

Susquehanna
UNIVERSITY

THE APPRENTICE WRITER



Volume 33

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Introduction

Welcome. The Apprentice Writer annually features the best writing and photographs from 4,000 entries we receive each year from secondary schools throughout the United States. Every September we send copies printed as a public service by The Daily Item in Sunbury, PA to nearly 3,500 schools.

Susquehanna's Creative Writing major now enrolls 170 undergraduate students. Our program in Editing and Publishing gives our majors an opportunity to showcase what they have learned

by working on one or more of the four magazines the Susquehanna Writers Institute publishes each year. If you are interested in learning more about the Creative Writing major and programs related to writing sponsored by the Writers Institute, see the back page for a summary or go to susqu.edu/writers for details.

Send material to be considered for next year's issue to appwriter@susqu.edu. For full submission guidelines, please visit susqu.edu/academics/10602.asp. Please be sure to include your name and address on each page. The deadline for submissions is March 10, 2015.

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Advanced Writers Workshops

Each summer, the Writers Institute offers the one-week **Advanced Writers Workshops** for High School Students.

The 2016 Summer Workshops will take place in late June or early July. Participants live on campus and concentrate on fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction.

The fee of \$810 (early application by April 15th) covers all costs, including room and board.

Go to susqu.edu/writers and click on “high school students” for more information and an electronic application.



This kind of you

Sophie Cloherty
WELLESLEY, MA

is October thoughts,
an effervescence of the mind.
To know, you said, is to want.
June came and so did rain.
Rain that whispered soft
like the letter of a lover
landing on s sounds the way
pine needles brush
a child’s face. I realized you
were a ticking, bound
to the minute hand the same way
a New York train is bound
to the rattling of tracks. Two
people
like beat-down shoes strangled
over a telephone wire, the same
wire
that carried the 80’s bands running
on your stereo, the only part of
you
I could feel pulse. The electricity
of my mind became currents
where you thrived. Two am came
and I realized we were star-crossed,
always wishing to be trapped

in the suspension of your radio
over off-road gravel. The stamp
of your sweatshirt on my skin
made me wish that moments
could be like envelopes, licked and
sealed
until they reached familiar hands.



Biology of a City

Alyssa Mulé
ATLANTA, GA

In Copenhagen I’m sifting through
skin
to find the heart of the city
but successfully excavating
only one slender wrist.

The tourist boat slicks
through the silken water,
with the matter-of-fact motion
of practiced punishing.
Rubbery wires run
the length of the pitted bridge,
red and blue
like the veins and arteries of one
forearm
laid bare to the bone.

At the front of the boat, the tour
guide
speaks too softly
for me to comprehend and too
loudly
for me to ignore.
Jerking my head upward
in a sudden and savage desire to
understand,
I catch a darting phrase here or
there, a Danish name.
Occasionally my jetlagged mind
wanders
to the idea of the night ahead,
to sleeping in this sharp-boned city.

My breathing will slow as I lie
sweetly snuggled
in a rib, or a thigh,
or a shoulder of Copenhagen.

Over the sea and the elusive stars I
will soar,
until I awake tomorrow morning,
when morning breath and blues
will jar me from epiphany.

Phoenix Song

Whitney Xu

MADISON, NJ

When I was born, my father swore he would never make me learn the piano.

“Every single Chinese kid in the world plays the piano,” he would say to my mother. And he was right. In our tiny circle of friends, all of whom were Chinese, every child we knew attended piano lessons once a week and practiced for half an hour every day after school.

Weeks after I turned three, my mother bought a toy xylophone at the consignment store, each note a different color of the rainbow. My father set it down on the carpeted floor of our cramped apartment and played the notes of “Twinkle, Twinkle,” and I clapped my hands together in excitement. I grabbed the plastic wand and banged out the notes that my father had just played: red, red, blue, blue, purple, purple, blue. He was astonished. He took the mallet back from me and played “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” and I quickly reclaimed the stick, tapping the ceramic blocks: yellow, orange, red, orange, yellow, yellow, yellow. My father was childishly delighted and spent the afternoon playing simple melodies for me to imitate on that tiny xylophone. That evening, he searched through the newspaper for ads from piano teachers in the area.

My first piano was a light caramel brown, upright, Baldwin with keys tinged yellow at the edges. The day we got it, I bounded onto the bench, sitting on my knees to reach the keys, and fluttered my fingers over them. The tinkling cadence of notes,

though jumbled and messy, was unlike anything I had ever heard. I was infatuated. Once a week, a stooping Chinese woman with jet-black hair and an underbite would come to my house and guide me through titles such as “Buggie Boogie” and “Witch’s Waltz.” During my first few lessons, Miss Sun assigned me two songs per week. Then three, then four. Finally, I began to play through the songs in each book before being assigned any of them. I could not play enough. I loved the symbols on the sheets of music. At the sight of a crescendo, I would hunch my shoulders and hammer my fingers down with more and more force. My hands flew off the keyboard, darting like embers from a fire, whenever there were staccato notes. My favorite part of playing was the way my hands felt. If I concentrated hard enough, my fingers became quick and nimble and bent in ways to create clear, pleasing harmonies. The technicalities of piano enticed me. After a year learning with Miss Sun, she told my parents to find new teacher because I had played through all the songs she taught her students.

Mr. Buchanan assigned me more sophisticated pieces. These were at much higher tempos, and many ended with grand, classical chords that I slammed down with all the strength I had in my arms. My mother always asked me to play for guests, and I found that they were most impressed with pieces that had the highest speed and the loudest sound.

When I was in sixth grade, I played Claude Debussy’s *Arabesque*, No. 1, one of his most famous piano compositions. I remember my father listening from beside me, and when I glanced at him, his eyes were shining with longing and awe. I was confused

by his expression. As I played, I wondered, Why is he looking at me like that? There was nothing hard about the piece. It was not particularly fast or complicated, there were no impressive chords or scales. However, I saw how much he enjoyed listening to it, and I played many more Debussy pieces for him to make him happy.

Mr. Buchanan would not smile through my lessons, like Miss Sun would; he frowned, sucked on his teeth, and furrowed his eyebrows. At the top of each page of music, Mr. Buchanan would write: 9/16, 5x, 120 -- the date, repetitions needed, and the tempo. I practiced over an hour every day, sometimes two, with my mother sitting beside me patiently. I watched YouTube videos obsessively, staring enviously at Martha Argerich, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Arthur Rubinstein, marveling at the perfection of their performances. I no longer enjoyed the feeling of my fingers flying across the keys; rather, I relished in the triumph I felt after conquering a piece. My purpose when playing was to complete a song without making any mistakes. In this way, the piano became my enemy, but as the songs I played became more complex, I was rarely able to claim victory. I cried when I practiced a *Polonaise* by Chopin for three weeks and still could not play it through flawlessly. A fissure formed in my relationship with the piano as pressure built slowly inside of me, cracking my ribs every new day I sat in front of the piano.

I spent ten years with Mr. Buchanan, during which I played Bach’s *Well Tempered Movements*, Chopin’s *etudes*, Haydn’s *concertos*, and Tchaikovsky’s *Four Seasons*, competed in annual local competitions,

and performed at Carnegie Hall with another group of his students. After that performance, my parents sold the aging Baldwin and bought a baby grand Yamaha. I both loved it and despised it. When I played at presto, the notes sounded crisp and clean like coins clattering on marble. However, the clarity of the strident pitches also rang out every mistake I made, and made every missed note nakedly obvious. Its lacquered black body, beautiful at first glance, was too easily covered in smudges and fingerprints. When I looked up from the bone-white keys, I would see my reflection in the glossy paint. When I was fourteen, I met my own eyes and realized that I saw no joy in them.

Eventually, even the thrill of fingers cascading through a scale was not enough to keep me on the bench. The technical skills I had developed seemed worthless. Piano siphoned the energy from me, and by the time I had played Felix Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso, the last song I would play for two years, every chord brought fatigue to my bones. When I finally told my mother I wasn't going to my next lesson, I saw her cry for the first time. But she did not argue.

The lid of the Yamaha lay closed and inert for months. School books and magazines piled on top of it, and my mother would run a cloth over it when guests came over. I avoided looking at it, but its black looming figure dominated the room.

I did not end my relationship with music altogether. I still played viola in the school orchestra, squeaking out concertos along with the other orchestra members. I met Surekha during my first year of high school orchestra. She was a small, dark Nepalese girl exactly one week older than me and the first chair cellist.

I did not notice her until one day, before rehearsal began, I heard her play Bach's famous Cello Suite, No. 1 Prelude.

The piece was not difficult. Her fingers slid easily up and down the neck of her cello, and her bow strokes were slow. After the first measure, goosebumps exploded across the back of my neck, and I remember shuddering involuntarily, just from these simple notes. Neurons in my brain collided from pure musical epiphany as her bow sailed powerfully over the strings of her cello. Each triad carried both jubilation and sorrow, the vibrations of her strings sending explosions of emotion into the air. I stared at her with longing and awe.

That day, I went home and sat down on the piano bench gingerly. I lifted the lid, dusty from months of neglect, and clenched and opened my fists. A familiar energy rushed down my neck into the tips of my fingers, as if my body knew what to do. An old fear wriggled from the cellar of my mind again, the fear that I would mess up, that the grace notes would slur or that I would play a B octave instead of a C during a climactic progression. I shook the thought from my head and opened the book. My fingers instinctively rested on the first chord.



Barcelona

Shoshanna Israel
MAPLE GLEN, PA

Your uncle teaches you carefully
to flick a fan like a dancer
all in the wrist
until you are delighted
by a portrait of stylized flowers

You are far from elegant,
hardly the flamenco girl
sketched in your souvenirs
who smiles, like she's got a secret
amidst the ruffles of red

Auntie takes you out one day
and guides you in maze of sun-
warmed stone
where you get lost amidst
kaleidoscope Gothics
and duck into tapas bars,
praying you look old enough to
blend in.

We drop coins in the buckets of
strangers
And you are shocked by the
geometry of this place,
all curves and swaying hips,
Architecturally feminine,
You feel very flat and pale and
small.

Until one thursday during siesta,
Auntie tells you the story of the
cathedral
And how it's always being built, for
hundreds of years
You take in some solace, along with
the stained glass
That the best things can take a
while.

*How it felt to be
touched before and
after*

Caitlin McGowan
MAMARONECK, NY

in my party dress
the pressure of a brisk and rugged
boulder
leaves crater bruises on my naked
thighs
grass stains on the cotton hem of
my underwear.
i feel the wind nipping behind my
ears and
the flash of his camera
ignite goosebumps on my shoulders,
his sugar coated fingers
wipe cream away from my upper lip
and suddenly the night and the winter
and the gauntness of my skin
is ever evident.

with my hair full of baby's breath,
he smiled at me with out his teeth
giggling, i fought an urge to bite
down
the space between his pointer finger
and my tongue
lessened
as the small piece of somebodies
gods body dissolved in my mouth
and i felt like even though i could be
holy now
maybe this wasn't how.

in my rain boots,
he sat on the step above me
in the late afternoon in july
we played hand games
and he told me horror stories about
where he was from
and about the devil and about little
girls
and when we went inside i cried for
3 hours

and i felt like the world was an
empty place
and i picked the leaves off of my
mother's succulent on the window
pane
to see if they would ever grow back
again.

in her kitchen,
the cool counter grazing my belly,
the room wept flash jazz
and felt like living inside of a Pi-
casso painting.
with his moth-eaten fingers
tracing the small of my back,
i feel the scent of camel snus
racing to reach my center
and i felt my lips curve downward
crescent,
and i felt recessive
and when i was alone again
i felt brittle to the core.

Sestina for Senescence

Clémentine Wiley
EDINBURG, TX

This morning Grandpa leans on the
table, heavy-set,
and swears as a boy he'd see soldiers
march past
this window dishing
light, where flies
now flit in to crawl on glasses,
and Grandma comes down the
steps.

Mom's lips purse as Grandma steps
toward the kitchen to set
breakfast, hustles to pour coffee in
our glasses.
This is routine though only a week
is past
since we boarded the plane to fly—
as guests, we shouldn't even wash
dishes.

For lunch Grandma tosses skinned

potatoes in a dish,
peels, slices, fries—sixty years she's
taken these steps.
Her skin sits in grooves—time sinks,
it doesn't fly.
Flushing, afternoon sets
into clouds slipping past
the bar's sign painted with a spilling
glass.

Still as glass,
the village lake holds its sky like a
giant dish
where wives in the past
with baskets of clothes and gossip
would step
to the edge and set
up scrubbing boards. Now plastic
scatters under the surface striped by
planes in flight.

The people who fly
see only how the trees fleece the hills
from across their windows' glass,
not knowing that dinner is set
soup warms the dishes
and soon we hear clopping steps
as the cows trudge past.

Their owner tractors behind, a rum-
bling echo of the past.
Most of the village from country to
city flies
but he follows in his father's foot-
steps.
My grandparents offer him wine in
a glass.

He pauses to dish
on the neighbor who stays inside
with his new TV set
and on the market's new step—sell-
ing tourists key chains and shot
glasses.

The church bells ringing, the
alarmed pigeons flying
—dishdishdish—drift into the past:
sullenly as the cows, steadily as the
sunset.



*Knots and
Branches*

Hye Rin Yang
HACKENSACK, NJ



Turbulence

Tara Sharma
SHARON, MA

Right now she is remembering the time when she was sixteen years old and her mother asked her why she was squinting. The room was not bright, and the question asked was not a confusing one so her mother told her she thought it bizarre, unnecessary, for her to squint. And she is remembering the way her mother held up three wiry fingers, a few days later, when she caught her doing the squinting thing again: June, can you see this? Should we take you to the eye doctor or something?

And now June is remembering how later that week, her mother saw her squinting once again, this time across the kitchen table at her father while he spoke. Why are you squinting at me? she remembers him saying that to her, in the middle of his sentence that she can't remember, so she shook her head quickly, looked down to her lap, tucked her chin in between the bones on her neck and held it like that for five long seconds, stretched her eyes as open as they went until she felt the skin of her top lid fold onto itself. June is remembering how when she tried to look back up at her father after those five long seconds, her eyes fell back together. So she tried looking straight up at the rust on the chandelier, and finally her eyes grew into ovals again.

She is remembering how squinting just came into her eyes the more she watched the places around her. She got used to the way her eyes would defocus every time the world gave her sharper angles, harsher angles, to deal with—and she soon found herself able to control it. The

muscle grew in with years, even though she could always see perfectly fine. One day after school her mother drove her to an optometrist so that he could tell June that it doesn't seem like there's any problem. Twenty-twenty vision, both eyes. But be careful—the more you squint like that, the more likely your eyes are to get used to the way that feels, and you don't want to end up getting thick rims when you have perfect vision now. June is remembering how on the highway ride home that day, her mother was just a silhouette while she softened her vision, very much consciously this time, at the dark air in front of her, blurred her eyes until the red lights and yellow lights expanded and intersected and soon formed perfect spheres of translucent fuzz, squinted until the lights grew bigger than the cars themselves, until they lensed the whole nighttime freeway in high beam incandescence.

June is doing it again in the window seat of her airplane tonight as she scans down below to a lit city beneath her. She likes the cars and the people and the hairs of roads when they are small and blurry, when she is hovering thousands of feet above, so that her eyes can squint them, squint hard, into looser lines and boxes to intersect, lacy with haze of light. She feels the clean jerk of the plane's wheels dropping and she sets into ground. The runway loudens and loudens after the wheels pound on the ground, for speed, and then quiet, slower, to stop.

The air is dark when June's brother Lee finds her at the terminal gate. As he drives out of the airport parking lot, she is remembering the conversation she had with him when they last drove alone and together on a highway. Perhaps it was the summer

after he graduated high school. She is remembering how he announced to her that out of everything there is to do in the world, he just wants to make things with his hands.

She asked, "Like, in life?"

"Yeah. Like bread, for example. Or, I don't know, a scarf? Or a letter."

June remembers this in the car right now, and she looks at her brother at the driver's seat. She finds his hands. They are veined with dirt. She wants to ask him if he still keeps up that garden on his terrace.

"Hands are basically like trees branches," he said in that same memory. "But no, really! Think about it. I mean, don't they just look like the most weird, irregular part of the human body? And they're pretty strong, too."

"So, you want to let your hands get all gnarled and thick?" She knew in that moment that he said these things to her that summer so that when he moved across the Atlantic, she would remember him as a brother as mature as she was, even if he was younger. June knew then that Lee was just making a box—a box she could fit all her memories of him into, something that will last in her mind for moments like this, until new conversations could be had years and years later.

In this memory on the highway Lee told June that he didn't care what his hands looked like, he only wanted them tough and useful and strong so that he could make things with them. June is wondering if his hands are now as tough as he wanted them to be on that day, years and years ago.

Now she wants to start a conversation with her brother in the driver's seat, but instead she finds herself

looking at her own hands. His whole letter-writing plan never really went too well for him; he made this clear to her by now.

“Your flight was okay?” he says now. So she looks at him.

“Yeah. Wasn’t too bad. God, I haven’t taken a plane in forever. I hate them.”

“Planes?”

“Mostly just the turbulence.”

June wants to ask why her brother’s car smells like cigarettes. But instead, she looks at the backseat of the car through the rearview mirror. She holds her eyes there for a minute, because she is hoping that Lee is maybe looking at her, thinking about what he has to say before he says it.

He starts. “So how have you been?”

“I, uh... good.”

He continues. “How’s mom been?”

“I mean, you’ve talked to her on the phone, right? She’s the same.”

June tenses her back against the seat. He is swerving through a corner.

“Does she still work? Do you guys, like, do anything together?”

“I mean, not really. It’s the worst now. She’s more talkative than she has ever been. Which doesn’t make any sense, right? But nothing she says has any motion any more. Like something is dull. You know what I mean?”

“Not really.” Lee’s face is blank.

“I don’t know. I don’t really get it. It’s a bit much sometimes, to watch her like this.” June looks at Lee. “It’s hard though now, because it’s only me at home now. It’s like we’re both blind to the other, or something. You know?” Her eyes melt into blur, quickly. She waits.

Now June is remembering the

time when Lee skipped school, when he was in tenth grade. She knew all along, and she loved it—she just never told anyone. Her mom never even found out. She remembers that morning. She was a senior.

“If you tell Mom I swear to god I’ll tell her about that time you hitchhiked last summer,” he said, as they walked down the driveway.

“Dude, chill. I’m not going to tell Mom. This is hilarious. I can’t believe you’re doing this.”

It’s because she thought her mom would find out anyway. She thought her mom would somehow taste it in her morning oats, smell it in the shampoo emanating from Lee’s bathroom, and feel its textures in noontime light. But that day when June and Lee came home, she was napping in her bedroom. When they woke her up, she asked them to go get the newspaper from the bottom of the driveway. She claimed it completely slipped her mind, as did going for her daily walk—where did the whole day disappear?—when they asked her about it.

June feels the car slowing in front of a whitewashed apartment building, as Lee turns the dial on the radio.

“I don’t know. Like, she never used to talk that much. Now it’s like her words are too thin. She just says them for filler.” June is still waiting for her brother’s face to shift. “It’s dumb, though. She thinks the more she says to me, the fuller we’ll both be. I can’t even listen to her, though. And then she’s alone too, and then she’s tired. Do you know what I mean, at all?” June is thinking that Lee probably cannot trace their mother like this, in his memory. June wonders if Lee can sense, at least, that this is why she got on the plane.



The next morning, June sits on a small futon in Lee’s living room, and she is drinking tea.

“Does Mom still eat oats every day?” Lee is pouring himself Cornflakes.

“Could you imagine anything else?”

“I mean, Dad hated oats. I hate oats. Do you even like oats? Wait, do you want breakfast?”

June straightens her vision and she is looking across the small living room and into Lee’s kitchen. June lets her brother’s outline cloud into a long brushstroke smudge. She lets the black lines separating the kitchen’s linoleum tiles stain into the white, so that soon her eyes blotch them into grey. She lets the kettle on the stove turn to one fog circle. She scans. She blurs the door, wide open, into the walls, the hallway behind it, leading to the doormats of other families. She blinks to force her eyelids wide, to get the shadows out. She places her mug on the table, walks into the kitchen to join her brother.

“June, do you want to see the terrace? It’s cool. And at this time of day, it’s really cool.”

“Right. I forgot you had that.”

“It’s perfect. I like the open space, I guess. And you can see everything from up there, too.” June watches how Lee’s eyes are wide and smooth and lit.

June follows Lee up the concrete block terrace.

And soon they reach the last step up and June watches her brother stand by the greying ledges, watches the way his hands are swatting at the sunlight, watches how his eyes become the shape of fish. Next June watches her brother’s hands move in

his vegetable garden. June is standing just above the top step leading to the bleached terrace. She is still and silent and squinting as she watches her brother—who is kneeling by the box of vegetable garden—plant his hands in the whitewashed morning.



June is looking at the clock. “Do you remember how Mom would always bring us boiled eggs on the way home from school?” The clock’s hands still look linear when she is thinking about how her mother had to get her hearing checked last month, when she would talk and talk but was never able to respond.

“Oh yeah.” Lee sits on the straw rocking chair beside her. He holds a crossword puzzle. He hasn’t written anything in the boxes yet; just notes on the side.

“And she would wrap them all up in aluminum foil and then pack them up in that old army green lunchbox, the one with the holes on the side, and then we would go to Borderland Park to eat them?”

June watches Lee be silent, before he looks up at her. “Okay. Yes.”

“I mean, do you remember her as that?” June still watches Lee be silent. “You probably do, right?” She lets him be silent now.

June just remembers the way her mother taught her, when she was old enough, the Four Minute rule. Let the water come to a rolling boil in the pan, then put two eggs in there and wait for four minutes before taking the eggs out. One of the eggs probably will have a little crack down the side. But four minutes is the perfect amount of time. And June is remembering how her mother never needed a timer back then—she just knew when the time was up. She

could look at the crack in the egg and see the four minutes inside of it. June squints back at the clock, and closes her eyes.

And in six days, again June is boiling two eggs on Lee’s stove. She looks at the clock for four minutes until the eggshell splits, just enough to look like a shadow. She is even remembering that her mother always said that eggs contained themselves. They were like a whole meal in one little natural case. She removes the eggs from the boiling water, rolls them up in individual squares of aluminum. She places the oval in the seat of her hands, and because it is warm she curls her other fingers around the shiny aluminum egg, and for maybe a whole minute she just holds like that, warmth rolling and steeping into her palms. The egg is warm as hands.

She places the eggs in a brown paper bag and then in her backpack. Her suitcase sits unzipped by the door. Lee has gone to get the car.



She is doing that thing again—so that the outlines of trees and buildings and highway lines blur into one cohesive, multicolored fuzz—when Lee drives her to the airport. June tries to smudge the whole, wide 6PM sky into just one color. Right now it purges sunset.

Lee stops the car. June watches his vision stream to the road. They are pulled over on the side of the highway. Rush hour traffic makes the air wobble.

“You know, June, I think mom’s boiled eggs never stuck with me as much as they stick with you. No, I don’t really think about them that often, I guess.”

June is knitting her fingers together,

then unraveling.

“I don’t really think of fixed things—her things—when I think of her, like that. Do you know what I mean?” June watches Lee look up at the filmy sun. “Oh yeah, June, did you like that terrace? The light always seems to be the best up there, all the time. It just works out that way.” Now Lee drops his eyes on his feet and June tries to do the same. She doesn’t hear him right now. She makes her hands look like they are stretching—she tries to crack her knuckles but the new air bubbles haven’t yet formed. She turns to him but he has already started the car back up.

He keeps driving her towards the airport, and the air darkens more too. And now her eyes need the feel of squinting again—so she is squinting and blurring the space in front of her until she sees a beach in the bronzed sky, but she makes it look like some shade of morning to her mind. This is what she is imaging right now, when together she and her brother are skimming over the highway in a small Toyota. And she knows that her eyes will eventually tire out, her squinting will be strained, that soon she will see only other cars again. She is very much awake. Still, she defocuses her eyes.

She is imagining in these eyes that night bleeds with the first blemishes of morning. She is imagining that she is at the beach with her brother, perhaps at that curious time of 5AM, when the eye can see the first whispers of light steaming out of the bands in the horizon, but the sky above is still dark, almost like that one little splotch of light is like a translucent bit of the sky. That’s what it is right now, that’s what she is imagining in her squinted eyes.

And yes, she and her brother are going fishing, in the ocean, their knees are in the water and they are fishing in the same way that their mother taught them when they were young, together, and they are casting off in sync, their lines are getting tangled up in the seaweed in sync, brother and sister and mother close by, to collect pockets of moments like these, these white and silent and glorious moments right here, these moments that justify something.



June is alone on her overnight flight home. She doesn't see any clocks around her, because, after all, she couldn't measure two thousand miles in linear hours. So she lets this time that she cannot tell defocus her eyes, and then everything she sees blurs into her brother, sitting at the window seat and sleeping: she's remembering the way he would fall asleep as he stared at the darkening clouds. She hated the way he insisted on taking the window seat when they were little because he would always fall asleep, wasting the views that she could've enjoyed. She always thought the window seat was for people who liked to see metal airplane wings touching clouds, for people who wanted less than an illusion. But right now she can't see anything on earth through the dark of overnight flights. So she holds her own hands under the overhead florescent whine, and one is warm and the other is cold. "Why do we know that clouds aren't actually solid?" She can hear him in this voice, this voice of questions that she knew many years ago but still to her sounds clear.



She listens for her brother's voice

again each time she feels the turbulence. He told her everything that one time, when she was young and her brother still younger. He even said that it could be such a nice way to go, go with the clouds outside the window made real.

"Even if the turbulence took over the whole thing, and everything was shaking and everyone shook right out of their seats, and yeah—imagine that, June, everyone wiggling on the ground—even then, we would still fall for, like, two whole miles. You're not going to get hit for two whole miles of time."



In this moment on the airplane, June is realizing why she needs to blur her own eyes. June squints her eyes because she wants to see in between things. She wants to see the world in her brother's focus because June is realizing that Lee never squints because Lee does not need to squint. And still, Lee does not see his mother's face in things. He can see her in between things.



Then there is the sleep that June longs for during that overnight flight. There is morning, and June watches the morning spatter the clouds that soon turn saturated with light, no walls to hold back daytime in miles of sky. Her eyelids even feel a bit more translucent, every time she tries to sleep.

Plane lands and June's eyes hurt and she is fearing that maybe she was squinting the whole time on that overnight flight. June is extremely sleepy when she thinks, for the first time, that perhaps her hands, too, are like her brother's hands—like trees. She keeps them folded in her

lap, keeps them that way until wheels hit ground.



And maybe it's just because of the jetlag, but June's eyes are aching to see her mother without defocusing. June will not blur her old, old mother now. Now, June is looking from the baggage claim through the international gate and she is seeing now the arch of her mother's shoulders, thin black strands of hair and a soft face now, a small portrait that stands still and waits.

In a few moments June is placing her backpack on the airport's linoleum floor so that she can hold her mother now, speak to her and listen to her now, see her hands. When she sees the slowness in her mother's reactions and the space in her mother's voice, June will watch her brother watching the world. She will hold in her eyes his two miles of time.



The Vase

Allison Huang
PRINCETON, NJ

When we arrive at my godmother's home, I feel that I have fulfilled the filial piety expected of a daughter too tall for the red *qipao* and matching silk slippers, and too brutish

to wrap my arms around my godfather's small figure without feeling sharp bones, as I perch like a decorated vase at the small oval table, watching my father

sit stone-faced and unfamiliar at the other end.

The casual array of spiced meat is too much for my mother to leave alone,

she wields a pair of shears from a used biscuit box on the counter and proceeds to ceremonially trim

the gray tails off of shrimp, as if two years had not passed since we last labored in the tiny kitchen, and a meal is conceived over the shriek of boiling tea.

At the table, everyone makes fists to pray a family prayer—my first in months, and I relax against the connected elbows, which tumble over each other to try to feed one another, the serving spoons forgotten,

as my sister plods away at the *ilys*, *omgs*, and *lols* underneath the table, face as taut as the white, pixelated screen, and sweet garlic cloves drown in the golden sauce of sticky fish.

I help myself to seconds.

At some point my mother begins to cry, wrinkling her brow in a tired knot, eyes like pale shells glued tight. I hunch next to her, shriveled in my tight traditional clothing, and she grasps my godmother's hand

across the table, which looks natural now, even as the disjointed handshake levitates over a sculpture of clear stark bones, of blue-rainbow oyster shells which undulate in pink rims,

but surely their arms will ache soon. I wonder

who will let go first and if my mother will hold my hand instead, or maybe

the leather handle of the purse in her lap, surely I understand what she means by loss, what it means to be torn from the motherland,

to return each year because it was the apartment that gave her, the allowance that she must pay back, surely I understand

the greatest Trojan defeat of my mother, who sits at the computer most days to program her way out of a past that keeps haunting her, shadowy travesties that trail and wash up on the gray wallpaper of the room.

And the Silence is a Beautiful Thing

Tiffany Wang
DENTON, TX

I.

I was told my mother was officially diagnosed when she was twenty-four, but she'd lost her mind long before then. Ever since she was eighteen, the fucking shadows began speaking to her, caressing her, hugging her, slapping her across the face. They danced with her day and night, switching masks as angels or demons, always lingering close by. She first met my father in the hospital after hours of surgery, because the voices wanted to see what color her heart was and so did she.

My father was a man who hated the city where he worked and saw my mother as more than the surrounding gray world. Perhaps he was drawn to her golden hair, her crimson lips – her brilliant thoughts, which became so closely interlocked with the whispers by the end that it was impossible to separate the two. Somehow, though, she was deemed fit and released from the hospital, with prescribed medication clanking in her drawstring bag. After that, my parents dated, eloped, and moved away, to the place where my father was born.

But if it had been me, I would have torn up any discharge papers I could find. I would have made sure she had proper care and locked her in and thrown away the key and never looked back, because anything was better than her –

(Katie, Katie – darling, can't you see my friends, waving there from the ocean? I'll introduce you one day, you know, but first they want to

meet me. Oh, don't worry, you can stay right here in the house, where you can watch me from the window with Jillian and Kylan. Don't be silly, darling, of course they're real, I talk to them all the time, don't I? Yes, Katie, they're right here, I don't understand why you can't see them, don't you hear them speaking? They'll take you to find me soon, real soon – I promise.)

– and even now she was still everywhere, lingering in the darkened corners of the house.

God, make it fucking stop.

II.

I remembered the rattle of orange bottles, which held the snowy pills that tamed her mind and made the smoky images vanish for a short while. It was then that we could go down to the beach and play, building castles out of shells. Whenever I walked down to the ocean, I still looked for the skeletal remains of the grand structures we'd once made.

When I was eleven, she emptied all the white capsules into the water and watched as they melted into nothingness. She smiled and told me that Jillian had informed her she didn't need her life to be dictated by some useless meds – and, if I loved her, it would be our secret. One month later, she walked into the ocean and never came back, because she discovered that she loved the voices more than she loved us.

III.

Insanity was hereditary.

It was what I was thinking whenever Emily Song, my lab partner, and I were cutting up a frog in biology. It was my turn to make the incision, in a horizontal strike across the poor thing's belly. As I did,

my hands were shaking as I felt the frog's rubbery skin fray apart –

(No, Katie, it's not supposed to hurt. No, sweetheart, don't cry, don't cry. I'm royal, you know, so all my subjects demand this from me and, because you're my daughter, they demand it from you too. Katie, it's alright, I promise. Just don't move and this will just sting – Katie, come back! KATIE!)

– and I lost my grip on the knife as it clattered to the table. Emily sighed and reached over to grab it, as I bit down on my lower lip and blood bloomed.

She gave me a sharp glance. “You okay?”

My nod blurred into a quick shrug. “Yeah, sure, fine,” I said quickly, my words colliding into one another.

The look in her eyes became one of complete pity.

“If you're sure,” she said sympathetically. Then, she went back to slicing into the frog, pulling apart its intestines as I wondered if this was how my mother felt, right before she slipped into the cold embrace of her beautiful shadows.

IV.

My mother had a tattoo of three seahorses on the inside of her left forearm. She told my father it was to celebrate our little family, but I knew she'd gotten it during her month of “recovery.” Secretly, I was positive that the hissing suggestions of Jillian and Kylan had had something to do with it.

Two months ago, I stood outside the Lucky Dime Tattoo Parlor, with the outside walls painted an ashy blue-gray, and signs peeling away from the windows. I planned on getting something simple on my side,

to cover up the faded scars from half a decade ago. As I rattled around the loose change in my pocket, pondering how to convince the man behind the counter to give me a tattoo without parental approval, the dim sunlight caught my forearm. There, steadily creeping up my skin, was the faint outline of three seahorses, two larger than the third.

I lurched away from the building as a ghost tried to claw its way into my head. I ran home as fast as I could and locked the door behind me, praying that 1-3/4" of oak could keep out the swath of noises beginning to fill my ears. As the silence stretched over me, the tattoo grew clearer, stamping down into my bones.

So I got rid of it the only way I could – with my father's razor, as I sat cross-legged on the tile floor. When I was done, everything was a sharp, radiant kind of quiet, except for the ragged exhale of my breaths.

After that, I unpacked all my winter clothes and began wearing long sleeves and avoided the ocean, because I couldn't bear to have its manic salt graze the scabbing scars.

V.

I was constantly terrified that I would be just like her. It was a ridiculous notion to think that one day, my mind would suddenly flip a switch, cranking out the voices that I hid from. Ridiculous and crazy – but there were moments when I felt like I was slipping into the place my mother had been a part of.

When she first imagined the voices that eventually consumed her, my grandparents thought it was just a phase. They signed her up for the farthest university from them and shipped her off to an overcrowded

city, where they hoped she would just disappear into the masses. She became someone else's problem, and that was the way it remained.

For her funeral, it was just me, my father, and the local priest. When the service was over and we'd thrown the coffin into the September ground, my father gathered me in his arms. "You'll always be your mother's girl," he said, crushing me to his chest.

I didn't tell him that was exactly what I was afraid of.

VI.

There was one night when she wouldn't stop screaming.

It was after she'd been so convinced that she had wings. She spent hours describing them to me –

(Look how gorgeous they are, darling. Jillian likes the color best because she says it reminds her of snow, but I think I like how free they make me feel. I'll be flying outside in a while, if you'd like to come. No, I won't fall – I'm an angel, dear. Angels don't ever fall.)

– but my father caught up with her as she was walking up the sloping incline, which overlooked the sea. He tore after her, blocking her way as he yelled, "Katherine, what the hell are you doing?"

She started to scream, her voice shredding the air and stuffing my brain. She was cast in the smoky light of the stars as she tried to pull away from him, reaching out towards the ghosts that only she saw and begging them to help her. When they did nothing, she hit my father, but he pulled her close and held her to him.

I hid behind him, and I saw her focus on me. Her eyes widened, tears reflected in her eyes and pooling down her cheeks. Her screaming instantly cut off, as her voice dropped

to a low, hoarse growl. "Tell him I need to go," she choked out, and that was the only thing she repeated the entire trek back to our house. "I need to, I need to, I need to."

A few weeks later, she got her wish.

VII.

After the incident with the frog, I worried even more. After all, I was nearly eighteen, around the same age my mother was when she first "met" Jillian and Kylan. I thought I was starting to hear the flutter of sounds wherever I went – so I went down to the shore to collect my thoughts, pushing my sleeves up to my elbows.

The waves pranced around my legs cheerfully. Hello Katie, they chimed sweetly, kissing my cheeks softly. Hello, hello, hello.

And here was the problem – Jesus Christ, all they ever said was hello, filling my ears with the gorgeous, terrible words that I loved.

I put my right hand in the air and waved weakly. "Hello," I said back.

VIII.

My father was a man who had taken a beating from life. He was sitting at the dinner table when I arrived back at the house, thumbing through old photo albums from the past. I caught a glimpse of my mother's grin, before he flipped the page and her smile blurred into my baby picture, beaming crookedly.

"Where have you been, Katie?" he asked.

"Beach," I replied carefully.

He looked up at me. "Are you sure you should be going there?" he said, just as carefully. He let the words he couldn't say hang thick in the air –

(No, Robert, I'm just taking a walk down to the water later. Yes,

I'm taking the medication and, yes, I'm fine. No, no reason, I just think it's a stunning sight, don't you? You can leave Katie with me for a little while. No, darling, we'll both be okay. I love you.)

— as a stillness blanketed us. There was no whispering, no voices — just the two of us, staring at one another. I felt the healing scars carved into my wrist and thought that I should tell him, maybe in a single, quick sentence. I would share how scared I was and the noises I was hearing and then he could take me to the hospital where he worked to find me what I needed to stay sane.

He repeated my name hesitatingly, but I couldn't. I found that I was my mother's girl through and through, and, just as she had never told him about dumping her pills in the ocean, I couldn't speak to him either. I didn't want to break whatever he still had left within him, because he wanted me to be normal and happy, just like what he'd wanted for her. The second I told him, it would all come crashing to an end.

"I'll be okay," I said. "I love you."

Then I went up to my room and shut the door. I knew I would tell him one day.

But today was not that day.

IX.

That night, a dim haze clouded over the moon. I slipped out of the house and found myself facing the sea. I sat down on the rocks gathered farther back from where civilization met with sand, and I looked out at the waves that stretched before me.

And everything was beautifully, maddeningly silent, just like it had always been.

Paulie and the Primates: Live! at the Musky Barn

DAVID MERKLE
GLEN ROCK, NJ

Grunged-up drug monkeys
Bang piano keys and blow sax
reeds
Give hand to the drumsticks and
eat out the mic with their groggy
voices
But no heavy guitar, this is a surf-
rock-jazz band

Circular melodies
And then rectangular ones
And then triangular ones
And eventually, chair and barstool-
shaped songs

But the barstools don't jive with the
monkeys—
They're more grounded that way

.....

All the alcoholics leave after only
one surf-rock-jazz tune
Muffled grunts and treacherous
sighs
"They're no rock band."
"Just a bunch of apes," they would
say

By the time the monkeys finish
their set,
There is nobody left to enjoy the
encore

.....

In the green room, they are re-
warded with complimentary beers
Though they would prefer some
bananas

Coastal Portrait

Clémentine Wiley
EDDINBURG, TX

I carry my words in a sloshing
bucket,
spilling only piddly things.
I never liked numbers that
slide, stack, click together or
the talk whirring tight as
speedometers' gears. I fling
the net, watch the greenblue pulsate
over it.

On Tuesdays at Sweet Gregory P's
the pulled pork burger is 25% off,
news drones from the TV, and I
want to
tell the owner about how
I tore out of the waves a
dripping bulk
netted, never seen so much silver
slapping the deck—
but don't. Days,

years, these
years fall by like
droplets penduluming
one at a time
sparkling and magnified
until they tremble, let go
to lose shape in the sea.





Dakota's Winter Wonderland

Dakota Thomas
HAMILTON, NY



Arktikos

Tucker Huston
UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ

Soft mints poke
playfully at arctic
soil; life persists.

Green turns golden purple:
poppies under eternal sun.

Lives here are

miners chipping away at glacial ice,
resilient.

I, too, toil
away in the dark.

Wait for the golden gleam,
my lantern in these shadows,
the moon in this night sky.

Like the warm Caribbean
basking in dawn's infant rays.

Our star loves these hallowed

grounds,
but dooms it; like
dying leaves.

Love can only do so much
for a wasteland.

Sloppy Seconds

Allison Choi
MILTON, MA

In the spaces between,
we hide ourselves,
our lives carefully bottlenecked.
We spend too long unzipped.
By dinnertime, sloppy seconds
waste down our faces,
unhinge the checkbone
underneath,
and pull the skin down like a
window shade,
into melting clocks.

Some people can never let go,
head locked in the mirror
of the past, slowly torturing
their bodies, some people
have already let go—
paled emotions, lost connections
until your mother is a numb pair
of lips
at your father's cheek.
You wonder why marriage
never sticks, if the love
sworn on wedding days
has an expiration date,
best before the products of it—
the kids, the accounts—
stretch it long
into a rainbow of loose
chords spilling out of
a cassette tape.

When a photograph ages
the photons expand,
saturating the film,
sweetening the filter
like an old Scotch.
Your mother hangs them
in ebony frames,
receipts for the memories
that owe you nothing,
you realize now.

Red Eulogy

Lisa Zou
CHANDLER, AZ

my grandfather wants to be
cremated near Tiananmen

in Beijing where his eldest son protested,
while the Square slips through

his views — once more to reach the nirvana
he never believed in, the coffin cycles

past the cabin his uncle built during a better dynasty
with trunks of weeping willows outside the cemetery

where he spent his youth and the cabin's roof
held my grandfather's baby teeth, he told me

it was a family tradition —teeth decaying for centuries
on a roof above three generations, my brother

lacks the Chinese to tell— and my grandfather does not know
two apartment complexes stand where his home had

and his son's dog which chased away the thieves had not aged
but was shot by a new neighbor who did not know my grandfather

much better than I did.



Self Portrait

Tiffany Wang
DENTON, TX

I.

I do not realize how drunk Katie is until she nearly drives into the tube slide on the elementary school playground, our red car skittering against the rubber chips.

“Shit!” she says, and jerks the steering wheel wildly. The tires crunch onto the paved streets as Katie slumps back, folding her fingers over a dented metal can. She takes a deep drink before sighing heavily, dropping it back in the cup holder. It misses and bounces down, where it rolls under her chair and out of my sight. She brakes violently as liquid seeps onto her shoes. “Shit, shit, shit.”

In the map inside my head, we can turn right, make a sharp turn, continue up the incline. If we follow the path upwards, we’ll reach the place where my twin brother listened to the ocean calling his name. There, he stared out at the edge of the world and decided he could draw better from the sea floor than he ever could on dry land.

“Cassie?” Katie says, slurring slightly. She looks at me blearily and I look back at her, at her chipped, purple fingernails and her glittery makeup, which sparkles enough to ward off the ghosts around her.

Two weeks ago, Davis was locked in a wooden box and thrown into the December ground. Dad left as soon as it was over and Mom booked it to the nearest bar, as I stood rooted to the spot, breaking Davis’s old charcoal pieces apart in my pocket. Katie stayed beside me the entire time, changed from my older sister to a beautiful marble statue. When

my fingers had been stained a dark, heavy gray, I put my hand in hers, and we walked to the car together, feeling the ground collide and crash beneath us.

“We’re okay,” I say, my voice shaking. I say it again, though, and then again, holding onto the thread of hope that she will somehow believe me if she hears it enough times.

II.

I don’t really see Katie again until Saturday morning, when she has finally recovered from a spectacular hangover. I go downstairs for breakfast to find her at the table, eating cereal with the newspaper propped against her bowl. I sit down across from her with an apple. “Morning,” I say.

She smiles out at me. “Morning,” she says back, before returning to the comics. A smear of glitter is still lodged to her left eyelid.

Both of us ignore the empty chair that’s next to mine. Both of us ignore the frantic clacking of a computer keyboard down the hall as our father buries himself in fixing the lives of other people, and the alarm that is going off in our parents’ bedroom that our mother will ignore.

Instead, we are perfectly fine the way we are, because a taped together family of two functions just as well as a family of five.

I gnaw on my apple and bite into seeds.

III.

She didn’t cry once.

After that phone call came, my world exploded. There were days where I literally ran out of tears, choking on my breaths as my mind continued screaming. I kept picturing Davis suspended in the air, how he must’ve looked as he hit the rocks

and the sea kissed his face, while his molecules broke apart and the bones that held him together unknit themselves into fragments. I spent hours lying on his bed, staring up at the tiger that he’d somehow managed to paint onto the ceiling. Its fur practically crackled as it bared its teeth at me in a half-smirk. I thought about how I knew that he never went anywhere without his sketchbook and hated coffee and loved the sunset right before the clouds came up, when the sky was hovering on uncertainty. I thought about how I knew so many stupid things about him but I didn’t know my own twin wanted to die – and then the sobs came all over again.

But Katie stole liquor from our parents’ cabinet and hid in her room and never brought up Davis after that goddamned call. She was chiseled from stone, as she drove her car around in the dead of the night, with the radio up much too loud. Sometimes I joined her, sometimes I didn’t, but whenever I did, her makeup was always perfect, she was always drinking heavily, and she never cried – never.

At least, not in front of me.

IV.

What I know about Davis’s sketchbook:

It has an unassuming brown cover, so at first glance it looks like an ordinary book

He’s drawn an opened palm on the bottom left of the cover in black Sharpie. When I place mine over it, it’s an almost perfect fit

He never let me look in it. Whenever I asked, he just smiled and shook his head ruefully, like just considering the thought was ridiculous. To be fair, drawing was always his thing, so I probably wouldn’t have understood

anything symbolic and elusive within his creations anyways

It's in front of me right now, half-hidden underneath a stack of old art magazines on his desk

Even the air is completely still. I never realized how much the missing presence of a 5'7" boy could crumple up a structure of a house and everyone left inside.

I sit down and gingerly place the sketchbook on my lap. I almost expect electricity to fly when I touch it, as a thrill rises up in my belly and lodges in my throat. I open it to the first page and stare –

Because there's nothing. No magnificent painting or even a hurried sketch – no indication of the hours that Davis spent, his fingers gripping a pencil and flying over the paper. Instead, an open void yawns at me lazily, grinning a Cheshire grin.

My movements become frantic. I flip through dozens of blank sheets as the cream-colored papers disintegrate softly. I'm halfway through when I notice the fragments lodged in the metal spine of the sketchbook, and I bite through my bottom lip. Davis once told me something about an artist never destroying his own work. Now, as I pull paper strands from the dulled spiral, I begin to see inside my brother's mind – and everything he managed to hide so well.

The cover of the sketchbook reads that there were originally 250 pages. Out of that, 189 are torn out. 60 are blank. And one is filled in, with the explosive force of Davis's thoughts.

It's somewhere near the end. The entire sheet of paper has been blacked out in thick, unforgiving strokes. On the back, in my twin's messy script, he's written four words in thin, red ink:

Davis Adams, Self Portrait

V.

I need a pair of clean jeans.

It's stupid, but nobody in the house does laundry anymore, and I've run out of clean pants that I can wear, so I sneak into Katie's room when she's at the store to steal a pair from her. I flick on the closet light and shadows slant everywhere.

The walls are covered in writing.

Furious, haphazard writing, where the pen has broken through the wallpaper and bled through underneath. There are paragraphs that cover endless space, which clash with the shattered sentences that loop through the clothes. Between these, angry print shifts into angrier cursive and becomes consistently messier as her handwriting spirals towards the ceiling.

Letters leap out, catching me by surprise and blinding me: I hate you, I love you, I miss you, God, Davis, you idiot why didn't you talk to us, you killed us, killed us in the worst possible way –

The air around me sits on my chest as Katie's words claw into me, melting into my skin. I look away, but for all the wrong reasons. Despite the fact that I have just invaded Katie's private sanctuary, all I can think is that I have stumbled upon a graveyard of words.

VI.

I follow the map in my head to the place to where X marks the spot. Then, I stand at the edge of the world and look over.

Dear God, it is so beautiful.

I'm seeing what Davis must have seen in the last seconds of his life and my fingers bite into my knee. Was it worth it, Davis? I think, fire spilling into my veins. I can almost imagine him drawing me right now, with that

quiet, manic gleam in his eye as he maps out the ice melting beneath my skin.

Are you happy now? I ask the waves that whispered his name at two AM and the cold wind that slowed his fall and him – because he's everywhere, painting the sky around me a glowing orange. God, Davis, I am so lost without you.

There's no answer, but I listen as hard as I can anyways.

VII.

I give Katie two things whenever I see her at breakfast. The first is a water bottle, because I can't keep watching her drink herself to death. The second is Davis's sketchbook.

She blinks. "Thanks?" she says, peeling the label off of the bottle, but not touching the book.

"It was Davis's," I say, and, immediately, her eyes harden. But she can't shut down now, and I begin to speak faster, my voice pouring out. "I get it now, Katie. Not completely and – God, I'm so pissed at him for deciding to leave because maybe we could've helped him, but it was his choice. I was in his room, and I saw this – and, now, I get that he was in so such of a shitty place that he thought there was no other way."

The water bottle skids across the surface of the table. "Okay," she says, standing up to go.

Desperation pulls at my lungs. "Look," I say, and pull the cover aside. I swear, Katie's eyes widen as she sees the paper shreds. When I get to the blacked-out page, she turns away. "Maybe we don't know why he did it or what he was thinking when he did or anything else. But in the end, we couldn't have seen it, and the only thing left that we can do is to remember him – so stop pushing him aside and pretending that he

didn't exist."

And I see her trying to hold it in – hold everything in. Except Davis didn't just draw art – he was art, and art has a way of pulling stars into never-ending darkness and causing oceans to murmur broken promises about life and beauty and love. It can build and shatter, and it's shredded us like one of the drawings he made that could uproot forests and move mountains.

"Stop hiding," I tell her fiercely, because that's what she's doing: hiding behind the smooth marble sheen that encases her features and freezes her tears. I put the sketchbook in her hands, and we share the weight of ten million pounds of paper and ash. "Stop hiding, Katie."

And, finally, she does.

VIII.

In the middle of the afternoon, the cliff is a sleeping giant, shuddering quietly beneath our footsteps. We lean against the sturdy wooden fence, close to where the sky and water interlock with one another – a clashing of light blue against a darker, more relentless shade.

"My little brother is dead," Katie says. Her voice is hollow, cracking down the middle.

"So is my twin," I reply softly, staring downwards. There's something about the aching pattern of the waves that catch me, smiling at me in the saddest way I have ever seen.

Minute after minute ticks by, fading into hours. I study the ocean and Katie sips from the water bottle, as we think about how to put ourselves back together – because the edge of the world doesn't necessarily mean the end of it.

IX.

I sit in Davis's chair, and smell the

thin underline of vanilla soap that he used to use. The sketches taped to his wall blink at me curiously as I balance a brand-new sketchpad on my knees and begin to draw.

It's slow, painstaking work, as my pencil bumps over the paper clumsily. I try to capture everything that I can remember about the way the cliff looked today, suspended on the brink of waking up. In my mind, I can imagine the swirling waters at the bottom, and the exact way the sun was caught between the rocks.

All of this I want to layer into my work. As I start to put in me and

Katie and Davis, though, I find that I can't bring myself to do it. To the slumbering cliff, we are just dream-figures quietly passing through, slipping in and out of everything as easily as it breathes. I think that Davis would be proud of me for the whole aspect of artistic realization, as I erase and continue.

When I finish, I find what I've done is in no way perfect.

But, to me, it's a start.

The Dirty Side of Glamour

Allison Choi
MILTON, MA

is when I find myself
at a basement party,
stretched long on the rug
like milk spilled from a carton,
the smoke from my cigarette
tying a cloth around
the branches of my fingers,
saying, "Your body has given up
on you."
But the mind,
the part of myself that is a well
overflowing with wonder,
can't stop being alive.
After knocking back
sweaty tequila shots,
eye-shadow splotches
over my face the way oil spills
lurk into rivers, my head
spinning, webbed with glimmer, as
I look
at the people around me,
the jock football player,
the blond petite,
who supposedly cheated on her
boyfriend

last week—they all must run
marathons in their lives, yet
here they are now, transfixed,
as the clock steals minutes from
the spell of their daze.
We resemble a Klimt's *The
Maiden*,
quilted in each other's caress.
The rest of the night falls yellow,
warm beer fuzzing down
our stomachs, a sentiment
crawls underneath my skin,
the craving of specialty
because these nights dial down
to average until the hum of
ESPN
is the only noise in the room,
and I know, there are forces
much greater than the substances
that warp our visions, the
cliques formed in
the girl's bathroom, the seventh
lover I've had, or gatherings like
this
when we're all here
not for each other but rather
for a notion that we have
to be here.

The Insomniac

Connie Guo

KATY, TX

Day 1

Tonight I can't sleep. It's not for a lack of exhaustion—anything but that. My eyes are bleary and dry and strained, the papery whites shot through with threads of red, spider-like veins. My eyelids are heavy, weighed down by sagging lashes, and they fall over my eyes like thick folds of drapery; I can feel them stick when I slowly peel them open again. Weariness swims in the sludge of my shrunken blue veins, oozes like pus from my open pores, and I have a headache pulsing painfully against my forehead, trickling down to my temples.

My mother used to take sleeping pills when she couldn't sleep. I remember the thin cylindrical orange bottle she always kept on her nightstand and the noisy clacking of compact little pills shuddering in the plastic container. But the dosage the doctor prescribed her ended up being too large, and she got addicted to them.

I never liked pills. Her bottle of sedatives used to leer down at me when I was a kid, mocking, with sharp serrated teeth-like ridges around the plastic cap. They were unsettling. I never knew what sorts of insidious chemicals were packed into those tablets for me to digest, all that concentrated artificial stuff swarming around my synapses to screw with my brain and bodily functions, arbitrarily flicking things off and on like nondescript light switches. Yet I was supposed to pop them like candies because a doctor told me so, because some insouciant

person with a shiny degree breezily handed me a slip of paper on which they had scrawled their illegible signature with an air of self-assured nonchalance. So I never cared much for doctors either—therapists, if you want to be specific (though, to be fair, the feeling was never one-sided).

They were always trying to square the circle, trying to psychoanalytically categorize and pigeonhole things they couldn't understand. They tried to tell me who I used to be and who I am now; who I should be or could be or will be, one contrived self birthing another in a series of endless Matryoshka dolls. They told me my mother left because of a man named Freud and that my brother hated me because the Aztecs used to sacrifice people to the gods, or, rather, their gods, the Mesoamerican version of hand-me-down deities as opposed to the other kinds. But they claimed that they were all right now, that everything was fine. They assured me their gods didn't need blood anymore; they were quite docile now. They'd gotten better, had some counseling, took some medication. It had all been proven to work—they guaranteed it.

But what really makes me question my sanity is why I was willing to pay almost one hundred bucks an hour for expensive bullshit when the Internet could've spat out cost-effective cheap bullshit after just five minutes with a decent search engine. That thought is especially depressing on a night like this.

Day 2

It's raining outside. The sky pours curtains of waterfalls into the soupy predawn darkness. It hasn't let up since this morning. Incessant multitudes of plump raindrops

slant downwards to splat against windshields and windowpanes, to slip down the projecting eaves of neighborhood houses, to be pumped out of overwhelmed downspouts, to slither into murky sewers, and to collect into amorphous puddles by impermeable concrete curbs.

Despite the weather, I decide I have to leave my small one bedroom apartment because there's a cockroach in it. It was clambering up the bare white walls, flitting this way and that, its wings fluttering noisily against the sides of my bookcase.

I'm not leaving because I'm scared. The cockroach just wouldn't settle down enough to let itself be killed. It was always burrowing into nooks in the furniture, under the refrigerator or between the couch cushions, and landing in distant ceiling alcoves, out of my range. I had tossed a few books in the roach's general direction in an attempt to knock it down from its high perch: Plato's *Republic*, Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sartre's *Nausea*, centuries of intellectual abstractions and human discourses soaring through the air to hit the wall in a succession of soft thuds, falling onto the cheap striped carpet with their pages splayed open like shot birds, not quite on mark.

I tried to ignore it when it became clear that I was unable to kill it, but the two of us couldn't escape each other. I was acutely aware of its existence and the obtrusiveness of its proximity, and I couldn't breathe or think or pretend to sleep without picturing it as a blemish on the pale walls of the adjacent room, scuttling in a repulsive bug-like manner across the carpet, brushing against pots and pans, the TV remote, the

kitchen countertop, or, God forbid, scampering onto the bristles of my toothbrush.

Since I could not stand its presence and since it refused to absolve me of it, I had no choice but to initiate a consultation in order to formulate a solution for this impasse. We agreed that the apartment was too small for both of us, but the roach obstinately refused my suggestion to find some other place to stay for the night, citing the concern that it might drown in the torrent. And although I hated and was disgusted by it, I had to sympathize with its predicament and instead chose to leave myself.

I didn't take an umbrella. I probably lost mine somewhere or lent it to someone, so instead I dug out a flimsy raincoat from the back of my closet, stuffed its front pocket with a bottle of this funny tasting mineral water and left.

There is a slight chill in the air tonight. It pinches my skin, scrapes the insides of my throat raw, and I can feel a resonating ache in my teeth. My breaths crystallize, diaphanous white billows curling up into the blackness above, and the smell of wet grass and concrete plugs up my nose.

As I make my way to an intersection, I see a fat man on a bike, completely exposed to the downpour, trying to cross the street and hurry into his subdivision despite the fact that the streetlight for cross traffic shines a lurid green.

I can't make out much except that his white t-shirt has taped itself onto his rotund figure in a not-so-flattering manner and that he's struggling with the bike, unable to push himself off the ground and pedal away. The headlights of an oncoming car blind me for a brief moment, two cones

of white light, and the man must have noticed them too because his movements start becoming more rushed and jerky out in the middle of the street. The spectacle's somewhat hilarious and sad at the same time.

The car—a purple van—doesn't appear to slow down, and I begin to wonder, rather belatedly, if I am about to witness a case of vehicular manslaughter, if this man in front of me is going to get run over and burst like an overripe fruit.

But then he scurries awkwardly to the safety of the sidewalk, half on his bike and half off it, and the van skates by, kicking up a spray of water droplets as it disappears around a corner.

I stare after it for a few seconds and take a couple of swigs of my mineral water (it tastes slightly metallic) before glancing down the street where the fat man had disappeared. The road is lined with flat-roofed, low-lying houses with darkened windows, sheltered behind the shadows of overgrown bushes and untrimmed trees. A few houses, though, glow with a warm yellow light like luminescent islands in a dark sea, and I can peer straight through the windows to see the blaze of television screens where mindless streams of images flicker one after another. In other rooms there are cluttered desks and blank, mask-like faces lit up only by the glaring brightness of computer displays. Time runs down around them as though they are candlesticks dripping with rivulets of hot liquid wax that pool and harden at their feet like clumps of solid fat, white and opaque.

I wonder if I should keep going, but I'm running low on drinking water so I end up trudging back to my apartment complex where the

cockroach is waiting for me. For the next few hours it sits on the bookcase and reads Nietzsche aloud to me in the muffled dimness of the bedroom as pellets of rain continue maniacally hurtling themselves at the windowpanes. I manage to catch something about an old man descending from the mountains and something about him dragging around the corpse of a tightrope walker through a forest before things stop making sense. As if they ever did in the first place.

The roach is gone by sunup.

Day 3

I'm wandering tonight, the same path I took the day before. My apartment was too empty, too still, and the stillness amplified the sound of my neighbor's hacking coughs emanating from just a few feet away through the thin plaster walls. In the bleary daze of insomnia, I listened to the old brick building creaking on its crumbling foundation, groaning with age. The maze of leaking pipes nestled in the papery walls shuddered and gurgled with every errant late night toilet flush, and I could hear the churning of my blood in my ears, could feel precious water evaporate through the pores of my skin. There's a line in the sand somewhere, a high school friend once told me, between being alone and being lonely, a certain point when silence turns to suffocation.

I almost wished the cockroach had stayed.

The rain suddenly starts up again when I cross yesterday's intersection as though it was waiting for me to get there. I keep going in spite of this, not stopping as I pass by the fat man's subdivision. I walk in the direction of a nearby commercial

strip which glimmers like a trove of jewels up ahead, a world away from the muted, quiet lives tucked in the sleeping houses behind me.

But before I get far, I notice a squirrel, roadkill, which is common enough. I've seen several instances of this with other animals such as birds, possums, and even armadillos, all carelessly littered by roadsides and by the shoulders of highways, but only when passing over them in a car. When it's like that, you go too fast to get a proper look; a fleeting peek over the front bumper maybe, with the indistinct shape of the flattened cadaver rising up into your eyes. But you can never glean much more than that before the car rolls over it and glides off. It's easier that way, easier to forget things you don't quite see.

The view's different from the vantage point of the sidewalk. The bowed head of the streetlight illuminates the spot where the squirrel lies prostrate so that no details are hidden from sight.

Patches of dried blood stain the pavement, dark and glistening in the fresh rain, and its mangled guts have spilled out from the left side of its stomach like a mess of tangled fleshy worms, a kind of pinkish-maroon color. Its body is deflated as though it's been popped open, and one arm is outstretched, crushed at the elbow. Water darkens the squirrel's pelt, and it feels wrong for me to stare at it like some gaping onlooker desecrating the sanctity of the image, watching with a mixture of revulsion and sympathy, a strange ambivalence. For a moment I even feel like crying. I don't.

Day 4

I drink from a newly opened bottle of that disgusting mineral

water tonight as I force myself onwards with brisk strides, daring myself to not glance at the squirrel's rotting carcass as I hurry by. I keep to the sidewalk, my shoes squelching in inch deep puddles as I pass glowing neon lights of sleepless 24-hour stores. Streetlamps cast sickly patches of sallow yellow-orange light on the streets, and there still seems to be a slick sheen of rainwater over everything, leftover from last night. It softens the sharpness of the night and blurs bright, colorful signposts, humming with electricity, into smears of fuzz, coating the roads so that they glimmer with the watery reflections of car lights.

Across the street directly in front of the huge, luminous parking lot of a car dealership, I see the outline of a woman keeping pace with me on the opposite sidewalk. She has a purple hoodie raised over her head and olive-toned skin, but the sharp, jabbing pins of light highlighting the night air around her prevents me from discerning her facial features. Even so, for a second, she seems painfully familiar, like an ambiguous approximation of the sister I never had or the cat I couldn't keep.

We move along at the same speed, taking the same steps, and when she turns her head to the side, I realize that she looks a lot like a classmate I once knew from middle school: a small girl with freckles and ginger hair who I never talked to, a half-stranger who flickered by me in school hallways in brief flashes every day for almost five years before she vanished from them and reappeared, pale and bloated, in a nearby lake a week later, deposited there by a tributary and gorged with murky river water. Or maybe she had moved away instead, and maybe I saw her

in a convenience store a month ago, for the first time in years, still small and freckled and red-headed, taking a pint of strawberry milk from the refrigerated dairy display.

But then the woman across the street tilts her face upwards and the artificial light slants queerly along the broad planes of her face. In that instant, at that angle, she looks improbably like my mother—even more so when she swivels her neck to meet my eyes. I hear her voice, my mother's voice, scrape insidiously against my ears, whispering: Don't look at me like that.

In the end, however, when the sparkling backdrop of the dealership slinks behind us, I find that she really looks like me. Her eyes are a reflection of my eyes, wide and fearful, her lips parted and her expression vaguely surprised, as though she's treading on the edge of an epiphany that never quite comes in its entirety but that is rather stingily doled out in portions throughout the passage of years.

I glance away, frightened by the sight, and when I look up again, my image has gone ahead of me. I stop to watch it slip into an unlit street, disappearing as if it's a mirage made from mist and scattered pieces of refracted light, a retreating shadow.

I crawl back to the misery of my moaning apartment building after that, spooked. There are fewer things worse than finding yourself in the dark, especially when you were never looking in the first place.

Day 5

I don't know why I can't sleep. My mother died about a month ago. I've forgotten exactly when. But then again she also died when I four—or was I five? And yet again, I'm pretty

sure, when I was fifteen. She might have kicked the metaphorical bucket a few more times between now and then, but the point is, it's the sort of thing you get used to after a while.

I was once told that I suffered—that we all suffered—from some sort of attachment issue, but sometimes I wonder if it's more because our lives are collapsing inwards today to counteract the expansion of the universe; if we're buckling under the weight and pressure, colliding inelastically against each other, warping and deforming in distorted perfection in hopes that somehow we might stick, that we might cling. I like to think that might be it.

I've finished off three bottles of water in the past two hours. I think I've run out. I'll have to get more in the morning before the dehydration sets in as it always does. The exhaustion hasn't gone away; I can still feel it hanging thick and heavy from my bones and crowding around the roof of my mouth, my tongue. I wonder if I can reach the end of the earth, the big drop off, that dangling ledge pushing into uncertain obscurity. The world always appears flatter at night.

For a second I allow myself to I entertain the thought, and I imagine walking to that unforeseeable edge: down and down and down, skin bulging with weariness, traversing the whole length of humanity before the sun comes up. Greater than Columbus or Magellan or Drake. I try to imagine my arrival: filled with a fullness, a bursting, reaching the conclusion of a long midnight pilgrimage to find myself on the other side of life, wherever that might be, and turning my head to see that the rain has let up and that the earth is filling out again. I want

to imagine that things will smooth themselves out then, like the final unraveling of the last great epiphany or the unveiling of the grotesque punchline at the end of a bad joke. But most of all, I imagine watching the daybreak until I have to look away, until I'm tunneling backwards or forwards, into regression or ascension, ricocheting against myself till it's over, everything flung apart in the centrifuge, my eyes burning against the incandescent sun.



The Rose Garden

Jo de Waal
GREENWICH, CT

The barbed wire memorial
iron rose buds circling
a meager sandy pit I walk around

would become a measure of my
sadness

a Nazi concentration camp
Polizeiliches Durchgangslager Amersfoort
filthy words I spit in native tongue

my father captured in the autumn
of 1944

was four years older than I am
now
a young man, holding the same
cool blue in his eyes
as mine

a Dutch man with chapped hands,
crooked teeth
a resistance fighter,
starved, beaten
yet hiding a falcon's spirit
had escaped somehow

in torn prison rags
spreading his wings quietly
darting into the abandoned town
of Arnhem
during work detail

taking flight

from darkness, from the sandy pit
of public torture
prisoners called 'the rose garden'

he walks beside me now
but my own feet become heavy
clogs
so I creep, heel to toe around the
coffin-sized space
he must sense the weight I carry

kijken, "look," he says pointing to
sailing sparrows
lifting our blue eyes to sky

he an old man reaches for my
hand drawing me away
alders, poplars casting long slate
shadows on damp ground.

Cali Soul

Sophie Cloherty
WELLESLEY, MA

The Santa Monica Pier is legend
of where your mother kissed a boy
she didn't know. The Valley is a
secret field
of books that grabbed your hands
and pulled you where paper cuts
don't heal.
Lombard Street watched your
brother's motorcycle
become infinite at two thirty am
Western Standard Time. Griffith
Park
curved to let your body forget in
another
behind observatory lights. San Fran-
cisco
Bay became a two-year stand. Five
o'clock Golden Gate traffic sang
your mind,
because your mother forgot the boy
on the coast, your brother didn't
have wings,
just wine. The apartment on 23rd
Blvd, Malibu
showed you fast is easy, good even.
Ventura taught you sound
is the only way to know life.
Your children sleep in the room
tucked behind the kitchen, warmed
by the down feathers that will carry
them
far into the pieces of you.



Untitled

Julia Reinert
TAMAQUA, PA



A Gardener's Guide to Heartbreak

Kathryn Ippolito
RIVEREDGE, NJ

Day 1

It is okay to break pots on day one. Watch the terra-cotta collapse into dust and fragments, like a long abandoned mosaic. Try and glue them back together using that gorilla glue he promised to mend your picture frames with. Use all of it. Make a mess. The pots will feel empty, much like you, much like your home.

For the first time in some time, you are alone. Most surprising about the aloneness, if I recall correctly, is the quiet. Silence sits on your tile floors and on the high shelves of your dark wood cabinets. It suns itself on your back porch, taking the place of laughter, of murmured conversation, of the snapping that filled the final weeks of your time together. Fill it.

Pour into your earthenware. Stuff it with paper, or chocolate, or earth. Open your tap, race yourself to flood the cold liquid over the top, watch it funnel out the hole in the bottom. Leave it to drain on your counter.

I remember lining up mason jars full of water on my window sill. Sun sifted through, distorting the trees beyond, warping the reflection of my hands. I stared into the glass and water until my eyes blurred.

They say that being in space is tremendously like drowning...every direction is boundless, the solitude in-frangible, the danger ever present. It is quite possible, I learnt that day, to have a near-Earth engulfment experience. It is just as dangerous as the kind between the stars or deep in the sea, and just as thrilling. Therefore,

allow yourself a taste of the “Big Empty”; explore it, and you will learn that life is much, much worth the living. Those who sit with their feet dangling over the edge of a cliff will most readily pull back if someone, indeed anyone asks them to not to fall. Let this book be that concerned stranger. Though the Big Empty seems inviting, once you’re there you realize the act is not as profound as you were hoping, and letting yourself spin off through this expanse was not worth the exhaustion and the heartache.

On day one, make yourself a mug of tea. Buy ten flower pots, the kind that shatter. Buy some strawberry seeds, some gardenia seeds, some basil seeds, and some seeds of your choice. Let some pots break. Fill the others with soil. Leave a package of seeds on each pot.

Important A/N: Crying on this day is optional. Sometimes it makes you feel better, sometimes it makes you feel worse. I wouldn't presume to decide for you. There's nothing wrong with you either way. Remember that--now it's all spilt milk. The best way to handle the situation is to clean it up, and pour yourself another glass.

Day 2

Good morning, and well done. You have made it through an undeniably miserable day. On the bell curve of heartbreak, the first day is one of the worst. But you've made it. And that means that this is not the time to eat the Chinese food in the back of the fridge (even if that's always been what you did when she got home late and you had had a long day, and neither of you could stand before the stove, so you curled into each other on the couch with your paper cartons of rice and hot vegetables). Today is not a day for black and white films and pining. The blessed thing about films, after all, is that you can turn

them off and turn them back on and Cary Grant will still be there, charm and dimples and tailored fedora, or Anne Hathaway will still be in the middle of her trembling, haunting minutes that earned her high-profile recognition. But right now, neither is your concern.

On the second day, wake up early.

I don't mean setting you alarm for fifteen minutes in advance of your usual time-- I mean the empirical, headache inducing, coffee-commercial early.

Meet the sun.

There is ineffable pleasure in early morning quietude. Unlike the noiselessness of the day before, this blushing silence pirouettes around you like a child trying to draw you to play. Beg off your cares, and with you to the arms of the waiting sun.

Someone once said that the cost of the aeroplane is that birds lose their wonder. The cost of learning is the loss of the magic ordinary things once possessed. In the early morning, in the space where the world breathes, there is the distinct feeling, like electricity in your finger tips and at the ends of your hair, that you are the only person awake. Now, the voices of cynical condemnation, the cold reason of textbooks that vanquished your daydreams, the wear of a life that moves faster than the Earth spins--these things are subdued. In these rose gold hours you can sit back and live. And yet, this is not merely a day of admiration and meditation, either. It is a day of responsibility.

After the appropriate civilities have been paid to the sun, go back inside and plant your seeds in the pots they've become acquainted with.

Push a small hole about four or five inches deep into the soil in each of your pots. Leave the surrounding

earth rather loose, and place your seeds in the hole. Cover them with care, and follow the packages instructions for watering and sun.

A/N: Would that I could be more specific for you, but if I were, how could this possibly be your story? I had you choose some seeds on your own because now they are yours to manage and believe in. No one else would have chosen the precise seeds you chose for the same reasons you had at that moment. An inimitable act. There. Have I made you feel responsible? If not, you can be sure I will keep trying. This is your story, and even if it does not feel like it, you are the tipping point, the unassuming hero.

Day 7

This day is a day for travel. Anonymous travel is the cure for a multitude of ails, not leastwise because it allows for the observation of others and the absorption of some undoubtedly-much needed Vitamin D. Begin planning the night before: find the nearest train station, mall, bus stop, or park. (I would have said airport, but remember, you're the hero now, and you have a selection of fine jars along your window sill, cradling plants that need you. You can no longer simply whisk away on a month long adventure as we once dreamed we would, exotic fabrics hanging from your frame, and beautiful foreigners attempting to catch your eye.) Be prepared to purchase a one way ticket.

The next morning, wake up as early as you despised me for commanding on Day 2. It will feel easier, and you will begin to acclimate to it. It's like opening your eyes underwater; the uncomfortable and hazy sensation gives way to an entirely new world ripe for exploration.

On such a day, it is essential to be prepared for any kind of weather. I

myself recall spectacular sun showers and something of a hailstorm. There may have also been any of the following: elephants, red umbrellas, orange groves, and incandescent light bulbs. Wide brimmed hats and hi-top shoes will usually accomplish the job perfectly well, on any day, in any climate.

Arrive at your designated destination just before the morning rush, when a few late night stragglers stumble from their transportation compartments: those shirts wrinkled, or high heels in hand, or children with hands firmly anchored about comforting rag dolls and valiant stuffed bears. Take a seat on a bench, side pressed into the cool metal of the armrest, and begin to observe.

The first few minutes will be loud. Pneumatic hisses, the urgent click of the heels of demurred commuters, your own blood in your ears; a thousand thoughts will catch you, a wisp of cologne that makes your memory hitch, the concerns of a busy day to follow nagging at your frayed sleeve. Allow them to wear themselves down to silence, and allow the rest of the world to seep into the ensuing quietude. Notice the wrinkles at the corners of the eyes of painted ladies, the heart traced over and over by the absent minded hand of the surly business man.

There is something inherently selfish about this particular recovery process.

I left my loved ones at the mercy of my loyal doorman and my answering machine, myself lost beneath blankets and tissues and tea bag wrappers. I snapped responses to polite offers of assistance, and when I deemed work worthy of my attention, I stormed from room to room, scorning the timid hellos of my coworkers, drawing my shades against

the cold sunshine. Everything ached, and it felt as though nobody deserved happiness in a world that could treat trust so glibly. Even the most altruistic among us would deign to classify this lash back as "preparing the less experienced among us for 'real life'". But like a game of hide and seek, this avoidance of people who "could never understand" is not one you want to win. After so long of seeking you out, your friends will return to the cookies on the kitchen table and the games in the cabinet, and wait for you to come out on your own. All the while you sit crouched in a closet, or beneath the sink, the empty glory of the only one who hid so much better than the rest, finally realizing that you were ultimately excluded from the game.

Today is a day of letting people back in. You are not the only one whose been hurt, and you'll find, if you give them the time, that a surprising amount of people do understand.

But not yet. Remember bell curves, and know that everyone has one. Look for signs of it, and when you see them all together, it may play a song.

While you are out you will need to run some errands. Top soil, a trowel, a sturdy pair of gloves with a quilted design. Enjoy yourself, for tomorrow will be hard work.

Day 23

Today starts with breaking soil. Your plants are spilling over the edges of the terra cotta pots you once threatened to destroy. Broken hearts and broken earth go well together. By now you will have started to build up habits, waking up early, breathing in and out, running water for a bath, grinding coffee grounds to dust that you pour numbly into the fine filter,

and your mechanical listening as water begins to boil. You're in the habit of being alive again. And almost imperceptibly, you will start to heal. There's an itchy heat that lets you know you're going to make it, if you don't keep ripping the sutures out.

In French, the expression for running away is "se sauver"—to save oneself. It's an alternative never presented in the princess films of my childhood. Rapunzel eternally suspended in the tower, Snow White forever asleep. But stopping here would be closing a book at the seam page. Prince Charming forever holding one shoe, or caught in the briars around the castle, his horse caught with hind legs embarrassingly in the air. You close the book and take a deep breath, and everything looks like it's going to crash from its delicate suspension. Two lives hinged on an overlapping moment, calamity in sight, but with the promise of a happily ever after.

That's not quite what happened to you.

A pair of hands reaching out. A plane ticket, a canvas cap. Ten letters, two letters, one. A goodbye, a half-hearted apology. The end of forever. And then the prince takes a detour, right around the enchanted clearing, the tower, or the glass coffin—and you're left with a choice and an ending sentence. Whether it was he, or it was you, someone flipped that page, and the stories diverged, and your chapters ceased to overlap. Tu te sauves. It didn't feel that way at the time. It felt like a suspension, and a snap. As you tumbled toward the safety net, you wondered if you could break right through. The net was inches below your outstretched fingers; you could feel the heat from your body hitting the thick ropes, reflecting, returning. And you half

expected the impact to kill you—but it didn't. Sitting in the wake of your landing almost does: staring at the ladder leading back up, and wondering if you could ever trust that same equipment to hold you up again.

Get up and run for it: add weight to the creaking scaffolds of your life. Tu te sauves. Start small. Smile at people on public transport. Stop cursing at the weather. Get dressed up. It will feel dangerous and a little careless, like walking without looking where you are going. That once rosy future has faded into obscurity again, its path taking a hairpin turn without you. You might imagine monsters where there are wonders, trying to make out what lies in that mist, and never take a step closer because you are afraid of being sure of the worst. Assume you will make it. Make plans for the third of next month, buy yourself a gift, transfer your seedlings to bigger pots, walk without looking.

What you do know is that he called to collect the coffee table and a hat he never used to wear. You have

those unanswered voicemails and newly freed up schedule. Your plants have you. Once you have sufficiently tilled your chosen plot of land, fill the holes you dug with water. Let it soak through the earth, turning it soft and velvety black, before transplant your shoots. They will look smaller than ever, with a sky unframed by windowsill and ceiling, and nothing to separate them from each other but the sunshine and the scent of air that settles on your shoulders and fills the space between their delicate leaves. Yet, even a few inches above the ground, it seems that they are once more at the top of the world, in the center of the sun's gaze, looking down, and finally seeing everything around them.

A/N: The trick to tightrope walking is to not look down. The trick to gardening is that you will take from it what you give. The trick to mending a broken heart is to open your eyes.

Ballet

Erinn Goldman
GREENWICH, CT

They say the Russians temptingly retreated into their land's heart,
while the French pursued into the oozing cold.
They say the Russians burnt their city,
like burning their country's finger so the French couldn't suck any blood
from it.
They say the Russians watched the French congeal into ice by the
hundreds,
as the French quaked like still-alive tails severed from chameleons.
They say the Russians erected frozen French bodies into ballet positions,
splattered standing across fields lit by moonlight and snow.
They say the corpses performed static ballet,
like curdling ambitions of this Revolution.

The Waitress

Kathryn Ippolito

RIVER EDGE, NJ

It was a small square advertisement in the local bulletin, between the charity drive at the elementary school and the wedding announcements. “First meeting of the Society of Waiters, this Thursday afternoon, the old church on the corner.” There are several such churches in my town; but anyone who had arrived before the snow set in at the end of September knew it referred to the steepled building down the block from my house, which had recently been converted, at the behest of the dwindling congregation, into a community center.

The advertisement recommended bringing a thermos and cookies. It also said arrive by 3 o’clock sharp—I considered the stress on punctuality ironic, given the subject of our meeting. Perhaps they thought it would ease our minds, to know that everything would happen when it was supposed to. I think it just left us with anticipation to spare. It was 3:05 and I could not find my cracked plastic thermos and I had run out of half and half. It was the first meeting, and surely they had begun without me. I imagined a semi-circle of chairs around, and a projector-lit screen with the words *Carpe Diem*. There would naturally be a bespectacled man, checking his pocket watch incessantly as he told us that time was relative, and that when it (whatever it was) finally happened, all of our anticipation will feel condensed into a matter of days. Running the projector from the back of the room would be a woman who couldn’t bring herself to tell the

attendees that the slideshow neatly presented lies. I found my pea-coat, worn in the elbows and the pockets, collected my supermarket package of jam cookies and my post cards from my mother, and left the door unlocked.

I had gone with my dad to an AA meeting once. It was just after the first postcard arrived. That day, he had gotten his shoes shined and his hair neatly trimmed, and we had walked to the gymnasium in the high school, two towns over. He carried some crayons and paper for me, but I had sat in my folding chair, with my lukewarm tea, listening. In succession, the people in the circle had risen, said their interminable first names, and always, “I’m an alcoholic.” As I walked down the street, I rehearsed, “My name is Aileen, and I’m waiting for my mother.” I shook off the similarities to the AA meeting commute, and the voices that cheerfully imposed on me through the years: “like father, like daughter”.

I could see that two or three people had already collected on the church’s front stoop. Framed by hoods and swaths of hair, their naked expressions ranged from tremulous to peeved, curious to compassionate. It was a disparate collection of neighbors and strangers: people whom I brushed past on public transport, or listened to on the local radio, or who had seen me grow up. People who had nothing to connect them, but certain defiant set to their shoulders, and a light at the back of their eyes that I could only call hope. One man caught my stare, and watched me progress, knowing that we were too far apart to call out a greeting. When I arrived on the church steps, he gave me a nod, then

looked away, as if I were a shocking sight.

Taped to the door was a leaf of computer paper, apologizing in a bland script for our unavoidably detained host who would come as soon as possible. We stood in the grey November snow in complicit agreement of polite introversion. People continued to arrive as if they hadn’t planned on coming, but saw a group, and allowed their “natural inquisitiveness” to compel them to detour.

We dared not speak until the meeting began, and were instead content to stare enviously at each other’s thermoses and packages of cookies, refusing to impose upon someone who came more prepared than ourselves. For a few brutal moments, I considered going back down the block to search for my black coffee and leaky thermos—or at least a pair of gloves—but I was prevented by searching eyes, and the understanding that if they saw my retreating back they would assume I wasn’t returning, and I would so miss our belated host. I instead reread my postcards, words I had worked to memorize, and then forget. I went in order of their arrival, in order of the wear on their glossy fronts, in order of the fade in the ink scrawled on their backs: my mother had just arrived in America, the weather was beautiful, and everyone’s teeth were straight. She would send for me just as soon as she had a job. As soon as she found an apartment. As soon as there was money to spare. As soon as someone could take care of me...

I tucked them into my pocket and thought I would observe the collected attendees instead, to try and understand what had really brought them to the steps of a

converted church in an unseasonal snow. There was the student across from me, with his hood up, and one headphone dangling over the collar of his jacket. He kept pushing his glasses up self-consciously, one hand stuffed in his pocket, and in the other a laptop and resume. He was the one that had watched me approach and once you had made eye contact with someone it was very difficult to see anyone else. I made a conscious effort to show him I had noticed other people. Next to him was a voluptuous woman in work clothes. Cuffed jeans and spattered toe steeled boots were visible beneath a velvety man's jacket. Her thick auburn hair had been pulled into a sensible braid, and the lack of make up on her face made left her laugh lines visible. She was the sort of person I would smile at if I passed her in the street. She almost caught my eye, and I hurriedly looked away. The slick footprints in the frost, the note on the door, the woman next to me. She leaned up against the handrail, folding and refolding a thick sheet of paper. I read the elaborate heading font: Will and Testament. It had creases through some of the clauses, smearing the cheap ink. It was unsigned. She almost folded in a rhythm. In half, in half again, into a triangle, and again, before the thickness of the paper stopped her. But the more she did it, the less carefully she went, and soon there were off shot tracks in the ink where her sharp creases had gone awry.

I looked up at the sky. Snow was falling more steadily now. The mayoral candidate who had been tapping his foot since the moment he appeared on the stairs checked his watch again, took out his mobile, and placed a call. His voice was

round and too-loud for the group on the steps, the same way it sounded on the radio as he refuted his opponent's jibes. He cast about an apologetic glance. His mouth was moving but all of his round vowels collided and I couldn't make out his meaning. A few minutes later, a black car rounded the corner, and slid into an imagined space in front of the church steps. The candidate adjusted the campaign pin on his lapel, offered us a glowing smile, and saw himself to the back seat of the car, which sped off down the street as quietly as it arrived. He was the first to leave. The man who had been on the steps (and who had smiled when I arrived, playing absent-mindedly with a key on a chain), moved up to take the candidate's place in the shelter of the door. He had his collar turned up and a pair of glasses tucked into the pocket of his overcoat.

The next person to break the silence was one of our later arrivals, an elderly man clutching a diamond ring. He stifled wild coughs, trying to retain the control to slip the ring onto his finger, lest it fall into the snow. It barely fit past his first knuckle. He shakily took out a handkerchief, dabbed his mouth, and fanned his red face. Then he replaced his handkerchief, and removed the ring from his finger, before looking down to avoid the woman next to me, who paused her vicious folding to glare. The student passed between them, breaking her stare, and not slowing as he gave the man an almost imperceptible pat on the arm before jamming his cold fingers back into his pocket. The old man watched him disappear down the block. He looked at the ring, and back down the street after the student. He shifted up a couple of steps, with a glance at

the man with the upturned collar. He smiled, and we carried on in silence.

I was sifting through my post cards again when the woman next to me stood up straight suddenly and brushed down the stairs, knocking a few of my cards to the ground. I stooped to pick them up and the woman with the braid helped me. It was hard not to see my mother's flourished signature at the bottom of each, although she tried to look unaffected as she brushed snow from the card. As she handed them back, I could see an apology in the limpness of her outstretched hand. I quickly put them back in my pocket, and gave her a tight smile, fighting the urge to tell her that it was alright. Over the past seven years, it had become habitual to apologize for my mother's absence and insist it meant very little to me.

It had been half an hour. I was viscerally regretting the coffee I abandoned in my rush. The elderly man mumbled something about "popping off for hot chocolate". He left an awkwardly shaped silence for any of us to ask for a cup. When none of us obliged, he tipped his cap with a doubtful "see you next week" and was off down the stairs.

It was just about too much. I had been gnawing my lip with indecision, giving rise to metallic pain in the cold. Before he had rounded the corner, I gave the man and woman half of a wave, refusing to look up at them. I picked down the stairs, and followed my old footprints back through the street. I went through my unlocked door, and found that my coffee had gone cold. I made a fresh pot, and tipped 2% milk straight in, until it was light and creamy. I poured a cup of the opaque liquid, and added two sugars. I took it to my front window,

to peek at the remaining two on the stoop of the church. I saw the woman draw in the snow with the capped toe of her boot. I tried to imagine what I would have seen if I had stayed. The old man had not returned with his hot chocolate. They looked at the sky, probably noting how they had lost all track of time in the woolen grey light. The woman gave the man a fixed look. He nodded. She turned, flipping up her collar, like his, and trudging down the stairs. She paused at the bottom, looking back reluctantly. He waved her on, and she turned her back to me, and set off, becoming a smudge of dark blue and reddish brown in the faded distance.

The man stayed leaning against the door, watching her go. He stayed

that way for some time after I had stopped being able to see her. I pretended I could see his shoulders raise in a sigh as he stood up straight, and turned to face the door. He took the key that he had been swinging from its chain, inserted it into the lock, brushed off his hair, and swung the door open. He looked both ways before stepping in and shutting it behind him.



Ars Poetica: Birds

LETTIA CHAN
ATHERTON, CA

They are heavy and light as snow. It starts when you come upon a hatchling fallen from its nest, when I walked away carrying the weight of the stranded. Had I known they'd steal my words, I would have cupped him overflowing.

Who would have known a baby bird could weigh so much? These crevices are full of him, a body plastered in the beginnings and ends of feathers that have never been—the birds, they have made a home for themselves. They breathe in the crooks of your limbs, tucked in the space between each rib, wedged between bone and skin.

They are singing a silent song. It has no words. It brings you close, closer, finds its way into your lungs tearing breath from man and you think your shoulder blades, too, might break into wings.

They hatch in their own time, moist and scraggly till they shake themselves dry, spring shapes and take flight—these creatures who rake themselves across your page, carcasses burned into letters, once winged, now jagged, scant, small-toothed. They know thawing better than March snow. Their shapes recede. They cling

to the dregs of your mind till their reason steals into air, each a crippled one in your palm that shudders and subdues. They shrivel up; they leave you in surrender.

Not one remembers your death or mine. You wake up to find one drinking from your ear. They hold all of our dying pieces. You feed the cursor these broken words that won't come out right. Their beaks widen as eyes, crying, crying.



Perception

Tyler Gleeson
CLARKSVILLE, MD



Skin

Aleah Gatto
RAMSEY, NJ

We change our skin every morning.
Like cars with oil, it runs dry,
blackens,
browns, the warrior organ.

When the sun tips into Africa, the
white skin
of zebras is bisected by black rods
that stick up from their hides.

In the Gaza strip at daybreak,
bombs singe skin

off little boys who ride bikes
without handlebars through the
skinny streets.

On the shoreline, tanner's skin is
peeled off in layers,
and in the South, it divides Texas
and Mexico
from fusing together, becoming one
skin.

Maybe we should get rid of our
skin,
rip it off all our newly-borns for the
dawn of
an age of just bone and flesh,
stomachs

popping out from underneath
livers,
hearts thumping against rib cages,
and lay
all our love, all our cards, on war-
pierced tables.

But we will always wear our skin,
surely,
and put on new skin
with every bloody rising sun,

and forever be like the snakes
who crouch in the underbrush, and
hiss,
and shed.

Ivy

Rachel Foster
LIVERPOOL, NY

The snow falling that night was the thickest it had been all winter. The snowflakes looked like billions of tiny clouds, flitting around like ashes, unable to resist the cruel push and pull of the wind. The wind was everywhere, brutally tearing the leaves that had somehow survived the past few months from their branches. Its vicious screaming was indiscernible from the agonized wails of the trees mourning their losses. The suffering that night was inescapable, from the cracked ice in the gutters to the broken sticks and rotting leaves buried under mountains of snow. Icicles hung like spears from the trees, threatening the life of the soft ground underneath. The battleground outside was impossible to ignore.

And there we sat, in the middle of it all. Your house huddled against the storm, surrounded by dozens of tall, precariously standing trees, protecting us from the violent bluster outside. If someone looked closely they could see that the roof was dotted with countless crudely fixed holes, most of them acquired during the three-day-long hailstorm we had back in 1993. The front door, too, was ruined during that storm. You said that your mother finally scraped up enough money about a year ago to replace it, after nearly a decade of listening to your grandfather complain about how the wind punched him in the gut every time he walked by it.

That night, though, the new front door did nothing to shield us from the wind. It crashed against the house,

threatening to tear off the roof or stab holes through the windows. You and I listened to it howl as we lay in the dark and painted pictures on the ceiling with our flashlights. We talked about how we could see dust floating in the flashlights' beams, looking like stars. You said maybe our solar system is just a speck of dust in someone else's flashlight, and I laughed, but I believed it for the moment and sometimes I still do.

We listened to The Smiths for hours as we lay there. We didn't need to speak because he spoke for us, but we did anyway. How else were we supposed to stop the darkness from rushing into our brains? The flashlights helped somewhat, but mostly they illuminated the shadows in the corners of the room and in the corners of our heads, making them easier to see and harder to ignore. All of the dangerous thoughts leaking out of our ears were caught by the dark room and thrown out into the storm, so we didn't have to think about them anymore and the snow could instead.

All night we were never able to tell what time it was. For a while we tried counting the hours by watching the moon through the window, but there were no holes in the heavy clouds to let any moonlight in. Eventually we gave up trying to keep track of the time, deciding that our night couldn't be governed by minutes and hours anyway. You loved it, like we were in a pre-technological world and all we had was ourselves and each other to keep us company. The time we had together was only ours, you said, and it was wonderful; we didn't need any clocks to tell us that. I thought it was kind of scary, being awake in the dark for so long; time seemed to blend together, like a vortex, spinning us

around and around until we didn't know who we were anymore. But being there with you made it better. I think I told you that. When I did you laughed and said you were glad that I was there too. I don't think you understood what I meant.

At one point we made peanut butter brownies. I don't know if you remember that. We were only half-aware all night, stuck in a stupor brought on by the eeriness of the weather and the seemingly permanent darkness. Looking back on that night, I can't remember what I dreamed and what I lived. When the timer went off you were sleeping and you didn't wake up from it. I remember looking down at you lying on the floor with a pillow clutched to your chest and thinking that I was so lucky to be your friend. I repeated that out loud, but only the wind outside heard me. I ate the brownies alone at the kitchen table.

I fell asleep after eating them. Loneliness and chocolate tends to do that to you. When I woke up you were sitting on the couch with a pen and piece of paper in your lap. You were shaking and your hands were cold. I held your hands and kissed your forehead and I told you it was going to be okay. I don't know how long we sat there but eventually you started breathing normally and you said your world had stopped spinning.

Do you remember the fun moments too? Those are harder to remember because we took them for granted. I remember we sat on the floor in front of the couch and played patty cake, our hands clapping along with the thunder that started about halfway through the night. We whispered the song to each other, forgetting that we were the only ones

who could hear ourselves. When the thunder stopped we stopped, and we made pancakes. You burned them and I spilled batter on the floor, but we didn't mind. We ate breakfast before dinner and everything was good.

We went outside when the sun started to rise. God, it was so beautiful. The snow was still falling but it wasn't violent anymore, and it was tinted pink from the sunrise. The sky was throwing a blanket over us and the rest of the world, making everything silent and peaceful. It was still windy but we weren't cold. We made snow angels and a snowman, and we gave them all names and stories. You ran through the snow across your front yard, falling to your knees when you reached the edge of the street. You turned to me and said, with a euphoric smile on your face, that you were happy. Do you remember that? I'll never forget it. You asked me if it would last and I told you I hoped so. How could I have known? I didn't know. I didn't know. You laughed wildly and said you hoped so too and the wind whipped your hair around your head like a halo.

My father passed away when



Mother and I at the Farmer's Market on a Sunday Morning

Ruting Li
MILTON, MA

Look, today the peaches are ripe,
flesh dipped
in dust. See, even the swallow stops
to
look at the plums, skin-deep shine
rubbed up by
the lady whose forehead wrinkles.
Tell me

how the smell of fresh fruit gathers
at the
back of your throat, pools there,
reminds you of
the last time I was a child begging
for a box of strawberries, the white
carton
stained red by juice, berries sitting
sticky
under the sun before they faded like
shadows
into the blank background.

Communion

Allison Huang
PRINCETON, NJ

When I played the piano in the background of communion,
they almost forgot me in the corner and I had to raise my hand
to ask for a small biscuit the size of my thumb,

Imprinted with a little cross and specially designed to melt
in your mouth, but still

The audible chewing of people's jaws as they work the wafer
makes everyone stare at the carpeted pews

As if when Jesus broke bread over the cedar table everyone was silent
and waiting for his shaking hands to accidentally drop the bread
he was breaking

hands shaking with the weight of what he was about to do,
hang from his wrists from damp and rotting tree and
feel his body slowly seduced by gravity and sinking into the heavy air

All this for a torn curtain and the haughty sheep which sit at the table
now,
With their mucous eyeballs
lolling at every swallow and bobbing Adam's apple,

and listening to the music that I attempt to spin,
rasping metallic twinges that groan with every
creak of the old wooden keys.

After Death

Sara Zhou
OAKLAND, NJ

I was eight years old, after a battle with cancer that ended on a cold steel table. I hadn't been there for the final minutes, final hours of his life before his liver transplant. Instead, I had gone to school. My father had battled his way through university and green cards and the Chinese Cultural Revolution in order to get our family to the United States, so wasn't he invincible? Of course he would come out of the surgery good as new. And, looking back at it, I was also very, very scared.

In my first eight years I didn't really understand the significance of death. I never attended a sermon or religious service or funeral, but my Christian friends spoke of paradise, of salvation, and sometimes of hell. Never of death itself, though, just what could happen after. I suppose that very few children can grasp a concept as finite as eternal rest.

So when I came home the night my father died and my mom rushed to me and hugged me so tight and said "Daddy's gone," I cried without knowing why, because "gone" to me had no meaning. Where was "gone"? Heaven? Hell? It could have been oblivion for all I knew, because the word is just as explicit as "nowhere." My strong, resilient dad who had hoisted me onto his shoulders on top of the Eiffel Tower just months before his final surgery, he couldn't just be "gone."

But over the next weeks, the remains of my father's life began to disappear. My mom donated most of his clothes to the Salvation Army, and his work papers and history

books made their way into the basement, locked away in a room that my mom told me was "too dangerous" to enter. There were a few photo albums and his violin, but his physical absence became an oppressive emptiness that crept its way into the master bedroom, the music room. I slowly began to lose his voice, and the sound of his violin playing in the morning. There was no more talk about hospital visits, about bills or surgeries. Just a small funeral, where I had been steered skittishly away from the open casket.

My most aching, desperate wish is to have had that last look. A last memory. We did have a lot of those, memories. Like when I had just begun to learn violin, we visited a shop with instruments printed with crazy zebra stripes and duck heads, and I squealed in excitement, "Look how cute they are! Can I have one, please please please?" My father said no, I already had a gorgeous, new violin, but I begged and pouted and finally he caved to my puppy dog eyes and granted my request to at least try out the instrument printed with neon polka dots, as long as we played a duet together. Maybe it was only "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" but it sounded so happy to my five-year-old self when I glanced at him playing a leopard-printed violin with a fond smile in his eyes. I sometimes resented that he scolded me when I played a wrong note or if I didn't eat my vegetables, but he was also the person who held me on his shoulders on the Eiffel Tower so I could be taller than all of Paris. He was gentle but strong, smart and kind in life. Now I play the violin he left behind, but the sound has morphed with humidity and age, almost unrecognizable compared to what I remember. That

clarity and soulfulness, it's gone just like my father is. I don't know where it went, or if it had just left with him – to heaven, to hell, to nothingness – and sometimes I wonder if I'll ever hear it again because if it's not true, this afterlife, that sound no longer exists.

So now it's just the memories that I'm left with after my father's death, the violin playing, Paris, memories that remind me of love and happiness. All except for the very end. I'm almost glad, because I can still remember my father as my Superman, vibrant and alive, playing his violin in the early mornings so that my mother and I would wake up to the music of Tchaikovsky and Beethoven, instead of painted stiffly with a mortician's hand. Even if there is no afterlife he still exists in my own memories exactly as I knew him to be, even nine years after he's been gone.

Now as my family and friends in China grow older, my mom and I are making more and more trips to see them before we have to part with them, too. Generally, they don't change much from year to year – a wrinkle here, a liver spot there, nothing detrimental. But this year we visited one of my parents' closest friends before they moved to the United States. I met her once, when I was five years old, but I don't remember her; I was told that she was a brilliant traditional Chinese doctor, loved by all her patients.

But what I saw wasn't the clever, wise woman whom I had come to expect. Instead, there was a frail old person rocking in a wheelchair, singing to herself and knocking a teacup against the table. She was blind, her brain destroyed by Alzheimer's disease. Her once beloved family and friends sat all around her, but she

couldn't remember their names; even when they gave her hints and encouragement, like, "It sounds like the word for light, I know you know who I am," her stare would be completely blank, and she sounded frightened, paranoid. She couldn't eat soup without spitting it up. She needed help from a hired companion to go to the bathroom.

What scares me the most about that encounter is that not ten years before, this woman was a completely different person, sharp and articulate and healthy. My parents knew that person. I met that person. But I'll never remember her now, because she's been robbed of her senses and her entire mind. To me, that person from ten years ago never existed and never will, and when she dies, all that will be left of her will be the image of her mumbling nonsense under her breath and spilling tea on her lap. Maybe for her loved ones in China it'll be different because they'll have memories of who she was, but I am absolutely certain that those will still be marred by those of her condition today. It's horrifying to think that, if memories are all what is left of a person after they die, a single moment can completely shatter an impression of a person you thought you knew, because my father's condition probably wasn't that much different from hers in the few weeks before his passing. Weak from chemo, wrapped in IVs, manic from pain medication. I've read about what cancer treatment is like. Maybe if I had seen him that last day, my image of him now would be different, too. But I didn't, so he'll always be my lovely, intelligent father. And that, that's a blessing.

I'm seventeen now, but already I am not who I was one, two, three

years ago. My legs feel heavy when I wake up in the morning. There's an aching in my wrist that wasn't there last summer. Soon, I too will grow old, and now I wonder what it is I will leave behind for people to remember me.



A Woman Takes Pills

Jiyoung Jeong
AUBURNDALE, MA

A woman takes pills. She picks up a call at 1 a.m.—your father has passed—and with a clench in her heart, a knotted sickness in her stomach, she pops a capsule (Thalidomide, white) that she had bought for her father's upset stomach last week. Sitting at the kitchen table with day-old pomegranates, the woman takes pills. From the glass surface her cratered eyes stare back, and she curls her toes against the January-cold linoleum tiles. She knows that her father must have taken pills before the accident, murmuring: those god-damn streetlights give me headaches these days. At night she writhes in white sheets, cased in insomnia; she wakes to take pills. Pharmacy bottles dressed in labels—Thalidomide: TAKE AT BEDTIME FOR NAU-

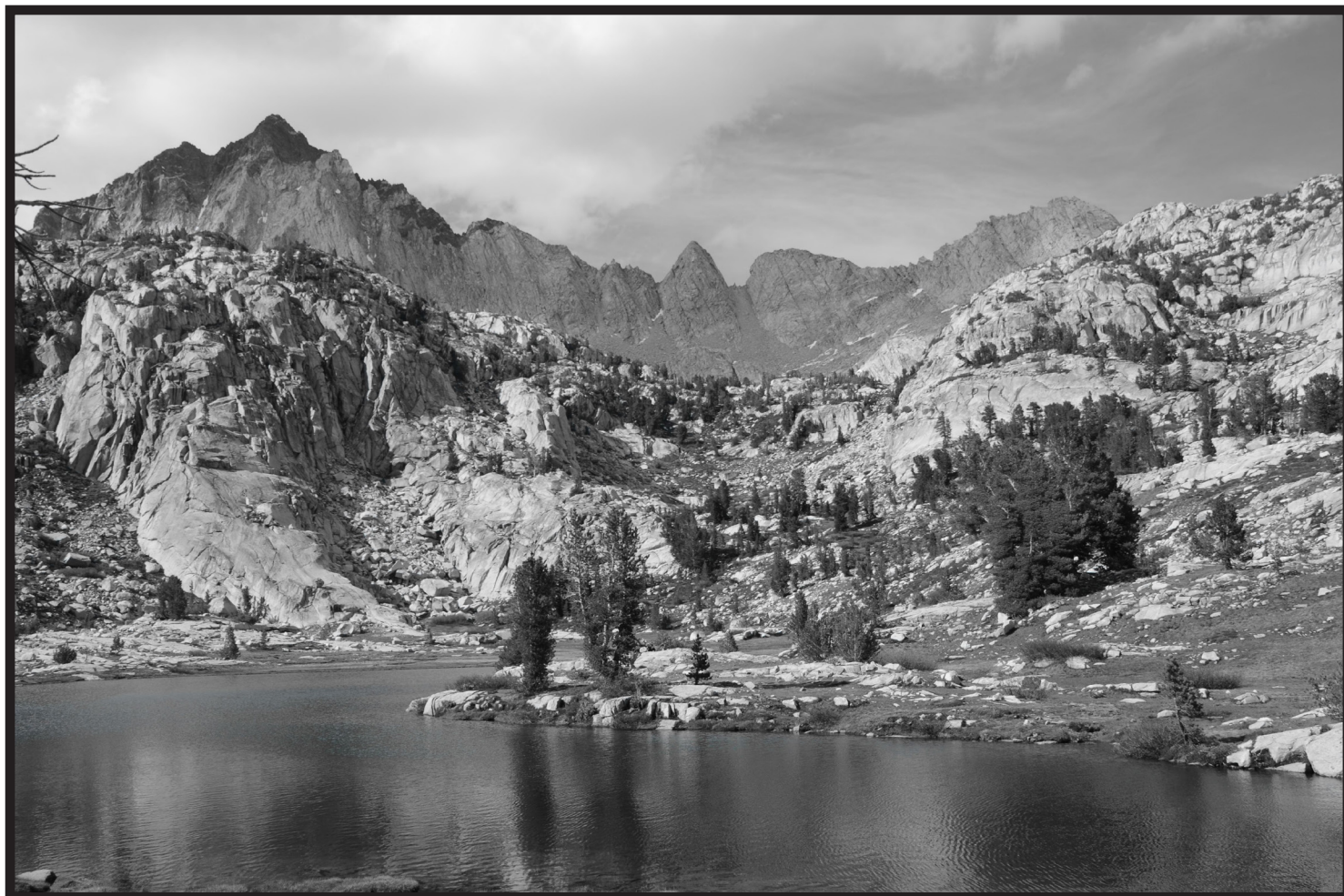
SEA—pile in cabinets. She talks to her boyfriend, who says that she will get better, and she keeps taking pills. For their three-year anniversary, they are back at her favorite restaurant, but she does not eat, and slips a pill between her teeth. He notes that her stomach has gotten fatter, and doesn't offer to give her a ride back to her house; at her house, she takes pills. She wonders if they can flush through her veins to wash away distress. At the kitchen table, as pills dissolve and diffuse throughout her stomach, she notices that the pomegranates have shriveled like ugly shadows. One by one, she tosses them out, thumping echoes. Her fights with her boyfriend, nightmarish dreams, and aches all grow like grass roots that bed into her belly—so she takes pills. On a Tuesday after work in March, she finally sits on a hospital bed while the doctor tells her about something else that has rooted inside her: a baby.

Inside her, a child—just a little embryo—sucks in pills. Curled like a seahorse, it pretends to not exist; it only flinches when the woman swallows pills. Capsuled beneath her ribs, it consumes pills through its belly-tube. Pills spill into the baby, and they cinch its bones (too early). Tied like a knot, it digests pills and whirls in water, stumping round walls. Some days it steeps in warmth and dreams—until, stepping in the shadowed kitchen, the woman sighs and glides pills down her throat. The child receives pills, and one day, bursts onto a soft sheet, coldness and light stinging its eyes. The woman's screech—my child—forks through its ears, and it squirms on its needle spine as white figures rush to cram pills between the woman's lips.



Laurel Lake

Richard Randall
WASHINGTON, D.C.



4H Rambling

David Merkle
GLEN ROCK, NJ

Out there in the gathering fog of
my uncensored youth
Candles tire themselves out
And bowls light
And beers empty
And girls spit at me from their
bedroom windows

Gods make out
In the steady stream of streetlight

My friend scampers past them on
all fours
Chasing after some marijuana-
induced mailman
Who, at one point in his life, had
shoved his dignity so far down his
throat
That he forgot to take it out



Nanu

Simran Malhotra
MILLBURN, NJ

As her paper thin, creased, veined hands moved slowly over the keyboard, she turned her head and gave me a sheepish smile. “I forgot,” she said, a line I had heard many senior citizens say. But I had learned to be patient, so once again, I explained how to use the shift key to type the @ sign. “Ah, now I remember,” she said. She smiled and the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes seemed to lift up like the corners of her mouth. “You know, the reason old people die is that they become useless.”



It was ninety degrees, and there was no electricity. The inverter barely kept one fan revolving on the patio of my grandparents’ auburn and manila two-story house. India’s monsoons brought humid weather, the kind that allow a sticky residue to lie on one’s skin throughout the day and force one to have several baths to keep cool. I lay on the geometric patterned bed sheet that covered the settee as I counted the number of flies and bees that flew by my head. Even though the patio was shaded, the devilish sun had still found a way to reach me. My skin had become the same color of the dark wood that was the flooring of my house in America. I resigned my arms and legs in a position of surrender to the heat.

The smell of the broiling butter masala chicken emanated from the kitchen. I heard grandmother’s loud, booming voice as she instructed the servant on how to prepare the salad. I should be studying, I scolded myself.

But my brain felt like melted, mushy jello. “Maaaayyyaaaaa!” my grandmother shouted my name. “Lunch is ready.” That was a lie; lunch would be ready in ten minutes. But since I had nothing else to do, I began my walk to the dining area.

Even though it was scorching weather, my grandfather’s dhurries were laid on the marble floor. The dhurries had different patterns and friezes, both Western and Indian. Each dhurrie was multicolored – cerulean blue, yellow ocher, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue and more. As I dragged my bare feet over each dhurrie, I could feel the years of work it took to produce these pieces of artwork. My grandfather treasured these dhurries; after all, the weavers he trained had made them. But now the factory lays abandoned as he retired due to his illness, hepatitis C.

When I got to the dining table, my grandmother was frantically deciding which napkins looked the best. “Maaayyyaaaaa!” she called, her back facing me.

“I’m here,” I replied.

“Oh, sorry, I didn’t realize you were behind me,” she said, turning around to the sound of my voice. My grandmother smiled. I liked it when she smiled; all her wrinkles were in the right places, and her face seemed to radiate warmth and goodness. I gave her my metal-faced smile. “Lunch is almost ready, so sit here, next to Nanu,” she said, patting one of the wooden chairs.

My grandfather sat slightly hunched at the table; he looked like a war veteran. But he was still in battle. He was fighting against his own body in order to win more time to remain on Earth. His spectacles sat precariously on the tip of his nose. His face was sullen and sad. His clasped

Grind a Layer

Danielle Weidner
LIVINGSTON, NJ

Grind a layer
of blue slab into
a wave that’s
elegant like the night;
press your lips against
its’ salty grain when
it stoops nearer.

I hope you remember
the curve of my lips under
the sombrero-shaped
canopy of that tree,
and that Monday night
where we walked
the sandy banks;
toes immersed in
the earth the way
I was in you.

You were my medicine;
this belonged in a movie.

hands rested on the table beside his dirty plate and a white paper bag. He had already eaten his meal, which consisted of dal and soybean roti.

He smiled meekly as I sat down. But it was a sad smile, a smile of surrender. The smile turned to a frown as he looked at the white paper bag. Pills, I thought. He hated taking his pills; he hated having to rely on something. He was an entrepreneur; he never relied on anyone or anything other than the dhurries he produced for a living. But he was old now, circumstances change and people change.

Slowly and shakily, he unclasped his hands and reached for the paper bag. In the background, my grandmother was clanging pots and pans

in the kitchen. Once my grandfather grabbed the bag, he pulled it closer to him and emptied out its contents onto the dining table. Pills of various colors – cerulean blue, yellow ocher, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue and more – laid on the tabletop.

I knew he didn't want me to watch. He didn't want me to know he was sick. But I always knew he was sick. In fact, I don't remember him not being sick.

The servant came and put a warm glass of water next to my grandfather. He cringed at the sight, but he began to open up the packets of pills.

Twenty – that was the number of pills he had to take. I sat there for fifteen minutes watching him put pill by pill into his mouth. I stuck to my chair, both physically because of the heat and mentally because I was shocked. How can a person have to take that many pills? But most of all, why him? What had he done to deserve this?

The electricity came back on.



When Ms. Lin left, I just sat in the computer room alone staring out of the window. It was raining outside. Little droplets pitter-pattered against the window. I thought about my grandfather. Would I too become useless?



Swallow-Song

Beatrice Lee
RAMSEY, NJ

come here little bird and taste
dig your tongue to my wounds,
claw into my skin and
drag down on
this calicoed beast
cut me up
a coward,
pleading,
let me stand for
the dirt-veiled wombs my
mother made, woven from those
wet
indian summer days and
too much syrup on your pancakes

little bird come sit on my poplar
tree
outside the window fly right in it's
been open too long
come sing me songs of the last
winter storms and how your lungs
fill
up with bramble and bubble over

hush now, spread your wings over
the
fire that's sparked in the hearthside,
curl up around it as you
would your kin pry open their
bones and lick
up their marrow
spew your father's last words, cook
it into
gore and let it clot, let it come
down a typhoon,
a heart-shower, let it pelt your
wings and
drown you

christen yourself to my book,
my sinew, let your beak drip this
cherry wine-blood onto raw
pulp, trace the outline of

this heavy season down from the
north shore to the bayside

I will give you my name,
cut it deep in blacked blood,
wrap you ruby-throated in the
molted feathers of daylight,

Croon you a lullaby
so as to sing myself
to sleep



of electra

BEATRICE LEE
RAMSEY, NJ

there are hellions on the night-
train,
they cross the nadir into the
light-core above my
bedside and trace flames across my
rib,
two reach torches around my throat
and
whisper, *taste.*

they cackle up charcoal and gaso-
line,
ignite a rush from the corner of the
rug,
crawl up a brocade curtain and
swing
through the window frosted
over by sealights.

in his cabin, the conductor blows
smoke rings in the last
sips of daylight.
tonight he will sit in his rocker un-
der yellowed moons.
he will not move to remind the light
he is there.

Empanada

Eliza Scharfstein
BROOKLINE, MA

Outside the Valparaiso YMCA
is a street speckled with stray dogs
and humans. The man with the
cap and tarred
fingertips pulls down the gate.
I hand him three coins that click
against his rings, say con queso,
and, in a waxed slit of paper, hold
dough crusted
with burns and cheese.

I remember Septembers, when
Rosh Hashanah
brings my mother's brisket to the
table.
Sauce soups in oil, and I see faces:
ancestors in black and white nailed
to the wall of my grandparents'
apartment,
Moses holding a rod to a state
he would surrender, the long dress
of Ester.
The seams of my Challah rip, and
memories of lives
I never lived braid into the
churnings of my stomach.

On the street corner, cheese
slits in between my teeth, and I see
a city slanted
in steepness, these hills staircasing
up and down, full of murals
painted on stone: a dictatorship, a
freedom,
an artist. The nearby crashing of
waves
onto silted sand sifts through my
mouth.
In the houses shackled by roofs,
people sip stories I'm beginning to
taste.

Courtesy of the School Paper, The Lawrence

Allison Huang
PRINCETON, NJ

I noticed, other than its uncanny ability
to use magnanimous words, that the Lawrence article
about the visiting of Billy Collins was written before

he even got here. This owed itself to the uncanny ability
of writers to write in past tense about something that
never happened yet. I wonder

what they felt after squeezing out the series of preterit
verbs, if their brains were firing axon terminal to dendrite branch,
instead of the other way around, or when their mothers called

if they couldn't speak without evoking the score of their Saturday
basketball game,
which they hadn't played yet. I wonder,
if when they stepped outside,

the snow began to melt into the gutter,
even as it was mid-January,

if they saw a rag of brown leaf floating back up and
reattaching to a branch before
seeing it flush a vibrant green. If they

saw the first bud
shooting from the ground,
tight petals still frozen with sleet.





Line 1
Scott Bodnar



Downstairs
Alyssa Mulé
ATLANTA, GA

The girl knows what perfection is. At least, she knows what it is not. It is not her neat little room, the smallest bedroom in a large house, not the plush pink chair she curled up on as a child. Not even the stacks of books on her sagging bookshelf, creased and wearied with age.

She cannot hear the sounds of perfection echoing from downstairs. Unlike in the books she devours (with protagonists she relates to), she doesn't hear parents screaming and arguing, the shrill shatter of glass, siblings bawling. The only noises that spiral up to her strained hearing sound like what any other girl might deem perfect—carefully controlled laughing, polite inquiries, gentle

directives strewn with “darling”s.

She fancies that she should hate the jeweled necklace weighing down her neck and the Victorian furniture decorating her room. Somehow, she cannot quite muster up abhorrence for what she considers her own.

Feeling all the worse for her lack of loathing, she allows herself to wonder whether she could traipse downstairs, feel welcoming gazes laid thickly upon her, kiss her mother and chuck her younger sister's chin.

She couldn't.

Unaware of how or why, she feels the walls of her room acutely. With this knowledge she cradles, how can she simply descend the staircase into warm arms and cold sweaters over

tap-dancing ribs?

She picks up a novel from her bedside table. Words are meant to fill the night with their possibility of perfection.

Something Borrowed, Something Blue

Rachel Pietrewicz
HACKETTSTOWN, NJ

I.

Six years before I am born, my mother is engaged to a man who is not my father. Perhaps she is happy in this relationship, perhaps she is scared to leave this relationship. Perhaps even my mother doesn't know. Regardless of my mother's personal feelings about this relationship, she is all set to go through with the looming marriage and take the only next step left for an engaged couple. Wedding cakes are tested for taste, dresses are altered, songs are chosen. The wedding is coming together beautifully.

With three days left before my mother is set to exchange vows with the man she thinks she loves, she changes her mind. Phone calls are made to the village of people involved in the wedding. The cake is cut and plated, shared among the employees at the bakery. Dresses hang uselessly in closets, ready to collect dust, or perhaps, in some cases, they are shredded in rage. Songs that had once meant something now mean nothing, and they can no longer be listened to without bringing back a flood of painful memories. My mother decides she doesn't want a husband or a marriage or a new house, or maybe she just doesn't want the man she's supposed to marry.

He has brown eyes.

II.

When I first hear about my mother's almost-marriage at age eight, I am shocked. At such a young, vulnerable age, I had assumed

that my parents had been together forever. But then I find out about this other man who had existed in my mother's life before my father. I feel betrayed, hurt, outraged on behalf of my father. But my parents sit me down and explain to me how love works.

Love, apparently, is not as simple as I'd thought it was. My mother hugs me and comforts me, and when she locks her gaze on mine, I know that everything will be okay because I love her and she loves me.

My mother has blue eyes.

III.

Whenever someone pages through the piles of family photos spread throughout our cluttered, cozy living room, they will inevitably remark upon the resemblance. They feel inclined to inform us that we all look alike, as if we had not known that before. "You share the same genes!" They tell us, as if they are scientists making a discovery worthy of a "Eureka!" exclamation.

At a young age, I learn to roll my eyes.

IV.

At first, it is just my sister and me. Two girls, two years apart. My mother dresses us in matching outfits, and at certain times and certain ages, we can pass for twins. "How precious," strangers on the street say, coming far too close for comfort. "They have the same eyes!"

Then, the twins come along. One girl and one boy, twelve minutes apart. My mother doesn't dress them in matching outfits, but they can always pass for twins. "What a handful," strangers on the street say, steering away from my mother with her four children.

They don't come close enough to

see our eyes.

V.

In seventh grade, I learn about genetics: Punnett squares and dominant genes and recessive genes and blood types. I don't pay attention much—I'm more interested in history than science—but a few details stand out to me towards the end of the lesson. When a mother and a father have a child, you can use Punnett squares to guess what color the child's eyes will be. I don't understand this process, the ordered little boxes lined up on my worksheet, determining the outcome of a totally random, seemingly unpredictable process.

Life is more complicated than that, I think. I raise my hand to question the legitimacy of the Punnett squares process, and my teacher sighs and tells me that, believe it or not, every problem can be solved with a pencil and paper.

I don't believe it.

But my teacher goes on and on about these silly little squares, so I start to play around with them. The color blue of eyes is a recessive trait, hiding behind the color brown, which is dominant. A mother with blue eyes and a father with blue eyes can only produce a child with blue eyes; they cannot produce a brown-eyed child. But a mother with blue eyes and a father with brown eyes can produce a child with any color eyes. Recessive or dominant, light or dark, it's a toss-up. The outcome of a couple with eyes of different colors is unpredictable.

My father has blue eyes.

VI.

Age fifteen is when I start to think about what-ifs. What if I had been born a day earlier? What if I had

been born a day later? What if I had missed the bus this morning? What if I had gotten to the bus stop early? I wonder how different my life would be if any those what-ifs had actually happened.

One of the what-ifs I ponder most often is what if my mother had married that man? What if she had married him and never met my father, or met my father but never fell in love with him, or met my father but never pursued a relationship with him because she was already married? Would I still exist in some form, a child of hers and her almost-husband? Or would I not exist at all, the genes I am made of simply not combining to form a single human being?

I think I would still exist, but I'd be different. Maybe I would love science and hate history. Maybe I would be taller. Maybe I wouldn't need glasses.

Maybe I would have brown eyes.

VII.

Every member of my immediate family has the exact same shade of blue eyes. The recessive genes from my mother and father carry over to their children, with no dominant brown genes to take over and hide the blue from view.

My family's blue eyes unite us. They tell others that we are related. We all have hair in various shades of blond and brown, nothing that immediately stands out as being similar. But our eyes are instantly recognizable as being part of the same family. I borrowed my eyes from my parents, and my siblings borrowed them from me. When my youngest sister cries because the boys at school are mean to her, I watch tears tumble from eyes like mine. When my father raises his voice, I

see the anger in eyes like mine. When my mother tells a joke she's proud of, I glimpse the gleam in eyes like mine.

I guess I understand why strangers want to remark upon the resemblance between the members of my family. It is quite extraordinary to see six different people with the same color eyes.

VIII.

In tenth grade, the guidance counselors lead us in an anti-bullying/confidence-building/suicide-preventing activity where everyone in the class has to make a list of characteristics, physical and otherwise, they love about themselves. After we all mull over our answers for ten minutes, scratching away in our notebooks, tapping our pens against the desks, searching the blank walls for inspiration, the guidance counselor in my classroom asks us to each share two things from our list, one physical characteristic and one other.

My classmates shyly tell each other about how they love their naturally straight hair, or their long legs, or their eyebrows. They name things like their athletic ability, or their fashion sense, or their skill at putting on make-up, or their singing talent. The students share their favorite things about themselves in a line down the classroom, zigging and zagging to follow the formation of the desks. Finally, it is my turn.

"My sense of humor," I say. "And my blue eyes."

February in Hong Kong

Letitia Chan
ATHERTON, CA

You and I, in the swelling tide of people, watch our breaths mingle and dissipate, read each other's smiles as we clutch our lantern by its bamboo frame. The orange glows translucent, a pregnant woman's belly, stiff yet capable of breaking, the heat warming my hands. I wonder if these frail shells are enough to hold us, hold our hopes, etched on their paper skins. We do not hear anyone count above the crowd. Perhaps an impatient child somewhere lets go, one, then two, slowly, lanterns lifting off, and the flicker in your eyes to hold on to me as the weight slips past our fingers—

see, a thousand tangerine candles rising, jellyfish from ocean deep. Their boxy heads ascend into the black of night, tickle the sky red through the haze, flames kindling the sea gold.





Untitled

Julia Reinert
TAMAQUA, PA



In The Absence of a Sky Train

Kamonphorn Buranasiri
LAKEVILLE, CT

Siam is not the place for prayers
or questions. The station is overrun
with insomniacs and barmen
building shelter out of train tickets
and last week's gum, wanting
nothing

but to hide from the tourists.

Meanwhile, all the gods and
eastern
heroes arrive to split morabone
and spit satangs at the platform's
beggars,
geckos, and prophets feigning dark
fits
of sleep in the unemployment line.

By dawn, the mosquitoes will have

finished
drinking all their offerings, the last
drop
from the back of a motorcyclist
stargazing in the ticket booth. He
swears
he can see her weaving galaxies
out of skylines, claims the heavens
are man-made, and stops to make
an itch.

This is how I see the world - This is how I see the world.

Carolyn Todd
ERIE, CO

Life is often jumbled, upside down, or backwards. It is an adventure full of fascinating, intriguing people waiting to be discovered and I advocate for the different, brilliantly wired minds. In society, when a person is labeled as different, a negative stigma is instantly placed upon them for the shallow human eye is unable to see all the factors that play into someone's life. Having faced these challenges of being different, I have learned to be open-minded when encountering new people. Being a part of a community that is often disregarded as incapable has motivated me to want to travel the world advocating for children with learning differences.

After being born in France and moving to America at the age of four, what I knew to be normal became the abnormal. I went from blue, white, and red, to red, white and blue; kissing cheeks to shaking hands; from speaking French to speaking English. I struggled in school and was noticeably behind in my spelling and reading abilities compared to the other students. I remember the days when my heart would pound and my cheeks burned with embarrassment as I stuttered through reading a few sentences out loud in class. This traditional school system told me that I was stupid, and I believed it. As my confidence decreased and my reading and writing refused to improve, my mother decided to have

me tested for learning disabilities.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia in fourth grade.

Discovering I was dyslexic did not have the resolution I thought it would in my life. I did not know what it meant or how I was supposed to feel. All I knew was that I did not want to be defined by it. I was unable to truly comprehend how dyslexia was affecting me until a few years after being diagnosed. I was at the store with my mom, and I read a sign I thought said "buswash". I became utterly puzzled by how a bus could fit inside such a small store. My mom helped me sound out the word, which actually said "subway". As I watched the letters rearrange to what everyone else could see, I finally realized how differently I saw the world. That was the first time I began to understand what having dyslexia meant.

Dyslexia is both a blessing and a curse. I struggle every day, working twice as hard as other students. I get stereotyped as stupid by people who do not understand what it means to have a learning difference. However, I refuse to give up. I have learned the importance of standing up for myself and others. I am now a coordinator for Eye to Eye: a mentoring based program that partners high school students with middle school students in order to raise self-advocacy skills in a safe environment through art projects. In listening to my mentee's struggles and sharing my story with her, I have watched her confidence grow as she becomes comfortable with her learning difference. Remaining optimistic through my challenges can set a powerful example and this experience with my mentee has grown my passion for advocating for those with learning

differences.

Being dyslexic makes me able to look at the world and see the amazing potential that exists in diversity. Dyslexia has given me the tools to see the beauty in difference and the passion to change the way we define intelligence.

I want to show the world what I see.

Chicago, Quiet Illinois

Kate Busatto
SEWICKLEY, PA

"Chicken in the car
and the car won't go"
is what my
grandmother
called it.
Now, 4.0 pessimists
invade the city
and it's tainted.
Maybe it was always
tainted for me,
the fat splat of
asinine water in
wholegrain Illinois.
I remember my
grandmother's fur
getting beat down
by the wind on
Michigan Avenue.
We stopped in
hotel lobbies
for a bit of
sun-colored noise
and some
atom movement.
The shearing breath
of the city
was quiet,
so cold your
car won't start.

Truro Red

Joline Hartheimer
UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ

The blood-red strawberries feel cold and swollen in my pale winter fingers, their tangy juice stinging the cuts in my cuticles. They may be “out-of-season” and shipped in from some Latin American country much closer to warmth, but I can feel the essence of summer lying right up against my skin, a precious keepsake that will be showing signs of rot by Wednesday. And they remind me of that time I was sitting next to you on those teal blue lawn chairs, our golden toasted toes peeking through the pebbly sand as we tossed the green leafy tops behind us into the dunes.

We sat in silence - not an awkward one, one that felt just right - your right hand resting on my thigh, watching the murky blue tentacles of the tide creep towards us, melting childhood dreams of sandcastles and shell collections in their way, left behind by the rambunctious family that had set up camp front of us. Afterwards, we would barefoot-tiptoe-jump over the steaming black asphalt to get back to the beige minivan, whose furry seats were sprinkled with cracker crumbs and smelled of orange juice and sunscreen. You would always bump your head on the door getting in, and end up holding your swollen temple while you drove back to the cabin, cursing under your breath. And I would always stub my big toe climbing up those splinter-infested stairs.

The screen door would bounce against the doorjamb as it closed, sending flakes of lead paint from the fifties floating down to the welcome mat, like dandelion pods in the wind.

The cabin was covered, like all of the identical rentals sprawling out around us, from floor to ceiling in fishing paraphernalia: sailboats and fishing hooks and seashells and sea glass nailed to every surface. I always complained about how cheesy it all was. Above the loveseat was a series of time-lapse photographs of coastlines eroding, the once strong and muscular arm of the Cape becoming flaccid as years passed by. A collection of plastic jello molds, shaped like lobsters, were the main kitchen decoration, complemented by ancient boxes of the cherry-scented fluorescent red powder in the cabinets, with expiration dates too scary to read. You told me once that jello is this giant conspiracy, that all the flavors actually taste the same when you hold your nose, and the smell is the only thing that makes lime taste any different than orange. I wish I had believed you.

We would stand in that tiny galley kitchen, hipbones connected as I stirred the pitcher of iced tea and you sliced the Portuguese bread we had picked up that morning in Provincetown, holding hands while waiting in line behind friendly gay men and wealthy Boston retirees, their accents filling the bakery. The serrated knife sliced the side of your knuckle so perfectly that it didn't look real, the fresh cut like a line drawn in the sand. But soon blood swelled at the site and eagerly poured over the break in your skin, the droplets falling onto the slices of bread, which absorbed them thirstily.

Frightened at the realization that you were in fact human, and mortal, and getting closer to death at each second, your face became pale and you coldly pushed me aside to run to the bathroom, leaking your fleeting

young blood all over our beach towels. I dumped the soiled bread into the garbage pail, the slices landing with a satisfying plump, and rinsed the bloody blade under the faucet until the water ran clear again. And with that clear water I washed the sand off the strawberries that I packed in our beach bag that morning.

The strawberries ended up being our lunch that day. And those were the last strawberries I ever saw trickling down your chin.

The Bund

Ruting Li
MILTON, MA

We stop, tonight, at the railing.
The lights of the buildings
dance in the water
the way we used to,
sock-footed sisters
on the wooden floor.
Across the river, a sign flashes
I love Shanghai.

I think, I may love it too:
the street dust, 4 RMB pork buns,
the sun in the afternoon, peachy
through the pollution.
I remember the time we left
the window open all afternoon, and
the city stink
crept in, the taste of car exhaust
like rusted coins spent on popsicles,
chrysanthemum leaves and garlic
oiled in the kitchen below ours.
At ten, the clock tower sings
and the city stars will blink out.
I'll stand and look at the skeletons
of buildings, watching
the river silt rise up at low tide,
the coal ships floating by long into
the night.

There's too much of us here,
but I could never be alone
with this city.

King of the World

Tiara Sharma
QUINCY, MA

That afternoon in your mother's
front yard
you told me the story of how Shah
Jahan
cut off the hands of his craftsmen
so they could never build anything
else like the Taj Mahal.
Your notepad was filled with
sketches
of the black mausoleum you
imagined he would build
and the silver bridge over the
Yamuna River
that would connect him to his wife
for eternity.

You carried me on your shoulders
so I could finally reach the worn
clothesline.
I pulled the rope down as far as my
arms would allow
and released. You held my face as a
clothespin
clipped your left eye and it swelled
as large as my fist.

Deep wells lie in the mattress where
your father's body
once moved and where your mother
still sleeps.
You return to her every autumn to
fold your things
in your childhood cupboard, sit on
the veranda
while the sound of temple bells fills
all of Jammu,
and sketch the house you always
wanted to build
across Greenbelt Park. "Perfection
within imperfection,"
you say, finishing the thatched
roof—the exact words

you used when you woke up in a
hospital bed
with that cloudy blue eye.

To this day, your used sketchbooks
lie stacked
next to your father's photo. As you
drape
a fresh garland of flowers over his
picture frame,
you tell me you would never believe
what they're saying,
that the Taj is sinking, slowly, into
the Yamuna.
Every night, I dream of those
builder's hands at the river bottom.
Every night, I wake up scared for
how much you do not know.

Delhi Braveheart

Tiara Sharma
QUINCY, MA

"If my daughter or sister engaged
in pre-marital activities and
disgraced herself by doing such
things, I would most certainly take
this sort of sister or daughter to
my farmhouse, and in front of my
entire family, I would put petrol
on her and set her alight." —A. P.
Singh, defense lawyer in the 2012
Delhi rape case

As you sit in your bus outside the
movie theater
and spot the slim girl in jeans,
remember the nights
your mother spent kneading dough
and boiling lentils
to welcome you from your night
shift.
Remember when, three years ago,
she found you
on the rooftop with a bottle of Vat
69 and the local village tramp.



Remember the word, sharam, the
shame in her eyes.

As you and your five friends pin her
down,
remember your sister's broken
marriage,
the night you set fire to her
husband's veranda
after you saw her purpled ribcage,
wounds that never bandaged
properly.

As you cup her breasts,
think about the man who groped
your daughter's chest,
the fight that ended in a scar
behind your ear,
how she has slept between you and
your wife every night.

Mukesh, as you force a steel rod
into her,
think of Goddess Durga riding into
battle on a tiger,
conch shell, lotus flower, and
trident in hand,
how you offered Her silver trays full
of sweets,
begged her for escape from your
slum.
Remember that Durga is in your
daughter,
in our daughters, in the ones that
"wear wrong things,"
and in this Delhi Braveheart whom
you leave on the road.

Back Home Again

Elizabeth Satterfield

INDEPENDENCE, WV

Music crackles inside the faded radio, drifting out of the dingy lace curtains that sway in the heavy summer breeze. There is a low hum of cicadas in the distance. The wind caresses my face, blowing away the tears that have silently slipped down my cheek. I am standing inside the aging screen door, covered in three layers of flaking paint. I lightly tiptoe onto the porch, pushing the creaking door out of my way.

I sit down on the white rocker and look out over the expanse of the barren land beyond my small porch. The thinning hay leans in the wind; a dog barks in the next county over; my vegetable garden has yellowed significantly as the drought has worsened. The absence of rain has destroyed all hope. As I sit and recollect the dry and disastrous past weeks, I close my eyes and let the rocking of the old chair lull me to sleep. I can hear footsteps on the second floor of the farmhouse. They retreat down the splintered stairs and slip out the screen door. A small hand touches my arm gently.

“Momma, are you gonna’ fix supper? We’re gettin’ hungry.” My eyes open slowly. I stare stupidly ahead. I do not know how to answer her because there is no supper. But I put on a weak smile.

“We’re goin’ on an adventure, Sis. To Mammy’s house!” The corners of her eyes turn upwards, and her front teeth are absent. She runs back inside the house, slamming the door behind her. I close my eyes again, ignoring the intruding thoughts that are running through my mind,

reminding me there is no food. No money. No man. I can now hear Sis and little Bubby racing through the empty, white-washed hallway, filled with ignorant bliss while the baby sleeps quietly. But the cicadas are silent. The dog has stopped barking. Static comes across the radio. The wind is not touching my face. My sorrowful eyes shoot open, and my weary legs stand immediately. I scan the horizon quickly for signs of disturbance. My hopes are high. Maybe he has returned. But his after-shave is not in the air. His old Ford pickup is not rolling into the driveway. His broad shoulders are not beneath my heavy head.

Instead, I smell rain. It is heavy, muggy, and moist. It fills my lungs and chokes me with the first happiness I have felt in months. The pale sun has sought shelter from the impending storm. The dark clouds hover above me, threatening to deluge the land with fresh life. A crack of thunder splits the sky and lightning illuminates the dark scene. Fat drops hit the metal roof and screams of excitement can be heard from inside the house.

I continue to gaze in amazement as the beads bounce off the hard and unwilling ground. Two pairs of footsteps pound down the stairs, and the slam of the door sharply hits my ears. “Momma, Momma! Look! It’s rainin’!” Four little hands grab my skirt urgently, pulling me out into the rain. The stout drops slide down my bare arms and face. Soon I am soaked to the bone as are the children, who are dancing in the magical puddles and imagining that life is perfect. I look at the complete joy emanating from their rosy faces and wish I was as carefree as they.

The rain stills beats steadily as I

retreat to the shelter of the house. I slip inside and tiptoe up the stairs, somehow fearful that any sound could ruin the momentary happiness of the rain. On the second floor, I walk quickly past my locked bedroom door. In the gloom, I grope for the nursery door. My precious baby sleeps peacefully, contrasting the turmoil that rages within me. I scoop him up and bury my face in the soft nape of his neck, smelling the last scent of him. I retreat downstairs with the fragile creature in my tired arms. I sit once again in the rocker, watching Sis muck up her dress, and Bubby catch rain on his tongue. I nearly smile, a genuine smile, but I catch myself. For I once had joy and peace in my homely life. He took the pleasures I experienced and turned them on their heads, giving me a personal relationship I never realized could be had. I learned pure love that comes from the soul and gushes on those fortunate to be near it. He taught me endurance and loyalty, something many do not understand. It was an old-fashioned concept of promises, camaraderie, brotherhood--and I embraced it all, as did he for it stemmed from his very passionate being.

My reverie is interrupted by the radio, which has emerged from the static aggressively. The blare of the weather alert echoes in my head, and my eyes squeeze shut tightly, as if my sheer will can make it just a systematic test. But the blare is followed by a serious voice, proclaiming the possibility of a tornado. My broken heart drops into the pit of my empty stomach. I run through the torrent and scoop up my babies, racing toward the underground cellar, toward safety. The baby screams in confusion as the

rain pounds off of his little cheeks. We scramble inside, grabbing the door behind us, huddling in the farthest corner silently. Sis folds her hands and offers prayers up to God while Bubby clings to my neck in sheer terror. I myself am stiff with anguish as I light the kerosene lantern, rocking the baby and hushing him earnestly. My only thoughts are survival...survival without him.

Our protagonist freezes in the reality of the moment, the reality that she cannot live. She cannot live without her better half. For he is gone, he was gone six months ago when he joined the service. He left her with only a kiss, a perfect, younger version of himself, five hundred dollars cash, and a dying farm. She knew when he climbed into that old Ford pickup and the dust flew behind him, he would not return. Five weeks later, the telegram was delivered. The ceremony was beautiful, the flag now sitting on the mantel beside his service picture. Everyday she sat in the parlor and looked at his face and the flag for which he had fought. Every day she cried inwardly and smiled outwardly. But her courage is decimated. Her joy lies in a pine box at the church down the road. Her heart lays shattered on the tear-laced ground.

The kerosene lantern flickers off, and my mind has yet to regain its strength. The deadly storm has passed after what has seemed like a thousand years, and the children have fallen asleep. I lay the baby down on the nearby quilt and push on the cellar door above us. I stand in the full sun of a new day. My sad house still stands nearby, and puddles of water lay in the yard and driveway. The air is fresh and full of life. My rocking chair tilts back and forth in the soft, relaxing wind, and the radio hums quietly.

Sunshine plays across my face, and I let it. I embrace that warmth

of a single ray. I shed no tears because the sun would simply wipe them away. Instead, I lie down in the damp grass and look at the cloudless sky that is full of possibilities to the rest of the world. To me, it is a clean slate that was washed with tears, anguish, and sadness. As I clear my mind, I become aware of the sounds around me. Crickets chirp near my ears, birds sing in the old oak tree, and gravel crunches in the driveway. I know that sound. It is the truck. His truck.

My eyes flash with passion, and my body runs toward the sound. My mind is racing and so wanting the impossible to be probable. My soul soars above my dreams in the clean sky and graces the tops of the trees, mocking the world below it. I am running in the middle of driveway toward the pickup. I see his rugged, smiling face through the windshield, and I throw back my head in laughter. I come along side his door as he slows. I grab the door handle eagerly as he steps out to envelop me in his strong arms. As I clasp onto his figure, my tears flow freely and wet his shoulder. I kiss his cheeks again and again yet he stands rigid. I hug him tightly around his neck but he makes no move to return the embrace. I step back and stare at his chiseled face. It is pale. Without life. Without love.

A shot resounds throughout the valley. A bullet tears through his chest. My eyes widen in disbelief, and I let out a silent scream. My mouth opens but no sound is heard. I reach out to catch his falling figure but he slips through my hands. His body does not lie on the ground, and the truck is gone. My head spins, and I glance around me furtively, looking for signs of him. My ears ring and I

stop in the moment when I realize I feel pain. I look down and see red seeping out of my abdomen. I touch it tenderly and sway, falling to the ground. As I lay there, evaluating my life, I realize who I am and what I have chosen to be. I remember the babies, sleeping in the cellar. I remember the man I loved, who left me to fight for us. And now it is over.



The Inuit

Caleb Tansey
WASHINGTON, D.C.

it is a barren road, save a husk
standing lone
in the gray
watching me as the flakes fall

only we two in the frigid air
it sews dread through my tripes.
i feel the echoing pulse

i reach in my mouth
and vomit words
that splash among the bodies.

it sees i am broken, opens its throat:
foreign tongue cut from the tundra,
through and through i am devoured.

all i feel is the flame of the Inuit
as i fold into its fire.

*Watching Children
at the Marketplace,
One Day*

Jiyoung Jeong
AUBURNDALE, MA

Uncle says they are dirt. He
sits at his stool behind apples and
tangerines, cigar perched between
lips to burn
his throat and lungs until
he coughs. Used to be one of
them, I know—
he murmurs something about cold
winters and

hurls a couple pork chop pieces for
lunch at
the kids now and then.

They drag their
shadows like unwanted luggage,
heads bobbing over
fruit and meat stands. Uncle just
listens to their
tongues swell in pleas, voices frail
like skinny branches thawed
from February snow—crab hands
blue
with morning cold, halo arms
around empty
tin bowls.

Now, one by one they slip
under Uncle, white knuckled
buyers and fruit—impossibly
dreaming like
dead men in search
of their bones.



Tree Windows

Nickolas Stagaman
HUBBARDSVILLE, NY



Liberation

Olivia Evans
DOWNINGTON, PA

It just takes one moment, I thought to myself. I stood at the top of a thirty-five foot cliff, and in looking down, I had neither desired nor planned to jump, but out of sudden impulse, a sudden moment of courage, I turned to my friends behind me, smiled, and stepped off the edge. What did I have to lose?

I fell in disbelief at my own action; adrenaline took over my body and sent endorphins to the furthest reaches of my limbs. As I hit the water, happiness became my only emotion. In my “YOLO” moment at a lagoon in the Dominican Republic, it didn’t take long to realize that I should strive to feel this way not just once, but every day of my life. I couldn’t help but think that living with a true passion must feel this empowering.

For as long as I could remember, “what’s your passion?” posed the scariest question of my high school career. At a rigorous magnet school in suburban Philadelphia, I always felt like everyone in my class could answer so eloquently, so surely, but I never had an answer myself. I would answer with things I enjoyed –travelling, chemistry, student government – but it never felt right. To me, passion should light a fire inside you. It makes you want to do things you’ve never done and go places you’ve never gone to follow it. Yet there I was, late in my junior year, without a flame within me that could drive me through. Quite honestly, I felt burnt out. I began to wish the year away, hoping against hope that summer would come sooner.

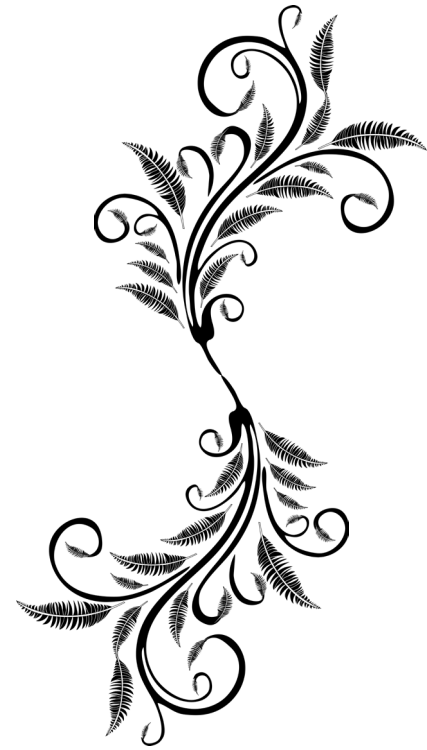
When summer did arrive, I boarded a plane from Newark to the Dominican Republic. What I didn’t realize, though, was that my journey would so distinctly resemble the cliff, and that in jumping, I would light a fiery inferno within me. I knew from a young age that I possess an acute awareness of those around me, and I have always steadfastly believed that people matter. In Dominican, I realized that this belief I hold so closely relates to a concept called “human security,” a field in which I found myself immersed for twenty-one days through service projects. It is, undoubtedly, my answer to, “What’s your passion?”

The funny thing about the word “passion” is that it originates from the Latin word “pati,” which means “suffer.” Quite literally, passion stems from pain, and that holds true with mine. The flames now within me sting everyday because I know that we live in a world where 780 million people don’t have access to clean water, where 2.7 billion people live on less than \$2 a day, and where having food, clothes, and shelter makes one richer than 75% of the population. Yet, that pain leads me towards solving these problems, because I can look at them and better understand them through a human security lens.

While I escaped to the Dominican to lose myself in the beauty of it all, I actually found myself. In a country rocked by insecurity, I saw the true value of community, leadership, understanding, and service. All the while, for the first time in my short life, I felt entirely fulfilled with and passionate about my actions. There, among the impoverished and the struggling, I felt most alive when giving a piece of myself to them. I

just had to step off my cliff.

In the Dominican Republic, I learned that we all stand on the edge of our own cliff. A leap of faith, a single step, is all it takes to send you sailing into the beautiful blue lagoon below. Once you’re there, nothing can stop the adrenaline that pumps your veins full of life, bringing it back to your heart. Searching for passion is exactly that. Sometimes you just need one moment of complete, utter fearlessness to find it.



Blue

Sarah Betancourt
DOYLESTOWN, PA

I. Sky

It was cold that day. Too cold to be outside for this long, but she didn't care. She had finally made a new friend and was determined not to let this one escape. It was a sunny cold, with a lazy cerulean tone, a deceiving cold that almost made it feel warm. She had never known this place was here, but she loved it the instant they arrived.

"It's really not much," he said, dropping her hand abruptly, suddenly staring at the frozen ground. "I just really like it here,"

She didn't reply, but instantly knew that there was indeed something that set this place apart. She took his hand again and his head jerked up; his soft eyes were alive, he was intrigued by this girl he had only just begun to understand. Together they sat down on the swings and quietly propelled themselves toward the winter sun.

II. Powder

The flowers had barely begun to peek through the receding snow, their tiny heads reaching for the egg-yolk sun. Though it had begun to thaw, it really wasn't time for a summery sundress yet. She didn't mind. His shoes were decrepit and needed to be replaced; the stubborn snow worked its way closer to his toes. Nevertheless, they pulled each other breathlessly down the hill.

"You're crazy," she laughed, talking more to herself than to him. The emerging grass had done something to her; she had abandoned her usual careful state for one with which she was unfamiliar.

She rushed to claim the left swing, the one that she had always had an affinity for.

He followed close behind, unable to look away from the crisp, clean dress that hung effortlessly around her. The right swing had always been his favorite, but for now he was content to stand on the left and listen to the sound of her smile as the periwinkle flowers grew up around his destroyed shoes.

III. Navy

She ran through the dark midnight, letting her feet lead. They knew where to go. She did not think, only ran. The envelope clutched to her chest, she was unsure of when the salty tears had started to flow. Soon, they reached the carefully scrawled ink and began to blur the words. The soles of her shoes pounded the street; her shirt clung to her body in the late-night humidity.

Without meaning to, she had ended up there. Of course. For just a moment, she paused. The only sounds were her quickening pulse and the rhythmic crickets. Then the tears took over. She sank into the familiar curve meant for a little girl, and sobbed until she could barely breathe. Finally she stopped to look up at the sky: the color of a bruise dotted with shimmering silvery flecks.

IV. Denim

His steps crunched over decay and crumbling leaves. They were now less vibrant and more a burnt brown. As bits of nature clung to his feet, he mumbled to himself that it was time for a new pair of shoes. The knees of his pants were threadbare, threatening to burst at any moment. He should probably get around to replacing those, too. The autumn

sun was fading early in the day, and the beginning of a chill was in the air. He didn't mind. He had always liked to be out at precisely the wrong moment.

It felt like generations had passed since he last ran down this street, since he had been young, reckless, and naïve. Now he knew better, and strolled carefully: there was more to life than this small town with its Easter egg houses and pure white fences.

Still, he was not ready to give up his childhood realm. He sat down slowly in this new, aging body. He no longer swung to the heights he had when he was king of the world. He caught one of the last crimson leaves as it danced toward his head and tucked it next to the velvet box in his jeans pocket.

V. Robin's Egg

Amid the thick scent of new blossoms there was a sense of new life. Birds gossiped excitedly to each other. Gleaming cars breezed by, their bold hues streaks across a lush green backdrop. She shaded her face with a delicate hand, her nails painted a ballerina pink. Despite the shadow, her eyes crinkled at the corners in the sun's golden light.

"Again, again!" cried a small voice filled with joy. The innocent laughter of a child who had yet to see the world echoed above nature's chatter.

At the bottom of the hill, he stood behind the left swing. Its occupant was new, but the shining sapphire eyes were the same. He glanced up to the crest of the hill to wave. She hesitated for a moment, remembering. She rushed down the hill to join them.

Red
Mallory Chabre
VERNON, CT

She came to me on a Sunday. In all honesty I couldn't be bothered with lady problems at any other time than the weekdays, but her voice was small and insistent. Then she said it. Three little words.

"I need you."



January 4, 1995

"Why are you here?"

My questions always seemed unnecessary on the first day. It's no wonder I usually came off as vaguely disinterested in those painfully obvious bonding rituals.

Her case file sat casually on the table beside me and my black espresso coffee. I knew what made her worry lines so deep, but I needed to hear it from her. I wanted to see her wet her lips just before the moment she decided to trust me.

"Well, Ben, I'm your classic case of romanticized depression. Although, after I set fire to my jackass ex-husband's house, some said I needed more than medication." She shrugged, the corners of her mouth twitching at the last part.

Jezebel O'Reilly was patient 26 in the last three years and not one of them was ever so ballsy.

"I've heard worse," I said with a nervous smile. I'd never been so scared of a woman.

She laughed hysterically like a child with a secret she would enjoy keeping as long as I begged for it. I cringed at the sudden noise.

"I'm available on Tuesdays," she informed me between lingering

giggles.

I held my business card out to her, "Just promise me one thing."

Her eyes traveled suspiciously to my crotch and I redirected her immediately, flushing every shade of drowned-out pink, "Please don't burn down my house."

She laughed again and removed the card from my hands.



Belle paced the length of my office with her flaming hair tied up and her fingers curled around her hips. She sighed, "I just don't see the point anymore."

I cupped my face with my palms and rubbed my smooth skin over the stubble. Then I made the worst mistake of my career: I thought aloud. "Neither do I."

I glanced at the framed document on the eggshell wall: Benjamin Gallagher, Ph.D. I couldn't say how many times I've wanted to tear it down and shatter the frame. How long has it been since I was passionate about filling up the sink for dishes? Late night documentaries, ramen in coffee mugs, or even casual arguments with someone significant? I realized the older we get, the more we lust after ordinary things.

My eyes continued to wander around the room as Belle kept moving, dodging pieces of furniture. I pretended she was dancing. Although, my office was hardly a space for any kind of hip-hop swing dance combinations. It was small, consisting of living room easy chairs, a desk of files, and a grounded light fixture along separate stretches of wall. I wouldn't call it homey unless the rest of the city burst into flames.

She made a small noise and

plopped herself on the charcoal leather sofa. Tears of the same color rolled over her flushed cheeks and the small freckles dotting her nose.

I had encountered many young women ready to die, but for the first time I didn't know what to say to the helpless creature on my couch.



February 1, 1995

"Hey, man, you don't look so good."

Spencer was half-heartedly sucking on a Popsicle like a five-year-old while I pretended to watch the game.

"It's nothing," I mumbled, "just a patient."

"A girl?" He asked, his voice going up an octave and his eyebrows dancing seductively.

"Shutup, Spence."

He was right. Of course he was. You live with a guy for 5 years and suddenly he knows everything and your blood type.

Belle was driving me crazy. In the past week, I had seen her three times on the street. THREE. Apparently she takes walks in the park on Wednesdays when I go running. The woman stops for every dog that shits in her general area. It made me think of a show I caught my mom watching about lonely old women hoarding animals for love. I shivered and kept running.

On Saturday, I went out to eat with my sister at a local dive and BAM there she was with her teeth in a burger that made her hands look like a child's.

By the time Sunday came around, I ran smack into her at the grocery store on 7th. I'm not too big on small talk, especially with my

Bruising

Letitia Chan
ATHERTON, CA

You tell me the bruises on your skin
that come into bloom so easily:
the strawberry stains that blot your kneecaps
and orange rinds that scar your back.
I know for this some breaking inside,
softer, smaller, must go unseen. How many
people harbor sickness that sprouts
in the quiet, bruises from the inside out?
You tell me about a girl whose grandmother
picks the seeds out of a watermelon
so that she will eat it. They sew gentle
as raindrops into your stomach, the girl
says, and a melon grows, round as a child.
An old man's fruit stand is toppled
by school boys. He watches the bruised
pears roll, into the gutter to still and exhale
upon their lop-sides. Home, he finds his wife
on her hip, slack as a doll, going and gone.
A woman spends a lifetime peeling
and eating pomelos, empty husks littering
the floor of her kitchen. She eats to forget,
but she can't remember the taste, bitter
as it is sweet, as soon as it is swallowed.
We ripen as plums, blemish and pucker
before we learn we are really caving in.
I dare not tell you, these things seep
through, bruising and bruised. The broken
know not their own breaking.

clients, but damn can she talk your
ear off. And shockingly, it wasn't ever
off-putting in the slightest. I started
to feel comfortable with her. I went
home and took two showers.

"I think I need a drink."



She threw her hands up. "I
shouldn't have come here, god, what
is wrong with me?!"

"A lot of things," I blurted out. I
regretted it immediately. I decided I
suck at my job.

She gave me a look like King
Leonidas going into battle. "Shut
the fuck up."

"I'm so sorry, Belle, I didn't
mean that," I breathed, completely
defeated.

Her eyes locked on mine.

"Why do you call me that?" She
looked innocent; subdued.

"Call you what?" I asked, stunned

by her sudden change in emotion.

Her voice was quiet. "Belle. My
name is Jezebel. No one but my
mother ever called me anything
different."

"It's just a nickname, you know
like..." I trailed off. I didn't know
what it was like. I'd called her that
ever since I noticed her in the park
with her pale skin reflecting sunlight
like a thousand tiny mirrors and her
posture: poised, alarming, definite.

"Forget it," she whispered
shuffling toward the door, "I need to
go."

She slid her black suede pea coat
from a hook on the door. I grabbed
her arm. I don't even remember
getting up, I just remember touching
her like she was the only thing I felt
like fixing.

"Belle means beautiful in French."

She stared at me like a boy at a
school dance with no clue where to
put his hands. And then she left. She
left me standing on a rug the color
of poison ivy. My heart, cracked and
oozing.

I watched her walk to her car from
the window. She wouldn't bother
with the seat belt. I loved never being
able to tell whether she was forgetful
or dangerous or just didn't care. At
the last moment she looked up at me
standing awkwardly above her. Her
smile was electric in the moonlight.

I spent the next hour rolling a
pair of faded white dice until they
tumbled over the edge of the table.
I imagined that was what it must
have been like to think the earth was
flat or to succumb to a mid-life crisis
that ends in divorce and a wrecked
Ferrari.

I think a lot about the world when
I'm alone. It's something I learned
from her. You numb the brain with
pointless ideas and conversations

until you forget about meaningful things. Distraction is guilt's best friend. I took advantage of her that night.



I got the phone call at 3am. The woman on the other end said I should take a vacation.

That morning I would update my patient list to twenty-five.

Spencer would bring hot wings and milkshakes for breakfast because that's as close as he gets to "I'm sorry."

The funeral would be a couple of weeks later. Her body would be at its most peaceful, with pills in her tummy and her eyes closed. I won't wear black or grey like all the other unhappy people because I know she'd just scrunch her nose and mumble curse words in the most charming way anyone can.

I think I'll remember her in red. For passion, for experience, and for people like her: with hearts like the sun.



Missing Girls

Tiara Sharma
QUINCY, MA

"This year, UNICEF reported that 43 million of the estimated 100 million women worldwide who would have been born if not for extraneous circumstances, including gender-specific abortion, would have been Indian. In the past, newspapers and billboards advertised sex selective abortions. None of this is said in the open. But it is clear from the numbers that India's girls continue to go missing."

-Neil Samson Katz, PBS, April 26, 2007

The day we went to the Bawe Mata temple,
a woman fell at my feet.

"Mata is in our daughters," she cried,
clasping her hands together.

My mother kicked her away
and readjusted the dupatta covering my head.

As we made our way towards the chamber
where Her shrine was kept,

I saw the woman clutch her stomach.

Let us not speak
of the midwife's hands massaging
Glory Lily and hot oil into the girl's abdomen,
the salt of her new husband's skin
the last taste to leave her tongue.

Let us not speak of the silver anklets
returned to her village in a plastic bag,
the funeral pyre lit for the girl
who still rests at the bottom of the sea.

As the fire burns, let us listen:

they are calling for a time
when they rode into battle cross-legged on tigers,
conch shells, lotus flowers, and tridents in hand.

Let us listen: this is the sound of India's girls
breathing in unison.

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