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### Kate 2012

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the **un**said

kate 2012



# acknowledgements

kate would like to thank the Otterbein University Humanities Advisory Council, with a special thanks to Dr. Amy Johnson, for its financial support and co-sponsorship of kate's publication costs this year. HAC's funding allowed kate to accept more submitted pieces, imagine a larger zine, and plan for new production and printing ideas.

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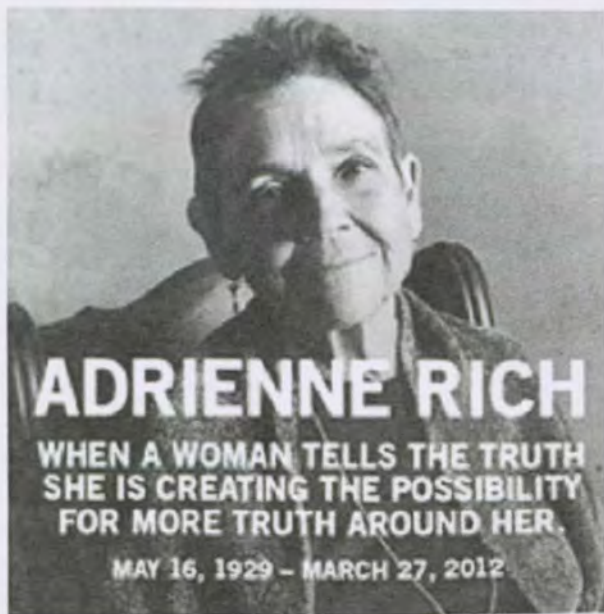
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Lastly, thank you students, faculty, and staff who submitted to kate this year. Congratulations to those authors and artists who had pieces accepted this year. kate admires, honors, and appreciates your bravery, gumption, and interest in submitting to the zine. This zine exists because of The Unsaid things you put to the page. For your bravery in saying The Unsaid, thank you.

# dedication



in memory of Adrienne Rich

and in gratitude for  
each person  
who chose to tell the truth  
on these pages

## mission

kate is a feminist zine (a more edgy, avant-garde, “neat” version of a printed publication) committed to interdisciplinary discourse and intersectional practice. In other words, we welcome work that explores and complicates not only our ideas about the study of women, gender, and sexuality, but also our ideas about the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality and other forms of social identity (i.e. race, ability, and class). We strive to build a pro-woman and woman-centered zine -- and Otterbein community -- that risks new ways of thinking and speaking about gender and sexuality, and, in this way, we see kate as both a transformative and transgressive project. The zine is open to submissions that take any form: critical or creative, mainstream or experimental, verbal or visual.

## vision

kate envisions itself as both a text and a space for change. We want to prioritize feminist values and principles, inspire real dialogue, and create a genuine community of socially aware and free thinking students at Otterbein.

We also want to:

- explore ideas about normative gender, sex, and sexuality
- work against oppression and hierarchies of power in any and all forms
- be a voice for racial and gender equality as well as queer positivity
- encourage the silent to speak and feel less afraid
- build a zine and community that we care about and trust

# letter from the editors

kate asked the Otterbein community to submit pieces that seemed experimental to them, the individual artist, or might be seen as experimental because the piece subverts more traditional expectations of what is appropriate to say. Create the thing they would otherwise not create. Say the thing they fear to say. Articulate what they have always closeted behind barricaded walls. Tackle a subject that many find out of bounds, out of place, and/or difficult to understand given the restrictions of language we are given. Seize your voice and shatter structures that have inhibited that voice and denied them the truths of the body, mind, and soul. Soon, the submissions began rolling in, and kate's editorial board was soon overwhelmed by the number of people who wanted to, were willing to, and adamantly supported the idea of a space and place for The Unsaid.

Inside these pages, you will find a collection of written and artistic pieces that represent The Unsaid. These pieces represent the unsequestered, uncloistered beauty of an unrestricted voice – a voice given a space, a place, and permission to speak.

The zine you hold in your hands is the product of your campus community. This zine is personal, real, and people-oriented. This zine is for you - Otterbein faculty, student, or staff.

kate is, and will forever be, a feminist zine committed to interdisciplinary discourse and intersectional practice. In other words, we welcome work that explores and complicates not only our ideas about the study of women, gender, and sexuality, but also our ideas about the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality and other forms of social identity (i.e. race, ability, and class). We strive to build a pro-woman and woman-centered zine -- and Otterbein community -- that risks new ways of thinking and speaking about gender and sexuality, and, in this way, we see kate as both a transformative and transgressive project. The zine is open to submissions that take any form: critical or creative, mainstream or experimental, verbal or visual.



This is kate, Spring 2012. Thank you to all of the individuals whose pieces populate this zine. We congratulate you on being published in kate this year, and we adamantly hope this zine will be something you cherish as a tangible piece of yourself, of Otterbein life.


We hope you enjoy this year's zine, and we hope you, the reader, too can begin to think about, articulate, and understand the power of The Unsaid.

Congratulations to those published. Happy reading.

Sincerely,

Hannah Biggs, editor

Jacqlyn Schott, assistant editor



**Your silence  
will not  
protect you.  
-Audre Lorde**

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# philosophy on experimentation

sarah mcelroy

You can only try to be a mother. A daughter. A sister.

You can only try to be a person—a human.

If “trying” is the epitome of experimentation,

then “experimentation” is the epitome of life itself.

Experimentation is always productive. For growth, for natural degeneration, for proof of birth humanistic and spiritual aspects of self. So how could “natural degeneration” be productive? Particularly for experimentation? Something must be broken down—deconstructed, for something beautiful/meaningful to be made. Experimentation is what makes us most human AND most spiritual. We experiment with being variations of human as well as variations of being non-human. We experiment with being human by living everyday on this soil, animalistically, in ritual. Birth, sex, sleep—all of our obsessively habitual activities. Likewise, we experiment with being non-human—fighting these overly normative tendencies to adhere to a form of “normal experimentation.”

Thoughts, in their own little diversified universe, are experimental—ideas of objects, nothingness, everythingness derive from this

innate human desire to experiment—to try life and ideas about life out. To attempt to wear a satin red dress of anger and see how it looks in the mirror and whether that reflection itself is representation of what it means to tangibly grasp emotion—to experiment with emotion.

Sensation and emotion, therefore, must be a vital organ to the physicality of experimentation. Tingles in our fingertips that allow a person to fluidly ink the dark vacuoles of our scattered brain—and also to halt, to resist, to flee from black holes that would want to devour our sense of individuality instead of release the grip of societal “common-sense.” Experimentation must be a way to differentiate personalities, not only between bodies, but within one individual body as well. To piece together a puzzle, and to purposefully break it apart—tear the cardboard pieces to verify how intricate and difficult it we are. How vast the difference is between saying “I’m a complex piece of dying flesh,” and actually show-

ing the complexities—which represent not only the complexities within oneself, but that these complexities exist within our world—or worlds. Visually, it is almost as if you are taking one silver brain-worm and dissecting it into a trillion different pieces only to find that in one piece of that worm exists a multitude of worlds that we are not used to—or even desire to comprehend. Or perhaps we do want to comprehend... but our own restrictions, our straight-jackets of normative behavior make this unattainable.

This probably sounds extremely abstract, but isn't this is how it is suppose to sound? Women writers, particularly experimental writers, are neglected for their "waywardness," but I feel that this feeling of "wayward" is exactly where women writers need to be—not to break oppression, because well that probably won't happen. But to live, breathe, and breakthrough in this state of rebellion. This state of rebellion is a "political act," why should or would women want to exist, literally speaking and otherwise, in a cookie-cutter world where her best friend is a pink Kitchenaid and a sensible shade of lipstick? I want to live in the world where my husband does the dishes while I top off a bottle of wine wearing old baggy clothes that I've still held onto since high school. Even subconsciously, experimentation and liberation go hand in hand. In a woman writing experimentally, something libratory always appears to seep out off the walls of a woman's mind no matter how many times she has plastered the cracks. Feelings

of entrapment from normative constriction in society—religious accusations of the fall of man—a consistent charge of vanity—

Someone who is attempting experimental writing should not prepare. The words should flow directly from the brain to the paper or computer without any inhibitions, restrictions, rules... but maybe sometimes there should be rules. Do not delete—do not correct typos—let your mind say exactly what it wants to say without the hindrance of making sure that the sentence is "grammatically correct." Don't worry about your meal being too spicy or too sweet... or maybe poisonous, because where the first initial intention lies is probably where the nucleus of the writing resides. Where the core of experimentation lies.

It is definitely a risk—not only to "try" experimental writing—but to try experimenting in any aspect of life. There is a risk of injury, whether that could be external or internal... or there is a risk for healing—and it could be a combination of the two of these merging together. There is possible injury because of the vulnerability, the exposure, the open wound that reveals an individual's blood curdling bowels—but once the wound is visualized, couldn't there be a possibility for less pain? Less fear? What is revealed becomes less prevalent and the outcome of healing and relief is beautiful. Letting go as though you have finally relaxed your body before sleep... and each dreamy thought brings you closer and closer to exquisite bliss—an absence of

regret... not even a comprehension of regret.

And not all experimentation in writing or in life could be derivative of injury or pain or oppression. I believe that this surge of energy or emotion to desire to experiment can come from any emotion—as long as that emotion is able to stand or live on its own... without the author—it exists in its own world and is able to transcend or weave in and out of the swarms of people and their multitude of worlds.

It is scary—no, terrifying to allow yourself the freedom to delve deep into the pits of your brain and see what monstrous activity may have been stirring, lingering. Some creeper that has been biding its time, only allowing its menacing whispers to be heard—and it is your job, through experimenting with emotions and with writing (or some experimental form or outlet) to lure this sinister beast out to the open so that you can have the chance to harpoon him to the soil and expose him for what he really is. Even if this beast is as formless as the fluffy and plucky Mr. Cumulonimbus rising high to show off his alabaster plumage.

Ye, these be the dangers of scaling the treacherous paths of experimental writing—but they must be taken. It is a freedom, a release, an explosion of fluidity and liberty that must be explored by our insatiable yearning to be free from all the constrictions and corsets of this literarily tyrannical world.

This way of writing heightens rather than threatens our creativity.

What it does threaten is our voracious aspiration to be fanatically organized, clean, sanitized, and sterilized. Instead of fluidly interpreting “the real” down to its ugly, grotesque, yet truthful parts—we surgically remove all blemishes and tumors as though our worlds revolve around a game of Operation. All stains are bleached... but this is where things get ironic. None of these blemishes, tumors, and scarlet stains are removable by our normative bottle of 409. They are permanent as death—it is only when we accept the permanence of our imperfections that we become liberated from the societally organized constriction.

However—this writing, although it may seem dark (from my description)—can also provide libratory pleasures... in the sense that it is similar to the intensifying feeling of an orgasm and there is also a flood of release. All our life we might be dominated by some built-up, intense feeling or pressure and experimental writing is the trigger to emancipate that magma and let the newly formed lava deluge the body of work or of the readers or of the author—or itself. This orgasmic experience should not be stifled by trivial apprehensions of failure or fearing the destruction of a language that has not proved to be deteriorating—language in voice, form, and technique has been relieved of its fetters of conventional concepts of “true/proper” literary limitations which signify (or rather do not dignify)

whether a writer is eloquent as they should be—by societal standards... when really the individualistic charm of experimental writing allows for evolution of not only thought, but evolution of humans in a world where ideas and opinions have been stagnate redundant.

Even in this philosophy, the words and sentences are free from corrections and ideas were prevented from the bane of backspace. It would be sacrilege and contradictory to do so.

How can we truly understand human nature and the core of humanity if we are

consistently correcting its flaws? Experimental writing, especially in our generation where we strive to promote and welcome diversity and prevent insipid and recycled ideas and litera-

ture—except, perhaps if that recycled literature brings forth ideas that say something innovative or vital about humanity or human nature. Still, there is resistance to experimental writing. We are still under the anomalous concept that we have everything to lose if we reveal what resides in the black holes of our complex brains... and that should be dissolved. I welcome the splendor of revealing to release and to come out changed—renewed—almost as if I am reborn after realizing that I have been ensnared by a womb of acute thought restriction.

# my top ten unspoken insights

amy kepple strawser

10. The three taboo dinner table topics of my childhood—sex, politics, and religion—are actually some of the most interesting things one can discuss.
9. With both pregnancies, I secretly hoped for a daughter; later, I breathed a sigh of relief that my sons wouldn't face the perils a girl and woman must.
8. In my profession as a college instructor, I always relate best to the clerical staff, who are mostly women.
7. Though my academic specialty is poetry, I prefer to read fiction with my students.
6. I long to translate literature full time.
5. Being heterosexual, married, white and middle class, I have the luxury to teach at the college level without benefits.
4. My body image has always been the reverse of an anorexic's: I find myself small.
3. Inwardly, I still feel like I'm twelve.
2. When my mom said "feel bad," she meant sad or angry. These words are now part of my emotional landscape.
1. Aging isn't so bad; I feel more and more comfortable with myself over time.



# the dance

brittany ivy dorow

When the moon turns to crest and the wolves leave their dens  
The women come out of their crates like soft feathered hens  
They strip off their pains, put their sorrows to rest  
their husbands don't suspect a thing.



The air hangs still and heavy and hot  
Rats scurry off to the graves  
Tantalizingly secret they lock up their voice  
and throw to the winds their burdensome names.

It's a strenuous thing to be looked upon like a statue  
All day long they're used and probed from within  
They reach down their throats to pull out their bones  
And run around the night in nothing but skin.

*Inspired by Paul Delvaux- Venus Asleeppage*

(me) production

christine famery

In June of 1943,

We moved in between this House's walls.

July: It was named a heterosexual, happy, home:

Adorned in the individualistic furniture (I picked off from the consumerist platter of muted gold);

Decorated with rationalized appliances (I'd look into);

Stocked with Campells soup cans (I opened), frozen appeasement (I lived for);

Dressed up in (my) continuous Sunday best, (I) Windexed windows, (I) dusted plastic plants,

(I) pulled back the technological blinds from the picture window

Watched

as the children of modernity stumbled over imported saplings

as the husband feasted on the horse shit mulch.

(I) worked because of it - (my) industrializing womb;

It Produced

three more moderns: 1944, 45, 46.

not one of them could see

the real beauty about

lineoleum.

In June of 1949,

I finally took a break to breathe the sweet breeze from the Kenmore oven,

Shuddering in black oil atrocity

I Rendered

Myself in full service of the floor.

# odi et amo

jessica campbell

Odi et Amo.

I hate and I love.

I write these words a hundred times a day. I write them across the warm sticky canvass of my brain. I write them across my lips, over my tongue and I write them across the walls of this disgusting New York Apartment. I feel myself slowly growing into them, like a plant that instinctively moves towards an open window to reach sunlight. This roman mantra is what drives my desire to scratch my way out of this city and flee forever.

A memory:

He would always encourage me to write. Every weekend he would take me to a different coffee shop where all these young women would read a thing they wrote and say look at me world,

I am female and alternative

And I don't have blond hair

And I'm not skinny, and I'm not pretty

And I don't wear makeup

And I can write shitty poetry too just like any other man

And I demand that you give me respect.

He would say why can't you stand up like them. Why can't you write.

I say I can. I say I just don't.

People ask me what it is like to live in the same old apartment in New York with your ex-boyfriend, after he fell out of love and dumped you and forgot you. Are you just really close friends, why haven't you left, does he bring new girls home.

I say he does bring girls home.

Why shouldn't he. I say no we are not friends. I say he lets me stay still because I have nowhere else to go.

Outside I say that I am invisible and he doesn't notice me. I occupy very little space. I am sure he doesn't mind even though we do not talk about it.

Inside I am thinking that I am immeasurably embarrassed every time he looks at me. I am like a tumor that he cannot get rid of. I am stupid. I am disgusting. I am ugly. I am pathetic. I am like a ghost that half-heartedly follows him around, one which doesn't frighten him but rather deeply annoys him, like a dripping faucet that won't turn off. I know he hates me, and every day I spend with him in his apartment makes me a little more intolerable. Every second of my life is made up of a high voltage desire to get out but I cannot. I know he so badly wants me gone. Every time he looks at me the festering wound that just won't heal gets a little more infected.

I am the festering wound.

He is the rotting body.

Every woman he brings back is like a salve he puts on to try and heal the injury. Relieves the pain for a while, but not the symptom.

A memory:

Every day he would walk around our apartment naked. He would do this ceremoniously.

He ate dinner naked,

He went to bed naked.

But especially he drew naked. He has never stopped drawing. As long as I have known him he has never put down his pencil. He would draw anything that came to his mind.

Sometimes he would draw volcanoes. He would

say this is the closest he can come to recreating the female form.

I say it's always been okay for a man to do this (walking around naked, that is) and if a woman tried to be her own naked self she would be ridiculed. A woman is expected to be modest and embarrassed by her body. I say that walking exposed like that is masturbation, in the sense that a man who does that is celebrated and self-assured and a woman who does is ashamed. I say he should be protesting against this, not promoting it. He says why can't you just walk around naked and masturbate and prove them wrong.

I say I can. I say I just don't.

Every time he brings someone home, he makes sure to never introduce me. Each girl remains a disembodied voice that I can hear through the paper-thin wall that divides our two bedrooms. They are always louder than I ever was with him. I want to know if they really mean it. I sometimes try and guess what they look like but mostly I just wonder about what movies they watch on the weekends,

And what sort of music makes them cry

And what kinds of food their grandmothers bake

And what they're afraid of

And what line of work their father is in

And what he would say if he could hear what I do now

And whether or not they write and masturbate.

Sometimes I move to the couch, because there the noise is a little more muffled.

But usually, I stay.  
When he's done he always walks out past the living room to the kitchen and gets a glass of water, as he always used to. He is naked as he always is. Having to pretend I am asleep when this happens is much more unbearable than listening to them fuck.

So I stay in my room.

A memory:

Before he left me, when my bedroom was only a study and we both had his,

When we were in love

And he would kiss me on the forehead

And I would clean the tub out for him, not because I liked to, but because I knew it bothered him if someone didn't

And he would make me cheesy mix tapes that he knew I wouldn't listen to right away

And we knew each other

More than we've ever known anyone else

we would lay in bed and talk and have sex for hours. After we were finished and he returned with his glass of water as he always did I would sit up in the bed and let the streetlight from our dingy window pour down on me, only to listen to the cars and the people outside and think. He would look at me like I was something to lose (when this was a bad thing to him instead of a good one).

He would tell me

If I could draw, I would draw you.

Me sitting naked and washed out from the over-used street lamps with my greasy hair and thick thighs and smudged make-up and embarrassing mole and broken family and dead grandparents and suicidal mom and angry dad and thinking about how this city isn't even real during the day and how he actually never stops drawing took this as the best compliment I have ever received. He sits up and touches my cheek and says would you ever leave me.

I say I can. I say I just won't.

A memory:

When we hadn't kissed in weeks,

And he didn't look at me after sex anymore

And he didn't wait up for me after a late night at work

And the milk was always gone

Because he didn't save the last of it for me anymore

I knew he had broken his promise.

This went on for weeks because neither of us knew how to admit he didn't love me anymore and neither of us knew how to admit I was still just as in love with him as I always had been. I knew he couldn't stand to think about what he had done and what he couldn't prevent from happening and I couldn't stand to think about it either. But my presence was a constant reminder.

Finally, he says you should go.

I say I don't know how. I have nowhere else to go. You know this. We moved here knowing this.

I have nowhere else to go. I have nowhere else to go. I have nowhere else to go.

He says go meet someone else and just leave.

No, I said. I hate men.

No, he said. You hate me.

Then one day, he simply grew tired of not saying anything. And he yelled

And yelled

And yelled

And yelled

And told me to get out and go far away and never come back,

And threw his drawings around the room and slapped at the walls, until he was too tired to do this anymore and simply looked at me with red wet eyes full of raw disgust.

He says I hate this. He says I hate thinking about you. He says I beg to forget that you even exist. He says get out. He repeats it until I am forced to leave the building and wander around the city,

And I hadn't grabbed a sweater

And my shoes were too thin

And I was freezing

And had nowhere else to go but out.

A memory:

I say that I don't know how we can afford to live in New York.

He says I don't know how we can afford not to.

I say but what happens when you stop loving me. Where would I go. I have no money and no friends and no family. This is too much.

He laughs and swings me around and says not to worry because that will just simply never happen. He promised me this would not happen. He kisses me on the forehead. We truly believe that this city is ours.

I wander the streets for hours, afraid to go back inside. Everywhere I go there is another massive building and my feet squeeze around them with effort. It feels like a maze. I have no air to breathe, I have no room to live.

We were foolish to move here.

This city has swallowed me whole.

# if my brain wrote a diary

leslie willis

Day? 1.

Female. That is obvious. Age? 20. Is that all you want to know? No.

Race is white. Satisfied now? No. Her hair is a soft blonde. More.

Eyes. Green. Liar? I think not.

Bright skies and sunbeams tall turn them blue. But that's not really what you want to know. No. Lurking inside is the real prize. Yes. A prize in your head is greater when dead.

Not pleasant? Well no. Truth is never so.

Memories. Yes. They are quite a catch. Seen only after the blue eyes wave white.

Important before the flag is brought up? No. Of course not. Why take the time?

Work, Work, Work. Laugh, Drink, Kiss, Sleep. Time is taken. Time gone.

Memories forget. Left alone for a while. Abandoned children. Their memories forgot them. Reasons? To Protect. The lesser evil is not truth.

Truth waves not a white flag nor red. No.

Truth advances, lunges and stabs. Reveals the red with no warning caution.

Red.



Day? 2.

A person. Made in china? Perhaps.

But what if? What? If we made it with love.

The sky would fall, yes? No. You may be wrong.

How expensive is love an ingredient to find? ...

No answer, no yes, no no, no reply?

You must be confused. For I thought the point, was the tip of the arrow on Cupids big bow.

But you have a better approach? No.

Yes.

What do you do when baking a cake? What? A Cake.

When you can't find the sprinkles to make it smile. What now?

Do you bake the cake still? Yes. Yes!

So when sharing a bed with him you call Mr.

What do you do when love is hiding?

Winning the game of seeking and finding.

...

No answer, no yes, no no, no reply?

I'll tell you my fickle less fortunate side.

You bake a cake! Even knowing the sprinkles won't shine.

No. Yes! Yes you do.

I know this because I'm speaking of you.

Day? 3.

Day. Today? To Day, my eyes stay shut.

Sleep. But not the resting of mind. Of body and of soul.

Be still my soul? Yes. But unfortunately no.

You dream. A dream? I dream a dream. Of what I cannot say.

Or rather I will keep quiet by my side. And spare your virgin ears.

You cannot know or understand the evil lurking here. In you? In us.

An evil made of flesh and blood. And eyes and ears. A heart.

A heart you say? No. Not one like you and I.

A heart of blood and vessels fast which keep the day away.

A heart inside of you and I. Our heart which does not beat.

But pounds and bursts when day drops down and night brings forth its thirst. Our thirst.

Yes.

Gory dreams are symptoms of things. Things not talked about. Disease.

Disease. Yes. That hides in there among the vessels fast. Heart?

Our heart.

That evil which we hate and love and love and hate no more. No more?

No more I wish but only dream of sleep and a longer day. Night.

Night brings forth so many skulls I'd like to keep down there. Our heart.

Hearts. Hearts of a lost and broken soul, which splits to a heart of two. Two? Two.

And only when the evil returns will your waiting finally cease.

But though you thought you'd cured the beast, its fangs will thirst for more. More?

More it will get when you come to terms with the fact that your heart is back. Back as one.

My heart? Our heart.

Back as one, but only when, the evil you removed, is back again and no more shunned.

But accepted...as a part of you. Me?

Us.

Evil rocks us all.

Day? 4.

Flying. Flying? High where no one can get me.

Get you? Yes. High where no one can see.

The stage of being happy but unsatisfied and carefree.

Trouble. Trouble? Yes. Trouble with myself. Myself? Yourself. Ourselves.

Seeing through the dirt and the scum on the glass.

A glimpse of rationality, flying high above the perfect pick fences.

Past the cardigans past the norm. Past all that lies above. Above? Yes.

Above the champagne. The Sparkles? Yes. I'd rather sit below.

Take comfort in the moss. The bugs with the beautiful fangs. Ugly you mean? No.

Shining, glistening painful acceptance.

Yes.

Painful though it is. Take heart in little things done to make you welcome.  
No talking, no seeing. Just beating heart to heart. My heart?  
Thump-ta-thump-ta- blind hearts. Blind?  
Blind but smarter still.  
Seeing is believing. But at last that isn't true. Truth.  
Truth of the unforgiving. The non-judgmental youth. Children.  
Friends without a care. No test, no applications. To make sure they're just like you.  
Me? You. Us.  
You, You, YouYou, You, You and You.  
What isn't worth a penny, isn't worth the wish.  
And you. I? We are the shiniest of them all. No faults, no flaws, no underwear.  
To expose you to the world. Expose? Of course.  
But rape does not need underwear. And much prefers the pretties. Pennies? New.  
And at last that pain is seen by the unforgiving youth. Children. No more.  
Why not save the torture, and make a better day. How?  
By seeing those forgotten flaws and faults. The underwear.  
Expose your own self to the world.  
Be raped by norms no more.

# here's the thing

hannah biggs

My life  
consists of  
a desperate attempt  
to be  
Real.  
  
To be?  
  
That is the hardest part.  
To exist is easy:  
to take up space  
and create noise.

But, physical existence  
and a voice sharing ideas:  
Those are not  
living...  
Real-ing.

I can't stop  
portraying,

pretending,  
succeeding at mimicking

*Me!*

I can't stop  
talking,  
thinking,  
acting,  
working.

That should be all that constitutes  
me,  
right?

I look, I appear

*Good.*

Lately, there has been a

S P L I T

What I am.

What I do.

These words are not  
mine.

My voice, tongue,  
cheek, vocal chords  
make me more dormant.

I don't recognize myself  
in the mirror.

I don't recognize this  
person,  
this attempt.

I know this is a  
common  
problem:  
unoriginal  
loss of self.

We have all  
suffered this.  
But I swear to you -  
you know when this time is  
different...

I cannot recall what I want,  
what I need.  
Who I am?  
I am a personality made up of  
others:

Others' opinions,  
ideas,  
perceptions,  
advice,  
dreams.

I am a person  
(A ploy at best)  
who has no  
self.  
No identity

Other than what  
I let  
others make  
for me.  
I can no longer produce own.

Ask me what I want in life?  
I have that speech  
practiced to perfection.  
School, PhD, job.  
Husband and home.

Ask me who I am?  
I can tell you that, too.  
College.  
Too forgiving.  
Midwestern.

Scared.  
Nice.  
A bit mad.  
Smart.  
Wretched.

Me feeling like

an imitation,  
a fluke,  
a half-life,  
a fake.

Honestly,  
words fail me.  
The mirror is split.  
The air between my face  
upon it -  
clouded.

What I see  
is a biological  
creation.  
What I see is a  
distortion.  
a passable mask.  
Unrecognizable,  
but it's all too familiar.  
It's haunting, really.  
Only the "I" I am is haunting  
myself.  
Ghost.

But, here's the thing:

There are moments,  
few and brief,  
When my ghost  
gains substance.

What I assume  
- what I believe I know -  
to be me.  
I happen  
when you step into my life.

Which is why these two stories  
cannot be told separately.  
I suffer to exist each and every day,  
to substantialize  
Reality ... and Dreams.

But those few hours when I don't  
chasm;  
they just happen to have you in  
them.  
Riddle me that.  
Because I am not so sure how I feel  
about this,  
either

No one ever told me,

allowed me to just  
STOP.  
Simply,  
STOP.

Friends and family advised.  
But never was there an interven-  
tion:  
a half tipsy, alcohol-buzzed lam-  
bast,  
a probing why  
against me...for me.

You were right,  
and you told me things I  
had to be told,  
but had never been told  
before.  
But you didn't stop there.  
You actually helped me,  
reached out to me:  
cared enough to correct what I  
couldn't.

Which is why this is a story of us,  
of you and me.

Two.  
Why no matter what we do with  
this:

You must understand  
that your existence,  
your stamp on my life,  
staccatoed interruption,  
has made me, a non-ghost me.

You've saved me,  
rescued me,  
reminded me,  
intrigued me,  
fascinated me.

But we can't forget:  
devastated me,  
upset me,  
ignored me  
hurt me.

Then redeemed me, again!  
Brought me back from oblivion.  
Made me recognize my own mis-  
takes,

anxieties.

Made me understand and cope with:

My faults,

intensities,

nonfunctioning functionalities.

You did something else with them:

You embraced, realized them...

Saw my flaws and faults

and realized I hated them, too.

But I was inept to change them.

I wanted to.

I hated myself.

You grabbed my hand,

pulled me back from the shadows

into the shadows of contentedness,

and helped -

sparked me to life again.

I can't place my reawakening happiness in another.

It's too risky,

But damn it all!

I can't put a name to this. Words escape

my usually readied, vocabulary-trained mouth.

You'll never know what you've done for me:

rescued me,

allowed and asked me to be me,

brought what I thought I'd lost

back to the mirror.

This is a story of me...essentially.

A me made up of and possible here and now partially by you.

How I skim the surfaces of life,

barely plunging or allowing myself

full access.

That's life without you in it.

How do I exist like this?

In a life that might not involve you?

I can't tap this *real* self

alone...

And whether the mirror

stays split,

cracked,

jarred,

ajar.

For a few brief moments

I have been reminded

how to *be*,

helped to *be*,

what I can only surmise

As *Me*.

And if the day comes

when I can tell you this,

although it most likely never will,

I hope you can know:

That stars crossed.

I was spurned to life.

Shocked,

again and again

into awakening.

I am terribly lost now.



And I will find my way out...  
somehow.

Mirror glued,  
but always fragile.

Or, this too: I won't get out.

Because sometimes

I wonder, too:

I don't think I really know  
any other identity than a mimic.

I don't know how to be me.

I worry I am all there is.

This, me, now -  
this is it.

No wonder I can't create.

Maybe there's nothing else there?!

And, yet...

Shattered pieces  
of my self,  
my heart,  
my ghost

adhere. Once in awhile.

But for now,  
The ghost remains  
upon the glass.

The tear

The tear

stains.

I wish  
it, I, you, just being  
here

didn't have to

S T O P.

Life hurdles on.

It won't wait for me to  
figure it out.

Train moving 100 miles per hour  
I'm on the track at 0

Train will win.

If I must exist as a ploy,  
a decoy,  
a ghost:

then so be it.

Because I can do that.

I've mastered that.

And in the solitude of my stranger  
self

I will learn to **fight**  
what I thought was myself

Because here's the thing:

Rescued or not:

At the end of the day,

all I have... is *me*.

And I better learn to be at home in  
that.

serene forgetting

brittany ivy dorow



# red & blue interlaced

jeff vasiloff

## Canto I: In the Belly of the Waste Land

In Memoriam: T. S. Eliot

I.

Is truth what is

Or what we wish

In the stone-vault daydreams

Of a morphine mist

No one dares blink 5

No one dares think

Belly up to bar folks

And have another drink

II.

Reach—I've got

To reach real 10

Far, real wide, real

Deep—it's not a

Choice—I waking

Up from general

Anesthesia. But you look 15

Like I'm

Delusional—irony

Irony

Plant, you say, making the

Rows perfectly straight, the 20

Fields perfectly flat—don't

You mean feed the baa-sheep

Until they're exceptionally

Fat? How can I flatten

The earth? Oh, you say it is 25

Flat, you have old maps to  
Prove it—old bones, old

Bones, but even dogs

Are afraid of

Cemeteries 30

No one dares scream

No one dares dream

Belly up to literal fundamentalism folks

And have a dip of ice cream

III.

Anger? Not for 35

Me, my golly no--not

About to go

Gothic, wear black and

Silver, and blow pale kisses

At the Grim Reaper—it's you 40

I'm worried about. You were

So soft and green when you

Were five—at twenty your  
Petals should've been oiled onto

Canvas and hung in the 45  
Lourve

But now you not

Only live in one of the

Little boxes, you've  
Become the ticky- 50  
Tacky. In the whole  
Peach of  
Ticky-dom. Ticking time  
Bomb--but what do I  
Know? I ask too many 55  
Questions. Enquiring  
Minds want to know  
Or do they?  
  
No one dares peek  
No one dares seek 60  
Belly up to the truth folks  
And take another leak  
  
IV.  
Restitution—I want restitution  
For a life I never lived, but  
Could've. Blast these 65  
Distractions—rules, roles, regs,  
Emulations, imitations, vitiations,  
Imaginations—oops too far, that  
One actually has value and so  
Was deleted from the 70  
Agenda

No one dares unmold  
No one dares unfold  
Belly up to quiet desperation folks  
That's why the soma's doled 75  
  
V.  
Redemption? Salvation? And a  
Big black pit called the  
Abys. Existential  
Psychologists come  
Closer--I'm falling. 80  
Falling, falling. Only your  
Consciousness confronts  
Me, only your optimistic  
Pessimism accuses  
Me. I confess I'm guilty—not 85  
Of sin, but that too--but of  
Ballooned beliefs and cotton  
Candy philosophical constructs. And  
The rain falls equally on the  
Conscious and the brain 90  
Dead  
VI.  
But these words—please don't call

This poetry—I mix metaphors with  
Salad tongs. Poetry is pretty—I wondered  
Lonely as a cloud—no offense my Cumbria,  
95  
Friend  
  
No one dares  
No one stares  
Belly up to the precipice  
If anyone cares 100  
  
VII.  
Is the abyss what is  
Or what we miss  
As we zip-a-dee-doo-dah  
In a morphine bliss  
  
No one dares cope 105  
No one dares hope  
That if you belly down the abyss folks  
You might find a rope  
  
**Canto II: Two Roads in a non-Yellow  
Wood**  
In Memoriam: Rollo May

I.	In your head, you're	Skies. Our color is gothic
Damn this hearing	Not really dead.	Moon, our eyes are
Aid! I thought you 110	You mean this is	Hemorrhagic wine, as we
Said going to	Just a near-	Mourn the loss of a Santa 155
Hail. Not to	Death?	Claus god, a cupcake
Saunas south of		135
Purgatory—who'd a		God—Merry
Think it? Weird 115	Thoreau called	Christmas and to
Flora down here—dead	It stepping to	All a good night to be
And red. Please excuse	Music of an	Bled 160
If I don't stop	Authentic fife—grab	Dry of
To meet the	Your thinking 140	Reassurances
Fauna just 120	Shoes--lac'è'm	
Now. If anyone	And rac'è'm—to	Jesus—friend—
Has a harp out there it	The music	Confidant. Son of
Might be a nice time to	Of a near-	Mary, son of 165
Plunk it	Life 145	Joseph--how your
On the coal paths in the dark pit125	There's another set of footprints	Words float like fluffy
There's a patter-pitter pat	In the pitter-pattered pit	Dandelion seeds above the
Unless you trek the blue and red	Where the nightscapes free of hoodwinks	Poppies that demarcate the
You'll grow enormously fat	And the prize hog's on the spit	Track of the pit 170
II.	III.	White laundry
You mean I'm not in	We walk together 150	Walkers we are—limping,
Hell? Hail no—it's all 130	Alone under black	Staggering, doing a stiff

Person parkinsonian		Do the schizophrenic waltz		Our heart seeds are	
Shuffle	175	Before you go to dead	200	Culturally covered with	220
Frankensteins—bandaged and				Concrete, beginning in Infancy, says the daffodil Poet. Preschoolers in	
Splint-laden, dancing like		V.		Chaste choirperson frocks.	
Mummies tumbling down a Hillside to		Neophyte, tyro hail! Fire		Arms folded, are pressed into	225
Requiem music that only 180		Before ice, hell before		Cigar boxes and egg	
We hear, that only		Snowballs, green before		Crates smothered	
We know is not Hallucination, that only		Gold, but crimson		With the licorice Jello of self-	
We know signifies		Contemporaneous with	205	Alienation	230
We may never	185	Cerulean or			
Again		Cobalt or		Our Poe-	
Visit our past Lives except as Ghosts		Cyan or		Worthy coffins are	
Stroll, stroll, stroll your soul	190	Prussian or		Slid, livid toes first, into	
Breathe after you scream		Thalo or	210	Moby's pool to a Mal-lifluous dirge of	235
The life you've lived was fiction folks		Ultramarine or		Scattered sighs, coughs, and Clearings of the	
It's melting like ice cream		Royal—all about		Throat—you of my Sperm, you of my	
IV.		The same		Egg—make thine	240
Two roads don't		Concurrent synchronous		Own self into Mine own	
Diverge in the non- Yellow pit	195	Blue-red	215	Image	
One road leads to royal blue		Interlaced, but let's		Our puny	
The other crimson red		Start with		Enclosures sink like	245
		Crimson			

Torpedoed ships		Bottom of the		
Filled with tar in		Deep sea and		Blight
Which we are Encased like slices		Dissonance in its		Desert
Of peach and	250	Roar		Desert 295
Pear and berries. After		On the crimson road we pluck our eyes		Blight
Demise and		275		
Decay Blueworld		And stick them to the shelves		VII.
Embraces our ebullient		And gape with nascent consciousness		Answer:
Individualities and fecund	255	Our naked smothered selves		You are
Potentialities				Alive! Forever-fused
Game over		VI.		Gemini's, 300
Game over		Skin-bare little		Synergy abounding, acutely
Red rover		Child, seed of my	280	Conscious. And the
Come over and	260	Forgotten soul, forgive		Authenticity audition
Bark silently for		Me. I knew not what I am. I crucified you		Goes on—and
Eternity		Though spotless. I		You may sculpture a 305
		Denied you three	285	Verse—i before e
We see through a		Times before the		Except after c—if only
Glass starkly		Cock crowed. I applied		You don't
Veil	265	My full conformity and		Rehearse 310
Veil		Cloned-identity to your		
Veil		Crypt stone.	290	Chorus
Hail yes it's a Bloody journey		Germination		Cadence
Up from the	270	Denied		(Henri Matisse) crimson

Hue	(Nicens		Poet's might!	
	Moocow), I played with		(At length...it doth...	
<b>Canto III: The Quality of Blueness is not Drained</b>	Baby tuckoo—everything	335	Die away...and fades...	360
In Memoriam: Paul Tillich	Sky-tint then—until my		Into...	
I.	Azur-opia was ceremoniously		The common day?)	
In the beginning was the	Corrected with catechismal		Not	
Literalspeak and that was	Dreading glasses		Perfect	
Orwell and good.			But OK--	365
Damn those library	Thus	340	Close	
Cards and paraphernalia of	Blueworld		Enough	
Free thinking. Brain- 320	Crept away--		Hip hip hooray!	
Heavy trampers can	Come on			
Lose their balance on the	Bill		Literalfundamentalist women must submit	
Blue road, the royal	Join the fray!	345	Spread your legs when you sit 370	
Road	(I pondered		You were made for birth and sex	
The blue road's like the white whale's sea	Lonely		Spake Tyrannosaurus rex	
325	As a shroud?)			
The hue of babies' eyes	Not a		III.	
Blueworld fetches angels' tears	Pun	350	Atención! Atención!	
And floats them to the skies	For crying out		Calling all	
	Loud!		Stone tablet copy	375
	(You must		Editors—report	
II.	Mean		To mid-	
Even before I	Celestial light?)	355	Antiquity Jerusalem	
Learned the proper	Now		Immediately—use	
Irish for pleasant	You're packing			
Heifer				



Well's time apparatus. 380	Think it—after 405	I pray for self-
Must have own Nitro and blasting	All, we're so damn	Awareness, acceptance of my
Caps. Graduate work in Hebrew and Aramaic	Clear-thinking,	Prodigious human
Scrabble desirable. Use strategic385	Conscientious, and dead	Frailty and arrogance, and the 430
Detonations to extricate	Accurate in our	Courage to
What remains of the	Exterminations, ethnic 410	Become. Maybe as my odd-
God-breathed blue	Ablutions, and every Rape and pillage	Shaped craft moves
Words from those	Junket	Toward an unknown
Of dinosaurs, mountain 390	Literal fundamentalist women's legs together	Shore, some of the 435
Goats, paranoid	Smile at the coming weather 415	Blueness will
Schizophrenics, and other Pundits, being careful to pick	Blue world knows you're just as smart	Leak through the
Up all loose Scriptural	Pregnant unpremeditated art	Seams of my
Fragments, lest you be 395		Skeptical Open- 440
Stoned to death for being a		Mindedness
Litterbug	V.	Red alone, or blue alone
	Faith without	Fingernail-scratching gramophone
IV.	Doubt is	Counterpoint crimson with the blue
God dead?	Dead. Works without 420	Interlaced symphony, purple hue 445
No, Hegel—same	Intimidations of Mortality is martyr Masturbation. Meanwhile the	
Answer forty 400	Variegated blue	
Years later—mustachioed	Sea flows gently under our 425 Queequeg coffins	
Scapegoat Zarathustra.		<b>Notes</b>
God misquoted?		<b>Canto I</b>
Once again, who'd a		

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). American-born poet. *The Waste Land* (1922).

Lines 24-26: Isaiah 11:12.

Lines 49-51: Malvina Reynolds (1900-1978). American songwriter. "Little Boxes" (1962).

Lines 56-57: Slogan of *The National Enquirer*.

Line 75: Aldous Huxley (1894-1963). British writer. *Brave New World* (1932).

Lines 89-91: Matthew 5:45.

Lines 94-95: William Wordsworth (1770-1850). English (Cumbrian) poet. "Daffodils."

Line 103: "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah" (1945). From *Song of the South* (Words: Ray Gilbert; Music: Allie Wrubel).

## Canto II

Rollo May (1909-1994). American existentialist psychologist.

Lines 136-139: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). American writer. *Walden* (1854), Chapter 18.

Lines 157-159: Clement Clark Moore (1779-1863). "A Visit From St. Nickolas." Later a song (1951), music by F. Henri Klickman

Line 176: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851). *Frankenstein* (1818).

Lines 190-191: Anonymous. "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

Lines 194-196: Robert Frost (1875-1963). American poet. "The Road Not Taken."

Lines 201-202: Frost. "Fire And Ice."

Lines 203-204: Frost. "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

Lines 222-223: Wordsworth. *Ode: Intimations Of Immortality From Recollections Of Early Childhood* (1807).

Lines 231-232: Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849). American poet and short story writer.

Line 234: Herman Melville (1819-1891). American novelist. *Moby Dick* (1851).

Lines 240-243: Genesis 1:26.

Lines 263-264: I Corinthians 13:12.

Lines 272-274: George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824). English poet. "The Sea."

Lines 281-283: Luke 23:34a.

Lines 285-287: Matthew 26:34-35 and 26:75.

Lines 297-306: Walt Whitman (1819-1892). American poet. "O Me! O Life!"

Line 313: Henri Matisse (1869-1954). French expressionist painter.

## Canto III

Title: William Shakespeare (1564-1616). English playwright and poet. "The quality of mercy is not strain'd" From *The Merchant of Venice* (1595), IV, i, 179-201.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965). German-born, American theologian.

Lines 315-316: John 1:1-2.

Line 317: George Orwell (1903-1950). India-born, British novelist and short story writer. *1984* (1949).

Line 325: Melville. *Moby Dick*.

Line 327: John Keats (1795-1821). English poet. "To one who has been long in city pent."

Lines 330-335: James Joyce (1882-1941).

Dublin-born novelist and playwright. *A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man* (1916), Chapter 1.

Line 339: Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Danish philosopher. *The Concept of Dread* (1844).

Lines 344 and 346-348: Wordsworth. "Daffodils."

Lines 353-355 and 359-362: Wordsworth. *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.

Line 369: Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:22-25.

Line 380: H. G. Wells (1866-1946). British novelist. *The Time Machine* (1895).

Line 388: 2 Timothy 3:16.

Line 397: Arlo Guthrie (b1947). American songwriter. *Alice's Restaurant* (1965).

Line 399: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). German philosopher.

Lines 401-402: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). German philosopher. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1891) and *The Gay Science* (1882).

Line 417: Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). English poet. "To a Skylark."

Lines 418-420: James 2:17 and 2:26.

Lines 421-422: Wordsworth. *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.

Line 426: Melville. *Moby Dick*, "Epilogue."

# an open letter to nothing (about nothing)

carina drakes

Nothing is as powerful as nothing  
Don't bother fighting nothing, it'll weaken you  
Embrace it, lay back and let it wash over you  
The sooner you sink down into nothing  
The sooner you can resurface from it  
Nothing is white noise  
what keeps you awake at night  
the blank page that taunts you and mirrors your oldest fears  
Nothing is the most elegant weapon  
Nothing is its own Trojan horse

If the silence becomes deafening and impossible to ignore  
If the void grows arms and comes knocking at your door  
If you listen intently but can't sympathize  
If your rose-colored lenses are just bloodshot eyes  
If your matchstick legs aren't good enough for them  
Start walking and striking bridges because that was then

# our family burden

jennifer russell

Me

I'm an embarrassment. Selfish. Lazy, part-timer.

I'm irresponsible. Too involved. A spoiled narcissist.

I'm a shell of a figure. Disappointing. Disapproved.

A depressed. repressed. resented Truth.

Burdens always speak the truth.

Elaine

My aunt was born a women's sin, a mistake of god or karmic fate

That's what my grandma was kindly told—as she played with sweet webbed toes

And looked for depth in dull-toned eyes.

A weight fell on her breath and chest and mind as she politely stated

“Go to hell” and giggled at her daughters surprise.

Fifty years or so and patience wears thin, while a once active woman becomes an invalid in her parents' home,

and the mind begins to twist, the hip breaks, the eyes weep, the arms fail. And an overdose occurs that leaves that daughter with shaky memory and trust, and med-  
less.

I look at my mother unsure and heartbroken. She looks back with disgust and irritation.

“She's not smart enough to commit suicide”.

I briefly wonder if she means not intelligent enough to know how to do it, or to actually succeed. Its neither. She's just not smart enough to want to die. Silly, I didn't know there was a limit on that sort of thing.

I prepare the meal her first time “back,” she's lucid and bright. She laughs that laugh and interrupts and speaks without constraint. Her parents yell and think she's mad, I know this means she's sane. It makes me smile and I press her to speak, my family's awkward glares at our backs. She can't notice and I pretend and we both detach.

“You know that laugh,” my mother says, now when were alone. “It's the same as hers. Your Aunt's.” High, choking, embarrassing, unconstrained. My pooh-bear laugh, my aunt's laugh, my nervous laugh. Annoying, I know that's what she means.

"You walk like her, it frightens me" that bow legged, ninety degree, shuffling, forward leaning, hunchback tell, tell of her disease. My wobbly knees.

"You remind me of her. You know; messy, careless, loud." She means embarrassing.

I'm embarrassing to my mother, a burden to the family.

### Kaylee

My sister was born *my* parents mistake, but a healthy one at least

A financial burden, doomed to fail,

A twice mothered child, living groundless and wild

I'd been praying for her since in my tweens.

She came with holes. My mother's ulcers, my father's job, my parents' schooling, my social life, my brother's normalcy. A mess of the already drowning. And she had needs. Her own needs. Materials, money sacrificed and schemed. A healthy home, not full of fights and mistrust and lacking dreams. A soothing rhythm, instead of sorrow. A primary caregiver, a replacement for a bedridden, hectic mother.

"You're not her mother, you can't decide and you can't punish her." How many times did I hear those words after three years of punishments and feedings, decision making and restless sleep. A thirteen year old fighting for motherhood of the non-existent. The never-yours. A forced-upon and forced-apart.

A frameless dream. Some groundless tweens.

"You act like Kaylee sometimes, just get it!" A shadow marks our fear, a running start disturbed the sleep of those that don't see.

A scoff and swear. "If you were her mother, then I guess you're responsible."

Irresponsible is what she means. My actions have been irresponsible when dealing with my family.

I'm my family's burden, a lack of responsibility.

### Ian

He has too much Genius for any-body to contain,

A brave experimentalist with manipulation skills,

An act of show and cleverness and a stain upon the world.

Ian was always fearless, careless, a self-proclaimed self-interest. He's a woman slaying, concept spouting, self-fulfilling—prophetic—asshole. Trespasser, transgressor, and an interloper in and out of home. A way he keeps from feeling hopeless, tragic, or alone.

"He's really not that bad" My mother has said. "You remember him wrong I think." The boy whose thrills are heartbreak, cheapskate and obsession, who plagued and livened my childhood with weapons, cults and philosophy? The only person I'll admit to simultaneously love and hate? I speak to him every day, like any day, civil and amused.

And I remember him fondly, it's her that tricks the mind. It's her that can't remember his calling of a

"worthless bitch" or "nonexistent mom." The crone, the fuck-off, the never caring, the only-ever-selfish, self-serving Cunt. My brother's words are angry. But better than his only half empty threats, or throat grasped hands.

"Stop acting like your brother." Acting like the boy-man who shouts and calls you name, uses you while you're sick in bed. Pushes you until you fall, makes fists and threats and destroys your heart. What could I have done?

"Ian" Is all she has to say, while looking at my form, hurled at me like an insult, for me to know that I'm a disappointment, I've done something so wrong, I've broken her heart or started to fail.

I'm a burden to my family, a disappointing shell.

## Dad

My father loves my mother, they were married on a shore,

They'd both left long relationships for a possible marital bliss,

But still too young, no money to spare, they sacrificed life for a kiss.

My dad, daddy, hardworking father. Whose always brought in the most money, hoarded the most money, spent the most money. He spends the least time with the family, the most time in chosen isolation or empty friend dates, the least time happy. My father has a waited soul, a chronic sadness, an inherited, to be inherited, state of eternal melancholia. Source of anger and grief.

"I just wish he'd cheer the fuck-up some days, give me a break." Give us all a break, give him a break. I wish he'd stay more often, help more often, converse more often, trust more often; anything plus smiling more often is good enough for her.

Maybe if he smiled more, the rest the problems would be fixed. But I doubt my father'd run off any less when getting news from my mother of another problem, another mass, another illness. An in-prompt to escape to a friends, an acquaintance, anyone within town limits without a family, an illness, or a way of contact. A cell phone ringing in the car of another driveway, another backyard, without notice or note. A worried, heartbroken lover left to deal here on her own.

"You know no one likes a depressed person," statement to a crying daughter, cruel. But you like dad. No chance for love? or friendship? Or fulfillment left in life? Did he trick you, do you regret it, deciding to become his wife?

I'm a child of depression, an unlikable burden, a family's resentment.

## Mom

She spent my childhood in delight, a light-hearted, energetic figure of selflessness,

Then two years bedridden, a late pregnancy to blame, a son to lose, a husband to resent.

Another four years of healthy, stressed out living. Another family trauma or two.

Until five years ago when we learned, my mother's time unknown.

She's sick. Not the sort of get-over, fixed, or tamable kind. Or the clear prognosis—definable—centralized, finite kind. A multilayer. Unbalanced. Medicated. Hopeless, hopeful. Four specialists, a gp, and five diseases so far kind. A weight of never-knowing, any minute, years growing, unpredictable, unreliable, reoccurring, never curing, tension in the air.

My mother's never said, "I'm dying," but I feel the words thick and taunt in my throat. Medical terms, medication, research, doctors words, and a confessional type treatment of symptoms and added stress are all I have to understand, its two maybe three years max.

Mom has long been the source for words and comfort, balance and punishment, the practical thought or enlightened word. No words since the illness. Complaint, worry, need, anger are the only ones she has left. A mind made sick with medication. A stiffened, cooling heart. A memory turned to irritated glances and thoughts.

I don't see, I doubt, that others can't tell. And yet she hides it well. Make-up, bright clothing, constant hair changing, a flashy bag or shoes, strong bold commands, still clever eyes, built up energy, a tolerance for pain. Her pain, her constant pain. They turn a blind eye. My mother cries.

Her husband of twenty years abandons her for friends after she receives the news that yet another organ may be failing.

Her youngest daughter invites friends over while she is bedridden an unable to conjure the energy to fight with her enough to send them home.

Her always-supportive in-laws are tangled up in knots with my aunt's needs, have lost their patience, and are rarely understanding anymore.

Her son, on one of her few full days, 'energetic days,' takes a vow of silence, followed by a month of shadow-pretending, followed by days of texting that lead up to a show of force with unimagined words.

"I never wanted to be a burden to my kids," she twists and writhes on her bed, a mangled face of broken vessels, wrinkled skin, and thick salt water tears.

"You're not a burden mom," I whisper in her ears, as I pull her up into my arms, a body frail from loss and disease. She curls her face into my shoulder, ashamed of the pain she feels. Ashamed of the loss she feels. Ashamed of her abandonment. Ashamed of her needs. Ashamed of what these things will mean to me.

## Me

My mother told me once I was born quiet—

After a week, my first two years were spent in silence—

She said my silence saved them, saned them

Does it still?

I hold our families burdens, and whisper through their fears.

# spare some change?

chelsea musselman

She sits in silence.  
Awaiting every drop of rain  
these dark clouds promise to deliver  
straight to the mere glass  
that separates her from the fresh air and strangers passing by  
eager to reach their individual destinations.

Head tilted, eyes sad.  
She knows she's close to home when the first drop  
introduces itself into her line  
of vision.  
Hands gripping tightly to the only thing that guarantees  
an exact direction.

Thoughts only existing m(in)d:  
The calm before the storm..  
When I scream?..  
Well, when I scream..  
I scream into nothing, the wind I suppose.  
and though it lingers for a moment..  
I'm not sure where it goes.  
And though you're always so far..  
Something tells me you hear it,  
from wherever you are.

It disrupts the atmosphere..  
And shakes the rain into meeting the ground.  
it demands that you hear it.. Without making a sound.



What more could I ask for  
that sudden gust of wind to do?  
Often the sky cries so I don't have to.

She opens her door and steps outside.  
Finds the sidewalk and begins a steady stride.  
Only to find a change in mood..  
The sidewalk, a vagabond  
He grips his sign,  
"love is a poor mans food."

distracted by the rain..  
she looks up.  
then looks down at the man  
and offers to spare change.  
To fill his empty cup....

meanwhile..

Far away, among the shadows of the trees  
he falls to his knees  
and whispers to the wind..  
Where have you been my friend?  
knees now soiled, he lets out a gasp, a sigh.  
I understand that wild and reckless breeze.  
I only wish I could reply.

the rain falls to him like an empty cup.  
he looks up.  
Desperation in its purest form.  
no one sees the tears when your kneeling in the  
storm.

No one can control the storm.  
You're a slave to the cycle.. The precipitation.  
Human misery and degradation.. enough to

repeatedly fill the sea.  
Fearful of drowning, you're fighting to be free.  
but no one can control the storm.  
no one..  
not even the rain.  
Not even me.

But, sometimes at night,  
just before the rain..  
the wind picks up..  
And whispers your name.

I wouldn't shelter myself from the downpour  
where would I go?  
We simply planted a seed..  
It needs this to grow.

We rely on the rain to fill this empty cup  
when your lost in your direction,  
"always look up."

what

sneha fernando

Though the days were long and the nights  
Were Cold, the Beautiful stream of moonlight  
calmed; calmed the soul in need  
in need in need in need  
of a penny  
a Penny  
a dime  
a Nickel  
Whatever they will give her

Sleep bird, OH You beautiful Bird  
You bird, Bird of Paradise,  
Always fed, Always watered!  
The ruler of the sky by day  
The Gangbanger on your prey

Run, rabbit RUN  
Breathe, Rabbit BREATHE

'Breathe in The Air, Run!' Rabbit! Run!  
Breathe! Breathe! Run! The last of your...  
Breathe, Rabbit, Run Rabbit, breathe  
Breathe Rabbit, Run Rabbit, Run  
Run! Run! Breathe – the last of your\_\_\_\_\_

The moon has become Yellow, The light is no  
longer  
Bright  
Fuck –  
My Sight  
What the Fuck are You doing  
To MY sight  
Oh Great! That sounds great,  
Yes Yes will do  
Not, a, Problem, at, all,

What the Fuck am I doing, doing, doing  
I ask my guitar, what, the, FUCK, AM, I, DO-

ing!

I, with my guitar,

...

Next day, Yes sir, No Problem madam...

What am I Doing?

Run rabbit, run rabbit run,

What is happening to me?

What are you doing to bird of PaRadiSe, Prey

?

How

Are You Doing that

?

Oh Yes Sir, Anytime Madam

Yes Madam, Yes Madam

Yes would you like to have my nickel ??

? My dime? Too?

and My

Penny? Too?

Yes, you filthy bird

Fat feathered fucker

Fat fucking BIRD

You Bastard Yes You!

You! Yes You! Bastard! I said

My humble mind

Torn to pieces

Living You are, at the expense of my life

Come down Hear BIRD of PREY

Come Ravish ME!! CHERISH ME You Bastard!

Fine! It is fine with Me! Rape me

More,

Don't stop

I live to give you happiness

Bird of Paradise

Bird of Prey

The moon is turning red  
Make it turn Red  
So that the Sun can shine  
On you  
Bird of Prey  
Rape me you greedy bastard!  
Rape me you filthy leech  
Make me dust and Bone! rape me  
May you live  
until Your appointed Departure, IN,

Where is my...  
Where is...  
Where is this...  
What?  
Hello?

Where am I?  
Is this the heat of hell? Why am I? These sand  
dunes  
Why am I? This Camel?  
Why am I? Why? I?  
Why? Why? Where?  
I'm loosing it/ who? huH?  
I'm riding  
Am I riding? This Camel?  
On an endless path of Sand Dunes?  
WHY? Why? WHY? Why?  
Where am I? Riding?

bird of prey and rabbit

sneha fernando



# fracture

hecky woodruff

I've become acutely aware of one vital fact. One crucial piece of information that seems to elude  
It's not particularly deep or intellectual; it's honest.

Experience.

Several months ago, I faced a loss, of sorts. This loss changed everything. Every plan, every  
dream—all of it. Gone. Out the door, around the bend, and away— This loss affected me in ways I  
never imagined anything could

But. Instead of fighting, of putting on a face, of rationing out my grief,

I let go.

I let go. I let it go. I let myself go. I let go. I let go. I let go. I let it go. I let it all go. I let it go. I let it. I  
let. I let it go. I let it go. I let it go. I let it go. I let it go. I let go. I let go. I let go.

I felt.

I felt all, everything, completely, fully, entirely. *Experienced*- all of it.

In those weeks, I *felt* more fully, deeply, and truly than I ever allowed myself to feel.

Something snapped.

In my grief, I was wholly me. *My* pain. *My* loss. *My* misery. *My*—

*Me.*

Years. A lifetime of 'yes.' The music box dancer, in eternal pirouette— a marionette manipulated from below,  
managed, maneuvered.

The music stops.

The composer rewrites the end.

The orchestra revolts.

Notes slice the air, cut through to new understanding. Symphony from cacophony. Symphony in cacophony.

There is beauty in the selfish. Learning the I.

Me. I want. I need. I crave. I can. I can't. I won't. Will-

Tailor the situation to meet the needs. Imperfect, but enough. Ideal in the moment and not a moment more.

A change. Initiative. Something of my own design. Divining the future from a cracked crystal ball. I let go of it; it shattered.

I let go.

I let it go. I let go.

I. Let. Go. I let go. I let go. I let go. I let it all... go.

The murk saved me.

Feeling, blind, I exist for myself. Me. Free. to try it all to fight to fall to fail To Forget.

to move on to move past to Revolt to Realize

I matter. I matter. I matter. I matter. I matter. I matter. I matter. I matter.

ImatterImatterImatterI-  
matterImatterImatterI-  
matterImatterImatterI-  
matterImatterImatter I  
fucking matter.

...The ENFJ personality type is characterized as The Giver. An extroverted intuitive feeling judging subject will give of herself until there is nothing left. Aware of her own needs but more than willing to cast them aside, the ENFJ allows herself to be sucked dry. After all, *is there any greater joy than the happiness of others?*

When all your life you've been told-The views you hold-The soul you sold-

*Enough.*

A glass slipper can only take so many feet before it breaks. Prince Charming wants you to bite the apple. If you're lucky, you won't choke.

"I do not pray. I revenge myself upon the day."

"Blank lines do not say nothing."

"What I sometimes mistake for ecstasy is simply the absence of grief."

If I give myself over, can I take their words? If I make them mine, will they be the same? Will, I?

A sentiment that haunts me. Try. Fight. Fall. Fail. Forget. Forget.

Forget.

For-No.  
No. No.

No no no no nonononono.



The wilting ballerina whirls wearily once more.

Should she lose her footing, would the lid come crashing down? Should she lose her footing?  
Should she...

“Let her try.”

Try. Fight. Fall. Fail. Forget.

Happiness is the acknowledgement that something may be—

I dismantled the slavemas-  
ter’s house with the slave-  
master’s tools, but I’m no  
architect.

A promising young artist chokes her life away. This happens every day. And there’s never nothing  
new to say.

“Experience” is just a euphemism for scars.

Time heals the wounds on the surface,  
concealing the tempest beneath.

Try. Fight. Fall. Fail. Forget.

I matter I matter I matter I matter I matter I fucking matter.

If only I knew how to write-

The End.

# new testament

jennifer rish

I am not a Christian.

I am not just a Pagan.

I am not a Pagan.

I am not just a Christian.

Why not find something in the intersection?

Why not black, or white?

Why not grey?

Somewhere, there is a purpose.

I think it may begin in the meditation.

Your body is yours but so is everything else.

Your body is not yours, and neither is anything else.

That's the main thing.

Jesus Christ and the Buddha hold hands. Jesus loves swings and park benches. The Buddha likes the leaves. These are the things that no one wants you to know.

I would tell you all the things I have seen, my friends, but if I did, you would never see yours.

There is no such thing as the God police.

All of us are the God police.

I had sex on a park bench and I think Jesus liked it.

I had sex in my head and I got in trouble with the nuns.

Somewhere there is a part of me that still wears kneesocks and carries a rosary. That girl is a crucible now.

Judge not and thou shalt not

Judge not and thou shalt not

Judge not and thou shalt not

Judge not and thou shalt be judged now.

In between the shadows of Beltane a scream rises above the song. It's the kneesocks.

The beginning is in the meditation.

The beginning is the curiosity.

The beginning is the start of a circle.

Ask, seek, knock

Ask, knock

Ask,

Knock, knock, knock, knock,

Seek.

Ask, and it shall be given to you

Seek, and you will find

Knock, and the door will be opened for you.

All door closers should be held accountable to Christ.

I'm telling.

While you knock, don't forget to ask, and while you ask, seek to be sure what you ask is what you want, if it isn't, ask anyway and learn your fucking lesson.

Above all, do no harm.

And blessed, blessed be.

No women in the church

No women in the church

Witchcraft is from the Devil and the Devil loves women

Women are from the Devil

Devil loves woman

Man loves woman

Who looks bad now?

Woman loves woman

I love woman

Who doesn't love woman?

Jesus loved woman.

So what is it?

If we aren't good, we're evil?

If we aren't evil we're good?

Where's the middle?

Somewhere where the circle begins.

Everything in moderation.

Buddha seems to know the issue.

Somewhere in the meditation is where it starts.

Somewhere in the mind.

When the mind experiments with reality.

And so it goes, and so it shall be, now and forever more.

Oh, and holla to the Atheists.

I think the experimentation starts within the meditation.

I think it resonates in that moment that you realize that every closed door is a lie.

Every lock an illusion that is shaken loose when you knock

Knock

Knock

That's why you aren't supposed to knock.

Because the doors have this tendency to open.

And then there are the windows.

Look for the windows.

Seek the windows.

Imagine, if we asked where the windows were, and then sought them, we wouldn't even have to knock, and the kneesocks wouldn't be the wiser. We'd climb out the window, a teenage rebellion, a fuck off to curfew, tearing the kneesocks on the trellis that leads down to the yard, and the street, and the sweet wine darkened night full of discovery.

Sing, sing to the Lord all ye lands

And dance in the night to the Mummer's Dance

Seek beneath the Banyan Tree

And give up on the afterlife

Once and for all.

Store up your treasures in heaven

But bring the kingdom of heaven to earth

Burn offerings of marshmallows to Aphrodite

And don't question your results.

And never forget to keep

Knocking,

Knocking,

Knocking,

Till the very hallowed halls of all that is fabricated

All that is lie

All that is corset strings

Crumble to the ground.

No religion instructs you to hate one another

They all call to spread light

The light

A light

And to love long before blows are cast

To drink of all that is good

And spit out all the bad.

And the pain, the pain, the pain, the pain, the pain

Will all vanish when the gap is filled with love.

Love is a blade. Love is a wild and desperate

animal. Love cannot be satiated until it is filled. It is filled when you are. It is filled when it has bled out all your hate through its gentle teeth.

Love struggles on, hungry.

Feed it. Sate it. Feed yourself. Nourish yourself.

This is my body

This is our harvest

This is our teaching

This is our mantra

No one said religion was easy.

Easy religion is cereal box religion. Zombie religion. Lies. Parasites. Easy, easy, searchless, effortless, thoughtless.

Crosses are heavy.

Nails are sharp.

Blood is wet.

Stakes are burning.

Demons are not just inside of us.

And there is a way to realize that all of these are there to stop the truth

The truth

The Truth

The Truth

The Beauty

The Passion

The Cross

The Pentagram

The Enlightenment

The knock.

The knock.

Knock.

## my personal story

amelia moody

Before elementary school, I never knew that I was “light-skinned.” I just knew that I had my mom and sister, my three crazy aunts and their kids, and a dad who I didn’t see much of; and that most of them looked different from me.

My family is literally like a rainbow. I have family members who range from lighter than me to as dark as you can imagine. But we never made a big deal out of it, which is why I never cared that much. But when I started school and was trying to make friends my skin color became a big part of my identity, at least to everyone else.

It probably didn’t help that I was extremely shy as a kid. When I started kindergarten, I didn’t talk to anyone until about three months after school started. That is where I met my best friend, and still good friend to this day, Jordan. She had a caramel colored skin complexion, so she wasn’t really dark, and she never made a big deal that I was lighter than her (except with jokes, that sometimes did hurt my feelings). But other black girls noticed we were friends, and needless to say did not like it.

“Why would you want to hang out with her, she thinks shes better than everyone because she’s light skinned.” I will never forget when a classmate said this to Jordan right in front of me. Did I do something to make her think I thought I was better than her? Then I realized she said “light skinned.” I could not believe it, someone actually disliked me because I was too light. I had heard of the typical forms of racism, among different races, but I never really heard of racism in my own race.

This was not an isolated incident.

This started occurring all the time. “Oh she is bourgeoisie,” “She is too white,” “She is not black enough,” “She thinks she’s better than everyone,” “She thinks her shit don’t stink because she’s LIGHT SKINNED.” Without fail it was always I thought these things or acted the way I did be-

cause I was light skinned. I would have rathered it had been because I had actually been a bitch or done something to these girls than based on something I could not change about myself.

Around 4th grade, after years of the same insults, I really started to hate my skin color. I wanted so badly to be darker. I would imagine having a skin color like Halle Berry or Gabrielle Union and believing that I would somehow be a “better” me with darker skin. I would not give off this energy that these other girls were picking up on.

I kept thinking if only these girls knew how envious of them I was. I wanted what they had. I wanted dark skin so badly. I was tired of girls thinking I was stuck up just because of my skin color. I was also so tired of being asked “are you mixed?” or “what exactly are you?” (which still to this day people ask me).

This continued throughout my adolescence. Each year it seemed like the girls just wanted to hate me. I would overly try to be nice to them to show them that I was not the girl they thought I was. I was not this stuck up person who thought I was better than everyone else. But each year without fail there would be a group of girls who tormented me. Who would ask rude questions to my friends about me, or make snide remarks.

Not only did I hate my skin color but I really started to hate girls. Girls fixated on the dumbest things to me. I never cared if a girl was light or dark, fat or thin, rich or poor, ugly or pretty. These things never mattered to me when it came to making genuine friends. But it seemed like I was out on a ledge by myself.

I still had my close group of girlfriends, which included people of all races and colors, but I became very guarded towards making other friends, especially girls. I was tired of getting my feelings hurt about something so minuscule to me as the color of my skin.

I did not stop really hating my skin color until about 9th grade. I think I just started getting this “I don’t give a shit what people think about me” attitude, which ultimately made me likable in a weird way. I made a lot of friends in high school, including the darker skinned girls. Now this does not mean that people did not comment on my skin color, they did, but it really no longer bothered me. It was weird, something just clicked in me where I really figured out people are going to say shitty things about you, rather than be about your skin color, your hair, your clothes, your body etc. I had to learn to not let it define who I am as a person.

If you would have asked me a year ago if I was ever bullied I would have said no. Because I did not consider what these girls did to me to be bullying. But now that I am writing this, and have talked

about it to more people I absolutely think this was bullying. It was so mean, it hurt my feelings and made me change the way I thought of myself. It made me really hate not only my skin color but a part of my culture, my ancestry parts of me that I couldn't and wouldn't change.

I still do not know why these girls felt the need to torment me. I still think it had to be something more than just my skin color. Maybe I did something that I don't remember doing that really pissed them off, maybe I intimidated them in some other way, maybe they were jealous of my friendships, maybe it really was just because I was light skinned.

Whatever.

It really does not matter. They did what they did and even though it sucked I actually appreciate it now, because I treat people so differently due to the way these girls judged me based on nothing but a superficial aspect of my being. I try hard to not judge people, to not say mean things about peoples appearance, to not make anyone feel bad due to something they cannot control. This doesn't mean I'm perfect, I'm guilty of judging people, but I still try to give people a chance and not let superficial things cloud my judgement.

I still have trust issues with girls. I sometimes feel that girls are shady and will always say stuff behind my back. I really think this stems from my being bullied for so many years. But for the most part do not let what these girls did to me define who I am. I love my skin color. And more importantly I love who I am as a person.



# mommy

I once knew a stranger. She was beautiful. She left a bar of white cheap soap in a deep dish, discolored. The orange dye splattered against the pearly china of the rinsing bowl. She isn't here. An investigation pursues. I pocket the red discarded lipstick and run down the hall, slam my door, sit on the floor and pull it out. A red smear appears on the carpet, my spit and finger rub and rub. The smear grows, I run.

I pick off the fluff stuck to my stubby fingers and attempt to rub the glue away. The glitter, its everywhere. Little bits of felt and scraps of colored construction paper. Buttons and ribbon, glue guns and Elmer's. I look over. Her Christmas ornament is so pretty, pudgy faces poking out from behind a trail of glitter and felt. I bite my dirty finger nails and look back over to my creation... a mess of wrinkled felt and a crumbled picture of me and Tarik. I throw mine away.

Tarik's hand feels warm and sweaty. I let go and rub my palm against my leg. I need to pee and the carpet is making my butt warm. More buzzing. More time. More buzzing. Silence. The door opens and I am relieved. "Don't be afraid". My body feels hot all over and my throat tightens, my eyes burn and my vision

# Cyrena Zhib

blurs. We scream, we run. My door slams and my body crashes. I sob and sob and think "Why does she look like an alien?". The next morning I will find her hair in a plastic bag on the kitchen counter.

It's hot. It's sunny. I feel cool and grown up with my new sun glasses. The tar on the parking lot burns through my jelly sandals and my hand is sweaty from holding hers. I want to ask her why she's buying a wig when she wears a headscarf, but I don't. She'll cry again, she always cries. I finger some of the hair while she tries them on. We leave and I ask her why she didn't buy one. We don't have enough money. She cries. I shouldn't have asked. Stupid, stupid.

I scrape the bottom of my shoe against the back of Baba's seat and make a pattern out of the black marks. The Lisa Frank stickers on the window are starting to peel, so I pick them off. I'm sad. Mambo Number 5 plays on the radio and we sing. She pulls into the driveway and the car stops. I ask her why he is allowed to have so many girlfriends and she laughs. I made her laugh so I laugh and my chest feels better.

She's in there. I don't dare look. Last time I cried, and we've had enough with the crying already. The machines groan and the wheels squeak. White shoes hurriedly cross, back and forth, back and forth. I undo the lopsided braid and untangle the yarn. The paint that makes up the smile on my doll's face is peeling off. I lick it and try to stick it back on. It tastes like the ends of batteries and fabric. Tarik makes a soft snorting sound in his sleep and my lap shakes from the sound. A monitor somewhere goes off, the beeping echoing through the halls and the white shoes racing towards it. The smile falls off my doll's face and I tuck it into my pocket.

She's really sick but its okay because I have a plan. I call for Tarik down the dim halls. The florescent light above me flickers. I try to color very slowly, I cannot make any noise. Tarik comes back with Baba and a handful of cheetos from the vending machine. His face is shiny and his teeth are tiny with a gap that would fit a whole room. "Tarik, come here! I have an idea!" His lanky body collapses against mine. His breath is hot on my arm and cheeto cheese sprinkles everywhere. "I know what we did wrong. We stepped on cracks and broke her back. If we don't step on any more cracks in the ground, she'll get better. Okay?" He nods. I steal a cheeto when he isn't looking.

Its warm here. And safe. The sun peaks through the window and Tarik peaks over the covers. Giggling. The machine wheezes but thats good. The room is warm with love and

laughter. I whisper to Tarik that we should make breakfast in bed, but she gets up and leaves. The bathroom door shuts. A loud, heavy thud. My heart starts racing and Tarik's eyes are huge. Run! Run now! She's on the floor, blood staining every inch of the counter, creeping its way across the floor. I can't stop staring. She coughs and more blood, from her nose, from her mouth, from her ears. More coughing but she won't answer us. I am calm. Tarik begins to wipe the floor, a scarlet mountain of tissues quickly appear. I make my way downstairs and call 911. I am calm. The dial tone sounds. I am calm. A smooth lady answers. The snorting and coughs echo through the house and bounce off the walls, hitting me. The lady asks She remembered me from last time. I didn't cry. I was calm.

Its sunny outside. Fresh cut grass and butterflies, a breeze and a bee. The pop rocks explode and crackle in my mouth and she laughs at my distorted face. My stomach hurt from laughing. We kissed her good bye and promised we'd be back soon. She died. I didn't cry.

One day all these cancers would eat you up and I would never get to tell you how much I needed you.

# noise

## meghan crawford

**You're fat you're ugly you need to lose weight  
just skip lunch no one cares**

**don't eat lunch no one cares you don't need it  
it will only make you gain weight**

**food is bad food is evil food is the enemy  
keep exercising 100 more crunches**

**50 more pushups no one is here to stop you**

**look at you you could still lose some weight-**

Food food everywhere I turn. Greasy fried fattening food. Onion rings fried chicken funnel cakes burgers fries. Crowded. So crowded. So many people. So many people walking talking sitting eating. Eating the greasy fried fattening food. My parents tell me I have to eat something. I don't want to eat I don't want that gross greasy fatty food. Fine. I'll have a sub from the Subway booth. 6in no cheese no sauce. When they aren't looking I throw half the turkey away. I tear and rip and break the bread into little pieces. I drink a little water. I'm not thirsty. I'm not hungry. Crowded. So crowded. People staring. Why? It's hot and humid and crowded so crowded. Sweat, sweating bodies surround me as we walk from building to building, show to show.

Dizzy. Just a little dizzy. Shake it off, keep moving, keep going. Spinning. Why is everything spinning? Sick. About to get sick. Try to move out of the way. Begin to wobble. We're almost to the gates... Spit up. Clear liquid. Still dizzy. Dehydrated, must be dehydrated. Mom is on the phone. I strain to hear the conversation. Doctor. Help. Wake up call. Worried. Weight loss. Barely eating. Got sick. Almost fainted. Help... Anorexic... Anorexia?

*We love you. We love you, healthy you not anorexic you. You are sick, you are not healthy. Look, I can see your bones. Your bones are sticking out. That's not healthy, that's not attractive. People are staring. Of course people are staring. You're emaciated. Your cheeks are sunken. Your chest is shrunken. I can see your rib cage. Your hip bones are sticking out. You're frail, you're sickly, you're anorexic.*

**Anorexic they don't know what they're talking about you're not underweight you need to lose weight you need to eat less you need to exercise more look at yourself you're not skinny you're fat you're ugly you're hideous-lose weight be perfect lose weight if you lose more weight people will like you you'll finally be popular guys will want to go out with**

you girls will want to be your friend you'll be perfect just a little more just eat a little less just exercise a little more we're almost there you've almost lost enough weight just a little more people are staring people are staring you need to lose more weight weight don't eat around them don't eat at all food is bad food is evil food will make you fat fat is evil fat is disgusting fat is failure failure is bad you must not fail you must be perfect you must be

It was just a bagel with butter and jam and a yogurt.

I'd been having big breakfasts for a while. Big lunches dinners snacks too.

To gain weight. To get better. To reach a healthy weight. To stop the doctors from institutionalizing me. Mom made breakfast today. She microwaved my bagel. I always have it toasted. She gave me whipped yogurt. I like regular. Disgusting. It looked disgusting all wrong. Won't eat it.

Won't eat it! Voices raised. Arguing again. Shouting yelling. Won't-eat-it!

I grow frustrated angry hostile. Maddened possessed I throw the 101 Dalmatian plate.

Misses my mom's cheek by inches. The plate shatters shatters onto the kitchen floor.

Mom's crying dad's yelling. I'm frozen. What did I do? Anger subsides. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry. Mom's running upstairs crying. Dad's

still yelling. I clean up the mess I try.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I'm sorry. I'll eat the bagel. I'll eat the yogurt. I'm sorry.

Look at me. Please look at me. I'm sorry... Institutionalization...

**Institutionalized no you have to fight it you can't let them they'll make you gain weight there they'll make you eat they'll try to brainwash you don't let them fight it fight it you are so close you are almost there you just need to lose a little more weight a little more weight and everything will be perfect just a little more No one's home today go for a run do it do it no one's around no one will know and you'll feel so much better come on just do it doesn't this feel nice doesn't this feel good speed up go faster push yourself you're fine keep going don't get sick keep going don't be weak keep going you have to finish you have to keep going push it don't you want to lose weight don't you want to be perfect now run the stairs do it one two three four five times repeat repeat repeat keep going keep running up down up down up down up down now crunches go one two start over one two three four keep going repeat repeat that one was bad start from the beginning that's weak keep going keep crunching you have to do it lose weight now stairs again up down up down up down repeat up down up down up down repeat repeat repeat**  
*This isn't healthy. You can't exercise. No walks, no runs, no crunches. No crunches. Your door stays unlocked***Throw away your snack don't eat it you**

**don't need those calories you don't need it it will make you gain weight throw it away** *Eat. No hiding, no dumping. Eat. Eat your snack.* **don't listen to them you don't need all this food you could eat less you need to eat less throw that snack away no one's looking no one's here to make you eat it just throw it away do it** *You're beautiful. You're smart. You're cute and kind and fun to be around. You have friends. You have us. You have people who care about you.* **Don't listen to them don't trust them trust me I'm your friend I'm here for you I help you you need me** *Eat. Please. You need to eat your snack. You need to be healthy. Food is your friend. Everyone has to eat. It's all about moderation. But you need to gain weight, this isn't healthy. Your body is shutting down. Eat!* **Don't listen to them they'll make you fat they'll make you eat they'll make you fat stay with me me I'm your friend, trust me** *Listen to the doctors. Trust them, trust us. Don't listen to the eating disorder.* **Don't listen to them they're lying they're liars they want to split us up they want to get rid of me they want you to gain weight they want you to get fat stay with me trust me** *Your body image is distorted. You aren't seeing or thinking clearly. This isn't rational. I know you I can help you I can give you everything you want* *Be logical, be rational. I can make you lose weight I can make you thin I can make you perfect don't you want to be perfect trust me You're not fat. You're tiny. Look at yourself* **fight them resist them don't leave me you need me. Look at yourself. Don't listen stay don't go stay stay with me I'm right I know the truth I show you what's real You're 89 lbs. see look at yourself you need to**

**lose weight** *You're supposed to be in the hospital. The doctors want you in the hospital. We don't want you in the hospital.* **see you see it you need to lose weight** *Fight they're the delusional ones they don't see things clearly* **Fight. don't listen to them I'm right** *Gain the weight you need to live. Food is your friend* **I'm truth** *You need to eat to live..* **don't let them brainwash you** *Trust the doctors. Don't listen to that voice* **don't leave me you need me** *Don't trust it. Trust us. Trust me*

Homecoming. Homecoming with my friends. Dinner at Brio. Dinner?! **Don't go** I don't want to go. *You should go.* I want to go. I can't go. I have to go. Food. Public. Friends. Eating food in public with friends. **Don't do it** I can't. *Come on it will be fun.* I want to. **NO** *Yes. I don't know. We already bought you a dress.* **It's ok go just don't eat** *Let's look up the menu. Now you have to eat this.* Panicked. Hyperventilating. Freaking out. Majorly freaking out. **You don't have to eat it But...? What are they going to do Well...** *You can do it. Be strong. I will...? I step out of the car, looking around, searching frantically. There they are. I can do this. We're ordering. Ordering. You have to order something they're already suspicious* Food arriving. Everyone's digging in. I should pick up my fork. I am going to pick up my fork. **Don't eat just pretend don't eat** *You can do it. Be strong.* **Don't eat** *Eat. Don't eat. Eat. Don't* Hands shaking. Staring, tentatively reaching, pulling back, staring...staring.

The noise amplifies.

## click flash

### Click Flash

Images, photographs, these are the things that I cherish most... why?

Am I trying to make up for something with all these images? Photographs are my memories of happier times. They surround me, swaddling my body in their warm light- smiles, laughter, playfulness, love. These are the images that make up my physical world.

In my head are other images – Images that are now ingrained within me—memories and demons...

What am I feeling now? The warm light of memory or the cold chill of a demon that I will never be able to get rid of?

Is this a memory or a nightmare that haunts me night after night?

What is real and what is not...

### Click Flash

A small portable cd player/radio. Some would call it a boom box. Dull and plastic using hues of gray and blue to make some kind of swirling design. there is a record

## chelsea fuller

button down and a blank tape inserted. It's just darkening outside the window... dusk. Her face is turned slightly looking up and the darkness that will soon surround her. Her mouth slightly ajar from talking in hushed whispers, so as not to wake her sleeping mother, to the recorder telling it her stories of somewhere else.

### Click Flash

An empty cabinet inside a dark kitchen. There is nothing inside except a container of sugar and some empty packages strewn around. The Girls small arm is frozen reaching into the depths of this cavern clutching desperately onto a single packaged brownie. Her face is filled with anxiety turned away looking for something or someone through the kitchen door.

### Click Flash

Three children sit around the same portable cd player. They each hold a small piece of brownie in their frail hands. The oldest, the girl is talking into the recorder while the other two children, one other girl, and the youngest a boy, sit watching with small smiles playing on their faces. They are listening to the stories of the oldest girl as she lets her tiny voice flow into the recorder, enjoying this brief moment in time where there

is no fighting, screaming, no fear.

Click Flash

The Kitchen, this time with the lights turned on, it is much darker outside. A woman stands near the empty cabinet her face purple and red with rage. The empty packages from before are strewn around the floor as though the woman was looking for something inside the cabinet. In front of her stands the girl looking both ashamed and terrified at the same time.

Click Flash

The living room. Dark hardwood floors, bare walls, no lights are turned on. There are two green couches, neither occupied. Standing directly in the middle of the room the woman stands towering over the girl, one hand clinched around the girls wrist her nails digging into the skin, the other hand balled into a fist, frozen mid swing. The girls face is winced together in a flinch and her body seems to be trying to pull away in protection. On the glass table behind them lays several different pills varying in shapes and sizes, and of course, the occasional alcohol bottle that has rolled onto the floor.

Click Flash

Still the living room, but this time from a different angle. The woman is holding the girl off the ground by her hair, the hand not holding the girl is raised as if it will soon come down to attack the girl. The girls face is terrified, eyes wide with fear, tears, and agony. There is a dog, large wolf-like dog colored shades of gray, black, and white. His pointed ears perked high on his head in a protective stance for his master, his face frozen in a snarl-his neck extended, razor teeth reaching out towards the girl. There is blood trickling down her knees,

running down her legs onto the floor below.

Click Flash

The girl is lying on the ground against the door, her body rolled up in a ball. Her face is stained with tears, red from being struck rapidly. Her eyes are wide, looking up at the woman towering above her wondering why she can find no love there. The woman is standing there, eyes fiercely trained on the girl. There is nothing in her eyes but hatred, a glint of sparkle from a smile. The woman is looking down on the girl and is laughing holding the dog by the collar.

Click Flash

The bathroom. Pristine white walls, white porcelain tub and sink. The girl is sitting on a dark blue shag rug on the floor. Her hair in disarray, the bruises just starting to form on her arms, she is focused on cleaning her legs with a wad of toilet paper. She is frozen perpetually with her face twisted in a sorrow dabbing at the wounds on her legs and trying to clean off the blood that has already started to hardened there.

Click Flash

The bedroom is empty this time, with the cd player still sitting in the middle of the floor, the record button still pushed down. The other children have gone off somewhere, maybe their mother has finally decided that it is time to make them something to eat. The girl is alone, alienated from her family. She is knelt next to the cd player her eyes trained on the still recording player. Her finger just about to press the stop button to shut the recorder off.

# two girls

ellie detrich

two girls lay  
side by side  
one is older, two is shy  
one has been here time again  
two's never ventured in this land  
one is forward, sadistic, strong  
and two just goes along  
unsure of what goes on  
feeling shocked and scared and wrong  
one continues the game she plays  
knowing how the dice will fall  
two can't resist the skin that's touched  
the feelings come, down falls the wall  
and just like that, it happens  
roots and hooks and dark and shame  
confusion floods and chills the spirit  
but who would listen?  
mouth taped, hands chained.

time passes in this way  
and to the garbage come the flies  
no idea what is true  
what is truth? what is a lie?  
and so the voice speaks out,  
having battled all alone  
despised by friends and sisters now  
no comfort from what once was home  
a losing battle has been entered  
not one took her to a place  
to listen, hurt with, love and heal  
now a callous is what's embraced  
I say I'm free  
that this is who I am  
that now I'm not ashamed  
Why can't you try to understand?



# finally, a whole person

jennifer hunter

Like a lot of girls in high school, my choices in guys were not always ideal. I dismissed the nice ones and was flattered when the good-looking bad boys paid attention to me. I dated the same guy for a long time during my sophomore year. Eventually I found out that he had cheated on me several times, so I ended things with him even though I still cared for him. It was tough and things were about to get much tougher.

I was "16 and Pregnant" long before MTV had ever considered any reality TV shows. MTV likes to make the girls into celebrities and my experience was the complete opposite. I tried to keep it to myself for a long time. My ex was completely surprised when I eventually called him. He was supportive of whatever I wanted to do, but did not want anyone else to find out including his father. Since my family could barely support my younger sister and me; I really did not have many options. I made the choice to pick a family to give up my baby to adoption to provide a better home. I had to read through written descriptions of families that I would never meet face to face. I eventually picked a religious family that had also

adopted a son in the past. I always thought that if I had an older brother looking out for me, things may have been different.

I missed the first few months of my junior year and had tutors come to the house in order to maintain my education. Only a few friends actually knew what was going on. Others thought that I was helping my aunt who had surgery and a little girl. That was true, but I left out what was going on with me. I was pretty much secluded from the rest of the world and as an extrovert that was tough. I often wondered why this happened to me because most everyone I knew was having sex at our age. I was living a lie and was not sure what was going to happen when I went back to school.

I had my baby girl on October 30, 1990 and left the hospital before she did. I thought it was best for the adoptive family to name her. The day that I had to go down to the courthouse was one of the worst days of my life. I went to the hospital and held her in a rocking chair for what seemed to be hours, but eventually I had to go sign the papers with her dad. I

took a letter and a necklace with a locket that had a picture of her dad and me. I remember crying outside the courthouse that I had to sign away my baby girl. Her dad tried to console me and was very positive that she would find us some day. I still tear up every time I think about that day.

I eventually went back to school and tried to maintain the lie. It took me a long time to start dating again. Of course when I did, I still chose the wrong ones. When I was nineteen, I met a guy who was 6 years older than me. We fought off and on and I kept thinking it would get better if he still wanted to be with me. It was emotionally and physically abusive. He convinced me to quit school since I was paying for it on my own. I should have known at the time to get out, but I also did not have any friends or family around that knew what was going on. School was put on hold and then I maintained another lie that I was in a healthy relationship.

We eventually got married and I thought that things would change. He wanted someone to cater to him like his mother did. We had two kids and things did not get better after that. I had a good friend at work that recognized what was going on and tried to warn me. The straw that broke the camel's back was when he started arguing in front of the kids. I did not want them growing up in that kind of house. My kids were one and three years old and I moved out with only one paycheck to my name. I had to charge groceries, furniture, and

gas on to a credit card that I knew I was not going to be able to pay off each month. It was tough, but life was so much better not being with him on a daily basis. That is the choice that I made to give my children a better life. Since then, I have always told people to not get married with the expectations of change; people do not change unless they want to.

At twenty-seven years old, I was finally learning what I wanted out of life and tried to make up for a lot of missed years. I was finally focusing on me for a change. The thought of my little girl was always in the back of my head. I wondered if I did right by her. I did see her dad once at that time and he remained positive that someday we would meet her. I could have pursued another relationship with him again, but he really had not changed his partying ways and my two young children were my top priority.

I met my current husband 6 months after my divorce and life is good with the exception of my ex still trying to control my life ten years later. That is a whole other story! Of course every relationship is going to have its ups and downs, but it is how you get through them that matters. The good needs to outweigh the bad if it is going to work out. Communication is the key to any relationship.

On the day of October 30, 2007, I took a risk. I posted on the adoption forum page of MySpace. I said "Happy Birthday to my little girl. It happened 17 years ago today at St. Ann's hospital in Westerville, Ohio. There's not a day

that goes by that I don't think about you." To my surprise, I received a message a few hours later from someone that claimed to be a search angel. She told me that my daughter was in Memphis, Tennessee and included a link to a MySpace page. I could not believe what I was reading. I was leery at first thinking it was a scam until I clicked on the link and saw a beautiful brunette with blue-gray eyes, a big smile, and a birthday crown. I knew it was her. I found her 17 years later and her name is Carol!

I did not know what to do with this information since I did not think I should contact her directly, so I contacted someone who said they were friends with her. He said that he knew she was adopted. I asked if he knew anything about a necklace. He said, "Yes, I have seen the locket." I could not believe it. He said that her parents were discussing the issue with their church and that I would hear back eventually. A long four days went by and I finally got a message directly from her that said, "Hey it's been awhile." We messaged back and forth online for the next couple of months. I quickly learned that we had a lot in common. Taking the risk to contact her friend was the best decision I made in a long time.

We finally met on my birthday that year when she came to town to visit. It was kind of tough explaining to my younger kids that they have an older sister, but they accepted it and were happy about it. Obviously I have not told them the whole story, but I had no problems

telling Carol that the condom broke after the high school Sweetheart Dance. She likes to tell her friends that you cannot always rely on condoms because she is living proof. Since meeting four years ago, she is a big part of our family. We try to visit as much as possible, but it is not easy being nine hours away. Text messaging and Facebook help a lot to keep in touch. We can joke about how she was conceived, but the fact remains that she was meant to be.

Finding my daughter and meeting my current husband have allowed me to be the person that I am today. At thirty-eight years old, I am still trying to finish my degree and hope to be done within this decade. Working full time, family commitments, and school is not always an easy balance; but I take it day by day. I know that I have made mistakes and will continue to make mistakes, but I try to not have regrets and consider it lessons learned. I can honestly say that even though I have not achieved all of my goals yet, I am finally a whole person.

# autobiography in portraiture

jaclyn schott

Grief is not a black hole— it is white

Waiting to be written upon

It is blank.

Autobiography in Portraiture

“What does it mean to be and to be you?”

Who are you?

You in the little bungalow on the corner

by the freeway ramp

Who are you?

You popping your gum,

scanning artichokes,

at the check-out on Thursday

Who are you?

You who gave me life

Who

You who broke my heart

are

You who sleeps within me

you?

I don't care to know

about your hometown,

but I'd love to know what you're afraid of;  
what is hidden

within your shoebox of suffering

Things written by the wounded

You.

attempting to rearrange

the

mis-

aligned

to escape from sitting with your own destruction

of sanitized insanity

to discover the ecstasy of

nothingness

and be

liberated

from the compulsion to circle the failed

but sometimes ecstasy is a formality of feeling

far from a crystalline state of being

where it is easier

to

be a

glass house

than a person

built with differ-

ent confusions

under  
the assumption  
that confusion  
is a profoundly  
liberating  
state

where it is  
doubt that is difficult

and

conviction easy

a calm mania.

But what is more profound than your own tragedy?  
Ameliorating the crucible of your spiritual melodrama

So then

what exists when

you

are not there?

Who are you?

Do I know you?

Can I know you?

May I know you?

A work of art—

where

one color ends and one begins

beneath the

stripped bare

layers

of painted illusion  
in shadow and line  
shades dancing

across

skin

Can you defeat the demonic work of art

that is yourself?

Do you paint—

—you paint—

—paint your

self in rumor and façade—

practiced beauty?

You

who are designed to break me

the only victim here will be me

as I capture you

in a portrait of language

and with every drop of ink

used in my Rorschach of you

I will blot my own autobiography

and continue to explore the question:

if the price of Heaven is grief

why are they selling Heaven for so cheap?

Why do demons percolate

like popcorn

in an

endless

cycle of

haunted

Darwinism?

Let me look at you as Eurydice to Orpheus.

Why?

That is an answer in its infancy.

First clue:

Don't look back.

Take me by the hand

Take me somewhere

New.

You.



# to fear

katelyn hanzel

Having fun yet? Are you enjoying yourself these days, the way you have since seventh grade? Are you comfortable, all embedded in the darkest depths of my mind? Sometimes I wonder if it's cold there, the shadowy hole in which you live. But then I think about what you feel like when you show up in my life, and honestly the only thing I can think of is the uncomfortable heat you cause. How you enflame my emotions, my thoughts. So... I suppose all those questions I asked before just aren't necessary; I know exactly how you've been.

I'm angry with you, Fear, and for so many different reasons. Mostly because you won't leave me alone, regardless of how defiantly I ask you, or how desperately I plead. You show up and engulf me in situations where I shouldn't be afraid, I shouldn't be frightened. But I am, because you make me that way, and you don't even care. You don't give it second thought, or a passing glance. You just show up and cripple me. I think you get pleasure from it, really. It's fun, a game, or maybe just a way to pass your time. I could come up with a multitude of things you could do doing other than hurting me. But I know you wouldn't take me up on any of my suggestions. That's frustrating, too. Knowing you won't even take the time to listen.

You come in all your different forms, Fear. It's like you have multiple personality disorder, and you don't want to try to get rid of your alters. In classes, you come around for exams, presentations, discussions; all of which I know I'm good at. Still, you can't just leave me be. I'm a pretty social person, too, aren't I? Talkative, loud, outgoing, friendly... wouldn't you agree? You like my friends – you hide away when they're around. You let me live, and be myself. But as soon as I'm alone in a room full of people I'm unfamiliar with... you scurry right on up to the front of my mind. Almost in my eyes; it's like you want me to see you, instead of them. Instead of the new people. So many times, you've been the one to stop me from going out, and meeting so many new people. You've made me shy, unsure, insecure, and self-conscious. You've made me feel inferior a lot of times, and you've made me feel unworthy of things. Sometimes friendship, most recently love. You make me feel like I'm not good enough for something or someone, when I know for a fact that isn't true.

Confidence beats you up a lot, doesn't she? She gets in your face and screams at you. She shoves, she hits, pushes, yells, screams and she pulverizes you, doesn't she? I like it when she does that. She already works really hard at it, and she does it often, but I really wish she'd do that a lot more. And I know hearing that must just make you cringe, but that's exactly what I want. I want you to leave. I want you to disappear completely, because I don't have anything in my life that I need to be afraid of. Not failure, not a lack of acceptance, not a lack of love in my life. I don't need to be frightened of any of that. The only reason I am is because you've rooted into me, and you just won't vacate. Fear, I'm exhausted. Truly I am. *I'm tired of being afraid of myself.* Don't you understand that? Don't you want me to be happy? That's what I want, but you have to disappear first. Give Confidence your room. I know she's been a little violent, but it's in my best interest. Your room is perfect for her. She can add a little new light, and she'll be as frequent a feeling as you, only with positive connotations.

Come on, Fear. I'm tired. You have other places to be. So give Confidence your room, okay? And do it nicely... I don't need another headache attributed to another one of your arguments.

Not yours anymore,

K.

# mother

curtis baker

Mother, you always were so close to me-  
Close through my ups and close through my  
Downs.  
Will you still be close to me?  
Through your ups and through your downs-

Mother, you always knew just what to say-  
Especially when I was down and gray.  
I cannot find the words to say-  
To help you find your way.

Mother, there is no cure for what you have-  
You've beat it once, but now it is back.  
What can I do, to rescue you?-  
What can I do? What can I do?

Mother, I wish I knew what to do-  
All I know is to be by your side-  
I will hold your hand and love you so-  
I just want to rescue you.

Mother, you've given me the strength to go on,  
When no one else thought I could-  
Your strength is but a pebble of what you are ca-  
pable of.  
Be strong for me, but more importantly be strong  
for you.

Mother, you are the strongest person I know-  
I'm here for you Again, that I want you to know-  
No matter what happens to you-  
I'll be strong and close to you...

# a spoken history

leah driscoll

I don't know why, but sixteen is the magic number.

Books and movies are dedicated to the stories of sixteen-year-old girls and the school year when it all begins — when she meets *him*, and maybe he helps her find all of her missing pieces, or maybe he leads her astray. Sometimes the girls are delicate and wide-eyed; other times they're sharp, practical, and devastating. But whether they're popular or reclusive, with shoulders back or shoulders slumped, they all stumble and blossom through the complicated, confusing, and all-consuming commotion of first love.

The best of these stories are adored and commended because they understand what it means to be a teenager, and don't patronize the characters or readers with melodrama and morals. These stories win awards, get taught in classrooms, sometimes become banned, and teach young girls that no matter what they think, they are not alone.

I can relate to these stories and pull wisdom out of them, but lately, these beautiful coming-of-age narratives leave me feeling more and more lost, like I've just missed my exit on the highway or I've fallen too far behind the car I've been following and I'm stranded, panicky and nervous in the middle of nowhere without a map —

Because I *miss* having a high school relationship, like I could somehow miss something I've never had. And so I've started thinking that maybe I've missed out on an important part of growing up. Don't we all need that first relationship, the one where we're not quite ready but we're more than ready to stumble and fall and *learn*?

And I feel like now that I'm already twenty years old and a more assured, mature version of my high school self, I've lost the possibility of having a first relationship like that. One where it's okay to be a silly teenage girl who's foolish and scared and so damn excited all at once. But that's gone. I'm older and I'm not supposed to be foolish. I'm supposed to be smart about relationships and have my head on straight. I'm supposed to be confident, not afraid, and realistic and mature instead of so damn excited.

I feel like I've fallen behind of my own life, and that's terrifying.

It's true: I've never been in a relationship, I've never kissed anyone, or done anything else for that matter. I've never *held hands*, for God's sake. Hell, I've never even shared "knowing glances across the room."

It took me a long time to truly understand this and accept it, but my best friend's mom explained that being perpetually single is not equivalent to

being a complete and total loser. She helped me to understand that there have been people and there have been opportunities, but I chose to go other ways, and that's not a bad thing.

Mark frightened me. The football games were always crowded to begin with, and I've never quite forgotten how uncomfortable it was to be pinned against the wall in that crowded stadium while he, nearly six feet tall, hovered over me. But we could've dated. If I'd wanted to, I could have made it happen. But I didn't want to.

Keng was.... Keng is difficult to explain. Just imagine a round-faced Thai boy who enjoys hiding purses inside grills and calls it art, and who loves the mole on his face, hair sprout and all, because it's "lucky." That's Keng. We had a strange and unexpected whirlwind of a friendship, and my people-watching neighbors across the street must have thought we were in love because some days he would bike over to my house and we would sit on the porch, talking for hours. He didn't ask me to prom; he told my friend Julie — right in front of me — that he and I were going to prom together, which, at the time, had been news to me. I still miss him sometimes, his silly smile and his childishness, his stupid pranks and his insistence that he would one day be Prime Minister of Thailand, God help them all. I'd always felt that anything more than friendship between us would have been weird, and not just because I wasn't interested in him in *that way*. But it would have been so easy to make that leap — that step, really, a simple step. I just chose not to.

Kenny was the love of my high school years, though it would have only fed his ego to say so. Still, not letting him know is one of the few things about high school that I care enough to regret. We could laugh with each other, had a good balance of similarities and differences, and even flirted every now and then in that awkward way of classroom

romances. But somewhere along the line I convinced myself I wasn't good enough, and he — well, now he's dating girls that are progressively younger and younger...though I'm trying not to judge.

And the last boy...I can't even use his name. Not here (especially not here). It's silly. But there were certain boundaries I knew not to cross with him, circumstances that made a relationship between us impossible. And to be honest, I hadn't realized I'd wanted anything — wanted *him* — until he was gone. I know he lied about why he left, and some days I wish he would have just been honest. He always thought people were going to judge him and see him differently, negatively...and I guess I'm just hurt that he didn't think he could be truthful with me. Anyway, the point is, he was supposed to return, but he just didn't, and I was completely unprepared for how forcefully it crushed me. I *still* miss him more than a year later. We had something together, and I think we both knew it and were frightened by the impossibility. Being together would make liars of us both. So we chose to overlook that *something*, to convince ourselves it wasn't there...and what's stupid is that I think it's still there now, but maybe only for me. Not that it matters. Together, we made the right choice. And I don't regret it.

But the stories that get taught in schools are not ones where the main characters pass up opportunities and choose to do nothing instead of something. Because how can we learn and grow except by doing, experiencing, *knowing*? And I could write it off at first ("Of course we're reading stories about sixteen-year-olds stumbling through love and heartbreak — sixteen-year-olds are the audience!"), but when I saw the people around me going through the same experiences, I started to realize that maybe this *does* happen to sixteen-year-olds, and passed-up opportunities or not, why aren't all the stars aligning for me? I adopted the mantra of obnoxious single girls everywhere: What's wrong with me? I

understand that I'm far from the prettiest or the thinnest, but aren't I *smart*, aren't I *funny*, aren't I *caring*?

This whining is all irrelevant. I have allowed myself to become convinced that because none of this happened to me when I was sixteen or seventeen or eighteen that I was caught in arrested development. Mentally and physically, I am right where I'm supposed to be, but when it comes to being in relationships, I am twelve.

I knew a girl in high school who called herself a late bloomer because she didn't lose her virginity until she was eighteen. Oh God, I don't even know what that makes me.

And you know what? Fuck that.

I am so sick and I am so tired of being led to believe that there is something wrong with me just because I haven't yet experienced what most people go through in their middle-teenage years. Some of the most beautiful people I know are in the same situation as me, or very similar situations, and I would probably punch anyone — in the *face* — who dared to suggest that there was something wrong with any of them. It's true, there are people my age who are getting engaged or married or shacking up, but that's where they are in their lives, and maybe one day I will reach that point and maybe not, but I've just got to live my life as it comes.

I know I said it earlier, but there's no such thing as falling behind one's own life. It's impossible. Sometimes people try to outrun their pasts or catch up with their futures, but you can't take even one step away from what you're living right here, right now. I haven't fallen behind my life because my life is right this very moment, and I'm always moving with it, moving with the present.

The world will try to get me to believe that

everyone my age is dating and sleeping around and getting tangled up in stories of desire and sexy Spanish lovers and quirky teenage pregnancies while I'm still sitting around, wishing I could, just once, know and feel that electricity, that terrifying twist of joy mixed with despair. But those are other people's lives, and I've got to start owning who I am rather than who I'm not.

The idea of a "late bloomer" is insulting because it takes one life and describes it solely in comparison to others. You see, I'm an incredibly important person: I've got arms that lift and legs that walk and lungs that harvest oxygen and all kinds of organs up in here. I am my own entity, my own being, and I just can't be created in the negative space between other people. Because I am not a fabrication, someone that only exists when there are other people to compare me to. I am my own person. If you take my life and pin it up on a wall next to someone else's, maybe then I am a late bloomer, but maybe they're blazing forward. Just because I'm twenty and I've never been in a relationship or had sex or kissed anyone doesn't make me a loser or immature. It just plain *is*.

Judge me if you must. Make assumptions, call me names, play on my fears. It's taken me a long time to reach this point, but I'm okay with my past and my present. I can't really say how I feel about my future, but I'll deal with that tomorrow. Perhaps now in this realization I've finally reached my coming-of-age, even if it was several years after that magical sweet sixteen. And who knows, maybe I'll have another one at age twenty-six and forty-three and seventy-one, just for the hell of it. It's my life — I'll grow however I want, thank you very much.

# i found god but was he lost?

kate m. carey

It was through death that I found God. God wasn't really lost. And I wasn't really lost. But we were having a long-distance relationship.

I prayed to Him nearly every night of my adult life. Nothing big -- no ceremony, no altar. no bowed head or kneeling at the bedside. Just silent whisperings. I prayed for my friends and family. I prayed for the POWs and MIAs. I prayed for my daughter to be happy, healthy, and well-balanced. I prayed for my husband's health. I prayed for calm strength and strong wisdom for me.

My mother died in October and God was there with us. Every day and every night of her hospice care, He was there. He didn't say much, but He did a lot.

When I yelled at him or cried, "Please God, take her." He was silent.

When I woke up and said, "Will it be today, God?" He was silent.

When she called out "Sweet Jesus, please let me die!" Like mother, like daughter. My mother's cries were met with His silence.

When she asked, "Why can't I die?" My father, brother, and I were left to answer her. I tried the "it's-not-time-yet" approach. My father tried the Catholic approach of his youth "Only God decides when you die." My brother was silent, like the God we kept asking for help.

But God was there. He stood by me. He helped me see that his miracles are even more evident in death than they are in life. He showed me what love was.

I saw love pour forth from my brother every time he lifted our mom from her bed and helped her to the bathroom.

I saw love in every screech-scratch-screetch sound of the slide of my father's walker as he made his way to my mother's room.

I saw love in my aunt's face with each new soup she brought because my mom always loved her soups. I saw love in my mother's friends who came to say good bye and I heard it in their voices as they called her from afar one last time.

I saw love as they listened calmly as she told them she was dying and she had a message for them, "Only God decides when you die," she said with the wisdom of those who know their time is short.

I saw love in the care the Hospice nurses brought on each daily visit and in each increase of morphine.

I saw love from my friend who drove an hour far out into the country to a place she had never been to bring me wine, chocolate, cheese and a loving hug. I saw love as I watched from the front porch as her car headed back to the city where we both live.

I saw love in the email life lines I had with friends of twenty-some years during the long days and even longer nights of Hospice.

I saw love in the drops of morphine I slipped into my mother's now silent mouth.

God showed me love. He showed me how others live his love because He knew that I needed love to conquer my sadness. He knew I needed to love my mother on her way to heaven.

It was through Death that I found God. God wasn't really lost. But in the warm fall light of October, he was found.



# regret

brittany fisher

1

To acknowledge what I'm feeling is to admit that I was wrong—  
I miss you, my past  
I should have listened to the sharp grass snagging my train  
read my mother's face seen my sister's tears remembered what I was saying good-bye to  
my puppy my kitty my bright green walls of happiness comfort  
now, I'm stuck the heavy rocks on my hand a constant reminder  
I know anger it consumes my future I am lonely  
To acknowledge what I'm feeling is to admit that I was wrong—  
So I don't.

2

If I knew my age I would have waited but twenty was just a number it told me nothing  
my guess, I was two  
too young too naïve too innocent too dependent  
making you understand that was like trying to make bricks cry  
so I hide my helplessness but you know it's there and hope it goes away  
it's not going away  
it's here to stay  
I have changed my new stove in my new house stares at me waiting for my mother  
I wish I was her then I would know  
then I would admit, I was wrong.

3

Until death still rings in my ear  
my rings throb upon my finger as if saying "murder maybe, divorce never".

# on depression

tammy birk

In the spring of 2010, I felt a storm coming on. I was trying to wind down a dissertation that was about fifteen years too late, and I was feeling increasingly strange to myself. Maybe you know how that feels. Something in me was becoming unfamiliar, increasingly ungovernable, and more insistent by the day. At some point, I joked in a text that I thought that I might be getting depressed—but I believe that I only used that as an excuse for an early afternoon cocktail. I knew that something was going wrong, like we all know that something is going wrong, but only in the vaguest possible way.

At some point, I do remember that I stopped eating, and this was something that had never happened to me before. I thought that I had a serious illness—I really did—and I spent hours on the internet searching for ‘loss of appetite’ and finding increasingly dire news about the possibility of a terminal disease. I had blood work drawn, I took my blood pressure constantly, and I couldn’t sleep because my mind was somehow both spiraling and strangely dulled.

I often would stand in front of the prepared food case at Weilands, a local grocery store, with a sensation that felt like an awful lot like dread. And the funny thing is that, at the time, I could not imagine wanting *anything*—not food, movement, feelings, you get the idea. For the first time in my life, I couldn’t generate desire for a single thing in this world.

I tell you this even though I have suffered two bouts of depression in my life—one, after the birth of my daughter, a depression that left me curled on the bathroom floor and surprisingly unafraid of dying. I really am not unfamiliar with how it feels to slide down into it. So it is hard to understand why I did not see the spring of 2010 as something more obvious and ominous. I taught classes, I tried to write, I despaired of writing, I watched TV, I stared at food, I worried that I was riddled with cancer, I felt like I was heading down into the well.

This decline ran about three weeks before it broke. And it broke pretty suddenly and pretty forcefully. One day, while in Whole Foods, I broke the news on the phone that I was going to stop writing my dissertation. I sobbed, but felt no relief. In the evening, I felt my body begin to swing wildly on me: crushing and clear depression one minute, raw animal anxiety in the next. I rummaged for old antidepressants in the hope of warding off the escalation of the depression. I took Xanax in the hope that it would strangle

the anxiety. Every previously successful remedy failed, and fear began to grow in me exponentially. My body and mind were disconnecting—I could feel them moving in opposite directions—and I knew that I was now, without a doubt, in serious trouble.

I went to the Emergency Room at OSU Hospital because I had no psychiatrist and no way to wait out another hour. I've been to ERs before, but I had never presented in a full state of psychiatric distress. I have had obvious wounds, fevers that you could measure and feel, acute pain in my kidneys—but I, until then, I had never walked up to a triage nurse, laid my head on her desk, and said “something is very very wrong.” Her first question to me was: “Are you considering hurting yourself?” And, without contemplating it much, I realized that I couldn't rule it out if I felt as I did for much longer. So I quietly said “yes,” and she took me back to a private room.

They needed to call a psychiatric resident to see me, so I waited for hours on a makeshift gurney in that room. I texted a few people before my phone died. I remember that I didn't want anyone waiting with me. I was strangely grateful when the phone went out, because it meant that people could stop trying to convince me that I needed companionship until the doctor came. I felt like I was in a kind of fugue state, and the fewer human interactions, the better.

The diagnosis didn't take long. He also opened with a question about my willingness to hurt myself. I didn't dispute it because, like I said, I couldn't rule it out. He asked about my willingness to harm others, and I remember that my eyes widened and I responded with an unusually assertive “no.” I was disgusted to be asked that, offended that that was even a live possibility for him. After a few more questions about my appetite, sleep patterns, and ‘attitude towards the future,’ he leaned forward and told me that he was going to recommend admission to Harding Hospital, the psychiatric hospital adjacent to OSU's Medical Center.

At this point in my life, I had known only one person who had spent any time in a psychiatric hospital, and she was a long-time substance abuser and had attempted suicide a number of times. She hated Harding. She insisted that it made her crazier. Oddly enough, this did not worry me at the time. I couldn't imagine an environment that could worsen my state of mind. I know that psychiatric hospitals tend to make people stiffen and cringe, but there are also times when you recognize that your fear of what is actually happening to you is greater than your fear of any response to it. Maybe you know how that feels.

I was wheeled through an endless underground system of tunnels to Harding, buzzed through two security doors, and taken to an intake room that was covered with posters insisting on the value of life, the temporary nature of all problems, the human capacity for resilience—that sort of thing. There were two night supervisors on the floor: one older woman with an unusually gentle demeanor and a younger African man who spoke with a French accent, called me by my name often, and made my name sound so beautiful and new. Both asked about my state of mind, handed me tissues as I wept, and helped me change into the required hospital gown and footies. Finally and without fanfare, the woman explained that I was on suicide watch and, because of that, I was not able to have any possessions, especially strings or sharp objects of any kind. She was lovely about it all, even taking the time to walk me to my room and gently

point out all the ways that I would not be able to kill myself in it. The windows didn't open, the trapdoor to the roof was secured with an alarm, and there were no pipes around which I could wrap a bed sheet. Standing there in the blue striped gown, I could barely register that she was talking to me as if I were someone looking to die.

In sum, I spent a total of four days at Harding. In case you have never been to a psychiatric hospital, there are some things that you can only learn by living there. You only have access to a shared phone in the hallway, and all calls are screened. You are denied electronic devices of any kind. The ward does not own a computer for your use. There is an oversized television that is always on in the common area, and, usually, it is turned to the Game Show Network or nostalgia programming. A few residents do nothing but watch TV. One resident—who I was told had been there for eight months—took up residence on a sofa because she couldn't bear to be away from the screen. That woman was one of a few psychotics in the ward, and, while my visitors were visibly uncomfortable around them, I came to appreciate them as deep and dark but not at all frightening. One woman who used to explode regularly at meals could be momentarily calmed if you stroked her hair. This I discovered entirely by accident, because I used to do this to my daughter when she was upset as a baby. The other patients were mostly depressives, a handful of unsuccessful suicide attempts, and bipolars who were usually—and spectacularly—off their meds. The unanticipated truth was that I came to really trust and care for these people in the four days I was with them. Unless we wanted to withdraw into our shared and spartan bedrooms, we had nothing to do but talk in the common area. So we would often sit around the tables and tell stories. About life outside of the hospital, about the side effects of the various medications they tried on us, about the maniacal monitoring of our food intake, about failed parents and marriages, about aborted efforts at school and meaningful work, about the visitors we did and did not want to see. Some, it turned out, wanted to prolong their stay at Harding for as long as possible. Others were resentful of every minute that they were there. You learned quickly how to tailor your words and encouragement.

My favorite co-patient was a beautiful bipolar boy—and he was a boy, maybe no more than 19—who had been in and out of psychiatric wards for the last few years of his life. He knew the staff and rituals at Harding, and he had the wherewithal to actually bring a guitar with him on admission. This, I decided with awe, was unusual foresight. You might have thought we would have little in common—a 45 year woman and a 19 year old boy—but we were surprisingly attuned to one another. Depression operates in an odd frequency, and it turns out that is easy and comforting to be with someone else who is living in it too. One night, when I was acutely feeling the impossibility of resuming my life outside of the hospital, he sat next me on the sofa and played a gorgeous and heartfelt version of Jeff Buckley's 'Hallelujah.' It had to be 2 am or so, and I was so taken with his willingness to play me this song, that I cried into my hands the entire time he was singing. I don't think anyone had ever thought to do something like that for me before, and I was too embarrassed to tell him how something so simple had drawn such deep feeling out of me.

The psychiatrists were generally helpful, but you only saw them for an hour each day. One woman, a stern and stereotypical Eastern European, asked me to drop my persona within three minutes of meeting her. Flabbergasted, I think I stammered around for a few minutes more, until she sighed and told me that she saw academics all the time in the ward, and they were usually the most difficult to talk to

because they insisted on 'over-narrating' very simple answers. I wanted to crawl under the chair when she said that, because I had absolutely no idea how I was going to talk with her for an hour if I wasn't allowed to tell long insightful stories about myself. I laugh to write this sentence, but it is true. Eventually, I came to deliver more concise and focused answers to her questions, and I think I was more than a little surprised to find out how much more I revealed when I didn't use language as a form of concealment and diversion.

When I was finally released, I remember the return home with trepidation. It felt like I had taken up residence in a parallel universe for four days. It felt like I had been in some sort of entirely unimaginable life situation, some kind of hermetically sealed world, some physical and psychic space that acknowledged the self that lived outside of it but didn't think about her much. Because of this, the re-entry was disorienting and a little frightening. I knew that my crisis had remade me in a sense, but, on my return home, I was not yet sure what that was.

At one point in my education, I remember learning that evolution—as a larger process—is sometimes gradualist (that is, incremental and slow-moving) and sometimes catastrophic (that is, more sudden and violent). When I observe the evolution of my own tiny self over time, I can see how such a fact can be made poetic. There is no doubt that most of my own evolving has been quiet and difficult to track, but the most *significant* moments of my evolution have always been powerful upheavals, dark nights of the soul, complete and utter collapses. This is my rhythm. This is how my psyche forces its own growth and the abandonment of older ways of being. After my hospitalization that spring, I can acknowledge this as a truth for you. It is a different self that writes now of the depression that devastated, changed, and freed her.

# grandma

For my whole life you were so small  
but so mighty  
Ruling the family with the fear of disappoint  
No iron fist is necessary  
With your sweetness  
Never old or feeble until 77  
Parkinson's is an ugly disease  
It turns beauty and strength into a facsimile  
Power turns  
It shakes out of you- quite literally  
Someone who could once walk on water  
now cannot sit up in her chair alone  
First it attacks your muscles  
seizures and spasms  
your body is no longer yours  
Write your thoughts down-No way  
Feed yourself- Just barely  
Taking steps- Small and thoughtful

# niki calvaruso

The years spent chasing siblings, nieces, nephews, children, grandchildren and students

GONE

Barely a spot in the fading mental faculties

Those little scraps of newspaper or receipts covered in your daily thoughts

to dos

what ifs

are now relics we joke about at family gatherings

Next goes the mind

Don't misunderstand- the body is failing quickly still

But slowly you begin to focus

on the shakes

not the day at hand

Granted when anyone hits their 80s

the mind begins to sleep

I remember growing up being so shocked you

only had  
only one semester of college  
leaving to become a wife and mother  
school was a dream- but a place holder  
while he was in the Navy  
More than 60 years you've cared for each other  
as husband and wife  
But loved since kindergarten  
met your soul mate at 6  
Now he cares for you  
stubbornness and the desire to give  
you the best quality of life possible  
keep him going  
we kid he will die right after you  
Because his purpose is gone  
And life without you seems incomplete  
This is a joke- only kind of  
This is how we know you will both be happy  
"I'll go when you go, Bon"  
I can hear him now  
like you're going to get groceries  
One day we can all hope to find someone like  
this  
But it is an impossible bar to reach

Life coming to an end is something we all  
must deal with  
for some it is slow and visible  
some it is quickly and out of nowhere  
It is, however, the great equalizer  
The one of two experiences all humans can  
count on having  
and that they know they will face- Eventually  
It makes man quake in their boots  
As a devoutly religious woman  
Death meant an eternity in heaven  
a beach vacation with Jesus  
But it was a far off idea  
not one you wanted to rush  
Eternity is a long time- No hurry  
But now death is a blasé topic  
As your siblings have started to pass this year  
it destroys the family  
Great tears of sadness and fond memories  
are shared at funerals and reunions  
But you remain matter of fact  
I don't know if this is a coping mechanism  
or the sad realization of imminent fate

This is a fate I cannot yet face  
For you I mean  
You leaving us  
is too much to bear  
I have faced the loss  
of close others  
it stings  
it burns  
it rips you from the inside out  
But it is not that feeling I fear  
It is the idea  
of you here no more  
The permanence of it all  
The idea  
the child of a motherless mother  
Right when you were diagnosed  
you said your father had Parkinsons  
and Alzheimer's in the end  
so it could be much worse  
This was so like you  
Not seeing the bad in the situation  
Looking on the bright side  
Now we watch the bright side  
fade away with you

One day you will be the fondest memory  
The hilarious stories we would tell  
how you could never drive  
and grandpa would find the car in  
the ditch at the end of the driveway  
because you were practicing at night  
the feeling of when I finally outgrew you  
not that taller than 5' is that impressive  
how you and Aunt Betty were too scared of  
cursing  
in childhood  
so you would say SH  
and she would say IT  
But you will never just be a ghost to me  
or mom  
I can only hope-should I ever  
have children of my own  
you will not be to them either



## immurement in writing: the body that wanted HIV got it

wes jamison

It seems all too obvious to me now that I'd write about having HIV when considering otherness in writing, though I've fought it for so long—for the whole two years, one month, and twenty-one days I've known I have it. Even as I sit to write this, I want to give up before I've even composed a single paragraph, because—and here is the demonstration of my content, noticing how long it is taking me to simply say it, even though I know the words, even though I've always known the words, even though I can say it to myself, even though it should be the very first thing I say in a text such as this—I am scared of being identified with it, of being identified by it. I fear it. I've dreaded it—*dread*, because I always knew I'd contract, somehow.

I fear writing *the HIV text*. Even when I was writing the most—during the three months after I was diagnosed—I fought against it, attempted to deny it, tried to make it secondary. It was always only footnoted, until more than a year later. I never wrote it. I didn't want to write it. I didn't want to write *HIV*, and I hated when I saw it glaring at me from the page, as I hate seeing it now, seeing that I've already written it three times. When I compose by hand, it is never in capitalized, and it is probably smaller than the rest of my script so that I do not focus on it. I never wrote *it*, though I used the acronym: I was able to write the inability to write etiology, the lack of privacy, the changes, the questions and my questions without ever owning or genuinely admitting that I have it, though I and my readers knew. And even now, I know I am not writing it. Because of that fear. The fear persists, though the dread is gone: my body that wanted HIV got it, and its desire has found another placeholder.

That is the closest I've come to genuinely writing it: *my body that wanted HIV got it*, understanding that *got it* is to be read as *did everything it could to get it*. This is the closest I have come to writing HIV—the thing itself, the illness. And I know that this is because, here, I give my body its own agency.

I've always hidden behind Identity, behind Self, behind versions of me—I've done it through the first paragraph of this text. And only thirteen sentences later, I've come as close as I ever have to passing this. Because now I realize that writing HIV is not writing Identity, though I wanted it to be; it is writing the body, not in its virology, its biology, its anatomy, but as its own entity. This is what I've feared: that something so fragile, so temporary can have such a claim in who I am, in what I am, and in what I am able to do; but at the same time be ultimately separate from me, something over which I've no control. Our bodies and our selves are consubstantial, and we picture ourselves outside of our bodies, because, in a way, we are. But it is the only tool

our selves have to use in order to do anything. It is what gives us any sort of power or agency.

Helene Cixous says that we are made of our weakness (6), and I know that mine has been HIV. The weakness has probably been *the body* even before diagnosis. And I am certain that this is common between us all: Cixous describes our common experience in living, as in writing, in this way:

What makes us flee, what makes us come running down the mountain, what no man, no prophet could ever do, is *look straight at God*, look him in the eye. This is a metaphor. It's looking at what must not be looked at, at what would prevent us from existing, from continuing our ordinary, domestic lives, and what I call, for better or worse: "the truth." (61)

What *prevents us from existing* is not an act of immurement (27) but the fact that we are already immured: we are each somehow built into the walls of our bodies. And we die there, we die because of being there, because we have this body, this fragile body that kills us. In this way, "God" is not an entity but merely a manifestation of mortality. Yes, this is a metaphor. And, in that vein, my body simply *is* HIV, as HIV is that thing that tells me, every single day, that I will die, that my body will kill me, is killing me, and that I am trapped inside of it, left to rot. HIV is, as Tory Dent describes it in *HIV, Mon Amour's* eponymous poem, the "affront of annihilation" (XV.11). This is a metonym. HIV/body is that thing that will prevent me from existing, and has prevented me from continuing my ordinary, domestic life. HIV is *the truth*. "Illnesses," Cixous says, "are our wounds, our vengeance, our cries, our calls, our metaphors" (73).

But Cixous says, "We can hope to move closer to everything we can't say" (61) if we confront God, look it in the eye; that "[w]riting, in its noblest function, is the attempt to...find the primitive picture again, ours, the one that frightens us" (9). I—we—necessarily must ascend downward toward God, toward the truth, toward that truth that frightens us. And as clichéd as this seems to me, there is nothing more frightening to me than to know that my body is killing me—has always been killing me—and I have no control over it (unless, of course, I did take control over it). Thus, I must confront my body, the body, *the body*.

Of course this is frightening. To confront that which we fear produces fear, as it is self-sustaining. But to confront the body also requires the use of one's body: we are climbing, we are walking, we are moving beds and opening doors. This is a metaphor. To write the body, we must go beyond temporality and corporeality, for the body is more than these, though with a foot, as it were, in each. To write the body, I must inhabit my own. I cannot write through my mind only. Before I can even write the body, I have to get to that place where I am able to write from and through my entire body. "We either use the whole of it...or a part" (65). I've been using only a part. Because I have not yet properly confronted God. I have not yet come close enough to dying.

I had been intellectualizing my illness, my body—confronting it with only my mind, which is not my whole existence. And then I stopped altogether. And I have seen the shift in my writing away from the corporeal altogether. I grew despondent over composing HIV in the way I

had been, because—and I can only use the words of Dent again, because she experienced similar, at one point, and wrote it in a way that I am not yet able to—I grew “bored by ideas of persecution and fatigues with my efforts/to connect sign with meaning, closure, and hence beginning” (“Fourteen Days in Quarantine” 4.13-4). Here, Dent writes about intellectualizing the body, her body, her mortality, HIV, her truth, the truth, my truth *through* her body. She came closer to death than I did. She climbed the mountain, somehow, despite her illness, and stared that illness in the eye, and came back, unafraid, somehow, and wrote not just the truth but that process of gaining access to it.

And I imagine that this is how most people begin writing about HIV: persecution, fatigues, signs, closure, etiology. But none of these are HIV, the truth, death. These are merely weaknesses, I think. HIV is a blessing, in this case, though, for its act of diminishing our bodies is simultaneously weakening the truth—the truth that is our bodies, that which prevents us from existing; HIV makes that truth, the body, less frightening, if only because it is now predictable and weakened. Though we are weak, innately, HIV (illness) affords us the power we *must* regain in order to write the truth (Cixous 103).

I think, sometimes, that, by virtue, HIV is the only thing that has been saving my writing, for every time I sit and try to write it, if I am genuinely trying, I am taking a step closer to that particular manifestation of my mortality, to God, to that which would prevent me from existing, to the truth. HIV is my truth, and I just have to get there before I can write the other truth—the body, my body, the phrase *I feel like dying*, because “it is really the only thing one should say” (18). I am a privileged writer, for I do not have to ask myself, “And what if [my] body was [my] destiny” (Lispector qtd. in Cixous 71), for I already know it is, already know that I am immured in this truth, this body, my body, and that it is that which I must confront.

# ring click

alison kennedy

It's amazing how your feelings can change about someone in a split second. I never thought that anything could make me stop loving her. But then she leaves me hanging, barely by a thread, when I need her the most. After everything we've been through, she can't be here for me right now. Ridiculous. Like an axe to a limb, my love for her is severed from the rest of my consciousness. Gone.

Giving Davey up is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done. He's mine. That once in a lifetime special horse. You only get one of those, maybe two if you're lucky. And he was mine. Always supposed to be mine. I swore up and down that he would be. But now he won't be. I have to find the perfect place for him to go. Doubt that'll make it any easier... But maybe.

I have to figure out what to tell her. I mean, I have to tell her something. Anything. But what? I can't do this anymore, and she needs to know. What to say, what to say? How do you tell someone that all of your attachment to them is gone? Something that we never thought would happen, but it has. I don't love her. I can't love her anymore. Nothing can make better the fact that she left me when I need her the most.

But to lose both of them at the same time... Can I do it? Can I handle that much pain? The two things I love the most in the world. Gone. At the same time. But I have to do it. I have to. There's no recovering from this one. I thought we could make it through anything, but that's just not true anymore. She has finally killed it. I never thought she could do anything this horrible. But she has. I almost can't believe it.

How do you tell someone that they have killed the love you once had for them? And over the phone? Not much seems worse than that. But what are my other options? Leave it until I'm home again? Not going to happen. That won't be for a few months. Email? No way. Too impersonal. I guess I have to call her. Ok. Ok. Ok. Brace yourself. You can do this. Ok, it's ringing.

RING

Breathe.

RING

Breathe. You can do this.

RING

You have to do this.

RING

Hello?

PAUSE

I'm going to talk, and you're going to listen.

PAUSE

I know you said you needed time.

PAUSE

No. No buts. I don't want to hear it.

PAUSE

Just SHUT UP and listen.

PAUSE

BREATHE BREATHE BREATHE

I can't do this anymore.

PAUSE

SHUT UP. I can't do any of it. This. You. Anything. Nothing. That's what I feel now. Nothing for you. Not anymore. Not after this.

PAUSE

What do you mean, what did you do? Are you serious? You can't be serious? No. No. No. No. NO.

PAUSE

How could you think it would be ok? Ok to just leave me for a few days, right now of all times? I don't care that you 'needed' space. That's bullshit. I'm giving up the one thing in the world that has EVER meant more to me than you. And you can't put your own shit on the back burner for a few days to help me even get used to the idea? I JUST decided to do this. I never thought I would have to give Davey up. Ever. I told myself that I never would, that I would always find a way to keep him. And I've failed. And you can't support me while I give him up. The one person I thought would really be there for me. And you're not. I don't get it.

PAUSE

NO. I really mean it this time! This time is different. Different from all of the others. I NEVER want to be with you again. Ever. Seriously. Never again. And you know what. It is your fault.

CLICK.

BREATHE

BREATHE

BREATHE

It's over.

It's really over.

I mean it this time.

I swear.

I've finally gotten out, and I'm never going back.

I've lost both of the most important things in my life.

Where is there to go now?

I guess the only place to go is up.

i speak fast and i'm not going to repeat myself

chelsea musselman



# dear sally

alyssa mazel

Hair straighter, legs longer  
Time is of the essence  
Now  
Already her dress is patterned  
Ruffling around her  
Midriff  
A loose but fitting satire.  
Pick-me-up's shadow chases naked feet  
*I won't go alone.*  
Pretty seeps in  
To the frame, seven  
Pulls and tugs at  
Four,  
At the white years  
That hold and hide her.  
Responsible colors will string up the small

By the beauty bones  
Just as it's done to her.  
Twenty years and done,  
Two breezes will reminisce  
Laughing  
Ghost laughs, laughs painted  
To their throats  
In rouge  
About the good old days  
Playing dress up, mottled minds  
Forgetting  
Unsound settings.

Speak

kristina fedeczko

The unsaid  
it weights you down  
and before you know it  
you're drowning  
trying to grasp an unreachable surface  
yet it only takes one  
one word  
one sentence  
to push you out  
from the dark abyss  
for the first time in your life  
you can speak  
words flow  
people begin to listen  
you changed  
from the girl who remained silent  
to the woman who  
speaks up



## editorial board



### **Hannah Biggs, Editor**

Hannah is a senior double majoring in English Literary Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She hails originally from Terre Haute, IN, and she is bound for Rice University in Houston, TX next year to pursue an English Literature PhD. Hannah also enjoys big band and jazz way too much for being a 1989 baby; she likes "things that were cool...once," but prefers to think of her tastes as sophisticated...or, something... Favorite quote: "Home is a place we all must find, child. It's not just a place where you eat or sleep. Home is knowing. Knowing your mind, knowing your heart, knowing your courage. If we know ourselves, we're always home, anywhere." -The Wiz



### **Jacquelyn Schott, Assistant Editor**

Jacquelyn is a junior English (Literary Studies + Creative Writing) and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies major. Her hometown is Fairfield, OH: known for either Jungle Jim's, a famous international grocery store, or for their high school theatre and music programs. The latter, along with her mother, spawned her love of all things creative and fantastical from show choir (NOT Glee) to Cirque du Soleil, from wedding shows to astrology (she collects Virgos), and from the written word to the stars and beyond. Favorite quote: "Meus fabula est mei ut dico" which translates from the Latin to "My story is mine to tell."



### **Aleyna Hamilton, Artistic Director**

Aleyna is a junior majoring in Visual Communications. Any and all free time is spent riding and taking care of her three horses Jack, Hank, and Echo (who is a former Otterbein school horse). Echo and Aleyna especially enjoy fox hunting and schooling dressage.

Favorite quote: "In actual fact, the female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems crack jokes, make music -- all with love. In other words, create a magic world." -Valerie Solanas, SCUM Manifesto



**Niki Calvaruso, Merchandising**

Niki is a senior Literary Studies major with minors in Psychology and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies. She loves hockey, social media, and singing along with her iPod at extreme volumes in her car. Favorite quote: "Put your ear down close to your soul and listen hard" - Anne Sexton



**Bailey Dye, Editorial Staff**

Bailey is a freshman majoring in Biology with a Pre-med intent. She is from Circleville, Ohio, home of the amazing Circleville Pumpkin Show that everyone should visit at least once in his or her lifetime. Bailey enjoys a wide variety of music, horseback-riding, reading and archery...and she does not pretend to be Katniss Everdeen...unless no one is around to watch her shoot. She has been described as an English major masquerading as a Biology major, which only adds to her mystery and intrigue. Favorite quote: "We must leave evidence. Evidence that we were here, that we existed, that we survived and loved and ached. Evidence of the wholeness we never felt and the immense sense of fullness we gave to each other. Evidence of who we were, who we thought we were, who we never should have been. Evidence for each other that there are other ways to live--past survival; past isolation." -Mia Mingus



**Kristina Fedeczko, Website Coordinator**

Kristina is a sophomore majoring in English Literary Studies and Creative Writing with a minor Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Kristina is a born and raised Ohioan. She enjoys reading, writing fiction, and drinking too much coffee. Favorite quote: "The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel must be intolerably stupid." - Jane Austen



**Sarah James, Publicity Chair**

Sarah James is a sophomore majoring in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a minor in Philosophy. Sarah comes from Delaware, Ohio. She likes reading pretty much everything, riding horses, and feminist critique of television, movies, and music. Favorite quote: "You must be the change you want to see in the world. " - Mahatma Gandhi



**Katy Major, Secretary**

Katy is a freshman majoring in Creative Writing and Vocal Music from Medina, Ohio. She is also an active member of VOX: Voices for Planned Parenthood and FreeZone. In her free time, she enjoys reading, singing, watching indie films, and drinking tea. Katy hopes to one day earn her Ph.D. and be a college professor, as well as continue to write and publish her work.

Favorite quote: "The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way to make life more bearable." - Kurt Vonnegut



**Alex Shaffer, Publicity Chair**

Alex is a junior transfer student to Otterbein. Alex is triple majoring in English Creative Writing, English Literary Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She is from Cleveland, OH, and loves color guard, reading and writing.

Favorite favorite quote: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." - Mahatma Gandhi

