SAINT ANN’S
LITERARY MAGAZINE

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We dedicate this magazine to Stanley Bosworth with love and gratitude.
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We are the first on earth to whistle

Singing did not come first.
We were whistling before that
In the peat bogs
And the volcanic deserts
That captured our footprints.
When the glaciers engulfed our homes
We were whistling.

It was not the birds that taught us
Nor was it the wind.
We taught ourselves
Before the burden of speech opened our lips
And pushed itself into the world.

Even then, we did not sing,
But as we crossed the Neander Valley
We were whistling.

Annie H
shortly after the woman in blue asks “tea or coffee?”

i can no longer tell if i’m smiling
because of you or because
i’ve never been more diluted
all this time i haven’t
stood or thought or looked
away from the double-paned window
little lights drumming in ear-deafening flickers
i would ask—“pass the water”
    but you’re sleeping
    (an escape from the blue
cross-hatched tablecloth-covered rigid-back
chairs
(no batteries included)

We are in rows
i’m glad you’re not awake to see
this speed smile smeared
across my already blank face

i straddle you
and a shiver like a pot of coffee under
my shoulder blades begs for me to
stay there
but i continue to cross you
not successful in steadying
my over-sea legs    This is my stop

Eliza M
Sundays Are for Lovers

I have told everyone but Noah Leavitt that I love him. The last people in the world to know, besides him, were my mother and father, but I think that that is normal because most thirteen-year-old girls don't confide the inner workings of their most complicated hearts to dear old madre and padre. I told them at dinner tonight that I was madly in love, and the reaction I received was that to be expected, unexpressive and unconcerned, the two facial expressions I am usually awarded when I attempt to involve them with the tumultuous turns of my passions and romances. My parents tell me that I am too young, that I will grow out of each preoccupation, that it is only an infatuation infecting the actively pubescent. I tell them that they are infected with the classic middle-aged suburban couple affliction of repressed emotion and one too many soggy tuna casseroles. And when my mother does not show offense at my onslaught onto her noticeably mediocre cooking, I have proven my point.

We buy our tuna from Noah Leavitt. His father owns the delicatessen in our neighborhood, the purveyor of gefilte fish and Oreo cookies. I like to shop in their store on Sundays, when Noah is working the counter and I am buying my favorite Bubblicious gum. Noah is an Orthodox Jew. He wears his yarmulke tilted as jauntily as one could be worn, his pais are bouncy but not overly curled, and his tallisim swish sensually as he types into the old cash register with the flip card numbers. I imagine that he wears his thick, military-green, Coke-bottle glasses because he has injured his eyes while pouring over the Torah in the dark of night and that the thin, sparse strip of hair above his lips is unshaven because of a religious obstacle. He attends the Yeshiva of Flatbush School, and I go to St. Mary’s. My parents have raised me Catholic. But for Noah, even during the heat of August, I always wear long skirts and turtlenecks on Sundays. I comb my unruly hair and tuck it behind my ears like I imagine a good Orthodox girl does, I wipe off my Scarlet O’Hara lipstick and Marilyn Monroe mole, and I lower my unmascaraed eyes demurely. I have a taste for dramatics, and acting is my forte. Three weeks ago, when I was paying for one jar of dill pickles, one pint of kosher vanilla ice cream, and one package of everything-flavored flatbread, Noah, his dry, crackled hand resting on the moist, perspiring ice cream, asked me my name. I looked up into his muddy brown eyes, smiled, and I lied. I said, “My name is Ruth, and I go to Ramaz.”

My name is Angela and I go to St Mary’s, which is the all girls’ Catholic prison where we are forced to garb ourselves in unflattering navy sacks that mortifyingly have our school logo, a cross, embroidered across the entire backside. My best friend Samantha, who is three years older than me and just like a cliché because she smokes cigarettes in the women’s bathroom in the basement and wears heavy green eyeliner and teases her hair, tells me that when guys turn around to see her so-called “bubble butt,” the only thing they can see is the flaming cross that is just like a chastity belt. The nuns who drill our classes into a dazed, monotonous state of sitting call me precocious and unfortunately thespian,
unappreciative of my embellishments of the weekly required Bible recitation. They also
don't enjoy the trills and flavor that I find necessary to incorporate during our choral
classes and concerts. But when I went to synagogue for our family friend's daughter's Bat
Mitzvah, the cantor seemed to go out on a limb and sing the Jewish songs exactly like he
wanted to.

My first unrequited love was Bobby Flaherty, the freckle-faced Irish boy who
was in my Sunday morning gymnastics class. We both took rhythmic gymnastics at the
neighborhood fitness center, and I was always jealous of Bobby because he had the nicest
silk ribbon wands and the better Michael Jackson dance routine. He had an uneven crop
of light tangerine hair and so many freckles that his face also appeared to be almost
entirely orange. Our teacher, Ms. Bradley, always told us that with practice we might one
day be as good as her star pupil, Bobby, who won the gold medal in a county rhythmic
gymnastics competition against adults. He used to wear black leggings and tight white tee
shirts that would become see through and moist from perspiration in the chest area after
an hour practicing jazz slides. Last August I decided that he was going to be my until-
death-do-us-part when he complimented me on my left wrist ribbon flutter. Bobby is four
years older than me, and the next month I saw him kissing another boy.

Noah Leavitt used to take Lee Kaufman to the movies and ice cream every
weekend until Lee broke his heart and left Noah for her rabbi's son. I know this because
of my next door neighbor, Georgie, who I used to love too until he became actively
pubescent which made his voice start to crack and his skin bubble sorely and he told me
that he thought that I was really strange. Georgie said that he went with his asinine older
brother Jason to buy beer from Noah's father's store and Noah was sobbing and dripping
on the old fashioned cash register and the selection of candy and Jason and Georgie found
a sliver of emotion in their cold, heartless bodies and took pity on the devastated Noah.
I had never noticed Noah before, for his pale, puffy face was usually hidden behind the
rows of powdered vitamin supplements and chewy fruit pastilles, but when I heard of
the romantic tragedy that had befallen him, I went to comfort another adventurer on the
journey of inamorata and I met my soul mate.

I want to be Jewish. I want a set of strict rules that have been followed for
thousands of years, I want to be a survivor of persecution, I want a personal connection
to Israel and Palestine, and I want to be proud of my heritage. I want Jesus and Moses,
and seven days of presents in December. I want latkes and Manischevitz. I want to have
thirteen perfect Jewish children. I want to go to Ramaz and be Ruth and never be called
obnoxiously precocious but instead gifted and talented. I want my parents to appreciate
my eccentricities and my dramatics; I want someone to be in love with me for once. I want
to be Mrs. Leavitt the Rabbi's wife and the perfect wife and the perfect Jew.

Emma M
Aqui te amo
after a line of Pablo Neruda's

I love you here,
with brick and clouded glass and twisted trees
and sky that spreads like moors upended—
gray and chill and I am gloriously
alone, with my heart opening

(punctuation is relation;
if I cannot choose between the filing period
the comma that enumerates and breathes
the semicolon, hand outstretched
the casual colon
I am left with questions—or perhaps
without connection)

I love you like this,
the intellectual intellectualized,
decontextualized, safe:
I love you like this.

(typing familial: familiar, ignored
taboo: devoured, with no touch of mouth
epitome: approved, unborn)

Epic in shorthand
is meaningless:
too little pain, too little to endure,
too little to demand, too little passion—
I want you to ask me to suffer,
to wait and ache and reach the climax drained
of tears. But even more I want to keep my job
after the war—remain a poet (not a muse)
retain the role reversal our genders unexpect
and quietly invoke (evoke) you, earning
immortality—

for mine is a selfish love, that yearns
to climb your soldier's shoulders over all the dead
towards something incorporeal, inchoate, infinite.
The corollas and the carillons are yours
(o grave indifference on which I draw)

I love you for this
Forever on paper

Katherine B

The Train Home on Wednesday

Fascinated by the faces on the train,
I created an intricate story for each,
Particularly the Japanese woman
With a colorful scarf
Perched over her neck.
Her arms had slipped from their sleeves,
Her long wool jacket hung draped from her shoulders.
I imagined a certain consolation coming from that pose.
It seemed familiar, as if when she was younger,
Her husband would stand behind her,
His arms wrapped in a similar posture,
Comforting her with his calm composure.
Or perhaps it came from even a few years before
When a small, barefoot child lifted his eager hands to her.
She granted his wish, carrying him on her back,
And he smiled, sticking his little feet out in front while she supported his legs.

I wonder what I was like as a child.

Eric S
Prairly Winslow

Below the folderal, beneath the fuselage, Prairly Winslow felt his bones intermingled in a fallacious fashion. The crash of the aeroplane into the breast of the sand sent shards into a state of sprawling bedlam, a beacon bellowing for beachgoers to identify. The fuelsmoke yielded faces, scorning the aviator upon their dissemination into the sky. Prairly inhaled tar, which was actively damning any obtainable oxygen. He was convinced that his ribs had punctured his lungs, anyway. He had a penchant for paranoia and a propensity to misdiagnose his afflictions. In fact, he was absolutely certain that the key factor for his descent into the dunes was his derelict desire for Vestal girls.

Often, he would find the parallax of his vision involuntarily falling upon the buttocks of a chaste, young muchacha. This ogling was of his will, but he could not be sure of how perverted such an action really was; a man is apt to let his inhibitions wane when in Spain. Nevertheless, he confessed these transgressions to a charred velocity panel which he mistook for a priest. This hallucination was owed to the peyote paella which Señor Vargas fed him. El Señor wired me the news of this accomplishment, and we consumed borscht together with his polski patron in the morning. Now, I don't usually enjoy beets, but they have their moments when chilled in liquid form.

The truth is that Vargas’ daughter noticed Prairly’s piquant stares and notified her padre of this malefaction. Winslow knew that these mild misdemeanors would never manifest themselves outside of his atrium, but an eyeful was sufficient for El Señor to take up arms. I’m not sure whether I would approve of such retaliation, but what do I know? Cabanas are the main matters which I attend to. Well, the smoke copulated with the clouds at an hour past three, which was approximately fifteen minutes after the plane poorly landed. For some silly reason, the hind valve in the cockpit unscrewed itself and burst from its captor, letting a stream of viscous solvent flow onto Winslow’s exposed kidney. At this point, delinquent metal had relinquished him of his right arm. Poor Prairly was stuck with his sinistra side.

This was where hope was lost, as Winslow realized that he would now never realize his flamenco aspirations on the guitar. He was spared three minutes later, though, when a conclusive conflagration was ignited by a wayward bolt and an explosion was elected to end his life. The beach children chortled and entertained the tumult with the regional vernacular, while I sipped a daiquiri and declined to humor his demise. After all, Prairsly Winslow ate blood for a living. A miraculously unharmed fold of skin fell into my refreshment from the outer atmosphere, alerting me that it was time to phone Vargas. As we conversed, I began to feel increasingly grateful that Vargas’ muchacha had not observed my gazes at her particulars. Then again, I never pilot planes.

Michael G
A Predicament Noted

A woman found herself, on an early hot Thursday afternoon, on the tracks; these tracks were of metal, a train’s. Such a train was speedily approaching. The woman may obviously soon have been hurt. Her movement from these tracks had been restricted, otherwise she would surely, acting out of her instinctual life-preserving judgment, move herself from her current location to a safer one so as not to be hurt or in any way caused grief by the briefly arriving train, locomoting, via the tracks on which she was, towards the spot she now occupied. Such an intersection of the train and the woman would most probably be terribly disastrous, as it would result in a loss of the desired and virtually necessary form and structure of the woman, possibly dividing her into two or more pieces of significantly substantial size, a fate considered, by most, unpleasant and to be avoided. This common sentiment is often brought to its full influence when such an appropriate situation arises, as it now had in the imminence of a forceful homovehicular collision.

The most plausible means by which the woman might have avoided partaking in this collision, would, by my estimation, be to receive some sort of external aid from some intervening being more capable than herself. Such aid would, continuing in my estimation, be in the form of relief from the force restricting her movement, perhaps accompanied by aid in the transportational act itself. Bearing these things in mind, I promptly and with great zeal began to await the outcome of this intriguing and much pondered situation.

Zane F

She remained calm as he told her of his infidelities,
A blank look plastered on her face.
What a twinge of distaste ate at her gut.
When she touched him,
He was no longer hers.
Her hand retracted.
It shunned the source of her nausea.
Sparks of rage began to blaze
As she beheld his contamination.

Caroline M
I am sitting in my room on my bed, not thinking about much of anything on purpose. Outside it is dark already, and the spidery branches of the tree are silhouetted against the purplish pavement and screen-printed over the open-top box of the scaffolding roof. You know those scenes in movies where the main character has just been dumped or has lost the girl or something along those lines, and as he walks dejectedly down the street, the only people he sees are cloying couples holding hands, giggling, in love, and happier than he thinks he will ever be? It’s like that, I guess, a spiteful joke of Fate’s—I am not thinking of you on purpose, but Fate will not rest until I am as unhappy as she (I have always thought Fate was unhappy—there is no other way to explain her behavior), and so every minute or so she cues her couples and sends them across my window, stage right to stage left, in a malicious attempt to make me feel some of her pain. I am not interested in being empathic right now and I close my eyes and rock back and forth. I can feel myself getting hotter as I move forwards and backwards, the friction of my body against the air making the emotions frozen behind my eyelids begin to melt, and I stop, but it is too late; they have been melted down, and they seep out from behind my eyelids, thick and only partially melted, coating my face. It is too late now so I resume my rocking, and now I am so hot that I am practically glowing, and I have to stand up to avoid burning my legs with my arms. I try to steady myself by leaning on the window, but I am too hot and the glass melts away, sticking to my hand, and then the entire pane melts away and in one tremendous rush falls into the box created by the scaffolding below. I step up onto the windowsill, and the remaining heated glass drips down from the top of the window, encasing me in a clear glistening sap. The black lace of the tree branches looks sturdy enough from my unstable position, and I step down onto it. It is not as secure as I had thought so I go down on my hands and knees and I am like a slug, leaving a trail of hot glass on the branches until I can reach the scaffolding. The glass begins to drip off of the branches but once I crawl away it cools and so the glass hangs there, permanently frozen into soporific stalactites. I am exposed now, balancing on the black glass latticework, four floors above the shadowy violet street, and the wind is hard and cold, so I dive into the limpid lagoon of glass below me, a makeshift swimming pool on top of the scaffolding. In scenes in movies where a character jumps into a swimming pool, the instant they hit the water is portrayed as a mind-numbing shock of cold and the sound is muffled, right? Well, it isn’t like that. It is hot, and the melted glass is heavy and dense, like thickened syrup, and when I break the surface to breathe I am not panting or out of breath, just ready to breathe again. I imagine I am a strange sight, my face glossed over with glass and my eyelashes dripping with it. I don’t know if anyone sees me, however, because at that moment the scaffolding gives way and I plummet straight down onto the street. There is no time to hit the ground because the world suddenly tilts sideways and I am now rushing down the street in a river of molten glass, past the closed-down deli (he shot his mistress,
shot himself), past someone’s rent-controlled second apartment (light is on a timer to make it seem like they live there), and I’m getting really hot now because I am completely encased in hot running glass, and I am falling down the street past the prison that is under construction (they want to knock it down but they can’t until the union workers are done building it), and you would think that this ride would hurt but I am sliding on the glass and the momentum lifts me up off the ground—I can’t feel anything except the scorching heat as I race past your house. I can see you through your window. You are sitting at your desk, working as usual, except that the world is tilted and so are you. But it seems you haven’t noticed. You never noticed much of anything. And then I am past you and I can see the sky now and the river and I am in the open and I start to slow down as the breeze cools the glass. But now it has solidified around me and it regains speed and I’m racing past the park, past the monkey bars (I’m sorry that I lied that time) and then I see the bars that I hadn’t noticed before, black looming metal bars that save people from falling but won’t save me.

There is glass everywhere—shards of glass in the air. Shards of glass in the water. Shards of glass on the pavement shards of glass stuck in the trees and shards of glass sticking into me. The world slowly rights itself but I stay spread out against the railing, impaled by a jagged piece of cold glass. My blood is hot but not hot enough to melt the glass, and it drips from the end of the icy stake in little crystalline orbs to fall onto the hard pavement where it splatters among the little bluish diamonds of glass. In movies that address death, death usually ends the movie, for it is impossible to think that anything could continue once the main character has died. But death is not like that. You continue working. You don’t notice that the world has slowly righted itself. You don’t notice me when you look out through your window and you certainly don’t save me. Things have always been upright for you. There will be no dramatic ending celebrating the triumph of love, just the final shot, a hot flash of the rising sun on limpid glass.

Chloe B
My Return Address Must Look Something Like This

A little girl once told me that there are butterflies as large as owls. The Chinese probably got a lot of silk from that cocoon. The Chinese invented silk. They walked across the desert with that silk. They used to listen to the harmonized whispers of the wind. They looked to the Sky to navigate. They wondered what tricks the Sky had up her sleeves. The dinosaurs walked the Earth millions of years ago and knew nothing of silk, nothing of cocoons, and nothing of little girls. The little girl knows nothing of dinosaurs except that they got hit by an asteroid and that their bones are found in deserts. I decided I am going to watch the Sky from now on and wonder what tricks she has up her sleeve. When the Sky decides to drop an asteroid, like a cocoon drops a butterfly, I’m going to see what the dinosaurs saw.

Perhaps the only purpose for time is so that all things do not happen at once. The entirety of the Himalayas grows half an inch every year. Inches and astronomical units are human inventions, but the Sun and the Moon are best friends. Wouldn’t it be a sight to watch Everest spring from the ground like a little anthill and then expand, in rocky greatness, to the Moon? Then the Moon would sit on top of Everest for a couple of minutes until Everest reached the Sun. The Sun would become a blowtorch and the Moon would not be able to withstand such heat. Then the Sun would melt its best friend until the Moon became liquid and dripped down the face of Everest in a molten Moon waterfall. Then the Moon would wade in itself, a puddle at my feet. I sometimes see my reflection in the moon. Everest sometimes cries Moon puddles.

Is this my only chance? Does life happen only once? If I die and become reincarnated as a little girl, do I keep my old birthday, or do I celebrate on the day I died?

A single butterfly rests in a two-hundred-year-old Oak. The Oak has no more leaves, for winter has come and it has been stripped of its entities. The Moon was full last night so the tide came up. The tide came up so high that the ground is nowhere to be seen and roots and all other things have been flooded. The butterfly wonders what happened to all the other butterflies and if he has missed the great migration. He listens to the harmonized whispers of the wind. He looks up at the Sky and wonders what the dinosaurs saw.

The closest thing to a cocoon is a casket.

Zeke E
Memoria

That this is the house of which I have dreamt. This where I am sculpted. It is an easy psychological trick to lay a heavy hand on this lawn. I notice now that the pool is at an angle. Strange how I’d always felt perpendicular. Here hatched the wildest of my schemes for childhood. What is more imaginative than a child alone?

This has changed, the lights have switched on. My cave paintings illuminated where there hung oils. Heralding angles, pastel silken draped women, and the frames, how the breasts sang upwards!

We had a grandfather clock; its pendulum did not swing. We were eccentric like that. We used battle-rusted tanks in the garden for decoration. Below said clock was a chair, too worn for an ass. The varnish on its wooden arms had faded leaving slivers for your small ones.

This was the best seat in the house because above it hung a photograph of my father—black and gray. This was Atticus Finch, Alcibiades. Then I believed we owned the Mona Lisa, and indeed there was a painting of a girl with porcelain eyes—but it was not my father.

I grew into my name, Absalom, and the picture was of Yeats. I feel no sorrow in this innocence, Ephemera.

These are haunted times. I had not remembered the wood to be so gray but the stamps on the bricks, marking hearkening back to 1928 when the shingles were laid.

How the dead kiss these walls!

Behind my dollhouse there is a chain-link fence. It marks the slope of a hill. There are four railroad ties in a rectangle. This discovery I made my garden, a visionary’s patch of cultivation heaven. I attempted to grow flowers there, with petals as large as my mother’s red roses. Nothing much grew.

He died in my living room, the man in that grave. Something like November 12, 1968. Only recently, living miles above the average man’s head, did I realize his bones had fertilized my soil. The marrow crawling through these pads. Iron nails, the static pendulum. Now I have dead men as dirt beneath my fingernails.

Danielle A
The dog lies under the hood of a car—
I recline in the shadow of the broken moon:

Over the Mountain

For Ambrose, in forest singing upward with a forte
Of a hundred years, swollen and groaning of a millennium!

Growing dark, shifting gears

Seen a lot of old water, old world,
Silken steam starts up on the mountain,
Follows the stream
Down

The road cuts back here, dust lavender
Miles of tired pavement, under the wing
Of ancient hawk,
Yellow bellied flowers trumpet the new
Awakening. We will remember the turn off,
The damp bank we lay in, the earth
We rejoice in and will rejoin.

Ivy covers everything down here,
Long rods of broken trees blooming in
Fire, no pharaoh here,

We are kings, knights, and lady,

The sun cast a shadow,

We cast a die,

The vine of the sand scales no wall,

He scales me,

This is the land where the air is born,

And then you, and then I.

Hannah Z
Soon after breakfast, Mother sometimes began her beadwork. When I finished clearing the table and doing the dishes, I would usually join her. Mother used to make wonderfully bright and lively patterns from those beads. My beadwork was never as good as hers. I was never very good at needlework or beadwork. I could sew a little, and I could knit all right, but I wasn't very talented at either of them. I secretly envied Mother’s superior homemaking skills at times. She’d had almost no trouble catching a husband and setting up a home. At twenty-two, Mother got engaged to Patrick Caldwell, a young and handsome New York lawyer on the rise. They were married five months after their engagement was published, and over the next five years, they had me and my two sisters. Now, eighteen years later, it was my turn. I was to fulfill my duty as a woman and settle down and marry within a reasonable amount of time. I sat glumly in my chair next to Mother and plugged away at my beadwork and tried not to think about the ordeal I would have to endure next month. My coming-out party. I had been to several of my friends’ coming-out parties, and to tell you the truth I was happy for them. They looked beautiful in their dresses that their fathers spent too much money on and flirted effortlessly with boys who vied for the slightest bit of their attention. “You’ll have so much fun!” they told me. “You’ll adore being the center of attention.” But I never had fun at their parties, as grandiose as they had been. The last time I went to a coming-out party I was asked to dance exactly once, and that was by my first cousin George. I stepped on his foot. I am a terrible dancer and cook and seamstress and anything else you would associate with my friends and their mothers. I love to sing and read and write and play the violin, but those things are not very useful when trying to catch a husband. I got very good grades at my high school, St. Andrew’s School for Girls, and my English teacher, Brother Paul, said I should consider applying to a few colleges.

“But why?” I had asked him. “I already have the skills I need to be a secretary.”

Brother Paul looked at me skeptically. “Is that really what you want to do, Ella? You are an intelligent young woman with a lot to offer. You can go much farther than that if you want to.” He handed me an application. “Just apply. If you get in, so much the better. If not, you can be a secretary like you always wanted.” He smiled at me, gathered up his papers, and left me alone in the classroom, holding an application to Radcliffe College in my hand.

I had felt embarrassed. Brother Paul had called my bluff. I did not want to be a secretary. My mother wanted me to be a secretary. That was what she had been when she left high school and worked at a law firm where Daddy was just starting out. I wanted to be a lawyer like Daddy. He knew so many interesting things, and I loved talking to him on those once-in-a-blue-moon nights when he came home from the office a little earlier than usual. I never had to worry about making a perfect leg of lamb or getting my hair to sit flat when I was around him. I thought he liked talking to me, too. Once I

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heard Mother tell Daddy, “If Ella had been a boy, it would have been easier on both of us.” Daddy stuck up for me. “There aren’t that many girls like her out there. Besides, you’ve got Annie.” Annie is my younger sister. “Let me handle Ella. Annie and Phoebe are yours.” I was fourteen when I heard that late-night discussion. It had been after I got into St. Andrew’s, and my mother was beginning to fear that perhaps I wouldn’t grow into the lady that she wanted me to be. That conversation helped me understand why I got to play in the dirt with my male cousins when I was little and run around in grass-stained pants while my sisters dressed dolls in their crisp, clean skirts. My mother encouraged me to play with my sisters and my other friends who were girls, but after a while, their tea parties and dress-up shows bored me. The hems of my skirt would brush against the backs of my calves, and I would long for my pants and imagine myself at the tree-climbing contest my cousins were having without me.

My mother hadn’t approved of my boyish habits then, and she certainly wouldn’t approve of my applying to Radcliffe. She was proud of my grades, but I knew that it unsettled her underneath her poised surface. “Straight As again,” she would murmur when she saw my report cards, the look on her face almost concerned. Then she would glance up and smile falsely at me. “Well, it is nice to see you put effort into your schoolwork!” she would say, leaving the second half of that sentence hanging in the air: because you don’t put any effort into trying to be a lady. My mother was so excited for my coming-out party. She picked out the color of my dress, invited a whole slew of people, most of whom I did not know, and kept trying to engage me in a conversation with her about this upcoming event. She is doing so now, after breakfast, with Daddy far away at the office and my sisters playing happily in their rooms.

“Ella,” my mother said to me, after a long-winded description of what is going to happen at that infernal party, “is there something wrong?”

I stared at the beadwork and suddenly I could find the words. I’m not sure where they came from. Perhaps I was remembering what Daddy must have felt like when Mother told him that I didn’t fit in with his other daughters. Daddy was usually confident when he formulated his opinion about something, and even though I wasn’t completely confident in what I was about to say, I pretended that I was. “I’m not like you,” I told her. “I don’t like coming-out parties. I’m not looking forward to being the center of attention in a roomful of people I hardly know.” I could feel my mother recoil. I took a deep breath. “I’m not thinking about getting married just yet,” I said. I wished I could reverse what was happening. I could see the displeasure darken my mother’s cheeks, and her fingers bend and straighten faster and faster. “I do want to get married, but not yet. But I don’t think I could be a married woman quite as well as you.” And before I could stop myself, the words flew out. “I want to go to college.” The fingers stopped working. “I applied to Radcliffe College. If I’m accepted, I would like to go.”

My mother looked up at me with that expression that I loathe: that pitying, condescending, completely misunderstanding look. “Ella, it was different when you were
younger and you played with George and Peter and Christopher, but you are older now. You have your future to think about, and this is a big step in your life,” she said.

“I am thinking about my future,” I replied. “But don’t you think that college is a big step in my life?”

My mother shook her head of impeccably coiffed golden hair. “Honey, they’re not going to teach you to change a diaper any better than I will. Why can’t you go to college close to home? Isn’t that what Margaret’s daughter is doing?”

I felt like a balloon that was slowly deflating. I knew what I must have looked like in front of my mother, with my wild brown hair and my glasses and my fingertips sore from beadwork. She must have seen a girl who needed to be put in her place, a wild horse that needed to be reined in.

My mother hadn’t finished yet. Her eyes were widening and her voice was fuller and more regal sounding.

“You don’t have to go to Radcliffe to prove anything,” she said. “We already know you’re smart. Boys don’t like girls that are smarter than they are. It damages their sense of self-worth. They’ll think you’re a catch that’s out of their reach.”

I didn’t say anything.

“Ella,” my mother said. “I want what’s best for you. And believe me, all they’ll teach you in college are things that you can never really use. We don’t become doctors and lawyers. We marry them. And it is every wife’s responsibility to take care of her family. It is my responsibility for me to teach you how to do those things. You’ve benefited from my knowledge. You and your sisters have enjoyed warm cooked meals and clean clothes and a nice home to live in. I have to teach all of you how to do those things, starting with you. It’s time for you to stop dreaming and plant your feet on the ground. And you’ll start with this beadwork.” She went back to her own beadwork, her fingers bending and straightening rhythmically.

I resumed my beadwork, as bad as it was. But I knew that no matter how hard I tried, I would never be the type of woman that my mother wanted me to be. I promised myself that I would go to Radcliffe if I was accepted. It was true that I couldn’t learn to make roast beef or to change a diaper at Radcliffe, but my mother couldn’t offer me the kind of education that would quench my thirst for knowledge that college could. I imagined myself as a wild horse living under a big open sky like I had seen in National Geographic: dignified, powerful, independent, and breathtakingly beautiful. I would be free like that one day, I promised myself.

“Wild horses are incredibly beautiful,” I whispered.

My mother glanced up. “What did you say?” she asked me.

“I said, ‘I think what you’re saying is really truthful,’” I replied.
He’d woken up, gotten dressed, and eaten breakfast before making his way to the bathroom to remove his jeans and relax on the toilet. As he skimmed through cover stories of *The New York Times*, he remembered his incomplete Latin assignment and stood to pull up his pants and complete the translation. But before he could flush, he felt an unexpected discomfort in his lower body and returned to sitting on the toilet, where he, once again, removed his pants.

“Dad!” he yelped. “Come in here—quickly!” His face was now a flustered red and his eyes were beginning to tear. His father, who was woken by the scream, raced in to the bathroom to find his son on the toilet with his pants down and face buried in his hands.

“What’s wrong, son? Is everything all right?” his father asked as he put his hand on his son’s shoulder.

“I’m bleeding, Dad. I think I might be dying,” he mumbled, spreading his legs to reveal the stain in his pants.

His father chuckled, “Oh, son. You’re not dying—you’re becoming a man!”

*Alessandra G*

Now I have learned
That it is better
To come away
With a piece of key
Lime pie that you know
Is good.

Good key lime pie
Is the kind when
You take a small
Fork prong full and
You make a face
He likes.

Indiana likes my face,
Even when the pie
Is not a good one
And a fork prong
Full just can’t make
Me cringe.

*Eloise H*
Cruising

My sister heats the skillet under the grill. The flame is vivid red, a violent Florida sun collapsing in our broiler. She slices onions with cheeks seared scarlet.

Today I drove streets I had never seen before. Only a few blocks behind the bridge we passed faded Chinese Woks (green awning, pictures of blurry noodles) past wire and cement, signs painted with caution, no left turns. Past Pedro’s and Annie’s. Two delicatessens. York Street, paved with cobblestones, bumpy like engravings of old New York. Bridge Street tilted to the side, slanted into more factories, into lots and warehouses, into river-polluted gray. Apartments stacked in pale masses. Buddhist temple, enclosed in thick wall of hedge. Through the openings glimpses of yellow walls, of gates and paths set back, retreating. Truck with dented doors. Smashed pickup.

She is peeling eggplant in thin edgy strips. Purplish white streaks and rounds of skin. They will caramelize in the searing heat, become charred remnants of pale ghostly rawness.

We could turn a corner and be anywhere. We could be downtown, across the bridge. Wall Street millionaires running to meetings, choking down five-dollar coffee. We imagined poring over lattes, chose dusty reality, sleazy cement wonder.

She inspects the fish for any blemish. Pats it dry with a paper towel. She will place it
under the flame, watch it turn volcano red
and flip it in the same quick way
she smiles: lips over teeth, baring narrow edges.

We were almost in the river.
Front Street sloping down into shady alleys,
streets named for sailors with hands thick
from lifting sails and cartons and packages.
I was driving, wobbled around the corner
towards the shadow of the familiar.

*Elisabeth R*

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**Yellow Blanks**

Green, the blackened yellow across the lawn, I mow the lawn and I get stung by
the yellow bees, the bees piercing my eyes. Bees go for the painful spots, they go for the
soft tenderness, I am stung five times, two in between my fingers. It hurts and I cry, the
small sweet bee once stung me, I went for it, went to kill it, falling off my bike. I sat in
the middle of the road thinking with my bike sprawled at my side, I sat there crying and
contemplating the yellow and about how I was alone in a jungle of yellow quietness and
emptiness. How no one was around, no one was there to pick me up, to save me, and no
one was listening to me cry. At that yellow moment I stopped crying and the tears were
sucked back into my face and I just sat there. I sat in a puddle of yellow thoughts, I pulled
out a mint that reminded me of my dad and examined my bee sting. I sucked my bee sting
while sucking the mint, I just sat there for a really yellow long time. I was still alone and
I was examining my situation deciding that I could scream at the top of my lungs and
no one would respond and I would still be alone. I was yellow and late for dinner. I was a
little yellow and alone on a quiet, dirt, dead end road. I was a yellow young princess lady.
I didn’t plan on moving as I studied the tiny rocks and sang to myself in the dead yellow
road sucking my mint and my bee sting.

*Danielle B*
Change Your Lightbulbs

it’s like an anvil this heat
it oppresses, depresses,
and i don’t know how to get out
not many do
because we are circled in by our sphere and time is running
by, on the outside
and talking doesn’t seem to work
today and yesterday i talked
but that anvil won’t lift till talking turns
to tiny actions which will set off reactions and build traction
on the slippery slope
we are falling
down
and this november is the hottest since 18 something
every time anyone even mentions it anvils come to mind, getting heavier
and heavier
till i am weighed down by the problem my parents’ generation couldn’t fix
and mine will have to pay for
mine will be crushed
be crushed by our parents’ anvil
and this time when the flood comes
the strongest will swim to live, swim to survive until swimming seems ruthless on the waves,
and
it will be the end of the cenozoic era, the end of the age of mammals
we will be extinct
lying in our crypt of water
and no paleontologists will be there, to name the next era
we better do an exodus or something, do an exodus, an expatriation
from this sphere we are stuck in, sticking to with our gooey oil-filled hands
I don’t like to think about it, nobody does but we gotta square this circle and
face it
if you don’t i won’t and we will be here watching flames through our circular windows
and even pyromaniacs won’t like it
and i’m scared just like you so maybe exodus won’t work but
i have other plans, i have many plans
built and built by the people all around me
so get out there and listen like you are two years old again
and absorb till you exude ice
and change those lightbulbs

Alyssa N
It is not relevant, when reading a poem about a man named Joe, that you have a friend named Joe. Don’t let yourself get distracted by your own associations. Think about what a specific line means in the context of the poem itself:

—How to Write a Poetry Protocol

If there is one thing that is clear to you, let it be this:
Joe, the main character, is not the same Joe that you know, and therefore you do not know this Joe.
They are not related, and this Joe could not pertain to you any less—you don’t understand him or his intents.
As Joe walks down the street and smells a New York Smell, and Joe thinks to himself:
“Shit. What is with this shit smell that has permanently seeped itself into the sidewalk?” you don’t know that shit smell.
It is NOT the same shit smell you think you know. This shit smell doesn’t smell anything like the shit smell at Montague and Court streets, and, in fact, Joe, who you don’t know, notes to himself just how little the two shit smells have in common.
When Joe:
falls in love with a girl that you don’t know, you don’t know how it feels.
lies in the crack between his bed and the cold wall, you don’t understand that either.
steps out between parked cars, that’s another thing completely.
is inside during a rainstorm, it means something specific.

When Joe gets his heart ripped out of his chest, you don’t know about it. You wouldn’t know if some character named Anna, or Bob, or Sam had the same done to them. You don’t know Anna, you definitely don’t know Sam. Don’t let yourself get distracted by your own associations.

Sam S
It’s Been Done Before: A Poem on War

The gilded smile fixed vacantly
on the throbbing crowd below
and his glassy eyes gazed proudly
at the wet foreheads aglow.
A clanking chain blew shrapnel dust
from his thick and righteous knee
as men possessed shimmied up his thighs
and boys tackled shoulders to see
Chloroform of stripes and stars, (Or Iraqi colors?)
atop his crown
postmarked: from US of A ( or, rather, Baghdad)
Saddam comes tumbling down.

“Jimmy Boy get off that couch!”
yells Mary Sue from Arkansas,
but Jimmy don’t listen—just tightens his fists
and reconfigures his monstrous jaw.
In that same instant the king of Fort Green,
also named Jimmy, on border patrol
makes digital Danny from the US marines
blow up a towel-head with his remote control
and Diana from Montana guides a Samurai warrior
in all his pixilated splendor
across a zen waterfall through a battle of broadswords
fending off, easily, every contender.

A stiff bronze arm in Heil style
crashes to the confettied square.
A lonely finger rolls under a car
but his torso is caught in the mob-crafted snare.
Tyrant Literally Toppled
Along With Regime
The Army Boys shout
The Shiites scream
BBC reports to the world it has witnessed
A veritable “scene of jubilation”
and the mass cheers the tanks that drag his body—
a moving scene of the birth of a nation.

Rachel Achs
Universal Reflection

Walking slowly through negatively curved space
I saw a shadow cast crookedly askew
Changing shape quickly on the
Amorphous, grid-like walls.
I peered through each cell on the grid.
Each one was of varying size.
Poking gently on the membrane,
Sending a quivering ripple:

Down and

Down...

Seemingly forever.

The shadow shifted, showing me
A rigid figure making shadow puppets
With the light from a swirling galaxy.
Continuing forward, or what I thought was up,
The top got farther away and so did the bottom.
It was here, searching for this puppeteer
And the “wall” he used as a backdrop
That my existential crisis began.

My gravity no longer seemed to apply
And the infinite curves set me parallel to myself.
I approached a section of perhaps positively curved space.
Nearing an edge, I noticed,
I was nearing myself,
Me, I, approaching me making hand puppets.
Retreating. I slowly faded from the view of the puppeteer.
I crept back to see myself again.
Coming closer and closer,
The other did not react, he just stood there,
Making birds and alligators and butterflies.
There was no mirror, I couldn't see anything reflected,
Just me.
I reached out and touched
Warm, living skin.

Julian F
The Secret Land of Adulthood

At the moment Dr. Gibbs held her just-born daughter in front of her face for the first time, Elizabeth Eliot realized that she had made a terrible mistake.

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Elizabeth Samuels. Nobody disliked her, but nobody really liked her either. She mostly kept quiet, immersing herself in a world of fantasy inside her head. Elizabeth’s fantasy world existed without any solid set of rules; literally anything was possible. Things were mashed and twisted from how they were in the real world until they finally became how Elizabeth wanted them to be. On certain days things would be Ninja-themed, on others her universe would be centered largely on talking animals. Sometimes Elizabeth could fly, other times she was faster than light, and once she was both at the same time. English was often the language spoken, but occasionally a new language would be created. Occasionally there would be variations on English, such as “Backwards English,” which was exactly what it sounds like.

Elizabeth released her visions through drawing, a skill she honed to perfection during these years. She would often dismiss school assignments to focus on depictions of her latest world’s landmarks and inhabitants. Her parents would yell at her for this and try to convince her that schoolwork should be her priority, but Elizabeth rejected these suggestions. Her “reality” changed daily, and if she didn’t document it to the best of her abilities today, her subject or focus might be gone tomorrow. Once a month she would make a new map of the main “land.” Each map was completely different from the last.

After graduating from high school, she moved to New York and worked as a “demonstrator” at F.A.O. Schwartz. The toy she demonstrated would change on a near-weekly basis, but her favorite was Lazer Tag. She would still do her drawings, although her grasp on reality was slightly stronger now than it had been before. Instead of retreating into an entirely different reality, she would just alter the world she was living in, in the moment. By visualizing bunny ears on skyscrapers, tentacles on taxi cabs, and third arms on co-workers she didn’t like, she could make it through daily life. One day a co-worker saw some of her “creature designs” (that’s what the co-worker referred to them as; Elizabeth preferred “citizen profiles”) and recommended her to a friend who worked at Nickelodeon. Within a year Elizabeth was a model member of the Nickelodeon graphic design team.

At Nickelodeon Elizabeth met Bryan Eliot, a rising executive at BET Entertainment. BET and Nickelodeon’s offices were both located inside the massive Viacom building and shared a cafeteria. Bryan was the type of man who was always enchanted by creativity, but never had much of it himself. He noticed Elizabeth drawing passionately in her notebook while downing a cup of chicken lentil soup one day, and was immediately enthralled by her. Things moved very quickly, initiated entirely by Bryan. Bryan loved her for being everything he was too grounded to be, and Elizabeth loved him for the good person he was, but moreso for how much he loved her. Theirs wasn’t a perfect
couple by any means, but in weird ways it all worked out fairly beautifully. After nine
weeks Elizabeth became pregnant.

The pregnancy was totally unplanned but inevitable. Elizabeth refused to take birth
control pills because she disapproved of any sort of pharmaceuticals, and refused to use
condoms because “they’re creepy,” so the fact that she hadn’t conceived yet was a bit of
incredible luck. Bryan was almost certain by this point that he wanted to settle down
with Elizabeth and spend the rest of his life with her, and he was overjoyed by the news.
Elizabeth was happy but something felt wrong to her. Since she herself had never really
grown out of a childlike state of mind, the prospect of having a similar creature excited her.
Elizabeth had never really thought about any financial matters in her life, but Bryan had
a high paying job and was more than fit to fully support her and child. Why, then, did she
feel this subtle fear whenever she thought of her upcoming child?

In the first moment that Elizabeth came face to face with her daughter as a solid,
living breathing creature and not just an idea, she realized just that. This was a solid, living
breathing creature, and not just an idea. Most importantly, this creature was hers; it was
her responsibility. She immediately saw the beauty in it all, but also felt the greatest fear
of her life. She loved her already, but could she love her in the way she needed, and would
love be enough?

When she was about twelve years old Elizabeth’s parents bought her a box turtle.
They were concerned that she was on her way to completely losing touch with reality,
and wanted to find some way to ground her quickly. They believed that by giving her an
entirely new life to take care of she would learn responsibility, and hopefully mature a bit.
They hoped it would bring her back to earth. Ricardo the box turtle died within a week.

Elizabeth sat on the edge of her bed staring at the crib across from her, and the
creature that lay asleep inside of it. If she forgot to clean her she might become infected
with something. If she didn’t pay enough attention she might be emotionally scarred. If
she didn’t watch after her she might get lost or hurt. If she forgot to feed her she might
die. Elizabeth couldn’t take this. The pressure of trying to pick out a name was even too
much for her. She wanted to run away; retreat into her own mind and escape to a land
where her actions didn’t affect other lives. She wanted to live fully in her fantasies, but for
the first time in her life Elizabeth knew that she couldn’t.

Keeping focused was an especially big problem. Her whole life Elizabeth had
worked on a system of weaving in and out of reality, somehow making it work. It was, yet
again, a sort of fifty-fifty deal. This was nowhere near good enough anymore. One day
while walking across the street carrying Babo in a Baby Bjorn, Elizabeth began escaping.
The clouds rained bones, which, upon hitting the ground, formed into human skeletons
and executed flawless Busby Berkley-style dance routines. She watched this play out,
totally enthralled, until a random hand grabbed her and pulled her back quickly. The hand
belonged to a middle-aged woman who was trying to prevent Elizabeth from getting hit
by a taxi. This had happened to Elizabeth often enough, but never with a baby attached to her chest. She began to rethink things.

Elizabeth held Babo in her arms. This is what she called her child. Bryan had told Elizabeth that she could pick the name, but the pressure of that responsibility overwhelmed Elizabeth, and all she could come up with was “Babo.” It was not a final name by any means. Elizabeth was nowhere close to being ready to commit to a final name. It was just a placeholder name. Elizabeth felt like a placeholder mother. She felt that at any moment someone was going to appear from a trap door and reclaim Babo. This isn’t what she wanted exactly, just how she felt. She looked at this creature and couldn’t comprehend that it was her child; that she had created it. She’d given this creature the gift of life. Now she needed to figure out how to give it everything else it needed.

It pained Elizabeth, but she knew it was necessary. Bryan worked far too hard and too much to pick up Elizabeth’s slack, and she didn’t want her child to be raised completely by a nanny. Elizabeth began what she knew would be a difficult process. She was going to completely remove herself from fantasy. She was finally going to ground herself in reality. Most mothers dream of giving their child the creativity and sense of wonder that Elizabeth still possessed into her twenties, and Elizabeth was no different. Elizabeth tried to pass much of this on to Babo while she pulled it from herself. She began painting with Babo at a very early age. She covered the walls of Babo’s room with Elizabeth’s old fantasy world drawings. Elizabeth recited tales of the lands and their creatures to her daughter long before she learned how to speak. Sometimes she would tell the stories in the languages she had made up as a child, which probably didn’t help Babo learn to speak any faster. Babo was being raised in a fantastic world of wonder. She believed in anything.

Elizabeth did finally start “growing up.” She would still get her flashes of fantasy but as soon as they struck, Elizabeth would begin repressing them. She was becoming better and better at this. She found that interactions with adults were now becoming easier. She found it easier to relate to them, now that she saw what the world really was. She still didn’t really like talking to adults, and most of what they said she still found to be boring and self-important. But she understood what they were saying. She began watching and reading the news on a daily basis in an attempt to give herself a better understanding of what was actually happening in the world. Most of it depressed her greatly. She had spent her whole life denying the ugliness that really existed, by choosing to believe only in beauty and wonder, but that was going quickly. She believed in next to nothing.

Bryan’s love for her suffered greatly due to this. Bryan didn’t want someone who cared about politics. He had spent most of his life around “serious adults,” and was essentially one himself, but he never really liked them. When stripped of her imagination, Elizabeth became just like all those other women; the ones he didn’t like. Bryan was a good man with strong morals, and he never treated Elizabeth badly, no matter how bland she became in his eyes. He never was mean to her, not even rude. Not only did he not
cheat on her, but he never even thought of other women. He was always sweet, but he never loved her again, and Elizabeth could always feel that.

Elizabeth walked down the street, pushing the nearly one-year-old Alice Eliot in her stroller. Elizabeth had come to terms with the world. Because of this, her creativity had suffered. She never went back to work because she didn’t know what to draw anymore. She never made art unless it was with Alice. She had effectively killed most of who she had been. But Elizabeth was a great mother. She loved Alice fully, and tried to direct her towards the beauty in the world as much as she could. She knew Alice would turn out great.

It was a cold, overcast day that reeked of ugliness. They had all seemed that way for a while. Elizabeth looked at the sky as it began to rain and saw the pain and sadness that she had come to realize existed so greatly, while Alice looked at the sky and saw the smiling sun and pink flying dogs that she so greatly believed did exist.

_Griffin N_

_The Last Note_

You ogle the pages, undressing  
The melodies with your transient eyes  
Who scan the barcodes like built-in record  
Players: battery-less and variable.  
Alone, each note grudgingly confessing,  
Requiring attention that some despise  
Instead of, as first designed, in accord.  
For this reason, the Last, immutable  
Note bears the weight of all others combined.  
This Lasting impact makes her often quake,  
Leafing through the vocal chambers, floating  
Like a piece of freshly sinewed toffee  
From a singer's mouth, hov'ring in the air  
As you hope its stick won't downwardly snake  
To your chin rather than, on space, perching  
Like sounds before an audience should do.  
When man-made, her source is much more aware.  
In this case, finale is not the end—  
Instead, a way in which she can suspend.

_Elizabeth N_
It’s Been Ten Years…

2007
You are cruising, now. In junior year, however, you rode a rollercoaster of springtime standardized tests. You held extremely tightly onto the safety bar. Make sure to bring a vomit bag during junior year.

2006
Your orthodontist lifts a weight off your shoulders when she tells you that you no longer need to wear your retainer every single night. The prospect of boys in the night time is now endless. If only your mother would agree. You lick your white, straight, front teeth.

2005
You need a break from the city life and voyage to Costa Rica for a summer filled with community service. You speak Spanish until you think in Spanish. “Yes, I ate only rice and beans for all three meals a day...No, yeah, it was fine, you get accustomed to it, really. Yeah, this tan? It’s from carrying rocks, lots of rocks—and wheelbarrowing and shoveling, too. But anyway, yeah, I helped to build the foundation for a new community center in the town. My older sister tried to teach me to salsa dance, but you know, white girls can't dance…” (Why did you have to add in that little joke? You were on such a roll. And why can't white girls dance?) You’ll smile lightly as if it were nothing. The voyage to Costa Rica really was a life-changing experience, no matter how high or how fake your voice gets upon recounting it. (Remember never to speak in that voice again, ever.)

2004
You are fresh meat in high school. A padded bra is the only solution. After your first high school party, remember to lather yourself in cheap Victoria’s Secret perfume. (It came for free with the bras.) You cannot let your mom smell the defiling odors of beer and smoke in your hair and on your clothes. And you cannot let your peers know that your mom is driving you and two friends home at 11:30 for a sleepover, yes, a sleepover with sleeping bags and Bring It On.

2003
Pre-fresh meat in high school. Your eyes are glassy as you dream about high school parties, frees in the middle of the day, going out to lunch all year long, pretty much just not being in middle school. You text older boys who wouldn’t dare to say hi to you on school grounds. You don’t get a wink, a nod, a high five, a pound, a punch, or even a butt slap, not a single source of acknowledgement. There’s high school. Then there’s middle school. Texting isn’t even capable of bridging that gap.
2002
It’s your last summer at camp and you still have only kissed a boy in Truth or Dare. Better get the ball rolling on that one. It’s Jew Camp, so while you know these boys will grow up to be successful shysters, at the moment they are at that awkward stage when the Jewish nose is peaking and the belly is plumping.

2001
Your sixth-grade boyfriend likes the Red Sox and you like the Yankees. You want your kids to be raised Jewish, he is Catholic. He likes math, you like English. He is gay, and you are straight. Don’t worry, there is still hope.

2000
You stop playing soccer with the boys at lunchtime after realizing it is hardly attractive. It’s time to sit on the sidelines with the girls and giggle. (You even join in on some cheers.) Giggling sucks, but the cheering is awesome. You collect Beanie Babies and Absolut ads. You still like stuffed animals, and you don’t know what Absolut is.

1999
You are very small, but don’t realize it. Whoever realizes they are small? You want to walk alone to your friend’s house for a play-date just a few blocks away and don’t understand why you are not allowed. If you changed your name, race, religion, height, gender, favorite color, favorite doll, favorite parent, then maybe your mother would let you. It’s Park Slope, no one will hurt you, come on.

1998
You wear a Yankees hat until you realize that all of the boys in the class are wearing it too. You therefore decide to make a village out of cardboard. You completely indulge in this feminine creativity as you throw your Yankees hat aside. The village starts with just a simple, single house until the rest of the girls in your class join you in furnishing an entire village that is complete with a kitchen appliance store, a grocery store, and a gardening store. (You are totally a girl now.)

1997
You vomit at Disney Land on the Tea Cup ride and are one hundred percent embarrassed. You get embarrassed easily. Try not to always let your face get so red; it’s nearly impossible to hide your embarrassment that way. You vow to never go on rides again. Instead, you just talk to Cinderella and Aladdin. (You manage to avoid all rides until the college process throws you for a spin.)

Rebecca N
What She Saw

I could tell that the girl across the street didn't need to hear our words to know what we were saying. She was young, but it didn't take an adult to understand that when the man I used to trust threw his arms in the air, he was giving up on me. She looked intrigued with every new gesture we made. When he pointed to the bedroom, she understood he was referring to the magical nights that we spent in there. She understood that when I threw my open palms up towards the ceiling with a confused expression, I was questioning myself and our relationship. When I closed my eyes and pointed at the door, she understood me more than I did myself. Hopefully the girl with pigtails will never know how it feels to be in my position.

This was the most obvious fight, yet I feared she recognized my mistake. I found myself looking into her life, just as she was looking into mine. Trying to read her face without any dialogue between us. Her wide hazel eyes and slightly drawn, open mouth didn't tell me anything. Do her parent fight like this? Why was I trying to figure her out and why was it so hard?

I couldn't understand why she was so fascinated with my life through two panes of glass. She was tossing me hints about herself, but I wasn't able to catch them. She seemed frustrated when her shoulders plunged towards the ground, but I was silent and so was she.

I realized then that she was more me than I was myself in these few moments, and I started to feel guilty for letting her see the pain that I tried, so hard, to avoid showing.

Aliza C

Hunger

let’s eat the moon away
and starstruck the evening oven,
I can’t pluck the stars but I can ferociously tavern them into sausage,
quick before my eyes go shut,
tell me how the intertwined massacre went down
into my river of ribs.

Charlotte I
Salty Summer Nights

I remember the summers when the sun would rest, hovering above the New York City skyline, and how the heat would change shapes, slipping into every corner and seeping across every patch of shade until it became unbearable to venture farther than one’s front door. These were the summers when we would climb up five flights of stairs to sit upon the tarpaulin roof, slumped among gaudy tattered umbrellas and dilapidated green beach chairs, sipping tall glasses of cool ice tea and listening as Grandma told stories of her childhood in Trinidad. The city lay sprawled below and we would watch the cars putter down the charcoal streets spitting clouds of fumes as we spied on the weary pedestrians as they dripped down the symmetrically gridded blocks. We would wave as neighbors appeared as though by magic, popping out from a picture book from the single entrance that opened onto the roof. They would hang clothing to dry on clotheslines before scurrying downstairs. The various arrays of harlequin clothing dangled limply like kites above the avenues, every so often rustling impatiently like birds anxious to take flight.

Our chairs usually lay in an absentminded circle, the large umbrellas squeezed between, creating a pool of soft shade. Bars of light always fell between the cracks of our makeshift tent, but we would shift our chairs like a small army to avoid them. The sun hated our shade, and in the long hours of the day the sun’s sharp talons clutched our umbrellas violently overhead. Grandma would always begin telling a story with a long pause, her voice starting in a soft whisper, and my brother, sister and I would move our chairs closer to hear. She always wore summery dresses no matter the season; their fabrics were bright flowery prints that she said reminded her of home. She always sat upright, fanning herself with a leathery hand. Her hair was a smoky gray and always tied up in a bun, wisps of hair floating outwards. Her eyes seemed to change color in the light. Tinted flecks swam beneath their surface, and when she turned and the sun caught her eyes, a new color would burst forth, like a fish jumping out of water, but just as soon as it appeared it dove back again skimming beneath the water’s surface. She told stories of her childhood back in Trinidad, describing the beach she went to each day: its pearly sand and translucent water that changed its shade with each new wave that rolled in and how the shallow water stretched languidly upon the ocean floor, hiding a treasure of kaleidoscopic coral.

Grandmother told us of the mysteries of the Caribbean Sea and how she swam with dolphins and the countless times she had stepped on fire coral that burned her feet. Her father, a fisherman by trade, would take a small weathered wooden boat out into the sea and, using thick rope nets, would catch hundreds of fish, their scales glistening with drops of water. Working in the boat with him he would take her to the nylon pool where the sand became crystal white and the water seemed to be made of thousands of sparkling diamonds, and it was believed that swimming in this mystical pool made you
look ten years younger. She told us dreamily of the tall swaying coconut trees that littered the beach and seemed to dance in the breeze and how they were as tall as skyscrapers. On her timeless island sweet coconuts fell to the ground and ripe papaya dangled from trees begging to be picked. She told us of the steel drum and how its soft notes were the island’s heartbeat.

Her favorite story, though, was that of the Leatherback Turtles. She would recount the tale, with a forlorn look in her eye, carrying us back to the salty summer nights when she and her brother would hide huddled on the beach, watching enraptured as the majestic turtles appeared from the shadowed water and plodded languidly up the damp shore. With tired eyes they would watch excitedly as the turtles padded along the coast aimlessly, before heaving themselves onto a secluded patch of sand. There, the turtles proceeded to dig a small hole and laid dozens of small white eggs in it. In the middle of the night, as the moon showered its soft rays and drops of sea water sprayed upon the shore, the turtles carefully covered their nests before slowly trailling back to the water’s edge and diving back beneath the pearly surface, leaving no trace that they had ever come. Towards the end of the summer, Grandma and her younger brother would return each night, waiting excitedly for the eggs to hatch. Sitting in the prickling sand, they would whisper softly until their eyelids began to droop and they feebly batted the prospect of sleep away. Finally, as the last days of summer dripped slowly away and the days shortened, the eggs hatched. They watched in silence not wanting to believe their eyes. The small turtles appeared like magic from the dark, struggling valiantly to find the water’s edge. They scrambled across the shore, falling into small holes and imprints that were etched into the sand. As the sun crept up to the horizon and the first veins of light bled across the sky, the last of the turtles filed towards the sea, disappearing beneath the water’s shimmering surface.

At this point in the story Grandma’s voice would trail away, and she would pause to take a sip of her ice tea, which by now was mostly water. Her eyes looked off into the distance as though she were still back in Trinidad watching the sunrise and the eggs hatch. Then she would disappear down the stairs to begin chopping vegetables for the night’s dinner. And we would be left in silence, watching the sunset’s colors drain across the sky, glinting off the skyscrapers as the sun spread her majestic wings for flight.

Nicole M
this is a dead field here.

Last in the crunch of morning everyday wheat is charred,

I have four brown wheat tips.

Red brown like copper engine or fire sticks like magicians have glowing night times in auditoriums everywhere

(children love them, so do grown-ups, weekends mostly.
Their grandparents take them on Sunday nights at five, out for dinner after downstairs.)

There is the crunch of oysters, or six charred wheats, morning when the sky is still green-gray like sick soap and bumpy, obviously, to leave you pinked and ribbed.

This is morning for orange plains, an Idaho morning (the bright dust that is stuck now, in the wind and in your windy sandcrawl hair and circling mail trucks, —alight with the white blue sheen of fluorescent light.

I have left too many motel mornings in green dust.
dust on armchair, dust on poor rough curtains, in the canals of my ears.

Brown char on everything and I think it is in the fireplace, in the wheat fields,
Burst into the shock of wood,
On the sheen of motel furniture, the carven desk the binder the blue lamp and in your fingernails too but you can peel it out, a vivisection, death flying and fruit flies—time is molten flesh and it is

Burnt into every atom: dust on skin and skin is dust.

(Kid, this is where everyone waits for their grandparents, are those yours? The blue woman with the cowlick and the man with a jaunting left funny bone and haltering fat ankle?)

Tonight you can char a marshmallow on river reeds, the ashes will smell like seagull and migrate someplace west, someplace drier, come to rest at a stop sign, exit 2-something, wait there and, chasing with burn and scab, setting and crawl, ash, onto the sheen of glossed wood.

Rebecca S
It’s a Beautiful Day in Moscow But Stalin’s Still the Boss

I.
It was hot in my dream
I kissed you on the cheek, you pulled back
And I knew—
But we were climbing, winding
Our way on tortuous roads through the hills
Of my childhood, and I was terrified
Of cracking bones
Losing control and not being able
To find or fit all of my clothes
Into my suitcase.

II.
The dichotomy of your lips
And why I [shouldn’t] so want to
Tear them from your face exposing
Skull and teeth and bone.
Your mouth—
That hole entering corporeal putrescent darkness
Leaking smoke [ah, brimstone inside—
But that flesh was once mine
How now I’d kiss that broken bridge
Of nose, wandering
From dream to dream of
Tomorrow.
But broken too is the bell and so
Striking that my ears prick, lids rise—
And ripe, the blood from my nails
Warms crescents in my palms
I AWAKEN—
The image in the mirror is sharp,
Pixelated. [[if, like a waning moon
I could shroud my face in shadow and become
One with the darkness again]]

Danielle A
You’re around the age when the pieces of the puzzle are beginning to fit, but the puzzle is vast stretching many miles down the road. Those unsteady two wheels no longer wobble, they have been mastered. You ride freely on smooth ground, for the bumps are much farther ahead. The choices you are faced with are deciding between candy or ice cream. Summers seem an entire year long. The cold weather is merely a time for snowmen and wearing your favorite sweater.

Then your mind works as a camera. Each observation a cryptic image. Stick figures are no longer needed, dimensions have been comprehended. You color with the lines; the sky can still be orange and the grass purple.

These images become less foggy and start to form a story. You have experienced a myriad of flavors, being familiarized with the good from the bad. The bitter have a cruel nature and bullish character. And the delectable stray from the need of power.

In avoidance of the foul, you take a more conformist path. It is comforting and seems an assurance of never being on the teased end. Matching nail polish comes into play and the latest Barbie doll for sure. Friends are the most important thing. As eyes hover over your paper, the rose must be red and the stem green.

School has suddenly transformed from placid lake to rough waters. Work no longer entails building with blocks, essays must now be constructed. Inside you feel a toddler, unaware that your mind and facade are well beyond those years. You took off your shoe, and at the end of the day, it did not fit.

At the highest rung of childhood, you can stare from the top down at yourself, not understanding division. But you have to understand percents. You have to practice piano. You have to go to tennis. You have thirty words to memorize for tomorrow. Girls are mean, boys are immature.

Loaded with the brusque ticking of the clock, and the necessities you cannot help but feel the weight. Especially with a glance in the mirror. The dainty-nosed, rosy-cheeked, big-eyed, tiny-framed child has changed. The proportions no longer mesh. An etiolated complexion and awkward features remain. A giant amongst the tiny girls and boys.

Family then crowds in, adding pressure until you feel faint. You’ve tasted so many flavors by now you almost forget which ones are good. As frustration blossoms, the devil on your left becomes a great companion. Confusion leaks in the veins, and a rebellious urge surfaces, twirling amongst authority, flirtations, and social atmospheres.

It’s a long arduous task to transfuse a better blood. Fortunately the reward lies in the fact that the image continuously sheds some of the unpleasant layers until the surface has settled. You’re not quite as high a mass and you are able to embrace the newfound curves.

The world is officially the size of a pea. Your mind works through a series of revelations: East 96th Street is no longer a separate state from Brooklyn. Christmas arrives as soon as spring ends. Crying occurs for many more reasons than just a scraped knee. Painting a simple picture racks the brain. To bike to the next town only takes five minutes.

Mackenzie G
Denim

At thought, lost
Suspended in a gelatinous matrix
Like a missing simile
Staring at my knees.

It is not a choice pastime for me
But I am lacking more desirable activities,
The most interesting element of my environment
Being the azure landscape of my lower portion.
It rolls endlessly
Like blue farmland
Or neat row ridges
Tangled with cobalt foliage
Or infested with indigo insects.

I probe the flaxen fields of denim
Looking for unseen landmarks
Beyond the fading tangle.

The knotted mass is infinitely complex
Composed of endless gray-blue snarls
Its fraying depths
Midst my outward ennui
Threaten to consume me
To plunge me into the mess of vine-like filaments
To ponder the denim forever.

Ashton K
A Kitchen in Michigan

Hadley had grown up mostly in that kitchen, with its chipped enameled Hotpoint stove, sky-blue linoleum-tiled floor, and lacquered dinette set her grandmother had bought for them on sale at Sears when they moved in. Many coats of pale yellow paint on the walls and crusty mustard-colored counters were afterthoughts. Seven years of relentless work had aged Hadley’s mother, Joane, more than a decade. Her face was sallow and melted as candle wax, with deep eyes heavily burdened. Since Hadley’s father had left his scribbled explanation on her mother’s bedside bureau, of his disappearance with another woman, Joane had had to work double hours to compensate. Money enough to repair the house was yet to be set aside. Instead, most of the savings from Joane’s endless hours at the local grocery went to food and proper clothing. Because Joane worked every day and some night shifts, Hadley was left under the care of her brother and grandmother. However, in actuality, her brother was too preoccupied to pay her the slightest attention, and Judith was too senile to tend to Hadley’s needs; in many instances it was Hadley that tended to Judith’s.

That morning Judith had been complaining of mouth pains, so now her dentures rested at the bottom of a glass cup and smiled awkwardly out of the room. She persisted in eating the scrambled eggs with tomato Hadley had made her, though whipping each forkful around her shriveled mouth long enough to dissolve the eggs and swallow. Hadley pretended not to hear Judith’s loud gulps as some of the tomatoes went down whole. Instead, she poured some Kicks cereal in a deep bowl. Her chubby eleven-year-old fingers slipped, letting milk spill over the side onto a crumpled newspaper that lay on the table and blur the charcoal-like font. Since President Johnson’s face was already warped, she decided she might as well use it as a placemat. Holding her thick hair the color of wheat bread out of her face with one hand, she knelt to wipe the spilled milk with the other, but their calico cat already lapped greedily at the few drops of the milk on the tiles like a hungry prisoner allowed one delicacy.

Two undersized windows let in minimal light, but the hanging light fixture and white refrigerator managed to exude a cheery ambiance. The wall sconces, though spotted with trapped dead flies, were the only wall decorations other than a hand-sized painting of a plain girl, supposedly representing Hadley, with chestnut eyes and a carrot nose, and the wall-mounted telephone above the stained coffee pot. A laser-pointer of fierce sunlight pierced the top of Judith’s head with such intensity that she moved herself with her plate of eggs across the table where she continued to nibble, occasionally dropping a wet tomato piece onto her flowered jumper.

Baba O’Reilly came on their radio, the keyboard introduction muffled by poor reception, but the sound quality seeming to go unnoticed. A long-haired boy around seventeen who wore a dirty button-down shirt and black jeans sprinted into the room, ricocheting his body weight off the doorframe to throw himself at the radio. His fingers
fumbled with the volume control, accidentally turning it all the way up. Hadley jumped, tipping her entire cereal bowl this time. Judith hardly flinched, maybe because her hearing was as good as if she had earplugs in day and night. The cat pounced at the opportunity and jumped onto the table in the puddle of milk and half-dissolved cereal bits. “Adrian! Look what you did. What’s your problem?” Hadley asked as she swept the cat back to the floor and mopped the milk with a towel that smelled of old sponge. “Shhh. I have to listen for who sings this song. I miss it every time they announce it.” The only sound was of Judith’s fork scraping her plate.

“Grandma…can you hold off on the eating for one second?” Adrian requested, outstretching his hand in a sidewalk patrol’s pose for dramatic effect. The song ended. Even the cat stopped rustling the newspaper. “The Whoooo!” screamed Adrian as he jumped once around the table.

He claimed Hadley was too young and Judith too old to understand his obsession with rock and roll, and maybe he was right, because they did not get nearly as much out of it as he apparently did. “The Who, The Who, The Who,” he repeated over and over.


As quickly as he had entered, Adrian sped from the room and up the stairs, knocking the telephone off the wall with his shoulder on the way, leaving the curled cord stretching to the floor, the receiver dangling from the end.

“You can eat now, Grandma,” Hadley told her as she wrung the milk from the towel into the sink.

“The eggs are cold now, dear,” Judith responded and carried the plate to the trash.

Hadley then commenced reading a book and Judith took to napping on the living room couch. Adrian didn’t reenter the kitchen for hours, and when he did, all he asked for was a cup of water.

*Catherine C*
Blind Date

_A WOMAN, attractive, mid-thirties, sits at a bar in a bistro. A BARTENDER cleans glasses SL. He exits and re-enters throughout the scene, serving off-stage clientele._

WOMAN: Can I have a glass of wine please?
BARTENDER: Red?
WOMAN: Yes. Thank you.

GEORGE approaches her awkwardly. _He is a little older, slightly gaunt. He is over-dressed._

GEORGE: Excuse me, are you Suzanne?
WOMAN: Who’s asking?
GEORGE: Uh…I’m George…I’m supposed to be meeting someone with a red rose.
WOMAN: Yes?
GEORGE: You have a red rose. I was just wondering if you were her…
WOMAN: Why are you meeting this Suzanne?
GEORGE: Well, I’m supposed to have a date with her.
WOMAN: Is that right? Lucky girl.
GEORGE: Why do you say that?
WOMAN: Who wouldn’t want to go out on a date with a good-looking guy like you?
GEORGE: Ha. Thanks…
WOMAN: Do you have some identifying accessory as well?
GEORGE: Blue handkerchief.
WOMAN: Very nice.
GEORGE: So you’re not her?
WOMAN: Who?
GEORGE: Suzanne.
WOMAN: I wish I were.
GEORGE: Oh…excuse me. Sorry for your time.
WOMAN: Not at all. [pause] You can sit here in the meantime, if you want.
GEORGE: I’m all right, thanks.
WOMAN: I wouldn’t mind. Do you want a drink?
GEORGE: No, I’m driving.
WOMAN: How responsible.
GEORGE: You think that’s funny?
WOMAN: It just seems a little excessive. I can’t imagine putting myself through a blind date completely sober.
GEORGE: Yeah, well… I’m driving.
WOMAN: One glass of wine—
GEORGE: I don't drink and drive.
WOMAN: All right, order a ginger ale. Suzanne will be impressed.
GEORGE: It's not funny. People die.
WOMAN: They do? From what?
GEORGE: Drinking and driving.
WOMAN: Oh I hadn't heard that.
GEORGE: It happens all the time.
WOMAN: That's awful.
GEORGE: [getting the joke] Yeah…well it is.
WOMAN: [to the Bartender] I'll have another. And a ginger ale for him, please.
BARTENDER: Right away, Miss.

The Woman motions toward the empty stool. George sits.

WOMAN: So this woman, Suzanne. Who set you up? Let me guess, she's a friend from your sister's book club.
GEORGE: No.
WOMAN: Well?
GEORGE: It was arranged through a service.
WOMAN: J-Date?
GEORGE: No, I'm not Jewish.
WOMAN: Maybe you just like Jewish girls.
GEORGE: No.
WOMAN: No?
GEORGE: I mean, I don't have a problem with Jewish girls—I don't dislike—I don't feel one way or another about Jewish girls, okay?
WOMAN: I'm Jewish. How do you feel about me?
GEORGE: What do you mean?
WOMAN: The service. Over the internet?
GEORGE: Yes.
WOMAN: And what, they put you in a chat-room and—?
GEORGE: No, they pair you up.
WOMAN: How?
GEORGE: Based on a compatibility test.
WOMAN: What does that mean?
GEORGE: Just questions…movies, books, food.
WOMAN: Tell me.
GEORGE: What?
WOMAN: Your tastes.
GEORGE: Where to start?
WOMAN: Where did the test start?
GEORGE: Favorite movie.
WOMAN: Well?
GEORGE: *Indiana Jones*.
WOMAN: I love *Indiana Jones*.
GEORGE: My favorite book is *Crime and Punishment*.
WOMAN: Of course.
GEORGE: You like *Crime and Punishment*?
WOMAN: I adore it.
GEORGE: Food?
WOMAN: Anything but Italian.
GEORGE: Really?
WOMAN: I hate pasta.
GEORGE: I can’t stand pasta. I’ve never met anyone who didn’t like pasta.
WOMAN: Until tonight.

*The Bartender arrives with their drinks.*

WOMAN: To...safety on the road.
GEORGE: Wait a second, this is incredible. Who doesn’t like pasta?
WOMAN: I hate pasta.
GEORGE: I know, I hate pasta.
WOMAN: We hate pasta.
GEORGE: Right. We’re probably the only two people in the state who could say that.
WOMAN: To hating pasta.
GEORGE: And you said you liked *Indiana Jones*.
WOMAN: Yes.
GEORGE: And *Crime and Punishment*?
WOMAN: Yes.
GEORGE: And you’re sure you’re not her?
WOMAN: Who?
GEORGE: Suzanne.
WOMAN: The woman you’re meeting.
GEORGE: Yes.
WOMAN: But you’ve never seen her, they didn’t send you a picture or anything?
GEORGE: No.
WOMAN: Why not?
GEORGE: I don’t know why not.
WOMAN: Seems silly.
GEORGE: Wait.
WOMAN: What?
GEORGE: Are you her?
WOMAN: Me?
GEORGE: Yes.
WOMAN: No.
GEORGE: Are you sure?
WOMAN: Am I sure that I am not Suzanne? Yes, fairly.
GEORGE: What’s your name?
WOMAN: Angela. What’s your name?
GEORGE: George.
WOMAN: George what?
GEORGE: Pallon.
WOMAN: Are you from around here, George?
GEORGE: Yeah, I live over on Fulton and Cross.
WOMAN: A quick drive away.
GEORGE: Yes.
WOMAN: Do you come here often?
GEORGE: Once in a while.
WOMAN: I like it here.
GEORGE: You, do you come here very often?
WOMAN: When I can. So this dating service. They don’t give you a phone number, an address…just a meeting place?
GEORGE: Yeah, that’s right.
WOMAN: Why is that?
GEORGE: People want to keep their privacy, I guess. Security.
WOMAN: Well, how do you know Suzanne is her real name? Or that she’s even a woman and not some fifteen year-old boy fucking around in the basement?
GEORGE: I guess I don’t.
WOMAN: How late is she?
GEORGE: Fifteen minutes. [beat] Are you sure you’re not her?
WOMAN: What do you mean?
GEORGE: It’s just that, in the description…it sounded like you.
WOMAN: What did it say?
GEORGE: Brown hair, medium height. Fit.
WOMAN: Normal.
GEORGE: But there was something…
WOMAN: What?
GEORGE: It said she had gray eyes.
WOMAN: Yes?
GEORGE: Your eyes.
WOMAN: Brown.
GEORGE: Really?

*She removes her glasses. George squints at her.*

WOMAN: Convinced?
GEORGE: Brown.
WOMAN: Sorry.
GEORGE: No, don’t be.
WOMAN: Do you mind if I ask you something personal?
GEORGE: No.
WOMAN: Do you do this often?
GEORGE: No. I mean…some…
WOMAN: Any success?
GEORGE: Well…no, not really.
WOMAN: Then what are you doing here?
GEORGE: Dare to hope…

*She laughs.*

GEORGE: You think that’s funny?
WOMAN: I think that’s kind of pathetic.
GEORGE: Thanks a lot.
WOMAN: Come on. It’s ridiculous.
GEORGE: What’s ridiculous?
WOMAN: You fill out a survey on the internet and you sit down with a total stranger and you’re supposed to just generate some kind of connection, as if you actually have anything in common with this person other than location and taste in movies.
GEORGE: It’s hard to meet people….
WOMAN: Honestly, the biggest thing you people have in common is desperation.

*There is an awkward silence.*

WOMAN: I’m sorry, that was awful.
GEORGE: That’s okay.
WOMAN: I don’t know why I said that. I do that sometimes, I just say things that I don’t mean to… I’m embarrassed.
GEORGE: No, it’s fine. You’re right.
WOMAN: No.
GEORGE: It is pathetic.
WOMAN: It isn’t…
GEORGE: I’ve been on three of these things. The first one talked the whole time about her cats, the second started crying in the middle of dinner, and then just last weekend…
WOMAN: What?
GEORGE: Well, I like Indiana Jones. But this woman was in a whole ’nother league.
WOMAN: Oh no.
GEORGE: She quizzed me on trivia the whole time. And then she brought me back to her apartment to watch deleted scenes.
WOMAN: That’s awful.
GEORGE: It’s hard. I just started this a few weeks ago; I don’t know how much longer I can keep it up.
WOMAN: Did something happen?
GEORGE: What do you mean?
WOMAN: I don’t mean to pry.
GEORGE: I got divorced… last year.
WOMAN: I’m sorry.
GEORGE: Thanks. [to Bartender] Bartender… I’ll have what she’s having.

Bartender nods, brings a glass of wine
.
WOMAN: Well, well.
GEORGE: It’s a short drive.
WOMAN: Cheers.
GEORGE: What about you, ever been married?
WOMAN: No.
GEORGE: Why not?
WOMAN: Why would I get married?
GEORGE: What do you mean?
WOMAN: Why would I want to?
GEORGE: I don’t know. Most people do.
WOMAN: Not me.
GEORGE: Never?
WOMAN: I could be persuaded to change my mind I suppose. [with half sarcasm] Maybe I just haven’t met the right person.
GEORGE: Yeah, well… sometimes even the right person’s not the right person. That sounds cynical.
WOMAN: Sounds realistic.
GEORGE: Why do you say that?
WOMAN: What?
GEORGE: Sounds like you plan on being disappointed.
WOMAN: What, should I dare to hope?
GEORGE: I guess.
WOMAN: I don’t plan on being disappointed.
GEORGE: No?
WOMAN: No.
GEORGE: What, then?
WOMAN: Waiting to be impressed.
GEORGE: I see. [beat] It doesn’t look like she’s coming, huh?
WOMAN: Her loss.
GEORGE: What did you say your name was?
WOMAN: Angela.
GEORGE: Angela.
WOMAN: Yes.
GEORGE: Nice name. [beat] Who is that rose for?
WOMAN: What?
GEORGE: I didn’t ask you who that rose was for.
WOMAN: It’s so I can be identified.
GEORGE: Identified?
WOMAN: Yes.
GEORGE: Who are you meeting?
WOMAN: I don’t think he’s coming.
GEORGE: Angela, huh?
WOMAN: Yes.
GEORGE: Nice name.
WOMAN: Thank you.
GEORGE: Do you want to get out of here?
WOMAN: Yes.
GEORGE: Okay.
WOMAN: You drive.

Blackout.

Alex C
Waiting for My Canvas

For years I’ve wondered
why you never had any interest in painting the little me.
You painted her.
She’s a decade older and half my blood.
Perhaps you painted her out of obligation,
because of the separation,
the guilt.
Still, I was of no inspiration.
Early mornings in that cluttered dusty studio I’d watch you paint.
In my flannel pajamas—
the ones that zipped all the way up with the feet attached.
Even if silent,
my presence was still a distraction.
Eventually you’d kick me out
or the fumes of paint thinner would get to me.

Daily I walk by that painting you did for her,
beautiful against exposed brick.
We both know
if you couldn’t paint the little me
you’ll never paint me now.

Kimi L
i want to escape myself. but i realize that my mission in life is to save my nine-year-old brother who has such a beautiful soul and such unparalleled genius for his age group, i’ve got to save him from the hallucinatory symptoms he’s developing now and keep him well and happy and safe so that he can accomplish the unbelievable things he’s fated to. i’m happy to play second fiddle to him because he inspires nothing but worshipful feelings in me.

why this descent? the winter break, i was in a prolonged manic state. now i’m in a place of absolute, searing, existential depression. just endless sadness and hopelessness, for instance last night i was at barley’s house. we’d been hanging out at aerodynamix’s, and gotten drunk there and left at two in the morning to go back to barley’s—with dukduk—

and we made grilled cheese sandwiches and drank a bottle of champagne; that’s another story. but the night wore on,

and barley and i got guitars and played. but i was increasingly conscious that it was getting later and that bedtime and sunrise were imminent, hopefully in that order. but i could see this countdown and i started feeling such a terrible sad comedown, because i rely on moments of fun and all that to pull me through these depressive periods, and when i feel like they’re ending—oh man. it’s the worst. and then it was 5:30 and there was absolutely no hope of me sleeping. i wanted to go home but it would have been so rude to call my dad on the phone to ask him to unbolt the door. barley set me up in the tv room and he sat with me for about an hour while i just cried and cried and spilled to him like i haven’t spilled to anybody in so long, because my closest, barley doesn’t really understand it, bosch fears it because it equates more stress and biff pretty much understands but is noncommunicative. i was crying about my self hate because i try too hard to better myself and be a kind and benevolent person and there’s a big side of me that is like that, i think more than sixty percent. but there’s some true awfulness in me, and because i spend so much time alone and know myself so well, it’s magnified. and i was crying because i get so upset about things i seem to feel more intensely than everybody else (such is the nature of manic depression) and then i get really embarrassed about feeling that way, and it’s like an endless self-hating cycle. and i cried because for all the pain and suffering, death sometimes feels like the cure, the only cure. but i’ll go to hell if i kill myself, and i’ll break barley and isaac in ways they cannot be broken, to say nothing of everybody else who would be affected. i cried about a lot of other things. i’ve gone on some new medication now, because that whole acid flashback permanent thing went from fascinating and eerily beautiful to just a fucking hellish nightmare twenty four seven. so i’m trying to do something about that, and simultaneously hold on to my creativity and not become a hollow man, as can happen sometimes. it’s an experiment.

anyway

at 6:30 i finally bugged and i could take it no more. i had to go home. i sheepishly called my dad and did, whereupon after an hour waiting and riding the subway in a deadened
haze with no music, i got to my room and experienced some of the worst loneliness i’ve ever felt and just cried some more. bursting into tears is the only good part about these agitated, completely over-stimulated and fried brain, existential sadnesses. because bursting into tears is kind of like that moment of orgasmic release.
i will say no more

addendum: isaac brightened my day for just that one moment last night, but it was the moment that gave me the final decision to press on. he was terribly agitated all night, clearly very afraid; i could see from the way he kept on refocusing his eyes that he was experiencing distortions like mine. when he went to bed, i came into his room and told him that i understood, and asked him what he had to say. he told me he was crippling nervous about school. then we confessed our hallucinations to each other and each came up with the same. i told him then that i love him more than absolutely anyone in the whole world (which is very, very true) and then kissed him on the forehead and said goodnight. as i left, for the first time of the evening, he was grinning from ear to ear.

PS a room with john/paul, brian wilson, sly stone and richard manuel would be just the ticket....

Oliver I

You, a red kernel of corn
A latent gem
Burst into my mouth and spur all sorts of sensations.
But I am grasped most by
The vision of a balcony
Perched somplace beyond bleak earth
Terra incognita
Sheathed in vines
All soft and ruby spotted,
And licking my fingertips
One by one
As dusk wraps the night
In its shroud of bottomless blue,
I think I will rest here
Laze and loll
For just a little while longer.

Zoe S
Sestina

The couple lazes in the field of green.
She gently places her hand on his mouth for silence;
Their eyes marvel at her finger now wearing a ring.
The wind is still strong from yesterday’s storms;
Running through the spine of every blade of grass is a slight shiver.
It’s early; the sunlight is still sleeping in the folds of the soft fog.

On other early mornings filled with fog,
They rise together, this couple still so green.
They open all the windows and both feel a shiver.
The telephone’s always exclaiming, “Ring! Ring!”
The couple busily flies around the house, their feet making tiny storms,
But despite all their efforts, there is always too much silence.

Even in the summer there is always a shiver
Of cold in the country air, windows covered in mist and fog.
The couple sits across the table from each other, watching rotten fruit turn green.
They try their best to fight the silence,
To make their voices ring.
They will not look under the table where they know there are growing storms.

They had always known about the storms;
Whenever they considered them for too long, they shivered
And stopped their thoughts. They preferred to be in a fog,
For their parents to tell them how fresh and green
They were, as they say, in obedient and attentive silence.
His father was very proud; her mother couldn’t wait to see the ring.

In their living room, the couple sits in ashamed silence,
Unendingly grateful for the telephone’s ring.
When she returns to the living room, after the call, he storms
Out. It is impossible for them to see each other through the fog:
A sickly rotten green
And so cold, one instantly feels a shiver.

He thinks he’ll give her new doorbell a ring.
Running, he storms
Her new porch, but as he brings his finger to the bell, he only makes silence.
In his stomach he feels a violent shiver.
His head is suddenly filled with fog,
And his face turns green.

Inside, she removes the ring of silence.
A shiver passes through her arm when she sees the ring’s stain, dark and green.
Though in her mind, the field is covered in fog, she will never forget the storms.

Sally D

Telegraph

My father has a friend who was a bum on the Telegraph STOP That was 40 years ago STOP I found him today STOP The Cal campus is different STOP I was going to buy records STOP They were first shelved when he first sat down STOP That says something about me STOP I guess STOP

It says more about him STOP

It’s warm here STOP I was with Ambrose STOP He’s allergic to the sun STOP

Sitting in greening Zen garden browning souls smooth brow smooth sailing hands rough on my stomach and then STOP And then again STOP Sun burned the trees bark on our backs recline against theirs STOP Soul 45’s an hour later STOP Everything is his mother STOP For his mother STOP

Everything is wonder STOP The apartment ends in light STOP Fire escapes make me homesick STOP Nostalgia is difficult when all you want is retrievable Amnesia STOP The aloe plant bleeds green STOP So does the sun at the end of the world STOP The air carries a different hum STOP We stop from a different hunger STOP We stop to breathe STOP He is mind STOP We unite in the STOP

Hannah Z
Astor Place

It is Sunday night when the beaver falls from the wall in the Astor Place subway station. One of the rectangular slabs of stone embossed with a rampant beaver groans, teetering for a moment, before it smashes to the dirty floor. It bursts apart into hundreds of fragments, sending slivers of stone flying. People will find them for months.

The subway stop is neither particularly full nor particularly empty. Some New Yorkers stop for a moment and stare, but they soon move on, muttering. Only a handful of tourists linger; the falling beaver has hurt no one. The New York crowds move fast and soon all the witnesses save two have come and gone.

The first of these two is the vendor who keeps a newsstand in what was once the women’s restroom. There is still a plaque that reads “WOMEN” above his shop. Abu Hasid is an immigrant from Morocco, a man who has fled one set of crowds for another. He is small with a rough-shaven face and short black hair. Tonight, he is wearing worn khakis, a once-white, sweat-stained tee shirt with “i luv da big apple” printed on it, and a square, green cap on his head. He is there every day of the year, selling M&Ms and the Daily News.

“Holy shit, man,” he says, shaking his head and looking at the shattered beaver. “Holy shit.”

The second witness is the station supervisor, who sits in the small token booth as she does every evening at this time. A tall black woman, she taps her fingers, staring blankly into a private nothingness. To Hasid, she would be but one of countless blue-uniformed women staring out from forbidding booths, were she not here, sitting across from him night after night.

Abu Hasid crosses the station and approaches her. He has no customers this Sunday night and has been furtively smoking a cigarette by the turnstile. The smoke he has exhaled now mingles with stony dust.

“Hey, Crystal,” he yells (he has often read the name on her silver badge). “You see that? Something, man.”

Crystal, of course, has seen. She frowns at Abu Hasid and leaves her booth. Abu Hasid reminds himself not to stand too far away from her; manners are different here. So they stand a few feet apart, Hasid grinning and showing his brown, battered teeth, Crystal, hands in the pockets of her blue uniform, scowling. She shrugs her shoulders.

“You in for it, man.” Abu Hasid walks away, shaking his head and grinning.

Crystal passes through the turnstiles to the broken beaver. It has left a gaping hole in the wall, a break in the station’s ranks of beavers, and a mess on the floor. Crystal stares like a child, unsure of how to clean up her room.

“Haven’t seen this one before,” she says to herself.

Abu Hasid appears on the other side of the turnstiles with a cop.

“Crystal, I think you gonna need him.” The vendor chuckles to himself as the
policeman vaults the turnstile.

“Jesus,” says the cop, staring down. “I’m gonna put up some tape or something.” He pats himself down, opening a pouch here and there, looking for his roll of yellow tape.

“What you gonna do, Crystal?” Abu Hasid is standing again on the other side of the bars.

She rolls her eyes. “Talk to my supervisor or something, I guess, like he’s gonna help a lot.”

Abu Hasid watches Crystal return to her booth and pick up the telephone. A stubby, bald man in a suit enters the subway station and moves towards the “WOMEN” sign. Abu Hasid drops his cigarette and hustles back to his stand.

“Can I help you, man?” he asks, hopping over his counter and moving behind the cash register. Abu Hasid can see Crystal off the phone, rummaging for something in her booth. The businessman brandishes a stick of chewing gum.

“Seventy-five cents, man. Have a nice——” Abu Hasid’s customer has put down three quarters and now walks away to Crystal’s booth. She is holding an orange piece of paper, a form perhaps, with three fingers. Her fingernails are long, curvy, and pink. After years, Abu Hasid has decided that they are fake.

“Gimme a twenty dollar metro card,” says the bulbous businessman.

“Outta metro cards.” There is something wrong with the microphone that Crystal uses to communicate with customers; she can be heard throughout the station.

Abu Hasid cranes his neck and sees Crystal filling out the form. The policeman is leaving, having found and used his tape.

“What?” Gum-man leans forward towards the microphone.

“Outta metro cards.”

Now Gum-man has turned red, like his tie. “What kinda place is this?” Crystal stops writing, bends over, and places a placard in her window. It reads, “Sorry—station clerk off duty.”

“Ya know what, lady? I’m gonna file a complaint; get you fired for this…” He storms off into the crowd of New Yorkers. Crystal sees the vendor laughing and laughing, and she smiles back.

At eight o’clock, Abu Hasid closes up his shop. He pulls down the shutters beneath the “WOMEN” sign and walks over to Crystal’s booth.

“You really showed what’s what to that man,” Abu Hasid says. He likes this idiom, which he came across in an English course once.

“Had to fill in a complaint form for that beaver,” Crystal says, chuckling.

“See you tomorrow, Crystal.” Abu Hasid waves good-bye. She smiles and waves back from her booth.

It is a sultry summer night. Manhattan is loud and ferociously dense. Abu Hasid trudges through it all to the Union Square subway stop, more crowded than the one he
has just left. The station is lonesome without beavers.

When Abu Hasid first moved to New York City, he was awed by the subway system. To him, it was an entirely different world from the one above: a subterranean labyrinth driven by the might and wealth of the Americans. He is seldom struck now by its massiveness, its wildness; when he is, he likes to pretend that it is fueled by the very fires of hell.

Tonight it is battering and brutal to stand on a packed platform for ten minutes, to board an N train so crowded it stinks of human sweat, to try to read the Qur’an leaning against a door with nothing to hold on to except the cloth-bound book. The train stops in a nameless, placeless tunnel. People stare as Abu Hasid reads. After many slow minutes, the subway begins to move again. The train begins to empty little by little. At last, Abu Hasid gets off the train.

Hasid’s apartment is deep in Queens. His is a neighborhood of apartments without air-conditioners, of wailing sirens, of sweaty, tired people speaking a dozen languages that Hasid does not know. As the slumped, sweat-drenched vendor walks along the street, he sees no Moroccans; he hardly ever does.

Hasid’s apartment building comes into view suddenly, looming before him. He looks up at its red brick facade, still radiating heat even after the sun has gone down. Hasid sighs and moves to unlock the front door. The glass windowpane has been broken again. He opens the door, stepping over the broken glass. Abu Hasid enters the stairwell and begins to ascend, looking both ways. He climbs to the third floor and arrives at his apartment.

He rents a small kitchen and living room, a bedroom, and a small bathroom. Eerie fluorescent light fixtures illuminate the stucco ceiling and the white paint peeling off the walls. Hasid sees his parents-in-law, gray, haggard, and too small for their traditional vestments. Putting down his backpack on the floor, he stumbles over to them and kisses them both on each cheek.

“You are late,” his mother-in-law admonishes him in Arabic. He is lifting his hands in protest when his wife appears from the kitchen area. She is drenched in sweat from the heat of the stove, the apartment, and the night itself. Their three-year-old son hangs from her left arm. Abu Hasid embraces them both, smiling.

After his wife has set down the eggplant salad and couscous, Hasid tells them about the beaver.

He likes to tell stories when he eats at home. It helps to distract him from food that never tastes as he thinks it should. Abu Hasid says that it is because the saffron and the cumin and the harissa are not good here; he says that it is because American meat is not fresh enough; he says that it is because the big meal of the day should be lunch, not dinner. Abu Hasid knows that none of these are the real reasons: it is his tongue, not the food, that has changed. He tries often to get his wife to cook “American” food, but she always refuses.
“You must try to make lasagna; it is so good,” Hasid will say. He has, in fact, never had lasagna, but he has seen it: layers of sun-colored noodles, mouth-watering tomato sauce, and cheese like lambs’ wool. Yet his wife shakes her head and his in-laws click their tongues. Tonight, however, he is too weary for this. He finishes his food and his story.

“What is a beaver?” his son asks.

Hasid thinks for few seconds. “I will show you tomorrow.”

After the dishes are washed and dried, Abu Hasid’s family arranges itself for the night. When his in-laws have settled in the living room and his wife and child are secure in the bedroom, Hasid takes his backpack, goes into the bathroom, and turns on the light and the shower. He reaches into his bag and, after rummaging around in it for a moment, takes out a crumpled paperback copy of The Purpose Driven Life. Sitting on top of the toilet, he reads.

Abu Hasid tiptoes out of bed at six o’clock in the morning and puts a leather pouch and his paperback in his pack. After kissing his sleeping wife and child he leaves and he walks quickly to the N stop. Hasid is interrupted from his thoughts at an intersection by a pack of cops with drawn guns chasing a man down the street. He remembers the cop with the yellow tape and smiles to himself. Abu Hasid whistles as he hurries into the first subway station of the day.

The train is very empty this early in the day and Hasid finds a quiet car. He reads the Qur’an as the subway rattles through the graffiti-covered tunnels of Queens. In time, he comes again to Manhattan.

As he has done so many mornings, Abu Hasid opens up his stand and spreads out the newspapers, reserving a couple for himself. Hasid does good business in the morning; people always stop to buy the paper. Nonetheless, during a brief lull, he leaves the newsstand and checks for the beaver. It is still there, shattered and surrounded by police tape. Abu Hasid remembers something and hurries back to his shop. He opens his backpack and takes out the leather pouch. Inside is an old Polaroid camera Hasid received as a wedding gift from his wife’s family. For Hasid, it justifies living with his parents-in-law in the tiny apartment, for he has taken many precious photos with it: photos of his friends in Morocco, photos of his wife, photos of his son as a newborn. Even now, the magic of pressing a button and seeing the world printed out on a sheet of glossy paper has not worn off.

Abu Hasid returns to the turnstiles. The station is almost empty. He leans over and takes a few pictures of beavers—broken and unbroken—catching the developing prints in his hand. Hasid hurries back to his newsstand and, once the photos have developed, puts them in his backpack.

Crystal is not on duty until evening and the station clerk at this hour does not care or know about the beaver; she hasn’t driven away any customers, either. The station is filled with lives too distant for Abu Hasid to touch. He sits behind his counter and reads
the Daily News stock report. The morning is slow and Hasid looks at his battered digital watch often.

At lunchtime he ascends briefly and buys a kosher hotdog from a nearby Indian vendor. It is hot on the streets but hotter still in the station where he eats by the beaver.

Later in the day, Abu Hasid is working through the sports section with his head and nose in the paper. He has a pad of paper and a pencil and he is trying to teach himself the rules of baseball when someone approaches the counter. Abu Hasid stops thinking about knuckleballs and sinkers and says, “If you need any help, just let me know, man.”

His customer is an older white woman. She is well dressed and has what Hasid believes to be an expensive handbag slung over her shoulder. She stops reaching for a bottle of water and stares at him. The lady slowly and carefully puts the bottle of water back in the cooler and walks out.

The cop comes by again, not long before Crystal’s shift is supposed to begin. Abu Hasid goes to greet him.

“Back for the beaver?” he asks.

“Yeah,” says the policeman, taking off his sunglasses. “I gotta get an account of what happened for the records.”

Abu Hasid eagerly relates the events of the previous night. He tells the story in his best English and gesticulates wildly as he speaks. The cop follows him carefully, taking notes.

“Thanks, buddy,” the policeman says.

“No problem, man.”

The police officer takes some M&Ms from Abu Hasid’s stand and leaves the station, waving to Hasid. Hasid waves back and begins to read the New York Times, mouthing the words quietly to himself. He is still on the front page when someone calls out to him. It is Crystal.

“I talked to my supervisor,” she says. “They’re gonna send a contractor or someone.”

“Yeah?” Abu Hasid has come out from behind the counter again. “What’s he gonna do?”

“Dunno,” Crystal says. “Put it back together or something.”

Hasid laughs. “They should take my ‘WOMEN’ sign and use it instead of the beaver.”

Crystal glances at the sign above Hasid’s stand and nods slowly. “Crazy stuff, right?”

“You bet, man.” They leave each other and return to their respective cages.

More people are in the station on a Monday night, so Crystal is busy. Hasid, however, is not, and soon it is time for him to again shutter his newsstand.

Tonight, Abu Hasid walks more slowly, watching the trucks and taxis and bright stores. In the window of one such department store, the vendor sees a handbag very much
like the one the older woman had earlier. Abu Hasid does something he learned in his subway station: he gives the handbag the middle finger.

Hasid enters the Union Square station, thinking about showing his son the beaver photographs. Suddenly, a policeman shouts at him and grabs his arm, driving away his thoughts of the look of wonder on his three-year-old’s face.

“Need to look at your bag.” The cop gestures him over to where two more are sitting. Abu Hasid runs his eyes over them. The cop who pulled him aside is a tall and broad-shouldered white man; the other two are short and squat. One of the portly policemen is also white, a red-faced cop with a small mustache. The third is a black man, apparently of higher rank than the others: his hat has a gold rim.

Hasid remembers the contents of his bag: an umbrella, *The Purpose Driven Life*, most of his day’s earnings (he keeps the rest in his wallet), his camera, and the pictures. Abu Hasid has seen policemen—he has seen Crystal—shoo away people taking photographs. He has read in the newspapers about terrorists taking photos of sites they wanted to bomb. He has read about people being arrested for mere camera pictures.

Heart pounding, Hasid turns to the chief policeman, but does not move.

“There’s nothing in there. I need to get home. My wife—”

“Don’t let him go!” the cop-in-charge yells. There seems to be excitement in the man’s voice.

The other two cops roughly grab him and pull the backpack off his shoulders. He watches as the cop with the gold-rimmed hat dumps the contents of his bag onto their table. The photos lie scattered on top of Hasid’s other things. The other two cops begin to pat him down roughly.

A train is coming into the station; with it comes a gust of hot wind. The police officer with Hasid’s backpack has the camera bag. Hasid stares as the wind from the train blows the photos away in flutter of white. He looks at the officers.

“What’s this?” The chief cop holds up the camera. The other policemen pause in their search of Hasid’s person.

Hasid gropes for words. His palms are drenched in sweat. “I had it—how do you say—fixed.” The police officer puts the camera down.

“What’s the money for?”

“I’m a vendor.”

The two cops have finished searching him. The black officer places the money down on the table. “Okay. You’re done.”

Hasid’s heart is pounding. “What?”

“Move along!”

Abu Hasid stuffs his stuff back into his pack, his sweaty hands slipping and shaking.

This night, Abu Hasid does not read the Qur’an, but he thanks Allah a thousand times under his breath.
When he gets to his apartment, Hasid does not tell any stories. He is calm now, but exhausted. He eats his dinner without tasting it and goes into the bathroom to read.

Morning, when it comes, promises an exceptionally hot and sticky day. Abu Hasid tries to whistle as he walks to the subway, but the oven-like world quiets him. The cool of the empty train, however, instills in him some hope for a half-decent day. He prays and reads.

When he gets to his stand, Abu Hasid repeats his morning actions. It is only later, in late morning, that he checks for the beaver. It is gone. The hole it had left in the wall is gone too, filled in with smooth, grey cement. There is no trace of the yellow police tape. Hasid stares for a while, until a customer comes to his shop.

Crystal comes at her usual time and he goes to speak to her. “No more beaver,” Hasid says.

Crystal shrugs. She has customers to deal with.

One spring day when he is a freshman in college, Abu Hasid’s son sees a beaver for the first time, near a small, pristine pond. He realizes that his father never explained to him what a beaver is.

Eli M

Journeys of Autumn

Driver: not so fast. How grand is this season.
Underneath its vast gray firmament,
the leaves are freed by the wind.

This season calms me completely,
as do the many journeys of the leaves.
Throughout the year they grow and mature, and then
the autumn wind ultimately carries them away.

Take the carriage and return home.
I need to be alone with the leaves;
to be among the great piles of them;
to partake in the wind; to introduce into my sullen life
something of the air, something fluttering through the sky.

Robert M
Allie Mae Burroughs

You don’t know what these eyes have seen,
    What these lips have kissed,
    What these ears have heard.
    Does my gaze make you uneasy?

The seasons have been changing my whole life.
    They will keep on changing until I die.

Leaves on that tree that I chopped down
    To build this house
    Remain in my front yard
    Like the memories I have of Nathan.

He bought me this shirt long ago for Mother’s Day,
    It is my favorite.

    My lips are chapped.
    The balm of beeswax is all out.
    I am going to wait
    Until the bees come back in the springtime.

I stand in front of my mirror every morning
    Parting my hair.
    I make sure that it is perfect
Because right now it is the only thing I can control

    I wish I could get away, but
    I feel like my back is against the wall.
    My nose is cold,
    My eyes have never seen anything new.

    I bite my lips for the springtime.

Zeke E
Undying Spinster

Truth is a woman whose heart cannot be won:
At man's first touch she shivers with a rush—
But her soul is so frigid, it's positively numb.

She was once a friend, but all she did was shun;
Now her evil sister makes me blush.
Truth is a woman whose heart cannot be won.

At once alone and lost, I long for her to come;
She chortles and leaves my morals to turn to mush.
Her soul so frigid, it's positively numb.

I shudder and sob at what I have become;
Finally she emerges to tell me to hush.
Truth is a woman whose heart cannot be won.

A shimmer of her wintry smile and you're paralyzed by glum;
With age, one realized how easy she is to shush.
Her soul so frigid, it's positively numb.

A woman unequaled: her Friday nights are lonesome,
She cries herself to sleep, sobbing into red plush.
Truth is a woman whose heart cannot be won.
But her soul is so frigid it's positively numb.

Rachel L
The first time you learn a language, you will be asked to count to ten. You will have been asked to memorize the numbers and the way they are said (un, like you are expressing displeasure with a mediocre meatloaf, deux, pursing your lips like the elegant ladies in the old movies you have seen in black and white). You will be prompted by your teacher’s fingers, bent to form bunny ears or curled into a thumbs-up. You will remember that the schoolyard rule (that thumbs are not fingers) no longer applies. You will shout out, “Trois,” with the rest of the class. You will feel your lips stretch when the teacher says this is right. You will count in your head the teacher’s fingernails, the beads on her necklace, the stripes on her turquoise sweater. You will call, “Neuf!” the word new and daring on your tongue. You will wait as the teacher comes to your desk. You will see the rest of the class watching, their mouths shaping “Huit,” their hands folded on their desks, the pencils with which they have been scribbling abandoned, as yours is, in the margins of their notebooks. You will listen as the teacher corrects you. You will nod as she counts again patiently. She will tell you learning a language is not easy. She will advise you to practice every night. You will not tell her that this is what you have been doing, huddled up on the sofa, turning the pages of your yellow notebook. Instead you will smile, you will write down her words. You will walk out of class behind the other students, walk down the hallway where you press your feet to the floor with every step you take on the bruised tile.

The first time you hear a man propose, you will not know what to say. He will be on his knees, a velvet box in his hands, and you will lock your ankle around the leg of your chair as if your own feet could betray you. You will think that you expected something more. Some feeling, maybe, grand and romantic, washing over you in cascades and crescendos. But all you feel is the awkwardness of his position, his knees bent, his arms inclined towards you, rising expectantly at the elbows. You will wonder at the neat folds of his suit, the soft curl of his hair. You will wait for him to tell you what to do. The waiter will bring over your salads. He will place them on the table and straighten the cloth. He will say, “Congratulations,” barely moving his lips, the way he might say, “Thank you” or “Good night.” You will nod, the way you might reply to a remark about the weather. You will think that men propose every day. You will wonder how many women say no, how many women run away. You do not know how they can tear themselves away from those waiting eyes and that box.

He will say, “What’s it to be?” He will be joking, as if you are ordering dessert or going to the movies. He will tell you that getting married is not easy. “I can see I’m surprising you,” he will say. You will not tell him you have thought about it every night; you have contemplated futures with and without his ring around your finger. You will not say you are desperate to see it glisten inside the box. Instead you will smile, you will reach
for your fork. You will press the tines into the pale lettuce and ask if you can please talk about it later.

2023

The first time you will raise your voice, you will be asked if you need to sit down. You cannot expect them to leave you alone. After you shout, they will crowd around you: your father, your great-aunt, the man you have never been introduced to, who hovers over the hors d’oeuvres like a picky bird. They will offer you napkins and glasses of water. Your great-aunt will slip you her ancient flask. You will laugh and push it away. She will keep returning the bottles of whiskey and brandy and scotch. “Can I just get you a little something, dear?” She will tell you about her mother’s smelling salts, “calmed her right down.” She will tell you anything if you ask.

You will not tell her you were really angry. You will not say he should not have been there. You will not point out this is your baby and no one else’s. You will not think of how you froze when you saw him with your sister, how you turned away when he stroked her hair. Instead you will smile, you will pour a glass of whiskey. The bitter liquid will burn your throat, a thousand times stronger than the champagne you would have had at your wedding. You will let it drown all the words left unspoken.

Elisabeth R

Imaginary Angels

They dance along the walls in their scenes,
Angels surrounding the wood rows.
Lower angels, reluctant, singing in the lines
Which stand above the chained dead.
Imagined, unforgotten;
They loom amongst cold poison.

Wonder down the path, through the gate
Into a wild factory of play
Things, monkey bars an impossible
Obstacle, raspberry lips
Romance popsicles on a hot day;
Too hot for snow angels.

Grace G
Christian Blue Jeans

Yesterday morning as I put on my jeans I thought of you
With a clarity that I normally reserve for thoughts that take up my time
(College applications, homework).
I heard your voice in my head, laden with Biblical austerity
Say that my jeans were too tight.
As if it were not enough to want to change into a long black skirt
With a large wooden cross for good measure
I hear your voice again, chagrined at your daughter’s sexuality
That you can see my panty line.
You could never handle the raw beauty of women, a quality
That cannot be enhanced by a Christian or secular pair of jeans,
Much less this arduous development of your own daughter
Into a womanhood she hopes will fit.
How can she find beauty that will fit her emerging self
When you discourage her from finding a pair of jeans that will flatter her body?

Marjorie R

A Mark Left

That stupid bow tie of his,
Heading for more exciting and more poorly sanitized places,
As he had been bound to do
Since he entered his industry with a deluded will,
Still a cared-for child in many respects.
As fortune would have it,
An hour or so before boarding the train,
He left behind.
It has, as he, with his sense of how things ought to be, saw fit,
Been tied around the forehead of some other thing,
A sculpture of a cat, sitting on the only end table in the apartment,
Obscuring, mostly, its eyes, and making,
With its sick, ungodly colors, the decent
Piece of art look utterly ridiculous.

Zane F
Vitruvian Man by Leonardo da Vinci

What cruelty caused this man
To be splayed out so, for the sake of science?

Not one muscle hidden, and left to the imagination
Not one feature cloaked
To hide his clear discomfort in putting his body on display
For centuries to come.

Who twisted his very limbs
And stretched them across the page?
Who filled in the lines and curves of his body
With an archaic ochre?

What infidel scrawled all these words
Above and beneath this man?
Who took such careful notes
And gave such importance
To an invented human being?

This is the ideal man.

The noble legs speak of a Hellenistic time,
The carved nose recalls King David
And the first founding of Israel.

Why was this man drawn
So perfectly to scale?
Did this venerable Italian desire
To taunt the coming generations
With such an image of virility?

There are no answers here—
Merely the flawless image of a man
(Double limbed because the artist got carried away
In the chiseled contours of his body),
Put on display
To give future children
Something to aspire to.

Sonia R
A Lovely Day For Heroes

He kissed her. She smelled of makeup, hairspray, and perfume; the way a woman should smell, he thought.

It had been three years since he’d seen her face. He pulled back to gaze into her dark blue eyes. They told a story, a love story. He hadn’t remembered how they were orange in the middle.

“Darling,” she said with a new cigarette pressed between her two rouged lips, “Where in the hell have you been?”

They looked at each other and laughed. He took her waist into his arm and led it towards the water, towards the end of the pier.

“You know what, Luce?” he sneered.

“What?” she said through a cracked smile.

“I missed you, that’s what.”

She giggled.

“You too, you old hound.”

Her hair was brown but it looked red in the sun even though it was setting. She stared down the sunset while he studied her.

“What have you been doing back here? When I left you were waiting tables. I’m sorry I didn’t write. The truth is you never gave me your address.”

“Well, well, well, that’s some excuse—a damn good one too—if it’s true, stranger. I’m not waiting tables anymore. You see, my uncle bought that old piece of junk, the diner, and he’s letting me manage it.”

“Well then, that’s swell!”

She stroked the old wood with an extended high heel.

“Where are you staying tonight? You’re not from around here, I mean, right? Or at least that’s what I’d remembered…” she asked. She was never shy, really.

“Yes, you’re certainly right. I haven’t looked as of yet. I came right to you from the train.” He shot her a grin.

“You could stay with my brother, he’s a nice man.”

He had hoped for a little more. He’d deserted his family to come here, and they wouldn’t exactly just let him back on the train.

“He’s right down the hall from me.”

That was more like it.

They stayed put until the sun set. He stroked her hair. It had become chilly, so she had curled up against him. He didn’t mind her, but sometimes her cute act got to him.

“How ’bout we get a bite?” He was famished.

“Sure. What time is it?”

“About seven, the sun’s down.”

“All right.”

They started walking. Conversation was thin; he counted time to the clicking of
her heels against the street. Neither of them knew what to say, it had been so long. He started thinking that he really didn't know her very well. She lit the sixth cigarette of the night and took a drag.

“Don't you think you might smoke too much, kitten? I don't remember you smoking so much.”

“Ha! I've smoked since I could walk and I will until I crawl!” she smiled with gracious yellow teeth.

He studied the smoke creeping out of the gaps in between them. It emerged to make a halo around her head. The thick leather collar of his bomber jacket found itself in a petite hand. She brushed his hair back with her palm.

“Ooh, it tickles! Why did they cut it so short, darling?”

“So it doesn't get in the way, I suppose.”

“It's not very stylish, if you ask me,” she giggled.

“We all looked the same, it didn't matter.” He didn't understand the concept of fashion.

“Really, now? I would like to meet one of your buddies and see.” She tried to put on a stern face, but she just looked like a doll.

She was hard for him to take sometimes. Three years ago she'd seemed a lot prettier, too. Maybe she'd aged. She could almost tell he was annoyed.

“Hey! It's the diner! Let's go in there. Don't you remember? It's where we met!”

He did. He followed her inside. There were two old men at the counter, drinking coffee with one hand, smoking with the other, and reading the same newspaper that they had rested on the counter. The only other people there were a few teenage girls in the corner booth and the one waitress behind the register.

“Hey, Lucy. Anywhere you'd like. Devon, right? She's told me about you.” The waitress held out a complimentary grin. Her lipstick was crooked.

“Really?” he spat out. It was one night, for Christ's sake.

“Alice!” Lucy shot her a look. “I didn't, darling, I just mentioned you once. Maybe. Let's sit.” She walked him to the booth in the back. The light was dimmer there, he couldn't see the zit on her chin that way. “What would you like? It's on the house, I hope you know.”

“Oh, anything at all. You know what's good here. Surprise me.”

“All right!” She was always willing to show off.

She ordered two rounds of chocolate chip pancakes. More silence. She picked at her nail lacquer as they waited. He examined himself in the mirror on the wall of the booth. It'd been a long time since he'd seen his reflection. He looked older, too. Not bad, just all of a sudden a man, not a boy of nineteen. He had developed wrinkles around his mouth and eyes.

“I was terribly worried, sweetheart. Every day I thought about whether you'd come back to me. I mean, I figured you would, but you know. I cried for a day straight when you weren't on the train last year.”

“I'm sorry. They delayed my leave because there were too many of us sick that needed those seats. My best friend was wounded two weeks ago. He was supposed to ride next to me
on the train home. He died.”

“That’s horrible! You weren’t wounded, were you, cupcake?” She clapped her hand on her mouth. When she removed it there was a red outline on her fingers. Careless, he thought.

“No.”

“Thank God.” She fiddled with her fork as a devious look appeared in her typically serene eyes. “I’ve got a question for you, mister; were the other soldiers’ girls prettier than me?” She batted her eyelashes.

“No,” he lied. “You’re gorgeous.”

“Aww! Did you notice that I lost weight?”

“Yeah, you look great, sweetie.” He hadn’t noticed.

“Hehehe, thank you darlin’.”

She took his beaten hands in her moisturized ones. At this point he wondered if it had been worth coming here. The teenage girls laughed uproariously. He turned. They were looking at him.

“You’re not so talkative tonight, hon. Why?”

He shifted his weight. She was too much. He’d come here because she was one of the few people he’d remembered from before the draft. Not only had she remembered him, it seemed as if she’d had a wedding date in mind.

“Nothing. No reason.”

“All right, sugar.”

He reconsidered. He was tired of her act; it was abrasive.

“Well, to be honest, there isn’t much to talk about. What are we going to talk about? That one goddamn night? It didn’t matter! You were the one that started writing me, remember? You were only sixteen!”

She cowered. Her bee-stung mouth was suddenly speechless.

“Say something!” he yelled.

“What is there to say, Devon? I love you.”

“No, you don’t know what love is! You’re a kid!”

“I’m the same age you were when we met!” There was a tear on her cheek.

“It was a long time ago, Lucy. It didn’t mean anything. You have to have known that.”

The food came. She started bawling.

“I spent three years of my life loving you, you son of a bitch!” She got up. “Supposedly I wasn’t worth waiting for and neither are you!”

“Wait, I didn’t mean it like that.” He had screwed up. Now he was stuck here with no bed and no girl.

“The hell you didn’t, Devon. And you can pay for your own goddamned pancakes.” She left and slammed the door on her way out. One of the old men looked up, but only one. There certainly were a lot of pancakes. He made his decision.

“Hey, girls, are you hungry?”

Scout P
The way little details often escaped me
her hands
were not only stressed
but curved in tiny half domes
as if cupping miniature igloos.
The way she rolled the
hangnail
between her fingers
as if kneading it
before letting it fall.
The bazillion hairs that grow from
a once naked scalp
that we do not know by name
just that they blend and rebel.
The ringing noise
that can be found anywhere
but some have the night to block out.

The way they were not only stressed
but curved in tiny half domes
as if cupping miniature igloos.
The way she rolled the
hangnail
between her fingers
as if kneading it
before letting it fall.
The bazillion hairs that grow from
a once naked scalp
that we do not know by name
just that they blend and rebel.
The ringing noise
that can be found anywhere
but some have the night to block out.

The stain, the wrinkle, the bad stitching
easily spotted on her green blouse.
The blouse
too tight in some spots
too big in others
however it was all she wore.
Moldy and pale
was the rest of her body
her thighs clapped together
as she sashayed uselessly
and her aged feet squeaked
on the shiny wood floors.

She gave me
unusually dark red wine
in a rainbow-striped mug
she told me she made the wine herself
in Australia
with her own grimy feet.

She giggled and pranced
but as I sipped
all I could picture was her
overgrown toenail
bursting open a grape as she jumped higher
in the bin
squashing the grapes
in a bin where a woman had once given
birth
a flake of dry skin
would part from her foot
forever unnoticed.
She sailed over close to me
feet squeaking
she put her lips to my ear
and whispered
“God is in the details.”

Mollie D
Flags were draped clearly and squarely over the coffins, with admirable attention to symmetry and detail. Three or four pale widows wearing black hats or veils with lace trimming stood with their handkerchiefs at their glazed, disbelieving eyes, mourning. The sun was glaring, on their faces sweat and tears were indistinguishable from one another. The priest at the foot of the oak coffin had a bible open in his wrinkled hand. He was speaking but no one heard him. All that they could see, all that they could feel, were the coffins and what lay inside them. Their husbands, victims of war, victims of murder.

Alice’s window looked out over Central Park. Every morning, before she took a shower, before she put on her makeup, got her keys, kissed her husband, and went to work, Alice would look out this window and sigh. What she sighed over didn’t matter. It was all a part of her daily routine.

Alice’s husband was buried that day, but she had chosen not to go to the funeral. Instead, she sat on the sill and looked out the window for hours, observing and sighing. If the cigarette butts in her ashtray had been pigs’ ribs, one could say that they had been eaten until the bone was bare. Yes, she had smoked those cigarettes until their very end, and another one in her right hand was slowly burning. She put her head on the window, closed her eyes, and tried to suppress the tears she felt coming. If she cried them, she thought, it was probable that she would drown.

When she opened them again, Alice saw a lady outside. Her hair was silver like the winter that seemed so far away, and there looked to be absolutely nothing between her old bones and her skin. The leash in her left hand attached her to a shaggy brown mutt, whom, every few steps, she slowly bent over to pet. Suddenly she was knocked over by a tall man in a suit holding a leather briefcase, who was running to catch the light. The shock caused her to let go of the leash of her dog, who, in turn, began to run down Fifth Avenue. The lady scurried to catch him, but she was too slow, too old, and she knew it. She sat down on a bench and put her head in her hands.

And that’s how Alice felt. One second he was there, the next he was gone. A shove had taken the mutt away, and a war had taken Oliver. Alice put out the cigarette and closed the red velvet drapes. She walked over to the bureau and looked into the gold mirror above it. She felt dead, she looked dead; as far as Alice was concerned, she was dead. Only, she was still there, and she didn’t know why anymore.

That night, Alice stood in the shower crying. She took off her clothes and stepped into the tub everyday, but this was the first time she had ever really felt naked.

Emily R
The bent silver spoon I found in the kitchen will never hold soup.  
It will never stir sugar at tea time. It has been beaten and then twisted and bent over.

Your spoon used to work everyday in the houses of rich white ladies in the Upper East Side. It was probably a wedding gift, but the cursive monogrammed letters on the handle have worn out with time. Every day you polish it to keep it from tarnishing. You kept the spoon alive and beautiful but never called it your own.

But one day you slid the spoon into your apron pocket when it is time to return to your one-room home in Harlem. Your tired hands hammered at the spoon until it was flattened. No tea time would ever have use for it.

And when the useless spoon was folded over and bent around your wrist, it was transformed.  
It was a bracelet. It was your bracelet. It was beautiful.  
And now as I run my fingers over the cracks and dents that have formed like wrinkles on a face from years of use, I decide to slide the spoon into my own pocket.

Ilana H

There was something about the way she said it,  
Something really was the matter.  
It was a realization quickly pushed  
Back into that corner of untouchables in my brain.

Her anger and frustration with my father  
And her sadness were suddenly screwed onto me.  
I was the hinge holding the two together  
And I was rusty  
And I was old  
And I wasn't enough.

My father always kept his sadness clasped in chains,  
Buried deep somewhere so that I was unable to see it.  
He was protecting me from the cold sadness  
While she let me shiver between the hovering trees.

I was angry with her and her small breaths and soft hand gestures  
As she would swirl the spaghetti round and round  
Until it sank into her lonesome sexless mouth.  
I was angry with the bites I had to pick at,  
Slowly healing with a pink scar to follow,  
Taking away my adolescence  
And replacing it with the clenching feet of winter.

Natalie B
Sound Poem

Dedicated to my mom

The sound of your footsteps coming up my stairs, when I’ve been up all this time talking to my friends is like...
Is like the sound of your tea spilling all over your bed right before you go to sleep
Is like the sound of your feet stepping on a wasp when playing soccer barefoot
Is like the sound of sneezing into your hand in the middle of a test
Is like the sound of “well…um… I don’t think I’m ready… but we can still be friends”
Is like the sound of distress my gerbil makes when I pick it up
Is like the sound of my sister’s alarm going off at 2:00 am
Is like the sound of someone else’s candy wrapper when you’re hungry
Is like the sound of a fire alarm going off in your ear when you finally get to watch a movie in class
Is like the sound of your favorite cup breaking on the ground
Is like the sound of juice falling on your pants right before the girl you like is going to talk to you
The sound of two best friends breaking up
The sound of your key breaking in the lock
The sound of your tire popping
Like the sound of a teacher informing us of a pop-quiz
Is like the sound of your computer crashing before you’ve saved
Is like the sound of your library book ripping
The sound someone makes upon finding out you’re ticklish
Like the sound of the cashier telling you the groceries are more than what your mom gave you
Is like hearing someone read something very interesting very slowly
The sound of “you got a new haircut”
But all the same I love you mom and I know you’ll pretend not to have seen the light under my door go off, right before you reach the top step.

Dash S
Crescent

My two loves. My love that is. My honey. Just a teaspoon can send me into a coma of joy. Joy, my mother, was born, like me, obsessed with Honey. She never married. I met my Michael once. He was boring, worked for the Board of Ed. I’m glad Joy and Mike never worked out. Well, my Ida. She had a secret. I don’t really know. It didn’t matter until the end.

Cold like ice. Icy cold. Icy hot. One time a girl licked an icicle on a brown roof. Her tongue stuck to it. She never got to remove it. When winter ended the only icicle left was the one stuck to her tongue. She thought she was a unicorn.

He put it in my mouth. It was an immediate taste. Nothing subtle about it. It was warty like a toad. I washed my mouth with something sweet and sticky afterwards.

Sammy pushed it like a red button with his middle finger. Everywhere untouched moved, and his finger hit the ground. Sammy had given her honey once. It was a foreign taste.

She has always wanted children—well, not children, only a baby. She didn’t know what happened when babies grow up. Teenager. Couldn’t want one.

The candle burned on.

She liked it but the taste would stay forever.

When they were together no one had a head. One might float away if not tied down by the rigid neck. Sweet made her dizzy. She made him light. A nauseous couple.

A boy in a park. Slides down a solid slide. Rolling, something breaks, and he goes rolling. The bump at the end where his teeth hit the roof of his mouth. Rose petals unfolding.

I woke up to a cold like nothing before, couldn’t get out of bed. Finally he came in and turned the heat up all the way. I sighed. Took a shower and sat undressed on the foot. Ugghh, I was thirsty. I walked over to my desk and picked up a bottle of water. As soon as it hit my throat I was frozen shut.

When things melt, form is lost. What was once an ice hotel, an iced David, an icy unicorn perhaps is gone. When refrozen, that puddle will become a stiffened puddle. A stiffened body is never again the same human.

Poured it on. All that was needed was warmth. She needed a hug? I gave her the honey. Heated in a cup of tea. Her neck started collapsing.

Her horn started melting.

Ana R
Ned and Lint (an excerpt)

Ned began his day as he always had: a shower best described as invigorating preceded his typical oral hygiene routine. As usual, Ned brushed each dental quadrant for an extra twenty seconds after his self-timed electric toothbrush beeped its view of completion. He chuckled to himself, this morning as all mornings, at the notion that two minutes of brushing was, by any means, adequate. After contemptuously washing from his hands the saliva that had dribbled out of the corner of his mouth and down the shaft of his Oral-B Defender, he placed his soap dish under a torrent of cold water that issued from his faucet and carefully rubbed away the murky soap residue that had traitorously deposited itself there during the night. When the little man with his green lunch box and, too, his maxim—“It pays to look clean”—were spotless in the center of the soap dish, Ned replaced the soap and continued an agenda marked most notably by intricate toiletries, their accessories and the care these things required.

Work was the same, which was good, thought Ned, because it just went to show that in fact it pays to look clean. The whole of his day, for that matter, from 7:00 a.m., when Ned awakened, to 9:23 that night, was completed without major incident, save for one near encounter with the sneeze of a man who might well, to the best of Ned’s reasoning, have been sick.

It may be best to consider the events of 9:23, by virtue of their supreme consequence, in their immediate and ordinary context. Ned’s dinner plates were cleaned and stowed by 9:20, his tie undone by 9:21, his shoes adjacent the door by 9:22. It was in this comfortable and, as Ned often smiled to himself, saltily casual state that he approached his closet to hang his coat and apply his unique organizational aptitude.

At 9:23, with his coat two-thirds upon the hanger, Ned noticed something that made him jump and his insides turn uncomfortably within him like clothes in a washing machine, or, equally, like mouthwash in its final yet most violent swishings. On his closet floor sat a gray confusion of hair, thread, and dust that could quite aptly be called lint. No stranger to cleaning, Ned had encountered several balls of lint over the years and had overcome each with the deft and artful motions of a trained combatant. Yet this one was different and indeed appeared to Ned as if it grazed the hem of a pair of his pants with utmost intention. Dropping his coat, Ned closed the door on that chaotic agent and, for the first time in years, commenced the breathing exercises that had preserved him through childhood.

After calming himself enough to think, Ned calculated that, equipped with the heavy rubber gloves he kept under the kitchen sink, he might remove the lint with only marginal ado, provided, of course, that the gloves be promptly disposed of. Ned fetched and donned the yellow pair that had so well served him in the past, and, rubbing the textured finger pads meaningfully together, he again approached his closet.

By dint of its seeming mundane at its outset, this second encounter with what Ned convinced himself was just a ball of lint made a mockery of the first. His confidence
growing with each passing second, Ned stooped low to catch the little ball still dancing in the wind that he had generated by augustly throwing his closet door ajar. Yet for all his effort and, indeed, his valor, Ned again and again grasped little more than air and once, the leg of his suit pants, upon which he pulled and which presently came tumbling down along with the totality of that fabric body to which it was attached.

Having worked up a sweat that was nearly insufferable to his gloved hands, Ned stopped, frustrated and more than a little perplexed. It was then, propped up in his exhaustion against the junction of two closet walls, that Ned thought he heard a voice—a small voice, weak and entreating.

“Please, sir,” it began, “if you can find it in your heart to spare me, I’m just a little ball of dust.”

Utterly bewildered, Ned scanned his surroundings for any more explicity animated being than the lint that had just spun to a halt at his feet. Unsuccessful, he again focused his attention on the dust ball. That same small voice piped up in reply, “Yes, that was me, sir. I know you intend to get rid of me, but I mean you no harm.”

“Yes,” Ned replied, finding his voice, “I do intend to get rid of you. I intend to throw you away and take a shower and get on with my life.” For good and forceful measure, he added, “This is not how I spend my evenings between 9:23 and 10:16, I’ll tell you that much!”

“You don’t mean that, sir,” the dust cooed. And with that, it scaled Ned’s unresisting form on course towards his left shoulder where both proximity to Ned’s mind and the presence of a natural depression made a very secure perch. The lint’s softness quite surprised Ned, who had been preparing himself for the most abrasive and intensely septic experience of his life. “Allow me at least the night, and yourself that time to think it over.”

That night seemed extraordinarily protracted to Ned, despite the fact that it was in truth a full fifty-three minutes shorter than usual, due to his encounter with the fully animate ball of lint in his closet. While Ned lay awake in his bed, covers pulled slightly higher for increased security than was typical, he repeated the conversation over and over in his mind. He would consider all possible explanations for the voice and conclude that he had, in fact, conversed with whatever filth had escaped, gone unnoticed, the night previous; even this seemed more likely to Ned than the contending theories, most of which were very elaborate and involved the government.

In fact, when he really thought about it, this dust affair was not so completely bizarre or, for that matter, unfamiliar. How often in sleep had some unfortunate collision of dirt, dust, and dander invaded Ned’s thoughts, and furthermore, how frequently in these imagined circumstances Ned had accepted it, had come, in fact, to love it.

In contemplation of this truth, Ned, for one fleeting instant, honestly considered permitting the lint’s inhabiting of the closet floor. Yet in a moment of self-conscious shock, he just as quickly rejected the thought with a frightened exclamation of “Disgusting!”
Mama!

I’m recovering from
A lifetime of sensibilities—
Mama imparted to me, instilled me
With distilled urge for sentimentality—
A mental barrage of “purity”:
Fear of endstop, fixation
On bebop, Bird.

Hat check girls.

“Baby don’t end up like them, keep your lipstick on your mouth, no need for rouge on cheeks, wear your hemline low and NEVER. Never. Pick up your own gloves.”

I liked to go wandering.

I liked to smoke.

Now, I am indoors with a coat on
And the window is
Open. And there is candy in my mouth,
There are wrappers in my ashtrays, my hands
Are white but they are none too smooth.

My eyes are clear but tired, my heart beats
But is irregular. I am irregular.
I am a hypocrite. I am my own twin,
I am in time but the key signature changes.

I liked the run.

I liked the fancy.

Now I am indoors with a coat on
And the heat is turned up, and the man
Is asleep but I don’t care where he came from
Who his mother is who his father is. I don’t need to know
Where he is going.
Mother tried to get me fixated on the *He*.

I’m thinking of leaving that for God, but
I used to be atheist. I used to not care what happened
Later, I used to. But now I don’t.

I used to think on everything in the eyes, and
Take pains to watch for some sort of distraction.

Now I don’t. There were too many a-warnings along
The way for that. I used to stay up, and I was my
Keeper. I was my keeper. I am not in a zoo,
But if I was I would be the zookeeper
And the lion trainer.

Now I am the lion.
No, now I am an Equus scotti,
A tarpan,
And that means my days are numbered
But I’ve known that for a while.

(the first time I contemplated death outright
Was on my mother’s lap. It was her death I contemplated
And how I knew it would be the end—We were in the
Kitchen. Mama told me, as I cried, to be glamorous
And be remembered for it. But if that failed,
I was told to be smart, outspoken, crazed, and wicked.
That’s the sure-fire route to immortality.)

“That’s all you can do,” she said.

_Hannah Z_
The Flying Squirrel in the Jungle (of My Childhood Backyard)

There was a squirrel, alive and twitching
upon the fence in the morning.
The sun was up, bright in my sight,
and I looked away, as quick as I might.

There was a squirrel, alive and twitching,
before the lion,
the sly tabby,
watching and waiting.
Through the bushes, across the wire
it scurried.
The lion caught up,
and I looked away, as quick as I might.

There was a squirrel, alive and twitching,
in the center of three-leaf clovers,
its nose sniffing, its tail twitching.
There were three hunters,
wild boys and amusing.
I looked away, quick as I might,
but they went away, out of my sight.
The squirrel was there, alive and well.
It had three worms—
they hung from its mouth—
and I looked away, as quick as I might.

There was a squirrel, alive and twitching,
soaked in rain and quivering
in the valley, a dimple of water,
its eyes tearing.
And I looked away, as quick as I might,
but I looked back, at a ring with a ruby rock.

Kimberly F
Manneken Pis

Oftentimes, when cultivating a recollection of ephemeral memory, one must ask oneself: “Where, when, and why should I begin such a saga?” Truly capturing emotional significance with words is both futile and facile, in a funny little manner. However, “when” is obvious—the work will be written in the context of time—and with the motility of transience noted, one can fully flesh a reasonable recounting of the tale. But—ah! The next rung of reinterpretation lies upon the location. Location may fail us, but the locus of the region is quite concrete and defeat is mostly met through discretion. So do not stifle, do not deny oneself of the exact event in mind. But with those two tenets firmly fringed upon the brain, the ultimate plateau is reached: “Why?”

Here are the particulars. Date: February 14, 1965. Location: Brussels, Belgium. It was here where I first rested my oculars upon the glorious, notorious Mannekin Pis. How the most prominent landmark in Brussels manages to be of a puerile preschooler emptying his bladder both baffles and enthralls me. I am enamored of such an irreverent, unapologetic city: the malt-soaked dewdrop of the air, the claustrophobic narrows of the brick-based boulevards, the shiftless lenses of the chauffeur’s spectacles, constraining cataracts-ridden eyeballs which most likely judge my every gesticulation. Where I was staying overlooked the Manneken. The bronze in my peripherals inspired me each morning; it reminded me that perhaps crassness can in fact remain romantic. But the key is the urinary, seldom the scatological. Perhaps it reminded me not to “piss” the day away as this prepubescent specimen does. Perhaps it has no meaning beyond itself, a nihilist manifesto encapsulated in the form of a flaccid lad’s loins. (Would a nihilist need a manifesto? I submit not.) Perhaps I think too analytically. The only thing I retained from the trip was the knowledge that Belgians had and still have a superior sense of humor to Americans.

The waffles were wonderful, but distasteful in disposition. One always gets wind of the waffles and their sugar-powdered confection, the caramelized crust adorning its carapace and its grill-branded braggadocio. It is actively aware that it is positively delicious. For this reason I enjoyed consuming the waffles but loathed their very character. I also vehemently loathed this particular day: February the 14th, commonly considered Valentine’s Day by brawn-addled bruisers and average public. However, what does this day offer apart from the standard quotidian monotony of daily condition? Well, the answer comes in what the day promises, and what the day lacks: love. It leaves men like me lonely, making little language with the maitre d’ so that she’ll serve my solitude in a more efficient manner. Well, fancy that. Fancy the day I’d feign affluence for a quick fix at t’Kelderke, the hovel in the hindsight of some Grande Place dust. Usually, the tourists fail to notice the dive and instead opt for the traps with their framboise and Bostonian barstools. Good cheese croquettes, though. I would venture to say that they were quite out of the ordinary. In fact, the entire restaurant had its fair share of idiosyncrasies: there was Jacques-Jean, the one-man metal-bending clarinetist, the swirl of Gauloise smoke in the Duvel-drenched...
Afris as the chefs, most notably Claude, sang a Brel-penned tune called *Les Bourgeoises*. The *moules frites* with an ample side-serving of *stoemp* was soon presented before me.

As the waitress hoisted my hearty rations onto the meadhall double table, I noticed the very gentleman I had been arranged with walking through the Nordic doors and perching himself on an outer corner, continuing the inhalation of the cigarette he had lit outside. I internally questioned the logistics of his course but decided that it would be optimal to order more beer for the both of us. If my informant were to require cajolery, a stout golden ale would suit such means quite swimmingly. He extinguished his tobacco and collected himself with what could be only described as savage aplomb. He combed his brow with the nails of the index and middle finger, straightened his coffee pigment tie, licked the milktoast from his moustache and sauntered over to the seat I had saved for him.

“What were his motives?” This is a question which would have been of great benefit to me to have posed. Now, I see myself in my current condition, spitting teeth and worrying about everything. Delusion is conducive to the deductions one makes in social interactions. With this knowledge, I feel no more secure.

“Ah, some *stoemp*, I see.” His vocals were brazen but not as brawny as I would have expected on initial glance. He was a statesman, or at least he could feign being one with relative ease. It eased me to know this. He sat with great mettle and serviced himself with my silverware to a heaping forkful of the concoction. With his other idle hand he spooned the bottom of the fork to prevent falling potato. The utensil entered his oral cavity, and, with great jurisdiction, he clamped his jaws shut. Every movement, every undulation, every perk of the lip and shock of the tongue seemed precise, symphonic, meaningful. Of course, I could have just been in a post-coital stupor induced by my invocation of the housemaid. After all, my Valentine’s needed some sort of compensation.

“Dreadful!” he exclaimed authoritatively, as if he were the grand arbiter of starch and sauce. Of course, if he had held such a vocation, then he would not have been where he was at the exact moment; his duty was to debrief me, and ensure that the engagement would continue with maximum efficiency. I am an efficient man. “Stoemp should have no cilantro. Cilantro, coriander is so dreadful, no?” It thoroughly surprised me to discover this man’s choice of lingua—a heavily accented but eloquently inflected English, a sinewy fluency which showed no flimsy misgivings. I felt heartened. This prompted me to reply.

“I’m no fan of cilantro. However, studies have shown that some find the taste of cilantro to vary with some sort of genetic predisposition—”

“Ah, to heavens with the science! All I know is that the stuff gives me a jellygullet.” I’d known this since age three.

“Well, you must have the defect.”

“It’s no defect! It’s an adaptation! Coriander is poison breed! Just like how science proves that some smell poison when they piss after asparagus! It’s all obfuscation—all mistruth! I truth you, do you notice any pattern of lies to the scientist’s rhetoric? The double helix, the spiral stairs that contain codes of prior peoples and whatnot—it’s all, how do the Belgians around these parts say it? *Merde*!”

Upon his exclamation of excrement, several French-speaking locals looked away from
their provisions and the focus of their oculars rested upon this man. One bespectacled gent had a particular optic of disdain for my man's semantics. I did not pass judgment—that is, until he repeated these words.

“Merde, merde, merde, merde! Look, look around you, look how shocked these people all are… You can tell which ones are from Flanders because they are still enjoying their food! Oh, Duvel…my favorite. You know, a good Duvel can coax the classiest dame into a daring double sack if you get my oratory…”

He would not shut up. If we were in Spain, I would have been forced to utter “callate la boca, por favor.” This is crass too, though. And I had seen many a man get shanked for these sayings. It was at this precise moment that I began to miss New York City and all its exploits… Americana in general. I missed Ed Sullivan, and that funny little statutory girl from Fieldston who played footsie with me at the fête, had I been sixteen….Hmm…She had legs. But that is crass, also. I miss Motown, the Watusi and Truman Capote. I missed the pulp, the comedy, the ethanol-spattered spittery that would leave my oral canal when soliciting a moral girl for oral itself. The moral in itself is, I missed home. I was not a freelance, I was a philanthropist, a beacon becalming the last bastion of free will in a fearing faction of society. I needed more.

“Ahah! So you’re wondering, ‘Who is this man? Why is he munching on my food and swilling my fill of beer? What is his purpose?’ Shall I state it, mister? Shall I state it so that we may get on with the things?”

“State it.”

“I’m Frederickson, I tell you—the ship is in Bruges, if you do so wish to continue your task—and you are navigating to Norway in search of establishing the course ahead. The cartographer is in Boom, waiting for your fellow man to meet him and pay him promptly in coinage to the full extent. There is a package deposited in the northernmost vestibule of your lodging. It is for the Oslo cat. Care to make him happy?”

“I’m confused. What is my purpose?”

“Your purpose is to transport. My purpose is to transcend.”

“That’s a big step of shim-sham, that one.”

“Maybe so, but I’m supposed to say such equivocation.”

“More convoluted, innit?”

“I wouldn’t know, I’m not a man of words. Laconic, if you will.”

“Could have fooled me.”

“Get it done. I’m off. Coinage!”

The informant tossed credit onto the double roundtable and left. This would be the last sight of him until the obits, where his heaping wreck of a car would be found ignited by an exhaust bomb. This would be approximately released at 18:00 the next afternoon in the Brussels Coq, a well-rounded corner paper. I paid for the remainder of the tab. So, I had a choice—continue his task or bask in my own sweat for another few decades before the Gauloise tar invaded my alveoli. I would choose the latter. After all, I’m firm, erect. I do not piss. I am a statue of stone, not bronze.

Michael G
I Was Not There That Saturday

I was not there that Saturday
when you kissed him in the leaf-cluttered space
between my world and your backyard.
And I was not there when you fell from your pedestal
and came tumbling down from the weathervane perch on that rooftop.

I was not there that Saturday
when you skinned your knee on the blacktop
and your mother kissed it sweetly, then took you for Italian ices.
I could not see when you traced your words in the sand,
scribbling in the dirt of our worn-down imaginations.

I was not there that Saturday
when you drove away from the spice of the neighbors,
the Latin/Bhangra taste still bitter on your tongue.
I could not feel the tremor of your car
as you trembled past the street dwellers and graffiti walls.

I was not there that Saturday
when your lip quivered as you boarded the Queens Village train line.
You left me alone at the park with the dogs and the bench-sleepers
when all I needed was to feel the cracks in the sidewalk
and the touch of your hand on my bare shoulder.

Nora C
Twilight

Charles Billings, with his feet over the side of the cot, struggled to make it the rest of the way to his eager wheelchair. Putting his hand on the chrome night-table, he transferred his weight to his quivering arm muscles and his feet hit the floor. Something hurt. More than usual. He maneuvered the flesh which he still had trouble believing was his body onto the sparse padding and settled in for an uncomfortable trip. He brought his feet up into the rests and set his hands on the wheels. The wheelchair squeaked and began to move forward. He reached a nice pace, turning at the cot, and got to the window fairly quickly. It was something to be proud of.

The glass was a patina of nicks and scrapes and the faint frosted circle of Charles’ breath emphasized its worn surface. The river looked like death. Patches of icy snow sped downstream, catching the sunlight. Charles could see the snow cover from the shore continuing into the horizon, where the sun had only risen a few degrees. But he had still missed most of the sunrise. The sky was pale blue and rosy fingered yet. Charles’ square glasses glinted in the nearly new light. He turned away from the sun and closed his eyes. He shifted noncommittally in his wheelchair and then slipped his left foot off its rest, scratching his sock against the grooved rubber. He stood up a little.

The nurse knocked gently on the door. Charles settled back into his chair, farted, and pretended not to know who it was outside his room. “It’s Molly, Mr. Billings,” she said, “Have you forgotten me already?” Of course, he hadn’t. It was a game they played. She would enter with her master key and introduce herself again like she did to Alzheimer’s patients. Mr. Billings turned his chair around, brushing his foot against his coat, which lay crumpled on the floor, still damp from the night before, when the more mobile residents were allowed to go out and walk in the snow. He had thrown a snowball at Carol Anne, but he didn’t think she had noticed. He rolled up to the desk near the bed to await Molly’s entrance. He found this a more dignified position than crouched over his wheelchair with his face pressed up against the window. The lock mechanism slid gracefully out of the door frame and a black high heel stepped into the room. Charles stared up at Molly from his desk.

Her face grinned at him and something hurt. Her green eyes looked into his, her nose crinkled. She was an expert. She pulled her brown waves behind her ear with the hand that wasn’t resting on the doorknob and Charles took the opportunity to glance at her small, pushed-up breasts in her white nurse uniform. “My name is Molly, Mr. Billings, and this may come as a shock to you, but your family has thought it best to place you into the care of St. Luke’s Hospital for the Elderly.” He chuckled and said, “Oh.” It was the best he could do. The nurse looked down, pulling away from his searching eyes. “Hmmm. Not very talkative this morning, huh?” she said and entered the room. Charles shut his desk drawer with a clang and turned his chair towards her. “Last night looked like fun. How was it? You looked so great moving around like that, but I guess I’d better help you
get to breakfast, anyway. Don’t wanna overdo it, right?” She smiled again, but this time her eyes weren’t a part of it. Charles looked for the wrinkle in her turned-up nose but couldn’t find it. So, instead, he tried to stand up, saying, “Please, Mary, I’m a grown man. I can do it myself.” He smiled at her. Sharp as a tack. And she giggled at the joke. “Oh, no need, Mr. Billings.”

Mr. Billings slumped back down into his chair. Her rosy legs were covered with white regulation pantyhose and jiggled a little with her step. Her perfume filled his nose, lily of the valley. It was early and she must have applied it only a few hours before. “You’re beautiful,” he wanted to say, “I love you.” But what was the point? He slouched into his chair, picking himself up a little to slip on the suit jacket she put over his shoulders. Sunlight streamed onto the ecru drapes and the door shut behind them, her legs bouncing with the turn of his wheels.

Alexander M

Our Broken Bed of Blackboard

I swiggle my fingers into your tiny box
And expose you: White, beautiful, glorious!
Your sleek body, slim and curveless,
Glides into place.

You tempt me further and further
Until I am drunk with your splendor
And can’t help but follow your trail
Left behind with each stroke—
Fair, weightless, and maliciously impermanent,
Clinging only momentarily to my slate.

Again and again I fail to resist you
And find myself using you passionately,
Until I lose hold of you, shrunken,
And you fall far from the gentle touch of my hands,
Collapsing,
Crumbling,
Until all that’s left is a painfully pathetic
Pile of dust
That scatters with the gentlest puff of air.

Serena K
The hotel is old and crumbling around it but this is quite a grand elevator; large and sleek with gold crawling up to the ceiling like ivy. The walls are green, saybrook sage or sherwood green maybe. I’m late for a meeting in the ballroom which is dim and hepplewhite ivory or maybe closer to a light cream. I saw it when I got here last night. I work for a small company that puts paint swatches together for larger companies.

I’m standing in this elevator with someone I work with, a man named Arthur. Arthur staples the paint samples and I think up names for them, so we have very different interests and work at opposite sides of the office. I smile at him when I get in and I don’t see if he smiles back because I am trying to figure out what color the light of the button makes when you press it to go to the ballroom. I see that Arthur has already pressed it and I see that it’s a dahlia yellow.

The elevator rumbles and groans and Arthur and I are heading down to the ballroom.

I am wondering if I should try to be a little friendlier with Arthur. He is a very nice man and I’m sure we could teach each other a few things (me to him about colors, him to me about staples) that would be to both our benefits. I’ve been working at the company for more years than I can count on both my hands but I’m not sure about my feet. Arthur came to the company thumb pointer middle finger years ago. On his first day he wore a symphony blue tie and after I shook his hand and welcomed him to the company I told him that no one here wears ties to work, it’s a very casual atmosphere. He smiled but he’s worn ties to work every day of these three years, sometimes the symphony blue one and sometimes the wolf gray one and sometimes the ruby desk one.

The elevator is going very slowly and I feel like we’re teetering or swinging in a way that we shouldn’t be — something about this elevator is beginning to make me nervous and queasy. Arthur doesn’t seem bothered. When the elevator lurches to the left a little more menacingly, he doesn’t even blink.

The elevator is swerving and ducking, bringing Arthur and me closer to the ballroom. I am twisting my wedding ring around my finger. It is marblehead gold. Arthur’s hands are ballet white and he is not wearing a ring. I wonder why he isn’t married; he’s such a nice man and very diligent and responsible with his work. I am thinking that if something really bad happens to us in this elevator, if a cord snaps or something, I know that my wife will cry for me and buy wreaths with golden honey and desert rose colored flowers. But I don’t know anything about Arthur’s family and I don’t know who will do these things for him. There is a large bang and another shift and I twist my wedding ring around more feverishly and I feel bad that Arthur doesn’t have a ring to calm his nerves. Arthur does not look worried. He just stares straight ahead.

But I feel like the elevator is never going to get us to the ballroom. I think that I am going crazy and that the elevator has stopped and that we are stuck in the middle of an
elevator shaft in a hotel I don’t even want to be in, in a city I don’t even want to be in with a man I don’t even want to be with. I am trying to think up new names for paint colors in my head but all I can get is violet stone and pink peony. I am staring at Arthur’s shiny black shoes and wrinkled shaker beige pants and bayou blue shirt with the top button loose and start to get really angry at him for not being scared like I am.

All of a sudden the elevator stops and bounces up a little and I guess that we’re here. The doors creak open and the ballroom is revealed to me and Arthur in increments: the musty light, my co-workers crowded around tables, the dirty Georgian brick carpet. I step off the elevator and wave hello to a few friends.

I turn around and see that Arthur is slowly falling forward. The room becomes silent as everyone in it begins to gasp: Arthur topples face-first onto the carpet. The back of his shirt is soaked with color: poppy red, Moroccan red, Tucson red, ravishing red, rust. It is blood. The room lets out its breath. Arthur is dead on the carpet of this ballroom in this hotel. There is a knife stuck into Arthur’s back. The handle is hale navy and the vale mist metal is exposed.

And all of a sudden, there is nothing in the world to see or feel or think about except that glint of silver.

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**Hungary**

An ancient shell held a baby inside,
The creature crawled to Hungary for a shelter in which to hide.
He walks with a creaking step up to the tower,
Let not the cobwebs make you cower.
Angel-lit fire sticks stream the corridor,
Castle man, castle man quickly seeks the one he adores.
Emptying streets with the face of a criminal,
The Castle man strives to make his messages subliminal.
One two three four, step in time, step in time,
His crooked teeth and eyes of lime.
At last he grasps one last desperate clutch—
The banister grave and morose to the touch.
The quiet bird from the attic may call,
The Castle man will shake, rattle and fall.
Cubes in the stone please release the night sky,
Castle man is on the last step,
At least he tried.

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**Sophia C**
A Circle of Friends

the half-cracked witty maniac tried to prove
he was no hack
with timed puns shunning society’s good nuns
and Samaritans
but who was he showing by his shunning
who was listening to his timed puns about nuns?
did not impress

the outwardly pretentious inwardly
self-conscious and
insecure businessman, always a tie
and a Rolex and a car, by far the best car
but an empty home, save the flat screen tv
a sea of material items, business papers scattered around, but no woman homeward bound,
dropped a dollar into the cup of

the contrived beggar, infinitely oxymoronic, or at least
hypocritical
the American dream discussed on West 4th Street
unrealized, never realized
so contrived,
stared at

the terribly ugly hooker,
who walked around town with no business
she tried every trick of the trade
but could not get a customer to pay
though she stayed out all night and all day
as all the sorry types of people passed her way
she could not get anyone to pay
pleading help me out to

the corrupt cop at the donut shop at 2 am
the corrupt cop, prostitutes his supposed watch
watched nothing except the clock
for his shift to be over
the corrupt cop sees a man running across the blacktop and locks him up
the man is yelling cracking jokes
and the corrupt cop, his shift long over, yells shut up you maniac

_Nico G_

A Crack in the Wall

Johann Wolfgang arrived home later than usual. He placed his coat on the rack and his hat on the floor beside it. He wanted to throw himself onto the sofa and fall asleep, but instead he brought a wooden chair over from the kitchen and turned it to face the wall. He took tomorrow’s production analysis out of his briefcase, sat down, and forced himself to read. The first few lines were bearable; the ones and zeroes were arranged in a way that made one comfortable reading them. But as he continued, the senseless two-digit murmur began to reverberate in his head, slowly hollowing it. The numberless numbers raced up through his nose, filling his eyes with their mucus-like meaninglessness, nauseating his intestines, and inebriating his brain. He became tired. His gaze wandered upward. He found himself staring at the wall. The endless stream of numbers had subsided and he could see the wall clearly. It was white. There were no stains, no smears, no dents. His eyes moved closer. The wall molded with his mind. He found himself lulled into a calm restlessness. A crack appeared. His eyes filled with vigor. He stretched his arm out and formed the crack into a smile. He remembered what he was supposed to be doing and tried hard to draw his eyes back to the paper, but it was too late. The smile sprouted wings and began to flap across the wall. Johann drew a butterfly to chase it. Out of the ground rose a tree. Johann stretched himself to fit its position. His arms became branches, his fingers leaves. He too sprouted wings, and as he flew across the wall, he planted fruits and flowers. Now the smile fluttered onto his face. The edges of his lips stretched out and curled. His mouth began to writhe in laughter. He threw his arms up in the air. He drew clouds and a sky. He drew dragons and seagulls, castles and palm trees. Lilacs bloomed everywhere. The grass grew pink and purple, and blue vines curled around the clouds. Johann jumped and screamed and flew. He yapped and laughed and with a thump fell off his chair and landed face first on the ground.

_Shon A_
With a skip in my step
I danced through the door.
Calculus II had arrived,
Great things were in store.

I sat down in a chair,
Needed little persuasion.
Ready for Euler and pi,
And volumes of rotation.

The class was all here,
The teacher was present.
I ached to get started,
I cringed in torment.

Finally, then,
With a scrape and a slash,
The teacher began teaching,
Equations appeared in a flash.

Isosceles triangles
danced in my view,
Infinite sums
And sequences too!

I was lost in the numbers,
Amuck in the math,
I tried and I tried,
But I strayed from the path.

I looked over my notes,
I thought with my brain,
But I just couldn’t get this one,
It all seemed so strange.

I tried lots of numbers,
Like forty-three and seven,
But none of them worked right,
Not five, not eleven.

I thinked and I thunk
Till my face turned bright blue.
I tinkered and tankered
Till my brain turned to glue,
But not one number was working,
Not the square root of two!

Then with a rumble,
A toss and a tumble,
I was shaken to life by a crazy idea...
If I moved this there,
Turned that to a square,
I just might be able to bisect the line here!

With a stretch and a crinkle,
A time-fabric wrinkle,
I was getting much closer!

I was wracking my brain
For the last missing piece...
If only I could get the
Surface area to decrease!

So I perused and I pondered,
But found nothing but schlup.
I quipped and I quandered,
I was getting so close, I couldn’t give up!

And then suddenly it hit me,
With a whack Boom BANG POW!
But it couldn’t possibly work,
I just didn’t see how.

I took out my pencil,
Began quickly to scribble.
Ignoring my friends,
There was no time to quibble.

I was going to solve this problem on my own,
Yes, I’d show the rest...
To the tip-tippy-top was I headed,
The BEST OF THE BEST.

So I added and fractioned,
Differentiated then rationed,
If P then Q,
To my satisfaction.

And suddenly it all became marvelously clear!
If integrated from zero, and revolved it right here!

I blazed through the algebra,
Arithmetic, PAH!
I was one step away,
When suddenly, STOP!

I had made a big mistake,
A terrible error!
My variables were mixed up,
It just wasn't fair!

And then it got worse,
Bad news number two,
Class was ending, the clock said,
I was shocked and quite sad,
I let out a boo-hoo.

I told myself to calm down,
Tried to stifle my anger.
I reminded myself it was a hard one,
A real whizz-banger.

I left class that day
Feeling glum and dismayed.
I had given my all,
My short and my tall,
But all of it amounted to nothing at all.

My teacher came round,
To collect my sheet,
I sweated and fretted,
And squirmed in my seat.

And as he bent down to look at my work,
He smiled and laughed, that insensitive jerk!

“Turn over the paper,” he said,
but I didn’t understand,
As he stood there and waited for me
to carry out his command.

Slowly and carefully,
I flipped over the assignment,
And, and, after a minute,
 Noticed a curious alignment.

If I was seeing it right,
And I seldom see wrong,
Why, my answer would work for this one!
It had all along!

I copied it over,
As fast as I could.
Put some decimals and negatives
In places I should.

I rejoiced and I shouted,
My classmates huffed and they pouted,
I had solved the expert-bonus,
And there was no doubt about it.

I was the best!
The tip-tippy-top!
No one could deny it,
The cream of the crop!

And I learned a valuable lesson that day,
One I would never forget, I’d never let stray.

That if I tried my hardest,
And didn't let go,
I would ALWAYS be right,
Be the STAR of the show!

_Caleb T_
Caged by the Crow

Arthur Tell had a way with words. In his fantasies, when told how eloquent he was, he imagined himself explaining it as the result of having such a brusque wife. “But the lady’s a good mother,” he would add in order to relieve the previous sentence of its cloaked venom. After all, they had been married seven years, to which Arthur would add in jest to his AA buddies, “but only faithful seven months.” The truth was, Arthur had never been unfaithful; it was simply something he said to reassure himself of his masculinity. When Deborah read his journal last month, rather than be like any weak woman in the face of reading her husband’s descriptions of his infidelity, she simply laughed. Upon reflection, Deborah decided she shouldn’t be so insensitive to poor Arthur for dreaming of other women but that she should pity him for being so pathetic. After all, she reasoned with herself like the excellent psychoanalyst she was, the man doesn’t have his own house, nor his own children, he doesn’t even have his own bank account! And because of this, Deborah considered herself his saving grace, as without him he would still be just a junkie in Tompkins Square Park.

Deborah worked demanding hours and it was in this allotted time that Arthur could do as he pleased. On most days this meant take long walks with his stepdaughter’s puppy, Mango, or lie around in bed until twelve watching Adult Swim. On stressful days, Arthur would smoke a cigarette out the window, but the thought of his wife’s disappointment in him as well as her reaction to his burning all her incense was most alarming, so out of guilt he would dispose of his vice. Deborah didn’t believe in sex, either. If Arthur so much as raised the subject she would immediately deem him chauvinistic and turn over like the icicle she was.

On Tuesday, Deborah came home early from work, weeping. Her sister, Alberta, had been hit in the head with a golf ball. Apparently some hoodlums ransacked the nearby golf course and were wreaking havoc on its neighbors. Alberta had fallen into a coma. Everything was dead, over! How could she possibly live on without her darling sister? The one who had taught her the ways of feminism, the strength of woman! “Oh Arthur!” she cooed like a baby crow, “hold me!” And Deborah threw herself into Arthur’s arms like a baseball into a mitt. Unfortunately Arthur was not the best catcher and Deborah fell, like the gigantic mass of human being that she was, straight to the floor. “MEN! I hate men!” she said and she got up screaming and slammed the door on poor Arthur’s face. In an hour or so, she reemerged, dressed comfortably with a small suitcase. Rounding up her daughters, she handed Arthur an envelope. “Cash,” she said. “The pizza number is downstairs.” And off she went, with both Theo and Alex, to Toronto.

As the door shut, Arthur had the mixed feeling of being a teenager left alone at home as well as a toddler abandoned in the backseat of a car. Embracing the former, he began to laugh out loud for the first time in months. His wife’s histrionics were actually funny! And Alberta, well, the two of them were like an old married couple skilled in
castration. How long would she be gone? Long enough to smoke in the house…_with the windows closed_? So Arthur plunked himself down on their beige sofa and watched the FX channel and then, after ten, he turned on channel thirty-five. The erotic infomercials were enough to make any man feel that way! So he did it, he masturbated right on the couch…no locked doors. Afterwards, Arthur had a funny feeling. He could walk around completely naked and who would stop him? He could even order a hooker! Arthur got so giddy at the idea of what he could do with his freedom that he let out a scream like a young girl. And then the phone rang. It was Deborah and she was beaming. “Arthur! Oh no, don’t worry! Alberta has woken up! She’s going to be fine! But she wants to get out of Toronto right away, you know, surround herself with family…so make up the couch for her, OK? I’ll be home in about an hour.” And Arthur dutifully replaced the phone, moistened a wet towel and wiped his masculine stain off of Deborah’s beige couch.

_Lola K_

_Fever_

—Inspired by _Man and Woman I (Lovers I) 1914_, by Egon Schiele

Our Embrace is fused  
Crafted into a shell:  
A scallop, perhaps, or a conch.  
You are yellow, in all your glory, a match to me,  
Resting perfectly into the hissing curve of my spine.  
Your fingertip grip is tight upon my breast,  
And you govern our synchronous breathing.  
You shimmy your belly upon the feel of my thigh,  
As you lull, and fill, and soothe me.  
Your affection and intention are made so clear,  
As you pull, and will, and woo me.  
We sit monumentally in a tender liquid potion  
Contained by a womb of jubilation,  
That nurtures, and merges us,  
Becoming the pretzel that we fantasized.  
A single motion defines your childish devotion,  
You settle in, and subtly win,  
In buoyantly capturing me, splendorous,  
Embracing all of my limbs.

_Zoe S_
Bad Influence

I saw you dead yesterday, Margaret.
You were walking down my block, with a cigarette in your hand, though I knew that you'd given it up since '87 and hadn't touched one since (save the times that you'd snatch them out of silly children's hands). But still, there you were, with a cigarette—no, a lit cigarette, with smoke pluming out of your mouth, and eyes like they'd never seen the sun's rays or felt the whipping breeze ever before. I tried to figure out whether I was hallucinating since I was seeing your ghost, Margaret, or since you were smoking. Then I decided I neither cared nor had the authority to know.

You were wearing an odd ensemble, something you would have called atrocious in your former life; you looked like a complete frump, and if I hadn't known you, Margaret, I would have called you a frump too. Your bosom sagged like you always said you hated, and your pants were up to your chin in a rather unflattering fashion. You walked right on by me, like I was just a fly on the wall, though I gaped and gasped at you. You seemed to be focusing on something really important, though your walk was slow and unsteady. I spent the night wondering what it was that was so important that you couldn't stop and say goodbye to an old friend.

And so you passed me by; I stood there for a moment wondering if that was really you, and how the hell I was going to explain that damn cigarette which you were holding between your index and middle fingers. I watched you walk down to the end of the block and cross the street while the oncoming traffic zoomed onwards. I reached out with my right hand, trying to stop you, Margaret, but then I realized that you were only a ghost and you were really buried six feet under ground in the cemetery around the bend. So I watched the cars hit you one after the other until you, Margaret, were simply lying there in the middle of the road with nothing but that cigarette in your palm and a glazed expression on your face.

Since I had decided that your ghost was invincible, Margaret, I wasn't too worried about your well-being. I guess I should have been more careful. I guess I should have listened. Or maybe, even if I had passed your words on to others, maybe then I could have done something. But when that young man walked into the street to lie beside you on the tar—a man that was young, whole, not a ghost—I did not cry out or yell to warn him of the blue Sentra that was coming your way. The car rolled over the man's body with a sickening crunch, and I saw blood gush this way and that. I didn't cringe. I simply turned away and began walking home. I hadn't yet crossed the street before the screaming commenced.

I spent that night wondering what was so important, Margaret, that you passed me by. Was it love? Did you see someone in the distance that you cherished more than me? I can remember hoping not, as our friendship was close to golden in the good days….maybe a bit weathered on the bad ones. I tossed and turned that night, and I hope
you know that. As I lie here on the tar, Margaret, I hope you know that I’ve been thinking
of you and that damn cigarette and that young man’s blood which I can feel beneath
my spine. I can see the oncoming headlights, and I feel fear for the first time, though I
clench my muscles so they don’t move. The tires screech, and I find myself thinking of one
person, Margaret; as they roll over me like cogs in a machine, I feel my insides turn out
and my heart stop beating….

And then I find myself walking down that same street corner, Margaret. And
now I finally know why you had that damn cigarette, because I have one too.

Emily D

Let Them Mourn, Let Them Rejoice

They say that it was a dark night and that he was
riding,
riding above the dust of his soldiers,
riding above their tattered gray uniforms and their
worn-down boots.
They say that he was sucking on half a lemon,
as was his wont,
a lemon from a box sent from the wife,
eaten by halves in the tent and on the horse.
They say that he was riding, sucking on his lemon,
through the forest,
a forest of birch trees,
white birch trees that appeared through the
mist like his fallen brothers,
lost forever in the red mud.
He rode through the wood with his soldiers
until the shot rang out,
rang out from the wrong side,
and he fell into the dust
and the lemon rolled away, lost to
the mist and the red mud that had claimed another.

Eliza D
Slowly, slower than I’d first expected, but surely I’ve begun to deteriorate. Not only do I see it in the mirror every time I catch my reflection, but now for the first time I can feel it. Today, I awoke from what I thought to be a deep slumber. I was sorely mistaken, for I woke to find myself sitting alone combing the flowing locks of a body that was not there. The combing was determined though, as if it had a recipient. Suddenly it occurred to me where I was. I was sitting on the naked tile floor of her bathroom—

I will never forgive myself for that day. No single person should ever have to bear the regret and grief that I do every day. The image of her tender young body crushed and broken against the side of the street will continue to haunt my nightmares until the day they lay me down. Had I held onto her hand for one more second, one more second, what’s a second that should decide one’s fate? In that one second the sun, moon, and stars were extinguished and everything I thought I knew shattered. After it happened, before she was taken from me forever, I managed to stoop to the street and look at her. For a long time I watched the blood trickle out of her mouth and down the side of her chin, creating a small black pool as it smacked the tar—

How can I be to blame for this? This was a predestined event that occurred for a reason, it is my fault alone! My flesh must be punished for that vile mistake, it can’t be your fault—Oh but it can! It can! This flesh, this, this! Had it but just gripped longer! How could you be so foolish? (She addresses her hand.) Speak! Speak cursed flesh lest thou be separated for eternity. What’s this? Silence! Off you go! (She dices her own hand into thousands of tiny bits as her husband enters.)

_A Tardy Meal_

The addled duck who never waddled  
Was dripping in the ladle  
Its toe bones lay next to potatoes, tomatoes, and leeks,  
The beak and eyes (still packaged in its head) looked blankly at the lingering scene  
Its leg muscles were caught inside the shells of mussels  
Maybe not cooked enough. That _Joy_ book said they should be wide open, just like it was,  
Surrounded by lime-covered cutting boards, the rind off to the side,  
Hoard of bitter seeds rolling around in juice,  
A mix of tomato, potato, sweet date and lime (whose rind is off to the side)  
Happy in cooking, upset in looking at the mess  
Even after a happy, hearty, tardy meal.

_Evan W_
Scene One

An old man walks in place in the center of the stage. He takes slow, lethargic steps and keeps his head down. People holding cardboard cutouts of trees, shops, and houses walk by him. The bodies of the people holding the cardboard structures are completely obscured except for their hands and feet.

Old Man: My feet hurt. Every time I move I feel a pinch, that transforms into a slap, into a hot, burning blade. The back doesn’t move; it’s rigid and too old for any of the feelings of movement I used to feel. My fingernails have a dirty yellow sheen that’s sickly, and it’s old age trickling out of the tips of my fingers. Nails bang into my head, and regardless of whether it is old age, worry, stress, not liking people, or some undiscovered illness, nails still bang into my head. My feet hurt. I wish I could wither like a flower. Dried wedding bouquets stay tacked on the wall after the bride is a mother and grandmother and so on and all the beauty she once had is still those petals. You always point out old cars when you see them on the street. Hey there’s a car from 1957, blue Cadillac, blah blah blah, they don’t make cars in those colors anymore, blah blah blah, they made such nice cars then, blah blah blah. People don’t get old like that. My feet hurt. This is a shirt that Linda gave me on my last birthday. Today is her birthday. First it’s my birthday, then hers, then mine, then hers. I have to buy her something, I should have bought her something already, but I didn’t, so I don’t have anything; I’ll buy her something today and give it to her when I meet her later. It has to be something young and happy and a little bit sentimental and valuable because that’s what Linda is.

The scenery stops moving and the man stops walking in place, raises his head, and stares. There is a cardboard house with a window cut out of it. In the window the face of a woman is perfectly framed. (She is supporting the weight of the house.) She looks worried and sad; the old man stares in amazement.

Old Man: This is an old house. (Pause) That is beautiful dilapidation from crumbling bits of the front stairs that make streams of rubble, to the curving tarnished iron handrails, the red door with peeling paint that both welcomes and intimidates and makes children make up stories about haunted houses, to the dust on the windows, in the windows, on the curtains, on all the dead ladybugs in the silent sill graveyard where they rest dainty and dead, to the brick of the house that peeks out from behind the new siding. People don’t get old like that house. My feet hurt.

He stares, the scenery does not move. The woman in the window begins to speak.

Woman: Oh no! And we just got the floors done. I said we should do the exterior before
the interior. It’s all such a mess. He could at least have the decency to not stare. (Pause) “Fixer-upper,” I hate that phrase, this house is disgusting. Stop looking at it! The next time I see him I’ll stare at his wrinkles, bent back, and bald head. If he could just stop staring at the outside, which will be painted and restored by February 15 at the absolute latest, and look at the inside, he would see the new wood floors that were just finished last week, and the polished cherry-wood furniture; I especially like the cherry-wood cabinet that matches the dining table with the glass front where I keep the crystal vases, a porcelain ballerina, and the china. If he could only see the matching duvet covers, and seat covers, and tablecloth, all forest green paisleys, on an ivory-cream background.

*She angrily closes forest-green-paisleys-on-an-ivory-cream background curtains and lifts her house, carrying it off stage. All the other cardboard pieces follow her. Blackout.*

*Sally D*

**Forbidden Pleasure**

She departs from her gloves  
The excitement tingles  
Every single second the clock is ticking  
She turns loose, takes a big breath  
The sticky sword-like spikes fling out  
She pricks each finger right down the center  
Round red dots appear but she doesn’t linger  
She has done this before so she does not fear  
She takes the rear of this dear fruit and begins to carve  
The juice spurts out splashing  
She takes a bite of the pineapple  
No gloves no morals  
She does not care  
She tears the luscious fruit bare-handed  
Sparks of juice-covered spikes soar through the air  
Her forbidden pleasure abruptly ends  
When she looks at her bloody hands and tells herself she will never do this again.

*Charlotte I*
Is that not what we wanted?

When the Indian looks across his plain
And feels the wind moving over his brow
And his horse, so calm,
Breathes out in the fall air
Is that not what we were?
When the iron horse makes trails of
Smoke and yet breathes no life
And shakes the mighty bison,
Were we not afraid too?
When the Indian calls out
And starts his ride,
Is he not gliding over the earth
Hair blowing, and rocking back and forth,
Is that not what we wanted?
When he sleeps at night
So protected and free
And we,
We
Ruin what is his, and all that is good,
Is that not because we wanted to be like him?
The Great Indian, looking out
Over the
Majestic Mountains
From sea to shining sea
Walking, never making a noise
So quiet
So fluid
Oh, God, didn't we want to be like him?
And now, the Great Indian
 Forced to live on land
We want not
Yet
Give to him anyway,
Is that the spirit he gave us?
To feel the heartbeat as one
And to have your tribe experience America
Before the name
And to have it
So wild,
And free
Is that not what we wanted?
Song of My Shelf

I celebrate my shelf and place things on my shelf
And what I put on my shelf, you shall put on my shelf
For every object on my shelf belongs to me and only me.
A child said, *Why do you have a shelf?* and pointed to it with both hands.
What an idiotic question, I thought to myself. “How dumb you are,” I replied.
Because it is obvious what a shelf is.
It can be made out of almost anything, of wood, of metal, of cloth, of stone,
But not fire, nor water, nor air, nor a giraffe. It is a shelf.
On your shelf you shall support your books which will hold your knowledge,
On your shelf you shall put plants in order to give you clean air to breathe, to give life,
On your shelf you shall put small people, but not very large ones for then your shelf may break and a man is nothing without his shelf.
One can have several shelves in one room if necessary,
But make sure to equally distribute stuffs on these shelves so that jealousy does not ensue
For we all know how jealous one shelf can get when overwhelmed by magnificence
And he himshelf has none.
Twenty-eight legos all on one shelf
Twenty-eight boxes all on one shelf
Twenty-eight planets all on one shelf,
And another shelf adorned with only a sock, and how would you expect him to feel?
The Song of My Shelf is not one of joy.

*Jeremy N*

A Mask on the Wall

A mask on the wall,
Dark and empty eyes,
Frozen lips,

I wonder who will wear it...

It looks strangely familiar.

*Eric S*
Static

Samuel was about to hang himself when the telephone rang. From childhood he had been taught that answering the telephone had priority over whatever he was doing at the moment it began to ring, a teaching which became a full-on mantra for him into adulthood, which is one of the reasons he wasn’t able to hold an office job. He lay down the noose and bounded off the chair to the telephone, a gray device which always resembled to him a candy bar whose outer layer had been peeled off and whose inner metallic layer still jailed the candy that he, Samuel, longed to free. After allowing it to ring once more, he picked up the candy bar and answered, though his greeting was not the typical “hello?” most expect. He would say nothing when he answered; rather, he would wait until the person on the other end said something in order to make sure the person actually wanted to talk to him.

After putting down the phone he thought about the conversation that had just transpired, one with his brother. Their mother was dying and preparations had to be made, preparations Samuel was expected to be a part of. He knew these preparations were merely addressing the bills that his mother had accumulated after three years of fighting illness—illness and her family. He also knew he hadn’t a penny to his name and the only reason he had food and an apartment was because the landlady had seemed to be intensely attracted to him after her husband died, so she cooked the books and other fibrous and proteinaceous objects with which he could sustain himself.

His landlady was a complicated woman who had only become increasingly complicated after her husband of forty-seven years died in his sleep. He hadn’t quite died in his sleep, though; really it was his wife’s sleep he’d died in. This requires explanation: his wife, the landlady, was plagued with chronic insomnia until, at the behest of her doctor, she participated in the testing of an experimental sleep-inducing drug which, in addition to sleep induced sleepwalking and night terrors. Her night terrors she wouldn’t let bother her but instead attempted to quash the demons (for she had been raised superstitious) in her cerebral cortex that had previously been ensconced by her insomnia by physically lashing out at them. Whether she actually hallucinated is not known; hallucination was not known to be a side effect of the drug and unfortunately she could never recall what it was she dreamed of. Her husband had described these incidents: she would stand up, grit her teeth in the direction of the door, and strike whatever she saw with blow after blow until she felt finished. Mostly she beat the air, and on particularly febrile days her husband would place himself near enough to receive the disrupted air currents but not so near that he would also receive a strike from his obviously mentally disrupted wife. However, the story according to the police report stated that she had been having one of her usual nightmares when her husband, by now used to them, got out of bed and proceeded toward the door, his motivations unknown. This was rather flimsy evidence considering the source of it was the wife’s accounts of her now-dead husband’s hazy recollections of her nightly
routine that he would share with her in the mornings. His wife, now in her medication-induced sleepwalking fit, behaved much like a carnivorous animal: if you got too close, she would attack on instinct. He just happened to pass into the orbit of one of her fists and she caught hold of him and beat him to the point of near-death and then beat him some more until he resembled something more appropriate to the Chicago meat-packing district pre-Upton Sinclair. It was ruled that she had been in an unconscious state and not punishable, but the manufacturer of the medication, in addition to having all governmental authorization to market and sell it revoked, was forced to pay her a sum of money that allowed her to die without collecting another month’s rent from any of her tenants.

After her husband’s death she went into crisis realizing she had no relatives or friends and that she was, in this world, completely alone. Samuel went several times to pay his respects and formed a bond with her that, to him, escalated not beyond a casual friendship. She, however, in her crisis was looking for a friend, father, mother, brother, sister, husband, a wife even, and did not care who the person was. Samuel picked up on this imbalance of devotion quicker than she did, and it made his head spin. If he refused her advances, she would turn off her stove to him, but if he accepted them, it would be against his will. Samuel had no woman in his life and he wasn’t intending to amass any now, especially ones more than double his age. She saw him to be a lonely man who was in need of both a motherly figure and a sexual partner. The former was about to die, and he had no need for the latter. She, to the best of his knowledge, didn’t know this or, if she did, paid no heed to it. To Samuel it was a matter of death and dignity; if he turned her away, he would most certainly lose his apartment, and without a job he would have no way to pay for a new one; however, if he let her seduce him, he would almost certainly feel amoral, though this was an a priori consideration because he had no knowledge of what being seduced felt like.

He thought of moving in with his brother who lived on the West Coast with his wife and four daughters, but the thought was extirpated almost as soon as it entered his head, for it dawned on him that he would serve as a reminder to his brother of the coast he had left in order to bury the memories of a mother who neglected him in favor of a brother who was nothing but a burden on him. Now the mother was exacting her revenge and the brother would be if he moved in.

As he stood over the phone, it became apparent that he would not be needing the noose he had prepared, so he would place it back in the fridge until he was ready to use it. The point of the noose was less to make the statement that he was ready for death and more to achieve perfect stasis. He’d lived his life in antithesis—no real friends, money, or skills—and since it was apparent to him that life was nothing but a series of intertwining chaoses, he decided to subordinate chaos by becoming static. He had tried other methods of obtaining stasis to no avail, such as lying perfectly still, which proved to catalyze thoughts of whether his existence was necessary or not, thoughts that proved even more chaotic than what he’d previously been thinking, which were most likely schemes
to avoid any and all fiscal matters. It was chaotic for the reason that when he thought about whether his existence was necessary or not, he concluded that, yes, his existence was necessary just as every existence on the planet was necessary, for he quite possibly could pull grass from the ground and throw it into the wind, an event which would be witnessed by others, an event which would have a lasting impact on some of those others causing their lives to take an entirely different course from what they would have taken had they not seen his act. He didn’t like to think that he had any effect on anyone, let alone change the lives of potentially so many; yet through his wish not to, and the subsequent isolation he undertook to prevent from having an effect on anybody, he became something of an oddity to those who did know of his existence. He knew of his landlady’s fixation with him which began to vex him, but he did not know that he had forever changed the life of one he had only come into contact with once—the butcher.

Many customers were put off by the looks of the butcher. This was because of a stereotype; for most people, when a butcher comes to mind, think of a middle-aged, overweight, disheveled man with an abrasive voice adorned by a bloody apron. This butcher was in his mid-twenties, came to work in jogging shorts and a tee shirt, dangerously handsome, and having a body much like that of a dying oak tree. Being the son of the original owner of the butcher shop, he had to treat his father’s regulars cordially, but none of them interested him the way he expected them to from the phantasmagoria his father would relate to him claiming he had heard these stories from him (much later, near his retirement, he found out most of the stories to be Poe). Mostly they were old, very old and bitter to have voluntarily relocated to society in which they were not able to integrate themselves solely due to the fact that they formed tight communities when they first arrived. He couldn’t understand that people would dislike culture because they were not able to assimilate to it after isolating themselves from it. But it wasn’t his place to understand it; at most he should be able to decipher “half a pound of pig lips” and carry out the necessary procedure. His first encounter with Samuel was lasting for him, because he didn’t recognize him to be one of his father’s regulars, and also it would be his last encounter with him; he was a breath of fresh air for the jaded butcher. From the moment Samuel wandered in, his eyes were fixed on the reflective surface of the counter and not once did he lift his eyes from it. After buying nearly four pounds of sausage links he departed, his gait greatly resembling the sideways scuttle of a crab. The butcher watched out of the storefront display as Samuel rotated his scuttle ninety degrees to the left and walked across the street, oblivious to oncoming traffic, not that there was any, into an apartment.

The butcher’s fascination with Samuel was not as intense as the landlady’s, or if it was, he never manifested it as anything more than occasionally glancing in the direction of the apartment in hopes that it would be Samuel obliviously scuttling to the butcher’s for sausage. But Samuel never came again, and the butcher continued his work into his old age.
Samuel glared at the phone as if to intimidate it into not ringing again, and after ten minutes he was satisfied it had worked, before going back to the fridge to take out his noose and continue as he had before interrupted by the telephone. More precisely, he dragged the chair into the kitchen so that he might speed up the process by cutting the seconds it would take to walk from the kitchen to where the chair had previously been in the living room. He opened the fridge but immediately closed it after remembering that it is common courtesy to leave a note when one is partaking in this type of event. Searching for a notepad proved fruitless, so he tore a piece of a brown paper shopping bag and scribbled a short note that he left at the base of the chair, much like the informational placard a statute in a museum has on its pedestal. Then he opened the refrigerator and took out the noose.

When he was found several days later, the apartment smelled of rotting pig, and he was found splayed in front of the refrigerator with what remained of the sausage links that had not yet decomposed around his neck. The landlady’s sobs escalated to a point where she was given mild sedatives so that the investigation might proceed without her banshee wail in the ears of the police. They ruled the cause of death to be suicide by strangulation from four pounds of sausage links hung from the ceiling—a sort of hanging/strangulation combination. His note, his last words to anyone who cared to read them, read: “To wish to reduce oneself to nothing as suicides do is ultimately the most tragic pretension this world has experienced. I’m not trying to reduce myself to nothing, but to something. I bequeath the remainder of this sausage to my disaffected brother and dying mother.”

Michael D

Pomegranates

Bastard children,
Sired by bees and birthed by tarts
(Is this sin or nature)
they are with every mouthful a reminder of their coy creation.
Red laquer
(Red blood, Red sin)
To bite, to bleed
Is this sin?
Sweet sin
Yes, sin stained I’d rather—
The pleasure warrants it—
Than unstained and denied be.

Nathaniel B
The bodies of these sirens are no longer birds
but gourds, balloons earth-bound: their necks are bent
swan-like in condescension, supplication.

All in earth tones, fruit and dirt,
except for two worn grey and hollow-faced,
they wear fringed girdles, fillets, earrings, necklaces.
They have no use for bracelets: armless
and thus helpless, they sleep huddled,
standing up like horses.

Their mouths are painted Os of emptiness;
behind them, the flat blue of judging eyes.

Katherine B

Elizabeth

Time powdered her face and stiffened her collar.
Each ruffle stank of sour teeth.
Each subject rotted in his love
Or slowly bent into a crooked curtsy,
Pressed by a never ending muscle.
A coffer grew,
And a tree
Became a shell
Became a ship
Became a mission.
Her mighty sails billowed white with age.
A boy was coaxed to become a man.
A virgin queen remained trapped in a gown forever
When time bowed its head,
The most loyal of subjects.

Rachel A
Synesthesia

I tend to hallucinate
Mixing dream and
Reality, feeling colors,
Tasting smells. I rise early
To feel the pink, green, and orange of the
Sunrise in my bones.

They tell me something’s wrong.
A renegade nerve
Or two in my brain. They call it
A disease, treat it like a disability.
They are blind to the beauty
Of my world.
A Beethoven symphony tastes better than any meal
They will ever have.

Foggy days are the strangest.
I wander, searching blindly,
Smelling the billowy white clouds,
But not seeing them.
My eyes reach beyond, glimpsing new worlds.
Ghosts cry out to me, beg me to release them
From their bleak purgatory.
Cackling sirens serenade
Me, tempting my soul,
Craving my flesh.

I cannot describe myself
In your terms. I stare
Into the looking glass
And see pulsing orbs
Of incandescent light,
Tendrils of smells, dirty hair
And honey mustard.
My eyelashes are sandpaper,
My nose the clash of symbols.
My dreams are your reality.
I only ever have one, and it’s a mundane affair.
I sit outside, looking across a green lawn and crystal Clear sky. Smells waft from the food placed in front of me.
I feel the cold metal of the fork
And taste the food as I chew.
I avoid sleeping.

Bill C

Longing Lactose

Milk, cream, ice cream, cheese, milk chocolate, pizza…dairy—none of it, not one morsel, scoop, sip or slice—I cannot digest any of it. I remember sweltering days of my childhood when eating an ice cream cone was as carefree as eating carrots. The days when I could drink enormous glasses of milk without the threat of indigestion are long gone now. A bowl of cereal is as perilous to me as a mug of liquid drainer. With puberty came my lactose intolerance, my mortal enemy.

All these soy substitutes make a mockery of fine dairy cuisine. I yearn for the days before this eating disorder. In recent years a pharmaceutical company took pity on the likes of me and created Lactaid pills. I remember the day I heard of this novelty. I rushed to the store to buy the pills in bulk. Then, with disregard for the directions on the back, I gobbled them down and rushed to the pizzeria, the ice cream parlor. I bought cheese, even a gallon of milk. I thought these marvelous pills would be the end of my woes. I was wrong; I could have read the entire Sunday New York Times in the lavatory that evening. In reality I studied the Lactaid pills, everything from directions to ingredients, inside out.

Now I slip a few of these pills and cautiously savor a few meager spoonfuls of yogurt, maybe one slice of cheese. When I feel brave I revel in the creamy goodness of a shot glass of whole milk. Such forbidden indulgences feed my insatiable desire for dairy. My intolerance is so severe that these pills do little besides provide the illusion that I am lactose tolerant. The pleasure derived from cream cheese and omelets and lasagna is so magnificent that I almost gladly endure my prolonged visits to the bathroom. Milk fat is my forbidden pleasure, dairy my destruction and my desire.

Julia G
The orange sweatshirt hung in her closet waiting to be worn, while the orange goldfish on top of the dresser swam around looking at her naked body. The little apartment with the seventies green paint chipping away and the tiny kitchen is her home. Since he left she had been wearing the sweatshirt, no bra, no shirt, just her flesh meshed with the orangeness. She would then put on pants, blue sweatpants, or jeans, red pants (maybe) or white. She wore her hair in that perfect-blond-walk-around-the-house style that everyone wants but can't do. It's loose and messy but at the same time neat and tight and always clean. The blondness of her hair and the workman-vest-orange sweatshirt work together well, but also make her an easily-seen target for the old workmen who wear the vest to remark to her. Then her blue eyes with the orange make all the other men without vests remark to her, and fall into her magic, never to forget her. Never to love again (or think for the moment that they will never love again). Emily, the one who breaks them, who goes home with them for Thanksgiving, whom Mom loves—but they don't commit. Because she will never commit the love back. Yellow roses are in the room, in three days they will die. They were sent on Valentine's Day from the distant relatives, the only family Emily has. Funny how the perfect ones always are really messed up down under. Emily picked blue jeans, with the awesome holes and paint stains—perfect. She opened her bottle of wine and put a beer in the fridge for later. Pouring herself a glass of Merlot and taking out another glass which she always did for her departed Sam, and leaving it as if he is Elijah. Every time hoping the glass will empty itself of the contents. Praying, wishing that he will return to her. She sits down in the love seat; the TV is going with a nature show about apes. She just sits watching the apes eating bugs off each other’s backs, fighting and mating, stealing each other’s babies. But Emily is not even paying attention. In her candle-lit romantic living room, Emily spaces out from Planet Earth. She knows nothing about apes.

Danielle B

For years nothing changed.
This is because I was afraid that if I moved, the half-full glass perched on the edge of my bookshelf might spill, and I would lose some of its contents.
But one day
I turned the container upside down over my head and
Dried out in the sun.

Ilana H
My white iPod headphones tangle around my wallet. I tug them out of my ears with impatience and scrunch them into a ball in my fist. My fingers are as dry as the bagel I ate that morning from winter’s thin air, and my limp-paper hair sticks to my chin like a magnet to metal. It is as lackluster as ever, except for the occasional electric pop from dead strand touching dead strand. I only have a twenty-dollar bill so I speed over the dirty beige tiles to the booth and ask for change.

“Please swipe again” the turnstile screen reads. Even though the text is calm teal, I imagine what annoying type of voice would inevitably go with it. It would be a giddy mechanical voice, zen and almost sedated, that infuriates you when you’re running late. I am always late. “Please swipe again” appears for the second time. The voice whines in my head, but with one last angry swipe I succeed in passing through. Why is it always the local New Yorkers who can’t swipe their metro cards correctly?

Giving up on ever untangling my headphones again, I jam them in my ears with the huge, wound-up knot of wire hanging right below my chin. Maybe it will be a new fashion statement, I try and tell myself. A man buried in his mammoth hood is mouthing something at me. He winks. My wire knot obviously doesn’t scare him, but I can’t hear what he is saying. My music is on full volume. It’s the type of song that you should walk in slow motion to, saunter down the street to, head raised in a high confident stance, but I feel the floor vibrate and the walls hum with the sound of an incoming train so there is no time to promenade. I run over the blue squares and yellow triangles that litter the floor—Clark Street station’s only distinctive feature. My friend and I have a custom not to step on the squares. They are bad luck. So I dodge the sluggish people, staying on tiptoes to avoid the criminal squares.

“Stand clear of the closing doors, please.” My scarf catches in the metal door, a mouse trapped in a lion’s mouth, unsure if it will be liberated or eaten alive. Luckily, my scarf is liberated. It’s a crowded car, but I don’t mind standing. I hold onto what my third-grade teacher called the “germ pole” but make sure only the tips of my fingers touch the metal. The woman next to me squeezes her arm into the tight pack of people around the pole, her fingers landing almost directly on mine. I flinch unconsciously and decide instead to test my balance without the pole’s aid. There is an art to riding the subway much like surfing. As the train screeches to a halt, I bend my left knee to lean with the train, my hands now buried back in my coat pockets. Small change slips down with the fuzz that paints my pocket bottoms, collected from its last trip to the laundry.

“This is Bowling Green. Transfer is available to the…” I know the transfers by heart. Sometimes when I ride with friends we mimic the voice and rate who sounds the most similar. This time, though, I’m alone. The subway is freedom. I can go wherever I want. What if I decided to go all the way to the end of the F line? What if I close my eyes and open them at a random stop and get out? It is almost unfathomable how many possible adventures stem from the subway. Ethnic neighborhoods vibrant with culture, neighborhoods divided into districts, from buttons to plants, Central Park like a maze of green. It’s limitless.

Catherine C

121
For Mr. Neil Douglas

when the weather was balmy
and I
enjoyed using the royal we
the waves were high
(except when we drove past Children’s Beach)
and the french toast was hot
the grass was fine through my fingertips
and oh, the plans we had for the basement
if only she would have come back
if only she could have come back

our three
was reduced to a two
(the we grows less strong)
our we loses hope
rather strength against the others

the basement
breeds clutter
it’s still a delight to know, however,
that with the flick of the light
the music will always come on
a delight that will always be haunting
someone must be down there with you

we, Mr. Neil Douglas
don’t speak any longer of her moments or episodes
we speak in hushed voices about her progress
but I remove myself from our we
and I think
what if she hadn’t missed that summer

Mollie D
Hard Work

In the winter in Montana rain was rare. Jack pulled over to the side of the road and grabbed from the back seat a blue tarpaulin that he spread over the freshly cut pine logs that filled the back of the pickup truck. It was hard enough to get anyone to buy non-union firewood when it was dry. He secured the tarp and got back into the cab. He put his old yellow poncho back with his sleeping bag and the tools that lay on the passenger seat: saws, axes, ropes and other necessities.

At noon Jack stopped for coffee at a roadside diner outside of Red Lodge. He dropped a quarter in a payphone and called home. He did not know if he wanted to hear a voice on the other line. Suzanne should be at work, thought Jack, and Tyson at the nursery. But he waited out the four rings anyway, until he heard his own voice on the answering machine. The rain pounded against the glass walls of the phone booth and water smeared its sides, making it almost impossible to see through. Alone in this little world, Jack felt lonely and anxious. The wind that flung raindrops on his face did little to dispel this sentiment.

Jack pulled the truck back onto the highway and wondered if she was having an affair. If she was, he assumed all responsibility. His job was hard on them. It was hard for Suzanne, who had to take Tyson to school and back and still work at the resort, and for Tyson, who had to go so long without seeing his father. But this was the life Jack had chosen. You had to work hard to get by, and Jack liked to work hard. The rain clattered on the roof and drowned out the fuzzy country music that played in the cab. As an independent lumberjack, which was what Jack had stenciled on the door of the truck, business meant traveling to where there was work. He had done all the jobs around town, and it takes time for trees and jobs to return. The money wasn’t bad, though; it paid the bills and gave Suzanne enough cash to keep her happy.

The rain turned to snow as the road climbed through the hills. On the right were the dead, brown hills, relics of a cold, dry winter. On the left, the hills with Northern exposure had snow left over from the last big snow back in December. There was no traffic, but Jack drove slowly and carefully through the heavy snow.

It was sundown when Jack pulled into town, but the mountains, sky and setting sun were all hidden behind the thick, dark clouds. The snow was beginning to gather on the road and Jack could feel it under his tires. He decided to stop by the resort to pick up Suzanne. She was a cook in the lodge cafeteria where the skiers had lunch. She was of Navajo descent, and had given her soft golden skin and thick black hair to their son Tyson.

“I’m sorry, sir, but Suzanne hasn’t been in all week,” said the manager, typing furiously at his computer. “She’s been sick.” Jack felt the sweat push out of his forehead and wiped it away with his sleeve. He had heard nothing from her all week.

When he pulled into the driveway of their little house, the road was thick with
snow. In the glare of his headlights, Jack saw Suzanne’s car, an old Ford, parked in front of the house. The lights were on in the living room. Jack decided to deal with the wood during the day but reached under the tarp to pull out two armfuls that would last them the night. He pushed open the kitchen door and stomped off his boots. It was dark in the kitchen. When Jack’s eyes adjusted he nearly dropped the wood on the floor.

Scattered atop the counter and around the stove were cartons of chemicals. He couldn’t make out the labels. Empty pill packets crunched under his boots as he moved to turn off a burner that had been left on.

Light seeped through the crack under the door to the living room. Jack pushed through the door. Suzanne was on the couch. The television was on but Jack could not see what program was showing. He was relieved not to have found a catastrophe in the living room and this relief momentarily outweighed his confusion from the science experiment abandoned in the kitchen. He set the wood down on the floor and moved to greet Suzanne but as he came closer he realized she had not noticed him. Her hair was ragged and disheveled, her skin sickly and sallow. Her bloodshot eyes stared into the floor where a bloodstained syringe leaned on a little china plate with the desiccated remains of whatever had been cooked in the kitchen. She had used the little belt they had gotten Tyson for Christmas to tie off and it hung limp around her elbow. She noticed her husband’s presence and rolled to the corner of the couch and buried her head in the cushions.

Jack scampered to the bedroom and found Tyson asleep in his bed. He picked up the little boy and held him close. Tyson awoke and rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

“Are you O.K.?” asked Jack, over and over, as if it were all he remembered how to say. Tyson’s warm forehead on his neck was answer enough. Jack slumped down weakly against the foot of his bed and stared into the empty fireplace. With shaking hands, he put Tyson down on the carpet and built a little fire from the kindling in the box next to the hearth. He did not have the strength to go back to the living room to get the logs he had brought in. He put all of the wood onto the flames and lay his feverish body down in the heat. Oh, what a feeling.

“This is how I used to go to sleep when I was little,” he said softly to Tyson. There was no response. The boy had made his way back into bed and was fast asleep.

Henry G
Braille

Lying

On a cold wooden floor
While shadows across her pale stomach
Bring out what she likes to hide

Tracing her stretch marks
With her fingernails
Trying to read them
Maybe they mean something.

Lying

About her age
To the man she doesn’t know
In the low light, stale smell.
Somehow
With a few less years
She’ll be more
Desirable

She misses him
She thinks it’s funny
How you could miss
somebody you never knew

But she was his bed
She was his fridge
And he was the one who made her smile

For a little.

Emma O
Anthem of the Sun

When the Ayolas ruled the world, so did the sun.

Thousands of years ago, when the western sun set behind a puddle of pink and orange clouds, when purpled glints of dust danced beside the breeze, when a pure nature existed, there lived a more primitive species. Beast overpowered Man. Man hid behind walls of stone, while beast waited with glistening lips just outside. Yet behind the towering stonewalls was a battlefield. Man against Man.

Inside the walls lived a civilization bursting from within. War ravaged the country; bodies piled over bodies stank in the steaming sun. At nightfall trees were set ablaze to light the way for murder. As Man battled Man, one reigned supreme. The ruler of this tribe, the Ayolas, was called Dobai, for almighty, supreme, and above all, light. Dobai was the sole communicator with their god, the Sun. As his father and grandfathers before him, Dobai took position as the highest priest and ruler among the Ayola tribe. Each woman, child, and man rested their fate in the hands of one man, much to their misfortune, as they would soon learn.

The Ayola men were predators. Each one by the age of six or seven was likely to have brutally murdered at least one family member. As the younger infantries were trained for certain death, their older brothers and fathers were mercilessly massacred on the battlefield. All feminine beings were used for two purposes: reproduction and medicine. Because the women were blessed with the gift of reproduction, it was decided by the Sun, they say, that women must have a higher wisdom of healing. Mothers and wives lost their children and spouses daily, and on heavier days, five hundred men could be killed.

One day, a day unlike all others, when the leaves ruffled in an eerie manner, when the Sun did not once show its face, an old woman made her way through the boisterous battlefield, climbed the mountain of Torealo, and requested the presence of Dobai. Alarmed, but impressed by her perseverance, Dobai welcomed this vigorous woman into his castle to hear her plea. She asked Dobai, as she fell down to her knees, kissed each foot three times, and raised her torso up and down, for what reason her seven sons and husband were killed. She said she did not understand this war, did not understand the reason for fighting. Languidly, Dobai responded, “They had to die.”

Thus marked the first sacrifice of a woman in the history of the Ayola tribe. Dobai sensed the women race becoming far too wise; he sensed their knowledge of his plan. This drove him mad, sent him spiraling into fits of anger and rage. He decided upon one final decision. In order to silence one, you must silence all.

For the first time in centuries the fighting had ceased between Ayolian men. Dobai had ordered the immediate cessation of battle and called for a mass gathering. He taught his people a new call, a new prayer to god. It consisted of a slow beginning, soft drum beats and hurried whispers, which soon developed into the inexorable pounding of drums and the stomping of feet, the violent shouts and screeches reaching an almighty climactic end, in which each Ayolian, both woman and man, sacrificed themselves. The Anthem of the Sun.

Lana B
Stop That Train

He said and yet he couldn't get on
he couldn't get on
and faces passed by, blank faces, blank white and black faces

and he stood and stared at the sun
until his eyes went black then white
and I knew him
I knew him
because I have been him
haven't you? when the step is too high to move up
to walk on up. And I cried

Stop that train

and the blank faces swiveled to watch me
they swiveled and their teeth snapped up and down, mechanically
the spotlight came down and I was drowned
in light
my eyes went from black to white

and I was a victim
a victim of their never ending procession
to madness, so sadness overtook
and I looked center stage and

now a whole cast of characters came on
they were players
playing at being real
I knew their blank faces from cars and cars of missed trains
I knew they needed someone to blame and

soon being bound and gagged wasn't enough for them
they cut of my hair too
we were massacred by these faceless shadows
and I knew the meaning of unfair

as they etched it into my elbow
I knew it and cried it and screamed it
and the millions of days that I had missed
the places I had needed to go swam before my eyes
till they turned black then white and black then white

I was a time machine
a cold sweat covered time machine
that lifted the curtain of color from this time
and faceless masks came on entering stage left

I tried to stare out the sun, to get away and stay away in its bright colored room
but it didn’t give me the head rush it used to

old fashioned camera flash bulbs went off in my head
my hair stood on end
with the sheer electricity

but knowing doesn’t stop me going so I fled
and upon leaving
my skin and hair and eyes turned from black to white

black to white then back and black to white
and I could hear ringing in my ears

*Stop that train*

the train I knew I didn’t want to catch

*Haiku*

Electrical light,
An angry bee in a cage
Buzzes and flickers.

*Alyssa N"

"Haiku"

"Eric S"
Repeating the word his teacher told him,
He hopelessly wished that it might just hold him
Like a fish in water, out of water,
Or a drunken sot in the arms of his daughter

Who hadn't thought not enough to scold him.

Sound it out, she said, like cinnamon, or anemone.
It’s as easy as Plato, a synonym or your enemy.
But like a second dimension on a number line,
Or a car with its suspension undermined,

He dined on, blind to his own reflexive enemy.

Suddenly, though muffled, the word seeped on through.
The key was in her ruffled hair, her hair was heaped askew.
If only he could reach right out and take it all away…
He leaned on in to leach it, yes, to make it all that way…
But she easily led to the breach away, and within her he withdrew.

Ultimately, he learned to compromise,
And no longer yearned for her swift demise.
The drunk was dry, and the fish was wet,
The line was lain and the axle was set,

The sane made mad, and opposites were met before his eyes.

And all the thick walls came tumbling down,
While all the heavy waves broke him down, down, down, down.

Sam S

Me and my dad have

have you ever had that feeling like you’re real sorry for what you did but you wish they’d stop rubbing it in? like a sore elbow rubbing and rubbing and rubbing

Alexander M
It was hard being old. Every day the man came to that conclusion, and every day it surprised him. His vision of age had always been based on his grandmother, a woman with boundless energy. She would always be dancing in parks, traveling the globe, or running a charity. When he was little, it had seemed to him that being old meant getting to be a kid without restraints or rules.

Now, however, he realized what being old really meant. It meant aching joints, wrinkled skin, and too many meds. It meant the loss of friends, the forgetting of addresses, and the sad passing of lonely days. Slowly he filled his battered teakettle with water. He lit the stove and then turned away, waiting patiently for the water to boil. Looking out the window he examined his postage-stamp-sized yard. It was neat, although nothing awe inspiring. The slight drizzle that was coming down would probably be good for it. He sighed. This wasn’t what life was supposed to be like.

He had worked hard, raised a family, and been a good husband. He had taught his child good morals, given to the local charities, and served his country. Now look at where it had gotten him. A tiny pension, barely big enough to live on, not even a phone call from his son, and Mary…burying Mary.

It had been two years ago. She had gone into the doctor’s office for a regular check-up and came out diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. A month later a policeman came to his door to tell him that his wife was dead. She had jumped off the Huron Bridge. Her only message, scratched into the snow, was the phrase “forgive me.”

After that things had just gotten worse. His son had blamed her death on him. They had a screaming match from which they never recovered. That funeral had been one of the most horrible experiences of his life.

“How?” The man looked up sharply. He had thought he was the only one left at the new grave. Clearly he was wrong. His son was standing there, his piercing blue eyes staring at him. The man’s stomach turned over: they were Mary’s eyes. He turned away not able to face those eyes.

“Dad, look at me! How did this happen?”

The man stopped himself from running down the hill like he wanted to. He couldn’t run from the grave of his wife, and he couldn’t run from his son. Turning, he looked at the young man standing before him. He was tall and fair. His thick hair blew in the strong January wind. This man standing in front of him was so different from the little child Mary had spoiled. He was different from the surly teenager who had on more than one occasion almost given his mother a heart attack.

“Tommy,” the man started and then looked down. How did he say what he wanted to say? Finally he just gave up. “Not now, Tommy, not here.”

“Yes, Dad! Now! If not now, when?” Tommy was in full rage now. He had been trying for two days to find out what happened, and all he had ever received was a painful, tear-filled look.
“You will try and forget, and knowing you, you’ll succeed. I want to know what happened to my mother! I need to know!” He continued his rant, oblivious to the silent pain of his father.

“She had Alzheimer’s,” the man whispered. His son stopped dead in his tracks.

“What?”

“She had Alzheimer’s.” he said again, this time louder. “She had Alzheimer’s and couldn’t deal! She didn’t want to go that way! She wanted to remember and live!” By now he was yelling to his son or possibly the cloud-filled sky. He wasn’t sure. “So she killed herself! She jumped off a fucking bridge in the middle of January! She left me ‘cause she didn’t want to fucking die!” He sobbed. Every emotion that had welled up in the last week came pouring out. The two of them stood there for what felt like an eternity, one crying, the other stunned. Finally Tommy spoke, his voice hoarse.

“How could you let her?” With that he turned and walked away, He walked away from his mother’s grave and his sobbing father who at that moment wanted nothing more than to join his wife.

Wincing slightly, the man shook himself out of these thoughts. They did no one any good, least of all himself.

Turning back to the kitchen, he looked far away to busy himself. His eyes fell on the wet coat. Without much thought he picked it up and hung it up on the hook by the door. Carefully he stepped over the puddles of rainwater that were on the floor. He would need to clean those up later. Before he could go find a mop though, the whistle of the boiling teakettle called for attention.

After turning off the stove he went to the cupboard, moving with the slow rhythm of people his age. Quietly he brought down the box of teas. Riffling through it without much care, he selected one purely by chance. It didn’t really matter anyway; he always put in so much honey to his drink that no other taste could be detected. Reaching up again, he felt around for his favorite mug. Wrapping his hands around its smooth surface, he brought it into the harsh light, just to get a nasty shock. The cup in his hands wasn’t his; it was Mary’s. Frozen, he remembered the day she had received it all too clearly.

“Mommy, Mommy! Wake up. It’s your day!” cried a small tinny voice that can only come from a six-year-old child. Ever so slowly he opened one sleep-filled eye. Blearily he could just make out the bright flashing numbers on the clock: 6:00 a.m. Wincing, he sat up and looked at the cheerful child wriggling itself between him and his now all too awake wife.

“Mommy! It’s your day!” the little boy insisted.

He smiled sleepily at his son’s enthusiasm. His beautiful wife was now awake and cooing at her little boy.

“It is, isn’t it? And what do you have there?” she asked, smiling at the box wrapped messily in (as the man would learn in a half hour or so) the front page of today’s newspaper.
Shyly the little boy held out the untidy package for his mother’s inspection. Carefully Mary peeled back the paper to reveal a bright pink mug. It was messily painted with big sloppy hearts all over it. On the bottom, the word “mommy” was childishly scrawled. For a second, Mary looked as if she was going to cry tears of joy. After wrapping her baby in a huge hug, she clutched the neon pink mug to her chest like it was a magic charm that would keep her safe from any danger or save her from any fall.

The cup was now chipped and the handle broken off. Dust covered the inside of it like a thin film. Silently he stared at this memory. He hadn’t realized that he still had it. Mary had always used this cup, and somehow he had thought that she had taken it with her when she jumped. For a moment more he gazed at this relic from the past. Slowly, his bony hands shaking, he placed it delicately back on the shelf. He closed the cabinet, went to the stove and poured out the water. Then, without so much as grabbing a coat, he walked out to the garage, letting the screen door swing behind him one last time.

*Emma H*

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**Charon’s Gift**

In my veins, deep within my capillaries and cell walls,
Underneath my mitochondria and through my plasma, runs gold.
It began at birth as a minor hurt that sprouted into
A rush that often pulses beneath my protruding limbs,
And a heaviness pressed under my tongue prying open my silenced mouth.
No fools’ for me, no sir, I’m the real deal,
For my prospects are good, as standards are low.
My heartbeats quicken as drumbeats and dream boats float on,
Breaking out from its prison of fleshy mire,
My own yearnings wane for our true desire.

*Emily D*
The Six O’Clock News

Victor loves to vacation in warm locations with tennis courts and beaches. He is unable to swim but his wife says that swimming is required in the Dominican Republic and that he must learn by Christmas. He often jokes that no lifeguard could ever manage to save his body from drowning, and his wife always laughs half-heartedly.

Victor’s wife, twenty years his junior, is both beautiful and intelligent. She had fallen in love with a handsome soldier who named her the “most beautiful woman in the world” and, to this day, Victor claims that he knew right then that he was going to marry her.

Victor wakes and enjoys the eggs that his wife prepared him for breakfast. He takes his time to shower and read the paper before leaving his house for a walk through the city. As he walks his wife calls to remind him of his swimming lesson and he decides to take the shortcut through the park.

Victor’s wife wakes to prepare her husband’s breakfast before she leaves for the office. She arrives late and fails to attend the meeting of her potential promotion, but consoles herself with the thought of her upcoming vacation. She is eager to relax and remembers to remind her husband of his afternoon swimming lesson.

Having spent his day at the pool, Victor feigns fatigue and demands his dinner. His wife stands to prepare the meal and says nothing of her disappointing day at the office. As they watch the six o’clock news, Victor hums Aretha Franklin’s Respect and his wife laughs because she has to.

Alessandra G

Destiva oblast

An old-time oblate
I spend the nativity in Oklahoma
I’m a joke by day
I’m a psalm by night

Sheriffs
Farmers

Go ahead and arrest me for my voodoo

But always know that I do not jibe my voodoo at you
Only at the sleeping plains

Grace D
The Cat Man (a true story)

The rumble and bump of the uptown 2 crashes through my ears as I curse myself for leaving so late, the building anxiety tense in my brain and hands as I pace on the platform watching people get into the uptown train. I poke my head out trying to catch a glimpse of a train. Nothing. My anticipation grows. I am late for curfew and I worry about my parents calling me out. The upcoming confrontation grows ever more perilous in my head as minutes pass and uptown trains scream into 14th Street station. Suddenly it comes, a cool breeze emanates from the track and a warm glint spreads up one rail. A soothing screech is heard and my heart leaps, a downtown 2 train has come. I swing into the train and grab a seat under a subway map. I tell myself that I will not be too late after all. I doze off slightly in the cold air of the train, passively scanning the posters, trying to find new ones. “This is West 4th Street, etc.” the recorded voice seeps out of the corners of the train, lulling me deeper into sleep. As I fall deeper and deeper something catches my eye, I awake and gawk at the intruders. Two fishermen with rods and tackle and a stinky box of fish enter the train. They are old hardened Latino men, looking as if they had spent their whole lives on the water. The first man is a tall ruddy man with the box of smelly fish, dressed in overalls and a trucker hat. The second man is a short wrinkled old man in a Yankees sweater; he carries a pole in his left hand and a box of lures in his right. They sit down opposite me, their stench wafting over me, engulfing my senses. A couple next to me gets up and moves down the car, a few people hold their noses. The fishermen are oblivious like the sea, minding their own business, so I turn away. Then I hear it, the familiar sound coming from their direction, I look over to be sure. The old fisherman is...meowing. He opens his mouth again and lets out a perfectly feline meowwww, it seems to rumble up from inside him and reverberate in his tiny lungs. I am startled but amazed at how this old man can emit such a flawless meowwww, and again he purrs it out but this time it is lower, almost insidious. By now half the car is staring at this old man, not knowing whether to be scared or amazed. Some people start to imitate him. He does not seem to notice the attention and meows again louder this time. The old man seems to think it the most normal thing in the world for a fisherman to be acting like a cat at three in the morning. He stops for a few seconds and the train car lets out a collective sigh of relief. I sit up in my chair, waiting for his next exclamation, I am entranced by this old man. Is he a cat on the inside calling for his fish? Has he spent so much time fishing that he has turned into a feline animal crying for its fish dinner? I cannot fathom what would make him meow in that manner for it is not a human noise. He then opens his mouth to start meowing. Swiftly his neighbor, a skinhead with a nose ring and a tattoo on his right arm, turns to him and says, “Hey man, could you please shut the FUCK up?” in an almost pleasant voice. The fisherman eyes him with apprehension and closes his mouth while mumbling something in Spanish ending in “voy a l’agua.” This old man gradually becomes sad and inward looking, reminding me of a pouting cat or a spoiled child. His stop approaches and he gathers his things, the door opens and he turns to the train, “MEOOOOWWWW,” he sadly exclaims and walks out. “Stay clear of the closing doors,” rings in my ears as I contemplate writing this story.

Chris N
my uncle died on the toilet.
my uncle, who at the age of
21 picked up a cigarette to help
him finally kick his thumb
sucking habit and who drank
his high school career away to
become a traveling salesman,
which was rather a
counterintuitive decision
seeing as he had never learned
to drive and in his constant
stupor he was in no condition to
do so, choosing a trade that
gave him no money, no free
time, no chance of love, and
separated him from his family
and vegetables, living off of
coffee and elvis sandwiches,
fried peanut butter and banana
glued in between his cavity
ridden teeth masking the
pungent smell of scotch, died
on the toilet late last night, or
maybe that makes it early in
the morning.

_Eliza M_

The sight below drained all hope from me. My eyes, if you had looked at me then—you
would have thought I was already dead. The city, my paradise of salvation, was burning
before me. The town was a symphony of destruction. Explosions cruelly played the drum
beat; their sound rattled throughout the valley. Sirens sounded off like trumpets loudly
and steadily. The murmur of gunshots played a clever piano melody. And worse than this
was the chorus of screams, terribly great, which rang endlessly upwards, towards the night
sky. It was all a spectacularly violent concert. I stood observing the extravagant amount of
energy that was put into death.

_Caroline M_
The quiet is everywhere: it covers all that I see, and all that I don’t. From my timeless perch, it coats me like a blanket, bathing me in my long-past youth.

My back has curved with time, molding to the concave spine of the chair. The house that lies behind me has reached that age where its wrinkles have become obnoxious, sinking deep into ribbon-like folds, matching me year for year as we gradually diminish.

I sit because if I got up, the world would fall, continents slipping down and off as my fat would slide down my thighs, buttering my bones with years of fried chicken and potatoes in lard.

The silence comes with the summer, the humidity strangling any remnants of noise. The peace that it carries barely shrouds the eerie lifelessness that lies at its heart.

Children run by, lending no sound to their steps as they watch their long-awaited two months of vacation melt into mere, disappearing days. They are too young to understand the necessity of the quiet, but still old enough to be bound to its mute perpetuation.

My spine is affected by a sudden shiver, unexpectedly seeping into my unwelcoming body. The weighty, careless strumming of a guitar faintly floats over to me, filling my body with the chilling interruption of the silence, each note accompanied by the piercing, sweaty steps of a passer-by.

Dum, dee, dum. He keeps on walking, whoever, wherever he is, each sharp jab on the pavement striking me right in the chest. The pain increases as he comes closer, and closer, throwing me back against my chair as I clutch my heart, silently screaming for help.

Years of tradition and custom have left my voice dried and shriveled, my screams nothing more than raspy gasps for air.

In between my rapid blinks, I see him. Matching each of his steps with the destructive beat attacking my aged, feeble heart, I wasn’t wrong. Halfway past the house, he stops, sensing me to his left. I felt his eyes coolly run over my body, running from head to foot, pausing on the spot of my pain, momentarily lessened. Calmly reaching for his hat, he tips the brim towards me, breaking the cheeky stare we shared long enough for me to stumble to my feet. Slowly, he resumes walking, calmly placing one foot in front of the other, picking up pace as he goes. Each step brings another stinging stab, until the sound of his steps becomes blurred, matching my pain moment for moment.

He moves beyond the trees, the sound of his footsteps becoming quieter, and more surreal. My pain stays.

A feeling of warmth runs back through me, breaking the chilly trance of the music. The calm, icy stare of his eyes remains in my sight even as I fall, unconscious, back into my chair. The gasping desire for air slows, and, finally, stops, as it all becomes quiet again.

Hanna S

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The Truth Beneath

*Mother walks in at 8:02 pm. My brother is watching television on the couch.*
*Me: Hey. I thought you were going to be home at six-thirty.*
*Translation: You let me down. Again.*

*Mother hangs up her coat on the rack behind the door.*
*Mother: Oh, I, um, you didn’t call me to remind me to leave at five-thirty. I was so busy doing, um…. I wasn’t even paying attention to the time. You should have called me.*
*Translation: It’s not me. It’s you. I know it was me. I won’t say it, though.*

*I shift my weight on the couch. I try not to look her in the face.*
*Me: You didn’t tell me to call you. But it’s fine.*
*Translation: You don’t have to lie because I realize you’re lying and I don’t believe you. But okay, at least you’re here.*

*She hurries past me as she speaks and her words trail off when she enters her bedroom on the other side of the house.*
*Mother: It was so busy at work today. And you know we’re moving. Did I give you the new…* 
*Translation: I still feel bad. I’m sorry. I’m going to go because this is awkward for me.*

*I sit on the living room couch, opposite my brother. He looks at me and shakes his head, then continues to watch wrestling on television.*
*Translation: That’s your mother.*

*I look at him. I stand up and walk to my own bedroom, the room by the kitchen that is furthest from my mother’s bedroom. I search my book bag for the forms and I carry them to my mother’s room.*
*Me: Are you ready to do the forms?* 
*Translation: I’m coming in whether you want me to or not. And you’re going to fill out these forms.*

*I can hear the television blaring *Desperate Housewives* through the shut door, so I burst through the door.*
*Me: Mommy, are you ready??* 
*Translation: I am being assertive. Please don’t think I’m being disrespectful.*

*She is sprawled out on the bed with her eyes glued to the television set.*
*Mother: Yes? May I help you?* 
*Translation: Leave me alone. I’ll try to be nice about this, so you can’t say I’m being mean.*

*I walk from the doorway to the side of her bed and wave the forms in front of her face, breaking her trance with the television. She rolls her eyes, squints at the papers and furrows her brow.*
Mother: Aren't you supposed to fill this out?
*Translation: Leave me alone. I'm tired. I don't feel like doing this right now.*

Me: You are supposed to do this. I can't do this because I don't know any of your information to fill it out.
*Translation: Stop it! Can't you just do this one thing for me?*

She looks at me and rolls her catty eyes at me again.
Mother: Why can't you do it?
*Translation: I'm not listening to you.*

Me: I just told you.
*Translation: You are so... slow! You never listen to me.*

I throw the papers down onto the bed.
Me: Is your laptop on? Because you're going to need that to fill out the applications online.
*Translation: I'm not giving you options anymore. You're going to do this because I need you to be there for me.*

Mother: Just leave the papers over by the laptop on my desk over there.
*Translation: I'm going to make this process as difficult as possible. I can't believe you're forcing this on me.*

I turn on the laptop and put it next to her on the bed.
Me: Is everything plugged in?
*Translation: I don't have time for your foolishness. Let's get on with it.*

Mother: What are you doing? I don't know how to do this. You're supposed to be doing this, you know. You're just being lazy.
*Translation: I do not want to do this. You should do this. I want to be alone right now.*

I walk out of the room before she can make any more objections, before she can see my eyes start to tear.
Me: All the instructions are there. You just have to fill in the blanks. Call me on my cell if you need anything.
*Translation: Just please be there for me. This is all I need you for. I know I can't depend on you to do it right, but just do it to make me happy.*

I don't know if I like my mother.

Christine E
Semele

Before she bore him a son she was the most beautiful in all of Greece
And you, jealous Hera
Did not turn your back on the opportunities
Of vanity
The peacock's sin
For beautiful women crave more than beauty.

“If you love me,” she told him
As you had taught her
For beautiful women crave power.

So Mighty Zeus was powerless to resist.
He did not show her weakness
Lest she think it dominant

And when the storm was passed
A child-god lay among the ashes.

Annie H

Application: Conclusion (Madman's Monologue)

Now it is all over, I can write
with equanimity—
it no longer matters. I had meant
to have an essay that outshone the rest
as sun to stars, but even God himself
was only granted seven days
to work his wonders—I had months and years,
if only I had thought, but spend them idly,
at books, at play; and then at last
the terror overwhelmed me and I knew
oblivion black as ink.

This is a formative experience.

Rewind the clock, let the alarm sound
sooner: I will write of it. I abandoned hubris
with my mind.

Katherine B
Dead Men's Idylls

If you are lonely, as I suspect you are, then I will tell you a place where everyone is so lonely together that you will forget whether the melancholy you are feeling belongs to you, or the man next to you, or whether it came from the drink that you just downed. If you find yourself on the Rue de Pigalle, wander up some, towards the great white sacred pulse that rules Paris. There, in one of the many small twisting alleys, is a small dark shop that only opens its blinds after one in the morning. You will not see it as you shrink into the alley, but if you follow the sound of slow moaning music and crazed orgiastic shrieks, you will find it hidden, set back from the street. Walk up to the window and peek through, and you will see all of your sad brothers, blue from life and the light, lying at tables or slipping quietly out from behind the heavy curtain in the back; and if you walk over to the other window, you might catch a glimpse of the pale bluish girls, lounging supine against the dark walls in exaggerated positions and various states of dishabille. You might see them say something to a man, or arch their backs a little deeper, or you might see even see their faces: pale maudlin faces with large wet eyes and limp red mouths. You will stare back and maybe even start to say something, but just then someone will draw the curtains, and you will be left standing outside. Maybe you go home and think of these girls, and you are sure that if you went back again you could convince one of them to love you, and the two of you would lead happy jocund lives and never again speak of the days before you met. Or maybe you are truly lonely, the kind of man whose cupidity for companionship cannot be sated by dreams. If you are this kind of man, as I suspect you are, then you will stand outside for a moment and then you will look around and head inside to join your brothers. You will arrange for a table with some of your compatriots and together think of your necessarily apocalyptic lives. You will exchange cigarettes and stories, and when you tire of each other’s company you will slowly get up and move towards the heavy black curtain. You will draw it up slowly and slip inside.

Chloe B
Condemn Yourself

The tiles scream with intention,
For there are no walls that do not speak.
Your heavy voice upon them is far too perverse to mention.

The girls slide fingers, leaving sweat marks and drool,
Removing their clothing even before they’ve met.
The tiles scream with intention.

One girl bled from her nostril
At the tender age of eight;
Your heavy voice upon them is far too perverse to mention.

Four children salvage their rabbit’s feet,
While others rotate their crosses:
The tiles scream with intention.

You’ve moved away to suppress your craving,
But the calluses on your hands remain.
Your heavy voice upon them is far too perverse to mention.

We should have built a barrier,
For mother and child and salvation.
The tiles scream with anticipation.
Your heavy voice upon them is far too perverse to mention.

Zoe S
The clock on my bedside table claimed in extravagant gold hands that it was ten o’clock in the morning. It was Sunday, I remembered—no school. I should just go back to sleep, but at ten o’clock the mountains of homework and chores that I should have been doing welled up in my brain. I rose from my warm bed, which groaned for me with every motion I made. Then I turned around and saw that my other clock read six in the morning. I looked out the window; the sun’s light bled over the city from its arc on the horizon while the rest of New York lay asleep.

“I knew I should’ve gotten a new alarm clock.” I flung the clock at the floor; metal shards and faulty circuitry showered the rug. I can be impulsive, to say the least, but I haven’t gotten enough sleep lately, and that piece of crap I bought on Canal Street for three bucks was a waste of money and now a waste of desperately needed sleep.

I went to the espresso machine in my kitchen and sat down as the poor thing tried desperately to make me some kind of coffee-like sludge; anyone could’ve mistaken it for gasoline. It didn’t look like the beans had been ground in this expensive contraption my parents bought for me at Bed Bath and Beyond. I couldn’t say much for the taste either. It woke me up a little, and at this point that’s all I wanted.

I thought about my friends, especially ones that I didn’t hate. There’s Adrian, but I don’t even know why I’m bringing her up. There’s Jameson. He’s a real intellectual; he has a giant vocabulary and knowledge of fine wines that he inherited from his dad. He has this girlfriend named Gloria. She’s a model or something like that that makes you expect her to be conceited. She is. Jameson wants to be a lawyer. He’s kind of a prick, but that’s one thing I like about him. He knows he is, and openly admits it. Anyway, aside from everything I hate about him and my other friends, I do like them all right.

My cat sauntered in from the bedroom. His name is Cloudy. He doesn’t sleep on my bed anymore because he’s gotten, to say the least, fat. I think the exertion of jumping the two feet is overwhelming to him, like a day hiker at the base of Everest. He stays on this one really soft chair and tends to stick to it like an old chocolate stain that’s become part of the cushion over time. He purred like a fifteen-year-old Chevy as he rubbed himself against my seat.

I took another sip of espresso. It was a lousy substitute for sleep because I was even more tired about a half hour after I drank it, but I felt okay now. Cloudy’s company was nice, nicer than most human company because I didn’t feel the need to make small talk with him. I hate when people try to talk to their pets. I mean, not when they’re just playing with them, but when they’re watching TV and actually trying to keep a conversation going. I like having a good silence with Cloudy, when we can just look at each other and I feel like he knows exactly what I’m thinking. I poured him some food, which in a minute I forgot about, almost feeding him again because the bowl was empty.

This time of morning was weird because there wasn’t anything to watch on TV. I
was too tired to read a book, and I couldn’t really go outside yet. There was no way I’d be able to fall asleep so I didn’t have anything to do. I decided to hell with the rules and went outside. “Maybe I’ll take a walk or something,” I lied to myself. I didn’t feel like getting dressed so I just tossed on my bathrobe and got on these slippers that I bought on Canal Street. I probably looked like some mangy thirty-year-old out on the street in a fluffy teal bathrobe and Scooby-Doo slippers. When I got outside, I didn’t feel like walking because I imagined that if I got too far away from my apartment, I’d freeze to death. It was as though I was disembarking from my spaceship onto a cold planet with insufficient equipment. So I just sat on the stoop, trying to think of something to do, staring at the newspaper inside a box by the curb a few steps down from me. The front page read: “Deficit Reaches All-Time High.” I don’t care about that, though. The Federal Government has always seemed like some kind of fairytale to me. The gigantic deficit never really affected me so why care? I’m not sure if I don’t care because I’m fifteen or because I’m just stupid. I think I’m smart, but I’m not sure, because dumb people think they’re smart. I don’t know…whatever. Whether I’m smart or not, I usually read the newspaper, but after skimming I didn’t see anything good so I put it back in the box and walked back to my dorm.

However, the cold fresh air had aroused my interest. I took another cup of espresso, put on a black coat over my teal bathrobe, and tentatively set foot on the balcony. There was a girl smoking Marlboros, staring with a huge smile towards the sunrise. She looked vaguely familiar. I sat down next to her.

“That’s the happiest look I’ve ever seen on someone this early in the morning.” Her stare hung on the orb of pink and orange fire a moment longer as she turned her head slowly to me.

“I’m sorry, what did you say?” she asked, her big smile hanging like a Welcome Home banner.

“Nothing, nothing. Do you come out here often?” I asked.

She lazily rolled her head back and forth with graceful indifference to how she looked.

“Sometimes. There was a beautiful meteor shower earlier, that’s probably why I came.” She said it as though she couldn’t remember coming out that morning. “There aren’t as many now but if you look it’s still dark enough to see a few.”

We watched for a few minutes in silence, and sure enough, a few white streaks scored the pale blue sky. She gulped another mouthful of smoke absentmindedly and let it trickle out her nostrils.

“You should try to quit.” The second I said it, I wished I hadn’t. She smiled at me again; there was no annoyance on her face.

“Yeah.” She nodded slowly a few times as though I had made some deep philosophical statement. “Yeah, you’re right. I quit.” She crushed the cigarette and tossed it into a garbage can. I couldn’t help laughing.

“You’re quitting, just like that?”
Her head bobbed again.
“I think so.” She spoke with the words of someone giving directions to a stranger, with no reason to lie.
“I have all this work to do, I should probably go start,” I said. I so did not want to do that right now. Just thinking about it was stressful. I think she sensed that.
“Okay. Though I don’t think you came out here just to leave after five minutes. Relax a little; watch the sun rise some more. It’s six thirty, we’ve got the whole day ahead of us.”

That’s what I did. I watched the sun climb and turn orange, and the sky get bluer, and the clouds drift back and forth. I didn’t worry about my *Heart of Darkness* paper or think about what insane organisms might be brewing in my refrigerator. An hour or so later, I bade Alice *adieu* and returned to my room.

I slept better that night than I ever had before. I was done with my work by seven and asleep at nine. I woke up early the next morning hoping to see Alice again on the terrace, but instead enjoyed the sunrise alone while eating breakfast.

A month passed and I still hadn’t seen Alice gazing out toward the horizon. I hadn’t seen her around school either. I asked Jameson about it and he responded nonchalantly, saying he heard she had some “rare kind of cancer or brain tumor. You know, something really crazy and unlucky like that.” He said that she had died two weeks ago in the hospital. The way he said it made me want to hit him. It made my stomach tighten the way my fist clenches and my knuckles turn white and my muscles go tense and my throat goes hard and my eyes glisten. I didn’t hit him. I thought it would be more blasphemous to Alice than Jameson’s previous line, especially if I had to explain it to the principal. He would nod his head in mock understanding. Then he’d send me back to my room saying “I’m sure you’re just upset over your classmate’s passing” and finish up with a pointless reminder about nonviolence.

When school was over, I didn’t do anything. I just sat on the balcony watching the sun fall out of view. It wasn’t like the first sunrise. Looking back, nothing could’ve topped the first one. A beautiful nostalgia had coated the memory, and Alice’s presence would never be recovered to make it like the first one. No, I didn’t expect it to be, and I didn’t want it to be like the first one. Alice was gone, and the sun was setting. When the last red shard had disappeared and the faint waver of heated air over the ocean stilled, I went to bed.

*Theo C*
Creeping hands slowly
Walking up a back.
Not their own,
But one that they have known
For a very long time.
Many nights.
One finger
Skips off the other,
Jumping over its brother to
A new vertebra (old really—its shape and
Feel are well known to the hands).
These are slack hands,
Skin loosening every day,
Covered with wrinkles that can no longer
Feel each other,
But only the
Caressing vertebrae.
The hands’ fingernails are clean,
No dirt is left after their many thorough scrubbings.
The fingers have reached her luscious neck!
Rejoicing, they stroke her wire hair.
Hair that was once full and long now has been
Stripped of that wholesome beauty.
The hands realize this.
The comfort of the hair would only stop the hands from reaching the person
Inside.
Why, asks one, are the hands not tempted to find a
Fuller,
Juicier
Woman who will tickle them with physicality?
The hands feel less and less now.
Their inner question is resolved by these vertebrae,
This hair that makes the hands return.
Those vertebrae
Hold their own inner question,
The matching of the hands.

Evan W
The Obscene Confectioner

The Obscene Confectioner
Pilfers the cache of my mind
And gathers up stolen muses.
He blanches them of all inspiration
And boils them down to a fine syrup
Which he stretches
and winds into ornate shapes.
He pours gelatinous taffy
On my train of thought
Clogging the engine
And halting
All progress.
He extracts a sugary concentrate
From my stolen whims
And carbonates it
Bottling the sticky
Substance for future consumption.
He candies my creative juices
Spinning them into a fine filigree
To adorn some ornate cake.
He covers my intellect in chocolate
Wraps it up in fine gold foil
And boxes it in a frilly container,
Imprints it with a guarantee of quality
And leaves it out to rot.

Ashton K

Towing

I used to watch the tow trucks
in morbid fascination
creeping up and down
the lifeless lines of cars,
prowling eagerly, opportunistically—
hunters savage and starved.

I used to watch the tow trucks,
their drivers surgically efficient,
snatch some hapless vehicle,
pry it open,
wrangle it off into
hushed evening darkness.

I used to watch the tow trucks
but I didn't think of it then:
not the violence
nor the lonesome chained cars,
colors muted in the darkness.

I used to watch the tow trucks
young, but all like a man
when he stands in the doorway,
hat tilted over eyes
watching.

Eli M
I wake up at 6:47 and brush my teeth. I take a good look in the mirror. It’s freezing in our apartment; I left the window open last night. I pour myself a bowl of Grape Nuts cereal and add a teaspoon of artificial sweetener. My name is Franklin Iphsvitch. I am a dentist.

I have a beautiful wife named Diana and we have been happily married for nearly twenty-seven years. We have a dog named Lucy that I walk every morning at 7:13 after I finish my cereal. I throw on my gray flannel jacket and scarf, my plaid pants and my royal-blue velvet slippers. I put Lucy on the leash, give her a pat on the head, and grab a plastic bag. I push the button for the elevator and the doors open immediately. Mrs. Aidan is there with her terrier, Russell, and after the uncomfortable silence and the five-floor descent, the doors open in the lobby. I let Mrs. Aidan out of the elevator first, and she walks over to the entrance of our building. I follow her through the revolving doors. She turns left and I turn right. I exhale and try to see my breath but it’s a couple degrees too warm. I love the cold. I let Lucy do her thing; she doesn’t like it when I watch. Lucy steps away from her pile and as I bend over to clean up the mess something hits me. I touch the top of my head and make sure that I’m not bleeding. I look up and think about where the object might have come from.

As I look back down at Lucy’s mess, I see a wisdom tooth. I rip off a little piece of plastic and carefully remove the tooth from the fecal matter. I wrap the tooth so that I can carry it upstairs.

“Hey, Diana?” I lightly shout as I enter my abode, closing the door behind me.

“Yes, dear?” Her voice really is music to my ears.

“Another one,” I say as I remove the dirtied tooth from the plastic. I wash the tooth in the sink with a wet rag and some toothpaste. I place the wisdom tooth in the wisdom tooth jar.

“That’s the second this week,” says Diana. It was actually the third if she counted Sunday as part of the week. The wisdom teeth had been falling on my head most mornings for the past nineteen years. I now have three and a half jelly jars filled with wisdom teeth. The whole thing is really kind of ironic.

Zeke E
I remember when rings of
smoke hovered in the midst of a john coltrane lick
and cool breezes sporadically raced through from the opening and closing of the door
when top hats were worn and
corrupt cops and mobsters swapped positions on the torn
streets
when world war one vets were still alive and in retreat
when world war two vets were still young and impressed with their feat
before Vietnam vets existed, just an idea of the elite
a flip-flop from maculate to imaginative

I remember when jesus and john lennon jabbed
back and forth, with lsd
the new thing, a new rock-and-roll innovation
a floating, footprint-leaving expedition, a competition, at the end
the start of william rehnquist

the end of william rehnquist
the end of taxation
the start of new regimes
the end of the middle, or hopefully the start of the end
of it

Nico G

Haiku

People whispering
Worries the cold traveler,
Wind carries their thoughts.

Eric S

150
Eleven o’clock on a Thursday evening. Things at the rubber pencil factory were not going well. There had been no shortage of desperately mediocre, tremulous incidents over the last few weeks, including (but not limited to) gastronomical explosions, homicidal chicken run, guitar warrior and organized revolution with fucking in the streets. None of this fazed Elridge Jim, the company’s founder and fearless leader, but this was a moot point as he was unreachable aboard a cruise ship to Brazil for a spot of turtleneck fishing. More importantly, none of this fazed Mr. Jim’s top aide Major Runtlestuntle, who, for the past month, had found his attentions diverted by the comely wiles of his secretary.

Major Runtlestuntle, in fact, was not currently serving in the army. He had fought as a troop in the Forgotten World War, but according to most sources had never made it up the ladder to the rank of major. He had been no more than a private before a well-aimed dagger to the sternum placed him on the casualty list (he got better). But his ego had been either inflated by his heroic experiences or diminished by his failure to progress, and he insisted with an iron cane that any subordinate in the company must dub him Major Runtlestuntle. Whispers that Runtlestuntle was not even his real name were quashed by a birth certificate which is now suspected to have been doctored.

Since his wartime injury, Runtlestuntle had made a swell recovery but had lost use of his chest. As a result, his heart knew when it was no longer needed and packed up and fled to Zaire. He now required a once-nightly injection of gasoline fluid to stay alive, but this was a closely guarded secret. A similarly closely guarded secret was that he had no skin and wore sheets of papier mâché that he was forced to restick every morning. But this secret is not relevant to the Forgotten World War, or to our story, and will be discounted. For all intents and purposes, Major Runtlestuntle was a cold, clinical, and unfeeling man. His eyes began to reflect a bit of despair but were too icily gray to submit to such emotion. He was a stickler for tidiness and rules.

Of course, rules were made to be broken. This was the first mental note he made when he saw Ribita’s ample, round derriere turn a corner into his office. Ribita was incapable of walking forward, so her most notable asset was pushed even further into the limelight. The young woman was led in by Elridge Jim, who informed Runtlestuntle that this girl was to be his new secretary, and following a pause for dramatic effect, left. It occurred to Major Runtlestuntle now that he had never seen the full picture of Ribita’s face. His eyes were without fail fixed upon her backside when she was faced the other way, so exclusively that when she turned to look at him, he had no choice but to keep his eyes fully on his work for fear of discovery.

Runtlestuntle’s passions were awoken by this new lust. At first he was timid and shy, like a mole rat in love. But as the weeks passed, he was so driven to distraction that he began to act out. Now, with the company hanging from a fragile string, all he could think about was how tonight was the night he was finally going to hop on her back and whisper his love into her ear. But she was tall, and besides, any sudden movement on his part would surely arouse suspicion. So he had devised a shrewd plan that appeared to him so hopelessly obvious that it could well succeed. He would wait until she was at the most opportune proximity to his desk and then he would drop an important document on the floor and ask her to retrieve it. While
she was bent down, he would spring from his seat and hopefully land right on the small of her back, from which he could murmur all the sweet nothings he desired.

The hours passed to eleven, the exact time that the super orderly Runtlestanttle had selected as the witching hour. When the clock struck, he daintily flipped the page off the table and watched it flutter softly to the ground.

He cleared his throat. “Ahem. Ribita. Would you be so kind as to retrieve that page for me?”

She stepped backward and turned around. Then she bent down with minor difficulty in her tight blue dress and snatched it with her fingers. Just then she became aware of a large body leaping over her bent person before landing in a crumpled heap in the corner. Apparently Runtlestanttle had forgotten that, without the use of his heart and blood, he had become nearly weightless. But he had come so far, only to fall so short! Was he going to give up now? Was he? Hell. He jumped up quick as a louse and hurtled across the way before grabbing her ears and folding them. Then he gingerly kissed the nape of her neck. All through this she reacted with indignation. Unfortunately for the Major, Ribita quickly overpowered him and called the National Guard who responded efficiently and gave Major Runtlestanttle the spanking of his life.

“Hit ‘im harder, boys!” the captain shouted brusquely. “Right in the center! Both cheeks at once!”

At that moment, Major Runtlestanttle knew for the first time what it felt like to be a salty dog.

Perhaps it was the clams who did it, who convinced him in their encased vulnerability that he should pry everyone open as he did them to see what was inside: if love was being open with each other, what better way to open up?

So he took the great two-handed cleaver from the kitchen of the restaurant he ran, reversing traditional gender roles with his hand on the knife used to chop up cow for family dinners, butterflied his sous-chef like so many cuts of meat and then went home and opened up his family and himself. I blame the clams: ambiguous beasts they have always been and always will be. I blame the clams.

Katherine B
It was all he had left—the American in the foliage. All he had left, save for the dirt of the jungle floor. The dirt of the jungle floor and the blood, of course. Most of his uniform was disintegrated, his name and rank stripped from his chest. His legs below the knee were now pink mist, dew on the upturned morning leaves. His weapons were gone, taken by children no longer frightened of dead bodies. No, he was not armed, but he didn't think he could bring himself to pull the trigger if faced with the enemy. He hadn't anger any longer. He had lost that along with his Midwestern home, along with his girl. He had lost the war—and he had lost his pride.

It was all he had. And he knew it was all he needed. For his throat to burn once more and the warmth of the fire belly to spill through him, rock him to sleep. How heavy that promise! And in this sleep, real sleep void of dark shadows and dream shrapnel, he would gain it all back. And would he meet with God!

He could feel the cold metal through his back pocket, its concave shape made to fit the curve of a thigh. He could recall when his father had given it to him. When he was sixteen and was infected with the idea of masculinity. A buck knife and a pewter flask. But all he had was the latter, no knife to slit his throat. Only, hopefully, three ounces of liquor... this kind Nepenthe...

With the effort of a ship crawling a rogue wave, he rolled his torso and felt down his side. The octagonal cap screwed off easily, and he was dismayed to find that his flask had been steadily leaking droplets into his pocket for...well, he didn't know how long, there was no watch. There was no sun...but he could feel that it still carried weight; the viscous liquid sloshed in the thin canister. Touching the cool spout to his lips, he drank the fire in one swig.

And he prayed for the rain to fill his lungs.

Danielle A
I eat snow. I eat snow and I have eaten it for many years now (sixty, seventy) and it is enough really because in the summer there is grass, flowers, and dirt.

There are little animals too, obviously, and I would eat them but they are so vibrantly alive and blue with light and in moonlight sometimes they bare their teeth, which are brown with the wood they saw and their gums are raw with insects and they might claw through my gums, gnaw on the whirl of my esophagus, poke through stomach. (There might be acid everywhere, spilling from my pores into the dirt and being absorbed there. They could claw through all three layers of intestine.

All my hair fell out, obviously; that is what happens when it is so precarious. It is a thread hanging from one tip in only scalp which is just skin and dead skin. It can like snow and crust and washes away in flakes and crusts into the cracks in fingernails.

(It was always so precarious. Nothing that thick and heavy can dangle. Neither can earthworms on tree branches.)

Sometimes I clear my throat, usually when my voice sounds like orange juice and there is pulp clogging it like it is a drain (always in wet flakes—skin bits or like rat teeth, small soft ones soaked in acid rain) and then I always test it out to see if it works alright after, like I say “hello” or sometimes “yes.” I don’t do it when anyone is around, obviously, I don’t think now is the time to be found because I am sixty, sixty-five, seventy and counting up, eighty, washing away like pulp at this point, fingernails green and brown and teeth broken in places. My voice would probably sound like a faucet sputtering or orange juice with hair and nails and my throat will clog with sweat and the blue of snow.

And someone will say what are you doing why have you eaten snow and smell like birds and I will have to say I don’t know and I’m sorry and anyway snow is just like ice cream. You can make ice cream from snow.

Rebecca S
I think I'll
light myself on fire.
Stand in a mirror &
watch me burn.
Then I'll jump out the
window and roll in the snow
naked. I've decided to
heat the hot tub to 150°
Celsius. Hop in and marinate,
serenaded by pepper-salt shakers.
Perhaps I'll open myself with a
letter opener, read my contents, then
dump me in the garbage truck.
I'll swim into the mouth of that great gray shark
and admire the dentistry. On the other hand, maybe I'll tie my thumbs to my toes and
toss me in a river,
wonder if I'll sink or swim. Maybe I should pin myself
to a giant canvas; stick me up in a museum, to be scrutinized thoroughly.

Nora C
I was once asked why Man yawns. After thinking for a while, I realized that the question is not why Man yawns, but why He stifles the yawn. For Man has been doing this long before the advent of modern customs and practices; I will not believe that pre-Victorian man stifled the yawn for fear of being impolite. No, why Man stifles the yawn is because the yawn means something. When the first man was on this planet, he was alone. Then, God created the first woman from the man's rib to keep the first man company. And from that moment on, Man was separated from himself, and Woman likewise. So, in order to return to that closeness that Man once felt, He and Woman devised a plan that would result in closeness, but without the possibility of conceiving. Thus, the Blow Job was born. However, because at the time of the advent of the Blow Job communication was most primitive, Man needed to know when Woman felt that She needed to be closer. Since all the grunts and other pre-language signs had been taken, Woman devised the yawn. When Woman yawned (thereby opening her mouth to the fullest extent, closing her eyes, and momentarily losing her gag reflex), Man knew that She wanted to be closer (for what other part of the body that can be manipulated with orifices resembles a rib, to even the littlest degree?) to Him. Now, as the years passed and yawning became a part of every human, for even a man (at times) wants to be closer to himself, language developed and the need in life for a primitive sign for Blow Job was replaced by a more eloquent one, words. Yet, the yawn had become ingrained into the brains of humans, and whenever one would yawn, a shame would descend upon them, for they were reverting to a more primitive state of being. So, to finally answer the question of why Man stifles the yawn, it is because the yawn is the call, or signal, if you will, for Man to prepare Himself for a Blow Job, and since that is no longer the preferred method of letting a man know that he is about to receive one, people stifle the yawn.

Ezra N
Lamma-Dee-Doo-Dop

In Guam, they call those *fritatas.*
I’m Gung Ho about your snow cones, Cal!
I’m keen on the flavors so can we kick it?
Yes we can (can, can)
Hey Cal, pass me a Little Betty Fudge Fact
Porque the child wants a little bitty for her headpiece
I like stemming the tide with you, Cal
I like your nasal spray Wednesdays and your color wars
I like the capture the flag sessions but I really like your face.
Seven is the age for marriaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaage!
If my friend threw rice would you buy birds to eat them?
I want to save the janitor some trouble.
In Guam, they call it “peligro.”
I’m not sure about that one, though.
“Peligro.”
You smell sort of like a Pelican on Fridays, but that isn’t such a bad thing.
I appreciate your acceptance of my condition,
And I promise that if we ever kiss, the cooties will miss your mouth.

Aaaaaaaaah…

Cal,

You’re the boy for me.

*Michael G*
The trail was a dark opening between the dark wings of the woods. The full moon only hung over the world; it did not illuminate it. I looked at my father, sat on the bumper, and shrugged my pack on. He turned the car off and shouldered his own pack. We stood for a moment in the total darkness and silence of the Adirondack night, a night older and younger than the warm, muggy, tired nights of New York City, a night tinged with balsam and the scent of running water and full of silent wings. We switched on our headlamps and looked at the faded sign. It was, as we well knew, zero point three to the base of falls, and both of us could make, and probably had made, this walk in our sleep. This did not stop the trail from growing longer or shorter as the fancy took it.

The pale white light of the lamps shone on only the trail immediately before us. It did not penetrate the darkness of the woods, where somewhere off to the left a brook ran, or where on the left the shoulder of the mountain rose. Every rock, every unevenness in the trail was familiar. I knew that halfway there the middle of the path fell in and became a gully, so I should go to the left; I knew that long protruding rock; I knew the tree that had fallen across the trail.

We walked in silence. What need was there for speech? We were two specks of light and humanity in that vast wilderness and darkness, each conscious of the other’s presence. It didn’t matter that we were less than half a mile from the car and civilization. The woods and the night had closed on us, and we were as alone as the first explorers of that land.

Not long after, we became aware of the falls. It was a distant rushing, like the wind in far-away trees, but more insistent, steadier. It intruded into the mind and filled it. The trail made its final dip to the stream. I descended to the rocks (there was no bridge; there could be no bridge) and made my way across, balancing and leaping even with the weight of the pack. On a rock in the middle of the stream I turned and looked at the fall, ghostly in the pale combined light of the moon and the headlamp, then back at my father, my partner (for we were never father and daughter, not on the trail; we depended on and trusted one another). He nodded. I finished the crossing and looked back. He made his own homage to the great fall and joined me on the opposite bank.

From here it was easy. Through the little stand of balsam, down the hill past the great boulder that guarded the way, and we were there. Dropping our packs, we smiled at each other. We were home.

Abigail H
In Marumba

In Marumba the sweat beads glistened in the searing heat. The smell of the cowhide drying in the sun lay thick in the sizzling air. The next morning the hide would be taken to the dye basins to be stained. In Cuamba clumps of dust gathered between a young woman's toes as she skulked through the market, her eyes grazing on the many baskets of yellowy bananas, carefully woven baskets in all sizes, and clay vases of water. In Gile men kneeled with one knee in the mud as they polished the shoes of the men sitting before them. The sticky polish, having melted in the hot afternoon sun, dripped into the cracks of the street, forming vein-like patterns. Children raced through the newly cobbled streets, their grandmothers running close behind. In Rutenga little girls rehearsed the celebratory dances to be performed in the parade next month. Women sat quietly at home awaiting their husbands' return from a long day's work. In Petuake the tall grass bristled in the breeze as the sun began to set. A woman's husky voice hummed a song she had once learned as a child. Streams of men filled the streets as they began the journey home. In Chiredzi night fell, and the blanket of sleep fell upon all its people. A man's drunken snore could be heard through the silence. The dog at his feet echoed the loud unpleasant noise.

Maya G

Bris Bliss

The baby cries as his mother chews salmon and thanks her guest for his generous gift. "Your baby is beautiful," he says to the mother, who thanks him again for coming and shakes her son in an effort to calm him. She swallows and looks for her husband, whom she finds reminiscing with her parents over her childhood in Tennessee.

"The house looks beautiful," her mother tells her. And it did. They had hired a decorator for the occasion to arrange a floral display and select dishware that perfectly complemented the hors-d'oeuvres. The "Congratulations!" banner, however, her husband had insisted on hanging.

The crib, covered in white roses, sits in the center of the room. The mother and father undress their child and attempt to calm his howling before laying him down.

"Cute kid," one guest jokes. Another helps herself to a bagel with lox spread.

The rabbi then stands to silence the crowd and, together with the mohel, approaches the crib of the shrieking baby. A snip is heard and then, for the first time all day, the baby is silent.

Alessandra G
The Strangled Woman—Paul Cézanne

In an instant she went from being a fiery shrew
To helplessly squirming on the ground underneath him.
But I couldn’t get involved.
She was drowning in her own white wedding dress,
Dirtied unforgivingly by the mud on his pants.
His rugged hands grew firmer around her neck,
And her defeated hair fell to the floor.
Frustration, radiating from him,
Forcefully inspired this sin.
She squealed, but any noise she might have made
Was drowned out by his roars.
My ears pounded from the deafening boom of his voice,
Yet there was nothing I could do to loosen his powerful arms,
I don’t think.
She cried while he yelled.
I looked for her face in the wiry mess of arms,
But only caught glimpses of the few breaths she could take.
It wasn’t my place to get involved.
Exhausted, her body slumped onto the floor with her hair,
And his strong hold persevered.
Her gasps were gone,
Leaving only his shouts.
He shook her now,
As if there were more color to steal from her face.
It was now my place to seize the rest,
Not by force, but gentleness.

Monica G
In Preparation

We are not Jewish.
We turn lights on and off.
We do not fast.
It is difficult to explain why I wear a star
Other than to say that I do it
To give anti-Semitic Christians the finger
And that I see Rosh Hashannah as a period of new beginnings,
And feel a strong connection to the letters that spell out my sins on Yom Kippur.

I am guilty of each one.

With every September come the anniversaries:
The anniversary of our car stranded two blocks from the World Trade Center.
The anniversary of my grandmother’s naissance
(And mine),
The anniversary of the shadow that fell across my consciousness
That gave rise to the numbness that we all felt.

Numbness follows after the soreness of screaming unanswerable questions.

Is it true poetry to admit
That you have never experienced that acute loss that comes from death
But loneliness that rose like yeast into self-pity?

No poetry exists to express emotions that you cannot feel.

Waiting for September
Is like waiting for the check that reminds me of what I have lost
Or permanently misplaced
But I can choose to pass the time in preparation for a new year
That will point the way to what I will find
And remind me of what still remains here with me.

Marjorie R
When the Morning Comes, Will You?

She would be here tomorrow. She would wake up still on the bed. She would wake up in the room, legs splayed, sheet mussed. She would wake up. She would wake up? She would wake up! She would. She would wake up. She would get breakfast tomorrow. Eight AM, Eastern Standard Time, she would wake up. She could eat it. She would try, sighing. She would strain, she would. She would do it! She had to!

Once I went to visit her, not in black like I am now, but in blue. Not so old or so tied up. For chrissakes she was more tied up then than I will be for a while: married, some property. Never had kids though. Never did. Made us all wonder who she loved and how. She never had kids but a small greening house on a graying street. She had a house on the beach where the waves were like a breast singing upward!

She wished someone would come and occupy her. She wished she would have some kind of occupation of the space remaining. She loved her husband, she was sure. She loved. She was so sure! Who, she wondered. Where were her brother’s children? Where was her brother? Would she see him tomorrow? No, she would wake up! She would wake up!

Her breathing always quickened.

She watched her breast rising rapidly! She wondered if it was back again—Was it back again, for good? Yes, she knew it was. She would wake up tomorrow. She would wake up tomorrow. She would wake up tomorrow. She would.

My father woke her at six in the morning on summer days. He would go into their garden at the greening house, the same where I found Easter Eggs, and find the ripe tomato. He would hold it in his hands. And then pull. Sometimes he punctured the skin, juice falling out. Sometimes he ate it and never told. Sometimes he placed it on the windowsill. He only ever took one at a time though, looking

She would try to swing her neck. She needed to look and make sure she was alone. She knew no one would be coming. She knew. She knew this was the start of alone. She knew her husband was at home, not sleeping but trying in vain in the new light. How she loved him! How long it had been!

for the face in the shine in the new light. I, later, also woke up to sit in the garden. Coming down from the attic, remember? The attic with dolls and old wedding dresses that were her mother, my great grand? Hours I spent. She collected little red riding hood novelties. More than novelties, though. Dolls, books, plates. She also had tea sets, she use to collect them. But then she moved on, and kept them anyway. How many hours have I spent lying on my stomach there? It was the only room in the house with any heat. My mother use to play with me there, and after she left it was just me. There was a miniature kitchen, German, she once told me. I never knew what made it German; it looked like it might have been French. The stairs had thick carpet, and I always would fall on the way

She threw her arm, and was worried by how limp it was! Would she wake up?
Did she want to? Could she? She thought about the visits from the last day. Two days ago? No, she knew it was yesterday.

I'd go sit in the garden to think. I'm not very good at that. My specialty has always been moving. Which is just…running. She always helped me quiet. Around her I could listen, and not just talk. Which is funny, because. Funny because. Which is funny because now she is so quiet. The first time I saw her face, this new face all I could do was talk, and move. She was overwhelmed. She didn't know how to deal with me any longer.

So I left her alone.

The day before that she was singing *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. Her niece had once taught her another version from her high school. High school seemed far away to her. Sixty-four years, she counted. Could she really have ever been there? She couldn't remember the faces, the halls, her teachers, the books.

When my mother left my father she was the only one who kept calling, usually on Christmas. Christmas was a big deal. Even more so than Easter. On Easter, up until. Up until I guess the last year, she'd hide a basket, full of pointless things, and chocolate for me. Usually in the shower. Can't imagine what she was trying to tell me. Anyway. There was always twenty dollars in it. I think she worried about me. Not as much as she worried about my father. She knew that somewhere in us, we were right, and in that she loved us.

She wouldn't wake up. She wouldn't wake up. She wouldn't wake up. She wouldn't wake up.

It was appropriate that I last saw her on Christmas. I didn't get a chance to say, “Love,” or, “Goodbye,” or, or anything. She was overwhelmed though, but she met my brother. She did, and saw that he looked like her, not like his mother. I was for her mother, born as she was dying. He was for her. It was the tenth night of Christmas when it happened. My father has been in bed ever since. I wonder if he'll wake up.

Hannah Z
Keeping Time

He doesn’t watch the keys anymore, observes the older brother. His fingers appear in their desired positions, and strike the desired sounds, while the boy’s eyes relax on the TV screen across the room. The song, now, comes from his fingers while his mind wanders elsewhere and his heart keeps time. He likes the song, he thinks, but doesn’t have to know for sure.

His brother ties his tie with sonatas in the background, buckles his belt, but never looks. He does his job. His heart, restless but ignored, keeps steady time.

Alex C
Drop

I’m sorry that I left you there
Crying broken in that chair
We had run out of milk!
I even did what you like
And bought the generic kind.

To let all things fall
Would be a fault of mine
If there had ever been a next time
I would have strewn the doormat with roses.

Chloe B