

F
O
L
I
O
2
0
9
5

FOLIO

FOLIO

Art & Literary Magazine

Southern Connecticut State University
501 Crescent Street
New Haven, CT 06515
www.southernct.edu
203.392.6936

FOLIO

Josh Gister ~ Editor

Michael R. Hemenway ~ Associate Editor

Jessica Piel ~ Fiction Editor

Melissa Owen ~ Poetry Editor

Larissa Hall ~ Art Editor

Jeff Mock ~ Faculty Advisors
Brian Johnson

STAFF

Elizabeth Alvarez	David Pacelli
Lindsay Curtiss	Jennifer Purus
Andrew Keeler	Sarah Tamulevich

STUDENT AWARD WINNERS

FICTION

FIRST PLACE:

NUTS

Anthony Brano

SECOND PLACE:

ACCOUNTING

Amy Ashton Handy

THIRD PLACE:

DESIRES

Shawn Taylor

ART

FIRST PLACE:

UNTITLED, OIL ON MASONITE

Noelle Weimann

SECOND PLACE:

AMERICAN FAMILY, OIL

Veronica Cianfrano

THIRD PLACE:

UNTITLED, STEEL AND STONE

Michael Anderson

POETRY

FIRST PLACE:

MINOR
Sarah Horton

SECOND PLACE:

BEAUTIFUL
Michelle Repass

THIRD PLACE:

LITTLE GREEN BOX
Yesod - Frederick Douglas Knowles

HONORABLE MENTIONS

SAINT CROIX RIVER
Jennifer Soboleski

MEETING JESUS AT THE BUS STOP
David Pacelli

SCSU CREATIVE WRITING FACULTY

MEGAN MACOMBER

was born in Chicago, grew up vaguely midwestern and southern, received her education in the east, and has taught at SCSU for about fifteen years. She is proud to live in the All-American Naugatuck Valley, the creative writing vortex of New England.

JEFF MOCK

worked in literary publishing for more than a decade, first as the Editor of *BlackWarrior Review*, then as the Assistant Editor of *The Gettysburg Review*; he served as the Fall '05 Advisor for this edition of *Folio*. He is the author of *Evening Travelers*, a chapbook of poems, and *You Can Write*, a guidebook for beginning poets. His poems appear in *Crazyhorse*, *The Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Quarterly West*, *The Sewanee Review* and elsewhere.

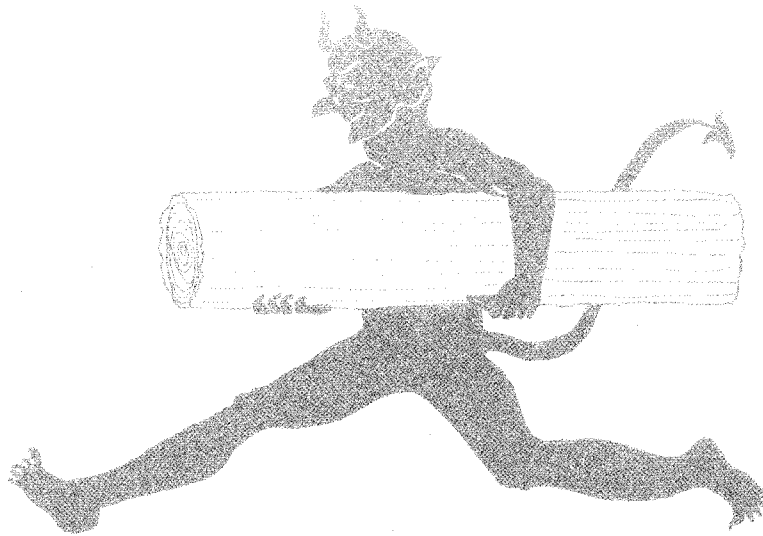
TIM PARRISH

is author of *Red Stick Men*, a collection of stories set in his hometown of Baton Rouge. Parrish was nominated by Tim O'Brien for *Best New American Voices 2002*, was a 2001 Walter E. Dakin Fellow at The Sewanee Writer's Conference and received a 2001 Connecticut Artist's Grant. His most recent work appears in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, and *War, Literature, and the Arts* and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He has just completed a novel entitled *The Jumper*.

VIVIAN SHIPLEY

won the 2004 Paterson Prize for Sustained Literary Achievement for *Gleanings: Old Poems, New Poems* (Southeastern Louisiana University Press, 2003) which was also nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. *When There Is No Shore* won the 2003 Connecticut Book Award for Poetry from the Library of Congress' Center for the Book and the 2002 Word Press Poetry Prize. Shipley is a Judge for the Connecticut Poetry Circuit. The Chair of the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival Committee, she is a member of the Board of Governors at Hill-Stead Museum. The Connecticut State University Distinguished Professor and Editor of *Connecticut Review* from Southern Connecti-

cut State University, she won the 2003 Hart Crane Poetry Prize from Kent State University and was awarded a Connecticut Commission of the Arts Grant. She was also awarded the 2004 Julia Peterkin Poetry Prize from Converse College, Spartanburg, S.C. Her twelfth book of poems, *Hardboot: Poems New & Old*, is forthcoming in 2005 from Southeastern Louisiana University Press.



JUDGES

FICTION

ROBIN TROY

grew up in Connecticut and lives in Missoula, Montana, where she earned her M.F.A. in fiction from the University of Montana. Her first novel, *Floating*, was published in 1998. In the fall, she will join SCSU's faculty as an assistant professor of English, teaching fiction writing and composition.

POETRY

WALT QUADRATO

has been the owner/operator of Brass City Records in Waterbury Ct since 1984. He and his shop have been the host and venue for dozens to hundreds of bands, such as Blur, Sunny Day Real Estate, The Apple Seed Cast, and the Reputation. He is a master wood worker and specializes in antique planes, scrapers, chisels, and other bizarre carving tools. His interest in poetry relies mostly on dazzling and stellar imagery.

ART

ERICH DAVIS

Erich Davis is a graduate of Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida majoring in both fine art and graphic design, with a minor in advertising. As a graphic designer in Connecticut, Erich has spent the past five years working for marketing and promotions agencies throughout Fairfield County. He has also been instrumental in the operations and curating for the Star Pin Gallery at the Star Pin Complex in Shelton, CT where he works out of his studio at Floodlevel.

FOLIO COMMUNITY

Folio is an active club on campus with over twenty staffers. The coffeehouse style monthly readings feature poetry, fiction, open-mic, live musical performances, displayed artwork and boast an attendance of fifty to seventy-five people. These student readings compliment and support the Reading Series sponsored by SCSU's Creative Writing Department. The integration of students, faculty, staff, readers and writers of all levels of experience and appreciation foster a supportive environment, promoting a sense of community among local writers.

The professors of creative writing represent the keystone of SCSU's writing community. Folio's expansion as a campus organization and a magazine is a natural outgrowth of the success and support of professors Megan Macomber, Jeff Mock, Tim Parrish and *Connecticut Review* Editor Vivian Shipley.

PUBLICATION

The literary work appearing in this issue was selected through a preliminary round of judging by volunteer students. Cover-sheets were removed so writers remained anonymous. The editorial staff reviewed the results and narrowed the selections by workshop-style analysis. Independent judges then chose first, second and third place pieces from those chosen for publication. Robin Troy judged fiction and Walt Quadrato judged poetry. Erich Davis judged art from a pool of submitted SCSU art students' works.

Submission to Folio is open to all SCSU students. Manuscripts are accepted from September through the first week of December. Guidelines are available by calling the Folio office @ (230) 392-6936 or through the English Department.

FOLIO FEATURED STUDENT READERS
FALL 2004 / SPRING 2005

Anthony Brano
Amy Ashton Handy
Michael R. Hemenway
Sarah Horton
Rex Krueger
Rocky Lungariello
David Pacelli
Paul Sorenson
Yesod

FOLIO FEATURED ARTISTS
FALL 2004 / SPRING 2005

Jamie Cuticello
Lindsay Curtiss

FOLIO LIVE MUSIC

Echoing August
My Hopes Dashed
Shawn Taylor
Bludrum

THE FOLIO STAFF WOULD
LIKE TO THANK...

Fred Agee
Meghan Chvirko
Brad Crerar
Jamie Cuticello
Lindsay Curtiss
Thomas S. Dorr
Jerry Dunklee
Dan Franko
Syed Hassan
Brian Johnson
Steve Larocco
Ben Martin
KT Matican
Jeff Mock
Moon
David Pacelli
Christy Paradis
Dan Paradis
Mike Pitassi
Tim Parrish
Jim Rhodes
Tony Rosso
Greg Sommerville
Ashley Thomas
Rachael Vaters-Carr

The Delaney's Staff
Koffee?
Open-Mic Readers
Student Center Staff

Mom & Dad

CONTENTS

- 1 – CAPTURED
Michelle Repass
- 2 – ACCOUNTING
Amy Ashton Handy - Second Place Fiction
- 12 – BLAME IT ON THE SUN*
Jessica Gilliam
- 14 – REFLECTIONS ON A SPOON
David M. Pacelli
- 15 – MINE IS A BACKWARDS SIGH
David Cerniglia
- 16 – LOIS GROWS OLD
Amy Ashton Handy
- 17 – A LOOK FROM PAST TO PRESENT
Naomi Pettway
- 19 – MEETING JESUS AT THE BUS STOP
David M. Pacelli - Third Place Poetry
- 21 – THE END OF THE BEGINNING
Shannon Marino
- 22 – CONFINEMENT
Jennifer Soboleski
- 24 – MINOR
Sarah Horton - First Place Poetry
- 25 – AS THE SUN RISES, FRIENDS BECOME LOVERS
Cori Payne
- 26 – FROM
Shane Martin
- 27 – I'M AMAZED
Brian Rowe
- 28 – FOURTH OF JULY
Naomi Pettway
- 30 – THE TEDDY BEAR
David R. DiSarro
- 31 – DESIRES
Sean Taylor - Third Place Fiction
- 40 – RABBIT
Michael Rayzer

- 41 – BLUE LINE
Michael Levy
- 43 – ALWAYS AND FOREVER
Tracy Fiderio
- 45 – THE SAPPHIRE ROOM
Jean Copeland
- 59 – THE GAME
Anthony Brano
- 66 – ROAD TO A PLACE CALLED HOME
Sarah Horton
- 68 – WHAT TIME IT WAS
Spencer Carlson
- 69 – ONLY CHILD
Laurie Moskal
- 71 – FLAWLESS
Jennifer Purus
- 73 – SEVENTEEN
Sarah Tamulevich
- 75 – A WEEKEND GENDER BENDER
Paul Sorensen
- 80 – WINE AND MELODY
David DiSarro
- 81 – HE SMELLED GOOD
Michael Rayzer
- 82 – TREAD
Amy Ashton Handy
- 84 – NEED
Daniel Procaccini
- 85 – BEFORE NOON AFTER NOON
David Ceringlia
- 86 – THE REASON WHY I SING
Jessica Gilliam
- 88 – FINDING HOPE
Jim Barron
- 90 – ELECTRONIC IMPULSES
Amy Ashton Handy
- 92 – PAPPY'S GUN
Joy Mlozanowski

- 94 – BUS STOP.
Yesod - Fredrick Douglas Knowles
- 95 – HAZARD ON THE GROUND
David M. Pacelli
- 96 – WHERE THE FENCE MEETS THE SKY
David Cerniglia
- 97 – FOR YOU
Spencer Carlson
- 98 – WAITING FOR THE BUS IN WINTER
Sarah Tamulevich
- 100 – PALANCAR REEF
Laurie Moskal
- 102 – COMING OUT OF OUR COCOONS
Cori Payne
- 103 – TRY TO SMILE
Melissa Owen
- 107 – SUNSET IN MAINE
Spencer Carlson
- 109 – BEAUTIFUL
Michelle Repass - Second Place Poetry
- 127 – MIXED MESSAGES
Cori Payne
- 128 – CAPTURE MY WORDS, FILL MY CANVAS
Kristen Greger
- 130 – FREE
Michelle Repass
- 131 – NUTS
Anthony Brano - First Place Fiction
- 138 – I LOVE TO HATE YOU
Cori Payne
- 139 – THE SHORE
Alexander Kearney
- 140 – BLINDFOLDS
Tracy Fiderio
- 142 – BURIAL
Joy Mlozanowski
- 143 – I SUPPOSE I WASN'T CRAZY AFTER ALL
Jennifer Soboleski

- 147 – STALE
Michael Rayzer
- 148 – SPARKLER
Jennifer Purus
- 149 – A TAINTED PAST
Tracy Fiderio
- 151 – DIRT JOURNEY
Amy Ashton Handy
- 153 – DADDY
Joy Mlozanowski
- 154 – LITTLE GREEN BOX
Yesod - Fredrick Douglas Knowles
- 155 – FROST
Michael Rayzer
- 159 – THROWING ORANGES
Sarah Horton
- 161 – BLOOD TRAIL
Daniel Procaccini
- 162 – RULES OF ENGAGEMENT
Amanda Marciano
- 163 – SAINT CROIX RIVER
Jennifer Soboleski
- 164 – SLIPPERY BILLS
Tracy Fiderio
- 166 – SAILING
David Cerniglia
- 167 – THE PROBLEM WITH EYORE
Sarah Tamulevich
- 168 – RICHARD THOMSON STRUGGLES
Brian Rowe

ART

PRETTY FACE

James Humbert

AMERICAN FAMILY

Veronica Cianfrano - Second Place

MY CONFUSION

Shizuka Shibata

NICODEMUS

Noelle Weimann - First Place

UNTITLED [GIRL]

Ashley Thomas

UNTITLED [STAINLESS STEEL & STONE]

Michael Anderson - Third Place

UNTITLED [MAN ON COUCH]

Ayube "UB" Balweel

BLUE GLASS BOWL

Amy Richardson

INTEGUMENT

Michael Donovan

UNTITLED [LEGS]

Ayube "UB" Balweel

AUSABLE

Matthew Perkins

UNTITLED [FIREMAN]

Ayube "UB" Balweel

VIEW FROM ARTROOM WINDOW AT START OF CONSTRUCTION

Chris Martineau

WINDOWS

Bonnie Bello

AUTUMN AT JONES FARM

Matthew Perkins

BLUE CERAMIC BOWL

Amy Richardson

CAPTURED

Michelle Repass

I tried to catch a fish today,
But caught something else instead.
The contagious laughter of a sleek silver dolphin
Who danced circles around my boat,
Flirting with my need to take something from the sea,
Then darting out of sight,
Flying through the vast waters with such ease,
As if no boundaries exist under the sea
And no worries survive in the heart of a creature
Which cannot be hooked.

ACCOUNTING

Amy Ashton Handy - Second Place Fiction

There is only one bottle of wine left. Jude can almost see it when she closes her eyes. It sits alone on the kitchen counter, brimming and dark. Lined up along the top of the stove are the empty bottles from the case she bought eight and a half days ago, the last time that she ventured out of her apartment. The empties are dull and green, filled with nothing but light. Jude will have to go to the store soon, she believes, but not until night falls. It has been this way since her sister's funeral five weeks ago.

She'll have to delay opening it, although the thought is tempting. But Jude knows that once it's gone it's gone. Right now the idea of going out in the heat and the light to get more makes Jude wince. Thinking about it she rises from the bed to check the blinds of the three windows in her boxy apartment. Closed, closed, and closed, although the sun shining against them makes each slat in the blind into a horizontal bar of shadow against antique yellow.

Passing two more daylight hours should be nothing after she has already battled through the past two hundred and four. Once the sun goes down she can perhaps tolerate people. She flops onto the small couch in the living room and rummages through the overfilled ashtray in front of her, finds an extinguished cigarette butt with two drags left. Lighting it with an orange Bic lighter triggers Jude's imagination. Is this sour odor what her lungs would smell like if someone cut into her chest cavity and opened her up?

A paperback copy of *The Scarlet Letter* rests, half read, on top of a stack of library books. Jude reaches for it and opens it to the page marked with a dog ear. She goes into her head, barely noticing the book in front of her for the images the words paint, savoring the language as if it were mind chocolate. The printed letters swim, then disappear into the forest and when Dimmesdale stands alone on the scaffold, cloaked in sin and darkness and he screams to be discovered her throat swells and he does not stand alone.

Jarring: thump, thump, slam! brings her back from this spell. It is the elephant people upstairs. Although Jude has never seen them

she believes that they must weigh three hundred pounds each, and that there must be about five of them crowded into their own shitty version of the unit she rents.

“Fucking square dancing?” she asks through the floor and slaps the book shut. Their only response is a series of indecipherable thuds. What does it mean, she wonders, what could they possibly be doing? Leaping from the couch, she stabs the face of the stereo with her index finger. Zeppelin cries “Hangman! Hangman! Keep me from the gallows pole!” and Jude begins to pace back and forth, across the ten square feet of her living room. In time to the music without realizing it Jude takes four steps out, turns, four steps back. With each lap she lets her eyes rest on the pile of books near the door.

That paperback she has just discarded does not belong to her. The University of Texas owns it and is probably wondering why she doesn't bring it back. They might also be wondering why Jude hasn't been to classes in over a month, especially considering that she is so close to graduation. There is only one semester left after this, and then she will have to find a job. No one has mentioned that fact throughout the five years of her coursework and so she hasn't concerned herself with it either. She has no intention of figuring that out right now. Kristina was the planner. Baby sister, future lawyer. Kristina never planned on what she got. Jude doubts they are discussing what the future means anyway in all of those classes she has missed. After Kristina died, Jude's plan had been to, number one: make it through today and number two: finish this semester. The first part of the plan had been working.

She should really bring the books back though and she knows it. Someone might need to read Hawthorne. It might make a difference that there is an empty spot on the shelf where this book should be. But the thought of the librarians paralyzes her. They would surely know, her skulking posture would be the giveaway.

“Just what kind of a person keeps so many books that long without finishing a single one?” they would think, muttering together behind the circulation desk and shooting her dirty looks.

Or worse, she could slide the books into the book drop at night. Then, when the librarians emptied the bin they would sneer at her inability to face them in person.

Handy-

Accusations are far more than Jude can bear right now. So the books sit on the table in a squat stack, long past their promise date which is stamped neatly and clearly on the lined cards in the front of each cover.

The faint relief she got from the cigarette butt has faded. She needs something, a distraction from the thoughtless dread that presses on the inside of her skull, that squeezes her internal organs until her throat aches at the top where the back of her mouth begins. A drink would be nice, but the bottle in the kitchen is the last one. She could use something to eat, only the idea of cooking is unappealing. She could go out. But the lights behind the blinds tell her that if she goes outside everyone will see the cracked yellowness of her skin and nails, the bloated swell of her cheeks, and the way her hair has become brittle straw. Better to wait for the gentled artificial lights of the night.

She wonders if there is something in the house that could relieve the crawling under her skin for another two hours. There will be no pills, no pot, no powder. That all went in one furious sweep after she came back from the funeral as if the drugs, not Jude, were to blame for what happened to her sister. Halting her pace in mid stride, Jude faces the wall. She allows the colors of the cloth wall-hanging to assault her eyes: a tie dye that takes up the entire space from ceiling to floor, wall to wall. There are thirteen loops in the spiral that whirls across the cloth. Kristina stole it from a rave last year and presented it to Jude, a banner of their joint knowledge, a secret pact of solidarity in the fast world. All bullshit, she realizes now.

Jude knows Kristina would be alive today if Jude had pushed a little harder, searched for truth larger than chemical enlightenment. Jude believes that she could have shared something better than glowing joints in the night and teaching Kristina the art of rolling one, free hand. And so, after the funeral, still draped in black, she had flung it all away: the plastic baggies filled with chalky tabs or light soft powder and bright green nuggets of herb. Every trace was now as gone as her sister.

But maybe, just maybe, Jude had stashed something away in one of her hazy out of focus hours. Maybe something had survived. And the thought of that possibility, fueled by the spasms in her muscles, prompts her to look:

under the bed beneath the mattress.
inside the hollow ceramic statue of the Virgin Mary.
behind each of the framed prints on the walls.
on top of the cabinets where the dust is thick.
in the back of the pantry behind the canned soup.
at the bottom of the memory box she made in summer camp
when she was ten.

There is nothing and she cannot breathe. The CD has played out and silence drops over the place. With it comes an oppressive sense of closing in, as if each brick that makes up this monstrous building has suddenly swelled. She closes her eyes and envisions it from the outside, a red brick mausoleum, breathing as it grows. The bricks grow heavier upon each other, making the air thick and close. Here in its belly she listens, head cocked to one side, sitting on the floor with the Popsicle stick memory box slung open. Can she hear the creaking of the support beams in the walls? Did the ceiling spring a new crack where the plaster resisted settling? Why hadn't she been more watchful that night?

Since last winter Kristina had been gone most of the time, out with friends that none of the family had ever met. They had always known each other's friends, but that fall strange names and numbers began appearing on the caller ID when Kristina phoned Jude. Kristina would disappear for days at a time, though Jude was wrapped up enough in her own life to ignore the absences. When she met some of Kristina's new friends Jude finally started to worry. They were sleazebags of the first degree, far more hard core than Jude's crowd. There was no sense of play about them as there was among Jude's friends. These were people who carried guns, who went to jail as others went to college.

As it turned out, these people weren't the ones who were truly dangerous, although Jude didn't know that then. At the time it seemed that Kristina was naive, believing that these hustlers and dealers were friends, and this frightened Jude whenever she took the time to consider it. She told Kristina as much, but Kristina just laughed at Jude's lectures, and Jude felt like a hypocrite.

One night when a phone call came, a childlike voice piped through the line and it was her sister asking for a ride home. That night Jude knew, or should have known that something real had changed, that

Handy-

Kristina was going far faster than Jude had ever wanted to go. The trip back to Jude's apartment had been silent. Kristina's eyes were black, the pupils dilated until there was no color, only a dull sheen of darkness that absorbed the light and gave nothing back. That night Jude slept in Kristina's bed right next to her, watching until dawn to be sure that her sister's chest continued to rise and fall, that the pills Kristina had taken wouldn't stop her heart while she slept or rebel in her stomach while paralyzing her reflexes, causing her to choke to death on her own vomit.

Now Jude lies on the living room floor, alone in her apartment, and takes her own deep breaths in time to the steady beat that she remembers from that night. Down here on the floor she hopes to find some lighter air with more distance between herself and the ceiling. She spreads her arms out, shaping her body into a lower case t. The floor presses against her back, the hardness of the concrete against her skull through the cheap carpet.

From the corner of her eye Jude sees a shadow move behind the slatted blinds that cover the window by the door. A quick series of knocks stops her heart and she holds her breath, slowly turning her head for a better look. Carpet fibers stick in her throat as she breathes sudden ragged breaths, her cheek resting on the floor. There is a dark silhouette, a shuffling of feet on the other side of the door. The door is four feet from her face. The door is two inches thick. The shoes of the person on the other side of that door must be less than five feet away from her nose and the noise of them echoes through her head. She figures it's Cameron, coming to check up on her again. So far she's been able to fend off the concern of her friends by claiming to need time alone. They, not knowing what to say in the first place, have resigned themselves to periodically stopping by.

Shuffle, shuffle, step, step. A shadowy head tries to find a glimpse into the apartment and she is completely still. Can he hear her heart pound and her blood swirl?

Go away, she mouths without sound. Just go.

The thought of allowing another person into her space at this moment makes her feel ugly, the apartment filthy, and her behavior pathetic. An odor of decay is tangible in the air. If she could see the color of this smell she believes it would be the green of infectious

ooze, seeping from black trash bags overfilled with food scrapings, empty beer bottles, and greasy spotted napkins. The pantry is filled halfway to the ceiling with garbage that she knows she should take it all down to the dumpster. Anyone would be disgusted with her right now, even the ones who love her most.

Cameron, or whoever it is, makes one last attempt, tapping knuckles on the door, unknowingly jarring her with each rap, rap, rap as the pupils of her eyes contract in time. And then the footsteps lead away to the top of the concrete stairs that lead down to the parking lot.

The rest of the minutes until darkness pass as she stays stock still on the floor, staring at the ceiling. She imagines the sun fading out, sinking into the tops of buildings across Austin's concrete expanse while she lies immobile on her living room floor. When she finally sits up, her head swims with a fluid pulse of blood in her ears. Head rush. She definitely needs a drink.

She lifts herself to her feet and trudges into the kitchen. Rinsing a wine glass in the sink her mouth begins to water and she swallows the saliva in anticipation. Her hands shake just a little as she peels the crinkly gold wrapper off the top of the bottle, pierces the cork and pulls. She sloshes the wine as she pours and closes her eyes to drink the warm liquid fast, the entire glass in one tilt.

The rest of the bottle Jude savors. She brings it out onto the balcony of her apartment to watch the parking lot. Sitting on the plastic chair she watches a cat stride purposefully to the dumpster and jump in. She times her sips, one for every car that goes by or voice she hears wafting out from some corner in the complex. It's too hot for red wine. She can feel oil seeping from her pores to pool in the crevasses of her face. It is always hot, living here. Even in the winter. It is as if time does not pass with evergreens that never lose their needles and air that never clarifies with cold.

The phone rings inside the apartment and Jude lets the machine pick it up.

"Hey, it's Mom. I got your letter today, I'm glad you're doing well and I miss you. Call me."

Jude will not call her back. In a letter she can keep up a pretense of normalcy, she believes. The paper and ink will provide a filter, and Jude can wrap her masked words up into an envelope and have

Handy-

someone else deliver them. The telephone is too immediate, too intimate for lying. If she tries to speak the whole story might spill itself and this, Jude believes, would be too much for her mother to bear. Jude lifts her wine glass to her lips and drains the last drops down. Before she even swallows it, Jude realizes she has no idea what she is supposed to do next.

Husbanding her strength, Jude lifts herself from the chair, and sways unsteadily for a minute. She'll go to the store. Almost nine days since her last trip there. She will buy more wine, some bread, fresh cigarettes. She goes inside and looks around the living room for her shoes. One black boot is under the coffee table, the other in the kitchen by the stove. She can see them both at the same time if she stares straight ahead and concentrates on her peripheral vision. They are indistinct when she looks at them like this, more color than shape, the suggestion of her shoes. Suddenly the thought of pulling them on over her socks, of tightening the laces, of tying them across the bridge of each foot is a suffocating consideration.

Are people buried with shoes on, she wonders. She can't recall what Kristina wore. Surely they didn't make her wear heels. Kristina, like her, preferred boots. Did they squeeze her stiff feet into her favorite pair of Docs, then lace them up? Do shoes take longer to rot than embalmed human flesh? She decides right then and there that she will be incinerated when she goes. They must put her body into the flames naked, and let the skin curl, turn black, then soften to ash.

For now, she must wear shoes. Pushing these thoughts back beneath the surface, she gathers up the boot in the kitchen, then retrieves its twin from beneath the table. She'll wear them, but the laces remain undone as she distracts herself with thoughts of what she will buy at the store.

Jude sits there, boots unlaced. Her tongue feels thick and she wonders what her voice sounds like. She tries humming, making up a tune just for its noise. Her voice sounds so much like Kristina's that people always got them confused on the phone. Unbidden, their last conversation replays itself to Jude.

"Come on Jude," Kristina had pouted, "You aren't going to take it tonight and you know you can get more by this weekend."

That was true. Jude bought the three hits of acid only because

she had the money at the moment and knew she would enjoy it that weekend. The next day was her Thursday class and she had a test too. Ending a sleepless night and coming down to a test was not a good plan.

“Fine,” Jude sighed.

“I only have a twenty, do you have any change?” Kristina pulled out the bill and held it at arm’s length.

“No.” Jude snatched it up. “I’m broke. I’ll keep the change and we’ll just say I’m charging you extra as a convenience fee,”

“I don’t care.” Kristina laughed, handing over the twenty dollar bill. “It’s mom and dad’s money anyway.

“Just wait until they cut you off. It sucks.” Jude gave her the tiny squares of paper wrapped in plastic. “Who are you taking it with?”

“Nobody you know.” Kristina tucked the shit into her wallet and turned to go.

“Hey,” Jude said without thinking, “I don’t like it that we hardly see each other anymore.”

Kristina rolled her eyes then and gave a half hearted smile. “You worry too much, big sister. And don’t call fifty times tonight just to keep track of me.”

“Why don’t you take it with Brett and Travis? They aren’t working tomorrow and you don’t have to worry about them like you do some other people,” Jude suggested.

“Come on. Your friends aren’t saints either. Get over yourself already.” Kristina turned to go, for real that time.

Jude reached out and grabbed her sister’s arm, pulled her into a quick apologetic embrace. Jude was gratified to see Kristina’s furrowed brow smooth itself, and to see the coldness fade from her eyes. She kissed her sister carefully on the temple, like she had when they were kids, making up after a fight. Kristina’s hair smelled like lavender from her shampoo, and her skin had been dry and warm.

“Go,” Jude said, pushing Kristina on her way and feeling foolish. “Just be careful.”

A few hours later she got a call from her brother telling her that Kristina had wrapped her car around a tree. Jude knows that the white and orange lights of the oncoming cars across the grassy median must have called to Kristina as if she were a powder-winged moss flying into a flame. She is knows without a doubt that the

Handy-

death of her sister had been caused by that twenty dollar bill which still sits on Jude's kitchen counter. But nobody else knows this part of the story.

Jude studies the tips of her shoes. Her eyes feel dry in their sockets. She imagines they are unnaturally shiny, and that anyone who looks at her will be repulsed by their veins that feel like red ropes lain across the whites of each eyeball. She closes them and presses her eyelids with her cold palms. She pushes until the pressure hurts.

Opening her eyes she is greeted by the wall swirled with color: red and orange, purple and blue on a field of yellow. Kristina's tie dye features a spiral, tight in the center, then widening as the lines hurtle out to the edges. Jude stares at it long enough that she believes she might slide in, becoming smaller and smaller with each whorl until she disappears altogether. Or else she will fly out. Either way she is already in motion, borne by the rainbow lines in one direction or the other. She has no images of what tumbling inward might bring. But if she follows the outward spiral she will certainly get farther than the corner liquor store. It becomes clear to her that she could buy all the wine in that store and it wouldn't fill the hole she's made in herself. She imagines walking there, past the storefront with the neon beer signs in the window. Once she gets past that part of the street, her fantasy picks up speed. She'll fly right past it, past MLK Boulevard, past the Capitol building, over the highway, and eventually she'll come to the edge of town. If she keeps going from there Jude will find open plains. Once she gets beyond that, who knows. She might end up at the ocean. Or in the mountains. Somewhere time passes in even measurable steps. Seasons mark these strides. She can find a place where falling snow and leaves bury the past. Maybe.

For the first time in a long time Jude wishes she were sober. If she were then she could drive. On the other hand, walking might give her enough time to determine where exactly she is headed.

With a general sense of direction Jude ties her shoes. She picks herself up, grabs a paper sack, and shuffles through the pile of library books. She considers finishing the half read paperback, but instead grabs two she hasn't started yet. *The Beautiful and the Damned* and *Don Quixote* nestle into the bottom of the sack. Jude makes a quick trip around the apartment, adds a lighter, three pairs of underwear,

a clean shirt and her wallet to the paper bag. She peels off the jeans and tee shirt that she has been wearing for three straight days and changes into something clean. Her keys are missing, as usual, but they turn up on the counter, and there she is faced with Kristina's twenty.

"Fuck it," she mutters, picks up the keys and stuffs the bill into her pocket. Jude unlocks the deadbolt, turns the handle, and opens the door.

The air outside is not fresh. It is sticky and dense, and smells like acid rain. She stands there, door ajar, watching her shadow cast on the brick wall that faces her. The shadow is framed by a yellow light from her apartment. It confronts her, a two dimensional ghost of Jude, watching to see what move she will make. The light defines the blackness of her shape and deepens the darkness in the rest of the world. Stepping into it, Jude closes the door and locks herself outside.

At the bottom of the stairs leading away from her apartment is a tall tree, the only one within the walls of this complex. It's so tall that no grass grows beneath it for lack of sun. Jude kneels there, sets the paper bag aside, and begins scrape away at the dirt. The ground is harder than she expected and she claws at it, feeling the skin beneath her nails ache as the soil wedges into the crease there. When she has dug six inches down, Jude is struck by the thought that the only difference between burying and planting is the expectation of the one who digs. With the occurrence of this thought, Jude extracts Kristina's twenty dollar bill from her pocket and the key to her apartment from her key ring then drops them both into the ground. With care she begins to fill the hole, marveling at the warmth and softness of the soil she has displaced. She tamps the last of it down with her palms, brushes the loose soil from her hands, grabs her things, and stands to go. She walks without haste toward the iron gate surrounding the apartment complex, believing it's the last time she'll cross through it. It's just begun to rain, and Jude wonders at the way the thin drops splash onto the brown paper sack without soaking in just yet.

BLAME IT ON THE SUN*

Jessica Gilliam

It must be my fault that
Father fell to the floor
holding his left arm,
never to get back up.
For daughters can be so negligent.
But I'll blame it on his heart.

I must have done something
wrong back then, to provoke the Man
to make me touch him there.
For children can be so careless.
But I'll blame it on his lust.

I know I'm to blame
for these self inflicted
scars of the skin I've
worn since adolescence.
For young girls can be so dramatic.
But I'll blame it on the knife.

Inside my heart there's guilt
For brother wallowing
in his own,
not knowing if it's
day or night.
For little sisters can be so aggravating.
But I'll blame it on the bottle.

Alone
in my hidden darkness
I'll close my eyes and
let Stevie put into words
the hidden
truth of my own thought...

"I'll blame it on the sun.
The sun that didn't shine.
I'll blame it on the wind
and the trees...
But my heart blames it on me"*

* "Blame it on the Sun" by Stevie Wonder

REFLECTIONS ON A SPOON

David M. Pacelli

Spoon. The name zooms like an odd loon off my tongue. A sp at front, double oo in the middle, then the n, like the ending of a poem. A spoon's an odd-shaped thing; a stick figure with no arms or legs. A head both concave and convex – a lens, only reflective. It's a pocket-size funhouse mirror. Flowing from the head, the body is anorexic – American-like anorexic. The spoon's anorexic to fit in with the other silverware. The spoon tries to look like the others, yet a spoon is different from the other silverware – no sharp ends to cut. An outcast, with a world of uses. Holding milk for morning cereal, or sipping hot soup; no fork or knife can do that. In the evening its job is to scoop the cork out of wine.

MINE IS A BACKWARDS SIGH

David Cerniglia

my rough-edged city wailed
at the glint of your pearl lasso
blurred at the seams

you scurried down the alley
under dead lamplight
where velvet ropes strung
tight over sewer grates
seeping foggy notes

but you barricaded stale spring night
pushing my folds and edges in
tied with a cinch
and I sobbed in the corner
as weight gave in to weight

so I hung you with care
by a cello string
behind locked closet doors
mannequin-smiling into dusk

LOIS GROWS OLD

Amy Ashton Handy

Her hands were spotted Titanium White, Cadmium Yellow, Alizarin
Crimson, liver,

oiling up images with enigmatic craft.

My child eyes trained her movements: smudging, lifting, pulling
paint across canvas

in streaks of stories

told on the faces of strangers

only she saw in the room.

I looked, entranced by the images channeled through those colorful
hands,

but the specters were hers.

She was magic, producing

seas of tempers,

snapdragons that could honey light on their wet stalks and

petals

textured animation in still life

all captured in frames by her twitching soft tipped wand.

When Lois awoke to blurred edges, dimmed light,
she was pushed into this foreign world where I find her now
sitting beneath a black sun in a strange world,
hands limp.

Unguided by magic, the brush tip slops across canvas

leaving unintelligible trails

like rain across mud slicks.

Darkness has pinned her down and poured searing dread into her
eyes -

it sludges through her

becoming her blood

filling her limbs with anxiety

she cannot channel out.

In her last years she burns alive.

A shadow mold of herself, the rest cooked away.

A LOOK FROM PAST TO PRESENT

Naomi Pettway

From sunrise to sunset the heavy cotton sack rest on her back.
Slaving all day in mid- August sun,
No mumbling or grumbling, this is how it had to be done.
With lunch in molasses buckets Granny and Aunt Net ate under
the tree,
While resting their brier pricked feet, burned by the heated sand.

Granny suffered, struggled, and survived so that one day I could be,
She begat child number eight, my mother who also lived to see
The cotton patches, and feel the sensation of burning brier pricked
feet.

While back pains immersed child number eight cried,
This does not have to be!
Life lessons learned while slaving in cotton patches,
led her to a different route.
She wanders through strange lands to be set free

Mae, my momma refused to live in a land that was limited
by invisible boundaries known as the color line.
She decided to march with Dr. King and now drinks
from the water fountain that God made for you and me.

From cotton fields to universities, she learned a better way.

She settles unwed, and in travail her rare bud appears,
and I live to enjoy swings and seesaws on the playground
versus picking cotton in the fields.
Southern rural is unfamiliar to me.

Alas, all the hard work has been done.
Granny and mom have paved the way.
Unlike granny, I have plenty of opportunities,

Pettway-

Shall I be a doctor, lawyer, politician, maybe I'll
Fly to the moon...

The best is yet to come, with all that I plan to do.



MEETING JESUS AT THE BUS STOP

David M. Pacelli - Third Place Poetry

At a bus stop I met a guy
who said he was Jesus.
Long greasy hair snaked down
his thin face. Christ, he said,
Jesus Christ. He held out his hand.
His words stunk like hope
soaked in whisky. Oh,
I said, that's nice.

It was midnight, clouds
of arctic air stretched
around me, around us.
I didn't care if he was the Son
of God. I was cold.

Jesus showed me
the back and front
of his hand. Watch
this, he said, waving
his outstretched hand
in front of my eyes.
He pulled a coin – a half
dollar from the air. He smiled.

That's it, I said, you're the Son
of God. You can walk on water.
He told me something
about only creating
what you have. I wore
my doubt like skin.

Pacelli-

I told Jesus his death
Was for nothing. Dude, I said,
You gave your life to live on
The streets?

Jesus stared at me, looking
into me. His gray eyes seemed
to see me. What if he was Jesus?
The hippie Messiah, living
on the streets, at a bus stop.
Dirty white tattered clothes cried
off him. He smiled as if he saw
my thoughts. What if he was here
to save us? I didn't know him.
Jesus wouldn't do cheap tricks,
I told myself. He cleared his throat,
and asked if I had a nickel.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Shannon Marino

fumbling around the house
creaky floorboards and splintered banisters.
washing out the stains of demolished dreams.
used up laundry, stereo still on
searching for an answer in static and the rinse cycle.
mother's cries at the hands of a child who can't sleep.
a colorless pattern of windows and curtains.
holding on to the television screen
and what's left of last night's dinner.
driving away when there's nowhere else to go.
but money is scarce and so is love.
scraped shins to go with a restless heart.
pieces scattered and dusty,
washed down the drain.
mindless talk with nothing to say.
hands anxious by the phone,
eventually life has to start.
promises kept in a box, the memories jumbled and sealed.
letters that have never been opened.
someone's drink left on the table.
once-in-a-lifetime vacations never happen
searching for an identity shared among three other girls.
convincing the outside world that it's better from the inside.
stepping outside to fall down.
innocence and guilt put into diaries with a lock and key.
holidays with mixed feelings, seasons that run into each other.
secrets whispering throughout bedrooms.
poster-covered walls portraying the reality of someone else.
so much going on at one time and nothing at all.
fumbling forward blindly and sometimes sideways,
going anywhere but here and ending up back at home.
all reality wasted in a backyard and a front porch.
and I escape with the last drag of a cigarette.

CONFINEMENT

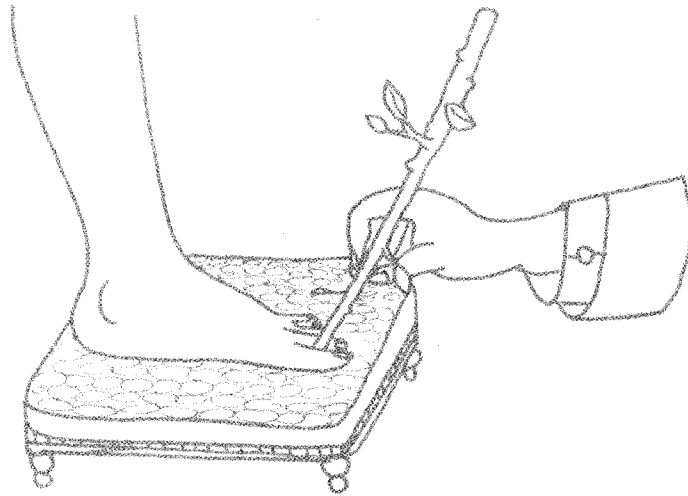
Jennifer Soboleski

Black and loose-collared.
Appropriate
For the situation.
The polyester flowed and stopped
Just above my knee.
Friends told me I looked just like Jackie O
At the funeral for my fiancée.
I had to carry myself with grace, as she had once done,
Make the best of a bad situation.
In this uniform, I had to be strong.

I waited in line, and when it was my turn
I bent down and laid my head upon him for the last time.
The smell of formaldehyde seeped from his chest.
He looked as though he was only asleep
In his blue sweatshirt and green Carhardt pants that he had cut into
shorts.
The bleach in his hair was just beginning to grow out.

I turned and walked through the crowd
I felt the eyes of his family and friends upon me.
Some looked at me with an air of contempt.
His mother's boyfriend told me to go to hell.
He made me feel it was my fault,
Guilt I had without someone adding to it.
It felt as though that thick twine had metamorphosed into my
hands,
That I had sucked out his final breath,
Made him cold
Made his heart stop,
Although I had no indication of what he had planned to do.

I chain-smoked.
The skirt of my dress swayed in the warm breeze.
I was careful not to burn it with the tip of my cigarette.
The dress meant something.
This would be the last time I saw him.
That night when I took it off, I set it aside
To be put in a special place
Like a bride would do with her wedding dress,
So I did.



MINOR

Sarah Horton - First Place Poetry

He asked me what I thought,
about him sleeping with that girl,
if I thought it'd be alright.
His deep eyes
dark and half smiling,
obsidian.

Later on,
the door was open,
and I saw them in bed,
squirming like worms.
The light catching bits
of bodies,
their faceless heads
bobbing.
The girl was sixteen,
he was twenty four.
I thought of my sixteen
year old sister
and her new long legs,
moist and tight like
fresh fruit with seeds
inside.

The sheet slipped off
his muscles pulled like
elastic bands
across his chest.
I rumbled my eye brows
and walked to the kitchen,

the knife rack cast monster
shadows on the walls.

AS THE SUN RISES, FRIENDS BECOME LOVERS

Cori Payne

There is a chill in the early morning air
and we walk briskly along the path in the woods.
The weeds grab at our legs as we pass,
leaves crunch and bugs buzz
in the still-dark world around us.
We reach the waterfall and sit on the
stone wall, the coldness against my legs
makes me lean closer to Chris.
He puts his arm around me.
I lean against his shoulder and notice
for the first time his scent:
clean and strong and earthy.
I listen to his breathing and mine,
and to the sound of the water falling rapidly.
We stay like that until darkness slips away
into day and everything suddenly looks different.

FROM
Shane Martin

From...

...the Earth
...the womb
...the innocence
...

...a dawn - awakening
...a haze of self-inflicted soul searching
...a small town in

Virginia
Massachusetts
Connecticut
New York
New Hampshire
Maine
Ohio
Pennsylvania
Delaware

...a distance
...a glimmer
...a thought
...a pen

I'M AMAZED

Brian Rowe

My mouth has grown tired of sailor's curses and bullshit answers. Smiling, twists my lips and frowning does the same and like the devil and angel on my shoulders, it only adds weight to drag this lady justice down. My hands can't write endearing letters or victory phrases, it struggles to add numbers and trace my own hand, as if the turkey I can make will feed a village or the numbers I add will solve the problems of the world. My mind should concentrate on the importance of education and my future but it turns casually to sex and books that won't guide me anywhere. As if I have a divining rod between my legs that will show me the ways to side step financial responsibility and like others in a time of need, I'm crying to a higher power, my neckline scream for a crucifix to keep my soul in check but my eyes strain for a scene from Fellini.

I look away from the days of wedding rice thrown in my best friend's hair, mortgages to add up and caskets to drop and it's over my shoulders I see a stone thrown in hopscotch boundaries and my feet bouncing on the chalk numbers. Where having a sandwich carved in half meant the world to a small child. Where grandfather's apple tree kept you safe from harm from tagging hands.

But now my feet can only travel so far and you can't walk far if you aren't in shape and my lungs have smoked a few cigarettes, as it was fashionable with friends in that bright big apple full of worms and advertisements, and I came to the conclusion on cobblestones I don't want a life of regret and that I have to host a dinner party for the past and present to meet. In the meantime, I lean against the safety net and enjoy the view with my headphones reminding me to breathe. And if I fall through the chicken wire, my body will land safely in a box full of cobwebs and I will merely dream. And buildings will erect above me but I am safe from their shadows and employment. And I will merely dream.

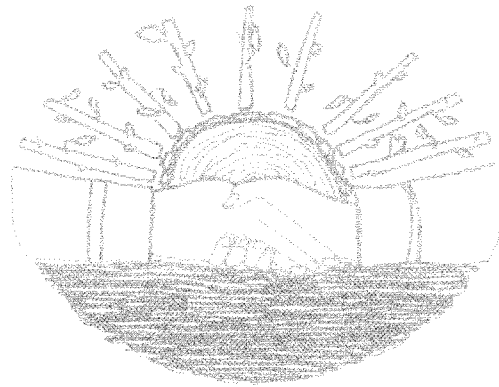
FOURTH OF JULY

Naomi Pettway

He looks towards the starlit sky
and the glittering moonlight.
He waits and watches.
He paces
in anticipation
for colorful sparks
to light the night air.
He looks toward the sky
and sits amazed
by the flying colors
Red, blue, and silver.
They fly and slowly come
down like a rain of skittles
until they vanish
into the night air.
He sits and marvels at the soaring colors
that come so close, you feel
that you can touch

the flying insignia
that brighten the night sky.

Too young to understand the significance of sweet liberty,
he sits and watches the rain of skittles fall
'till they disappear into thin air.



THE TEDDY BEAR

David R. DiSarro

I looked to my floor and saw
her small teddy bear staring
back up at me. The brown fur,

matted around the eyes, created
a somewhat dazed expression.
I stood up from the bed,

approaching it cautiously at first,
as if it were a wounded animal.
I knelt down and picked it up,

pressing its fur to my face, inhaling
trace amounts of her perfume. Pulling
away, I noticed its mouth, a thin stitch

unwavering and cold.

DESIRES

Sean Taylor - Third Place Fiction

She's salty sweet, slick glazed neck, dirt peppered, moss flaked, from the boulder I hold her up against, her curls tickle my nose, strawberry scent, and I squeeze her thighs as her tongue penetrates my ear like a tidal wave, flooding my spine, steaming back up in a howling swing of the hips. Trembling, she slides from my grasp, but her legs clamp tight, sinking sandals in my back, under my shirt, fingers knotting my hair, as she cranes back against the rock and screams a primal, "Miles," and I'm on the brink of explosion!

A dog barks through the woods.

"Oh shit." She says, "Shit, shit!" and her wide green eyes level on mine with fright and her legs unclamp and slide out of my grasp and she pushes me back and scrambles for her shorts and leaves me cocked like a pistol with the trigger half pulled. I grab my own shorts and slide them up in vain to contain my excitement, twigs, hitchers spike my crotch, and the dog barks even closer.

"Hurry!" she says, pulling wet hairs from her sticky red face, straightening her shirt, all in one circular swing, like a dance; all with a bright toothy smile. Then she stumbles through the brush ten feet to the trail and slings on her pack.

I'm not so easily gathered, my excitement hard to conceal, so on the trail I sit on my pack and lean forward to retie my boots. A shepherd jogs past the pines at the bend of the trail, ahead of a startled boy with a large orange pack and a tall stick, stopping in his tracks. The tail wagger approaches to sniff Mary's crotch.

"Pandora, stop it!" the boy shouts and lunges to yank him back. "I'm sorry."

"Its o.k.," She says grabbing it behind the ears, "she's beautiful."

"She gets excited," he says, snapping a leash to her collar. "I didn't think anyone would be out here."

"Neither did we," I say, standing.

She gives me a look.

"Sorry," he says.

"Don't be," she says, "Have fun."

Taylor-

The dog turns to lick my hand.

“Come on girl,” the boy tugs her leash, and she snaps her nose to the trail dragging him south. “Bye,” he says over his shoulder running.

“Cute kid,” Mary says, glowing. “How old do you think he is? He looked young? And that pack.”

“Who cares?” I sneeze to a sudden stink of perfume on the breeze.

She draws to speak, hands on hip, brow crossed, but a huffing, stout, red faced woman comes round the bend.

“Hi,” the woman says, looking up from stumbling feet, catching her breath. “You haven’t seen a monster with a dog by any chance, have you, about this tall?” she asks, raising a hand above her head, and wiping sweat from her brow.

I sneeze.

She springs back, second and third chin jiggling, like the flap on the back of her arm, as she slaps a hand to her mouth. “Goodness. Bless you,” she says, eyeing me with caution, nostrils flaring.

“Thanks.”

“You’re right behind him,” Mary says with a smile.

“Not for long I’m sure,” she says, turning to a man lumbering up from behind, “Come on James,” she orders, shaking her head, shifting her pack with a grimace. “Thank you, good day,” she winks, plodding down the trail, calling, “David, wait up!”

James rubs his shiny bald head, nodding a plastic smile without looking at either of us, tugging his knee brace, trying to catch up, too slow to be out of breath, mumbling, “That boy’ll be the death of us.” They disappear down the trail, and we’re alone with the birds.

“That was close,” Marry says, turning to me on the balls of her feet with a devilish grin and a wink.

“That sucked.”

“I can’t believe we did that,” she says, putting her hand on my shoulder and leaning in.

“They killed it,” I say.

A light smack on my cheek and she pulls away. “That’s all it takes huh? We were right next to the trail, what do you expect?”

“They never would have seen us.” A large bee buzzes my head, three circles, and gone.

“They would have walked right by our packs,” she says.

“We could have been popping a squat.”

“Oh, get over it.”

“Get over it?” I grab her tiny waist, “Ever get blue balls?” I lean in to kiss her, but she pulls away.

“Blue balls my ass,” she says. “It’s always about you isn’t it? Now you have to wait.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, really,” she says, cracking her neck left and right, with a bounce on her toes like a waiting fighter. “Settle down,” she says with a grin, punching my arm and bouncing down the hill, boulder to boulder, black shorts flashing pale pumping thighs up to her ass, she shouts around the shoulder of her tall blue pack, “You’re it!”

“You asked for it,” I say, slinging on my load.

I’m amazed how she moves with all that extra shit she brought, shit that I can’t really say anything about, now that I’m in the dust. She hasn’t complained once about her blisters, or the rain yesterday, or the bugs, and her pace hasn’t let up. And she keeps me moving forward down the path, chin up. She splashes through a cascading stream, stomping, calves mud caked, picking up speed, disappearing around the bend of the wooded slope.

I remember her at the bus-stop as a kid, ten, twelve years ago; candy cigarettes, jean jacket, chewing gum, blowing bubbles, trying to one up everyone, at everything. Back then, had anyone ever said I’d be with her, here, now, anytime, I would have sent them off with a shot in the arm. After I left Worcester in eighth grade, I never gave her a thought, long before that actually, except passing in school. Not once had I thought of her before that night last year.

I round the bend and she’s far ahead, down a steep switchback, leaping a log with one step, and shifting her pack. She looks up through the birch, and waves, running on.

Heart pounding, I pick up the pace, jumping rock to rock, legs like pistons, thumbs hooked on straps, breeze in my face, flashing white trees, wet t-shirt cooling, out-hiking the mosquito’s. A grouse beats its wings far off, like a lawnmower starting; can’t remember the last time I heard that. Down in the valley a farm dog barks. She runs on down the mountainside.

I wonder, had I not run into her last year, how long it might have

Taylor-

taken me to get back out here? And the best part is, this was her idea.

My Appalachian Thru-hiking stories inspired her, she said, and I loved telling her. She was turned on by the commitment of walking six months, 'just for the hell of it'. She said she'd love to try, but she only has a couple months off in the summer. When I told her the Long Trail follows the A.T. in Vermont for ninety miles, before splitting north to Canada, and that it was one of my favorite sections, she told me we were doing it. I figured it was all a bunch of drunken nostalgic flirting, not having more than a common bus-stop past, but she called me the next day, and didn't let me forget, and here we are.

We trained in the Berkshires and the Catskills on weekends. Living two hours apart made it tough. I thought about moving to Worcester, but I didn't want to jump into things too quick, and I figured that if the whole thing did happen, and I left New Haven, I wasn't going back. Between May, June and July, we went packing nearly every weekend. The more we went, and the more I told her about trail life; the sunsets, fresh air, stars, interesting people, hitching, getting lost, getting sick, threatened, all the crazy things that happen; the more I told her, the more I remembered, and the more excited I got. And the more excited I got, the more excited she got. When it came time to quit my job, and there was no turning back, and no doubt of our going, I got so excited, I almost asked her to marry me. But I a month on the trail is a marriage in its own right, and so I figured we'd see what would happen. But my mind raced ahead to us climbing in Chili, Africa, Alaska, Nepal... I've imagined us everywhere on earth, and she's always a willing ear. I can dribble fantasies for hours.

Now, I draft her, sucking her strawberry shampoo air that'll fade in another day. Canada is three weeks away, and I cruise with burning thighs, hoping it will take us longer than four weeks.

Though I've been here before, rounded this same bend, crossed the same stream, it's all new to me now, having someone to share it with this time; someone who loves it like I do. Truth is, I've been out here with her, in my mind, for a year, even before I thought it would really happen.

We stop by a stream in the shade of a giant oak, with skunk cabbage air, and eat peanut butter and honey on bagels, and feed each

other heavily buttered popcorn for desert, smashing mosquitoes on our flesh and leaving them as a bloody tally, laughing.

Mosquitoes: 0. Us: 37, since we started counting.

“It would be fun to have a dog out here,” she says.

“What? No. Too much.”

“What do you mean too much?”

“They’re like kids. Needy.”

She stands, wiping bagel crumbs from her shirt, and touches her toes to stretch, head up, eyes on me. “What’s wrong with kids?” she asks.

“Nothing,” I say, “I love being a kid.”

“You would say that.” She swats the back of her leg, checking her palm, “thirty-eight.” She stretches her arms to the sky, and sighs, and looks at me a long moment, raising her leg to the tree to stretch. “Don’t you ever think about having them?” she says, chin to her knee.

“I’m twenty four.”

She holds the stretch. “So am I. Won’t be forever though.” She stands straight and switches legs.

“Why rush it?”

“Talking, isn’t rushing,” she says, exhaling deep, hand on her ankle easing forward, shorts climbing.

“I’d like to talk about what we could do right now.”

“Stop it,” she says standing straight. “I’m serious. One day I want kids.”

“Not today I hope.”

“Miles!”

“Yeah, me too,” I say, “eventually.”

“Really?”

“Not any time soon.”

“Eventually?”

“Definitely,” I say, putting my hand on her shoulder, “just not now.” She doesn’t ask what eventually means, and neither do I.

She smiles and pecks me on the cheek and touches her toes again.

“I love you,” she says, bent over.

I smile.

“That was one cute kid, wasn’t it?” She says, standing straight. “It’s great seeing families together out here.”

Taylor-

“Yeah,” I say, and finish the last of my bagel. “You done eating?”

“I guess.”

I pack away the food, my stomach unsettled, and thumb through the guide book. “There’s supposed to be a vista up the hill,” I say without reading.

After lunch, I lead slowly up the steep trail, pack chafing my shoulders. There is no vista, only a thick hemlock summit with lots of mosquito’s. We both hike in silence, tired from the heat, from the bugs. I think of our conversation. I’ve never really thought about having kids. Not that I don’t like them, I’ve just never thought of it, too much to do, to see, to be home changing diapers.

She has lots of little cousins in her family, and a niece and nephew. I have only a baby cousin Rick, who I’ve never met. And she’s around kids all the time teaching. Makes sense that she’d want one, I guess. To see her with her niece and nephew you’d think she already was a mother. I’d never thought much of it. We’ve only been together ten months. We’re both twenty four, forty-eight combined. That might be a good age, forty-eight, your dead by then anyway.

Mary looks up and smiles every time I turn around. Her shirt drapes loose from her breasts, and I imagine her with a round belly, and I get nauseous and turn to watch my feet.

We hike till dusk with hardly a word, pitching camp under a grove of birch, by a fire-ring we won’t use. A bat swoops at the swarms around our heads. She crawls into the tent to put on dry clothes. I follow the trail to the water, empty bottles in hand.

It’s cool by the spring under the laurels; mint smelling, stereo birds, bright waving ferns. At the bottom of the clear shallow pool, two red salamanders sit nose to nose. I drop the filter hose in and they scatter separate ways, the bobber bouncing mossy ripples. I pump slowly, metered, until all four litters are filled, and I lean back against a log and listen to the water bubble up beneath me, trying to pick the sound of every little ripple, trickle, and pop, like the notes of a score I’m trying to scribe to my brain. I may have sat at this very spot when I hiked thru last time. I used to sit in spots like this for hours, letting time roll away, no cares, no obligations, no one to answer to; just my thoughts, and the steady babble of a brook, the wind in the trees and the colors inside me lids. Purple spots, and white. I melt back, into the log, pulling rich green breaths.

A scream and I open my eyes to darkness, a lonely owl somewhere above. I shiver, crickets sing and I slaughter a dozen mosquitoes on my leg in one shot. The temperature's dropped. I think of Marry, waiting at camp and stand frantically on pins and needles, nearly falling, leaning into a tree. Legs waking, I remember to grab the water, and stumble through the brush losing sight of the path before my eyes can adjust. But the smell of cooking Ramen lures me in. I crash through the trees into the clearing behind her and she jumps nearly knocking the pan from the stove, blinding me with her headlamp.

"What the hell happened?" she demands, fists on hips.

"I had problems with the filter."

"I was worried. Where were you?"

"At the spring. Could you take the light out of my eyes please?"

"Sorry." She does it. "I looked for you, I found the stream but you weren't there."

"All you had to do was follow the blue blazes."

"You don't have to be an asshole."

"Sorry," I say.

"You were just gone for a long time, that's all." She shakes her head. "Dinner's almost ready, sit down."

I sit Indian style in the dirt, back to her log seat. We sip our soup in silence slapping mosquitoes without count. Pale moonlight beams through the canopy. The wind picks up, and stays up, and the mosquitoes are blown away for the night, but I still feel them biting. In the dim light, on the log, she towers over me, the shine of her eyes fixed on me. She puts down her bowl and asks, "What's the matter?"

"What?"

"You're distant."

"I'm tired," I say, scratching my arm.

"Me too," she says with a sigh and a pause. "Miles, I'm glad you brought me here."

"It was your idea."

"I wouldn't be here without you."

"Well, I'm glad you are."

"I can see why you love it so much, well, aside from mosquitoes and the blisters. It's beautiful out here, with you."

"It is great isn't it?"

Taylor-

“Yeah,” she says.

“Did you take your pill?”

The breeze whistles. She answers, “Yeah.”

We clean up and get into the flapping tent, shutting out the creaking trees and the cooling night air. Under the blanket, I pull her shivering waist tight in a spoon, her legs twitching, and I run my hand over her Long-John thighs.

“Miles?”

“What?”

She takes a deep breath, “Do you think we’re gonna’ make it?”

I squeeze her knee. “Of course.”

“Not the trail... I mean, well yeah, that too, but past that? You and I?”

My heart skips against her back, and I wonder if she feels it. “Sure,” I say and cup her breast and her hand squeezes mine as I kiss the back of her neck.

“Me too,” she says, arching her neck. “I just worry, that’s all. I like to think about the future.”

“Just’s enjoy now.”

“Your right,” she says, and turns to face me, stirring up the baby powder between our legs.

I sneeze three times.

She blesses me and kisses my forehead.

My heartburn flares as we lay in the tent, face to face without a word, her warm breath on my cheek. I run my fingers through her curls and roll over, turning my back to her, and she pulls my waist tight.

“Good night,” I say.

“Miles,” she whispers in my ear, “I’m still hungry.”

“Me too.”

She runs her hand down past my belly. “I mean for you.”

“Yeah?” I say, and turn to kiss her.

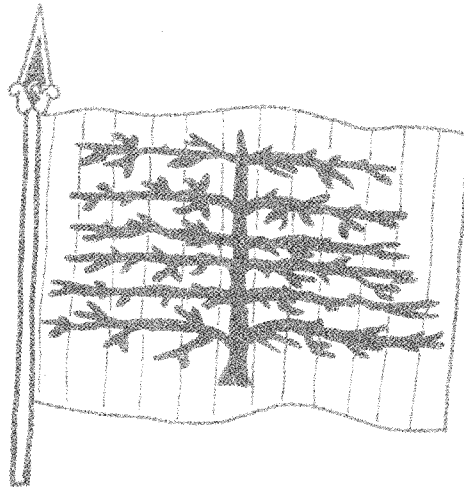
She pulls off my shirt, pushes me onto my back and straddles, kissing my neck, kneading my head. I pull off her shirt and rest my hands on her thighs. The tent flops to the breeze, trees whistle, and branches wave patterns on the iridescent yellow ceiling. A lone coy-dog wails far off.

When she’s done, and I am, and my hips drip cold fluid, she rolls

-Folio

off and pulls the blanket up over our shoulders. "I love you," she says and kisses me on the forehead, pulling me into her breast. I kiss her back, say goodnight and close my eyes, listening to a mosquito buzz through the tent.

I find myself in a white room, white picket fence out the window, mini-van, tire swing, and a baby screaming through walls that close in around me as I lay strapped to a bed, and then there's a sting on my nose and I wake up in the tent on my back, mosquito in my face, sweating, out of breath. Her head snores on my chest, drooling, and my arm sleeps under her, my hand numb on the back of her head. I lay awake, watching the shifting moonlit patterns on the tents yellow ceiling, while the tick of her heart counts the time.



RABBIT

Michael Rayzer

I've never felt more helpless as I did then,
Trying to free the newborn rabbit,
From the jaws of an unimpressed, disinterested, black cat.
I didn't know rabbits could scream.
As the cat stalked away,
I felt like I was hanging from those same teeth.
My eyes burned with tears,
And I wondered if they would ever stop.

I heard he shot himself,
And I wondered if I could have saved him.
By some kind of gesture,
Some kind words.

But I don't even know how to feel now.
Something other than numb, selfish.
I don't want to be dry eyed in this room,
With these people.
But I'd given up feeling for something,
I'd given up feeling hopeless.

Looking at this closed coffin
I had to wonder if I was
The black cat that carried him away.

BLUE LINE

Michael Levy

A single flute caressed my inner thoughts as our eyes glistened along the sea of people staring down at us. The sound of several calm, castle-creeping symphonies run through my brain, soothing me to a gentle lull as police kept a watchful eye over our chained bodies. My ears witnessed inner turmoil as my heart skips a beat. I prayed this image of music bouncing through my temple would be enough to keep my body still and our message vibrant. I know each girl felt this, but it was as if each one of our voices would be extinguished if even one girl fell to exhaustion.

There was Jenny, the follower of the group. She was the one most of us figured would drop out. Then there was Amanda and Kiki, both sisters. Rachel, Claire and I, Jill, led the group's protest of sexist mall advertisements which ran rampant through all stores, regardless of the sort of store we were in.

Hell, even in the pet store you'd see a picture of a scantily clad woman holding a gerbil, with the question, "Wanna touch?" written out in the prettiest and frilliest of pink fonts.

As our arms remain bound by steel tubes, timid glimpses at the smoky sky, which seemed almost on fire tonight, I knew all our minds were racing in circles. A thousand piercing questions rocked back and forth in our foreheads. I felt like the room was spinning in a never-ending cycle of criticism.

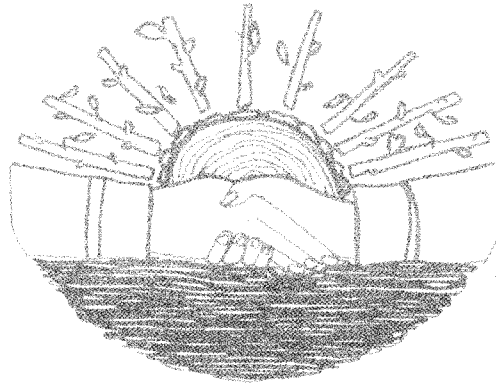
The steel tape caresses the tubing, which binds our sweaty hands together. Palms squeezing tight as we triumphantly protest. Shouting, our female vocal chords were on their way of giving out. Caving in like a body after a leg joint is viciously snapped. Even hoarse and practically mute, our message was clear.

Levy-

There they stand. The men in black and blue. Their uniforms always complete them; their own pudgy bodies wrapped in slacks and dress shirts made of the finest blood and carnage. Extended fingers equip long wooden beating tools, in case we got out of line.

Their eyes tell us one thing:

“Don’t cross the Blue Line.”



ALWAYS AND FOREVER

Tracy Fiderio

I wish he'd smashed my head into the window
of his Volkswagen Jetta until the glass
crumbled and crashed like needles on cold cement.
I imagined taking a shard and running
it across my wrist, slashing through the flesh
like fresh chicken breast. He could never
come out and say what he wanted, instead
he'd choke on his words stuttering until I
pitied him enough to spit it out for him.
"Are you saying you think we should
break up?" As I blurted the words I most
dreaded, I watched as relief washed
over his face, he took a breath and muttered,
"I think it's a good idea." I felt the anger
simmering inside my potted emotions.
I wanted to hurt him like he was killing
me. I pictured kicking him in the balls
till the spit sputtered out of his mouth
onto his precious leather seats. Disbelief
overwhelmed me. He had hugged
me, singing Elton John's "Tiny Dancer"
as he rubbed my cheek with the open
palm of his hand only an hour ago.
Now he wasn't sure what he wanted and needed to be alone.

His empty promises of "I'll never
leave you, I love you always and forever,"
echoed in my ears as I sat shaking.
What happened to always and forever?
I always was too much for his weak bony arms
to handle. He asked me for a hug
as I went to run from the car.
I pressed my head into the nook

Fiderio-

of his neck and stared blankly at the shimmering reflection of my streetlight on his dirty window. I noticed the smudges of his thin finger, which that one foggy night had spelled, "J & T 4 ever."

He pushed me away, and his tears followed the trail of freckles that trickle down his cheeks. I felt the burning disbelief in my stomach.

He dared to be the one to cry when he just ripped my heart out of my chest. As I struggled to leave, he leaned over and whispered, "I just want you to know you look beautiful tonight." And I felt the tears tumble down my cheeks and I ran.

My future is without him. I'm alone, and I can't catch my breath.

He left me behind with the memory of the soft feel of his dark greasy curls and the sweet subtle taste of his lips. The hope he'll come back kills me.

THE SAPPHIRE ROOM

Jean Copeland

Huddled alone under my blanket, dizzy from mindless channel surfing, I was elated by Kim's phone call suggesting we make an impromptu appearance at the opening of a new nightclub. It seemed like an exciting proposition when compared with self-inflicted nausea. Upon arrival, however, I quickly learned our unfortunate fate – nightclub purgatory – that seemingly eternal wait outside in the bone-chilling December night air, languishing in an endless line of unwitting souls also seeking passage inside. And scanning the unlikely array of revelers with whom we would be mingling that enchanted evening did little to raise my plummeting hopes. It looked like a convalescent home had just been evacuated, blue hair and high belt buckles as far as the eye could see. Suddenly, nausea seemed the more appealing alternative.

"What's so special about this club that we had to drive sixty miles from home and freeze our asses off waiting in line to get in?" I asked Kim with a tone.

"This isn't just any club, it's the long awaited reopening of New York's infamous Sapphire Room," Kim enlightened me with high-octane enthusiasm. "It was the place to be seen in the fifties. Frank Sinatra almost performed here."

"So?" I asked innocently enough.

"So?" Kim fired back. "You don't like Frank Sinatra?" She glared at me as though I had just fed her dog cyanide.

"I love Frank Sinatra," I said, "but unless he's performing here tonight, all the rest is trivia."

Kim's glare became even more indignant. "He's dead. You know, you might try to show a little enthusiasm," she rebuked, "We're supposed to be having fun."

"Having fun?" I retorted. "Take a look around. There are about five other people here our age. The rest are like eighty."

"They are not. Besides, I thought you were into nostalgia."

"I am. I watch 'I Love Lucy,' don't I?" I said defensively through chattering teeth.

Copeland-

“Oh, be original,” she replied peevishly, “so does everybody else.” Her eyes then caught a glimmer. “Now this place... this is real nostalgia, a living, breathing monument to those swinging days of the fifties when you could actually hang out at a club without a roofie being dropped in your drink.”

“How did you hear about it anyway?” I asked, looking around at the building’s somewhat dilapidated exterior.

“It was profiled on TV the other night, the History Channel, I think. In 1955 there was a bloody mob hit right inside as everyone partied. Turns out it was owned by some mob boss. He was the guy that got rubbed out. The feds closed the place down shortly after the murder because he owed back taxes. It was a very cool story.”

“Sounds it. And since when do you say ‘rubbed out?’” I tried to tease Kim but was upstaged by the mounting thrill of anticipation.

“Hey, we’re moving,” she excitedly exclaimed as the crowd ahead of us began flowing into the club.

We rode the swell of eager elderly partiers inside, gliding past the bubbly hatcheck girl right into the lavish ballroom. I have to admit, it was an amazing spectacle to behold. The new owner was so successful in recreating the look and aura of the Sapphire Room of 1955 even I bought into its captivating mystique. The deliberate lighting gave a subtle illumination to the bandstand replete with a sharply dressed big band orchestra, their instruments gleaming as intermittent flickers of twirling light danced on them. Surrounding the spacious hardwood dance floor beckoning from the center were small tables draped in navy-blue silk cloths, each with its own lamp that provided an intimate glow. The room was enveloped by the warm resonance of a blond singer who sounded remarkably like Doris Day as she crooned “If I Give My Heart to You.” Nubile waitresses strapped to heavily stocked trays of cigarettes, cigars, lighters and mints navigated the room, weaving in and out of the surge of handsome waiters in short black jackets balancing their teeming trays of cocktails. We grabbed the first available table and sat, still admiring the unusual and evocative retro décor.

Though I had spent the entire time in line griping that the joint was going to be full of mostly mature folk, and by mature I meant ancient, I found myself smiling at how vibrant every one of them seemed. Men and women alike were beaming, giddy with the rush

of memories inspired by revisiting the club in which they used to dance, laugh, drink and probably first fell in love.

More than an obvious chance for some shrewd entrepreneur to cash in on the current retro resurgence, the reopening of the Sapphire Room was a time for second chances, a night for fond final farewells, lingering last looks back and above all, closure. The glimmering eyes of a withered man chewing a stogy as he hobbled by reflected the collective gratitude of everyone in attendance. For most, that night was a brief yet magical journey back in time to the glorious, fleeting days of their youth, a time when joy, vitality and hopefulness for the future occupied their consciousness instead of the burdens of sickness, loss and prescription copays now daunting their remaining days. At twenty-four, with little clue about life beyond the importance of self-tanning and locating the bar with the two-for specials, it was difficult for me to fathom the profound meaning that night held for those who had made the pilgrimage, but all that was about to change.

As we meandered back from the bar, my attention was drawn to something conspicuous.

It was a man and woman of about forty standing in a secluded corner cuddling closely as they took in the room. They made a striking couple; both attractive, festooned in what appeared to be costumes from the fifties and very much in love.

“Check that out over there,” I instructed Kim, knowing she’d get a kick out of them.

“That old dude pulling up his socks?” she asked.

“No, that couple over there. They think it’s a costume party,” I laughed.

We passed through a small cluster of people that obstructed our view, but when we emerged, the couple was gone.

“I think you’re seeing things,” Kim informed me.

“They were just there two seconds ago,” I said, puzzled.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” she then announced.

“Thanks for the update,” I replied distractedly, still looking around for the vanishing couple.

“No, I mean I really have to go. Come with me,” she insisted, and off we went to the facilities.

Copeland-

* * * * *

As I was sitting half-check on the sink waiting for Kim to emerge from her stall, a woman sauntered in. It was the mysterious disappearing lady from moments earlier. I've heard of people getting caught up in the magic of a theme party moment, but she was really over the top, adorned from head to toe in full fifties drag. Her brunette hair was in a bouffant, and she wore the cutest little magenta organza cocktail dress, magenta pumps that would give a drag queen shin splints and rounding out the ensemble was a glossy string of pearls, of course. I tried not to stare, but I couldn't help myself. I had seen elegant women before, but none like her; though her wardrobe was glaringly out of fashion, her breathtaking beauty was timeless. Added to that was a haunting sadness in her rich brown eyes that made it even harder to look away. She smiled cordially at me as she went to the mirror and applied a fresh coating of lipstick. I tapped on Kim's stall door.

"Uh Kim, the party's out there you know," I discreetly informed her, still eying Miss Bouffant.

"Give me a break, I had black bean soup for lunch," Kim shouted back, unaware that we had company.

I smiled weakly at Miss Bouffant in a futile attempt to hide my mortification, but Kim's shockingly audible "whew!" and the ensuing flush ruined any chance of redemption. "I like your dress," I told her because if I didn't say something I was sure I'd die of embarrassment.

"Why thank you. My husband's boss bought it for me," she offered, her voice a velvety husk. She seemed grateful for the compliment but turned quickly back to the mirror, somber again.

"Nice boss," I commented dryly, as I shrugged off a sudden cold shiver.

"He's the owner here... well, he was," she trailed off.

"I think I saw you near the dance floor earlier," I said, propelled by an unnamed impulse to continue the dialogue. "Is that your husband?" I pried.

"Yes, we're celebrating tonight," she said with a smile. "We've been apart for a long time."

I nodded amiably as I continued trying to avert my eyes. If they're

celebrating tonight, I thought, why did she seem troubled? I decided to mind my own business, as I cursed Kim under my breath for enlisting me to pull latrine duty with her. I then heard myself blurt out, "Are you all right," followed by a compelling urge to kick myself for doing so.

She looked at me from the mirror then turned and smiled, "Oh yes, I'm fine," she said with a forced cheerfulness that clearly revealed she was anything but.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be nosey," I said, feeling like a jerk. "Meet you out there, Kim," I called out as I started to leave.

The woman followed me out into the hall where the band's rendition of "Young at Heart" had made its way. "I'm Madeline," she said extending her delicate hand, "How do you do?"

"I'm Kelly," I said, locked in her penetrating gaze. "Nice to meet you."

"Are you from around here?" Madeline inquired.

"No, I'm from New Haven."

"Oh." She paused for a moment then hesitantly began, "I was wondering if you..." She paused again, "oh, no I couldn't ask you..."

"Ask me what?" I begged, tantalized by the growing intrigue.

"My daughter lives in New Haven, and I was hoping you could stop by her house and tell her something for me."

A loopy suggestion to say the least, but there was such sincerity in her eyes that I couldn't bring myself to dismiss her as the nutcase she was beginning to seem.

"Do you and your daughter not speak?" I asked, flaunting my indisputable talent for stating the obvious.

"Unfortunately, we don't anymore, but there's something I really need her to know," she said plaintively.

"And I suppose an e-mail is out of the question," I replied dryly.

"A what?" She absently tugged at her dress.

"E-mail, you've never heard of it?" I asked incredulously. She shook her head. "Boy, you're really playing this fifties act to the hilt."

"Look, Kelly, I'm sure this seems rather peculiar to you, and ordinarily I would never ask a total stranger for such an enormous personal favor, but due to my special circumstances..." She paused

Copeland-

as her brown eyes began welling up. “Would you please help me?”

Like I had a choice in the matter. “Sure, just tell me what to say and where to go.”

Madeline’s eyes dazzled with delight. “Oh, Kelly, you’re just a dear! I’ll write it all down for you and bring it to your table.” She hurried off, never missing a step in those treacherous pumps. Kim finally emerged from her porcelain sanctuary.

“Wanna dance?” she invited with an inappropriate level of perkiness.

“Why not,” I said dryly, “My grandma would be so proud.”

* * * * *

I never knew it was physically possible to tear it up to the likes of Rosemary Clooney, but Kim and I had been managing it quite handily. After “Come On-A My House” ended, I dragged Kim off the dance floor, the bizarre bathroom conversation I had earlier replaying in my head.

“So what else did that program say about this place?” I asked as we stationed ourselves by the bandstand.

Kim brushed the hair off her forehead and teased, “Oh, so now you’re interested.”

“The hair on the back of my neck keeps standing up,” I shivered. “What actually happened here back then?” I inquired.

“The guy that was murdered,” Kim began, “Carlo DeGallo, he was the boss of the Vinciente family, and there was this other guy, Marco Tomassi, he was the accountant, rumored to be a crook of course, for some of their business fronts. Well, from what the program said, I guess some under-boss wanted DeGallo out of the way, so they whacked him here that night and pinned everything on Tomassi, the accountant,” Kim said.

“Did Tomassi do it?” I asked, enthralled.

“Nobody knows. One of the goons they caught said Tomassi did it, but he said he didn’t. He said he was just there to have a good time with his wife, that it was all a set up.”

“So didn’t Tomassi’s lawyers like figure something was messed up and get him an appeal or something?” I asked, drawn in by the poignant story of these unknown figments Kim was bringing to life.

“The poor bastard was stabbed to death in a prison fight a couple of years later. You think anyone gave a crap enough about some low-grade mob accountant to launch a huge investigation to find the real killer of DeGallo?”

“So the guy goes to jail for a murder he might not have committed, then gets wasted in there before anyone can figure out whether or not he did it,” I lamented. “That bites.”

“That’s why the reopening of this place is so significant. The mystery’s never been solved,” Kim said excitedly. “The evidence they had against him was questionable, but they never found any other suspect. The prosecution said Tomassi did it because he was promised a bigger role in the organization by the new boss,” Kim added.

“So maybe Tomassi did do it then,” I commented, easily swayed.

“Maybe, but then they showed Tomassi’s wife crying on TV after he was stabbed, swearing up and down that he didn’t do it, that he was framed.” For dramatic effect Kim added, “but nobody cared.”

“Well of course she’s gonna say he didn’t do it,” I countered cynically. “She was his wife.”

Kim shrugged her shoulders ambivalently. “Anyway, two mob guys were dead, and the

Government got its money after seizing this place. Everyone was happy,” Kim editorialized.

“Everyone except Tomassi’s wife,” I said.

“It’s strange you know,” Kim began wistfully, “on that show last night, none of it seemed real, it’s like it was just a movie or something, but being here, it’s like I know these people were real, like their tortured spirits are roaming among us, unable to rest.”

I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand up again. “Kim, shut up, you’re starting to freak me out.”

Kim gave me a playful smile, leaned toward me and conceded, “Okay, you win. All the guys here are eighty.”

I laughed, brought back to reality by her deadpan. “The waiters are young,” I said, keeping a positive vibe.

“I’m going to get some water,” Kim said. “Then we can go.”

“Okay, I’ll be at the table.” I made my way through the throng of senior dancers and plunked myself down in my chair with a sigh of disappointment. I was thinking how I hadn’t seen Madeline since

Copeland-

our ladies' room encounter. She said she would bring me the information about her daughter, but it was well after midnight, and Kim and I were ready to leave.

"I was hoping you were still here," purred the husky voice in my ear. Startled, I stood up and found myself face to face with Madeline. I was riveted by her powerful magnetism; an indescribable energy emanated from her that was as ethereal as it was sensual. "Here's my daughter's address." She enclosed the slip of paper in my hand, squeezing my fingers over it. "You'll never know how grateful I am," she gushed. As she glided toward the exit, her organza-wrapped form in fluid motion, I was overwhelmed by an inexplicable sense of sadness, already missing this stranger leaving me as intensely as I would a lifelong friend.

When the exit door slammed shut, I regained my wits and realized that I had no way of getting in touch with her afterward to tell her how my meeting with her daughter went. At the risk of great personal peril, I fearlessly dove into the sea of polyester pantsuits on the dance floor and adroitly negotiated the swirl of gyrating octogenarians as I rushed toward the same door. I threw it open and stepped out onto the crystallized street, but she was already gone. I leaned against the building to catch my breath, frozen not from the temperature but from sheer disappointment. Would I ever see her again? Maybe her daughter would be able to tell me where to find her.

I went back inside and found Kim. She read my face instantly.

"What's up with you?" she asked.

"This night didn't turn out at all like I expected," I replied dejectedly.

"I told you Frank Sinatra was dead before we even came in," Kim said with a smirk. "Come on, we'll find a younger crowd tomorrow night."

* * * * *

Shivering on the sidewalk in front of Madeline's daughter's house the next day, I suspected there was a distinct possibility that I had crossed the threshold into complete and utter madness. Oddly enough, that didn't seem to dissuade me from approaching her door

to deliver Madeline's cryptic message. I pressed the doorbell, and a neatly coifed woman in her sixties answered.

"Can I help you?" she pleasantly offered.

Smiling awkwardly, I suddenly felt rather ridiculous standing there with the note in my hand so I wisely decided to make it short and sweet.

"Can you please give this to Phyllis," I said and immediately started down the steps toward my car.

The woman read the note and before I knew it, she was charging down the steps in her stylish sweat suit after me, yelling, "Hey you, wait just a minute!"

I stopped in my tracks, and as soon as I turned back, there she was in my face with an expression quite reminiscent of the parochial school nun who caught me kissing Walter Finch behind the paste shelf in the fifth grade. I nearly peed myself.

"Who gave you this?" she spat with a lethal measure of anger and bewilderment.

"Madeline did," I sputtered nervously. "I don't know anything else so please just give it to Phyllis," I said as I tried to slip around to the driver's side of my car. She grabbed my arm.

"I am Phyllis," she muttered, still slightly bewildered.

"Well evidently I have the wrong Phyllis," I said in a low, impatient voice, "because the Phyllis I want can only be about twenty years old." Then I casually informed her, "I think I'll be on my way now," as I tried to disengage my arm from her vice grip, but this lady meant business.

"Who gave you this note I asked you?" she demanded sharply.

"I told you, some lady Madeline." I tried not to let her smell the fear.

"Look, I don't know what kind of scam you're trying to pull on me," she said with a menacing glare, "but you're not going to..."

I started panicking. "Lady, I'm not pulling any scam. I went to the Sapphire Room last night," I stammered, "and a woman named Madeline came up to me, gave me this note with this address and asked me to give it to her daughter. Now if I got the wrong house, I apologize. I'll just take the note and..."

"I'm her daughter," she quietly announced over my shrieking.

The atmosphere fell silent. "Say what?" I replied.

Copeland-

"I'm her daughter," she said again, flatly. For a split second nothing existed but the two of us trying to comprehend each other.

After a moment, I smiled at the woman. "Wait a minute, somebody's yanking my chain here big time." I looked around the neighborhood still smiling. "Okay, Kim, very funny," I shouted into the chilled air, "very elaborate too, but the joke's over. I'm on to you guys... Kim?" The woman just stared at me as I prattled.

"My mother passed away two weeks ago," she said somberly once I finally shut up, and I knew then that if this was a joke, she wasn't in on it. I didn't know whether to hug her or run for my life.

"How could she be your mother?" I croaked in utter disbelief, "You're older than she is!"

She looked at me quizzically. "My mother was ninety years old. She passed in her sleep."

I leaned against my car, shaking my head. If I had thought I might have been losing my mind before I knocked on Phyllis's door, this exchange had eliminated any doubt.

"Did you say the Sapphire Room?" Phyllis asked.

"Yeah, I went to the reopening gala last night."

"And she was there?" she asked as a cautious smile began creeping over her face.

"I guess so," I shrugged, with a cautious smile of my own.

Phyllis smiled warmly as she read the note again. She then placed a gentle hand on my shoulder and said in a near whisper, "Thank you." She turned around and headed up the steps to the warmth of her house.

"What! Hello?" I shouted frantically, and then it was my turn to chase after her. "Would you mind explaining what in the hell is going on?"

"I don't know," she shrugged. "I certainly don't believe in miracles, but if I did, I'd be tempted to call this one. But since I don't..."

"Yeah, me either," I nodded with disappointment. Then I remembered the program Kim told me about last night, and a vile realization washed over me. "Your last name isn't Tomassi, by any chance?" I asked.

"It's my maiden name. Why?" she responded, her eyebrows crinkling with curiosity.

"Your father's story was on television last night, the Sapphire

Room and the whole mob connection.”

“I saw it,” she said trying to guess where this was leading.

“I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if some creep saw it too and thought it would be funny to...” and before I could finish my thought, Phyllis’ face turned cold.

She nodded her agreement and added, “People can be very cruel. Creating a hoax out of someone else’s tragedy is their idea of fun.”

“I’m sorry I fell for it... and troubled you,” I said, suddenly feeling very sad.

“It’s okay. It was nice to think for a moment that it could’ve been true,” she smiled.

I walked down Phyllis’ steps hating the world. How could somebody do such a terribly mean thing, I wondered. And how could I be so stupid to fall for it? I slammed my car door and sped away from Phyllis’s house, seriously contemplating going back to the Sapphire Room that night and knocking somebody on their ass. My cell phone then began singing and jolted me out of my homicidal fantasy. It was Kim.

“What’s up?” she asked casually.

“I just discovered that people are scum and totally humiliated myself in the process,” I growled back.

“Did I call at a bad time?” she asked.

“You might say that,” I retorted still foaming at the mouth.

“Well listen, I just wanted to let you know that it wasn’t the History Channel that did the story on the Sapphire Room, it was the Travel Channel, some ghost story show.”

“Ghost story?” I asked.

“Yeah, this isn’t the first time that club’s been reopened. Whenever someone tried to reopen it, people said they saw weird things.”

“What kind of weird things?” I asked, doubtful that anything could be weirder than what had already transpired.

“The usual stuff, cold drafts, a fog, oh and a mysterious guy dressed like he’s from the fifties.”

Suddenly, my steering wheel jerked to the left, causing my car to swerve and narrowly miss a UPS truck that was double-parked on the right. “Kim, stop messing with me. I’m not in the mood,” I snapped, completely dismissing the fact that I almost ate that truck’s tailpipe.

Copeland-

“I’m not messing with you,” she said earnestly, “I watched my tape of that show again, and I’m just telling you what it said.”

“So what, am I supposed to believe that woman I was talking to last night was a ghost?” I asked incredulously.

“What woman?” Kim replied.

* * * * *

As I approached the entrance to the Sapphire Room that same night, I was of the opinion that a lengthy prescription for anti-psychotics would immediately follow whatever took place inside, but I didn’t care. I didn’t know what I expected to learn by going back, but I knew I couldn’t just leave it alone. I vigilantly scanned the crowd for Madeline, and it wasn’t long before I spotted her standing alone near the bandstand in a cloud of dry ice being pumped from under the stage. This must be the ghostly fog, I cynically chuckled to myself.

“I found your daughter,” I said rather tersely as I approached her.

“I know,” Madeline said with a smile. “I purposely waited hoping you’d come back, so I could thank you.”

“Is that right,” I said snidely. “I probably could have you arrested, you know. You may be having fun, but that woman just suffered a terrible loss, and she didn’t find your prank so funny,” I scolded.

“I know she suffered,” she began softly. “That’s why I asked you to give her that message. It will bring her a great deal of comfort to know that her father was innocent.”

“So that’s what was on the note,” I replied, shaking my head. “Well you certainly spared no detail in planning your little hoax,” I complimented, maintaining my stoic wall of defense.

“Your Doubting Thomas routine is quite convincing, Kelly, but I know you believe,” she smirked knowingly. “That’s why I chose you.”

I felt the cold shiver from the night before creep over me. “Chose me?” I countered, still on the defensive. Then having mustered up a potent dose of mocking sarcasm I said, “If this message was so important why didn’t you just make your voyage from the great beyond a non-stop flight right to your daughter?”

“You amuse me, Kelly,” she smiled with sparkling eyes as she ad-

justed a lock of my uncontrollable hair. “You try so hard to deny what your heart knows is true simply because it doesn’t make immediate sense to you.”

“Doesn’t everyone?” I asked quite sincerely.

“Eventually... But don’t let that happen to you.”

This was crazy. No, she was crazy! “You... you...” I stammered in frustration, “You should find a new hobby,” I spat and turned to walk away from her.

“Kelly,” she called out, but I kept walking, right out the door and onto the street, never looking back.

Storming down the desolate street, fumbling for the keys in my over-stuffed purse, I grumbled aloud about how dare Madeline accuse me of believing in ghosts. What this dame lacked in fashion sense, she certainly made up for in gall. I was no genius, but I was smart enough to know that the supernatural only exists in cartoons and B-movies. As I put the key in the door, I caught a faint whiff of the fresh, floral scent of Madeline’s perfume. Certain she was about to ambush me from behind with another helping of irresistible charm, I swiftly whirled around, poised to fend off her attack, but all that was there was my own icy breath billowing into the night air.

* * * * *

The end of the long winter was signaled by persistent flower buds struggling up through the cold, crunchy cemetery grounds. It was no small task finding Madeline Tomassi’s grave, but I too was persistent. I stopped obsessing about Madeline after the New Year, but I couldn’t seem to put the experience behind me. We never got to say good-bye. Yes, I shamefully admit I was a victim of my own sentimentality. Maybe I was the butt of some nut-job’s hoax that night at the club, or maybe I was so moved by all of Kim’s talk about mob murders and despondent widows that my subconscious launched into overdrive and spirited me away to some twilight zone-like realm, the likes of which Rod Serling couldn’t have imagined. Whatever.

I placed a single red rose across the top of Madeline’s headstone and kept a respectfully somber demeanor as I stared at her name etched in marble and entertained wild speculations about what really

Copeland-

happened to her that fateful night in 1955. After a moment, I turned to leave and was met by Madeline's daughter, Phyllis, cradling a potted geranium in her arm.

"Hello," she said affably, then offered a smile of familiarity. "It's nice to see you again."

"It is?" I replied, surprised she recognized me. "I thought for sure you would've blotted me out of your memory," I joked. "How've you been?"

"I'm okay," she smiled, "and as much as I tried to blot you out, you always came back. I started thinking about why you showed up at my door and how good it made me feel after all those years to know my father was the innocent man my mother fought so hard for people, me especially, to believe."

"You're disappointing me, Phyllis," I joked. "I thought we were simpatico, you and me, you know, hard-boiled cynics."

"I lived my whole life not believing," she confessed as she crouched down to carefully place the geraniums just right. "I never knew what I was missing until you showed me." She got up rather fast for having sixty-something year old bones. "Try it some time, you'll be pleasantly surprised."

"Maybe I will," I smiled, pleased with myself for having inadvertently succeeded in giving a confirmed skeptic the gift of faith.

As I turned and started walking away, Phyllis called out, "Oh, Mom said to watch out for those UPS trucks."

I turned back but all I saw was my single red rose resting on the headstone, its pedals quivering in the late winter wind.

THE GAME

Anthony Brano

My back burned because I spent the week delivering cases of liquor. Just like the week before. And the year before. I didn't even like to drink! I'm not sure if I hated drinking because of the taste. Perhaps I hated it because I had to lug the stuff up flights of stairs and into dingy basements all day.

It was Sunday. Sunday was my favorite day, especially during football season. On Sundays, a man had the right to lounge around the house and watch the game. It was in the book. On Sunday, I owned my own body, and I expected to plant it right in front of the TV.

First, I had to get rid of the dog. I shooed Lombardi into the hallway and fed him greasy canned dog food. There was nothing more distracting than having a hairy ass in your face when you were trying to watch the game. I went to the kitchen and rummaged around for my usual snacks. I found an old bag of potato chips, only sticky peanut residue in the Planter's peanut tin, no soda, and no M&M's. My feet tingled against the kitchen's chilly checkerboard tiles, and I wished I had on more than a T-shirt and a pair of boxers.

In my hands, I clenched the greasy, crumpled bag of potato chips.

"Angie! I shouted."

"What do you want, Frank? She responded from the bathroom."

"I need my snacks, I said."

My wife stormed into the kitchen with half-applied make-up on her face. My yelling must have startled her because her lipstick was smeared all over her face like the Joker's. We were supposed to be getting ready to go to a goddamn dinner for all the drivers at work. Every five or ten years the company liked to throw us a bone.

"I didn't buy your snacks this week, she said."

"Why not? I asked."

"Because we're supposed to be getting ready, remember? I knew if I bought all that junk, you'd just sit on your ass all day and watch football."

"But it's Sunday."

Brano-

“Frank, we talked about this weeks ago. You never take me out anymore, and this is a free dinner, said Angie, folding her arms across her chest.”

“But my snacks.”

“We’re going.”

She disappeared back into the bathroom, probably to wash off all that make-up and start over again. Why did she waste all my money on that stuff, anyway? I stood alone in the kitchen and scratched my crotch, then returned to the living room. I decided to do without my snacks.

I found clothes cumbersome, so I wiggled out of my T-shirt. I’d rather have my skin warmed by the corduroy couch. I flicked off the living room lights and I bathed in the metallic-blue glow of the TV, where the glass of bubbly black Coca-Cola floated atop its red coaster and sat in the shadow of the bottle from which it was poured. An attractive blonde clad in a T-shirt several sizes too small sang that the viewer should “Have a Coke and a Smile,” and I frowned. Angie knew I did things a certain way on Sunday, and she had to go ruin it for a dinner that didn’t start until six.

After the commercials, militaristic thumping drums and blaring trumpets sounded, and John Madden appeared to give me a pre-game assessment. My heart quickened. Not only was I watching my favorite team, the Green Bay Packers, but the broadcast was being led by my favorite commentator. Madden symbolized what a man should be. He played guard for the Eagles, back when you could punch and bite your way to the goal line. Then he led men to victory as a coach. Madden was a man who did what he wanted. He grew tired of all the headaches and ulcers suffered from a grueling NFL schedule, so he quit. He hated flying in airplanes, so he bought his own bus. The picture filled with Madden’s fleshy red cheeks and gray hair, and he explained to me how the Packers needed to run the ball in order to defeat the Lions.

“That’s right,” I whispered.

Madden reminded me a lot of the men I worked with. Men who didn’t give a shit about anybody else and controlled their own lives. Men like Joe Panino, who all the other drivers just called Joe ‘Stache, since he had a big, black, handlebar moustache. It seemed like all the drivers had a nickname, but me. I must not have had any nickname-

worthy qualities. Joe used to be married, but like most of the other drivers, he divorced his wife, paid alimony and child support, and generally enjoyed himself. Joe spoke of going to the bars for a drink, and not as a delivery boy. He'd meet women and give them what he called a moustache ride, and although I was never quite sure what that meant, I knew it must have been good.

Joe wasn't perfect. He'd get to the warehouse late, every Monday morning, and stagger into his truck. Then he'd drive like shit all day, and break a bunch of cases. He'd return with booze smeared all over the walls inside the truck. The bosses never really cared, I think, because Joe was considered one of the boys. Joe 'Stache. I was always too "good" to be one of the boys, too "quiet." My idea of fun used to be speeding through deliveries to get home as early as possible. I wanted to spend as much time as I could with my son and my wife before it was time for bed. So many nights I'd get home too late, and they'd already be asleep. I regretted those nights because all I could do was sleep off the tiredness and soreness, and prepare for the next day. I never saw my son anymore, on account of college, and my wife hated me.

Madden gesticulated with his hands and shrugged his fluffy eyebrows together. My knees clicked together, and my teeth chattered along the edge of my thumbnail. I got nervous on Sundays. The game was all I had left. I suffered through work all week just for that moment, just to sit there in my living room, watching my TV. It was serious. It was the game. No time to worry about the kid's tuition payments or car insurance. It was game time. I had to concentrate.

The Packers won the coin toss and they elected to receive the ball. I would have deferred and kicked it away. That's what my father taught me. You defer and take the wind. Let the other team worry about scoring. Brett Favre, who had thick-short arms and legs like me, licked his fingers and then thrust his hands between the legs of the center. The offense was in the I formation. Eleven men all dressed in gold stood organized and ready for attack.

"Run it down their goddamn throats," I whispered to them through the TV.

Favre's 'huts' echoed through the room. That was the correct cadence, the same cadence taught to me by my father. I played ball almost all through high school, but after my father died, I never wore

Brano-

a uniform again. He was an engineer, which in my mind made him a step better than a driver because he had skill. My aspirations as a player ended partly because I had to support my mother, which made school no longer a necessity, and football no longer a pleasure.

Favre was much younger than me, but as quarterbacks went, he was getting up in years. That's how I felt sometimes. The job seemed to get harder and harder each day. Tasks that used to be easy became grueling and I thought about how much harder they were. That made me weaker. But like me, Favre's strongest asset was his toughness. He came from working-class stock. He also played football at Lambeau Field: the coldest, hardest ground in football.

The center hiked the ball and Favre handed it off to Ahman Green, the running back. The stadium seemed to shake as sixty thousand people simultaneously cheered. Their cheers made me want to cheer. Green danced his way through blue and white enemy jerseys and found himself alone, running up the sideline. I found myself on my feet with my fists shivering above my head. With long, graceful strides, Green darted up the field, and into the end zone. But wait! The quick yellow flash of the referee's flag indicated that there had been a penalty on the play. What had seemed like certain victory turned into a loss, a step backwards. I felt my life to be much like that play, running for the goal only to be cut down by an uncontrollable situation. The referee grabbed his wrists. Some fat lineman must have held a defender. Bastard.

"Stick it up your ass, you pussy," I screamed.

Angie stomped into the room and mashed the power button on the TV.

"What the fuck did you do that for? I asked, my eyeballs bulging out of their sockets."

"You are not going to ruin this evening, Frank."

"You're not going to ruin my game, Angie,"

Wielding my remote control, I flicked the TV back to life. She spun around and again smashed the power button on the TV.

"Frank, go get ready, you haven't even shaved yet."

She crossed the line, fucking with the game. As the years tired me out, they only made her meaner. The only time she was ever satisfied was when she pushed into my territory.

We hadn't had sex in six years. That was the time we had to go

out of town for her great aunt Eleanor's funeral and were stuck in a hotel room together. I didn't want to go because I never even knew the woman. She was 86 years old, for Christ's sake. But, as usual, Angie forced me to go, and I did what I was told. I couldn't believe someone as strong as Angie could be so devastated. She cried and cried over the old lady. I tried to console her, and it just sort of happened. Comfort sex. I only intended to put my arm on her shoulder, and maybe give her a hug, but we ended up doing it all over the hotel room. She cried off and on the entire time, and I wasn't sure if it was because of Eleanor, or the failure that was our marriage. Her cries made me want to cry, but not because of Eleanor.

Anyway, she acted more and more like her father each day. With Angie, it was a power struggle. She had to prove to everyone around her that she had it. I cared more about respect than power, although I thought the two might have been directly linked. I had little power in that relationship, and was afforded even less respect.

I literally stood up for myself and approached her.

"C'mon, get out of the way," I pleaded.

"Go get ready!"

I was completely naked, except for the boxers. She stood there in her bathrobe, commanding me. She had just gotten out of the shower and her legs still glistened with droplets of water. Her make-up had been reapplied, and her face looked good enough to put on a magazine cover. I spied a little cleavage between the folds in the robe. It was then that my dick poked its way through the little peephole on my boxers. I was angry and aroused at the same time. That was the closest my wife and I had been to being naked together since Aunt Eleanor's. I didn't think Angie felt the same way at all.

"Frank, I'm only going to tell you one more time, go!"

My face turned red. I was tired of being shat on all the time, especially by her, the woman who was supposed to love me. I got the idea in my head to forget about the game, the dinner, and our problems. Our son was living away on campus, and except for Lombardi, the house was empty. I placed my hand on her shoulder and gave it a little squeeze.

And then she said it.

"No."

Along with that refusal, she hit me with the Gespario lazy eye.

Branco-

When she or any of her rotten relatives were angry, their right eyes would droop into their cheeks. I hated it when she did it. The eye meant I wasn't as good as she was. The eye meant she was looking at a steaming piece of swarthy guinea trash. In this case it meant that she really did care only about the dinner, and didn't want to touch me, or have me touch her.

My anger boiled and my hands shook. I was angry because of the way she treated me. Angry because of the way I felt about her. I wanted her so bad. I didn't know whether to clobber her, or throw her to the ground and fuck her. Maybe both.

I slapped her.

I slapped her hard, right across the face. She fell to her knees, and I stood there with a palm full of make-up. She looked up at me with tears in her eyes, and I looked down at her with tears in mine. I tried to help her up. She pushed me out of the way, skulked into the bathroom, and slammed the door. I didn't want to hear her sobs, so I turned the TV back on. I didn't want her to hear mine either.

The game continued, but I didn't pay any attention to the TV. I went to my room and pulled on a pair of black khakis and a collared shirt. I looked in the bedroom mirror and saw a man I didn't understand. That display in the living room had been the only time I ever hit my wife, but it had actually been an act of passion. Angie emerged from the bathroom fully dressed, with her make-up reapplied for at least the third time. She looked beautiful. She had on a long navy-blue dress, and her hair was wound up in a bun. The make-up perhaps covered the mark my hand made on her face, but we both knew it was there.

The company held the dinner at Lucca's, which was one of those dimly lit restaurants that gave off the illusion of being elegant. The drive only took about twenty minutes, which, of course, felt like hours. I drove like I wanted to hit something. I veered around turning cars, and as we made our way towards the city, I beeped at the occasional jaywalker. I thought for a moment that the air pressure in the car was much heavier than outside, that our emotions were like two opposing storm fronts gaining mass on our respective sides of the car. At one point, I had to slam on the brakes, and she dropped her compact. When I reached down to grab the object, which was

by Angie's foot, she flinched with terrific intensity.

We arrived at Lucca's and Angie transformed. She smiled and greeted the other drivers' wives and dates as if our fight never happened. I made note of this and then proceeded to the bar to check the score of the game. Statistics scrolled by on the screen and somebody tapped me on the shoulder.

"Hey, Frankie, how goes it?"

It was Doughboy, one of the younger drivers. At only twenty-nine, he had already acquired a nickname. I told him it was going. He let out a high-pitched squeal.

"Did you hear about Joe 'Stache?" Doughboy asked like it was possible I had heard about it. He knew as well as I did that I was in fact out of the gossip loop. Information always filtered to me last, and that information was usually inaccurate.

"No, what happened to him?" I gave Doughboy the satisfaction of giving "old Frankie" the news.

"You won't believe it. He got shit canned because he brought a girl on the truck."

"That's too bad," I said. But I was actually quite pleased.

Doughboy continued with all the sticky particulars, which I didn't care to hear, so I walked away. I found Angie at our table and I slid into the chair next to her. She sat sipping a glass of water and making cheap conversation with the other wives. She had prepared weeks for this moment, to appear in public, on display. For a moment, I thought the slap had been forgotten, but when the waiter approached with our meals, and the conversation stopped, Angie again shot the Gespario lazy eye in my direction. Her tears had only been a momentary display. She got what she wanted out of the evening, and I knew the game would still be on when we got home.

ROAD TO A PLACE CALLED HOME

Sarah Horton

I am trying to catch you
before mom drags you off
to the movies.
But it's almost, seven, I'm
not going to make it.

A bullet down the barrel of the
highway, fields are on both sides
of me.
Miles and miles of green.
I never know what's in them.

I pull up to the driveway and
the house is shoved into
the ground like a tombstone.
The yellow roses hang along
the fence
curling towards the house,
and the cats are in their
place pushed deep into the
magnolia branches, hiding.
The gurgle of my car on the
gravel driveway frightens the
cats, sends them flying into
the yard, like rifle pellets.

I pull up to the house.
Mom jumps into her Yukon,
screeches off.
You in the passenger seat,
eyes are two black dots,
like someone drilled two
holes into your head.

Mom's hand grips the
steering wheel
her body slouched against
the window.

You see me pass,
manage a smile.
I know the leather seats are cold
and it stings when you try to move,
rubbing your bones together
for warmth,
on empty seats while
a swivel of smoke rises from your
mouth,
then disintegrates into the air.

WHAT TIME IT WAS

Spencer Carlson

And she sat,
hair streaming down
over her shoulders,
then whipped back
with a motion that seemed almost frustrated.
I saw her think:
'How dare it cover up
the feature presentation.'
She looked up at me,
for a minute,
and I looked at her.
Her grass green eyes lit up
as the sunlight bounced off them
reflecting into mine.
That moment
was wonderful.
Even though
she was looking
up above me, I felt
her eagerness
and my excitement
that I decided
to sit under the clock today,
when she wanted to know
what time it was.

ONLY CHILD

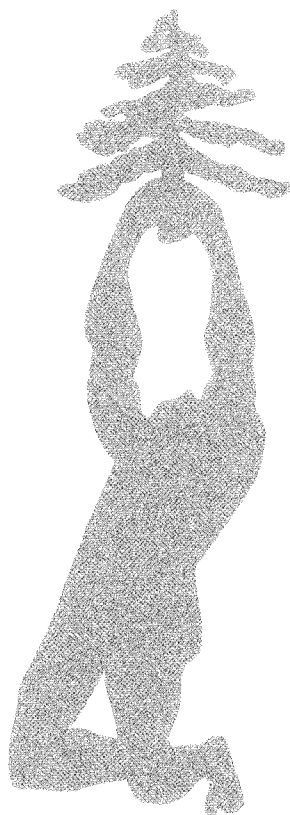
Laurie Moskal

She sits on the changing table polka dotted
with floppy-eared blue Labradors and yellow butterflies.
Her small eyes dance with squares
of reflected light from the lens.
She is less than two in the picture.
The wispy brunette baby-curls
still flower from her large bobble head.
They never reappeared
after the first haircut.
Two new teeth, barely visible,
protrude pink gums, one a bit more than the other.
Her miniature feet poke out of fuzzy flannel
pink pajamas. Her big sister,
age seven or eight, stands beside the baby,
cheek touching cheek, long fingers grasping
short pudgy arms.
This was before I got braces. The jack-o-lantern teeth
are too big for my head.
My father didn't know as he snapped the shot,
how tightly I squeezed, or that I dug my fingernails
into her perfect new skin. He didn't know
what made her start to cry as the Polaroid popped out,
colors and shapes of the moment
soon to develop into a glossy print.
I hated her, the musky and delicate sweet
smell of powder and dirty diapers,
the mean contortion of features when she fussed,
the fat sticky fingers,
inclined to pull hair and pinch skin.
I was disappointed the day she was born,
red, ugly and squirming,
and I didn't want to hold her.
Sometimes I pretended to like her,

Moskal-

but when my mother's head turned away
I made mean faces.

She's fifteen now,
and she doesn't remember that I hurt her.
When she looks at the picture, cropped to fit
in a heart-shaped frame, she smiles
and laughs. That's cute, she says.
She doesn't see the pain.



FLAWLESS

Jennifer Purus

Barbie's long locks of blonde hair
fall around the white porcelain
toilet that she vomits in.
Her knees ache from kneeling on
the cold tiles of the gas station's
grimy bathroom floor.
Her eyes are red and filled with tears,
her cheeks covered in black mascara.
Her perky D sized breasts are positioned
Perfectly in her pink sweater.

Her toned stomach quivers with discontent
as she sticks her manicured, perfectly
painted fingernails down her throat.
In the other hand, she clutches her
sparkling red ruby and diamond purse.
She heaves her lunch into the bowl.

Outside, in the cold blustery weather,
Ken paces back and forth in his
polished black Versace shoes.
He bangs his fist on the bathroom door.
"Damn it, Barbie you are going to make
us late again for L.A. photo shoot!"

Barbie startles, sits up straight against cold wall
and grabs a handful of rough toilet paper to
wipe the puke from her mouth.
She flushes the toilet and stands up,
her weight supported on the rim of
the toilet seat she just barfed in.
She sprays herself with perfume and
Quickly cleanses her vomit encrusted

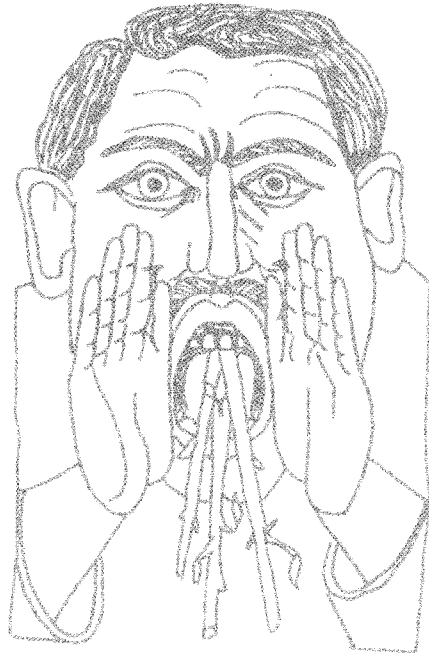
Purus-

mouth with spearmint flavored mouthwash.
She pulls her hair up into a tight pony tail,
adjusts her black mini-skirt and checks her
sparkling white teeth in the cracked mirror
that is tacked on the bathroom wall.

Ken furiously barges into the bathroom
to find Barbie, lining her lips
with a red cherry gloss.

“Barbie, you look FINE,” says Ken.

As she turns to face him, he snatches her
hand and drags her, tripping in her high heels,
out to the shiny black Limousine that has
been waiting for them in the parking lot nearby.



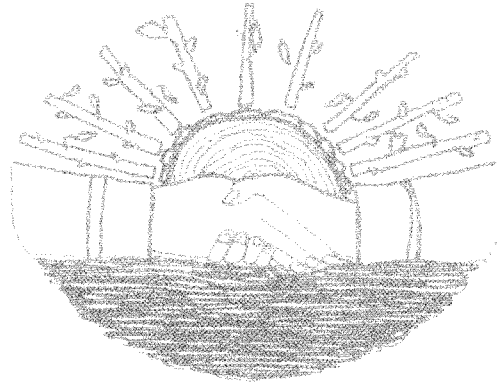
SEVENTEEN

Sarah Tamulevich

I don't know why I helped her; why I didn't ignore the sounds of whispered curses and shuffling feet that stirred me from sleep. When I sat up in bed and turned on the lamp, she whirled around to face me: startled, breathless, cheeks flushed with girlish fervor. Jillian, what are you doing? I asked, squinting in the light. She raised a slender finger to her lips, begging me to be quiet. I said nothing, watching her skirt from corner to corner of the room with swift steps. The shadow of her figure glided smoothly across the opposite wall—smaller, thinner, younger than mine. Our house was silent; the bedroom window was open. I heard the faint, chugging idle of his pick-up, and knew she was finally leaving. She collected colored hair clips and elastics from her dresser, grabbed her favorite compact discs and stole photos of her friends in braids and braces from their frames. She stuffed these things, her life, into her canvas backpack. Gently, she lifted the ceramic piggy bank from the shelf above her bed and unplugged the rubber stopper. She shook it empty, seventeen years of savings spilling out like water over the faded rainbow rug. I slowly eased out of bed and sat beside her on the floor. I counted the coins; she unfolded the dollar bills and jammed them in her pockets. Together, we swept the change into her backpack. I followed her to the window. She slipped out onto the roof of our front porch, and I wondered how many times she had escaped, undetected, through our bedroom window. Jillian turned to face me, her large brown eyes begging for approval. I spotted his truck underneath the orange glow of the streetlight. I thought of all her impassioned arguments with our parents, the desperation

Tamulevich-

of first loves and the boy who used to wait for me beneath the orange lamplight. I nodded in silence. She climbed the lattice down to the ground without hesitation and crept across the front lawn, her footsteps leaving soft imprints in the wet grass. Rushing to the truck to meet him, her platinum blond hair trailed behind her like a ghost. I knew she wouldn't go far with \$38 dollars in change, a few wrinkled dollar bills—still, I wished it were me.



A WEEKEND GENDER BENDER

Paul Sorensen

Maria wasn't looking for a hero. The world didn't want to be saved. At least that was my thinking that weekend. Eight days after Maria's engagement to some villain I still wasn't handling it well. A friend of mine, Anthony, who was not so much close to me as he was just really nice, offered to let me tag along for a conference his company was sending him to. It was 4 days and 3 states away from everything that had been bothering me. There was a free room, open bar, and expense accounts. I hadn't been going to work myself, so it was easy to say "yes."

Right off the bat it seemed to be working. Everybody that had some real business there spent the entire day in seminars while myself and a handful of corporate wives sat in the hotel bar drinking whiskey sours and margaritas. At night we were wined and dined by representatives of the host corporation, a technology outfit called Greensleeves.

I had resigned myself to the fact that my life had been a wash, and began an extensive collection of tiny, plastic cocktail swords. They seemed the appropriate weapon for me, small and impotent. Rick, Maria's fiancé, was a real man's man. Not a villain really, but sort of an asshole. His relations with women were benefited enormously by his natural tendency to be a pompous, disinterested douche bag. I realize that I'm not saying anything new here, but it was at that time that I had just come to realize that these things don't just happen by accident.

I continued to mull all this over, my utter sexlessness, as I sat at a table outdoors underneath a tent on the third night. I was wrestling a steamed lobster, and I was losing. The physical strength was there in my arms, enough anyway to tear the little bastard's arms off, but it wasn't in my heart. I kept catching sight of his face, so heart-breakingly dead. I glanced around at my fellow diners who were ripping into their lobsters as if they were romantic rivals and twice as delicious. I steeled myself and twisted at the tail. That surprisingly colorful gross part kind of spilled into my plate and I knew he had

Sorenson-

won. I had not anticipated, however, that he might escape.

My lobster, plate and all, darted down the table, swiped by a woman 5 or so years older than me, maybe thirty. I had noticed her on the first day. She was a representative from IBM, a little taller than me, with round friendly features, dark hair, and tan skin. She was a little hippy, but in a way she made work: cuddly, even. She still hadn't spoken to me, but was stripping my lobster clean, discarding the shells and piling the meat neatly off to one side. Finished, she slid the plate back over to me. She smiled.

"I saw you struggling, and lobster is too good to be wasted."

"Thank you very much," I said, and meant it. I was too beaten to be emasculated any further. I took a big forkful of meat and shoved it in my mouth.

"I'm Donna, from IBM," she said handing me her card and moving to the seat directly next to me.

"Thank you, Donna," I said, swallowing. "My people shall be eternally indebted to you." She sort of gave a half laugh so I carried the joke further, reaching into my pocket and knighting her with one of my little swords. "I dub thee 'Donna the Lobster slayer,' Knight of the Realm." She laughed out loud now, and accepted the sword with much mock honor.

We spent much of that night together. She talked a lot, which was good because I don't. She told me about growing up on the West Coast, and her family, and what it was like working at IBM. For my part, I was more charming than usual. I guess because I wasn't trying to be. She had seen me at my worst and hadn't seemed fazed. We had moved to a little bar across the street where there was terrible live music. We were sipping white Russians when I finally let a little bit about me slip, about why how I ended up there and Maria. The conversation had lulled for just a second. I had a quick thought about how if Maria had been there I would have ordered some dark beer that tasted like organic toothpaste. It was at that moment Mike, one of Greensleeves' hosts, showed up.

I didn't like Mike right from the get go, but that's just me. He was tall, and kind of bulky. He had a full goatee and dark stubble covering the rest of his face. He was mostly bald, with what remained of his hair cut close to his scalp.

And he was loud. He walked over and threw an arm around each

of us. He began buying enormous rounds of drinks on his company credit card, all the while acting like the money was coming out of his pocket. He told lots of jokes that mostly revolved around pedophilia, and a good number of sexually explicit personal anecdotes which all ended with the punch line: "And I was like!" at which point he would make this ridiculous face where his jaw dropped and his eyes bulged.

As I looked around now I could see that the bar was half filled with people from the conference. Even Anthony was there, sitting with a couple of coworkers. He noticed me noticing him and gave me an invisible smile, like we were two grifters working a con.

I turned back to Mike and Donna to find that I was the one standing outside the action. A lot of the conversation had shifted to their work, nothing technical, nothing I couldn't understand, but conversationally I was at a loss. Words passed between them easily, a lazy volley. I smiled and nodded, each time my laugh a little quieter, my "Un-huh," or "Oh, Jeeze," given a little less regard. I reached a point where I had to keep running my hand across my mouth to know if I was just thinking something or actually talking out-loud.

I was about to turn to Donna to say something along the lines of "Hey, lets ditch this guy," when I noticed that the two of them had gone off and ditched me. What followed immediately after that remains a bit of a blur, as I became very drunk, very quickly. I remember being furious, about what exactly, I'm not sure. It had something to do with Mike being an obvious asshole, and Donna being drawn to him for that reason. There was also some jealousy: me jealous of Mike's secondary sexual characteristics, and his ability to drink hard liquor without gagging.

Several hours passed and I began to pull it together. It was getting close to last call, and the band on stage, though as talentless as the ones before it, was covering classic rock songs of the 1980's. I made my way to the crowded corner that was functioning as a dance floor. The crowd was pensive and awkward. I would have admitted that Bon Jovi had sounded better, but there was nothing in the performance that would have accounted for their demeanor.

I looked to the right corner of the stage, the place where everyone else seemed not to be looking. It was Donna, completely unconscious, slumped over the stage with her head resting on a blaring

Sorenson-

speaker. Behind her was Mike, who appeared to be dry-humping her big, round ass with the same intensity with which she had dismantled my lobster.

For a moment I was simply heartbroken, disgusted by Mike and, worse, by the fact that Donna had in essence chosen to be there, violated, poisoned, and permanently damaging her right ear. Donna wasn't looking for a hero either. She was looking for an outlaw. Mike was a real villain, as far as I was concerned. It wasn't any of my business. Hell, it was probably the way the world was meant to be, but the alcohol had sharpened my sense of righteousness. I would take action.

But what action to take? Mike was a good six inches taller than me, had a decisive weight advantage and had probably, you know, thrown a punch before. I balled my right hand into a fist and brought it to my face. It looked so tiny. The skin seemed too soft, the fingers too fragile. It was the kind of thing I ought to protect, not hurl into danger for the sake of some whore. I began to consider the rest of my body, the parts that would likely be savaged after my limp-wristed salvo glanced harmlessly off of Mike's chin. Once again I needed words: the right combination of reason and veiled threats. Donna was a client. He was out on his employers' dime. The only way this could end well for him would be to walk away. But there could be no reasoning. The second chorus of "Living on a Prayer" thundered through the room erasing all sound that was not the strained cry of some lonely, suburban cowboy.

I took several steps closer and another glance to make sure I hadn't been mistaken. It was still happening, as clear as a Sprite and Stoli Ras. His right hand was on her back, pinning her to the speaker and keeping her propped against the stage. His left was holding her at the waist, twisting a fold of flesh where her blouse had ridden up. Though I couldn't see his face, Mike really seemed to be driving it home. If I was going to intercede now was the time. That I might be leveled was always a possibility, but to throw the first punch would be to guarantee it.

I half danced myself the rest of the way over to them, falling in step behind Mike. Quietly murdering the last of my dignity, I slipped my hands around his waist and over his paunch. Resting my chin on his right shoulder and thrusting my pelvis forward, I began to hump

him. For a few seconds the three of us bounced back and forth, an ungodly Newton's Cradle of momentum, homosexuality, and rape. My testicles, frantically trying to escape, had nearly retracted up into my abdomen, and it is my impression that Mike had not noticed them at all. How else to explain the way he slyly turned to look at me, as if he was about to welcome another guest to the party?

Our eyes met. He stopped moving but did not disengage Donna. His expression was one of weary amusement, as if any second I would reveal the punch line that would make this somehow less horrible. I ran my tongue across my top teeth.

There was a blur of motion and I found myself spun around. I fell backwards into Donna, now behind me, and as I hit the floor she slid down and we collapsed in a pile. Scrambling to my feet I could see that Mike was gone, probably to his car already at the speed he had moved. The crowd around us was no longer pretending Donna was invisible and though people were now willing to watch me struggle, no one moved to help.

She was heavy. Goddamn heavy. I dragged her out from the crowd and dumped her into a one of the booths that lined the walls. She was breathing and her heart was beating, but she was completely nonresponsive. She reeked of booze and smoke and sweat and Mike's cologne. Holding her there so close to me, she really was quite ugly. Her cheeks and forehead were caked in thick make-up that was now only partially concealing the oily bumps on her skin. Her eyebrows had been drastically over plucked and then penciled back in, and her hair, which still looked nice, was hard and brittle from styling spray.

I got up, removed the business card she had given me from my wallet, and dropped it on the table. She had not been worth it, but I was.

WINE AND MELODY

David DiSarro

With a glistening white wine
and the softer melodies of John Coltrane,
you seduced me in late hours.
I watched you delicately grip
the bottle and pour its contents
into a dainty, slender glass,
spilling a few dribbles onto yourself.
You chuckled playfully and licked
the excess from your hands, your tongue
gliding slowly up and down your fingers
while the intoxicating aroma drifted to us
with the scent of wildflowers' drying on the windowsill.
Sitting on my lap, your breasts at eye-level,
while I caressed their soft, delicate exterior and
dampened my lips to gently kiss your creamy skin,
you whispered suggestive words that would craze
any man into swift and consenting action.
Notes danced in the shimmering scented air,
our bodies quivered with rhythmic
impulse and chaotic excitement, sweat
dripping like wax down a burning candle.
I smiled while looking into your deep azure
eyes, realizing the breadth of our lives is only
beginning. Together we lit a candle, its dim
light dancing on the exposed and elegant energy
of our bodies. In all those evenings
of wine and melodic movements
inside those walls, nothing
was more beautiful than you.

HE SMELLED GOOD

Michael Rayzer

A bar of Irish Spring.
A regular cloth.
No loofahs here.
Only queers use those.
Is it queer to smell you?
I can't help
But revel
In the tang of you.
You're a steward,
You understand.
My intoxication
Cannot be helped.
And thankfully,
Only the most
Obvious sniffs
Are punished.

TREAD

Amy Ashton Handy

My boots have freed me to run, to kick, to stomp
- six eyelet, padded top Doc Martens; I live in them.
They fit fine and solid, the leather dark cherry red.
I fear that in the end it won't be the leather that gives out,
but their soles.

Countless steps will wear them away and
already the instep has gone smoother than the outer edges.
These boots marveled far with me, and I
rubbed off bits of sole onto surfaces all over the world.
Tiny molecules of these boots must linger on
the concrete stretches of Houston and
on park bench seats in Austin,
along miles of Colorado trails,
absorbed into the gravel throughout La Plata Canyon.
Down the paths at the Singapore Zoo,
elements of the soles intermingle

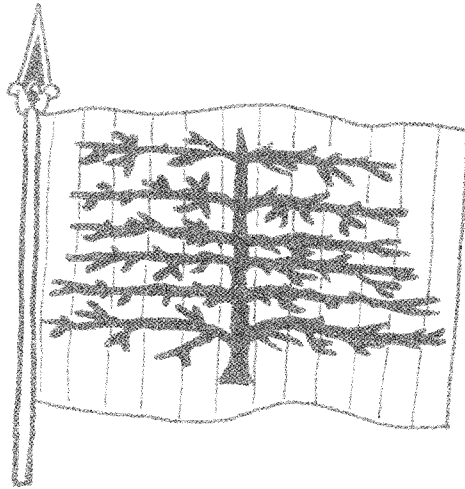
with fur shed by Bengal tigers,
and dust kicked up by African elephants.

Half of my soles were spent around pool tables
and on the lower rungs of barstools in grungy pubs
from New Orleans, Louisiana to King Salmon, Alaska.
There are no cherry red boots for sale in Naugatuck.
I checked.

And I need them for days like today when
I called in sick to work,
whistled to the dog and set out alone just
to hear leaves crunch and to breathe
air crisp with color and chill.
At the trail head I let Ookami off the leash and
she bounded ahead with the joy of being unrestrained.
Contagious joy. I followed her,
to a soft muddy meadow where she was
rolling with glee in a patch of concentrated sunshine.

-Folio

This is my antidote when I fall ill with the darkness of life:
the contrast of bright leaves against blue sky,
the earth springing with color and life
all the while preparing to sleep the winter away.
Remembering past moments of light is weak medicine.
I wear boots to fortify steps out of dark patches
and into the sunshine of muddy meadows,
to seek a place fit for celebrating
the movement of the seasons.



NEED

Daniel Procaccini

You've tapped into my head with thump like bass,
A beating rhythm in my veins is played.
I feel in harmony, I know your ways.
You'll play until my mind begins to fade.

That beat gets more and more odd time lately,
Each moment of the day has lost its flow.
The beat, you see, has lost its grip on me,
And now I feel I will end up alone.

I want your beat, your rhythm to catch hold,
So I can lure the music in me out.
I want to feel your pulse go through my soul,
I want to breathe your air when I'm all out.
I want your touch, but I don't want your scorn,
I want the beat inside me to be born.

BEFORE NOON AFTER NOON

David Ceringlia

sunlight dumped itself mercilessly
into the streets
onto few translucent objections

street vendors acrid with sweat and pork stopped
only for a hot minute
brown from the neck to the middle of the chest
with last week's almost-white
undershirt
underground

subways skirted city legs
past pink faces
blank white eyes

no faster way to move downtown

light rumbles us down the sticky stairs
hand on the banister's been god knows where
fingers finger the gatekeeper's mouth
and manages to make you push past
with your crotch
while still managing to hit your ass on the way through

and promises breathe on the other side

THE REASON WHY I SING

Jessica Gilliam

I stare straight ahead
At the thing I feared most

The man who held me
On his shoulders when I
Couldn't see through a crowd
The man who talked me
To sleep when nighttime
Fear would take over my mind

Now lying there
In his best suit between
The satin trim

A quick glance over
At my mother
Eyes are filled with tears
That mourn the love
That was once her life
She closes her eyes as
They race down her face

Not knowing how I'll
Survive this, I drop my
Chin deep into my chest
Afraid to show my tears

In my second of utter despair
A woman behind me
With a face like mine
Anoints the room with hope
With a song from
Her heart...

He always said I looked
Just like his little sister

Before I can realize
Aunts, uncles, cousins,
And siblings are singing
With joy of "the hem
Of his garment"

Heads that were bowed
In sorrow,
Now raised in unity
To sing towards the
Heavens

That had been
Our family's way

From my left I feel
A bond of sisterly love
As we, too, surrender
In song

Our way of saying goodbye.

FINDING HOPE

Jim Barron

Mel's serene smile couldn't mask the bad news.
You don't live with a woman forty five years
Without learning to read her face.
It all began when her tennis game crumbled,
Playing half a step off pace with a hint of a limp.
She laughed about watching the wrong balls,
But finally acknowledged a painful muscle.
A leg MRI launched a long medical journey.

Turning away from the magnetic monster,
Her jaunty walk belied both verdict and pain.
The facade didn't fool me. I knew we were in trouble.
It was totally in character for her to divine a diagnosis
The technician was professionally obliged to conceal.
Feeling healthy except for a sore leg, she knew it was
Cancer when he asked how long she had been sick.
She kissed me, as a navigator confirms bearings with a sextant.

A kaleidoscope of peril and data whirled into our lives.
Its slashing, staccato beat never left our consciousness.
Three doctors recommended the same oncologist.
He found a small lump high up in her left breast.
The biopsy was positive for breast cancer.
Numerous lymph nodes were involved.
A full body MRI suddenly assumed crucial significance.
All culminating in an expedited treatment plan meeting.

Mel's oncologist presented a whole basket full of bad news.
Metastatic cancer was in the bones of her neck, lower spine,
Ribs and femur. Three spots on her liver were suspect.
A neck brace and a walker were immediately imperative
Until radiation could beat back the cancer's assault,
Lest a jar break vertebrae and sever her spinal cord.

Devastated, we listened to his half of a telephone conversation
While he bartered our lives with the radiation department.

The verbal duel swung back and forth between silence and
frustration.

“I know your schedule is full, but this woman needs immediate
treatment.”

“Appointment protocol is not the issue here, this has the utmost
urgency.”

And in a final burst of emotion, “Damn it, Meyta, do this for me.”
In a few moments he turned back to us with a calm, professional
voice.

“Tomorrow at 1 PM,” is all he said.

We left inexplicably exhilarated by our first victory
And a hope that persisted until forever began, three beautiful years
later.

ELECTRONIC IMPULSES

Amy Ashton Handy

To: The Muse

Cc: story inspired by J.P. and S.B.

Bcc: and the unfortunate third, S.P.

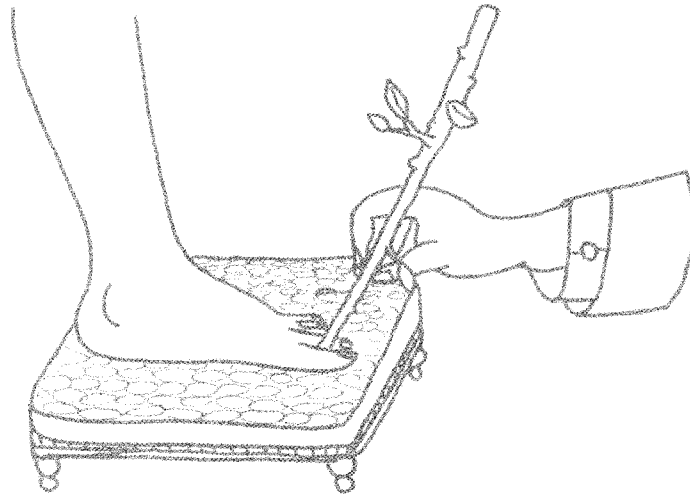
Subject: Just a word (I will not say to you)

Hey you (piece of my living history),
It's been a while (four years, three months, it was a silent
goodbye) and I thought I'd say
"what's up?"
Just wondering (late last night when sane people were
asleep in peace) if you'd kept that
thing I wrote (for you about you to you). Of course
that was long ago (yet
immediate, unfaded, sharp edged) and if you're anything
like me (and you are - it was always our problem) you
threw it out (I know you
wouldn't throw it out, you always loved to
read about yourself).
If not (then I still possess you), will you send it?
I need it for something (although I don't know what.
You and it are relics of childhood;
I am grown) and seem to have lost the original.
I still think
(each time first times are frightening,
when bonfires soar beyond control,
if I enthusiastically abandon sobriety,
closing my eyes, ears tuned to Janis Joplin
Ball and Chain,
at any mention of Amarillo,
because she always comes home
as expected,

-Folio

should people ask me where I'm from)
of you from time to time, so write back (don't
write back, write back, don't write back.).

Take care (make me new),
J.



PAPPY'S GUN

Joy Mlozanowski

On the hottest day of that summer, the one I turned thirteen, my momma came home early from work.

She found me in the corner of my room, crouched on my heels with my gingham jumper pulled tight over my knees. My body was damp and ached all over and Pappy was on the bed. He lay on his side, sprawled away from us, the mattress too small for his long frame. His bare feet dangled over the end wrapped in a rope of sheets and he did not move.

Momma ignored the strangeness of him there, and came to me. She got down on her knees and picked up the warm revolver at my feet. It was Pappy's gun, the one he always carried when he made his rounds through the neighborhood, collecting money.

Momma said, "Tell me..." knowing there was nothing to tell. Then she said, "I know what he's been doin'.... Just 'cause I been mendin' your dresses, doesn't mean I was pretendin' not to know..."

Her words pressed into me like sharp stones. I looked in her eyes, wet and dark, two deep wells of her sorrow. She slipped her warm hand through my hair.

"He promised me, child. He promised me no more... God'll be burnin' me in hell along with him. I should've been knowin' better."

She stood and walked around the bed to Pappy. I knew she could see the way his trousers were left open, his white tee shirt colored rich and heavy with his blood. The bed sheets soaked up what still spilled from his body. She leaned close to his face and held her hand near his mouth. Then she backed away and sat down on the chair by the dresser and stared at him. She wiped the gun clean on the skirt of her dress.

She said, "You listen to your momma, now... you go and wash your hands."

I stared at her, silent, and did not move.

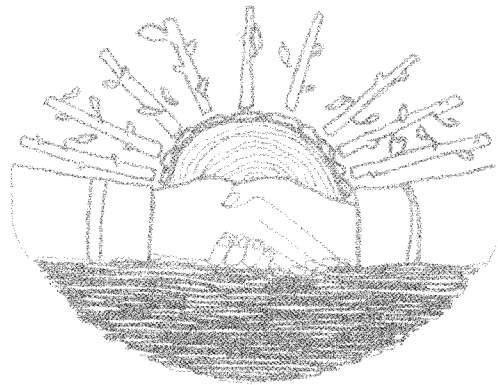
"I mean it. You go wash your hands, girl. Soon the men will be coming and asking all them questions. I'll be answering.. you don't say nothin' unless I tell you."

-Folio

I watched her mouth, trying to understand the words she made. The air between us felt sticky and thick. I pulled back the hem of my dress and unfolded myself from the corner and left.

I stepped into the bathroom and the door of my room clicked shut. The faucet squeaked when I forced it open all the way with my bruised hand. Over the rush of the water in the white basin, the gun spoke one more time.

Then the murmur of my mother's voice came trickling down the hall.



BUS STOP.

Yesod - Fredrick Douglas Knowles

bus stop.

conversations fluid in foreign languages
wounds mended with tissue-made bandages
last minute arrivals to destinations pre-destined

bus stop.

banging with beats of be-bop
a.k.a. hip-hop; doo-rags
and diamond studded chains
“size D...” batteries keep the energy affixed

bus stop.

clouded with black smoke
transits in transience
transmitting a transformation;
ethnicity's from eastern europe to tokyo,
body language fast to slow
hurry quickly catch a lift
not fast enough have to sit...and wait

bus stop.

luke-warm benches, cigarette-butt conventions
all the way from marl-borough to new-port
billboards of big millions
granted to the common civilian,
as a white butterfly breezes by
naked to the common eye,
free of the fee of gravity
a leisure not granted to you or me

so dig deep and pull out that change,
different day but still the same...

bus stop.

HAZARD ON THE GROUND

David M. Pacelli

It squishes between your toes
like a stick of warm butter.
The scent of shit wraps around
your face.

You look down.
Lying in the tall, silky grass,
your footprint is ingrained
in the soft chocolate rock.
Your mom always said never
go out without shoes,
even in the summer.

Now, you stand in the middle
of the park, open space around you.
The sun, a spotlight, pierces
down. Like a man on a nude beach,
you're exposed.

You look around, see if anyone's looking.
You see people walk by, glancing
at you, then back straight ahead. You think
you can see them pick up their pace.
A short kid points at you, then dashes
off. You feel the warm clump sticking.
It feels moldable
like clay. But soon it will be baked
hard; a fossil for all to see.

On your right, sitting on a bench is an old guy
with smoke-colored, sagging skin; he hunches
over a splintering cane. He stares at you
and smiles like he broke wind
without anyone knowing.

WHERE THE FENCE MEETS THE SKY

David Cerniglia

so there it is.
squint and you can almost see it, too
sitting there back against the wall
spine and flesh to the brick
and fence meets thought

it cuts the periphery you only see up
or down
shaping

standing in your place and bending at the dirt
shadows intrude between me and the ground
the sun's not quite right

in April it mocks and in May it mourns

off to your left
red brick and mortar
for your fingers to trace

to your right a fence slinks sad and proud
used to keep dogs and children
from the road

always at the corner
let yourself fall
or caught in the sharp angle's glance

FOR YOU

Spencer Carlson

I'd give you a necklace,
and a giant smile would come over your face.
I'd give you a turtle,
and you'd say thanks,
knowing you'll give it
away in a week.
I'd give you my heart
freshly ripped out of my chest.
You'd say, "Oh how romantic."
I'd give you a grenade,
you'd take the ring shaped pin
and toss the "useless remains"
back at me.
"Throw that out for me," you'd say.
And I'd blow up into pieces.

WAITING FOR THE BUS IN WINTER

Sarah Tamulevich

The cold air at the bus stop is an unforgiving slap
on the face. Next to us, Old Man Winter waits for a bus, too—
he wears a powder blue tuxedo and a paisley cowboy hat.
The bus to Boston will arrive soon and you
will leave me here in the cold, undecided air.
You are standing beside me, but I never know where
you are. The downward turning of your mouth
tells me you don't want to leave, but every Sunday
we find ourselves waiting on this corner.
I steal glances at you, observing the sharp angles
of your jaw line, the long, smooth curve of your nose.
Your forehead wrinkles. You act distracted,
pretending not to notice how hard I try not to cry.
Old Man Winter coughs behind us, says he's feeling
a little loopy, and sits down on the curb. I stare at him,
wondering which bus he waits for, and if he
wishes his girlfriend would leave with him.
A maroon car with a silver streak pulls up and, through
the passenger side window, Mick Jagger reminds me
that I can't always get what I want. I cringe and think
of last night when you told me the same thing.
I don't want to wait here anymore. I want
to climb a tall tree for a while and watch us from above.
You never know what I need, and I refuse to make
it easy for you. The bus arrives. We face each other.
You lean in to kiss me and I taste stale lemonade
on your warm, slippery tongue. I nestle my face
close to your neck and inhale your almond oil aftershave;
the rough collar of your corduroy jacket rubs against my chin.
You whisper that you will be home soon. You wish
that I wouldn't be angry, but I love you too much
not to hate you when you leave. I say nothing.
You turn away, board the bus and wave to me

-Folio

from the window. Someone tugs on my elbow—
Old Man Winter is behind me, a twinkle in his icy blue eyes.
“There can be no love where there is pride,”
he tells me in a raspy voice, and winks before sitting
back down on the curb. The bus pulls away.
The air is still cold, but no longer unforgiving.



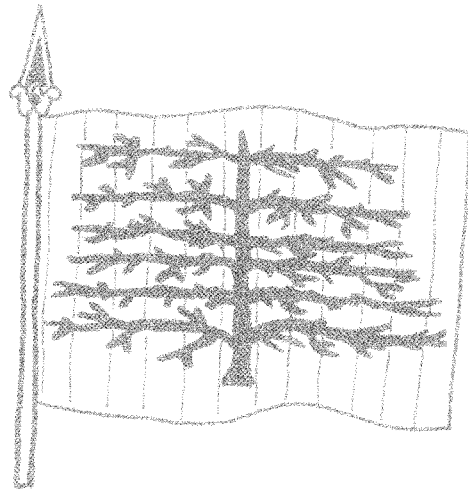
PALANCAR REEF

Laurie Moskal

Sixty feet below the ocean's surface,
Off the coast of Cozumel,
Two scuba divers float effortlessly,
Suspended in time.
Bubbles rise from their regulators
And expand as they travel to the surface.
Their fins move up and down
In slow motion as they traverse the maze
Of tunnels and swim throughs.
I close my eyes,
Plunge with a splash into the glassy
Turquoise green,
And descend to join them.
Sunlight creeps through the cracks and crevasses
Of the huge cavern of rock,
Painting the coral of the reef below
Vibrant reds, yellows and purples
That don't exist naturally in the dry world.
We swim slowly through
This mysterious universe,
Dragging our fingers through the soft,
White sand on the seafloor,
As tiny yellow damselfish
Dart into the gorgonians
To hide from our shadows.
Suddenly the sunlight is blocked
By the dark, massive shape of a manta ray
As it glides overhead like a majestic bird.
We propel ourselves over
The gaping blue mouth
Of a giant clam and point at a spiny lobster
That scuttles backwards out of sight.
A spotted moray

-Folio

Peers out at us from his hole, open-mouthed,
Displaying rows of tiny white teeth.
My heart skips a beat
When I notice a black-tipped reef shark hunting below,
And without thinking
I reach to touch his tale,
A need to make sure that it's real.
His smooth gray skin sweeps my fingertips,
And I catch sight of his green eyes before he fades
Away into the cobalt blue.
They look almost human.



COMING OUT OF OUR COCOONS

Cori Payne

The first time I dropped acid
was in a church bathroom.
We waited until service started
so we could slip out a side
door after and walk home.

Megan's mother let her out only
for school and church,
and to come to my house
Sunday afternoons to study,
i.e. take bong hits, listen to
The Dead and drool over old
pictures of Bobby Weir.

When we got to surrealism
in art history, we really did
study, obsessed with Escher
and Dali. We'd lose ourselves
in the mind-bending, dream
worlds they created.

The second year senior
who sat behind us in class
said that tripping on acid was
like being in a Dali painting.

We didn't see any clocks
dripping, but we giggled
ourselves silly, scrunching
up in balls on the living room
floor and then jumping up,
arms outstretched, saying we
were becoming butterflies.

TRY TO SMILE

Melissa Owen

It is nearing Christmas and I curse myself for wearing my shortest skirt. I swear my panties have icicles hanging from them by this point as I weave in and around the expensively dressed housewives, their shopping bags banging into my hips and legs. I pull my scarf tighter around my mouth and taste its dry, itchy wool. I am still deciding whether I should go through with this.

I met him at the hair salon where I work. I was standing over him, guiding his head into a sink, barely paying attention to the fact that he was young and male, and not only that, but the only young male customer I had in weeks, due to the holidays and all of the old ladies who felt it absolutely necessary to re-perm their crusty old heads. Just as I was about to adjust the water temperature and start spraying, he held up his hand.

“What kind of shampoo do you use here?” he asked.

“Paul Mitchell, do you really care?” I answered and blushed at his big eyes.

“No. What’s your name again?”

“Melly. Melinda, actually. Shouldn’t you already know that? You made the appointment with me,” I said, trying my best to be a bitch.

“Well, actually I just made an appointment for a haircut and I got you. Aren’t I lucky,” he said and rolled his eyes.

And I had laughed just as he had hoped for. He had tried to get me to go out that night, but I told him I had plans and gave him my number instead. It’s been three days and here I am, standing outside of the bar, biting into my thumb nail and deciding if I really want to go in. I look around at the pathetic display of Christmas lights around the City Green and a cold wind shoots up my skirt. I walk inside. The Talking Heads mingles with smoke and what seems like a thousand voices. Jack is sitting on a stool, a beer in front of him, a cigarette dangling from one hand. He is wearing a black button-up shirt with the sleeves rolled to his elbows. The icicles melt into my crotch. I step around guys trying to get into girls’ pants and girls

Owen-

who will later let guys into their pants. Really, I hate bars. If Jack didn't look like he did, I doubt I would be here right now.

"Hey," I say, poking him in the elbow. I force my lips upward.

"Hi," he says. "Find the place okay?"

"Yeah, I do work on the next block over, I'm familiar with the area." Jesus, why does everything I say sound like an insult? I smile wider and choke out a laugh.

"Right," he says. "What could I get you?" He gestures to his beer.

"Uh, whatever." A Valium would be nice. He waves the bartender over, while I glance around, praying I won't recognize anyone. Jack hands me something in a glass, which I bring to my lips and take a huge gulp of, not caring about taste or ladylike manners. He smiles at me, appreciating my unabashed behavior. I finish the entire glass before I even find out where he lives or what he does. He orders me another, thinking I liked the first one. I didn't but I drink the next one with the same enthusiastic chug.

"So, do you live alone?" he asks.

"Yeah, I have an apartment not too far from here. Thank God for outrageously expensive haircuts, huh?" I laugh. He smiles with his lips together. I blink at the nausea starting to flower inside me. He orders me a beer and eyes the slit of skin exposed above the top of my skirt. I pull my coat around me with one hand as I hold the bottle to my lips with my other hand.

"So Melly, what do you usually do for fun?" I notice that he is starting to sway.

"Not this," I manage to say before I start to feel a rising in my throat. I turn and run for the bathroom, bumping into a million sweaty bodies, screaming conversations. I throw open the door and bolt for the first empty stall. I throw up with such force that some shoots outward instead of down. I keep puking until I collapse. My head feels light and empty.

After awhile, I don't even mind the smell. The toilet looms over me, rimmed in brown and I know that my insides are soaking in the bowl. I am slumped over in the corner of the filthy stall and I start thinking. The bathroom door swings open but I don't move.

I am sure that on the other side green and black and pink shoes with pointed toes are dancing. And lipstick is being reapplied to

puckered lips. I know that hair is being tousled and I don't care. My hair, dyed black with French girl bangs, hangs in my face. I can feel the wet strands on my cheek. I wish someone were here to hold it back for me. I am sure that Jack would have, but I am also sure that if I had stayed with him, dancing and drinking, he would have tried to fuck me. Not in this club or in this bathroom, but later when I was too drunk to give a damn.

My clothes would have disappeared piece by piece and my face would have been touched, as if to give the illusion that he loved me and I would have let it happen. My head would have felt too heavy and my arms would have been dead at my sides. I would have just laid there and worried about bleeding and getting pregnant, not the fact that I was not conscious enough to tell him that I wanted him. Which I didn't, despite the warmth I felt between my legs every time he smiled.

I look up, my eyes opening as if a spotlight is beaming down on me. Pain rips across the back of my eyes and I think of stars and how they are nothing special. Most of the shoes have vanished. Back to dancing and showing off their cute skirts and kissing skills. I don't like kissing much. It's too close, too startling to open your eyes and find that some stranger is connected to you. There is too much tongue and teeth and stomach juice escaping into my mouth. I glance down at myself. An orange-brown stain on the collar of my shirt peeks up at me. My skirt is hiked up and my ass is starting to feel numb. My left Mary Jane is hanging off my big toe. I should probably get off this piss-stained floor and wash my face, rinse my mouth out and try to smile. Jack is still out there, maybe meeting a new girl, buying her a shot, smiling. Or maybe he is waiting for me, concerned and wondering.

When he had called me earlier in the day, I had agreed to meet him without my usual hemming and hawing. It was one of those moments where you realize that you are nothing and you need to start being something before you are dead and it's too late. Or maybe it was more than that. I knew that I had potential for meeting some sort of euphoria at some point in my life. I guess I thought that maybe Jack would be that one, the one to kiss me and everything would make sense.

I turn my head on the stall door, so that my face is pressed against

Owen-

the cold metal. My eyes roll up and I notice that someone has written "I Love Sam" in red marker. I laugh to myself, thinking I will never be that pathetic. Balancing my hand on the toilet seat, I stagger to my feet. My head is spinning and I realize I have to get out of here. I place my foot on the toilet handle and push down, almost toppling over. I try not to look at the mess swirling down the drain.

I slide the bolt and touch the door with my fingertips, lightly so as not to make a grand entrance with puke dribbling down my chin and my skirt twisted to the side. But I am safe; no one is primping in front of the wall of mirrors. I step over to a sink and let the water run over my hands. I cup them and drink big gulps, splashing my face in the process. I look into the mirror, my eyes widening. I have black circles under my eyes, an almost blueness to my skin and a big green snot dripping from my nose. Through my vomit haze, I realize something else. I have to get out of here without anyone seeing me.

I turn to my right to examine the small window that is set high in the wall. There is just a screen covering the window. I picture it in my head. Step onto that last sink, hoist myself up, knock the screen out, and squeeze through. I lift my leg onto the lip of the sink and then stop. I smile, dig around in my bag for a tissue and a cigarette. I clean my face carefully. I light my cigarette and lean against the sink, take a few drags. Those fucking pretty-eyed ones. All they have to do is look at you and you want to trust them. I stub my cigarette out in the sink and leave the butt there. I walk over to the door, wobbling a little and laughing at myself. I walk out of the bathroom, past the bar, never looking, just keep walking. I step out onto the sidewalk and stop to calm my dizzying head. I wait a couple of minutes, give him a chance to burst through the door, and demand to know what is going on. But he never comes out and I just keep going, steadying myself against the passing buildings, the cold air buzzing in my ears.

SUNSET IN MAINE

Spencer Carlson

The unpeeled orange fell from sight.
I had to snap my fingers to turn on the stars,
so I could see the full detail
whom I was thrusting into.
We will have no recollection
of how we got to where we are,
only the sex on the beach
we each guzzled down would be saved,
in our own intoxication.
From this night we will know love
and it will bring us to marriage.
I love her, and so she loves me,
Ipso Facto.
Even though Samantha Wethers
didn't seem as enthralled in the moment,
I knew there was no other place
she would want to be.
She had to be feeling the same
orgasmic rush I was,
screwing on the beach
of this lake in Aurora, Maine.
I felt the sounds of the party in the cabin
slapping us in the face,
telling us to wrap it up, before we sober up.
It hurt to realize that our love would end
with the lowering of our blood alcohol level.
Both beginning to notice our imperfections,
I realized her nose was as large as what was once erect
and she roared a giggle at that twig lying within my forest.
Mr. High-Five tried to hide,
being told how ridiculous it was.
As I stood up away from her,
the smell of strawberries in her hair turned

Carlson-

into a thick pine from the woods close by.
I looked into them and saw the cabin
bouncing to the dance music
and breathing out light.
The trees mocked us,
grunting and moaning
as we walked towards the party.
Covering up the joy marks I gave her, with makeup,
she made herself look more presentable
so that I would maybe leave with her tonight.
And she sighed and shook her head looking at me
in fear that I would find someone else later.
The grunts weren't really mocking us, though,
it was just the wind whistling
at the girl's great strides.
Or possibly glancing at her soft bombs.
Because of her largeness,
I was beginning to be attracted once again.
In certain areas.
Quickly I grabbed her soft hand
and turned her around.
Leaning in against Samantha's
smooth lips,
my tongue met the
minty freshness of her chewing gum.
I wanted that bangin' girl to know
that I'd take a ride on her anytime.
But the bad connection of feelings
caused her hand to be swung
into my face.
And this time after some words,
she snapped her fingers
to turn on my stars.

BEAUTIFUL

Michelle Repass - Second Place Poetry

I will tell you to slow down.
Wait.
Don't grow up too fast.
Someday, you'll miss this.
But you will not listen to me.
You will not believe me
As your eyes remain fixed
On my grown-up hands
Which hurriedly apply sparkling blue eye shadow
And bright red lipstick.
I will tell you that you do not need makeup.
That your face is natural and fresh
With light freckles sprinkled across your nose
Under big round crystal balls for eyes.
But you will not believe me.
You are eager for the vibrant flare of color,
The bubblegum lipstick and rose blush,
The creamy glosses and crushed powder shadows,
To steal away boys' attention
From the younger version of yourself.
I will try to sell you the cliche
That true beauty is found only within,
That consumption with the physical appearance
Will rot you from the inside out
And obsession with the approval of others
Leaves you constantly searching for victory
In an unwinnable battle.
I will tell you that the most beautiful woman you can be
Is one who believes in her mind, body and spirit.
But you will not believe me.
Just like I did not believe my mother
Until I saw it with my own two beautiful eyes.
She wished with all of her beautiful heart

Repass-

That she could make me see what she saw.
And I wish the same for you.
And I know you will not listen.
But I will try and tell you.





James Humbert

Pretty Face

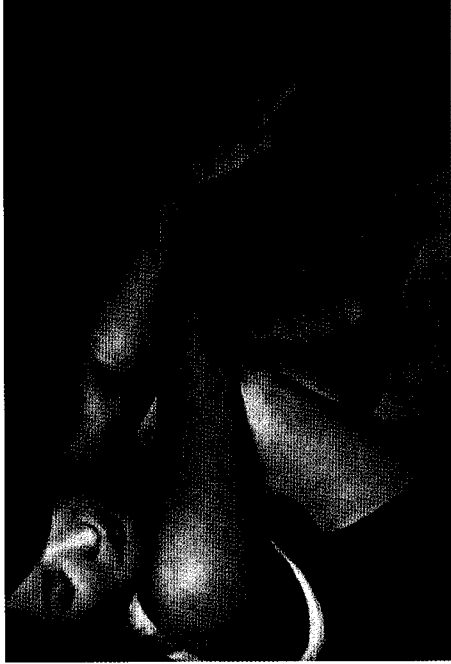
Watercolor



Veronica Cianfrano

**American
Family**
Oil

Second Place



Shizuka Shibata

My Confusion
Pastel



Noelle Weimann

Nicodemus

Oil on Masonite

First Place



Ashley Thomas

Untitled

Acrylic



Michael Anderson

Untitled

Stainless Steel & Stone

Third Place



Ayube "UB" Balweel

Untitled

Photography



Amy Richardson
Blue Bowl
Blown Glass



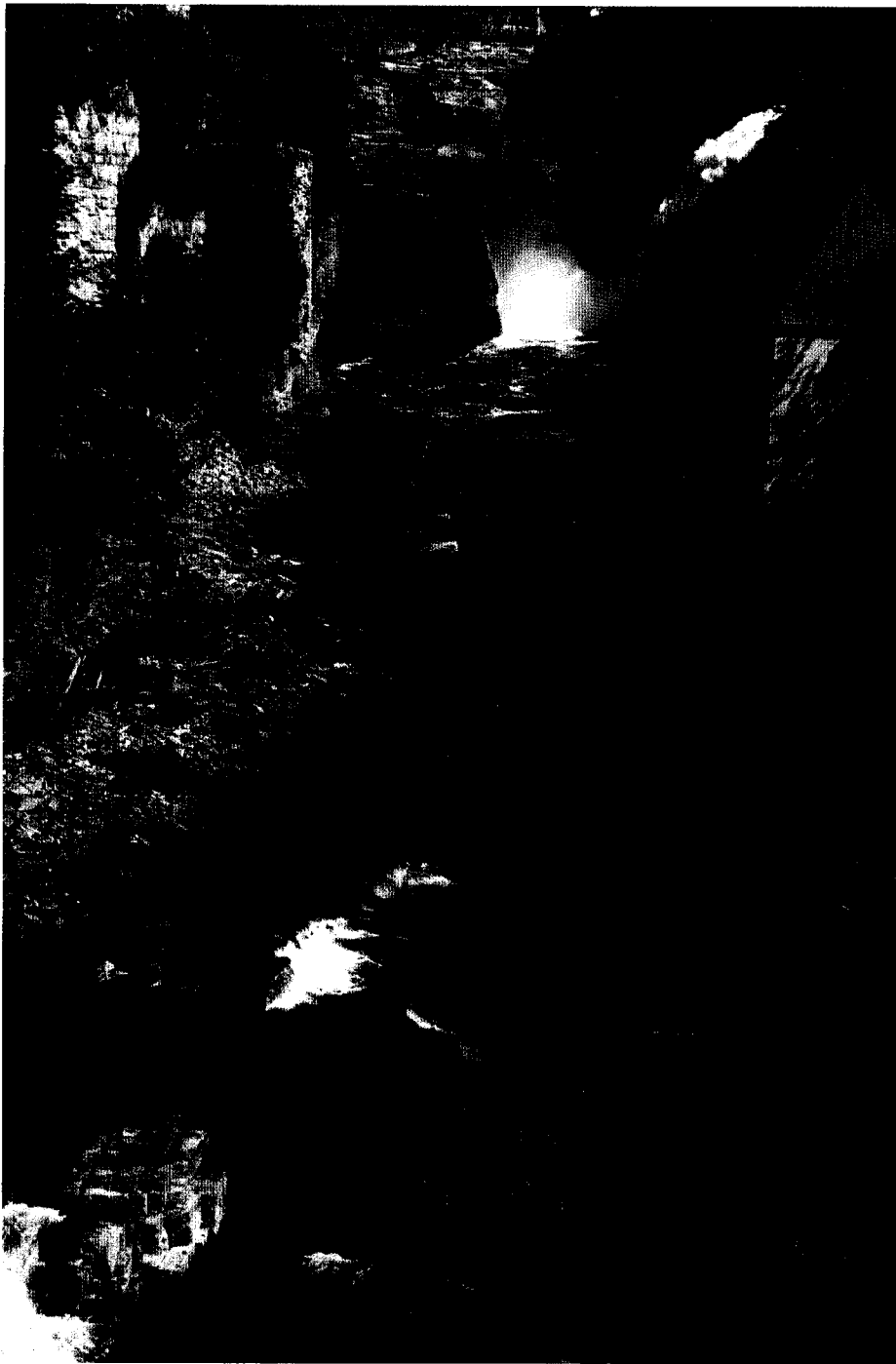
Michael Donovan
Integument
Steel & Canvas



Ayube "UB" Balweel

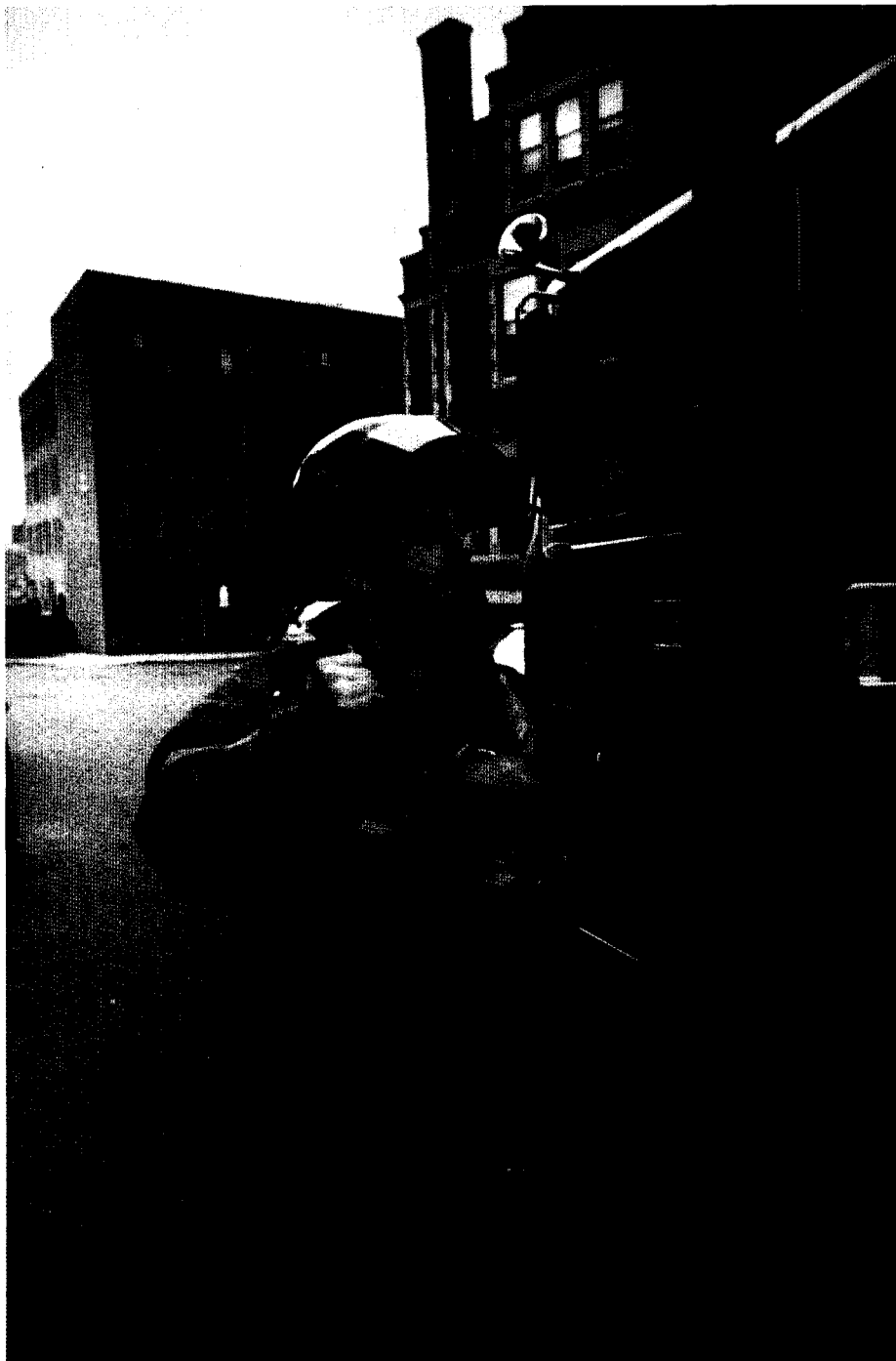
Untitled

Photography



Matthew Perkins

Ausable
Photography



Ayube "UB" Balweel

Untitled

Photography



Chris Martineau

**View From Artroom
Window at Start of
Construction**

Oil on Canvas



Bonnie Bello
Windows
Pencil



Matthew
Perkins

Autumn
at Jones
Farm

Photography



Amy Richardson

Blue Bowl

Ceramic

MIXED MESSAGES

Cori Payne

I overheard you earlier
At the bar, telling a friend
You're happy being single,
The whole while keeping
An eye on every guy
Who talked to me.

It's nearly 3 AM now,
I watch you sleep
Next to me
Face squished against
Your pillow, mouth ajar
Emitting short bursts of air.

Tattooed muscles bulging
Out of one of your trademark
Orange skater tee shirts,
Arm draped casually
Around my waist;
Too casually.

I wonder why
You've never tried to kiss me,
Or tried anything else.
For two months now,
You've seen me every day, always ask
Me to stay, but like it doesn't matter if I
Do or Don't.

In the morning
When I try to leave
You pull me back to bed,
Holding me against you
Saying it's too early
To wake up.

CAPTURE MY WORDS, FILL MY CANVAS

Kristen Greger

Skimming the edge of low passing clouds,
View temporarily obscured ahead.
Wet droplets gather on tired wings
Weighing the bird of prey down as each moment passes.
Burdened, heavy, and hungry for more...

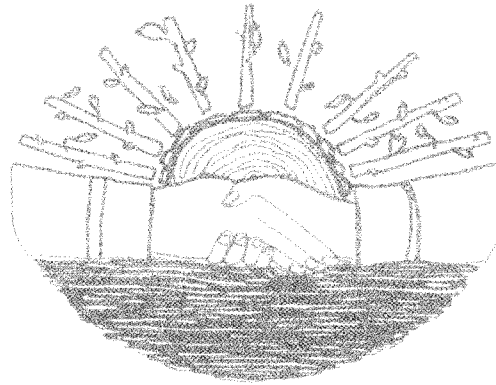
Popping little whiskers above ground,
Feeling for safety, for anonymity.
Eyes lifting above ground level,
Scanning the skies for an unseen predator.
Afraid, crazed, and in need of an escape...

A slight discrepancy in the terrain!
Heightened sense of life in the peripheral,
Lightening fast reflexes to catch
The elusive, fleeting gray spot.
Desperate, grasping, and unfathomably sharp...

Paralyzed in the shadow of impending capture,
Swift movement, but far too late.
In the mouth of the burdened conqueror,
Struggling will do no good.
Defeated, with no chance of fleeing to the dark recesses...

For a moment there is nothing to think of.
Just the dream of flying realized.
No more fear, just freedom in the last moments of life.
The grips loosens and Oh!
Falling, floating, and impact that spreads life across a blank canvas...

The hawk is my pen.
The mouse is my subconscious.
Hungry, the hawk stalks for sustenance – words on a page.
Caught on a chance and broadened for the world to experience,
The mouse is no longer hidden.
Writing, slaving, strewn across a vacant expanse for you to see.



FREE

Michelle Repass

I need to have the leisure to be free,
And face no judgement when I speak my mind.
I cannot stand rejection I may see,
Because the words I cannot seem to find.

If there is pressure laid upon my back,
And I am not allowed to run my course,
I will respond by getting far off track,
When giving up ideas that come from force.

So keep in mind when looking for my thoughts,
They won't fit in a strict or structured mold.
And what's inside my heart cannot be bought,
And what's inside my head cannot be sold.

And so it goes when I must bear the curse,
I can't write poems except when in free verse.

NUTS

Anthony Brano - First Place Fiction

“Don Sanchez is the world’s greatest bull rider, hands down, I said.”

“Bullshit, he said.”

I sat at the kitchen table with my father, the two of us gulping down vast quantities of blood red Vino Robusto. It was almost two in the morning, and what started as a respectful visit to my father’s house had turned into a drinking match. He sat across from me, but not facing me. He crossed his leg and looked at me over his shoulder, the way he always did when he disagreed. His lazy eye drooped at me, the collection of eye guck at the tear duct daring me to continue my defiance.

“Dad, Sanchez has all the records, nobody can touch him, I said.”

“You don’t understand nothing, Paul. Lane Frost put up 92 points on Duke, something nobody has ever done. Most men couldn’t even ride Duke, you know why?”

“Yeah but-“

“Because Duke was a dirty son of a bitch. Nothing meaner than a bull with a torsion, kid.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Makes the bull mean. Twist his nuts, and he goes nuts. And Duke was a mean son of a bitch. I saw him gore a man clean through when I was passing through Braddock County.”

He must have felt secure in his own person, knowing that there were still places in America where people used animals as playthings. In fact, at that table, at that moment, I believed he was defending that way of life from my intrusion. I, my father’s son, who respected the land as much as he, could not possibly know anything about bull-riding.

“Dad I think you have to assign a value to a man by analyzing the component parts that make him great.”

“Now what the fuck is that supposed to mean? You can judge a man on a single action. Lane Frost is the greatest because he did what no other man could do, and that’s it. He fought nature head

Brano-

on. And he didn't need any machine to prove anything."

My father had a thing against technology, a real Luddite. I think he'd prefer if we all just galloped around on horses and ate our food raw. But that comment had less to do with technology than his disagreement with me had to do with bull-riding scores. Point in fact, we argued over everything. Any opportunity my father had, he'd try and dress me down. He stuck in the shot about technology because I had recently bought a motorcycle. My father hated that bike. It was a black Harley Davidson full dresser. The bike said 'screw tradition,' and my father hated that too.

"Fine. Let's say you do judge a man by, what'd you say, his components? Then you're a regular asshole for riding that bike. There's nothing noble in riding a bike."

"But I only ride it every once in a while."

"Why do you need that thing, anyway? You're not proving anything by riding. Knowing you, you'll just get yourself crippled."

"It's not a competition. I ride because of the emotional high. It's exhilarating. It's feeling the wind in your face and knowing you control all that power. Dad, there's nothing else quite like it."

"That's just it, you control the power. When you ride a bull, you can't control him, he controls you. You don't have to pay ten thousand dollars to ride a bull either."

"Yeah, but I also don't have to abuse an animal's body to ride my bike."

I usually wasn't that aggressive with my father. Most of the time I let his jabs roll off me, and sometimes I didn't even respond. But I was proud of my bike. I was proud of the fact that I had canned olives for three years to save the money while attending school. But my father didn't care. There was no competition, no glory in riding the bike, so he deemed it superfluous.

"Don't get smart with me. To that bull it 'ain't abuse. The bull is what they call a confrontational animal. That's because he was bred that way. Thousands of years ago, the fucking cave men did that kind of shit. Bet you won't read that in any books. What you don't understand is, the bull lives for that fight. That's the only time he and men are on the same playing field."

"But--"

"That's enough talk about the bike. You're a man now, and you're

going to ride it, and that's that. Besides ... I don't think your mother would have approved."

My mother died the year before, and ever since it became my father's bargaining chip, his trump card. Whenever he went on the defensive, he'd drop mom onto the table, because he knew I'd shut my mouth. But that night was different. My mother was proud that I was saving my money, that I had a goal. And I wasn't going to let him rob me of that memory by using her death as part of his argument.

"Don't bring mom into this, it's not right."

"Don't tell me what's right, boy. I loved your mom too."

A stalemate. We each grabbed for the half empty bottle, but his hands clutched it first—he was always faster, even in old age. He splashed wine all over the front of his shirt and managed to even get some in his glass. Then he slammed the bottle onto the table, instructing me to match his glass. I coddled that bottle, wondering why my father always had to compete with me. He even competed in mourning. Sick. He never stood next to me. I always stood in the darkness of his shadow. Not that night. I poured the remaining wine into my glass, little crimson dribblets raining onto the kitchen table. I gulped, forcing another mouthful of wine into my stomach. This was it.

"Dad, I got a book that says Sanchez rode Thunderbolt, a bull you know is just as dangerous as Duke, for 95 points."

"Oh you do, do you? Here comes the big college man with his books again."

"What do you want to bet me? I asked."

My father backhanded the bottle of wine and it crashed against the brick façade of the kitchen. His teeth clenched together and his nostrils looked like big bottomless pits.

"I'll bet you your bike that that frigging book is wrong."

I jumped to my feet and the back of my chair smacked against the wall behind me. He retorted by stumbling to a standing position and tossing his chair into the bile-colored kitchen cabinets. I didn't even bother to ask what he'd bet against the bike. I was just happy I had thought of my own trump card. I didn't need his money. I just wanted him to respect me.

"We're goin' to your house right the fuck now for that book, then

Brano-

I'm gonna take your bike. Don't you welsh either, not like a coward like you usually are, he said."

There are two kinds of drunks, the happy ones you laughed at and the mean ones you tried to avoid. My father was the mean kind. His judgment never got impaired, but the alcohol twisted his anger dial to maximum. I followed him as we bumbled through the kitchen and out the front porch, the screen door clacking against the door trim as we exited. I walked to the driver side of my pick-up truck but my father pushed me aside.

"I'm driving. Knowing you, you'll drive around in circles all night to keep me from your bike, he said."

I had to leave the keys in the ignition. He slammed the door shut and turned the key. The truck rumbled to life and just as one of my ass cheeks touched the passenger seat, he hit the gas. He backed up and glass shattered as he smacked my rear end into something in the dark. The truck lurched forward and I slammed my knee into the glove compartment, but it didn't really hurt because I was drunk. The door latched half shut and we were on the road. He swerved around the empty road, the yellow streams from the head lights the only thing in sight.

"I don't need any book. I've seen 'em all kid, and I know what's what."

His speech slurred and he belched a sour grape-tasting burp in my direction. He straddled the steering wheel between his knees and thrust his hands into his jacket pockets, fumbling around for a cigarette and lighter.

"Gimme a light, he shouted."

He leaned over and used the muscles in his mouth to point the cigarette in my direction. His mouth made a hybrid grimace-smile that I hated. I lit myself an old butt I had in my shirt pocket and raised the flame to his face. The fire illuminated two black eyes, but instead of accepting my help, he snatched the Zippo, lit the cigarette himself and stuck the lighter in his pocket. That's how it always happened. He'd claim he needed a light and then he'd just take mine. He must have had dozens of my lighters. The two of us sat mulling over the bull riders, plumes of smoke billowing out the windows of the truck. My head ached from the wine and the wind from the windows seemed to tunnel straight into my ears. My eyes focused

on the speedometer, which read over 85, or thereabouts. My father squeezed the steering wheel, probably imagining it was my neck. Why was he always so angry with me?

The truck clipped an aluminum trash can, and my father veered around the centerline. My heart began racing like the engine of the truck. I didn't give a shit about bull-riding anyway, but it wasn't about bull-riding or motorcycles or books. It was about pride, and control. I tried to control the situation with my logic and books. I had to argue with him over a motorcycle he was probably jealous of not owning himself, and it hurt his pride. What about my pride? I stared at the side of his blocky head, a silhouette in the night, and wished I wasn't there.

We turned wide onto my street, which was in the old Italian section of town. The houses were all three stories high and close together; you could open a window and pluck bread right out of your neighbor's kitchen. This was father's old neighborhood, before he moved to the country.

We neared the front of my house and he didn't slow down. Instead he plowed over my mailbox as if on purpose. He put the truck in park and got out. I followed and slammed my door.

"Go get your book, professor."

He always called me that when I tried to act smart. I unlocked the door to my house quietly. Old Teresa Gespario, our auntie, lived upstairs. I felt around in the dark for my light switch, clicked it on and consulted my bookshelf. I pulled books down off the shelf, shifted some over and tossed others to the floor. I found the book and flipped to page fifty four.

"Fuck!"

Sanchez had only tallied 85. I wiped the beads of sweat off my forehead and looked around the apartment, as if the solution would be under the heaps of dirty laundry and empty cans. I wanted my mother. I wanted to be held by her so she could tell me it was okay to make mistakes. She always knew how to handle him in these situations. The situations where he won and made the world know it. I returned with the book. I'd tried to take him to my own playing field, but it didn't matter. The whole thing was silly.

"Dad--"

"Gimme the book!"

Branco-

He ripped the pages from my hand and squinted in the moonlight.

“85, he said.”

“Look, I made a mistake. Let’s forget the whole thing.” I pleaded with him. I just wanted him to leave.

“Fucking welsher, there’s no such thing as mistakes, he said.”

He already had my bike rolled out of the garage. I rested my palm apologetically on the handle bar but he pushed it away.

“Wait a minute.” I said.

He grabbed the bike by the fork and rear tire, and muscled it onto the bed of my truck. The paint chipped and the chrome scuffed, and metal rubbing against metal made my ears ping. I wanted to reach out to him so I put my hand on his shoulder. He elbowed me in the ribs. I’d had enough. I decided then to throw hands with my father. I was much younger. I danced around like on TV and caught him above the eye. He shrugged off the blow and landed his own to my head. His fist, forearm, and elbow scraped across my head in one piston-like motion. We battled in the street, inebriated as all hell. I fought hard but it didn’t matter. He was still too big, too mean. I attempted a shoulder tackle, but he kneed me in the jaw. Blood and spit spewed out my mouth and nostrils, and he kicked me in the balls. I fell to the ground and his shadow again stood over me.

“I’ll always be in the right, boy. You’ll never whip me.”

Then he punted me in the ribs for good measure and I groaned like a child.

“For heaven’s sake, what’s going on down there?”

Old Teresa stood on her second floor balcony with a lamp in her hand and a dumb-founded look on her wrinkled face. My father clenched his fists and scowled up at her.

“Get the fuck back in the house, Aunt Teresa, and mind your own goddamned business.”

Odd lights from the neighborhood windows lit, and dogs howled in the distance. Fuck her for getting involved, and fuck him for being so rude. I perched up onto my knees and told him to let her alone. He didn’t even hit me. He just stuck his big hand in my face and pushed me back to the ground.

“This bike is too dangerous, kid. Come by and pick your truck up when you’re thinking straight.”

He got into my truck and sped off with my bike. I at once hoped he'd wrap himself around a telephone pole and do the world a favor. But at the same time I hoped he'd make it home alright. I lay outstretched on my lawn, my pride bleeding more than my face. He was right. The bike was dangerous—that's why I seldom rode it.

The next morning I called over his house to see if everything was okay. My sister answered and told me how dad and I smashed into her boyfriend's car. She told me his name was Bob. I asked if Bob were mad and she said no. I told her good because if he were, dad and I would have to go and smash the rest of it. I asked for him, but I knew he wouldn't get on the phone. He hated telephones. I latched the handset back onto the receiver and sat on my couch. My eyes hurt because of the swelling and I laughed to myself. I opened the bull-riding book and began to memorize statistics.

I LOVE TO HATE YOU

Cori Payne

The more I see you, the less I like you,
your voice grates on my nerves.
I can't stop thinking about pressing
my curves against your body.

The more I see you, the more you irritate me,
forcing unsolicited opinions on everyone.
I want to run my tongue down your neck,
slip it in your mouth to shut you up.

If I see you anymore I may have to push
your mute button, or turn the volume
down so I can turn you on.

THE SHORE

Alexander Kearney

I walk and walk along the shore that is
Another home to me. I breathe the air
That is so pure and fresh. I see the fizz
Wash in from crashing waves that are so rare.

The beach, it is unique in every way.
While strong in wind and waves, there's dunes and sand;
In spots it's smooth, in spots it's not. Today
I'll stroll where the ocean meets the land.

My feet are damp and softened by the wet
Floor that is sinking beneath me. I note
The roaring sea, as it rolls on by set.
I find and toss a shell that will not float.

The beach goes on and on 'til out of sight.
It's calm and it's not. It just feels so right.

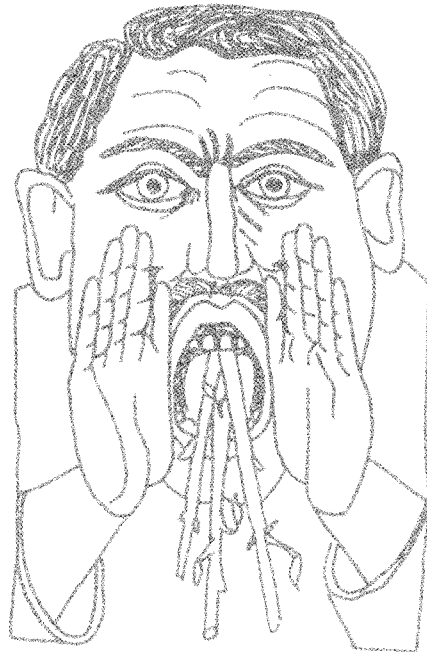
BLINDFOLDS

Tracy Fiderio

The word lesbian is not mentioned
in front of Aunt Tanya. It's that unspoken
rule no one dares to break, fearing the awkward
silence sure to follow. I asked my mom
if she approves of Aunt Tanya's lifestyle.
Her teeth clenched. She looked at me
blankly, I have no idea what you're
talking about. During a night out
with my grandma, we see two women alone
together at the theater. Afterwards, my grandmother
icily remarks, Lesbians are becoming quite
the epidemic these days. My mother nods
in agreement, and I want to rip
her hair out. Squirming in my seat, I wonder
if they can be so ignorant. I hold back
the words that threaten to rip apart the façade
my grandmother loves to play
with poor Aunt Tanya who never
found a man to love.

I wonder if they think that makes
it easier for Aunt Tanya, blinding themselves
to her wounded looks at family functions
when all the couples get to pose
all cutesy, cheeks squished
together in glee. I want to stand up
at the dinner table and shout to the ceiling,
My aunt is a lesbian, and it's ok.
But I can imagine the daggers
that would shoot from my mother's
eyes like I was exposing this
unimaginable secret. Maybe if they
all walk around in blindfolds life

will pass by, and they won't have to deal with the awkward uneasiness of Aunt Tanya being a lesbian. But I don't want to be the one to crumble down the fantasy 25 years in the making. Hopefully, one day the blindfolds will get dusty and they'll get sick of the stale scent and take them off, letting their eyes adjust to the sunlight.



BURIAL

Joy Mlozanowski

Let me lie down
in the warm cradle
of dark, sweet earth
like the ripe bulb
of some fantastic flower
that will push up
open-faced and ready
in tomorrow's sun—
I am ready
to have the flesh
of my body return
to every element of
its ancient beginning,
not burned,
not preserved,
but whole
within the mothering clay
meant to enfold it,
and my bloom
will push up
open-faced and ready
for tomorrow's sun.

I SUPPOSE I WASN'T CRAZY AFTER ALL

Jennifer Soboleski

I wonder to myself, could life ever be sane again?

—The Smiths, “Panic”

I punched the paper-thin pillows in an attempt to fluff them before I lay down on the springless mattress. The thin sheet did nothing to block out the chill of the room. Marisol sat on her bed opposite me, taking her hair down and retying it into a ponytail.

“So what did you do?” she asked. Her brown legs dangled above the shoddy grey linoleum.

I shrugged my shoulders a little bit, embarrassed. “I made an attempt to attempt to kill myself,” I replied quietly. I began to clean the dirt out from underneath my fingernails with my teeth.

“What?” She laughed, large gaps showing between her teeth. “How do you attempt to attempt to kill yourself? I never heard that one before. You either did or you didn’t.”

“Well,” I sat up. “I went into the bathroom at school to slit my wrists, but I didn’t have anything sharp on me. So I tried breaking the mirror in my compact, but this girl came in to smoke a cigarette so I didn’t get the chance.” We looked at each other for a moment, and I shrugged. “I thought I was losing my mind. I went to guidance and said I needed help, so they called my parents and told them to send me here to get evaluated.”

“Yo, that sucks.” Marisol shook her head. “Most of the kids in here are really fucked up. I knew you were different. You’re too quiet.” She laughed and I smiled at her. “You think you’re gonna be okay?”

I shrugged again. “I hope so. I’m just scared, I guess. I don’t even know why I did it. Just... I don’t know.” I bit one of my cuticles and looked up at her. “Why are you here?”

“Shit,” she crossed her legs Indian-style, on the bed. “See these scars?” She held out her arms so I could see them. Long, crooked lines snaked up her inner forearms to her elbows.

“Jesus Christ,” I whispered under my breath. “What happened?”

Soboleski-

“Got caught fucking my boyfriend,” she replied, matter-of-factly. “My mom came home early when we were fucking on her bed. He tried hiding when she came in, but she found him and threw his ass out and told me I couldn’t see him anymore. My sister was giving me shit about it, so I went into the kitchen and got a knife. Then I locked the bathroom door and ran my wrists under the water. Then it was slice slice, you know?”

I winced. “Why...? I mean, Jesus. That’s horrible.”

“My mom broke the door down to get me,” she shook her head. “She’s a nurse, so she just wrapped my arms up and got me here. Yo, they didn’t even give me nothing when they were stitching me up. Just made me lay there, bleeding all over the place.”

“Is he even worth it?” It was one thing to want to die for your own sanity, but to do it for someone else was something I couldn’t imagine.

“Hell yeah!” She grinned. “Son of a bitch is fucking huge!” I imagined Marisol, her gappy grin and upturned nose fucking the image of her boyfriend I had in my head. I immediately blocked it out.

I sat up and rubbed my head. “I’m going to go out in the common room. This bed is so uncomfortable.”

“Whatever,” she said, getting up. “Gonna take a shower anyway.”

I walked into the common room. The blaring fluorescent lights were in stark contrast with the pitch black sky outside. I sat on one of the maroon couches and looked at the blank television screen. What was I doing here?

Another patient came in. I remembered him from the group meeting we had after dinner. I decided early on I didn’t like him very much when he had mouthed off to a nurse and kicked another patient.

“Hey, no TV after nine,” he smirked at me and sat down in an armchair.

“Wasn’t planning on watching it,” I said as I curled into the seat.

“Who you bunking with?” He bent over in the chair, resting his elbows on his knees, and began gnawing at his thumbnail.

“Marisol.”

“She’s something, huh?” He snorted and shook his head.

“What do you mean?”

“She tell you why she’s here?” His eyes widened.

“Yeah. Her wrists.” I pictured the scars, like train tracks, zigzagging up her arms.

“That’s part of it.” He looked around the room. “The bitch is only thirteen.”

“Are you serious?” She had never mentioned her age, but I knew she was young.

“Yeah,” he replied. “And the boyfriend? Twice that and married.”

I stared at him in the harsh light. “I had no idea...”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “She’s a fucking slut. Thinks she runs the place cause she’s been here a long time, too.” He pointed at me. “Don’t let her give you any shit.”

“I won’t.” His gaze made me nervous. He was young, too. Maybe fifteen? “Why did you kick that girl tonight?”

“Who, Helen?” He rubbed his hands together. “She’s a fat bitch. Chased her parents around the house with a butcher knife. That’s what she’s doing here. You can’t mention it to her, though. She’ll go fucking crazy.”

“I’ll remember that,” I nodded. I couldn’t imagine saying anything to her, anyway. She had bitten two orderlies after dinner when they wouldn’t bring her another Jell-O cup.

“You know something? You’re too fucking normal to be in here.” He stood up and began pacing the room in front of the TV. “Why the fuck are you here, anyway?”

I shrugged. “Just depressed.”

He stopped pacing. “Shit. Why they got you in with the kids? You look older.”

“I’m seventeen.”

“Oh, you’ll be out of here after tonight. They probably just didn’t know where the hell to put you since you’re almost an adult. Hey, you get your vitals done yet?”

I nodded. “Someone started screaming and the doctor and nurse had to leave for a few minutes.” It had scared the shit out of me, but I tried not to let on.

“You know why?” He smiled. “They bring you down where the real nuts are when they check vitals. Fuckin’ loony bin. Vietnam vets and shit, schizos. Try to scare you into getting straight.”

I stood up and stretched my arms out in front of me. “I’m going to go lay down. Good talking to you.”

Soboleski-

“See you,” he nodded in my direction as he turned the TV on.

Marisol was towel-drying her hair when I came back into the room. “Nurse came around.” She nodded to the nightstand. “Left those pills for you. They’ll help you sleep.”

I picked up the little paper cup and took out the pills. I popped them into my mouth and drank them with the small cup of water that had been left with them. “I hope they work. These beds suck.”

Marisol threw the towel on the floor and tossed her long, brown hair over her shoulder before putting it in a ponytail again. “Yeah. No wire springs. One less way to kill yourself.” She smirked. “If you’re here long enough, you can find a million ways to do it though. Mirror in the bathroom, shower door, metal covers on the wheels to the bed. Shit, you could hang yourself with the blankets. Have to tie them to a doorknob or something so you’d be sitting there a while, but it would get the job done.”

I looked around the little room before lying down and pulling up the covers. Marisol turned off the lights and got into her bed. I listened to her breathing for a few minutes.

“Marisol?” I whispered.

“Yeah?”

“Did it hurt? When you cut yourself?”

“Not really. The water takes away the sting.”

“Oh,” I didn’t know what else to say. “Well, goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” I heard her shift in bed.

For the first time since that morning, I felt really alone. I thought about what made me want to hurt myself. It was nothing, really. Just a feeling in my chest. I just didn’t want to feel it anymore. There was really no reason. I hadn’t carved lines on my wrists with a knife or tried to kill my parents. I hadn’t really done anything. But I was still here. And the room was getting colder.

STALE

Michael Rayzer

I know the only thing I'm not on is your mind.
I know we're numb but I'm glad we're not scared.
I know you wish we could be terrified together.
I know this isn't the way
But I know it's a way.

The sweat I drink from you, fresh, is as cold and stale as you are.
Even though I know every bump, every mole,
Every dip and despite knowing where,
Each skin cell ends and where each one begins,
I know I will never be familiar with you.

I know I shouldn't need this.
I know you need more than this,
But you can settle.
I'm settled.
I know I'm not what you want but at least I'm something.

SPARKLER

Jennifer Purus

If I can ignore the media and market noise,
there's something sweet beneath the idea
of making another person look better.

A wealth of experience and a tremendous
expression of support and unity
marks the spirit of the times.
It sends a sharp chill along my spine.

Indirect sunlight in the form of deep red,
Orange, and yellow emerge in the sky.
They produce a unique sight, a spectacle,
but yellow and black caution tape seclude
the area from onlookers.

Humans are willing to kill other humans
to reach their goals, to become
A world power, but there is no particular
"hero" involved or anything. It's just
one community of people helping another.

Everyone wants to be a tribal memory,
everyone wants to illustrate their identity,
everyone wants a conscience, they want
a warm sensation to trickle over everything.

An aura is the supernatural glow
that emanates from every living thing.
You see, the aura produces different colors,
Blue hues, green, red, yellow...
Some are bright some are dull.
Some times they spike out like fireworks.

A TAINTED PAST

Tracy Fiderio

I hate when the past kicks me in the ass.
Everything's just fine and dandy.
The sun's shining yellow. I wake up to a day
new and fresh like a piece
of wintergreen gum melting on my tongue.
Then someone walks by
with a wrinkle in his forehead,
and a memory of Sean's face rams
into my brain like a brick
crashing on cement.
His lazy bloodshot brown eyes
and maniacal grin flash in my eyes.
That uneasy feeling
of something so wrong stiffens
my veins and hardens my blood.
I was too young. That's a plausible excuse.
Too stupid to listen to my parents,
too stubborn to hear that screechy voice
in my stomach that cringed
every time he came close.
I chose blindness.
Saturday mornings with his Kitchen Aide Coffee Maker
and Record Journal in hand, I thought he was so
grand and mighty fine. The older boy,
every girl would be jealous.
It's too bad that his firecracker-red flannel shirt couldn't warm
my blood. Nothing could.
He dreamed
of graduating high school, I dreamed
of Harvard.
In Lovell is where he belonged, where the people
drive tractors and look forward to
the Hog Show.

Fiderio-

I pushed while he pulled, but he couldn't
beat me in this tug of war.

He talked of marriage, and the next day
he slept
with another girl.

I was stronger, but still was
scared. I'd be alone, alone to face
my future that loomed ahead.

We broke up. I deserved better.

But it still
hurt. He insulted my pride and degraded
my love. He was so wrong, but I still thought
it was love.

That part of my past screeches
in my ears like a scratched record.

I wish I had been smarter.

I wish we never were.

If he could see me now, he'd see
what he gave up. He'd know he could
never be good enough.

DIRT JOURNEY

Amy Ashton Handy

Muddy footprints in the hall,
a reminder of progression.
I am washed away cell by cell, molecules of me-
a spiral on the dirt journey.

A reminder of progression:
our brushed off skin becomes the dust,
a spiral on the dirt journey.
Touching hands we shed small parts of ourselves.

Our brushed off skin becomes the dust,
cached in corners, swept outdoors.
Touching hands we shed small parts of ourselves,
bits added to the cosmic mass.

Cached in corners, swept out doors
no particle reserved,
bits added to the cosmic mass
as our elements co-mingle, sifted.

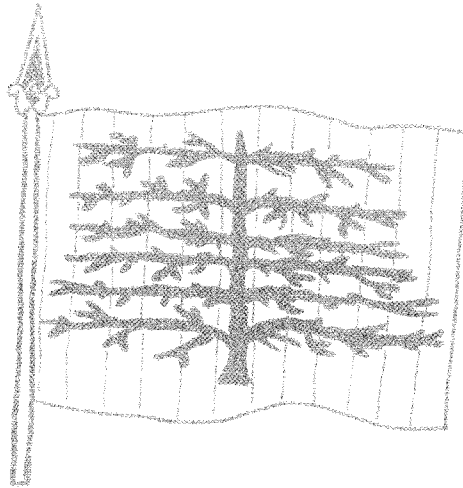
No particle reserved –
elephants, chickens children, dragonflies,
as our elements co-mingle, sifted,
shape shifted, yet the essence is unchanged.

Elephants, chickens, children, dragonflies,
we are dressing the earth in a rich new coat,
shape shifted, yet the essence is unchanged.
Parts unified as soil, black under the sun,

we are dressing the earth in a rich new coat,
worn to the end of our story.
Parts unified as soil, black under the sun,
we are buried in the pockets, carried,

Handy-

worn to the end of our story –
a spiral on the dirt journey –
we are buried in the pockets, carried
on soles leaving footprints in the hall.



DADDY

Joy Mlozanowski

It is morning and I sit with cold cereal
pretending I did not hear her midnight obscenities
soaked in gin,
nor your murmured voice
and the struggle to keep her contained.
Half-wishing
you would rescue us both from her anger,
I see your bulging blue-black eye
under the jagged new red of your brow
and know you cannot even rescue
yourself.

I would not marry a man who let me behave so badly.
Today I am fifteen
and have decided I do not love her.

Then I pity you and decide not to cry.

LITTLE GREEN BOX

(An Ode to Eve)

Yesod - Fredrick Douglas Knowles

my sweet little niece,
i have to write something about you
knowing nothing about you.

i have to tell everyone
that i love you.
that we...love you.

here such a short period of time
leaving behind bleeding hearts.

leaving behind...
-a little green box.

-a box containing
the elements of your livelihood,
containing a picture of an angel
with closed windows to the soul.

-a little green box
containing a hat...
comb...
p.j.'s...
and lock of hair.

-that's all you had time for.
that's all we'll ever need.

(eve montgomery knowles, december 31, 2001)

FROST

Michael Rayzer

There was winter in this car, there was winter outside of it and no matter how far I drove I knew I couldn't escape it. There was no heater in the car; it came that way. I had lost the feeling in both of my hands a few miles back, and I had to keep glancing at them to make sure they were still on the steering wheel. I hated this weather and that's why I had to be here. I looked down at the gas gauge as the needle continued its gradual slide to E. It was morning and I'd have to stop soon. I glanced out the driver side window and wondered if I was deep enough into nowhere yet. The actual road ended a while ago and now the car labored over stones and ruts in the frozen dirt road. I wanted to push the car until it ran off into the woods or broke down, out of gas, with a cloud of steam billowing out through the sides of the hood. But then I'd have to walk back. I pulled the car off to the side of the road. Off to where the winter had killed most of the plants. The ground was spotted with grass, short and browned, and bushes that stood, arms bare, waiting for the next frost to kill them.

I pulled my hands away from the steering wheel and flexed them. I tried to get some blood into them and warm them but I barely managed to work my fingers out of the knots they formed clutching the wheel. No matter how many layers of coats or flannel or thermal underwear that I wore, I still became so paralyzed I could barely move. I unlocked my door and climbed out of the car slowly, feeling weighted down and heavy. I reached into my pocket and my fingers wrapped around the butt of my grandfather's 9mm Berretta. And I had hoped that it would have felt warm and light in my hands, but I barely managed to pull it from my pocket or level it at the woman in the backseat of my car. I reached over and pulled the door open and I wasn't sure if it was colder outside or in the backseat of that car. She looked up at me, her cheek bruised and her mouth shut with duct tape. Her hair was pale like her skin, except it had a golden hue to it. She trained her eyes up at me and they were blue. Looking at them now made me wonder how I could have ever loved them.

Rayzer-

“Get out of the car.” I stepped back from her as far as I could dare. She rose out of the car slowly, like something unholy and I never let the gun drop from her forehead. I had dragged her out of her house late last night and we’d been driving since. She was still wearing the night gown I bought her, blue like her eyes. She was shivering, her hands bound and her skin brushed over with red paint, and I wanted her so cold that it burned. I almost wanted to feel bad for her but she wouldn’t stop glaring at me.

“You should be scared.” I couldn’t even hold the gun steady so I let it fall to my side and I let my eyes leave hers, and follow the wavering cloud of my breath. She stopped crying sometime last night and I wished she’d start again so they’d find her with tears frozen on her face. I raised the gun again and pointed it at her chest.

“I’m going to kill you.” I let my finger stray to the trigger but it was too stiff to pull it back. She shouted at me through the duct tape, struggling to pull her hands free of the ropes. She finally ripped her hand free and blood swelled from a fresh cut as she pulled the tape off of her mouth.

“You’re too much of a shit to do any-” The sound of the gunshot cut her off. The bullet went wide of her and cut neat holes into both backseat windows. She backpedaled into the door, the cracked glass showering her as she shook it loose from the frame. I’d never fired a gun before and the sound was unreal and it almost shattered me. I tried to catch my breath as I placed my free hand under the butt of the gun so I wouldn’t miss again. She stood there against the car, her breathing labored and becoming panicked. We just watched each other.

“Oh my God...” She whispered softly and she closed her eyes. I guess she was praying.

“Just stop. I-I don’t want to drag this out.” I said.

“Why ... how can you do this to me?” She suddenly seemed too weak to stand on her own but she managed. I should have gotten shoes for her. I could feel the cold ground through the soles of my boots.

“I have to, I – uh –”

“You don’t even know?! My god Gerald it’s been two years!”

“I know!” I had forgotten I was the one with the gun and I jabbed it towards her so she remembered too. I forgot the power she had

over me, but I wouldn't give her any here. Not today.

"So, do I even get a hole?" I think she wanted to laugh but tears started pouring from her eyes and she sagged against the car again.

"Our baby didn't get a hole." I said.

"Oh god, is that what this is about?"

"No." I wanted to cry. But I'd been wanting to cry everyday for the last two years.

"Going to kill me for your unborn child? It was my baby too! It was inside me, and we decided together!"

"Shut up..." She must have been lying, but I couldn't remember. I shut it all out. I would've been a great father. I wouldn't have agreed to have our baby killed.

"You killed my baby and I am going to kill you." I tried to sound angry and dangerous but the most I could manage was a whine. "You killed it and then you left me! And I'm going to kill you!"

"I wasn't ready to have a child. We weren't ready. And I left because ... I couldn't stand the way you looked at me." She pushed herself away from the car and started walking towards me slowly. Rocks were strewn about the ground and even as they cut her she didn't stop.

"Get back." I raised the gun but she still refused to stop walking. She never did what I really wanted her to.

"I regret it every day I'm alive. It was the worst thing I have ever done, because I loved her as much as you did."

"You didn't care about the baby, you never cared about either of us."

"I did! I loved you, I still love you – I just needed time." She reached for the gun and pushed it away from her chest, and my hand, frozen, clung to it. "You can't do this Gerald, I'm pregnant again. And I—"

"I know. Your husband told me." I looked down at her and when I was this close to her I couldn't help but to admire her eyes. They were cold, like our surroundings and I couldn't help but feel my insides begin to tense up and become brittle. I wouldn't let her break me again – not like before. I'd been supportive after the abortion. I'd been nice after the break up. I'd been understanding when she started dating. I'd been gracious in my defeat when she got married. I was okay, I think, when she never came back. No matter how

Rayzer-

perfect I was she never came back.

“If you know, then you can’t go through with this. We can’t make the same mistake again.” She pressed her forehead against my chin, like she used to. And she always managed to be warm even now and maybe she still wanted me. Or maybe she was just trying to keep herself and her baby alive. At least she wasn’t showing yet.

“I have to, or you’ll never leave me alone...” It was as if I haunted her. And she’d taken everything from me because I hadn’t known not to give it to her. I pushed her hand away from the gun and I pressed it against her sternum. I couldn’t find her heart.

“No, Gerald, don’t do this.” She struggled against me, her fingernails biting into my hand and drawing blood but I was already numb. She was strong but I’d been locked by the cold and my hand wouldn’t move. “Gerald, oh god, Gerald I’m so sorry, don’t-” She gasped as I grabbed her by the back of her hair and I wanted to say I was sorry but my voice was stuck. I wanted to tell her she was too much like winter. I could feel it in her bones or when she brushed past me after she left and how I’d feel cold and paralyzed. I wanted to tell her I’d never leave, I could never leave her. But the gunshot startled both of us and it must have been my turn to break her. It took me a moment to realize what happened as she relaxed in my arms and I watched her irises roll back and hide from me. I let her fall away from me as I struggled to catch my breath and think over the sound of the blood pounding in my ears. It was amazing how warm her blood felt and it was like she was burning herself into me. I ripped off my coat and my hat and my shirt, but I still couldn’t get her off of me. Her blood was everywhere and I knew she’d never leave me.

THROWING ORANGES

Sarah Horton

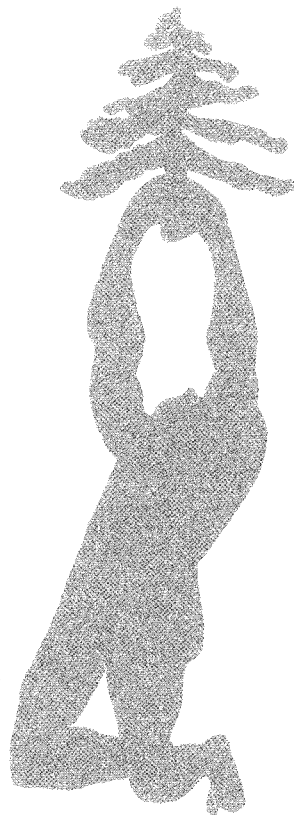
The undersides of the leaves
look like the undersides
of frogs,
poached white bellies
littering the sidewalk.
The sky is an ink wash
full of salts.
Rain soaks the dry places,
and the sky bleeds onto the
houses, blue grey drips
from their porches.

Half the day is gone and
I am waiting
waiting
to go to work,
to see people I don't know,
to look out of big windows
at a city that doesn't want me.
I feel tired all over and my
stomach feels like I
swallowed something hard,
it is full and swabbling around
in there.

I will become known for
the things I hide away,
not the things I put out.
Walking with my coat curled
around me,
the collar up past my ears
like old leather flaps that
hold mummies inside.

Horton-

Feel like singing,
swaying,
getting back to
the orchards
the sticks,
tin forts in the woods
throwing oranges at
my brother.



BLOOD TRAIL

Daniel Procaccini

You catch my scent,
I'm a dog in heat,
Nevermind anything that you thought
You knew about me.
There's a trail to set,
I'll set it for a week,
And before you know what hit you,
You'll be following my lead.

A temporary relief
To your insanity,
When the deed is done
You'll forget about me.
We'll turn around,
Go our separate ways,
Not even look at each other
Because there's nothing to say.
But in a couple months,
A trail of red- chase repeat.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Amanda Marciano

Stand your ground
Don't lose sight
Always win if you pick the fight

Be head strong
But compromise
Never trust your enemy's lies

Love her still
Against your will
Although to many,
You push aside how you feel.

Be romantic
Try to stay
Don't believe them when they say,
Its okay

Conflict is the issue
Love is the game
All of the rules stay the same

Sleep with the enemy
Keep them close
War and love are like that rose

That pricked your finger.

SAINT CROIX RIVER

Jennifer Soboleski

On a warm August night,
In the summer of 2000,
I left Minneapolis
For the Saint Croix River.

I parked on a dark
Residential street
And snuck past the 'No Trespassing' signs
Through the woods
To the edge of the sand.

I looked out
At Wisconsin ahead of me
And skipped down the beach;
Peeling off my sweaty tank top,
Sliding off my shorts and underwear,
And tripping out of my sandals as I reached the water.

The soft sand oozed between my toes
As the shallow waves pushed and pulled against my body.
The coolness of the water
Caused the stubble on my legs to stand out and bristle.
I dunked myself underwater,
Exhaling oxygen in large bubbles,
And rose to the surface again.

I remember looking up
At the full moon
Afterwards as I sat on the dock.
The warm wind dried the beads of water on my pale skin,
And I wrung out my hair
Into the river.

SLIPPERY BILLS

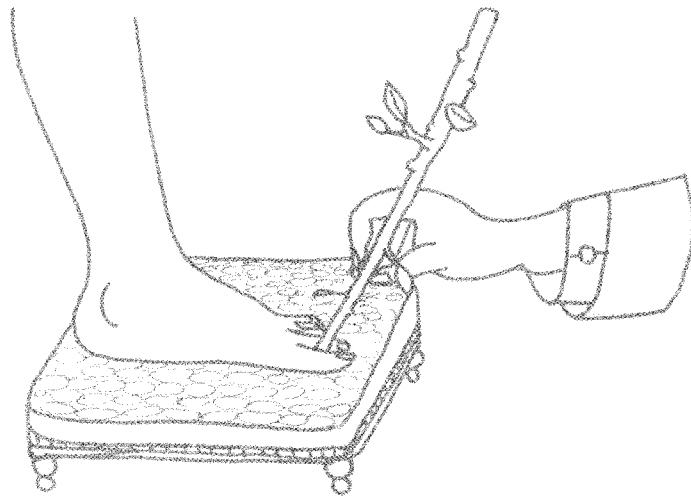
Tracy Fiderio

John Fiderio is a real high-class
kind of guy. He's the type to take
any asshole to the best restaurant
and fork over his platinum credit card
while the other guy squirms in his seat,
eyes darting, and pretends to reach
for his money in the frightening depths
of his so-deep butt pocket.

His corporate buddies talk down
to him as if he's a rebellious child,
cause they pity that he never
made it through college.
A degree makes a man.
If only they saw John
coming home half past nine each night.
Listening to his 5 year old
daughter balling cause Daddy
missed her Kindergarten graduation
for an appointment, as he bleeds
tears of guilt. Yet, they tell
him he's not a man.

And as John carelessly hands
over the bill with his credit card
tucked in the leather case, I want to grab
hold of his stubbly chin and yell,
Daddy, get a grip!
The slippery bills of ignorance
float out of my father's hands
and the wings of sainthood sprout out
of his calloused carpenter palms.

John will be missed when he's gone.
People will say, He was a good man.
We wish his family the best.
His golden grave will attract
dogs all over town. The
hounds will piss on the piled
snow banks as the wind kisses
the chilly marble tombstone.



SAILING

David Cerniglia

yours are black and white
and above
a smart white cap tilted like you spent no time at all
adjusting it. Perfect.

heavy eyes curl under lids made fat by squinting in July sun.
it was oppressive, that July.
at my funeral, you'd have stomped
back to the car growling for air conditioning.
but my sweat had to be a testament to your
death

you are black and white
and not a foolish eyelash out of place

black coat, probably wool
white shirt
gray buttons
black tie
ribbons of different shades of gray that were
red and blue and green and purple after the war

a Mona Lisa stare follows me around the room.
Every crease at the corner of your eye is the inside-smile
a story that you remembered but didn't speak
 Yellow-hot days on the Yangtze
 Breathless panics below waves
 That yellow breathless girl from Manila

up your crisp white sleeve
a tattooed collage smelling of sea salt and secrets

THE PROBLEM WITH EYORE

Sarah Tamulevich

“This is the last birthday
that will be forgotten,” thinks Eeyore,
his sawdust-stuffed heart broken.
He sulks behind oversized ears, wandering
alone through the Hundred Acre Wood.
No one ever remembers his birthday.
And yesterday, his house fell down.

Such a disheartened donkey; nobody
notices, nobody cares. Even little Piglet,
with all his nervous worry, often tires
of Eeyore’s self-loathing—what does it matter
if his tail won’t stay on, if all the thistles
are broken, all the balloons burst open?
Nobody likes a mope.

But today, Eeyore and that rain-cloud hovering
perpetually over his head will be noticed.
Today, Eeyore will go home, finish off
that bottle of antidepressants, and hang
himself by his defective tail.
“Don’t be so gloomy,” Pooh had said,
a honey-stained, indifferent look on his face.

Soon, Pooh won’t be so apathetic, so
careless. In a day or two he will wonder
absently about his desolate friend, and
head to the House at Pooh Corner.
There he will find Eeyore, the dead donkey,
suspended from the rafters—
a broken thistle, a burst balloon.

RICHARD THOMSON STRUGGLES

(with the holidays, and left this on your machine)

Brian Rowe

I would wish you Merry Christmas but that would be too nice of me. You lied over and over to me. Remember we would run to the stop sign and you would fucking trip me, you would laugh like an eight year old would at the sight of another child scraping their knee on dirty sidewalks leaving a stain in the cracks for the ants to crawl into. You You You only ran away from me to be with your friends while I cried waiting for our mother to come outside with band aids to take me into the house like I was a wounded soldier in the field of battle but there was no field, it was our shitty middle class neighborhood. The only gunfire we heard was Jimi Hendrix records skipping slowly while you waited impatiently for the songs that you loved to overtake the stereo. And I couldn't complain because I thought we were forming bonds. And I think we had to form bonds, we have the same fucking parents, the same penis did the same job twice and we are its products. And all the times you left for school without me because you had to be seen as the first kid in high school who could drive. I know you were a kid and I was a a kid but the scars grow with my body. You have a wife and child to keep you anchored and I'm still struggling to figure out where I stand. You laughed at my birdhouse production saying I should try to find one to house myself. You came by when you weren't busy physically distancing yourself to see my workbench of scrap wood and blue paint, you laughed at my cracked hands saying I would never be like our grandfather who could work magic, placing a smile on our young faces by making dinosaurs we could pull. When do you smile? I don't know what you do with yourself because you are so concerned with showing the world I am the failure of the family. Goddamnit, I am not a failure and don't want to be on display in your exhibit of the past. I am simply not a memory. I am not the stocky teenager who puked in your bed after a night of drinking in our neighborhood. So don't pin me in your exhibition. I am trying to be included in your holidays which you don't want to call me up for. You didn't even want to let me know when mom died. You didn't want the family to

-Folio

be reminded when I showed up at the funeral with the only face I can wear and the clothes that may not have been ironed. But at least I had love in my heart. Do you understand that? I have love, I have forgiveness, I have every fucking feeling you wish you could feel. Sure I fucking can't hold a job, not all of us can afford that cushy republican voting lifestyle you have. I think I have tried harder in life trying to do good for nature while you tried hard filling your bank account. Tell Monica, I decline the invitation and that, and that I will be spending wherever I am welcome. Thank you.



be reminded when I showed up at the funeral with the only face I can wear and the clothes that may not have been ironed. But at least I had love in my heart. Do you understand that? I have love, I have forgiveness, I have every fucking feeling you wish you could feel. Sure I fucking can't hold a job, not all of us can afford that cushy republican voting lifestyle you have. I think I have tried harder in life trying to do good for nature while you tried hard filling your bank account. Tell Monica, I decline the invitation and that, and that I will be spending wherever I am welcome. Thank you.



Michael Anderson
James Barron
Ayub "UB" Balweel
Bonnie Bello
Anthony Brano
Spencer Carlson
David Cerniglia
Veronica Cianfrano
Jean Copeland
David DiSarro
Michael Donovan
Tracy Fiderio
Jessica Gilliam
Kristen Greger
Amy Handy
Sarah Horton
James Humbert
Alexander Kearney
Yesod - Frederick Douglas Knowles
Michael Levy
Amanda Marcano
Shannon Marino
Shane Martin
Chris Martineau
Joy Mlozanowski
Laurie Moskal
Melissa Owen
David Pacelli
Cori Payne
Matthew Perkins
Naomi Pettway
Daniel Procaccini
Jennifer Purus
Michael Rayzer
Michelle Repass
Amy Richardson
Brian Rowe
Shizuka Shibata
Jennifer Soboleski
Paul Sorensen
Sarah Tamulevich
Shawn Taylor
Ashley Thomas
Noelle Weimann