

teach us to unthum passion
in the vein of human tragedy
to love through the anguish of now

tonight we cast our shadow
of djali and egun phrases
of our blood red blues

cotton-myth our story
around ritual for
poets prophets and
space between planets and atoms

tonight we gather to speak
the eulogy of years

kiss the sigh which opens
the oneness of human tears

OPUS
2004-2005

o love love

OPUS

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issue iii

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1 College Circle
Geneseo, NY 14454

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Enjoy!

Table Of Contents

Poetry

Dana LePage, <i>Dusty Wooden Panel</i>	9
Duncan Carranza, <i>Petty Games</i>	10
Terasa Hahn, <i>Sensation</i>	13
Nicole Schwartz, <i>Center Stage</i>	17
Schuyler Woos, <i>Night Terrors</i>	17
Harrison Watkins, <i>El is for</i>	18
Meg Vasey, <i>So You Grow Up</i>	18
Beth Pinkerton, <i>Sleep</i>	18
Michael Chin, <i>Good Night for a Cigarette</i>	22
Dana LePage, <i>Together Descending</i>	22
Alex Egan, <i>I Think I'm Starting to Understand</i>	
<i>Why I Always Wear Black</i>	23
Duncan Carranza, <i>Typo</i>	30
Pia Fleischmann, <i>Homage to Night</i>	30
Meg Vasey, <i>it's a good romantic movie,</i>	
<i>In the bullshit kind of way</i>	30
Jessica Allen, <i>Stagnant</i>	31
James Merenda, <i>A Protest Worth Digestion</i>	31
David Aloj, <i>7:34 p.m. street lights have</i>	
<i>yet to come on</i>	37
Meg Vasey, <i>Big/ littles.bigbigs/ littlesbigs/</i>	
<i>so on so on</i>	37
Drew Campbell, <i>Taco Love</i>	40
Shannon Barbeau, <i>Stragner</i>	40
Laura Sengillo, <i>Prima Ballerina</i>	40
Maureen Cahill, <i>Sleep</i>	43

Prose

M. Mullen, <i>On My Waist</i>	11
Peter Lobczowski, <i>Twenty- Eight Dollars</i>	14
Jodi Guilboard, <i>Daddy's Girl</i>	19
Dianna Walkowski, <i>Leaving Charley</i>	26
Alex Egan, <i>Play Once and Repeat</i>	33
Eric Dawson, <i>To Whom It May Concern</i>	38
Jeanette Ebling, <i>You Are Interesting</i>	41
Amanda Bukowski, <i>Searching For Moonlight</i>	44

Art

Amelia Harnas	9
Dana LePage	12
Lauren SooHoo	13
Amelia Harnas	17
Alex Egan	19
Amelia Harnas	22
Alex Egan	23
Niki DeLawder	24
Katherine McCarty	29
Amelia Harnas	30
Amelia Harnas	31
Dana LePage	32
Amelia Harnas	37
Katherine McCarty	39
Amy Zarzicki	40
Lauren SooHoo	42
Niki DeLawder	43
Dana LePage	45

Aristotle

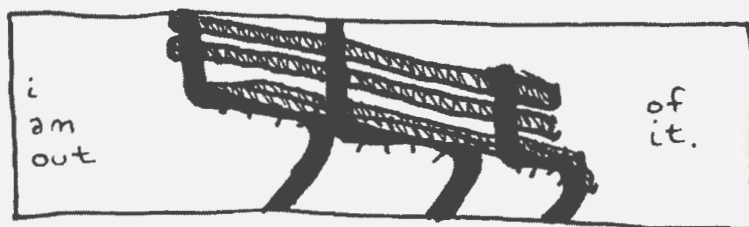
This is the beginning,
Almost anything can happen.
This is where you find
the creation of light, a fish wriggling onto land,
the first word of Paradise Lost on an empty page.
Think of an egg, the letter A,
a woman ironing on a bare stage as the heavy curtain rises.
This is the very beginning.
The first-person narrator introduces himself,
tells us about his lineage.
The mezzo-soprano stands in the wings.
Here the climbers are studying a map
or pulling on their long woolen socks.
This is early on, years before the Ark, dawn.
The profile of an animal is being smeared
on the wall of a cave,
and you have not yet learned to crawl.
This is the opening, the gambit,
a pawn moving forward an inch.
This is your first night with her, your first night without her.
This is the first part
where the wheels begin to turn,
where the elevator begins its ascent,
before the doors lurch apart.

The dusty wooden panels
stained with waxy polish, disguised
as orange peel
threaten the sharp intake of prosthetic air
that leaves me disorientated to your next move
and abrades my eyes to wet.
My chest rises in thick sigh to the night
as She draws a charcoal shadow over my face,
carefully rendering curves of dusk.
You could have fooled me.
I know who and where
but never why.
My innocence is swept away by a simple flicker of your lashes under dark brows
and darker eyes
with just a hint of gray.
Picture framed in black and white.

*(End of reason,
slide into emotion).*

But I came here for the man in
green
and left empty
minded.
You tossed my words carelessly away
into the bottom of some cheap wicker waste basket.
But I stayed and explained myself
again, shards of a once familiar pattern
scraping at my temples.
Provocatively
your lips graze mine,
tongue jagged against cheek,
burning imprint of yours over mine.
As I wrap my arms around myself
to remind me that I am still here
I sigh in your ear and to Cassiopeia outside the window.
I will not for(ever) stand by you until
Life
do us part.

Dana LePage



Petty Games

Sometimes

I make

stupid

little promises

with myself.

The single player version goes like this:

If I successfully beat this car, on foot, coming up behind me, to the next
fire hydrant/lamppost/tree/person/line painted on the street

or

If I hold my breath until the next song on the radio is over

or

If I (in a mall) consistently step right in the middle of every other beige/stained/brown/cracked tile square

or

count to some number before my friend gets up the hill and says hello
then

I will do a flip/become a vegan/tell the cute girl walking next to me that I'd like to get to know her better/stop global
warming/run into traffic...naked/join the army.

The two player version is done like this:

If that girl sitting in the café turns three more pages in her book before I finish my mocha
then

I will kiss her
on the mouth

or

If that nerd sitting on the wall swings his feet into it one more time as I walk by
then

I will truly make Humpty Dumpty look like a tame nursery rhyme
and he will need stitches

or

If I get passed by one more car while on this bridge
then

I will end these petty games

and drive through metal beams into the air of this dark day/week/month/life.

Duncan Carranza



On My Waist
M. Mullen

These tears betray me but I won't let them fall. They will spill so I look up, try not to blink. I want to close my eyes. Rather, through a blurry glass, I must watch your shoulders rhythmically shake the tears from my face.

It is too much, too fast, not enough air. If I just do this right, you will stop, and I can lie next to you. I need to take a breath, just one. A sob escapes, now a cough, I am crying and choking.

Please, slow down, please.

Your hands push me; they won't give. With every shove on my shoulders you are closer to coming, to stopping. And I am closer to breaking. You thrust me towards my emptiness which you use to feed your moments of dizzy bliss.

Slow down, just for a beat. But then I will mess it up and I will wait longer before I can just lie next to you, and breathe.

You know that I don't want this; you see it in my eyes. You tell me you see it and ask me to lie. So I am lying, telling you it is ok. It shouldn't be just ok. I am not.

The pressure of your hands chokes me, although it is not just the hands, it is your dick, so grossly enlarged because you want. I see myself, the degradation of looking at your greed.

You use that thick voice when you talk about it and the voice fills my stomach with shame. I listen to it and answer. I tell you what you want to hear as I pretend that I am what you want.

"I want to come all over you, all over your face," your voice aches. I shift away, inconspicuously recoil, and you move over me and again soil me with your filth. Now you get up, take Matt's paper towels and wipe off your mess.

In this moment I masquerade as a filthy tramp, whispering that which you will enjoy into your ear, anything to please you. All I want is the satisfaction of knowing that I am capable of making you do something. Even if it is for you to want me to play the part of your shameful slut.

So, I play the part. I let you push me up against the wall and now it is our routine. It is what I know to do: tease and tempt, play the part of the dirty tramp. I wear the short shorts, lean this way, stretch that way. In the end, I can lie next to you.

You like the struggle; want me to bite and fight you off. The terror in my eyes entertains you. Find thrill in watching me as I am smothered. Sometimes I play along, give you what you want, tell myself that if I pretend to fight you

off, you will like it. I get you all riled up. Then you will be satisfied and maybe there will be a few more minutes of lying next to you after.

While you lie on your side, you nudge me onto my side, so that I fit into the space in front of you. Then you pull me tight against you. I can relax in your arms for a few moments, but I know you are right behind me. I feel you and your ulterior motives. You deceive me with your false motions, this is not cuddling. However, I live for these moments of imitation affection. You don't nudge me anymore; I know when I can turn onto my side and slip into my spot.

I tell myself that you enjoy a play struggle, but there is nothing left to feign when you hold your weight over me, as you come on me or hold my head with your hands. Your simulation has no boundaries to let me know that this is only a game.

I convince myself that I drive you out of control. The tears, and choking, and coughing could be avoided if only I put a damper on the dance I do for you. My endless tactics have led you into another zone. I need air while you want, so I panic and you ignore me. Trapped, I must listen as you speak with that degrading voice. There is nothing left to do but perform to the best of my ability so that you will be done.

And then when you finally let go, I feel your release, your euphoria and I crumble. The struggle was so hateful; you found glory there in my submission. You broke me to reach those few moments of uncontrollable energy.

"That was amazing," you say, "it has never been like that, with anyone." You subtly remind me that have had your share. One of the most traumatic experiences in my life gave you the best orgasm, well congratulations.

At 3 AM, I walk to the bathroom. "I didn't give him head yet tonight," I think, lacking the pride I know I should feel. I notice my easy breath as I walk down the hall. "But that was bad," whispers an echo. The lights in the hallway seem to have a more noticeable yellow tint tonight. "I didn't cry tonight," I weakly counter. The temperature feels right; everything is in place- I am home. "Feels like I was raped," an undertone I can't acknowledge treads by. The shiny emerald green tiles on the floor are very quiet, no one else is stirring.

You ask me if I like that. No! It makes me feel dirty, like tramp, but I have to say yes. Why do I say yes, why do I answer your degrading questions and encourage you? I feel like this is the only way you let me get close. It is the only thing that keeps us together. You say, "Wanna be a movie star?" Don't you get it? You make me feel like a porn girl who has nothing left to live for. No standards, no shame- I just do my job. Somehow, I close my eyes so that I can ignore you as you obliterate my self-respect. I find myself clinging to you as my only stability. I know how we work. I know what you will say and do to me. Your disgusting habits have become mine; I know them as regular and normal.

"I wanna fuck you so bad. I want to ravage you." You scare me. You are over me and I stare at your arms knowing what they can do. So I tell you "not yet," and scoot down. I am so alone with you. I just want to make you happy, make you like me, love me. What more can I do? I hold one single standard and you tear me down.

I let you tell me what you want to do to me and fight to avoid letting you do it. I think maybe just a little longer and you will realize that you do love me, that you need me.

You tell me not to say "not yet" and I recognize the frustration and anger in your voice. Or laughing at it, saying "not yet, when we get married." Why won't you let me say it, believe it?

Instead of saying anything, I'll just scoot down.

I just slip under the situation and hide within myself. Moving above you would be physically impossible, so I close my eyes until you tell me to look at you. Then I sink as far as I can until it is safe for me to come up. It is safe when we are on our sides; your arms are tired from holding you above me. They are on my waist.

sensation

The grooves of life
in each digit
maneuver, caress and grapple
the skin of my neck.
Each finger
Punctuating
some new
Long neglected plot.
My head tilts
as if weighed down by some invisible force.

And in fact
it is.

My head feels a little heavier nowadays.

The same thoughts keep
piling
up
accumulating
penetrating
striking
deeper
and deeper
into the
wounds
of my raw
waiting
heart.

The thoughts pile so high I fear there is no room for new ones.

And it's the new ones I need.

Bring on the garbage men of overused sentiments

I have a pick up.

Reinforcements may be necessary.

I'm tired of missing
of missing things I never had.

The hand that strokes my neck
is my own.

I haven't found anyone else to do it yet.

Teresa Hahn



Lauren SooHoo
Pencil Drawing

Twenty-Eight Dollars

Peter Lobczynski

It's a slow Saturday afternoon in late November at the Java Bean. It's a wish-I-was-a-beatnik place where customers in cable-knit sweaters order coffee-based drinks for five dollars that come in tiny cups which they drink while typing haiku on their iBooks. Sharri, the nineteen year old punk girl, is the only other one working. The room is practically empty until a tall, pale customer walks through the front door with his arm around his lady's shoulders. College students. He has reddish-brown hair, judging from the sideburns coming down from his brown old man's hat. He wears a brown leather jacket, pleated tan khakis, and brown leather shoes. Brown's lady has long black curly hair, and wears one of those long sweaters college girls wear, also black. Her pants are white corduroy—no, almost white but a little tan. Her boots are black leather, the kind with high rubber heels. They head straight for the dessert case and bend down for a closer look.

I really hate my job. I don't drink coffee, missed the boat for college by about fifteen years, and am the only black worker on staff. Sharri is the next closest to being a minority; she wears black leather instead of Gap. As much as I stick out, I think it helps the management to have a black man around to make the place seem multicultural. In my six months here, I've heard a lot of philosophy majors discussing Buddhism and a few kids studying for art history with flash cards of African and South American statues. But that's about as multicultural as the Java Bean gets. Still, it's the right combination of not-bad paying and steady.

After checking out the dessert case for a minute, Brown and his ladyfriend step up to the register.

"Hello," Brown says in a voice so sophisticated it almost sounds English. Phony as hell, too.

I nod, already irritated.

"May we have two Irish cream cappuccinos and one slice of lemon meringue pie?" he says, raising his eyebrows and gesturing toward the case.

"A'ight, man," I counter in my best thug voice. I even surprise myself with it: I sound like Ving Rhames, that guy from Pulp Fiction. I hate putting on a show, especially for these rich punks, but if he's going to be all proper and shit I've got to have a little fun with him. If there's one thing I know he'll be afraid of, it's a disgruntled black man. I start punching their order into the register. I'm really hitting the keys like I want to kill them.

Brown's eyes widen for a second, shocked. *Is this the same safe coffee shop?*, they say. I glance down at their interlocked hands and imagine their knuckles turn a little whiter from grabbing each other so tight.

"Twelve bucks even," I say when the total comes up. I am looking down at the register when I say it, but then look up with my eyebrows clenched tight. As if to say, "Where's my money, bitch?" This is so much fun I have to crack a smile to keep from laughing.

"Wonderful," Brown smiles. He pulls a tri-fold wallet, brown leather, of course, from his back pocket. It's fatter than my wallet has ever been. He reaches inside and removes two twenties. He extends them to me like he's feeding a tiger.

I take one of the twenties and begin to make change. When I offer him the five and three ones, he sticks the other twenty in my hand.

"Most obliged," he says, looking me in the eyes for the first time. His eyes are light blue, unnatural and penetrating. I look away first, somehow defeated. My eyes drift naturally to the money in my hand, and Ving Rhames dies inside me.

A buddy of mine was in construction for a while, and he made fistfuls of cash. But they ran out of work for him and he had to move south to find more. I have a little girl to feed, though. I can't be moving and chasing work.

14 Not that I get to see Melody often. Her mama said she was done with me. She didn't like the life I was leading, and

didn't want to expose our daughter to it. I don't blame her, but I'm done with that shit. Last year one of my buddies got busted, and that woke me up. Melody's daddy isn't going to prison, even if it means working at a place like this. Her mom hasn't said five words to me since she moved out, but I send her a whole week's paycheck every month.

There is movement to my left. Sharri places their order on the counter. Brown and his ladyfriend grab their overpriced dessert and drinks and flee for safety at a nearby table.

I look at the money in my still-extended hand for a full five seconds before snapping out of it. A black man in front of a cash register with a handful of cash—nobody even needs to ask. I pocket the money and look around to see if anyone noticed. Everything looks cool. Sharri is leaning into the dessert case, rotating the lemon meringue pie so that it faces out at an enticing angle. The few customers are wrapped up in spiral notebooks full of poetry.

Already images of the things I can get for twenty eight dollars rush to mind. A new pair of jeans to replace these busted-ass ones I've had since forever. A haircut, which I've been giving myself for so long I don't even know if I'm in style or not. Even a couple CDs. I can't remember the last time I bought a CD. Not that I don't make money, but I send so much to my baby girl that I can barely make it on what's left.

Sharri is done with the pie and has started polishing the stainless steel jungle of coffee makers. Which reminds me, I better act like I'm doing some work before the manager comes in and sees me standing around. Roy's a hardass about people getting paid for doing nothing. I start wiping off the countertop even though it looks spotless to me. I move the tip jar to wipe under it and realize something: tips are all supposed to go in the tip jar and get split up between all the employees. Not that I don't need it more than the kids I work with. Sharri's cool, but she told me one time what she spent on a pair of combat boots—it was more than I spend on shoes in a decade. But is taking this money the same as stealing from the tip jar? I'm pretty sure Roy would fire my ass on the spot if he found out about that. I look at the handful of dimes in the jar—nobody would believe that a slow morning like this would put this kind of cash in the jar. If anyone finds out I have this much in my pocket while I'm working the register, they won't even ask where it came from. Stealing from the register could land my ass behind bars. I put the jar back, trying not to even rattle together the few cents that are in it. I don't want anyone looking over her till I figure things out.

I almost freak at the sound of the bell that rings whenever someone opens the door. Damn, more customers... I'll just play it cool and it'll be all good. It's a group of four white college kids (surprise) who still look hung-over from last night. I like them already. "How's it going, guys?" I ask.

The leader of the group grins at me like I'm an old friend he hasn't seen in years. His eyes are bloodshot, and take a second too long to find mine. These guys aren't hung over, they're high. Red Eye stands there staring at me for a few seconds without saying anything.

"What can I get you guys?" I ask. My tone is artificially friendly, like an actor in a Java Bean training video. Normally I wouldn't even notice, but I remember Brown as I say it and wonder when I became so robotic. I put on a show for him and I'm putting on a show for these kids. I don't even know how the real me would deal with a customer.

Red Eye jolts back into reality. "Uh, can we get four Zingers?" He points to the ultra-carbonated cola section in the cooler behind me.

No sooner do I put the bottles on the counter than they are snatched away by his friends. Red Eye pays for the whole order and his group heads to a table. No tip. How can I shine these kids' shoes and get nothing, but fuck with Brown and get a small fortune?

Damn, did Brown think I was threatening him? I didn't say anything threatening, but he looked scared shitless. Man, if he thinks he was bullied into giving me money, that's like mugging someone. Only it's a lot easier to find the mugger if you know where he works and if he's the only black guy there. The cops could be here within ten minutes of him leaving. But if that's what he's going to do, why is he staying for dessert? I look casually in the direction of Brown's table. Him and his girl are done with the pie and are talking about poetry now.

“It’s too restrictive,” she says.

“But I think that’s what’s so fascinating about it!” he corrects her. Whatever it is that’s so fascinating, Brown is very animated about it, waving his arms and almost standing up to make his point.

What a douchebag. He definitely would have already run squealing to the cops if that’s what he was going to do. So why didn’t he? He must have meant to give up the money. He would probably have tipped that much no matter what I acted like. Why, to show off for his girlfriend how much he tips a common servant? A common *black* servant?

I glance at their table again. They’re getting up to leave. I should crumple up the money and throw it in his face as he walks by. *I don’t need your pity, bitch!*, I’ll shout in his face. Who the hell does he think he is? They’re putting on their jacket and sweater. I crumple the bills into a tight ball with one hand and continue wiping the countertop with the other. They’ll have to cross my path to get to the door. First I’ll throw the towel to get his attention, then I’ll hit him right in the face with the money.

Here they come. He’s still talking about something “intriguing,” facing her. Perfect. They’re just about even with me now. I slowly lift my arm, getting ready to cock it back. I’m just about to let it fly when Brown turns to face me.

“Good day,” he says with a wave, smiling.

“Peace,” I respond. Social reflex. I try to cover up the awkward position of my arm by turning my towel throw into some kind of wave. They are gone before I can feel too foolish.

“Sharri, can you cover the register for a minute?” I ask. “I need a smoke.”

Sharri is glad to change positions after polishing stainless steel to a mirror finish all morning. I grab my fat black coat from the back and zip it up as I walk out the front doors. The air is freezing cold, but at least there is no wind. A few tiny snowflakes fall from the gray sky in almost straight lines to the ground. The street and sidewalk are both busy. I scan the crowds for Brown and find him waiting for the light to change at a nearby intersection.

I reach into my coat for a cigarette and remember I’m all out. I put my hands in my jeans pockets instead and feel the crumpled money in my right hand. I pull the money out and smooth the bills with my hands. It’s still twenty-eight dollars. The bills are warm from being in my pocket, and the warmth makes the paper seem soft and pliable. It feels good.

Down the street the light has already changed and Brown and his girl have crossed to the other side and out of my life. It’s too late now to throw it in his face or to thank him. I’m not even sure which I would do if he came back.

The office buildings a few blocks away stretch up toward the cold, white sky. To the people in those offices, twenty-eight dollars is nothing. People like Brown, who followed all the steps you’re supposed to take—high school, college, job. I fucked that up a long time ago. Now I’m serving coffee to people on their way up, and to me twenty-eight dollars seems like a fortune. I just got it and I’m already thinking of ways to blow it. There has to be something better to do with it.

I take out my wallet, which is empty as usual. I open it up to put the money inside and see the picture of Melody right in front. It was taken a year ago, but it’s the most recent photo of her I have. She’s running toward the camera with a huge grin on her face, her curly black hair captured right as it’s bouncing up with her motion. Smiling, I slide the money in and put my wallet back in my pocket. I need to start saving for my girl’s future if I don’t want her following my broke-ass example. But maybe first I can get her a little something.

Center Stage

Sparkling black
rapid ripples
crash their way into
the bottom of our arena.

Chilled sprinkles of the Hudson
hop gracefully into the frosted
August air.

His slightest touch
shrinks the mountains upon my arms,
softens the winds' bites to my cheeks,
silences the city's shrieks,
and guides my legs into dancing to
Over the Rainbow / Wonderful World
that slips through the speaker.

Gazing
Way up high
the night sky lurks.

Through his hungry eyes
the reflection of buildings
brighter than the moon
envelope us.

Silent shimmers of illumination
surrounding,
pondering,
our every move.

Alone,
stars in our surreal world
Where trouble melts like lemon drops
and *blue birds fly*
we are the hub of all existence.

Our curtain call awaits us,
the song begins to end
and the flashing city lights applaud.

All the while,
in his blanket arms
I think to myself
What a wonderful world.

Nicole Schwartz

Night Terrors

You laugh in the night

At a joke he tells you

And it pares away calluses
That week's-worth of healing
On my flesh, raw again

Like apples in a cider press
With the same aroma of fermenting
Life

You are razor sharp and
Cunning with your sex

What wandering map will trace
Our paths' convergence

Betrayal, forgiveness

I must be a blind traveler
To ask for that

Embrace

Again like the moonlit fog
Orbit abuse and desires

But do not come here to hold me

I am lost.

Schuyler Wood



take me to the river

Amelia Harpiss
Pen and Ink Drawing

E is for

she said she was just, she said
she was just holding her shit in,
and i said i'd rather not be around when she exploded
and that maybe i'd give her a bullet to bite and run,
my fingers along the teethmarks, tracing her.
and if my fingertips could have given any comfort i
would've rubbed her back until she gently fell asleep,
and maybe i wouldn't be worried so much about why
all my friends drink so much, but it wasn't much, it wasn't so much,

enough,
so i put her bullet on a beaded chain and wore
it around my neck. while all the time she drove on headed
for a wreck. and we passed under the bridge where my hands wrote
our names in a heart and
there was only a stick shift between us but we were miles apart, she swore
to God she had both hands on the wheel, but i wasn't
worried about her hands while she was crying tears the color of

steel. so we reached the end where the needle hit E and the trip was done.
And we had driven for miles and miles and now we were back to the start
but i still couldn't look at her for more reasons than one.

and i think
i may have died along the way, cause now i'm just a colorful ghost, fading in
the sun,
tank empty in more ways than one.

Harrison Watkins

So you grow up
And teachers tell you
Don't talk to strangers
Don't give money to beggars
They'll just buy liquor
Don't make eye contact
Because communication is dangerous
And it's at the cost of being exposed
So the other night
When I was at the
Bus station a guy
Came up to me and asked
"hey sis you got fifty cents so I can buy me a hot chocolate?"
and me, not having adopted the
routine of people blinders "I don't see you , you'll go away" glare
handed over the 75 cents that I had on me
and a couple minutes later
out he came
with hot chocolate
and it was beautiful

Sleep

Slipping out of my comfort and into your arms
I constantly feel at home
As causal words suddenly sound significant
Sweet summer rain pounds my bare back
and I take all of you into my mouth
Beautiful cupped breast, gently
Finger nails meet skin, softly
Pan away to see two curvy bodies entangled together
in blue stripped sheets
This is where we thrive, where we grow, where we exist
here in the shadows of the twilight
I slowly slip into slumber, matching my heart beat to
yours
and I am the happiest I've ever been,
here sharing your breath

Beth Pinkerton

Meg Casey





Daddy's Girl
Jodi Guilboard

*Alex Egan
Photograph*

Once when I was in first grade, I came home from school and had a very interesting story to tell my mom. It was late in March and my teacher was planning some jokes and other fun activities to do in class for April Fools day. She started by asking everyone if they knew the significance of April 1st. My little hand shot up in the air! I was so excited because I knew the answer to her question; according to my dad, April 1st was one of the most important days of the year. When Mrs. Stuart called on me, I proudly stated that April 1st was the opening day of Trout season. Mrs. Stuart chuckled a little and called on the next student. I didn't like Mrs. Stuart.

Daddy and I were always like that. We had our own agenda and not too many people understood just what being "Daddy's girl" was all about. Today was another one of those days. I woke up on time for only three things: fishing, hunting, and softball. The first week of April was always way too cold for softball, and for hunting for that matter, but I always opened my eyes as soon as I heard my doorknob turn and Dad start the KEE-YAH. Whenever he woke me up for fun stuff, he would wake me up with his infamous KEE-YAH. This move consisted of him getting a running start from the moment he opened the door, flying through the air while yelling "KEEEE-YAAAH" and landing on me just soft enough so that I could still breathe, but just hard enough that every now and again the bed went crashing to the floor. Last time we fixed it, we did a sturdy job. Mom was proud.

I was only nine, but that morning, I suited up for the 10-and-under East Greenbush Girls Softball team's first practice of the year. Black sweatpants, long sleeved tee-shirt under my favorite blue Mickey-Mouse sweatshirt, cleats on, a brush

through my hair, and I was ready to go.

Dad asked if I wanted to go duck hunting with him later that evening. Of course I would go! I was proud to be the only one who never turned him down. I loved softball, but got even more excited about duck hunting. I'd played softball all my life, but duck hunting was so much more exciting. Ever since I could remember, I was always "daddy's girl" accompanying him on his hunting and fishing expeditions.

Our old house had a room we once called the "mudroom". It was the first room that you walked into before entering the house. Connecting the house to the garage, it was a cold little space where people took off their shoes and left their coats when they came to visit. Daddy took over this space. Out in what used to be the mudroom, he stored all of his hunting and fishing supplies. It was sort of like his office. This room is where he and I worked diligently side-by-side tying flies for trout season and made bets on whose lure would catch the biggest Rainbow Trout.

Daddy and I rummaged through his room gathering the supplies we would need and threw them in the back of the truck. He kept his duck decoys over in the corner near the door connecting to the garage, and they were strung together with fly fishing line so that we didn't lose them out in the water. With the help of our next-door neighbor, Chris, we just managed to lift the boat (that we had spray-painted camouflage) and tie it to the top of his red Ford Ranger truck. At last, we headed to Aunt Mary's house on Knickerbocker Lake. It was a couple of hours before sunset; the perfect time for hunting ducks and other fowl.

Aunt Mary lived in a recently renovated log cabin on the lake. Her family was the only family that lived directly on the lake, and their cabin didn't even have a scenic view of the water. We visited her often to swim at the beach or to fish or hunt at the lake. Daddy really liked going to Knickerbocker Lake because there weren't other people out there scaring away our fish or fowl. We had the whole lake to ourselves. Once we were settled and got the boat in the water, Dad started rowing across the lake to our destination. He usually let me row, too.

We always decided that half way across the lake we would switch and he'd let me finish rowing to our spot. As usual, Dad kept rowing past the half way point until I insisted that it was my turn. He laughed and stood up so that we could switch positions.

The boat was shaky and I was still wearing my cleats from softball practice earlier that morning. That cold April day became quite breezy and the waves were choppy across the water. Daddy slowly stood up as we tried to figure out how to change positions while keeping the boat as steady as possible. Once he was completely out of his seat, Daddy spread his legs apart and made a tunnel for me to crawl through. If we both stayed in the middle of the boat we would have no trouble keeping balanced. I slowly got down on all fours and began crawling slowly and steadily to the bench where I would have to sit to row.

The bottom of the aluminum boat on my bare hands sent a chill through me. I finally reached the bench and started to turn around. Just then, the spikes of my cleats slipped on the aluminum and the boat jerked suddenly, rocking us back and forth. Dad tried to save us by grabbing the other end of the rowboat to steady the rocking. Next thing I knew, I was in the water under the boat that was upside-down on top of me. The piercingly cold water soaked into my navy-blue Mickey-Mouse sweatshirt and instantly penetrated my arms and legs.

My life preserver was on, just as Mom always nagged about, but it trapped me under the boat, keeping me afloat so that I couldn't sink a little in order to free myself from the dungeon that was created between the water and the bottom of the boat above me. I put my hands above my head to try to move the boat, but the weight of it and the suction that was created between the top of it and the water left me helpless. I tore off the floatation device and swam under the boat to find Dad's dark hands and disheveled face and in complete panic. I clung on to his back and shoulders, and we both looked over to the shore. Funny, it seemed much closer when we were *in* the boat.

Dad told me that I could not hang on to him because we each had to swim separately and as quickly as possible if we were to make it to the shore before our muscles would start to stiffen up. If we spent too much time in the frigid water the cramping would prevent us from swimming. All I remember of the swim is that it took a long time, but I will never forget the mud.

From the water, the shoreline looked like a heavenly destination, but it was deceiving. The mud sucked us in and was so soft we couldn't even walk on it without losing our legs in the depths. Our entire legs sunk in, and I began to imitate Dad as he started to crawl through the mud like a bear. The mud sucked and sloshed at us and I used all the energy I had left trying to pull my limbs out before they were swallowed. We finally escaped, but were lugging twice the weight we had hauled when we were dry.

I followed Dad through the woods and toward the train tracks that would lead us directly to Aunt Mary's house. I was almost running trying to keep up with his large, duck-like steps. He always walked with his feet turned outward, and took huge strides, making it almost impossible for me to walk in his footsteps. I usually tried to make a game out of it by seeing how many consecutive steps I could take in his footsteps, but today was not the day for games. If we followed the train tracks for just a bit longer, we would practically be in Aunt Mary's back yard. Finally we reached her cabin, hoping that we could warm up there. She wasn't home.

It was a good thing that Dad was confident no one would ever steal his old beat-up Ford, because if he hadn't left the keys in the ignition they'd be at the bottom of the lake by now. Dad immediately started the truck and raced home. There was no time to waste; we had to get into the warmth as quickly as possible because both of us had already begun to cramp up. The heat poured out of the vents so hot that it burned but felt soothing against my icy-cold fingers and reminded me that I could still feel the sensation of heat. My fingers, knees, and elbows were extremely stiff and I could tell that Dad's fingers were also cramped because he drove home with the heel of his hand instead of gripping the steering wheel like he usually did. I didn't complain and neither did he. We just sat there, soaked on the vinyl seat, sharing the silence. We were both afraid and silently and separately thought about what could have happened, and how Mom would react to our day's events. I knew Dad was worried that Mom would be upset. I saw in his eyes that he was still in shock, and felt responsible for putting my life, our lives, in danger.

We pulled into the driveway and Daddy came around and carried me inside. In the bathroom, he started the shower and told me to get in first. I took off my heavy mud-drenched clothing and looked in the mirror and cried. My lips were purple, and my body splotchy red-and-white. The hot water made my body sting and itch as I began to feel the heat in my legs, arms, and fingers again. After we had both showered, Daddy and I wrapped ourselves in blankets and bundled together on the couch. He cried because he didn't know what he was going to tell Mom, I cried because he was crying, and we both cried because we were afraid of losing each other and because we had made it, together.

Good Night for a Cigarette

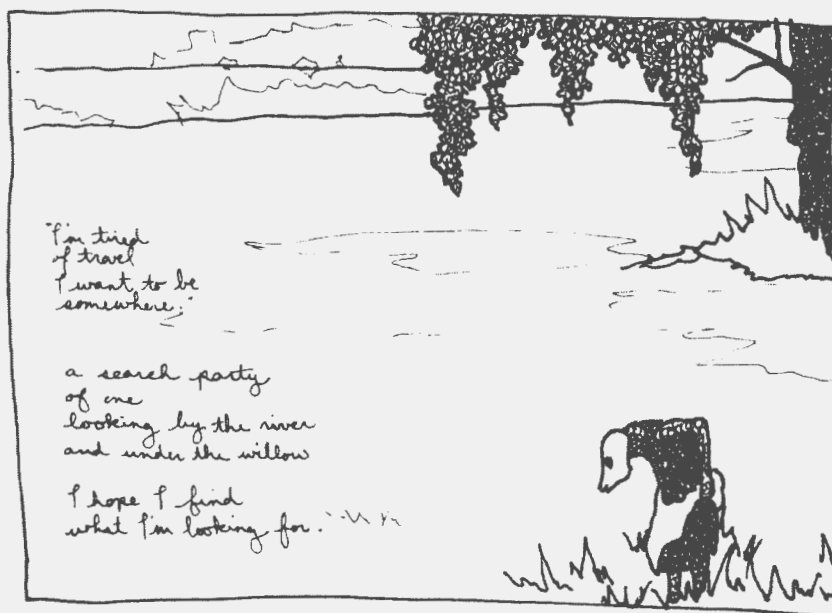
It's a good night for a cigarette.
Never been a regular smoker
and this isn't about craving nicotine
or the scent
or the dance of the sparks
I flick to the ground.

April lies around the bend.
It's warm enough to walk outside
sit outside
no need to button up the coat.
Slow breeze
clean air
stars shining overhead.

I could sit here
smoke my cigarette
philosophize with the moon
write silly love poems
about a green-eyed girl
skip over puddles of melted snow
taking the long way home
stopping by the cafe
sip iced tea
or coffee
in this in-between
time of year.
Stop reminiscing
and start thinking about
what lies ahead
maybe climb a tree,
still naked without its leaves
and reach out to touch
that black night sky.

It's a good night for a cigarette.
It'd give me a reason
to linger out here
get lost in a cigarette dream
and not come back
'til the cold sets in,
but still have some fire
to warm me.

Michael Chin



*Amelia Harnas
Ink Drawing*

Together Descending

bodies(plural) pitterpatter of rainrhythm
pitterpatter(of fingertips
tiptoes curling
little twilight eyelids)ready
opening
 slow blossoming
rocking, riding
newness wholeness rhythm risk
silkstrips hide-&-go-seek findbreasts
(go riding gently into the night)
dusk and stars and rain and sweat
lovers lips with
tips of tounge
explore insidesmouthsthigs
makinglyascending musictipped ears to
sighs and breath of honeydew and pinecones
 dancebodies(plural)
off the sheets-headstiltback
sleekerslickerfaster
newness wholeness rhythm risk
reachexplosion(
 touch of white waters waves
drowning, flooding insidcurves
open 0 mouthfastmoving
bodies(plural)
 descending together)
hushedshining foreheadseyelids
lingerstardust sleep

Dana LePage

I Think I'm Starting to Understand Why I Always Wear Black

Why do we always push away
What we've been waiting for the longest?
I grew up yesterday
To find out that I'm a Toys 'R Us Kid
And that Happiness doesn't grow on trees
So I settled for the subway to Content
But when I changed trains at Fifth Avenue
I caught the one-way to Lost
Where I met a wise man who told me I would never find what I was looking for
A pregnant woman who told me to use protection
And two old ladies who told me to pull up my low riders
I only wished that Certainty was as easy to come by
Love was delayed or speeding on past
While Stress and Jealousy were always right on time
And Empathy was nowhere to be found
It was as if I trying to catch up with myself
To fall further behind
But they had forgotten to add the brakes
And getting off was taken off the schedule
Where I was
Was never where I wanted to be
And where I wanted to be
Was never where I was going
But I always managed to make a pit stop at
Nowhere
I blamed it on my sense of direction and bought a map
It told me Wrong Way
So I threw it away
Since getting somewhere wasn't going anywhere
I went back to where I had started

There I realized it was where I had always wanted to be

Alex Egan

Cadillac

Far Away
Coming from nowhere.
Back turned to the sea,
I walk, with my guitar.
This guitar is old
older than that oak
older than that crone
older than that song.
Down we go.
The guitar and me
Headed for a place
a desert
away from the sea.
a Cadillac
Caught in the sway of my guitar
Bringing forth the memories
of Pink Aphrodites
Driving away from me.

Jessica Strain





Niki DeLawer
Printmaking

This is the middle.
Things have had time to get complicated,
messy, really. Nothing is simple anymore.
Cities have sprouted up along the rivers
teeming with people at cross-purposes –
a million schemes, a million wild looks.
Disappointment unsolders his knapsack
here and pitches his ragged tent.
This is the sticky part where the plot congeals,
where the action suddenly reverses
or swerves off in an outrageous direction.
Here the narrator devotes a long paragraph
to why Miriam does not want Edward's child.
Someone hides a letter under a pillow.
Here the aria rises to a pitch,
a song of betrayal, salted with revenge.
And the climbing party is stuck on a ledge
halfway up the mountain.
This is the bridge, the painful modulation.
This is the thick of things.
So much is crowded into the middle –
the guitars of Spain, piles of ripe avocados,
Russian uniforms, noisy parties,
lakeside kisses, arguments heard through a wall
too much to name, too much to think about.

Leaving Charley

Dianna Walkowski

Saturday. Charley only kicked at the ugly pebbles as he made his way along the stream so small that no one had named it. The stones with blue or green streaks running through them he left alone, but the plain brown and grey bits of shale he dragged his feet over just as he had done as a child. No one ever came in these woods now. It had been a long time since even he had been back.

Geoffrey would be there waiting for him, though. Five years his senior, Charley's brother would never let him down, especially not at a time like this. They'd built the clubhouse near the bank of the stream when Charley was seven. Being nearly a mile behind their parents' house and close enough to the minor cacophony of the small waterfall at the end of the stream, it was the perfect setting for their loud war games, hunting games, any game they could think of. Seclusion was what they'd both craved as children, and what Charley continued to love about the weather worn pile of boards he saw before him.

The door they'd dragged three miles from the neighbors' garbage at the side of the road was no longer completely attached but hung from one of their make-shift hinges. Something red had stained the crevices of the wood's grain around the handle; it had been there for years. It looked almost like a handprint, perhaps something left behind from a pack of teenagers looking for a place to drink. Charley scratched absently at it with his fingernails before opening the door.

Immediately, broke out into a large grin. "I knew you'd be here before me!" Charley laughed. His brother was seated on one of the lawn chairs they'd garbage picked in the far corner, just below the faded, wrinkled Grateful Dead poster they'd won at the town carnival. Geoffrey returned his grin, which was remarkably similar to his brother's but with a lazy slant to it that Charley had spent hours in front of a mirror trying to imitate.

"How are you, Kid?" Geoffrey asked, his smile fading a bit. "You sounded pretty bad on the phone."

"You're always here when I need you," Charley said contentedly. He walked over to the hole in the wall they'd cut for a window and rested his hands on the jagged edge, looking out at the familiar woods. "It's been a while since we've been here, hasn't it? I always forget how peaceful I feel in these woods until I'm back."

"I'll always be here when you need me, you loser!" Geoffrey laughed. "So what's going on?"

Charley's eyes locked on the motion of the leaves in the breeze as he tightened his grip on the edge of the window. He didn't want his brother to notice how much his hands were shaking. "You know Cassie?"

"Not personally. You've never introduced us. Always so busy, Mr. Big Shot College Man!"

A short, fake burst of laughter was forced from Charley. Geoffrey had been the one who wanted to go to college, not him, but times had been tough. Dad just couldn't afford the tuition back then. Five years difference between them had been enough for a small savings to be accumulated and Charley had always been the honor roll student anyways. If only one could go, Dad had felt he ought to invest the money wisely. "You don't buy a falling stock just because it wants to be bought," Charley had overheard his father say to their mother during one of their arguments. It felt so long ago.

"What's going on with Cassie?" Geoffrey prodded at the pause. Charley blinked and turned to look at him, unable to keep the tears from forming. They burned as they perched on top of his lower eyelid, but he refused to let them fall.

"She's going to break up with me," Charley said. There was a strange choking sound beneath the words, like a deer caught in barbed wire. "She was having lunch with Rachel and she didn't know I had come in with the guys. And I was on one side of the condiment bar and she was on the other and she didn't see me and she told Rachel that things just didn't feel right anymore. What does that mean? It feels right to me! And then I ran into Rachel just an hour later

and she didn't even say anything about it!"

"Rachel who grew up down the street from us?" Geoffrey asked.

"Yes! She was the one who introduced us. She didn't even try to convince Cassie to stay with me," Charley hissed.

Dirtied from the window, his fingers went up to his face, leaving trails of dirt and mold as he massaged the pale skin stretching across his cheeks.

"Doesn't feel right," Geoffrey repeated, shaking his head. "That's one of those stupid things girls get in their heads. It doesn't mean anything. I wouldn't worry about it. Just go talk to her. You can convince her to stay with you. Why wouldn't she want to?"

"That's what I thought!" Charley blurted, his arms sinking back to his sides as his neck tilted upwards in frustration. "I've always done everything for her! Three years we've been together now. I helped her with schoolwork and I was there for her when her mother died and just... everything! I'm always there for her! I never forget to call or when our anniversary is or anything. And I put up with her moods when she gets all sulky about nothing. What more could she want? How could it not feel right anymore? How can she leave me like this? I can't believe she's going to leave me!"

"Come on, Kid," Geoffrey said gently. "Given the chance, you're great at convincing people to stay in your life. You just need to talk to her, show her that it is still right, and she'll stay. You guys can forget all about this, and then everything will be fine. Cassie isn't going to leave you."

"What if I can't convince her?"

Geoffrey sat back and laughed in a comfortably patronizing way, crossing his arms across his chest in the laid back manner Charley envied. They'd always been very different. Charley was the uptight intellectual and Geoffrey was the mellow hot shot. The latter had such an easy time with people; regardless of his lack of talents or skills, doors burst open before him because of his striking charisma. Despite exhaustive efforts, Charley was not charismatic. He followed the boys in his dorm around and pretended not to notice that they tried to ditch him. Cassie was only the second girl he'd ever taken out on a date as well as the first who had agreed to a second date.

"Look, remember back when I got my acceptance letter to the university?"

Nodding slowly, Charley wiped at the hateful tears escaping his throbbing eyes. He let his weight fall against the rotting boards just behind him. "I remember. Dad said he couldn't help you pay for it and you two got in a huge fight. You said it was the only thing you'd ever wanted, and Dad said that he was sorry but wanting didn't make money appear. He said that you shouldn't bother because you wouldn't be able to make the grades anyways. Said you should just go to full time at the shop and live at home. And you said you were going to leave. You said you were going to get a job and take classes and live on your own in the city. You wanted to leave."

"And what happened then?" Geoffrey prompted him.

Charley's eyes opened and closed several times, slowly and requiring much effort. His heart had nearly broken that night as he crouched behind the kitchen door and listened to the two men yell at each other and the shrill shriek of their mother trying to mediate and getting knocked to the floor. "As you were on your way out, I told you not to go. I told you not to leave me." His head lifted, with a new confidence and energy. "Mom left that night while we were sleeping so I couldn't try to talk her out of it. But when you tried to leave the next morning, I talked you out of it. You stayed with me."

"See? People don't leave you when you get a chance to convince them," Geoffrey concluded. "So what are you waiting for? Go find Cassie and convince her before she leaves without giving you the chance!" His enthusiasm was contagious. Filled with reassurance, Charley stood tall, wiped the dirt and bits of leaves off of his clothes, and combed through his hair with his fingers.

"I'll do it. You're right, all I have to do is find Cassie, talk to her, show her why she shouldn't leave me, and

it'll all be fine. It'll all be fine. She won't leave me," Charley nodded. He smiled again at his brother, who returned the expression. Before he left, Charley took a step closer to him and said bashfully, "Thanks, man. I mean, I really appreciate you being here when I need to, like, talk about stuff. I can't talk to the guys at school about stuff like this, and Dad... well, you know Dad. So thanks. I don't know what I would've done if you had left that night."

"No problemo, Kid," Geoffrey smiled. "I'll always be here for you. You need to talk about anything, you've got a problem, just meet me back here. Always. I'll never leave you."

Monday. "Geoffrey, I want you to meet my fiancé, Cassie," Charley beamed proudly. He helped her to be seated in the other lawn chair across the old end table from where his brother sat.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you!" Geoffrey said. "I've heard so much about you!"

"Well, I've heard so much about you, too," Cassie replied. Her dirty blonde hair fluttered as a breeze came in from the window where Charley leaned again. "This is such a cute little clubhouse you guys built here, so quiet this deep in the woods. You don't find solitude like this around the campus, that's for sure."

"Yeah, my Dad hasn't come back this far in years," Charley said. His eyes squinted slightly. "Never been here actually. I remember feeling kind of bad about that, that he didn't want to come and see what we built. It could've been a great father and sons kind of thing, but it was just a sons kind of thing. That was always how it was. Mom and Dad fighting, me and Geoffrey off doing our own thing. Geoffrey always took care of me."

Cassie smiled and looked admiringly towards Geoffrey. "And taking care of me, now, too," she said. "I hear that you're the one who saved me from making the biggest mistake of my life. I can't believe I was even thinking of breaking up with Charley. I'm so grateful that you convinced him to come talk to me and set me straight. Not only did I decide I never wanted to leave him, I thought it was time we made it official. We're getting married! We're going to be together forever and we'll never leave each other."

"That's right," Charley nodded, taking a step closer to her. He kneeled down in front of her and took her cool little hand in his. Kissing it, he reached up and stroked Cassie's hair briefly before standing and looking at his brother. "Geoffrey has always given me great advice, and confidence in myself. Whenever I need a sounding board we meet here and talk things over, just like when we were kids."

"Charley!"

At the sound of his name, Charley walked over to the window and leaned out of the hole. Through the thin brush, he could see Rachel jogging out to him. She held her arm up and waved when she saw his head emerge from the clubhouse. "Your dad said you might be back here!" she yelled. "He warned me it was quite the hoof out here, but I need to talk to you!"

"Sure, what's up?" Charley asked pleasantly, his glee overpowering his previous feelings of betrayal. Rachel slowed her pace as she neared him. Her head tilted up as they spoke through the hole and she panted.

"Well I'm looking for Cassie, actually," she said awkwardly. She rested both hands on her hips. "I was supposed to meet her today and she didn't show, and then when I went to her room her roommate told me the last time she saw her was Saturday night. She said that you two were fighting." The roommate's exact words had been "screaming to hell and back" but Rachel felt that to repeat that would be tacky. Dating all the way back to their childhood friendship, Charley had always been oversensitive and touchy. Conversation with him was generally stressful as one had to consider every word thoroughly.

"She's right in here," Charley smiled. "We did have an argument but we patched everything up and actually we're getting engaged."

Rachel's lips parted, then spread into a stunned smile. "Oh, how great!" she exclaimed. She rushed closer to the window and peered in to congratulate the bride-to-be, but her smile fell. Rachel's eyes turned upwards to Charley, and

she managed to squeak pitifully, "Charley, what's wrong with her?" Rachel looked back at Cassie, slumped in a bloody lawnchair, neck bent backwards at a grotesque angle with a strange protruding lump sticking out of the side. One of Cassie's blue eyes was open, staring blankly at the wall. A fly wandered around on her cheek.

"What do you mean?" Charley asked, turning his head to look at his beautiful lady. Cassie shrugged at him. "Cassie's fine. Better than fine, actually!"

"My God!" Rachel screamed. "She's dead, isn't she?" Tearing her eyes away from the body, Rachel saw in the dim shadows a fully clothed skeleton in the other lawn chair. Strands of hair remained between the graying bone and a dingy baseball hat, giving the illusion of a skull with a full head of hair. It had once been a white hat, but was now a deep red. The left half of the face was gone, jagged fragments of bone dangling from what remained.

It was all Rachel could do to keep from fainting. She was silent, and looked up at Charley again.

"I thought he disappeared eight years ago," Rachel whispered.

"Geoffrey? Disappeared?" Charley repeated. "What are you talking about?"

"You did this?" Rachel covered her face with her hands and let the heavy sobs shake her body.

"What are you talking about?" he asked, standing. He started towards the door, and Rachel collected herself enough to run. "Rachel, wait! Wait, what's wrong?"

"She's crazy! She's turned against you," Geoffrey said bitterly.

"She's leaving you," Cassie agreed.

"Go after her!" Geoffrey insisted.

Charley looked over his shoulder at the two people who would never ever leave him. "What are you waiting for?" Cassie smiled lovingly. "You can convince her to stay with you. Rachel's been your best friend since you guys were kids. She always got along so well with Geoffrey and you know how close me and her are. Convince her to stay. You're persuasive and she's reasonable."

"Yeah, Rachel's reasonable," Charley nodded. He smiled as he left the clubhouse and began running after her, repeating to himself the words of Geoffrey and Cassie. "She won't leave me. She won't leave me."



Katherine McCarty
Pencil Drawing

Typo

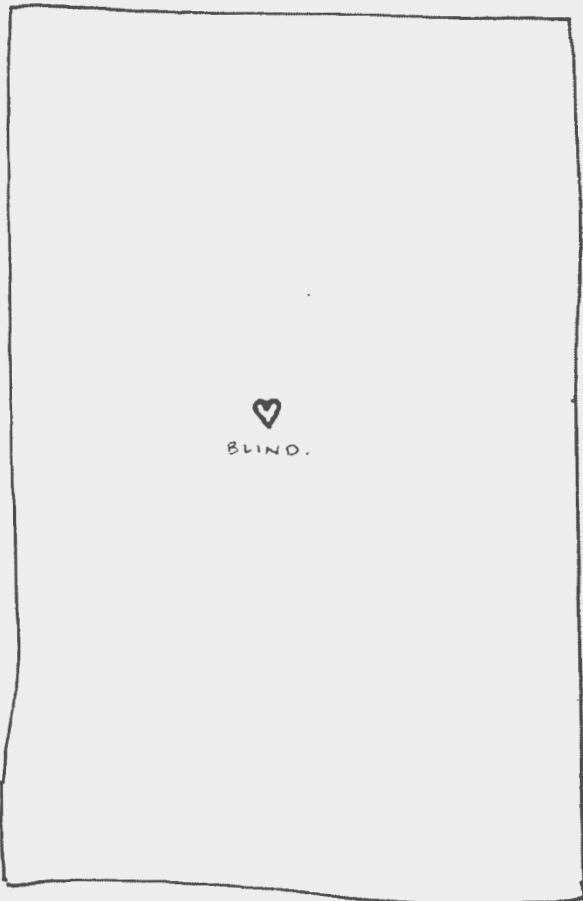
Iluvsoccr81: thanks for asking
Iluvsoccr81: I fell through the cracks
Iluvsoccr81: of my floor
Iluvsoccr81: and dripped into the septic tank
Iluvsoccr81: from there I leaked into the sewer
system
Iluvsoccr81: then settled
Iluvsoccr81: till a wave
Iluvsoccr81: swirled the sediment around
Iluvsoccr81: and I flowed out to sea
beachbabe03: no
beachbabe03: sorry
beachbabe03: sleep
beachbabe03: how did you sleep, not seep

Duncan Carranza

Homage to Night

White fire burning in the night
Lighting the way, providing dark sight
For strangers, travelers, lovers sneaking
While in the trees watchers are peeking
Curious eyes that wonder why
The man in the moon looks so suprised
When every night, without fail
His shadowy light provides a veil
For strangers, travelers, lovers sneaking
Who speak all words through whispered speaking
With such care not to disturb
The others who must also curb
The enthusiasm that moonlight brings
That inspires one to laugh and sing
Dance and rejoice in a silvery light
And pay homage to their friend, the night.

Pia Fleischmann



*Amelia Harnass
Pen and Ink*

it's a good romantic movie, in the bullshit kind of way

Enter 2:40 pm now rolling
So I passed you in the hallway
And trying to be subtle as in a wink or coy smile
I grabbed your arm and yelled
EXCUSE ME IM MADLY IN LOVE WITH YOU
No wait
I threw myself into a locker and sighed
OH THE TORMENTED WOES OF LOVE AND YOUTH
No wait
I caught you against the wall between two arms and whispered
YOU DO KNOW HOW TO WHISTLE DON'T YOU BABY?
No wait
I started passing out flyers that proclaimed
MEG HEARTS (YOUR PICTURE HERE) FOR ETERNITY
Well okay
So I passed you in the hallway
And trying to be outrageous
As in a movie romance or desperate fleeting passion I said
(Yes "said"- the plainest and most pitiful adjective of all)
"hey"
and handed you the sock you left in the quad

Meg Vasey



*Amelia Harms
Pen and Ink Drawing*

Stagnant

I've been talking to a stuffed dog lately.
Cute if I was 5;

Sad because I'm 20.

Not even like I'm kidding myself
But in solemn whispers to something
I know to be real.
I feel flat-chested and freckled,
with toes turned inward
again.

Not that I was ever comfortable being young:
Bored with monkey bars,
Then awkward and bookish,
craving talks with adults;
It's just dreaming while awake that I miss.

Instead of fairy tales though,
I peruse a guidebook to London
and imagine
A time I won't need it.
When I live there with only cats
and peeling wallpaper,
And the whining sound of my voice fades
into confident articulation.

Then again,
I'll probably always sound like this,
And an ignorant tourist, I'm sure,
I will forever be.

Jessica Allen

A Protest Worth Digestion

"Just listen to the page"
tells the overture.
The ink is flowing
through glorious crescendos
playing daring notes
with purpose.
Deemed
too harsh on the imagination.
Aural judges,
with sweetness,
docile melodies
to grace their presence-
to question
their worthiness is
heretical.

"There is no listening"
you spoke in confidence.
"There are—
words and a page.
And I hear nothing"
resounded your gavel.
I attempt to script
a protest
into my symphony,
but you feel no twitching
in the muscles of your feet.
The tempo is unpleasant,
and you grimace
at the lack of
perfection
in harmony.

The acid laced on my lips
is only negated by the softness
of the kiss on your eyes.

James Merenda



Dana LePage
Charcoal Drawing

Play Once and Repeat

Alex Egan

The loud wails of sorrow and heartbreak ended abruptly as she turned off the ignition. She knew getting out of the car was a mistake, but she had come this far, there was no turning back now. The door to her past gleamed white in the sunlight, almost blinding her, as she stepped up onto the front steps. She hesitated, asking herself why she had come here. She didn't really need the answer. Taking a deep breath, she rang the doorbell.

After an excruciating moment of silence, she heard the sound of approaching footsteps and saw the doorknob turn slowly. Her heart stopped. The smiling face of his mother appeared behind the door. "Hello."

Her heart had resumed at full speed and she panicked. The words caught in her throat. Finally after what seemed a painfully long time, she coughed out, "Hi, is Gavin here?"

"Oh sure honey, one minute."

She had almost wished that she had said, "No I'm sorry, he's not." It might relieve some of the turmoil in her stomach. He was going to sense it; she knew it. He would hear her heart beating like a timpani and feel her kneecaps about to collapse. He would know. Her weakness was all too obvious and she felt like a phony for trying to act like she knew what she was doing.

As she contemplated turning around and getting back in her car, his mother called, "Gavin!" Too late.

A groggy voice replied, "Yeah?"

"You have a visitor!"

She heard shuffling and he appeared. He looked like he had just fallen out of bed. He probably had. His hair was mussed and his t-shirt and boxers disheveled. He stopped suddenly at the sight of her, his mouth dropping slightly. His mother sensed something between them and wordlessly tiptoed out of the room.

She was still on the doorstep. She looked at him, waiting for him to say something. He came closer. "What are you doing here?" he asked dreamily. He looked like he believed he might be sleepwalking.

"I really don't know," she answered softly. "I was just driving. This is where I ended up."

He said nothing for a moment, studying her. She again wondered if she should leave. "Come in," he said finally.

She followed him into his room. It was strange that it would be the first time she had entered it. "Um...you can sit down," he said. He looked exhausted and still slightly bewildered. She looked around the room, but the only place to sit was his bed. She perched stiffly on the edge of it. They looked at each other. Although he was finally right in front of her, she felt like he was still a million miles away.

She opened her mouth to say something, anything, but he stopped her. "Don't." She gazed at him expectantly. He ran his fingers through his hair, most likely thinking of what to say. God, she loved his hair. She remembered how thick and soft it was—is. He sighed. "Stella..." his voice trailed off as he put his face in his hands. Making a recognizable grunt of frustration, he walked over and collapsed on the bed next to her. He looked over at her sadly. She could only look back. She didn't know what to say. She didn't even know what to feel.

The grief on his face became too much to bear and she turned away, looking around at his room. She believed you could find out a lot about a person by their room. It was their personal space, to fill as they chose. She realized how little she knew about him. She never had much of a chance to learn. He reached over and gently turned her face towards him. "I am so sorry." She started to pull away but he held on—lightly, but firmly. "Look at me," he said. "I'm sorry. I know I messed up. I've been a wreck without you. Wait, I am a wreck, but that's beside the point. I've missed you like crazy."

She gazed deeply into his eyes, probing, searching, trying to find an answer. She looked past the distorted reflection of herself only to see a bottomless black emptiness. She couldn't tell whether he was lying or not. She had never been

able to. Sirens ringing in the back of her head told her he was. He could sense her hesitation and added carefully, “I swear to you.” His face dropped. “Please. Give me another chance.”

These were the words she had been dying to hear for the longest time, but now that she finally was she didn’t know if she was ready to accept them. Questions shot through her mind. Why did she drive here? Did he now feel obligated to say these things to her? Why was she still the only one making the approach? What was she doing? She was about to drive herself crazy. Stop!—she reprimanded herself. She thought of what to say. His hands were still on her face. She loved his hands – long and delicate but strong. They held the history of her skin, something she shuddered to think about. Pulling herself out of her reverie, she dropped her head out of them. She still had yet to say a word.

“There’s a reason why you came here,” he pressed. She imagined what she could say, “Yeah, to tell you that it’s over and that I never want to talk to you again.” Somehow she couldn’t manage to form those words on her tongue. She knew why she had come here too. It was the same reason why she had gone back to him again and again. She wasn’t ready to admit it.

He took her hand into his and looked at her pleadingly. “Say something. Please Stella!”

A deep sigh echoed through her insides. She had always felt that holding hands was one of the, if not the, sweetest signs of affection. She wondered if he knew. She finally spoke, choosing her words carefully, “I gave you a second chance already.” She paused. “To be my friend.” The smile that had started to form on his face at her voice quickly disappeared. “But you didn’t accept that,” she continued. “You just ignored me.”

“I know, I know,” he answered. He hesitated, looking at her sadly. “I just couldn’t—I couldn’t be your friend.”

She sucked in her breath. How dare you?!—her mind screamed. “But you said—”

He interrupted her, “I know what I said. I guess I didn’t mean it. That or it changed. When I held you in my arms I realized that I couldn’t go back to the way things were before. I couldn’t be just your friend anymore.” Her shield was melting, but she couldn’t let him know that. For once, she had to be strong. What was she doing here?!

“You’re going to have to,” she said, looking at him gravely. “Or you’re not going to have me at all.”

“How can you say that?” he cried. He startled her with the emotion in his voice. He had always seemed rather numb when it came to their relationship. Now he threw off his inhibitions and loudly expressed his true feelings. “I know you like me! I know you do! You don’t really want to be friends!”

All of the tears she had ever shed over him splattered in her mind, pouring reminders of the pain she had gone through. She couldn’t bear to be hurt again, so she told him that.

He got on his knees in front of her on the floor. She was more than taken aback. He kissed her hand tenderly. “I promise I will never hurt you again. Please Stella. You wanted me to try, well look at me, I’m trying.” You haven’t even begun to bleed like I have for you, she thought. She had been a complete mess over him, trying again and again and again to make it work. It hadn’t worked. Her efforts had always left her stretched out and unfulfilled, taking another piece of her every time. Now they were back to the beginning it seemed.

He got up and sat back down on the bed next to her. She was speechless. As a final plea he whispered, “I can’t live without you. And this time, I won’t.” The angry thoughts that had been flaming through her head fizzled at his silky words. Another crack appeared in her protective wall. He brought his face closer to hers, imploring her with his eyes. She didn’t pull away. He moved in and kissed her lips gently.

Like a violent tide, a wave of emotion and memories enveloped her. She remembered every touch, every kiss, every beautiful feeling he had ever given to her. She floundered above the raging depths, trying to hold onto the thought that this was wrong, that she shouldn’t be doing this. She was too weak. The wave had caught her, and she was carried under. A Fiona Apple line drifted through her head, “All my armor falling down in a pile at my feet...” That was what had happened. She folded.

He could feel her resistance release and her body soften. He slid his arm around her waist, pulling her closer to

him. He brought her face close to his, until they were almost touching, and gazed intensely into her eyes. She trembled. Her heart was beating so fast and hard she thought that it would jump right out of her chest. Holding back, he was giving her another chance to choose. She felt like she was teetering on the edge of a cliff. She could see her blood soaked fate below, but she had come much too far to change her mind now. She leaned in and kissed him back.

She knew that he would never change. Maybe he meant the words he was saying when he said them, but they wouldn't endure. They never did. She knew that he would break her heart again and again. Somehow, at that moment, it didn't seem to matter. She forgot the past and ignored the future; she was living in the present.

He held her tightly, kissing her softly, sweetly, slowly. Feelings of complete bliss and utter sadness swirled and clashed in her head. She felt herself being pulled in every direction, overwhelming her. It became more than she could bear and a cold tear slid down her cheek. This was followed by another and another. That didn't stop him. He kissed her faster and harder.

They slid down onto the bed until he was on top of her, their hands still tightly intertwined. He clung to her, as if begging her to hold on. Their movements became more frenzied—her hands through his hair, his fingers up her stomach, their lips everywhere.

The burdens of their past clouded around them, screaming angrily at them to stop, reminding them of what had happened before and what would happen again. They couldn't hear, tangled in their turbulent embrace. At this second, it was only the two of them, twisted together in their artificial love. Nothing else mattered.

Something someone once said unexpectedly interrupted her thoughts, or lack thereof: "Desperate actions bring unpleasant ends." She pushed their end out of her mind, but the tears continued to flow steadily down, mixing with his hot kisses. A cold flood of grief spread over and around her like a heavy blanket. The tears fell harder and faster, but he only held her more tightly, kissed her more deeply. His hands moved up and down her spine as he ran his lips along her neck. All she could feel was his touch, all she could smell was his scent, all she could see was him. She ignored the most unmistakable sensation of all: the taste of "this will never happen again."

By the time she got back in her car, the tears had long since dried. His empty words echoed through her head. They at first pulsed their loud falsehoods, but then faded quickly until they finally fell silent. She started the ignition and the loud wails of sorrow and heartbreak promptly filled the car. Only this time they didn't squeeze her heart almost in half with their melancholy words and depressing melodies. This time things were different. She was right for once. It never happened again.

7:34 p.m. street lights have yet to come on

the ice cream man
is so fucking annoying
i want to scream sometimes
and run outside
with a shovel
push away all the little kids:
GET OUT OF MY WAY!
throw them to the ground (softly)
and come face to face
with the man
and his music
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING HUH?!
WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS IS?!
IT'S NOT A FUCKING AMUSEMENT PARK!
rip down his signs for
milkshakes and rocket pops
popsicles and lemon ice
find my way into the truck
where the box of sound hides
tear through shit and sugar
milk and plastic
raise my shovel in the air
(slow motion)
and pound that piece of shit
to nothing
until it skips
and repeats

pop goes the weasel
motherfucker.

David Alói

Big/littles/bigbigs/littlesbigs/so on so on

My roommate often refers to herself
in
The “we” form
Now.
a petit tragedy.

Meg Casey



Amelia Harnas
Pen and Ink Drawing

To Whom It May Concern

Eric Danson

To whom it may concern:

I'm not looking for your pity. I don't want this to be one of those stories you hear during the day; think to yourself "Oh, isn't that sad"; then go home and mention it to your family over dinner, or perhaps a cup of tea next weekend when you visit your mother: "Did you hear about...wasn't it just so sad." I just want to try to explain, so that someone will understand me, so I don't leave this world as obsolete as I've lived in it, so that my life will mean something to somebody.

I was five years old, living the same life that every five year old does. I'd wake up in the morning, open my eyes and see my pictures hanging up on the wall, my mom always said they were great and found for each of them their perfect place on the wall. Then, as I lay there and looked around at all my stuff I could start to smell breakfast. Whether it was bacon and eggs or sausage or cinnamon toast or even just cereal, I could always smell what was for breakfast when I woke up. I'd go down the stairs in my pajamas, the ones with the feet on the bottom, always going back and forth over the squeaky stair a few times. Following my nose to the kitchen; "Good morning" I'd say theatrically to my mother until she kissed my forehead and then make my way to the table where my breakfast was already waiting, orange juice, milk and whatever else my mom had gotten ready for me. After a leisurely breakfast we'd go upstairs and my mom would get me ready for school. Then I'd go; play with friends; hear stories; eat snacks; kindergarten is paradise. My mom picked me up during her lunch break and brought me to my Grandma's house for the afternoon.

It was a day just like this, just like all the others before it. Breakfast, school, Grandma's house. Everything was going perfectly. How could I have imagined what was to happen? "Hello...Speaking," my grandmother said to the person on the other line as I sat at her feet playing with a set of blocks. "I see. We'll come right now." I'd never driven with Grandmother before, but hanging up the phone and picking me up were almost one action as she brought me out to her car and buckled me in the back seat. Soon we were at the hospital. I'm sure we must have been there for hours, but when it all started to unfold it seemed like minutes to me. My father's car was in the shop at the time and my mom had to pick him up from work, it was out of her way but it was necessary, and she didn't mind. Another man was coming home too, except he had stopped at a bar first; he died instantly, my parents weren't so lucky. I cried a lot in the waiting room. My grandma held me the whole time, tightly in her arms as she sang songs from her childhood; smooth, low songs. There was peace between my tears. We stopped at my house on the way back from the hospital; I picked up some things I would need for the night. I would never go back there again.

I had a good life with grandma. On my birthdays the whole family would come to our house and she would cook the special meal she only made for me. I could talk to her about anything, and she never got mad. At High School graduation, she was there; I could see her smile as I shook the principle's hand and received my diploma. When things weren't going well while I was away at college she'd listen for hours about my day and help me get through the bad things. "It'll be better tomorrow," she'd say. "Just you wait."

Ring Ring

"I'm sorry to call you so late, but it's your grandmother..." I hung up without allowing the voice to finish what it was

saying. I knew it already and couldn't bear to hear her say it. The street lights looked like shooting stars as I blew past them on the expressway. I ran through the halls of the hospital until I made it to her door, perhaps opening it harder than was necessary. I slowly made my way to her bed and knelt beside it. There was no need to speak, we'd already said goodbye; she didn't want any crying tonight. I spent the whole night beside her on my knees, holding her hands as we just looked at each other. As the sunlight made its way into the window I knew that I was alone. I could hear my grandmother's voice singing those songs from her childhood and there was peace between my tears.

But now I'm completely alone. So many times I have needed to talk to her but there's no answer at her number. There's no one else, nobody even knows that I exist.



Detective Evans, the first officer to report to the scene, bends down to take the piece of paper out of the cold fist. She struggles to read it through the wrinkles and red marks that block out some of the words. After making her way down to the signature she raises her head to take in the scene. Four bodies lie in the street, a man, his wife, an old woman, all of whom had been shot from behind, and that of Luke Alexander Gallagher, one hand still clutching his gun and the other, now empty, still lies across his chest.



Katherine McCarty
Graphite Drawing

Taco Love

I love you
the way I love a soft taco.

I want to wrap myself around you
the way a flour tortilla
wraps itself around the refried beans.

Your lips,
like ripe red tomatoes,
call to me with their succulence.

I want to taste every ingredient:
The salsa, spicy and intoxicating;
The onions and peppers popping with flavor;
The soft orange shredded cheese;
The crisp, bright green lettuce,
like you, like every part of you.

Your skin, like that soft flour tortilla,
not those clunky hard yellow corn tortillas that force you to unnaturally angle your head just to bite
into it, and then crack and shatter between your teeth, with one jagged piece of baked tortilla,
not quite chewed, slicing and tearing your esophagus on the way down,
no.
Not like that.

You,
you, love,
are the softest of the soft,
the tastiest of the tacos,
the most delicious love of all.

Drew Campbell

Stranger

It flickered there one brief moment—
glitter streaking meteor,
reflection on a passing car.
I did not know you, but by some chance we met
(fleeting familiarity—did you feel it?)
eyes catching
as rough edges sometimes do on your sweater as you
pass,
arresting the steady stride of life for an instant.
Frozen, silent acknowledgment surfacing in those
wintry eyes,
gray-blue and oh so still...
I knew you.
And then you were gone.

Shannon Barbeau



Amy Zarzicki
Wood Sculpture

Prima Ballerina

Do not just stand there
watching me struggle to Dégagé,
I was once the prima in this too.
I was glissading through life
and at the highest point of my jeté
it all came crashing down.
I fell off my high perch
in a flourish of pink fabric
cascading toward the ground.

So do not look at me with your effortless attitude
giving me those sham sympathetic glances,
soon enough you will begin the unfortunate
tombé.
Then I will be the one with sham sympathetic
glances,
and you will be the one struggling
just to return to a demi form of your own
production.

Laura Sengillo

You are Interesting

Jeanette Ebling

She'll spend high school being indifferent, as if proving a point. She won't fit into any group, and she'll decide cliques are lame. Even the word clique is lame. She'll be a drifter. A loner. She'll think being quiet is mysterious. Everyone else will think she's just weird. They'll ask her if she ever talks, as if she's mute. She'll just nod her head.

Her parents will take this indifference as depression and throw her into therapy for a year. She'll talk to the woman about meaningless occurrences which cause her anxiety. After making minimal progress, the highly educated doctor will tell her there's nothing else she can do for her. So much for modern medicine.

She'll decide to channel all this trivial anxiety into art. She's creative. She'll take a few art classes at school and dream of one day studying at Pratt. She's a dreamer. She'd look good carrying around a portfolio almost as big as her, filled with half completed sketches and covered with splotches of paint. She'll also try her hand at poetry, but her poetry will be sad. Not emotionally-sad, just pathetic-sad. She'll decide not to become a poet.

She'll keep a journal. She'll fill it with all of the thoughts and feelings that she'll feel like she can't share with anyone because they won't understand. Or care, even. She will relate every aspect of her life to song lyrics from various bands, which no one she knows has ever heard of. She'll take pride in this. She'll include pictures and articles and drawings in her journals to show whoever is snooping through them just how creative she is.

She has always loved to read. Her favorite teacher will be her English instructor. She'll take creative writing simply to have another class with this teacher. She won't even be sure she can write creatively. She'll end up writing shallow stories about the life she wishes she were living. She'll doubt her talent as a writer. Actually, she will see she has no talent as a writer.

She'll take up a job babysitting for the two Colombian-American kids next door. She'll discover she is a terrible babysitter, which she'll find puzzling since she grew up reading *The Babysitters Club* books. This will cause her to question her abilities to become a good mother. It will worry her. To put her mind at ease, she will decide it's only other people's kids she can't stand. She will love her own children. The Colombian mother will tell her she needs to play with the children and talk to them more. Her dad will say, if the mother wants more entertainment, she should have hired a clown. Needless to say, the job will only last one school year.

She'll move blankly through the rest of her high school career. She'll have a few friends with whom she'll make worthless, superficial connections. They won't understand her aversion to partying and her antisocial tendencies. She'll study and make good grades with little effort. This will please her parents, which will in return please her. She'll graduate at number 25 in a class of 375. She won't recognize this to be as much of an accomplishment as everyone else will. She should have been number one.

After struggling with the decision of which college to attend, she'll settle for community college. She'd had big dreams of going away to school, making new friends, starting a new life. However, the preconceptions she'll have prior to attending the college will disappear. She'll decide she likes college life. Even community college life. It will be a vast improvement from high school life.

She'll enroll in the honors program. She'll make jokes that the community college honors program is an oxymoron. She'll wonder how some students were selected to be a part of the program. It couldn't possibly have been based on intelligence.

In her very first college class, she'll make her very first college friend. The two girls will be partners in one of those ridiculous icebreaker exercises designed to torture shy people. After getting to know each other over a few weeks of class, she'll realize this girl would have paid no attention to her in high school. Her new friend was probably one of the 'cool' girls. She'll take pride in now being considered 'cool.'

To her amazement, she will be asked by one of her professors to be an English tutor. The professor will tell her she writes very well, contradicting her thoughts derived from her high school creative writing class. Despite her uncertainty, she'll give it a try. She's not a people person, but maybe she can become one. She'll discover her hidden talents as a tutor. She'll decide to major in English. Perhaps she'll even teach.

Her father will decide he's tired of spoiling her. He's paid for her car insurance and gas long enough. She'll be forced to get a job. She'll apply at a department store and be hired on the spot. Lucky her. Her official title will be Fitting Room Attendant. Her first night on the job she will pick up a dress from the fitting room floor that someone had peed on. She'll cry all the way home that night and wonder why she didn't just quit right then.

Her boss will act as if their jobs are the most critical to society. If she doesn't pick up the clothes off the floor, the world will collapse. Her boss will speak slowly to her and explain, in detail, the simplest tasks. Regardless of this, her boss will value her as an employee and will assign her special projects. Again, lucky her. From this experience, she will recognize the value of getting a good education, so that she will one day be able to save herself from retail hell. It will reestablish her love of school.

In her honors English class, this kid will keep looking at her from across the room. She will assume he has magnified vision and can see the booger hanging from her nose. Because the only reason he would be looking at her would be to gawk at some hideous facial deformity she is unaware of. She'll decide she likes him looking at her. They will discover they have similar tastes in music and sneakers. He'll be in a band. She'll be impressed.

When the two of them start spending more time together, she'll think she's finally going to have her first boyfriend. He'll be affectionate and tell her she's wonderful, but then he'll inevitably break her heart. He won't want a relationship. She won't understand this. He won't explain it either. She'll wallow in everything she remembers of him. Seeing him in school and in her classes will make her chest hurt. Every song she hears will remind her of him. Songs that she had listened to for months or years will finally make sense. Now she'll understand what they're singing about. She'll take comfort in the lyrics. She'll write them all down in her journal.

*Somewhere under water maybe you could find my heart
'Cause that's where I threw it after you had torn it out.*

She'll continue on with her days as usual, despite her melancholy disposition. She'll misleadingly believe she'd rather be alone, while still holding onto hope that the jerk will change his mind. He'll confuse her with the way he keeps looking at her.

She'll take public speaking to ease her fears of being the center of attention. After the first day, she'll realize she made a huge mistake by signing up for the class and will wonder why she tortures herself so. Nevertheless, she'll stick with the torture. In her speeches, she'll exploit all of her quirks in hopes that her classmates will appreciate them. They will seem to. Her professor will be most impressed. In the middle of comments about eye contact and posture, he'll write, *You are interesting.*

Sleep

In the dark hours of early morning,
I turn over in my bed and
look between the shadowy blinds
covering my window.
I study the graveyard across the street
where the troubling blue glow of the moon
flickers on polished headstones,
illuminating plots of the dead,
freshly buried.

I choose not to sleep.

I submit myself to the solitude
of being the only one
awake.

The beauty of city living was that
someone else was always up.
I'd look out my window
to the apartment across the street:
a light would be on, a TV glowing,
a refrigerator door swinging open
to reveal a soothing, white light
shining on half empty cartons of milk
and jars of sweet relish.

I would keep my light on to let others know
I was there for them.
I would stay awake so perhaps they might feel
safe enough to fall into slumber,
secure enough to let go of the day.

Insomniacs find solidarity in their sleeplessness.

With the sunrise, I could fall asleep
as the madness of morning traffic began:
coughing horns and screams to hail taxi cabs
on the choked streets below.
People racing to work
while I was racing into sleep,
running into dreams I waited all night to have.

Here in the country,
the sunrise brings not a
comforting chaos,
only a brighter light
to reflect on the
twinkling headstones of the dead.

Lauren SooHoo
Pencil

Maureen Cabill



Niki DeLander
Printmaking

Searching for Moonlight

Amanda M. Bukowski

The world was gray. The fog clung to everything obscuring moon and stars and the familiar landscape of her yard. It was silent too: all sound muffled by the mist that strangled the night. She wandered alone, barely conscious of the dew that soaked her bare feet. She didn't know where she was going and it didn't matter because there was nothing to see. She didn't even know in this gray haze if she was still on her own planet, let alone her own yard. She kept walking.

Wanderlust ate at her on these nights when the whole world disappeared. There was something out there. Something, just beyond the mist. Two, three, five steps further, just a little more - but always the fog thinned and she was left standing alone in her own backyard feeling as though she hadn't gone anywhere at all. She knew this but she moved onward anyway. Stopping took too much effort.

I might get somewhere this time.

She laughed at herself even as the words ran through her mind. Though her yard was surrounded my miles of empty farmland, there was nowhere to go. The world is a sphere always circling back to where it started. You don't exist, you exist, you cease to exist. The thrown ball stops moving. Kinetic energy become potential energy and the whole world moves steadily on towards elimination.

Still, she kept moving onward. It was habit. She was searching for a reason to search but time after time she came up empty handed. There was nothing but mist. It caressed her skin like the cold touch of a ghost. She faded into it. She was a ghost. Purposeless. Thoughtless she floated, the spirit of a life never lived.

As usual, painful reality pulled her back again, this time by means of a hidden root and a sharp rock on the ground. She landed heavily on the rock and as she rose she felt blood trickle down her leg. Her life was like that, half a blanket of heavy fog and half a reality filled with things to hurt her.

The blood continued to ooze down her leg, she grimaced and then sighed as she thought of it.

They'll never believe that I didn't do that.

It didn't really matter though, it would serve to draw attention from the ones she did do tonight. The fabric of her shorts caught painfully on the newly made cuts that covered her thighs. Reminders. A ghost didn't need a purpose, people did. She was worthless.

If only it wasn't for this fucking fog.

She didn't know if she was referring to the night or the haze that clung to her mind. Either way she was trapped. She could no more clear the fog in her yard than she could clear the heavy mist that resided in her mind. The cuts chained her to the world. They reminded her of her body. They punished her for existing without reason.

Her parents couldn't understand why she did it. How could they know? She was a specter living in their house. Even to these people that were supposed to care she was nothing. No one had ever loved her and no one ever would. She wasn't anything to anyone and so she lived in this gray world, cutting to keep existing, wandering to try and find a purpose. Her parents sent her for help and then forgot about it. She was being taken care of, everything was okay, the world was rosy. Right?

She laughed at the thought.

Color doesn't exist. Everything is gray.

"Why don't you just stop?" The therapist had asked her once. She never answered but the question came back to her now. Why didn't she just stop? Stop cutting, stop living, stop hoping that the next time the clouds thinned the world would have more meaning than when they descended. She sat down and bathed in complete nothingness she found

no answers. Cold seeped into her joints; they stiffened and she became a statue, a memorial to a worthless life.

Time moved and she didn't. The fog lifted and yet she was still shrouded in mist. Her eyes fixed blankly on a random spot before her, not really seeing anything until she noticed movement. A small rabbit had made it's way into a patch of clover before her and was busily munching away. She stared idly at it, the only living thing in sight, a speck in the universe.

The owl struck without warning, and gripping the rabbit in its talons it slowly rose from the ground. She watched in speechless despair as the world destroyed happiness once again. In her mind all she could see was the owl flying off and tearing the rabbit into pieces. Blood and gore and helplessness filled her mind.



Dana LePage
Charcoal Drawing

Is this my answer?

The rabbit screamed. Its bizarre sound rang out in the still night and startled her from her reverie. It began to kick its legs violently. It writhed in the owl's talons, fighting savagely against Fate - and it won. Startled by its passion, the owl dropped the rabbit and called angrily after it as it sped off into the night.

She sat motionless until both were out of sight. Again and again she watched the struggle in her mind.

Why?

She didn't know if she had an answer.

Standing up she realized that she had wandered far from home tonight, the haze born wandering had deposited her far astray into the fields beyond her house. She thought of the rabbit scurrying homeward as she made her way back. She imagined it returning to it's burrow sore and bruised and bleeding from the owl's terrible grip. But it would return home tonight, there would be pain, but there would be life. Perhaps tomorrow it would return to this spot willing to fight, if it needed to, for the chance at the good things that life could bring it.

She glanced down at her arms covered with old scars, remnants of so many nights when she had fought to urge to end life. She was oddly proud of them.

Battle scars.

She had not given in to the predator depression. She had not abandoned the dream of happiness. She had fought the iron-taloned grip of desperation. Her battleground was her own body, but she had not yet lost.

And this is the end,
the car running out of road,
the river losing its name in an ocean,
the long nose of the photographed horse
touching the white electronic line.
This is the colophon, the last elephant in the parade,
the empty wheelchair, and pigeons floating down in the evening,
Here the stage is littered with bodies,
the narrator leads the characters to their cells,
and the climbers are in their graves.
It is me hitting the period
and you closing the book.
It is Sylvia Plath in the kitchen
and St. Clement with an anchor around his neck.
This is the final bit
thinning away to nothing,
This is the end, according to Aristotle,
what we have all been waiting for,
what everything comes down to,
the destination we cannot help imagining,
a streak of light in the sky,
a hat on a peg, and outside the cabin, falling leaves.

Billy Collins

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