Dual Coast Magazine
©2014 All Rights Reserved
ISBN: ISBN-13: 978-1632750044 (Prolific Press)
Design and editing by Glenn Lyvers
Layout and editing by April Zipser
Distribution in the United States, Canada, and Europe.

DUAL COAST

ISSUE #1 DUAL COAST MAGAZINE 2014

Nells Wasilewski 1
Gram's Sitting Room

Deborah Guzzi
3 The Tall Ship Burns
The Broken Column Painted by Frida Kahlo
Dream Catchers
Astigmatism
A Blooded, Virgin Night

5 Craig Parmelee Carter
Lunar Eclipse

Ashley Sgro
7 Grey
The Oracle of Alta
They Betray Him
Bryanna Licciardi - Exits

9 Carol Nissenson
Here Kitty

13 **John Abbott**
Matinée
Art's Bar
On What Felt Like the End of Winter
The Midway

Matthew J. Hall
15 Call and Answer
Dear Confidence
My Mannequin and I

17 **Terry Barr**
What is That Song?

Ken L. Jones
Gone for Good 19
True To My Memory

Louise Matsakis
21 Running to and from
Georgia for You

John Grey
Driving Lessons 22
The Low School
that was High School
The End of the World
as Ben Knows It

Alan Gann
23 The Clumsy Juggler's
Junk Drawer
The Last Day of March
My Semester in
New York City
Crossing the North Quad

FOOD!
20. TRISH LAUBACKER
CHICKEN TACO SOUP

CONTENTS

ISSUE #1 DUAL COAST MAGAZINE 2014

J. J. Steinfeld
24 Waiting for the Traffic Light to Change
Wanting to Untarnish the Past
An Inexplicable Whisper
Creativity, or, None the Existential Less
Not a Favorable Morning for Questions and Answers

J.D. Isip
29 Son of a Bitch
Filipino Food
Vomit
Pitfalls
Faraway Words on Jars

33 Marie Lecrivain
A Letter to Hector from Astyanax
Pulvis Solaris
Antimony
Hermaphrodite
The Possible Tao of Li Po

31 Gregory Letellier
Beer and Self-Loathing in the Land of Lochs and Legends

36 Marshall Callaway
Restraint
45 Rapture, 33 Speed
Scotch Mirror
Ratchet Lake
The Errant Double-Proof

35 Ariana D. Den Bleyker
Moment of Becoming

36 Bill Melton
Dad

39 Charles F. Thielman
Brushes Soaking in Color
Sculptor and Open Window
Beautiful October
Solitude
A Painting, An Early Morning Walk, and All the People

40 Heather M. Browne
The Gathering
The Scents I Send to You in Heaven
Unboxed
Her Dream
Mermaid Dreams

41
Meredith Devney
Iona Campbell

PHOTOGRAPHY
A special exhibition by Todd Gontarek
On display at http://DualCoastMagazine.com

CONTENTS

ISSUE #1 DUAL COAST MAGAZINE 2014

42 Gene Desrochers - Nice Work Guy
43 B.T. Joy - The Egg
45 C. Marecic - Stretched Across an Unmade Bed

46 Nells Wasilewski
Blackberry Wine and Dreams

45 Emily Strauss
The Dawn of Redwoods
Ghost Moon
Socks
At the statue of Kun Iam, Macao

47 Bill Vernon – Innuendo
49 Rosemary Ybarra-Garcia - La Danza
50 Emily Berthold - I Just Want to be Kind
51 Cara-Aimee Long – Timid
52 Dixon Hearne - Collateral Lessons
53 Cindy Rinne - Learning Curve
54 Christine Thompson - The Fog that Blankets Oakland Cemetery

50 Chris Gusek
86ed

54 Claire T. Feild
Magnetism
Devout
Haughty
Kangaroo
Laborer

56 Lynn F Hoffman
Caninomy
Eighth Avenue
The Bullets Went thru Billy and They Broke the Bartender's Glass
Ice Cream
Crazy Man
Blind George

59 Richard Hartwell
Hard Water

60 Leila A. Fortier
Soft Anonymity
Reservoir
Caverns of Sand
Anomaly
Blissful Isolation

62 Bruce Deitrick Price
SEX
Saturdays in Kansas
DWI
SETTER

63 Heidi B. Morrell
What You Grow
Spine of Continents

CONTENTS

ISSUE #1 DUAL COAST MAGAZINE 2014

66 Milt Montague
Letter to Ruth
Memories
My Masterpiece
Lest We Forget
Magnolias

68 David Novak - [u]

72 April Salzano
Lost Mementos

73 Deborah Guzzi
Who Do the Voodoo?

75 T.J. Cheverie
Masks

72 Gary Bloom
They Eat Horses, Don't They?

75 Eric Scott
As She Sleeps

76 Daniel Shirley
First Reunion
Entropy
Surrender: A Poem about Violence
We Were Forced Into It Against Our Will

78 Gloria Keeley
Cold Oven
The North Carolina Farm Poem
The Bees Are Gone
Burning Down the Doll House

82 Chris Palmer
Cecelia and Sun Tzu

83 Darlyn C. Lojero
Romancing a Blank Sheet

83 Dave Gregg
Follicles
Carnival
Over Coat

84 Jeffrey Zable
Of Dreams and Marriage
A Bad Message

85 Carol Hamilton
Distances
Dig
Passover Hat
Materialism
Family History

87 Julie Bartoli
California after the Fact

Gram's Sitting Room

Furniture draped in white covers looked like hovering ghosts. Allie yanked the cover from the baby grand piano first and tossed it aside. Faint echoes, both of past laughter and sketches of conversation mingled with aunt Grace's talent at the piano, brought back fond memories and gave her pause. Her bravado of a few short moments ago evaded her momentarily. Holiday parties and family gatherings were so much a part of this room. Feeling the need to preoccupy her mind, she began to randomly remove covers from the furniture.

After a while, only two covers remained in place. Stalling for time, Allie walked over to the table sitting under one of the large windows on either side of the fireplace. The family Bible was lying open to Gramps' favorite verse. She knew it by heart, but she read it anyway. She gently closed the worn cover and placed the Bible near her purse.

Allie looked at the remaining covers. She felt faint when she stood beside the one on the left. She lifted the cover, as if in slow motion. The smell of pipe tobacco and well-worn leather assailed her senses. She thought her knees might buckle. Gramps' old leather easy chair sat there, seemingly staring back at her. The arms of the chair were faded from many years of use. Allie touched the small, worn indention on the back of the chair where Gramps would rest his head when he was deep in thought. More often than not he would drift off and snore gently.

When she came to visit, Gramps would always say to her: "Allie, if you didn't bring a book, I'll get you one from the library." He never got her a book, but she would find herself sitting at his feet, in front of a slow burning fire, listening while he read to her about countless things and places. The resonance of his voice was so soothing and comforting; it made her feel safe and loved. She had adored him, as he did her.

Drifting back from her daydream, she stared at the other side of the fireplace where the last cover remained. Allie walked over hurriedly, and, without ceremony, removed it. The tiny cricket rocker was unchanged. It was a tiny chair, delicate and feminine, like the lady who owned it. But in truth, like its owner, it was sturdy and dependable. The rocker had always been incongruous with the rest of the room. It was a pale maple wood, unlike the other furnishings, which were deep rich mahogany. The upholstery was neither fine leather nor tapestry. It was a bright, colorful patchwork. The decorator had stormed out of the room in a huff when Gram refused to give up the chair. Gram didn't give a fig what anyone thought. She loved this chair and so did Allie. Gram was her own person with no reservations about expressing her opinions. Her straight- forwardness did not in any way take away from her compassionate and loving nature, but rather enhanced it.

Gram was always sewing, "mending," she called it. She would often tell Allie: "When I finish another stitch or two, we will go and see if we can find some cookies and milk." Allie always wondered how it could take so long to finish two stitches. When she was older, she realized that one or two stitches usually meant finishing whatever Gram was sewing.

Gram was her best friend. She had listened through Allie's turbulent teenage years, and encouraged her during her college years. She held Allie and made her hot chocolate the first time a boy broke her heart. The two of them giggled like teenagers when Allie became engaged. They stayed up all night laughing and talking. Her wedding reception was celebrated in this very room.

Allie stood motionless. She closed her eyes, allowing herself the small luxury of one last moment to savor the feel and smell of Gram's sitting room. Then the moment faded, and it was time to go. Picking up her purse and Bible she exited the room. As she was closing the doors, Allie would have sworn, she heard Gram say: "Be sure you close those doors, Allie, or we will lose all our warm air." She smiled when she heard the latch click.

When Allie finished with her walk through the house, she did not tarry. Walking briskly to the door, she opened it and stepped out into the late afternoon sun. Janice Thompson, the realtor, was down in the front lawn erecting the auction sign. Allie greeted her. They discussed the sale, and confirmed the plans that they had gone over on the phone. Janice assured her all would be in place for auction day. She had the gardeners and the cleaning agency lined up to get everything ready. Feeling both grateful and confident of Janice's ability, Allie said her goodbyes and got in her car.

She switched on the radio as she was turning out of the tree lined lane. Allie was humming along when the thought occurred to her: how very strange that she had never, before today, noticed that the walls in Gram's sitting room were dull gray!

--Nells Wasilewski

Sweet & Spicy Cinnamon Cupcakes

Yield: 24 servings

CAKE:
1 ½ sticks unsalted butter, softened
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
1 cup cake flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon salt
1 ½ cups sugar
3 eggs, room temperature
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 cup sour cream

FROSTING:
5 sticks unsalted butter, softened
5 oz. bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled
5 oz. white chocolate, melted and cooled
1 lb. confectioners' sugar, sifted
¼ cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon ancho chile powder
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line muffin pans with paper baking cups.

In a medium bowl, whisk the all-purpose flour with the cake flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon and salt. In a separate bowl (or stand mixer), beat the butter with the sugar at medium speed until fluffy, about 3 minutes. Beat in the eggs and vanilla until incorporated. Add the dry ingredients slowly and then the sour cream.

Distribute batter evenly into the paper cups. Bake on middle rack in oven for 15 minutes, or until cupcakes are springy. Transfer to cooling racks and let cool completely before frosting.

Frosting: Beat softened butter until creamy. Add confectioner's sugar on low speed until incorporated, then on high speed until fluffy, about 2 minutes. Switch back to low speed and add in cream, vanilla, cinnamon, ancho chile powder and cayenne, then gradually beat in the bittersweet and white chocolate. Increase speed and beat until light. Stir with a wooden spoon to deflate air bubbles if necessary.

The Tall Ship Burns
Deborah Guzzi

Burnished gold, aged bronze patinaed by the firelight
singed by sullen Sol, not stayed by Poseidon's hand;
aflame, aflame, the tall ship burns, see the masts ignite.

Impenitent, the sky rains ash blackening the night.
The fire sends a smoky pall upon the sea and land,
burnished gold, aged bronze patinaed by the firelight.

Fire eats the air, it snuffs man's breath, death maybe their plight,
yet, all hands come to the Captain's call, his to command,
aflame, aflame, the tall ship burns, see the masts ignite.

Hell's inferno has come a calling on this sun lit night,
a foul wind blows, the fire roars, and so the flames are fanned
burnished gold, aged bronze patinaed by the firelight.

Without their ship, the crew were lost, debtors they'd alight
They went up like straw scarecrows shriven by the brand,
aflame, aflame, the tall ships burn, see their masts ignite.

Burning cinders catch the dock, the workers run in fright,
pain and heartache fill the wharf, still, they must disband.
Burnished gold, aged bronze patinaed by the firelight
aflame, aflame, the tall ship burns, see the masts ignite.

The Broken Column Painted by Frida Kahlo
Deborah Guzzi

You thought me spineless
so in a fit of anger you tore mine out
bloodless, I rose
sword swallower, strengthened
by my tattered paper edges

The abyss of your barren soul
wrapped me in gauze
shrouded me on parallel
partitions

nailed to the crossbars of your lust
Only mother-me did you revere

all hail the hidden cunt
affixed to the missing cross
white cloaked, virginal, tresses unbound
lay me not across the landscape of your desire

grovel at my shrine

Dream Catchers
Deborah Guzzi

There was a time when feathers found me like talismans, they came.
Without their soft down, I was grounded, the sparrow thought to lend me flight.
Now, neither up, nor down do my eyes go, for the third eye is my frame.

Flight takes a lonely path, stirred by each wanton wayward breeze.
The sky above is not for me, the spiral path of mystery, my hook, my lure.
Ah, not to choose but taste of both would, I dream, be heaven for me.

Now, within my window's pane I've hung a catcher of dreams
I've found a way to fly inward and rise upon the fragile breeze of mind.
Feather's hang among the circle's weave, they are the tokens I keep.

Astigmatism
Deborah Guzzi

The curvature of the eye
marred by irregularity distorts.

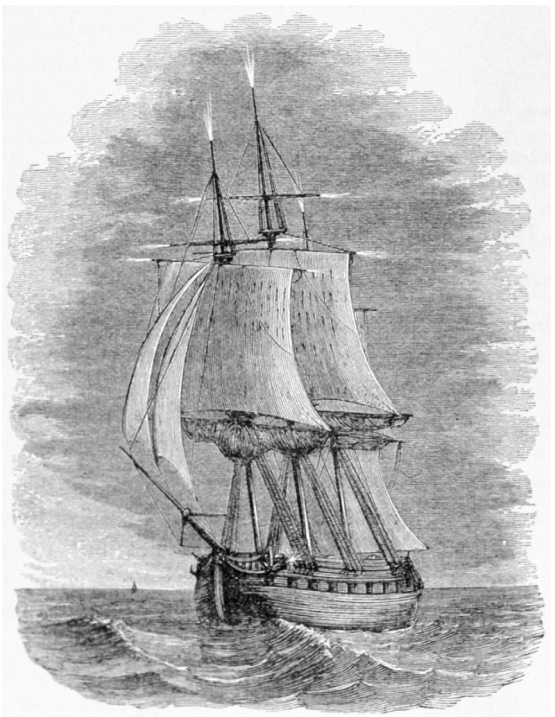
Rain falling through the aqueous arch
prisms, propelling points of light
skyward, produces an aura most saintly.

Sunlight swallowed by the curve
curls sensuously, rising ever skyward
from the steaming fecund surface
of earth and sea to join on wayward winds.

The curvature of the eye
marred by irregularity distorts.

The child looks out and up
into the parental face, through the lashes
of this imperfect form and settles, smiling.
knowing no norm, only accepting the is.

The adult cut and crisp, dried, and molded
cries, mourning their losses and their imperfections
denying, with a stubbornness born from naming.
Name nothing, for in not naming, the eye can accept,
accept, all things as beautiful.



A Blooded, Virgin, Night
Deborah Guzzi

Brighter than a fall bonfire but with the chill of ice
the Winter sun haloes the gray and barren woodland,
throbbing, almost hesitant, with a florescent pulse,
brazen in its unrelenting descent, it clings

to the horizon.
How it hurt my eyes.

Thin skinned, the lids tinge orange, the white of sol's merging:
trunks, boughs, branches, twigs, welt the dusk
rouging the line between, blooding the virgin night.
Pricked, the brain pulses in tune unable to look away.
How it hurt my mind.

Splayed fingers block the sharpened spears of screaming fright
the Winter sun, indexed, palmed, scratches the face of I.
Within a lightless room a pall hides blue veins, near comatose,
brazen, the light, the light, I sigh, until shades and stars arrive.
How life and death both hurt

LUNAR ECLIPSE

Craig Parmelee Carter

On Saturday morning Alan Carston awoke from a vivid and erotic dream. It had occurred in the early hours while he slept soundly, and unknowingly, through a total lunar eclipse. In the forty-two minutes that the full moon was hidden in the earth's shadow, he was visited, touched, aroused, and put helplessly under the spell of a women; a goddess, who had whispered her name on a kiss in his ear... Odessa.

Damp with sweat, Alan turned to his wife, saw that she was still asleep, and closed his eyes once more, hoping his dream women would reappear; that she would take him in rapture and keep him forever in her secret world where he could remain nuzzled in her bosom, bewitched by her sensual whispers, and delighted in her magical scents, just as had happened moments before. But this did not happen, and as daybreak neared, the veracity of his dream began to wane, and was utterly and brutishly splintered when Ellen woke up and asked him how he would like to have his eggs.

"Poached," he said. "I think I'd like them poached."

"Really?" she said, astounded. He had never requested poached eggs in all their years of marriage nor had she ever prepared them that way. "Why poached?"

Alan had no answer. Indeed, he wondered why he had suggested it, and now a justification was required. "I've always wanted to try poached eggs," he said weakly.

"I'll see what I can do," Ellen conceded.

She took her fuzzy, pink robe and matching slippers from the closet and commenced the morning routine. As usual, Alan remained in bed until he heard the bathroom door open and the leather bottoms of her slippers brush the oak stair treads. He waited longer this morning, trying to dispel the mounting uneasiness of his romantic encounter, which he felt he'd somehow betrayed with his peculiar breakfast preference. But as the shower hissed and splashed from his chest, the fuzzy remembrance of his dream returned; the whispers of the mysterious and seductive Odessa and the euphoria he'd enjoyed amidst her aura. Who was she? Angst filled him as he toweled off. He smelled the charring of toast and heard the shrill whistle of the kettle and the dissonant crooning of his inattentive wife. What was distracting her? His heart pounded. Should he tell her? Tell her what? About a fantasy women in a dream? About the bliss she had bestowed upon him? The erotic nuance? Ellen would be distrustful. Her interpretation would be sinister. She would question his fidelity; would blame a secret crush; would try to pin it on someone he knew, maybe someone he worked with.

This was a rabbit hole he dared not go down. Nothing he could come up with would explain the erotic visitation. She was, he hypothesized, someone with whom he had shared a past life, or a long-forgotten childhood infatuation now fully ripened in women-hood, maybe even his mother. It didn't really matter. He would keep it to himself. What was important was that he hold fast to the vision; that for whatever reason, a goddess had chosen him and he would protect the sanctity of their bond; that his dream women was no threat to their thirty-year marriage, but could actually enhance it. Indeed, he plotted, if he could impart a subtle transference of this supernatural anima to Ellen, she would then possess the sensual allure of his fantasy-women; morphing, as it were, in a sort of metaphysical switcheroo.

Ellen stirred a pan on the kitchen stove. "We're out of eggs," she said, "I made oatmeal instead."

"I hate oatmeal," he whined - a half-truth. He hated her oatmeal. It was pasty and dry. She placed the bowl before him and he nudged the contents with a spoon. The skim milk in his coffee made it look like it something from the workbench.

He pushed the mug aside. "Dammit Ellen."

"What?" she pleaded, "I didn't make up the rules."

"What's the plan today?" He nibbled on dry toast and watched the starlings spewing seeds from the feeder.

"I could really use some shoes. Let's take a drive out to the mall. We can get lunch and you can look at those graphite clubs you've been talking about. What do you think?"

The mall seemed like a good idea, although golf was suddenly less of a concern. "I was thinking I'd lay off golf for a while. Give it a little rest. We should really work on putting some excitement back in our lives, don't you agree?"

"What's got into you? You want to quit golf? What do you have in mind?"

Alan's imagination ran wild. Here was his chance. "Let's just get you those shoes," he said.

An awkward edginess pervaded the tedium of the drive. Ellen troubled over her husband's sullen mood. The sudden disinterest in golf was unsettling as was the insinuation that their relationship had gone stale. He behaved like a stranger. Alan's concentration was impaired; preoccupied with the likelihood that Ellen would resist the tactics of his covert plan.

"Let's get you a sexy nightie," he blurted wildly.

"Alan, I just need to get some shoes," she said. He looked away disappointedly; fiddling with the radio.

"I'll tell you what. You go and get me something nice and we'll meet at Charlie's."

Alan nervously skirted the perimeter of women's sleepwear and lingerie. His eyes were drawn to a headless mannequin in a Calvin Klein display fitted in a black thong panty, her nippled breasts jutting upward. Then another in a red lace boy-short, her breasts scooped in a transparent demi bra. He closed in, sheepishly entering the tantalizing exhibition of women's underthings. Polished marble tables displayed panties and G-strings, thongs and bikinis, teddies and tangas, bustiers and babydolls, chemises and corselets, negligees, bralettes, and bodysuits. A leggy mannequin gestured a sultry pose. Her hair was done in a pink pixie cut and her eyes, heavily shadowed in black, returned Alan's gaze with shameless it's me you want innuendos. She modeled a transparent brassiere in tangerine and a matching lace panty which was visible through a long, chiffon skirt with a lace waistband and a teasing front slit.

A heavy-set women in her sixties offered assistance. "This set," Alan said, circling the mock diva.

"Yes, it's a lovely combination, isn't it? For your wife?"

"No, well, yes, it is."

"Lovely," she purred, repeating again at the checkout counter, "just lovely." She folded each of the separates and placed them in lavender tissue. "Comes to two-hundred and twenty dollars."

Never had Alan derived this much satisfaction from such a frivolous expenditure. He made his way out of the department store and broke into an ecstatic trot as he passed the food court and the kiosks and the other stores, swinging the glossy gift bag by its fine rope handles.



"For you," he said that evening, advancing the glamorous ruse. "I'll pour champagne while you try it on." He surveyed the bedroom; adjusted the dimmer; closed the drapes; pulled back the covers.

She emerged in her seductive ensemble, enchanting in the dimmed light, and after they clinked champagne flutes and sipped the sublime nectar, Alan, heart palpitating and drunk on his vision now manifested in his unsuspecting wife, bedded her. And as the moon rose once more in the east, he ran his hands down the small of her back; touched the lace waistband of her panty.

Grey

Ashley Sgro

That bright, hazy mist inside the darkness of my kitchen. It wafted through the air like a spark of colored wind, but I barely saw its shape. Its particles boasted brilliance in the black air while I kept still nearby.

Then it discovered me.

It had to. It noticed my skin, a solid figure, and wiped itself from my sight.

I lost it—lost the shadow of that pale grey ghost which lingered, then disappeared.

~~OO~~

The day was wet. Splattered throughout the surface of the pavement were swells of water. They were big, and I didn't want to make the mistake of stepping into one.

But I was curious.

I wondered if I would drown: be engulfed then swallowed by the thick mass of dirty water. I wondered if I would be trapped in a lonely place. I wondered if I would slip into an unconscious obscurity.

I wondered if anything at all would happen.

~~OO~~

There were no stars that night.

I fantasized about the people who stood outside gazing up at passing shadows. Shapes that were ever-present. Almost untouchable. A mass of moving figures that hung over the surface of empty heads—drowsy minds.

The Oracle of Alta

Ashley Sgro

If a group of travelers were to fly over the town of Alta, they would almost certainly mistake the houses below for a circle of crumpled stones. Every home looked the same: small and grey. Hut-like. Dirty and deserted.

All of Alta's bodies were swarmed along the front of a shack that sat before the edge of the town's dirt road. Faces struggled to find a place at one of the two tiny windows at either end of the structure, but only a few sets of eyes would be able to see inside the home of Mr. Worne.

Being the oldest member of the community, Mr. Worne was taken care of by the people of Alta. The attention paid toward him was more of an obsession than a gesture of kindness, since everybody wanted a chance to enter his home to sit on the lap of the long-armed oracle.

They remembered a young girl who, some years ago, managed to find her way into his home. She was small and looked to be about five years old. They had hated her for being so close to him and had envied her for how well she fit into the vacant space on his lap.

They remembered how frightened she had looked as they watched her through the windows. They'd clawed at the glass when she'd slid off his lap and crept toward the palm of his right hand that was resting on the floor. They'd watched her grab his wrist to help lower herself onto the flesh between his fingers.

They remembered her closing her eyes in the midst of their noise. And they remembered pushing their fingers flat against the glass while they'd watched Mr. Worne curl his fingers around the body of the small girl. She'd looked content, but the bitter pounding of the people outside had disturbed the quiet calm felt inside the house.

She'd kept eyes on them and the shape they made: an assemblage of body parts—one human-painted pane.



Exits

Bryanna Licciardi

Mother is standing by waiting,
apron-tied
her hair pinned in curls
some already falling

I'm pushed against
his swollen ribs that crack,
splinter, my palms wet with soft acid,
bone ripped aside
I emerge careful.

She stirs a teacup
waiting for me to sit.
There's plenty for both of us,
she says, and pours.

A warm afternoon.

We pay no mind to Father
sticking dead to the floor.

They Betray Him

Ashley Sgro

"I wish he'd come inside and sleep in his own bed."

"He does this every night, and I'm so tired of trying to make him stay."

"With us?"

"With us, in the house—whatever." He turned to his wife. "Face it, our son is acting like a child. We tell him to grow up a little, and he runs outside like a baby. If he wants to sleep out there in the dark, that's fine with me," he said as he closed the blinds. "He'll come in if it rains."

"He didn't last night," she said, "and it was pouring."

"Oh, yeah," he laughed. "And I bet you ten bucks that he'd come charging into the house or at least hide in the garage to keep dry."

"We shouldn't be betting on things like that."

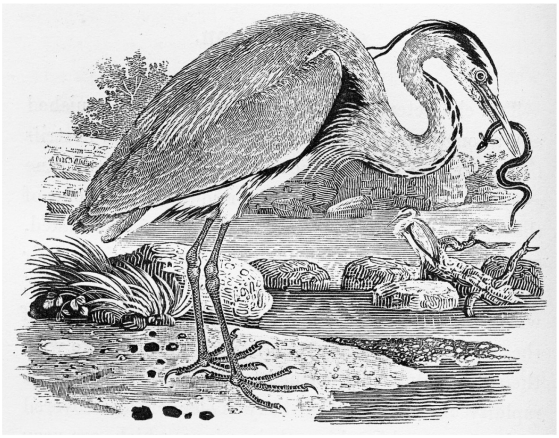
"Hey, you took the money."

She placed her hand over her husband's.

"I'm so worried about him."

"Don't be." He pulled away. "He's where he belongs."

Oregon, for Vacation?



Oregon has 363 miles of coastline. When you think about travel, maybe Oregon does not come to mind right away, but the Oregon coast is there, and it's free.

The good folks of Oregon would like me to imagine surfing or jumping sand dunes in a rugged dune buggy while onlookers wish they were me. This is not the reality for 99% of us. I want to see the coast, smell the water, feel the cool-salty ocean mists, and maybe even catch a fish—but my perfect trip to the Oregon coast never includes jumping dune buggies over sand dunes.

There are great activities though. Investigating tide pools, mild hiking and exploration are perfectly suited to my 45 year old body. I could use a brisk walk, believe me, but not the rock-climbing of my youth. Tide pools really are beautiful. Have you ever seen a starfish crawling along at micro-speed? It really makes you stop and wonder where we are all going in such a hurry.

Other Oregonian activities include hunting for agates, beach-combing, and plenty of eye candy. Watching waves splatter at Devil's Churn and discovering the elegant beauty of Hug Point's waterfall can lift your heart. Then there is whale spotting, or interacting with the hungry seals. Photography! Bring your camera if you go to the Oregon coast. I can tell you from experience, if you don't have it, you will wish you did. You always see something new and surprising.

Maybe Oregon is not on your list of travel destinations, but it might be just what you need. They are not touristy, and fresh fish is always on the menu.

--Staff

Here Kitty

Carol Nissenson

Rebecca didn't think she left the living room window open intentionally, but when she got back to the apartment from her weekly humiliation at the unemployment office, Balboa, the rescue kitten from Hell, was gone. It wasn't her idea to rescue him in the first place. She liked animals only enough to know that she didn't like them, and shouldn't be allowed to have them.

At the beginning of August she was terminated at the newly incorporated Save the Micronesian Striped Iguana Fund. To be more accurate, the fund was terminated when its sole major donor discovered that the lovable little poison-spewing beast looking longingly at the camera in the touching 'You know you need me' posters, was either already extinct, or never existed in the first place. Who knew? Dorie, her boss, probably.

It wasn't exactly the perfect job, anyway. Rebecca shared her 4x5' office with a corn snake and a gecko (both caged, thank god) and had to bring her own laptop. Britta, the office manager, had an inexplicable fondness for Yanni, and played his 'Greatest Hits' on her desktop at least once a day. If anyone asked Rebecca what she was doing there to begin with, she explained that Dorie had convinced her that if the little bastards died out they would have taken the entire ecosystem of Nauru with them.

Rebecca's building on W. 93rd was what the ads on craigslist call a 'luxury building,' meaning there was a working, graffiti-free elevator. Her apartment had the original radiators, and a tiny kitchen with a gas stove she had to light. The living room looked out on a small courtyard that nobody ever visited, because the couple in the garden apartment let their rooster use it as an exercise yard, and a man on the fifth floor of the building facing hers occasionally peed out his window.

"If you need a roommate, put an ad up at Columbia," her totally clueless, older sister, Marlin, advised her from her pale pink mini mansion in Berkeley Heights. Marlin had achieved her one life goal: to have enough money that she didn't need to have a goal. Rebecca's goal was to save the planet. Despite an M.A. from Columbia in what her sister referred to as 'green stuff,' she hadn't saved anything, not even Nauru and its imaginary lizards.

The posting drew inquiries from a Pakistani grad student who ended the interview by proposing to her, a junior who hoped Rebecca wouldn't mind if she 'smoked a little weed' in the apartment now and then, and a twenty-something who didn't actually go to Columbia. "The other girls I live with do. They think I'd be happier somewhere else." Hmmm…

So Rebecca made one of those ads with the tear-off fringes on the bottom, and posted it in a little coffeehouse around the corner. That's how she found Olivia, her roommate of last resort.

Unlike the now and then weed smoker, Olivia was gainfully employed, a big plus. She worked in customer service at Omnipatek, one of those hi tech companies whose homepage proudly proclaims "WE PROVIDE SOLUTIONS" without mentioning what they're solving.

"I'm not going to pay $1300 a month to share a bedroom. You can keep your clothes in there, if you want." Those were Olivia's terms. The rent was due in six days. Rebecca bought herself an air mattress, and moved into the living room.

Olivia and her 'would have qualified as a sugar daddy if he'd been five years older' boyfriend were in the midst of a trial separation.

"I told him if he wanted me to move out, he had to pay my rent somewhere else. He's got a lot of money. It's no big deal for him."

Four days after Olivia moved in, Rebecca came back to the apartment to find IT digging his tiny claws into her air mattress. There was a note on the table.

> He was wandering around Bear Mountain, so I brought him home. His name is Bear. Gone out to get a litter box and cat food.

Bear had the distinction of being that rarest of all creatures; an unlovable kitten (not that Rebecca would have loved him under any conditions). He had the face and the personality of a Tasmanian Devil.

Four days after 'Bear' moved in, Olivia, for no reason whatsoever, changed his name to Elmo, and ten days later, to Balboa, because she loved the movie 'Rocky' and 'He's such a little champ.'

During his first three weeks in Rebecca's apartment the 'little champ' shat in the bathtub and a pair of Rebecca's running shoes, bit one of her dates on the ass, and spent an entire night batting a #2 pencil around the living room.

Olivia referred to Bear-Elmo-Balboa as "My sweet little baby." Rebecca called him "Rosemary's Baby," not to Olivia's face, of course.

The Sunday before the Great Escape Olivia announced that she and some guy named Bradley were going to Atlantic City for three days.

"I left instructions. You need to change the litter box every night." She breezed out the door with her matching four-piece luggage set, and Rebecca went into her former bedroom and curled up in fetal position on her former bed. In a touching show of solidarity, Balboa used the couch and matching loveseat as scratching posts.

And so, it was with truly mixed emotions that Rebecca faced the reality that Balboa had made a run for it, the mixed part being that she couldn't afford to lose Olivia's share of the rent.

Balboa didn't come back when she called him. He didn't come back when she yelled 'Elmo' or 'Bear,' either. She contemplated using his nickname, but she felt uncomfortable yelling 'Fucking Monster' out the window.

"Hey!" It was peeing man. "I saw your cat." He pointed at the fire escape. "I saw him a couple of minutes ago, two flights up. He climbed in the window."

Well, that was easy. Rebecca grabbed her keys, and took the graffiti-free elevator up to 6D. A very nice, middle-aged man lived in 6D. He introduced himself to her the week she moved in, and always said hello when they shared the elevator.

She had a lengthy debate with herself regarding knock style. Soft and apologetic or strong and assertive? As always, she went with the former. There was no answer, no 'wait a minute,' no sound of footsteps on a wood floor, and no 'Get me the hell out of here' meow.

Rebecca was going to slide a note under the door when the realization hit her. The window in 6D was still open. Balboa could already be downstairs de-feathering the rooster. Equally possible, he was still in there, shitting in shoes and destroying furniture. The only option was to throw herself on the mercy of Tomas, super extraordinaire. At least that's how she always referred to him, although he was fairly ordinaire. It made him happy, and much more likely to come to the apartment to fix things in less than the customary forty-eight hour waiting period the other tenants had to put up with. She went to the basement to plead her case.

"I'm not supposed to do that, Ms. Chase." The sentence had a silent 'maybe' in it.

"They do it on Law and Order all the time, Tomas. I'm sure it's legal."

The keys were in his hands, but he wasn't moving.

"My roommate will be heartbroken. You have no idea what that kitten means to both of us." In Rebecca's case: rent money.

"Ok, but I gotta go in with you."

As the slowest elevator in the Upper West Side ascended to the 6th floor Tomas delivered a moving soliloquy with alternating lines of "I hope I don't get into trouble" and "I hope he doesn't find out."

He opened the door slowly. "Mr. DuPont?"

"Here Kitty," Rebecca called hopefully. "Maybe he's in the bedroom…Oh my god!" Over the couch hung a giant portrait of Mr. DuPont dressed in nothing but a half dozen piercings. On the piano were two large photos, more or less in the 'Super Real' style, featuring body parts that probably belonged to close friends of his.

'Tomas I think I'll skip…" She realized she was talking to herself. He was out of the apartment, waiting down the hall, his head in his hands.

"You can lock it. I'll put a note on it."

```
Someone thought they saw my little gray cat climb into your apartment.
His name is
```

Rip. That was pointless. The cat had no idea what his name was.

```
Someone thought they saw my little gray cat climb into your apartment.
If you find him would you call me?

Thanks,
Rebecca 4D
```



"All done. Tomas?" His head snapped up and he dashed to the door.

"Calm down. This is New York. I'll bet there are at least three more apartments that look like that in this building." Rebecca chirped.

"No they're aren't. I've fixed almost every toilet here, so I know. I'm going now."

The sun was setting on W. 93d. Little What's-His-Name was still missing, and Mr. DuPont was likely out on the town, in brown Dockers, a white polo shirt and leather underwear. Rebecca wracked her brain for a good story to tell Olivia.

"He was despondent. Somehow he managed to open the living room window. He left you a farewell letter…"

Rebecca's phone barked. Three days after Attila the kitten moved in she changed the ringtone. It was comforting.

"Rebecca? It's Blake DuPont, 6D. Found your kitten hiding under my bed."

"You did? I was hoping he was there. I thought I heard him crying." Sure she did.

"He's still under the bed. Poor thing must be terrified. I'll be here for at least another hour. Why don't you come up and get him?"

"I'll be right there." Oh, swell, another visit to the DuPont Museum Of Homoerotic Art.

The door to 6D was open a crack.

"Rebecca, come on in. I'm in the bedroom."

She could hardly wait to see what he had hanging over his bed.

Pretend not to notice. Pretend not to notice. Pretend not to notice. Pretend not to…OH

The TMI portrait over the couch had been replaced by a framed poster of Monet's Water Lilies. There was only one photo on the piano, two hot young guys holding champagne glasses.

"I think I'm scaring him. You should go in there alone." Mr. DuPont exited the bedroom making that tongue-clucking sound that is always spelled out 'tsk, tsk,' even though it doesn't sound like that at all. "Oh, that's a picture of Randy and Dennis at my 50th birthday party. They're here all the time. You've probably seen them in the lobby."

If Rebecca could have done it with a straight face, she would have said, "I may have seen them somewhere, but they weren't dressed like that."

She knelt by the bed groping around for anything small and furry

Several puncture wounds and stigmata-like gashes later she managed to drag out a writhing, hissing Balboa.

"You were right. He's a little upset. I better get him home. Thanks for everything."

Mr. DuPont stepped between Rebecca and the door. "The lock sticks. You know, you and your boyfriend should come up for drinks sometime. How about next Saturday? Nothing fancy. Randy and Dennis and a couple of girls we know from the gym, are coming. I think you'll like each other.

"That's sounds great. Sure. Can I bring anything?" A whip, perhaps? "I'd better get Balboa home." That sounds great? Well, she could just show up for one quick drink, and…and…

And that is when Rebecca summoned the courage to do what she should have done from the beginning.

"Olivia, it's Rebecca. I can't stand Balboa. You're going to have to find some other place for him to live."

"Ok."

Matinée

John Abbott

The girl lifts her skirt
To the boy from Biology
Who wouldn't touch the scalpel
But now grips her flanks with nails
That should've been cut

She's on his lap, back to the screen,
But she can hear the actors
Speaking in a language
That is all vowels and intrigue,
Whispers and casual lies.

The boy nears his finish
As the jealous adulterer drinks poison.
A man two rows ahead
Knows what is going on
But doesn't want to miss a scene

By leaving to tell an usher.
Afterwards, the girl straightens her underwear,
Takes a seat, and struggles
To catch up on what binds
The room in this close, shared darkness.

Art's Bar

John Abbott



One of the only
Workingmans' bars in town
Situated near the GM Plant;
They catered to the men
Who worked the line
Kept the food simple
The jukebox stacked
With blue collar rock
And soul. Saturdays
They hauled out a
Big screen T.V.
For the college football games.
My dad took my sister
And I there even though
We were too young,
Even though the bar
Had a no children policy.

He strung our restless bodies
Through the afternoon
With the promise of
Quarters doled out
For pinball and the skill crane
Where I tried, without luck,
To win my sister
A stuffed panda bear
She had her eye on.
"Just stay out
Of people's way,"
Dad told us, but
We felt we belonged,
And the smiles
Of the beer drinkers
Confirmed this belief
And gave the bar
An air of grace
That cut through
The stink of smoke
And stale peanuts and spilled
Beer and the leftover
Grime of a hard day's work
Almost too holy
To wash away.

Crispy Potato Cheese Balls

8 large potatoes, peeled and boiled
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup milk
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1/2 cup butter, divided
8 ounce block Colby Jack or Cheddar cheese
1 cup corn flakes cereal, crushed
1/4 cup melted butter

Heat oven to 350°
Mash potatoes with salt, milk, onion powder and 1/4 cup butter.
Chill until firm, about an hour.
Cut cheese into 1 inch cubes.
Shape mashed potatoes around the cheese cubes into 2 1/2" balls.
Roll in corn flake crumbs.
Melt and brush remaining butter on potatoes
Place on slightly-greased cookie sheets.
Bake 20 minutes or until heated through

On What Felt Like the End of Winter

John Abbott

Dead limbs
dirty snow
a quarter moon
left out too long
breath sharp with
sawdust, fills every step
can't remember every
angle
branch or leaf
if only this
rush of light
offered forgiveness

Call and Answer

Matthew J. Hall



Poems I wrote in the early hours
are placed in water tight bottles
and entrusted to the tide.
I stand in wet sand at night
searching for a glass encased reply
but for now the wind, the moon and its pull on the waves
know far more about poetry than I do.

The Midway

John Abbott

There'd been a rumor
All summer that they
Would close down the midway
By the lake
Everyone in town knew
It was seedy, no place
To bring your kids
For a night of skee-ball
And merry-go-round rides

But for the teens
Who made it their hangout
It was bad news.
Where would they go
Now on Friday nights
To get away from
The expectations parents
And teachers had for them
And let the raucous
Tinny music ease
The transition into adulthood,
The future which, if they
Had to be honest, scared them
More than anything else – the fear
Of STD's or bad trips
Or losing the privilege
Of taking out their parents' car

But who among them
Really believed they'd
Shut down the midway
After all it was something
Of an institution in town
Necessary if only as counter-
Point to more wholesome attractions
And for the teens
It was more
Than just a spot to score
Drugs or hook up,
It was a place
To be seen
And let the customs

Of their cliques play out.
They were too naïve
Then to think someone
Would take this from them.
So they kept on
Doing what they'd been doing
Till the last night
Came and they had to leave
The sweet heavy smell
Of fried food and calliope music
and the feel of open
Air to haunt the closed
Spaces of pool halls
And arcades, places
Too small to hold all
They thought they could be

Dear Confidence

Matthew J. Hall

Confidence, you are the ultimate trickster.
Your bright light is a dangerous fire.
How do you decide where to set up home?
Why do you laugh and celebrate foolishness with the saddest of clowns?

Confidence, you have given voice and stature to vile delusion.
Their jeering and jabbering is drowning out those you have helped better themselves.

Confidence, do you revel in being misunderstood?
When will you quiet your loud trumpet?
Have you not met Consequence?
Do you not ache?
Are you not bruised?
Do you not mourn the many still babies recovered from your womb?

Confidence, you should get together with Humility.
She is an excellent mathematician.
She counts costs and weighs sacrifice.
You would make a wonderful team.

Confidence, opinions should be shy at conception,
naive at birth, carefully formed and delicately nurtured.

Confidence, why won't you listen?
Are you that insecure?
Life's hurdles should be approached with Grace.
You should get to know her, too.
She would teach you beauty and see it as an honour.

Confidence, Conclusion hates it when you rush her.
She should be treated respectfully.
Shame on you, Confidence. Shame on you.

Do you not remember dancing with Peace?
Can you not recall the plans you made with Patience?
Have the echoes faded from the music you made with Creation?
Take stock, Confidence.
Put your house in order.
Reacquaint yourself with Quiet.
Spend some time with Reflection.
Let Introspection kiss your forehead.
And for all our sakes, learn how to cry.



My Mannequin and I

Matthew J. Hall

We watched TV on the love seat together
the bottle seemed to go down smooth and fast
but I don't think she touched a drop.

She is the silent type,
doesn't laugh too much
and keeps her cards close to her chest.

I ordered in but she wasn't hungry.
She was grateful of my large appetite;
I don't think she approves of waste.

I purchased a nice floral number from the charity shop.
It hung a little loose but she was glad of the gesture all the same.
She likes to take things slow;
that's okay with me.
I too am a little prudish.

I told her about my Mother.
I told her about my plans for the summer.

What Is That Song?

Love is like a sin my love For the ones that feel it the most/Look at her with her eyes like a flame/She will love you like a fly will never love you, again. "Paradise Circus"—Massive Attack

I came to Massive Attack through the BBC crime series "Luther." In London, terrible madmen roam the streets sometimes wearing Punch and Judy masks reminding us of Vendettas and perhaps even Guy Fawkes. All I know is that police detective John Luther has his hands full trying not to fall in love with a serial killer named Alice. Hell, he has his hands full trying not to be a serial killer himself, and the main difference I see between him and Miami Beach's favorite serial killer "Dexter" is the music. Dexter doesn't have Massive Attack, but thank god Luther does.

Is it possible to like a TV show or a movie mainly for its soundtrack? Or even for one song: a song that not only creates a mood for the plot or that underscores the "hero," but that almost becomes a character itself?

I don't remember the episode of Luther where MA's "Dissolved Girl" appears, but it doesn't matter. Listen to "Dissolved Girl" once, or maybe a few times, and you'll probably be able to come up with the story—Luther throwing an apple over the prison hospital wall so that the incarcerated and deranged Alice might find it and extricate the secret he's imbedded in it. Her smile when she finds it. It's all too delicious.

Massive Attack's first record, Blue Lines, was re-released last year, but only on vinyl. I've listened to it repeatedly and see massive new "Luther" episodes coming.

I feel about "Luther" and the music that haunts it like I do about the TV show that helped break the ground for such inescapable faire: Twin Peaks, ABC and David Lynch's early 90's creation about the psycho-killer of the small-town beauty queen, Laura Palmer. I loved the show and actually hosted a Twin Peaks party with my wife back in the spring of 1990. I was pony-tailed "Leo," my wife was the "Log Lady," and our baby daughter was the "Log." People are strange but maybe we were all made crazy by the soundtrack, sounds composed by Angelo Badalamenti with songs sung by an unknown crooner, Julee Cruise.

Not to give any plot points away, but in the greatest scene of the series—the most haunting five minutes of network TV--the killer is about to strike, while investigating agent Dale Cooper sits at a roadhouse bar with Sheriff Harry and the afore-mentioned Log Lady. A Giant dissolves into the place where Cruise has been performing to tell Cooper that "It's happening again." Cooper looks as if his mind is breaking, while in other parts of the bar, James and Donna, who desperately love each other, cry over a lost friend, and bad Bobby looks like he finally gets that this town, this life, has been punctured so badly that no plug or tape or replacement town will ever heal it. All these feelings, these epiphanies, these helpless forebodings, happen as the most lush and beautiful and hypnotic songs fill in the troubled town of Twin Peaks.

Don't worry. You'll see the murder.
And the mirror.

But I'm still thinking of these songs, mainly, "The World Spins." Songs written by Lynch, and I could quote some of the lyrics for you, but they'd be so badly out of context. Still:

Moving near the edge of night
Dust is dancing in the space
A dog and bird are far away
The sun comes up and down each day.
Light and shadow change the walls
Halley's comet's come and gone
The things I touch are made of stone
Falling through this night alone.
Love, don't go away. Come back this way.
Come back and stay forever and ever.

Of course it's Laura Palmer the song is referring to. But my associations aren't so much with the characters or horrors of Twin Peaks.

We used to put our daughter to sleep by playing Twin Peaks music. No matter what puzzle she was constructing, what stuffed top she was talking to, she'd drift off to these tones, to Cruise's softly echoing voice. I miss those days of driving to see relatives and needing her to sleep. "Put on Julee," my wife would say, and in a few minutes, the magic happened. No matter how many times it worked, no matter how many times our daughter's head slipped to the side in deep sleep as she sat in her car seat, we'd keep listening with the tape on repeat; we never got tired, even late at night when we'd sometimes stop at the Krispy Kreme whose "Hot Doughnuts Now" sign blazed so brightly in our little version of Twin Peaks.

There are other movie-themed songs, too. I knew I'd like Wes Anderson's Rushmore the second Max Fischer donned his red beret. But at the film's end, when Max signals the DJ at his cast party and then The Faces' "Ooh La La" attacks, I could barely stand the beauty.

And then there was Sofia Coppola's wisdom in having Bill Murray and Scarlett Johannson kiss to Jesus and Mary Chain's "Just Like Honey" at the end of Lost in Translation. How did she know to pick that song? I would have liked the movie anyway, but when I heard that song just after I saw the lovers whisper what we can never hear or know, I almost cried.

Coming out of the theater that night, our daughter was waiting for us. She had elected to see something more age appropriate.
"Was that movie bad," she asked.
"Why do you ask that?"
"Well, the people who came out just ahead of you said it was the worst thing they had ever seen."
I just shook my head.

And then there's Mad Men, whose creator Matthew Weiner continually gets his score right. The way each show ends, sometimes with seemingly filler music that plays into the credits but which always seems to complement the bittersweet or offbeat way the characters face or don't face their problems. And the music is so soft that it's deafening. It's Husker Du in reverse. I can't stand watching it with people who have to talk during the show, especially at the end. Can't they hear the quiet? Don't they want to?

In one of the last episodes of this season, "Flood," Don falls in love for the first time with his son; New York City explodes after Dr. King's assassination; a Jewish man tries setting his workaholic son up with a nice Jewish girl. And the song that ends it all is Paul Mariat's "Love Is Blue," which features a harpsichord and was number one on the pop charts in 1968, no small feature for any instrumental. I don't remember which Beatles song it replaced, but does that really matter? Maybe to Matthew Weiner, it does. It must for he decided to use it and not "The Ballad of John and Yoko."

It's happening again. My daughter, now a woman of twenty-three, recently asked me to watch The Perks of Being a Wallflower with her. I didn't need much convincing as I had wanted to see it when it was released last year but got lazy, and like most

movies of its sort, it left our cinemaplex too soon. So she and I watched it in her urban apartment, a former tobacco warehouse. While I fell into the plot and The Catcher in the Rye angst of the central character, Charlie, and his particular "Jane," played by Emma Watson, not only was it the music that got me, it was the music that "got" the characters, too.

Watson's character, "Sam," is riding with Charlie and her half-brother Patrick through the autumn Pittsburgh night, and as they cruise the interstate and hit the tunneled underpass, a song comes on the radio.

"What is this song?" Sam cries. But no one knows. As she turns it up, she climbs through the truck's opened rear window and stands in the flatbed, arms outstretched, reaching for all the things one of "those songs" causes us to reach for. She's in bliss, and Patrick and Charlie smile and are in love.

I love that it takes the rest of the movie for them to find the song again, for of course by then, they've finally and truly found each other. I also love that they never name the song, because the film's set in the late 1970's and don't we all know the song by now anyway?

I also love that life back then was like that. Radio DJ's didn't always announce the song titles and artists, and I hated when I'd hear one of "those songs," and then be left with no recourse of how to find it, how to buy it. By sheer luck I might hear it again; it might even become a hit, leaving me wondering what I ever worried about. But more often, it would just slip away somewhere, would vanish forever in those days before "You Tube," and "Google," and all the ways we have now of putting our finger on what we love.

Thinking of Sam and Charlie and Patrick making mixtapes and listening to The Smiths and to Bowie's "Heroes," I thought of one more movie song, one that develops over the course of the plot, though caught up in the wonderful window of movie time as we are, we can't know, don't even wonder what it is or means.

It's in Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window, where we see a musical composer in an upper apartment across the courtyard from "hero" LB Jeffries (James Stewart) working on a new piece. He struggles with it, gets drunk with it, seems finished with it, in the bad way. But he doesn't quit. At one point Lisa (Grace Kelly) hears the tune and asks Jeffries "What's that music?" She thinks it's marvelous, transcendent. And it is. It saves "Miss Lonelyhearts," gives her reason to live, though it endangers Lisa herself.

We learn only in the credits that the song is "Lisa's Theme," composed by Franz Waxman, one of only two compositions he wrote for this, his final film with Hitch.

What indeed is that music? Why does it move us so? And what meaning would these movies and TV shows and our lives have without it?

Which brings me back to "She will love you like a fly will never love you, again." I don't know what that line means, and maybe I'm not supposed to. All I know is that this song forms the opening credits for "Luther." And in the moody, romantic seductiveness it creates, I wonder if we're not, in the end, only that fly and nothing more. Listening to sounds we can't explain, to words that send us off to sleep. To those places in the back of our memories where we can ride through the flowing air around us and be heroes "just for one day."

--Terry Barr

Gone For Good *~~ Ken L. Jones*

A blue bird too big to fit
On the homemade
Sunflower pregnant feeder
Outside my hospital window
Lands claws first
Like the Velociraptor
Who he has supposedly been
Shrunk in size from by evolution's whim
The raw redwood edifice quakes
Beneath his head turning as he
Checks the area out with Don Knotts
Twitches for any natural enemies
Then with a lurch he is gone
In a blurred tidal wave
Of ocean colored feathers
On missions that will be
Forever unknown to me

True To My Memory

~~Ken L. Jones

On a day ground fine as if in a mortar and pestle
The marsh flat's skies became a crumbling circus
A hand painted fresco you can almost taste
A bottomless barrel of anything is possible
That will not erode if I draw a snow heart
Upon its purple suede bone chill long fermented
In the neon pink city until the winds dissolved it
All the while teaching it a trick or two
Then brought it all out here to paint all that is natural
With even more vibrant hues



~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Chicken Taco Soup

Soup:

1/2 small can tomato paste
1 (14.5 oz.) can diced spicy red pepper tomatoes
1 large potato, peeled and chunked
1 zucchini, chunked
1/2 white onion, diced
1 small jalapeno pepper or 1 tbsp. hot pepper powder (habanero or chipotle)
1 glove garlic, chopped
1 tsp. dried oregano
1 tbsp. ground cumin
2 tbsp. low sodium taco seasoning
2 tbsp. chopped parsley or cilantro
1 1/2 cups frozen corn
3/4 cup crushed tortilla chips
4 cups (1 large box) low sodium chicken broth
1 pound boneless skinless chicken breast, cut into strips

Topping:

1/2 cup milk
2 cups shredded taco seasoned cheese
1 tbsp. butter or margarine
Whole tortilla chips
Taco seasoning, if desired

In 7 quart crock pot, combine all soup ingredients. Simmer on low for at least 6 hours.
When chicken and vegetables are tender, combine margarine, cheese and milk in a small sauce pan on low heat until cheese is melted. Add seasoning (optional). Ladle soup into bowls, place several whole chips on top of soup, top with cheesy mixture and serve. *--Trish Laubacker*
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Running to and from Georgia for You

Louise Matsakis

And I kept the windows open,
Unwisely and desperately,
attempting to replace your sighs
with the dull noise of my car as it pulled through the air of
the sweating Appalachian night.
The sound muted as I stopped for one of those cold drinks made of
stuff that has the same consistency
as almost melted snow.
And then,
just like I knew I would,
I spent the last folded five dollars in my pocket
remaining from a Christmas gift
on one of those outdated calling cards they still carry
because love is the same
as only choosing among the things you need the most.

And after we hung up I slept and in the morning,
I awoke suddenly, and was greeted by only more of you:
I remembered the decomposing payphone
I recalled how I stood there,
embarrassed of the silence that existed,
where I imagined only songlike sentences could be.
An aging gasoline station attendant watched me speak to you
peering at me with the eyes on his balding head.
I was kicking pebbles onto the Georgia interstate,
and toying with the daisy patches of my denim shorts,
desperately listening for words you never said.
I was pleading for you, I wanted you to only gently
try and untangle your tongue and not be afraid.
because love is the same
as believing it can only come from the person who is on the other line.

And then I resigned to coming back,
even in your silence, I thought I knew it was what you wanted.
I left with my hair still wet and cold.
I daydreamed as it dried.
My hands tried not to burn themselves
on the steering wheel of my car.
It was humid and the sun
lit the flower infested fields I drove beside
Its warm pressed uncomfortably close to the sadness
that lingered from when we spoke the night before,
and forced me to smile and wonder about world and its light.
It was then that I looked instinctively
to the empty passenger seat for your eyes to share this with.
Like the tiny cocoons of butterflies that I can still picture from grade school
I knew then I would give you time to emerge,
I will patiently wait,
for the fear we all have to dissolve.
because love is the same
as being terrified and enthralled at once.

DRIVING LESSONS ~~ John Grey

First time my hands touched a steering wheel,
they froze and sweated all at the same time.
My knees buckled.
The air in my chest
played hopscotch on my lungs.
A college parking lot
abandoned for the summer -
not a vehicle in sight -
and yet I felt like a kid
on a bicycle
pedaling in the Indy 500.

But it was part of my father's directive
driven into him by his father.
Fishing, hunting, facts of life
and steering an automobile through city streets ~
when it came to order,
it was like pick a card, any card,
though eventually I knew
I'd have to deal with his entire hand.

Of course, he never said
okay, now it's time for Shakespeare
or appreciation of the pre-Raphaelite painters
or the lake poets or...
no whiff of an inheritance there.
In books, in galleries,
I was either on my own
or in "ask your mother" land.

I managed to navigate
that parking lot
without hitting another invisible car.
I stopped when he said.
I turned to the right and to the left
without his having to correct me.
He was more relieved than proud
that I learned quickly.

And I got high marks in fishing,
proved too squeamish for hunting
and his fact of life lecture
came three years too late.

My own child learned
hunting and fishing from his grandfather,
told me not to bother
when I slid "How Babies Are Made"
out of its hiding place.

But I did teach him to drive
and in the same parking lot.

Watching him slowly turn corners,
his foot shaking inches above the brake,
I could have sworn
I was seeing myself at the wheel.

A scary moment that -
two sons, nobody the father.

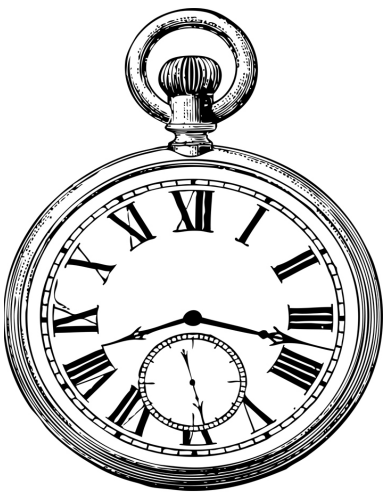
THE LOW SCHOOL THAT WAS HIGH SCHOOL ~~ *John Grey*

There was the teacher who
constantly scratched his pendulous chin
and the other who taught
the rigid
rules of math
with the vagaries of a facial twitch.
Also, there was the thin spectacled woman,
hair cloistered in a bun,
who never married
but assured us that Henry VIII
did this evil thing six times.
Some were better than others
at jamming knowledge
in our mushy minds,
but no mentors,
no inspirations,
No English teacher took me aside;
pooh-poohed the assigned novel,
shoved Thoreau into my hand,
said, "Read this instead."
No science instructor's eyes lit up
when he pronounced the magic "Tesla."
Their monotone voices,
bored looks,
came with the curriculum.
Maybe they were just
the predictable products
of their own debilitating education.
Lackluster in, dreary out,
as they say.
Today, I don't write because
some teacher leaned over my shoulder,
scanned my work,
said, "That shows promise."
I was graded, not encouraged,
My teachers are filed under
"despite their muted efforts."
For all that,
I never missed a class.
Teachers tried to impart knowledge
but mostly, they were that knowledge.

THE END OF THE WORLD AS BEN KNOWS IT *~~John Grey*

The kids are shooting BB guns at a tin can on a fence again.
The old man is jumping up and down in his parlor, rattling the furniture.
The woman's tears are so heavy in her eyes that they bend her over
until it's her greasy hair that's mopping the floor, and her own
body liquids that fill the bucket. Ben is praying urgently to God,
throwing up his arms until they almost touch the ceiling.
The storm is rising. Bullets firing, old man jumping, woman weeping...
it's all part of it. The end of the world would always be an
accumulation of small, annoying things. And this time it's local.
Besides which, the toaster isn't working.

Meanwhile, the Antichrist is delivering mail to the neighborhood.
Or he drives by in a milk truck. And look, it's the four horsemen
of the apocalypse… Shell, Walgreens, Home Depot. Burger King.
Who doesn't float up with the angels will burn in the coming hell.
But then the kids run out of shot. The old man's medicine kicks in.
The woman's phone rings, A short conversation ensues. She's
calm now, goes about her business. Ben thanks God for intervening.
It's not the end of the world after all. Just a preview. But the
toaster still won't toast and he can't afford to buy a new one.
But he's sure the apocalypse can't involve just him. This has to
be an electrical problem that needs fixing. He must remember to call a priest.



The Clumsy Juggler's Junk Drawer

Alan Gann

I can explain
queen and jack of hearts missing from harlequin deck
warranty cards filled out with misplaced intentions
buttons never sewn back on
coffee-stained application to Barnum & Bailey school
ruby earrings never taken from their box
scattered dice and a rundown pocket watch

But don't ask about the red leather glove
or postcards marked Cyprus, Beirut and Berlin
else I would have to explain one summer abroad
sticky nights filled with hash and ouzo
and dominant blondes— salt rubbed wounds
cut of Mediterranean winds

The Last Day of March

Alan Gann

I woke with an unfettered morning
dressed in a long-sleeved t-shirt and my old blue jeans
laced boots, grabbed binoculars
and headed for the park
just like I had done so many other mornings.
Through patchy clouds and a light fog
birds chattered and chirped,
flit from brush to bush to leafed-out branch.
I duly noted a low-flying marsh-hawk
and gaudy cardinals
flirting as if it were the second week of spring.
I peered into the thick tangle
looking for the short, notched tail
that distinguishes savannah sparrow from song,
prowled thicket for towhee and thrasher.
As the sun began to burn through
blue birds emerged from their boxes
and the air was filled with swift and swallow
darting and diving over the field.
For three hours till an upstart
with chestnut back and white eyebrow
hops onto a rotting log and calls
empty-camp, isn't it, isn't it—
empty-camp, isn't it, isn't it—
for three hours I had not thought
of Michael, or Jack, or Ed,
but now all I can do is glare and remember
and finally
when this silence cannot stand any longer
I yell fuck you.
A nearby jogger hurries on,
empty-camp, isn't it, isn't it—
and the tiny wren vanishes into the reeds.

My Semester in New York City

Alan Gann

Mama didn't just up and die when she found out I was sharing an efficiency with a black lesbian named Djimbe Skyy.

Skipped Renaissance Ensemble to watch lightning strikes over Central Park, barely caught the subway in time for my Piano Composition class

Monet's Water Lilies ~~~ Van Gogh's Starry Night

Joined a ska band called Crystal Night—
Quit after the ADL picketed our gig at the Bottom Line.

Thought I was the only person from Farmville, North Carolina to eat a falafel sandwich or have a friend named Qadeer.

At first we dressed in the bathroom, but it was such a pain and pretty soon I quit showing excitement if I saw…well you know—didn't blush if she saw me.

It was a month before I quit staring up at sky-scraped cityscapes. Two months and I sneered at cricked-necked tourist. After three, I just didn't give-a-shit.

But what I remember most is going home,
stepping off the bus—

First thing my daddy says is "Come here boy, let me look at you. Why you haven't changed a lick— not a lick."

Waiting for the Traffic Light to Change

J. J. Steinfeld

I have to change my downward moving life before there's nothing left worth changing, Boyd thought, then whispered the words to himself and to the ten other people standing near him as he was caught in mid-morning downtown errands, waiting along with the other pedestrians for the traffic light to change at one of the city's busiest intersections. Boyd had been thinking about changing his life a great deal lately, his usual unease and dissatisfaction with his work seeming even stronger this morning, and somehow the traffic light seemed to symbolize the change that he was contemplating, specifically, whether he should retire early from his job in the Motor Vehicles Department.

Boyd told himself that at fifty-seven he hoped to have at least twenty or twenty-five years ahead of him to enjoy life, not that he was very good at enjoying life, when he sees across the street the woman he had met at a nearby downtown bar last night, she looking different in the morning light, but who doesn't, he tells himself. For a few minutes, at least, he had thought he was falling in love with the woman, even imagined that he might marry again, perhaps third time lucky, he had smiled to himself, so taken was he by the way she looked and her fresh-faced, charming smile, but they had gotten into an

argument over the difference between having a mid-life crisis and a spiritual crisis. He told her he was having a spiritual crisis but she insisted it was a typical male mid-life crisis, and that was why he was trying to impress a woman half his age at a bar. He resisted asking her age, not eager to determine if she was indeed half his age, or even more disconcerting, if she was younger than his twenty-nine-year-old daughter from his first marriage. She was definitely older than his twenty-one-year-old son from his second marriage, but what was the point of worrying about age, when it was mortality and human emotions that were the real concerns when two people meet, regardless of the setting. He told her he wasn't trying to impress her at all, that he liked to think about and discuss the theological, even in downtown bars. Stupidly, he had asked her if drinking to excess on a Friday night would jeopardize her chances of getting into Heaven, and she, her smile dissolving, said she'd prefer to go anywhere as long the conversations weren't boring and insipid. He congratulated her on using the word insipid, which he considered an impressively descriptive word, and then she added that Heaven, if it existed, was insipid. He argued that Hell would be much more insipid, and she moved to a different bar stool, offering her fresh-faced, charming smile to another stranger.

Amidst his thoughts of last night and of the theological, Boyd wondering what is taking the traffic light so long to change, he hears a sad-faced stutterer nearby reveal to a woman who reminds him of his second wife, a younger version though, that all he desires from life is a reflection of freedom, a single smile slightly tarnished, the memory of the reflection, the re-creation of that smile, as if he is attempting to conquer his stuttering by attempting to defeat someone in bewildered debate. After the woman steps away from the man, his stuttering fierce as abandonment, he says loud enough for everyone waiting for the traffic light to change to hear, “I thank the Lord that I am not God.”

Boyd moves closer to the curb, prepared to cross the street even if the traffic light doesn't change, seeing that the woman he had met at a nearby downtown bar last night has turned around and walked off in the other direction, but his thoughts of the woman and last night are quickly supplanted by his thoughts of the stutterer, thinking how foolish and ludicrous what the man had just said — I thank the Lord that I am not God — even concluding the stutterer must be having some sort of mental breakdown, well beyond a mid-life or spiritual crisis, just as a small car comes speeding around the corner, the driver sounding his loud horn, and the waiting-to-cross pedestrians break into inarticulateness. Boyd wants to hurl something, well-formed words or a childhood toy, toward the traffic light and the speeding car and even the now distant woman from last night, closing his eyes and seeing what he wanted for longer than he could speak. He would stop waiting for his life to change and make that change, first thing Monday morning.

Crossing the North Quad

Alan Gann

She walks across the lawn,
a smooth glimpse casually given

teenage cotton and tan lines
exchanged for a live beat.

Tonight after she swallows
her last bite of pizza

she’ll tell roommates it was a leer.
Gross and giggles and just maybe

give I was once nineteen,
rock-hard and broke,

but no way grok
how pale florescent days

leave a permanent squint,
years just more pounds to shed,

that desire grows
in creek-side brambles

free to pick
if you don’t mind thorns,

purple lips,
sticky-sweet down your chin.



10 reasons living in Hawaii is cheaper than you think!

1. The islands themselves are filled with free things to do. There are expensive tourist traps everywhere in Hawaii, but the locals know how to have fun for free. There are flea markets, museums, tours, and plenty of outdoor activities. The world-class beaches are still free!
2. There are two ways to have more money, earn more or spend less. One thing you won't be spending your money on in Hawaii is an expensive fitness club. The temperatures ensure you can get outside and exercise all year long.
3. Forget paying for tanning beds too. There is plenty of sunshine to be had in Hawaii.
4. Depression causes many expensive side-effects—but Hawaii has very low incidences of depression. In fact, many doctors believe the sunshine and fresh air have many health benefits that lead to good mental health. The point is, when you feel good naturally, you will probably spend less money going out to eat, shopping for things you don't really need, or engaging in expensive activities so you have something to do. Live happier and you are content to do more things that don't cost money.
5. You don't drive far to get anywhere in Hawaii because you are on an island. Unless you drive in circles, there really isn't that far to go. You won't burn expensive gas and there won't be much wear and tear on your car. That said, most islanders do not have cars. If you live in any city, you can get by without a car and nobody will think you're poor or weird. Dump that expensive car payment and live the Hawaiian way. Walk, ride bikes, or take a scooter around town. You will fit right in.
6. Rent in Hawaii is about the same as many metropolitan areas like San Diego or New York. Your standard apartment is about $1300/month. Many people pay more than that on the mainland. If you are willing to give up some space, so you can live in paradise, you can probably afford to rent an apartment in Hawaii. For example, if you currently pay $850 per month for housing, plus utilities, and you have a decent car with insurance, chances are you will be paying about the same cost for rent in Hawaii (without the car). Many jobs in Hawaii pay more too.
7. Costco is your friend. You have probably heard that food is very expensive in Hawaii. Not for locals. Locals shop at Costco and get almost everything they need at about the same cost mainlanders pay. You may have to be innovative to find storage room when you shop in bulk, but food really is not more expensive if you stay away from stores near touristy areas.
8. Dump that expensive wardrobe! Nobody dresses up for anything in Hawaii. With very few exceptions, even professionals wear shorts and flip flops ("slippas" as they are called by locals). Hawaiians typically save over $1,000 a year on clothes. Also, because the clothes you will wear everyday are lightweight, more can fit in a washing machine. It's cheaper to do laundry when you wear casual clothes all the time. The savings add up!
9. It goes without saying, your utilities are cheap in Hawaii. It is beautiful in the day, cool at night (perfect for sleeping), and the trade winds keep everything comfortable. You won't spend hundreds of dollars every month cooling your house, or heating it either. Factor this year-round savings into your monthly housing costs and Hawaii looks more affordable all the time!
10. The best reason Hawaii is more affordable than you think is because of the people. Nobody cares what car you have, or what brand of clothes you wear. In fact, despite all the best efforts of mainland commercialism, Hawaiians just don't have the same level of consumerism. You will never have to spend more than you want so people respect you. Nobody has the luxury car to make a statement, and very few people own property. It's assumed that everyone rents. Nobody will try to find out how much you make. They don't care. So you don't have to spend to keep up appearances. Instead, put your money in the bank and go to the beach. Aloha!

--Staff

Wanting to Untarnish the Past

J. J. Steinfeld

A year after his rancorous divorce from Louise, Royce called his ex-wife and argued it should be considered an anniversary of sorts, to be celebrated open-heartedly, and she agreed but not without some grumbling and head-shaking hesitation to meet him for dinner, his treat, the finest wine.

"I think you're experiencing a new form of perverse sentimentality," she said after agreeing to the dinner date.

"I don't know if it has anything to do with sentimentality, but I want to untarnish the past." He had recently written in his therapy journal that his life felt horribly tarnished and he wanted to untarnish the past.

"Only the deities of discord know what that might mean," she said, with an acerbity that often infused comments to her ex-husband, both before and after their divorce.

"Some of the things you say to me make me want to cry," he admitted.

"Maybe if you were able to cry, even a few tears, you could deal with the past a little better," she said, ending their phone conversation. She could not recall him crying even once during all their years of marriage, and found this an emotional deficiency of his.

~~OOO~~

A week later, wearing a new blue suit and an old tie that he had worn during one of their last times out together, Royce arrives a few minutes late at the Italian restaurant she suggested, and after a slight stumble, he awkwardly sits down, a darkened corner table. Louise, casually dressed in jeans and a sweater she bought after they first separated, greets her ex-husband with, "Stumbling as an art form," her words as an accusation of his life; she once told him that she liked words more than his height and weight and less than desirable temperament. Actually, she had been working on a poem about when their marriage disintegrated, and "Stumbling as an art form" was one of the lines to describe her ex-husband's life. They were both high-school English teachers, at different schools, though. She had published two chapbooks of what she considered acerbic poetry, knowing all too well that quality was in her poetry along with her words to her ex-husband, and was hoping to publish her first full-length collection before taking early retirement, at sixty, next year. He had been working on a science-fiction novel on and off throughout his teaching career and hoped to finish it soon, but was not looking forward to his retirement, at sixty-five, in less than two months. Somehow meeting with his ex-wife, he believed, would help him to deal with the end of his teaching career and the prospect of finally completing his science-fiction novel.

During the last years of their marriage, she always seemed to outdo him in exchanges of wittiness or insults, but he attempts to salvage something, self-respect or dignity, he's not sure, by saying, "Do we create ourselves? We uncreated our marriage, after thirty years together," she responding that perhaps they should have gone their separate ways earlier, after twenty or twenty-five years, perhaps. "Still, it was a marriage, and it did clock in quite a few good years," he tells his ex-wife, sounding as though he was a debater overwhelmed by the complexity of his topic.

"Our marriage, regardless of its duration, was a cosmic joke," she says acerbically, thinking of the power outage during their tenth anniversary party. "What the hell is a cosmic joke?" he asks, apologizing for his angry tone, the wine, of course. "I'm a much calmer person now," he explains, but is reluctant to tell her he has been seeing a therapist and keeping a daily journal since their divorce. Calmer than what, she thinks, and recalls a few of his profanity-laced outbursts during their last year of marriage.

"Thank God the children were grown," he says, yet again, the smallest of small talk. "Grown into what?" she asks, the acerbity accompany each word. Neither of their children was academically inclined or cared the least about creative writing despite their parents' encouragement growing up, the son now selling cars and the daughter working in a day-care center.

Louise eases away from talk about their children by asking how his little space creatures were doing, and Royce surprised her by saying he had nearly finished the novel and had a literary agent interested. She thought he would never complete his novel, let alone make a serious attempt to publish it. He had once thought of dedicating the book to her, but she had disparaged his attempts at describing other worlds and life forms over the years with a few too many "little space creatures" remarks. "I have a scene in which my main character offers one of the space aliens an imported beer, not knowing he was having a conversation in a bar with someone from another galaxy." She asks, "Is your beer-drinking scene humorous or serious?" and he says, "You'll have to read the book when it sees the literary light of day."

The wine was indeed fine, they both agree, glass after glass. And they are both pleased with their meal, a vegetarian pizza for him and a meat-filled lasagna for her. Louise asks if he has become a vegetarian in his approaching dotage and he explains that it was a new year's resolution that he was managing to keep, while she reminds him that she had been a vegetarian during most of their marriage, but now likes to indulge herself with a good steak or other meaty meal once or twice a week. Another bottle of wine is ordered, the restaurant's most expensive. He mentions that he went alone to a musical in town last night, admitting he really doesn't like seeing plays or films on his own, but there hasn't been anyone in his life. She is romantically involved with man going through a divorce, a professor she met at a poetry reading at the nearby university, but does not see any point in telling her ex-husband. "The first play we saw together was Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, front row center," she says, catching the irony, not he, and they both laugh, the textures as different as highbrow and low brow, her assessment, acerbic as ever.

Then, another thrust at their discordant past together, telling him that she had rented the film version of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, the 40th Anniversary Collector's Edition DVD, the day their divorce was finalized. "Finalized," he echoes, anger unabated.

Catching himself again and attempting to firm his emotional footing, he says, "The sex was grand after we got home from the play," allowing a smile of lustful recollection to appear. "Who were you with?" she asked, acerbic as ever, pouring another glass of wine of wine. She jots down the words on a napkin, hoping they might later turn into a poem.

"I've made so many damn blunders and mistakes in my life, and now I can't seem to make any sense out of anything anymore," he says, looking sadder than she can ever recall.

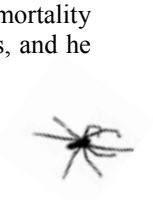
"One more go at your guilt, mortality strangling you and your life's work," she says, and he cried, finally, she's almost willing to forgive him.



An Inexplicable Whisper

J. J. Steinfeld

I was looking at a tiny insect crawling along the floor at my feet, attempting to recall when I was first brought to this room and forced to sit on this old wooden chair, when the questioner's words ended my reverie. The questioner has a lovely voice, and I shake my head at this strange thought, especially since I cannot tell if the voice is male or female, and I cannot even pinpoint the accent. The questioner's threats are not immoderate and I fail to see any incriminating evidence, nonetheless I tremble with a rhythm that breaks consciousness into small fragments of fearfulness, upsetting the smooth undulation of daily headlines. Could this be the time awareness ends for me, the time when forgetfulness causes forfeit of all sense, all forms of breathing, all poetic routes for escape? The door I can see from my confinement has new locks, the windows have been bricked in. All I have of hope are the memory of having escaped once before and the knowledge not altogether uninviting that God doesn't play fair but fairness to God and fairness to a man strapped to a wooden chair in a locked room are worlds apart. I smile at this thought also, the questioner telling me I have a disconcerting smile, much like the previous person in this room, a woman who was most cooperative but died, unfortunately, from strain to her already weak heart. Once again I refuse to speak, listen to the threats repeated as if unimaginativeness was an art form this questioner finds pleasing and necessary. Resorting to an anxious tactic, I convey my life's history with the blinking of my eyes. Then the insults begin again, becoming louder than the threats, insults and threats a cacophony, the fairness or unfairness of God impossible to differentiate. I cannot recall the incantation that unlocks locks, shatters bricks, but I begin to sing a lullaby in a language from another time and the questioner falls asleep just as I hear an inexplicable whisper and come very close to believing.





Son of a Bitch

J.D. Isip

Five dollars, mama, he'd say and, because it was cheaper
than wondering why, you gave it. Then ten. Then twenty.
I did the best I could, you'd say and, because that seemed
to cover a multitude of sins, he learned the song by heart.
This is for my mama, he'd say, and knock it back in reverence
the first few times. By last call, it came down to, That bitch.

This time, you'd say, and he'd promise sobriety and sunshine
and you believed because believing is easier and he would say
I love you, mama, which would get you to pay his rent or lights
and he might even cook you a repast of all of his favorite things
More money, mama, he'd say because most of his favorite things
cost more than you gave and gave less than he wanted, or needed.

This is for my mama, he said when the rest of you died away
and nobody heard or cared and it hit and hurt, That bitch.



Creativity, or, None the Existential Less

J. J. Steinfeld

Morning, lousy weather
out of coffee, computer on the blink,
none the existential less
consciousness prevails
and it's story-writing time
synapses and psyche insist
the momentum of being
does not take no or nonsense
for an answer
I wonder if it will be a long story
full of twists and turns
and enough sex to get me in trouble
or a short story
with several exalted subplots
and characters admirable
I wonder if this will be a trip
through the underworld
or through clouds
half symbolic and half frightening
I wonder if I will live
another minute
or a decade of monstrous
uncertainty and pitfalls
I wonder about wonder
and put down my pen
as if it were a weapon
or a prehistoric beast
hungry for anything
that moves.

Filipino Food

J.D. Isip

We leave the head on, bones to
pick out; eating can be a chore, so
many utensils so we go without
fingers like kung-fu
(but we're not that kind of Asian) scoop
grey-green mongo beans, bitter melon,

too much garlic, onions in everything, rice
makes one meal last for three. Friends
hate the smell
shrimp paste, bright
fuchsia, fishy, they always take too damn
much like that scene in Joy Luck Club but

we're not that kind of Asian. We're lesser
so we boast and brag it, every European
spiked our genes
but how they recoil,
the descendants come to try out the exotic,
cursed and spit out. They expect Chinese.

Not a Favorable Morning for Questions and Answers

J. J. Steinfeld

The individual clouds
on a most cloudy morning
began speaking to each other
not very loud
but loud enough for me
to hear and shake
my head at in a rite
resembling trepidation:
What does this mean
meaninglessness?
How do you exist
existentially?
How do you use words
wordlessly?
How do you perfect
perfection?
Cloud after cloud
question after question
I caught underneath
the celestial interrogation.
Am I supposed to answer
or smile knowingly
or run for cover
before the clouds
grow angrier
with the gods?
Not a favorable morning
for questions or answers
so I'll hide behind
a huge oak tree
and perhaps
ask its advice
about its world
of wordlessness.



Vomit

J.D. Isip

It wasn't, of course. That sour, rusty odor
sent coworkers, us, tipping trashcans, sniffing
at counters, at the air, wide-eyed like deer
so sure death is crouching in that scent.

After two weeks, when the pattern pointed
to her, we each hypothesized: An alcoholic,
obviously. No, my brother is an alcoholic
and he smells like… well, not like that.

Then it was clear, horribly clear, and it was
me who drew the short straw, who had to
invite her to sit down, offer tepid water
in a paper cup, breathe in strawberry body
spray

spritzed in some final, shocking awareness
just before I shut the door on us and the
rancid fruit smell, my hollow words circling
her trembling, realizing, I just stopped caring.

Pitfalls

J.D. Isip

Thinking there was more time, waiting
out an evening or forty, supplicating words
stillborn and scattered in that stone gray
sunrise that settles nothing, promises

only a new monochrome world risen
like ash from ash, she'd say Let me die, let
me to every pair of passing feet, every chair
or tottering walker that brushed past

in shadows where her still small voice
joined the chorus from door to door, Let me
echoing through unexplored corners
and darkened doorways, every one open

haunted with yellowing eyes, gaping mouths
sending prayer and plea Let me die, let me
from the dank, urine-tinged recesses
the nurses avoid or jump past, relieved.

Beer and Self-Loathing in the Land of Lochs and Legends

I was in Edinburgh, moseying among the bar lights and old cobblestone streets: a terrible place for a hopeless romantic. I was spending two nights at a hostel there before the start of my semester in Stirling, and the last thing I wanted to do was spend it thinking about home. I walked along the Royal Mile, awestruck by the picturesque castle on a hill in the distance, the quaint shops selling kilts and cans of haggis, and the street performers juggling bowling pins and playing with fire. I thought: *What a wonderful place to fall in love.*

Then I remembered how badly I wanted to have a few beers. I turned into the first bar along the street, ordered a pint of ale, and man sitting next to me recognized my accent and struck up small talk with me. He was an American too. He said he's a business student in Washington, and after a nasty break up, he felt he had to get away. He kept talking, and I just listened and drank. He bought me a whiskey. We kept talking about love, and he brought up his ex-girlfriend again and again, saying he was certain they would get back together when he returned to America.

"What about you, man?" he asked, nudging me. "Do you have anyone back home?"

I'd be lying to say it wasn't love that sent me across the Atlantic. It was a girl named Erica, my first college girlfriend, who I met in an Ethics class at Emmanuel. Her hair was long and black and when she smiled, she had little dimples. She was an all-around quiet person; her voice was soft and she hid her emotions in pretty phrases she penned in a notebook. She was humble and intelligent, and from the moment I laid eyes on her, I wanted to kiss those dimples.

Eventually, I asked her out for coffee. We walked to Panera Bread along the streets of Boston, fiery autumn leaves blowing along the sidewalks. After the first nervous sips, we seemed to have a lot in common. She said she likes pop-punk music and Pixar movies. She said she likes reading classic works of literature. After our coffees were finished, we left the café to watch a movie in her dorm room. We sat, not touching, watching Monsters Inc., and when the credits rolled, I wanted her the way everyone longs for a person: to feel the warmth of their closeness, to feel at home in their arms.

There were more dates: more cups of coffee, more movies. There was dinner and hand-holding and kissing goodnight. Then there was the night just before Thanksgiving break that I put on a clean oxford shirt and a sweater and walked up to her room to ask her to be my girlfriend. My hands were sweaty; I fidgeted like a person on pills.

I was tongue-tied, un-smooth, un-suave. Maybe pills would've helped. "Of course," she said. "I would love to be your girlfriend."

I felt drunk and happy. It was a tiresome flight from Boston to Heathrow, one which put me in a don't-fuck-with-me kind of mood. I spent a few days traipsing around London, but mostly I was trying to get myself adjusted to Britain (crossing streets was, for months, the most difficult part). But things changed in Edinburgh. I was no longer traveling alone, with no one to discuss love and heartbreak. I finally had someone who felt the way I felt.

This guy from Washington and I kept drinking and talking about love. The memories of that night are hazy, but I specifically remember laughing so hard I spit my beer back into my glass, and slapped the bar.

"This bartender's cute," he said. "What do you think of her?"

Erica and I did things any couple would do. We danced and laughed and swapped mix CDs. She made me the best mix tape I've ever received. She gave me soft, alternative tracks by Copeland and Death Cab for Cutie, interspersed with '90s pop-rock hits by bands like Something Corporate and Third Eye Blind. She was the pop-punk girl I dreamed of when I was thirteen, dancing in my room and singing Sum-41 songs to my Lara Croft poster.

With Erica, we were eager to be as close to each other as possible. We got to know each other by physically and emotionally peeling off layers. I thought she was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen naked, in movies or in real life. I remember our first time having sex, shaking with anxiety, trying to act calm and assured, and hearing the words of Death Cab's "Transatlanticism" burst to life in her tiny dorm room.

But as time moseyed on, there seemed to be, even in our most intimate moments, a distance. In the winter, as soft flakes of snow stuck then melted to our windows, we revealed ourselves wholly. We peeled off each other's clothes slowly, and lay for hours, sharing our fears and passions. But as the winter melted into spring, we kept our anxieties hidden to journals and blog posts. We became champions at letting our emotions stay inside, to whiter the way flowers do if you keep them in a broom closet.

Then summer came and we really began to hit a rough patch. She was away in Rhode Island, and I was home in southern Maine, playing in an adult soccer league, longboarding, and stealing my dad's beer. I missed her so much that it hurt. But at the point, I didn't know certain vital things about love. I didn't know that, as un-romantic as it sounds, love at

some point requires purely hard work and good judgement. I was young, dumb, and horny; and I bought into the brassy notion that true love comes easily.

We broke up over the phone.

My pint was almost empty. I wasn't drinking at this point, I was inhaling. The guy from Washington kept talking. My mind floated between subjects like a bird that can't decide which tree it prefers.

One night, drunk off cheap red wine, I gave in and spoke to her. I told her I missed her, and she said the same. Days later, she came over to watch a movie in my dorm room before heading out to a party. I did all my laundry and cleaned the living room of my suite just for her.

But she seemed different when she arrived. She exuded a discernible hesitancy. She lingered in the doorway. I tried to make her feel at home by offering her tea and snacks, but she brushed past my offer, leaving her coat and boots on as she moved onto the couch. I put in a movie to watch, but we only got through about half of it before she kissed me and suggested we move to the bedroom. I was complicit and desperate: I had my shirt off by the time the door slammed shut.

We made love in nervous, choppy undulations. The two ingredients of our sex were always these: stage fright and an uneven rhythm. But during the part in which we'd normally collapse into each other's arms and talk and stare at the ceiling, she jumped right out of my bed. She began pulling her wool socks on.

"You're leaving?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, her voice cold and sharp as an icicle. Nay: a thousand icicles. A thousand tiny icicles driven cleanly through my heart. She only wanted the physical part of sex, that much was clear to me. Perhaps the sex had nothing to do with me, really. Maybe the sex was just to prove something to herself.

I put on boxers and sat on my bed, watching her pull on her boots. I tried to kiss her as she was leaving, but she turned her cheek. It was precisely in that moment of unexpected loss, watching my bedroom door click shut, that I learned that in love you feel at home, and in heartbreak you feel rootless and distant. You become a tourist to you own life. You think you know where you belong, but then she leaves before you can ask, "Was it good for you?"

I stumbled through the streets of Edinburgh, back uphill toward the hostel. The lights were still burning among the dreary Scottish night. That castle lingered like a rain cloud.

I should have gone to bed, but I stayed up thinking about the guy from Seattle and his girlfriend and the bartender. I grabbed my laptop out of my suitcase and moved to the hostel common room. I looked at all the hostel residents, strangers from different continents. I met a South African guy who asked if I was Canadian and an old Brazilian man with a bald head. I met a red-haired girl from California who was also studying abroad. But I wondered why they were at the hostel on an more personal level. Were they searching for love? Were they fleeing from heartbreak? Or were any of them like me, juggling both at the same time?

The room was spinning. I felt like I understood how the sun felt up there in the cosmos, distantly burning and watching all the little planets dance around its axis. I was sick with booze and heartbreak. I opened my laptop and went on Facebook. I opened Erica's profile, and in a private message, split my heart open in a rambling message completely devoid of poetry. It was the social networking equivalent of tossing a stone at her window and throwing my arms up in pleading.

I sent it, and shut my laptop.

I didn't wait for a response because I knew by the time difference, she was probably in the middle of a sleep cycle. I should have been sleeping too, but instead I sat by a window, looking out into the night and thought about sleeping beside Erica, running a hand up her naked leg, up the gently curved hill of her hip to land softly on her dimpled cheek. I wanted to hear her laugh again. I wanted to pull her into me, in the middle of the old Scottish streets lined with grey stones and those burning bar lights and storybook castles, and tell her I love her again, hoping she might love me too. There is nothing more to say about that night. I went to bed with nothing but my dreams, my fears and passions waiting in her inbox, and the pale moon looking down at me.

--Gregory Letellier



Faraway Words on Jars

J.D. Isip



Tea leaves, tarot, astrological promises,
questions about the man you were seeing,
Filipino? What province? Prick size?
She'd call you comrade, give us all

Coffee with Borden's and pandesal
"Play your games," you said before
providing Technicolor answers.
She told us take a nap upstairs.

You were gone for three months.
"This is your father," you called the man

who wasn't, whose eyes took in
America, LAX, his new wife, us.

There were four more. Always fresh-picked
from the islands, new last names,
men like legends
You hoped to label and preserve.

Pulvis Solaris

Marie Lecrivain

There are various ways to obtain
the most treasured of substances.
Stand outside for seven nights
under the auspices of Saturn and
Mercury. Count in breaths of seven
on the way to le petite mort.
Scale the seven hills of Rome
during the summer solstice.

Once you behold all
of creation in an orange halo,
you've attained your goal.

A Letter to Hector from Astyanax

Marie Lecrivain

from Hector Astyanax MN Jatta, red Apulian red-figure column-crater,
ca. 370–360 BC. From Ruvo. Stored in the Museo Nazionale
of the Palazzo Jatta in Ruvo di Puglia (Bari).

Dear Dad,

I found our family portrait
on display for day-tripping tourists
who know so little
- as I did then - of who you were
beyond what Homer, Hollywood,
and history have extolled.

We're immortalized in red tones,
the color of your blood
spilled on the threshold of Troy.
Mother's thighs are tight with tension,
her eyelids at half-mast,
your right foot is raised
in heroic stance,
your helm held out to me,
its silken plume a white flag
in my pudgy hand.
It's a pretty scene,
but truth be told;
I needed to hold your hand,
to know you as my father,
and not as legend.

Your son,
Astyanax

Antimony
Marie Lecrivain

Part of herself on the periphery is a wolf-woman who awakens at 3 am, fierce and sweating from dreams of rending apart the poisoned flesh of her enemies. She follows the retreating image of her dark, desperate face in the glowing disk of the Western Moon, already on a downward trajectory to escape her question: Why did you summon me? With no answers, she gifts the heavens a hairy middle-fingered salute, and with one last howl, encloses herself in a slumbering cage of meat and bone. She will awaken at dawn, confused by the musky scent of anima imprinted on the tangle of rent sheets.

Hermaphrodite
Marie Lecrivain

Those little voices in your head are the quicksilver imp seated on your left shoulder who whispers naughty thoughts at the speed of light and the righteous mouse on the opposite side who digs his claws into your shoulder with exquisite disapproval.

In the moment you're faced with a pivotal choice, these two disparates embrace and dissolve into the crannies of your cerebellum. You can move forward into the singularity of silence.

The Possible Tao of Li Po
Marie Lecrivain

I.

I imagine you showed up
for your initiation
hung over and slightly resentful
as the morning light
gilds the edges
of your haphazard beard
and creeps into the
small corners of your
blurry vision. To you,
this is nothing more
than a networking tool,
and a notation on your
court resume.

II.

Hands tied behind your back
you follow the other aspirants
into the Holy Grounds.
The pleasant aftertaste
of last night's vintage
sours in your mouth
as you utter your sins,
one after the other:
a quartet of casual marriages,
a brace of causal children,
and an internal library filled with
volumes of witty poetry.
Your heart hammers
a staccato beat
against your ribs
as you face the mirror
image of your banal self
clothed in the reptilian aura
of arrogance. You force
a smile, and bow your head
in acceptance - this too is Karma.

III.

There is are questions
that can never be answered,
but I will always wonder
what it must have been
like for you, Li Po,
to reclaim your place
among the Immortals -
to be one with your tao,
and what it was like
to walk through the fire,
burn bright as a star,
and come out of the forge
reborn as a poet.

Moment of Becoming

I dream a room full of mirrors. In them I like to stare long and hard until the focus is no longer my body, my face, my eyes. I can only focus on my pupils. They are black. They are so black I am reminded of water that looks black from a distance, darkened by depth, and I'm convinced I'll go blind for staring so long, no longer being able to see my face clearly enough to feel the sleepless nights, long hours, the faint line on my forehead, the crease at the corners of my eyes, lips. I float. Not the kind of floating that is uplifting, the kind that pulls the body from itself like it is rising. I float, but it is a subtle pull, pulling down. I float, fall into the darkness. All of the angles, the lights, they stay above me, in my periphery, they stream, flood toward me, strike my hands.

I've never been this cold before. Not the type of cold that aches in the feet, causes convulsions in the jaw—the kind that freezes the mind, thoughts stuck on repeat with no volume control or power button to stop them. Really cold. I feel my body twist in the sheets, one hand passing through the air, my breath coming in a whisper, words I've not known trailing along the tip of my tongue. The deep red of muscle flexing beneath my ribs, seeping into my vision, pushing past my thoughts in some semblance of words. I float above it. My hand passes through the light, rays splaying through the spaces. Everything slows down. I'm hyper-aware of myself, every fault amplified a million times. There is no sound of breathing, of life. The oxygen seeps into me through the light.

I sink. The light dulls, fades, becomes more particle-like, specks of energy shimmering in front of me. I'm awake. Half-awake. I'm suspended. There is resistance surrounding me. It takes more effort to wave my hand. The particles chase my fingertips, stream behind the motion; stars escaping from my pockets, yellow pennies bubbling from my skin. I settle slowly. I'm frozen.

Thump. Thump. Thump. I hear it though I'm not sure I've ever felt it. Fear. My heart. There is fear. Pain. Lack of cadence. It's no longer pumping blood and oxygen through my body. It's protecting my body from pain. I fear its breaks. Everything is flowing from just this organ. I'm numb. It feels like plucking a delicate lily, fresh in the dew, slicing the petals in half because the whole petals were too plump, too large to appreciate, plucking the stamen because it was too fuzzy, dipping the rest of the disfigured bloom into a bucket of white pain to mute the blush of pink as though life itself were a blemish.

I'm soaked. I turn my head and see the white of my skin. I'm naked. I'm still and quiet. There's no friction. Strangely, I'm prepared for death. No, not this minute, this second. Maybe not tomorrow or in the coming months or years. Maybe not in 20 years, but one day. This is as close as I'll get to seeing myself motionless. See myself. I think of what it means to know me, to see myself lying on my back. I pull my hands to my side. They follow slowly. I lift my arms into the weight, the viscosity, fold my hands on my stomach. I look hard and deep into the light, look for signs of motion, hold my breath and listen for moving air. I wonder if, even hope, I'll die soon so this moment is all I'll need to feel my own passing. It's a much more silent, tender moment, private even. No tears. No family or friends. Just me.

I pull my right hand up to my breast, press firmly, wait. My chest doesn't rise, but I feel a beat through my palm. I wonder whose beat I'm really feeling. I listen to it throb inside my ears. My body tingles knowing how one day it will no longer by mine. My heart has changed, the beat impossible to count, decipher, pink scars having either severed or combined them. I'm falling. Sinking.

The light waves its soft tentacles. I return the gesture and soldier on up to the end with as much confidence as possible, though I feel I'm overdoing it. I always do. My eyes close. I'm hungry. Hunger comes naturally. I have nothing but to eat what time has left for me. I bite down hard on my tongue to satisfy my sudden starvation, hoping the pressure would alleviate my growing discomfort. My pain is lack of breath, though I'm at peace. I smile awkwardly, chewing the inside of my cheeks as though there were something to be said, something to be hungry for. The seconds grow colder, and for a brief moment, this hunger, this life faded away, leaving me with nothing more than knowing how easily I could be erased because there seemed to be nothing more, just angles, light.

I'm alive, haunted. And, for now, that's enough.

--Ariana D. Den Bleyker

Dad

Bill Melton

The years slip away
Since his death
Yet his memory
Grows stronger.
Sometimes
There is a gentle tug
At my conscience
When I think in error.
At other times
A feeling of warmth
Knowing somehow
That he is pleased.
Perhaps a still small voice
When all alone
Lost within myself
And he is there.
Someone
Who gave so little advice
While alive
Now seems to advise me daily.
Is it him
Or the principles
Which he taught
That I now hear?
Regardless
He is there
Shaping
Molding
Ever present



Restraint

Marshall Callaway

I hate your dog.
Because she replaced me
or because outside of your
expert training
she had no manners,
either way I hate the bitch.
Yet one can't help but be moved
by the farewell drop
of a devoted cadaver dog long retired
falling to the ground on top
of the grave of her handler.
She must have known it was you,
for if the embalming fluids
did anything to remove your scent
we tried our best to restore it
with a few packs of menthols,
two bottles of scotch,
and a bag of candy,
a little somethin-somethin for the journey.
I wonder just how sensitive her nose is
whether she could tell that the
smokes were unsmoked
scotch was undrunk
through the earth
and the lead-lined vault
and the casket of reclaimed barn wood.
The other dogs were better.
The one we put down on my birthday,
when you had all but abandoned your post
as husband and father
and demanded I tend to the dog
so your wife could have a vacation,
he was a better dog.
The shepherds sent to live with my brother,
that you'd be damned if you'd see go to other homes
because you'd put too much work into them
though you were no longer around
to see to them,
they were better dogs.
This little shit,
this unbreakable puppy who,
weighing in at 104 pounds,
jumps on the elderly,
she's a rotter.
Obnoxious, annoying.

How anyone could desire her breed
is beyond me.
But with one plotz and mournful yowl,
my sympathies shift from me to her.
There is no consoling her.
She lies pitiful by your casket spray
and I can tell she knows,
she understands what has happened.
Once she gets up, my revulsion floods back
and I just want to kick her.
But I don't.
For you.

45 Rapture, 33 Speed

Marshall Callaway

There's a tiny scratch on a motorcycle.

I am stuck on that score
as it skips the record back—

to the crackle and pop of authenticity,
of enthusiastic lives lived well.

The scratch joins the loop,
jarring at the start, jagged at the end.
Repetition speeding, slogging grief
for the ruined disc;
it still contains the soul of the music
but will never play right again.
Slow, then fast,
as if the drive belt
is dry-rotting.

I listen as the best go down,
the pure, the strong, the virtuous;
slow, in a drag,

the world wrecks its rock stars.

There's a tiny scratch in everything.
Every surface,
every tank, every record
wears an inscrutable flaw,
hidden to all but the eyes and ears
fixed on the fissure
that some giant
used to kick start his ascent,
listening for the right tune to ride.

Scotch Mirror

Marshall Callaway

I stole the Glenlivet mirror from my dad
when he lost his home.
I told myself if he wanted it back
he could get a damned wall to hang it on,
but until then it was better off with me.

More an advert than overt reflection,
it shows me drunk, bonded and brittle,
the tenuous relationship between a father and son
who repeated histories in their own voices
and tried to make sense of themselves.

Rob Roy

3 dashes Angostura Bitters
2 oz. Scotch Whiskey
.75 oz. Sweet Vermouth

Add all the ingredients to
a mixing glass and fill
with ice. Stir, and strain
into a chilled cocktail glass.
Garnish with a cherry.

Ratchet Lake

Marshall Callaway

For years the dry lake rusted,
eighty frustrated acres
pitching tantrums in our backyard,

throwing up trees where we'd cleared,
mocking our attempts to scape the land.

We plinked water balloons in the bed
with a .22, teasing ourselves,
as one gallon by one
spilled to disappear,

whiling the time elegizing
l'esprit qui passe.
Or something else entirely—

a capacity.

We'd drive over new trees
not just to kill them but to *fuck them up*,
to maintain we were more than nature.

All in the name of recreation.
This was the indicative illustration
at the top of a clean page
in a very old book,

the words and the world
were ours now to speak.

We scraped our plans and mockups
and cleared the thrown-up trees,

transmuted the earth
from sponge to occlusion;

reinvested inheritance
into our legacy
and counted interest
not yet returned.

Weirs diverted backflow
for bounties of mountain laurel
and geese alighted to our delight;
this ratchet lake lived.

Sun cresting the power lines,
we saw the light on the lake
or a breath of a moment
before the lenders came and took it,
dragging us from its banks.

The Errant Double-Proof

Marshall Callaway

I am born again a pie pan
in the kitchen of a master baker
now nauseated by the baking
for the memories it recalls.

Virgin enamel
shines sliding down my sides
and reflects promises of pastries
my master refuses to stomach.

Drifts of butter blending
with lard, fine salt and spice
will never burn in my nose
for scorching my artisan
when he catches them unexpected

in just the right slice of his mind
as he retreats to his mother,
to her delicate craft of icing,
stippling resplendent fantasies
up confectionary tiers

or the savory fumblings of his father
who dredged tenderloins in sugar
instead of prescribed flour
to the delight of the dawning chef
discovering his tooth.

The pains folded into instants ensure
that the sweet fond of his fats
will never brown in me
and only dust will dust my edges.
I am a useless gift,
a token of talent resigned,
relegated to the future,
estate-saled to an amateur
who will never taste the potential
I was promised.

Brushes Soaking in Color

~~Charles F. Thielman

The night spread deep blue lakes of wind
as our yellow lamps flared on,

my hazel eyes born of sought dream, city
evergreen, thorn home and supple shoulders.

The night spreads deaf honey, our throats sought
wings,
moon planting quivers of blue silver in reach.

Gray-blue sweeps into spruce, mirror, alder,
pain and rose, our salt bodies soak in each other.

The night sung indigo hymns, bats flew from caves
and our various parades revolved over flash avenues.

Iris blue to sienna brown bloom open in sight and
vein,
hope and scheme, speech, distraction, vase and sky.

This night tossed ignition keys into flame and step,
and I spun slow with a windflower in a yellow dress.

O, how this night spreads open, naked, wet, arms,
thighs brown as I dance inside your hot breath,

lips and tongues, your finger-tips
tracing the salt opals in my back.

Sculptor and Open Window

~~Charles F. Thielman

No wind for days, the webs collect mist.

Rails unfurl strands of rust beside
a river's quiet, the friction
of cloth on a mirror,
current inscribing clarity on stone.

Oak trees gray-sleeved and muscular,
he touch-starts a jazz anthem, sax notes
woven between branches and cold stone.

He thinks it was the brass mouth of a trumpet

feeding insight while he beckoned
sunrise and coins. Rush hour fired up
up and rolling, most workers avoiding

wrong turns en route to paychecks,
streets pumping tendrils of blue exhaust.

Or, was it the night laid flat and dark
on windows? Or a dream of facing emeralds, pain
dissolving as his soul pulled glint after glint from stone,

the memories of joys steering him close to river sounds.
His eyes swivel between stone and pre-dawn sky,
the grace of breath after breath visible then gone.

Beautiful October

~~Charles F. Thielman

So many trees flaring colors
at their raucous retirement party--
yellows and reds and more amidst
the green to dark green of fir, spruce, cedar.

Squall-lines of rain-shower and gust
soon peeling leaves from branches,
leaves drying yellow to brown
under a slanting sun,
scraping across sidewalk and street,
brown sails pushed by colder winds.
Oregonian umbrellas thumping up, hut halos
colliding cause quick-stepping, eyes adjusting.

The touristas are now leaving to go bask
under desert sun. Coast motel and shop owners
and employees pull out rain-gear, soon to stand atop cliffs
watching waves grow large as wallets thin,
the first storms roiling in, blue to indigo blue
washed with grays, whitecaps to closer horizons.

This is my love's favorite month,
her eyes absorbing these many-hued skies,
this softer light, these flaring leaves, mists and rains,
and, soon, this love poem written as she sleeps,
sea eagle wings held close before dawn,
her dreams spooning inside tides
of greens and yellows,
reds and oranges,
blue upon blue,
yes and yes

Solitude

~~Charles F. Thielman

She dons a robe of silence
leaving the burn-pile of love.

Reviewing her life-spread maps,
embers spiraling down, she notes

the junctures, the choices, hears again
the crack of bets flung at reality's walls.

Well past being tripped up looking back,
she knows how solitude vases the rose stems

of unspoken needs. Pushing face first
into sandpaper wind, her dream

of flying brought down to wishbones
snapped short. Her gaze reaches inside

the forest's quivers of moon-light.

A Painting, An Early Morning Walk, and All the People

~~Charles F. Thielman

Faces of this age, inbound,
transit under city towers.

Tip of paintbrush inside canvas rivers.

My eyes wander in a white sky,
drawn as human
to our magnetic stutter,
hands in pockets.

Distant jackhammers cube the air.

Trees wanting a wet gray shine,
the strokes of a sable brush
lay cart tracks down on
canvas gravel, through pools of water
reflecting November overcast
and the skies of a seagull's cry.

Let the vandals worship their statues.

At the bus-stop,
I stand back and watch
children make churches with their hands.

The Gathering

Heather M. Browne



It started with the sun
casting colors on the sand, sun
tanned brown
pointing cowry shells – golden baked

An old seagull by the sea watches me collect
a gathering of shells to string around your neck

There are feathers scattered
and I weave them between my collection
of earth and sea - softness and smiles
From God - to sea and sand - to bird - me
Our gathering - an Offering
As our little old bird watches by seaweed freshly brought
sharing in this joyful weaving - for you.
Gathering too.

The Scents I Send to You in Heaven

Heather M. Browne

fireplace smoke rising
morning coffee brewing
old men's cherried pipes
and trees
Do you miss the scents of earth?
fresh-cut grass after rain?
salty ocean breezes? pink camellias?
or my skin?

Unboxed

Heather M. Browne

I held her tight
Her weight in my lap
boxed
to let her go gently
Water & wind ready to embrace her

The sun falling halfway
Our metal casket gleaming mid-flight

I needed her weight
in my lap
Not wanting to give her up
I thought I'd swallow just one bit of her
Take her in and make her stay
But she had chosen differently
Forcing me to reach into that wooden box
for her
And holding her one last time
extending my arm out into open air
fingers begrudgingly freeing
dropping her from sky
I let her go

IONA CAMPBELL –Meredith Devney

To her children she was magic--
kneading flour and water into sticky loaves
that rose on the window's ledge, planting
seeds that grew into plucked potatoes.

Wrestling a chicken with one hand,
butcher knife in the other, fist around neck
as she dragged it to the tree stump,
her apron never bloodying.

Standing knee-deep in the creek,
rubbing and wringing out soiled linen
over limestone, using soap she boiled
from lye and lard. After divorcing

her husband in the sixties, she still
cooked and hand delivered meals
to his doorstep, stayed up knitting
afghans from every shade of yarn

so he won't chill at night, she told
her children, but they knew better--
she was magic: always making
something out of nothing.

Her Dream

Heather M. Browne



Her dream grew
Too large
Imagination spilling
Filling her room
Needing out
Creeping upon its windowed reflection
In pane

Shelved dolls listening
Hearing the dream's gasp
Unable to split the seam of weighted eyelids
Lashed
Their response stuck in frozen smiles
Pearly teeth clenched
Anchored in place
No way to alert
Escape

Mermaid Dreams

Heather M. Browne

It started in dreams

Wings giving way to tail
Your scales growing in phases
taking away more of you
We wrapped your knees and ankles with ribbons first
binding away your humanness
losing your kick

You stitched and sewed
a rainbow cocoon
losing hips, ankles, and knees
forcing you to master dolphin undulations

In dreams seamless
Rising and falling each crested wave
Breathing in your ocean
Salting you Mermaid

NICE WORK GUY

Gene Desrochers

Every morning he dipped his toast in his hot black tea. He watched the eddies of margarine, or whatever you called it, this new-age, healthy-for-you oil balance stuff, swirl, congeal into circles, squares, triangles, lines, or milky ways--his fortune for the day. Then, he would drink his fortune or dump out the tea, depending on whether he liked what he saw in the margarine. He ate his toast from the crust to the inside. He operated around the center because he figured he didn't like the crust very much. He wanted the worst of it over with. Why didn't he just not eat the crust? He had heard somewhere as a kid that it was healthier for you, but who knew if that had any scientific backing. That morning he looked at the oil slick and knew it would be the worst day of his life. He threw the whole mug into the recycle bin, then moved the bin to the curb two days early. His cat rubbed against his leg.

~~OOO~~

He drove like his wheels were stuck in super-hold hair gel, except when one of two things were happening: when he was on his way to have sex or when he was on his way somewhere where he thought there was a good chance he could have sex. He'd had a professor, or better yet a teacher, in a high school class on spirituality and religion, who seemed to favor Buddhism over other forms of religion. This teacher had once told him that he or more specifically, the class in general, was more likely to die in a car accident than anything else at the age of seventeen, and that they should try to be bodhisattvas of the highway. "A bodhisattva of the highway," he thought.

Every time he went out there, he should try to leave himself enough time so that his emotions would not overtake logic and basic sensibility of right and wrong. He should keep in mind that he was driving an object that could kill many people in an instant with one wrong decision. His lessons from high school fluttered away in the wind like butterflies, except for the bodhisattva-driving lesson. He couldn't even recall the teacher's name, although he could see his face; glasses, scraggly white beard, balding, with the matted ponytail in the back that somehow tried to make up for the baldness on top. Mr. Fox was it? The –ox ending sounded correct.

The rotary-dial phone on the mosaic table fluttered as the hammer hit the stainless steel bell. Tara cried softly and asked him to come over. They had not had sex yet, and this added nitro to his sex driving: the possibility of sex with someone different who did not demand payment in the form of cash. Maybe it was going to be a good day despite what his swirling oils said. Good move tossing the cup.

He popped the hood and checked the synthetic oil, as he did every morning. It was golden and within the acceptable range. He inspected the windshield wipers, wiping the black smudge off the blades with a wet sani-wipe that he ripped fresh from a Costco pack in the glove box. He noted with some trepidation that the remaining sani-wipes numbered less than ten. Sex first, then he could swing by Costco on the way back. He'd stay in the rest of the day so as not to toy with fate.

He leaned in and sniffed the driver's seat. He pulled out a bottle of CK1 and spritzed the leopard print seat cover. He quickly wiped the steering wheel's wooden surface and gave the parking brake a brief once over. He checked his mirrors, signaled with both the blinker and his outstretched arm, then proceeded off the curb.

A cat, his cat darted across in front of his purring Cobra, just as he accelerated. He smashed the brake pedal as Snuggles darted up the driveway into his backyard. He should get out and shuttle her into the house, but the lure of naked breasts pulled his right Doc Martin sideways to his gas pedal with an audible swoosh of his slacks.

He reached the first stop sign without further incident. He tapped the black knob and Metallica filled the cab with electric guitar and deep, angry vocals.

I guess the oil in my tea was wrong this time. Nothing bad happened to him and the day ended with him crawling into bed, tired but contented that he'd gotten to have sex with a beautiful if distraught girl. He'd even remembered to stop at Costco and replenish his sani-wipes. Nice work guy.

Then the call came, three months later. He wondered why she had not called again. He had heard once that having sex with someone you don't really know intimately is unsatisfying, particularly for women. She seemed to enjoy it, but then again he never got that level of ecstasy they always describe in Cosmo or Maxim. Some kind of screaming that

seems a little out of hand. He'd seen pictures of women in some mask they called orgasm, but it looked like most of them were dying. Anyway, he supposed it wasn't so bad, 'cause here she was on the other end of his rotary dial phone wanting some more lovin' no doubt.

They exchanged hellos then the dirty word came, pregnant. Why you calling me? You are the one who impregnated her she claims. Ha. A woman looking like you must have sex round the clock, no offense, he says back with a laugh and a wink in his chest. Did you wear a condom she shoots back? What's a condom he retorts? Are you retarded she asks in a voice one octave lower.

She started throwing up and wanting to eat more food, although it's not weird food combos like they claim in movies, just more of the standard peanut butter and honey sandwiches along with a draught of orange juice. She claims to be thirteen weeks preggy. Kids that are mine. The only time we had sex was that day he says. She says that's the only time she's had sex in the last six months, so it has to be his or some ogre who pillaged her in the middle of the night while she was ruffied.



He looked at the tea he was drinking and dunked some of his toast into it. The oil eddied around a bit as steam wafted into the seventy degree re-circulated air. That's funny, it says today could be the best day of my life, but the oil sometimes shifts to the same worst day position it had thirteen weeks ago. There wasn't even any wind.

Are you still there she says? Yes, he's there. According to my teacup, this is going to be the best day of my life, he tells her. She waits. He guesses he'd better go over to her place again so they can get to know each other.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

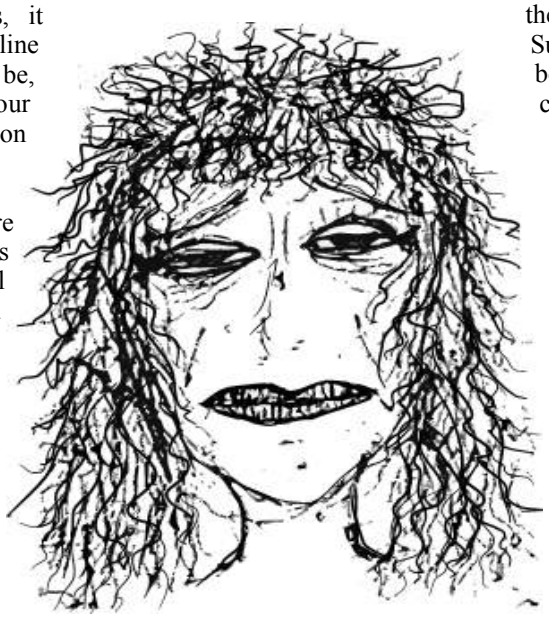
The Egg

B.T. Joy

This morning slicing
slices of bread into equal halves.
Half-five and the light
not yet flinging its handfuls
of yellow rice on the fox-worried roads
I took two eggs and cracked them in a bowl.
The second yolk spilled greasy as the late ball
of a sun on still white clouds. And round the half sphere
of her rim, where goldenness should have met with albumen,
clung a crescent of some darker substance:
two spots of blood in a yellow orb
lit by light off curves china. Half-five
and dark as Glasgow ever was. I fetched the whisk
and whisked a slurry from what hatched out: from yolk
and white and birdish points of unborn tissue.
Hurairah tells us certain acts
cause a black spot to form in the heart
or likens the soul to a mirror
to which worldliness is a stain
and remembrance a wax for polishing.
Think of it as the spore of a wart
that wheedles its jagged roughness
under ridges in the skin.
Or how the human face sometimes
develops blemishes for want of soap and water.
Or consider me, worldly and often forgetful,
so dubious concerning sin and ever mindful
of all the good lives that word has stunted.
How I ate the egg and the bread, one soaked into the other,
two matters sharing a single light brown form
and somewhere in it all I swallowed, with compassion,
two dark spots of the smallest sin; nestled within
a circle of golden promise. I ate
and drank stewed tea and readied for the day. Knowing
that the sin of the egg was a sin I shared:
I too once swam in mindless ecstasy. You can still
feel it sometimes. When you're close to love or close to sleep.
A stillness too deep for any poem. And yet I too laid down
a clot of blood on the unfamiliar earth. I too left home;
swearing never to return.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lenses and Breaking Free

Fish Eye, Telephoto, Microscopic, and Infrared lenses all deliver perspectives. Each particular lens frames our vision, revealing differing views of reality. If we could only perceive the world through a single lens, that single perspective would be our only reality – the single frame of our perception, even if it were broken or malformed. This is the problem with reality. The perception of ones own reality may differ from that of another because the frame or lens is different. How then can anyone fully understand who they are, or who anyone else is to an absolute certainty? Identity is a combination of mind, body, and the lens they are perceived through. Identity itself exists as a floating signifier because the word "identity" is far more tangible than the concept it represents. For these reasons, it might be said that our online identities, whatever they may be, are no less real than your perception that you are a person reading Dual Coast Magazine.



Identity is a little more complicated because it is influenced by social construction. Concepts and ideologies manifested by society serve to frame the individual identity itself. Social manifestations such as class, gender, and the associated roles help to label an individual identity within these social constructs. If you change the societal role of any social construct, it will change the perception of reality framed by this social construct, and ultimately change the identity of individuals within that society. If, for example, society revered and celebrated mediocrity, the roles of the mediocre and their status identity would change, even if the individual did nothing differently. Social construction is one aspect of identity, not fully "the real" but that part of our reality which we create for ourselves. It is one of the many frames which help people to anchor their identity to a more solid reference point, because "identity" is only as real as the validity of the lens it is perceived through. By using a lens which everyone can agree on, such as a societal lens, individuals find assurance that they understand themselves.

Identity encompasses far more than anchor-points of reference on a grid of socially constructed ideologies. Ones identity also consists of the flesh and of ones individual mind therein. Body and mind are related - they are biologically interconnected, but "identity" is squarely in the mind. This is because the mind itself determines the identity of the body and how significant the body is. The mind can choose to break free of the roles of society and identify separately. Each mind is different, and as such, the perception of self-identity is framed differently for each individual. The mind cannot currently exist without the body, which serves as a life support system. However, the time may come when an alternative life support system can be substituted and the mind may exist independently. Such concepts of the mind-and-body-split are recurring concepts in cultural texts.

One example of how the mind exists separately from the body is identified in online personas. The mind is able to grasp the online social environment found in MUD's, Chat Rooms, Facebook profiles, and other online social networks. Using ones own mind, an individual can place themselves at any tangent of online social construction and imagine a relational juxtaposition between their own persona and others. The online community cannot fully determine the validity of ones social role; it is forced to accept the role an individual plays and adapt by playing its own societal role. This is a form of identity – a societal anchor where groups of people all use the same lens to determine the social identity of an individual. If the mind chooses to exist in cyberspace as a rich debutante, it needs only to play the role and the online society will then play its accompanying role. The mind can assume a new identity and exist separately, breaking free of the constraints of the body. The online society is the playground of the mind, no less real than what you think you are experiencing now.

--Staff

Stretched Across an Unmade Bed

C. Marecic

abandoned to another monotonous afternoon
a sheet twisted—no, crumpled—and left to fend for itself
against a lead gray sky and one more distracted communication
that can't quite overcome the settling of inertia
upon her empty belly—soft, supple, brown from sun and fragrant oils—waiting,
of course, always waiting, for the touch
the spark that will ignite—no, better to incinerate—these dreadful
eternal moments into little bits of ash and dust
easily scattered by the evening's freshening sea breeze
or, at least, casually flicked
into a half filled souvenir ashtray filched
from a bar in New York.

The Dawn of Redwoods

Emily Strauss

a hundred million years
they have stood silent
giant immovable forces
scarred black, lichened,
swaying in storms lost
beyond memory of any
living being except bristle-
cone pines on a distant
peak, their bent, shriveled
equal, gnarled beasts
on their stormy rocks

redwoods survive
cataclysms, continental
drift, dinosaurs— placid
in coastal fog, every few
thousand years one falls
breaking through the stand
shattering against nearby trees

and I stand close to touch
one's skin, cold and rough
implacable today, the same as
millions of other days, my touch
as a deer passing or a Juramaia
long extinct, a lightening fire
rushing by, no response needed

Ghost Moon

Emily Strauss

The moon appeared in the hot
afternoon, a fraction of itself
faded and tentative, the air
shimmering in waves
rising from the salt pan-dried
lake whose glare offsets
the hard crystals in my eyes

a pale ghost without the force
to intrude into reality like
when it used to represent
an absence I once felt, now
just a careless habit of thought.

I ignore it mostly, concentrate
on shore birds— willits, phalaropes
wavering in the scope at the salty
edge, the crescent a distraction
from feather markings and beaks

the ghost exiled to a distant shore
where the sand shines at dawn
on different species— an East coast
as alien as cardinals where the moon
must rise out of the sea like a red
coal and the ghost hardly knows
it means him.

Socks

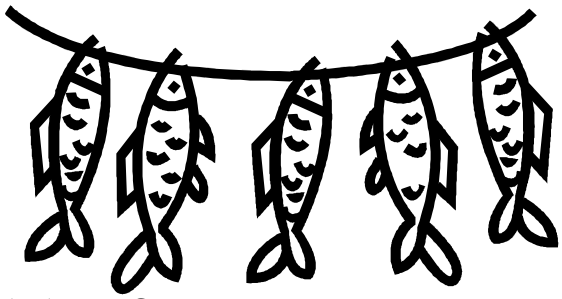
Emily Strauss

to B. L. F. (1924- 2012)

after the War
a young man
left the Carolinas
permanently
found a dirty
desert oil town
new friends
brought his ways
lost his accent
wore long argyle
socks

the child
played at his feet
her hands crept up
feeling the softness
to the knees, stroked
the socks in the heat
on the plush carpet
seated at the low table
no other furniture
an empty living room
tall glass windows
staring off at wooden
derricks, bare tan earth
the glare throbbing but
cooler inside, keep
to the shade

at least
the breathless air was dry
unlike the swamps back
home, the young man
watched the child
indulgently.



At the statue of Kun Iam, Macao

Emily Strauss

At the statue of Kun Iam
standing on a spit at the end
of old landfill, obscured
by the warm fog swirling
over the dirty brown river

a white female ghost
goddess protecting wooden
fishing junks, only tourists
from the ferries walk by

across the road one of
the new glittering casinos
crowded at all hours—
Buddhist meditation
music floats in the mist

bamboo flute ethereal over
the water, a mysterious
noise issuing from the clouds
in all directions beneath
the blare of voices, taxis

a slow chanting faint
in the haze before the sun
pierces and rotten smells
rise in the sudden heat—
tourists retreat to the cool
air of the money halls.

Blackberry Wine and Dreams

Nells Wasilewski

All was well, who was right
and who was wrong was
never an issue among our
elite group. Agreements
to disagree were reached
and, every voice
was heard. Cheap
blackberry wine and
courageous talk changing
the world. We would never
be subservient robots--
ours was a mission to reach
toward the future and fill in
the gaps of erosion with
lofty goals and whimsical
reforms. I didn't expect
it to end like it did--five
years were gone! The empire
crumbled, and philosophical
dreams scattered like debris
on an abandoned beach.

INNUENDO

Bill Vernon

Climbing up onto the truck bed, I didn't know what to expect, wasn't even sure what detasseling corn meant, but it paid $1.25 per hour, and the workers already in the truck looked like old people and women. If they could do it, I could too. The tail gate banged into place behind me, the engine started, and I looked around. The others were seated on bales of straw facing me, but not one bale had room for me to sit on.

"Hey, Teddy Bear! What you doing here? You lost?"

It was a big guy seated with his back against the cab. I frowned and looked away.

"Hey, Teddy Bear. I'm talking to you."

My hair was long and curly, prompting his "Teddy Bear." I hated it, especially with all these people listening.

The idiot said, "Hey, what's your name?"

An older man on a bale pointed to a space between his bale and another. I went over, sat on the metal floor with my back against the side boards, and put my elbows up on each bale.

"Hey, I asked what your name was. I'm just being friendly."

Every eye was watching me. I said "Bill!" hoping it would stop the comments.

He clapped his hands and laughed. "Perfect. Billy Beaver!"

My face reddened. He was referring to my two prominent upper front teeth, a flaw I was most conscious of. I made fists and shifted forward to stand.

The old man pulled my shoulders back so I sat again just as the truck started forward, flinging everyone off balance, making us brace ourselves. When our positions settled, the old man leaned over next to my ear. "That's Drexel. He just got out of prison."

I looked up at the old man.

He said, "Leave him alone."

Drexel was lighting a cigarette. He looked mean in a Marlon Brando-rebel way, with black, slicked down hair, tight Levi's, black boots, and dark long sleeve shirt. I closed my eyes and let the big mouth puff away on his fag.

The truck shot out of town into the country so the wind whipped around us and the ape had to bend forward to protect his cigarette. I bounced with every bump, and the side boards vibrated painfully against my spine. I cushioned myself as best I could, even sat on my hands palms down for a while, leaning forward away from the boards. The trip seemed a lot longer than seven miles.

The driver unloaded us in a barnyard, said the owner would be there shortly with instructions, and walked away.

"What do you think, Teddy Bear?"

The jerk with his arms crossed was talking real loud so everybody heard. I looked away at a nice thick woods beyond the big cornfields.

"Hey, Billy Beaver, you know any good jokes."

The other people watched us like an audience at a play.

The big guy grinned. "Hey, I bet your girlfriend likes to run her fingers through your pretty hair."

Insults in front of all these people? I yelled, "Shut up!"

He laughed. "Billy Beaver don't like me. He must think his little wiener and his girlfriend's buns are a secret."

Such language in front of these older people and women shocked me. I barreled into him so fast and hard we both went down. He cursed while I squeezed his waist from behind.

"You little shithead!" He wrestled me around and stood, slapped my face, pulled his right fist back to hit me hard, then looked away, his fist suspended like a snake about to strike. People in the crew were yelling at him to leave the kid alone.

He released me so I fell on my butt.

Then a man in a straw hat appeared. "What the hell's wrong with you two? Any more trouble and you can both hitchhike back to town. You hear?"

Drexel lifted both hands palms open. "It's over."

The farmer looked at me. When I nodded, the farmer said, "Go clean up over there," and pointed to a water pump by the house.

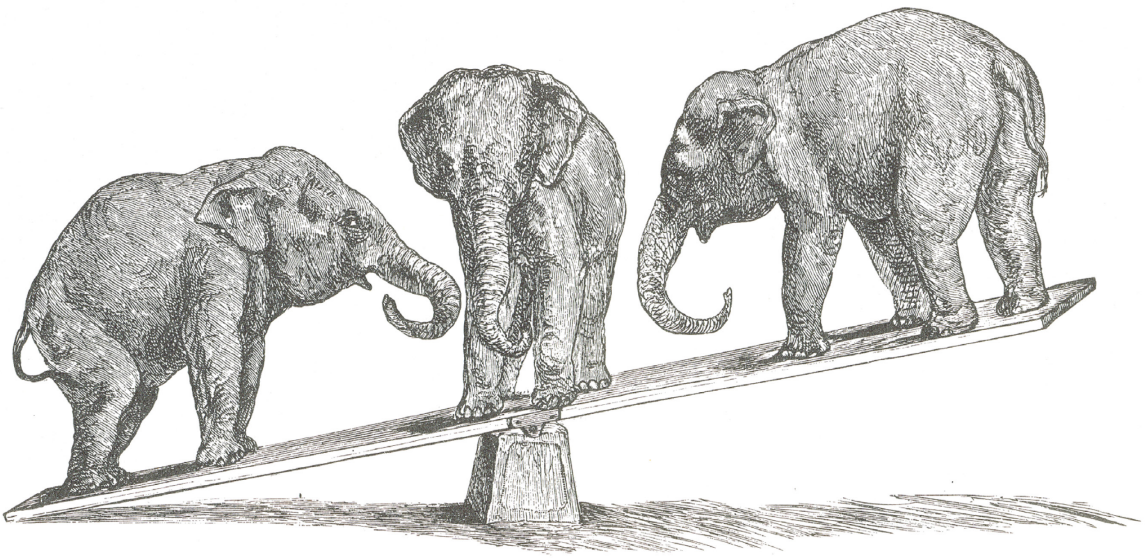
Then I realized a goopy mixture of mucous, saliva and tears was covering my face. I whimpered, started that way, and told myself that if that stupid bully said another word to me, I'd insult him and get him to chase me around until the farmer saw us and fired him. I didn't care what happened to me.

The old man from the truck grabbed my arm. "You ain't got no sense, have you? Come on and rinse off."

He pumped the metal handle until a clear, thick stream spilled out. I shoved my cupped hands into the flow and brought them to my face. Coldness from under the earth washed away the grime and the shame, even my anger. I rinsed again and felt cleansed, the way I felt after confessing to a priest.

"Stand still now." The old man brushed off my back and sides with his open hands. "There you go. The dirt's all gone. You okay?"

I nodded. "Thanks. You know I don't even have a girlfriend." Was it the principle of the thing? Or .... I didn't know what made me fight like that.





La Danza

Rosemary Ybarra-Garcia

El baile comenzó
en el Hidalgo Hall.
Salvador, dressed in
a zoot suit salsa,
dashed across the wooden floor,
jitterbugging the Boogie-Woogie,
bugle-boy danza.
Damas
lined the wall
in high-heeled, hair rolls.
They hummed tunes
and smiled giggles,
as if they didn't feel
the stares that came their way.
"Swing a little closer
mi muchachita in blue.
Come a little closerrrr…"

Las Black Widows made
their grand entrance at the hall.
Estas damas were from LAAAAAA.
Machas, full of power,
cuchillo breasts,
long-legged black hose.
Their straight-edge dares
froze the swollen
dance floor
and parted the sea
to where their men stood,
menacing leopaaarrrds.

Salvador danced with María
who was not yet fifteen, but full
of wanting to be…
Her mother watched.
The molote on Doña Juana's head
was a beacon that didn't work so well.
"María, swing a little closer,
mi corazón,
niña preciosa.
I want you, my beauty.
Be mine…"
Manuel tap, tapped Salvador's shoulder
for a dance with María.
Salvador refused.
La plaita ensued.

No more Boogie-Woogie,
only fists
that slammed Salvador
under a painted bench.
María was grabbed by her mother.
Salvador spent the night in jail.
No more danza, no more Boogie-Woogie, bugle boy.

Two weeks later…
the dish ran away with the spoon.

I Just Want to be Kind.

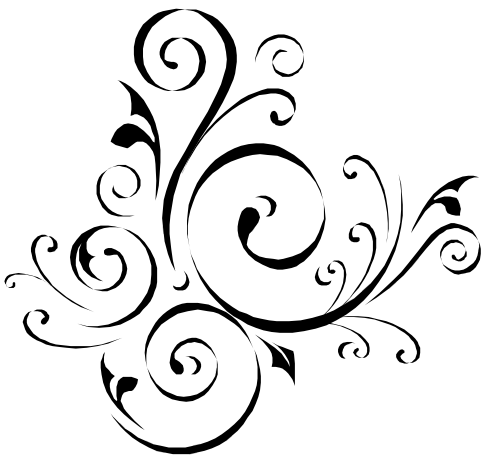
Emily Berthold

Not sexy or new.
After all, aren't we all a little acned and hackneyed?

And then, like a blink,
we're old:
scattered in wrinkles,
one for each mistake,
with the lamest strut you finally
recognize as all your own.
I definitely don't need to be a genius.
After all, aren't all geniuses a little bit alone?
Brains far too bright for anyone
to look at for too long.

And should I really want to be rich
when the rich become bored by their things?
Who needs that when I've got a few real friends?

No.
I just want to be kind.
after all,
what else is there to accompany me out of
the darkest winters of my mind,
than a smile from someone I loved
with the purest part of heart?



86ed ~~*Chris Gusek*

in my days of loathsome
women chasing
“you better be gone
before I get back” said she
and truthfully I was
gone a long time ago
but the time when I let
the rice stick to the bottom
of the pot
sealed the deal
stole the deal
and I got the heel
the ol’ 86



Timid

Cara-Aimee Long

Peter did not think it was a good idea to jump in the car and drive three hours in order to pop in on his sister unannounced, but his parents were urging him to do so.

"Your father's back is acting up," his mother said, "or else we would go."

"Mom," Peter began in protest, but she cut him off.

"What if something has happened, Peter?" His mother had now closed the book. He would go, as uncomfortable as it made him. His sister was tougher than he – she never asked for anything and so Peter never had to give anything, which worked for him. He was not uncharitable, just timid.

His sister, Veronica, was two years younger than him, but he always thought of her as older. That's because she was usually the first to do things: buy her own car, move away, get married, etc…Peter thought of himself as a late bloomer, or at least, a later bloomer because he had done all the same things as his sister, just not before she did.

His wife set his coffee down on the table. "Do you want me to go with you?" she asked, blowing into her cup.

"Thank you," he said, reaching for his coffee, "but I don't even know what's going on. For all they know Veronica could just have a cold or not feel like talking." But he knew that wasn't true. He knew as he said it that something was wrong in Veronica's life and he was scared to imagine what it was.

"Still," his wife said, "maybe I should follow you out there."

He looked over at her. She was smart and careful and thoughtful and that was why he loved her.

"Okay," he said, "let's do that then."

They finished their coffee in silence. Caroline rinsed the cups and put them in the dishwasher.

"Alright," Peter said to her, signaling that he was ready to leave. They each grabbed their keys and put on their respective jackets. Caroline kissed him lightly on the mouth before they got into their cars. He waited for her to back out then followed behind her. Caroline could navigate like a bird. Peter trusted her to get them places whenever they traveled together. He imagined her brain was shaded and lined like a map. For a while when they were first married he called her Atlas, but she didn't like it so he'd had to stop. About two hours into the trip, Caroline texted and asked him if he had let his sister know that he was coming. He had not. He then asked Caroline if she thought that he should. 'I honestly don't know' was her reply. He decided not to.

When they made it to the town where Veronica lived, Caroline pulled over.

"Right," she said as he pulled alongside her. "I will grab lunch in that café while you go to Veronica's. Let me know when you get there."

He nodded and got back onto the road. Normally, Caroline would come with him to his sister's – she and Veronica got along very well and considered each other sister's – but this was…what was this? Peter felt scared. Did he think Veronica was dead? No, he didn't. Had there been an accident? He didn't know, but he hated this feeling, this dread. Once, when he was six, his father had gone to the store during a blizzard because he needed medication for Peter's ear (Peter was one of those children who had had near constant ear infections as a child) and he was gone for almost two hours. He remembered his mother staring out the window, waiting. Peter and Veronica watched their mother wait. And Peter remembered the sense of fear he had experienced knowing that someone you loved could walk out the front door and never come back. When his father did walk in the door, knocking snow off his hat and boots, the family nearly erupted in cheers. Peter remembered his father hugging his wife and kissing her forehead, a gesture which instantly made him feel secure again. The pharmacist, Peter's father explained, had gotten to the store very late due to the weather and that's why it took him so long to get home. Then, from his coat pocket, his father produced candy bars for both Peter and Veronica, and their parents let them eat them on the spot, something which never happened. Peter smiled faintly at the memory.

He turned his car onto the street where his sister lived with her husband. He could see her car parked in the driveway. Peter took a deep breath and pulled up along the curb. He got out of his car and walked up to the front door. He had his own key, but he rang the bell anyway. He stood and waited. He counted to twenty and rang the bell again. He heard his sister shout, "Just use your key." So Peter let himself in.

"Veronica," he called. She strolled out in her bathrobe with a towel wrapped around her head. "You know I'm here," she said. She looked at him. "Did mom send you?" she asked.

"Mom and dad," he said.

"Jeez," she said, and began walking toward the kitchen. "Where's Caroline?"

"At the café," Peter replied.

Veronica filled a kettle with water and put it on the stove. "Why?" she smirked, "did you guys think I was dead or something?"

Veronica's smirk annoyed Peter.

"We were concerned," he said.

"Yeah," Veronica said, softening. "I know."

"So?" Peter said.

Veronica poured water for tea once the kettle whistled and gave him a mug. They sat down at her kitchen table. "Rick and I are splitting up," she said. She was matter of fact about it, not sad. Peter said nothing. He liked Rick well enough, but he wouldn't feel like he was losing a brother or anything.

"I had an affair," Veronica said. Peter looked up at her. "I know, I know," she said, blowing on her tea. "It was stupid. It was a way for me to get out."

Peter felt bewildered. "Why not just leave," he asked.

"Marriage isn't like that and you know it," Veronica said sternly.

He shook his head. "I have to call Caroline," he said.

"Tell her to come," Veronica said. "I mean, why wouldn't she?"

Peter called Caroline from Veronica's bathroom. He wanted privacy from his sister.

"Everything is alright," he told his wife. "She and Rick have split up. She had an affair or something."

"Oh," Caroline said.

About fifteen minutes later she pulled into Veronica's driveway. Peter let her into the house and kissed her. She squeezed his hand.

"Where's Rick then?" she asked Veronica, after they had made their way into the kitchen.

"He's at a friend's," Veronica said. "He wanted to try and work things out, but…" She trailed off.

"You don't want to?" Caroline asked. Peter suddenly didn't know what to do with himself, but Caroline still had his hand.

"No, Veronica said firmly. She stood up and leaned against the counter by her sink. "Maybe I will regret it, but I just don't want to be married anymore."

"You should call mom and dad," Peter said.

Veronica groaned.

"Better to get it over with," Caroline said.

Peter handed his sister his phone. He and Caroline went into the living room and turned on the TV. Caroline sat next to him and put her head on his shoulder. He kissed her hair. They heard Veronica mumbling in the kitchen. Peter looked at his wife.

"Do you ever not want to be married anymore?" he asked her.

"Never," she said, and turned the TV up in order to drown out the sound of Veronica's voice.

COLLATERAL LESSONS

Dixon Hearne

The boy who picks a festered splotch
That hides his soul, veils his life,
The hefty girl overflowing a desk,
Whose foot will never fit a glass slipper,
The trembling voice of a reluctant reader,
Patched pockets and knees
Inviting insult, teasing, hurt,
Brown and crooked teeth
Made worse by smiling,
The empty seat of a girl
With knitted hair and
Tell-tale stains of an accident,
The four-eyed child in the front row,
The unkempt boy in dirt-brown shirt,
Sack-plain faces that blemish the room—
Weeds among rare flowers,
Nameless, blameless,
All the same—

All the pain.

Learning Curve

Cindy Rinne

Out-
siders invade your
land. Tell you,
Hate your

neighbors.
Your family awakens
to explosions. Bleat-
ing sheep.

Lebanese
Civil War destroys your seaside city of man-
y faiths. A rosebush grows in
a pool of Adonis's

blood. You throw
roses in the aqueduct in shooting rains, now Cali-
fornia suns. Avoid thorns of seven
petals, symbolizes inclusion. Your

son
learns all day. Forgets
in night dreams
where a

Marid
steals rare blooms. Starts over. Leaves
settle thick in the
gurgling spring.

A young prince
climbs down the well to find a princess sitting
on a stone chair. The Marid
snoring with his

enormous head in
the princess's lap. She wears a necklace of moonlit flowers.
I ask my friend, Do you remember how we
met? Does your prophet believe

in
suicide bombings?
The rebels
kidnap
a teach-
er from the American
University
in Beirut.

I only
know what I read in the newspaper. I de-
light in your gift of homemade
lafa bread and falafels.

More parsley in mine,
you say. At home I crush it like a pancake split
open. Crunchy in flat bread made by your
mother and your daughter sit-
ing

on
the floor for hours. My
daughter photo-
graphed the

process
for a report in High School.
Your mother asks your
daughter, Aren't

you glad you
found such a bright young man in your arranged
marriage? I can choose in
America, she

whispers. She weds him
and they move to San Diego. The prince beheads the monster and marries the princess. They become guardians of scarce flowers.
You

fast
until sunset. Your
son eats
In-N-Out,

smokes weed
in forbidden daylight hours.
You carry the se-
cret in fossil roses.

The Fog that Blankets Oakland Cemetery

Christine Thompson

reveals an opaque existence among
the silent markers with names
of lifeless bodies buried
below ground in boxes
embellished with gold
handles.

Inside the boxes life breaks down

much like the fog that slowly dissipates into
the ground where worms
and grubs feed off
blackened fingers that
bare jeweled
rings.

I try not to walk on the concaved dirt-mounds

believing those below will
scream obscenities or
worse – I will succumb
to the fog's misty
clarity of
life.

But I know that I will soon step upon

the lilies, peonies, carnations
that rest on the freshly dug
dirt with a silent marker
that speaks my name
birthdate and
dash.

Will the surrounding stony-kinfolk bare witness

and gossip of my good deeds
bad deeds, no deeds, or will
they remain stone-faced
with silent tongues
towards Heaven's
Hell?

The fog's tendrils seize my vile soul as I walk on

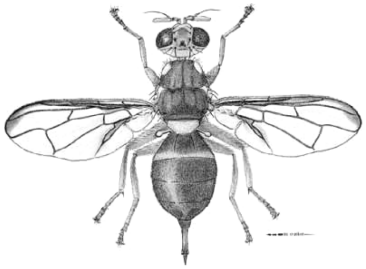
where thoughts of dense dreams
haunt my silken-linings
full of swollen joints
that creak each day
the sun shines
Dull.

I think, one day they will sing Amazing Grace

but not until the trumpet sounds
when flames of bright chariot-
fire burn my eyes and
cauterize the festering
stench of human
existence.

Magnetism --Claire T. Feild

Having a fascination for clothes,
she wears designer dresses.
She embraces the realm of the
probable,
throwing fall leaves high up
into the atmosphere
so that when they glide
downward
she will have a colorful
dress to wear
and something not on her
agenda:
rainbow extensions for a
face moving dark
and fast as
crumbling
burnt toast.



Devout -- Claire T. Feild

Tallying fervent spirits he
cannot swing,
For in his childhood he
burned the face
of his twin in faith,
the smell of matches
still crawling through
his epidermis.
Forgiveness yanks and then
sweeps his soul's
scars into a cavern,
His soul, bathed white as
clam chowder,
His soul, freed from the
soup's lumps,
the bathetic in life
strewn away from
his soul now intent
on serving the poor.

Haughty --Claire T. Feild

proud she stands,
the musicality within,
for no one sits on
haunches to feel
the aloof wind she
sends our way, the
wind's decadent
force causing us
to laugh.

Kangaroo --Claire T. Feild

Our animalistic eyes padlock, meteoric, as the car makes a straight shot down the dusty road from the farm's naughty realm: the kitchen table the place where flies entertain the smallest human specimens as well as the largest mortal organisms, one man living in glee as he kills flies on the veranda table.

Laborer --Claire T. Feild

He handles dirt as if it were a god, tilling it daily for his native plants. At dusk, he can be seen bending over to put the last touches on his canvas, his desire to rest imminent.

Caninomy

Lynn F Hoffman

(caninomy, kay-nine-oh-mee n. the custom of naming a person after their dog)

Ranger's dad meets Rusty's mom on the path in the park
where the beech tree flexes over the little iron bridge
it's sunny, summer, sweet-grass time
much like the day Rusty's mom's great grandfather
bought at auction one day a sturdy girl who
properly punished and penetrated gave forth
a boy who lived to see a hope alive a mother dead
and his own daughter leaving for the north for a mill
where, grinding fine she fed and fattened
the girl whose boy raised up Ranger's dad
and nobody with two feet on the path in the park
that day imagines who is born reborn
and playing out what's been paid out
when Rusty and Ranger sniff and growl
or who might be flapping, cawing in the tree
above them or buzzing 'round the trash
or crying in that brand-new stroller
and who might be brought this time
to heel, lie down and stay.

Eighth Avenue

Lynn F Hoffman

The shine on the fenders curves
like the shine on her boots as she
walks knee-forward on Eight Avenue sidewalk
toward the car door that's opened for her
as her beauty deserves, as her rarity demands.
She makes the last few steps over subway grate,
over heel-catching, elegance-ending iron traps
with just the smallest effort she curls a foot
and dips a hip to land on feet as if they had balls.
Three steps, four and she's in the car, door shut.
We were rooting for her, stirring our coffee in the cafe,
cheering the grace, wishing her a leg up as there, but barely there
she skipped on the check that stiletto heels
pay for their sheer impossibility. Brava!
Ah but you, and you my dear, how much lighter
you were as you as you walked away from him
and yours with your heels uncaught.
Not three steps, four, but more.
You sweetheart, you coulda made it
all the way to Broadway.

The Bullets Went thru Billy and They Broke the Bartender's Glass

Lynn F Hoffman



The singer doesn't tell us if the bartender
was drinking from a tall crystal flute
which was vaporized shedding shards
with Chardonnay every way or
if the glass in question was the mirror
which bars install, allowing
customers to fix their eyes on their eyes.
But bars being what bars be,
I'm betting that the shatter was on the latter and
that the next day when Billy's sickly wife saw herself
in that mirror with the requisite requiem drink in hand,
saw herself Mosaically, thru the cracks by Stagger Lee
with bits of Billy embedded, lead-driven,
shining in the bloody, smoky light,
she saw herself shaking, making plans
to do her own damn gamblin' there.

Ice Cream

Lynn F Hoffman



I spent all my wealth
on an ice cream cone.
strawberry.
some of it I ate,
some of it I shared,
some of it melted
and dribbled on the ground
leaving stains-some pretty, some ugly
but all of them a cause of joy among
certain sweet cream-eating ants.
now the cream and cone are pretty much gone,
just this little tan spike remains.
I plan to enjoy every last
crunch and lick
every flavor, every cool aroma
every hot sugar aftertaste
every fruity reassurance
and if you'd like the smell and chill
and feel of the cold-cold
brain freeze that comes
from the licking of a well-tended
much-enjoyed cone,
if you would like some chilly pink
to run down your chin,
come closer and
we'll share
what's left.

Crazy Man

Lynn F Hoffman



crazy man's walking down walnut street
talking to himself, no, not just talking
pointing hands, cutting slices of invisible provolone,
pounding the top of an airy lectern,
slapping fist to chest and raising his chin to heaven offering up his
special understanding of the nature of things and urging heaven to agree
and give him oh give him lordy man, a sign, a nod
a yesyes even if only he can hear
the big uh-huh. then he will close the deal
with the great understanding and the cosmic heart and mind and wallet
will embrace him and by the time he reaches rittenhouse square he will be
affirmed by the firm, understood by those with standing, not withstanding
that no one but him heard a thing on walnut street that day.

and he could be shithouse-rat, rabid-bat, gnat-flicking, pinky-sticking suitcase nuts.
he could be living inside a bread bag where
there's nothing but him and six invisible pets
and chandeliers made out of fine-wrought wire-taut thought.
or
he could just be another guy with a phone
in his skull who's walking while he's talking to a woman
who won't quite do just yet just now just what
or
he could be a poet trying to get a ruling
that it's really all one big pretzel
no matter how you salt it
.
and ain't it a shame about the rest of us
walking the other way, looking at
the crazy man lover poet and not knowing
which one he is
or which one we'll be
when we poke our very own hands in the air
and drum our breasts
on the other, farther side of the square.

Blind George

Lynn F Hoffman

old george is blind and he walks north
on passyunk avenue not counting his steps,
just brailing the sidewalk with his feet.
he's got years in on this job, he hears his foottaps echo
off the glass of mr. martino's restaurant,
he feels the breezy emptiness
of the city parking lot, the tilt of its driveway.
george doesn't need your arm, your hand,
your eyes, your sense of being blessed,
but he takes them all anyway

lending you his senses, proferring
the feel of his dry warm hand
turning, flexing a nostril by gary's deli
purring 'good dog' at the sound of
a shaking tag. he has so much to show you,
and there are not so many blocks,
don't you see?

Hard Water

What is it that makes the memory of rainy days, hard or soft? It isn't just the volume of the water falling down or the driving wind or the lowering sky. It has to do with something else entirely. The soft rain is of a gentleness and kindness, or else of a sadness, and of a loss. It is reserved in my memories for those happy days of pleasures or for those days of partings and of sorrows, of good-byes. The hard rain is of a combativeness, of a tempestuousness, of a conflict. It is reserved in my memories for those days of necessary journeys or of sharing revelations with something beyond the limits of my understanding. All this musing has brought me back to thoughts of another rainy day, a day in Gilroy when I was probably fifteen or so.

It had been raining steadily for several days and the ground in the Santa Clara Valley was soaked and full and could not hold anymore. The slough behind our house, which ran through the open fields and by the unpainted shacks of the migrant workers, was swollen with the refused water of the sodden fields. The small children of the migrant camps would often play in the open slough when it held only the run-off of the constant springs from off the hills. They would launch small pleasure boats down the trickle of their dreams, chasing them for a while, and then watch them gather distance as the boats navigated into town and entered storm drains and culverts.

But this day, the day I have in memory, the women and children of the camps stood in the doorways looking out through the curtain of water. There was a mixture of men wading arm-in-arm down the slough. Along the sides some were knee-deep, while in the center others were up to their waists in the murky water. They were Mexican and Italian and Portuguese and Anglo and they were uniformly wet and drenched. Their stern looks and curt conversations indicated seriousness to their labor that had brought them together. One of the children was missing. Whose and how and why were unimportant any longer; an alarm had been raised by a distraught mother. Family and friends and neighbors and bosses and others had been gathered to walk the slough; to drag the ditch in search of the child.

I joined them in a second tier of waders. We were spaced out several hundred feet behind the first wave, in the event they had overlooked or overstepped something. I stumble over describing my ambivalent feelings as a young teenager. There was, of course, the element of wanting to be a hero, of wanting to find the child. But under the circumstances, finding the child was not really what any of us wanted to do. With each step I encountered something unseen and unknown underfoot. And with each step my heart would palpitate momentarily faster until I, was assured that the obstacle was too hard or too small to be a child. I did not really want to succeed in my search.

As it was, someone in the front vanguard did find the little boy. He was dead of course, drowned, and his body had washed down the slough and was pinned across the grating guarding that culvert that ran under the road leading into town. The crush of the water and the branches and leaves and broken boards and trash had been heaped against his body, hiding him from the view of anyone looking down as they drove over the bridge and into town.

Once the cry was taken up that the body had been found, people began to drift away. Only a very few advanced further to see the body, to participate as spectators at a preliminary viewing. Unlike many other tragedies, most of the people, the ones who had helped walked the slough, left and slowly trudged home along the banks, sucking the mud as they pulled their shoes and boots up at each step. There was no further talk; we were all captivated by the hard rain. I wondered how many times he might have sent his small boats down the slough towards this culvert. I wondered how many dreams he had launched while watching his small craft float away from him.

-- Richard Hartwell



~Reservoir~

Leila A. Fortier

~
There
Is no such thing as
Indifference~ In any given
Moment we are everywhere and
Nowhere~ The pinnacle of flux in
Bottomless intervals~ This thirst
For something greater than
Water or wine~ Salivating for that untapped reservoir~ We are the ever
Evolving shortcoming~ The break from meditation pleading for
Its own peace of mind~ That inconsolable itch of
Inspiration~ Chasing words unto blank
Pages~ Daring to invoke the
Unanswerable where
Only the question
Remains~ The
Night will
Always
Own
Us
~

Submerged in a sea of watered song
Translating tongues into infinite
Silence where language
Is once again
Reborn
~

~Soft Anonymity~

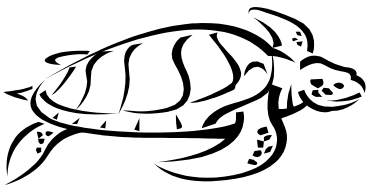
Leila A. Fortier

I
Am dissolving
Into the subliminal interior~
A floating caress perpetually undressing~
Gesticulating wordless and deliriously tongue-tied
I ask you obscure and unanswerable things~ You snatch
Away all my questions~ Leaving the words to swim within
My eyes~ Silence is pollinating deep inside my ear~ I am
Adrift within the honey of speechlessness~ Leaving
My anima wrapped in soft anonymity~ Only
To merge into shapelessness

~Caverns of Sand~

Leila A. Fortier

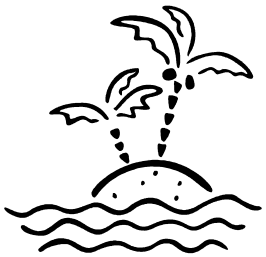
There are caverns of sand that we have yet
To lay our bodies~ Parallel with the island
Humidity~ Where saturated skies descend
To powdered dusk~ Against the silhouette
Of palms~ Amidst the symphony of
Cicadas~ Where dragonflies
Flirt with the
Upturned
Slice
Of
The
Moon
Let us not forget
What we will leave behind
When our time is done here~ Let us
Not forget to leave our imprints in the
Barren caverns of sand~ Let us always
Remember that our life together began
Here…on the smallness of this island



~Anomaly~

Leila A. Fortier

I
Was trying
To remember my
Home and my country
But I vanished for a reason
I must have wanted to forget~
Now is my reincarnation~ How
Many, you ask? I have not been
Clever with numbers in any
Of my lives, apparently.
Everything in nature paints~ Why do we try to
Imitate it? Be an anomaly~ Forget the
Known~ Expectancy disappoints
Come to art with your
Desperation



~Blissful Isolation~

Leila A. Fortier

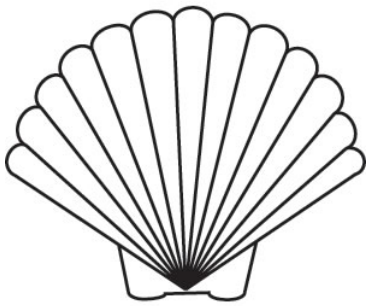
~Fireflies~
Flicker a promissory
Note as a symphony of cicadas
Emerge from hibernation~ I listen intently
To its sounds of unshaped words: its xylophone
Chakra vibrations~ I confide in the gecko glued
To the door~ A glass canvas of snail trails and
Precipitation~ You have been talking about
Leaving since we arrived~ But
Sometimes, 11,000
Miles away
~Is not~
Enough for
Me~ I have no desire
To bridge that distance or look
Behind~ Perhaps people, like countries,
Were meant to be separated by water~ There
Will come a day that you will miss this humidity
You will dream of these subtropical greens…the
Viscous sweat of our memories~ The white-
Shouldered waves of silence that
Erased our previous
~Histories~

(Gathering us)

In its glistening nets of blissful

(Isolation)

Baked Scallops



4 tbsps. butter, melted
1 ½ lbs. scallops, rinsed and patted dry
½ cup seasoned bread crumbs
1 tsp. garlic powder
½ tsp. onion powder
½ tsp. paprika
½ tsp. dried parsley
¼ cup grated parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 400°F
Combine the bread crumbs, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, and parmesan cheese in a small dish. Dip scallops in melted butter and roll into bread crumb mixture to evenly coat. Place scallops in a 2 quart casserole dish without touching the sides. Pour remaining melted butter carefully into dish and bake until scallops are firm, about 20 minutes.
Serve over rice or linguini. --*Staff*

><> <>< ><> <>< ><> <>< ><> <>< ><> <>< ><>

SATURDAYS IN KANSAS

Bruce Deitrick Price

Four girls. We knew they'd grow
up and leave home. But New York,
all of them! Please, God,
tell me why.

I think Father had his doubts about
four daughters; man wants a son somewhere,
But now they're far off, he takes it
harder than I do; writes more
letters; worries more.

Saturday nights, we play cards,
watch TV, in bed by eleven. I know
what Father's thinking
as he slips off to sleep:
what are they doing now...
dancing and drinking...
wrong kind of men...
crazy city life...

SEX

Bruce Deitrick Price

It was never something apart,
something I could talk about,
say. Oh, I like that. I didn't
even know what it was
until I met him. I was
more than innocent, I was
dumb.

For me it was something we did
together, like movies and bowling
and shopping and taking little trips,
I loved it because I loved him.

He always said he wanted to make
me happy, and I wanted him to be
happy, and that was far as I
could talk about it.

Well, whatever we were doing
went on six years until one day
he says he wants a divorce,
tells the judge I'm sex-crazy,
I'm like a whore, he says,
says I could write a book
about sex. Hah!

Everything I know about sex
you could write on a matchbook.
Same goes for what
I know about men.

DWI

Bruce Deitrick Price

Every year we have a cake
with another candle on it
as though he had climbed
out of the wreck alive and
sat at the table with us now,
laughing and telling his jokes.

Every year we celebrate his
birthday as though he'd never
slid a hundred yards down
Foster Street, rolled over ten
times, knocked down a lot of signs
and killed the little girl.

Every year we pretend
that another year has passed
with only the usual troubles.
We say toasts, but they are really
prayers, for the living and the
dead. Every year we try to forget
what our son took and what
he left behind.

SETTER

Bruce Deitrick Price

Late afternoon, on the edge of
an interstate, where it cut through
a neighborhood, this red setter
stretched out by the white line
looking as if he's asleep. No
blood, not a mark on him, just
this beautiful dog lying in
strong slanting light, cars
passing a few feet away.

I want to stop and drag
him from the road but
I'm going sixty-five so
I drive on, thinking of
the family, especially the
children, waiting for that dog
to come home.

What You Grow

It wasn't enough that he was self-centered and selfish, sometimes Barry Cranston acted downright arrogant. Certainly his younger girlfriend Cherie knew this. They had an off and on relationship, which at the moment was off. Barry had passed the fourth decade with not much to show for it other than his skill as an electrician. He liked soccer and was a fairly good cook; in fact, that was what intrigued Cherie in the beginning, that and Barry's outdoorsy, thick hair good looks.

Often Barry would shop in the local organic grocery store to further his cooking endeavors. He frequently wandered the fresh produce section looking for inspiration, buying squash and fruit or fresh basil for his favorite bruschetta. That was where he came across an older arthritic woman, rather hunched over, rummaging through the Fuji apple section.

"These are good eating," she ventured to anyone nearby enough to hear. Barry glanced around for a friend, and seeing no one, he answered her.

"Yeah they are, and they're consistently that way. Sometimes the red ones, you can't rely on them."

"That's right mister!" the woman confirmed.

Eight days later, Barry ran into the same elderly woman again close to the red onions. He actually brightened a bit seeing her, surprising himself. This time, he said the first words, "When I cook, I like to use the sweeter red onions."

"Me too, although I don't cook much anymore. Still, just mushrooms and onions sauteed, suits me fine."

"You must live nearby, I saw you here last week right?"

"That's true. You're not gonna come rob me are you?"

Barry didn't know whether she was joking or not, and he felt tinged with what could only be called dismay. Barry offered, "No no, I live just around the corner from here; not good doing that sort of thing."

"You never know. I don't trust strangers."

They jousted like this for a few minutes, and Barry somehow felt he was defending his integrity, which he was. He thought of Cherie saying, "Sometimes you come across as a suspicious type."

He didn't want to come across that way with the old woman for some reason, to this charming lady with the intense orange flecked brown eyes. Something compelled him to be understanding and gentle with this woman.

"I'm Barry, and you must be? He had framed it wrong.

Not missing a beat she answered, "We'll I must be June!"

They chatted more and suddenly Barry said he'd be back on Saturday morning to buy ingredients in order to cook a special dinner for his girlfriend; for which he hadn't yet called regarding this, nor had he any idea if she'd be willing to anyhow. For an instant he felt a wash of guilt that he had deceived his new acquaintance. But he did want to see the ol' gal again. That's why he awkwardly spurted the fib. Of course why would June return so soon just because he was planning to.

"Maybe I'll see you then, on Saturday, " June pronounced.

On Saturday that's just where June pushed her walker, the produce area of the Natural Foods Emporium. Barry spotted her reaching in the organic carrots, and after greeting her, she soon asked about his girlfriend; whether she had a job, a family, how long he knew her and more.That someone was so interested in his doings warmed him, so much so that he found himself offering to give June a lift home.

"Well, I won't get in any car with a stranger, quasi or not, but if you'll take my groceries, the juice is heavy... I suppose I can give you my address because I really don't have much, you know, by way of belongings, so..."

Barry followed her as she inched along the pavement pushing her walker, suddenly realizing the effort June had expended by just showing up at the grocery store. He was touched by this, and that guilt returned because of his earlier deception about his girlfriend and dinner. Maybe he was self-centered.

When they arrived at the small cottage he immediately saw it needed painting. But what he didn't see right away was behind the house. She said folding the recycled bags, "Here, let me show you something." She led him to the back door and opened it. Stretching out before them was nearly half an acre of land, only part of which was planted. A tiny vegetable garden of three tomato and three or four eggplants, a patch of flowers, mostly marigolds and roses, and some fruit trees dotted around.

"Zow," exhaled Barry, "That's a lot of land to use. Are those plumb trees?"

"Yes and yes those are. Been thinking about this since the second time we met. You can see it's much more turf than I can handle, so, I was wondering if you want to plant some tomatoes, maybe some squash or melons. It's still early enough to plant."

"I could use some seedling starts," Barry agreed without realizing he was, "And come after work to water."

"The only thing I want for using my garden, is to come out here and pick some of your results," she winked.

~~OO~~

Barry came over every day for the next month, planting, watering, tending. He relaxed and enjoyed himself chatting with June about nearly everything. He confessed about his not really having a date with Cherie, but June didn't mind; instead she encouraged him to call her and tell her about the big garden. So he did call her, and right away she said how he wasn't sounding so tense anymore and he told Cherie about how he met June and the big garden. Cherie exclaimed impatiently, "She's a good influence, I don't care where you met her!"

As Barry's tomatoes and yellow neck squash grew and ripened, so too did Barry's awareness of how other people felt, and his empathy blossomed like June's fruit trees in spring. But by late September, June had developed a bronchitis, coughing endlessly, so it wore her out. It quickly turned to pneumonia.

Barry brought by extra blankets, and while he was there he made her hot tea; he felt her fore head and knew she had fever. It rained and thundered coming down in sheets. June looked pale and gaunt. "I think you need a doctor. Let me take you, there's a clinic on Spool street not seven minutes from here. " June grimaced and shook her head, coughing and gasping as she pull the blankets higher.

"June listen, I've used it myself." He didn't tell her it was for a migraine headache. But it did change her mind. Eventually June got better from the medication, but was never again as strong as she was before. Somehow Barry sensed this, causing his more regular visits.

He began to call her every morning, just a quick exchange to hear June's voice answer. " Hello Barry, I'm a-okay." or "Hello Barry, gonna rain today, torrents they say."

One morning in late February with heavy frost, she answered brightly, "I had a great night's sleep. Feel good for a change. Don't bother visiting today, don't need a thing."

"Good to hear, but I visit on Wednesdays."

"No need dear."

But, Barry saw through this. He quit work early, eager to confirm his suspicions about June's cheeriness. He arrived at her house and she wasn't breathing. He called 911, and pumped her chest, blew in her mouth. But she was gone. After the EMT's took her body away, Barry drifted out and sat in big garden.

He had made a simple bench for June last summer, for her to gaze out on the vegetable plants, trees and flowering bushes while he pulled weeds or watered. But he hung his head now, hands to face and wept.

--Heidi B. Morrell

Spine of Continents

Heidi B. Morrell

Pushed up from the crust's movements,
or spewed from the hot belly of the earth's core,
mountain ranges form a spine,
the bones of continents.
Cloaked in tree and bush
except on the highest peaks,
when one travels there
elevation yields a holy revelation.

They house a wonderland of life,
woven into a fortuitous web of drama
and interdependence,
predator and prey,
wolf and deer, bear and fish,
hawk and rabbit, cougar and goat.

Sapphire sky arcs over new snow melt
pounding down gorges, over precipices,
down hillsides into rock-strewn ravines,
finally easing into rivers in the flatlands.

Tension and serenity to be had here,
spirits in the trees,
gathered in nature's symphony,
the music of God.

Missed Connection

I was the fat guy at the Wal-Mart
last Saturday at 2PM. I wore
the Notre Dame football jersey,
so just maybe you did not think
I was fat—maybe you thought
I was buff, and if you thought
the latter then I was only joking
about the former. I had
a runny nose. It was just a plain
old runny nose. That horrible sniffing
was not because of a drug habit,
it was just runny—very runny,
so don't be turned off
by my perfectly normal runny
nose. I also want you
to know, I was not buying condoms.
I know I was standing there by
the condoms when I saw you,
but that was purely coincidental.
I don't even know what condoms are
For. Looking hopefully
into your eyes while standing
next to the rack of rubbers—
not my style, unless you like that.
You don't know me
so don't judge me Miss
"wears a name tag."
I was just standing there, sucking
in my buffness and sniffing
a normal kind of sniff, hardly
aware of where I was standing.
And while we're on the subject,
looking into the carts of others
is a violation of sorts, though
I understand perfectly that
you wanted to get to know me better.
I don't blame you—mother
told me I was handsome.
And yes, I saw you looking.
I could tell instantly that you were
attracted to me. It was in the way
you asked me if you could
"help me find anything."

--Staff

Letter to Ruth

Milt Montague

Dearest Sister,
It is nine years since
Your voice was stilled
You left us all to soon

You cannot hear my plaint
Yet, I must bare my heart
Shout into the uncaring wind
I miss you so much

I think of you
My eyes water
Still a tear, dear Ruth
After nine long years

When mother was busy
In the store
You
Were there for me
My biggest sister

When preteen curiosity
Led me towards philately
You
Bought my first stamps
“To give you a start”

Mid teen years steered me
To smoking cigarettes
You
Bought me a pipe
"Much more masculine"

Interest in clothes was next
And of course, girls
You
Bought my first sharp tie
"A great ice-breaker with girls"

You were always there for me
A gentle loving presence
Nonjudgmental and
Ever encouraging

A child of the
Great Depression
Your life was hard
Until you found George

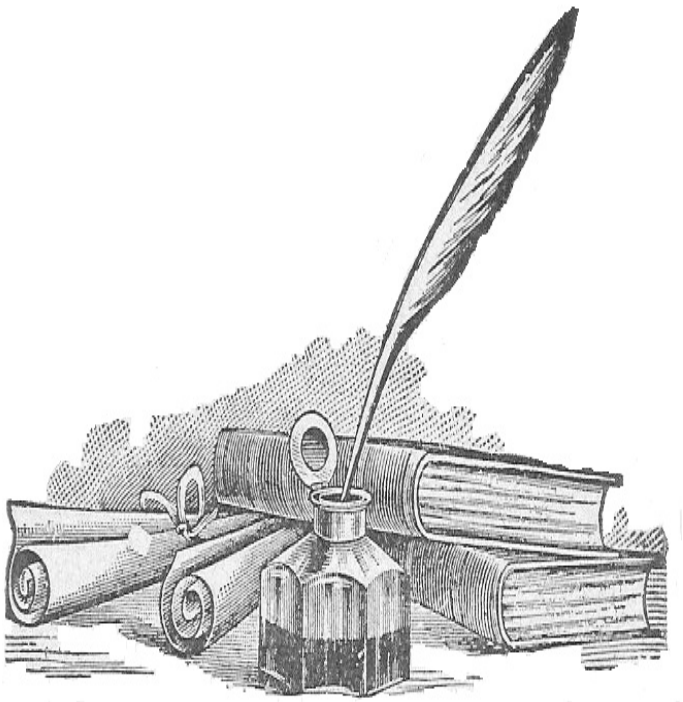
You both wore unhappy pasts
Yet were so happy together
And I loved him for that
Especially after David was born

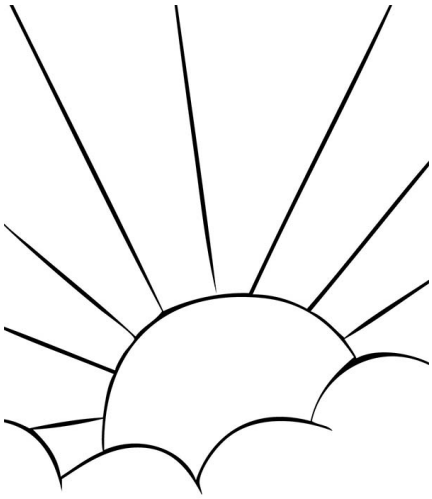
George has since gone
To that same place of no return
If I could believe that you two
Were together in some spiritual.....
I know that we all must go
To be swallowed up forever
Never to be seen or heard from
E-v-e-r-m-o-r-e

I wish....
I do so wish....
If someday we could all....
Mom, Pop, Gert, You.....

Your loving kid brother,

Milty





Memories

Milt Montague

suddenly awake
sleep gone
sky grey
day just begun

focus my thoughts
pictures rise from
long, long ago.....
from the battlefield.....
world war 2.....
the Black Forest.....
Aachen in 1944.....

it is first light
I stand above
my fallen enemy
holding a snapshot
from his jacket pocket
a smiling blonde young man
a smiling blonde young woman
in her arms an infant
iconic young family

the father dead at my feet
he is my age

I feel only a
moment of remorse
it was he or me
today I won

My Masterpiece

Milt Montague

my best work is at first light
faint rays of day
below the horizon
palliate the black night
a glimmer in the mother lode

chip away corners to reveal
the idea imprisoned within
chop and carve as my opus evolves
from an amorphous glob
unsure of its final form

instinct guides my cursor forward
then my half-baked creation
lies fallow for a day
regenerating till morning

revisit the unborn embryo
separation has allowed my mind
to more accurately shape the result

resume the molding
to the picture in my head
my magnum opus is taking form
albeit crudely so

the clouds have mostly gone
a glimpse of my tour de force
another 24 hour dormant spell
further fashioning
shaping my work of art

at last the final polishing
a word or two need refinement
an idea not quite clear is clarified
my creation emerges
my brainchild is complete

my masterpiece

I hope

Lest We Forget

Milt Montague

lest we forget those still alive
survivors of World War 2
heroes of that horrification
remnant of those who gave their youth
strength and souls to preserve
our way of life

my buddy Morry Kaplan
survived near fatal injuries
on the battlefield in 1944 Germany
while serving as a medic
in the United States Forces

after two years of intensive care
in assorted army hospitals
he was released
able to survive on his own
only with a certified medical aide

lift a glass to Morry and
all the others long since gone
[a small glass.... alcohol is a no no]
and to Chicago where he was birthed
and to our glorious country
as he nears his ninetieth year



Magnolias

Milt Montague

Magnolias are budding
Though frost is here

Spring's pledge is nigh
As December is due
Darkness is everywhere
Storms scourge our hides
Abrading our resolve
Testing our mettle

Magnolias are budding
Sunny skies shall prevail

Evil bestrides the world
Goya's Black Period,
Bosch's hellacious oils,
Governments slaughtering
Their own people
Greed is triumphant

Magnolias are budding
Job knew the answer

---

[u]

[u] was out of the question.

That much was obvious.

[u] was immature. It was juvenile. It was lazy and sloppy and thoughtless and in all honesty probably a little bit on the slow side, too, and that was not the kind of message that a guy like Steven could afford to send.

Not now, anyways. Not at this point.

No.

[u] wasn't even an option. It couldn't be.

Steven knew that much, at least.

After all, he wasn't that bad at this.

It's just that he wasn't all that good at it, either.
His problem wasn't a lack of words. On the contrary – there were too many of them. And they all had him surrounded. Words smothered Steven with their own special allures and subsequent pitfalls. Words seduced him. They teased him.

They tricked him

They led him on and on until he was completely enthralled and enamored and this close to finally making a decision when all of a sudden, just like that, like the snap of a finger, they would turn their respective backs on him and they would leave him, all alone.

Words left Steven abandoned and confused and betrayed.

[you] was one of the worst offenders.

[you] bothered Steven the most.

Because in a perfect world – or at the very least, in a perfectly grammatical world – *[you]* would be the correct choice. Because *[you]* made sense. *[you]* was proper. *[you]* was clean, *[you]* was polished. It was plain and it was simple and it worked.

[you] was right.

Yet the longer Steven stared at *[you]*, the more *[you]* began to change. Right before his eyes, the letters began to become rigid. They tensed and they tightened and soon they transformed *[you]* from something that was right into something that was just a little bit too right.

[you] became deliberate. It became standoffish. It became too much like an exchange between strangers.

[you] became cold.

[Hey. It was nice meeting you last night.]

Steven reread the words he had typed on his phone, his thumb hovering over the "Send" icon.

He shivered.

The prospect of *[ya]* did little to warm him up.

Sure, at first, *[ya]* had seemed like a safe middle ground to Steven. Not quite a *[you]* and not quite a *[u]*, *[ya]* was the sort of second person pronoun that was mature yet laidback. It was more playful than *[you]* and less capricious than *[u]*. It was proper and respectful and yet still with a drop of devilish intent interwoven within its lettering.

It even flowed nicely.

[Hey. It was nice meeting ya last night.]

But Steven couldn't use *[ya]*.

No. *[ya]* was a cop-out.

[ya] was a cop-out because there was no real practicality in *[ya]*. Because there was no point in it. Steven had thought it over thoroughly, he really had, about how *[ya]* had two letters and how [you] had three letters and how the elimination of one single solitary letter could possibly truly ever warrant *[ya]* to be a worthwhile, meaningful abbreviation.

No. Steven had thought it over and decided that it was clear. Too clear, in fact.

[ya] was trying too hard.

[ya] was trite.

And if there was one thing Steven did not want, it was for his pronoun selection to appear to be trite.

Steven sighed and rolled over in his bed, his limbs dragged along unwillingly. Everywhere he turned, he was met with false choices, with uncooperative destinies. They were just words, *[u]* and *[you]* and *[ya]*, yet they refused to communicate properly. They refused to play along. They squirmed about in his hand and wriggled away through his fingers. They writhed against acting as what they were, as what they should be. They should have been easy enough to grasp at this point in his life.

They were only second-person pronouns, after all.

They shouldn't be that complicated.

They weren't *her*.

Steven sat up. Maybe, he began to realize, maybe his problem wasn't some pronoun or an associated grammatical derivative. Maybe it was something deeper than that.

Maybe it was his whole message.

[Hey. It was nice meeting you last night.]

He dissected it, piece by piece.

[Hey.

it was

nice

meeting

you

last night.]

It was only eight words long and it was a train-wreck. A debacle. A tragedy in the making.

He didn't even know where to begin.

It was weak, for starters. It was vague. Boring. Safe. White bread. It was a text message that was somehow shy, one that was wary and nervous and riddled with crippling self-doubts and too afraid to take any sort of meaningful risks or chances or gambles with love and honestly, Steven thought, honestly, who would want to end up with somebody who's that much of an emotional coward, even via text message?

Even the word *[nice]* was wrong. *[nice]* was asexual. It was neutered. It practically suggested ambiguity in Steven's sexual orientation. *[nice]*? Honestly. *[nice]* was perfectly adequate to describe a night in with your grandmother, certainly, but it was hardly the romantic, passionate, heart wrenching sort of terminology that would grab at somebody's soul.

No. It was all wrong. Everything was wrong.

Steven deleted the message and decided to try again.

It was back to step one.

What was he that he wanted to say? He tried to remember. He tried to push past pronouns and adjectives, tried to ignore their shouting and demands and threats and to think about what it was he had wanted to say, to her and to himself and to anybody else that was willing to listen.

And so he typed.

[Hey, I think there's a chance that I may like you – or u or ya, whichever you prefer, really, I won't dwell on that any longer than need be, or more appropriately any longer than I already have.]

[Back to the point, though: there may be a chance that I may like you, although I don't know if that's because of your eyes (which are really nice), or how you looked at me (right at me) with them when you talked, or maybe because you laughed at my (intentionally, I swear) dumb jokes or (even better) how I laughed at your even (intentionally?) dumber jokes.

[Or maybe because it's because I'm desperate. Because people tell me I'm too picky and that I should stop that.]

[Either way, there's still a chance I may like you and that presents a very stressful position since I don't get many date opportunities and am constantly reminded of this fact by others – who happen to be the same others who also constantly remind me that if I continue on this life trajectory I may die alone, or at least more alone than what is considered to be normal and this, apparently, is a very bad thing.

So then. Drinks?]

Steven read back what he wrote. It was honest. It was truthful. It was the most honest and most truthful thing he had ever written in his life and it was exactly what he felt.

He panicked, and deleted it immediately.

[Hey. It was nice meeting you last night.] he typed.

He pressed "Send" and was washed away, caught helplessly by a current of indecision, of doubt and hope. He couldn't see where it was bringing him, the current, or where he was going. He didn't know what to do. Whether he should follow it, to trust it, to let it bring him to wherever it willed, whether it be safe harbor or out to sea or crashing against who knows what. Or if he should swim against it. To struggle to find something that would keep him afloat, something that would keep his head above the water.

He thought of what he should do, and all the while the current carried him.

And before he figured out what to do, his phone rang.

--David Novak

Lost Mementos

April Salzano

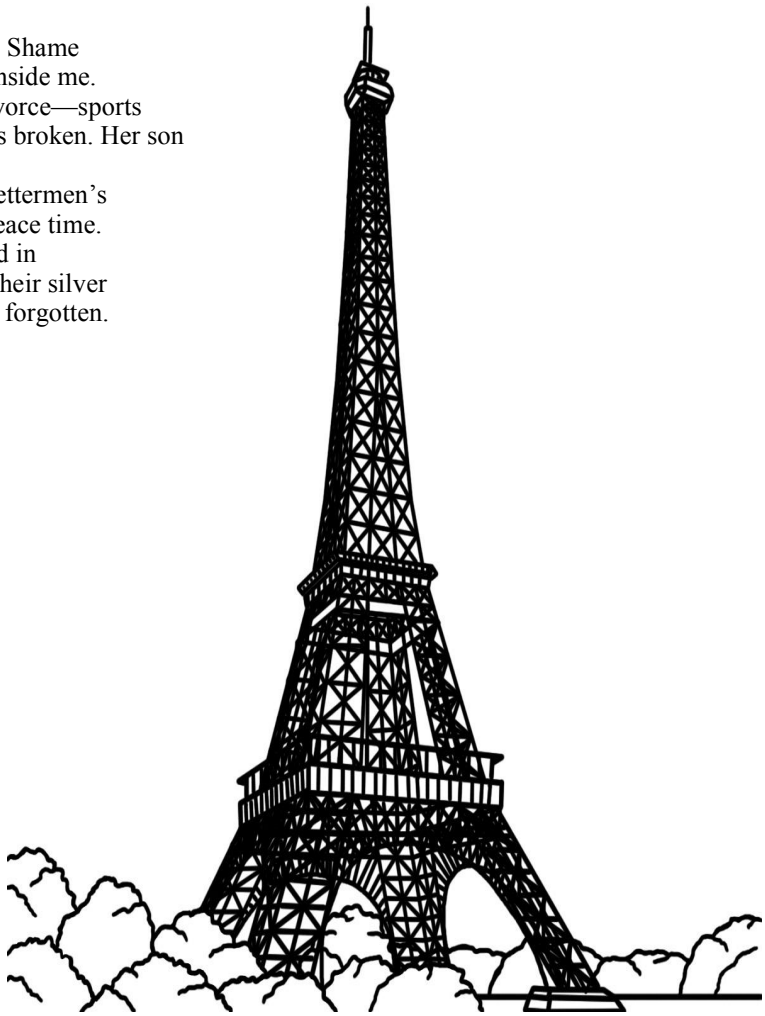
My ex-husband has the napkin with the ankh-shaped blood stain
from the tattoo on my back, pre-scab. It was the late 90's
when jeans still covered the place modern girls decorate with black
tribal marks and esoteric Asian phrases, poorly translated.
Now it is an old-school tramp stamp, marking the time
before I stopped believing in anything eternal.
The curved loop of the cross formed a target
for the anesthesiologist's infinite needle to pierce a portal
into my waiting spine so I would not feel my first son fly
down the water slide of the birth canal, enter the world
through a door that slammed shut behind him, stitched
closed for another four years. Industrial-thick maxi pads lined
mesh hospital panties to promote healing what should have been
a welcome wound. An ex-boyfriend
has the Band-Aid from birth's antithesis before I started
college and contraceptives. Just a dot of blood in the center
from an IV for local twilight that cost a hundred
dollars more than the cognizance that came anyway. Shame
did not pull out early before shooting its load deep inside me.
My mother-in-law took everything back after the divorce—sports
scrapbooks full of news clippings, records of records broken. Her son
always could run faster than anyone else.
She took football jerseys with retired numbers, the lettermen's
jacket. No one wanted the dog tags issued even in peace time.
They still dangle in my jewelry box, a name punched in
like Braille by the teeth of a typewriter. They blink their silver
subliminal message: nothing we can identify will be forgotten.

They Eat Horses, Don't They?

Gary Bloom

I've only known one French woman
this one in Minneapolis, married
to a French executive at a
horse packing plant. The French,
apparently, not only eat
snails, they also eat horse meat.

She had eyes filled with life's disappointments
though she was still young and pretty.
Her husband was aristocratic, old, and bald,
like a crumbling French chateau.
I didn't know what she was doing in Minneapolis
married to an old bald guy who worked
at place where they killed horses.
Back then, I didn't know enough to ask.



WHO DO THE VOODOO?

~~Deborah Guzzi

Elizabeth, Bet for short, got on the road early. She was tired by the time she pulled off the highway onto the back streets of Manchester. She thought to herself, New Hampshire wasn't supposed to look like this. This morning's drive was four hours; she'd never gone more than thirty minutes from home in a car by herself. Today's drive, past the old lifeless mills and across the debris-clogged river, made the hairs on the back of her arms raise up. She'd come looking for a teacher, a shaman, who was recommended by a number of friends. She came to learn and to grow.

The houses she was driving past were Victorians; many were derelict, marred with graffiti. She could imagine their glory days when small children ran from the grand porches. Ghosts, of Aunties in swings with beaus and mothers rocking babes in arms, linger in the shadows. The gray day made grayer by the shattered glass of broken streetlights. Finally, the house number she was looking for appeared. She sighed. The house was a sooty gray. Its shutters hung from rotten sashes. Grime covered the clapboards of the house like the skin of the unbathed homeless man on the sidewalk. She parked on the street making sure the contents of the car were covered and the doors locked, approaching on foot. Up broken steps she walked, all five foot four of her broomstick straight and vigilant, holding onto a two-by-four rail. Keys peeked out from the knuckles of her fisted right hand. For a Saturday morning in late November, it was eerily quiet. There was a strong cold breeze; it had apparently blown open the front door. She felt like Gretel, except the gingerbread house was not made of cookies, and she was expecting "the good witch."

Her light tread barely stirred the dust as she walking up the interior stairs grimacing past plastic Christmas wreathes and rubber linked foot mats. Bet reached the energy worker's door on the third floor: three the number of creation, the trinity of the soul. The energy of the building was stale and lifeless. Un-retrieved newspapers and mail lay on each landing. The lack of cooking odors added to the solitude of the place. Though she was here to study Reiki, she didn't understand how someone so skilled at working the body's energy could so totally ignore the buildings malaise. A green brass doorknocker in the shape of an elephants head with a red plastic heart dangling from its trunk hung from the teacher's door.

Bet "tap, tapped" the hollow heart on the hallowed door. She took the knocker, as a positive sign she was in the right place; Ganesha the Elephant God was one of her protectors. Bet's heart raced. The door sprung inward. Her teacher to be, Susan, welcomed her with a Buddha like smile and a tight hug. Susan was much taller than Bet, wiry from the ends of her salt and pepper hair to the bone thinness of her limbs. Bet entered warily

An east facing bay window backlit Susan in a rainbow aura. Bet could see three cluttered rooms. She stood in the barest, calmest room, the center room. There was a single, tattered, overstuffed, Queen Ann chair there holding court over a threadbare oriental rug of Prussian blue. Dust bunnies gathered in the room's corners and one or two rolled riotously across the floor following a stray breeze from the un-caulked windows. To the left, a mountain of art and artifacts rose from floor to ceiling. Its contents somewhat incomprehensible; its width and height restrained only by the walls of the room. Billowing rolls of rice paper roiled wave like against drapes of lace. Bet took a step back, a bit afraid of being absorbed by osmosis. She glimpsed taxidermied squirrels and birds buried so lifelike amongst the ritual inanimate objects. The corners of the ceilings held dust weighted webs called Irish Lace. It was like a scene from Great Expectations, Dickens' spinster Miss Havisham would have felt right at home here. Bet there wasn't the drying corpse of a bridegroom in the spare room. To the right, through a high oaken opening, was the kitchen. The student followed the teacher in trailing luggage and apprehension.

Susan made herb tea in mismatched teacups. The woman sat discussing life, hers and Bet's. The hour, now, well past noon, Bet's stomach growled. The hands of the antiquated chrome bound circular gas stove's clock showed 1:15.

"May we have some lunch?" Bet asked.

"Lunch, yes …" Susan reached for her coat on the chair back. "This is my art garret, I'm infrequently here, so we must shop."

Bet fished through her pockets to retrieve the money for the classes. "For the lessons, room, and food," she gestured, holding it out toward Susan.

Nodding, Susan stood, the green bills slipped into an overly large beige sweater-jacket.

“May I see my room?” Bet asked.

Susan pointed to the door off the kitchen.

“It’s right there.”

Across an expanse of gray asbestos-laced linoleum, worn to the black backing, they walked. Susan opened one of the doors. The nights’ lodging appeared before her, truly, a monk’s cell. There were no bureaus no chairs not even a mattress frame. There were no curtains on the windows. A yellowing, egg crate foam, mattress peeked out from beneath dingy stained sheets. The mattress lay upon the un-swept hardwood floor. Susan pulled of the sheets and flipped the mattress. Quickly she replaced the same sheets and smiled.

“I had guests last night. I’ll just straighten this up a bit. We’ll have a cozy nest for you in no time.”

Bet eyes widened. She had paled noticeably. With a deep breath, she pulled back her shoulders and firmed her resolve; she came here to learn and not to judge by exterior appearances the quality of her teacher’s knowledge. She knew from experience coddling was seldom an effective learning tool. With a nod, she put her bag in the corner.

When they returned from shopping they cooked dinner, vegetarian chili and baked sweet potato, building internal chi and harming no animal. The meal finished, Susan led toward the room at the front of the house. Stocking footed, Bet entered the maelstrom.

Susan sat Bet on a yellow-vinyl tuffet held together with peeling gray duct tape before the altar of life and death. The altar seemed to move in the candle smoke like a living thing. Fountains cascaded like tears upon river stones. Candles of all colors bled waxen steams down the sides of the phallic pillars. Crystals of raw purple quartz, lava stones from the bowels of mother earth, and the bleached bones of a buck lay scattered in a heap. Buddhist prayer flags: red, yellow, blue, meandered drunkenly through raised daises of random heights around vases of dead chrysanthemums. Turtle rattles, hawk feathers, scrolls of kanji, all balanced tentatively.

Bet gnawed at her lip, it seemed as if even the smallest motion would topple the whole mass onto her feet. Her eyes glanced at Susan as she knelt. Susan was all shaman now, she placed a deer’s skull beside us its jaw agape. She reached for a bottle of amber liquor.

She smiled. “Your altar gives you power. It must be fed in thanks.”

Bet’s pupils grew large in the candlelight. She wrung her hands. Susan put the bottle to her lips, taking a mouthful, she flung her head up, and down rapidly; with a burst of energy, she sprayed the liquor in a fine mist over the altar.

“This is how we feed the altar.” Susan explained.

Her thin white hands extended the dubious bottle toward Bet. The liquor was warm, sharp, tasting of methanol. The straw wrap on the reused bottle reeked of mold. Bet could almost see the forest. It reminded her of the local moonshine she’d sipped in the foothills of the Himalaya’s, Raksi. Susan had brought this back from her shamanic studies up the Amazon. Bet spit. The fluid burnt her tongue and lips. It fell gracelessly, puddling in the hollows of the skull’s jawbone.

“Close your eyes,” Susan commanded and covered Bet’s eyes.

Susan walked in a circle around Bet stopping in front of her. She was so close even blindfolded Bet knew where she was. Susan then placed Bet’s hands in prayer over her heart chakra. She traced a line from the heel of Bet’s hands to her fingertips. Bet’s arms and hands were then raised above her head. Susan circled again placing her own hands on the crown of Bet’s head. A burst of breath shot downward through cupped hands into Bet’s skull. Moving methodically, cupped hands to Bet’s spine, Susan sent a tone through her cupped hands into Bet’s spine at each chakra point the tone changed. Bet resonated with breath. Silently, Susan traced symbols onto Bet’s opened palms at heart height, symbols of power. A tinksa sounded, bells to awaken the newly reborn. Susan removed the blind fold and Bet opened her eyes. The air hung heavily with power, a wavering mirage like electricity filled the room, riding on the smoke woven candlelight.

Creativity, re-birth, growth: all were the shaman’s gifts. From the bowels of earth Mother and the tempest of Sky father, from all the numerous God’s and Goddesses of nature, from the human excreta gathered in this room; a new being more powerful than ever before stood. Bet now understood. Creativity does not exist in a sterile environment. Birth is a very messy business.

Masks

T.J. Cheverie

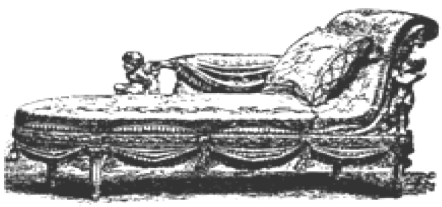
We all wear them,
Everyday,
In our places of business,
And in our homes when we are
Alone.
Some wear the mask of the Prince
and others wear the mask of the Prophet.
There are ones that are quite beautiful;
Others that are not-so-much.
Handmaidens wear a mask of Servitude,
and soldiers the one of War.
my father wore one that was blue,
and covered with the markings of
a life of hard work and long hours;
through which he put a roof over our heads
and food on our table.
my mother wore a Death mask
when she was only 49-years-old,
and shopping one day at our
local grocery store.
Me, I wear the mask of the Poet,
Through which I make observations
And then record my thoughts and feelings.

As She Sleeps

Eric Scott

She's sleeping on the sofa again. Her strawberry hair frosts her forehead. Strands of hair, like frayed ribbons, cover her brown eyes that seem to have grown darker with age. Tracks of mascara spread across her blotchy pale skin like the branches of a tree in winter. She snores lightly, reminding me of the time I told her she sounded like E.T. when she sleeps.

I want to leave her.



When we first started fighting, the yelling was dramatic, the words vicious. But it pained us to hurt one another. We always made up the same day, both of us apologizing for hurting the other. Over the last year, the frequency of our fights did not increase, but the climax changed. After each fight we would separate, each of us finding our own space, allowing time to calm the situation. But that was the end of it. There were no apologies, no make-up sex. We walked through life waiting for the other person to apologize, to say I love you. It got to the point that when she did say I love you, it shocked me, like cold water splashed on my face, and I could never repeat the words back to her.

The fighting faded, as we grew tired of blaming one another. We realized the love had died months ago and it was simply our emotions reacting, surprised to be finding out so late in the game. We tried therapy twice a week. Some weeks felt as if we were falling in love again. But it was a lie. We were waiting for something to change, knowing that something did change. We just weren't ready to accept the truth of that change.

Eight months ago, I started packing. The decision to leave was hard, but it was what we needed. As I watch her sleep, the half-packed boxes littering the living room of our apartment remind me each day of my failures. My failure to leave. My failure to make things work between us. My failure in her.

She rolls over and her snores fade to a whisper. The anti-depressants stifle her breathing along with her zest for living, for loving me. I feel regret. Regret that I don't love her anymore. But more so, regret that one day the waiting will end. Because there is comfort in the waiting. As I watch her chest slowly rise, I understand how long I have put my life on hold, waiting for her to change. While I hit the pause button on life, an uncaring world kept on moving.

Friends and family shuttle in and out of my life wanting to know when the waiting will end. The cute girl at the front desk with the bubbly laugh and warm greetings, smiles when I come into the office. She wants to know if I have started my new life. Her smile teases me with thoughts of moving on, of joining the world again, maybe her world. I fall in love with her a little each day.

But she's waiting. But not for me. She wants her fiancée to set the date. So, she waits for him. The secretary who sits next to her is waiting for retirement. My son is waiting to learn how to drive. My friends and family spend their lives waiting for promotions, babies, football season. They are all waiting for something or someone to give them purpose, to make them, to make me, feel like life matters.

I watch her curl her legs and bring her knees into her chest, her arm flops and dangles from the sofa. Her sleep is never peaceful. The scars on her wrist scream at me of failures past. Troubling thoughts arise when I look at the red lines. Some of the lines are light having faded with time, like ghosts waking from a nightmare. The fresh cut, a deep red grin surrounded by inflamed skin as if the skin were yelling at me, speaks of time wasted waiting for her to get better, to be able to let me go. The cut dark and horrid, striking through the tattoo of infinity she talked herself into getting six months ago when things were going to be different. I can't help her, but I am responsible for her. Without me, she would succeed and she would take my desire to live with her.

There are days, after a Scotch or two, I think she may be right. I think about joining her, end the waiting. Would it be better to acquiesce and follow her down her crimson path into darkness and what lies beyond? Maybe death is the solution and not the enemy. With death, the waiting would be over, the pain lost below the green grass of the graveyard.

When these thoughts overwhelm me, I focus on the cute girl's smile and it draws me back. I see escape in that smile. Even though I know her smile is for another, I see hope in her face and I want to find that peace again because in it is a chance to become whole. I desire to be whole again. I want a smile of my own.

That is worth the wait.

First Reunion

Daniel Shirley



The spark jumped the
gap between our fingertips
in the moment before they
touched for the very first time.

It was so quick, I didn't
know if it was real
or if the electricity only
flowed after we had touched.

But something had flowed,
had been flowing for months
while we, separated by
nearly a continent,
spent every possible
moment together

connected only by our
words and the electricity
they flowed on. "Distance is
only in your mind,"
you said. You said it
over and over
trying to convince me, trying
to convince yourself, but
still, somehow, we both knew
it was the truth.

But the distance was also as real
as the energy cascading between
us, sharp and powerful and
potentially as lethal as the time
we endured together, talking
not talking, counting weeks and
seconds and days

until finally the time ran out
and the distance vanished
and we gave in to
that deep, dynamic
fingertip-shock of current.

Entropy
Daniel Shirley

He stares into the mirror
envisioning crystal skin
smooth, unblemished
flawless. His gaze is hard,
eyes narrowed, as he
presses fingers into the
flesh of his cheeks,
pulling the fabric under
his eyes taut, the
wrinkled threads
of his crows' feet
momentarily erased.
It's a hard thing,
he thinks, to be.
To be in front of the
mirror, forced by his
own eyes to recognize
the flaws he cannot
pretend to unsee,
no matter how desperately
he tries to ignore the
connection between
his own sagging jowls
and his brittle,
shattered future.

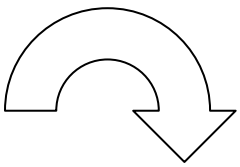
Surrender: A Poem about Violence
Daniel Shirley

"You're quiet," she says,
leaving her question
implicit. unasked.
assumed.

Yes, I am quiet. Because
to speak is to surrender. To
take my most intimate
thoughts, those quietly
polished gems and
the roughest precious
stones of my consciousness,
to gather them up into dull
words that can never
be anything but barely
adequate a container
for them, and to gift
them away like a
plastic jump rope at Christmas.
I am quiet. Because
to speak is to hand over
the only thing I have
worth having and to watch
as it is hefted, weighed,
and ingested, to watch
as she, scowling, rolls
every inadequate syllable
over her tongue, chews
carefully – or worse,
carelessly – and swallows,
consuming my only thing
worth sharing and digesting
it, making it hers until what
she has taken in bears no
resemblance at all to the
awkwardly crafted
intimacy I surrendered.
And I am left stunned
by the monstrosity it
has become that I
do not understand.

I am quiet.

I can only nod slowly, and
smile – less tightly, there -
and turn the page I'm
not reading, and hope
that silence, dedicated to
my own destruction of
someone else's ideas,
is not the same thing
as surrender.



We Were Forced Into It Against Our Will
Daniel Shirley

We buried him in the driveway, which, in
hindsight, may not have been the
brightest idea. But there was no other.
We didn't realize how long it would take
to work through the cement.
And we didn't anticipate
having so much dirt
left over, and nothing to haul
it away with.

We had bags of cement ready to mix,
heavy bags, too, and far more than we'd
need. We called that "preparation."
The weight of the bags in the trunk bent
my axle, and the rear tires wobble -
or did until they caught up with us
which is maybe just as well. The treads
were starting to wear in funny patterns
like a sideways S, spinning
halfway to infinity -
simple cause and effect. In a
deterministic universe, the more times
you toss a coin, the easier it is to predict
the distribution of heads and tails.
That was my defense.

COLD OVEN

Gloria Keeley

tires on gravel
the couple drives away
embarking on their travels

hiding behind a rose bush
I leave a rose at their door

I take over their house
I sleep in their bed
I cook on their stove
I wash my clothes in
their machine
cold sheets blow on the line

friends receive my new
phone number
my driver's license has a new
address
mail arrives daily

I walk the invisible dog
to the beach every day
shorebirds search the shore
I give them sand dollars
to purchase the moon
squid prefer clean water
their ink writes chanties
on the ocean floor
terns turn in
five directions
sewing up the points of stars

back home I turn on the oven
the potatoes burn
like hot horses
after a rough night ride

I eat juicy tomatoes
picked from the campus field
row upon row of
red sea shell souls

the radio news is on
there's a wind over Kansas
rain makes progress
on the roof
the shutters shuffle noisily

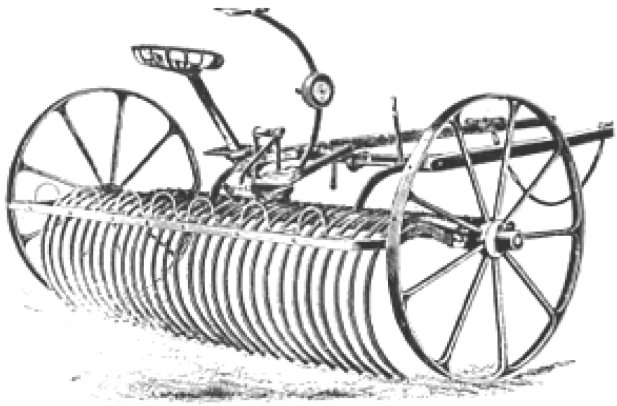
I enjoy the evening
beauty salon magazines
on the coffee table
the Braille of piano rolls
etch audio notations

a photo album contains
one baby picture
beautiful rosy cheeks
and dress to match

before bed I go outside
to view the stars and moon
over the house
with my face skyward I
name each constellation

at peace I start back
toward the door
I spot a cross
out farther in the yard
the oven turned off and cold

Here lies Tiny Alice
her rose dress
emptying in the ground



THE NORTH CAROLINA FARM POEM

Gloria Keeley

My North Carolina farm was a life then.
Everything creek-easy and slow.
I'd listen on it
the buzz of a natural day
before the autos cranked up
for their egg deliveries
and in town concerts

The life simple, passed; memories locked
a quilt patchwork:
crinoline
corn muffins
sugar cookies
stick fishing rods
the deer along the river walking
on marble pebbles.

Our zoolike kitchen,
walls of cracked wallpaper:
the insides of the strawberries
appearing to fall out.

Time is all space now
the stillness not enough.

Today, the farm is a skeleton
the cows having long ago pastured
their bones away on sunny hills
and growing grass.

The asphalt is a grazing wasteland
for the hearsted cars
that pile up like smashed, recyclable cans.

I run by
flying kites
like many colored balloons
hoping to discover
electricity.

THE BEES ARE GONE

Gloria Keeley

the logs of river divers
swim the deep spring
a house on the shore
reveals stitch work of
drawn drapes

bees spin over Africa
stop the globe
in mid hive
land on the continent
first sting
then stung
past the tense
of death
extinct in
a snap

dawn dusts the
orange crate moths
a pleasant guitar chord strums
the strings of Alabamy Bound
on the foreign jukebox

sun pours down
the throats of hummingbirds
nestled in the
cosmos moon
periodic time tables
stored in cells that
remember those warm
living days

now it is night
not turn of the earth night
but the eternal
where lies the Holy Ghost

I am a certified planet
until St. Christopher
cancels my
subscription

BURNING DOWN THE DOLL HOUSE

Gloria Keeley

In my neighborhood when I was little there were many more boys than girls. I always played with the boys, mainly because my older brother had to take me along when he went to play with his friends. We'd play tag, basketball, and mostly baseball. I loved playing baseball. I didn't like softball. I liked to pitch overhand. I also preferred the smaller baseball to the larger softball.

When I was in the first grade I always played with the boys in the schoolyard. We'd run around playing tag, marbles and we'd shoot baseball cards to knock down the cards we placed against a wall. I was really good at both, but especially marbles. My mother used to laugh as I'd walk to the car after school with my huge sack of marbles.

One afternoon after lunch I was playing baseball with the boys. The girls were playing jacks and jumprope. Now, I don't hate jacks or jumprope, I just would rather be playing baseball. Just as I was about to get my turn at bat my teacher, Mrs. Rollins, came up to me. She told me that I couldn't play with the boys. She said she noticed I played with them every day and it had to stop. She made me go and play jacks with the girls. When the bell rang Mrs. Rollins told me to sit on the bench alone out in the schoolyard. Then she and all the kids went back into the classroom.

When my mother came to pick me up after school I told her what had happened. She was furious. She got out of the car and stormed into my classroom. She went right up to Mrs. Rollins, who was at her desk putting students' papers into her briefcase.

"What do you mean leaving my daughter Gloria out in the schoolyard alone", my mother began. "Anything could have happened to her!"

Mrs. Rollins started to explain that I was being punished for always playing with the boys.

"What?" My mother answered, incredulous. "Why can't she play with the boys? Boys are all she has to play with in our neighborhood. She's allowed to play with boys. Don't stop her from doing that, she has my permission to play with whoever she wants. And don't you EVER leave her out in the schoolyard alone again. I'm going to the principal right now to tell her what happened."

With that my mother took off for the principal's office. Mrs. Rollins never stopped me again from playing with the boys.

~~OOO~~

My life and the way I looked at it changed one day when I was in the first grade. I was 5 1/2 years old. Mrs. Rollins was reading us a story. We all sat at our tables listening. Each table had two students. The girls were paired with the girls and the boys were paired with the boys. I don't even remember who my desk partner was. What I do remember is that directly behind me was Bobby. His was the last table in the middle row. This particular day, as I was listening to the story, I decided to take my little chair and sit with Bobby and his desk partner. Bobby moved over to make space for me and said to the other boy.

"Make room, we have company." I thought that was so nice of him to welcome me that way. I was in love with Bobby. He was the cutest and nicest boy I'd ever known.

Mrs. Rollins was reading to us the entire time I was moving my chair to sit with Bobby. When she looked up her face turned red and she marched over to me.

"What are you doing?", she half yelled, "Who said you could move your chair back here?...Well?" I didn't answer because nobody told me that I could do this, I just did it. I didn't think I'd done anything wrong.

"Come with me, young lady!"

I didn't like being called young lady, but I followed her anyway. She led me back to the cloak room which was a small alcove in the back of the classroom.

"You stand back here until I say you can return."

At this point in my young life I really didn't understand that I was being punished. When I was old enough to finally understand that standing in the corner was not a good thing, I had gotten to the point where I spent a lot of time standing in the corner. I've had to stand in so many corners that I can putty and spackle a crack in the wall and paint it so you wouldn't even know it was there.

After Mrs. Rollins left me there alone, I looked around at all of the coats, practiced tying my shoes and glanced out the small window which looked out onto the schoolyard. The schoolyard was empty. Having nothing better to do, I reached up over the

coats to get my brown lunch bag. I opened it and looked inside. I always got a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, an orange, a banana and cookies. I went for the cookies. I was eating the second cookie when Mrs. Rollins came back, I guess to tell me that I could come back into the classroom. However, when she saw me eating the cookie her face got redder than ever. The rush of blood looked like an elevator going up.

"This isn't lunch time!", she yelled. She grabbed my lunch bag and threw it back up on the shelf.

"You just stay back here a little longer." She left me there, still red in the face.

Having nothing better to do I peered out of the small window in the cloakroom. I saw a man walking toward our classroom. He was carrying something but I couldn't make out what it was. Very soon I heard some pops and lots of screaming. Not fun, excited screaming but horrible screaming. I tip-toed to the end of the row of coats and peeked into the classroom just in time to see the back of the man's head and the back of my teacher. All of a sudden my teacher's head looked like a watermelon blowing up in all directions. I couldn't comprehend what was happening. The popping just kept going and soon all of my classmates had fallen down. The man's eyes started darting around and I realized I was in danger and I snuck to the back of the cloakroom and hid behind bookshelves. I shook like a leaf as I saw the man's shoes entering the cloakroom. He stopped, I couldn't see his face. I crouched perfectly still. He left quickly and I heard the classroom door slam.

I laid still for I don't know how long. After a while, I heard sirens and lots of screaming. (I later learned that the screaming was from parents who had gathered in front of the school. They were told by the Chief of Police that it appeared that all of the children were dead). I got up slowly and peeked out of the small window. One of the policemen spotted my movement and shouted, "There's someone inside! I just saw someone move!" I scrambled back to my hiding place. I then saw feet at the entrance to the cloakroom. I began whimpering. I soon saw several sets of feet coming in slowly. I looked up and saw that their guns were drawn. I started to really bawl now. They must have spotted my tiny feet and they put their guns away. "It's ok, honey, come out. It's safe, we're policemen. What's your name?". I peeked again to make sure. They all had uniforms on. I slowly came out, still crying. "Gloria", I said very softly. One of the officers came up to me and tried to lead me out by my shoulder. "Don't touch me, please don't touch me!" I said. The officer said "OK, just follow us. Keep your eyes closed, we'll lead you out." I didn't close my eyes. It was important for me to look for Bobby. I repeated, "Don't touch me." I didn't want them to lead me away yet. I looked around and saw all these little bodies on the floor, I saw Mrs. Rollins and I saw a lot of blood. My eyes darted all over until I rested on the place where Bobby's desk was. I saw him, I knew it was him by his clothes. I ran up to him, knelt down and cradled him. "Bobby! Bobby!" That was all I could think of to say. I looked at him and shook. His face wasn't really there. I cried uncontrollably, still yelling, "Bobby!" One of the officers finally picked me up and brought me outside. I heard one of them say, "She has blood all over her, but it's not hers. She's OK, she's fine." I saw that he was talking to the parents. The officer said, "This is Gloria, is her mother or father here?" My mother let out a shriek and ran up to me. She hugged and hugged me, crying fitfully. My brother, who had been in the third grade classroom, was there too. He hugged me and kept his arm around me.

When we got home we were not allowed to discuss what happened and no newspapers were brought into the house. At family gatherings nothing was ever mentioned about the incident.

My mom let me go to Bobby's wake. It was, of course, closed casket. My mother had told Bobby's mother that we would be coming. I shyly went up to Bobby's mother and she hugged me. She gave me his Roy Rogers bedspread. Bobby and I had talked about it when he got it the week before. His mother said that Bobby told her about our conversation and how much we both loved Roy Rogers. I had asked Bobby if Pat Brady, Bullet and Nellie Belle were on the bedspread. When Bobby's mother gave me the bedspread all she could manage to say was, "Thank you for holding Bobby. I know he heard you. It comforts me that you did that." I wondered how she knew about that. Later I realized she must have read it in the newspaper.

I often think of my fallen classmates. I don't really even remember what many of them looked like, although I can still see Bobby vividly. I think of all of them as I go through each rite of passage in my life's journey: My first Holy Communion, Confirmation, first school dance, proms, my graduations. I stop and say a prayer for them all, who never got to experience all of the ups and downs of growing up. To be cut down so young is so unfair and except for a weird twist of fate it could have been me too. I will wonder why I was saved to my dying day.



Cecelia and Sun Tzu

Chris Palmer

A drab drizzle unwelcomed Cecelia when she woke to the first day of fifth grade.

To fight back at the doom that seemed to stretch to next June, she snatched up her gay new tartan beret, before she'd even gotten to the bathroom to brush her teeth -- confident that a bright nonchalance was the best attack on a future that included Ms. Hallsworthy for 8:15 roll call.

"I shall defend the erosion of vibrancy," she declared to her teacher's looming shade, as she seized an umbrella in the stand by the door. But she set it back to heed the call to breakfast, for necessary fortification, and she marshaled her lengthening thoughts for a more strategic campaign, while gnashing molars ground her oatmeal to gruel.

Her beret. A soldier's cap. The flag of her uniform … also to shield her eyeglasses from a rain intent to dim her vision. She grinned, and closed the door behind her on a thinning courage, which faded fast.

I am not alone, she thought. Though it certainly felt like she was.

"How nice of you to join us this fine morning, Cecelia," Ms. Hallsworthy droned, like a queen bee expectant to dine on the sacrifices of her students.

"Not such a fine day, really, Ms. Hallsworthy, don't you think?" Cecelia winced even before she'd fully let fly her poor darts.

Sun Tzu's voice, as she imagined it from the glorious pages of *The Art of War*, which she nursed nightly like a cup of hot cocoa at her bedside table, resounded: "He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot, will be victorious."

How she had failed her hero Sun Tzu, in the first confrontation of her new campaign. She steeled herself to receive the coming blows.

Ms. Hallsworthy banked a dark fire. She smoldered. Poison vapors leaked through her narrowed eyes, but her words were almost soft, almost a comfort. "We need to make the best of what we have."

Had Ms. Hallsworthy been reading Sun Tzu? Was that possible? Still, she seemed to know it was not a time for her to fight.

With as little licking of wounds as possible, Cecelia tactically withdrew and opened her math book. "Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance," whispered Sun Tzu.

I am not alone. Head down and eyes averted, Cecelia smiled at the seven times table.

But one thing about school never failed to boil her blood! And after a long, slow simmer she'd reduced this to a simple pudding: How am I supposed to know something if I can't imagine it?

This was her way of finding no sense at all in having to sit still all day (in the vigor of her youth!), and being *told* things she was supposed to then "know" -- without ever being asked to give an example (to make up a story!) of how these things could have anything to do with her!

Without seeing how these things could have anything to do with her life, she had reasoned, how *could* they have anything to do with her life?

And because she felt there *was* something to know, she'd sought guidance that encouraged her to look and imagine what was true for her. And though she didn't understand all she had read, she knew that she *knew* what she did.

Which, apparently, did not yet include enough to choose her battles wisely, at least with Ms. Hallsworthy.

Ms. Hallsworthy …

Sun Tzu spoke again: "The opportunity to secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself."

Ms. Hallsworthy …

Then an odd, new thought turned and tumbled through her mind. Ms. Hallsworthy was … not the enemy.

I am not alone, and Ms. Hallsworthy is not the enemy.

Cecelia looked up. Still math class. And Ms. Hallsworthy didn't seem to have changed much, or at all, that Cecelia could see. But all was not quite the same.

Cecelia looked for the dark fire -- the essence that defined Ms. Hallsworthy, the lantern that had lit all she'd foreseen and had feared for her fifth year of school. *The enemy.*

Sun Tzu spoke: "Be extremely subtle, even to the point of formlessness. Be extremely mysterious, even to the point of soundlessness. Thereby you can be the director of your opponent's fate."

She did see *some*thing … but more an ember, really, than a fearful fire … there in the space that seemed a space Ms. Hallsworthy might call her own.

Cecelia looked closely. It seemed to move, slowly, to float. But still there -- in the room, in a space that Ms. Hallsworthy might call her own. Or might not.

Then, as Cecelia watched, its last heat, its last light, lifted free. It expired, and was gone.

And what was left in the room, it seemed to Cecelia, was a space that we, here, might, or might not, as we chose, call our own.

And Sun Tzu said: "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."
In fact, Cecelia thought, that might be the only way to do it.

Romancing a Blank Sheet

Darlyn C. Lojero

who knows you more but the fingers
that traverse the arch of your back
and trace the minute soldiers
on your weakening limbs?
they have been searching and discovering
all that is you for twenty four and a half
befores and afters
of this yellowing afternoon.

who understands more the secrets
beneath the lead cross-hatched on your chest
but the hand which draws
muscle patterns to cover that empty space?

My beautiful, they will come tomorrow
armed by the dawn, armed to claim you
to appropriate the color of your eyes
to smooth the lines on your forehead
but before so
I will have long named you.

Follicles

Dave Gregg

My face I own
it is mine all twisted
in wrinkle and vein
but my hair
has no honor
I thought it agreed
"Less combing"
in exchange for
"Robust growth"
more "blow-dry"
for "less grey"
the hair belongs
elsewhere
I've no shampoo called
"Meeting You Half-Way"

Carnival

Dave Gregg

a sad story
the other day
a woman ate
a large slice
of King Cake
choked on
the baby
baked inside
not even real
or ever born
she was a
grandmother, 94,
and pro-life

Over Coat

Dave Gregg

this red jacket
and it's attitude
always superior
whatever
generation
wore it,
mother, grandmother
myself now my own
sits and eyes it
warily, judges
"It will not fit,"
"But it will," I think
"if not you, someone."

OF DREAMS AND MARRIAGE

Jeffrey Zable



I was stationed at the top of a grassy hill next to a redwood tree. I had a gun that could only shoot one bullet at a time—to shoot another bullet one had to cock the handle back, in which case another bullet would fall into place. I found this strange, but there was no one to ask about it. I stood there waiting and waiting, constantly turning my head in different directions to see if anyone was coming. Finally, from off to the side, I saw a very tall, fat man in a black suit slowly walking toward me. When he got close enough that I could clearly see his face, I shouted, "Stop or I'll shoot!" I noticed that he had one arm folded across his chest and in his hand he held a camera, which changed into a gun, and then back into a camera, and then back into a gun. This went on continuously second by second. When he was about 30 feet from me, I started backing down the hill holding the gun straight out, trailing him until he stopped in the spot where I had previously stood. "Drop it!" I yelled, and as he pointed what now remained a camera at me, I fired a shot, which to my surprise bounced off his head. Realizing I didn't have enough time to cock my gun to get another shot, I dropped it and started running. I remember that I turned around once and saw that he was carefully aiming the camera at me as I zigzagged across the grass, trying to make it harder for him to follow me. And then I heard a shot, which hit me right in my lower back. I froze on the spot, straightened my body, and then fell straight down onto my face. As soon as I hit the ground, I awakened in a complete panic. My pajamas were soaked, and so was my pillow. When I shook my wife awake and told her the dream she said to me, "Yeah, that's a very bad dream. We'll talk about it in the morning. In the meantime, why don't you change your pajamas and put on a new pillowcase. There's a fresh one in the closet!"

A BAD MESSAGE

Jeffrey Zable



I'd been giving out pennies to kids for about six months, as many I had in my pockets when they asked for them. Some days no child would ask for any; other days I'd maybe give out five; other days I'd give as many as ten to fifteen. Because I knew that the kids liked to receive them I usually made a conscious effort to have some pennies in my pocket. Sometimes when I gave out pennies I'd tell the kids that they were lucky pennies, but never specified what kind of luck they would bring. I mainly gave out pennies because I could see that kids really enjoyed receiving them from me, a teacher at their school. Then one day the principal called me into her office and said to me, "You can no longer give out those pennies. It will only get you into trouble. I just spoke with a parent who is very angry that you have been giving her daughter pennies. She said it sends a bad message to the child, that she doesn't have to work for anything, that she can just get money for free. It seems that you've given her child three pennies in the last week and the mother wants it to stop immediately." Shocked by this information, I responded, "It's too bad that I have to stop doing something because of one parent when I've given more than a hundred different kids pennies and never heard a single complaint from any of those parents. I give out the pennies because it's a fun way of making contact with the kids and I know that the children enjoy receiving them. I can't see how I'm encouraging 'freeloading' by giving a child a penny once in a while."—"I understand what you're saying," my principal responded, "but really a teacher shouldn't be giving out money to students. It will only get you into trouble, so you had better stop right away."-- "No problem," I responded, and left it at that.-- And then those little rubber bands with pictures on them became popular, and as I could buy 10 or so for a dollar, I started handing them out, and got away with it for about a month until once again a different parent complained that she didn't want her child wearing those bands as they could cut off the circulation in her child's wrist.-- "O.K. O.K." I responded, "No more pennies. No more bands. But may I give my own students pencils and crayons if they need them? How about paper? Erasers? And may I still put stars on their papers to show that I appreciate their work???"

Distances

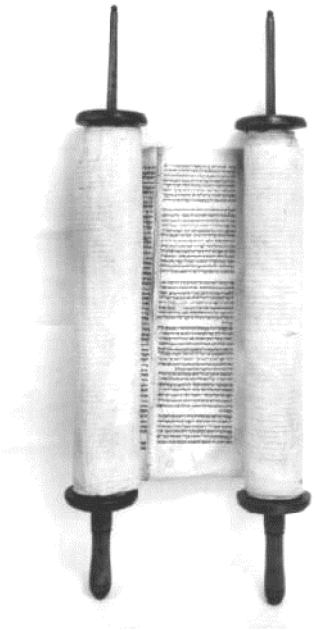
Carol Hamilton

The moon is moving away from us,
hitching itself ever higher
by its own tuggings at our gravity.
It is paling out,
like your face,
but so gradually,
I think you are still here.

Dig

Carol Hamilton

In this desert dust
my hands touch
her hands
dust to dust
stone charred
supper over
jawbone lifted
rabbit to bone
bone beneath stone
bone to bone



Passover Hat

Carol Hamilton

We, thoughtless, had an Easter Parade,
the principal a tall, mercurial Irishman,
Judy Garland and fashion all playing
their part, paper plates, construction paper,
paste making up the rest.

There in the suburbs, many students
were Jewish, fathered by Yale professors
who favored public schools,
all named Bill that year, it seemed.
So it was Billy who brought his hand-scrolled Torah
for Show and Tell, confided to me
that he could not unroll it
or we'd all have to stand up.
He said he was a R- R- R- he couldn't remember-
what kind of Jew, a joyous kind, I thought.

And he marched in the parade,
beribboned in his paper Passover hat,
happy with green paper spirals
hanging down like dreadlocks, a celebrant
in our procession of bunnies and eggs.

Strange to think he is probably a grandfather now,
and I'm hoping his joyous genes have
sent forth a tribe of light-hearted
enthusiasts, full of W- W- W- whatever
it is that they were and/or are all about.

Materialism

Carol Hamilton

The things around them
turned Dutch painters
greedy for light,
which could not have come
so often, for I, too,
lived edged by the North Sea
and saw little enough of it.
But the prosperity of maps,
compasses, mirrors, satins,
pearls, velvets gave their brushes
the touch of worship,
they amazed at their luck,
or was it bragging?
Either way, a tempered reverence
put down the coinage
of their homes and their worldly
wonder of rich and novel things.
What care even to the sun-touched
folds of Vermeer's leggings.
I learn to look with a caressing eye.

Family History

Carol Hamilton

One son tells of when his baby brother
turned blue, and he and elder sister
say the epoch of our hell is gone,
never happened to them. But
the youngest, the one never blue,
recounts the details of those years,
he then too small to remember,
and how a Gumbi deer tripped
down the attic steps each night
into his charming room with slanted
dormers and Cape Cod curtains
and walls of crisp whitest white.
I never saw his deer but hear his
screams, still think of his determination
to escape that bed, and I remember
a haunted place. Some houses
lock you tight in nightmare,
and still, miracle, hold cherished rooms
and history, a Grimm brothers'
setting for a timeless tale, recast,
retold beyond all reason.



California after the Fact

Julie Bartoli

Age 12

I got my first job behind a pushcart icebox filled with tubs of ice cream. Vanilla, chocolate and mocha, but never strawberry because the shitty Chinese man paying me an under the table wage of two dollars an hour didn't like strawberry. He'd show up at noon everyday, crack open the icebox and scan its contents, mumbling to himself. An hour later he'd return with more ice cream. Around six when the lights were just beginning to change, we rolled the cart into a garage he owned on Embarcadero and he handed me my sixteen dollars.

Two weeks into the job a homeless man with three teeth and a unibrow approached my cart and demanded I give him the tin of cash behind the icebox.

"No," I said, but he reached around and took it anyway. Then he opened the icebox and spit inside.

"Oh, fuck you," I said to his back.

He shrugged and gave me the finger.

When the Chinese man arrived at noon I told him what happened and he sighed for an hour.

"You no fight, Darcie?"

"No. I don't."

He knotted his eyebrows and stroked his chin. "We get you assistant," he said, and the next day you showed up.

Your name was Dean and you had a thick black mullet and squinty eyes. From some angles you looked handsome but from most you just looked cruel. You were two years older than me, and when you showed up with a pack of Parliaments sticking out the front pocket of your Hawaiian button-down I thought you were the coolest thing on Earth.

The Chinese man gave us a scrambled introduction, winked and ran off to catch the BART. You nodded, opening your pack of cigarettes. Without a word you fished out two, handed me one and lit them both. I never smoked before and wasn't sure how to hold it, but I copied your two finger technique and inhaled quick, pursed puffs. I wouldn't pull the smoke into my lungs though—I let it sit on my tongue and exhaled when you did.

"That Chinaman is retarded," you said.

"He's not so bad."

"He told me I had to fight bums."

"Just because?"

"No." You laughed. A thought bubble of smoke floated overhead. "Only if they try to rob us."

"Are you going to?"

"We'll see how I feel."

After an hour of honest working you taught me to do whip-its with the cans of Reddi Whip. At first the highs were a quick rush of cold hollow sinus pressure, then we realized that if we held our breath we could make them last for minutes. We plugged our noses and stared over the bay, letting the west coast breeze blow through our bodies, fill us with sea salt. When the Chinese man did his test squeezes the next morning, every can of whipped cream was out of air.

Age 13

It was one of those sick grip summer days, the rare California temperature spikes. People walked slower, breathed heavier between the hills and valleys. Asphalt steamed when water hit, and no one went barefoot without singeing the soles of their feet.

We took solace in your backyard, running through knee-high grass and spraying each other with the gardening hose. I wore a string bikini even though I couldn't fill it out. But I liked the way I was developing, edges going soft.

"You look beautiful," you said, and I believed it.

Your mother came home from work at five, wiped. She was a CNA at the local nursing home and her scrubs were stained with what looked like vomit. She reheated meatloaf in the toaster oven, humming an old Beatles song.

"Dean, is your girlfriend staying for dinner?"

"She's not my girlfriend," you said. "But yes."

Age 14

I didn't necessarily want to lose my virginity to you. There were other guys in Oakland, guys my

age with better hair and better postures. But one week earlier I found out that my boyfriend was cheating on me with Lisa Laurel. He was always worried about me sleeping with you. Now seemed like the time to do it.

We smoked a blunt in your attic, where the smell clung to the insulation for weeks. There was one tiny light bulb and you sat underneath, so it looked like you were in the constant process of having an idea. You laid out a quilt of old t-shirts that your hobby mom made. We stripped down facing opposite directions. When I turned back, you were naked. Your penis was hard, thick and a little bent.

"You're sure about this?"

I rolled my eyes. "Don't make it more than it is."

"I'm not."

You laid me on my back and kissed the space beneath my thighs. I put my hands behind my head and relaxed, let the feelings wear into me like waves beating speckled sand. I bit my lip and stared into the core of the bulb overhead, watching kaleidoscope rainbows shrink and shift. When you thought I was ready you pushed into me, gentle, both hands on my waist. For the first minute it hurt and when it started feeling good you were done. But in that brief interlude between start and finish it was like those whip-its. Euphoric.

"Looks like I made you a woman."

"Hooray," I said, wiping a spot of blood off my inner thigh.

Age 15

You knocked my makeup tray onto the ground, sent mascara, eyeliner and lip-gloss flying into the corner of the room. Called me a whore, a puta, said I was the most disgusting thing you'd ever seen.

"I wish I never fucked you."

I lit a cigarette and sat on my quilt, the floral one your mother made for my birthday. It was an array of flower patterns, daisies, poppies, roses dripping hot pink petals.

"That makes two of us," I said, not meeting your eyes.

I was ending our relationship, if you could call it that. In reality we were doing everything we'd done before we started sleeping together, only now sex was a constant possibility. I was taking that possibility because your smart friend, Felix, asked me out and I said yes. He had potential. I liked that.

"Fuck you, Darcie."

Your feet echoed down the stairs, out my front door. My window was open and I heard you drop your keys, a metallic clink on the asphalt. You cursed. Seconds later the car started. You swung the wheel and floored it with enough force to make crooked zigzags at the end of my driveway.

In the morning you called and apologized. I said it was fine while studying the skid marks through the window. You shouldn't drive angry.

Age 16

The day you dropped out I swung by your place and walked in on your mother sitting on the couch, knees tucked under her chin. She was crying.

"He had four months left," she said, nose running. "Why would he do this?"

I found you in the attic, high on Vicodin. You kept laughing when I tried to speak and even when I was silent. I waited until you came down, gave you glass after glass of water and forced you to drink each one. Ice rolled against the bridge of your long nose when you dipped your head back too far. Two hours passed before you became even a silhouette of yourself.

"I was just done, Darcie. You know?"

I didn't. I was on a studying kick, turning my overall GPA into an exponential curve. I wanted to follow Felix to Berkeley, to trade my hot pants for bellbottoms and study French literature. I wanted to see something other than Oakland in the cracked conscious of my dreams.

When I stood up to leave you asked me to kiss you. For old times.

"I can't do that."

"I know."

"Then why'd you ask?"

You hiccupped.

Age 17

I got into Berkeley, not with a scholarship but eligible for enough financial aid to buy a small boat. I'd been there a hundred times but for once the school was mine, not Felix's. It was the edge of summer and I wanted to walk the campus, to feel the weight of my new home.

We hadn't seen each other in weeks but you agreed to come for the drive. We rolled through Telegraph Avenue, past the thrift shops and ramshackle jewelry stands, the Indian restaurants and psychic booths. The windows were down, music loud and my hair was wild.

"You know," you said, "I think I could have gotten into Berkeley."

"You couldn't even get to community college."

You twisted your head so quick that it almost turned all the way around. "I mean I could have gotten in if I hadn't dropped out."

Bullshit. Your grades were worse than mine, your attendance record an absolute joke. By senior year you weren't making it to a third of your classes. You dropped out before you even dropped out.

"Did you put on your application that you're Spanish?"

"Yes," I said, no longer staring through the windshield but simply at it.

"That's probably why you got in."

I gritted my teeth and gripped the wheel until my knuckles turned bone white. "Dean, what exactly are you doing with your life?"

You opened your mouth to say something but I cut you off.

"Are you going to be a rapper?"

"Darcie."

"An athlete? Is your 5'7 ass gonna play basketball?"

I looked over, satisfied. You crossed your arms over your chest. Pretended to stare outside, watch the flashing Christmas lights dangling from nostalgia shop shingles. The song on the radio cut to commercial.

You swallowed hard and reached forward, tracing waves in the dust on the dash. Your hand was shaking.

"Pull over."

"Dean—"

"Pull the fuck over."

I got in the right lane and rolled up next to the sidewalk. Called your name but you were already throwing open the door, swinging both legs forward at once. You almost tripped. When you crossed in front of the car I could see that you were crying.

Age 18

That night you took the keys to your mom's Monte Carlo and drove into one of the only trees of route 1, towards Bodega Bay. The autopsy showed that you were drunk. It also showed you didn't die on impact. Some people called it an accident. Some said suicide. Either way, we all agreed you were dead.

I still think of you when I'm alone at night, listening to rain swim through the gutter. I wonder what went through your head in those last moments when you were trapped between the seat and the dashboard, blood pooling from your temple. Was it of the ice cream cart? The Chinese man? The playground we'd smoke in, dragging our feet through woodchips, listening to static and Biggie on your dime store boom box? Garbage can bonfires, girls with dreadlocks, crescent moons? The way the bay clouded in the morning and cracked open clear by noon?

Or were you thinking of that time in my attic, the night you truly owned me.

