SAINT ANN’S
LITERARY MAGAZINE

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I am not sure what it means—
but I think I want to punctuate your equilibrium
I am a bee and you are the flower and I want to pollinate you
(as well as all the other flowers in the garden) ha ha!
but
when you draw near
you tie my tongue around my half-hitched esophagus
and I stand there (or fall to the ground and lie) like a laminated animal
a lame male
mail unclaimed
scattered clutter

*Sam S.*
Across the Bridge

Here in the C of NY and the US of A
I cross the Bridge (Manhattan) aboard the Q

That notorious skyline,
the only reason to ride this train
(despite the walk, the wait):
to feel like “City” is me, is daily,
is right there. I nonchalantly shuffle
to the window with the best view.
I want to pull a disposable
camera out of my fanny pack
and compose a thoughtful, evocative
caption (“Brooklyn Bridge, 11:30 pm”)for the scrapbook, yet to be scrapped

Watch. Look closely.
It joins massive continents
with a dismissive wave of the arm
an unchanging curve cupping the water
shuttling between family, kitsch,
up & coming (coming but not up)

And self-assured, segregationalist
self-supposed City Superstar (ny, ny)
flickers his lights upon the River
humming his own Broadway shower
tune, oblivious to his neighbors
who pout indignantly, unable to sleep.
The lights in important buildings shine
still (despite the hour)
like the plaintive eyes of a circus animal
between the grates of his metal cage

Meanwhile, the Electrons trade
and re-trade in a frenzy
(despite Wall Street’s firmly sealed entrance)
The bridge is sturdy and stone  
Stands in the river  
Holds its ground (without a quiver)  
Scrapes the sky with its turrets  
the river bed with rock, live fish (now dead).  
The ball point of the American flag stands  
tall, ushering horn-honkers  
masochistic joggers, internet bloggers  
across the Murky Mass below  
(from West to East, East to West)  
This is the Pilgrimage

Nora S.

Magellan

Magellan was the first to go around, and the Earth  
(in the minds of men) became a round shape.  
One day Einstein’s mind wrapped around space and time—or did man’s mind shape that?  
And now the shapes our minds made get around to shaping us—suggesting that what goes around comes around.

Benedict L.-M.
Hymn to Aphrodite

Those who honor Cypris (sower and giver of love)
in their words and in their deeds
(with tangled limbs and entwined hearts),
these her hands hold lightly.

Small dark Sappho (honey-voiced)
caught and sang the queen,
her golden chariot drawn of doves
borne lightly through the upper air—
she who may not be taken lightly,
for those who too lightly esteem her daughter of Zeus, weaver of wiles,
are caught within the toils of dark-eyed Love,
inextricably transfixed with arrows of desire.

Attended by every grace, robe divers-coloured as her mind,
she strides throughout the aether;
she is in the ocean wave, and everything springs from her.
Lady, sea-born Aphrodite,
let the wings of love
curve over me lightly, 0 that I may live to weave words by the hearth-fire of affection.

Katherine B.
The old man slowly shook out a match and dropped it in a glass ashtray. He brought his ash-stained fingers to his mouth and inhaled deeply. The other men regarded him slowly and the eyes of the smoker began to twitch. They were brilliant blue and trembled in their sockets.

The man shook out the creases of his pants. He looked up and then glanced quickly back down. He began to speak.

“My name was once Rob Cortan,” the man began. “I lived alone in a house on the old Dorado Road long ago. I was a farmer. Corn, peas…” His voice trailed off. The men regarded him impassively with their dark eyes.

“I was a farmer and one day the Demasciendos came. I remember it like it was yesterday. They came a-knockin’ and they said to let them in, to let them the hell inside.” The man dropped the smoldering cigarette into the ashtray. A thin ribbon of smoke curled above his head before disappearing.

His company barely noticed. There were three of them; they sat on the couch and kept their eyes on the floor. The old man tried not to look at their metal guns or dust-worn boots.

He cleared his throat and began again. “There was one I remember in particular,” he said, “had a sorta mean-eyed look to him. He just looked at me; he had those big dark eyes. I shoulda spoken to him. Spoken and persuaded. Or shot him.”

He gave a dry chuckle. “I shoulda died and been honorable. Shit, I was only twenty and when he lifted that steel gun up outa the holster, I up and went with them. We rode white horses. He didn’t say nothin’ tha’ whole way. I reckon he was…” The man paused and gathered breath. “At any rate we soon got to a house on the border. Get me? They left the horses and went into the house and I was all alone. I climbed off ma horse. Shoulda left, shoulda left or snuck away. But I was afraid ‘cause I knew that they were after me. I didn’t want to die in the dirt.”

He gave another low chuckle and coughed into his fist. “So I sat there and put my face in my hands. I just tried to think it out but I couldn’t think of nothin’ and so I bit my lip. I was sitting there with my fists clenched and blood running down my chin and when I felt a hand on my shoulder, I looked up, determined. I was so sure—I was gonna be a man and kill the son of a bitch. I whirled around, but a gun was at my neck and I fell into the dirt.

“I remember hearing a low laugh behind me. I looked up and the dark, mean-eyed guy was standing beside me with his gun at his hip and his feet firmly planted in the dirt.

“Not bad,’ I heard him say. My hands were shaking; there was dirt and blood grimed into the nails. I could see that he was still laughing and I started to back away.
There was a barn nearby, a red one I think, and I wanted to escape. To calm myself I started to imagine my house with its brick walls and fields. I even thought about Mary some. I backed away some more and a hard grin crossed the man’s features. Then it softened to contempt when he saw what I meant to do.

“’Oh you son of a bitch,’ he said and turned to face me. He pulled out one gun and shifted his weight back and forth. I looked up and saw that he meant to kill me. I’m pretty sure he did and I heard the wind whistle real slow.

“He pulled the trigger and I felt the sun pounding on my back. I thought for sure I was ‘dyin’. He left and they woke me up soon enough. Somehow they brought me back. They say I was ravin’ and when the men came on the road, I was wrapped up in a sheet ravin’ about death and courage and dark eyes on barn doors.”

“I heard that they dumped me on the front steps and my screams woke the town. I heard that they came running with their billowed-out clothes and bags and all. I just lay there and they said I was a coward for not shootin’. For not killin’ nor for not dyin’ but I didn’t care nothin’ about that.

“I woke up the next week with a scar, a headache, and a broken string of images that didn’t make no sense. They took care of me, this town did, and I never mentioned none of it to nobody.”

The old man fell silent and his company blandly regarded him. Then the man on his right reached into the pocket of his faded rancher jacket. He pulled out a switchblade and held it in front of the eyes of the old man.

“Do you know who I am?” he asked. He spoke the inflected words softly. His face was wounded and twisted. The eyes were steady and still.

The man nodded. He tried to speak and found that he couldn’t.

“You ran, old man. You ran, but we let you go. Ah yes, we let you go.” The two men behind him nodded. They were dressed in the same fashion as the first man. They all carried guns.

The man continued to hold the knife and the blue-eyed old man refused to look at it. Tears were streaming down his face.

The dark-eyed man continued to look serenely off. Then he smiled. “You die; we all will. But not from me. You will die, old man. Everybody die.”

He clicked the knife shut. The men slowly departed, their blank faces twisted. They closed the door behind them and walked towards the calle with deliberate measured steps.

The old man continued to sit at length after his tale was done. Eventually he walked up and locked the door. He sat at the old wooden table and glanced off into the night, his hands trembling.
Chapter House

“As the rose is the flower of flowers, so this is the house of houses.”
—English translation of the Latin inscription

Each wall opens upwards
to the high mounted windows of the room
which stream light into the middle out of which a pillar
juts from the antique tiles, lending support.
The smells of incense, old women, and history
cling to the walls and flake off with the paint as we inhale.
As we go, we read of kings and judges and priests
who passed on this title and beheld
these now faded and chipping paintings
and in the rhythmic tread of our feet on the carpet
we pretend to hear the hum of monks chanting again
and from the remaining panels, ancient men,
their textures and colors wrinkled by time,
emerge through centuries of dust like ghosts

Joanna B.

Desert

In the desert
the dunes stand between the Earth and the Sky
the Heavens are a holy blue
but the sands burn with anger

The names
of the dead

Lingering on the wind

It does not forgive: the empty land
soaks up the blood.

Tim C.
A Comic Nightmare

Can you blame me for being just a bit insecure? We’re talking Superman here. Super Man, a man so great that he is super. And my girlfriend—my wonderful, beautiful girlfriend—dated him. Oh, the pressures… It takes every ounce of strength and decency for me not to ask how big he was. I mean, I have been blessed—my father must have been a lucky man, but Superman?

She would probably lie; she’s so sweet. This woman, this blond goddess, still the bud of all my fantasies after months of dating, is simply too kind. I broke down the other day and mentioned him. We were having a fight (our usual once-every-two-weeks sort of deal) and I said it: “Oh, so I’m not as good as the man in tights?” And oh did she cry, and oh did we make love after I apologized.

She is a school teacher, the purest woman I could ever know. And I, you ask? I am but a lowly comic book store clerk. Ironic, right? Idolize Superman from the age of three, wear Superman undies exclusively in middle school, and see what happens; the comic book gods bite you in the ass—that’s what happens.

I was at her place the other night, and you’ll never guess who called. It was the man himself—his voice so pleasant, comforting, and disgusting. And I had almost stopped thinking about him constantly. Then the unbelievable took place. With my own ears, on the answering machine, I heard him ask for her back.

Needless to say, I’ve dropped eight pounds since the other night. I’m working out constantly, having trouble sleeping, and (thank God not at her place) I might have wet the bed.

Why did they break up? you wonder (as did I when she first mentioned him), for they are still good friends. “He never had any time really,” she said. “And it would have been selfish of me to have him make time.” Oh my beautiful, lovely, kind, fair lady—breaking it off with him so he could continue to save lives and make our city safer.

The pressures have gotten to be a bit too much. I could have sworn she uttered (quietly) “Oh Superman…” the other night while we were in bed, though I’m sure that she did not. I’ve been waiting my whole life for a girl to enjoy me so much that I become “Oh Superman!” but not under these conditions.

I’ve stopped eating, joined Equinox, written and torn apart fourteen love letters, thrown out my collector’s Superman comics (I am an idiot for not selling them), and I have not taken a shower in four days. This Superman character is really getting to me. As a matter of fact I haven’t seen my girlfriend since I shamelessly left the other night after I heard those two words. Oh God, I was supposed to meet her for dinner tonight.
You know the rest—according to her I don’t have enough time for her, and this selfless bitch thinks that it would be selfish of her to make me make time. I’m not in a place right now where I can “juggle a relationship and comic books,” she says. It would be best if we “saw other people.”
Well, at least now I know what it’s like to be Superman.
Stupid whore.

Jason W.

A Confession

Lambert stood at the bottom of the steps of Saint-Sulpice looking upwards. The day was a cliché, too formulaic. It was gray, of course. It always is gray, isn’t it? When it concerns Paris, it always is gray. When it concerns Saint-Sulpice, it’s always gray. Isn’t it? O, the cinematic monochrome of Parisian Sundays. The tip of the Eiffel Tower, just visible beyond the stores and buildings that line the rue Bonaparte, was barely outlined by its ash-hued lights through the fog. It, too, was curious to witness Lambert’s inconceivable turnaround. Lambert turned away from the church, but there were still the lions. They circled the ice-covered fountain, guarding the main entrance of Saint-Sulpice. Suspicious and skeptical of Lambert, they hovered, as though ready to pounce if the sins warranted. Lambert shivered. He turned back around. The towers of Saint-Sulpice loomed over him, guardians of absolution, almost palpably searching him. Or was it God himself whose hand he felt? Lambert thrust his hands in his pockets. He’d heard, once, that a man committed suicide by jumping off one of the towers. So Lambert wasn’t the only guilty one. The Towers are menacing. God is menacing. Lambert puffed out his cheeks, blew hot air from his mouth, and walked up the steps. Half expecting the doors to open on their own, awaiting his visit, he paused. He turned again to the lions. “J’y vais,” he mumbled and reached for the door handle. He tugged for a moment at the wrought-iron church door before managing to open it. A sudden gust of warm wind blew him backwards. He stepped across the threshold.

Adriel S.
Arriving in Istanbul

Arriving in Istanbul
Late at night
Dazed.
Jostled through crowds
Into a car.
Staring through its windows
At the thronged sidewalks
Air humid and thick
Cooled at moments
By a teasing trickle of breeze.

Trying to sleep
Losing that battle
Staring at the ceiling
Hours and days merge.
Hotel windows open to the
Loud noise on the streets
Below. Shouts and
Bells and half-sung melodies
Hang in the heavy air.

Lapsing waves reverberate
Braying donkeys shrill cry
In my ear.
On a boat
Sweatering in the sun,
Early in the morning.
Trying to cool off by diving
Into the water.
Sharp, salty, stinging, blue.
Out,
Boiling once again.
Lying under a blanket,
Big Dipper above
Pours night into the sky.
Drifting off to sleep
Finally
Lulled by waves
Slapping the side of the boat.

Returning to land,
Unsure whether
This is all a dream.
Camera in hand
Reassures me.
Back home,
Lying on my bed.
Recapturing memories
Vivid as the colors of a
Turkish rug.
White ceiling above me.

_Lizzie B._

What would you do if your doorman asked you out?
Would you get him fired; scream and shout?
Or would you stand on your tiptoes, give him a kiss,
Tell him, “That’s sweet, but if my boyfriend saw this...”
Or would you jump up and down? Rejoice? Sing a song?
Would you think this occurrence not one small bit wrong?
Or would you just walk away, not knowing what to say,
Find it too overwhelming, and leave it for another day?

_Flannery S._
What Goes Around

Mr. Altaire is taking the rest of the day off. He worked very hard this morning and outside it is a beautiful day. He escapes the smoke and confusion of his office and emerges onto the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, where strolling couples bathe in the warm sunlight. He stops at the bank and withdraws four hundred euros, which he slides into a blue snakeskin wallet. His face broadens as he smiles at the crisp bills and at the good weather, the sort of good weather that solves your problems.

Turning left and winding his way down through the narrower and less crowded streets, Mr. Altaire finds shade and solitude in the little canyons between the rows of white buildings and walks quickly towards the Seine. He crosses to the Eiffel Tower, where the men selling trinkets do not approach him on account of his sharp suit and fast pace. On the green grass of the Champ de Mars he finds his wife and his daughter sitting beneath a wide tree.

Marie kisses her father on both cheeks and kneels on the cool grass over the picnic basket, handing him cured ham and bread and cheese. Her father sits on the blanket, so as not to dirty his slacks, and pulls from the cooler a bottle of wine and two bottles of sparkling water. Marie would like some wine, but she does not ask, instead she waits for her father to offer it. He doesn’t. She sits and eats while her parents argue about politics and taxes, and Marie doesn’t care. She is thinking of her boyfriend, Alex, whom she’s going to see for dinner. Her father doesn’t like Alex because he’s American, so Marie tries to be sullen and silent.

Looking up at her parents, Marie sees that they are fighting again. Her father has forgotten to buy dessert, and her mother is upset that her picnic is ruined by her husband’s carelessness. “So attentive to his work, why can’t he exert that energy for his family?” her mother complains. Marie cleans up, and walks out of the park and down the Rue Saint Dominique to their apartment where she showers and smokes a cigarette on the balcony.

Cooking a veal roast in the oven, Mr. Levy has the kitchen windows wide open and the fresh air blows through the room. The sun is low in the sky and though he held out for as long as possible, he now has to turn on the lights. Alex comes into the kitchen trailed by a blond girl in a blue blouse, who introduces herself as Marie. Mr. Levy is shooed from the kitchen as his son insists that he and his girlfriend will finish the cooking. He is sitting at the dining room table reading the paper when his son brings out the roast.

The roast is delicious, and the wine is excellent. The conversation is lively, and
Mr. Levy likes Marie very much. When the cheese plate is brought out, Mr. Levy is slightly drunk and thoroughly enjoying himself. Afterwards, they move into the living room and talk, but Marie says sadly that she should be getting home, and so they escort her to the door. She kisses each of them on both cheeks and trots down the stairs.

Alex has mastered the art of sleep, and he is now wide awake. He humors his parents for another hour, and then they go off to bed. In his room, Alex pulls on a sweatshirt and grabs his keys. He hangs his camera around his neck. Just before eleven, he emerges onto the street, which is empty, and the air is very still, and just then, he feels as if there were no one else in the world. He jumps the gate in the Metro and rides up to Place Pigalle.

Here Alex feels at home, among the strippers, the whores, the junkies—here the city is alive, teeming with people, and the warm breeze reminds him it is nearly summer. He spies a quiet bar, and he realizes that he is a little early, so he sits in a corner, orders a Coke and waits for the excitement to begin. Soon the place is full, and Alex tries to soak in the energy and the atmosphere; but not to be sucked in by the whirlpool of people and drinks and lights at the bar. Sleeping is a waste of time, he says to himself.

At four in the morning, things are winding down, and Alex leaves. The Metro is long closed, so he phones a girl he knows called Julie who will give him a ride home. She was expelled from their school in her senior year, but she and Alex meet for drinks sometimes up in Montmartre. She doesn’t pick up her phone, but Alex knows where she is, and he leans against a parked car outside the hotel and waits.

When the big wooden front door swings open, Julie comes out of the shadows with an older man who wears a sharp suit. As he gives her the money, she motions to Alex and the man looks up. Alex takes a picture, the flashbulb illuminates his stunned expression, and instantly Alex recognizes him and sets off running down the street. He is gone before the other two know what has happened, abandoning his ride even though it is a long way home, and Julie is confused and she quickly walks away, leaving Mr. Altaire in his dark suit slumped against the dirty white wall, his head in his hands.

*Henry S.*
Nervesauna

So she went into the garden to cut a cabbage leaf to make an apple pie; and at the same time a great she-bear, coming up the street, pops its head into the shop—What! No soap? So he died and she very imprudently married the barber and there were present the Picninnies, and the Joblillies, and the Garyulies, and the grand Panjandrum himself, with the little round button at top and they all fell to playing the game of catch-as-catch-can, till the gunpowder ran out at the heels of their boots

—Samuel F.

In his anecdotage, he began to believe, for the first time, in stuporstitions. He had never been agustomed to accept these tales at their valuetations, but the boulder he grew, the more affordlorned he was destined to beglum. Some thought that this man was sacrifarcing too much, misaching for a place in the unihearse he could cull his pepfuge. Unfortunately, most were only interested in banctuaries and self-ladderfying pursuits. These pee-pulls thought they stood under nothing and understood everything, but in fact only pseudolized it all. The old man, howclever, without much skill in the art of escamouflage (though he was a strong advogive of legendemain), did not believe in The Machinamagician, and that remained. The others though, were pracfictionheirs of incognegro and advogette disinfusionmint. There were distill the some who were sindearly concerned, but the old man was fine, just experitrending, so they put ersatz in their tea and put the tea in themselves. The old man deprided it would benesuit him to ungavel this mystery by reactually leaving his banerhood to search for his pepfuge. He had distill been searching these passé years, until a week aflow, when smudgeonly, the old man found what he seamed to be nooking for, and the unihearse no longer disurned him aflung any of the others, and inheed, could only numbtux the slydea of a nothim, and this was his own way of making certain The Machinamagician would never fool him again.

Pierce D.
Garden

The deck was laid cake-like, flat and creamy, with swirls of girls in frothy white frosting dresses dotting its surface. It looked out onto a large garden, shrubbed and green with twirls of jade-dyed ivy decorating the light-blanching grid of the trellises. In the very front of the garden there was a little lawn studded with nonpareil gardenia bushes, inside of which, if one knew what to look for, a lady’s thin black stocking could be found, hanging forgotten in the cobweb of branches.

Chloe B.
The first thing we noticed when we entered Ghost Town was the garbage. Piled up in the street, scattered along sidewalks, it was everywhere. We were told that there was an army of garbage trucks that came by everyday, but no matter how much they picked up, there would always be more by morning. We never saw them. They were like phantoms, arriving at night and leaving no trace of their existence. The locals said the town was in a state of “debris exhaustion,” and we believed them. The second thing we noticed was the smell. It wasn’t as bad as it was four months ago, when the stench of rotting food, contaminated water and decaying bodies had hung in the air like smog and permanently suffocated until people forgot to remember to notice it. It was the least of their worries. But now, as we made our way slowly through town, the remainder of the odor was excreted from the walls and carpets, choking us and stirring our bile.

The people we saw were dazed. In some parts of town there were no souls to speak of; they all congregated together in the Quarter. The Quarter was their refuge, hundreds of them moving together because they couldn’t stand to be alone. Every restaurant was booked, every hotel overflowing, while Out There raccoons scoured their houses and rats took up residence undisturbed.

We wondered what was Out There. We spent a day being jostled by the masses, tripping over their beer cans and hearing them sing dirges long into the night. And then the next morning we got our car and went for a drive. Leaving the Quarter and crossing the canal, things began to get quiet. Every so often now, we would see someone driving around, or working, or talking with a neighbor. Every house had a tattoo. After the waters had receded, people had come by to inspect with their spray paint. These tattoos were the signs of disaster overcome. These tattoos told stories. They told the day of inspection, the name of the inspector, the number of bodies found. Some people had left messages before they evacuated, for people like us to read and remember. There were the practical, safety-conscious messages, “Dog Under House,” and “Please Bulldoze.” “We Will Begin Again” was hopeful, “No Reptile Found,” comical. Later we saw “Beware, We Shoot Looters,” and we began to feel the desperation that the locals had felt before they had been forced to leave.

We turned down a street where the house on the corner was split in two by a tree. This road brought us parallel to the river. Most of these houses had suffered minimal damage; there were people busy heaping moldy furniture onto their lawns. On this block we could see the remainders of the refrigerator takeover. There were about three fridges left on the block, taped up and tilted at strange angles. The garbage trucks had taken care of the refrigerators, if only to avoid a major bio-hazard. Windows were smashed, doors swung off hinges, shingles peeled off roofs. We turned off the car and climbed out, and began to walk up the grassy hill to our right. We rounded the top of the knoll and suddenly stood in front of the raging river. It was the first clean
air we had breathed in two days. There was a huge barge steaming along in front of us, and I thought back to months ago when all ships on the river were rescue vessels, bringing supplies to the stranded. I shivered as I watched the lone barge on the gray waters, the wind whipped my hair across my eyes, drawing tears. As we walked silently back to the car, we overheard a conversation between two neighbors. In the yard of a small house next to us was a man clearing out the water-soaked furniture of his life. He was speaking to a woman in a car, who had paused on her way down the street.

“How’d you fare?” the man asked.

The woman shook her head. “Six feet of water. Everything is ruined.”

The man hung his head and there was silence for a moment. We stood there, quietly watching this moment of solidarity between two victims.

“Are you coming back?” he asked.

“No. I found a good job where I’m staying. I’m not coming back.”

They shook hands and smiled at each other sadly.

“I hope you have a great year,” the man said.

“Same to you. Good luck.”

She drove off. The man went back to work and we walked slowly back to the car.

As we drove on, I noticed a sign on a tree advertising “Tree Cutting, House Gutting, Total Renovation” for disaster victims. The further from the Quarter we drove, the worse the destruction got. Pretty soon, we could no longer spot the tattoos on the houses—they didn’t need them. There were no structures down here left to save. The few people we saw were standing in the rubble of their front lawns, as if the storm had hit yesterday, not months ago. It became impossible to drive down certain streets because houses lay in the middle of them. We saw cars parked on rooftops, fences suspended in midair from electrical wires. One house looked undamaged except for the fact that it was no longer standing. It was as if the house had exhaled deeply and lay down wearily, like a heifer who lies down to weather the storm. It began to rain.

We turned the windshield wipers on but remained silent, there seemed nothing to say and besides, we couldn’t find the words even if we wanted to. Lone trees remained standing every few yards, trees whose roots went down for hundreds of years. The salt water wasn’t good for the magnolias, however, and already they were beginning to die.

It reminded me of a movie I had seen once about tornados, and yet this was an entirely different type of storm. Houses had been ripped in half, showing cross-sections of bedrooms and kitchens—one road we turned down was scattered with colored pencils of a child long departed. We turned around. We were heading slowly and steadily towards the break in the fortification, not because of any previous agreement but because of a mutual need to see the head of this terrible monster. A few
blocks from the breach there was a car, surprisingly undamaged, and in the driving seat there sat Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer. Some jolly soul had come down days before to spray-paint “Merry Christmas” on the side and string lights over the ’94 Buick. Rudolph was rain-soaked and we drove past, unsmiling.

We never made it to the break. Three blocks away from the gaping mouth that had been stuffed with sandbags, and there was no way to get through. It was a war zone, a wasteland. Three city blocks had been completely obliterated—the water had rushed in and lifted every house off its moorings, the houses had then floated until they smashed into each other and stopped, on Tennessee. What was left behind was unrecognizable, pieces of wood and twisted metal left to show for the lives that had been lived on those blocks by the water.

There were no cohesive thoughts, no actions we could use, no words of comfort to convey. We drove out of Ghost Town that night because there was nothing else we could do, staying there made us feel helpless and exhausted. The town reeked of death and destruction, and we turned away in fear even as our hearts screamed to help them. But did they need our help? They had each other and really, that was all they would ever have—the solidarity and brotherhood that comes from surviving disaster. They will always be Out There, and we will always be here, marveling at the power of water, and the strangeness of those beyond our help.

*Phoebe P.*

**Where does the battered sail fly**

where does the battered sail fly
blanched like the veil of the sun
the yellow hideous fear in the captain’s eyes
indicates real danger

and mingling with the sheath of gold
that splays across the water are threads of purple
ochre and a sort of diamond white

and back again to the captain’s face
and back once more to the current’s continual beat
and your thoughts swell and churn
and move you like a battered sail

*Allison B.*
CHUCK and STEVEN sit slouching in chairs. CHUCK wears a store-bought Batman costume and STEVEN wears red face paint and lobster claws. Their teacher CAROL stands with perfect posture to the side; she is wearing fangs, cat ears, and a cape. ADAM enters; both his feet and body are bare except for a green Hawaiian lei that is draped around his hips. He carries two notebooks, a pen, a calculator, and a Bible. He takes a seat at an open desk and lays his items on the floor beside him. CHUCK and STEVEN laugh.

ADAM: I’m sorry; I had to park my bike. Happy Halloween, Madame.

STEVEN: Nice legs.

CAROL (facing away): Adam, where is your clothing?

ADAM: This is my costume, Madame. I’m Adam.

CAROL: Excuse me?

ADAM: Adam, my idol, from Adam and Eve. I finished Genesis last night.

CAROL (facing ADAM): Oh, wonderful. However, I’m going to have to ask you to put your clothing on, Adam.

ADAM: But Madame—I’m Adam! I am man. Who better to be Adam than me? Than Adam!

CAROL: Yes, that’s true. But you are also naked, Adam. And I do not tolerate nudity in my classroom.

ADAM: That’s absurd (pointing to STEVEN), and you tolerate lobsters? Lobsters aren’t even suitable for a classroom environment. In fact (pointing at CAROL), neither are cats! I hate cats—I’m allergic to cats!

CAROL (taking off her cat ears): This is not up for discussion, Adam. You will either dress yourself or you will leave.

ADAM: Nudity is a virtue, Madame. In truth women destroyed its purity! Because thou wert forbade, thou sought to intrude and ultimately ruin innocence. You ate from the Tree of Knowledge, Madame! You brought this upon yourself! You classified nudity as evil.

CAROL: Adam, I’m afraid that I must ask you to leave this class. Chuck or Steven will give you tonight’s assignment.
ADAM: I refuse! How dare you treat me with such disrespect? I practically created you! With such greed I should take back my rib!

CAROL: I'm sorry, Adam. Please gather your belongings and leave.

ADAM (approaching CAROL): That's it! I'm taking the rib.

Alessandra G.

Across the Equator

We walked along Brazil
Atop a skyward
Fist of flame,
Swarmed by mullioned mountains
That overlooked the night,
Proclaiming all danger
As outnumbered
And remote.

We walked along Alaska
In the dark half of the year,
And lived on sorrow and salted salmon.
The unwary frozen taiga
Was a melancholy clay garden
Inscribed into our pallid faces.

We walked in a peninsula
On the sea of solitude, in the far east
Crossed with frost, and kept our frozen vigil
We were supposed to grow into,
Dozing in parkas, hunched deep in our coats.

Leora M.
Darl left the hospital where he had just seen his mother eaten up from the inside. Little else could have happened to her with all that anger she had, and her sickness and all that, which just festered up inside her and grew until there was no room left for it and it had nowhere left to go. That was when it had decided the only way out was to eat Darl’s mother and so it did, as Darl watched her pained face and the confused look in her eyes before they closed forever.

Darl walked away from the hospital where all that had happened, and he didn’t turn around once. He just kept on walking, following a bike path that wound into the woods, where the trees looked dark and soft around the edges, and kept on walking away from the hospital and didn’t stop until he knew that when he turned around he wouldn’t be able to see it. Then he dropped onto his knees and banged his head into the pine needles and rocks that lined the forest floor. It wasn’t much at first but he continued to bang his head until the front split open, just a little, and beads of blood ran down his face. Then he reached his arms around his knees, tucked together, fell onto his side and rocked back and forth.

A day before Darl’s mother lay in bed. She was cold and wanted her hospital sheets but she had been feverish only a moment before, and now she would have to reach all the way down to her brittle ankles if she wanted to get them. The thought of this made her head ache and so she lay uncomfortably, not sure what to do. She felt as if she were not sick enough for she could still think all too clearly. She didn’t want to think anymore, not now. She tried not to think about what her hospital room looked like in the dim gray light of the T.V. She had nightmares where she sat outside the hospital and saw herself through her window with the persistent light of that T.V. and it all looked so pale and confined next to the violet sky that hung above the hospital parking lot. So Darl’s mother could not close her eyes nor could she stand to keep them open. The only thing she had ever done since her arrival at the hospital that gave her any peace was to place a white sheet over her face and stare. There she saw herself reflected in the cloth, white, androgynous and beautiful and she did not think, she only was who she wanted to be. Once she had been so still beneath her sheets a nurse had mistaken her for dead and raked back the sheets to reveal a wide-eyed old woman who bolted upright and gasped for breath as if emerging from underwater.

When Darl was thirteen years old he had gone fishing in the brook behind his house. He had made a fishing pole by tying a loop of string round a hook to an old birch branch and throwing a fly on the end. He would dangle it into the water and watch as the sun fell through the trees tiny fish clambering and fighting each other for the treat. Whenever this happened Darl would feel perversely guilty, watching the fish struggle against each other for a hook in the mouth. This was his first experience of irony, when he had realized there was less good in the world than he had thought.
Darl sat with his bleeding head, which he had banged against the ground. Pine needles stuck to its surface, and their saccharine smell was caught in his mouth with the taste of blood. He closed his eyes and tried to remember where he had experienced this before. Darl had caught more fish than he ever had in one go and he had brought them home in a basket to show off to his mother. He was skipping towards his house when he saw his father and her shouting at each other. He couldn’t hear what they were saying, but his mother was exasperatedly waving her arms and his father didn’t seem to notice because he just stared right past her. Suddenly his father turned and started walking away from the house and into the woods. His mother turned also and looked for a moment as if she were about to cry. A pressure tugged at Darl’s stomach. The basket he was holding fell to the tips of his fingers. His mother sprung towards him. Darl watched her black dress billow out behind her. His mother asked why he had caught so many stupid fish. Darl did not respond, he could not understand why she was acting like he had done something wrong. Darl wanted to tell her that the fish were for her, that they weren’t stupid and that it was their fault, not his, that they had been caught. He could, however, only stare at her, wide eyed, as if he had just been struck across the face. Darl’s mother stared right back. Then, without taking her eyes off him once, she snatched the basket of fish from Darl’s hands. Darl didn’t move. As his mother looked into his eyes she saw disappointment and misunderstanding. She felt accused, and in her anger she grabbed a handful of fish from Darl’s basket and clenched them in her fist until the eyes exploded from their heads. Their eyes rolled on the ground like beads of glass and their innards dripped down his mother’s hands. Darl looked away from his mother at the pine trees all around him. A feeling of alienation overcame him, of transcending the confines of his body. It was as if he had stepped out of a husk, like the silver fish skins his crying mother clung to, and could now see who he really was. Darl saw that he was a child. He saw he was only one piece of the world, a small one at that, and that the only life he could affect was his own.

Darl could no longer care about his mother. He was himself, and he was invested in that, and she could be eaten from the inside out for all he cared. She was helpless, and Darl saw that as she wept and beat her bloody fist against the ground strewn in pine needles.

Darl’s mother stared up at her white sheet. She felt the familiar presence of someone close to her. Someone she hadn’t seen in years. It was her son and he had come to see her die. She would not, though. She knew she could not die, not while she was within her sheet. Within its folds, within the whiteness that had neither beginning nor end, her thoughts could flow, unperturbed, continuously and through them she would live forever.
Darl walked in and saw his mother beneath the white sheet that the nurse had told him about. The sheet was wrinkled and had stains of sweat on it. A fan was running on the ceiling. Darl thought, sadly, that he understood why his mother would not remove the sheet. When he was young his mother would not leave the house. She would cook in the kitchen or sit by the windowsill and knit. Darl could see her in his memory, rocking back and forth in their darkened living room, looking out the window with not enough courage to step out the door and walk amongst the trees that she stared at with such admiration. The outside world held too many possibilities, too many chances. Darl’s mother had always felt that wherever there was chance fate ruled absolutely. She made sure in her own home there was no chance, no possibility, and while Darl found this stifling, his mother felt it was the best type of place to be in.

Darl walked over to his mother and placed his hand on her face. She didn’t even stir. It was as if she were dead already.

Since Darl’s mother first got sick she had never felt as good as she did now. She was no longer under her sheet because now she and the sheet were one. She saw, within it, a face that she recognized but could not tell who it was. From the face came a body, light and ethereal, that shone before her and laughed like a little child. It was her son, when he had been very young and she realized that this must have been a very long time ago. She smiled and held out her arms as the boy began to run towards her. What a feeling of exuberance it was to be needed and to be loved! In the child’s eyes she saw both these things reaching towards her, and she opened her arms even wider. She was on a high now, with the sheet displaying her desires onto its white surface like an empty canvas ready to express a painter’s will. She was on a high and her heart was beating so fast she felt it would fly away at any moment. It was so glorious the way she felt that she knew the feeling could not possibly last forever.

Darl pulled the sheet off his mother’s face. At the moment Darl’s mother realized that her sheet was torn away from her, her heart stopped. The world seemed colorless as she looked around her, not understanding why her sheet had been removed. The thought, which confused her, made her angry, as confusing thoughts always did. She tried to move but could not and this only made her even angrier. Oh, if someone would only throw the sheet back atop her head! No one did, and her anger grew and with no outlet it began to consume her from within. It hurt so much and she could do nothing. Yes, nothing, for nothing in her life had changed! She still had no control. She could only cling and hope, to survive, to hold on to her abject life. All the pain she had ever felt was gone. She was in a place, a dark place, whose cool placidity enveloped her. She saw her son, Darl, and wrapped him in her arms.

Noah D.
Kerwyn lies buried in the warm sand
only his arms and head are not covered
towels lie scattered across the bright beach
inhabited by friendly people watching the cold waves
umbrellas block the burning sun out of onlookers’ eyes
seagulls fly overhead keeping watch at all times
the hot sun blinds Kerwyn and he squints
the buriers observe this with cheerful smiles
a young girl runs by kicking up sand
an old couple frowns as the biting sand hits them
mounds of sand on Kerwyn’s chest resemble breasts
frowning with sand in his face he is not amused
a pair of sandals lies close by
Kerwyn thinks about getting up
he feels the grains of sand rubbing against his body
his face bears an expression of discomfort
he questions his choice to be buried
and thinks about the feeling of the cool water
the sun beams down on the sand
dark-skinned man buried in the sands of time

Brian C.
1. NYQUIL

awake eternal  bed swaybacked  awake languidly

plane skewed

stomach bare  cheek stained  eyes hungry

Don't
Pop
Pills
Adolescent
Sleep
Come
Slow

light intrudes  car runs  book open

youth unchecked

2. like Schrödinger’s Cat
alive and dead in one moment;
open the box

3. I got up at 6:15 and went to a psychologist’s
Baroque office
On my mother’s order/behalf (my mother is a psychoanalyst too)
Remarking on my mind like Mardi Gras, he told me about
Subconscious dream this that, metaphysical property
Hopscotch and psychoablodablo and then stated
That I had better get out of the city.
My Ma paid 150 to hear what I had told her the night before
4.
I woke up one morning aching for
LAST NITE’S DISHES and my
Billie Holiday, thinking The
Day Lady Died all the while.
I had dreamt up a
Bathtub cold & with bubbles—
A writer discussing Kafka
At me
From a footstool sat,
Relatively arranged.
I was in my own twisted
Oklahoma
And I didn’t feel all that
Compelled
To tell him—
So I kept bathing
Tho I don’t remember being
In the nude

*Hannah Z.*

*Birth of the Cool*

Freed from the hunger
   for the now and the next,
Satisfied with the simple,
Content with the complex,
Nothing to add,
Nothing to remove,
No longer needy,
Nothing to prove,
Calmly,
Sound fades into silence,
Enjoyed while it lasts,
Relinquished without defiance.
Liberated from hypnosis,
Life’s no longer so cruel.
It’s the end of neurosis.
It’s the birth of the cool.

*Eric S.*
“Cigar?” the wedding guest asked.
“Don’t smoke,” the father of the bride responded.
“Oh,” the guest said as he tucked the extra cigar back in his blazer pocket.
“Surprised?” the father asked.
“A little,” he said with caution to the most famous chain-smoker in the county.
“Only cigarettes,” the father corrected.
“... and quitting,” he added.
“Quitting?” The man pitched the word as a question.
“Quitting.”

The father of the bride converted the word into a friendly but stern end to the conversation. He was a willpower man. He knew he was capable of quitting, and he hated the massive amounts of attention this task was drawing. Especially at the wedding, it seemed like in addition to “Congratulations for your daughter” and “That turkey dish was really something,” everyone had to comment: “I hear you’re giving up smoking.” Was it that interesting? He despised people who wanted to ask invasive questions about his abilities to quit. But people didn’t exactly talk in so many words. “I hear you’re giving up smoking” would be too conspicuous, too harsh, too evocative of the days when friends conversed to excess. There was a time when it was common to talk in long sentences and even string several sentences together into detailed stories, which sometimes extended for hours. Language was used to an unnecessary extreme at that time. In fact, there were translators who would learn multiple languages to better help politicians communicate, or to help regular citizens read international literature. Gradually, probably before your great-grandparents were born, humans matured and came to the realization that much more is expressed in body language, tone of voice, and eye contact than in frivolous speech. It was decided long ago that literature was a useless form of entertainment. Why say more than one or two key words to convey a point? Long paragraphs are tiring.

“Do you?” the priest asked.
“I do,” the groom said.
“You?” the priest asked.
“Do,” the bride said.

“Good,” the priest declared. The bride and groom kissed. It was a beautiful ceremony. Quite concise. The bride’s father leaned against a stained-glass window of Moses or someone biblically significant like that. The glass created a kaleidoscopic myriad of glowing red, orange, green, blue and lighter blue on the church floor. The
floor was very smooth, cold marble. The bride’s youngest sister ran to her mother to retrieve her shoes because her sensitive bare feet were getting cold.

“Shoes,” she demanded, stretching out her hand.

“Honey,” her mother complained, looking her up and down from her dirty feet to the ripped hem of her skirt, to her frizzy hair which was breaking away from its bobby pins and ribbons.

“What?” the young girl half whined, half politely inquired. The tone of voice leaned more towards an innocent question, while her hand continued to reach with stubborn insistence for her shoes.

“A mess,” the mother explained the obvious to her daughter. “You are” was implied. She was embarrassed for her child to be darting around a church and wrinkling her flower-girl outfit. Her angular posture exhibited clear signs of annoyance: her hand clasped her hip, and her shoulders jutted into an angry hunch.

“Here.” She handed the shoes over.

“Thanks!” The flower girl ran off again.

“Kids.” Her mother turned to a nearby wedding guest.

“True,” the guest nodded and closed her eyes in knowing agreement.

“Right?” the mother turned and asked her husband, who was eagerly eyeing a loose cigarette that had been forgotten on a round table.

“What?” he snapped, his thoughts away from the temptation.

“Kids,” his wife summed up the conversation for him.

“Yes,” he replied. “Kids.”

“Difficult,” the wife muttered.

“Yes,” her husband said. “Quite.”

“Cake!” a young voice squealed.

“Cut,” suggested the groom.

“All right,” the bride responded and cut the first slice.

Eva D.
First Boy in Grandmother’s Pearls

He sits in his grandmother’s room, holding her pearls
touching each one with each finger as he weaves them in between.
His mother will come to get him soon take him away from the smell
of stale flowers and fresh moss and her mirrored dressing table with its lengthy, lonely pearls.

Clutching them tightly, he curls them up over his head remembering when she wore them to his birthday last year to his mortifying recitals to get a double scoop double fudge ice cream sundae at Prudence’s a Sunday last August.

They fall cautiously onto his bony shoulders not used to this added weight or this jumble of memories and smells and worries and countless whispers about nothing in particular except the thrill.

Three imperfect spheres clink against his collarbone his shirt left lying in her stained ivory bathroom sink soaked from softened tears.
He giggles, coughs,
wanting to feel the coral red flowers
of her Sunday dress
against his swollen jaw and
the engorging darkness.

He holds his breath
as his gentle stroke
careses her dress
in his lap
waiting for the hushed release
and tilted eyes.

He shivers
as he hears his mother call his name
then her name
more quietly
without any effort
or reason.

His hands rise
to catch the light switch
causing the pearls to tap the vase
of dead dyed flowers
each an unnatural color
or the remains of one,
splotchy and broken off
or fluttering carelessly in his breath.

He sighs and removes the pearls,
placing them back in the second drawer
on the left,
to be left there
until the following winter
when they would sell other traces of her and them
to strangers
who don’t remember her
or him
wearing her pearls with double fudge ice cream
and coral flowers
in August.

A tuft of dandelion fluff in his crumpled cheeks,
“Two scoops, please.”

_Sinead D._

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**D & G Stands for Detachment & Garlic**

With hands swollen from heat
and feet,
I stand upright like Lady Liberty
in the Piazza at San Marco,
its domes floating over me like planets.
I stand immersed in Venetian Summer,
like an ambassador.
I am one of many masses of
fanny-packed asses and
Vaporetto passes.
I stand, observing this Piazza,
which appears to display something not unlike Plato’s Theory of Madness—
“Scusa, ragazza. What’s the matter, Miss?”
Oh, just longing for New York’s hustle and hiss.
Or maybe I find Venice
to be an abyss
of pigeons
and panting tourists
and too-tight pants.

_Maggy S._
A Walk in the Park

Cale never really thought about death. When he did, he thought that he would live to a ripe old age, and then one day he would never wake up. Painless, that’s how it was supposed to be.

There was a park near where he lived, called Kelsey Acres, named after some guy who had done some thing. Cale had never really bothered to pay attention to those particular facts. He didn’t go to the park for history lessons. He went to relax because, with all the green around him, nothing in the world could touch him. He went to the park to get away from the skyscrapers, the endless lines of cars, the endless stream of people, the ever-ongoing construction. He went because there were times when he couldn’t hear his own thoughts over the sirens and the horns.

It only took one night for his small haven to change forever. And he could clearly remember how it had happened.

He sat on the bench he almost always sat on, not paying much attention to what was going on around him until something caught his focus. A couple he recognized passed. He’d always seen them together, holding hands, kissing even. He never would have expected to see from this man and this woman what he saw then. The woman ran past him screaming, and gunshot followed her. Cale looked to where the shots had come from, and sure enough there was her boyfriend, fiancé, husband, holding the gun. He screamed something after the woman, and the only words that were coherent enough for Cale to catch were “bitch,” “kill,” and “fucking affair.” Then the man fired off the rest of his shots randomly.

Cale felt the impact, but never felt the pain.

The woman got away and the man stomped off in the other direction like a sullen child, leaving Cale the only one still in that part of Kelsey Acres.

Cale sat in his silence, staring off into space, and was startled when he heard another voice. He looked up in confusion.

The man standing there was far too pale to be healthy, was Cale’s first thought. The second was that his black hair and dark eyes only made him look paler. The man offered him a hand.

“We should go.”

Cale blinked and took the hand, standing.

“Where’re we going? For a walk around the park?” The question earned him an odd look.

“Don’t you know?”

Cale nodded and smiled faintly. “I know. I want to hear it from you though.” The man looked at him for a long moment, and then said, “You’re dead.” Cale
turned to look at the bench behind him, at the body there with his own face. He nodded to the man.

“I know.”

There was silence for several minutes before Death spoke again. “Right. A walk around the park then.”

_Natasha S._

**City of Winds**

When the wind blows hard from the south
And you come across a cave in the sea,
Enter its gaping mouth,
And you will find me.

I will be your guide here
In this wondrous city of wind.
The end of your journey is near
In this city of dreams and long-dead kin.

Around every corner, a spiral tower rises
And the smell from the markets makes you halt.
A city of ever-changing moods and disguises—
Look back and the towers turn to salt.

Finally, arrive at the never-ending fields.
Now you will discover the power this city wields.
This city where the winds carry scents from all four corners
Will forevermore hold you within its borders.

_Bill C._
I Wrote This With A Sharpie On E.E. Cummings’ Back

I just started writing a
Random line
As if to get me started into some
Magical D
E
E
P Poetry Land
Soon I realized that this starting line
(My Plane If You Will)
Was in fact missing a wing,
Something mildly important
I erased it as if to board another flight
Until some snobby and possibly gay
(Not gay in a bad way just an adjective to describe his character, not that all gay people act the same or that all gay people are snobby, I just find it funny I live in such a sensitive society where I have to write huge run-off sentences to justify using gay and snobby in the same sentence)
Flight attendant stopped me entering the plane, saying
“I’m sorry sir, but the first class is for artistic poets”

Making my way to the back I was greeted by a
“Poet”
Who continually shouted
“FUCK WAR”

You can obviously understand such a statement
Would have to be said in a half-dozen paragraphs
In order for him to be seated in first class

So we slowly took off, pencils scribbling
Unfortunately the pilot started to say over the speaker:
“Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I have some announcements”

And the plane crashed
And died
Fritz’s Carousel

Heavy clouds as black as burnt marshmallows veiled the ground in darkness so only glimpses of the stars shone through. The carousel was still. Horses’ blank eyes stared ahead, their cheerful colors hidden by overcast skies. A huge man was bent double over a grey and pink wooden horse jerking his arm back and forth with a wrench. His face was hidden by the horse’s plaster tail but his huge legs were in plain view and feet as big as a monster’s dangled off the edge. Grease stains, still wet like fresh scabs, stained his wrinkled corduroys. Since he was seven feet tall and it was hard to find clothes that fit correctly, these were one of only three pairs of pants that had been specially tailored for him. On the other hand, his navy blue jacket looked brand new but a few sizes too small. When his face finally emerged from beneath the horse, it did not suit such a giant. His nose was a blushing ball, delicately positioned at the center of his pudgy face, and freckles were tossed around. Two immense eyes bulged and lips with an air of innocence accented his chin.

The carousel suddenly started to spin, each horse bobbing up and down to the usual tune of optimism. Surprised, the man tumbled onto the wet grass but he showed a smile, not a look of pain. The horses’ still faces returned excitement. He shoved himself off the ground with his hands, his torso reaching to the horses’ galloping feet.

“Finally,” he said to himself picking up his workbox. The carousel had been broken for over a week and that had meant the woman who sat in the center and pulled the levers, Emiline Fischer, had not been on duty. The man was infatuated with Emiline. The only problem was, she didn’t know about it. Her eyes were like blue marbles as they smiled at him when he walked by. The only time her delicate hands had ever touched his was when he had passed her a screwdriver to fix her radio, and even though she was a mere five feet tall while Fritz was close to being a giant, she didn’t look up at him with fear or uneasiness as most other people did. Her chocolate hair, copper skin and sideways smile were what generated his life. She made him feel, and think, even weep with love. In Fritz’s mind, he had already sailed over the horizon with her beauty.

The earth pounded under his feet as he sauntered back to his trailer. Living on the site of a carnival was not always a good thing but at least he didn’t have very far to walk for work each morning. Fritz had joined the carnival crew only three years ago, when he was thirty, and originally he was one of the attractions. “The Gentle Giant,” they had called him. When his father, whom Fritz had been very close to, heard that his precious son was degrading himself, he had stopped communicating with Fritz. Soon after, Fritz realized that he didn’t like the crowds’ negative attention either even
though he felt connected to the people who worked at the carnival. He felt more accepted than ever before so he pleaded with the owner until he was given the job as a mechanic. Over time, his father had grown to accept the facts, and now, Fritz felt that he had a pretty good life.

When he got to his trailer, he had to duck considerably just to squeeze through his door. It was like succumbing to humiliation and showing the world his biggest fault. Like having no sugar on an unripe grapefruit, the trailer seemed dull without furnishings to spice it up. The dirty dishes stacked high on the Formica counter were the only reason the place looked inhabited. Also, there was a portrait of Fritz. It was dark and there was just a weak glow that illuminated his face. His eyes looked down and his head was cocked to one side. He was noticeably younger. No wrinkles gathered under his eyes or pleated his forehead, although overall he had the same melancholy expression that added an eerie ambiance to his character.

Fritz yawned, his face scrunching up, and lay down on his cot to tug the blankets up to his broad neck. He left his feet to stick out the bottom, cold air silently biting his toes. His eyes fluttered closed and the world went blank.

Not too long after, he sprung up, his ears ringing with the sound of his telephone. His hands were like useless animal paws as he fumbled to unearth his clock. Eleven p.m. it flashed. Eleven p.m.

“Hello,” the giant moaned into the receiver.

The voice on the other line pronounced, “Fritz, I have a problem.”

“Uh huh.”

“We don’t have any hot water and the sink isn’t working.”

Fritz rolled his eyes in frustration. It was eleven o’clock at night. Grinding his teeth, he asked, “Would you like me to fix it?”

“Could you? Great. I’ll just leave the door open for you. You won’t even have to disturb us while we sleep. My wife is just so tired she can’t be bothered to make you your usual sandwich. I don’t know what has gotten into her lately…” he droned on. Fritz’s head sagged and he hung up.

Cormac was his only friend in the world, or at least the only person who cared enough to call and inquire if he was still alive. It just happened that those occasional times usually involved fixing one of his broken appliances or coming over for one of his wife’s peanut butter sandwiches that Fritz so much despised. But he didn’t have the heart to tell Mrs. Jenkins that he hated peanut butter. He grabbed his toolbox and shuffled silently to the door. His corduroy pants fluttered in the wind and his blond hair that drooped like a sad dog whipped his face. The air was cold and mysterious but driving cramped his long legs and stiffened his neck. Fritz had trouble getting into a car let alone driving it, so he decided to walk.
His knuckles beat against the door hard. Mid-knock, he remembered that Cormac had left the door open. He ducked his head and entered. Unlike his own hovel of a house, Cormac’s was cozy. It was decorated with rugs and lounge chairs fit for the queen. A vase of tulips adorned the coffee table and warmth smothered the room. Fritz set down his toolbox in the inviting kitchen and set to work. Screech screech, the pipe chimed as he twisted it gently back into place. That hadn’t taken long. He unfurled from his crouched position under the Jenkins’ sink, slamming his head on the counter.

“Ahh!” he yelped in surprise and held his hand on his throbbing head as he rocked back and forth. He could hear Cormac thumping down the stairs.

“Fritz, my pal,” said Cormac, as he glided like a dancer into the kitchen wearing his furry dressing robe. “Oh, I see you’ve fixed it! Thanks a bunch. And whatever happened to your head? My…well there’s nothing a good sandwich can’t fix, is there?”

“Sure.”

“What’s wrong buddy, not hungry?”

“I thought you were sleeping,” Fritz tried to change the subject. “Upstairs with your tired wife?” he probed.

“Well, it was kind of hard to miss the squeaking and yelling.”

“Oh.”

“Anyway, I wanted to chat.” This happened every time Cormac had a “quick” favor to ask of Fritz. It was always accompanied by a chat around the kitchen table with Cormac drinking tea and Fritz sitting with his long legs tucked unnaturally under the table. Fritz didn’t mind these chats too much, though. Sometimes he even enjoyed them, at least more than being alone, but tonight he was not in the mood.

“Have a seat, I’ll make some tea,” Cormac gestured to the wicker chair at the head of the table. Five minutes later, Fritz was listening to Cormac speak and watching the steam rise slowly up from his mug to disappear in the cool air.

“Do you remember when there was that watermelon growing contest and everyone was growing theirs secretly so as not to reveal how big it was?” Fritz nodded in recollection. “And then it turned into a huge guessing game as to who would win? That was pretty pathetic, don’t you think? I mean really… just a watermelon…” Cormac rambled on.

“Uh huh.”

“Well, what was I saying…? Oh yes, the new rumor. So I was buying some fertilizer for my plants the other day and I overheard the storeowner talking to Mrs. Merty. She said that a new person is going to work at the carnival. I thought you’d like to know. She’s apparently running the carousel.”
“We already have a person for running the carousel,” Fritz retorted. His legs shuffled beneath the table.

“Not anymore. I believe she left today. Something about her boyfriend in California and a better job, etc. At least that is what I heard.” Fritz could feel his back slump and his cheeks drop. Emiline was leaving and he had not had a chance to say goodbye. Her smile would never greet him again in the morning and he wouldn’t get to see her biting the tip of her pen as she spun with ease in her chair and pulled levers to make the carousel run. He would have nothing to look forward to every time he walked out his door. Cormac was the only person left in Fritz’s lonely existence. But he tried not to show his misery.

“That’s good to kn…”

“Oh and did I tell you about Mr. Gordon’s new lawn mower?” Cormac asked, his eyes wide and his eyebrows high on his wrinkled head. Obviously he had not caught on to anything that was going on in Fritz’s devastated head. Cormac was not a very sensitive man. He was what Fritz liked to call a “typewriter.” His gossipy mouth would spit words out before his brain had gotten the chance to process what was being said. Some people also interpreted his behavior as selfishness. This was how it went for about an hour. Cormac would tell stories and Fritz would pretend to have at least a slight interest, but his mind was elsewhere. When the moment arose, he made his escape.

“I’d better hit the road. I’ve got to start work early tomorrow.”

“I guess you’re right.” The chairs screeched across the tiled floor as the two men rose. An accidental yawn escaped Fritz’s mouth.

“Bye Cormac.” The door clicked shut behind him. Once he was alone, his feet rolled from heel to toe across the pavement. His head was bowed like an embarrassed little boy’s, and his hands hung like limp strings at his sides. A piece of chewed gum mashed on the bottom of his sneaker, stretching and sticking stubbornly to the pavement. A tear escaped Fritz’s hollow eyes. Emiline was in that tear, and she slowly trickled down Fritz’s face to drop like a ghost on the ground. A few more steps and he would be home. He could see his unmade bed, his portrait watching him from the wall, his dirty dishes, his yellow toothbrush, and his antique telephone, but he could only see a blurry picture of Emiline who was what he wanted most.

_Catherine C._
I don't know how to write a love poem.
It's never been a talent I've needed or wanted or
Maybe I wanted it but didn't really understand needing it.

I realize that I'm supposed to burst through dams with my words about you,
I know the power of couplets and personifications, it is me more than you that
wishes
I had romance at my fingers,
Ready and willing to fall into place on the page, to
Blossom on every line in sweet hiccups of my gathered feelings,

But I'm stuck here, thinking
Of those who did it so easily, who could soar with only
Ink for wind, who needed no prompt or crutch.

How do I follow those lines that line the library shelves?
They twist every syllable to their whim, can
Bend the slightest whisper of affection into an ode, thunderous and
Passionate.

I don't know how to write a love poem.
God knows I've tried, at every hour,
In every position, I've sung in every key for you, used every color—
But I can't seem to get it right, not
The motion in your face, the gentle smell of your skin slanting down over your
features
Sliding over your collar bone and
Forearms;
I can't pin down the way you walk in only twenty-six scratch marks,
I'm trying, I'm trying so hard to feel the way you laugh in vowels,
Imprint your touch in consonants,
And I'm still just all words.

I have no way to make them wear you, you take no form on my page.

How do I possibly tell you in one line what it is that breaks
Through me when I see you,
I can only grasp for tenses and rhymes,
Pant for coherence and allusion, I can only hope you feel the weight of my crumpled cries.

I love you.

_Cordelia I._

The First Verb in the Dictionary

She is left alone; even the clouds can no longer worry.
They rush from the sky, leaving the sun alone,
somehow dulled by the circumstances.
Around her, all seems to wilt, and she submits
as she feels herself begin to surrender.

Hope has forsaken her; she tried to convince it to stay,
but it would not listen. She was no longer a concern.
Could it have waited a few moments longer?
Perhaps. But then the trees would still be providing shade.
The river would continue to hush in her honor.
The wind would calm, so as not to disturb her drapes of leaves.

They pay no heed now, for there is no need.
She has been undoubtedly abandoned.

_Ilana N.-G._
Thy Teeth Are as a Flock of Sheep!

Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep! Thy sweet lips—
What? I said that thy teeth are like a flock of sheep! Bah!
Where was I? Ah, yes, thy sweet lips slope up and down again, as a tumbleweed bouncing in a rye field—
Well, I’m sorry, but that’s just how I feel! I call them how I see them, and as I see them, thy sweet lips are as tumbleweed!
Thy earlobe belongs not to this world. It has the curvature of the divine. Should all of the mathematicians of Greece look upon thy earlobe and put their heads together, it would take them ten years to find the equation of thy earlobe. And this equation would be so beautiful and so elegant that when Cupid himself looked upon it, he should be struck by his own bow and find himself enchanted by that perfect lobe, and devoted to its keeper!
I think you know very well what that means! Why, it means that your earlobe is so perfect a geometric structure that it makes fools of wise men, servants of masters, girls of boys. Well, perhaps not girls of boys…
My dear, of course I mean it. I mean it as the day means the night!
But why, princess, do you frown upon me? Though I do confess, thy frown does become thee well.
For when thy sweet mouth angles downward, the dimples in thy cheeks take flight as angels and sing to me songs of such beauty and charm that would turn even the darkest heart to look upon thee with affection.
And now, beloved, I can take it no longer.
Let us get up early to the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine flourish,
Whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranate bud forth:
There will I give thee my loves!

Alex C.
My Brother the Vegetable

About two weeks ago, though I cannot pinpoint exactly when it occurred, my brother Raoul began to undergo mysterious alterations of character…. Now he is a vegetable. I first noticed his new physical state when I saw him take root in the lawn. I didn't think much of it; he had just broken up with his girlfriend and I assumed he was going through some sort of a relapse. Looking back, I can almost understand why he would go and turn himself into a cauliflower: his ex was a real live carnivore. Every morning she would go out with a lumber axe down to the pastures and whack a cow or a ferret; she even got Roger, our sheep dog. After she hit the prey with the hatchet once, she would throw the axe to the ground and charge to fight with teeth and head butt and elbow and kneecap vs. whatever the animal was able to gather in time. She once fought a bull armed with a rake and a garbage-can top. Every time she charged, the bull, named Esteban, would whirl the rake above his head in a complex pattern that usually ended with the ex receiving a crushing blow to the side of the head, and, if she fell down after the head smack, Esteban would jump on her repeatedly until she rolled away and was able to stand again. I remember this battle going on for hours, and at certain points in time I could scarcely tell who was the carnivore and who was the bovine. Of course you can guess how it ended. Esteban attacked with another complex rake-spin head attack but, when the rake whistled towards her head, she was able to catch it and disarm him. At this point Esteban realized that he could not win so he beamed the trash lid at her and thundered away. Once the lid was disengaged from her ribcage, she was after him like a bullet and, within minutes, she had chased him down and ripped off one of his legs. The leg was quickly followed by both arms and his nose ring, all of which she ate while Esteban was forced to watch as he saw his blood dripping freely down her arms and the gore gathering in her lap. Then she picked him up and brought him back up to the house, slammed him down on the table and announced that breakfast was served. I guess that is what she gets for teaching the farm animals self-defense.

Well, back to Raoul, the vegetable. He…well actually Raoul wouldn't be a he now, would he? Vegetables don't have genders so I guess my brother is an it, but then again “brother” has the connotation of masculinity, so I should actually be calling it “blood relative,” but then again vegetables don't have blood so Raoul would just be a relative, but how can it be a relative? Raoul is a vegetable and I am not related to those photosynthetic autotrophs! Raoul is a relation, yes, a relation of mine.

Anyway, recently Raoul has stopped eating, and our grandmother—well actually my grandmother—came and baked it its favorite pie but it didn't eat it. She was so sad that she got frustrated and called it some inexcusably harsh words like
 VEGETARIAN and MEAT-HATER, the second word because her meat pies are world famous. Presidents of many countries around the world come to partake of her pies; we have had the President of New Jersey, the King of Alabama, the Sultan of Wisconsin, the Tsar of Idaho, and leaders of many other well-known countries of our world. And Raoul had the nerve to decline that pie! And it isn’t even dying of starvation! It just sits out there with this blissful expression on its face, drearily gazing into the faultless sun, its mouth partly open, body swaying gently in the wind. It doesn’t even mind when the neighborhood boys come and throw sticks and knives or rocks and cars, though it really didn’t like when they pegged it with chipmunks. Chipmunks have a tendency to dig holes in its scalp and hide their drugs in his hair. It says it is just downright uncomfortable.

Then it happened. Raoul had finally pissed off enough people in the local council that they had a meeting to decide its fate. This was about four days ago; apparently they didn’t like the idea of a giant cauliflower boy-veg scaring off all the tourism, you know, all of the people coming to see his ex eat a cow raw, or all of the city folk who come the thousands of miles to see our rural pasture city suburb. The council deemed that Raoul must be exterminated by a very unique process, a process that could only be used on a giant vegetable like Raoul; the means of death was decided to be death-by-sautéé. As in to be sautéed, because he, it, is a vegetable, and we sauté vegetables though I have never heard of sautéed cauliflower.

It all happened very suddenly. 311 (you know, the guys for domestic disturbance) came and took him away in an organic produce truck to the public execution pasture where they had set up a gigantic grill. They took Raoul from the truck, tied it down and fired her up. Raoul began to steam and sizzle in a very appreciative manner until he finally exploded into a pile of cellulose and gore.

Eliot C.
I hate the Boston Tea Party.
There was no “party” involved, no little girls playing with ragged teddy bears and corseted porcelain dolls, no tiny chairs and plastic cups, no adults sipping Earl Grey and English Breakfast (pas d’infusions de chamomile: the strong stuff, the caffeine)
there wasn’t even a tablecloth to lend the affair some formality
something those rebels could have used, a bit of sitting and sipping tea
think of all the old ladies in rockers who had to drink water because a few Indians (or whatever they were—colonists, Patriots, Bostonians)
decided to toss a few barrels
it must have been a real subject for the tea table
tea gushing everywhere, waves of it pouring off the deck of the ships, so the fish could regard it with their baleful bubbly eyes:
it ain’t no tea party, is it

Elisabeth R.

The past is a distant memory

The past is a distant memory
That I tread carefully
To repeat my mistakes sparingly
And continue my advances steadily
To look forward to the future ahead of me
There is no end you see
No matter how you look at it
Time will stop for no man
As I stand here reciting this verse
One minute or ten hours later
These words unlike me will be immortalized on paper
A testament to the cycle of nature
of how all good things must come to an end
For others like it to begin again

Dupy M.
Officer Gerard Castle knocked on the door of 66 Sixth Avenue with the butt of his flashlight. The two trees in the front yard shivered and a brown leaf floated onto the front porch a few feet away. He zipped his police windbreaker up a few notches and knocked again. He heard a howl, the wind against the paneling. The door looked like the other ones in the neighborhood, as was the case with the rest of Number 66. The door was some mediocre wood that didn’t really have a name with brass numbers on the top. The matching brass knocker was sitting on the door mat. Castle’s flashlight hit the door again more insistently. He glanced over at the windows. They were both closed. “This is bullshit,” he thought. “Dispatch sent me here, ’cause they knew it was bullshit and now I do too.” It was a call about disturbing the peace. An old man had called about them playing loud music or something of the sort. Everyone knew that no one had lived there for years. “I don’t hear shit; I’m fuckin’ leavin’,” Castle thought, and pocketing his flashlight, he turned towards the steps. Something creaked. Castle hadn’t started moving yet. He stood in place. There was another creak. Castle slowly turned back towards the front of the house. The window shut and Castle took a step back in surprise, brushing against the handrail of the stair. It fell apart and Castle felt his lower back tense up. It was so cold all of a sudden. As he zipped his windbreaker, Castle noticed a sickly magenta light leaking through the bottom of the door. The door slammed against the wall and shattered. Castle lowered his foot and entered, flashlight beam wandering the sitting room. Castle was preparing an explanation for breaking the door when he noticed the squat, black shape in the corner. He approached it, stepping past the green armchair. He showed the flashlight on it and it seemed to stir. His lower back cried out in pain and he reached his free hand behind him. His windbreaker was covered in ice where he had brushed against the porch. He tried to brush it off, but his hand became too cold and he drew it back, drawing his gun in the same motion. He approached the black shape and he noticed that it was some sort of pot or tub. It gave off a slightly sweet smell, like the unplaceable perfume of a crowd, which permeated the whole room. He looked inside. It was filled with a red stew. It was bubbling, despite the breeze coming through the open doorway. A bubble popped on the surface and what looked like a bone revealed itself and began floating on the top. Castle felt a twinge on his left hand; ice had begun to grow on it also. “Pure virgin’s blood,” said a voice behind him. Castle swung around and fired blindly. He heard a thunk. Something had hit the floor. Castle ran top speed out of the house. “What the fuck was that, man?” Petey asked Boomer. Boomer shook his head. “Fuck, man.” Petey tried to get up. He managed to get to a sitting position. “Bad trip, dude, bad trip. You never hear gunshots, right?” Boomer shook his head. “You hear that shit?” Boomer nodded. “Fuck, man, we should check it out.” Petey was a bit unsteady on his feet, but he had come down mostly by now. His Hendrix poster winked at him.
Petey and Boomer descended the stairs, holding the handrail the whole way. Boomer almost tripped on the carpet. “Aww, fuck, man. Look at our door.” The rotted-out, nameless wood that had functioned as a door for the squatters lay splintered next to the door frame. The two finished descending the stairs. Petey was lost for words, so Boomer said, “Bad shit, man.” Craig was lying in a pool of his own blood, not moving. “Go check the virgin’s blood, dude,” said Petey. Boomer looked into the pot at the hallucinogenic, taking a deep breath. He checked the camp heater underneath it and gave the thumb’s up. “Okay, cool, man. You can take out the ginger now.” Boomer fished the bone out. “Man, I can’t figure out… Does he have a pulse or not? Or is that mine? Nah, it’s all the same pulse, you know? Like have you ever listened to like another—Aw, fuck, you wouldn’t get it anyway.” Petey giggled. “Fuck, man, I think I’m getting high again. Turn off that fucking heat.” Boomer switched the heater off and the perfume began to drift out of the room through the doorway. Petey started giggling again. “Fuck, man, I bet you could smell that stuff outside, fuckin’ get high off it.” Petey lay back down on the ground. “Turn the tunes back on, man.” Boomer moved towards the stairs, gave up and turned the heater back on, collapsing into the green armchair. It erupted in a swarm of spiders and Petey and Boomer started laughing. Something else did too.

**Alexander M.**

I want to be written a poem.
I don't care if my eyes are compared
To flashing red lights, and
My smile to that of a rabid dog.
I don't care if you claim you care not for my love,
And that time is of the essence.
I don't care if you only talk of how you need me,
As if I am not a person but a thing at your disposal.
You can sing my praises in the foulest notes,
Or not sing them at all.
But at least from this I can gather that
You took the time
And devoted it to me.

**Flannery S.**
First Fifteen Miles in Vermont

After the spring by the road’s edge
The curve and the straightaway,
Past the tired, tired cabins of the Traveler’s Den,
Signaling vacancy, permanently
Through the cow-pastured farms of Crowley’s Dairy,
The cornfields blend through their windowshield
Into the green mountains ahead
Into a solid smear of summer crop
Out our unwound windows
We know we’ve crossed the line now
(the change in the pavement tells us so)
But we’ve never been sure where it is.
We’ve searched for a more concrete sign
A clear statement, a The Green Mountain State Welcomes You,
Uncertain, we pilot down the ingrained route,
Unsure of our state
Passing by silos painted and rusted with public service announcements
Got Milk? and smiling faces.
The sun’s sloping rays cut through the afternoon
Freezing that moment, that air, that light
In warm bands of familiar haze
Our westward cheeks are washed with that
Descending glow
As we downshift
Declining towards the shores of Queechy Lake—
Our affirmation of our place, now fifteen miles in,
Curving along its banks
The fading waves catch the afternoon
Holding it till they ebb still
Lapping sounds, beats, the wooden docks.
We pass and are reflected in a blur in its silencing surface
Wondering how deep these still waters run

Mariela Q.
What God Gives

Rupert, hands stuffed in his bomber pockets, walked slowly into the park. His brown hair was disheveled, sticking up a bit on one side; there was a red mark on the bottom of his left cheek, which stood out against his pale face. His skin was sallow, almost a yellowish hue. The bags under his eyes indicated extreme fatigue; his face was the portrait of exhaustion.

He fumbled along the dirt path in front of him, trying desperately to stay upright. The park was old and rundown; no one but the caretaker had been there in months.

Rupert kept walking, his shoes tripping up so often that they looked five sizes too large. Finally Rupert stopped.

There was a small meadow in front of him; the grass was yellow, and there were patches of mud splattered near the right edge. In the center of the meadow was a decrepit tree with no leaves; it was rotted and leaned precariously to one side. Sitting against the trunk of the tree was a young boy.

Rupert made his way to the tree, stepping in a pile of mud on the way. He mumbled a half-hearted curse and continued on until he had arrived. He sat down next to the child, never looking directly at him. Rupert chose instead to look at the weathered remains of a dead bird three yards away.

“Hey, Theo,” Rupert choked out at last, after several long minutes.

“Hi, Roo,” the kid said, drawing a circle in the dirt between his legs. The child had the same brown hair as Rupert, the same pale, nearly translucent skin.

There was another long silence as Theo drew in the dirt. Rupert’s thumbs twiddled absentmindedly.

“I drewed the family,” Theo said suddenly, scooting back. There, in the dirt, were three stick figures; one of them had a triangular body, symbolizing the female.

“See? There’s Mama, and there’s Papa, and there’s you, Roo,” Theo said happily, pointing them out one by one. Rupert nodded his head.

“That’s great, Theo,” Rupert replied. There was a pause. “But where are you?” Theo shot Rupert a confused look.

“I’m right there.” He pointed at a blank spot in the dirt. “Can’t you see me?” Silence.

Rupert’s face hardened for a split second, then—

“Yeah, now I can see ya.” Theo smiled happily, and started picking rotted bark off the tree behind them. Rupert sighed, his eyes suddenly very soft, almost sad. Then they froze.

“Stop that, Theo,” Rupert said suddenly, his hand reaching out and swatting away the piece of bark Theo had most recently pulled off.

“Why? The tree’s dead, it can’t feel it—” Theo started. Rupert’s eyes hardened.
“Yes, it can too feel it, now stop!” he shouted. Theo’s eyes filled with tears, but he did stop. He sniffed and rubbed his eyes, not looking at Rupert. Rupert’s eyes burned as well. Neither boy cried.

“Come now, let’s go home,” Rupert said finally, pulling himself up to stand. Theo nodded and stood as well. Rupert took Theo’s hand and began walking along the dirt path. He didn’t trip once.

They finally came to the gates of the park. Theo began tugging his hand away from Rupert’s.

“I can cross on my own!” he insisted. Rupert sighed and let go. Theo smiled. Rupert turned away and opened the gate. Unlike the rest of the fence, which was old, the gate appeared to have been recently replaced. It creaked open and Rupert stepped outside. He crossed the street, head down. There was a crack of thunder; rain began pouring down in sheets. Rupert’s hair was drenched in mere seconds.

“I’ll race you home, Theo!” Rupert shouted, beginning to run. He ran for a long time, his pace quickening as the rain came down harder. Finally he reached an apartment building and raced inside the lobby.

“Good evening, Master Thompson,” said the doorman. Rupert inclined his head.

“Hey, Willie,” Rupert replied. Rupert was silent during the elevator ride up to the fourteenth floor. The doors opened and Rupert stepped out into a dark wood corridor. He walked down it and opened the door at the end of the hall, fumbling a bit with his keys.

“Hello, Rupert dear!” called a voice. A middle-aged woman with short brown hair and dark expressive eyes walked in. “Oh dear, let me help you dry off. Take off those wet clothes, come now….” Rupert peeled off his wet jacket and handed it to her.

“How was your session with Dr. Meissner?” she called as she hung up his coat.

“It was okay,” he replied. She re-entered.

“Well, what did you talk about?”

“Stuff.”

“What kind of stuff?”

“Just stuff.” He looked at her pointedly. “You know, I did talk to Theo today.” A sad look flashed across her face.

“Oh honey,” she said, giving him a strong hug. She sighed. “I know you miss him, I know… We all do.” Rupert stiffened in his mother’s embrace. “But dear, we have to move on. The whole family has to move on.” Rupert stared out into space. He sighed softly.

“I know. But not yet.”

Emily D.
Long Brown Hands

Even as an infant, with a rosy, fleshy face,
She had long brown hands.
I saw them in a black-and-white memory.
She had sensitive fingers, that would effortlessly point
Her personality in the direction
They wanted it to go.

When she became a mother, and we all had those rosy, fleshy faces,
I would watch her long brown hands
As they effortlessly finessed yarn into forms and structures.
As our bodies folded and
We felt those little pinches on the backs of our eyes,
We could, from under warm cotton sheets, hear her
Slender, sensitive fingers
Caress the keys;
Making mournful melodies and
Lethargic lullabies
Lightly tugging her wrists and forearms in the direction
They wanted them to go.

With disbelief on our faces,
We had seen those long brown hands,
Splattered with hot red juice
And crushed brown bits.
Beneath the narrow and stretching fingernails
We could see all the tiresome work
She had done that day.
She would then let the clear, brisk water
Wash over
Her narrow, stretching fingernails, slender sensitive fingers,
And long brown hands;
Until all evidence of her work
Spiraled down
And disappeared.

Sally D.
Ten Commandments

The department store sign hung crookedly and was tarnished from abandonment. Lord and Kaylers, it read in a proud boldface script. The “Lord” hung mischievously at a perilous angle to the rest of the sign. The dangling limb formed the perfect roosting spot for pigeons.

Sam had never been fond of pigeons. Every time he went to buy a cup of coffee, they were there; whenever he came home at night, they were there—the sign always vaguely threatening to fall on his outstretched hands. He grimaced when he reached into his pockets for his keys, the eyes of the birds all on him.

Yes. They looked ridiculous lined up along the sign like that. What sort of animal naturally forms a straight line anyway? That sign was a hazard. That sign was bad for property values. That sign had to go.

That sign was landmarked.

Lord and Kaylers had been quite an emporium in its day. The building was majestic, tall and (once) a brilliant creamy white. It had gold cornices. It was covered in dirt, animals, and shopping-cart-of-goodies-man’s pee.

Sam’s roommate was an engineering major. He told Sam that the sign was definitely potentially unsound. In the event of a mild earthquake the thing would damn well collapse. That was the last straw. Sam bought a ladder and his roommate brought some screwdrivers. Sam wasn’t going to let a hideous chunk of plaster end his life.

They hatched a plan. They were two college graduates; maybe this knack for covert operations had been honed when stealing the hands from the clock tower. They had a flashlight and they had engineer friends. They also had a basement with Lord’s name on it. Sam’s roommate’s girlfriend had decided that the “and Kaylers” wasn’t offensive and didn’t have to be removed. It would’ve required an extra ladder.

At 2 a.m. Sam’s roommate snuck into his room and clanged some screwdrivers together.

“What the—? MAN? Banging!? Two a.m.!” Sam rolled over. His roommate’s engineer friends appeared at his side. One poked him with a flashlight and shined it in his face. Sam’s face, illuminated, looked pale and just a little freaked out.

“Stealth,” his roommate replied. It was time.

They all gathered their tools and slid down the stairs, single file. They worked like the gears of a new machine. In their little black sweatshirts they looked like they were performing a choreographed dance. They were out of there, sign in tow, in five minutes.

The next morning the old man across the street was outraged. That sign
had been there since his childhood, which was a long time ago. He appealed to the community, who couldn’t have cared less, and to the community board. The community board put in a new and better sign, in the style of the old one. Only it was big, metal and fluorescent. It was even more surface area for pigeons. At least it wasn’t precarious.

Sam silently wept as he watched a crane put the new sign in place. He could see the old man at the front of a small crowd clapping with enthusiasm. He turned back to face his roommate who was wiping his hands on his pants, having just hung the old sign over the fireplace.

Elizabeth B.

I wake at night and dream of silence
as lost fragments drift through
my veins, until they run
not with blood, but song.

I wake at night and dream of dark
and light drains gray through the curtains
and loud silence filters through my mind.

I wake at night and dream of space
while these blank walls close around me.

I wake at night and dream of sleeping.

Abby H.
I’m just here to say,
I am sorry.
Sorry for breaking your glasses,
When I was too young to hold them.

But you yelled the way you did,
Kept me up for nights, you know.
I cried for days, you know.

Seems it will always be there,
haunting my hindsight,
Keeping me up nights, you know.
Keep me crying for days, you know.

I can’t touch them still.
But I can watch.
I can watch that new woman you’re with
Play with them,
While they sit on your long pointed nose.

I promised I wouldn’t say,
But God it is killing me.
She’s never going to replace her,
She’ll never be good enough,
She is not my mother.

Although you’re blind now,
Blinded by the new prescription
Or the woman touching your face,
I cannot tell—
Remember little me,
Trying to do right by you.

_Lana B._
Candice Sorro’s Story

In came my storming father and out went half the papers in our house, blown by the powerful wind.

“That is the last day I’m goin’ back to that dock!” muttered my father.

“So get a better lawyer,” said my mother as she washed the dishes.

This was the third time that this scene had occurred. My father has a business that’s in charge of exports and imports. Stuff arrives from around the world in ships that anchor at our pier. Four years ago an older man with a sneaky look and a toupee came by the dock and told my dad that he could “help” him and that business would improve if he were there. My dad took a look at him and said no. There were mafia members around, and this guy seemed like trouble. He and his “family” now have been interfering with the unloading of ships by scaring our foremen. Our workers are leaving us, along with our guards and overseers, allowing perfect freedom for anyone trying to steal anything. Business is slowly falling apart.

My dad came into the living room and said, calmed by a glass of Cabernet, “Tonight is story night. Now turn off the television and listen closely. There was once a beautiful mourning dove. It sang and flew, and flew and ate the berries on the tree. All was relaxed and peaceful, the air clean and clear. The dove landed on the grass and began pecking for food here and there. A strange object lay on the grass. It was black, round, and hard, and smelled of deceit and humans, two things most feared in the meadow. The poor bird could not know its future fate or that of its home. Day after day, when coming back in the evening to its favorite tree, the mourning dove would inspect the object and observe it with curious but cautious interest. However, each morning, all that had perturbed the bird was gone with the dandelions in the wind; and so the dove sang from its heart of peace and love, two things all creatures want for their home and family. But the day for singing would soon be gone, though the time for mourning would be all day long. On this day the air smelled of gloom and uneasiness. Our dove in its tree sat watching, even waiting quietly. A spell of awkward silence fell. Then, with sudden swiftness, a noise burst upon the meadow like none ever heard there before. An incredible cloud, dark as the color of charcoal, rose up into the sky. There was a smell that made all the animals’ quick hearts beat fiercely with terror, and minds shrivel with panic. The geese cried out a shocked alarm and the little white field mice scampered in fright. Families of deer and quail huddled together. Half of the meadow was gone with the bomb, and all the little souls that had made their home there.”

This was the end of the story, but not the reason we all got up. There were three sharp knocks at the door. My father rose to open it, stiff and straight. My mother
had a look in her eyes of scared wonder. I didn’t know what to do, or think. An older man stood in the doorway. Behind him were two men dressed in black jackets, and behind them, a black Cadillac. The man in the doorway stepped aside and gestured to the other men as his small, fierce mouth formed the word “now.”

*Megan S.*

Mickey Blue Eyes

Ol’ Mickey blue eyes,
they called me back when,
the cars were still red and bright and the trees were still there and they all said
be happy because these are the best years, the only years when
in the same deli in the same diner, we can all buy

those grilled cheese sandwiches and the seventy-cent colas and
nothing else will matter
so don’t you forget it they smiled and said
that when I got to the theater to the premiers to the bright lights and city
sights they told me not to forget the day when I was still
Ol’ Ol’ Mickey
the sky was gray that day
the trees were still green,
we were all happy but not for long they said
and they were right and that day I
cracked my fingers against the clouds that threatened
against the wind and the rain and the
steel subway grates when it
was all still possible that I could
crack my fingers and all I had to do was find
the path that led to the carpet that led to the days when we could
ride, ride, ride.

*Bianca S.*
Once, not too long ago, there lived the best zurna player in all the land. His name was Salif Mustafaov. People would call for him from hundreds of miles away for him to play at their weddings. Anyone who was considered dignified was expected to have Mustafaov play at his wedding. Often, if Salif could not make it on a particular date, the wedding was rescheduled for another time.

The key to Salif’s success was his instrument. He constructed it himself at the age of seventeen. His zurna was made from the finest gold in the world. This gold was mined, smelted, shaped, and polished by Salif Mustafaov himself. He had his cousin bring back cane from the banks of the Nile. Salif split, wrapped, and tuned this cane himself to make the finest reeds ever heard in the continent of Europe.

Mustafaov, one day later into his career, was hired by a local Romani (Gypsy) queen. This was a great honor for Mustafaov, and he arrived at the wedding promptly and played his zurna for all the beautiful cousins of the queen, each of whom was more skilled a belly dancer than last. “Perhaps this will be a more rewarding job than I thought,” Salif thought to himself as he watched the dancers gyrating to his melodious music. As he played throughout the night, he tried to figure out which of the Romani Queen’s cousins he wished to accompany him home. As several more hours of continuous playing passed, he came to the conclusion, following the famous proverb, “Why drink from one flask of plum brandy if you are given two,” that he need not choose only one dancer to bring home.

The night came and went (as did his countless shots of absinthe). Before he knew it, Salif noticed that it was sunset yet again. He noted the dancers’ ability to never stop moving for days and felt threatened that he was with women who could dance endlessly without getting tired. Unfortunately, he found his endurance not to be comparable to that of the dancers. “The wedding must go on,” he thought as he continued to play. Regrettably, the wedding did not go on: the dancers found themselves stopping their persistent spinning when the zurna music stopped with a detuned bleating goat-like sound.

Salif Mustafaov had died. He was honored all around. Zurna students were warned not to overplay if they did not want their lungs to collapse as the once-great Salif Mustafaov’s had.

Meanwhile, Salif had arrived in heaven. He was there for many years and although comfortable, he was sad because he did not have his golden zurna. Many years later, he had finally gained the heavenly credibility to be allowed to speak with God. During their meeting, Salif complained to God that he would never be happy until he had his golden zurna back. God replied, “The purpose of heaven is to enjoy
yourself. I can see that you will never enjoy yourself without your golden zurna.” God then permitted Salif Mustafaov to return to the land of the living, but he was not allowed to return without this zurna. “If you care about this zurna so much, I want to hear what it is capable of,” God said. “The only way you will be able to return is by playing the most soulful tune I have ever heard on this zurna you speak so highly of.”

With those parting words, God snapped his fingers and Salif Mustafaov fell to Earth. He had not realized the implications of his request. He was now a ghost. Although he had no intention of scaring people, much had changed in the time of his absence. Forests of concrete had replaced the forests of wood. People had never heard of the name Salif Mustafaov. If he mentioned to the few people who were fearless enough to talk to him that he was once a famous folk-musician zurnista, they would scorn him for mentioning “the devil’s music” and back away.

Salif spend a good six months asking people if they had heard of his golden zurna without any help whatsoever. He was feeling particularly sad as he walked through the trees of the last forest that had not been knocked down in his land. As he walked, he came across a Gypsy encampment next to a stream. It turned out that the woman he saw washing clothes in the nearby stream was the granddaughter of the Gypsy queen who had the honor of being Mustafaov’s last patron. She, being accustomed to persecution herself, did not act scared by the ghost. She soon recognized Salif’s sorrow and invited him to stay at the camp.

“The last time we have felt any joy was when we were able to dance to your music,” she said. “I will help you find your zurna if you suggest to God that he help us combat our suffering.” Salif quickly agreed, and soon every Gypsy in the land knew to look for a golden zurna, as this would stop their suffering.

In no time, the zurna was located. It was found in a folk culture museum in the nearby concrete wilderness that was labeled a bustling metropolis. People ran as they saw Salif, a ghost, walking down the street surrounded by a troupe of Gypsies. The museum curator did not. He was quick to recognize Salif from the old archives. Although slightly scared by the ghost, he was much more intrigued to talk to Salif about the times when music was played freely and enjoyed.

As Salif explained his dilemma, the curator twirled his long beard. After much thought, the curator decided that he would let Salif have the zurna in exchange for being able to witness the most soulful tune ever played for God. Salif, of course, was quick to agree.

The curator went into the back room behind a beaded curtain. He spent twenty minutes as old dusty books in odd alphabets came flying out of the room. The crashes and clanging continued until the curator appeared with the zurna in his hand. He tenderly handed it to Salif Mustafaov who prepared to play it.

As he gingerly placed the reed to his lips, the room fell silent. God was
listening. Salif drew in a breath: this was the first time that he had played for ages. He was playing his signature piece, or so he thought at first. He then realized that only a dull whistle was being produced. He was not let back into heaven, as he was so out of practice that he could not play any tune, let alone the most soulful tune that God had ever heard.

Now, when we hear the wind whistle, it is the ghost of Salif Mustafaov trying to play his way back into heaven. Perhaps one day the wind coming out of Salif’s zurna will be soulful enough to let him back in.

Jeremy B.

Ode to My Centenarian Spouse

I love the way your dentures clink,
as into sleep you slowly sink,
as I pop open my nightly meds,
and we lay on pillows our aged heads.

Your arthritis makes you creek,
incontinence will make you leak,
but through your troubles I will stay,
until your final dying day.

We know the day by capsule cases,
I can’t manage shoes with laces,
yet I love and hold you close,
though you’re just a little gross.

Maybe you’ve already died,
kicked the bucket, said good-bye,
but still you walk and drink your tea,
hanging around for slow old me.

We don’t talk much anymore,
minds too muddled, throats too sore,
maybe I’ll ask you someday,
have you gone that deathly way?

Benedict L.-M.
Spicy-sour, slippery-wet
like membranes, like my own imaginings
of cell walls, mitochondria, the tangle of my guts
within my clenching belly, foreign as biology
has always been to me, crunching-sour
with an almost-fleshy yield that protests its mutilation
even as it bares its throat for the guillotine
it cannot help but paint my mouth as
in its slippery, marine imaginings,
fluid as the water of its fishbowl-jar, amorphous
in its floating seaweed shape, floating strands
of hair, the hair of a drowning girl, a mermaid
stranded on the shore with naked breasts
as pink, translucent, as her palace made of abalone
beneath the sea, a jewel in its setting,
a pearl in its oyster, alone and quiet
as I was, in the midst of my peacefully bickering family
and all those others waiting, shining-faced
and happy, loud with the peculiar clamor
that isolates—I was alone, sea-washed and silent,
reveling in melancholy and anticipation of
the lacquered trays, black as the waitress’ hair
who bore them, from that land across the sea
where all they eat and wear is from that sea,
watching chefs heap jewel-colored fish,
their jewel-shaped eggs, onto mounded rice
white as their faces, quiet as their eyes,
the first time I ever tasted pickled ginger.

Katherine B.
See Hear Speak

ten the three wooden monkeys removed,
their house was renovated and
the old couple floated out to sea with their
antique furniture, tattered rugs, cuckoo clocks,
boxes of toys, forgotten memories and
fading laughter

I

_speak no evil_
Only the crickets are conversing tonight
but they do so heartily
to fill the hole where other voices should be.
Rustling leaves muffle the creak of the dock below
and blend with the crickets’ conversation.
Children were told stories of the crickets
and how they love warm enclosed spaces,
and when the children crawl into bed,
and bathe themselves in the blankets,
they think “I’m snug as a bug”
and begin to chirp

II

_hear no evil_
A tune catches on the breeze and dances around
and the children and the crickets go
quiet for a moment and listen;
the cuckoo clock’s chime sails across the waves
and back into the living room where it used to hang,
midnight echoes out over the water, and
when the song has rolled away and the clock has faded once more,
the chirping recommences and the waves begin to cry
as they trip over each other and fall on the rocks

III

_see no evil_
Moonlight sifts through the leaves,
swirling and sliding on the branches,
the occasional firefly illuminates
a patch of grass or a bunch of leaves,
and as one ventures by the shore, it shines
on a chair, rocking on the waves,
and the children see it and remember who
filled it before the water:
she is an old woman and
she whispers lullabies, as she used to,
to the children who fall asleep
amidst the rustling, chirping ivy
and while her image floats around
on their minds, she floats
back out to sea

Joanna B.

Entropy

She waits for the water to bubble,
To mix, and turn the roots and leaves
Into a flavorful broth. Then she can drop the
Chicken in and listen to its muted clucks as floating
Feathers fall onto the soup’s surface, suspended, then
Grow wet as they sink and glow dark like globs of ink.
The bones boil and break like windowpanes in a hurricane.
Soon, the soup will be ready to serve and then dishes will be piled
High and skywards with bubbly waterfalls spilling off their sides and a
Soapy sheen gleams in the light of the kitchen’s sixty-watt bulb. The counters
Are aubergine and running red with the blood of birds, caught in wintry flight when
The cold had grown a ring of icicles across their wings and so they fell, landing with a
Dull thud against the earth, and disappeared into the stalks of whistling grass. I can recall
My mother whistling with a blade in hand and cutting chunks of frozen bird for dinner.

Noah D.
Frustration

There are some times when, observing the actions of others, one thinks of them as being very inferior, often despite having acted the same way before oneself. One is inclined to feel intellectually superior to and despising toward the ignorant fool, yet at the same time to feel somewhat sympathetic towards the poor misguided person. One of the two usually outweighs the other, depending upon one’s initial like or dislike of the person.

I have many times been in this position, and being keen to notice embarrassment (or in this case lack of it where it seems due), I always take note of it. Sometimes I try to let the person know privately of the error of his ways; other times it is so noticeable, and makes me so angry, that I present the issue as a public argument, or maybe tell friends of it later, or both or neither. In any case, these events build up anxiety that, if left unexpressed, makes one feel very tired of other people.

In case some people might jump to conclusions, I would like to say that none of these incidents have happened at Saint Ann’s, and the names have been changed.

One of the earliest memories I have of moments like this is from when I was about five or six, riding to school on a school bus. The older students got off before those my age did, and for a few minutes the only people in the bus were the driver and maybe ten small children. The driver liked children, and for those few minutes had fun with animal noises. He would verbally imitate various domesticated animals, and would ask the children which sounds corresponded to which animals. Once he said, “And what sound does a cow make?” And the children would chorus: “Moo!” I, having actually been to a farm with cows, let loose what I thought sounded more like the mindless, agonized wail that cows tend to make. This earned me a comment from the girl sitting across from me: “You make bad animal noises.” I should have argued with her. I may have said something like “That’s what cows sound like,” or some other unsupported statement, but nothing persuasive. I was too shy at that time. She probably wouldn’t have believed me, even if I had shown her a video of a cow moaning. Stupid little girl.

Much later, about six years, I was in a hallway. Everyone was there, all of my peers. We were more or less all within a few yards of each other. One of us had just come through a door, which he now closed behind him. The door, however, did not finish closing; Fred’s finger was in the way. People didn’t like Fred; he was obnoxious, loud, and full of himself. He quickly retrieved his finger, caressing it and inhaling through his teeth. Most of those present did not notice this, as we were fairly crowded and talking amongst ourselves. Fred, apparently due to lack of attention, tried to envelop his hand in his stomach while running furiously down the hall and screaming.
One or two of those who disliked Fred more than the others laughed at his ridiculous performance. I myself had to stick my head into a nearby room for a moment to relieve my face of a mischievous smile I had recently acquired. Fred soon ran out of hallway and turned around to reveal a face like a ripe wet tomato. “It’s not funny!” he screamed. He may have attempted to injure someone, but the important bit was over, and the rest did not stay with the memory.

Sometimes one has no sympathy at all for the foolish person. This happened to me fairly recently. It happened as my favorite kind of argument: an argument about something that in fact does have one correct answer, with no room for opinion. The stakes get so high, there is no sympathy for the opponent, the victory is sweet and absolute, for the loser is left with nothing to say. It was nearing the end of the day, there was really no work that ought be done, and most of the few of us were anxious to leave. Then the argument happened. I’m not sure where it came from, but it was Daniel and I disagreeing upon whether 0.\bar{9} =/≠ 1. I was arguing that they were the same. My initial argument was that \( x(y/x) = y \) and that \( 3(1/3) = 0.9 \), therefore \( 0.\bar{9} = 1 \). Daniel, however, would not accept it. He went on like a zombie long after being beaten. “If that were true, then that would be saying that 0.01 = 0.” 0.01 is a preposterous number. Daniel poured forth complete nonsense, with his piggish face, his completely circular nostrils, his wide chin that was too close to his neck. That is how I would have described him, were I asked at that moment. He would start an argument, and I would immediately point out a flaw; he was persistent, but beginning to hint at uncertainty; I would beat him eventually, it was only a matter of time. And I had allies too; if I came to be at a loss, they would find something to say. I was impatiently awaiting victory, trying to avoid making personal insults as long as I could. But there was a man with authority over us in the room, and he would not let the heated yet fated argument continue, forcing us to boil, painfully unsatisfied.

Zane F.
The Tale of the Dinner Knives

Oh! Oswald’s aspirations for gracing the breakfast table were quelled
By a central synapse of sorts, a lapse which in fact triggered such a slumber
Mandible disarmed, limply lowered by flaccid tongue
“Hush your bones.” And the deed was done.
Lulled by the perfection of such comfort
Or was it the blemish of a weighty wake?
The absence of a dream seemed troubling
Or if such a visage was present, the vessel of memory
Could not shackle it in time, nor buff it to a shine.
Mandible meets maxilla, tongue’s power disperses
As quickly as ’twas usurped.

Jaws jostle Oswald as the dawn’s handshake reaches the bedside
Ever so slightly oscillating; reaching the feet, scanning the legs,
Caressing the knees, springing with spasms,
A yelp and all dissembling of a mellow Thanksgiving morrow ceases
Fingers to the active site, soothing tense tissue with political tact
From five to ten, the digits expend, but what?
“Five more, a foreign limb, an ethereal extremity is massaging me?
What can this be? Is such a blessing blasphemy?”
Befuddled boy exercised brittle vertebrae in declining slope
All alien apparitions subject to his gaze of scrutiny
Such that the amazement which came to be was that
Of a third appendage, fully budded from the lofty position of his ribbed cage.

“The Gods, the angels, the saints! They have granted me the power of three!”
Each digit by digit, crowned by haloes, shrouded by mystery,
Such a wonder, a hallowed oddity to be witnessed
Though bare-breasted he would remain until a third sleeve would be reserved.
So Oswald opted for the dinner-knife persuasion
And jumbled his jelly-legs down the helical spine of stair and step
Whilst his mother broiled and toiled with the ‘mallowed yams, the basted bird,
The candied hams, the greens and the in-betweens, the salmon salad,
The succotash stuffing and egg yolk pie for an adoring audience.
Silently sweeping beyond the matron’s grasp
Boy unsheathed his pricked prize
And, jelly-legged, he trekked back up the stairs for once-more.
The blade neutered textiles and damned the fabric
Until for each garment and vestment, a hole, ever apparent,
A perfect circle, key in symmetry, for said limb
Operatic in motion, elegant in execution,
Facilitating revelations with swoop of palm,
Brush of slap, breeze of bruise,
All which, confused, resolve to calm
As the arm locks and cocks back to default,
The position in which it remained once, quite still;
It would attain such a constant again someday.

Michael G.

A Paternal Force

Wafting from the children’s holiday gifts was the unmistakable odor of menthol cigarettes. My suspicions rose as I searched for a culprit, only to discover my own son huddled under the Christmas tree. He extended upwards and approached me, sustaining his crouched posture. Suddenly fierce, he looked up at me and confessed to the sin in a surly drawl. I impressed upon him the severity of the punishment I was to inflict on him. He responded with a snarl and went straight for my throat. I struggled. “Shut that insolent mouth of yours you boorish goon. Now off of me at once.” He allowed me to manhandle his features until the expression on his face vaguely resembled remorse. Feeling content, I sent him back to the children. They were almost inscrutable due to the dense smoke billowing out from under the Christmas tree. My fury rose and I continued my exploration of the unfamiliar surroundings. There were erect figures charging past me at every route of travel that I attempted. The air was taut with formality. My neck began to bulge more than usual due to the constriction of my formal garb. The manners in this land were definitely foreign. Sweat poured off my chin and I was helpless. This was quite a humiliating paralysis.

Then through the hazy characters careening by, something became distinct. I craned my throbbing neck to decipher it. It was advancing at a rapid pace and I saw that it was a rather pathetic looking child. He was drawing near and caused quite a disturbance. Now the shriveled thing was at my feet and when I saw the face I retched. My son was gawking at me and clutching at my waist. The boy was unbearably thin and frail. His impudence was unacceptable. I tore his hands off me. “Release me this instant, brat. You disrespectful maggot!” I landed a firm slap on his shrunken face that sent him sniveling away into the throng of bodies.

Anders M.
I take out the ingredients and place them on the counter. She takes her apron and ties it around her waist. She then takes an apron out for me, and I do the same. I take out a large bowl and carefully place it beside the ingredients. She takes out the butter to let it thaw. She motions to me, and I grab the bowl to bring it to her. There’s a drop of water on the floor. I lose my balance and the bowl breaks. She jumps, startled, and turns around to see the damage. She starts to scream. I don’t like it when she does this so I start to cry. She stops yelling, walks over to the broken pieces, picks a large piece up, and begins to cry. One tear makes its slow way out of her eye and rolls down her rosy cheek. She wipes it away, picks me up, and says she’s sorry. She then pulls out another bowl, a plastic one, and places the butter in it. She places the other ingredients in the bowl and, with her hand over mine, she teaches me how to fold.

Lily K.
Prisoner

He had a feeling he was being watched. He was right. He moved down the
path quickly; after all he didn’t like this place. The woods were creepy, especially at this
time of night. Unfortunately for him, that path was the quickest way home from his
friend’s house. He didn’t know why the main road twisted in a horseshoe the way it
did. It left him having to take this path every time he wanted to go to visit his friend.
The road would be a ten-minute walk. Normally the path through the woods was
three. However, tonight it seemed like it was taking forever.

He was about fifteen, but he was the type to still lie awake at night terrified
by the thought of some horror movie or scary story that had come to his attention.
In other words he was a bit of a wimp. He was isolated because of that fact. The
boys in his class were all a lot tougher. They liked football, gory action movies, and
womanizing. All things that to them required guts, which is something, even the boy
could agree, he simply did not have. He still slept with his childhood stuffed animal.
As a result they teased him, made fun of him, and took any opportunity to embarrass
him, sometimes to the point of beating the shit out of him just to make themselves
look tougher in the eyes of whoever else was watching. The one guy who didn’t do
any of this was the one friend whose house the boy was now returning from. The
boy had suspicions that they were friends only for charity. As for the girls in his
class, in younger years they were nice to him out of pity. Recently, however, they had
discovered the other sex in a more intimate way. The boy was now perceived as just
that—a boy. These girls were more interested in men, thus had begun to ignore the
boy completely.

The boy shivered as he reached his most feared part of the path. There was a
section on the trail where the light of his friend’s house disappeared and the light
of his house had yet to show. The moon left plenty of light to see by, but it still left
the boy feeling terrified. Most of the time he would sleep over at his friend’s house
to avoid this very scenario. But tonight he thought he really would rather deal with
the brief walk of terror. His friend had been having a party, which the boy had been
invited to. The boy went but decided to leave when he found the rowdy drunk kids
who picked on him were not to his liking. He sighed now, wishing he had stayed. A
night of insult was better than this walk.

Something felt off to him. Checking his watch, he discovered what it was.
Usually this dark portion of forest lasted a little under thirty seconds. Tonight he had
been on it for over three minutes. He looked down to the path below him. It was still
below him. He had walked this path a hundred times before and there were no forks
in it. He was still on the path, so what was wrong? He approached a large oak tree,
which was the landmark for being halfway through the dark, scary part. Normally this would settle his nerves, but this was the second time he had passed it. Then he noticed something else. On a crisp autumn night such as this, one can hear his feet crunch the leaves below, but the boy could distinctly hear another set of footsteps in the night. Now he was scared. Trying to calm his nerves, he began to count to five. As soon as he decided that he had recovered a little courage, he gave a cry for help.

Light. There was some light between the trees. He opened his mouth to call to it, but suddenly he decided against it. He couldn't put his finger on it, but something about that light terrified him more than all the darkness around him. He hid from it, hoping to God it wouldn't see him, but his hopes were soon dashed. The white glow, whatever it was, was turning toward him. He stood in the shelter of the oak tree, petrified for what seemed like forever, dreading the approaching footsteps. Finally the light reached him and stopped. The boy scrambled to find his voice.

"Who...are...you?" he asked, terrified.

It was me. I'm the writer of this little tale. I had decided to speak with the boy tonight, as I was growing bored with him. I decided I wished to have some fun. Vonnegut enters his stories to observe, I enter mine to torture.

Without a word from my mouth he knew all this. He didn't understand how I could be his writer exactly, but the torturing thing didn't quite appeal to him.

"Please...my parents will know if I'm not there in the morning," he begged pathetically.

I laughed at that plea. I'm not sure why. I made him say it; I saw it coming. "Your parents," I began, "don't even remember your existence. I made sure of that."

He froze. He wasn't sure what I meant, but those words would sting anybody. So I decided to elaborate. "Tell me your name and I'll let you go," I told him. The comment sounds random, but I meant to prove a point.

He was relieved. The question was an easy one. But as he began to answer, he drew a blank. He tried to think, but his name couldn't come to him as if a fog clouded his mind.

"You don't know because I haven't given you one," I said. "Don't you see, you only know what I choose for you to know. You only see what I want you to see. You only think what I let you think."

"What do you want with me?" I had him ask. As soon as he asked this, he began to feel a pain in his chest. It was small at first, but soon it grew. Soon he was in more pain than he thought possible, but for some reason he couldn't scream and the pain just grew stronger. I giggled.

"I just removed your lungs. You're still alive, though, because I'm not allowing you to die." With that his chest ripped open exposing the freak anatomy that I had
just given him. “Sorry,” I continued, “but I was curious to see how it looks. It’s weird, I assure you.” With that I closed him back up again and restored his lungs without ever lifting a finger. “You’re not a real person,” I explained. “You’re just a copy of one I observed. See, in the real world I’m the same as the next guy. I have no real power. However, in this fictional world I can rule. Here I own you. You do what I want. You bounce to my every whim. You’re my doll. And I can do all the things to you I can’t do in the real world.”

He heard every word, but he didn’t want to accept it. Through his mind he searched for any possible response to prove me wrong. Finally he came up with something. “If I do whatever you want, how come I’m disagreeing with you.”

I laughed coldly. “The only reason is that I wanted you to. Resistance makes a hunt more fun. But it’s starting to tire me. So let’s have total obedience from this moment on, understand?”

At this moment his mind went blank. “I understand,” he repeated almost as if he were in a trance. His personality disappeared as he waited for me to create a new one. Of course I had no intention of doing that just yet. The night was still young. “I think I’m going to make you a monster.”

Sam L.

A Blurry Vision

I’m not even standing in the rain
But it’s hitting me through
The warm lights

of the city.

Subdued tuba
Or is it a French horn?
Perhaps it is a twelve piece
Symphony blasting
strumming
tapping

me

Into the cracked dripping
—It’s an ocean for
an ant—

Sidewalk.

Eliza D.
Yesterday’s Lunch and Tying My Shoes

I’m afraid I’ve forgotten how to tie my shoes.  
It’s been nearly ten years since I learned  
the intricate riddle of bunny ears andloop de loos  
that my mother used to sing to help me remember,  
and now the words are faded  
with the years, I assume.  
I don’t know exactly when they left me,  
but it hit me yesterday,  
sitting down to lunch  
with you across the table and an unwanted burrito on my plate  
(you never asked me what I wanted, or if I even liked burritos),  
that I no longer could hum the melody  
or recite the rhyme that always made me giggle  
as my mother propped my tiny foot on her knee  
and pulled the laces tightly, saying, “You see?  
It’s easy.”  
I would watch her, studying every loop, cross, and pull,  
listening to her song, singing along, and then—  
I learned  
and it became easy,  
too easy,  
and somewhere along the line I stopped singing that song,  
stopped making bunny ears.  
My little feet grew,  
along with the rest if me,  
and somehow years later I ended up sitting at a grungy cafeteria table  
with an unwanted Mexican delicacy  
and you,  
who know nothing about my little feet  
or my long lost song  
that I still can’t seem to  
remember.  

Jeanna P.
George Jamerson sat all on his lonesome in the diner on the corner of Seventy-second Street and Third Avenue. He was a regular there, always ordering the same dish, Greek salad with a side dish of mozzarella sticks. His hair was a wavy, tightly controlled mop of medium length and his skin had the pasty pallor of an overprivileged cadaver. His eyes were a mild, sunken blue and his mouth was an efficient, toothy rectangle framed by tight, drained lips. He had a slight periodic twitch in his right, bushy eyebrow and frequently rubbed his cleft chin with his thin, scabby knuckles as if discomforted by something. His eyes alternated between half-shut and wide and restless. Despite his troubled air, he wasn't given a single look by any of the other customers ebbing and flowing around him. It was as if he was part of the wallpaper. The impression he imparted was indistinct—he could have been a comfortable if disaffected member of the middle class or right above the line of poverty.

In truth, George Jamerson was a secret powerhouse. No one gazing at his skinny, pale arms loose in a button-down white shirt vaguely stained by wine would have guessed that by night he would compose new entries in the book of fate. No one looking at his bloated, cushy stomach hanging heavily upon his dark blue jeans could have possibly imagined that he had long determined the course their life would take. Born to a cylindrical working-class family (his father in a coal power plant and his mother on the assembly line at a toy factory), he had by the age of seven become quietly resigned to a dull existence that would prove a constant struggle. But on the day of his eleventh birthday, his parents were both ripped from life in a cruel, bizarrely coincidental accident: following a controversial Brooklyn Zoo break-out, they were both gored by ostensibly the same rampaging zebra but at different times and different locations throughout the city.

Orphaned in one swift, darkly hilarious blow, George fled the squad car which arrived at his school to tell him the bad news and relay him to the police station. George fled the car because he was a wise boy, even at that age, and he knew that, without a dependable next-of-kin, this dark turn of events would inevitably lead him to a squalid foster home. And so he knew that the only thing for him would be to lie low until he had been surely forgotten (and until he was old enough to work to support himself). The choice he made regarding where to hide out was extraordinarily ironic and must have been subconsciously (or perhaps consciously) motivated by his sadness: he used his pocket lunch money for the day to buy an all-access pass for the Bronx Zoo (its Brooklyn counterpart was being slowly restored) and wandered about in a grief-stricken daze. He sat on a bench for hours and, when closing time.
finally came around, hid inside a bathroom stall. Later, under the cover of dark, he squeezed into the chimpanzee cage and introduced himself. Although the monkeys weren’t immediately enamored of their human visitor, and although George wasn’t immediately enamored of the red buttocks he saw constantly dancing around him, by early morning the two parties had already begun to coexist and George had dug himself a deep hole in which to hide.

So began a routine which would, surprisingly, keep him alive if barely functional for the next three months. He would sleep by day inside of his hole, which he would deepen and widen on a daily basis. Come the night time, however, he would emerge and fight his monkey friends (who had come to view him as a something of a comrade) for whatever scraps of chimpanzee food still lurked. Once fed, he would devote attention to his hole. By sunrise, he was so tuckered out that it was not difficult to fall back asleep. The constant struggle to survive had kept his mind off the loss of his parents (whom he had never been that close to anyway), and so his mind kept ahead.

After about three months in the zoo, something very strange happened. After another routine night, shortly before sunrise he was suddenly blinded by a flash of bright, crippling light. He fell backwards onto dirt and slowly opened his eyes to see if the monkeys had responded the same way. But they were all either asleep or quietly awake and did not seem in the least bit shaken. He rubbed his eyes and wondered to himself. Then there was another flash of light and God appeared to him, in all his glory, atop a plate of scrambled eggs. George was so awed by the revealing of his lord that he immediately prostrated himself. But the benevolent savior reached his hand to George’s head, his ethereal, transparent fingers passing right through his crown.

“Stand, George Hamilton. For you are a great man.”

“Sir, my name’s not George Hamilton. It’s George Jamerson. George Hamilton is a noted MGM contract actor.”

God blushed. In honesty, he had wondered to himself what George Hamilton was doing living side by side with impoverished, riffraff monkeys (and, for that matter, why he looked so small). He was not accustomed to making mistakes and was even less accustomed to apologizing for them. And so, in a move motivated solely by pride, God continued unabated.

“Yes, exactly. George Jameson. Just the man I was looking for.”

George looked down at his feet, smiling slightly.

God continued, “George, you have proven yourself time and time again to be a good man. A strong man. Your swimming skills are impeccable and your mind is sharp and quick. I have a job which I would like to pass on to you, should you choose to accept all that it requires.”
George had not lost his faith in the power of God and was to that day a religious boy. “Yes, sir. Anything.”

“My last fatewright passed on this morning. This tragedy leaves a big hole in what I require. This year’s births have not all been assigned histories. And that’s not even mentioning all those who will be brought into this world in the future. All of them need life stories, and my last writer has died.”

“But sir, wouldn’t that take an infinite amount of time?” George, although eleven, was articulate and astute.

“Oh, young George, that’s the rub. Detailed histories are not necessary—the men who occupy this world have some amount of choice. All that the job requires are synopses, brief half-page long stories marking the milestones in a man’s life. After an enormous amount of deliberation, I determined that you, George Jameson, are the best man possible for this job.”

George knew that he had been mistaken, but also knew that getting right with God was what could most guarantee him an able life. “Sir, I accept what you will have me do.”

“Perfect.” God was appeased and he disappeared, leaving a soggy plate of eggs with the dirty marks of running shoes upon them. George ate the eggs hungrily and prepared to embark on his future.

Oliver I.

My pomegranate is a scooter.
It just rolls and rolls right
Out of my hands,
Off the table,
Leaving a trail of juicy skidmarks,
My fingers are getting sticky,
Tripping across puddles and
Potholes filled with syrupy red sucrose.
Lovely little ruby jewels of delight
Are scattered at my feet—
I’d feel like a princess,
But they burst below my socked step
Like landmines,
Bleeding and dyeing them with their sweetness.
And I just want to lick my sugary wounds.

Mariela Q.
Derek Carraway’s wife was sitting on the front porch floor, playing checkers with herself. Her opponent, her son James, was in the bathroom, forcing a razor across his white-creamied face. It was a summer Saturday. The digital clock in the bathroom read 7:38, the wall clock in the hall hovered somewhere around 7:35, and James’s watch, clouded by lakewater, kept its time obscured. He was late to meet Sophie. When the telephone had nearly rung itself off the hook a few hours earlier, James had said, “I’m hanging out with my mom, I’ll be by later.” Of course Sophie exacted a time from him. And so he had said “sure” to 7:30, but then was late.

His mother Lucy (Derek Carraway’s wife) was sitting on the front porch floor, playing checkers with herself—the dust up and down on the road beside her, the black and red pieces zigzagging and crisscrossing their way across the board. Her eyes darted fervently from square to square, frog-jumping the very piece she had just managed to save from the gravest danger, moving tentatively the uncrowned red piece. (She couldn’t help but feel partial to the red pieces—the lively, sprightly ones.)

It was Saturday and Lucy had said to her son, “Your grandpa loved checkers, would always play…” With her breath paused, the nostalgia brewing behind her eyes, the details (the toast with cream cheese, the table in the den, the father’s cigar) threatening to cloud the afternoon, James decided to take matters into his own hands. Why not play? After all, there was nothing left to this barren expanse of late afternoon, this three-till-six range, suitable only for idleness, lethargy.

Derek Carraway was probably in his car then, inching along the highway toward home, thinking about nothing in particular. Or perhaps at that moment he was still at the mall and had not yet discovered that Sears no longer carried the top-of-the-line leaf-blower. James found the set of checkers from God-knows-when in the hall closet and, leaving behind the chess pieces, brought it out to the front porch. Had he been home, Mr. Carraway would not have been interested in playing checkers—not for any grandiose reason, just that he found the game dull and completely pointless. But James, just nineteen—on the brink of manhood but still Mama’s boy—could take pleasure in board games. In high school, teachers would always tell the Carraways about James’s undying perseverance, how he invested himself completely in everything he did.

Mother and son were arranging themselves on the front porch floor in that awkward manner that accompanies any whimsical activity done for a first time. They would have played in the parlor or the kitchen, but it was just too hot. Their fingers might have melted into the checkers’ shallow ridged wells, the rest of them onto the rug from their vacation in Guadalajara. James, addressing his mother in the manner of all sons that fancy themselves courteous gentlemen, expressed indifference toward his checker color, said, “your choice.” And how surprised he was at the speed of checkers! How surprised he was by his mother’s manner, which, usually mild, giving, self-
sacrificing, was so ferocious and self-serving on the checker board! Whole regimens of black pieces were jumped, double-jumped, and wiped from the board, or cornered into squares with no safe escape. At the beginning of each new game James resolved to play better, not to make the mistakes he made before, to beat his mother once and for all—but after mere minutes, he would be losing again.

The hours were passing by, the sun descending onto the faraway road, the road by which Mr. Carraway would arrive home. As hours elapsed, Lucy started to say things like, “Okay this is the last game, and then I have to start dinner, and you should really get going to Sophie's.” But she too got distracted, caught up in the checkered mess. Even without the help of his mother or his waterlogged watch, James knew he should call it quits—accept that, for myriad reasons, his mother was an infinitely superior checkers player. He simply could not. But countless defeats buried James in that bottomless abyss of failure, that paralysis in which even the mind finds pathways, until then unfamiliar. At 7:32 p.m., four minutes into the twenty-seventh game, jolted suddenly by the ring of the telephone next door, James forfeited. He went upstairs to shave off his five o'clock shadow and hoped to make it to Sophie's by eight. He kissed his mother, Lucy Carraway, on the cheek, and left her on the front porch floor to play checkers with herself.

Nora S.

There used to be a poster
On the L. I. E.
For a red-haired Russian girl
Missing/Murdered
5 months pregnant
For seven years
It’s gone now
And I wonder who it was
Who stopped looking.

Annie H.
When I was a child, there was a coop for hens, and heavy with them. It sat beneath a tree who stood tall and yet the tree was heavy too, heavy with Spanish moss, gray in the sun, that same sun, who late in the afternoon would run the moss’ gray shadows down the hill where they would land on my house.

Low and squatting, the house existed cat-like in the sun. Made of wood, hand-cut and clayed, the building was supposedly shingled, a falsity that endured all my father’s attempts by shedding yet more shingles. It had at some point like the hen house been painted, but both remember many years since then. The middle step of the house porch was broken; one of the porch’s corner columns was equally useless.

That was my house in my youth, a nearly beat old building that showed little in the way of clever carpentry but plenty in the way of hard work and use. In full it seemed fairly normal, simple and like the houses near us, a home. Never quite perfect, ever slightly too warm or too cool, it was my shelter, my home.

To see the complete panorama of my existence, the supporting figures must now appear. My father was a man whose pride was enormous though he was not completely without reason. He was both intelligent and determined, and whenever he duly considered a problem, he was correct. He did pick his battles, and those he fought, he dominated. He was strong as any and had by all reckoning married the most beautiful woman seen in that area. My mother was indeed a beauty of rich Chicago nobility. She grew up in a cascade of gaslight chandeliers, twisting and flowing silk, and rolling velvets, and one day found herself rolling on a train to visit relations on the west coast. On the train she met a young conductor. Neither of them ever made it to the Pacific. Changing both train and direction, they made a home in far-west Georgia and he turned easily to farming, she less naturally to mothering. My mother’s strain of parenting was fabricated from memories, guesses, and obvious essentials. She had not been reared to raise children herself, and without a nurse she was somewhat baffled. I don’t think she ever realized quite what had happened that day at high speed, amongst private carriages and all aboard’s, and with smoke at the windows.

And I, I am a child of scorn and mercy. Scorn for madness, mercy for insanity. A different, singular person, forgiven for why I am shunned, yet not less shunned for that forgiveness. My mother recognized my difference early on and, in effect, hid me from the world. This never upset me. I had no real liking of new, indeed almost all, people. Unlike my father, she never truly forgave me for my differences. She always seemed to think I had decided to be as I was. This was perhaps aggravated by the fact that after me she never gave birth to a living baby or one who managed to live more than a few days. The death of the third, after five days of increasing joy, drove her to the church, and even further away from me.

I never met any of my younger siblings. My mother always sent me away at their births and I was never invited to my parents’ room to see them, so I never did. It
was due to the birth of the third that I first met Mammy Sutton. The first two families that my mother had sent me to for her first two labors had both refused to accept me again, so instead, in a twist of vindictive wit, she sent her mad son to stay with the town crazy.

Mammy Sutton had two reputations, both equal deterrents to most villagers. The better known reputation was that of a madwoman, not dangerous but truly mad. This was supported by the fact that she often spoke to her husband, twelve years in the grave. The other theory was that she was a witch specially gifted with speaking to spirits, again supported by her dialogues with her wed deceased.

My father truly disliked and perhaps feared Mammy Sutton, and would have refused to send me to her were it not for his true love of my mother and the then unborn child. So it was, three days after my unmarked eleventh birthday, I met Mammy Sutton.

She seemed tall, sitting on her porch with the day’s dust settling, the sun sinking away; she sat in her rocking chair, a woman of striking size who would summon the dead to rise through the earth and dust and fly on the last red beams of the sun to do her bidding. She carefully watched my father and me approach, staring unblinkingly though the sun was at our backs. My father did not meet her gaze but stopped at the gate. I continued on, avoiding her eyes till I stood on her steps. She nodded, though it was unclear whether to me, to my father, or perhaps the spirits attending her, and rose. My father turned away and walked down the path as I stood. She entered the house and I still stood. She turned and retraced her way to the doorstep and with the slightest motion of her head gestured me to follow. It was only as I rose to the deck of the porch and stood on the same level as her that I realized she was in fact slighter than me in height.

The first visit was strange to me. I was neither instructed to stay away from her nor yelled at, the latter being the thing I hated utmost about my mother. I was, in fact, left primarily to my own devices and she to hers. I was allowed also my silence, the right to go without speaking or responding as long as I would do something if she asked. It was a luxury beyond belief. She cooked and fed me though she didn’t eat herself. After serving me she stood and walked out. Walked into the gray, night-chilled air away from the house to sit on the side of her well and look out. Her house was high on a ridge, perhaps the most removed house in the town. She sat and watched. Through the window I watched her, my silent guardian, as she saw the general store close and the house lights in the town flare up and eventually settle down, and I fell asleep.

There was nothing that I can explain about that stay that would make it sound meaningful to you, nothing that could give you a chance sense of what it meant to me. But that does not upset me. It was mine, that visit, a time for me and me alone, where
I could do what I pleased and be cared for and not yelled at, free and silent and where I wanted to be.

On the fifth day, after my younger brother died and I was taken home, I screamed and was screamed at and so I had to leave the house and do what they wanted. In those five days I had grown used to freedom and greatly resented this.

Time and work passed and I became accustomed once again to my life. Months dragged on, every month my mother spending more time in the church and me trying to find ways to visit Mammy.

At the break of the New Year my mother left. I never knew what happened to her. Whether she returned to Chicago or finished her voyage to the Pacific, I don’t know. My father lived the rest of his life convinced she had become a nun, but I have trouble seeing her as one. However, her disappearance allowed me to follow suit, though not to the train yard but up to the crest of the valley’s eastern ridge to the house of Mammy Sutton.

Nathaniel B.

**Bus Stop**

i wait beside the road today
in the rain
again
(i left my umbrella at home)
the road is a long gray band
shining like a silk ribbon
vanishing into nothingness
the rain falls
forming rivers both large and small
carrying with them debris
and dirt
and drowned rainbows
they have no channel
yet they all choose the same destination
the gutters
flowing through to the sewers
the canals
and then perhaps the sea?

Diana M.
Forever and Ever

“I love her. I truly do,” Mr. Brooks thought to himself as he looked at his wife. He went through this every single morning. He would wake up and walk into the living room to find her sitting there, and in his mind there could not be any greater way to start a day. Mr. Brooks thought his wife was beautiful. He thought she was just as beautiful today as the day he had married her. He thought she was as beautiful as any person could be. Mr. Brooks and his wife were married fifty-six years ago, and every day was better than the last for him. “Good morning, wonderful,” he whispered into her ear. She stared back at him in silence, no emotion present on her face.

The time Mr. Brooks spent with his wife had been much less rewarding lately, but Mr. Brooks didn't care. He just loved seeing her so much. He leaned in and kissed her lips. They were cold and motionless, just as they had been for the last several days. He guided the back of his hand gently across her face, going over every bit of its pale flesh. He caressed her ear, and then whispered into it, “I want you to know you are the greatest person in the world. You always have been, and you always will be. I want you to know that. I don’t care about what has happened. I won’t care if you change. I will still love you no matter what you look like. Nothing will ever stop my love for you.”

People would probably say Mr. Brooks was crazy if they knew. They would tell him that he could not be with his wife any more. They would tell him it was not right for him to be with his wife any more. Mr. Brooks would not let that happen, though. Mr. Brooks would not let them find out. He had stayed inside his house with her for the last six days, not leaving once. He closed the blinds, he locked the doors. He had not picked up the phone when people called, nor answered the door when people knocked, both of which had happened quite a few times. He knew that people would frown upon it, so he didn’t give them the chance to frown.

Mr. Brooks remembered when he first met her on the beach so many years ago. He thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He watched her swim around in the ocean, and he thought it looked like an angel flying through the sky. He admired her from afar, and in an instant everything in life suddenly made sense to him. He knew he had to talk to her, but he had a hard time building up the courage. Finally he made his way over to her. He asked her if she wanted a soda. They started talking, and from that moment on the only thing that Mr. Brooks cared about in the entire universe was her. He never stopped thinking about her, even once, from that moment on.

Mr. Brooks was not going to lose her for anything. “I don’t care, so why should they?” he asked his wife. She looked off blankly into the nothingness. Mr. Brooks grabbed his wife’s hand. It was cold and bloated, but he didn’t care. He couldn’t live without her. His life would have no meaning if he was not able to see her. His life would have no meaning if he was not able to hold her. He put his head on her breasts. They were not as comfortable as they had formerly been. They were now stiff. He
listened to the silence of her chest. He preferred the pitter-patter of her heart, but he knew it was never coming back. Mr. Brooks had lived with the lack of sound for almost week, and it now bothered him less every day. “I don’t care what happens to you. I don’t care what happens to your body. I have always loved you, and I will love you always.” He wrapped his arms around her in tender embrace. “I will never let go.”

Griffin N.

**De Kooning invented the loft. That was the 30’s.**

She was 110 household volts of jailbait if I ever did see one—
dancing to the hi-fi speakers,
blasting that manic spade’s music of plastic trumpet grunts,
namely, Louis Armstrong;
Hip/genteel/intellectuals ridicule
North Beach—Kesey giving up the go ahead
for quick runs to Mexico—
the drug store in town closed up shop.
Fiesta of euphoria traded in for the tit show in
between the isles at City Lights;
on soap opera commercial breaks the girls went for a beer,
and the very soul figures of Hip,
Jazz, the tight pant when worn right,
civil rights—left town leaving
debris of the madness: the hip vocabulary itself: dig and man, baby,
and so fine, split, and balling, oriental,
hip allusions, metaphors, literary,
fox, and the struggle. Skipping town
on Sunday, bypassing Church, and
not collecting bread on Tuesday. Threads sold in bundles
in tweed stores with the next 40-mile rest stops
on wide highways to nowhere but out.

Hannah Z.
A giant icicle fell down from the sky and broke my friend Norm into two, almost equal pieces. I was standing next to Norm and felt the cool wind from the speeding dagger, which was pleasant. Norm’s de-Capitated body, however, was not. The man above the air conditioner from where the icicle had fallen shouted out and ran and called the cops or something and people came running with shots and hoses, and everyone was running around all frantically and stuff, but none of that actually did anything. So I knelt down beside Norm and told him (I knew exactly what Norm liked to hear) I kneeled down beside Norm and told him that precisely 734 seconds had passed since he had been impaled, told him what that was as a fraction of the earth’s revolutionary cycle, told him that when the sun explodes, and we all explode, and I break in many pieces and Norm breaks again, the gasses from this sun will probably contract cool in some stellar void to form a red giant. “Norm,” I said, “Norm, all your matter will be together again then anyway.” I finally told him that he had lasted this long and that he had a lot of enemies, who “have Tried to br-
Eak you, gNorme, but they End up looking like complete idiots.”

Sam S.
I am on the porch of my house. It is very modest, if I say so myself, with only whitewash and plain brown shingles. The porch has a few chairs on it, I suppose, but Those are only so that I can look out over My land. They are only old rockers, one is wicker, and they can barely survive the cold anyhow. I shrug, gathering my knitted sweater against me and pulling my slacks down around my ankles. I knew I shouldn't have got them from Town. They are too short for me, but the man from the store wouldn't measure me right. Usually Betsy made our clothes, at least the ones she could, there being only two sheep. They are a ram and a ewe, but they won't have children. People and animals aren't always so different. Betsy's wool underwear scratches my thigh. I guess she is the love of my life. We met in a winter like this one, when my mother still made my clothes. She was very beautiful and though she's wrinkled now and some of her hairs are grey, I think she still is. My Betsy. I think it would be nice to have a son, though, to call mine, maybe even more and a girl along with them. We'd be a proper family. I'm too old to work my farm on my own. There's always good men to help with such things, but all the same— I rock my wicker rocking chair, with the blanket Betsy made. My field is coated in frost. There won't be any using it till later. A robin is in the pine tree in front of my porch. It looks like a picture postcard and I think I am happy.

Alexander M.
A New York Snowstorm

White crystals fall and kiss the pavement
Flurry up and spiral downwards
Approach the clouds, then dive
All of a sudden, like birds from a rooftop.
In time, from wind, they dissolve onto the earth
Retire from their frenzy
And become one with the waterdrops.
From far way, from high up, you can see them flowing,
Gliding, a waterfall of snow, the snowfall in New York.
And soon the snow begins to pack, the shower now harder,
The air cooler, a shrouded sky
Invisible.
But as it coats the streets, the umbrellas and automobiles,
People and scaffolding—as a snow leopard’s fur is draped across the skyline
And the heavens themselves are filled with howling.
Below its delicate design is crippled
Crunched and compacted
From snow into ice, silk into iron
As swarms of footprints pour onto the sidewalks
Shatter the glass floor
And turn the city’s royal white to sickly gray.
Engines roll through the streets and snowflakes are ripped apart,
Trampled on, then sucked into exhaust, and blown back filled with dust,
Into oncoming waves of sleet.
So dirty gray powder settles in cracks and corners
In gutters, and underneath cars
In everywhere unnoticed
First as hail, then ice,
Now rocks, and over night these are piled up, now boulders,
Sheer cliffs from what was powder.
In all the city, between each car, on every corner the sun rises
And casts its rays on the blood-black pinnacles of ice
Stained darker than their shadows
In a New York snowstorm.

Will L.
The Color Red

It was the irresistible crimson lips. They gave me the scarlet fever; they were partially to blame. And this, my love, was no ordinary scarlet fever. It was incurable, and it would burn within me for the rest of my pathetic life. This was a fever that no medication could cure, for there is no antidote to unrequited love. Though she made me believe otherwise, I was simply her toy, and I would soon pay dearly for it. She was contagious…I was infected with an irritation of the heart. This was a disease in which that horridly beautiful crimson color engulfed me, and I could not escape. I was in a sea of bloody deceit and emotion.

But it was not the lips alone that were irresistible. It was her softly swaying hips, the way the light delicately touched her collarbone in the moonlight, her tender hands, and her deep green eyes. These were eyes that whispered, “I will never be yours.” She was forbidden, intangible, and because of it, all the more unbelievably sexy! It was an illicit affair, a taboo subject, and this is why I needed her desperately. That soft pout was the only thing I didn't have, I couldn't have, and so it was the one thing I had to have.

Oh, it would end badly, so incredibly badly! I thought she would cure my disease, my addiction! She did not. From the moment her fair hand brushed my cheek, I knew I was in trouble. Her touch was ephemeral, her love even harder to grab hold of. How could I be so close and yet so far? She had him, and oh bless my pathetic soul, I had you. But you were not enough. Forgive me, but I could not help what I felt. Her eyes were dazzling in a way that yours never have been. She had that sparkle, that attractive cheerfulness, and yet she retained a darkness, which she used to lure me in. She was no ordinary woman like you. Your sun-kissed tresses were only yellow in my cold eyes, while her auburn locks seemed to flame with heat. I was a fish on her hook, her prey.

I needed her. Is need the word? My dear, I don’t want to offend you but to say that I merely wanted her would be dishonest. She was everything you were not. Yet somehow she alone could not complete me. I wanted you both. Oh selfish me—I wanted you both! I yearned to spend nights of lusty passion with her and return to you, my dear innocent wife, so that I might forget about my dirty sins. I’m sorry it could not be that way. Oh, we enjoyed many a night, many a night replete with bliss and ecstasy, excitement and fervor, yet rage and suffering. I suffered from her toying, and from my own deceitfulness. I suffered from her curse, the red-hot fever she cruelly passed on to me. Oh, soon she would be in the midst of certain redness herself. And how silly that I should wonder if I might have you back after this.

I am ashamed to go on. Only once you have been under the influence of a creature like her can you fully comprehend the situation at hand. How torn I was—
that awful state of being where each and every one of the multiple choices you could make would be painful. It was torture! Why me? I was philandering my way to hell. I was utterly obsessed with her (or was it the idea of her?), upset that this was not a mutual addiction. Why was it my heart that had to be contorted—yanked in every direction? The emotional pain was so strong that it created physical pain. I felt as though infectious hands were wrenching the happiness out of my body.

The start of it all was a cold day in January, that sinful month that makes you crave hot cocoa and romantic fires, the fires that sizzle and crack while you cozy up to the warmth of another body. The wind whips you and your face becomes raw, tender, roseate—vulnerable. For some reason she was not affected by this frigid month. The bitter, severe, piercingly horrible months that oppressed most people for her seemed to swelter with heat. She had an effect on me, worse than the effect of any month, and I fell for her trickery; I was seduced into her fantasy world. I was on my way home to you, my love. It pains me to share this with you, oh how it makes me hurt! I had a gift for you, a little present for my love! As soon as she came out from that angular, cursed alley corner, though, I was under her wicked spell. I halted abruptly and was pierced by cupid’s arrow. As some kind of horrible venom took hold of me, thoughts were racing through my mind. Oh, so many horrible thoughts that I could not control. No matter what subject I tried to switch my mind to, all I could think of was her beauty, her magical hold on me.

She saw me; she noticed this trance I was in. She began drifting lightly towards me with a longer stride. She reached me and brushed my cheek—almost accidentally, it seemed, but an accident it most certainly was not. As she passed, she did a half pirouette with her head—it seemed this was in slow motion. Oh, how it did. She revealed those crimson lips, the lips that I would have fiercely wild dreams about, the lips that had a mind of their own, the lips by which she performed her witchery, the lips by which she enticed her victims, the lips that seemed to be magnetic, and boy, was I of the opposite charge.

Suddenly, the frigid air and the violent blowing felt soothing. Maybe it was because I was under a trance; maybe it was because for once I felt free from you. You, the perfect wife, and I, so utterly confused. Don’t you understand? You were flawless, and I was flawed in so many ways. With you I felt defective, inadequate, and inferior, and I needed to get away. You were so simple and so honestly real, nearly perfect, but not as exciting to me as she was. So I followed her, and though she never looked back until we reached that house, I knew she knew I was there. Clichéd it may sound, but true it was. That was the night, my dear, when I told you I was not well. Well, I was not well, that much is true.

Thirteen hours later I was in her arms again. She found me again, or maybe I found her. Not only was I in her arms but I was in her arms in our bed. Our bed. You
were gone. She was no sweeter than you, no gentler than you, and maybe no more beautiful than you—but she was less available than you, and so unlike anyone I had ever had. As I plunged into her soft, brightly rouged lips, I noticed her hand under my shirt and felt the cold metal on that doggone finger brush by my chest; it was as if she was letting me know she was taken. This seemed like a game and so I slowly and gently brushed her lower back with my ringed finger as well. She removed her lips from mine and averted her eyes from mine, as she gave a sinful smirk. I stared. She understood. The game was on. It had begun. Oh my love, despite my most well thought-out efforts, the game would never end.

There is no point in further explaining our passionate nights. The more I explain, the more I hurt and the more I’m afraid I will make you hurt. Silly me, you are as hurt as you could possibly be. Therefore, I will end these painful descriptions of lust and passion. But my dear, there is more than simply this that I must confess. I needed to get out of whatever it was I was in; it was bliss but it was hell. I was being pulled apart as one part of me wanted the excitement of her and one part yearned for the safety of you. I was kidding myself, believing I could have both. But I realized I didn’t really want both, I wanted you and only you. She was thrilling for a month, maybe, but then what? What is a rollercoaster ride that is crazy and wild for a minute but then comes to a screeching halt? Not enough. Only you are enough. With you there’s no sudden crash—maybe a loop or two—but no damn crash. No goddamn crash.

I needed her gone but couldn’t force her out of my head. So I devised a plan. It took quite a while. Isn’t it romantic that I killed for you? I knew you’d think so. It was an interesting death—one of those you would find in a clever movie. It took weeks of planning, but you, my dear, are well worth excessive time spent on anything. I could tell you what I did, but then, as they say, I’d have to kill you. They thought it was suicide and left it at that. I wish they had found out. I wish I had never been born so I wouldn’t have to deal with this, you, her, any of it.

And now who am I? I am the same hopeless man that had a despicable liaison just one year ago. The same man that betrayed you and left you abandoned, deserted, neglected, but mark me, not forgotten. You, my dear, will never be forgotten. I know, however, that in your right mind you could never forgive me and that is why I must end my shameful life. I can no longer go on, being chronically repulsed by myself. I will never be content without you, just like I could never be satisfied without her. Oh, what a mistake. I am writing you this letter, my love, because I am too much of a coward to admit to all of this in front of you. I am too much of a coward to turn myself in and to suffer the consequences of murder. But, my dear, I will suffer greatly from the circumstances of my deceit and forbidden relationship. She passed on the wicked red-hot fever to me, oh yes. But this time, I will end it.

Caroline W.
No Need for What Is Unnecessary

I can clearly recall the day the mohel cut off the tip of my equipment. Well, no, I don’t remember the experience first hand, but I remember seeing photographs of the incident. My facial expression when he made the incision: a twisted look of pain and disappointment that my parents had not rescued me from this torture. I scrunched my face and cried out until he poured wine over my young tongue. I was drugged so he could proceed unhindered with a sadistic ritual as old as monotheism itself. I toyed with the possibility of a longing for that bit again, like when a person loses a limb, he still feels the limb is there; would it be possible to have a phantom foreskin?

When the procedure was complete, I saw my mother trying to comfort her drugged baby who was now fractions of a pound lighter. This was the most vulnerable time I had and will ever experience, a ritual all my family had seen and witnessed. An event that, in effect, determines masculinity. Would the mohel slip, and cut off extra? I suppose this was a risk my parents were willing to take. Whatever I ended up with would have no effect on them, so they would have no problem placing me under a blade and giving consent to cut me. The eleventh of March, 1991, eight days after I had taken my first post-utero breath, I had been stabbed, stabbed right through to the otherwise, stabbed so hard and with such precision that I lost an entire section.

Having hardly matured since that date, I have not been able to think about it….until now. The spirit of curiosity overcame me, and I forced myself to type “foreskin” into Google to see what I had missed all these years. Unfortunately, my Internet connection was finicky and slow, so it took a full thirty seconds before I was to have one of the most crucial epiphanies I would ever have to reckon with, one that was so powerful it could not be kept up as a thought; it had to be vocalized.

“Jeez, these dicks are fucked up,” was my initial reaction, followed by a monsoon of laughter at such a ridiculous appendage. I compared it to one lacking it and made the simple conclusion that it would be better to have one without not because it prevents infection and has numerous other benefits, but because one with looks like a one-eyed armadillo, whereas one without is a noble church bell. And why should such a beautiful bell be tarnished by an ugly mono-optic armadillo? In the end, I was proud to have a noble church bell instead of a deformed armadillo. Notre Dame, ring your mighty bells for all to hear.

Michael D.
The Tale of the Gigantic Sea Elephant

Well, there I was by the ocean. I had walked, of course. Any other means of travel made me extremely nauseous, a mere two steps on a horse made me vomit, I could simply not stand their smell. And so, as I was saying, there I was near the sea. I had been walking for many weeks, sometimes seeking shelter, but mostly not. I had been walking through the worst of weather; in one week alone I crossed through a heat wave, a tropical storm, and a blizzard. You might say to yourself now, “Well why not just ride a covered buggy with a driver? It would make the trip pleasanter ten-fold.” And I will answer by telling you that I am extremely stubborn and any other means of travel would simply not do. It just so happens that I thoroughly despise letting any animal, human or wheel do any favor for me, let alone carry me along through such horrid weather, and I will tell you that this is because the minute you turn your back you will have wheels up to your waist, cattle and horses to the horizon, and tens upon tens! UPON tens! Of pathetic peons demanding that you repay the favor at that very instant!!! I will never forget the day when a wheel came rolling after me demanding a thousand feet of string and in addition to that many other things!

But that is a whole different story entirely, ah yes… So I had walked for many weeks; I barely stopped for food. I hate eating, it makes me feel nauseous. Two bites of an apple and I would vomit. I could not stand the tartness. And as my stomach flipped my whole body would shake and I would keel over and show symptoms similar to dysentery. I hate apples and I hate eating, but there are many things I hate. So, really, apples are rather insignificant. By the ocean, where the blue water met the white sand, there were some docks and a rather large jetty. Immediately I noticed the huge terrapin. Each daybreak on the wharf, their brine-caked eyes; spiked, overturned; such thunder in their strain. And clenched beaks coughing for the surge again. Such passionate creatures, and because of this I hated them. “Oh no!” you say, “more hate?” And I answer calmly, “Well, YES!!” I hate passion. Wherever I see it, it burns my eyes like lime. Especially in women, making them crazy and stupid; emotional to the point as if they were another species. And if anyone asks me about passion I will say the same thing. “It’s all dung!”

But anyway, though I was quite sick (the sea made me that way… I hate the sea), I traveled over to the docks and noticed a small commotion. People were talking, a small crowd even. Before I continue, let me tell you that I despise crowds. All the people, they immediately push in from all sides trapping me, and I will become easily sick. I find myself panicking in a mob. I become short of breath and occasionally faint. So upon approaching the crowd, dwelling upon my hate for mankind, I saw a large form in the midst of the crowd. I was instantly intrigued. And let me tell
you, I hate being intrigued or surprised. Living life simply is much easier and less strenuous. I have a weak heart. And surprise usually makes me short of breath. One day a big enough surprise is what will kill me. So there I was on the dock, feeling quite intrigued and thus very scared. But this was a new kind of intrigue than I had ever felt before. I walked closer and heard a loud masculine voice boom over the, to me horribly annoying, monotonous hullabaloo of the small, but to me very terrifying crowd.

“Trundled from the strangeness of the sea—a kind of heaven. Ladies and gentlemen, the greatest sea monster ever exhibited, alive, the Gigantic Sea Elephant!!”

At first I thought I should immediately turn back. Anything with the word “monster” in it gets me all worked up. My siblings used to scare me as a child, waking me in the dark, screaming “MONSTER!! MONSTER!!” I would wake with a start. Occasionally I would soil my bed. I hate monsters and I hate being scared. But I could not help taking a closer look. Fortunately, I did not have to enter the crowd, for I could see the monster. And what a sight it was. A large appealing shape, resembling all the most fantastic species in the world summed up into one outrageous creature. With fins and a trunk, tusks and a large tail. At this point a new feeling came over me. A very alien feeling.

I thought for a moment with a smile on my face. And then I realized what it was. I felt neither hate nor dislike for this creature. Then I thought, “But wait, I have hate for many things, come to think of it almost everything.” This feeling, then, must be love. Why shouldn’t it be? I had never felt it before. To me it all made sense, and there I sat for many days, many weeks, many months. Not one muscle did I move until the day that I died. “Was it real love?” you ask. I shall never know for certain. But even if it wasn’t, I died with completeness in my heart. True love or illusion, it does not matter, because I died content with my life. And I can safely say I had no feelings of hate for the Gigantic Sea Elephant.

Sam A.
Old Monty Cards

Old Monty was flipping the cards in the damp room underneath
The blue sky I couldn't see that day when it was still wartime and still steerage and I
Was sitting and watching the old man with his slinky glare and gnarled fingers.
He was lifting the cards up one by one
Life, death, happiness, a penny for your thoughts they said but I didn't have no more
Pennies or thoughts and so He grinned at me in his dim headed way the old
Guy and he shuffled those cards that came from some bar in a village that time was
Already
Forgetting and he winked and I could feel the floor move because it
Never stopped movin’ in those days. I used to dream about that floor moving underneath
The blue sky I couldn't
See
Monty was dealing those cards while I watched with my blank eyes, and Frieda, she was
Rolling her eyes toward me and I could see those red black patterns that said health,
Wealth and whatever else junk they were supposed to tell me.
Monty grinned at me in that small moving room with our dead company and I knew the
Sky was out there but I couldn't rightly remember where I could smell the beer and the
Hay and the dirt on those cards that came from the little town no one would ever see and
In the gray dark room
Against the pipes and the wood and the crumbled paper tickets,
Those cards were moving and smiling up at me with Monty’s crooked stare
Health, wealth, and luck,
He grinned at me and those teeth were wide and black and rotten because old Monty was
Rotting and rotting but I didn’t say nothing to him,
I couldn’t and the cards shuffled for health and wealth and the floor moved as if to prove
Us all wrong.

Bianca S.
**Separation for Dummies**

We moved to the river to escape
Into an apartment stacked upon apartment upon apartment upon apart—
As if the orange light from the setting
Sun wouldn’t fill us with a sense of failure
Walking home after a day of high school
To the sounds of a single cloud crying
Trying to cover up the beams of light

I used to walk home with a guiding hand

We moved to the river because of the one
With the Ex Why Chromosome
He lives happily away from setting or rising
Transfixed on revenge
Emerging from darkness with red eyes
And loose vowels

I used to never see the sun

Greeted by the cloud when I came home
She didn’t hide in her room to return with strained eyes
She blocked awareness from my brother’s vision and mine
His eyes are now red too
Sent away to re: have failed
The clouds grow grayer every evening

*Charley S.*
The Pond

In the center of the woods there is a patch of brambles, twisting boughs, that gives way to a clearing with a pond in the center of it. Paul knows this clearing well. He goes there whenever he can—after the bugs, who cluster together in the late afternoon, move their separate ways, and the light hangs thin and violent through the trees.

Tonight Paul has come later than usual. It is already dark, and only the sounds of crickets, resting in the grass by the water’s edge, allow him to find his way. He sits down, slips his feet into the cool darkness of the pond, and leans back to stare at the moonless sky above him. The cricket’s song, coming from so close, has become a single note, a hum of vibrating legs. The cool of the water feels good on his feet. He would like to keep them in the pond forever.

A breeze moves through the clearing from the direction of Paul’s house, and he hears the screams of his brother carried on it. He sees the sweat-drenched man, eyes pale, bolt upright in bed, in the light of Mother’s nightlamp, one of the many she has left around the house. Paul has asked his mother to get rid of it, because the light shows his brother’s shadow in the hall. When the shadow turns he knows his brother cannot sleep and he will soon wake up from tossing and scream, even though he does not mean to, because gunshots are sounding inside him. That’s what Mother has told Paul.

He wants to believe Mother, but she is so quiet and seemingly distant that whenever she speaks, it sounds like a murmur, a thought, only by accident escaping her lips. Paul would like to ask his brother why he screams in the night, or why he never leaves his bed even during the day. He wonders if his brother, when the yard is gray from storm clouds covering the sun, waits like him for the rain to come drumming against the windows. Perhaps, if he does, that is why he always stays inside.

The crickets have gone silent. The only sound Paul can hear is the trees, groaning as they sway in the wind. He can feel waves being formed on the surface of the pond. He closes his eyes and remembers what happened that morning.

Paul sits at the kitchen table watching, past the screen door, the perimeter of the woods standing like a great wall before him. Mother is holding a piece of bread, speared through with a long fork, above the flame of the gas stove’s burner. Paul turns and looks at her, then turns once more and stares at the dilapidated toaster resting on the kitchen counter. He finds it strange that Mother will not get rid of it, even though it does not work. She will not even consider buying another one. Paul has asked her and she only shrugs her shoulders. (It is the same as when he asks her if she will get rid of the nightlamps.) Mother pulls the bread away from the fire, butters it, and brings
it over to him on a plate. After she has done so, she walks past the table without even slowing to see if he realizes his breakfast has been served. He does not move. He sits, waiting, and listens for the creaking noise of footsteps on the stairs. For a minute all he can hear is birds chirping in the yard, and then a low moan, old wood aching even under a woman as small as Mother. He knows Mother is going upstairs to talk to his brother, like she has everyday since he returned from the war. He gets up, quietly opens the screen doors and slips between them.

Paul runs to the tree next to his brother’s window. He thinks that if he climbs out far onto its longest branch he will be able to see Mother and his brother talking, perhaps even hear what they are saying. Though the tree’s bark is relatively smooth, he finds, where the trunk diverges into branches, a gnarled clump that he can grab hold of. He uses this to swing upwards. He is careful and the leaves cover him, they make his movements appear only rustles in a cluster of green. Mother thinks he is nothing more than the wind. After a few seconds Mother shuts her eyes. Paul’s breathing is shallow. He almost forgets what he has come here to see. He lays his stomach down onto the base of the longest branch and makes his way to the end of it like an inchworm. Now he can see his brother feverishly turning in bed and Mother hovering with a washcloth by his side. His brother is sick.

The wind picks up, and Paul can sense it pressing the blades of grass around him to the ground.

Mother says something, but Paul can only see her lips parting slightly. His brother turns away. Mother reaches over and pulls at the sheets he has wrapped himself in. He struggles to resist but is weak, and she pulls them from under him. Since he can remember Paul has not seen any more of his brother than a head, poking out from a pile of white cloth. Now Paul can see his brother entirely. His body is pale and the bed he lies on is marked with stains where his sweat has dried. Because Paul has not seen him move in years, he is not surprised at first when he sees that his brother has no legs. Only later, when the sun has begun to set and Paul can no longer see through the window of his brother’s room, does he drop from the tree where he has been hiding and feel a sense of guilt.

The wind rises once more and, blowing a patch of cloud aside, shows the full-bodied form of a moon. Blue tinged and hanging low, it casts a silver light that shows Paul’s feet past the darkness of the water. Paul begins to stand up in the pond.

Slinking from the side of the house, Paul steps from his backyard to the field that lies before the forest’s edge. Here the path is more civilized, covered in stones, and runs a plum line parallel to the horizon. Paul walks along it, bending down to pick up stones, pocketing some and throwing others into the distance. The stones take flight as they leave his palm, arching over the wheat stalks, blood tip spears in the evening’s
glow, and he stares transfixed as their passing hue changes to a red sheen before they land with a dull thud and disappear forever.

Once the sun has vanished, Paul makes his way into the forest. Following the sounds of crickets, he stumbles in the darkness, trips over a root, grunts, and is surprised by the sudden clink of objects bumping in his pockets.

Paul stands above the water. His feet are numb and he would like his legs to feel the same. He steps further into the pond until the water reaches his knees, and looking down he sees the displaced earth rising upwards like silver flakes, shining in the moonlight. The water does not feel so cold, and Paul steps in further. He pictures himself, centered, a source of life, the pond and whole forests growing from his fingertips, blessed by fertile night, and turns, blending the world around him. He spins until tiredness sets in. Able only to feel the weight of tiny waves come up and break against his side, he realizes, with a sudden fear, that another cloud has covered the moon. Now, in the darkness, he hears it once more, a howl barreling through the trees, a flesh-rising wind of its own. Paul turns, not knowing in which direction the shore is closest, and blindly pushes his way forward under the water, trying to escape.

Paul cannot touch the bottom. He kicks his legs, but they only pass through water. His chin is turned upwards so that while he sinks, his mouth can still reach the air and he moves his lips, speaking silently, as water fills his ears. Staring out, he sinks, pulled by the forgotten weight of the stones in his pockets. For once his brother’s screams are nowhere to be heard.

Noah D.

A pebble hurled against its will
Into corroded gully
The thruster not a bit aware
Of its abusive folly

And there it lay—without a friend
Oh, flooded with emotions!
Away from all it used to know
None with to share its notions

Serena K.
Soul Mates

Soul mates
reflected in each other’s newborn sheen
solar son, and solitary daughter
trapped in the paradi-oxical garden of creative genius
with reason but not Knowledge

Her ability to ponder
is clouded by her lack of judgment day
or variety of choices

His parasitic obsession
is her security blanket
so far the only comfort she can find
in the fauna and foliage
of omnignorance

Author and father
creator and conceiver
left brained and right handed
golden locked and fig vine twined
tempted and contemptuous
first snake in the first Temptress
man of her dreams of only one man of one man in her dreams
sol in her solitary dreams of solitude and sold to the only buyer
her one man one minded single minded man of her soul dreams

Woman and wonder woman
golden locked and chaste bolted
temptation and detention
a glorified reflection
of extreme concentration
and passion
curious, luxurious, luscious like a private garden in a larger garden
woman of the garden, Arden, guarding, guarded, Eden, Adam, even
but not equal
fucks her creator to Know his power
hubris and his bris
bitch of womankind

It’s not her fucking fault.

Rachel A.
What Would Ophelia Say? (Act I, Scene 4)

O, where, in truth, does right obedience lie? I know that I am only small in fact, But are their hearts and minds of greater rank To thus direct the action mine would have? If this, which is as taught to us, be so Then think’st I mine own self below the snail, Who keeps thoughts on his back beyond assail. Though to my brother, “to thine self be true,” His daughter yet may not as this construe Good father’s good advice in good intent. But why existeth this most unjust bent That, rending lover whole to halves, disjoins As well her hand from his and, too, their love. O, Hamlet, they do speak of thee unfair, My keepers who would have me see thee not. The one claims, from the vantage point of he, That you by category be disposed To wed some higher maiden than I be. But are assertions of your caste not such That, if you’ve promise made to me ere now, Then such prediction of your majesty O’erules the mere street prophet’s falsities? The other man assaults thy count direct, And say’st thou sell me falsehoods for myself. But know’st I well the value of my worth, And would not traffic love for sum of wealth. O, Hamlet you to me and I to you Will be, despite these edicts, always true. Ere I, which is as fitting lover do, Depart the stage, I whisper thee adieu.

Sam B.
Peanut Butter, Pickles and Jokes

Grocery store: milk, butter (unsweetened).
Dry cleaners: pick up Rob’s three blue shirts (which he needs for every day when he goes to do his job as an accountant, which is apparently someone who counts for a living, which I don’t think I would like since I’m not very good at counting).
Hardware store: Three nails and a sixty-watt lightbulb.

Not too bad. It’s an all right list considering it doesn’t require another trip to the pharmacy. I’m getting sick of Mrs. Haigan and her really scary stares. Sometimes I try to get her to laugh with a new joke from *The Book with the 1,000 Best Jokes EVER!* (Which is probably my favorite book, EVER). But she doesn’t really get them and even though everyone knows it’s polite to laugh when someone is telling a joke, she never does. (Although that can be tricky because sometimes you think someone is telling a joke and they’re not, and then you laugh and everyone looks really shocked and stares because they think you were being rude, even though you weren’t trying to be).

I guess that’s what adults are like sometimes. Well, maybe not just adults because sometimes I tell kids at school my jokes, even my favorite about the alien and his spaceship, and usually no one laughs. Except one time Emmie laughed in Social Studies when I told my second favorite joke about the man and his dog, and she laughed for a really long time and I don’t think it was at me, like everyone else, which I really liked.

I got sweetened butter. I didn’t even know they made two kinds. Mom says she can’t make dinner with sweetened butter. I told her I would like my chicken to be a little sweeter anyway, but she didn’t answer me so I left. She says I never listen and I’ll never learn anything. But she doesn’t know that that’s not true at all. I listen to everything she says. But then sometimes I forget. Like when I was in the grocery store I was thinking about how Emmie has a really nice laugh. It’s not high-pitched and giggly like all the other girls in my class. It’s really deep and loud, like she really means it. So I was thinking about the laugh and then I just took the first butter I found, since I didn’t even know they made two kinds. Mom told me that everyone knows that but I bet that if I asked lots of people, there would be a bunch who had no idea that there are two varieties of butter. Sometimes Mom says that I’ll never learn anything with my attitude. I tell her I want to learn everything. I think that means I’ll have to work on my attitude. The problem is I don’t know what the problem is with my attitude. I asked Rob once and he told me to ask my mom. I told him Mom had given me the advice in the first place. Then he said, “Did you pick up my blue shirt?” I didn’t see how that answered my question and so I left the room.
Sometimes, when no one is at home, I make myself a peanut-butter-and-pickle sandwich and I read *The Book with the 1,000 Best Jokes EVER!* Dad and I both liked peanut-butter-and-pickle sandwiches and we both liked jokes. Mom says just looking at the sandwich makes her want to throw up and she doesn’t like my jokes. I think it’s because she stops listening in the middle and when I get to the punch line she doesn’t get it. I sit on my bed and I tell my jokes out loud. I laugh really loudly which makes me feel better, and I remember when Dad laughed so loudly that people would stare. But he didn’t care. He showed me the sandwich when I was seven. I didn’t think it was gross, not even for a minute. He told me I was very nice because I didn’t pre-judge anything. He smiled when he said it, so I think it was a compliment.

Yesterday in school Paul told me that I was wearing the ugliest shirt in the world. I told him he must have seen a lot of shirts because that’s a big statement to make and you can’t say that without thinking about all the shirts in the world and he had to pick one, which happened to be mine, to be the ugliest. I guess that’s saying something. Emmie told him it wasn’t nice to say that to me. I told her not to worry about it, even though I was kind of hoping she was, although I was also hoping that she couldn’t see that my right eye was a little wet, but that was probably just from allergies.

Mom says that allergies are for sissies. I told her Dad always had allergies in the spring when there’s lots of pollen and dust flying around in the air. She sighed, like she does a lot when she’s talking to me, like she doesn’t have words. Then she says, “Allergies aren’t for big boys like you. Stop sniffing.”

One time I saw Mom sniffling and Rob had his arm around Mom’s shoulders. I wanted to come help but Rob doesn’t really like me to help and sometimes he yells, which makes me kind of nervous.

One time this woman told me that you shouldn’t be nervous too often otherwise you’ll never get anything done. I think she’s right because sometimes I can’t do the things that I really, really want to do because I’m really nervous. Like the time when I wanted to make my speech about bridges (my other favorite thing because my dad used to build them, and I know everything about them) for show-and-tell, but I was so nervous I had to leave. And the reason I was most upset was because Emmie was in the class and she made a really good speech about Colonial times which was really interesting because I learned that the women wore lots of layers under their skirts, even when it was hot, and I really wanted to do a good speech too, so maybe she would think I was really smart. But then I got really nervous and I said that I had a sty in my eye, something I read in a magazine once, and that I couldn’t see very well and would have to go the nurse. I don’t really know why I said that since my eyes felt just fine. It made me wish I were braver, which is something that is really hard to be.
That’s what Mom always tells me to be. She thinks being nervous and acting like a coward is bad. I try to explain that I don’t want to make more trouble, but sometimes it’s really hard. My Mom is always brave and she never cries. Well, except this one time when I came home early because when the nurse didn’t believe I had a sty and said I had to go back to class. But I didn’t want to. When I opened the door I heard sniffling. It was weird because usually it’s me who’s sniffling and it’s weird to hear a noise that you always hear coming from you coming from somewhere else. I didn’t say anything when I walked inside and I closed the door really softly. I walked down the hallway and I trailed my fingers along the white wall because I forgot that I’m not supposed to because I get fingerprints on the wall sometimes. My mom’s door was closed but I could tell that was where the sound was coming from. Then I realized my Mom was crying, which she never does, except for one tear at Dad’s funeral which I watched drip all the way down her neck. She was crying really loudly and I could see her through the crack in the door. She was sitting on her bed, looking at the picture she keeps on her bookshelf. It’s a picture of me and my dad when he took me to his office and explained everything about bridges to me. Then we went to see a bridge that he had just designed and Mom took a picture. Then I remembered that day and how it was different. Mom didn’t make sighing noises and Dad laughed so loudly when I told my new joke that it echoed across the water. Then we had lunch and everyone was smiling a lot. When I remembered that day it made me really sad, even though it was a really happy day. Then I started to cry too. I sat outside Mom’s door and I cried, silently, so Mom didn’t know I was there and I guess this means that sometimes even Mom isn’t brave although she’s the bravest person I know and I wish I could tell Dad because I think he would be really proud.

Alex S.
Cassie’s such a fuckin’ slob. The bitch doesn’t function the way most people should. She says, “Frank baby! I made you lasagna! You know I just hooove to make you lasagna!” OK, Cass, big fuckin’ whoop, you made me your disgusting lasagna. I’ll have the decency not to vomit it up right in front of you, if you have the decency to clean it up. But she doesn’t clean it up. She never cleans it up. She just leaves the plates, the glasses, the knives, the forks on the couch until the entire animal kingdom gets a piece of it.

Then the fat bitch says, “Frank, baby, do I look fat in this?” I’m no liar. Of course you’re gonna look fat when all you fucking do is sit around in your own filth, eating Twinkies and watching Ricki Lake. Then she gets all red and puffy and tears the whole fuckin’ house apart. Then the cunt storms out, as if I’d give a fuck, and goes to some bar, like the whore that she is, and sleeps with a black man. The next morning she stumble in drunk, most likely covered in syphilis and pleads for me to fuck her. So I laugh in her face. “You think you’re making me jealous, Cassandra? I don’t want to fuck you anymore than I did yesterday. Now would you please go clean up the kitchen?” Then she starts crying again and calls me a bastard.

I can deal with this. This is all peanuts compared with what that stupid bitch did next. I’ve got this beautiful car. A 1978 red Ferrari. Got it from this Spanish guy, Rey, for twelve grand. Cassie’s pretty fuckin’ jealous of my car, because I actually like it. And I don’t like her and she knows it. Anyway, I get home from work one day, and I work a very stressful job. So I’m thinking, I know what I’ll do, I’ll take the car out for a drive. So, I go to the garage and my beautiful car is nowhere in sight. I try and calm myself down by drinking a few beers. An hour later, the bitch, who doesn’t have a license for a reason, walks in the front door. “Frank baby! The paint was chipping on your car so I took it to that Spanish guy, and he repainted it for free! But they didn’t have red….so I thought green would be nice!” My ass he did it for free. Who the fuck do you think you are, Cassandra, putting your dirty fuckin’ hands one hundred feet near my baby? That was the last straw I tell you. So I say, “Cassandra, you fuckin’ cunt! If you weren’t so fuckin’ gross I would use your blood to paint my car red.” This gives me a good idea. I tie the bitch up. Bada bing, bada boom. Too bad I had to wash the trunk of my car out six times afterwards. But it was worth it. Cassandra, the world’s gonna be a better place without you.

Lola K.
Eric woke up on the right side of the bed. He sat up and stretched as tall as he could. He then thumped his right foot on the floor, followed by the left. He slouched and struggled to stand up. He started walking in a languid, dazed state until he reached his dresser doorknob. He pulled the small wooden knob to find an almost empty drawer, containing just two pairs of briefs and one pair of boxers. One of the briefs was ripped, and the other’s elastic was completely worn out, while the one pair of boxers was hot pink with Hawaiian flowers printed all over.

“Ah shit,” he yelled, banging his knee against the dresser. “Ah shit!” he yelled again, but this time louder and with greater enthusiasm while clutching his right knee and falling to the floor.

“Everything all right in there?” shrieked a woman from another room.

“Yeah. Everything’s just peachy over here,” Eric said sarcastically. The woman didn’t bother to answer. Eric eventually brought himself back up. He opened up another drawer, just to find a button-down Hawaiian print shirt.

“You know what?” Eric said under his breath with an angry undertone. He pulled the shirt out of the drawer and slammed it shut. He opened the drawer below and pulled out the boxer shorts. He left the room and walked toward the bathroom. The kitchen and dining area of the apartment was in between his bedroom and the one bathroom.

“What now? Is there gonna be a luau in the office today?” said the woman, giggling at her joke.

“Ha-ha,” Eric said as he entered the bathroom. He dropped the floral print clothing on the floor and opened the medicine cabinet. He pulled out a razor and laid it on the counter. He turned on the tap and grabbed the shaving cream that was sitting on the counter. He pressed the top of the metal bottle and the foam came out. He put it on his face, picked up the razor and started shaving the bristles left on his face from not shaving the previous day.

“Ah shit!” he yelled again, about two seconds after the razor touched his face. He threw the razor into the sink as hard as he could in a bout of frustration and rage. He stormed out of the bathroom, leaving the water running quickly into the stained porcelain sink.

“Ah shit!” he yelled again, throwing his hands into the air, noticing he forgot his clothing on the bathroom floor. He quickly threw on the shorts and the shirt, and he left the room, buttoning the shirt as he walked back to the bedroom. He opened a third dresser drawer and pulled out a pair of black pants. He pulled them on over his boxer shorts, and just as the top reached his waist, he heard a giant rip.

“Ah shit!” he yelled, trying to inspect the pants. He decided to just give up and leave, ripped crotch or no.
“Excuse me, sir, you have to sign in.”

Eric walked up to the security desk, took a pen and wrote his name on the sheet of paper in the clipboard.

The woman behind the desk looked at the paper. “You have to put the time down too.”

“Fine,” Eric said. He looked at his wrist for his watch, and he noticed it wasn’t there. “Ah shit!”

“Excuse me sir, but you have to watch that mouth of yours. You’re not the only one around. There are children all over this place.”

“Well I’m sorry. I come here every single day, and I work my ass off every single day just to get some money that’s barely enough to keep me fed, let alone my high rent—“

“Mister, there are people behind you waiting to sign in. I feel they’d appreciate it if you’d—“

“Ah, the hell with you.”

“Sir!” the woman yelled at him, starting to get angry. Eric was on his way toward the elevators, and ignored the woman. He leaned over toward the elevator buttons and pressed the up button. It didn’t light up. He vigorously pressed it four or five more times. It still didn’t light up.

Suddenly a pack of maybe ten or twelve people walked through the door and came up behind Eric. He backed himself against the wall to make room for everyone. One man in the crowd, who seemed to be their leader, walked ahead and pressed the up button. It lit up, and Eric was dumbfounded. The elevator on the far right opened up and a swarm of people rushed out of the building, ignoring the woman behind the desk’s yelling.

The leader of the pack conducted the crowd to walk inside the elevator. After they all packed themselves in, there was no room for Eric. They were already surpassing the weight limit.

“Ah shit,” Eric groaned as he slouched over as much as he could. He walked toward the staircase and opened the door marked “Staircase A.” It was quiet and empty. He could hear the echoes of his ripped, waterlogged shoes hitting the hard floor. He looked at his non-existent watch again and moaned as he slowed down. ‘I’m gonna be late. Why am I walking so slowly?’ he thought. He sped up and started jogging up the stairs. Floor Eleven was his destination. Eric was on Floor Three, almost at Four. His jog turned to a sprint. As he almost reached the eighth floor, the door flew wide open as he slammed right into it. He fell backwards, flat on his back. He squinted his eyes and moaned once more. He saw a figure walk slowly up the stairs, and he heard the door to the ninth floor open and close.

“Ah shit!” he yelled, now in more of a delirious state. “Bastard!” he screamed
as loud as he could.

“Hey! Shut up,” he heard a voice say off in the distance.

“Don’t you talk to me like that!” he said back.

Suddenly the door opened again right next to him and hit him in his right leg.

“Ah shit!” he screamed. He lunged to clutch his right knee, again, and struggled to stand up.

“You’d better keep it down out here, and watch your mouth as well,” said the man standing in the eighth floor doorway.

“Ah, the hell with you all.” Eric started back up the stairs, this time limping.

“Eric! Where’ve you been? The meeting with the new Pfizer client is today, and you said you’d be here at eight-thirty to plan. You’re not anywhere here, and no one’s seen you. Where the hell are you? Call right away when you hear this. Bye.”

“Ah shit!” Eric yelled and pounded his right fist against the “erase” button on his answering machine. He picked up the phone and dialed so fast that he pressed all of the keys at once. He tried again, and failed. He tried again slowly, and in the middle of his dialing, his office door swung open.

“Eric! Goddamnit man! Where’ve you been? You look like you were mugged… in Hawaii… What happened to you, man?” It seemed he was talking as fast as humanly possibly.

“Hey, sorry. It hasn’t been the best of—”

“Okay, down to business. So that guy is coming in—”

“Yo, you have a cigarette on you?” Eric asked, distracted.

“No, I don’t. Now this guy is coming in an hour and a half. This could cost us our jobs. Mr. Morrison has been very competitive with that CCG meta-media, and he’ll fire our sorry asses if we screw this up. Okay? So let’s concentrate and get serious. Okay?”

“Fine.”

“Okay? I’m not hearing enthusiasm.”

“Okay! Jesus Christ!” Eric yelled, getting frustrated. He sat down in his desk chair and pulled out a file drawer to his right, and smashed it right into his knee.

“Ah shit!”

“Hurry!”


Eric picked up a big black garbage bag from the ground and opened it. He swept his arm across the desk and everything fell into the bag. He picked up the bag
and threw it over his shoulder, picked up his briefcase and stormed out of the room. Keith, Eric’s business partner, had a look of astonishment on his face. “You—”

“See ya!” Eric said with a sarcastic smile on his face as he turned his head and left the office room.

“Laika! That’s rude. Don’t point,” said a tall, dark-haired woman on the street, holding her daughter’s shoulder with one hand. The child was pointing at Eric, who, soaking wet, had just tripped on an empty plastic bottle in the center of the sidewalk. A speeding taxicab driving through a puddle had also splashed him. “Ah shit!” he yelled once more. He brought himself to stand and walked carefully down the subway steps. He took his Metrocard out of his pocket and realized it was ripped. He tried swiping it quickly, then slowly, but nothing worked. “Goddamnit! That had eighteen dollars left.” He looked up and noticed everyone staring. He made his way discreetly over to the machines to get a new one. Eric pressed the start button, and then he accidentally pressed the Spanish button. Hearing his train coming, he decided to guess. He did take Spanish in college for a bit. “Ah shit!” he said. He apparently had pressed the one hundred dollar button. The train doors were about to close, so he went to another machine. He pressed English this time, Get New Metrocard, and Cash. He pressed in four dollars, so he’d have just enough for now and maybe another time. He took four one-dollar bills out of his soaking pocket, and realized the dollars were soaking as well. The machine wouldn’t accept the dripping wet money, so Eric walked to the man behind the glass window.

“Hey, could you give me four dry dollars? Or just a Metrocard?”

“Sorry, I can’t take those.”

“Oh, come on. Please?”

“Do you have any other money?”

“It’s all wet.”

“Fine,” said the man shrugging. He handed Eric a Metrocard. “Have a nice day.”

“You too.” Eric whisked the thin yellow card from the man’s hand. He walked toward the turnstile and swiped his card. He found a seat to wait in between an overweight woman and a man in a bright purple suit sleeping very heavily. ‘Ah shit,’ he thought, not saying it out loud for once. He looked at his wrist, forgetting again. “Excuse me, miss, do you have the time?” he asked a teenage girl passing by. She held her head up high and kept walking, appearing to be ignoring Eric, almost as if she thought he’d drag her into the bathroom and rape her. “Oh, thanks a lot. I ask as politely as humanly possible, and you still ignore
me. Not all men are pigs you know.” Eric stood up as he starting yelling more and more loudly.

“You know, you’ve got to control that anger of yours. Here, she’s great.” Eric turned to the right and looked down at his seat. A man, maybe in his mid- to late-thirties, had stolen his seat, and not only that. He was holding out a business card in front of Eric. It read:

Mary Johnson, C.S.W.
Psychotherapist
Cert. Psy.

“I’m not taking this crap. You get your ass out of that seat. You damn well know that I was here first.”

“Well, you got up. Oh, and you wanted to know. The time is...” The man moved the cuff of his sleeve further up on his arm. “Five seventeen.”

“Okay fine. I guess you have some decency,” said Eric, turning away from the man and walking to his right. He got to a free wall and leaned back against it, dropping his briefcase to the ground, still damp from that speeding car going through a puddle. Eric had been waiting for about forty minutes when he began to get pretty frustrated. The Q had come multiple times, but still no R.

“Goddamnit! How long does that goddamn R take?” He slouched against the wall, and sank down to a sitting position. He looked to his left, still no train. He looked to his right, still no open seat. He looked up at the ceiling, noticing the nice painted tiles. He slowly moved his head downward, appearing to be studying every little detail of the hand-painted designs. He ended up looking to his left. There he saw a dark-skinned man. He was holding black garbage bags, one in each hand. He was wearing glasses, taped together. It looked as though if you took off the tape, the glasses would fall to pieces. The man was walking slowly, seeming to be taking his time. He was mumbling to himself. You could hear his voice, but the words were incomprehensible. He walked straight toward Eric for about five minutes, just taking his time. Eric looked away, looked back, and saw the R train appear. He jumped up and grabbed his briefcase. The train stopped and the doors opened. Eric was about to get into the train, but he looked at the man once more, still mumbling. Suddenly the man stopped speaking his wordless words, lifted his head and looked at the crowd of people about to board the subway train.

“And so our hero calls it a day.”

Eric let out a little chuckle. It seemed he was the only to notice. He stood outside the train for a few extra seconds, then walked in, grabbed the pole loosely with his left hand, and let out a sigh of relief.

Lily R.
The Bruiser

The bruiser, bugging in his bumblesquat citadel
Fielding misdoing with force of fist
Pow! And lonely palms caress one’s thighs
Streaming salt licks endow one’s eyes
I withdraw my littlest digit! Aye
The crust has made its stand
And one’s lids may rest again
A jab to the jaw, a jib in the jointed bay
Making haste, it makes waves as saliva mops the floor
A penny wasted; the pence forlorn
To counter the many masques of scorn

The Bruiser, basking in his billygoat brewery
Sipping the stouts in an afterglow of victory
Fine wines, each key with enthalpy and brine
Basking in every morsel of the Energies
Surveying the peat for chattering challengers he may see
To bam them with bops of knuckle and mass

Glass among a rusted pane
The rustic rapist scrapes his penny loafers
On hardwood and linen craft
A penny wasted; into the fissures of the floorboard it goes
Leaving legacy of reprehensible course
Vestal gals, loose and losing petticoats
Mourning what is justified as such a crime
For if my desired derelict engaged in fisticuffs
Perhaps these lasses would have lasted

But not on this morning
No, not in the night
So let us continue, awaiting his fight.

Michael G.
“Be quiet,” the expert advised. “You wouldn’t want to disturb the teenager.” “The teenager?” the tour group of young couples chorused in a harmony of edgy tenors and shrill sopranos. “Yes,” the expert said in a slow, controlled voice. He knew if he talked too fast he would be unable to hide the panicked words that were waiting to bubble over his boiling thoughts. “Our specimen is what we in the field call a member of a ‘transition breed’ or an ‘at-home stress inducer.’” There has been quite a bit of debate among the most prominent experts about the teenager’s development, habits, behaviors and potential dangers. The unanimous decision has been made that to ensure the safety of society’s bread-winners, teen rebellion must be put to an end.”

A shaky hand was raised. “Yes?” the expert asked. “Can you tell us something about these behaviors which are so detrimental to society? My wife and I recently had our first child. We fear that one day Jimmy, too, will morph into a teenager. What signs should we look out for which might indicate that our firstborn is on the verge of rebellion?”

The tour guide paused. “Now is the time for you to get worried. You have a good twelve to fourteen years before your child exhibits symptoms of the unwanted change. The answer to your question is a bit…complex. Before I address your concerns, let’s proceed to the bedroom so that you can make your own observations and you’ll have a better sense of what we are dealing with here. Does everyone have their clipboard? I want you to all take good notes, but again, do not make a sound while we are in that room. Follow me.”

The expert pushed the door open with daring strength. He strode forward into the room and motioned for the group to line up behind him. They shivered and twitched their way to the wall, then clung to it as if they were explorers dangling from the ropes of an ancient bridge, which had just snapped and was suspended one hundred feet above a crocodile-infested river. Only one or two of the guests had steady enough hands to take notes. The rest of the group gripped their clipboards and pens to the point where blue inks was squeezed out in gallons while paper crumpled and shredded, snowing down to the floor. There was no fear that this could make a noticeable mess. The floor was already covered from corner to corner with clothes, schoolwork, candy wrappers, and many foreign objects known only to teenagers and the few parents who had made it far enough into their children’s rooms to glimpse them. The teen lay sleeping, a dragon protecting her gold, a ripped pirate-ship sail of a blanket tossed over her, her headphones on, whose wires had twisted and tangled.
in her sleep, the music playing at a harsh volume. All the expert could do was a baton-twirling dance with his arms, first motioning toward the girl, then gesturing a reminder to the group to stay quiet. It was not necessary for him to remind them; no one was in the mood to talk.

Several excruciating minutes passed like ghosts laughing at the unfortunate living inhabitants of a haunted house. One mother of three ran from the bedroom in terror. Finally, the guide ushered the group out and pulled the door quickly shut, making certain that no poor adult had been left behind to suffer. The couples in their twenties gasped for air, while the ones in their early thirties grew so hysterical that they crawled madly around the waiting room like rabid foxes, and toppled over the coffee table. They knew that in a few short years, it was statistically likely that they, too, would raise teenagers.

“What did you notice?” the expert asked after the group appeared to have regained its bearings.

A young man and his wife attempted speech.

“The girl, so pale, so, so…”

“Mess everywhere. Kay…”

“He’s trying to say ‘chaos.’ I—I—it was, you seeee…”

“Terrifying. The stench and…”

“Yes, yes, I know! And worse things.”

“Punk clothing. Ripped jeans, black t-shirts, miniskirts! And short-shorts!”

The couple’s eyes grew larger than their faces as they awaited the expert’s advice.

Before he could respond, the girl suddenly emerged from her bedroom. She thumped to the kitchen, her loud and destructive movements parting the nervous Red Sea of the tour group. She did not even notice them, her glazed-over eyes blind to the sight of adults and her ears deaf to the sounds of parental voices. The group was pulled by the inevitable force of burning curiosity in the direction of the kitchen to watch the girl prepare teenage food and take teenager bites.

The expert narrated the scene.

“Our teenager is hungry. This is a phenomenon that adults experience as well but in the case of the teenager it can lead to a devastating snack, which often results in recuperating and refueling the specimen, meaning that she is refreshed to go out and cause more damage. Now she is spreading peanut butter onto a slice of bread. She is currently putting said slice into the toaster oven. You see! This is just sort of the thing we do not want to happen! Every sensible person knows that you toast the bread first, put peanut butter on second. She might accidentally light the toaster oven on fire! Now she is pouring a glass of milk. Now she is sitting down. I suspect she is waiting for her bread to toast. She is reading the newspaper. A little fact you might not know: teenagers tend to be highly literate and sometimes even intelligent—a deadly
combination for a criminal. Her toast is finished. She will most likely proceed to eat it. She may also drink her milk."

“You are so knowledgeable,” the group admired.

“It is my job,” the expert stated with the proud curtness of a patriotic military officer giving sharp commands.

The girl went out to the movies that night. While she was gone, the guide took advantage of the now relaxed atmosphere of a house empty of teens, and imparted much wisdom to the couples. When he was finished with his intense monologue, they stood frozen in shivering ice, and all they could do was think about the destruction that teenagers were causing everyone, all the time, without end. The specific details were extremely top secret and gravely serious, so the expert was foolish to speak with such open ease. The young couples, who of course feared for their future safety, make all the research about teenagers public. Havoc reigned. There was no longer any space left in adult society for peace of mind or trust. The expert was assassinated that very night during the brief window of tossing and turning, right before he could fall asleep. Teenagers played loud rock music.

Eva D.

Seahorse Love

The seahorse must have missed the story of Adam and Eve. Mr. and Mrs. Seahorse twist and spiral up and up with ease.

For her, a celebratory dance, for him, the potential consequence. She is the one who wears the pants while he biologically reinvents.

It is commonly misperceived that we, as women, do not lust, have desires to be relieved when rather it is just nine months of growth is more than most women lust for.

Joanna B.
He Imagined

He imagined things that could not be written.
About their trip, about each other.
On the plane she fell asleep with the Lonely Planet guide in her hands.
She has a plan for everything, a contingency fund burning a hole in her
wallet, worn leather threads and all. Take a month off, she said back
at the warehouse. See new places,
do new things. He thinks
he is interesting enough already.
Looking out the window, he imagines possibilities, distractions.

In the city they collected concert tickets in the violet light of a
full moon, stumbling over clubs and cafes in a shower of cobblestone
moonlight. Late nights were tapas, disco, long lines teetering on
breathless heels. Everything was lights, rainbows, sparkles. weekends
in Ibiza, nights on Las Ramblas, they spent their days waiting for the
night.

Flying over low, thunderous mountains, she was still asleep,
reluctant to wake to this
or maybe just tired, worn out from their travels. Travel has a way of
getting to your bones
or so he’s always heard.
He can’t make out more than a few lights
a glowing lantern, a cabin perhaps, a stop for lost tourists on their
way from an alpine pass now receding behind them into the fog, obscured
from vision by some overhang, some rocky obstacle
he can’t haul their suitcases up, not accustomed to distances. He thinks
they will walk miles to the nearest tavern where meals stretch late
into the night, bowls are scraped clean, glasses tipped back,
he can taste the New Year dry on his tongue.

They have traveled across the map, little red lines tracing the heart
of the country
and now the taxi ride home: neither of them saying a word
cought in the rain dripping at the windows, staring into the lights of
this faraway city as if bewildered by it all, blinded by the dusky
glare of billboard lights, dust spilling over them and into the air, 
mountain dust mixed with city smog and regret 
and something beyond them, beyond anyone 
in the mountains 
surrounded by fog.

Elisabeth R.

When I get off the bus home from school I always see crows in the road—
the wide street over the hill so you can't see cars coming over it—my mom always 
complains about it to other parents, but she's never directly warned me
Off of it, forming a T, is the thinner street lined with houses that almost inch out over 
the road.
The grass is green but it’s chilly, and the leaves are brown and orange and the ground 
is layered with them.
The crows always mill in the middle of where the streets connect. I step off the bus 
and walk a few hundred feet over up the hill towards the T.
The yellow bus is decayed and bumpy, but it’s the only automobile I never get sick in.
There’s a street to the east of my house that is the exact opposite of this one, but I can’t 
remember if I’ve actually walked down it.
When I wake up on the second floor but smothered by the biggest tree in Ann Arbor, 
I always walk down past the crows to where the bus picks me up, or up the hill where 
everyone else lives.
I walk past the crows and up the street. The woman with the Sinbad book still hasn’t 
covered the construction paper on the side of her house.
She has two huskies and neither is particularly nice but at least they don't bark and 
chase us around like the German shepherd up the road or the Rottweiler behind the 
yard.

Sateesh D.
I want to write
like Rimbaud did

about Ophelia:

her pale hair and pale face,
skirts spread and floating

lily-white

against the darkness
of the water
she inhaled (pretty little girl,
fit only for a nunnery)

to breathe her lovesongs out again
to die
to make her sad songs
more sincere—

No one will ever love you
honestly,
the song will run
six or sixteen generations hence

yet Hamlet gave the lie
to all the uses of this world

in loving his Ophelia
not wisely but too well,
with mindless honesty—

opening his darkness to her light
he drove her to drown out the sight
in darker waters

Katherine B.
I’ll never forget our Sunday lunches at Blueberries. It was strange to watch how our small Italian delicatessen evolved. How the aisles narrowed and the shelves tacked, forming cavernous tinned tunnels of Alpo cans and powdered chocolate milk. We ordered chicken salad on white most of the time and tuna during Lent because that’s how Josie liked it. She had always hoped Louie behind the counter would remember our order and just ask “The usual, ladies?”—Louis wasn’t his name but it ought to have been and to us the joke never got old. We sat outside under the shade of Hebrew International umbrellas and unwrapped our waxed paper packages. After a while it got worse. The chicken salad, I mean. But Josie didn’t seem to notice, so I didn’t mention it.

One Saturday about two years after I moved out of the city, she called me up, asking if I would join her for lunch at the new place that had just opened up on her corner specializing in a chicken cutlet that Joe claimed to like more than her own. I said yes. It must have been before Tom moved in and, well, it had been eons since I’d seen them last. It was only after I had reached our multicultural little deli strung with Italian flags and patriotic-hued and star-spangled banners announcing “Grand Opening!” that I realized Louisa wasn’t there and it would be just Josie and me. To this day I still wonder if I would have recognized her if it wasn’t for those rose-tinted glasses that she had always worn. I’m sure I would have; of course she was older than the last time I saw her, but she was still the Josie I had remembered. As usual she was clad in her black clam diggers and flip flops, toes poking out and painted an orange that matched her tanned skin. Unlike Louisa, she seemed to have gotten all of Joe’s melanin gene. But what struck me the most was that her wiry hair was still dyed that same cranberry red. I was overcome with a desire to hug her and couldn’t help but laugh as I remembered the night Louisa and I had convinced her to do it. It was her first high school dance. And Lou and I, being the cool sophomores we were, decided to boycott such lame-o social events. At the time I don’t think Lou or I would have ever imagined it lasting for the next twelve years. I couldn’t picture it lasting through the rest of high school, but then again I don’t really remember whether it was that fall or the next that I stopped seeing them so often. It was that fall, in fact, because as I remember Lou and I still sat together in our chemistry class. We were lab partners. We had decided this at the beginning of the year. And later Mr. Lourie wouldn’t let me work alone—I was a liability with the Bunsen burners. And anyway I would benefit from her low percent errors, he said.

I was relieved that we only talked briefly of Louisa. Josie said that she was doing better now, that was all, and the sandwiches were good. So when she asked if I would meet her again next week, I didn’t hesitate to say yes. After saying our goodbyes—like Lou she had picked up her father’s ridiculous “Ciao”—and as I walked
to the bus station, I thought of how good it was to see her. And sitting on the bus back downtown, I made little lists in my head of possible conversations the two of us could have the next week.

At lunch it never really seemed awkward. Pauses in our chats weren’t rare, but it was as if it all just fit into the routine and came to be as natural as sitting at our table—the one farthest from the opening and closing of the automatic door—was. We agreed that such a device was more of an inconvenience than anything else, and Josie, of course, insisted on putting up protest signs. Eventually I started buying the Sunday paper at the corner store opposite Blueberries and bringing it along. She’d first ask to have the book review and flip through the pages, asking me if I had read any of the books being reviewed. She always sighed, saying if Joe hadn’t always been so much, she would have read a lot and then gone off to college, like me. She then would ask for the crossword. And she was good at it. Whenever she got stuck on a long one, Josie would push her rose-tinted glasses back, gently nibbling at her pen, and say, “Lou does it with pencil. I always use a pen, you know. A red one.”

This was the extent to which we talked about Louisa. Sometimes I could tell Josie wanted me to respond with something like “Well, now that you mention it, how is that ol’ sister of yours?” or like “Gee, Louisa, how’s she doing these days?” I never did. But that wasn’t why I was there. I mean, I was Josie’s friend now. We enjoyed each other’s company as it was. These Sunday afternoon pleasantries continued as Tom and I got closer. I never spoke of him directly with Josie because he was simply something foreign to our world of wax-cupped lemonade and fly-away newspaper sections. And likewise I had no reason to mention Josie, and certainly not Louisa, to Tom. Of course he knew where I went those Sundays, but being a sensible man he put no additional thought into the matter.

After we were married, Tom and I that is, it seemed only reasonable that it was time for us to stop. I never officially broke it off with Josie. But soon lunch became a cup of coffee, no newspaper involved, and from there, sometimes a phone call on Sunday afternoon. And the last time I spoke to her ended with an unspecific invitation for dinner, chicken cutlet, of course, for Joe, at their house. As I hung up the phone I felt like I had just swallowed a huge gust of wind and my stomach dropped. I began to cry. I felt a sudden wave of guilt, a feeling that had been rippling in me ever since our first tuna sandwich, and maybe even since Lou’s percent errors. I tried to explain to Tom, but that made it worse.

Mariela Q.
When I see sunsets, with their striking and
Indescribable colors smeared across
The sky in the late afternoon and evening,
I think of my father.
I think of the stories he always tells about
The night I was born—
His argument with the doctor, and that the time
On my birth certificate is wrong.
I think I may have inherited some of his stubbornness.
And his love of pointless anecdotes.
He always says one of the most beautiful sunsets he’s ever
Seen was from the hospital the night before I was born.
Maybe that would explain my attachment to them—
All I know is that I can link many of my most poignant
Memories to violent sunsets.
I may have tried to catch the moon as a child in the desert
Of Las Vegas, but even now my heart is sucked into every
Striking sunset that flames before my eyes,
And I melt with disappointment when the purples and pinks
Are too weak to satisfy me.

Flannery S.
Inversion

It’s dark when I step outside, the kind of dark that leads me around the construction detour and into the sickly pool of street light; the kind of dark that appears when you accidentally expose photo paper, and the lit-from-within office buildings are inverted like film and I cross the street there’s this girl she looks familiar she looks like that boy I used to take walks with. It’s really dark out now so when you walk quickly or if you’re scared or sad or something you only see the lights, like those maps with light-up points, but instead of the United States it’s the intersection of Atlantic and 4th and instead of pushing the button to find Las Vegas on the map it’s that’s the streetlight that I would stand under when I was twelve to go to the dentist and, I see those kinds of headlights behind me. So I walk into the deli with the lit-up yellow awning that is reminding me of sunflowers tonight. The clock is still hanging in the sky, perfectly inverted next to the windows of the office building, and it shows me I’ve been waiting four minutes but it feels like I’ve been waiting for hours, and when I go to pay either could be true. If someone pushed my little button on the map right now, I would be underneath the don’t-walk light that I always try to catch when I walk home from school but then the light changes and I walk back past the perpetually unused doorway that the homeless woman sleeps in, and I can never tell if she’s in there or not because the car lights and street lights and clock lights and sign lights aren’t enough to illuminate more than the ridges that her blanket makes where it folds. But I’ve already passed her, now I’m avoiding the construction detour and walking in the street and headlights close in on me slowly so I look behind me to see if someone’s there but they’re not, because now I’m opening the gate which is hard to do when you can’t see the lock, because the timer on the light is broken. So then I’m inside and I can see everything when I walk up the stairs but I’m still wondering if that woman was there tonight, beheaded by shade, or if she left for the night, and where did she go, and did she realize that she forgot her blanket. No one will try to steal it though, because if she’s not there they won’t be able to tell because it’s too dark.

Chloe B.
Soft southern sunlight creates fractals on tangled hair.
A smooth face shelters your tough skin from the heat.

And just as warmly as the sunlight dances on the facets that surround us,
The little white hand hugs your broad stance.
When the flash goes off
You squint.
From the sunbeams, no less
(mine are weaker and there’s a fight to keep them open)

The tiny teeth bare themselves in a grin,
I provoke, poke, prod for a smile
But I am left
Only with a content flame
Under your profound and veteran skin.

This memory is gone
The torn edges of a photograph
are merely edges of the forgotten.

Rachel L.

I have not loved you as I ought,
I have not seen your soul nor sought
To love your errors and your lies.
I have seen reflected in your eyes

My face, and love I may have dreamed.
I built on hopes an image that seemed
To contain perfection. It is not you:
It’s fragile glass and rings untrue.

I will love you in the purple twilight
When your face is half hid by night
Then I will see in your imperfect face
An echo of your imagined grace.

Abby H.
It was a time of quiet and of waiting. Joy slipped under her covers. It was dark. Joy knew the blanket was blue. She rolled over and wriggled under another layer of blankets. Now it was all dark, but she still knew that the blanket was blue and the next was green and the next was brown. Joy hugged her pink nightgown to her body. But now it was only a little pink and mostly dark. Joy liked dark. It hugged her like she hugged her nightgown and the blankets hugged dark. Joy took in a deep breath. Then she made herself as small as she could, pulling her knees up. She was still bigger than the stool in the corner that was red. She pulled tighter. She was still bigger than her cat, whose name was Jessie. She pulled tighter. She was still bigger than an atom. She learned about atoms in school. Her teacher, Mr. Adams, told her that a period at the end of a sentence had more atoms than she could count, at least a billion. A period was very small and she could be smaller. She pulled her knees. Her chest all of a sudden hurt a lot. She pushed her knees down again. Now she was big again. Joy thought how big she could get. Maybe she could get as big as her bed. She stretched and her toes touched the bed end. It was cold and she squeaked. So did the bed when she brought her feet up. She moved again and the bed made another sound. Joy remembered a long time ago. Her feet could not touch the bed end. She was everything but then she was a princess, the biggest, atom-sized princess. She crawled through a mouse hole to escape her evil stepmother and married the prince. The prince was the biggest, atom-sized prince and he was the only prince. Joy shivered and hugged her nightgown, which was hugged by dark which was hugged by the covers. It was a time of quiet and of waiting. And the best moment was when she would push the blankets off of herself. Everything was light. She could see the red stool and all the blankets and her pink nightgown on her body. Dark was inside her now and dark wouldn't come out until the next morning. Dark was inside. And it was the best moment when she hugged dark.

Alexander M.
Jacques put down his girlfriend’s manuscript. He looked up at her beaming face across the room. He wrinkled his nose. The story had left a bad taste in his mouth. The next words that came out of his mouth had to be handled with care. He took off his dark square glasses and rubbed his eyes. Even with his hand covering his face he could smell her anticipation. It was potent in the air of their rustic loft-like apartment, not an unpopular style for writers and their girlfriends. He looked at her. Her eyes were a clear gray that reminded him of the smell of his father’s cigars. She smiled a pink and yellow smile at him. “It’s,” he began slowly, but he was rescued by a knock at the door. He opened to find a package deliveryman in a mustard uniform.

“Package for,” he paused to check his clipboard, “Jack Rubenstein.”

“My name is Jacques Ruby,” Jacques said through his teeth.

“The label says Jack Rubenstein, at this address.” The man’s tone was curt at best.

“Fine, just give it to me.” Jacques grabbed the package, nearly forgetting to sign for it. The man winked at Jacques’ girlfriend, who had come to the door, before turning on his heels and striding away.

“What is it?” The sound of her voice was like a classical painting, beautiful and meaningful but beginning to fade away. Jacques began to open the cardboard. Inside was an unopened package of underwear, two neatly folded shirts, a sweater, a fruitcake, and a handwritten note. Jacques picked it up and studied its words: “Dear Jack,” it said, “If this package reaches you, I will thank the stars in heaven. It took your father and me ages to track you down. I bought you new underwear and am sending your red sweater along with two nice shirts and a fruitcake so you don’t starve. Call us when you get the chance. Love, Mom.”

“You told me your parents were dead.” Jacques could see his lies stand up in front of him. They were mocking him. Growing larger and more sinister looking with each second he delayed a response.

“I’m going outside. I’m going for a walk.” But he was out the door before his words were out of his mouth. He stuffed his hands in his pockets as he walked the blue street. Evening had begun but night had not come yet. It was a strange time of day. Stores were closing as he walked. It was the time between the life he left and the life he searched for. He heard the figures of the past running after him as he walked. He walked by a group of laughing children. Their laughter flowed into his mouth and he could taste it. It tasted like fruitcake.

Rachel L.
The Eternal Feast

As I waded through the suffocating snowdrifts, my stomach began to churn. I knew that I would not be able to consume any form of nutrition until I returned to my home where I could nibble at neglected scraps. I felt the rapidly approaching Christmas feast, which I had been dreading for days, sneering at my famished state, flaunting its uctuous meats and viscous puddings of which I would take no part.

When I arrived at the expansive dining hall, I glimpsed a band of brutes huddled over a lavish supper, bolting entire turkeys in one go. Upon closer inspection I realized that these ghouls were my extended family. I shuddered to think that for the greater part of the evening I would have to endure their onslaught of affronting inquiries into my life and future. In the past my typical solution was to sink into the creases of a chair and leave my food untouched. I had always been so repulsed by their lewd and inconsiderate attacks that I could never bring myself to eat any of the divine banquets that I longed for. Yet this time I was determined to eat.

Having completed my advance on the kin, I came to a halt. I could not see their faces, as they were hunched over the meal. I made a feeble gesture of greeting and walked toward my empty seat. Just as I was growing fond of being ignored, my cousin Isaac came slinking out from a shadowy corner, leering at me as he offered to take my coat.

“I’m supposed to take that thing,” he said, gesturing towards my moldy leather jacket. “Grandma Susan told me about Tanya. She’s your girlfriend, right?” I nodded.

“Grandma thinks she’s too short.” He said this with a smirk. I did not want to respond to his snide remark so I shuddered and proceeded to sit.

Once seated in front of my empty plate, I took a furtive glance at the occupants of the table. I caught my step-uncle René eyeing me hungrily. “Here, give me your plate, boy, you look gaunt.” He grabbed my plate and loaded it with heaping servings of lamb shank and wild rice, then lathered it with a generous amount of the inky family condiment, grape ketchup.

My stomach was quaking with hunger, but my fear of ending up like the gluttons repelled my every attempt at ingestion. As my food got colder and the feast wound down, my brother Jake, who used to suffer from a similar ailment, poked me in the ribs and said, “You know, I would advise that you eat, because we all dread the food at first, but we must expand. We must inflate forever and together with the others. These people, they are really hungry. They strive for the intake of substances, regardless of their content. And as you grow, you will become increasingly ravenous until you just can’t stop absorbing. Don’t worry, you will see.”

I was so enthralled by his speech that when I looked up, I found that I had been drooling on my shirt. I sheepishly wiped my mouth and stared at my cold lamb. The more I stared, the hungrier I became. It became a necessity that I gorge myself
right then and there. And when I finally began to eat, it was divine. I was suddenly wolfing my food with the family and loving every scrumptious morsel. The meal seemed to go on forever, and as it continued, I grew larger and larger with the family that taught me how to really eat.

Anders M.

The Unenlightenment

Roman aqueducts twirl and come crashing down,
Suddenly drama is drowned
The city starts burning,
To be replaced with a yearning
For apocalyptic behavior & Christ our savior.

The barbarians roar from shore to shore
Eating away, eating away,
Seemingly forevermore.

Ireland is left with
More learning than the rest,
For thwarted on every shore
For centuries nor they
Whored & screamed & killed &
Schemed and fell into
 Darkness.

A small twinkling light glimmers
In a corner of Europe,
Stuffed in crumbling manuscripts,
Moth ridden and dying they lie on shelves
To slowly spread anew faster & faster
& 2x & 4x.

Then you realize,
what would man have done without paper?

Chris N.
Two boys, a man, his wife, and a woman stand in a line. The boys, both in middle school, wear matching wizard hats, lightning scars, wands, red “invisible cloaks,” and spectacles. The man, slightly overweight and in his forties, sports a long, cotton-white tangled beard and a purple velvet cape. His wife is dressed as “slutty Hermione.” The other woman, well over sixty, wears feathers; she is Hedwig, the owl.

WIFE: It's getting cold. Can I borrow your coat, sweetie?

MAN: This opens in three minutes. Can't you wait?

WIFE: But my legs are numb.

MAN: Just shake them and you'll be fine. Besides, you look great, darling! (He kisses her)

WIFE: Not in front of the kids. (She inches her skirt down)

BOY 1: When does it open? Thomas is sick.

BOY 2: No, I'm not! I'm just cold.

WIFE: Richard, give him your coat.

MAN: But it opens in three minutes!

BOY 1: Three minutes! But we've been here for four hours!

MAN: Well, you want good seats, don't you?

BOY 1: In a theatre?

BOY 2: (shivering) I'm still cold.

WIFE: Richard, look at your son! He is shivering!

MAN: It's opening in two minutes, Joanne!

(BOY 2 sits on the ground)

WIFE: Stand up, Thomas! You'll ruin your “invisible cloak.”

BOY 2: I don't feel well.
BOY 1: He looks pale.

MAN: Son, be a man and stand up! We’re about to go in.

BOY 2: I think I have food poisoning. *(He throws up)*

WIFE: Oh no! Tommy! You *are* sick! *(BOY 2 wipes his face, smearing his lightning scar)* Paulie, run into that deli and get us some napkins and water.

HEDWIG *(opening the doors)*: You may now enter the *Harry Potter World Premiere*

MAN: Fuck. Now we’re going to miss the movie.

*Alessandra G.*

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**All This Talk**

There’s a tiny, quilted pocket of the universe, 
Tucked away in the armpit of a saint—
A place where smoke-eyed, dusty peoples 
Gather on stuffed, stained sofas.
There, writing is not communication 
Nor is writing decoration.
There, personal offenses fly, 
Slide down white walls, 
Circle around heads.

Don’t let all this talk get to you. 
Whatever you hear is false. 
Don’t be moved by newfound knowledge. 
There, whatever you hear is false.

Post rumors on the room-posts. 
And old, gritty secrets still sit, buried 
Beneath couch cushions.

*Maggy S.*
I am on the airplane, Flight 173A to Portland, Maine, all by myself. I am going to camp for the very first time, and I am nine years old. A few minutes ago I had exchanged a teary goodbye with my anxious mother, and now I am sitting in a window seat up near the front of the plane. The flight attendant, Jackie, has been very nice to me, but there is nothing that she can really do for me. As we take off into the clear, blue sky, I lean my head against the scratched, egg-shaped window and stare down at the concrete ground until it becomes so small that I can barely tell where it is. I open one of the teen magazines that I bought at the gift shop and pop into my mouth a hot pink square of bubblegum. I am skimming an article in my magazine (“Casey&Aaron=Splitsville”) when Jackie comes through the aisle offering beverages and snacks. I ask for a Dr. Pepper, and she also gives me a mini bag of pretzels which I eat even though I’m not hungry. Soon enough—the entire flight is only about one hour—we are close to landing. I suddenly feel overwhelmed with a million different emotions—I’m excited, I’m nervous, I’m apprehensive, I’m already homesick. I can’t believe that I’m actually going to be at camp today, and every day for the next three and a half weeks. When we land, I gather my stuff together as the other passengers exit the plane. I am flying as an Unaccompanied Minor, because I am under the age of fifteen and without an adult, so I wait for a person who works for the airlines to escort me from the plane to the gate. It is a tall man named Jimmy, and as he walks me to the gate where the director of camp is waiting, he cracks jokes and asks me stupid questions about myself. The director’s name is Shelley Thomas, an older blond woman wearing small glasses and a warm smile on her face.

“You must be Samantha,” she says. “I’m Shelley.” She is dressed in the same camp uniform that I am wearing, a white tee shirt and navy shorts. My heart begins to race. I nod and offer a weak smile, and she walks me through the airport down to the baggage claim area where the rest of the campers who are flying meet. She leaves me there to go get the other arriving campers, and I am left to make some new acquaintances. There are some older boys laughing and talking on the side, a chubby girl with frizzy hair reading a book, and a large group of boys and girls playing cards on the floor. I sit down a few seats away from two girls who look a bit older than I am and seem to know each other from past summers. Luckily for me, a male counselor with lots of facial hair announces that we are ready to leave and will be taking the white van parked outside.

Everyone slowly walks outside to the van and gets in. I get the window seat in the middle row next to the two older girls. As we start driving I am informed that it is a pretty long drive (about three hours), so I slouch into my seat and get comfortable. For the whole drive I do not utter a word, except for when I politely decline the offer of a sandwich. I eavesdrop on the conversation between the two girls sitting next to
They are discussing why the one girl decided to come back to camp this summer instead of joining her father on a safari in Africa. I am growing tired, doing nothing and watching the cars on the highway go by. I have never been a fan of cars or driving in them. Then a cheesy 80’s song comes on the radio, and almost everyone joins in singing. I don’t. I don’t really know the song too well, and even if I did I would still be too embarrassed. This is basically how the rest of the drive continues, until we are in a smaller town filled with large, healthy-looking trees and I learn that we are only minutes away. Once again my head is filled with questions. Who will I be living with? Will I like them? Will I make friends? What will camp be like? We pull up to a grassy field by a lake with a few log buildings on it and kids running around. This is it.

Elizabeth S.

Sonnet

When under the starless night
I choose to walk the city streets,
Cradled in arms of lamps whose light
Forms the footpath on which I keep,
I hear from buildings the clamor of life
Yet find myself in a silent sleep
Made of the mind that has run to ice
And born of the footsteps’ endless beats.
I see the shadows and hear clustered talk
Of people in windows lit with yellow glow
But onward and onward I must walk,
The people I can never know.
As the dim light of day appears I once again must leave a place.
The darkened mirror of a puddle shows the passing image of my face.

Noah D.
Sitting Bull

My house had a beautiful backyard. There was a big blue swimming pool, a flower garden full of tulips and begonias, and a grassy field where my brother Paul played soccer with his friends. Paul was twelve then, and he was just beginning to get older. He was a soccer aficionado. He played soccer, watched soccer; you might say he lived for soccer. He ordered Liverpool pajamas from their catalog. One day, he told me, he’d play for them. For Paul, life was just the space between soccer games, and every loss was a step towards glorious victory.

Nobody could match that enthusiasm for soccer besides Ryan, the other striker on Paul’s team, which toured the state all year looking for teams to beat. There was competition between Paul and Ryan over everything, going as far back as I can remember, over soccer, school, and now girls. They fought constantly over the littlest things, but there was never any animosity, not for long anyhow. The victor of one contest was the loser of the next. They took it all in stride.

Paul’s birthday fell on a sweltering August day a few days after his return from summer camp, and he had a birthday party with a dozen friends in our backyard. My parents were driving all the way to Reno to pick up Paul’s birthday present. Thus I found myself awoken mid morning.

“Wake up!” said my father from the doorway, “You’re in charge of Paul’s birthday party. We’re going to pick up his present!” I stumbled down the stairs. Paul warned me that the party was starting soon. I took a shower and wandered around the house finding things, grabbing my hat and sunglasses, a carton of orange juice, The Catcher in the Rye. I made myself comfortable in a lawn chair at the far end of the pool, where I could keep my eye on the party without being involved.

Before I knew it, there were some fifteen kids laughing, screaming, and swimming all around me. I introduced myself to Paul’s friends, and the boys shook my hand and the girls giggled. The sun was burning my arms and legs and it was very hot and humid. I went for a swim in the cool blue water and I felt much better. I went into the kitchen, fixed myself a big steak sandwich, and sat down in a wicker chair on the porch, which was sheltered from the sun and sealed from the moist air. Through the window I watched them run around and yell, though I could not hear what they were saying, like little actors in a silent movie.

They wanted to turn on the grill and cook lunch, and Paul came in to ask me and I said sure. The boys had a hamburger contest. Three of the girls would judge, despite some very serious objections that girls didn’t know good burgers. The amount of intensity and concentration these kids could put into something so trivial amused me. When it came time to pick a winner, the girls chose Paul. The others assumed Paul
had won because it was his birthday, and my laugh at the other boys’ disappointed expressions rang out in the empty house. Suddenly the house was cold and lonely, and I returned to my chair outside. The metal armrests had become very hot in the sun.

The kids lunched quietly on a few tablecloths spread out under a big oak while I watched birds circle in the blue sky. Ryan proposed they have a diving contest and Paul came over and asked me. At first, I was reluctant because the pool was hardly five feet deep, but Ryan demonstrated how you could dive and not come near the bottom with a perfect streamlined shallow-water dive.

“All right, go for it,” I consented, and put down my book to watch. Ryan went first. He took a running start and slipped into the water with hardly a splash, emerging on the other side of the pool with a grin on his face. “Beat that!” he yelled, laughing. Paul went next. He took a running start as well, and as he reached the edge he tripped over the lip of the pool and dove down. I saw his arms and head hit the bottom of the pool, and his body crumple against the hard cement and float to the surface. His friends were in the water before I was. They pulled him out and we lay him down on his back on the hot tiles around the pool. His heart was beating and he was breathing, but he was unconscious. Someone called 911, and an ambulance came and took my brother and me to the hospital while his friends waited in our driveway for their parents. A quickly scrawled note taped to the front door welcomed my parents home. Two soccer goalposts were tied to the top of the car with a big blue bow.

My brother doesn’t go in the pool anymore. Nearly three years later, he still doesn’t much like to be near it. Ryan comes over sometimes, and they watch baseball on television, but I don’t think my brother likes it very much. When Ryan leaves, my brother sits in his chair with a soccer ball in front of him and tries to kick the ball; he puts everything he has got into the effort, but his legs don’t move. After a few seconds that seem like a few hours he stops and moves on. He spends most of these summer days reading and says he wants to coach a soccer team when he’s older. When I help him into bed at night, he still wears his Liverpool pajamas.

_Henry S._
Fantasy: Live

Tight orange pants with wrinkles distract me as
Spectral figures, demon smoking,
Stuck in a seventh-grade mentality,
Huddle together under an awning.
And then one girl flitting glances
At a man she didn’t know was gay,
But no one normal ever blew her mind.
(Deep accidental thundering
From misplaced wires)

And then someone squats beside us,
In the corner, where we sit and wait it out.
And all I see is the thirteen-year-old sweetheart
With her wilting moonlit eyes and small decorative nose
Disfigured, dismantled with an age that swept over her
And left her with pronounced love handles,
Black thongs, tattoos, a cotton tank shirt
Claiming: New Dork

My partners regret their lack of foresight.
How could we be dateless on a night like this?
There’s nothing like the tiki lights
To see that shadow in your
Sweetheart’s smile.

Then the voices,
The voice transfigured into a sickly teenage voice
As if I am hearing candy sing,

Then
Breasts shaking with beat of cymbals
And the light twists around the figure at the drums
Whose orange glitter shirt controls the room.
I am thinking, why are you so grateful,
What does this mean to you?
Then trenchcoat bevies
Disguising age again, but this time the reverse
And disappointment hidden, muffled in inflated voices
While a man with a hyena’s gaze looks on
And hair he wanted to look Bad
And still the noise like a cymbal
Crashing on your skull

Hilarious shuddering voice
As if they want to ram the noise down inside of you
Where’s the alcohol to disassemble the charade says one girl’s pouty eyes
“Why the constant instinct to deceive,” we all hear, or rather
Feel enunciated through his contact with the mike
Songs of misery, “no forgiveness
Only resignation”

Girl realizes that his noise is swallowing
Her voice; where did all this awkwardness begin?
Laughs like a toy doll, wondering how it comes out

And I remain on a girl
In a dress of cashmere stripes
With a slit cut in the front
Whose size has clearly
Thwarted her design
To fully migrate,
Fully become
Object of lust.

And later we talk
She knows her details down like that
And all she doesn’t know, or couldn’t know,
What it is she wouldn’t give for fame.

*Allison B.*
We Are As Ants

It was two months into school and little Billy was already acting out, his latest victim an innocent little fourth grader who was very much like himself at that age. Billy remembered what it was like to be in the fourth grade. He also remembered how badly he had been picked on and swore to himself that he would never allow himself to get into that predicament again. And now little Billy was no longer a scrawny fourth grader but a fifth grader. Billy was the boss.

Something drew Billy to that boy as he scanned the length of the park during recess. There was a little girl wearing plaits—no not good enough; a boy on the swings—too much to lose, he didn’t want to risk the chance that the boy would get seriously hurt—and then the little boy all alone sitting by himself playing with blades of grass. Billy’s memory instantly went to his first few months of school, how he, just like the little boy, would sit alone on the grass. And maybe for some bizarre reason Billy chose this boy to save him, save him from the pain he had suffered just a year ago. But for whatever reason, Billy’s mind was made up. This would be his next target.

As Billy began to lift himself off the concrete slab he was sitting on, he noticed two ants scuffling around next to his right hand. His grandfather’s story was his first thought as he looked at the tiny little ants, his grandfather’s story that he had told him on his deathbed, the last of Billy’s favorite goodnight stories. When he was five those were all he lived for, but when they had stopped Billy had stopped, stopped reading, stopped hoping, stopped dreaming of his grandfather.

Now as he stared intently at these little ants it was almost as if they were reenacting the story. One ant visibly smaller with one antenna missing was fighting over God knows what with a strong healthy ant, “Maybe and probably over nothing,” he heard his grandpa laugh, a deep raspy laugh. “Just showing that he could,” said his grandpa of the big ant, “just showing that he could.” He meant the conversation the big ant and the little ant were having as they were fighting, the big ant exerting its power when deep inside it knew that it too was handicapped, that the very reason it was taunting the small deformed ant could just as easily happen to him.

“Don’t be the big ant,” Billy’s grandfather had said. “Be the small ant because although it may not seem like it, that teeny little ant is ten times as strong as that big ant. That small ant is living with its problems; that big ant though, he’s taking it out on the little one instead of working out his problems. Goodnight Billy.” Billy remembered it, and for the first time in a long time his grandfather was present in his life.

As Billy reached for a stick he realized it wasn’t worth it. The little ant was just living his life. Billy lured the small ant onto the stick and slowly carried it to a
shady spot under a tree. Billy was done with sticks, done with ants, and for the first time since his grandfather’s death Billy was going, he was actually doing something, something good. And when he looked over to that spot where his ex-target had been sitting, he was gone. In Billy’s mind he knew that the boy had found his shady spot under a tree.

Lauren B.

For Emily Dickinson

I.
No need to be sadistic
On Wild Nites,
Wild Nites,
No look of agony
Is true on Wild
Nites, Wild Nites,
Illusions—Disillusioned
Looking on true bodies of agony
On Wild Nites,
Slightly Secluded,
Seduced slightly subdued—

You would have liked Emily Bronte.

II.
Sun, I expected you This morn,
Quiet the Morning air did fly—
But on His wings—you did not come—
And left me alone to rise.

I waited for you by the door,
Looked for Your glory at noon—
But waiting in the end forsook me—
Though I thought I saw the moon.

Hannah Z.
Raspberries were better, he always said
So, I said so too
Jammed, jellied, extracted and juiced
Into pops and suckers—
But, best, he knew,
Plucked from thorny brambles,
Swollen warm from the sun
In our sweaty, sticky paws
Dyed with the Technicolor nectar
of ices, losing their cool.
Summer whites smeared
With our pulpy fingerprints
Our collars dampened and wipe across our muzzles
Stained, ruddied, and crimsoned—
A makeshift napkin.
Reaching in deep
He’d find the prize-winning berry
   The diamond in the rough
   The ruby in the brush
Popping that fruit into his cherry mouth
I saw satisfaction, I’d never have
Forbidden to me because I lied,
Saying raspberries were better.
I cry over those plucked berries,
Now fermenting before my eyes
At the bottom of my bowl,
Wishing they were a different fruit.

Mariela Q.
Punish This!

I am sticking
to My guns. My laser guns. No more listening
to your stupid orders, your stinkin’ rules.
I will stand My ground,
ya hear?
I don’t need your PB & J

anymore. I am sick of your dumb PB & J
anyway, too slimy, too creepy and too crawly and I hate having sticky
fingers. Just wait till next time you try this, so I can hear
you beg, you won’t get off easy, because I won’t even listen.
Not to you. Ever. Never, ever again. Ha! You lie on the jelly-covered ground
and I will be your King, ruling

over you, giving you orders, My orders, you will follow My rules
’cause I am your torturer, Death Star, mwahahaha, just like a jelly
fish, not those harmless moon ones, but gianormous killer ones you like ground
up in that sicko seaweed take-out stuff you eat with those sticks
you stick in your hair, you look like an alien, from the toilet! You’d better listen
or I’ll sting you with my tentacles, and you won’t even hear

me as I sneak up behind you, for I am a secret spy with superduper-sonic hearing
so that I can watch you squeal like a blood-gushing pig, as I, the Ruler
of My Kingdom, laugh without stopping for three million years, listening
only a little, as My slaves make Me a peanut butter sandwich—no jelly
or crust (of course, I hate the way you make it)—I can do as I please, with you stuck
in a shoebox, or in an underground
dungeon, with nothing to eat but ground
up crusts, and all you can hear
is Me, jellifying your walls, chewing my PB sandwich with my mouth open, ’cause you’re stuck
locked in, frozen in an ice cube, because only My rules
apply now! And I will pour tons and tons of rotten jelly,
which I didn’t eat (hahaha) slowly over your head, and all this because you didn’t listen

to MY rules, like I didn’t listen to your stupid dumb unfair smelly ones…I really didn’t
hear you, I didn’t know I had to eat the whole sandwich, o.k.? Here’s My warning: next time you
try to ground Me, hide all the Smuckers, ‘cause you’re gonna get it, mom.

Sinead D.
A Collision

I was on my way to school, and it was not one of my better days. My hair seemed to stick out at ninety-degree angles from my head while tufts of hair dropped in my eyes like flies tickling an aggravated arm. Nothing could be worse than both a math and science test on the same day, especially ones that I hadn’t prepared for. Except for the fact that those were my first two classes. With every step I took my bag seemed to get heavier and dread seeped into my stomach. The sidewalk was so immensely crowded that I had to navigate like a fish through murky water. I darted in and out, focusing primarily on the ground ahead of me but also on people’s feet clomping only inches from my own. What was the math test on anyway? Had he even told us? Maybe I was making the whole thing up and we didn’t have a test after all. In my head I started going through all the algebraic rules I could be remember. That was when I started losing track of where I was going. People became questions from my algebra homework, their feet were my wrong answers, and the sidewalk was my page.

A man with a hunched back and long gray beard held out a paper for me at a street corner. “Free. Save the . . .” I pushed past him, hardly listening. There were only a few more blocks to go. I swept my hands frantically through my hair to try to unsnarl ferocious tangles, but to no avail. “Faster, faster,” I thought. “I’m almost there. I might as well get this over with.” My eyes came into focus again only as I stumbled over my own untied shoelaces and found myself in the chest of an old lady. Her penciled eyebrows first arched up in surprise and then furrowed down in disgust. Her arms that pleated like my uniform skirt pushed me away. “S-s-sorry,” I stammered, too shocked at myself to say anything else. A grunt was her response. She was one of those old ladies who would whack a young person on the head with her newspaper if they were doing something wrong, and at that moment I thought I was that young person. But all she said was “Tie those shoelaces missy. You could trip.” She then continued to hobble along, her short legs shuffling insecurely over the cracks in the sidewalk. I was left to stand and gape at her, as everyone else pushed past me. Once the initial shock was over, though, I remembered my other, bigger crisis. I ran the rest of the way to school and managed to slip in the door just before the late bell rang.

*     *     *

I was a wreck. At age seventy-two I looked like a dying beast. If only I could have been young again. There were so many things I would have changed. If only I had married Bill Gates I would have been the richest woman in the world. Alas, I did not
and was therefore stuck with Edgar. I would have hated leaving him anyway; we had been together for over forty years. The dates and times escaped me. I was an elderly woman and my mind was not what it once had been. Sometimes, I would say that I needed something from the cabinet, and by the time I got there, I’d have forgotten what it was I had wanted.

I was making my daily trip to the corner store for a carton of milk. It was for my cat, Sherman. That was the only thing I hoped never to forget. My dear Sherman was a gray cat who was half as old as me and almost half my size as well. He hardly ever moved from my couch, and Edgar, for the most part, was there to keep him company. When Edgar or Sherman did get up, my imagination envisioned that there was a small indent in the couch where they had been sitting. The gold couch fabric was fraying at the bottom and the wooden legs had become Sherman’s scratching post. He was a very spoiled cat and needed his milk every morning.

So, I was ambling down the street to the store. It was a very crowded morning and many bothersome people kept getting in my way. My rights as an old lady say that I get my share of sidewalk space. If only I had brought along my newspaper I could have used it to show them what I was made of. About halfway there I caught sight of a girl. She was almost running, and right towards me. Her eyes were focused on the ground, her bag swinging like a wild animal against her hip. She had a round face with high cheekbones and red lips that pursed naturally. She was a pretty girl, or at least pretty enough to stand out in the crowd. Maybe it was her hair. Well, at that moment a Fed Ex truck honked a remarkably deafening screech, so I turned my head. When I turned back, I almost slammed my face into the girl’s. I thought she ran into me purposely, thinking she was stronger than I. On the other hand, maybe she was trying to steal my purse. I had taken a self-defense class before, and I could hold onto my own handbag. Anyway, the girl’s eyes stared into mine and it was like she made no connection with them. I, glaring back into hers, found them blank. She was scared of me, I was sure. And I was glad of it. I was a strong woman so I gave her a fierce look but she still didn’t say anything. Finally she murmured, “Sorry,” and started to run off, but I told her, “Tie those shoelaces, missy. You could trip.”

*Catherine C.*
Mort stepped out of the red jeep truck, slamming the door behind him. The early morning sun glinted against the rearview mirror and he slowly walked towards the swamp, mud squelching against his sensible brown boots. He rolled up the sleeves of his red flannel hunting jacket while he walked. His blond hair hung in his face and he stepped slowly.

Mort had come to hunt the gators. The gators had been in Melrose Bay for years and Mort had been hunting since he was a kid. He liked hunting; it made him happy. He stepped slowly towards the reeds, lifting his gun and grabbing for any spare branches on the shore. The wind was quiet and he could hear his breath.

He did not see any gators, but he knew that they would show eventually. They always did and he always shot them. Sometimes he would throw a stick at them first. He would fool them into thinking he was harmless and then he would take out his .9 buckshot gun and shoot the bastards dead. Mort was a cheerful kind of guy. He coached Little League soccer and basketball and worked at a gas station.

He was known as a good guy and he did nothing to discourage that reputation. Now, however, he held his head to the right and stared at the marsh. He whistled under his breath, barely noticing the way that the muddy water soaked into his blue jeans.

“Gator, gator, gaaa,” he sung under his breath. His voice was low and tuneless. He saw a green head bobbing with a row full of white pointed teeth. He smiled and shot.

When he was done, he took the jeep and headed onto the highway without his catch. He always wanted to take them home but he knew that Sally would not like it. He thought that a gator head would be a very good thing to have.

He drove slowly once he got to the freeway, stopping only for a cup of coffee at Dunkin’ Donuts. He did not buy a donut. The coffee tasted like shit and was filled to the brim with cream. He dumped two sugars in it.

He sat at a plastic table with his styrofoam cup clutched in his right hand. He looked around the store idly. On his right, a blond girl in a black sweatshirt and ripped jeans was busy stealing sugar packets. Two old men sat playing cribbage in a nearby booth. There were not too many other people around. This did not bother him. He sat there for a long time, smiling slightly.

He drove to work and arrived in time for his twelve o’clock shift. It was a difficult job but he would never get credit for it. It had seemed simple on the application; he had only to stock the shelves, pump the gas, and wipe the counters. He had not counted on smiling at the township folks everyday.

“Smile, smile, smile,” he thought mockingly to himself and went in. He was good at his job; they had given him a plaque once. That had not made him less bitter.
When his shift was done for the day, he drove his truck home slowly. He stumbled through the door and made his way to his room. He sat on the bed with its neat white sheets and set the alarm for six o’clock again. He cradled his head with his right hand and closed his eyes. He dreamt of the gators that he would see again the next morning.

*Bianca S.*

We walked amidst the marshes
Collecting mist and mud
In mud and shoes

The moon glares down upon us
Not coldly, but curious
Entitled to a tally of the swirling
World below her, to record
The exponential growth of babies,
Lovers parading in pairs and triples,
Negative depressions in dark-eyed men
Or the infinite ebullience of that blue-eyed boy
Who casts a soft glance (stealthily) at his brown-eyed girl

We’ve walked these marshes before, you and I
Treading a pace or two behind, little feet
Squishing in the mud as it tires to devour me.
(You said you would never let me be devoured
—not even by the most moist dirt there ever was)
But your guiding shoe prints are yet a pace or two
Ahead, digging ditches in the marsh, wide enough
For any hasty and hungry quicksand

*Nora S.*
Now dreading in her heart the time to come,
Half-dying with fatigue, the tiredness
Long, languid days build up, intrepid Kate,
That corner-dweller, hailed her RA
Sweet-tempered Megan, praying to the gods
For verdict better than what she had heard.
And lo, with winged words the messenger
Of those above freed sleek-haired Katie’s mind
From care—“The dance, they tell me, will be held
Outside; the rain’s let up enough.” News filled
With joy for you, shy Kate, whose soul took rest
In quiet—joy, as when a child, who
Has sown the seeds of some small plant, stood long
In vigil till the day it sprouts, poured out
Sweet water from the Appalachian hills
Upon the earth about its roots, at last
Bears witness to its glorious first bloom,
With petals like the sun. He plucks it then,
The flower a golden splendor breathing scent,
And carries it through ashlar halls to where
His sashed and lovely mother waits, hands furled
In her expectant lap; she smiles at
His gift, extends white arms around him—his
Reception gives him joy. So was the joy
Of Katie, book-devourer, when she learned
The lord of thunder clouds had spared her from
The clash and heat of Terpsichore’s rites.

*Katherine B.*
To the Management of Chez Babollena:

I had a traumatizing visit to your restaurant this evening so I am writing immediately to warn you of the changes you must make. Your establishment is rife with health code violations, your wait service is rude and lazy, the atmosphere is oppressive, and I don’t mean this in a judgmental way, but your clientele is rather distasteful. Apparently my 2004 copy of Fodor’s is outdated because it praises Chez Babollena as “classy,” “a New York sanctuary for cultural sophisticates,” and “home of the famous raspberry tart that tingles each sense with each bite.” I may not be a food critic, but I tried that very tart, and it almost made me sick! If there aren’t some fast changes, excuse me, but I will make motions to get this place closed down!

I arrived exactly at 8:00, and indeed my name was at the top of the list—table for two, 8:00—there was no mistaking the time and the table and yet, and yet—it pains me to re-visit this dreadful moment, but re-visit I will—your hostess refused to seat me! Imagine that! Directly below the names of myself and my husband were the names of two young newlyweds and they were seated before me. That’s right, they had an 8:15 reservation, far from being an 8:00 reservation, but just because my date hadn’t arrived, I was told I would not be able to sit, and this uppity, overly-happy, fake little duo was seated before me! Outrageous, that’s the one word I’ve got for those sorts of shenanigans. Outrageous, ridiculous, unfair, tragic!

By 9:00, when Richard still hadn’t shown up, the hostess finally had the courtesy to seat me. And I’ll tell you another thing. With the Chez Babollena prices you simply cannot afford to eat enough to get even close to full, as at the end of the evening I was still hungry! Now we get to the tart. Nothing has ever lacked appeal or flavor or originality or pizzazz as much as that “famous” raspberry tart! Perhaps it’s because I hadn’t liked my appetizer or entrée, but honestly, I somehow knew I wouldn’t enjoy that tart one bit. Richard used to work at a bakery, and he’d bring home the most amazing tarts, delightful sugary strawberry or kiwi things, and we’d drink cider and talk about—I guess my point is that I went into that restaurant with a pretty high standard for the quality of the tart-eating experience, and when I sat there alone in Chez Babollena, I had completely the wrong kind of experience, and even if the tart wasn’t so awful, I’ve had better, and I would certainly not recommend this tart to anyone, especially not someone who wants to go to a restaurant for a pleasant, romantic anniversary dinner...

But some people prefer to forget anniversaries, I suppose…I mean we’re talking about Chez Babollena here, let’s not get side-tracked, the waiter snapped at me! He folded my napkin all wrong, and when I made an honest, perfectly fair comment about it, he said in this terrible uncaring tone that I was complaining over
nothing. I did sort of raise my voice a few notches, but then he got quite rude with me and even went so far as to tell me I shouldn’t drink so much at a locale as classy as Chez Babollena! Yeah, sure, what he meant was a locale as trashy and depressing as Chez Babollena! I practically expected to see rodents and cockroaches and for there to be plumbing problems in the bathrooms, and hair in the potatoes, and no end of disgusting infestations, so clearly, your restaurant is very good at hiding all of its downfalls and fooling innocent customers into thinking they’re getting their money’s worth and not being secretly food-poisoned, but…

I’m sorry. Maybe if my husband of thirty years had remembered our 8:00 table, which I told him about a million times, then Chez Babollena would have seemed “classy” and like a perfect “New York sanctuary for cultural sophisticates.” Maybe I would be able to say that the writers for Fodor’s do, indeed, know exactly what they are talking about, and maybe I would have thought the waiters were kind individuals just doing their jobs, and maybe the dainty vase of flowers on the table wouldn’t have seemed to be so blatantly mocking me in my aloneness. Well, now you know exactly how I feel about your establishment and now that I know exactly how I feel, I’ll be giving Richard a call. Thank you for your time.

Good luck with your business.

Sincerely,
A concerned patron

Eva D.

Why aren’t there black people
On Friends? Because you notice
The damn difference

Charley S.
Spring Deferred

What are you doing here, poet, on the ruins
Of your promise this sunny
Day in spring?
Surely you understood that
Luxury was the standard
Of our soul.
Surely you realized
(As you dressed in suit and tie)
That the dreams of children are
Meaningless.

And yet,
The weeping
Of young grass,
Which pushes through
The old and cracking pavement
With a force immeasurable,
Draws me from my winter’s slumber
To protest
Your hurried sleepwalk
That tramples my green
Core.

You can’t have
Stopped
To pen a verse of such
Inconsequence.

And yet,
I have.

Sam B.
Sign over Horizon (Horizontal Axis)

Lately I have not been able to do things I could to their full capacity, 
like a toothbrush kept for so long, my mind’s bristles 
weather from the storm of practice 
and soften to the point that they now seem confused and 
long to stroke and hug the things they used to scrub away and remorselessly send into 
the 
exile 
of my spit, bound to journey 
through the pipes of the sink and water companies, in for a more exciting time than ever I am or will be. 
My point is that I used to be able to title any work of mine 
cleverly, and before I wrote it, for I would always know the subject. 
Now I find myself having to think at 
a blank screen with every writer’s worst nightmare 
(or mine anyway) 
*New Microsoft Word Document.doc.* 
I shudder just thinking about all the scrubbing of my brain I do, or try to do, 
while these words stare at me, the witty conclusion 
at the end of a freestyle, able to shut down anything I have to say. 
By far the worst creative tool is a word processor, and while the 
worst of these is, to my knowledge, 
**Word Perfect,** 
I still feel *New Microsoft Word Document* inherently threatening to anyone 
with a computer. 
It is not Microsoft’s; it is mine. 
And this reflection does not rid 
myself 
of the fact that there is a white screen bearing down 
on 
me 
like the Johnson Treatment, 
though no one asked me whether I wanted to be treated like a president, 
or which one for that matter. 
Either way, though, it is too much responsibility. 
And back to my point, the monitor is treating me, blank 
like when you brush your teeth without
toothpaste, just to get a good midday scrub in, and it tastes like licorice for some reason, and you hate licorice. Everyone hates licorice; how does it make any money?!? And the screen envelops me like Kennedy, did I say Adams? I meant Monroe.

... I mean Johnson, Johnson.

... So I observe the room, all the things I usually miss (O how idleness makes one more aware!), and I am reminded of the time my first semester Spanish teacher told me, “You are the kind of student, who, when a fly is in the room…” and rather than finishing the sentence he makes finger motions pointing to the direction of the fly while staring straight at me, but I understood. Hell, I looked at where he was pointing, but the fly had fled, flew.

Which is kind of cheap because flying entails much less danger than other aerial methods of transportation, because you have control over when and whether you will fall, not that this is a poem or anything.

And that has always been partly the reason I would rather have Spider-Man’s “power” (because it is not, technically speaking, his power, but we, as a society, have come to accept that web-slinging is included in the package) than Superman’s, because that added danger makes it more exciting, like trying cinnamon toothpaste after using mint for so long that it no longer does anything for your breath, though I did see a weird orange flavored toothpaste, which surprised me because every fruit-flavored food product is usually horrible tasting, orange more so than the others.

We seem to have gone off on a tangent, so if I may bring us back to the focus of this conversation, my mind is deteriorating, or have you forgotten? It really is too bad, because I am not really that old,
which I say in place of my exact age in order to 
relate to as many people as possible; otherwise, 
some of you would lose interest and suddenly find yourselves 
enamored by a fly, or how the first few layers of your skin are transparent, 
or by the inner workings of a walking ladder, which are hard to understand when you 
do not have one with you, so give up now.  
And, as I was saying, 
I, really, 
do not want to talk 
about my mind right now.  

Pierce D.

The smoke that seeps from your lips surrounds us, 
cradling our bodies in a smooth, silky haze.  
Translucent memories 
and mingled desires 
pollute both the sky and my mind, 
making me believe that when you look my way 
you see me, 
and when our kneecaps clash 
you care.  
But you 
lost in your world of fog 
and I in my whispers of hope 
share no such connection.  
Soon you will put out your cigarette, 
the shadows of sentiment will clear, 
and I will be left nothing but whispers 
and the smell of your smoke 
in my hair.  

Jeanna P.
On page 217 of my 300-page autobiography I eat a turkey sandwich for lunch.

“A turkey sandwich?” you say. Yes. A turkey sandwich. With one piece of whole wheat bread on top,
a piece of iceberg lettuce,
two slices of tomato,
the turkey,
a piece of Swiss cheese,
and another piece of whole-wheat bread on the bottom.

“Nothing special,” you remark. Hmmm. You think it’s nothing special. I wonder what your reaction would be if I told you that with my first bite of this sandwich I chew my first piece of meat in 41 years, at the age of 50.

You are not alarmed by this occurrence, are you? Well, I guess it’s not such a big deal. I have not eaten meat in 41 years, and then I wake up one morning and decide that meat is no longer revolting to me and that animal rights do not really matter. Fair enough; I guess we all go through sudden changes at some point in our lives.

But what happens when I eat this turkey sandwich? My body has been craving this evil poultry for so long that I must buy another sandwich. I run to the nearest deli and the man stares wide-eyed and warily at me as he throws together my sandwich. He watches (probably disgusted and scared that I am rabid) the saliva drip down my chin and the look on my face because no matter how hard I try I cannot take my eyes off the turkey. When he hands me the sandwich I throw money at the counter and tear the paper off as I run out the door.

I spend the whole afternoon, evening, and long into the night eating meat from ten different delicatessens and grocery stores. “Now, this is becoming slightly outrageous,” you think. Well, maybe, but it is entirely plausible. You reluctantly agree.

This is the part that is really troubling me.

So after I eat all of this meat that my body has been craving for 41 years, I realize that my body no longer recognizes this substance and that I am now having an allergic reaction to the several pounds of meat that I have allowed into my system. I do not comprehend this quickly enough to call for help, and on page 219 of my 300-page autobiography, I die.

Puzzling, is it not? I meant to live until I was 70 and fill those 81 pages with the rest of my life. Do I go on to discuss the way my children have dealt with my will? Or are the remaining 81 pages just blank?

Flannery S.
He’d fallen down, tripped on a log during a morning jog in the forest that lay a block over, and then a hill and a couple of houses away from his own home. It wasn’t a park, but if it was a real forest, it had always felt relatively dead. It was deep enough that, if one stood on the hills near the entrance, or at the valley in the middle, the houses on the sides would be out of sight. But on the other side of the valley he could see backyards and hear a dog barking frighteningly. In the center of the valley was a decomposing VW Beetle, and it was his interest in the rusty car that had caused him to miss his footing and fall down the hill.

He lay in the leaves and for once couldn’t hear the dog barking. The forest was less decayed than he’d always assumed—when he could only hear the dog and his own feet, in any case. The wind couldn’t hit him, but it was shaking the trees above, and a leaf fell on his stomach. The leaves he was lying on were dry on the top and wet on the bottom, and he didn’t want to take the effort to push himself all the way up, so he stayed still. A beetle crawled over his arm, and an ant crawled over his face. The leaves on the ground couldn’t stay in one place—they were always shaking or blowing or being crawled upon. He was, it seemed, the only thing in the forest heavy or solid enough not to move. There were very few birds, but they were there, and they made some noise.

He saw a disgusting insect on a wavering shrub a few feet away and jumped up, shaken. Then he continued to jog until he was, again, the only thing moving.

_Sateesh D._

The Cold, that mocking force, she plays with me.
I hide, I fight, I sneak around,
But snarling with her dogged teeth, she never lets me go.
Her virulent caress pinches at my will,
And to stay above the surface I am forced to retreat
Into the conflagration of my own gurgling veins—the only warmth that remains.
Provocatively she skips around, encompassing me,
And I think I can withstand her; but just as sovereignty begins to soothe the scars,
The reins are tightened, and I am dragged back on all fours.
And now she has triumphed.
Reducing me to primal instincts, I feel her fermenting in my lungs.
My heart will pump, and age will come, but Cold, all-powerful, has drained me.

_Catherine L._
Max faced me abruptly. How I hated that kid. Ever since our first day at the Moscow Kindergarten under the tutelage of the master Mr. Taylor, there had been bad blood simmering between us. I liked Michael Jackson and he liked dinosaurs. I had tried to accommodate him. I walked around with talons for fingers, gnashing my teeth all the way, just like Max and his hoodlums. But at night I would shiver and resent how I whored myself to make life easier. As I lay staring at the ceiling listening to *Thriller* or *Dangerous* (often misfed tapes playing backward), I would send my thoughts over to Michael and ask him to forgive my trespasses.

Max had already seen me for a faker and a fraud. The only dinosaur I cared about was the mastodon, simply because I like yelling “Mastodon battle!” But that trick, once seen as hip and somehow dangerous, was growing old and I was either unable or unwilling to broaden my repertoire. I can’t remember.

Things came to a head in the middle of 1993, one wintry snack time. I had outshone him in standing in line for recess, leaving him to take the back. Mr. Taylor yelped, “Last but not least: Max!” causing the young ruffian to burst into regretful tears. Now, in snack time, I had cookies with gloop, the envy of everyone. Throwing his weight around, Max approached me. He stood facing me, in the way of my arm.

“Gimme those cookies!” he shouted like a Neanderthal.

“The fuck you kidding?” I wanted to know. “Stand back, G. You’s about to receive one bad whooping.”

Hoping he would be sufficiently impressed by my mastery of the urban vernacular, I tried to turn away. But before I could process the light pressure on my arm, it had turned into a searing incision. Max had chomped down on my forearm. He raised his head, a flap of skin dangling from his mouth, blood all over his teeth. In shock I glanced at my own arm. Most of the skin was hanging by a thread and I could see the sinewy muscles staring back at me. I sweated from the pain. Now, in life, when someone slaps you, you must always turn the other cheek.

I quickly pistol-whipped him. It knocked his leftmost front tooth out.

“You think I’m playing around? Muthafucka, you ain’t laying one hand on these muthafuckin cookies, as sweet as if God’s blood had topped them.”

Max stood up fiercely. “You will not take the Lord’s name in vain!” He ran for me. I began to panic. My pistol was in my hand, sure, but four years old was far too young for a manslaughter conviction.

I did the only thing I could do. I screamed, “Mastodon battle!”

Max halted in his steps and began to laugh at me. I hated myself for being such a fool. Just then there was a massive pounding on the door. Mr. Taylor got up
from his bed and answered it slowly. He was immediately crushed by the powerful foot of a mastodon.

The classroom erupted in cheers! The mastodons, four in number, entered wearing party hats and carrying piñatas. They immediately went about their work, using children’s toes as nails and hammering them in with their club fists. “Who wants a wammer jammer party?” one of them asked the crowd. The students who weren’t bleeding to death cheered again.

The smallest mastodon peered around the room from behind his spectacles. Spotting the hi-fi in the corner, he crossed the room (flattening the TA) and selected from the stack of CD’s Lesley Gore’s 1959 hit “It’s My Party and I’ll Cry If I Want To.” The dinosaurs all spontaneously began to boogie. I was impressed with their moves. They knew the twist, the watusi, and more.

They began to play piñata, selecting Imogen, the largest girl in the class and using her as a bludgeon. Chaos erupted when the first piñata burst, scattering lollipops all over the place. Most of the class was decimated in the ensuing carnage, as four excited mastodons fell all over themselves to collect the sweets. Max was among those lost, and I felt a certain sense of gratification.

That night, after saying my prayers, I telepathically thanked Michael Jackson and the mastodons. It had been a groovy day.

Oliver I.

Bathroom Walls

The year we write this is our last
and will be yours, so listen fast.
We know it’s farthest from your mind,
it will draw close, so please be kind.
What you live now was once our life,
the center of our joy and strife.
What we live now I do not know,
we went just like you have to go.
We once felt the teacher’s lash,
but hope we have since made a splash.
We don’t know if we have gained fame,
you may have never heard our name
But know that once, before we went,
we sat here, and dreamt.

Benedict L.-M.
Why Wouldn’t We?

REED and JUDITH BROWNE sit in their living room in their suburban Wisconsin home in the late morning. A medium-sized dining table sits on the middle of the stage, which they sit at opposite sides of, in chairs. Various items are sprawled across the table, although in a rather neat manner. Mostly food items, such as some fruit, a couple of pastries, and perhaps a bagel or two.

They are an average-seeming couple, in their mid-to-late 50s. They are both reading (JUDITH the newspaper, REED a rather thick novel) and look like they couldn’t have anything else to do with each other. A strong silence fills the room, but there’s no sense of anger or irritation between them, just general boredom and disinterest. It would be safe to guess that neither has said a word in several hours.

(A long silence)

JUDITH: Hey, Reed...

REED: Yes?

(REED looks up from his novel)

JUDITH: Have you heard about this facial transplant surgery?

REED: What are you talking about?

JUDITH: This business where they take one person’s face, remove it, and then place it on someone else’s facial...area.

REED: Well, why would anyone want to do that?

JUDITH: If a person needed a new face.

REED: If their old one was ugly?

JUDITH: No, silly, if they really NEEDED it. For instance, if you were in a bad fire and your face was all icky and melted. If you wanted to look normal again. I mean, you know, people say appearance isn’t everything, but if your face was all deformed like that, you probably would be significantly less happy. I mean, you know, the difference in quality of life must be astounding. Just having the milkman be able to look you in the eye must make everything so much better.

REED: I still think it’s silly. Where do they get the faces from?

JUDITH: Ummm....(She scans the article for the answer) Ah, here, they take them
from dead people.

REED: You mean the scientists dig up graves and then steal the corpses' faces?

JUDITH: No, the people agree to donate their faces to science before they die. It’s just like being an organ donor.

REED: Except creepy.

JUDITH: How is it any creepier than being an organ donor?

REED: If you donate your liver to some guy, your kids aren’t going to see him walking down the street and think “Wow, that man has our dead father’s liver!” They wouldn’t be able to tell. Think about it. What would you do if you saw some guy walking around with my EXACT face after I had died. My face just sewn on to some guy’s head.

JUDITH: They don’t sew the faces on, they surgically graft them.

REED: That’s not the point. How would you react?

JUDITH: I guess it might...creep me out. A bit.

REED: Yeah.

(They look at each other blankly for a moment, then go back to reading. Another painfully long silence)

JUDITH: Hey, Reed...

REED: Yes?

(Pause)

JUDITH: Do you want to have sex?

(Pause. REED looks up from his book for a moment to think)

REED: Sure, some time, yes.

(REED goes back to his book. Pause)

JUDITH: I meant right now.

(Pause. REED lifts his head up again)

REED: Well, that’s just silly.

JUDITH: Why?

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REED: It’s just a ridiculous thing for you to ask right now.

(Pause)

JUDITH: But, why?

REED: This would be an awful time to have sex.

JUDITH: I don’t understand why you think this.

REED: Well…I’m halfway through this chapter. I never like to stop in the middle of chapters.

JUDITH: Then let’s do it after you finish.

REED: Well, the chapters in this book are very long.

JUDITH: You’re halfway through. It’s fine, I’ll wait until you finish, and then we will have sex.

REED: Look, I really don’t feel like having sex right now.

JUDITH: I told you I’m more than willing to wait a bit.

REED: I don’t want to anytime in the immediate future, okay?

JUDITH: I would like some reasoning, Reed.

REED: I’m just…not in the…mood.

JUDITH: You’re never in the mood!

REED: Oh, that’s not true.

JUDITH: Reed, please name the last time you were in the mood.

REED: Whenever we do it I’m in the mood.

JUDITH: Well then, what was the last time you made love to me, Mr. Browne?

REED: Why, it was just the other day.

JUDITH: Remind me, please.

REED: The other day, we had some sex, it was nice.

JUDITH: My memory is hazy, please give me some details of a specific instance.

(REED thinks hard about this for a second)
REED: Ah, here, I remember it clearly. I came home late from work, Joey was at his high school prom, and we decided to take advantage of our free house by having sex on the living room couch. There. That was some good sex.

JUDITH: You retired five years ago. Joey has graduated from college.

(Pause)

REED: Oh...wow.

JUDITH: Exactly.

(Pause)

REED: I’m sorry it’s been so long.

JUDITH: Don’t apologize, just have sex with me. I don’t understand this. You’re procrastinating about making love to me. Your wife! This is sex, you know, it’s not some sort of ancient Chinese torture. It is something humans look forward to frequently participating in, especially with people they claim to be in love with. Do you not love me anymore, Reed?

REED: No, I do.

JUDITH: I don’t believe it.

REED: It’s true!

JUDITH: Show me.

(REED looks Judith directly in the eye)

REED: I love you, Judith.

(Pause)

JUDITH: Yeah, that will do.

REED: Wait, you’re not going to tell me you love me?

JUDITH: No, well, I mean, you know that.

REED: Oh, I do?

JUDITH: Yes, it’s not a topic for debate.

REED: I need to prove my love for you, but you’re just automatically in the clear?

JUDITH: Yes, that’s exactly how it works.
REED: I don’t think that’s fair.

JUDITH: Remember, I’m the one who wanted to have sex!

REED: I didn’t NOT want to have sex with you!

JUDITH: Then why aren’t we having sex right now?

(Long silence)

REED: I never thought we’d be one of those couples.

JUDITH: One of which couples?

REED: Those couples who aren’t even interested in having sex with each other anymore.

JUDITH: I wanted to have sex!

REED: But be serious here. You know if I had said sex, you would have found an excuse not to. You liked the concept of us having sex, but you didn’t really want to.

JUDITH: That’s not true.

(Pause)

JUDITH: Can I ask you...

REED: Yes.

JUDITH: You didn’t even know what I was going to ask.

REED: I assume it’s going to be okay with me.

JUDITH: Why don’t you want to have sex with me?

(Pause. REED sighs deeply)

REED: It’s just that when you’re so used to having something good available to you at all times you start to take it for granted.

JUDITH: What?

REED: Hmm... for instance, right now, I like pizza because it’s a special treat of sorts. It still has some mystique left in it. But let’s say I worked at a pizzeria. Now, having pizza around me all the time, it’s no longer all that enticing. I know everything about pizza, heck, I even make it. There’s no mystery. And having it around me all the time
makes me not want it anymore, because I know if I don’t have it now it’ll always be available to me later, so I just keep pushing it off to later.

JUDITH: Did you just equate me to a pizzeria?

REED: Yes, I did, I’m sorry. But do you get what I’m saying?

JUDITH: I guess so.

REED: You do know I still love you.

JUDITH: Yeaaaa...

REED: And I still find you unbelievably attractive.

JUDITH: Honestly?

REED: You’re more beautiful now than the day I met you.

JUDITH: You’re just saying that.

REED: I’m not. It is true. I just think we both need to understand that we’re not kids anymore. Sex seemed like the most exciting thing we could do back then, but now we’re more mature, and we understand that having an intellectually stimulating conversation can be just as exhilarating as sex was to us back then. We’re in our fifties now, we’re getting old. Sex might have been the greatest when we were in our twenties, but it’s just not as fun now. We’re both not as good, you must admit that. I find other enjoyable things to do with you. Even if it’s just us sitting here reading quietly like we were this morning, being in the same room as you makes me happier than anything else in the world could.

(JUDITH smiles. She leans in and kisses REED. After a little while JUDITH pulls away, and both go back to reading, though they seem much happier now. Long silence)

REED: You really want to have sex, don’t you?

JUDITH: Yes, very much so.

(REED closes his book and stands up)

REED: Fine, let’s do it.

JUDITH: Sure, let me just finish this article.

(Blackout)

Griffin N.
At the Start of a New Year

I can’t say some other things, so I say this.

—Stephanie Brown

(In the beginning, my words aren’t working and you, muse, are not here to give them to me and no one else’s will do the trick and these words have been boiling in me for a long time except there were no words, nothing to spill over, so it’s just hot air.)

In the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, where the ceilings are so high they evoke dizziness, a feeling of confused right-side-up-downness, a thousand voices float in a midnight mass from back forward from down up; smoking incense, swinging forth-back-forth-back wafting, pushing upwards, mingles between the vibrations of song.

And her voice, distinctive, one in a thousand, rose above the rest.

Just as Lazarus rose from the grave so she does now: in song and smoke and ash she is yet she is buried beneath us, buried entombed buried in our memories.

Memories of Chinese food on Christmas Eve and of a Japanese tale about a multitude of origami birds and of one expansive tree climbing to the Cathedral ceiling strung round with a thousand pristine-white angelic paper cranes, ascending, a symbol of hope;
And we never even reached a thousand,
a subconscious desire not to test hope
at the risk of being left with only excuses.
And either way, she has long since been broken
into a thousand pieces and folded into cranes
for someone else, everyone else
one thousandth for everyone.

I can’t say she was my muse, is my muse
I can’t say these words are worthy
I can’t say I’m writing this for her
I can’t say I’m writing this for me
I can’t say there is no selfish hope of release
I can’t say poetry is selfless
I can’t say some other things, so I say this.

—In memory of Christina Porter, January 1, 1984–January 16, 2005

Joanna B.
Brooklyn Naps

A midnight walk through leaves. Thousands of stoplights change just for them.

*Benedict L.-M.*