

FALL 1999



MANUSCRIPTS

Manuscripts

*Love of Wisdom, the helmsman of life.
--The original Frat motto*

Butler University
Indianapolis, Indiana

Volume 68, No.1
Fall 1999

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something about the voice and its origins

And so it came to a cigarette
Outside in the rain, out of the rain,
Under the overhand in a non-descript city,
Where the poet smokes dodging bullets of rain
In front of the poet who leans
Against the wood of the doorframe,
And she exhales quickly,
The poet in the rain, smoking in the rain,
Standing in the rising mist is saying
"You know, I've lost my voice"
And the poet by the doorframe says
"Aren't you talking?" and the poet says
"No, I mean my poetic voice" -exhaling-
and the poet leaning
Against the wood of the doorframe
Says "Well, aren't you talking?"

-Cat Bohannon



Places I've been

My life.

A dirty truck-stop vagrants shuffling in and out with little regard for the shiny glass doors or anything else everyone embarking on unexciting adventures into the vast openness of the world I sit stifled in a little town with waitresses wearing wide watermelon earrings stools that spin and spin and sin until time has escaped.

My mind.

A cluttered Chicago street hustling and bustling avoiding muggers and models in effort to escape corruption or violation devouring every detail until I can't see anymore blinded by the brilliance of a street performer lilting saxophone laments unheard discernment.

My soul.

A perpetual merry-go-round driven by an unseen psychotic engineer conspicuously torturing me Slow Fast Slow horses and elephants manipulated on little poles spearing them painfully through the middle Fast Slow Fast air thins eyes blur stippled animal faces eerily smirk at me in my turmoil.

My heart.

The Leaning Tower of Piza entered by tourists with glaring cameras and foreign words keen to the hastily made walls sinking foundation observers expectant of the eventual demise of the tower falling like a construction of tarot cards the wonder of the world's most enamored failure.

-Jessica Lollino

Goddamn am I falling. in love, for her, out of mind. Falling... like a drop of blood through a glass of ice water. just friends, but I can't stop myself. Watched Shakespeare and hopefully felt for her healing hand. grasped it and died of desire. Pecked her forehead at 3am to say "I love you" the only way I knew how. Pecked her forehead at 3am to ask her if she'd fall with me.

-Mark Wuellner

Maybe I should paint. It's really stagnant in this room. Shit - no time for that. Gotta get these hooks up. Gotta get the hooks up gotta get the hooks up. I figure I've got a little while before they show up at my place. It depends on how quickly they work - I know they'll find the slug, and it won't take long to match it to the gun. Should've filed the serial numbers down. Won't do any good now. Gotta get the hooks up gotta get the hooks up.

See, the way it works is this - the fishing hooks are hanging from low test fishing line - you can't see the wire if you're in the dark or even in a room with natural light. Hang'em all about six feet off the ground - average male is what - 6 feet tall? - he walks too quickly into a room and the hooks catch his eyes and rip 'em out of their sockets. Got the idea from a special on the Learning Channel about cults. There were these serious Santeria fanatics out in Tucson who booby-trapped their whole compound, and when the cops showed up because the neighbors were complaining about all these weird goings-on, three of them had their faces yanked off by fishhooks. I know it isn't gonna keep them from taking me to jail or shooting at me or gassing me or whatever, but I figure it'll be

good for effect. They're gonna label me insane anyway so why not go the full nine yards and give them something else to bitch about? Gotta get the hooks up gotta get the hooks up.

It's not like I was planning on things turning out like they did. I was in the process of doing us all a huge favor. You try to kill the devil and look at the shit you get into. . .

I was away for a week - I worked for a brokerage firm, and all the old seats - the ones that had been filled for 20 years or more - were bought out. I had been there for 21 years, so my time was up. They flew us out to Boyne Highlands in the U.P. of Michigan, took us skiing. I suppose they thought that made it all better. I didn't really bother to fight them on it too much - I had a lot in the bank and the severance package was generous enough. What worried me was finding something to do with my time. I didn't really want to go back to work for anyone else, but I didn't want to sit around my house all day and feel myself getting older, either. I was pretty spooked.

I got home a few days later and the lot down the street from mine had been bought. It's the biggest one on the block - at least two acres larger than mine. Couple that with the fact that the smallest lot starts at around \$200,000 - it was obviously a good-sized investment. I stopped by to say hello to the kid who was building on it one afternoon that week. He seemed nice enough - Roger Hudlin III. He worked for a big publishing firm upstate - I don't remember which. We said 'hi' a few times when we were both outside, talked about business or our yards - you know - typical neighbor bullshit.

I didn't think much of it after he first moved in, but for whatever reason the kid really made me nervous. I don't know why, but I started keeping tabs on him - you know when he went to work, how late he was out on the weekends - that type of thing.

About two months later, I began having trouble sleeping, so I started chewing these valerian root tablets - they're supposed to help slow down all your body processes and relax you. They helped a little and I started getting a few more hours sleep at night so I was happy, until I had the dream.

It was like this - I was in my front yard mowing the lawn - shit, I mean that's weird enough right there. The last time I mowed a lawn was to help pay for my ticket to go on the class trip to Coney Island in the 5th grade. Anyway, I was in my front yard and I looked down at Hudlin's house, and the whole place was on fire. I dropped the mower and ran down the street to tell him, but when I got there the house was gone - Hudlin was standing where it used to be and was just staring straight ahead.

I asked him what was going on, and he wouldn't answer.

I asked him again and again, but he wouldn't say shit.

I glanced down and suddenly there was a Titlest 9-iron in my hand.

I asked him again and he wouldn't answer, so I hit him.

I asked him again - nothing again - so I hit him again, harder.

He wouldn't open his mouth and he wouldn't budge.

So I started beating the hell out of him. I threw everything I had at him, and he didn't move. I hit him in the face so hard it pushed his jawbone through his cheek, the skin just dangling down. I cracked him in the side of the head so many times I lost count. There wasn't a spot on his body that wasn't covered in blood, and I didn't stop. I kept hitting him and hitting him, asking him again and again and again and he just stood there, taking everything I gave him. When I was too tired to go on, I stepped back to look at him - he wasn't even a person. Just a statue - standing there bleeding to death. You ever see someone when they get a deep, deep cut? There's so much blood it starts to look black - like tar. That's what Hudlin was like - a great big tar statue. I dropped the club and started to turn around to go home, but then something

happened - Hudlin raised his hand and pointed out toward what should've been his driveway. It wasn't there, but his mailbox was, and the address said "666".

Then I woke up.

I know, I know - "666" on the mail box - oooohhh, scary. Like something out of one of those bad Exorcist rip-offs. But it still freaked the hell out of me. The whole next day I was sort of in a daze. I had never dreamt anything like that before. That black bloodied statue pointing toward the numbers . . . I couldn't get it out of my head. I was a little nervous to go back to bed that night, but I was so tired from bumming around the house all day I fell asleep the earliest I had in months.

And it happened again.

Only this time it wasn't a golf club, but a crow bar.

All of a sudden I went from an insomniac to a narcoleptic. I'd be watching TV and the clock would say 2:30 p.m., and when I'd look at it again it would read 11 p.m. I'd fall in and out of sleep constantly. And every time I'd fall asleep I'd have the dream.

Over
and
over
and
over.

Each time I'd have something different to beat the shit out of Hudlin with - a baseball bat, a mallet - and it got weirder and weirder each time. One night I'd pound him with a three-hole punch, the next a blender or a Cuisinart. One time I remember smacking him around with a huge black vibrator.

I started taking Vivarin and No-Doze to keep myself from falling asleep, but it didn't do anything but put me more on edge. I was a mess.

I finally talked to a friend of mine who used to be a shrink and the best he could come up with was that I was probably nervous about having some young kid down the block from me. He said that it had something to do with my not working anymore, and feeling jealous of Hudlin because he was out and about every day.

I didn't know what to think, but I knew I wasn't satisfied with what he had to say. I asked him about the mailbox, too, and he did get back to me with something interesting. He said that often times in dreams people will see important numbers or letters upside and/or backward. It has something to do with unconscious perception of things. I wasn't sure why, but I latched on to that.

The night after he told me that I was on my way out the door to have dinner with some friends who were in town when for whatever reason - I honestly don't know why because we were in the middle of a hurricane and I was trying to stay dry - I stopped to look at my mailbox. My address was 996. Hudlin lives three houses down from me - which made him 999. Flip it over ...666. I remember feeling like I couldn't move, but...

Next thing I know I'm in my bed with seven people standing over me. Mark and Janie - the couple I was supposed to meet for dinner - came by after waiting for about an hour of waiting at the restaurant and found me lying in the driveway with a concussion. They said I must have slipped on the wet pavement and hit my head. Four doctors were there plus a nurse. It was surreal.

Everyone left at about 10:30 after they had seen I was all right, and I headed downstairs to watch some TV. My head was killing me, so I popped a few more of the painkillers the doctor had left me. I started flipping around to see what was on right as the storm kicked into high gear. The wind was so strong a few gusts shook the house. I was nodding off just as the TV went to static. I went outside to see what had happened, and sure enough the winds had knocked the satellite off the roof.

I took a few Vivarin to keep myself on my toes, and went about trying to fix it. It was too windy, though. I couldn't even get the ladder to lean against the house for a few seconds without it being blown over, so I headed back inside.

Now I was wide awake and didn't have anything else to do, so I turned the satellite tuner off and started flipping through the basic channels. I don't know if it was because of the storm or what, but nothing wanted to come in. Not even the networks. I wasn't that surprised though, because last time we had a hurricane the satellite went out and I couldn't get anything in. Problem was I was wide-awake and needed something to occupy my time.

I made my way into the cellar and dug up an old set of rabbit ears. I don't even remember why I had them. I tried for about twenty minutes to hook them up to the TV but my hands were shaking too much from the Vivarin. I took another painkiller to try to counter that, and after about 10 more minutes I felt OK.

I got them hooked up and flipped around again, but the only things that would come in were a public access station and one of those religious channels. I wasn't too keen on the public access, so I stuck with the church channel.

The preacher on this channel was talking about man and the devil - how they were different. He said that man, man had to work for what he was given in life - and he couldn't have everything he wanted but he should still be happy. Now the devil - the devil, he said, could have anything he wanted anytime anywhere, and not be beholden to anyone for it. I don't remember why that was a bad thing, exactly, but . . . well, it was. Anyway, they showed this same sermon over and over all night - it was worse than HBO.

Again I knew something wasn't right, but I couldn't figure it out... until I asked myself why I was sitting at home in my robe at 2:30 a.m. on a Friday watching religious programming. I remembered I was supposed to have dinner with Mark and Janie . . . and I remembered waking up in my bed with everyone there . . . and then I remembered my mailbox, and then seeing Hudlin's . . .

And then it hit me. All along I knew something wasn't right with Hudlin, and all along I felt like he was there but he really wasn't there . . . I had a revelation.

I could barely sit still. The devil lived down the block from me. I had helped him cut the limbs off a tree that was keeping the sun from his skylights. He was the new treasurer of our fucking neighborhood association!

I was pacing up and down my halls for hours muttering 'Oh man, oh God, oh God, oh man, oh man oh God oh God oh man, ohmanohgodohgodohman.' I kept asking myself if it was really true, over and over ... I knew I couldn't sleep now. I took a few more Vivarin and sat down to think about things. How could I tell if Hudlin really was the devil?

At sunrise the next day I realized what I needed to do to find out if Hudlin really was the devil. It had been right in front of my face since last night - I guess I just needed it spelled out for me again. I went back into the TV room to lay down on the couch, and the sermon from the previous night was being replayed. I was half-dozing off, half paying attention when I heard the preacher talk again about man and the devil . . . he told me exactly what to do. I needed to take away Hudlin's possessions and see if that would irk him or not. If he did care, we were all fine. If not, well, I wasn't sure what 'if not'. but I knew it wasn't going to be good. I started planning everything out that morning . . .

What I decided to do was this - start out small. I figured why try hard to piss him off right away? I mean, if stealing his paper upsets him just as much as blowing up his garage, why bother to go the full nine yards right?

That night at 4:30 a.m., I hopped in my car and cruised down to Hudlin's house in low gear. I wasn't exactly sure what I was planning on doing - I had a baseball bat, three cans of spray paint, 100 feet of piano wire, two gallons of gasoline, a package of road flares, five pounds of ground beef, a nail gun, and a can of Fix-A-Flat. Well, the Fix-A-Flat was in the trunk to begin with.

Anyway, I wasn't really sure what I was going to do - I figured when I got there the moment would play itself out . . . I hadn't felt that alive since they told me that I was getting a seat with the firm. I drove donuts in his yard for 15 minutes straight - then just to make sure it didn't seem like Hudlin was being singled out, I cruised through a few of the other yards in the neighborhood, too. I spun through my lawn real quick, too - I mean, I needed some kind of common ground for us to meet on, otherwise I'd have trouble trying to gauge his reaction.

I ended up at a do-it-yourself car wash on the east side of town at 5:45 in the morning with Cat Stevens' "Here Comes My Baby" turned up on the radio as loud as it could go. My mind was racing - I couldn't wait to talk to Hudlin that afternoon about what had happened. In a way, I was almost hoping he wouldn't care . . .

I could not, for the life of me, register one iota of concern on Hudlin's face when I asked him about his lawn. It was crazy. It seemed like he didn't even notice half his lawn was upside down. Suffice to say I knew what had to be done - I had to step things up.

I spent the whole rest of the evening thinking about what I could do to try and get under Hudlin's skin, and at about 2:15 a.m., I finally came up with something - but it required a trip to a place in Camden called "Popular and Adult Products".

I passed that store on the turnpike on my way to work for 20 some-odd years, and the name always cracked me. "Popular and Adult" - like on one aisle they're selling jeans and television sets, the next blow-up dolls and anal lovebeads. Christ.

Anyway, I got to the store at 2:45 - shit, that's something else that always irked me about that place. It's a pornography store, and it stays open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Banks don't even have those

kind of hours. Ask yourself - Which is more important to a healthy, functioning society? - round-the-clock ability to access your savings or pornography?

I got there at 2:45 and was out the door and on the road by 3:25 . . . with a trunk full of dildos.

At 4:00 I was at Hudlin's; at 4:25 I had managed to dig up all the plants in his front yard; and at 4:55, his \$200-an-hour landscaped lawn had been transformed into a garden of multi-colored 10-inch erect penises pointing straight toward the front door. It looked like a picture from an S&M homebuyer's guide. I headed home, popped about 5 painkillers, and didn't see anything but the insides of my eyelids until 2:30 that afternoon.

Maybe it was because it was the second night in a row someone had vandalized his yard. Maybe it was because he was pissed his month-old-landscaping was ruined. Maybe it was because he really wasn't the devil. For whatever reason, the next day the police were in front of Hudlin's house, probably trying to figure out whether or not someone fertilized his lawn with Viagra.

I watched from the den for about 10 minutes when there was a knock at my front door. It was Jack Perkins - from the house in between mine and Hudlin's. He had a grin on his face that would've put the Cheshire Cat to shame. According to Jack, Hudlin had taken sick and wasn't going in to work, so he didn't even know what had happened until the guys who mow his lawn showed up. They were the ones who called the police, and when Hudlin saw the front yard, he just laughed and told them to clean it up. He even tried to cancel the police order, but it was too late - they had already been dispatched.

Obviously, something else had to be done . . .

This time it was a little tougher, though. I didn't really know how to go about deciding what to do - so far everything I had done was more or less just vandalism, and frankly it wasn't doing the trick. I was still giving Hudlin the benefit of the doubt, and I didn't want to stop until I knew for certain if things were one way or the other. I was awake from that afternoon until 11 o'clock the next night trying to amp up my little litmus test to no avail. That's when the storms started to kick back up.

The cheapest black slacks I owned were an \$1,100 pair of Dolce-Gabanas, so I had to run down to Caldor to pick up a cheap pair. That set me back about 30 minutes, but it was OK because Hudlin had saved me time and left his Jag out for some reason - that meant I didn't have to sneak into the garage. I made it home by 2:10, and was out the door and headed to his house by 2:25. It wasn't raining yet, but it had been thundering for a good three hours and the winds were picking up steadily. I knew we were in for a big one.

The lightening rod ran down the east side of his house, which meant once I had it unhooked from the ground I didn't have far to move it because his driveway was right around the corner. There were two clamps on the side of the house keeping the wire in place, and both were at ground level, so I didn't even need the ladder. I had it unhooked and was coming down so fast it was hard to see where I was heading. I made it to the corner of the garage and sprinted toward the car. Within 30 seconds I had the ground wire attached to the hood ornament of Hudlin's Jag and was on my way home when lightening struck.

I turned around just in time to see it - it was beautiful. It was like it happened in slow motion - I literally saw the energy pulse down the wire into the car. When it hit the windshields exploded, the seats caught fire - the car hopped a good foot off the ground and came crashing back down. The tires melted to the driveway. My ears were probably bleeding it was so loud.

As soon as the lights inside the house came on I snapped out of it and headed back toward my place. In five minutes I had on my robe and was running back toward Hudlin's house. He was already out in the driveway circling the car. I could see from the road that the ground wire had been blown off and was swaying gently back and forth by the side of the house. It'd probably be at least a week before he even bothered to look over there. He saw me coming and I waved and proceeded to lay it on nice and thick . . .

"Jesus, Roger - what happened?"

"Lightning - the car must have been struck by lightning . . ."

"I had gotten up to get a drink of water and it sounded like your house exploded . . . are you OK?"

You weren't anywhere near it, were you?"

"No . . . no. You didn't have to come all the way over here - it's pouring."

"I wanted to make sure you knew what happened - I mean-"

"No, no - I appreciate it. You want to come in and dry off?"

"No, I need to get home and get my rest . . . You don't seem too upset."

"Upset?"

"Well, yeah - that was an awfully nice car and, well - look at it!"

"What are you gonna do? Act of God, I suppose. Maybe he's got it out for me for some reason, eh?"

"Yeah . . . yeah. Well, look, if you're all right, I'm gonna head for home and get some shut-eye."

"Thanks for stopping by - I appreciate it."

"No problem - you call if you need anything." "Will do. Take care."

"You too, Rog."

I went home and closed my eyes and tried to visualize what was going to happen . . . I was going to kill the devil. I had to - there was no other choice. I finished a bottle of Vivarin right before I realized I needed my rest, so I took a counter measure of painkillers and stalked around the house half-dead, trying to figure out exactly what it was I was going to do. By this time it was almost sunrise, so I figured there was no use for sleeping. I headed up to my bedroom - it had been so long since I had actually been up there - and pulled the gun out from the empty Florsheim box in my closet. I sat in the den and watched Hudlin's house until I saw the taxi pull up to take him to work, and then I made my way over to his place.

It wasn't very hard to get in - I had noticed he tended to leave one of the downstairs windows cracked on the side of the place that faced mine, and today was no exception. I made my way and had a good look around. The place was a palace - just stores of the most expensive shit you could imagine. His entire stereo system was all Linn Audio and Krell components - with Thiel electro-stat speakers that sat at least six feet off the ground. The carpet made you feel like you were walking on air. Paintings on the wall that had to be original - big names, too - Jasper Johns, Jackson Pollack . . . That living room was worth at least \$1,000,000 by itself. And then the bar - oy vey. Four or five bottles of the MacCallen, three fifths of Grey Goose, Bombay Sapphire, French Indonesian Cointreau - you name it, it was there. I wandered around the place for a good 25 minutes before I decided to sit down and go over everything in my head again.

My mind was racing, but I felt pretty good about the plan, so I decided to have a drink and relax - Hudlin wouldn't be home for a few more hours.

After two - well, maybe six - Singapore Slings, I heard the lock turn on the front door. It didn't seem right - it felt like there should still be some time before he came home.

I must have stood up, because all of a sudden, I saw him rush at me. I started waving the gun and yelling and he stopped - then darted toward my left - er, his left - eh - he darted. Before I knew it we were on the floor wrestling, and all of a sudden I heard a shot . . . and he slumped off. I didn't realize I had even pulled the trigger . . .

More importantly, I didn't realize it wasn't Hudlin. I got up and looked at the body and I didn't know who the hell it was. Some guy in a cheap suit. I dug around in his pockets and found a business card:

Thomas Kendall

Allen, Watts, & Kendall

Insurance Adjusters

I'm assuming they'll just become "Allen & Watts." I killed an insurance adjuster. He was there to look at the car, and Hudlin must have left him the key to get some paper work or information inside the house . . . Anti-climactic, I know, I know. Just hold on.

I got out of there pretty quick and now I'm here, waiting. Well, alternating Vivarin and painkillers and waiting. Waiting for the cops to take the bullet out of the body.

Waiting for them to match the serial numbers slammed into the back of it with the ones from the hammer of the gun sitting in my coat pocket.

Waiting for them to come knocking on my door, telling me I'm under arrest.

Waiting for me not to answer so they'll burst through the door and get a few faces full of fishhooks.

Waiting to try out this remote detonator. Sure it isn't pretty, but it'll do the trick.

It's amazing what you can do with a trip to Radioshack.

It's amazing what you can do with a bag of crumbled cat litter dissolved into gasoline and ground beef.

It's amazing what you can do when you pack your homemade napalm into a coffee can filled with broken glass and stick it under the bed frame of the devil with a tiny little transmitter that emits a tiny little spark right in the middle of the mix.

Absolutely amazing.

-Collin Armstrong

Upon waking from an apocalyptic dream

A careless Father
Now spends time with
His blackhaired Son
In the reeds along our trail.

I carry the Virgin statue
Heavy, arms hurting
My legs sink into marsh and I shout the prayer to the line
Behind me.

My dog begins to limp
A bruise not a thorn
She tells me: a slow bruise
On all our hearts.

We come upon
Those monsters in the
Clearing and my heart
Shakes

I show them the rust-covered statue wet
And dewy our group picked it fresh
From the lilies of an italian yard
They ignore the group in a line they
Take me and I leave the Virgin

And I leave her sinking
I leave her face cast in sorrow unending in
The marshy mud
So does
Everyone, the lime, as they hurry ahead leaving
Both of us before
I even leave her.

So the monsters take me on further
I jump from a tall waterfall
Into that strange pool
-a grave of dull swords.

-Kimberly Campanello

On Buttermints

It's not just buttermints. It's circus peanuts and conversation hearts and Nutella and mayonnaise on french fries. It's playing tennis on a ninety-nine point nine degree day, loving a day of waist-high snow, and living in an central-air-free-house. It's a put-on-your-shade-it's-so-bright Hawaiian shirt with not one but two obnoxious hues of orange and 80s music so cheesy it didn't even bother to join the new retro come-back trend. It's all of the things I love with a slightly obsessive passion which make others gag, whine, and sweat.

Who in their right mind could possibly not find the smooth, creamy feeling of a hailstone-esque mass of sugar, cream of tarter, and artificial color yellow 5 dissolving slowly in their mouth and creating saccharin-filled cavity havens completely scrumptious?? Most people with normal sensory apparati would answer with an emphatic, "Everyone!" I, however, am a creature of radical tastes. Call me the "extreme queen" if you will but I find a fat, soggy, sitting-in-a-vat-of-grease-for-close-to-an-hour french fry smothered to the midpoint in mayo (possibly the world's heart-attack-inducingest condiment) more appealing than those fresh, crisp, golden kind they place so carefully in the fry sleeves for all the ads dipped in Heinz any day.

Wading to class through winter's little frozen gifts - I love it. Sweating profusely - I love it even more.

So, there it is. It's now been officially established: My sensory pleasure meters function on a completely different scale from ninety-nine point nine percent of the population. There's always an exception to the rule - the occasional sucker for candy hearts at Valentine's Day or the infamous mayo/ketchup combo lover. However, so few possess and infatuation so strong as to provoke a late-night Meijer run in mid-March to catch the post-holiday sales or a hearty appetite for double-digit fat and cholesterol contents that I truly believe I'm in a league all my own.

With this establishment established, there now exists the question of just why I harbor such an insane taste for the untasty...or perhaps desire for the undesirable is a more appropriately collective phrase. Is it an indication of inherent desire to be different? An unconscious effort for creativity? An abnormal method of demonstrating a need for constant attention even if through disgusted gasps and direct disagreement and therefore a sure sign of emotional neglect as a pre-teen? An adaptation to the harshly varying Indiana weather patterns? Perhaps a psychological metaphor for a largely undesirable career path, such as that of the funeral home director, which I'm destined to follow? Evidence of a heightened sense of kindness toward those judged harshly? Merely an unhealthy tendency of favoring extreme circumstances and environments? Or simply a signification of some sort of fetish for grossing people out?

Speaking in less philosophical and intellectually lofty words though, I think it suffices to say that I like strange things because mediocrity annoys me.

All hyper-analytical proposals aside though, I just really like buttermints.

-Amy Vaerewyck

Everyday lunch breaks

With that hat you always wear,
olive green
with strings.
Long chestnut hair plunging past your ears,
shaded from the sun.
Maybe you're going to join the army.

I was the girl
timid brown hair,
delicately aged eyes.

We strolled along the customary route
arm in arm
familiarly,
as lovers do.

You smiled,
and touched the small of my back,
breathing definitely over my neck,
pressing against me
to get a better look
at your bagel
as it leaped from the heat of an oversized toaster.

-Leah Anderst

pale

Strangely simple paradox
To loathe the means and not the end,
Blind to fantastic scenes
Only roads and crossroads,
Destination becomes destiny;
And departure, dread.
Dreams fade to desires;
And danger, defeat and death.
The shadows in their business suits,
Their uniforms, their bluejeans
Run, pale and substance-less.
A limb of light, even a spark,
They couldn't comprehend-it might
Make shades evaporate
And reveal the barrenness of
False idols and ideals.

-Brandon Bruning



Without Closure

I hate not knowing the whole truth. The answers to my questions of "What happened?" and "why?" were delayed, put on hold.

I sensed her condition was pretty bad this time. There had been other "scares," but this definitely seemed to be the worst. This time, they weren't predicting a miraculous recovery. In fact, there was only a solemn recommendation: Notify all of her immediate family members and close friends.

Mom was already at the hospital. At home it was just Dad, the kids, and I. As soon as he hung up the phone with Mom, I knew. All the information I needed to know was given in a simple gesture of his. Starting at his hairline, he moved his hand over his head, over the countless waves of brown hair. I watched the hand move smoothly and deliberately over wave after wave. When it reached the nape of his neck, he started all over again.

"Daddy?"

Wave, after wave, after wave

"Daddy, what's wrong with Grandma?"

After wave.

It actually took us less than three hours to get packed. After Mom's phone call, there was a blur of tears and confusion. I don't know how long I stood and watched my Dad grieve. I had been crying too, but the realization didn't hit me until the phone rang. It was mom again, and she needed us to bring her an overnight bag. They were giving Grandma one week to live. Absurdly, I half-hoped it was the Doctor, telling us not to come. I wanted it to be "too late." I picture him as the George Clooney type, in a white coat with a stethoscope intelligently draped around his neck, and a solemn voice.

"Ummm I regret to inform you," he would say through the receiver. "The cancer progressed faster than we expected it had spread to her lymph nodes she died comfortably would you like to proceed with the necessary arrangements?"

But there was no death. According to Mom, she was still living, breathing, but also hooked up to all kinds of different machines. She even relied on a bedpan. I'm not good with breathing tubes. And mom said they were feeding her intravenously, and I remembered what that looked like. Bruises like huge purple spiders where the tubes enter the skin, tape marks

"Daddy, I don't wanna"

"If you were dying, would she come and see you?" is all he said.

So we divided the tasks evenly. He canceled his conference calls and postponed presentations. He also had to call the kids piano teachers and soccer coaches. As for my duties, the bleach load needed to be put in the dryer and there were stacks of dirty dishes in the sink. The beds needed to be made in the bedrooms, and I was in charge of all the packing. I even had to change the cat's litter box.

I couldn't stop thinking about my Grandma, cold, drugged, and forfeiting the fight to live. I had known for a long time that she was weak and wanted to go. There was so much to get done before we could leave, and the longer it took, the more obvious it seemed that we weren't going to make it. I gathered the kids' pajamas, toothbrushes, coloring books and markers for the car ride. And I still had to pack for Mom. In a way, it seemed just like any other trip we'd taken. Dad even told me to pack the kids' bathing suits because there was an indoor swimming pool at the hotel where we were staying.

But when I actually made it to Mom's closet and began to put her things in the suitcase, I couldn't bring myself to pack her leopard-print swimming suit from the Victoria's Secret catalogue or the Liz Claiborne pant outfit with the matching belt and shoes either. As if she would want her "Sun-Ripened Raspberry" nail polish with the "No-Smudge" lipstick! Regardless of what I packed for her to wear, nothing would make the guest chair in Room 314 any less uncomfortable. No matter how warm of a sweater I packed for her, the air from the heater would continue to blow cold, malignant air.

Two hours and forty-eight minutes later, when everything was finished, we left. It was my first ride in Dad's new BMW. It was black, like my Dad, with black leather and tinted windows that lied about the time of day. For the first time, I thought of my Mom, and the condition she would be in when we saw her at the hospital. She'd have on yesterday's makeup, black tear streaks where the mascara ran down her face. Her clothes would look worn, full of wrinkles, and she'd have a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

And then there'd be Grandma, hooked up to machines that wanted to save her. They'd be pumping the life that she didn't want back into her body. She wanted to leave it all behind, the twenty-five years of loneliness since my Grandpa died, since he killed himself. She lived through his alcoholism and the

beatings, and through late nights working as a waitress at the neighborhood bar. After Grandpa died, she had to rely on small tips to feed her children as well as pay off the enormous bills Grandpa had left behind.

I had so many questions to ask her about the past, but I never had the guts to ask.

Was it worth it, Grandma? Because the alcohol buried him and the bruises never completely healed. Eventually, the owner of the bar fired her, and my Mom never fully forgave her for not being there to read Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty at night. I knew enough to hold my tongue because a question like that would've killed her.

And now she was dying. Despite the pain I knew she was enduring, I wasn't going to let her die yet. There was too much about the past that I still needed to know. "What happened?" and "Why?" still needed to be answered, and I wanted the truth. Was it true my own Grandma hated my Dad, as well as all black people? The thought of my Grandma being prejudiced was too much to bear. I was told she believed my Dad was "an exception." To her and my Grandpa, all blacks were thieves, poor, and stupid. I can imagine Grandma asked my Dad questions like, "Do you sell drugs?" and "What do you want with my daughter?" that's just how she is, and has always been. I remember going to visit her during the O.J. Simpson trial, and her telling my Dad to, "Watch out," because he looked too much like O.J., and she was worried the police might put him in jail. But she swore that she wasn't prejudiced, and to this day, I almost believed her. Once, she told me a story about how she gave a poor black boy a glass of lemonade against her sister's orders, and when her sister found out, she made my Grandma throw the glass away. "I always liked blacks," she'd said.

And there were other stories, all of which were told to me by my Mom.

April 2, 1980. Mom was pregnant and in labor with me, and Grandma wouldn't take her to the hospital. My Grandmother didn't want me to be born.

"Lights, camera, action!" I stumble forward, ankles and knees buckling, into the spotlight. The familiar crowd applauded; they had seen this act before. There they were, my family, with halos of gray smoke encircling their heads. My lips. Chafed and dry. Nervous. The spotlight shone down on me. Up in the secret room, her room, I became a star. Adorned in all of her finest dresses and scarves with her entire jewelry collection at my disposal. I transformed into a princess, her princess.

"You're going to be Miss America one day," she would say.

Anything I wanted, she gave me. All I had to do was ask. Yellow eye shadow, pink lipstick, and fourteen bracelets on each hand. The most important person in the world to me, aside from Mom and Dad, my Grandma was a glamour girl, too, with her saggy skin and grayish hair dyed red.

I was fifteen when Mom told me the story of my birth; she almost had me on my Grandma's living room floor. She said Grandma didn't want any part of the pregnancy; she didn't want to be a conspirator in something she believed was so wrong. So she refused to take my Mom to the hospital. Thank God my Mom's best friend came.

Parkview. That's the hospital's name. I had been born here, and now my Grandma was lying on her deathbed here. Dad parked the Beamer in Level 3 Section G. When it was time to leave, I wanted to be sure we could find our car. But this wasn't the first time we'd come to visit Grandma here. About a year ago, her condition turned from bad to worse when the doctors blew a hole in her colon. It happened during surgery. They were trying to remove the cancer from her colon, but they weren't careful enough. Then she had to have a series of surgeries to correct their mistake. Her body never quite recovered, and the disease spread throughout her body. When we first admitted her to the hospital, they told us that she should've been dead. Her hemoglobin level was way below normal. On the elevator Dad went over the "Do's and Don'ts" with my younger sister and brother. He had summarized Grandma's condition in two very basic words, "She's sick."

"No touching, no coughing, no crying, and not even sad faces are allowed in Grandma's room," he said. "And more importantly, don't ask any questions."

I had to know.

Ding. Level One.

But I couldn't.

Ding. Level Two.

I shouldn't, no, not on her deathbed. Not in front of the entire family.

Ding. Level Three. Door opens. Arrows point toward the ICU.

It has to be the smell that hits you first. Next are the "Antibacterial" nurses who walk around in scrubs with the words "germ-free" invisibly stamped on their foreheads. I was dreading the little green line on the monitor that reminds you their heart is still beating. We hadn't even reached her room and I could

hear my own heart pounding. It was trying to drown out the questions that were racing through my mind.

"You make me so proud," kept replaying in my head. I wanted her to have always been proud of me. She was proud of me, wasn't she? And my family? She loved my Dad, she loved me she wanted me I was her favorite grandchild that's what she had always said.

Mom came out of Room 314 to greet us. The person in the room, with the bed pan and the cancer, the person with the saggy skin and grayish hair dyed red, with the clip-on earrings and stylish heels that I adored, that person was dying. And by the looks of Mom, it was killing her to see Grandma like this. Her clothes were wrinkled and we could tell she had just finished crying.

She hugged us and then told us to, "Look happy when you go in to see Grandma. Smile and tell her that you love her very much."

But I couldn't have forced a smile even if I would've wanted to. Everything hurt. I couldn't feel my lips. They had gone numb. I couldn't shouldn't say anything

Everyone went in the room but me. I wasn't ready. I didn't have my thoughts together, and the questions wouldn't sit still in my head. Something kept telling me it just wasn't the right time.

About five minutes passed before Mom came back out into the hallway. "She wants to see you," she said.

"I've smoked for over half of my lifetime," she said in her raspy, almost man-like voice. I watched in amazement as she chopped up the onions and green pepper for supper. She was doing so well, especially since she had been out for only four weeks. The day she came home, we threw her a "Welcome Home" party to celebrate her miraculous recovery. Even her doctors had come, and we all ate her favorite dessert, German chocolate cake, and ice cream.

"Here, Grandma. Let me finish those," I said, taking the knife away from her so that I could finish the vegetables. It was only a two-hour drive, and I had wanted to spend the weekend with her before going back to school. My offer to cook her dinner was quickly rejected. For the most part, she looked relatively healthy. A few of the purple spider bruises hadn't finished healing, and her hair was missing its reddish tint, and she had lost a few pounds. But overall, I couldn't help thinking she still looked like a glamour girl.

-Brea Thomas

Cycles

The history of grief finds its roots
In the parting from the womb.
And the flight of a bird
Can be traced back to its birthing nest.
But the bulb in the womb
And the egg in the nest
Have guilty creators
Who ran from their roots
Because their leaves
Said they would die too.
We have all tasted a heaven
Like we have all tasted a hell.
But what does it taste like
To deliver, to god, a moment of existence
Where you feel as if you are not responsible,
Asking him instead to serve the delicacies
We aim to devour?
Porcupine stew perforates the glands
That now drip with the salty sweat
From ancestor's work in the fields.
They are the catalysts for all ambiguities.
A great grandmother who was bitten by a dog
Has alleviated the phobia
through the passing on of her genes.
But the dog bit her because it feared
Old women with canes.

There are no heavens without hells
no hells without heavens
no true moments of existence
or roots without roots.
History comes from history,
Which is a child of your own
That you will never see.

-Erin Kelly

You're sitting in a red plastic chair. Uncomfortable - hell yes, it's uncomfortable. It's straight hard back digs into your spine. You bend over placing your elbows on your knees and rest your chin in your cupped hands. It's too bad you've gotta wait here another 50 minutes. Next to you, a man in a red shirt and Bermuda shorts sits and stares. His heavy breathing gives you the creeps. Perhaps he's smoked one too many cigarettes. You've already distinguished the odor. Smoke oozes out of every pore in his body. You'd get up and move, but you can't. The section is filled. There are people everywhere. Tall people, short people, skinny and fat, old and young - you couldn't find another seat if you wanted to. Like fingernails on a chalkboard, his breathing scrapes at your hard white skull.

You try to ignore his presence. Out the window - that's a good place to look. It's dark outside, but you wouldn't know from looking. Thousands of lights give the impression of fake day - light and time created by man. In the distance, rows of little lights . . . blue, red, and white flicker - blink, blink, blink. Lining the runways, these lights guide pilots safely back to the ports of glaring white light. You wonder how on earth they can see. How do they actually steer those planes into the terminals? The wings are really long. In the dark, it'd be almost impossible to see. They have such teeny windows. If you had to fly one of those fuckers, you'd hit something for sure.

Your flight leaves in 45 minutes now. Forty-five minutes. God, if it wasn't for him you wouldn't be sitting here right now. He had to move to Boulder which, of course, means you have to go visit. Driving takes two whole days, so there is really no other option. Until now, flying wasn't an option either. Your focus changes from the lights outside to the planes. Huge aluminum cans - that's why they really look like. Big coke cans with wings on each side. It's hard to believe they actually fly. You've seen what they look like when they crash. Millions of tiny pieces clutter the earth like a jigsaw puzzle waiting to be reassembled. Why did he have to move so far away?

Once you board the plane, you know you're going to have to deal with some moron sitting next to you. If it's not "Bermuda shorts man," it will be some kid. You can see him now. Sitting there, smiling away, some blonde-haired little boy with plastic wings pinned to his shirt. This is his first flight too, but he's excited. You may feel smaller, but at least you're stronger. You'd be the first one out if you have to escape. You could reach the emergency door first. That kid wouldn't stand a chance, and you'd know exactly what to do. They taught you during class. Grab the red handle, pull up to the right, and push out. There are inflatable yellow slides at the two middle exits, and emergency windows in front. Two months ago, you couldn't set foot on a plane without having an attack. Two hundred dollars and a couple of pills later you are sitting in an airport. Thirty minutes left!

You've been planning this trip for months. You told him to wait by the phone. If for some reason you couldn't get on the plane if you couldn't make it, you'd give him a call. You'd call and tell him not to wait. Scanning the room, your eyes drift and change focus. "People-watching" - that's what your best friend calls it. It would entertain you for hours at the mall, but it's not working now. You are annoyed by their presence. Their actions irritate you, and you're not sure why. They heighten your sensation of fear. Yet, you also find yourself humming the old Billy Joel tune "But we will all go down together." This really doesn't comfort you much.

Twenty-five minutes! They're boarding the plane now. First class then coach. Rows 1 through 6. That's you! You wait in the crowded line. "Bermuda shorts man" is behind you this time. Thank god! Slowly, you make your way up to the plastic airline attendant. Clutching your ticket, you watch the passengers in front of you disappear - one by one. In such moments of observance, all sound seems to disappear. You wonder quietly to yourself who they too are going to visit. Is it really worth it? Who will grieve for them when they too disappear? Relying solely upon your feet to keep moving, you somehow manage to keep up with the line's pace.

Looking up, you finally hear her. "Miss, may I have your ticket please?" Caught completely off guard, you hand it over obligingly. As she tears your ticket in half, you stare blindly down the endless hallway. Two more steps, and . . .

-Kristen Frank

A Woman, Illuminated, in a Crowded room.

She has a straight back
pressed up against her chair.
A string keeping her in line with
the zenith,
like my mother.

I'm wearing spotted pajamas
my eyes are heavy and bloated.
They fight some evenings.
Wrong apples again?
I threw myself down the stairs
where I eavesdropped,
but not really.
I hadn't time to beat her steps
to the yellow bed I sleep in.
She walks with a purpose,
her head straight with her back,
to tuck me in.
She stays until I breathe rhythmically,
audibly.
She searches the curls flying irregularly
around my head,
and turns to stone.
I hold her still even as I sleep.

The woman,
illuminated,
in a room without space to grow
has slumped a little
to sleep.
She rests her head on her left shoulder.
She'll hurt when she wakes up.

-Leah Anderst

Transcendence

Two women wearing black dress suits and silver high heels
resting their thousand dollar briefcases
between perfect hipbones and firm rounded breasts
stand in the suffocating New York subway.
An elderly lady, slumped with old age,
and aiding her poor sense of balance with a cane,
stands directly in front of them.
The two women, swaying like withered trees
with each jerk from the rusted track,
take no notice of her debility.
These sovereigns bump her many times
before the feeble enslaved woman moves,
because they are reading *The New York Times*
in hopes of absorbing every piece of available knowledge
so they can degrade everyone they will talk with tomorrow
at their thirty-dollar-a-plate luncheon.
Perhaps they can even enlighten some lucky folks
of the abominable power that is required
to sit on the cushions of the black leather chairs
that are situated like monuments
at the ends of every business table.
Because they surpass humanity.

-Erin Kelly



Don't take a picture. It won't last longer.

TVs are available to us as we sit in a restaurant, pump gas, or cross the Atlantic at 30,000 ft. The average individual's audio attention span is probably about three minutes tops. Painted and malnourished skeletons in high heels are praised for their beauty on the runway and featured in two-page centerfolds of publications with readerships in the millions while the works of pioneering literary gurus are stacked carelessly on dusty shelves to be removed for involuntary perusal only by a few unlucky students. A musician with a scratchy voice, rhythmless drummer, and lyrics as dry as biscotti can make it big because he or she has a washboard stomach or posed in the buff on the cover of Rolling Stone. All of these examples serve as proof that our society is preoccupied with appearances.

I may be the ringleader of this visual infatuation. I can't help but glance at the paraplegic's hand heavily grasping the joystick as she whirrs past me on the sidewalk. Throughout the entire lecture, I must fight to concentrate on the role of Periclean democracy in ancient Greece instead of the lecturer's habit of swinging his chin around when he talks, how she always gets all but a few hairs tucked neatly behind her ears when she puts on her reading glasses, and how often he unknowingly smudges his nose with chalk dust. I admit, with mixed shame and pride, that I am an avid people-watcher.

Like a creepy, unwanted embrace, I slide the guilt of superficiality away and celebrate the fact that people-watching is an entertaining, therapeutic pastime and a universal involuntary reflex. People-watching, like a good loud cry, is therapeutic. Like an unopened pack of baseball cards or a question mark Dum-Dum sucker, it promises surprise and variety. And like that curiously-satisfying sound of sucking hard things up in the vacuum cleaner, it quenches an undefinable, yet universal sensory yearning.

In the lunchroom, a spot perhaps as alluring to me as a Hallmark store to Beanie Baby enthusiasts, I hastily settle for pea-filled entrees and thick, creamy milk in the race to claim the chair with the best view of the crowded room. I sprawl on the lawn under the sun's bleating heat to read a chapter of garbled umlauts and throaty growls, and find the intermittent stream of faces and fabric to be the sole barrier between my drowsy head and my less-than-stimulating German text. An impatient horn nudges me through the unheeded green light as I tear my attention away from the future of America skateboarding up the curb outside my window. The large glass pane of my front window becomes an activated TV monitor as the academic buildings regurgitate masses of unsuspecting actors and actresses hourly. The view is a sitcom, soap opera, drama, action, and romance airing all at once- like all good programs do.

I can recall few more satisfying times in my life than the laugh-inducing spotting of the family with father-son matching overalls, and mother-daughter matching denim skirts and bandanas. I had my own personal epiphany as I watched the angelic senior citizen on the puddly sidewalk rescue countless worms from a moist death-by-stomping. When my lungs feel like ignited coals, my boredom like the lead vest in an X-ray room, and my legs like they've run the circumference of Saskatchewan instead of a football field, the momentary passing of the fellow human renews my energy. With this passing, I am amused, if only for a moment, by the barely-there loin cloths called running shorts, touched by the maternal vibes flowing from the wheels of the stroller, humbled by the male form's ability to tone so beautifully firm, and amazed at the amount of muscle and cellulite that coexist in the world.

I can still summon pictures in my head of soccer cleats of nearly every player on my 10&under team. I vividly remember the haircuts and favorite outfits of my kindergarten classmates. Images of noses and mouths from my distant past are still almost queerly clear. I remember how the first grade acquaintance wore her pink stocking hat on top of her head, instead of covering her ears like I'd been taught to wear it. I recall how the girl in Mrs. Zeisig's class wore pink corduroys with a red velour sweater and stuck out her tongue when she colored. I have involuntarily memorized the peculiar, lumbering gait of the girl who gave me a construction paper Christmas card when we were twelve.

Now, I scrunch my eyes shut at the melancholy bodies whose troubles I can only imagine, and my worries melt away as I say a silent prayer that their burden be lifted. I feel the corners of my mouth curve upward at the curly hair, scrawny frames, and casually-slung shoulder bags that inflate my happiness with a small warm bubble. I am the absurdity of the girl hitching up her humongous jeans to save the frayed edges from further defacing by mud and water instead of wearing ones that actually fit cause she didn't know it was going to rain today and anyway that's how she likes her pants to fit.

Shamefully, I admit that as I say prayers and smile sincerely, I'm also wrinkling my nose at the mindless conformity of stretchy, black pants and baggy, cargo khakis, automatically deeming the wearers personality-less. My lashes drip with salt, as I realize that paradoxical weakness of my own character. Angrily, I drown the inhuman judgments in guilty poison and resolve never to let them surface again.

Funny how watching others provokes so many statements beginning with "I". When we look at others, we ultimately see ourselves. We see, in them, our own faults, foibles, and beauty and are given a rare outside view of ourselves which surpasses the capabilities of any mirror. We identify with the sadness, joy, and sheer humanity seeping from every pore of their beings, and with this identification are reassured that we're not alone in this mindless circus. Then, how could "staring", as it's negatively so often negatively connoted, be rude?

I once heard a very powerful speaker tell a story about a little girl in the grocery store with her mom. The girl, with her yet uninhibited irises and naturally tolerant pupils, saw a man with a severely disfigured face. Without a moment of learned hesitation or hypersensitivity, the little girl tugged at her mother's hand, saying, "Look at the man's face, mommy."

The girl's mother jerked her sharply away from the man, scolding

What's so rude about noticing another living, breathing, feeling human being? What's so rude about caring enough about the perfect stranger to notice their differences, their similarities, their visible contribution to the melting pot? Looking at others with our "windows to the world" is as natural as smiling, frowning, and loving a child fresh out of the womb. It is the instant that the foreign concept of "different=bad" seeps into the innocent flesh of a child, the instant the offensive look-away reflex is learned, the instant one is taught to alienate that staring becomes rude.

And yet everyday millions of eyes gracelessly avoid leg stubs and scars. Where did this idea of a socially correct, forced aversion of the eyes when faced with deformity come from? The word deformity, in essence, is merely the opposite of conformity, another negatively connoted concept. The only evidence that tells us that conformity is generally considered the lesser of the two evils is the silently understood approval it receives. When faced with people who have the same color eyes or similar hands, we don't feel the need to look quickly away so we won't appear to be staring. And once we erase the oppressive stigma associated with being different, we won't feel the need to look away from someone with hands shaped differently than anyone else's in the world, and everyone, deformed and conformed, will feel tolerant foreign eyes on them- just looking.

Admittedly, there's a fine line between staring menacingly, disapprovingly, or stalkingly and merely observing democratically. However, too many times we mistake the eyes resting kindly on us for an instantaneous, harsh judgment. It's the code of the thin, crinkling skin in the corners of the eyes that is so hard to decipher. There's the barely detectable crinkle of immediate absorption, approval, and dismissal. There's the hairline crinkle of potential compatibility and the deep bark-esque crinkle of obvious affection. There's the seldom-seen dry crinkle of indisguisable intolerance. There's the border-line frown crinkle of silent contemplation and curious indecision that's so often mistaken for intolerance. There are a million other crinkles all uniquely their own, and ninety percent of the time, there's no possible way of telling exactly what crinkle's happening at all. And so we must rest our insecurities on the bed of trust.

In one excessively liberal and overly refreshing class I'm taking this semester, we do this lovely exercise in which we move, in a circular pattern, to everybody in the class in turn and look straight into his or her eyes for several initially painful seconds. We sing a weird Sufi song to them about their beauty while making corny, sweeping hand motions. Expectedly, during the first few trials of the exercise insecure giggles echoed, shoulders squirmed, and eyes were nervously averted in the incense-filled room. But with the persistent opening of our eyes, we soon realized, there's no cause for squirming, no need to feel rude, no reason to look away.

"No reason to look away - in a perfect world," you argue. Who's to say our world isn't perfect? Who's to say there aren't a million eyes out there watching a million faces and thinking a million kind thoughts about them? Do we ever stop to ask people what they're thinking when their gazes fall on our unsightly blemish, recently butchered hair-do, or four-fingered hand? Maybe they'd answer, "I've never seen anyone wear a zit so well," "I was wishing someone would try that cool scattered-layer style," or "I wonder if it's easier for him to fit his hand in the can for the last Pringle chip?" Instead, assumptions of repulsion, distaste, and alienation flood our brainwashed response systems, and staring becomes rude. If, in fact, our world is imperfect, perhaps the imperfections lie not in the keen observer, but in the quick-to-react observed. Perhaps, we should pay more attention to the bodies and faces floating through our lives each day. Perhaps, we shouldn't teach our children to avert their eyes in the check-out lane. Perhaps, we should risk offending and look one second longer. Perhaps, we should remember that windows are meant to be opened.

-Amy Vaerewyck

Marines, a conversation en route to Providence

The first day, it was like a cry fest,
I couldn't believe it. All the guys cried.

Really.

I didn't cry, though.

No?, None of us cried.

Really?

Yeah, it's different for girls.

I didn't think girls got treated

Different.

We don't. We HANDLE it

Different.

Oh.

See, we're treated equally. We're
not used to that. No one is surprised when I
make it through boot camp. Plus,
we don't have the whole ego thing.

I understand without you having to explain it.

-Leah Anderst



Dysfunction

The yellow police tape is really starting to annoy me. My mom says that it's an eyesore. She keeps asking me what the neighbors will think. What the hell do I care what the neighbors think? If I were her, I would be more concerned with hiring a lawyer to protect my murdering ass than with what the neighbors will think. The police still think daddy committed suicide. She told them that he heard her on the phone with her boyfriend. Yes, she said a boyfriend, like she's in the eighth grade again or something. Anyway, she said that daddy heard her on the phone talking with him and that he just couldn't stand the thought of living without her. Well, if anyone had taken the time to examine the kind of woman my mother is, they would have seen that anyone would THRIVE if they were blessed enough to live without her.

So, yeah, I did know that she was having an affair. It didn't bother me. Not really. See, this was not the first time she ever cheated on daddy. She always brought her little indiscretions to me, like I was supposed to care. The first time, I'll admit, I was surprised. I even cried and screamed things like, "Does daddy know?" and "How could you do this to our family." Gosh, that was brilliant. Straight from a made for TV movie. I'll admit, I've always had a bit of a passion for acting. It's a gift. You know, thinking back on it, I may have even threatened to tell my dad. Daddy he's always been a great bargaining tool. Now he's gone.

She can't really effect my life anymore. I just tell her that whoever she decides to dabble in this week isn't a huge concern to me. This current "boyfriend" has only been with her for a few weeks. We've never had a typical mother-daughter relationship. Actually, that's not true. She did tell me once that she loved me so much when I was a baby because everyone would always crowd around us and tell her how cute I was. She would dress me up just like her. She'd always say, "Oh, Lucy, someday you'll be just like me." Great mom, can't wait! Of course, it was always about her and the attention I brought her because I was cute. So, I guess while I was small enough to fit in a car seat, we had a great relationship. She told me that I just wasn't as much fun when I got older. Anyway, it's kinda funny, the only thing she ever did talk to me about was her personal life. She told me things that no little girl should ever have to hear come out of her mother's mouth. I swear, she described her sexual life like a drunken sailor. Is it me, or is that just sick? And daddy never knew. Shit, they could have screwed right in front of his face and he would've said, "You make a better door than a window I can't see the TV." Poor, innocent daddy! He was always a little naive. Mom and I would use him when we fought. Usually it gave us both a good source of entertainment to see the total bafflement on his face, last night wasn't so funny. Last night she won.

See, my mom's last boyfriend was our next door neighbor. She told me all about him, like I was supposed to be happy for her. What was I supposed to say? "Great mom, that way you'll still be right next door if we ever need you!" What the hell? Anyway, this guy turns out to be really cute well, mom always says that mothers and daughters should share everything maybe she didn't really mean EVERYTHING. She told my dad. She ruined the perfect beauty of the picture I had chosen to show daddy of who I was. Do you know how long it took me to build that up in his mind? Things like that can never be gotten back, you know? Just like when your house catches on fire and all your little baby pictures and stuff get ruined. Funny, that's what everyone keeps saying, "It's just a terrible tragedy." It sure is.

The only thing that is just ruining this right now is all the attention mom's getting. It's driving me nuts. She has other men to run to, what am I supposed to do? She knew that daddy would get all the sympathy if everyone found out that she is a big whore. Now, she's getting tons of cards and flowers, everyone is paying her so much attention. She loves that shit. I can just hear all the ladies from the country club now, "Ohhh poor Kathy, her husband killed himself and left her all alone." Too bad it won't last long.

I'm calling the police. I'm telling them that she killed him. I'll confess everything about her telling me of her little trysts with the man next door and how she made up some lie about me and that daddy told her she could never talk that way about his precious little angel. I'll say that he told her that he was changing his will to leave me all his money because I have always been the only person in the whole wide world that has ever given a damn about him. She can not get that money! She doesn't deserve it! I'll say that I saw her go into his room with a gun and shoot him. BAM!! Right through the heart! I'll say that she walked right up to him and shot him point blank! That way it seems more cold and calculated! Police love that kind of stuff! Makes their job so much easier. And I like to do what I can to preserve the decency of this fine country of ours. I'll say that she put the gun in his hand and that she had gloves on to protect the gun from fingerprints. Then, she carefully closed his eyes that had been wide with terror and disbelief. God, daddy always did over-react to everything! I can understand some fear, but disbelief? Come on, dad, for once in your life be a man! Of course, none of that is true, but right now I'm starting to feel some pain,

so I can probably muster up a good, heart-wrenching cry and make it pretty dramatic for the cops. My dad always said I should be an actress. I will miss him. He was always so supportive.

My mom, she deserves so much more than just life in prison, so please don't feel sorry for her! She has taken away the love that I deserve one too many times. She will hate having to wear those prison uniforms, though, and that really brings me comfort right now. She always did say that orange was not her color. See, people with light skin tones and red hair just do NOT look good in oranges and pinks. Just picturing her scrubbing away at the dishes of three hundred other women and making license plates for all of us free, law-abiding citizens makes me feel so much better. And I deserve to feel better. I've had a tough day! Don't think that I'm giving her more than she deserves, either, and don't throw me any of that bullshit about her being "wrongfully accused" because you don't know what it's been like living with her. She has been a constant struggle! She's nothing but selfish and now I am just going to give her a little punishment. Daddy got his for not believing in me and now she gets hers. And you know what, it might be a TOTAL lie! I mean, I don't know for a fact that she didn't play some part in it. It hurts me to think that she did it. That way nothing makes me feel guilty and I don't have to pretend he committed suicide. You know suicide gets you straight into hell! No purgatory, no nothing just straight down there! So, we won't even entertain suicide as a thought. He would never do that! He loved me. He would never leave me here all alone with her. I can't be with her all alone! So, she must have killed him! With his own gun in cold blood!! It is really sickening that this is the place our world has come to. So much evil in the world! And my mother is pure evil, I am just sick at the thought of her. See, she's getting what she. . . God. . . there is blood underneath my fingernails. . . guess that makes biting them out of the question. How should I get it out? I bite them so they're too short to really clean with that little hook thing on the end of fingernail clippers. Knowing me, I'd probably get in there too deep and make myself bleed. Can you imagine? How sick that would be. . . our blood would be mixed.

-Karalee Stockman

A Letter to Dad

I have wanted to tell you
That I didn't suffer.

I was cut from the car by a giant helicopter saw
And walked away with only two broken ribs.

But those lights that flashed
Like a sudden crack of summer lightning,

They still pervade every darkness I swim through
And throw me into kaleidoscope dreams

Of your arms thrown around me
In different colored designs.

How was it that suddenly the wind
Carried you away, like a kite, to the clouds

Where you breathed in deep and smelled
The rain that now slips through my fingers

Like the old baseball games at Wrigley
Where we would share cokes and hotdogs

And sit in fields of historic peanut shells, cheering.
The last of your sweet breaths

Was filled with puddles of hot blood
Streaming from the gashes in your head

Cut by the sharp swords of the shattered windshield.
And I watched, screaming, as the door catapulted

Your muscular chest cavity into the steering wheel,
While your insides and crimson blood pummeled the dashboard,

Splattering its repression like a Beckman pre-war painting
On my yellow and white Sunday school dress.

But I didn't suffer.
Until now, when I can admit

I have lost the sense
Of sensing anything at all.

-Erin Kelly

Did I tell you that they made me call him? It was five against one, what was I supposed to do? I've never been the "strong" one. Now Becky, shell give you a piece of her mind if you want it. Even if you don't want it for that matter. One time, we went to Denny's and the waiter brought our eggs scrambled. Scrambled! "I can't eat these," she tells him. She looks Mr. Waiter right in the eye and says matter-of-factly, "I thought we asked for hard boiled." (We always get hard boiled so we can pop out the yolks and fling them at each other.) So anyway, Mr. Waiter is all apologetic and whisks her plate away to get it right this time. I felt kind of bad for him, though, so I just ate my rubbery eggs and tried to smile. Guess who got egg yolk thrown at her? So like I was saying, I'm not much of a "strong" one. When they made me call him we were at my house. (Were always at my house.) I tried to tell them no, I just can't do it, but they wouldn't listen. "That's the whole point of Sadie Hawkins," Heather said. "The girl has to ask the boy!" I had to dial. 695314 I slammed down the receiver and by this time they were all getting mad at me. "Would you just stop being such a chicken and call him?!" I know hell say yes because Sarah's best friend's brother's girlfriend's sister said he told her you were cute. Now call!" Becky rolled her eyes and thrust the electric blue phone at me. I stared at it. She would be able to call David, so why couldn't I? I tried to roll my eyes back at her but remembered that the only way to ever get them to leave me alone is to just do what they want. I had to call. My shaky finger had to dial all seven numbers and my shaky hand had to try to hold the slippery receiver. I caught a glimpse of my best friends fiery locks. Why can't I be like Becky? Just this once! She had her dress picked out before her date even said yes.

Ugh and they all crowded around me. I found my voice somewhere and asked for David. I hoped he couldn't hear them all giggling, but he probably could. don't know what we talked about. Maybe how the weather is finally good for sledding or how Mr. Webber always says tolerate. Whatever we said, I knew I couldn't get off the phone without asking him or they would probably never talk to me again. Could you imagine going through the rest of junior high without any friends? Anyway, that's how it started. He still has five days, six hours, and 35 minutes to change his mind. But I guess that maybe I'm glad they made me call him. He did say I was cute.

-Shanna Bohdan

Floria

For several moments last night
I wept without understanding
Truly why. I was a swath of
Knitting and the yarns of my heart
Needed an old woman's touch. The
Beauty of anything had left
Before midnight without word or
Blow. Sticky dried tears left bumps on

My face the next morning. A face
Disfigured, blind eyes infected
The anti-cantabile of
Punk music ushering me out
The door ignoring the drip
Of blood between my legs I left
Before noon without explaining
-no one to embrace. Undoing

Followed. Tosca poured my coffee.
Yes, that was her name. No, my plan
Couldn't work. It shouldn't- there she
Was talking of buying a sixth cat
For her daughter. It would never
Work, warning signs everywhere. In
the questions asked of me, in
Tosca's smiles

...the round-trip ticket stub I had refused to read lying there at my elbow.

-Kimberly Campanello

London

Outside of the Tower of London
where the peril of wives came early
early like the pigeons
missing toes
on a hot afternoon
sweat seeping through long sleeved shirts.

Outside the Tower of London
bread crumbs don't always fall from
friendly hands
fearing diseased feces
raining from the sky
The sky filled with crippled, tortured pigeons.

Outside the Tower of London
umbrellas go up
for the sun and the spit
of the clouds
and the pigeons pace and pace
and peck and peck
at the dirt
in the cracks
forging their signature
over ages
like the prisoners
bloody and tortured
pecking the thick cold walls
scratching their toes against
the uncaring corners and confinements.

Outside the Tower of London
tourists look up and gasp
at the pigeons
marked as captives.
They enter the tower
and marvel at the inhumanity
at the cruelty
man inflict upon man.

-Leah Anderst

Being smothered,
by someone who is never there.
Counting the days,
he doesn't call
Trying to find fault
in self-proclaimed perfection.
Never a fight,
or a nonagreement.
Just two people,
who are perfect for each other.

-Gwyn Fox

Perfection

To me, he is perfection.
Perfect in the way he smiles
And loves and is.
The way he looks so far down
Into my eyes and I look back
Down into his. We connect.
He laughs his own laugh
And wishes me sweet "good night"s.
This man is so strong and kind,
Gentle and protecting,
Tall and handsome.
He knows he is good at what he does
And still tries to improve.
I have never known someone
Who has a great sense of humor,
Is a good conversationalist,
And has conviction in his opinions
Like he does.
He has a wonderful voice,
Likes to travel to far off places,
And sits with style.
He cracks me up.
He teaches me to think.
All of the eclectic qualities
I have been searching for,
And was hoping to find one person
With just one of them,
He has all of them.
Every last one.
It's truly amazing.
He is amazing.
He is perfect.

-Pam Salling

Hazel

Hazel her eyes
(And where I will weather the summer)
Hazel and no flames to lick her face.
Far from lust though not so far as not to feel its
heat.
Hazel flames by far purer
Are dearer
And envelop something else than what I now
feel I am
(But that was where I was born).
And did not know-
How could I-
at the time, the time.
Time, my love, my heart
Hazel is the fragrant sap of cedars,
Is the rich apple cider,
But these are out of season
And the bud of our flower presses open toward
the spring,
Clear hazel of poured chardonnay;
And we are neither ready-
Let it season-age-
Beloved, we must not
Stain our lips
Before the press is even trod
Nor do I want to whisper
Too much to you
For fear you'll be afraid, and-
Nor do I want to hold you
Too far from me
For fear you'll be afraid, and-
And turn your hazel glance away.

Instead, let us together fill
A bottle
And seal it
So we in parched, gentle dread
may watch-lest it shatter-
And eagerly await the day
When we may fill our cup
And be the other's draught
That I may drink sweet hazel
And feed you warm brown loaves
And blessed and whole our communion,
If we but wait
And do not run so quickly
To the mash, the pulp so carelessly thrown out.
Let us guard our mouths from its too-early
sweetness

Hazel her eyes, and
Hazel where I was born
And so many shades of past
Steep in this now, in her,
So many I must question if this is some
Mockery
But such a gentle form of mocking-
The only savor is the waiting:
This now can only be confirmed
By our tomorrow,
Her tomorrow

And I can only hope that at each tomorrow I
awake
Still drinking hazel
Filling my gaze-
my lips-
her eyes

-Brandon Bruning

An eternity of remembering you roaring at the sunrise in Fitzroy Square,
lamenting the lack of brilliance and vodka on Sunday mornings
never leaves me lonely.

Us walking,
questioning the locked parks taunting us;
beauty confined and isolated though centric,
like us, inaccessible.

We sit on a vandalized park bench discussing everything.

The States, teenage pregnancy, rugby, the looming topic of love.

You say it's like the Loch Ness Monster, all speculation and faith, wanting something
that extraordinary to exist.

I inform you it was a scam, it was a motorboat mistaken for monster.

So we walk again, to some place I will never find twice,
at five thirty in the morning the scenery is secondary to the company I share this stroll
with.

Again we sit, on hard concrete steps leading to an institution of higher learning,
teaching us more now than during regular class hours.

We watch the jesters perform as we sit near, saying nothing, leaning into our shared air.

I focus on your glasses and look down to your hands occasionally.

You look at me in the way no one else has and say the most beautiful declaration I can't
remember,
or won't.

My eyes fall to your lips, full and tinted.

We draw closer inconspicuously, my breathing quickens,
rushing into your words creating a separate entity of us.

Story ends here; selective recollection is an asset I use often.

Memories stop abruptly, as we did.

No good-bye, just more walking and thinking and hesitation.

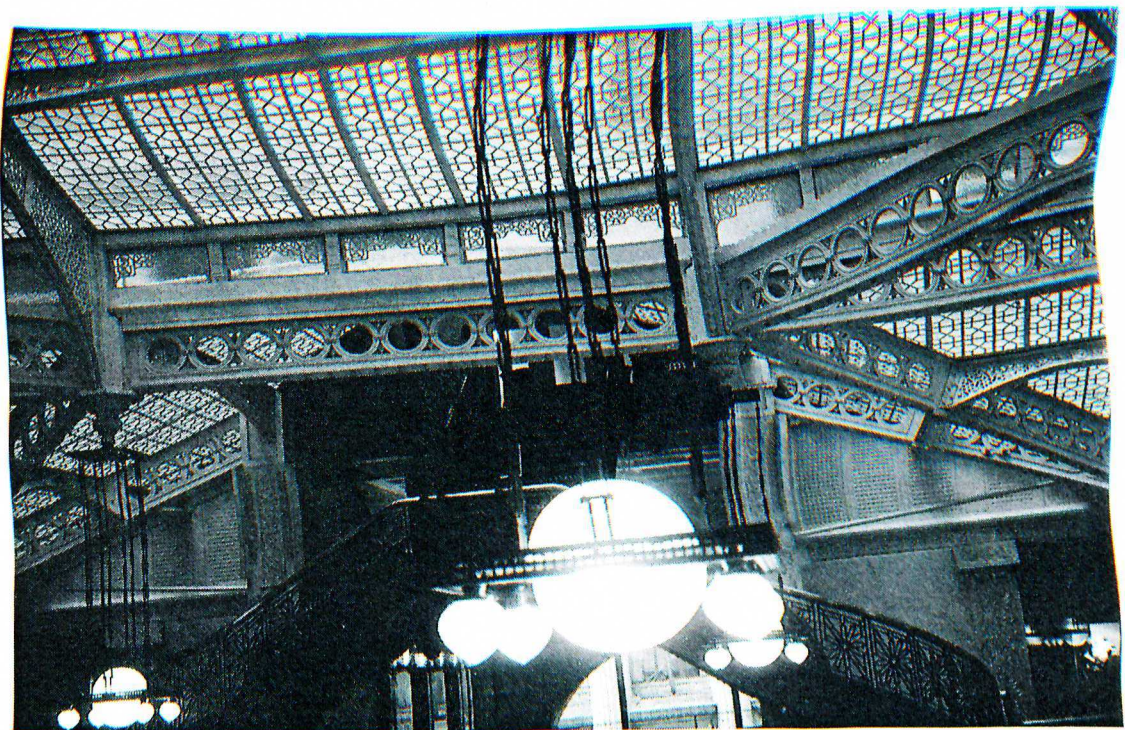
And I leave London and you and all happiness behind for my personal hell in Indiana.

*My only solace is the nocturnal inhalation of our mingled and meshed molecules,
sending me into a comatose slumber, a narcoleptic Juliet.*

Awaking to the enchanting sound of you.

Roaring at the sun as it streams through my window.

-Jessica Lollino



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