalactites,  
Soda straws and stalagmites of yester-year,  
It ripples and flows.  
Penetrating the once-white curtain,  
And sweeping over the flow-stone.

The aged wine bursts into the dome room  
Crowning Belladonna, and none too soon  
As her blossoms falter, fold, then fade.

**Seed**

(Sarah Parcel)

Father, father  
Where've you been  
these years that I've been struggling?  
Where'd you go those hours  
when I traveled through the night?  
I know you felt you had to be  
the man you had to be  
needed to see the views you  
had to see  
(and they were beautiful - painted in your mind  
through eyes the color of fertile soil).  
That pine tree grew.  
It grew so high it towered over me  
over you.  
So high its branches bent over the rooftop  
and dropped pregnant pinecones to the ground.  
I loved the days of nonsense,  
dirty fingers,  
and flea market mazes  
but everything was clouded over  
by sweat that smelled like Michelob,  
bloody lips  
and black eyes  
and the pine tree  
so tall  
so straight  
that you cut down.

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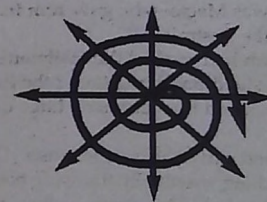
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## Threshold

(Susan LaBrier)

If my son Danny could talk, right now he'd be saying, "Three o'clock. Wagon Ride. Three o'clock. Wagon Ride." Like an alarm clock—without the snooze button. Instead he paces and flaps his arms, his face is anxious and serious. He looks more like fifty than five. I slide open the back door and he runs to get seated, back straight, head up—intent like a foot soldier off to battle. He's facing the long black handle that rests in his big red wagon.

"Ready, Dano?" I reach up and undo the combination lock that secures the six-foot gate. By the time I pull the wagon to the street I feel dampness on my neck and sweat sliding down my back. The wagon feels heavier, or the sidewalk is less yielding to the plastic black wheels in this August heat. It takes all I have to smile at the fresh twenty-something passing Danny and me on the sidewalk. She looks like a deodorant commercial—walking to her car, slinging a backpack over her tiny shoulder.

"Boy! He's got it made." She's nodding toward Danny.

"Yeah" I hear myself say to her.

*Fucking got it made*, I say to myself. She's an imbecile but I still feel my cheeks redden, wondering which one of us, Danny or me, looks worse. I realize it doesn't matter, I'm responsible for both. My oversized white T-shirt is flecked with frosting, evidence of the fight Danny and I had over a piece of chocolate cake. Danny has a brown ring around his tiny pink mouth and icing hangs on his brown curls like a laurel wreath.

"What's your name?" the twenty-something asks.

"Say, my name is Danny," I urge my five-year-old who has never spoken a word in his life. Looking down at him, I see that he is naked except for his saggy pull-up. It didn't matter until now.

"Danny? Wow! I want those long long lashes." She begins to push away his bangs and recoils at either their dread-lock texture or his piercing screech.

"He's autistic," I blurt out.

"Oh, like Rainman," she states this not as a question, but as a fact. Then she nods as if there is no need to explain anything further.

"Something like that." I return the nod and give her a no-teeth smile. "I have to keep moving or he freaks out. I'm not kidding."

With that, Danny's fists start flailing in the air. He screams. His black fingernail tips just miss tearing the flesh of her naked thigh and the wheel of the wagon barely clears her bright-white sneakers. She hops back and takes a few quick steps to the safety of her car.

Danny fixates on the movement of her wheels as she takes off. She and I exchange hesitant waves. Danny's loud motor-like "eeees" match the sound of her engine. He's stimming—his body is taut and his fingers wiggle like worms out of dirt. He looks orgasmic. I wish I could stim because it looks better than any drug I took back in college. Who knows, maybe those drugs are why he stims. I let out a shameful snort.

"Ow! Damn!" I stubbed my toe on a piece of rising sidewalk right in front of Rea Ann Beatty's house. This is my punishment for being black-hearted.

"Sorry, Rea Ann...jammed my toe."

Rea Ann comes to the railing of her bright white wood porch. A book, probably the latest beach read, is held open by a thumb as her girly-muscle arms stretch up and over her long blue-black hair. She's braless in a teeny tiny 'wife-beater.'

"Hey, Jill! How's my Danny today?"

If we were still friends I might tell her how *they* want to start doping him up because of his aggressive behaviors—biting, kicking, banging his skull. Instead, while I struggle to get the back wheel over the concrete that had just attacked my big toe, I tell her Danny is fine.

"Glad to hear it. If you ever get a chance to run..." She stops there because she knows better.

"Yeah—maybe when school starts. I'm dying to get back out there."

"Great." She says, but we both know I'm lying.

"Bye, Danny."

"Take care now." *Go to hell, Rea Ann.* My mother's voice tells me she meant well.

"Everybody means well don't they, Danny?" I bend down to grab a handful of leaves that have died too soon. Danny snatches them from me, raises them above his head, and rubs them together producing brown confetti. His body twitches with excitement. I switch to pull the wagon left-handed for a while and sigh. These rides remind me of two things—Megan and the emergency room.

Megan was a saint. She had worked with Danny since he was three, since the diagnosis. She could get Danny to do a lot of things. And she did so without pinching his elbows, gripping the back of his neck, or restraining him, as her boss Rob, Danny's consultant, encouraged. He 'encouraged' because it was unethical to demand. It was Megan who gave him the name, in her best WWF announcer voice, "Rob the Restrainer."

Megan had applied the mailman's credo to her wagon rides with Danny. If it snowed, she'd pull him around the block in his sleigh, if it rained she took an umbrella. Jack and I bought her a huge down coat for Christmas for the really cold days.

She left early one day, feverish. Danny had stomped from room to room, crying, screeching, eventually throwing books, a vase and magazines across the living room. I tried to hold him down on the daybed in front of the picture window, his fist pounding my bones, nails digging deep into my forearm flesh. I held strong once I got his arms pinned and his legs locked. Then he bit into the tip of my left shoulder and yanked his teeth away. Freed, he began kicking his feet against the window. I told the social worker that he didn't feel pain, that's why he didn't stop kicking after the glass had broken. She wrote me up. I have a record at Division of Family Services, but so does Rob the Restrainer. Somebody "hotlines" him at least once a month.

I raise my head to catch a hot breeze. It pushes Rob away and feels good on my damp forehead. Danny furrows his brow and baas like a sheep in response to our turning the corner toward home. Another breeze, one of those teaser breezes, wind from the future, just cool enough to remind me that the summer is giving way to the fall, tosses back his leafy brown curls, exposing eyes that are blue or green, depending on what he wears. They're blue today. He lifts his tiny freckled nose up to the wind and smiles, then giggles. I wish he could be this happy all the time.

"We're almost home, Danny." I want to keep walking but can't think of anywhere to go. I search the old, mostly red and a few white brick houses that sit close to the hot tar street still steaming from an earlier rain. There's nowhere to go.

I apologize to Danny that the ride is over as we pull up our drive. The front of the house looks so peaceful, the quiet red and brown bricks against the clean white trim, short green grass, compared to the back where two pine trees challenge Jack's ability to grow anything, even weeds. Danny takes my hand for balance up the deck stairs and releases it when we reach the glass door. It's fingerprinted up to where the alarm is set—for those trying to get out, not in. I buckle Danny into his high chair and stroke his cheek at the thought of this unnatural act. I hear Jack's car door slam as I dig through the fridge for some applesauce.

It's early for him to be home. An image of him groping his associate Melinda flashes across my mind. I decided long ago that she looks like Barbie's friend Francie—gorgeous, ageless. Maybe he came home to confess to having an affair, or to just leave.

"Hey, you." Jack's words tickle my ear. His hands slide around my ever-expanding waist.

"Hey; yourself." I barely kiss him and close the refrigerator door, squirming to get his hand off my fat. I lead Danny to the basement with the applesauce. He takes two bites and begins running aimlessly through the room.

"So, how was your day?" Jack asks as we sit together on the love seat. The flat, worn out cushions force us each into a slouched position.

Jack stares at his loafers and loosens his tie as I start to ramble.

"He got into the fridge, broke some eggs when FedEx came." I notice that I'm eating Danny's applesauce and stop.

"The talk-board came?" Jack asks.

"Yeah. He dumped your coffee all over the kitchen floor when your mom called to tell me about that autistic boy *they* killed in a church up in Wisconsin. While she was giving me the gory details, he must've climbed onto the counter, opened the cabinet, and dumped the entire can on the floor. I think your mom's afraid I'm going to kill Danny.

"Nah, she's afraid Rob is going to kill him."

"She'd still blame me."

"Probably." He laughs and squeezes my hand. "Where's the talk-board?"

"Upstairs, it looks pretty intense."

"Do you think Danny will get it?"

"I dunno. He patty-caked today." Jack tries to patty-cake but Danny runs away. I tell Jack he's in charge of the talk-board and that I'm going to take a shower.

Danny makes his way over to Jack, and I push myself up. Jack tosses Danny around and their giggling stops me. Watching them makes me think how much Jack and I need a talk board. Maybe we could tell each other how this feels.

I shudder from the cold shower water or maybe from thinking of Rob at school with Danny. The image of Danny plastered to the kitchen floor in my own home—Rob's knee in his back holding Danny's arms straight behind him comes to mind. Probably another good reason to drug him. Rebecca can't handle him the way Megan could. Megan graduated last May and moved back to Texas. But Rebecca always greets Danny with a toothy smile and open arms so he can lose himself in her lumpy rolls. I wish I were always that happy to see Danny.

"You smell good." Jack is horny.

"Thanks." So am I, or lonely. I can't tell the difference.

He goes back to reading the paper and Danny alternates between stimming on snow from a non-existent TV channel and running sprints around the room.

"How about pizza, tonight?" He asks and I wonder again why he's here.

"What the hell are you doing home so early?"

"I dunno, I just left." He seems so lost. Maybe Francie dumped him.

"I'll have a salad," I tell him.

"Aw c'mon have some pizza."

"No...my jeans are getting tighter. No dressing." If I stay fat then he can justify sleeping with Francie.

"You look great in your jeans." He says and gets all come-fuck-me, and I know she dumped him.

I practically run from him to feed Danny some of the applesauce. Jack heads upstairs. I turn on the monitor so I can watch Danny from the kitchen. I notice he still isn't aware of when we leave the room; even an animal would do that. The pizza will take about a half-hour Jack says and hands me a cold bottle of water from the fridge.

"Does Danny have a doctor's appointment, tomorrow?" Jack's looking right at the calendar on the fridge while fingering the peanut butter. His sandy blond curls, brown eyes and the freckles he gave Danny force my hand upon his back. I rub once and pull away.

"He wants to put him on risp...risperidone." I sit down across from Jack.

"Want me to go?" he asks.

I let him take my hand. Francie definitely dumped him. Jack hasn't been to anything of Danny's since the official diagnosis.

"No. It's all right." I wave him off.

"I want to come."

"No."

"I can go if I want."

"What a luxury." That felt good.

He turns his chair away from the table; a subtle "fuck you."

"Do you think it's a good idea, the Risperdal or, risperidone?" I ask.

"I think it's risperidone." He scoots his chair back in. "The kid is killing you, and if he doesn't kill you he's going to kill somebody or himself. Jesus, remember the window."

Maybe it was the acknowledgement that Danny was killing me that made me reach for his hand. With my free hand I loosen my hair from the worn monogrammed towel. I feel the brown wet strings fall around my face. Jack reaches over and wraps some strands behind my ear. I want so much to kiss his palm or ask if he's been sleeping with Francie.

"Why are you home so early?"





He takes more strands, forces them behind the other ear and asks if I remembered that he hired a new assistant last month because Melinda quit to get married back in June. I nod but have stopped listening. Francie doesn't even work for him any more. He says something about how well the new guy is doing, that's why he was able to come home early—on time.

"I miss you," he says, and Danny screams after mistakenly turning off the television and losing the snow. The doorbell rings and I run down to rescue Danny before the pizza girl "hotlines" us again.

Jack holds a limp piece of pizza in one hand and the talk-board instructions in the other. Danny flails his arms, whining constantly, while I cut his pizza into tiny squares. He can't reach my cheeks so he digs his nails into his own leaving bright pink tracks. I add nail-clipping to the list of grooming he needs.

Later that night, I think about the medicine while listening to Jack snore and Danny's breathy stimming. I stroke Jack's smooth back. I miss him, too. I wake long before Jack's alarm to the effects of Danny's finding the chocolate cake—he's wide awake, banging pots and pans in the kitchen.

"You can go in now, Mrs. Wade." She's an angel sending me in to the savior, Dr. Mormino. He's everything a mother of a child with autism would want. He cannot be anything but beautiful no matter what he looks like because in his eyes, I'm just fine. He assures me it's perfectly normal to want to use a stun gun, just once, because that's all it would take, if he could feel it, to stop Danny from ripping my flesh with his teeth, running naked into the streets or wanting to watch things break. I'm a perfectly sane, capable and loving mother when I cross his threshold.

"So, what do you know, Jill?" He slides the kleenex over forgetting that I'm not one of his blubbery feel-sorry-for-yourself mothers. I push it back a little reminding him that I'm a martyr. The maroon leather chair feels warm from the previous mother. I choose the one closest to the window overlooking the park. The oppressive August heat isn't keeping a group of kids indoors. I can hear them screaming, laughing. Talking. Their words push my eyes back to the desk where the latest article on autism faces me. It has the same statistics but a new breakthrough. A woman taught her non-verbal twelve-year old to write. He writes poems. He has a book published.

"Pretty fascinating stuff." Mormino taps his finger on the article. "Women—mothers— never cease to amaze me." I want to know what I have done that amazes him. Danny has grown only in size. I don't ask. I don't really want to know. Instead I ask if he heard about the boy who was murdered in Wisconsin.

"Yeah, like I said, some people never cease to amaze me." He rubs his temple and asks about Danny.

"He broke the lock on the fridge." I'm bored, bored with Danny stories.

"Let's try the risperidone. Jill, he's not getting any better and he's getting bigger, stronger. And, if your restrainer friend is back—even if not, there's another hyper-vigilant behaviorist right behind him ready to prove himself. Hell, with the medication, you might even get some rest." I smile satisfied, my martyrdom intact.

"Jack's coming today. Should be here any minute."

"Good, better to do this together. You know, Jill, eventually."

"I'm ready to try the medicine. But you know there's no way of getting a pill down his throat."

"Not a problem—'rapidly disintegrating,'" he's reading the brochure as he slides a blister pack across his desk. "They use these in the hospital so patients won't cheek their meds and spit them out later."

I have no idea what he's talking about.

"It might make him sleepy, maybe hungry— watch his weight—and don't go on the internet and read all the alarmist talk about this not being FDA approved for autism or children. It's often prescribed off label. We'll try this dosage for six weeks, you won't see a change for about two. We'll keep an eye on him. The door clicks.

"Hey, Jack!" Mormino reaches to shake his hand.

"Sorry, I'm late," he says to me, squeezing my arm as he sits down. I realize it was easier when I thought he was sleeping with Francie. Dr. Mormino goes on to explain that Risperdal is the brand name—a lot of people get confused. Something about seizures and epilepsy comes up. I reply yes and no to questions by some sort of cue that would ensure we would walk out with that drug even though it still scared me. Could Danny get worse? Jack says that isn't possible and we laugh. Is this funny?

Home again, the drug weighing on my mind, I drift through the gate and find Danny sitting naked in a puddle, stimming off water droplets from the sprinkler. My mother is watching him intently and completely aware of the lake that is forming in the back yard. She is eating Danny's gummy bears.

"I was afraid to turn it off," she says rubbing her feet together.

"Give me those." Gummy bear by gummy bear I lead Danny out of the puddle and into his high chair.

"Jesus Christ. The grass is ruined," Jack informs me as he slams his keys on the kitchen counter top.

"Nothing ever grows back there, Jack. At least she baby-sits. Hand me a pull-up."

I start to ask him when the last time his mother baby-sat but this fight was getting old, too. I push a pill through foil from the blister pack and stick it in Danny's mouth. It 'rapidly disintegrated' before Danny could claw it out of his mouth. I see my mom off and convince her, for the moment, that using the sprinkler was a very good idea. In the kitchen Jack is holding the blister pack and pointing to the broken foil.

"Did you give him a whole tablet?"

"Yeah?"

"He's only supposed to get half to start."

I mutter a few expletives and call Mormino's office. The nurse laughs and says it will be okay but Danny will probably sleep for quite a while—easily until the next morning. That's funny. Jack thinks so, too. He grabs the talk-board, says he's almost finished programming the words, and heads upstairs. Danny's still in his high chair. He's not stimming, crying or giggling. He's calm. He's normal. He's not autistic right now. I hold his face in my hands and look into his eyes.

"Are you in there Danny? Come out, come out wherever you are." I sing to him. He blinks twice, his head bobs a few times then he slumps. He's asleep. I watch him to make sure, then unbuckle and lift him out of the chair.

My arm and back muscles burn from Danny's dead weight. As I reach the top step I wonder why the hell Jack didn't carry him upstairs. I'm forming a snide remark for him as he appears in the bedroom doorway wagging a joint. I shake my head and laugh—instead of being pissed that I overdosed his child he wants to get high.

"Don't be silly, Jack. Put that thing away. How old is that stuff anyway?"

Jack ignores me and takes a match to the joint. The paper crackles and hot ash falls to the floor. Vacuuming, laundry, all the chores come to mind and just as fast the second-hand smoke chases them away. What the hell.

"Wow, he'll actually be sleeping in his bed." Jack is standing next to me.

We both stare at Danny, asleep before five, in disbelief. Jack hands me the joint. I almost lose a lung coughing.

We smoke some more and order some pizza—no salad. We swear we'll never do this again. We make love—awkwardly—as bad as the first time. I wake up off and on through the night to watch Danny sleep and wonder when I started thinking that Jack was fooling around. Having the night off from Danny has given me a weird energy. I'm tired but driven to be awake.

"You know, I might take a run," I tell Jack in the morning.

"Good, go. But hurry back." Maybe Jack is afraid of Danny.

The sports bra is a little snug but I am not deterred. I tiptoe past Danny's room like a thief. I hear him stir but deny it. As I walk on his whine follows me then a long "eeee." I turn back, open his door and sit on the edge of his bed.

"Morning, Danny." I brush back his dirty bangs and kiss his forehead. His gaze is fixed on the pine needles that have turned silver from the sun. I should have given him a bath last night while he slept—maybe under heavy sedation he could tolerate soap. He smells moldy—probably from the sprinkler water. I feed him breakfast and kiss Jack off to work. I can feel Francie wanting her job back.

Danny squawks and I release him from the high chair.

"Let's do some work, Dano." I give him my open back and he climbs on.

Once downstairs, instead of running sprints, Danny slides down my back, my legs, then drops to the floor. His arms straight above him, twitching as he stims at the rotation of the ceiling fan blades.

Danny fusses as I direct him to his little yellow chair next to the little white table. His lids are dropping every few seconds and then he reaches across the stained white table for me and cries. I can't resist and let him crawl in my lap. His occupational therapist would say he's "seeking pressure". I squeeze his limbs and pretend he needs his mom.

"Anybody home?" My mother is yelling from the stairs.

"Down here, Ma."

"The door was open. Why wasn't it locked?" She leans to kiss my forehead.

"I thought I'd do some laundry for you. I noticed it was piled up pretty high yesterday."

It's a trade: Jack gets clean socks, and she's forgiven for the flood. I can see this on her face so she turns to Danny.

"Is he sick?" She strokes Danny's head and I explain the drug fiasco. She says if he falls back asleep, she'll stick around while I run some errands, if I'd like.

In Danny's room he's clinging to me but can't seem to fall asleep—or wake up. I rock, sing, massage and nothing. I carry him to the kitchen and finger the blister pack. Maybe just a little won't hurt. I can't hold him all day. I break a pill in half, well more like a third.

Danny yawns. I sneak the broken pill in and it disintegrates before I can debate it any longer. He falls asleep on the way back upstairs. I take the run, then head out to the mall for a pair of jeans that fit. An hour later I am guilt driven home.

"Still asleep." My mom says and grabs her keys. She's afraid I'll leave again or he'll wake up or both. I head upstairs to lie down next to Danny. As I start to doze I feel his fist hit my back, then a kick to my gut, another kick and he's still. An odd gurgle escapes. His back arches pushing his stomach up his tongue out then back in. A current seems to run through him.

"Danny wake up." I shake him. "C'mon, Danny, get up. You missed your wagon ride. Danny, let's go." His pull-up is soaked and soiled—so are the sheets. I change him and carry his heavy body to the wagon. He smells moldier than before. He's so heavy I almost drop him into the wagon.

"This will wake you up, Dano." I say as I throw him a handful of dead leaves that just sort of cover his belly. I undo the lock. The air is heavy, humid. It's hard to breathe. The sky promises rain but it won't deliver, I can tell.

I'm hoping Danny will "baa" as we round the corner to home. He hasn't stirmed at all.

I clear the dead leaves, carry him in and dismiss the alarm. Danny's not going anywhere. He feels even heavier or maybe my legs are sore from the run. My face is wet, probably from the humidity.

Danny isn't sweaty but I draw him a cool bath anyway.

"Mommy will cut your hair, clip your nails." I finish and clean out his ears. I wrap him in a towel and lay him back in bed. I kiss his cold damp forehead. Of all the ways I feared Danny could die, this was not one of them. I probably should take a shower, call someone or something. I hold his cold hand and look out the window, wishing the pine needles were still silver, that it was still morning, that this wasn't hindsight.



**Two Small Tributes**  
(Kenneth E. Harrison, Jr.)

**I. To See If Something Comes Next**

There is nothing here at the top of New Jersey. the feel of morning in his legs, the smell of air as it heavies the farmlands and the strip-malls. Cars occasionally, and the sounds of deer in the backyard where he lives with the wheelchair and his lengthening boyhood. To see if something comes next he must first and foremost leave. It is like those midnight drives beneath canopies of trees where his head means to brush the bottom branches. Another point of view. Gradations of brown, of green, from a Continental window seat.

**II. Avenue Salvage**

Some of these tires are amazingly new. Other, older ones seem not too old either. Only when a shining aisle of hubcaps ends does it resemble the magic you glimpsed once in a Tolkien book as a child. (Our taste in literature aged a bit while we were reading.) Now a perversity seizes us—in every cracked windshield, every mopey junkyard dog, even in the stray handlebars leaning against an oil drum. You've said you often feel like leaping from your own skin. Now's a good time.

And a full moon appears right on schedule, bright enough to flatten down your flyaway hair. There is pleasure in being gradually, steadily, disillusioned. But no one feels like being pleased now.

—for Jack Gilbert and John Ashbery

**Spring Cleaning, 1987**  
(Sarah Parcel)

Endless days in cramped corners of musty closets where taped-together boxes overflow with pieces from the past.

When I was ten I tried on Grandma's wedding dress (fragile dragonfly wings of bone-colored silk.) Sleeves hung to my knees and the train lagged behind in the bedroom as I marched like a bride through the house on red carpet.

I remember even then my ten-year-old waist filled out the dress.

Placid sunlight heavy with dust and pollen poured through windows while Grandma piled my arms high with bristly wool sweater sets and polyester pantsuits long-abandoned.

Stooped and grey-headed, she was once a mother, once a girl who filled the fragile wedding dress with life. I watched her (as sunlight settled on her shoulders) and touched her withered hand lightly.

**Robin**  
(Sarah Parcel)

You sit, smiling in a plastic kiddie pool sharing shallow water with a bouncing ball swirled like a cloudy marble. That you would meet a man seven years your senior charming but more in love with the bottle than you or me. That you would find yourself at eighteen, a mother for the first and only time in your life, balancing your future like a cloudy ball in your hands. None of this shows in your squinting smiling eyes as your hand grips the pool's plastic edge, keeping balance.

**Truth**  
(Robert Miller)

About fifteen feet above the water, traveling at thirty-two miles per second squared, you're gonna think, "ohhhhh fuck," and you're gonna piss yourself.

**Twice Fear**  
(Christine Pearson)

Tonight I went out to smoke a cigarette on my back porch, and startled a possum rifling through a trash bag. He scrambled over to a safe corner, a rat-like body followed by a wormlike tail. My first instinct was to escape back inside; possums had nasty tempers, I'd heard, and spread rabies. I looked into his white face, hideous, angular, and at his mouth, with his lips, almost nonexistent, pulled back slightly to reveal tiny sharp teeth, dripping with diseased venom. But black eyes looked wet in the glare of the porch light. As he stared out at me from his dimly lit corner, those dark glinting eyes seemed to beg for mercy.

Later, at a party, we gathered around the computer to watch the Paris Hilton sex tape. The video quality was poor, the room glowed with the green light of horror movies. Her thin lips were almost transparent, chalky white skin was stretched across the fragile skeleton of her face. Her eyes were black holes, each holding a glint from the light of the camera. Staring into those chasms, I swear I saw fear, a plea to be taken quickly. No one in our group cat-called, or whistled, but instead everyone kept a suffocating silence, until someone finally muttered, "Jesus." And it was then that I remembered the possum, huddled in a corner, awaiting slaughter.

**A Dog's Tale**  
(Matt Healey)

Very few people know John as well as me. No one knows what he smells like or his strange habits. Right now, you are probably really grossed out over what I just said. I hear you thinking, "How in the name of all that is holy does he know all this crap about John?" Or perhaps you are thinking that I am a deranged pervert. Well, try looking a little lower and thinking outside the box. Ask yourself,

"Who knows what I smell like?" Chances are you know someone who does. But anyway, my name is Ferrari. I know, it's not my favorite name in the world either. I would much prefer Strider or perhaps Seamus (pronounced Shamus, long 'a' sound). But there are worse names, like Rover. But my name is my name and not the subject of my tail (tale).

Not many people believe dogs, or any animals for that matter, understand them when they talk. To this end, you have developed a system of hand signals and commands in order to communicate with us. They are highly unnecessary but always funny, especially when some poor human cannot make a dog obey the hand signals. John happens to be one of the many unfortunate people who do not realize I understand him. However, I put up with him because he lets me play with his socks—man's greatest gift to canine-kind. They roll up in a ball, stretch, and last a long time. The day he stops letting me play with his socks is the day I stop paying attention to his hand signals. If people spoke dog there would be no problems. Again, not part of the story but something you should know. WE UNDERSTAND YOU! Look into a dog's eyes if you do not believe me. Anyway, on with the story.

John, while a little nerdy, is very nice on the whole. He has a good job, a house with a big yard and no fence (I love that part), and of course, me. He cuts the neighboring old lady's grass, shovels her snow, rakes her yard and takes out her garbage. He eats ramen noodles and drinks Amber Bock, and

bowls once a week with his friends. He does not get many dates, either. He arrives home after work and reads the newspaper, watches television and reads. On the weekends he works in the yard. Occasionally, he goes to Happy Hour with his co-workers and tries to meet women. He rarely succeeds, and returns home disappointed. He thinks I do not notice, but I do. Dogs pick up on a lot of things and while we may not be the greatest judges of human beauty, we are unequalled judges of character. The large majority of the women John dates are not really his type. I pick up on this right away. It takes John a little longer. One particularly peeved me by clapping and whistling at me at the same time. Naturally, I turned around and walked away.

"Ferrari," John pleaded. I grudgingly turned around and introduced myself to Bridget. She smelled heavily of perfume, you know, the kind that's too musky for its own good. Bridget knelt down and took my face in her hands.

"Oh, you're such a good doggie," she said. "Yes you are." She rubbed the sides of my face like a grandmother would. The more I smelled her, the less I liked her. She kissed me on the nose and I sneezed in her face. Her breath stank.

"Oh, disgusting," she exclaimed. Yes, you are. John then locked me outside while they watched a movie. That was their last date.

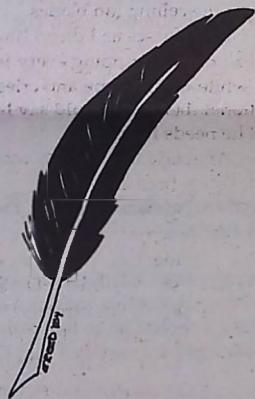
I love being locked outside when company comes, except for Brian and Callie, who are John's best friends. Those two know I understand them and I am convinced that Brian is half canine himself. They have a chocolate Labrador named Mariner, who is also very cool. But they do not apply to this story either.

I love the outdoors mainly because I am a dog, but also because of the scenery in our neighborhood. I also get more free food than a barfly, and I can't even talk. I saunter up to the neighbors' backyard and try to look as wretched as possible. Eventually, I get a bone or a treat or maybe even a piece of meat. *Waiter, I'll take my steak medium rare and a baked potato. (Am I full of myself, or what?)* It helps that I know the right houses to visit. For example: my good friends Mike and Lucy, a younger couple with two young daughters, always have one or two pieces of leftover supper for me. Thanksgiving and Christmas are wonderful times at their house. Mrs. Kensington, the old lady next door, always has a peanut butter treat for me. Of course, mooching food is not my only outdoor activity. I also look for a nice girl for John.

The apartment complex a few blocks over proved good grounds for this activity. I lie in the garden across the street, hoping to catch a glimpse of a nice girl. Whenever I see one, I emerge and try to make her notice me. Sometimes it works but mostly I just wind up making a fool of myself. That's okay, I'm a dog and I can get away with that. When I am noticed, I take John for a walk, hoping said female will see us, recognize me, and talk to John. Sometimes it works, but mostly John starts talking to her about cars, and I hang my tail in disappointment and pull him away. It gets depressing, really, going through all that work only to see him demolish it. He may be a nerd, but I love him and persevere in my endeavor.

On a fine May afternoon, a Saturday if I recall correctly, I once again lazed in the garden near the apartments, eyes half opened and ears half listening. My anthropological study proved boring, as most people just did Saturday things like sleep and lounge around, basically all the things dogs do all the time (Yo-ho, Yo-ho, a dog's life for me.) See what people miss? Anyway, I lay there communing with nature because John was visiting his parents and I wanted to be outside on this fine spring day. Unfortunately, everyone else was gone, too.

So there I was, dozing off, when I heard a car pull into the lot. I opened one eye, hoping to get a glimpse of the driver. The door opened and out stepped the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. I opened the other eye and raised my head. She had close-cut, auburn hair and bright eyes. Her shorts came to mid-thigh and her midriff revealed a very nice stomach. She carried herself with an air of graceful confidence that I had never seen, especially in women whom John found hot. She opened the trunk and ran a hand through her hair. Now was my chance.





I stood and hurried across the street, praying she did not see me. I lay behind another car and started talking.

*Look at me, I'm so pathetic. I need attention.* This sounds very whiny and works great when I want to go outside. I watched her from underneath the car. She straightened.

*I'm lost and all alone. My shamelessness knows no bounds. Help me find my person.* She walked towards my spot.

*Over here.* She circled the car and saw me, prone on the ground. A look of concern formed on her face.

"Hey, there," she said kneeling down. "You're not hurt, are you?"

*I feel better now that you're here* (I know, I'm horrible). I smelled the back of her hand. She wore perfume, but not the overpowering stuff. This was a sweet scent, very vanilla. Her hand stroked my nose. I closed my eyes. Her touch was gentle and soothing. *Wow, I cooed.*

"Can you stand up?" I stood. "I think I might have a treat for you." I followed her to her car. She rummaged around and produced a carob truffle. My mouth watered. I love carob truffles. I gently took it from her hand and chewed it before swallowing. She scratched me behind the ears. My eyes rolled back into my head and my tongue lolled out. She stopped and I nudged her hand and she continued.

"What's your name?" She knelt down and looked at my tags. "Ferrari. Your owner must love cars." She smiled. "Well Ferrari, my name is Cynthia." Thankfully, she did not try shaking my paw.

*Cynthia*, I sighed. Such a wonderful name, rolls off the tongue. The church bell chimed once, then twice, then three more times. My eyes refocused. It was five in the evening. John would be getting home soon. He was probably home now. I turned and ran back home, dodging through yards and hedges with one thought on my mind: John must meet Cynthia.

As it turned out, John pulled into the driveway the instant I tore across the neighbor's front lawn. He frowns upon my wandering ways and was particularly upset this time. No matter how much I begged and pleaded he refused to let me take him for his walk.

"You've been out all day."

*But you haven't, I retorted.* It didn't work because he doesn't speak dog. So I ate my dinner and retreated to the sunroom in disappointment. It would have to wait until tomorrow. I stretched out and yawned. Tomorrow John would need his walk, and I would introduce them.

The next day I woke up in the exact same spot. I yawned and stretched again and lay there listening to the house. The sun shined into the room, warming the tiles. My thoughts drifted to Cynthia and our encounter the previous day. I sighed happily. Today, John and I needed to walk down that way. I raised my head and looked at the clock. It read 10:15. John usually went to church at 10:30 on Sunday, being a good Catholic boy.

I rose and stretched again before meandering into the kitchen for a drink. The water tasted fresh. Good boy, John. My breakfast sat beside my water and smelled fresh as well. It was standard Purina dog chow that I found tolerable. It beat the canned fodder that other dogs ate, so I never complained. John gave me a home and I love him for that.

I finished my breakfast and walked into the living room. On my way there I made a mental note to have John get my toenails clipped. Hopping up on the couch, I rested my head on the back and gazed out the picture window. The street we live on carries little traffic so I watched the squirrels and birds play in the yard. It's great fun seeing them scatter when one of the hawks swoops towards them. However, none of them were aloft this morning, so the animals went about their business.

Several minutes passed before a figure jogged around the corner. Normally, runners hold no special interest for me. I find it mildly amusing when I see a dog take their person for a run, since those dogs are normally hyperactive and I find them funny as well. Anyway, this runner seemed vaguely familiar and upon closer inspection my jaw dropped open. The runner was Cynthia. I placed my front paws on the back of the couch, tail wagging.

*Hey, over here, I called. It's me, Ferrari.* She ran by the window and I upped the volume. Then I realized she wore headphones. Typical. I stopped yelling and slumped back. Why is nothing ever easy? I looked at the clock. John would not be home for another forty-five minutes. I watched Cynthia disappear up the street. Bugger all.

For the next week I watched out the front window all day, hoping to see her again. At night, I took John for his walk in the vicinity of her apartment complex, always looking for her. Naturally, I never saw her, only her car. John had no idea what I was up to. He kept telling me that everything was going to be all right. I did not answer him. First of all, he would not understand a word I said to him, and secondly he had no idea who this girl was, nor the slightest inkling of her greatness.

By the following Sunday, I was in a right dreadful mood. John was gardening in the front yard and I lounged under a bush, intently watching the street. She had to come back around eventually. I made sure I was up by seven this morning to maximize my window, but still nothing. What ever happened to punctuality? If I possessed hands I would have thrown them up in despair but since I did not, I sighed. I sighed a lot that week. I sighed one more time for good measure and gazed up the street. Come on (that also come out as a whine).

*I give up.*

It was probably too good to be true anyway. I closed my eyes and listened to the wind in the trees. A soft smacking sound resonated on the wind. At first I thought it was a hammer, but the constant rhythm caused me to open my eyes and look. My jaw dropped open.

*Cynthia*, I howled tearing from my resting place at a dead run, tail wagging and tongue lolling. I stopped at the edge of my yard and called at her again. She glanced then performed a double take. I could only imagine what went through her mind when she saw me there, tail wagging happily and a gleeful expression on my face. Her stride hesitated and I loped over to her. She stopped, recognition dawning on her face and she knelt down.

"I remember you," she said. "I gave you a treat last week." She scratched me behind the ears.

*I remember you, too. It took you long enough, but that's okay.*

"Is that your owner?" she asked indicating John.

*Hey, John. Get over here. I want you to meet someone.* John stopped digging and rose. He walked down to where we stood, an embarrassed look on his face.

"Sorry about that," he said. "He does that to everyone."

*I do not.*

"That's okay," she replied. "He's a sweetheart. So Ferrari's your dog?"

"Yeah," John said. "I love cars."

*He owns over four hundred Hot Wheels and twenty models of Corvettes and Mustangs and Vipers. None of them are in the packaging.*

"My favorite has always been the 1968 Fastback Mustang," she said.

"I built a model of that," John said. "Red, of course."

"Is there any other color?"

"Absolutely not," he replied laughing. So far, so good, but only two minutes had passed. I quieted down and listened to the conversation. They went back and forth talking about cars, then sports. Cynthia, we both found out, was a high school teacher. The conversation continued for about fifteen minutes before Cynthia and John said farewell. John apologized for interrupting her run.

"That's quite all right," Cynthia replied with a smile. "It was nice talking to you."

"You, too." She started jogging again and I nudged John's hand. Thankfully, he got the hint.

"Hey," he called after her. She stopped and turned around. John caught up with her. "I know this sounds a little strange, but would you like to grab a cup of coffee sometime?"

"Sure," she replied. "I normally get home from school around 4:30."

"I get off about five. What would you say to six tomorrow evening at the diner up the street?"

"I'd call it a date."

"Cool."

"See you then."

"Bye." She jogged down the street and around the corner, an excited spring in her step. John returned to the garden, his face glowing with joy. I sat under the tree and patted myself on the back.

Well, I won't burden you with the details of their coffee shop date, except to say that they went out again later on that week, and the next week and so on and so forth. It has been almost a year now, and they are still seeing each other. Brian and Callie both agree with me that Cynthia and John make a good couple. I'm so proud of him. I think that John might even pop the question sometime soon. If so, I get to be the ring bearer. And, dear reader, remember that behind every good man stands a good dog.

## A Mess: A Spilled Goldfish Bowl

(Christine Pearson)

Today in my e-mail, a letter from someone named Tara had the subject heading, "Are we hanging out this weekend or what?" Searching my memory for a girl named Tara, I clicked on to find two women, naked and licking each other. Now, I know good damn well that I haven't made plans with either of these women.

\*\*\*\*

A visitor to Merritt's diner in Boise, Idaho, will find that their famous scones, proudly advertised in shabby white cursive on their sign, aren't really scones at all, but funnel cake.

This is good for me. I hate scones.

\*\*\*\*

Tonight, I wrote a sappy love poem about our break-up, went out to drown 8 pints of Guinness, and brought home a Brazilian bartender, whom I sent away after deciding that I couldn't sleep with him. Really, this night made absolutely no sense.

\*\*\*\*

Two Kinds of Love: The way a female cat lifts her ass in heat is so different from the way she sprawls out to offer her teats to her young. While grooming her young, she seems much more content than when her scruff is being pulled back by a tomcat. Which really doesn't surprise me. If someone did that to me during sex, I would be pissed too.

\*\*\*\*

In a college town in Kansas, a girl cracks open a fortune cookie that reads, "Your path will be long and arduous."

\*\*\*\*

One typical biker chick tattoo, a puffy heart that reads, "In memory of Butch." How did Butch die?

\*\*\*\*

And if the year hasn't been bad enough, they had to go and change the flavors of Lifesavers. Trademark. They do this with crayons, too. I don't use crayons anymore, and this is probably a good thing. One less thing to be bitter about.

\*\*\*\*

A poster read, "Small minds worry about small matters." sigh.

\*\*\*\*

Tonight, my high school friend Shannon called me. "Remember Tara from our drama class, junior year?" You see where this is going. Tara looks quite different now.



**Veil to Void**

(Katie Anderson)

Falling through stars I hear nothing  
but the sound of universes dying and being born  
falling into your eyes  
I hear nothing at all  
and wonder why in such a wild iris  
with incredible passion  
does sound cease to exist  
the inaudible void I all too often fall within  
wishing for a single moment something would  
break through  
the veil of those untamed mirrors to your soul  
and reach with verbal intensity something  
into the depths of my soul  
a voice in the darkness so I know I'm not alone

**Forgiveness**

(Paul Huggins)

You will not move the sky  
by prayer or sacrifice,  
but forgiveness  
can be found  
beneath its blue glare.

Forgiveness  
was created by those  
who need solace  
after a fall from grace.

The everlasting sky  
will never learn to forgive.

**God**

(Sarah Spafford)

Meet me tonight  
Underneath the night sky.  
I'll be alone,  
Amazed at your power.  
There, I can finally feel you  
And know that you hear me  
In the quiet.  
As the world lies still  
For a moment in time,  
I stand as my heart inclines  
Toward you  
And find you in the vastness of the stars.

**Chasmic Echo**

(Ben Tag)

There is a lonely thunder  
That rolls down the verdant hills,  
Across lush prairies  
And through the blank streets  
Of every village,  
Rattling the bones of the loose and  
Wrinkled windowpanes.  
Children weep with terror, dogs howl  
As the steeple knells the hour  
And the aged smile, who have weathered  
Many storms, and rub arthritic hands on trembling backs.  
The thunder peals on,  
And all the souls  
Of the world  
Pause to mark time  
Then pick up their  
Tomes of fashion  
And wish upon a style.  
The thunder peals on,  
With both bang and whimper  
In hand, swinging madly and  
Entrancing the masses like a carnival daredevil.  
Perhaps it began  
When man soared with the sun  
And plunged with waxen rain  
Onto the spikes of a stone-grey sea.  
Or, likelier still,  
With Abel and the stone  
Denting the ground  
And the sad rain fell red.  
The thunder peals on,  
And I mark it in my book,  
Another note in the raucous  
Symphony of nature.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God,  
And the word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came to be through him, and without him  
Nothing came to be.  
What came through him was life, and this life was the light  
Of the human race; the light shines in the darkness,  
And the darkness has not overcome it.

**Philologos**

(W. William Melton)

He was with God not God with He  
Who was He  
He was the word  
And it was through the word that all  
Things came to be  
For He is who first named all We could see  
Without He nothing came to be  
Because without a name what else are you  
But no thing  
And eventually what thing came to be, but us  
You and Me-human life  
The world came alive linguistically  
As tongues painted everything in color  
For now the trees had leaves and they were green,  
Emerald, or sea  
What once waved helplessly amidst the breeze  
Now breathed  
These works lighted our minds with a glowing  
majesty  
That became our light  
That the darkness cannot see  
Because the darkness cannot speak  
It has no vessel to literate that which it thinks  
It is without a God  
For it is God where tongues cease  
For the wise say silence is the key  
To the mysteries of reality  
Where there is but one word  
And that word is He.

**Destinies and Destinations**

(Paul Huggins)

The sky is dark  
but the blacktop river  
is darker.  
The starry topped sky  
is spread over head,  
tempting me into sleep.  
I grip the wheel tighter.

I ride the long ride.

The dashboard light  
casts an orange glow,  
making me ghoulish  
in the rearview mirror.  
I smile, but that makes it worse.  
I shake my head and look away.

I ride the long ride.

My eyes are burning  
from squinting to see into the night,  
but my universe ends  
at the rim of darkness  
beyond the headlights.  
Out there is the unknown chaos.

I ride the long ride.

The air is stale and warm,  
stuck in this tomb with four wheels,  
but cracking the window  
only brings the cold night closer.  
Freon-tinged, recycled oxygen  
is the only thing keeping me alive.

I ride the long ride.

Sitting in mechanical misery,  
I split the darkness in two.  
Speeding on the asphalt arteries,  
I am driving to the heart of this world,  
through the hardships of the ride  
to the rewards of the end line.  
Onward to my destinies and destinations—

I ride the long ride.

**Ode to THUNDERSTORMS**

(Adie Bennett)

Long hot summer days,  
Azure skies dotted with puffy clouds  
Resembling cotton balls.

Atmosphere, unaware of low pressure and cold air  
Waiting, hunched to swoop down upon a warm front  
like a cat.

Convergence of these two fronts  
Creates turbulence  
Erupting into huge clouds  
Rising, higher and higher into the heavens.

The soft white and gray tinted clouds disappear  
to be replaced by  
The massive towering cumulonimbus.  
green and black, these clouds are tinted the colors  
of olives.

The temperature drops, feel the electricity charged air  
around you.  
An unreal calmness sweeps over the land,  
the sudden stillness of a summer day is eerily  
noticeable by the abrupt quietness of  
the animals.

Winds are picking up speed,  
No more calm before the storm,  
Trees sway menacingly as lightning forks and flashes  
across the sky.

The rolling of the clouds is echoed in the booming of  
the thunder,  
Rain plummets from above, piling and puddling below,  
Cars slow on the freeway and children take refuge  
indoors watching  
Though not too closely, out the window as the Gods  
wage war in the Heavens,  
And it makes its way to Earth.

Inspired by this quote: "Storms, the tantrums of the  
atmosphere." —Discovery Books

**Autumn's Past**

(La'Vonda Merritt)

As I shuffle through the fallen leaves upon the  
deadening grass  
My soul journeys for its belonging in  
autumn's past  
Summer came and went with tribulations  
galore  
The trials I endured through it all, of it I could  
take no more  
I continue to trolley here and there as I walk  
amongst the trees  
I clear my mind of the burdens I bare, time assured  
the pain to ease  
I have never walked alone with myself in a forest  
unknown to me  
Maybe this isolated confinement I feel will open my  
eyes to see  
That the world never stops but goes on around me  
with or without my presence  
And that troubles, trouble about me only, is ignorance  
in its purest essence  
The things that I do not know or haven't experienced  
as of yet  
Face me in my future's prime, including those I wish I  
had not met  
My heart is as chilled as frozen ice resulting from  
Autumn's past  
Confusion from being lost, searching to be found  
wondering if I'm the last  
"The last what?" you might say...well the last soul  
searching patiently waiting for the day  
When my haunted spirit can be lifted into the cloud of  
exhausted repentance  
My Lord come and redeem thee into natural  
originating innocence  
In Autumn's past I feel unborn like a child that has  
yet to live  
I shed my life of the oldness it knows and my dying  
soul I give  
To anyone who is soul-searching for belonging in  
Autumn's past  
To help another routing my route will free thine own  
self at last.



## Alive

(Sarah Spafford)

Under the cool and stormy spring skies,  
 Something inside of me quietly dies.  
 For the death of this thing, I will not mourn,  
 Because in its place a freedom is born.  
 Now lightning and rain and thunder surround  
 Me, as my heart begins to pound.  
 The soul that was once so weighed down by fears  
 Finds an outlet for joy in slow-falling tears.  
 And I smile and thank my God for the rain,  
 And for love that always conquers the pain.

## Ancient History

(Ben Tag)

When I consider the clack and buzz of an old streetcar  
 Or the sky fading to grey,  
 I realize that  
 It must have always been so.  
 Yet the reflection  
 Of the looking glass  
 Is always brighter,  
 More serene; it is  
 No wonder that  
 Narcissus met his fate.  
 The great lion of Egypt  
 Has reared its head  
 With a new riddle  
 Though marred for spite  
 By the king. The riddle  
 Forever transient,  
 The dunes, the dunes,  
 The sands that slipped the glass an hour ago  
 Are baked in tomorrow's desert.  
 Truth is our requiem  
 For the impermanent, eternal moment.  
 The requiem is tainted  
 By the baptism of a new; to be  
 Survived in diffidence, or agony, and  
 Recollected with tranquility and light.

## Ruins in Blue Skies

(Katie Anderson)

Moonrise high,  
 fullest proportion,  
 Iris in sky blue bloom  
 It is through those windows I seek—

Celestial backdrop fills me with wonder,  
 It's there,  
 deep within the silvery—blue .  
 Blue from mourning  
 Silvered by the sliver of sorrow.

Right now,  
 what you admit to know is irrelevant.  
 Not that I try to slither beneath your learned flesh;  
 Might I have the desire, though not the will.

How often do you gaze inward,  
 through those eyes of shame?  
 When last have you touched your own fragments—  
 tattered and torn,  
 They wear you so well.

## Journey

(Adena Jones)

And I wonder where you've been,  
 Because all my life I've wandered  
 Down crooked paths, over broken stones,  
 Through the darkness and the rain.

I've passed over mountains and rivers  
 Trying to find the light I see in your smile now.  
 The waters raged in my drowning heart, fearing I  
 would not find you.  
 The night stars led me when I was lost in a wilderness  
 of thought.

Tangled in the jungle of despair I writhe free,  
 Only to find the ocean farther off with every step I take.  
 I'm losing hope fast and the sands of time are burning my skin.  
 My mind is going numb and I'm losing strength fast.

At last I broke through the panes of loneliness,  
 And the silk strands of my heart have captured you.  
 I found you to comfort me.  
 Found half to now be whole again

And I wonder where you've been,  
 Because all my life I wandered  
 Down crooked paths, over broken stones  
 Through the darkness and the rain,

Until I found you.

## The Death of Dirty Sanchez

(Anniina Vuori)

One morning, Dan woke up with a ticklish  
 feeling on his upper lip. Half asleep, he was trying to  
 drive away the fly that had come to disturb his sleep,  
 when he realized that this was no fly. It was something  
 much bigger, almost earth shaking. He had gotten his  
 first facial hair.

"DDDDaaaaaadd!!!!!!!" He ran out of his room.

His dad had been the father of four children way  
 too long to be shaken by such screaming, so he just  
 turned the page of his newspaper.

"Look, Dad, look!" His 14-year-old son exclaimed,  
 proud of his accomplishment like a 5-year-old who  
 had just learned how to pour sand down his baby  
 sister's back and wanted to show his new talent to his  
 ever-admiring parents.

"Come on Dad, you gotta look!"

After hearing his son jump up and down for thirty  
 seconds or so, the father decided there was nothing  
 else to be done than to actually look, and so he finally  
 lifted his face from the paper.

"Look at what?" He said after glancing at his son  
 for a while.

"I can't see anything different," he said, and was  
 just about to turn his face back to the newspaper when  
 the son grabbed his wrist.

"Right there, Dad, right there!" He squeaked, now  
 shaking out of joy and excitement. He had already  
 named his one brave hair Donald and could not wait  
 for the time when there would be a whole army of  
 Donalds covering his face. Oh how jealous all his  
 friends would be!

"Oh you mean this little thing," his dad said. What  
 happened after that was so horrendous that the boy  
 remembers it still to this day in slow motion.

His father squinted to see the hair better, took it  
 between his two fingers, and when it was already too  
 late for the boy to fight back, he pulled it out. All that  
 could be heard for a long while was a desperate  
 "noooooo" coming from somewhere deep in the boy's  
 throat. For weeks, he had nightmares about this  
 horrible event.

Years went by, and the boy had almost forgotten  
 his tragically brief but the more important friendship  
 with Donald the hair, when he decided to grow a  
 beard. He had always liked experimenting, and now  
 that the hair had really started growing, he saw his  
 moment had come.

"Damn Dude, you look like a Mexican porn star,"  
 his friend said with a chuckle when he first saw The  
 Beard. It included a moustache that covered his upper  
 lip and a little inverted triangle under the lower one.

"Hey, it was hard work growing and grooming  
 this thing, so give me some respect Man."

"Hard work growing it? I don't think so, I've seen  
 your love carpet," the friend said, referring to Dan's  
 chest hair.

Another friend, Ryan, walked by.

"You've got something on your upper lip, Man,"  
 he said. "You really have to do something about that  
 nose hair problem of yours, it's getting out of hand."  
 "It's called a moustache, ok? A moustache!" Dan  
 yelled, half angry, half laughing.

"Yeah, the moustache of a Mexican porn star,"  
 Ryan said.

"You're such a Dirty Sanchez now," John added.

And that is what he was called for the next four  
 months, Dirty Sanchez. He and his beard became the  
 eternal source of amusement for his friends, who  
 could probably never hear too many dirty jokes. Dan  
 didn't mind, because what 18-year-old guy doesn't  
 want to have the reputation of a Mexican porn star?  
 Dirty Sanchez was already something of a legend,  
 when one day Dan finally realized something. His  
 world was full of good-humored hellos, but they all  
 came from other guys. The girls had disappeared  
 mysteriously, and when he started thinking back, he  
 remembered that the last time he had managed to  
 hold a conversation with a girl was that Saturday  
 night at Ryan's party. The girl had said how hot she  
 thought men with moustaches looked, and the next  
 day he had decided to start growing one.

It couldn't be clearer: Dirty Sanchez had to go.

"We had our moments," Dan thought to himself  
 when he grabbed the razor with his shaking hand.

But before he took it all off, he shaved the sides so  
 that he looked like Charlie Chaplin, and then he  
 walked around his room like a real vagabond. Then  
 he realized how retarded that was, shaved the rest of  
 the beard away, and went to see if any of the cute girls  
 who lived in the dorms were hanging out in the  
 lounge.

And that was the last day Dirty Sanchez was ever seen.

## Pick-up

(Lara Schrage)

a fly on the wall.  
 I'd rather be a fly on the wall  
 or the mascara goop in her eye.  
 'Cause I've seen this scene before  
 and it only makes me nauseous when you wink at me.  
 I don't look like I'm having a good time?  
 You wouldn't either if you were looking at what I'm  
 looking at.  
 Look, I'm 22.  
 I don't care if you have an MBA  
 are a CPA  
 working on your MS  
 so you can collect more BS  
 watching your MTV and DVDs, listening to your  
 MP3s.  
 Listen up.  
 Blow that smoke elsewhere  
 'cause I'd rather be skinned alive  
 and rolled around in salt  
 than let another greasy,  
 disposable,  
 Gap-wearing,  
 Martini-drinking  
 word grate on these ears.

## Papilio Indra

(Lara Schrage)

I.

She was his  
 4 a.m. girlfriend  
 sneaking and squeaking  
 like a rat  
 through her own trap door  
 into his bed.  
 She sold sex toys  
 like some sell Mary Kay.  
 Her custom-made vampire teeth  
 were shipped first class  
 from New Orleans.  
 A tattoo of an Indra Swallowtail  
 branded her skin on the curve  
 of her back where cute becomes  
 obscene.  
 Her pleather pants  
 were black, to match  
 her stilettos and lipstick.  
 She always spoke cordially  
 to his daytime girlfriend  
 and threw temper tantrums  
 when he ignored her in public.  
 Dancing with other women, she grinded  
 until she had the attention  
 of the whole room.  
 The role of the midnight mistress  
 was written for only her:  
 tiptoeing, then running  
 when he called at 4 a.m.

Papilio Indra

II.

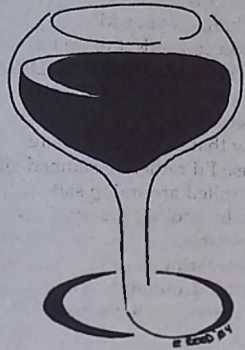
I was his  
 daytime girlfriend  
 committed  
 like a wife  
 for two years.  
 The town saw me  
 on his arm.  
 I made constant lists  
 to stay organized  
 and loved marking off accomplishments.  
 While he beat his drums  
 in smoky venues, I sat  
 upfront, eyeing down  
 skinny girls in pleather.  
 I made collages  
 and surprised him  
 with books by John Fowles.  
 My favorite was *The Collector*  
 which I would recite  
 and act out  
 when I felt like he was trying  
 to slink away from me.  
 Once, as we were lying  
 in bed he mentioned  
 an old girlfriend.  
 I pulled his pillow  
 from under him  
 covered his face  
 and forced him  
 to call me Clegg.



## Me You TV

(Jacob McDonnell)

Supposing I like television  
 We sat there, for entertainment  
 Led by the blue flicker  
 Her eyes reflected the scenes  
 Yet I did not watch the television  
 I watched her face  
 Measuring her crevices and curves  
 Riding her high cheekbone



## first date

(Adena Jones)

we did actually go on one date  
 before his conscience got the better  
 of him and decided  
 not to put his life on the  
 line by dating one girl  
 while living with another

but that night, that beautiful summer  
 evening we spent in dreamland—  
 he in his pinstripe suit  
 from working hotel security  
 and my hair  
 pulled back just right—  
 was the perfect recipe  
 for a beautiful night.

the walk down the cobble-stoned  
 maryland avenue was magical and serene—  
 the spumanti was cold, yet warm  
 as it went down—  
 while the dew on the goblet  
 ran

down  
 the stem  
 and  
 dripped  
 on  
 the marble table top

he slid over to my side of the table  
 and placed his suit jacket around my  
 bare  
 but tanned shoulders

i leaned my cheek on his shoulder  
 and breathed his cologne—  
 my berry sorbet eye shadow leaving glitter behind  
 that would get him into trouble later on.

## Beauty and the Boot

(Dorothy L. Onstott)

The girl sways like a poisoned spider  
 That shuffles across tile.  
 With flowers in front and silk behind,  
 She marches down the aisle.

She starts to get light-headed  
 And the room begins to spin,  
 As she realizes there's no way out  
 Of the trouble that she's in.

Who's waiting for her at the altar?  
 Her young and handsome groom.  
 What's waiting for her at home?  
 A dustpan and a broom.

And like the drunken spider,  
 That crawls and claws and spins around,  
 She knows her life is over  
 As the boot heel quickly comes down.

## I Chose This Pretentious Title for You

(Matthew Trost)

I am become death, shatterer of worlds.  
 - Bhagavad-Gita

There is a pattern to our lunches together.  
 The university cafeteria will be half empty. The P.A.  
 system will be playing some nauseating, anguishless  
 love song, one by some blond singer-songwriter with an  
 acoustic guitar whom I distinguish only as *not* being  
 Fiona. I will laugh at the way you speed through the  
 buffet line, neglecting me, and then you will go sit at  
 the centermost table while I tell myself that I'm a big  
 girl and can pay for this salad myself.

Sitting at the table, I make conversation with  
 you the only way I know how: first I try to explain  
 something about my faith—the personal versus the  
 transpersonal, for example. You fail to listen, being  
 stubborn as you are, having been tainted by a lifetime  
 of Christianity. But then you lecture me in that  
 self-assured way of yours about obvious concepts like  
 the Assumption of Sin and the Holy Trinity, which I  
 have already read long ago, not in your plagiarist  
 Bible, but in their original format, the early *Vedas* and  
 the *Mahabharata*.

"Three in one," you say, as if I'm ignorant.  
 "Each is all-containing and overlapping, so they don't  
 need to interact. That would be like me talking to  
 myself."

"And yet," I would reply, "the thought seems  
 familiar."

"What?"  
 "I envision an old man, alone in his bedroom,  
 mumbling into his mirror, forgetting to step back and  
 remind himself he's not God."

"I guess the age of a religion has nothing to  
 do with maturity," you sneer. "The longer something  
 lasts only means the more time it has to confuse itself.  
 Can a theology develop Alzheimer's?"

You think you are clever, but I see through  
 your grin. Every part of you, the way you slide your  
 fingers through your hair or the prongs of your fork  
 through garnish, is mere subterfuge. One day, rest  
 assured, I will uncover you. "You understand exactly  
 what I've been saying all along," I say. "You feel God  
 growing inside you like a war, but you deny its  
 presence out of pure jealousy."

"Jealousy?"  
 "The Atman is easy to find, and you resent  
 the idea that it could exist inside anyone else but  
 you."

"She's a charmer, ladies and gentlemen."  
 "A snake charmer, I suppose."  
 "And she has claws."

Oh, do I? Then I want to dig my claws into  
 you, draw your blood, and drink your fluids, and I  
 want you to watch me laugh as I swallow. No body  
 of yours will be spared from the maw of my mental  
 legions. I will watch the souls of your dead  
 transmigrate into new lives, a generation of  
 subordinates to my reign. I will laugh then, too,  
 because as a matter of fact, I hate you.

#

The students, perched in an array of plastic  
 desks, have leaned forward to gawk at your pale,  
 chapped mouth. I've never seen a T.A. gather so  
 much attention. Your presentation material is  
 interesting, but not as interesting as the way you  
 purse your lips after every sentence, as if waiting for  
 the professor to kiss you to indicate you may go on.  
 He is an old man, the professor. This is why he  
 clearly appreciates you and your place in his class.  
 He can read your pompous chalkboard scribbles  
 better than any of us.

I yawn theatrically, hoping you see. You are  
 explaining something about thermonuclear dynamics,  
 which does not belong in this lesson about a  
 land-based invasion of Japan in 1945—though the  
 professor remains enthralled. You are not as smart as  
 you or anyone else thinks. Are your twenty minutes  
 over yet? The wall clock reads 3:14p.m. I try to  
 concentrate on the thunder outdoors rather than you.  
 The only point to staying indoors is that the weather  
 is terrible. If the wind blows and shatters the  
 windows, I figure I am at the best spot in the  
 classroom to avoid the shards of glass, but you are in  
 the direct path of disaster.

An explosion of thunder shakes the building,  
 and the lights flicker, but your presentation continues  
 unabated. My fingernails tap the underside of my  
 desk. I could fiddle with my backpack zipper tab, try  
 to unstick it (it caught a loose thread sometime this  
 morning), but I fail to see the point. You are going on  
 and on about the Los Alamos Project. The physicists,  
 you say, all took into account the horrid consequences  
 of their new weapon. They were precise with the  
 causal nature of their work. Your words are much too  
 poetic for that rectangular engineer's face of yours, I  
 think, as you add, "Scientists carry with them an  
 invisible tool: a measure of prospective death."

I burst into giggles. Everyone in class,  
 including the old professor in his foggy, ovular  
 glasses, turns and stares at me. I bury my head in my  
 arms not out of embarrassment, but to hide myself  
 from your laughable pretentiousness.

"Only at this school could I find someone who  
 thinks ultimate responsibility is a joke," you mutter. I  
 am the only one who hears. Oh, little David, you  
 must understand that I have the gift of seeing through  
 you, because unlike you I grow *with* God, not under  
 Him.

We meet in the quadrangle after class, under  
 the remaining half of "our tree," which has apparently  
 been struck by lightning. It is, or used to be, a ginkgo.  
 Its bright green leaves would have turned a mild  
 yellow next fall. The species may grow as large as  
 oaks; botanists call them Maidenhair Ginkgoes. The  
 only tree I can think of that resembles a maiden's hair  
 is a willow. Imagine a head full of those ginkgo  
 leaves, like miniature fans. I always wonder if you  
 like my hair. I think it's beautiful and lustrous. It  
 might mean more if you said so, but you're always  
 complimenting my skin.

"It's so pretty. Like cinnamon," you say. You  
 run the edge of your pointer finger down my  
 shoulder, then my arm. "You look gorgeous when  
 you wear bright colors."

I fidget with my pink top. I thank you for  
 your compliment even though it is hurtfully obvious  
 that you merely want to get laid. "My mother used to  
 make me wear bright clothes for the same reason."

"Can I give you a ride to your dorm?"

I decline, but offer to walk you to your car.  
 You shrug and adjust your belt.

Across the parking lot I see a familiar girl with  
 brilliant red hair. "There's Jeannette," I say. "She's  
 really beautiful, don't you think?" You turn and  
 squint. "It's so strange that she's always single.  
 You'd think guys would be killing each other over  
 her."

You reply, "I couldn't date her because Ron  
 likes her." At this I shake in disgust, but you don't  
 see. Can I please, just once, be reason enough for  
 you? "But yes, she is beautiful," you say. "Very nice  
 hair."

Boys like you offend as often as you breathe.  
 Women, at least, use restraint until the most precious  
 moment when the pain caused will be most effective.  
 Many young men in my life, mostly boyfriends, have  
 called me a 'cunt' because of this, because I know how  
 to inflict emotion. To this you would reply, "Knowing  
 that something is intended to hurt lessens the pain by  
 half." So maybe men like you win in the long run.  
 You say hurtful things accidentally, which must mean  
 you really mean it. But us, women, our barbs are  
 retractable.



Should I tell you I had coffee with someone? His name was Sal, and he was a Graphic Design major. Like other men, he too wanted to get laid, but he made it seem more romantic. (I remember one time you said that romance is a woman's word for when a man *indirectly* asks for a fuck.) He might kiss without tongue every once in a while—just being penetrated does not appeal to me. But I digress. The point is, I might tell you about it, but more importantly I might not. I definitely won't tell you that I'm considering his proposition.

But you sadden me, David. You love my skin, which means you love that I am exotic, when in reality I am no stranger than a fast food restaurant. My parents were born in Calcutta, not me. Or do American boys love girls whose parents originate in other hemispheres? It is sad. Bio-psychologists might say this type of attraction is natural; evolutionarily we search for mates whose physical traits differ from our own, average us out. We seek the best choice of cells with which to sculpt our offspring. Perhaps this is why, whenever I beat the concept into your fact-filter, you don't listen: Indian cunt is not principally different from European cunt is not principally different from African cunt is not principally different from....

Later in the week you take me to your parents' suburban home, where I offer to cook a meal. This is the only truly "foreign" activity I can offer, but I learned it half-heartedly from my parents, who taught with even less zeal. The walls of your house will smell of turmeric in a few minutes. The chicken slices, as they sizzle, have turned a dazzling orange color. I add touches of other spices while you ruminate aloud.

"It's arguable," you are saying, "that even before the United States destroyed the Axis Powers, Russia had emerged as a third bogey. Regardless, each conglomerate, geographically connected or not, was a superpower. Three entities, all vying for control of one Earth."

This is why I dislike visiting your house: you leave your papers lying around, open to your own ostentatious comments.

I add rice and stir. Rice: the staple food, the body of any meal. "It's convenient that you leave Third World countries out of every argument," I say.

"What's your point?"

"Every thesis is just a simplification of terms and ideas. The way you collect and merge facts is like a child clumping bits of clay. When you mix all the subtle, intricate hues of yellow and blue, of course you'll get one big, dull green mess."

Alluding to what you know of Einstein, you reply cleverly, even I must admit: "God does not play with clay."

#

Flipping through my old diaries when there's nothing to do, I decide that I need some plain friends, a few intelligent women, or maybe a nice gay clothing store attendant. Your company depresses me. According to the blue notebook containing months March through September of 1999, we've been friends for three years, since freshman year at the university. According to the more recent red notebook, we've been fucking for seven months.

"I need to be single right now," you have explained. You cut and measure each sentence and word, like a doctor offering a fatal prognosis. "I need to be my own person, not some unit of a larger entity. I don't know what will happen if it starts to feel like 'me and you' instead of just 'me.'"

Some call this scenario "friends with benefits." I now call it a joke. You get upset when we do not have sex for a few days; I, however, get upset when you "forget" to call for a week. But of course, I should understand your busyness: finals are coming up in two months, one month, two weeks, a few days ... and after finals you just need some time to recuperate. The sex has always been better in the summer.

What depresses me is that, spanning all human history and literature, that one thing has been responsible for more drama, pain, disillusionment, and death than anything else: the rubbing of one's genitals against another's. Don't laugh, because that's all it really is—ridiculousness. Think *Othello*. Two people, mostly of opposite gender but often not, engaging in that oft-sought and oft-spoken act, the ubiquitous desire but also the eternal taboo, the conjugal experience of an engorged proboscis placed in another person's orifice. And that completely standard, completely meaningless act seems to be all you want from me.

Maybe what I'd like is not to think about you. I have not meditated for weeks. I tell myself that only my body yearns, only my mind hurts, but that I, centered in an eternity of spirits, do not. The palpable me feels your coldness, but I do not. But in facing you and these overlapping ghosts you've bred in me, it is not my tear ducts that cry. I cry, David. I cry.

I want not to hold myself, but you. A million spoken passages exist in my mind; passages paltry compared to the art that is the sound of you breathing. But you just want a warm reservoir for your semen. You abhor washing off your palm, I'm sure. In this aspect I am better than your right hand, at least. I feel a thousand leagues of pain, but you think a condom is the only thing between us. I think if I kill myself over you I would like my epitaph to read exactly that: *BETTER THAN DAVID'S RIGHT HAND*. However, unlike those stupid saints of your faith, my body is not incorruptible. This fortune only holds true for the Atman-Brahman. I will rot and fall to pieces, but that thing inside me, that tiny flame of a greater star, will still burn.

Sometimes I have sex dreams. There I become the distant, fertile country you seek to pillage with your smart missiles and flying machines. You live at my expense. Oh, God. I cooked you curry chicken with rice, David! I cooked for you!

#

Maintenance workers are sawing down the remains of our ginkgo tree. They will likely replace it with a kinder, more aromatic Bradford pear. With any hope I'll have a shady spot to sit next year. But I consider the old ginkgo: a botanical mistake, this prehistoric tree. The species has existed longer than animal love. Confused, is it?

I decide to ditch class because I'll only spend the time thinking about you. Instead I sit in the quadrangle, in the lotus position, meditating. All the distractions here, the students' voices, the bells tolling at intervals, will prove a challenge. If I can reach the point of stillness here on the concrete, wondering whether people are staring, wondering if you might be there staring too, I can perhaps do anything, even disappear from the great wheel of existence.

The lake of my mind appears. This is where meditation becomes most difficult: I must quell the wind so the waves can subside.

But I want to be this wind, David. As the wind I can slip through your web unperturbed. The wind can go anywhere. The wind has choice.

When you let me play with your penis you are inadvertently playing with my heart. I know, I know; I act as if I have no choice. Where is my free will these days, anyway? I thought the assurance of personal freedom was one of the rules of life, but rules change, I suppose. Rules can be bent, broken, destroyed, even fellated.

Your erection is waiting for me under the covers. (Did you know that the phallus is Shiva the Destroyer's symbol?) I do not fondle you fondly. Though your hygiene is excellent and you're always careful to wash yourself in these "special" places, I still feel dirty, taking you into my mouth. I thought I had escaped the lattice of your mind. Ah, but what purpose has the wind other than to blow?

When I swallow, I pretend I have many throats.

Could this possibly be a dream? Could I have fallen asleep during deep meditation? No, I've just grown confused. A dream, at this stage, is not possible. In dreams you only fuck me; it is in real life that I suck you off before we fuck for real.

#

Peace activists are often met with the question, "Could Gandhi have overcome Hitler?" To this I have no answer. Next time the world breeds a dictator, is threatened with a thousand years of servitude, we shall try it. But what do we do when love becomes despotic? Does *Satyagraha* exist for unrequited lovers? Is it Vishnu who preserves this endless chain of created and subsequently destroyed relationships? Vishnu, Vishnu, where are you?

David, we create our own cosmos, with its overlapping circles of love and sex, a gargantuan emotional Venn diagram in which my wish of wishes is that we could meet in the center. Through the politic of "you and me" I manage somehow to subsist. But what I seek now is the solace of escape. I slept only three hours last night; I have missed two meals and know I will miss at least two more. I have realized my contradictions, and they are manifested in the simple fact that I love you, I love, love, love you. Hence, I *must* call Sal.

#

Springing for ice cream was the best idea you've had in months. The sunset behind the shopping center was beautiful, and never before do I remember a breeze making me feel so happy. The suggested visit to your house was gratuitous and expected, but I followed, happy at least to have something on my stomach.

Everything after the dessert—the wordless drive home, turning the lights on in your living room, then turning the lamp off in your cold bedroom—has become a blur. David, my beautiful, beautiful tyrant, I am on top of you. You need to learn to control your hips. The way you move in the missionary position, it hurts me. Some girls like it rough; I prefer unbearably gentle. And while we're at it, control your mouth, too. Do not talk while we do this. Do not say something that will shatter my delusions about you for the millionth time.

Following the explanations in manuals I have read, I dig my fingernails into the flesh just underneath your left nipple. There I leave a claw mark, a special one, red lines the shape of a waning crescent moon. The scratch will last for several days. According to the manuals, this mark is one of possession. Although I have not convinced myself that I own you in any way, I leave it as notice to all your potential lovers in the future: I have trod this ground. This was mine, for a few precious minutes. I hope, in a couple of months, you realize that I'm the only woman who has, who will ever, put up with you.

I hate myself for becoming that distinction.

Your parents won't be home for another two hours, so I will wait longer, torture you. Your arms are spread out and your hands clutch the edges of the mattress. You merely want to get off, I know, but this has become a war of our hearts, mine throbbing but yours absent, and I will not surrender though there exists no regiment on your side to kill. In the past, when we've done this, you have asked me, "Could you just tell me when it's okay to get off?" So you're willing to wait until I come. How *polite* of you, David.

My mind wanders. I think now of Sal, poor, alone, curly-headed Sal, with whom I slept last night. I wore my bright orange sari when I went to see him. David, I made absolutely sure to get you into bed the next day. This whole situation is contrived. You will be just another name on my list. The way I figure, I've diminished your status by half.

I begin to rock back and forth like I'm dancing on you. This is a cosmic dance, David. *Lila*. Without detailing the events, I will say that Sal, though no exquisite lover, had a sort of cleansing effect on me. On those upcoming nights when I'm alone and I begin to hate myself and miss you, it will be nice to remember that you are not the only man I've touched in the past three years.

But your face is so goddamned beautiful, David, and now I am starting to cry. I look at you until your eyes open and meet mine, and I say, "David, I cheated on you."

You are taken aback, though I can't understand how you could possibly be offended, or even how the word "cheated" seems appropriate here. "What?"

"I slept with someone last night."

You are still hard inside me, but I can feel you and your body weakening. "How could you do this to me?" You shake your head, settle your hips, and pull out.

"I'm sorry."

"Get off of me."

I rise up, swing my leg over you and roll to the edge of the bed, my face buried in your mattress. I feel so alone next to you now, so quiet and isolated, that I could be meditating. And suddenly I remember something you told me when we first met, outside the class registration office: As he watched the first atomic bomb detonate, unfolding in that pivotal space and time complete destruction in fire, Robert Oppenheimer's mind raced with remembrance of a certain Hindu passage—if you hadn't learned the short bit of text from your modern histories, I might have told it to you now.

# # #



**Tennessee Dark**

(Paul Huggins)

Tennessee Dark  
ain't all that dark  
except in the small hours  
'tween the witching hour  
and the work whistle  
that dawn brings.

It ain't dark, not in the night air,  
where the stars shine brightly,  
and crickets drone nonstop  
and hungry sounds behind the trees  
go hand in hand with the tears  
of a scared child.

Tennessee Dark lies within,  
where his rotten peach pit of a heart  
beats in time with the cracks  
of a thick leather strap upon skin,  
and where he smiles for every tear  
and breathless scream.

It is honky-tonk greased  
and tightly combed hair into Elvis chic,  
held together by cigarette smoke and whiskey fumes  
and sometimes a bandanna soaked in motor oil  
just to show that he's lowdown and badass.

Tennessee Dark is Love and Hate  
tattooed on massive and scarred hands  
that hold no tenderness,  
just a threat of action and reaction.  
Trivial vengeance is his.

It is 8 inches  
of sleeping steel sharpness  
in his back pocket,  
there in case somebody fucks with him  
or somebody needs to be put in their place.  
There are times when he feels like  
running it across trembling skin,  
barely light enough to not draw blood.

Tennessee Dark is cheap whiskey  
and even cheaper beer  
drunk down hard, again and again,  
before going home to beat the wife  
and maybe the kids if they give some lip.  
Then he wakes up the next day and wonders  
why his family doesn't love him.

He is Tennessee Dark.

**Tainted Earth**

(Kalisha Dawn Lemmitt)

Drinking and driving  
high on love,  
the jaded girl screeches the wheels of the Pinto  
into the motel lot  
and watches as her sugar daddy  
walks in with another baby.

A cheap wine bottle falls  
as she leaves the car door wide open.  
the recently sharpened knife she holds  
against her tattered shirt as she  
stumbles six cars down  
towards his Jeep.

She falls hard on the concrete.

Knees bleeding outside her jeans  
she crawls towards the back of the truck.  
The moon reflecting her face upon the blade.

Her hair is jagged, her mouth twisted  
in a painful glee  
as the wind blows leaves  
as if to bandage fresh wounds.

The rain slowly begins to fall,  
making crimson puddles  
upon the earth.

**Warm**

(Beverly Green)

He's only  
Emotionally  
Compromising  
Me, and it's  
Out of control.  
It's only  
When I see him  
Around, my eyes  
Catch his, and  
I can't let him go.  
Why is it  
When he lifts  
Me up, I'm way  
Up? And, when he  
Brings me down,  
I'm so down?  
Maybe  
I'm too damn  
Hard on myself  
And I don't need  
Him around!  
Because he's only  
Emotionally  
Compromising  
Me, and it's  
Out of control.

**Promises**

(Robert Baumann)

After the salad  
And the last few sips of wine,  
We paid the bill and hurried home  
together.

That night  
Your lips were like the big Syrah:

Red, warm, and tasting of spices.

Each kiss was more intense and entrapping.

But, now when I drink another  
fine Côte Rôtie  
alone:

I taste your mouth of broken promises.

**threads**

(Olivia Ayes)

cold backs turned,  
tugging, fighting for warmth  
from rough satin with threads loose.

one, breathing heavily  
through a defiant nose,  
enjoying the warmth  
she won.

the other, staring at the cold wall,  
thinking of building more walls between them  
so she, too, could sleep soundly  
and not be cold

or numb  
or empty

from fighting and tugging  
for their love  
barely holding at the threads.

blink. snore. blink.  
blink. blink. snore.

as they tug to claim rightfulness  
and fight to defend their wrongs,  
the threads continue to loosen.

yet no one wins.  
they only become cold  
and lose the warmth they once had  
as the threads loosen.

**Afterglow**

(Gerianne Friedline)

Cheek to chest  
Drifting on a sea of memories  
Rising, falling  
Cresting on a breath

Cloaked in warmth  
Arm bracing  
Hands spent  
Possessive  
Reassuring

The pulse that is life  
Drums  
slower,  
softer,

Steady

Every cell  
Every hollow  
Known—  
Places worshipped  
forever calling for consecration

A sacrament  
Anointing  
Transcendence

Then Courage  
to return  
to solid ground—  
Honeyed breath teasing an outer shell of skin  
Trusted fingers catching, combing streams of hair  
Peeling all veils  
from a face that once feared exposure  
vulnerability.

Eyes opening  
To the Wonder of today  
And the Promise of tomorrow

**A Young Wife's Letter to Her Dead Husband**

(Christine Pearson)

Darling, this is bullshit.

The counselor that your mother suggested  
wants me to write letters to you.  
I wish you could have been there when she said it,  
we could have shared a good eye roll together.  
It's supposed to make me feel better.  
She said something about untended grief,  
which immediately brought to mind a  
garden overgrown with weeds.

Really, I'm just doing this to make your mother  
feel better. She worries so much about me.  
You know I prefer grief the old-fashioned way:  
a bottle of gin, and lying in unwashed sheets  
for weeks, contemplating the ceiling tiles and  
the cigarette butts mounting in the ashtrays.

But this is unhealthy, they say.

Your mother took care of me when I was  
sick, recently. I think in taking care  
of me, she's taken care of her own grief.  
Le Tigress has not done well in your absence.  
I've never seen a cat drool, but she did,  
for days and days she was just one gray  
furry mound spreading puddles all over  
your side of the bed.  
Poor girl, her spirit seems so broken.  
Her eyes have become sad and bewildered,  
and I think I've caught her eyeing me  
suspiciously a few times.  
But perhaps I'm just being paranoid.

I read in a magazine today that the best way  
to win an Oscar is to play a handicapped person  
in a movie. We had just discussed it two  
days before the wreck, and I wanted so badly  
to show it to you. It's in moments like these  
that I miss you the most—little weird bits that  
I can't show to anyone else, because only  
you would understand. And laugh.

I do miss your laugh.

The mornings, I think, are the worst for me.

When I wake up, I instinctively say  
your name out loud. Then I lay there,  
trying to make sense of being alone.  
The silence is terrifying; I can't hear your  
rushing footsteps, there's no fresh shower  
followed by cologne smell in the air. And  
there's no one to bring a cup of coffee to me.  
Somehow, I make it through the day, but  
every morning, it begins again, this being alone,  
or more importantly, this being without you.  
A piece that fit into me, never needed  
explanations, and understood what Bob Dylan  
meant when he talked about a twin.



## Author Biographies

**Katie Anderson** is a psychology major. She has been writing poetry and prose for 12 years. Her prose incorporates the first and third person and a glance into the development of the plotline, while her poetry is very symbolic and highly interpretive.

**Olivia Ayes**, age 20, an Honors College senior, is an English major and a Biology minor. She is working towards Writing and Teaching Certificates, while being a student mentor for Multicultural Relations, a middle school tutor/mentor for GEAR UP St. Louis, and a co-editor for *Bellerive*.

**Adie Bennett** is pursuing a B.A. in English and is an active member of the Residence Hall Association.

**Robert Baumann** earned a B.A. and M.A. in political science from UM-St. Louis. Interested in international conflict resolution, he now works in the Center for International Studies and is inspired by the poetry of Diane Wakoski, Lyn Lifshin, Colleen McElroy and Marge Piercy.

**Annette R. Crymes** has a B.S. degree in Accounting from St. Louis University and is currently indulging her senses in the wonderful world of writing.

**Geri Friedline** is an English major working on Writing and Honors College certificates. Geri wrote as a teenager but did not have time for writing as an adult. Now, she has to make time to write, and her adult relationships are her best inspiration.

**Beverly Green** is a senior, majoring in Political Science and working toward a Writing Certificate. She is the choreographer for the UM-St. Louis Flames dance squad. Many things, such as everyday people, situations and life itself inspire her.

**Ebony Hairston** is pursuing a B.A. in English.

**Kenneth E. Harrison, Jr.** is an M.F.A. candidate in Creative Writing and has a group of poems forthcoming in *Margie*. He currently works as a tutor in the Writing Lab.

**Matt Healey** is working toward a BA in English.

**Paul Huggins** is an English Major working on Pierre Laclède Honors College and Writing certificates. He has been a Resident Assistant at UM-St. Louis for the past three years.

**Adena Jones**, Kansas City native, is graduating in May with a B.A. in English and Writing and Honors College certificates. She worked on *Bellerive* and *Litmag* and works as copy-editor for *The Current*. She will attend graduate school this fall and hopes to become a professional editor.

**Susan LaBrier** has a B.A. in both Psychology and English. About seven years ago, she began journaling to empty her head of characters and dialogue. Recently she began devoting more energy to the craft of fiction writing and story telling.

**Kalisha Dawn Lemmitt** is an English major working towards a Marketing minor, and Creative and Technical writing certificates. Her inspirations are songs, friends, and emotions. Meditation is also an important part of her writing process.

**Jacob McDonnell** is an English major who began writing in high school and is inspired by metaphysical poets (John Donne) and urban poetry. "I hated television, but I loved the girl," he said about his poem, "Me You TV."

**W. William Melton**, general studies major with minors in communication and philosophy, has been writing for 14 years. He enjoys writing film scripts and envisioning stories that come to life on the screen. Ultimately, he would like to direct his own scripts.

**La'Vonda S. Merritt** has two B.A. degrees, English and Mass Communication. She will receive her M.A. in May in Communication. She has done internships with Q95.5 WFUN and Legitimate Entertainment. For her, writing is the ability to speak to the soul without uttering a word.

**Robert Miller** has a B.F.A. in Studio Art, Philosophy and Art History minors, and is currently in the graduate Philosophy program.

**Dorothy L. Onstott** graduated with a B.A. in English from UM-St. Louis. She has been published in *Bellerive*. Currently, she is pursuing an M.A. degree at another university.

**Sarah Parcel** is a UM-St. Louis student pursuing an M.A. in English with an emphasis in composition.

**Christine Pearson** is working towards an English degree and a Writing Certificate. She thinks writers write for the same reason astronomers study space and biologists study life. "It starts as curiosity, but you hope that at some point, you will have a larger impact."

**Lara Schrage** is a graduate M.F.A. student in Creative Writing, emphasizing poetry. She has been published in *Hyperbole Magazine*, *An Anthology of Young American Poets* and serves as assistant editor for *Natural Bridge*.

**Sarah Spafford** is an undecided major interested in English and Sociology. She has been writing since age eight and still loves it. Great writers and the people in her life, especially her boyfriend Tom, inspire her to continue writing.

**Ben Tag** is an English Major. "Inspiration is an odd word ... if I do not write, I will never get these ideas out of my head. They will return repetitively like a drum loop, incessantly pounding on my brain until I scream and hack apart a piece of paper with a pen. That's what writing is."

**Matt Trost** studies literature and creative writing at the Pierre Laclède Honors College. He enjoys fiction for both its political and cathartic potential. He often writes about the squabbles of suburbia, where he was raised, precisely because the place is so impossible to like.

**Anniina Vuori** is an exchange student studying English and completing a communication minor and a Writing Certificate. She has one more semester at UM-St. Louis before going back to her home university in Oulu, Finland, or another exchange in Glasgow, UK.

### MFA in Creative Writing At The University of Missouri-St. Louis

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#### Writing Faculty:

**Ruth Ellen Koehler** - Poetry, *When The Moon Knows You're Wandering, One Girl Babylon*

**Steven Schreiner** - Poetry, *Too Soon To Leave*

**Howard Schwartz** - Poetry and folktales, *Sleepwalking Beneath the Stars, Tree of Souls*

**Mary Troy** - Fiction, *Joe Baker Is Dead, The Alibi Cafe*

**Eamonn Wall** - Poetry and essay, *The Crosses, From the Sin-e Cafe to the Black Hills*

#### Visiting Writers:

**Rick Skwiot** - Fiction, *Sleeping With Pancho Villa, Winter on Long Lake*—Spring 2004

**Phyllis Moore** - Fiction, *A Compendium of Skirts*—Spring 2005

#### Past Visiting Writers:

Poets **Jeff Friedman**, **Sharon Bryan**, and **Donald Finkel**

Fiction writers **Lex Williford** and **Jaimee Colbert**

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St. Louis, MO 63121

**Application Deadline is February 15th of each year.**

## Open Mic Nights

*Litmag* presents The Coffeehouse, Thursday, April 15 at Gallery 210 from 7:00 - 9:30 p.m. Enjoy a night of literary readings and meet those who contributed prose and poetry to our literary supplement, *Destinations*.

also

*Litmag* and Residential Hall Association will host a Coffeehouse at the Pilot House Thursday, April 22 from 7:30 - 10:00 p.m. Students and staff will be sharing their literary works.

Everyone is invited!



English 4895, *Editing Litmag*, a course in editing and publishing a student literary journal, will be offered at UM-St. Louis in Spring 2005. Interested students are invited to meet with this year's staff on 4/15 or 4/22 at the Open Mics. Or contact Professor Sweet at (314) 516-5512 or [sweet@umsl.edu](mailto:sweet@umsl.edu).

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

*Litmag* is looking for original, unpublished poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, artistic black and white photography, and photos of artwork for its Spring 2005 publication. All UM-St. Louis students, faculty and staff are invited to submit in these formats following these guidelines:

- **Poetry:** five poems maximum; poems should not exceed three pages and must be printed separately.

- **Fiction/nonfiction:** any combination of fiction and/or nonfiction; no more than 3,000 words total may be submitted.

- **Artistic photos and art entries** should be submitted in 3x5 or 4x5 black and white glossy (250-500 dpi) as well as on a reformatted disk.

- All written entries must be typed in Microsoft Word using 12-point Times New Roman font, prose are to be double spaced. Please submit on both a reformatted disk and a hard copy.

- Place entries in green submission box marked "Litmag" outside the English Dept. office on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Lucas Hall. With each entry include a title page with author's name, work's title, word count, address, email (if applicable), and day/evening phone numbers.

- Author's name should not appear anywhere on the manuscript or art work.

- If your submission is chosen for publication in the Spring 2005 issue of *Litmag*, you will be notified in advance of publication.

- **Entries will not be returned.**

**Submissions will be accepted from September 27, 2004 through January 18, 2005.**